ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE HOMETOWN: THE WORKINGS OF MIGRATION AND INTIMACY IN THE TOWN OF DOLLARS, PHILIPPINES

by

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (Anthropology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA (Vancouver)

AUGUST 2018

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the dissertation entitled:

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Abstract

Filipinos are now among the most mobile population in the world, and much literature on Filipino migration has focused on what happens overseas. This dissertation investigates the effects of migration at home, in an attempt to address the gap in existing literature, as has been noted by scholars of migration. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork as well as from an archive of experiences as returning resident of Nabua, a lowland riverine-agricultural town located in Southeastern Luzon Island, Philippines, I explore how migration and intimacy co-produce what is now called by its residents “Town of Dollars.” In the Bicol region, Nabua is known for the many male townsfolk who served in the United States Navy from the beginning of the 20th century until the closure of the U.S. Bases in 1991, and who sent dollars to their relatives who were left behind. Generations of people from Nabua have been shaped by this migration and by the stories brought home of the “American dream.” Therefore, this dissertation investigates Nabua as a site in which desires for and orientations for migrant futures are produced and conditioned. I look into the entangled workings of migration and intimacies in everyday life – including both quotidian and spectacular public events. The chapters in this dissertation make sense of several domains such as religious ritual, memorialization projects by returned retirees, and the private realm of the family. However, like many rural communities in the Philippines and elsewhere, Nabua has also been transformed by rapid globalization and neoliberal restructuring, resulting in the transformation and structuring of life, particularly of the majority of the non-migrating rural poor. Engaging with feminist, phenomenological, and postcolonial/decolonizing renderings of the lived experience, this dissertation argues for the need to bridge discussions of the much-studied Filipino diaspora with the investigation of what occurs in the origin community of migrants, including how migration-oriented state imaginings impinge on the lives of the rural poor. Finally, my effort in writing an “anthropology of the hometown” approaches questions of intentionality, self-reflexivity, and empathy for interlocutors who might also be kin, neighbors, and townsmates.
Lay Summary

This “anthropology of the hometown” illustrates the interweaving of migration and intimacy in both spectacular and mundane aspects of everyday life in a town called by its residents as the “Town of Dollars.” In Chapter 2, I show how shame, place, and kinship press upon academic work to the point of non-production. Chapter 3 responds to calls to interrogate “empire” through an analysis of how the retired U.S. Navy men’s narratives can nuance the often generalized postcolonial consciousness. In Chapter 4, I investigate a Holy Week ritual beyond its folk elements. Chapter 5 presents an ethnography about my family’s migration history. Finally, Chapter 6 shows that migration and the benefits earned from it are also out of reach for many of the town’s landless and poor residents. For many residents, precarity seems to loom over them everywhere. Therefore, they hope for improved lives at home.
Preface

This research was approved by UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board under the title “The Workings of Intimacy and Migration in the Philippines,” with Certificate Number H13-00229-A005, and with Dr. Alexia Bloch as Principal Investigator.

All content, including photographs, that appear in this dissertation are authored by Dada Docot, unless stated. All translations from Rinconada, Bicol, Filipino (Tagalog) to English are by Dada Docot. All interviews were held in the Rinconada language of Southern Bicol. The historical text Cuaderno that is used all throughout this language is in the Bicol language. All translation errors are the sole responsibility of Dada Docot.

This funding research was financially supported by the Vanier Canada Graduate Research Scholarship, administered by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Minor grants for purchase of research equipment, travel, and dissertation writing include: the Bottom Billion Fieldwork Fund by the UBC Liu Institute for Global Issues; College Li Pai Lin Memorial Graduate Scholarship for Dissertation Writing by St. John’s College, and the International Research Mobility Award by the UBC Office of the Vice President.

A version of Chapter 2 has been published as a journal article with the following citation information:

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2373566x.2017.1370385

If citing this dissertation, please use the author’s preferred name: Dada Docot.
Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................. iii
Lay Summary .................................................................................................................. iv
Preface ............................................................................................................................ v
Table of Contents .......................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ................................................................................................................ ix
Specifications Regarding Language Use ........................................................................ xi
List of Abbreviations ..................................................................................................... xii
Glossary ......................................................................................................................... xiii
Dedication ...................................................................................................................... xv

Chapter 1: An Anthropology of the Hometown................................................................. 1
  1.1 Acceptable Topics .................................................................................................... 1
  1.2 The Philippine Migration Situation ....................................................................... 3
  1.3 The Town of Dollars ............................................................................................. 9
  1.4 Anthropology of the Hometown as a Fraught Venture? ......................................... 21
  1.5 Theoretical Engagements, Interventions, and Itineraries ........................................ 34
    1.5.1 Back to the Hometown .................................................................................... 35
    1.5.2 Intimacy into Philippine Studies .................................................................... 41
  1.6 Chapter Previews ................................................................................................ 49

Chapter 2: The Method of Negative Production During Fieldwork in the Hometown...... 56
  2.1 The Return Home ................................................................................................ 56
  2.2 Researching Migration at Home ............................................................................ 58
  2.3 Non-Screening: Baad ng Pauno .......................................................................... 59
  2.4 Non-Filming: Fleet Reserve Association’s (FRA) Elections .................................. 61
  2.5 The Force of Supog in the Non-Screening of Baad ng Pauno ................................. 65
  2.6 The Force of Ginikanan in the Non-Filming of the FRA Elections ....................... 74
  2.7 Conclusions: Positively Valuing Negative Productions ........................................ 83

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 U.S. Memorial Day in Nabua</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Chapter Organization</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Home, Memory, War in the Postcolony</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Nabua at a Time of Colonial Transition</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Outlining Memory</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Lolo George Masculino’s Story</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Uninvolved Labors?</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Conclusions: Centering Interruptions</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 4: “*Balo-baló*”: Rehearsing Faith, Migrants’ Homecoming, and Kinship with the Sacred

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Christ Has Risen</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Ritual, a “Term of the Trade”?</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Migrants’ Contract with the Sacred</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Forging Kinships with Inang Katipanan</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Production of Consciousness in the Novena</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Familial Solidarity in (a “Commercialized”?) Rehearsal of Ritual</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Conclusions: Troubling Ritual</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 5: Of Houses, Care, and Kinship: From Nabua to Manila to Los Angeles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Kinship and Going Abroad</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Organizing Family History</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Logics of the Filipino Family?</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 The House in Anthropology</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 The Three Houses of My Family</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.1 The <em>Ginikanan</em></td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.2 The City House</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.3 Desired Destination</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Smooth Relations of Care?</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.7 Theatrics During a Homecoming................................................................. 240
5.8 Conclusions: Migration as a Family Project.................................................. 245

Chapter 6. Bare Subsistence in the Age of Rural and Overseas Mobilities..............249
  6.1 The Subsistence Villagers........................................................................ 249
  6.2 Roots of Landlessness........................................................................... 252
  6.3 Manay Jessa – Unkinned in the Wage Economy..................................... 259
  6.4 Manay Piling – Subsistence in the Margins of a Lingering Industry........ 268
  6.5 Madawon Family – Labor Precarity in Manila and Beyond.................... 278
  6.6 Troubling the Anthropological Toolkit.................................................... 289
  6.7 Concluding Thoughts, Moving Forward.................................................. 307

Afterword: New Migrations Amid Duterte’s War Against Drugs.........................312
Bibliography ...........................................................................................................318
List of Figures

Figure 1.2.1 Nabua town in the Philippine map ................................................................. 7
Figure 1.3.1 Nabua’s location within the Bicol administrative region ................................ 11
Figure 1.3.2 The “Resource” Map of Rinconada District ...................................................... 13
Figure 1.3.3 The official seal of the municipality of Nabua ................................................... 13
Figure 1.3.4 The Balikbayan Night in Nabua held during the annual town festival ........... 21
Figure 1.4.1 The first public event of the UBCPSS held in 2011 ......................................... 29
Figure 1.4.2 A UBCPSS novena .......................................................................................... 29
Figure 2.4.1 Entangled American and Philippine flags at the FRA Branch 127 ................. 64
Figure 2.5.1 Unused invitation to screen films during fieldwork at home ........................... 71
Figure 2.6.1 A navy man’s mausoleum in Nabua shaped liked a ship .................................. 83
Figure 2.7.1 A photograph taken on my first bike ride to one of Nabua’s farm areas .......... 84
Figure 3.1.1 Flag-raising ceremony in commemoration of the U.S. Memorial Day ........... 93
Figure 3.4.1 Navy men in Nabua in circa 1960s ................................................................. 114
Figure 3.5.1 Armando Neglerio (left), a Nabueño navy man .............................................. 121
Figure 3.6.1 George Masculino marries childhood love ...................................................... 133
Figure 3.6.2 George Masculino at a reenlistment ceremony in the 60s ............................... 135
Figure 3.7.1 Officers and enlisted men aboard a ship ......................................................... 141
Figure 4.1.1 The Easter Angel of 2014 ............................................................................... 155
Figure 4.3.1 The 2014 Easter Angel making faces ............................................................... 159
Figure 4.3.2 A family tree showing devotion to Inang Katipanan ....................................... 165
Figure 4.4.1 The image of Inang Katipanan in Nabua .......................................................... 169
Figure 4.4.2 An excerpt from a comic drawn by a devotee of Inang Katipanan ................. 173
Figure 4.6.1 The 2014 Easter Angel practices her lines ....................................................... 187
Figure 4.6.2 The last Easter Angel before the ritual’s monetization in 1971...................... 190
Figure 4.6.3 A family photograph taken in 1938 with the Easter Angel ............................ 190
Figure 4.6.4 Solicitation envelope of the Search for Easter Angel ...................................... 193
Figure 4.6.5 Nabua’s image of the Risen Christ ................................................................. 197
Figure 4.6.6 The actual ton-ton is held at the crack of dawn on Easter Sunday ............... 199
Figure 4.7.1 Commissioned holy icons for the Church ....................................................... 202
Figure 6.1.1 Children sit on a plow while waiting for the feeding program.............................. 250
Figure 6.3.1 Nigo-nigos or bamboo plates woven in Nabua .................................................. 260
Figure 6.3.2 A typical landscape outside Nabua’s centro...................................................... 261
Figure 6.5.1 On sunny days, bamboo strips would be neatly laid out ..................................... 280
Figure 6.5.2 A payag-payag at Nang Tita’s house................................................................. 281
Figure 6.6.1 Baskets from Nabua displayed at the Best of Bicol Trade Fair ......................... 293
Figure 6.6.2 The Nabua Home Industries booth................................................................. 294
Figure 6.6.3 Woven Christmas decoration of NHI .............................................................. 297
Specifications Regarding Language Use

Like most of the languages spoken in the archipelago, the Rinconada language belongs to the Austronesian language family. The debate whether Rinconda is a language of its own or a mere dialect of Bicol remains unresolved. For conversations on these linguistic classifications in Bicol, see Jason William Lobel (2005), the Ethnologue Database (SIL International n.d.), and Curtis McFarland (1974). It is outside the scope of this dissertation to debate on the linguistic identities in the Bicol region, and for now I maintain Rinconada as having a vocabulary distinct from the national language of the Philippines called Filipino, and from the main regional language called Bicolano.

To briefly note my proficiency in the Philippine languages used in this dissertation: I was born in Nabua, but my family soon moved to the capital. I was raised and educated in the Filipino-speaking capital city of Manila until I was 12 years old. My siblings and I were raised speaking Rinconada at our home in Manila. I spent four years for high school in Nabua, and then I returned to Manila for my university education. I speak Filipino and Rinconada fluently. I understand but do not speak Bicolano, although most Nabueños do speak it, as it is the official language in Bicol that is commonly used by the local church and by the regional mass media.

I use the following format in distinguishing non-English words in this dissertation:

“Italicized words enclosed in double quotes” Rinconada (language spoken in Nabua)

‘Italicized words in single quotes’ Bicolano (regional language of Bicol)

‘Regular words in single quotes’ Filipino (official language of the Philippines)

Underlined Words Spanish

As this dissertation is on a “Town of (U.S.) Dollars,” I use American English spelling.
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTI</td>
<td>Department of Trade and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>Fleet Reserve Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHI</td>
<td>Nabua Home Industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHIC</td>
<td>Nabua Home Industries Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFW</td>
<td>Overseas Filipino Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIR</td>
<td>Smooth Interpersonal Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBCPSS</td>
<td>University of British Columbia Philippine Studies Series</td>
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</table>
Glossary

“Angot” Unmarried
‘Balikbayan’ Returnee (vacationing or permanent) from overseas
“Balo-balo” Rehearsal of the Ton-ton ritual or Salubong in Filipino (see Ton-ton’s definition below)
‘Barangay’ Roughly, village; the smallest political division in the Philippines
“Bisa” Gesture of respect for the elders
Centro The central hub of the town that is considered “urban”
Cuaderno The Chronicles; A manuscript containing Nabua’s colonial encounter
‘Endo’ Abbreviation for “End of Contract”; also known as the 5-5-5 system
“Gagastusan” Expenditure season; events that cost money
“Ginikanan” Place of origin or genealogy
“Iba” Other
“Iba man” Different
“Iba na” Has become other
“Inang Katipanan” A locally venerated Marian icon in Nabua
‘Kababayan’ Townmates
“Kanagtitios” Extremely Poor
“Kingurang” House owned by the elders of the family
‘Lola/Lolo’ Grandmother/grandfather
“Manay/Manoy” Elder sister/elder brother
“Nigo-nigo” Disposable serving platters made of woven bamboo
“Pag-iiba” Member of an expandable kin network
“Pag-iribanan” Clan in English; Kamag-anakan in Filipino
“Panuga” Religious vow
“Paralote” Farmer working on small farm lots instead on big farmholdings
“Paroy” Grain of rice; palay in Filipino
“Pasali” Subdued performance
“Sag-uli” A melancholic homecoming
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Souvenir Program</th>
<th>An annually printed festival program</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Supog”</td>
<td>Shame; Hiya in Filipino</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Tios”</td>
<td>Poor; impoverished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Tipan”</td>
<td>Covenant with the sacred</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Ton-ton”</td>
<td>‘Salubong’ in Filipino; Dramatization of Christ’s resurrection</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Uma”</td>
<td>Farm area; rural area</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Utang na loob’</td>
<td>Debt of gratitude</td>
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</tbody>
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Acknowledgments

In Nabua, the word for thank you is “mabalos,” which means “I hope to repay in some form, in the future.”

I hold deep appreciation for all the people who contributed to my formation as a person and as a scholar.

First, I thank the Musqueam people, for hosting me in their traditional, ancestral and unceded territory on which the University of British Columbia stands.

My supervisor, Alexia Bloch, has been brilliant, rigorous in her commentary, and kind all throughout the dissertation process. I am inspired by her work as a feminist scholar and by her energy and labor in getting her students to arrive at the dissertation finish line.

Dissertation committee member Geraldine Pratt, who is also a faculty supporter for the UBC Philippine Studies Series (UBCPSS), has been very present in my academic development outside the Department of Anthropology.

I hope to emulate the kindnes of my committee member, Patrick Moore. I wish all students could have such a gentle soul in their committee.

I am grateful to my external examiner, Martin F. Manalansan IV, for his review of my dissertation. I am honored to have been read by one of Philippine Studies’ most distinguished authors and most respected mentors.

I thank university examiners Leslie Robertson and Leonora Angeles for returning constructive feedback. Their engagement with the communities that they work with have profoundly inspired my own project.

My MA supervisor, Shinji Yamashita, now retired from the University of Tokyo, has been extremely supportive of my ventures for over a decade now.

I cannot imagine life in UBC without the friendship and critical engagement that I found through my Philippine Studies Series (UBCPSS) community. I received incalculable support from my colleagues who are emerging scholars in their respective fields and who very kindly read chapters of this dissertation. Chapter 2 was read by May Farrales, Chapter 3 by Teilhard Paradela and James Pangilinan, Chapter 4 by Dennis Gupa, Chapter 5 by Christine Peralta and Chapter 6 by Vanessa Banta. Edsel Yu-Chua has been a kind, eager and hyper-responsible partner in founding the UBCPSS. I benefitted tremendously from my friendships with Karla Lenina Comanda, Chaya Ocampo Go, Krystle Alarcon, Amber Heckelman, Ron Darvin, Gerald Tembrevilla, Patrick Cruz, Genevieve Cruz, Steff Tad-y, Elle Clark, Phebe Ferrer, Caroline Chingcuanco, Treenee Lopez, Ted Alcuitas, Maureen Mendoza, Christian Vistan, Migrante-BC, and many other members and supporters of the UBCPSS community.
I received useful feedback on the early forms of my dissertation chapters – from Bonnie McElhinny during the 2014 Berkshire Conference of Women Historians; from Jason Gavilan who was my co-panelist at the 9th International Conference on the Philippines; from the audiences at the 2016 Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et de Folklore meeting at Basel University, and; from the attendees of my seminar presentations at the Center for Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) and the Rothermere American Institute at Oxford University.

Various networks came to be my pedagogical sanctuary. The events and workshops facilitated by the Graduate Students Network at Race, Autobiography, Gender, and Age Studies, with the guidance of Benita Bunjun and Sunera Thobani, equipped me with the critical tools for navigating academia. In the social media-based group called “Binders Full of Women and Nonbinary People in Academia,” I felt supported and inspired by the multitude of stories of success and struggle by my fellow scholars of color.

The Liu Institute for Global Issues continues to be very generous with its support that sustains the activities of the UBCPSS. My allocated space at the Liu Institute that faced a breathtaking landscape, was my haven during my comprehensive exam preparations. The Center for Southeast Asian Research at the Institute for Asian Research also offered a peaceful writing space.

I am glad to have made the decision to do a six-month academic visit at University of Oxford in 2014. I am grateful for the advisorship of Xiao Biao during my academic visit and the approachability of COMPAS director Nicholas Van Hear. The North Oxford Overseas Centre was my lovely home during my visit, and there I met treasured friend Felix Castellanos. Fellow anthropologists Ken Cheuk and Joyce Fengjiang were very hospitable during my stay in Oxford.

My pre-doctoral fellowship at New York University-Shanghai (NYUSH) provided funding that allowed me to bring my dissertation to completion. Brad Weslake’s and Duane Corpis’ kind review of my application materials allowed me to expand my academic horizons via this fellowship. My friend and colleague Asligul Berktay has been lavish in extending care as I worked through the last pages of my dissertation. Dannah Dennis, Fareed Ben-Youssef and Rebecca Ehrenwirth provided feedback that allowed me to arrive at my defense. Yanyu Wang was selfless in giving support during my stay in Shanghai.

Scholars around the globe have been very inspirational. I am in awe of the work being done by my peers Christina Sornito Carter, Teresa Lorena Jopson, Bubbles Beverly Asor, Genevieve Asenjo, Jason Gavilan, Ignatius Vinzons, Regina Estorba-Macalandag, Hussein Macarambon, Bradley Cardozo, Carlos Picos III, Michael Atienza, Tricia Okada, Jocelyn Celero, Rosa Cordillera Castillo, Liberty Chee, Jorge Bayona, Anjeline de Dios, the Alitaptap Collective at York Univeristy, and the Philippine Studies Berlin.

I am fortunate to have crossed paths with some of the most brilliant minds in the field of Filipino and Philippine Studies such as John Paul Catungal, Lieba Faier, Vicente Rafael, Leny Mendoza Strobel, Robyn Rodriguez, Fenella Cannell, Ethel Tungohan, Roland Tolentino, Danilo Arao, Ninotchka Rosca, Joi Barrios, Cesi Cruz, Kale Fajardo, Mamoru Tsuda, Stephen Acabado, Philip Kelly, Robert Diaz, Julius Bautista, Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez, Sharon Mapa, Danilo Arao, Erik

I shared many unforgettable moments in and outside of the classroom with colleagues from UBC including Naayeli Ramirez-Espinosa, Vishala Parmasad, Lauren Harding, Diana Marsh, Daria Boltokova, Oralia Gomez-Ramirez, Brenda Fitzpatrick, Fraser GermAnn, Mascha Gugganig, Rachel Roy, and Danielle Gendron. Administrator Eleanore Asuncion has been my closest friend in the Department of Anthropology. The seminar on Anthropology of Development led by Sara Schneiderman was crucial to the shaping of my arguments in the last chapter of this dissertation. My acceptance into UBC was through the recommendations of Millie Creighton and I am truly grateful.

I met some of the most wonderful persons whose friendship I will treasure forever at St. John’s College where I resided for a year upon returning from fieldwork. Rushie Rastogi was my best buddy for joyous conversations. Dinner chats with residents Bingyu Liu, Stefan Sunandan Honish, Abhijit Pandhari, Stephanie Lu, Jon Roth, David Gonzales Agudo, Issamou Lar, and Ian Okabe always kept me rejuvenated during the challenging times of writing.

My interest in the broad category of “culture” was incubated at the Philippine Collegian. I treasure the wisdom and creativity of my Kulê peers Hilda Rosca Nartea, Bheng Densing, Jake Salvador, Xavier Gravides, Timothy James Dimacali, Tom Estrera, Jo Abaya Santos, Niel Mugas, K Alave, Adjani Arumpac, and Jacq Hernandez. I look up to my Kulê editors – Maureen Gaddi dela Cruz, Richard Gappi, Seymour Sanchez, Verk Magpusao, Jordan Santos, Mykel Andrada, and many others. My bestfriend Vincent Jan Cruz Rubio and Kim Nepomuceno – my first academic mentors – will be remembered forever.

I am inspired by the imagination and practice of many creatives such as Jessica Hallenbeck, Alvin Zafra, the artists of Respond and Break the Silence Againt the Killings (RESBAK), and many others.

I am moved to action by the artistic minds of my fellows at the Burikbutikan Artist Collective, namely Kristian Sendon Cordero, Doods Santos, Pen Prestado, Frank Peñones, Bernadette de los Santos, Tito Valiente, Victor Nierva, and others. The invitation that I received from Rochelle Ontengco Priela and Gian Paolo Priela to participate in the Best of Bicol trade show tremendously changed the direction of my research project.

My kababayans Lee Jack Jacob, Joenin Masculino Orias, Monserrat Saraspi, JP Bornas, Joedy Pornillos, Joel Jimenez, Lilette Placides Manuais, Ellaine Villaraza, Cleofe Oida, Sonniegie del Parto, Janjan Alcazar, Alexa Ibarrientos, Rene Boy Rabacal, Alden Junio Gallarte, and many others, helped me reconnect to our hometown during my return for fieldwork. My mother’s friends such as Gloria Adiuba Cabrera and Bonifacio Garnace also helped me find the ways beyond the centro.

Many doors opened to me through the help of Fleet Reserve Branch Association Branch 127 elders such as William Soliven, Nicolas Lastrella, George Masculino, Matias Velasco, Sr., and
Jane Barachina. I also received guidance from Nabua Agricultural Office Head Boyet Duran, Nabua Municipality Staff Rosary Penetrante, Camarines Sur Polytechnic College President Dulce Fajardo Atian, and the staff of the Department of Trade and Industry in Camarines Sur. Communities such as Nabua Forum, Taga-Nabua Ika Kin, Gay Society of Nabua, Nabueños of Montreal, Nabueños of New Jersey, and Nabueños Affiliated by Unification and Solidarity, introduced me to many concerns shared by my kababayans. It was here that I met friends John Phillip Pesebre, Prescilla Pesebre, Gerald Daza Ballester, Romeo Oida, Jr., Peachie Vargas Francia, Rebecca Eguia Doblado, and many others.

I thank all the basketmakers and supporters of Nabua Home Industries.

Many of my former teachers and classmates at my alma mater, Nabua National High School, also generously shared their time to answer my questions.

In Vancouver, Rosario Ladaw-Bautista has been very generous in sharing her home for the storage of my things while I was away for fieldwork.

My parents Lydia and Patricio Docot raised me and my siblings with the gift of appreciation for our roots. I am eternally grateful that we were taught to speak the Rinconada language and to love our hometown’s cuisine while growing up in the capital city of Manila. I owe my parents my enduring love for our hometown. I am proud to trace roots to Nabua.

The life trajectories of my siblings – Manay Malou in the US, Manay Weng in Australia/New Zealand, and Patrick in Manila – consistently move me to write more and to advocate for understanding the effects of Filipino mobilities on the very personal.

I thank the Brina family whose members are in Nabua and all over the globe. I am indebted to my Brina aunts, uncles, and cousins for the endless well of support that they extend to me. Many life lessons learned from Tatay Crispin and Nanay Edad remain to be my guiding light.

The Docot family kindly lent me a vehicle during my fieldwork, which allowed me to get around Nabua beyond the limitations of my bicycle.

Deyan Denchev has stood by me over the years in so many ways that I cannot count. He has been thoroughly patient in looking over the pages of this dissertation, even when it was still in its rawest, yet-incomprehensible, form. I would not have reached this point if not for his patience, shared dream that I complete this stage of my life, and unconditional love and care.

Thank you, dear reader, for visiting the pages of this dissertation.

Finally, I am most grateful to my kababayans in Nabua and overseas for taking time to share their stories with me. I offer this dissertation, a very small gift, as an incremental return for their incredible generosity.

Mabalos po kaninyo ngamin.
For my parents,

Lydia Brina Docot

and Patricio Parañaal Docot.
Chapter 1: An Anthropology of the Hometown

1.1 Acceptable Topics

One of my mother’s 10 siblings, Auntie Bea, came to my mother’s apartment the day that I arrived in Nabua. I stood up to meet her as soon as I saw her, performing “bisa” as a gesture of respect. She teasingly asked if I might have brought some gifts from Canada. I said that unfortunately, my luggage could only accommodate my books, cameras, and a few clothes, but that I had packed a few bottles of lotion in the ‘balikbayan’ box that will be arriving soon. “That’s great,” she exclaimed, “because your Auntie Dianne’s skin must already be like a fishnet by now!” She was referring to another aunt who is notorious in our family for hoarding the bottles of lotion from the balikbayan boxes sent by our relatives in the United States. “Fishnet” is a local idiom used to refer to skin that has become ribbed by the tropical sun. Auntie Bea shared hearty laughter with my mother in their recollection of Auntie Dianne’s passion for gifts coming from overseas. In Nabua, conversations often begin with jokes – the type that would seem insensitive and strange to the unenculturated. After we had calmed down from laughing, Auntie Bea asked why I had come home. My mother listened as I told Auntie Bea that I was home to research “the experience of migration of families in Nabua.” Enthusiastically, they began to enumerate their ideas about what I should include in my research.

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1 Bisa is a gesture of respect for elders that includes a younger person taking an elder’s hand to bring it to touch their forehead.
My aunt said I should interview a family whose daughters all went to Japan as entertainers. Elsewhere, the participation of local women in a highly gendered, racialized, and sexualized work might arouse unfavorable impressions, but my mother and aunt instead expressed admiration for these Nabueño (people of Nabua) women who were able to give their parents a life of relative comfort and stability. They also concluded quickly that the owner of the fancy hotel and restaurant at the centro who had retired in Nabua now as a multi-awarded Filipino-American scientist would surely be an appropriate subject. Auntie Bea asked, “How about one of your uncles who jumped ship when he was a U.S. Navy man?” I replied with a mix of shock and excitement, “What? Who?!” not knowing that I was related to persons whose extraordinary stories are chronicled by journalists and scholars. Perhaps realizing that this is not a “good” family story for public sharing, they refused to elaborate and instead continued, “How about the local beauty who married a rich foreigner?” I responded by telling them that I was also interested in how stories of migration in Nabua might intersect with government policies – a rather vague articulation of my interest in the Philippines as a top exporter of migrant labor with over 10 percent of its population now living and working overseas. My mother presented a framework for assessing the condition of Nabua: “Look at the poorest of the poor, then the middle class, then those who have made it.” I responded that sometimes migration stories tend to focus on such progression, on the positive, on successes, and not on life’s tribulations that may be caused by these mobilities. Their suggestions about what could be studied in Nabua was also an attempt to insulate me from what is “not good” – murky local politics and village gossips. I told my mother and Auntie Bea that with all these restrictions, it might be challenging to find people to interview. My mother replied with
confidence that given all her connections as a ‘barangay’ politician for 13 years, it would not be a problem.²

1.2 The Philippine Migration Situation

About 2,500 Filipinos departed for overseas work daily in 2009, ballooning to over 6,000 daily at the beginning of 2016 (Migrante International 2015; Philippine Overseas Employment Administration 2018). With so many Filipinos leaving the country every day, the United Nations Population Division (2017) reports that the Philippines now ranks 9th in the list of countries of origin of migrants, leaping from its previous 13th place in the year 2000. Migrante International writes that the lack of progress in improving wages and generating local employment facilitates the continued increase of Filipinos leaving the country for overseas work; Filipino out-migration is also generally low-skilled, with 34.5 percent of migrants recruited into “elementary occupations” which is defined by the Philippine Standard Occupational Classification as involving the “performance of simple and routine tasks which may require the use of handheld tools and considerable physical effort” (Philippine Statistics Authority 2012). The Middle East is the leading destination for Filipino migrants leaving under government-facilitated short-term contracts, but the largest cumulative population can be found in the United States, with over 3.5 million Filipinos living and working there, including “permanent migrants” (Philippine Daily Inquirer 2016).

² The barangay is the smallest political and administrative unit in the Philippines. The term derives from “balangay,” the organized pre-colonial settlements that the Spanish found when they landed on Philippine shores. Today, each barangay has an elected “captain,” supported by eight councilors and a youth representative. These elected officials form an administrative and legislative council that creates local rules within their area of responsibility, and mediates in the resolution of village-level disputes.
Given these unprecedented overseas mobilities, the Philippines is experiencing a shift in its main sources of income, with dollar remittances increasingly more critical in the local economy. The Philippines is the third largest recipient of overseas remittances globally, following India and China (World Bank Group 2017). Each year, the Philippines reaches a new record high in its history of human labor exportation and cash remittances, and these numbers are a conservative estimate given the many informal channels that recruit migrants and facilitate remittances. National debates are also frequently linked to the normative migration situation. In 2013, the Philippines formalized the addition of two years to the country’s basic education curriculum. This shift is said to contribute to boosting the competitiveness of Filipino youth in the global labor market and addressing unemployment. Migrante International chair Garry Martinez points out that this educational reform is motivated by the systematic professionalization of the youth who will graduate from senior high school with certificates compatible with those required for low-skilled overseas employment (Ellao 2013). The search for possibilities for expanding the outbound workforce continues, while the discussion of pertinent local issues such as job generation, low wages, massive population growth, and agricultural reform, often remain unaddressed by government policies.

The Philippine government maintains that promotion of overseas migration is not among its official policies and that it has never been. Perspectives on the “promise” of overseas migration can be gleaned, however, from the statements of government officials on various public issues. In 2012, in the middle of the heated arguments about the implementation of the Reproductive Health Bill, the President of the Senate argued that the use of contraceptives and teaching sex education would be detrimental to the country’s
export of labor, which relies on having “excess” population. The overseas sojourn of Filipinos has already come a very long way since the issuance of the 1974 Labor Code of the Philippines. Under the Labor Code, the Philippine government created agencies which were “to ensure the careful selection of Filipino workers for the overseas labor market to protect the good name of the Philippines abroad.” Various institutions such as the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency and the Overseas Workers Welfare Agency created in 1974 today continue to facilitate the migration of Filipinos within an intricately operating “art of governmentality” systematically orchestrated by none other than the state itself (Guevarra 2003).

Migration literature commonly features concerns arising from the feminization of migration from the Philippines. Scholars have written about the dramatic changes in the domestic realm in rural Japan brought about by Filipino brides (Faier 2009), the ambivalent conceptualizations of “home” as perceived by Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong (Constable 1999), the changes brought on by transnational familial arrangements that now heavily rely on the remittance contributions of female kin (McKay 2005, 2010; Parreñas 2001b), the negotiation of moral codes and sexual desires of Filipino wives in Islamic Saudi Arabia (Pingol 2010), the gendered racialization of carework within colonial/post/neo-colonial labor regimes (Choy 2003; Parreñas 2001a, 2005), and many others. Rolando Tolentino (1996) locates the global distribution of women as nurses, entertainers, domestic helpers and mail-order brides, within relations of power in which they are marginal. Official statistics on Filipino migration also reflect the production of what Tolentino (1996, 73) calls the “geobody” of the Filipino woman – “a body made allegorical for a sexualized and gendered, nationalized and racialized body of people.” In
1975, women accounted for only 12 percent of the total of outbound migrants (Dimzon 1997, in Gamburd 2000, 35). Migration figures from 1996 show a remarkable increase in women migrants, almost catching up with their male counterparts at 44 percent (Philippine Statistics Authority 1997). The ratio has shifted even more, with the latest numbers from 2017 showing women migrants now at almost 54 percent of the total (Philippine Statistics Authority 2018).

This dissertation is written at a time of the ubiquitous presence of the effects of migration in the everyday life of Filipinos. Several scholars from the anthropological field and beyond have indeed already written about the effects of migration in the Philippines. Anna Gueverra (2003) and Robyn Rodriguez (2010) point to the institutionalization of labor brokerage in the Philippines. Ethnographic works studying life outside of Manila such as those by Raul Petrierra (1992), Deidre McKay (2005), Filomeno Aguilar et al. (2009), expose how the resulting effects of migration have produced a “remittance culture” that has impacted familial care, agricultural-scapes, and others. Other researchers point to the endless conditions of precarity experienced by migrants (Pratt, Johnston, and Banta 2017). While there is certainly a considerable amount of work on the effects at home of increased mobilities, migration scholars continue to point out the need to focus on investigating spaces where migrants are warehoused, especially in relation to the larger volume of scholarship produced on what happens elsewhere. In writing this ethnography of my hometown, I hope to address this gap, with the added elements of self-reflexivity, auto-critique and auto-ethnography. Nabua, a lowland riverine-agricultural town located in Southeastern Luzon Island, Philippines is known in the Bicol region for the many male townsfolk who served in the United States Navy from the beginning of the 20th century.
until the closure of the U.S. Bases in 1991, and who sent dollars to their relatives who were left behind (Figure 1.2.1). The suggestions of my relatives about what counts as “good stories,” speak of how stories of the “American dream” have shaped perceptions about overseas mobilities that earned the town its self-ascribed moniker – the “Town of Dollars.”

Figure 1.2.1 Nabua town in the Philippine map, with Nabua marked with the “Navy Man” icon. Illustrated by Pen Prestado.
I investigate Nabua as a site in which desires for, and orientations towards, migrant futures are produced and conditioned. Nabueño migration reflects the trend towards the feminization of labor, especially given that the first recorded migrations from the town were of men. However, while national statistics are also categorized per region, the porosity of the urban-rural divide today implies that Nabueños may also find overseas employment in recruitment agencies in Manila. Many parts of this dissertation point to some of the effects of this feminization of migration on contemporary families in Nabua and their relations beyond. With the nation seemingly determined to keep brokering Filipino labor overseas, I ask: What does everyday life look like in one of the Philippines’ towns that is at the periphery of national and regional historiography? I investigate how migration and intimacy co-produce a postcolonial town, particularly in the domains of both the spectacular and the mundane. In writing an ethnography of the hometown, I engage with feminist, phenomenological, and postcolonial/decolonizing renderings of the lived postcolonial experience. My dissertation stresses the importance of bridging discussions on the Filipino diaspora with the impasse of dispossession in the origin community of migrants. The above conversation with my mother and aunt illustrates my positionality as an anthropologist of my hometown and absentee resident after many years of urban (Manila) and overseas (Tokyo and Vancouver) education. How might intentionality and self-reflexivity in anthropological ethnography of the hometown become re-framed by explicit mediations and expressed investments of my relations and informants concerning my research about our common hometown?

3 I return to some accounts of forced labor migrations from Nabua during the Spanish period in Chapter 4.
1.3 The Town of Dollars

Nabua has a total of 42 barangays, a population of 83,874, and a land area of 8,800 hectares (Philippine Statistics Authority 2015). The Philippines is geopolitically divided into “administrative regions,” Bicol being one of them (Figure 1.3.1). Regions like Bicol are further divided into “legislative districts” or provinces, and then into even smaller administrative “divisions.” Nabua is, therefore: a municipality in the Rinconada division, within the province of Camarines Sur of the Bicol region. The towns and cities in the Rinconada division speak the same language, albeit in different tones and variations. More than working as geopolitical, administrative legal divisions, some of these groups also work as ethnolinguistic categories. In the case of the Bicol region, its residents are called “Bicolanos,” an ethnolinguistic group in the Philippines.

In 1901, only three years after Spain relinquished the Philippines to the U.S., William McKinley signed an executive order that launched the gendered and racialized enlistment of the first 500 Filipinos into the lowest sector of the U.S. Navy (J. M. Morris 1984). Their recruitment occurred during the height of the Philippine-American War, which followed the handover of the Philippines, after more than 300 years of Spanish...

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4 The division of the Philippines into administrative regions was decreed by President Marcos in 1972.
5 R.J May (2003, 137) argues that language could be used to identify ethnicities in the Philippines. May continues to suggest that if language could work to mark identity, then 86 percent of the Philippine population could be categorized into only eight major language/ethnic groups, Bicolano being one of them. However, this categorization is debatable considering the unresolved issue of languages versus dialects in the Philippines. Further, the construction of identities in the Philippines that are “group-level,” according to James Eder (2013, 274) could also become variegated by individual “geographic and economic mobility, outgroup marriage, subsistence economic change, religious conversion, and the political salience of localism....”
6 For many years, Filipinos were only recruited to the Steward Branch, where no white Americans were allowed. Timothy Ingram (1970) calls U.S. naval ships “floating plantations,” in reference to the historical organization of slave labor in agricultural production in the American South.
colonial rule. Nabua is landlocked and yet young men found ways to join the U.S. Navy. Desires for overseas mobility held by many Nabueños whom I interviewed for my research have been shaped by this migration. The recruitment of Filipinos officially ceased in 1991, when the last U.S. military bases in the Philippines were closed. This U.S.-bound migration of Nabueño men increased and diversified beyond employment in the U.S. Navy when state-sponsored mass labor exportation took off in the 1970s. Nabua’s moniker as “the Town of Dollars” indeed links the town to its colonial past, and it speaks about the perceived transformative effects of foreign currency and overseas-bound mobilities on the local economy.
Figure 1.3.1 Nabua’s location within the Bicol administrative region, with areas marked using their town’s monikers or main produce. See Footnote 7 for more information. Illustrated by Pen Prestado.
Meanwhile, Nabua’s neighbors also bear memorable nicknames. During beauty pageants, contestants from other Rinconada towns introduce themselves as coming from: the “Egg Basket of Camarines Sur” (Baao), the “Home of the Smallest Fish in the World” (Buhi), the “Fish Basket of Bicol,” the “Town of Tilapia” or the fancy-sounding “Fishing Shangri-La of Bicol” (Bato), among others (Figure 1.3.2). Nabua’s local government embraces the moniker for the town, as can be seen in its official seal, which prominently features the figure of a U.S. Navy man and an anchor, surrounded by local produce such as taro, rice, and others. This is an outright acknowledgement of the influence of American dollars in the making of the town’s history and identity (Figure 1.3.3). Located at the centro of Nabua is the headquarters of retired U.S. Navy men. Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) Branch 127 in Nabua was accredited by the headquarters in Washington in 1949 and is one of the over 220 FRA branches, and one of only 7 existing in the Philippines as of 2018. The town’s first college building was built in the 80s with the donation of World War II veteran Cleto Descalso who retired in Nabua as a philanthropist (Capa 1997). Nabua is also known in the region for its well-funded Church. This is reflected in the fact that Nabueño families get recruited to participate in religious money-making activities elsewhere.

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7 In April 2018, I learned new monikers from online conversations with friends with whom I interacted on social media. The conversation was spurred by my post on the different monikers used in Bicol, especially during beauty pageants. I am thankful to my friends who trace their roots from all over Bicol for participating in this conversation that helped produce what I call “resource maps” for this dissertation. The maps chart the resources that are generally known to be available in the Bicol region. A discussion on the geopolitical mapping of the Bicol region based on “resource” and the monocropping system deserves future attention. Filomeno Aguilar (1998), for example, has already written about the class-based oppressions in the Visayas due to the spread of sugarcane plantations during the Spanish period.

8 The FRA branches are classified as belonging to the “Northwest region,” grouped with “all branches overseas in the Pacific.” There are also FRA branches located in Alaska, Hawaii, and Japan. The 6 other active FRA branches in the Philippines as of 2018 are located in Iloilo (Branch 064), Olongapo (Branch 074), Baguio (Branch 154), Southern Luzon (Branch 171), Dagupan City (Branch 247), and San Miguel (Branch 367) (Fleet Reserve Association 2017).
in the region, in hope that at least some of the dollar donations will find their way to other churches.

Figure 1.3.2 The “Resource” Map of Rinconada District. Illustrated by Pen Prestado.

Figure 1.3.3 The official seal of the municipality of Nabua.
Nabua’s moniker notwithstanding, persistent poverty is experienced by most of its “left-behind” non-migrating population. Nabua’s centro or “urban” area maintains the typical layout of towns following the Spanish ayuntamiento system, which was meant to concentrate power at the heart of each town for bringing together activities that are economic, religious, and political in nature, for more intensive political control and surveillance. Like in many other towns and cities, economic growth and development are usually concentrated in this hub, and the benefits of these only trickle to the outlying rural barangays. The Department of Interior and Local Government (2009) reports unemployment in Nabua to be “alarming,” at above 10 percent, as compared to the national average of 6.3 percent. Underemployment is also “very high,” at 30 percent, versus the national rate of 18.1 percent. Furthermore, in terms of poverty, the government reports that the “magnitude of families living below [the] poverty threshold is too high” at 50 percent, while the national average is 26.9 percent.

Three public monuments found in Nabua’s centro additionally communicate the paradox at the heart of the town’s moniker; they provide an insight into how a group of people envisions the identity that it hopes to craft for itself and to project as a community with layered, complex, and sometimes, competing histories. These are the statue of the “Three Agtas” at the main roundabout, and the two commemorative war memorials located just across the road, inside the town’s so-called Veterans Park. An interpretation of these monuments requires a brief recollection of Nabua’s past. The Cuaderno or The Chronicles, reproduced in print for the very first time only in 1978, is the only known historical document that tells us about the town’s

9 While this report is already dated, more recent information is not available, reflecting the haphazard state of town-specific statistics in the Philippines.
10 “Park” is an overstatement as it occupies only about 25sqm.
social organization and ways of life during the early years of encounter with Spanish colonization.\textsuperscript{11} The Cuaderno begins its documentation of events affecting a group of settlements in 1571, when Augustinian Friar Alonzo Gimenez reached Lupa (literally, “land”), which was headed by Panga from Borneo.\textsuperscript{12} These settlements, according to Danilo Gerona (2006), were not permanently settled villages and were organized under the rule of their respective powerful chiefs. The first Catholic mass was held in the same year.\textsuperscript{13} In 1578, Franciscan missionaries arrived, and the pre-colonial hamlets thriving around the area were unified into a group of colonial rancherias.\textsuperscript{14} The town’s name – Nabua – appears for the first time in the Cuaderno in the same entry, perhaps renamed as such following the reorganization of Lupa into a colonial settlement. As part of the encomienda system, Nabua was placed under the jurisdiction of a Spanish encomendero under the favor of the Spanish King, and its native residents effectively became corvée laborers (Gerona 2006, 5).\textsuperscript{15} In 1678, a civil government was installed in Nabua, which means that tax collection and tribute payments began. Meanwhile, the Cuaderno also records the rise and integration of the landowners into the expanding colonial politics. While

\textsuperscript{11} The Cuaderno has been reprinted only twice (Nabua Quadricentennial Celebration 1978; Nabua Town Fiesta May 3 & 4, 1997; Souvenir Program 1997; “Cuaderno” 1997). The original document was presented as a single book signed by a certain Sr. Alverto Melos, and it was formerly guarded by 3 prominent Nabueño families: Capistrano, Dinero and Pasadilla. The contributors through the years are unknown, but likely hail from the same three families.

\textsuperscript{12} This is 50 years after explorer Ferdinand Magellan landed on the shores of the Philippines.

\textsuperscript{13} Gerona (2006) writes of pre-Hispanic Nabua as consisting of independent villages of 30 to 100 households headed by chieftains. Gerona speculates that the riverine villages in pre-Hispanic Nabua must have been like its neighbors, which were thriving and prosperous, with village heads protecting their territories through ceremonial rituals of blood compact and marriage, trade, and other kin-expanding activities. Gerona also makes it clear that the town’s past was not one of utopic harmony. To support this, he cites Franciscan Friar Marcos de Lisboa’s Vocabulario de la Lengua Bicol of the 17th century as listing indigenous words that provide an insight into inter-village conflicts that may have composed Nabua’s pre-Hispanic social organization. Lisboa was also assigned in Nabua.

\textsuperscript{14} Gerona (2006, 7) argues that Nabua may have been integrated into the colonial encomienda system earlier, in 1575, upon the creation of the Spanish base in Bicol’s economic capital, Naga City.

\textsuperscript{15} An encomienda was a territory entrusted by the Spanish king to a colonizer.
moments of jubilation, such as successful harvests and festivities are also accounted for here, we also learn about forced labor, public punishments of the local population, inter-village disputes, pestilences and disasters in Nabua, among other things.

The local historical and popular discourse crafts Nabua as the supposed “mother town” of the Rinconada district (Gerona 2006), in part making assertions about Nabua’s supposed role in the foundation of the area. Today, Nabueños also commonly circulate the story that our landlocked agricultural town spawned the flourishing city of Iriga, and the resource-rich towns of Buhi, Bato, Bula and Baao, as well as the fishing and beach town of Balatan. Nabua’s “exceptionalism” that was supposedly crucial to the making of the Rinconada district appeals to many Nabueños as it could be deployed when making claims about our place in history, especially within the context of our understudied past. The Cuaderno provides clues for complicating this discourse. As mentioned above, Nabua was the resulting town produced out of the colonial government’s reorganization of the thriving native settlements in the area. Writing about Nabua’s past needs a dedicated investigation, but for now I suggest that it is important to challenge conceptions about Nabua’s supposed exceptional place in local history.

In rethinking these “origin” narratives, it is likewise crucial to shed light on the experience of dispossession, displacement, and colonial violence that Nabua commonly shares with many “peripheral” towns in the Philippines. I hope to direct critical reflections towards the historical experience of resource and labor extraction that tends to be elided in our conversations,

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16 As the Cuaderno notes, Iriga was Nabua’s visita (a settlement within a Spanish colonial town) that separated in 1683. Bato, another visita, was declared independent from Nabua in 1753. Balatan, a village that includes a shoreline on the Ragay Gulf in the Sibuyan Sea, became a town in its own right in 1951, upon the successful petition made in the same year by Gregorio Balatan, a new member of the educated elite who rose to power in the American colonial period.
as the dialogue that opened this chapter shows. To cite a few examples, the Cuaderno records that Nabueño men were often recruited for various purposes all throughout the Spanish period. In 1827, abaca was planted in the town, which tells us that labor and agricultural production in Nabua fed into the larger demands of the Spanish metropole. These are examples from the very distant past, but “peripheries” such as Nabua remain to be containerized as sources of agricultural products, crafts, and human labor – provisions that are mobilized according to the demands, desires, and pleasures of cities and global capital. Therefore, in characterizing my fieldsite’s “typical milieu,” Nabua compares with many other towns and cities in the Philippines and the Global South today, whose histories are layered with multiple historical oppressions, resource extraction, and dispossession, producing today’s common experiences of ongoing social disorganization, uneven wealth distribution, rural underdevelopment, labor precarity, and political dynasticism, among other postcolonial conundrums.

In this ethnography of everyday life in Nabua, I interweave ethnographic data with writings and reflections on various sources, such as oral history, archives, monuments, popular and religious reading materials, among others. The Cuaderno offers a rich record of Nabua’s past but is not accessible reading material in Nabua as copies of the souvenir programs on which it is reprinted were handed out only to those who have contributed funds for their publication. The Nabueño sense of local history has become displaced by the more dominant regional (Bicolano) and national (Filipino) historiographic accounts that more commonly appear in the scholarship. Philosopher Pierre Nora (1989) writes of “sites of memory” – locations at which identity is

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17 A “souvenir program” is an annually published book in Nabua. It is essentially a “souvenir” for the year’s fiesta. The book contains the schedule of the annual festival, messages from politicians, essays on Nabua, poems, among other content. Its publication is funded by personal contributions, often from successful local personalities and business owners in Nabua and beyond. Most of its pages contain festival greetings from the donors.
produced, made to endure, and eventually transmitted, but which also exist to crystallize memories that have already been lost. In contemporary Nabua, the statue of the Agtas built by the local municipality in 1997, arguably stands for Nabua’s claim to indigeneity and precolonial history within a context of a dearth of local historiography. This local history is supplemented by the monument named “Unknown Soldier of Nabua,” which was unveiled in 1962, dedicated to the Nabueños who fought in World War II. It is composed of a rather unmonumental gray concrete wall, against which a replica rifle with a military hard hat on its muzzle is propped. Inscribed on the lower portion of the concrete wall are the names of the residents whose participation in fundraising contests helped construct the monument. Ironically, the wall memorializes the yet unnamed heroes of Nabua while identifying precisely those whose wealth helped create this public memorial. A couple of meters from this monument stands another war memorial that offers a different historical narrative. Retired U.S. Navy men and their relatives built the town’s replica of the Washington monument flanked by the Philippine and American flags. Its plaque lists the donors for the construction of this monument built to commemorate “Nabueño-American cooperation.” Honoring disparate alliances during the colonial occupation of the Philippines, these two monuments appear to be at a standoff.

Adding to the three intriguing representations are the fences surrounding the minuscule park, which now also serve as columns for large tarpaulins announcing the most recent victories of various families, such as recent graduations – often from the maritime academy, but also for

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18 The pieces of pre-colonial golden jewelry and utensils from Nabua displayed at the Ayala Museum located in the Philippines’ business district, for example, are a cause of bewilderment to Nabueños “discovering” them for the first time.

19 Residents of Iriga City criticize Nabua for its unhistoricised cooptation of the Agta group, who they say have always resided in the mountains of Iriga, and historically would only occasionally come down to Nabua to trade. For a discussion of the Agta in Bicol, see Kristian Sendon Cordero (2015).
degrees in nursing, engineering, and other professions that are in demand overseas. On the second of May every year, the town’s *Boa-boaan Festival* parade passes through the roundabout where these monuments stand. The parade’s participants retell Nabua’s past by translating it into oral history accompanied by chants, dance moves and music. The oral history, repeated over the microphone in the hall at the centro where the parade ends, retells how the local chief Datu Tungdo’s daughter named Laypani was suffering an ailment that the healers could not cure. One day, Laypani was carried to the Barit River so the community could begin their petition to a god named “Balahala” who was believed to reside there. On the way to Barit, the group accompanying Laypani passed by a crowd of natives who were getting baptized by the Spanish friar. Datu Tungdo angrily scolded the natives for allowing themselves to be baptized into the Christian faith by the Spanish stranger. Datu Tungdo fainted in the midst of his angered reprimand. The Spanish priest quickly baptized the chief, who then awoke, miraculously healed. The sickly Laypani was also healed after her baptism. In this narrative about Nabua’s “first miracle,” Christian conversion brought by the colonial encounter marks the beginning of Nabua’s salvation from life’s uncertainties, simultaneously eliding violent processes of transformation, such as the *reduccion* or the “settlement of natives converted to the true religion,” upon Spanish arrival (Gerona 2006, 8).

According to Gerona, the term *reducir* means persuasion through reason or through submission. Gerona writes that relocation of the widely scattered and independently headed native settlements into a compact settlement was necessary in carrying out missionization and

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20 The Cuaderno attests to the existing headships during colonial arrival which means that the area that came to be called Nabua had an organized social structure before the *reduccion* process. The reduccion refers to the rearrangement of scattered villages into organized divisions for easier colonial management and religious conversion.
colonialism. He writes, “It was through this system of Catholic conversion that the friars undertook the comprehensive transformation of the encomienda of Nabua.” The public monuments in Nabua and the narratives that people tell about them, in effect reflect what James Eder (2013) calls the process of “ethnogenesis” in the Philippines through the de-indigenization of native population through religious conversion upon colonial arrival.21

In the evening of May 3rd, the Balikbayan Night (Returnees’ Night) is held only a block away from the three monuments (Figure 1.3.4). It is a ball attended by the town’s elite who are often kin of U.S. Navy retirees, or vacationing returnees. Those who can pay the entrance fee to the Balikbayan Night enjoy an evening of ballroom dancing in a hall that is enclosed within a chainlink fence that still allows the non-entrants to watch and to gossip who’s who and who came home from where, but does not allow them to cross over the fence to join in the night of merriment. Aside from this important annual ball held at the centro, the annual calendar of Nabua marks many other spectacular fiestas celebrated in reverence of the villages’ patron saints, by clan and class reunions, by the homecoming dances for those returning from overseas, and many others – during which wealth and success are often made public through the sums paid by the prominent families for these affairs. At the same time, those who live in the outlying farms of Nabua often express disappointment and exhaustion from the dire conditions of the present. This ethnography attempts to depict a hopefully fair representation of this wealth of stories that

21 R.J. May (2003) argues that the Spanish colonial period produced “three major ethnic blocs” in the Philippines: the Christianized “mainstream” Filipinos; the “cultural minorities” who identify with indigenous communities that historically resisted colonization, and; the “Muslim Filipinos” with roots in the Southern Philippines. Through these categories, May makes an argument that identity in the Philippines presents a narrative of assimilation into the colonial religion and of resistance. The forms of identification in Nabua in terms of nativity/indigeneity, class, ancestry, and other social distinctions, are lingering questions that I hope to return to in the future.
encompass what Manalansan and Espiritu (2016) call “mercurial ‘layerings’”—in the case of the Town of Dollars, of multiple colonial encounters, tense allegiances with the U.S. through the local men’s labor for the American military apparatus, family life and solidarities that increasingly expand across geographies, hybrid practices of ritual, and contemporary precarious conditions.

Figure 1.3.4 The Balikbayan Night in Nabua held during the annual town festival. Most of the attendees are returnees from overseas.

1.4 Anthropology of the Hometown as a Fraught Venture?

We recall that Renato Rosaldo (1988) who proposed to conduct an ethnography in the Philippines for his doctoral dissertation, was once advised by his professor to study other (supposedly more exotic) countries. The Philippines has “no culture,” said his professor, and it would be better to do fieldwork in countries such as Madagascar. The cautions and worries
continue, albeit taking new forms. At an international conference on the Philippines, I sought the advice of a Filipino professor on my dissertation topic but he was quick to tell me, “be kinder to yourself,” adding that I should switch to another topic if I still can. Confiding with a fellow Filipino scholar about this celebrated professor’s response, my friend concernedly cautioned me about “wearing [my] feelings so close to the skin.” Both referred to the difficult situation of confronting the drama at home. An anthropologist of Asia also told me that the Philippines is not an established “area” and that auto-ethnography is better done after the Ph.D., effectively implying that anthropological othering is a rite of passage that must be taken by the student anthropologist. During my graduate training, I encountered similar stories of fellow overseas Filipino scholars being discouraged by their professors from returning to their communities for research. A Filipino studying anthropology at a European university was advised to do fieldwork in Latin America instead, with the reason that studying the “other” would facilitate easier entry into the academic world. These forms of academic policing link with anthropologists’ fixations on studying other cultures which they then report as “closed, coherent, and different” (Rosaldo 1988, 78). Sol Worth once grabbed the camera from Mary Jane Tsosie, annoyed at how the Navajo was filming her grandfather and thus asserting the hierarchical relationship between the anthropologist and the subject (Rony 1996, 212). On the other hand, we recall Sonya Ryang’s (2005) frustration about the “dilemma of the native.” Researching as a “native” in the Black community in Harlem, John Jackson, Jr. (2004) writes that compared to their Western counterparts, “native” anthropologists are assumed to be less adept at interpreting the “emic etically,” seen to begin from an “overly identificatory position,” and being unable to stand “above and beyond...in a posture of laboratorial scrutiny.” The “native” often needs to explain their location/positionality as an insider and researcher of the communities that they study, and
my experience with fellow Filipino scholars of migration points to the tense perceptions about doing anthropology not only at home but at the hometown.

This anxiety about researching in the hometown was further exacerbated by the responses of two Philippine-based anthropologists who gave me a brief about the themes being explored by our fellow Filipino anthropologists. They told me that it is rare for Filipino anthropologists to study one’s community because, “We still need an anthropological other.” It is important to contextualize these responses as a way of thinking about the fraught genealogies of knowledge production in formerly colonized countries, especially if we were to consider postcolonial approaches in our contribution to the scholarship. These impressions about area-based research in the Philippines are linked with the colonial origins of Anthropology and Philippine Studies whose foundations were laid during the American period. Like in other colonized societies, early anthropological work in the Philippines served as a “handmaiden” of the expanding American empire in their civilizing mission in the Philippines. Dean Worcester, an American anthropologist who headed the First Philippine Commission and the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes in the 1900s, divided the Philippines based on a nomenclature, classifying groups as Christians and Non-Christians, with the former often coming from the “civilized” lowlands and the latter from the “wild” highlands (Hutterer 1978, 139). Worcester’s mapping of the Philippines based on these categories led to the charting of the country into lowlands and highlands – the two categories of the “field” that still are used by anthropologists of the Philippines today. Intellectuals and anti-imperialists in Manila were critical of Worcester’s work,
which they said was used by the U.S. colonial government to justify their civilizing mission, especially in the Philippine highlands.22

William Davis and Mary Hollnsteiner (1969, 64) observe a “sharp” shift towards the study of the lowlands after the 1950s, writing that 90 percent of titles before this period focused on “tribal societies.” For these authors, this interest in lowland “peasant” communities was “due to an increasing awareness that information about the numerically dominant lowland populations is essential to a government interested in national development” (64). This shift occurred during a time when the Philippines was released from its Commonwealth status (1935-1946), an era that was additionally devastated by WWII. Davis and Hollnsteiner also trace the increased dominance of lowland studies to the establishment of the Philippine Studies Program at the University of Chicago in 1952 headed by anthropologist Fred Eggan (64). While their account on the development of anthropology in the Philippines is certainly illuminating, Davis and Hollnsteiner curiously skip anxieties experienced during post-Commonwealth and the post-WWII neoliberalization in the Philippines that arguably contributed to the reorientation of anthropological scholarship in the country. Writing in the 70s, Filipino anthropologist Mario Zamora (1974) observed a sustained shift in the scholarly focus from the mountain peoples to the lowland Christians. Certainly, the lowlands – the areas pulled into global commercialized agriculture since the Spanish occupation, and ravaged by the Spanish-American War, WWII, and

22 Anthropologists have already written about the more complex positionality of American anthropologists in the Philippines during the American occupation of the Philippines. For example, drawing from Worcester’s wealth of anthropological work in the Philippines, Karl Hutterer (1978, 134) writes that Worcester was indeed a strong defender of the American occupation of the Philippines, backing his position with evidence on the uncivilized “wild” communities that were yet to be mapped. However, Hutterer also argues that despite all the controversies, “Worcester’s greatest concern was the protection of the non-Christians from what he saw was an historic exploitation of lowlanders.” In 1912, the Annual Report of the Philippine Commission included a report on slavery and peonage which “aroused the bitterest debates” but which led to the 1913 passage of an Anti-Slavery Bill in the Philippines (Hutterer 1978, 134).
others – were more accessible to the growing number of Manila-based intellectuals. However, the continued experiences of dispossession in these areas also came to be a serious concern among the scholars in the new anthropology departments in the Manila universities who came to be interested in the process of “indigenization” and engaged anthropology.

The indigenization process in the social sciences in the Philippines, according to Alicia Magos (2004, 348), is a “historical process in which students and scholars become critical of the colonial or neocolonial system of education, leading to its reexamination.” Magos contends that a Filipino scholar’s process of “unlearning” progresses with the country’s struggle to define itself within its troubled history. This move towards indigenization of anthropology in the Philippines occurred during the height of Martial Law. Facing iron-clad despotism, and steeply declining quality of life during the dictatorship, scholars, and activists at the University of the Philippines began to push for the academy itself as a site for interrogating the Philippine condition. As Magos recalls, activists began to regard Philippine education as “neocolonial” which led to its eventual self-introspection. This period produced critical scholarship using a paradigm of “indigenized scholarship” (Magos 2004) that paid attention to the multiple layers of oppressions and violences experienced within the permanence of dispossession and political turbulence in the country. Researchers were committed to highlighting the peasant struggle in their scholarship, but as it would be observed later, it came with some cost. Fenella Cannell (1999, 6–7) laments

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23 Philippine anthropologists and archeologists are also exploring the contested territory about how the Spanish empire materially pressed upon the agricultural, social, and political organization in the “highlands” (Acabado 2018).

24 It must be recalled that during this period, Ferdinand Marcos also heavily capitalized on indigeneity in crafting a nationalist discourse that would be instrumentalized during his dictatorship. The Marcos government funded academic scholarship that promoted the ideology of ‘bagong lipunan’ (new society) founded on purported values of “indigenous” solidarity.
that the lowland had come to be depicted as “perhaps nothing but the sum of its colonial parts, a culture without authenticity, or else was only to be defined in a series of negatives, by what it had failed to be.”

These conversations on knowledge production on the Philippines are further complicated by the increased deterritorialization and brokerage of Filipino labor. With mobilities causing a shift in the scholarship towards the study of the Filipino diasporic experience that later became an important foundation in ethnic studies in the United States (Aquino 2000). Belinda Aquino (2000) writes that it is not that the Philippines as a fieldsite was no longer relevant because it still existed as a “vignette of imagined community.” The cautions I heard from both colleagues and friends about centering my doctoral research in the Philippines directly links with these developments, but their well-meaning commentaries point to the lingering anxieties in this postcolonial conundrum, with attempts at self-reflexivity still uncomfortably clashing with the genealogies of knowledge production in the fields of anthropology, Philippine and Area Studies, and with the intentionalities of the scholar as radical, engaged, indigenized/indigenizing, and diasporic.

When I first looked up UBC for my Ph.D. education, having a Philippine focus for my prospectus did not seem to be a promising option as Southeast Asia was not, and is still not, among the Department of Anthropology’s focus areas. I had initially entered UBC with a proposal to continue my masters research on the Filipino community in Japan, but my everyday experiences in UBC as organizer for the University of British Columbia Philippine Studies Series (UBCPSS), a collective of scholars, academics, and community members that I co-founded in 2011, oriented me towards new advocacies within the university setting that could
contribute to the existing work on the Philippines and Filipinos in Vancouver (Figure 1.4.1). During that time, the founding members of the UBCPSS felt a pressing need to advocate for the greater visibility of scholarship produced by minorities of color in UBC and Vancouver in general. At UBC, I was inspired by the decolonizing scholarship emerging in a university setting on the unceded territory of the Musqueam First Nations. Formal events in UBC often open with a ceremony led by the indigenous elders such as Elder Larry Grant to welcome visitors to their ancestral land, a practice that was new to me and that subtly embedded in my mind a deeper sense of responsibility as a visitor in Canada, and towards “my own community.” My undergraduate education in the University of the Philippines had oriented me to remain invested in political issues happening back home, and these roots were the pillars of my organizing work with the UBCPSS (Figure 1.4.2).

As we worked together in UBCPSS to foreground Philippine issues in the university setting, I came to know of the many struggles of the Filipino community in Vancouver that my Filipino-Canadian friends were beginning to explore. The members of our group shared a strong sense of bringing into the university the issues that concern the larger Filipino community in Vancouver and Canada. While I felt that I was committed in my solidarity with them, I thought that their stories are theirs to tell, based on their own terms and readiness. While I was very thankful to receive top funding for my research in the Philippines, I felt guilty as I do not

25 There is extensive organizing work in Vancouver done by the migrant-led Philippine Women Center and Migrante International. There is also academic work on the Philippines from the School of Community and Regional Planning with Prof. Leonora Angeles, in the Department of Geography with Prof. Geraldine Pratt, and in the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries’ Project Seahorse Research Group. Undergraduate Filipino and Filipino-Canadian students formed a club called Kaba, short for ‘kababayan.’ There was however a gap in scholarship produced in the undergraduate and graduate levels by Filipino and Filipino-Canadian students in UBC and Vancouver in general. The UBCPSS seeks to address this gap. The UBCPSS was co-founded with undergraduate student of anthropology Edsel Yu-Chua who identifies as Filipino-Chinese/Filipino-Canadian.
descend from immigrants to Canada who had paid taxes while my Filipino-Canadian friends worked extra jobs to fund their education and living expenses in Vancouver. Hearing the personal stories of displacement experienced by my friends in the Filipino-Canadian community in Vancouver and frequently unsettled by my privilege in Canada as an outsider receiving Canadian government funding, I wanted to help open up more space for these important issues by writing grant proposals and by organizing in the background. I recognized that I was merely visiting, and that I had my own histories to process and my own unresolved postcolonial layerings to peel and sift through. Looking back at the case of graduate students with Filipino roots in our group, those who do not hold Canadian citizenship or those who were raised in the Philippines during their childhood seem to be more drawn to doing a Philippine-based research while those already identifying strongly as Filipino-Canadians seem to choose research areas that are very close to their personal attachments and diasporic identities and histories. It is certainly interesting how these unspoken ethics about researching “ourselves” become projected onto our shared advocacies and individual academic projects.
Figure 1.4.1 The first public event of the UBCPSS held in 2011.

Figure 1.4.2 A UBCPSS novena gathering titled “Prayers for Those Killed by Marcos” held in 2016.
In UBC, I found myself in an environment where I strongly felt that self-reflexivity and studying one’s community were welcome and valued. Thus, it was in UBC that my long-held passion to contribute to knowledge-production about the Philippines was awakened. I began to direct my attention more closely to the Philippines, and to the possibility of writing an ethnography of my hometown. I thought that there are many stories that I carry with me, that circulate in my family’s transnational space of care, and that are left back home – multiple colonial aftermaths that I need to face sooner or later.

One rainy evening in October 2006 in Tokyo, during a break from my masters thesis, I began a personal blog about Nabua. The first posts were simple – I had posted some photos of local delicacies and some of my favorite spots around town. To my surprise, the blog had over 20,000 page visits within a week, and visitors had left many requests. They wanted a forum, chatroom, and other interactive features. The blog eventually evolved into a website called the Nabua Forum, which had over 1,200 registered users living in Nabua, in other parts of the Philippines, and beyond. With the growing popularity of social media platforms, the website closed and moved to Facebook. Today, the Nabua Forum on Facebook has over 3,000 members.

It was in this online community that I first read lamentations about Nabua remaining in the periphery of Bicol’s and the country’s historiography. Many online Nabueños holding different occupations in different countries wrote about missing Nabua and their left-behind kin, and I realized that my own family’s complicated stories of mobility were all too common to many Nabueños. It was also through the Nabua Forum that I learned of the broad spectrum of possibilities for transnational political activism, cultural work, and local-overseas collaboration that could be coordinated online. I was born in Nabua, but it was through the online community that my academic and community-oriented interests in Nabua were kindled. These passions were
awakened during the time that I was away, trying to remain intimately connected to “home.” In many ways, this dissertation serves as a culmination of the many issues that I heard about repeatedly online, often recalled in tones of nostalgia by my ‘kababayans’ or countrymen, as well as the many stories about Filipino migrant life that I heard from my family, fellow Filipino scholars, and the Filipinos that I came to know as I moved across the globe.

It seems to be understood that choosing the hometown as a fieldsite creates a situation where it is all too easy to be burdened by personal drama. These and many other warnings against studying one’s community replayed in my mind as I was set to return home. I began to think that I should have heeded their well-meaning advice that anthropology of the hometown is a fraught venture. Studying someone else somewhere else, where things would be at least somewhat strange and unfamiliar, suddenly seemed “better.” Thus, in my notes written before returning to Nabua for fieldwork, I wrote about my “pre-going home jitters.” I planned to delay my arrival, skipping the Holy Week events, which I knew were going to be a focus area of my research. I suddenly wished I had chosen another topic and fieldsite. I thought that I should have proposed to study the controversies surrounding the Canadian mining companies operating in resource-rich Mindanao. This was a burning topic discussed in several workshops at the UBCPSS. As Mindanao is not my land of birth, perhaps some degree of detachment could afford me the capacity for emotional distance and the so-called scientific objectivity.

In his instructive piece on the post-Cold War progression of “area studies” in the United States that came to be led by immigrant-scholars, Vicente Rafael (1994, 106) asks: “But what does it mean for indigenous scholars to return home? What does ‘home’ mean to them, and what does ‘returning’ entail?” I was returning home to the Philippines not as a returnee immigrant, but as an overseas-trained scholar holding Philippine citizenship, as an anthropologist who could be
called “native” in academic jargon, but who is not indigenous, as a self-identified “local” of my “field,” but whose long-term absence due to education in Manila, Tokyo and Vancouver, had estranged me to an extent from my community. For Rafael (1994, 107), the category of the “immigrant – in transit, caught between nation-states, unsettled and potentially uncanny – gives one pause, forcing one to ask about the possibility of a scholarship that is neither colonial nor liberal nor indigenous, yet constantly enmeshed in all these states.” It is fair to additionally ask, what do we make of anthropology when the category of “native” is increasingly problematic at a time of increased mobility, and when the process of “indigenization” could appear to produce a less self-reflexive appropriation of “indigeneity” for the purposes of academic production?

It appeared that my professors and colleagues were not wrong about the bottomless well of personal drama that they had warned me about which could cause great delay, especially because anthropological data gathering occurs within a limited “fieldwork time” (Fabian 1983). During my research in Nabua, a bamboo fan craftsman was quick to establish his “intimacy” with me by

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26 According to the Republic Act 8371 or the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997, the indigenous peoples “refer to a group of people or homogeneous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organized community on communally bounded and defined territory…” (The Government of the Philippines 1998). As I mentioned earlier, Bicolanos are among the major ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines. Like other lowland ethnolinguistic groups, Christianized Bicolanos are not considered under IP Law to be indigenous people. Melisa S.L. Casumbal-Salazar (2015) observes that scholars on the Philippines have not yet agreed upon a lexicon that could account for the arbitrariness of the “indigenous subject” that came to be contoured by colonial forces, national and international legal frameworks, and development/aid projects. I concur with Eder’s observation that the indigenous peoples in the Philippines hold several overlapping identities that may be cultural, economic, and political. In the case of Bicol, this would mean that the indigenous Agtas simultaneously identify as Bicolanos, perhaps as members of the economic underclass (I return to the two-tiered Bicol social organization proposed by Norman Owen in Chapter 6), and as Indigenous Peoples according to the state’s legal rubric. Thinking about identities in postcolonial Philippines, Eder rightfully observes that contemporary Filipinos are sometimes “pressed to locate themselves” within a complex web of confounding categorizations. For now, I recognize that the ongoing struggles of indigenous peoples in the Philippines (or closer to Nabua, the Agtas in Rinconada) remain to be intimately attached to displacement and dispossession. Similarly, I recognize that a related story of colonial violence and assimilation produced the historical “mainstreaming” and “Westernization” of my own ancestry, making me today a Nabueño, taga-Rinconada, Bicolano, and Filipino in the diaspora.
narrating his connections with my family. He introduced himself as a supplier of bamboo fans for my family’s defunct handicraft business. He paused dramatically after his introduction, and with a voice flowing with sympathy he told me: “Sadi bagang upod maaksidente si tatay mo. Nagkutod na ko kad’to ku maisiwan kong si tatay mo su naaksidente. Ako kadto namunpon ku utok niya...” (It was around here that your father was run over. I ran as quick as I could when I learned that it was him, and it was me who gathered from the road the pieces of his shattered brain).

I agree with Martin Manalansan IV and Augusto Espiritu (2016) that the binaries native/stranger, nation/diaspora, here/there, no longer appear tenable and that knowledge production must address the tensions that complicate these fractured pairings. Germany-trained anthropologist Rosa Cordillera Castillo (2015), reflecting on doing ethnography amid political conflict in Southern Philippines, writes of one’s positionality as shaped by: one’s intellectual genealogies, the conflicting anthropological trainings received at home and overseas, the informants’ expectations, and one’s political commitments. Certainly, these experiences in the classroom in the Philippines and overseas, in the anthropological fieldsite, and in the intimate realm of the personal and familial, render blurry the boundary that demarcates the insider/outsider binary. I write these tensions with the hope that this approach to an anthropology in the hometown will not manifest as what Caroline Hau (2014) calls “claim to epistemic privilege” that could exclude others, while remaining uncritical of one’s positionality.

In my attempt to piece together this postcolonial puzzle, I conceptualize “hometown” as a compound of two concepts: of home as a place of intimate attachments with kin and land, and; as a postcolonial town where the personal, histories, and memories converge. In thinking about the postcolonial hometown as a node of histories and lived experience, I draw inspiration from the
life work of Filipino historian Resil Mojares that suggests a turn away from what he calls “old” histories centered on the colonial periods, the nationalist, and the “Filipinocentric.” I also take heed of Rolando Tolentino’s (2003, 80) critique of the study of the Philippines as sometimes failing to critically interrogate the “macro-narratives of the nation” and to understand particularities as “experienced from within.” Meanwhile, Prospero Covar (1998) conceptualized the Philippines as composed of various ‘batis’ (streams) of culture that could nuance the study of the often generalized “Filipino experience.” F. Landa Jocano (1998) argues similarly that social practices appear in subtle variations – recognizing the necessity in foregrounding under-researched communities. I hope to the add to the complexity, richness, and depth of Bicol by adding to the works of regional scholars Maria Realubit (1983), Paz Verdades Santos (2004), Danilo Gerona (2006), Kristian S. Cordero (2006), Jasmin Llana (2009), Victor Loquias (2014), and many others. Like Mojares, I hope to contribute to the centering of the “periphery” by paying attention to events occurring outside the centers of knowledge production in the Philippines. Coincidentally, “Rinconada,” the district in which Nabua is located means “corner.” By “periphery,” I refer to those spaces that have receded from the center of scholarship and remain in the “background setting” (Azurin 1995, 127).

1.5 Theoretical Engagements, Interventions, and Itineraries

Some years ago, before I began my travels overseas, I worked as a photographer for the University of the Philippines’ student newspaper called the Philippine Collegian. My peers and I were among the last batch of photographers who processed our own black and white photographs in the office’s own darkroom. Digital photography came soon after like a wave, finally displacing the art of black and white photography in university journalism practice in the
Philippines. In the darkroom, I learned how to bring additional texture to a photograph. In the darkroom language, to “agitate” a film means to periodically stir up the developing tank in which the film and the chemicals are contained. A more rigorous agitation of the tank will cause coarser grains on the negative, and therefore a more dramatic texture and contrast on the photograph will be produced. Agitations, even if the word itself suggests something that is tense or unrelaxed, could be productive. The less you agitate, the more shadows you get. More rigorous agitation sharpens contrast. During photographic processing, a photographer could also choose to manipulate light exposure. Sections of the image that were overexposed to light could be “dodged” or “burnt” to give the selected portions longer or less exposure to light, therefore normalizing light or de/emphasizing shadows. I learned from working in the darkroom that the image captured on film is but a fraction of a creative process. How the world was framed by the photographer through their eyes and the camera is just the beginning, but we tend to get caught up in theorizing this part of a larger agentive process. The processes of agitations, dodgings, burnings, among others, enrich the textures of the image. I find these processes also personal as they encode the ways that the body moves into the process of production. I find these photographic vocabulary as graceful significations of the creative production process, and of thinking about the agitated/agitating subject of studying the work of intimacy and migration at home.

1.5.1 Back to the Hometown

Writing 18 years after the publication of the seminal *Nations Unbound* (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1993) that set the pillars of the transnationalism framework, Nina Glick Schiller (2011, 46) notes that the “rosy picture” of transnational migration that scholars have painted
“reinforces the desirability of the new migration regime of contract labor,” which has dehumanized migrants through unfair and exclusionary labor conditions. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2001) argue that transnational theory disregards conditions that were present long before the emergence of capitalism and modernity which underlie the globalization of labor. E. San Juan (2000, 14) staunchly critiques literature on Filipino migration framed within the transnational framework, arguing that it tends to “befog” an environment that is “already mired in the instance of contingency, aporia, ambivalence, indeterminacy, disjunction, [and] liminality.” For San Juan, the “fatal mistake” of the transnational model in studying the experience of Filipino migration is its postmodern rendering of the Filipino subject as if having a “reservoir of free choices” (56).

Moving forward in studying people’s mobilities, scholars have appealed for the need to critique the “assimilationist perspective” (Lazar 2011, 70) and the pervasiveness of “methodological nationalism” in migration scholarship (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Çaglar (2008, 2) note the need to address the conceptual barriers in the field of migration studies such as: the preoccupation with theorizing migrant settlement and integration; the focus on global and gateway cities as research sites; the homogenization of places as “container[s] of national processes,” and; the use of the ethnic groups as the basic unit of analysis and object of study. Considering these unprecedented departures, others propose a focus on “diasporic journeys” (Johnson and Werbner 2010), while others propose to investigate “society” as “transnational social fields” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Scholarship on Filipino migrants around the world has included groundbreaking works that chronicle labors brokered by the state (Guevarra 2006; R. Rodriguez 2010), changing care practices (Parreñas 2001a; Choy 2003), new intimacies tied to post-WWII and post-industrial developments
(Constable 1999; Faier 2009), queer identities in the diaspora (Manalansan IV 2003), among many others that contribute to our understanding of shifting identities, lives, and intercultural encounters during a time of increased mobilities of humans, and of course, capital. I trace my inspirations for this dissertation from a growing list of illuminating works on Filipino migration, taking note of the various critiques of the migration literature.

The literature on Filipino migration is vast and to limit my discussion in this section, I focus on the recent developments on Filipino migration that link with my concern in understanding postcolonial subjectivities and contemporary inequalities in the Town of Dollars. The ongoing conversations in what Robyn Rodriguez (2016) calls “Critical Filipino Studies,” I believe, foreground important re/orientations in studying Filipino mobilities. Rodriguez notes that studies on U.S.-bound Filipino mobilities tend to focus on “immigration” that “has the effect of reifying US nationalist ideologies of liberal multiculturalism and the idea of the United States as a ‘country of immigrants,’ not of empire” (33). For Rodriguez, the enduring effects of American colonization of the Philippines links with the production of long-lasting inequalities in the Philippines that ultimately shaped the country’s “transnational migration apparatus” (39). For Rodriguez, it is crucial to conceptualize labor brokerage by the Philippine government as not merely a literal exportation of Filipino labor, but as also constituting relations of dependency that are neocolonial. As she writes:

I suggest alternatively that Filipinos’ global and US migrations must be understood as inextricably linked because both migrations are attributable to US imperial legacies in the Philippines, specifically the formation of the neocolonial Philippine state as a labor brokerage state. The globalization of Filipinos is linked to the globalization of US capital and the expansion of its military-industrial complex. If Filipinos labored for the American empire from the turn of the century to the present in the United States and its territories, as the American empire globalizes, Filipinos are laboring for empire globally, and the neocolonial labor brokerage state has facilitated that process (52).
In other words, Rodriguez proposes a shift in discourse that highlights the inescapable entanglement of Filipino labor in the production and spread of American empire and capital as the Philippine nation-state fuels America’s persistent imperial projects. Rodriguez writes that a “radical epistemology,” borrowing from Oscar Campomames, is important “if we hope to fully grasp the new complexities of the Filipino migrant experience” (52). Certainly, Rodriguez’s attention to the deepening rootedness of the American influence and intervention in the Philippines’ labor export orientations offers a critical perspective on “what should” be underscored in thinking about the ubiquity of migration in the level of policy and everyday life, in the Philippines and beyond its shores (Manalansan and Espiritu 2016, 6).

I take seriously Rodriguez’s theoretical interventions that stress the unevenness of contemporary life especially structured by American colonization, and I hold them alongside Neferti Tadiar’s (2015) cautions about investigations into “empire.” Tadiar (2015, 146) also advises us:

Empire studies risks a similar confirmation of this geopolitical order when its location of historical precedents for today’s imperial actions traces the very same narrative lines of continuity through which the imperial subject maintains its privileged representational being. It risks, in other words, being a discursive means of imperial reproduction.

Recognizing the prevailing inequality that Filipinos in the Philippines and overseas find themselves in, Tadiar (2015, 150) points out the importance of attending to what she calls “practices of dissolution” which otherwise “might issue out of the excess and leftover of life-making on the part of those serving as the means of reproduction of others” (150). Pointing to a model of how renderings about contemporary life embedded in unequal mobilities might look, Tadiar applauds Lieba Faier’s (2009) account of Filipino wives’ “running away” as risky but creative acts that are among the “historical repertoire of everyday life-making” of those
implicated in gendered and racialized contemporary mobilities. Tadiar asks researchers to highlight the “realm of actions and processes that takes place beneath the threshold of intelligibility...” (151). Tadiar calls these modes of surviving a “remaindered life” – the “life-sustaining forms and practices of personhood and sociality...” (151). Such actions, as Tadiar proposes, resist being pushed into “permanent outmodedness and illegibility by the discursive and practical mandates of imperial reproduction.” More than just agentive actions, Tadiar regards these “life-making capacities,” and she suggests that it is imperative to consider the “permeability, extendability, divisibility, and mutability of selves, the porousness of belonging (family, household, kin, community), and the transmissibility of potency and life across persons...” (152). Tadiar’s proposition is essentially a call for scholars to push against the discourses that contain lives under empire in a “grid of intelligibility” (156). In a similar vein, Phanuel Antwi et al. (2013, 7) point to the need for scholarship to highlight the modes of life that “diverge from the straight paths of neoliberal accommodation.” I understand Tadiar’s call as sharing the same commitments as Latin American feminist-critical race phenomenologists such as María Lugones (2003) and Mariana Ortega (2016) and postcolonial thinker Gayatri Spivak (2010) who call for the foregrounding of unreadable tensions, fractures, fragments, creativities, and others that are antithetical to the logics of empire and capital.

I am invested in addressing these critiques of the transnational model in migration studies and Filipino migration while considering seriously the suggestions offered by Rodriguez, Tadiar, Lugones, Ortega, and Spivak. As already shown by scholars who use the transnational model, it is important to continue to problematize the Philippines, for example, as crucial to the formation of migrants’ subjectivities, as shown by May Farrales (2017) in her work on Filipino/a sexualities in Canada. In Filipino migration scholarship, many authors have demonstrated the
dense attachments of migrants to the Philippines, as experienced for example by Filipino female nurses-intellectuals in the United States (Peralta Forthcoming), by Filipino caregivers who simultaneously fulfill paid carework, transnational mothering, and activism (Tungohan 2013), gendered and racialized divisions of Filipino labor that render the invisibility of cultural minorities overseas (Coloma et al. 2012), among many others. In thinking about the context of Nabua, I think that despite criticisms, the transnational model in migration studies remains useful especially in drawing attention to the still under-investigated “home” – the origin community where desires for mobilities are conditioned – where inequalities continue to deepen and manifest in everyday life. These contemporary inequalities have been contoured by multiple colonial layerings, although I agree with Rodriquez that American influence is persistent and enduring.

The collection *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* in particular inspires my thinking through studying migration at home (Ahmed et al. 2003). I take note of the point made by the editors of the collection that the questions about migration as related to the literal act of traveling needs “to be supplemented by the question of *who can stay at home*” (7, italics in original). Ahmed et al. challenge migration scholars to pay attention to acts of uprootings and regroundings of home as linked with “colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial relations of power” while also finding the intimate connections between “leaving home and imagining of home” (8). The transnational framework, therefore, facilitates a return to the study of the “hometown.” Finally, considering Filomeno Aguilar’s (2014), proposition that migration has now permeated the Philippines like a yeast, I suggest that the idea of the “village” is no longer plausible. Just like the category “peasant” as it is used in anthropology, the “village,” following Michael Kearney (1996, 1), “has been outdistanced by contemporary history.” I thus
take the route of investigating the hometown – transformed, unsettled, and stirred up in many ways by mobility, and by the precarious conditions of life in the Philippines that motivate and agitate these very processes. In examining the hometown, I turn to the growing field of intimacy studies.

1.5.2 Intimacy into Philippine Studies

Intimacy studies has become established as a field following a turn in the scholarship to add into the dialogue the work of emotions, habits, and affects that do not fit quite neatly in global and neoliberal scripts and configurations. For Lauren Berlant (1998, 281), intimacy “involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about oneself and others.” She writes that stories that allude to the intimate are usually “set within zones of familiarity and comfort” (281). Still according to Berlant, intimacy is premised within optimism, and to unsettle it causes tension to the normatively kept/managed intimacy. Alexia Bloch (2017b, 19) conceptualizes the terms “intimacy” and “intimate” as useful in demarcating “an affective sense” and considering the “realm of emotion” that have been shaped and transformed by mobilities following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In another work, Bloch (2011) uses the concept of “intimate circuits” in writing about the elaborate transnational circulation of care despite the states’ heavy regulation of these intimacies. Ara Wilson (2012) proposes the term “intimate economies” as a model that can be used in studying the overlapping of the intimate and economic life. In the collection *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time* (Pratt and Rosner 2012), the intimate spans “the specific, the quotidian, the affective, and the eccentric.” Antwi et al. (2013) write that the investigation of intimacy means to question its supposed “places” and “non-places.” As could be discerned from the growing list of work within this field,
the terms intimate and intimacy cover a wide range of meanings. It includes inquiries into the private, the familiar, love, sex, informality, personal connection, economy, policy, etc. Intimacy does not have a fixed definition. Wilson argues that it is in fact this lack of fixity that makes intimacy an appealing analytical category (32).

There is no doubt that research on the intimate has transformed the ways that we understand the lived experience, especially at the level of the family. I follow an expanding list of feminist work on intimacy that nuance our understanding of the family, arguably pioneered by Carol Stack (1975) in her ethnography of an urban ghetto conducted over three years. Stack shows that Black families surround themselves with “essential kin” – the large circle of friends, and close and distant kin – that allows for the wider circulation of care and resources. Stack’s research challenges misconceptions of non-nuclear families as “disintegrated.” Research on the intimate has also extended our understanding of physical proximity in relation to emotional closeness. There are many examples, one of which is Mary Chamberlain’s (2006, 5) account of “emotional attachments” which she contends spread quite expansively – “vertically through lineages, horizontally through kinship networks, and transnationally across the oceans.” In the anthropology of kinship, Janet Carsten’s (2004) relational approach to the family proposes that kinship can be lived and made, orienting our understanding of kinship beyond consanguinity, and towards “relatedness.” Carsten proposes for scholars to take a “long way round” and investigate the many new guises of kinship such as the house, gender, personhood, substance, including idioms. Fenella Cannell (1999) extends these conversations, suggesting that in the case of the lowland Christians in Bicol, transactions of intimacy are not only between husband and wife, or between humans, but also between humans and the supernatural. Altogether, these projects offer important contributions to the ongoing project of interrogating the concept of kinship and its
supposed intimate logics. They show the power of intimacy in dealing with the nuanced, the complex, and the messy, which would otherwise fall out of earlier structural-functionalist renderings in anthropological ethnography. However, I hold that it is imperative to reserve some cautious use of intimacy as an analytical category as it expands into a “field” if we were to also return to Spivak’s critique about the presumed readability of the subject. Would the endorsed capaciousness and all-inclusiveness of intimacy also dangerously slip into Spivak’s critique of earlier scholarship that purports to effortlessly hollow out the subject? How does one go about studying intimacy considering its slipperiness, and everywhereness? What does it mean “to consider the logic of intimacy” (Antwi et al. 2013, 1)?

My dissertation hopes to contribute to the ongoing project of nuancing the family and other engagements of the family (in ritual, in demonstrating solidarity and success, etc.) which could productively draw from the anthropologist’s “deep embeddedness” in the project. My ethnography of Nabua includes an investigation into the family’s messy relations and transactions of care, now increasingly, within highly mobile conditions. I examine the experience of the family and intimate relations within it, tracing stories along multiple generations and geographies, that fold into layers of histories, religion, work, and present configurations as produced by the state and global capital. Thinking about the sometimes anxious and unsettling facets of life that are inscribed into our ethnography of the “intimate” orient me to return to cautions about the persistent reductionism across disciplines, especially when writing about the conditions of the so called Third World, and giving texture to the stories that animate our ethnography. Spivak (2010) writes that the intellectuals’ representations of their subject fall under two categories: representation as “speaking for” (proxy) and representation as “re-presentation” (embodiment). Lugones (2003) thinks in a similar manner, but this time she looks
inward, pointing out that the self (in her case, as racialized other) may also be unknowingly constructed by others, in effect suggesting the importance of a self-introspective interpretation of the world:

In a ‘world,’ some of the inhabitants may not understand or hold the particular construction of them that constructs them in that ‘world.’ So, there may be ‘worlds’ that construct me in ways that I do not even understand. Or, it may be that I understand that construction, but do not hold it myself. I may not accept it as an account of myself, a construction of myself. And yet, I may be animating such a construction.

In the study of the Philippines, the popular analytical categories from “indigenous” theory that are often deployed in approaching intimate Filipino relationships provide a useful example. Virgilio Enriquez (1989, 48) expresses disappointment with scholars’ inclination to merely pluck out from a list of supposed indigenous worldviews in reading the Filipino “experience.” For example, the concept of ‘utang na loob’ (debt of gratitude) is often operationalized to read Filipino relations as circumscribed within rational transactions (Kaut 1961), and as demonstrating a commitment to solidarity (De Mesa 1987), among others. Frank Lynch’s (1962) theory on Filipino personality have become a canon in reading/constructing Filipino interpersonal relations as “smooth.” F. Landa Jocano (1966) has already critiqued such articulations of Filipino behavior and personality as “common-sense anthropology,” but interestingly, these values consistently reappear with slight modifications in Philippine Studies literature until today. The ways that these concepts come to be deployed tend to be reminiscent of the earlier anthropological readings of cultural patterns and behavior and mappings of so-called social organization (Yengoyan 2004). Research on values often deploys keywords in the hegemonic language of Tagalog, thus the ubiquitous category of the “indigenous” becomes dangerously appropriated to stand in for the generalized Filipino subject. I suggest that there need to be a renewed interrogation into the brand of Philippine social science that tends to very
easily derive from the notion of the “indigenous” and that assumes shared knowledge across varied histories, lifeworlds, ethnicities, and ancestries. It is important to continue to nuance the Filipino subject, especially given the richness and depth of the historical, cultural, and political experiences that produce Filipino identities today. Filipino postcolonial identities remain muddled, and as Melisa S.L. Casumbal-Salazar (2015, 76) writes:

Contemporary valences of indigeneity in the Philippines and the Philippine diaspora are shaped by colonial and postcolonial hierarchies of difference; the emancipatory rhetorics of anti-/de-colonial nationalism, regional autonomy, self-determination, and civil rights; transborder affinities and political organizing across indigenous peoples’ movements; and solidarity work between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Given these disparate enabling conditions, it is unsurprising that Philippine conceptualizations of indigeneity are contingent, heterogeneous, and conceptually unstable.

In short, notions of identity and indigeneity in the Philippines and beyond are ambivalent and hard to grasp (even by the inquiring self). Given this recognition, anthropological analyses must also account for the tensions and unreadable dramas that fall out of the ready list of “indigenous” keywords related to the Filipino experience. Anthropologists of the Philippines are yet to seriously take on Jocano’s (1966, 290–91) challenge to move away from the generalization of experience to focusing instead on what he calls “if-situations” in which “any mode of action must be conceptualized in terms of exclusiveness and directness of relationship.” Here I recall that each frame in a film roll encodes different temperatures of light, which means that each frame will need individual attention and adjustments to retextrue its exposure to light.

Such assessments of the study of Filipino relations, personality and worldview, I believe, could be productively critiqued using Spivak’s views about the often-transparent reading of human action and relations – now within claims of investigating the “intimate.” According to Fadwa El Guindi (2004, 113), there is “a problem for ethnography when a project is begun with a prearticulated, Western feminist perspective.” The same critique stands for an ethnography of
the Filipino experience that is grounded in a prearticulated list of so-called indigenous worldviews, especially considering the various “streams” (Covar 1998) of cultures that flow along local and transnational lives. I bring into this dissertation some of the possible ways to expand conversations about intimacy and the intimate by interweaving stories about: religious practice that is enmeshed with personal, familial and community ambitions, histories, and religious text; the nuanced meanings of values such as “supog” (shame) and “ginikanan” (roots, origin place); relations of care and familial ambitions that are nurtured in expanding geographies; the different valuations of labor according to those who labored for the U.S. empire, and; the dense attachments to the hometown despite the worsening precarity of everyday life, and others. Like Bloch’s (2017b, 5) thinking about the ways that intimate practices are transformed “in a time of widely atomized lives,” my dissertation does not quite offer “a story of progression, of people mastering the ways of capitalism.” In putting these stories together, I am reminded by Sara Ahmed (2010, 195): “the promise of happiness depends on the localization of suffering; others suffer so that a certain ‘we’ can hold on to the good life.” This dissertation locates orientations about the good life by contemplating through these layerings that make up Nabua today.

Antwi et al. (2013, 4–5) propose to “retexture the field of intimacy studies in relation to postcoloniality.” Retexturing the field, according to these authors, requires paying attention to the “anxious entanglements” of what they call “happy fictions” or the circulatable stories of success and progression, with “interruptive texts or textures” or those modes of life that emerge out of postcolonial violences and inequalities. My intervention in migration and Philippine scholarship engages with questions of authorship and knowledge production. In thinking through intimacy and authorship, I draw on phenomenological analyses of anthropological knowledge
production. Throughout this dissertation, I bring together conversations on migration, phenomenology, and occasionally, visual anthropology, in my discussion of migration stories and histories as they figure in everyday life in Nabua.

Visual anthropology also offers vibrant insights into authorial subjectivity, intentionality, empathy, ethics and responsibility. Ethnographic film practice in one’s community, according to John Jackson (2004), calls for a “rigorous self-reflexivity.” The author’s self-understanding of one’s rigor, however, clashes with the end product – in this case, film. In *Film as Phenomenology*, John Brough (2011, 192) contrasts a filmmaker with a phenomenologist, writing that the former “makes things,” while the latter “reflects on the experience of things and on things as experienced.” Brough suggests the films have a phenomenological potential because of the “powerful arsenal at its disposal” which includes image, narrative, camera, and other elements that all come together during film production. A completed film, for Brough, works as a “prepared particular,” demonstrating a kind of Husserlian bracketing that presents a world in a particular way. However, it needs to be pointed out that phenomenologists argue that the act of image-making is “more practical than reflective” because the maker of the image “looks to the world in such a way as to allow her body” (Wrathall 2011). Along these lines of thought, we can understand knowledge production – in this case, a text-based dissertation – as drawing from a broad range of possibilities, but one’s production is often limited by time, technology, expected output, and other elements. The final edited narrative that appears on-screen depicts bracketed narratives but they also serve as signposts to the other dimensions of the story that have been cut away or that have been made to recede from our view. The editing process in film, and the bracketing process in phenomenology, therefore, demonstrate ways that narratives are constructed which include the processes of assemblage, addition, emphases, and finally,
omission. I suggest that the process of constructing the narrative must be apprehended by questions about intentions, positionality, place, kinship/genealogies, and personal attachments. If intimacy studies seek to account for affects and emotions even if they are messy and unsettling, an anthropology of the hometown, as I came to learn while in the “field” and while writing, is unable to escape the weight and demands of the intimate-personal. My cautious use of intimacy studies, I hope to suggest, is a productive site for engaging tensions, dilemmas, complexities, the untold, and uncertainties with knowledge production that upholds self-reflexivity and auto-critique.

It is challenging to plot the timeline of my fieldwork in Nabua. I first returned for fieldwork in March 2013. This was interrupted by a month-long visit to the U.S. for my mother’s surgery from February to March 2014, and then again by an academic visit at the Center on Migration, Policy, and Society in Oxford University from June to December 2014. My fieldwork in Nabua resumed from December 2014 to January 2015. In February to mid-December 2015, I opened a crafts shop in Manila and periodically returned to Nabua for more research. I closed the Manila-based shop in December 2015 to return to Vancouver in January 2016. My dissertation writing was interrupted by teaching multimedia art students in the School of Design and Arts in the La Salle College of Saint Benilde in Manila from August to December 2016, then by teaching in the Department of Anthropology at UBC from January 2016 to April 2017, and then by teaching in a general social studies course in New York University-Shanghai, from September to December 2017.
1.6 Chapter Previews

Each chapter in this dissertation hopes to elucidate how the intermingling of intimacy and migration shape everyday life in Nabua. I write here about only some of the affairs and events that range from the spectacular (e.g., public rituals), to the deeply intimate (e.g., auto-ethnographic account of rural-urban-overseas migration). However, the writing on one’s hometown inescapably brings one’s own life story, often uncomfortably, into the narrative. As already mentioned above, I returned to Nabua for my fieldwork as an overseas-trained researcher whose positionality blended with personal history as absentee resident of Nabua. In Chapter 2, I present a reflection on the intermingling of my academic ambitions with locally held ideas about “supog” (shame) and the “ginikanan” (place or origin or genealogy) when doing research at home. I introduce what I call “negative production” – the “non-productive events” that initially seem to create frictions against the disciplined and rigorous acts of data gathering. I take cues from Spivak’s observation that the crafting of “certain kinds of convictions” where researchers render the objects of study in readable ways is inherent in knowledge production. I argue that academic ambitions may have discomforting effects on the “respondents/interlocutors,” especially when fieldsites are places in which relations are claimable and expandable. I suggest that it is important to re-consider fieldsites as spaces in which anthropologists should nurture relational sensibilities. I urge for the reconsideration of what appears to be “negative” in the academic world, as it can also be productive, while also thinking about the inevitability of anthropological participation in the messy (and extractive) work of knowledge production.

Sometimes, the intentions and politics that underlie our academic commitments may clash with the concerns and ambitions of the people for whom we hope to labor academically. Spivak’s critique applies to some of the scholarly work done in the Philippines which assesses
Filipinos as “victims and did not know it” (Rimonte 1997, 59). Following warnings on the erasure of peoples’ agency in writing a postcolonial ethnography, I argue in Chapter 3 for the need to place at the center the ways of memory-making that retired U.S. Navy men deploy when reflecting on their racialized labor for the U.S. “empire.” I suggest that it is important to think of their narratives as embedded in what may be called an impasse of colonial and postcolonial turbulences. The “circulatable” stories that the retirees would like me to inscribe in my ethnography offer a piece to the incomplete picture of how the American arrival was accommodated/resisted outside the centers of the Philippine historiography. My analysis draws from interviews with retired U.S. Navy men residing or vacationing in Nabua, as well as from ethnographic notes from my attendance and observation of their formal meetings, private gatherings such as wakes, funerals, and public rituals, such as flag-raising ceremonies in honor of departed veterans, etc. I interweave local and national history with the life stories of the retired navy men who are key contributors to the making of Nabua’s history as the Town of Dollars. Learning from Latin American phenomenologists Mariana Ortega and María Lugones who think about the postcolonial lived experience, I consider the notion of the “multiplicitous selves” – the open-ended identity of the oppressed and marginalized – of the retired U.S. Navy men in Nabua. I frame their narratives of “escaping” Nabua to join the U.S. Navy, their labor for the “empire,” and their shared desires for becoming memorialized in Nabua, alongside their aspirations to create respectable futures for themselves and their kin in Nabua, nurtured within the context of a troubled past in Nabua.

That retirees deploy ritual to publicly perform their participation in the making of the Town of Dollars, tells us about how migration histories contribute to the production of locally celebrated rituals. In Chapter 4, I turn to investigating how migrants’ homecomings and their
calculated work in fulfilling covenants made with the sacred now intersect with the celebration
of religious rituals in Nabua. I push for considering the mobility of Filipinos as a key force that
shapes contemporary local religious practices. The “Ton-ton” (Descent), is an Easter Sunday
ritual celebrated in different varieties by Catholics in the Philippines. Called ‘salubong’ in the
Tagalog-speaking areas, the ritual dramatizes the meeting of the risen Christ with his grieving
mother. The salubong is already much discussed in Philippine scholarship. I offer an original
discussion of a religious ritual celebrated in Nabua called “balo-balo,” which is nominally a
rehearsal for the ton-ton, and which casts a spotlight on covenants made with the local icon
called Inang Katipanan (Our Mother of the Covenant), as well as on the financial might of the
family/clan. On the evening of Black Saturday, a time that is supposed to be rife with the quiet
anticipation of Christ’s resurrection, the balo-balo is held in Nabua with much vigor and
spectacle, even if it is meant to be a mere rehearsal. The balo-balo opens a space for the
community to bear witness to a family’s fulfilment of their vows made with the local Marian
icon, but its quality of “rehearsality” more importantly allows for the practice of faith to intersect
with local commitments to maintaining honor, familial solidarity, and other secular elements that
become encoded into the ritual. To move away from finding “culture” by analyzing the visually
and symbolically perceptible elements of ritual practice, I complicate my discussion by inquiring
into how a local novena blends with historical text, producing Nabua’s dynamic ritual practice.

In one sense, this dissertation is an attempt to confront the messiness of home, following
scholars (Kondo 1990; Narayan 1993; De Jesus 2005; Pierce 2005; Okely 1996; Behar 2013;
Manalansan IV 2014) who have done the painful work of piecing together fragments of personal
history. The force of kinship, often expandable and locatable in Nabua, presses upon my
discussion all throughout the chapters. In Chapter 5, I move closer, drawing from my “deep
embeddedness” in the twinned concepts of migration and intimacy. This time, I zoom in, into the rural, urban, and overseas migration of my family, proposing migration as a robust theme through which Janet Carsten’s (2004) call for “redoing kinship” can be partially addressed. I explore the circulation and negotiation of power and care among my kin across three different “houses” in which familial desires for upward mobility were nurtured. I propose the “house” as a framework for looking at the taken-for-granted concept of the “Filipino family” whose members may now disperse to different locations. I propose the house as productive in understanding the contemporary family as expanding, moveable, and unfolding across geographies. I introduce “pasali” – which I translate as “subdued performance” – as a theoretical contribution for challenging the often easily analyzed “logics” of Filipino relations and behavior. Concepts such as ‘utang na loob’ (debt of gratitude), ‘pakikisama’ (being one with the others) and other value concepts that were popularized by Philippine anthropologist Frank Lynch’s Smooth Interpersonal Relations (SIR) remain prominent to this day in Philippine Studies scholarship. I show how pasali works as an analytical lens through which messy intimate theatrics could be better understood. Family members, despite being individuated by education, personal agencies, and ambitions, are entangled in processes which pull them back into, and re-orientate them to, the past, “traditions,” collective memory, and concerns such as familial success.

The auto-ethnographic account of my geographically expanding family sets the scene for **Chapter 6**. During fieldwork at home, I stepped into the world of family business, an undeniably capitalist enterprise that starkly contrasts with “non-profit” academic work. This immersion led me to relationships and networks that predate my research, and which eventually had an impact on my research direction. As I became embedded deeper into the business, I came to know about the different face of Nabua. The Nabua that I knew was close to how it is imagined by its
retirees, vacationing residents, friends, and informants who, like me, come from the town’s centro. While my fieldsite is regarded by many of its residents as the Town of Dollars, it is also home to many non-migrating rural poor – the “kanagtitios” (very poor) – who struggle every day in the midst of the slow death of their main sources of livelihood: crafts and farming. For the poor in the farming villages of Nabua, the town’s moniker is associated with a living standard that is plainly out of reach. Experiencing landlessness and bare subsistence, the people of Nabua also search for prospects in the extra-village economy only to find precarity everywhere. The many cautionary tales of hardship during urban and overseas migration dampen the enthusiasm for the fruits of migration among this population, and they hope instead for improved futures at home. Theirs is a remarkably different story of rural life in the age of heightened aspirations and governmental push for overseas migration. I close my dissertation with this chapter as an appeal for the need to bridge conversations about Filipinos overseas that more prominently appear in the literature, with the everyday struggles of the poor “back home,” who are left behind with limited prospects.

It is a commonly said in the Philippines that asking for directions when lost will only bring further confusion. For example, rather than being told to simply turn east after one kilometer, one is told which turn not to take, which tree or house to watch out for, how many electric posts to count until destination, or where another reliable person could be found in case the suggested route is too complicated to follow. Conversations in Nabua also develop in a seemingly aimless trajectory, and speakers are slow to reveal details, and often fail even to give basic context. This ambiguity in speech is complicated even more by some bodily gestures. For example, instead of nodding in agreement, eyebrows are repeatedly raised to express the same. Nabueños repeatedly invoke kinships and affiliations as a way of establishing rapport or asserting privilege and
position such as the bamboo craftsman’s unsettling revelation about the circumstances of my father’s death. The Rinconada language that is used in Nabua uses what is called “angry register” in linguistics (Lobel 2005). This means that the language is emotive such that the vocabulary changes depending on the degree of anger that one wants to express verbally. For example, for the word “ngungo” (mouth), one could also use its synonyms “ngusngus” or “ngurapak,” the latter being the angriest form. A parent reprimands their child for having a ngurapak that spews foul or disrespectful words. However, Nabueños also use words in the angry register form even when exploding in joy and amusement. A skilled jokester can be said to have a ngurapak that delivers delightful jokes. I bring this up to point out that stories that I encountered in Nabua have parallels to the ways that directions and jokes are said and that conversations are told – sometimes they are harshly said, or too familiar, too slow, and like in the case of the confusing directions, I would often find myself lost, even if I was talking to my kababayans. This linguistic style directs attention to the depth that an engagement with the local language could potentially add in an attempt at nuancing the local lifeworld.

From the very beginning of my fieldwork, a classmate from high school helped me “reintegrate” in Nabua. His mother works overseas, and he knew I was studying migration. We already shared a long history of friendship but despite this familiarity, “he reveals gradually, step by step, in little quiet moments” – as I wrote in my notes. But even if he did not share with me his own story, he was generous in introducing me to many others, and I followed the leads obtained in this way, in addition to my family’s suggested research itineraries. I had asked him if he wanted to sit for an interview, but we eventually never did one. He told me, “Cara-Carlos Bulosan man kami kadto. Poverty-poverty!” He meant that his family’s story was as melancholic as Carlos Bulosan’s description of his immigrant life in America, as he had seen me reading
Bulosan’s (1946) classic “America is in the Heart” one day when he visited me in my mother’s apartment. It is a linguistic style to repeat syllables or words to emphasize emotions. One day, he passed by to bring me lunch that he had cooked, and he confirmed the news that I heard from someone else that he was finally leaving “for good.” After many years of caring for his nephews and nieces as his mother and siblings worked overseas, he told me that it was his turn to raise his sails; he was headed to Dubai. My friend’s story does not add yet to the layers of histories offered here, but Ahmed (2010, 176) reminds me that “emptiness and fullness are not the point.” The pieces in this dissertation do not yet, and perhaps cannot ever present a complete picture. I hope that this ethnography helps us make sense of the Town of Dollars, which like my friend’s life and like my relatives’ suggestions about “good” stories that must be recorded and circulated, are rife with postcolonial conundrum.
Chapter 2: The Method of Negative Production During Fieldwork in the Hometown

2.1 The Return Home

“Home again,” I thought, as the bus slows down to stop briefly at the centro of Nabua. Approaching it, my feelings of relief over our safe arrival were mixed with hints of stress and anxiety. Along with stirrings of nostalgia, returning to Nabua evokes memories of loss and separation. While riding his bicycle, back in 1994, my father was run over by a bus on this same highway. The accident happened at a time when my father was burdened by the feeling of smallness that we “did not make it” in the city, and that we had to accept material support from the maternal side of the family so we could rebuild our life in Nabua. Our return to Nabua in my youth was a “sag-uli” – a melancholic homecoming that signifies a return from a less successful venture beyond Nabua. Following the accident, my mother prohibited us, her children, from going anywhere outside the centro. All throughout my stay in Nabua for my high school education, the farthest I was able to go in what I now call my fieldsite, was the cemetery, which is a mere 1.3 km from our home. Fast forward to my research in Nabua, when I have finally broken my mother’s prohibition to explore the rest of our hometown. My first purchase was a cheap bicycle and on it during the cool hours before sunrise I began to explore the parts of Nabua outside of my grieving mother’s imposed comfort zone. The realization slowly dawned on me that the fieldsite to which I was returning, and where I imagined I would be gathering data, and photographing and filming the “intimate” everyday, was quite unfamiliar to me. How could I
research at this “home,” when its space and people were but distant strangers? And – equally – how could I film at this home where people are also my relations?

Inherent in the academic forms of disciplining is learning how to create one’s own style of reductionist representation, a process that Gayatri Spivak (2010) has critiqued for reflecting “certain kinds of convictions” that render subjects of study as transparent or readable. This may occur even when the researcher intends to “do” academic labor for kin and acquaintances. The act of capturing lived experience through audiovisual technologies is not immune from this critique. Our ambitions for academic or creative productivity require serious discussion, along with our habits of knowledge production as created through what Marilyn Strathern (1987) calls “routine reflexivity.” Using examples from my fieldwork in my hometown, I discuss in this chapter the messy contexts that have led to what might be called “negative productions” – situations during which projects that are aimed at creating, delivering and sharing knowledge in written, visual, or other forms, become unmade, unsettled, folded up, declared failed or unrealized.27

I wrote in my Ph.D. proposal that I would be audiovisually recording daily life in Nabua, as well as conversations and interviews with research participants, contingent on their consent. I wished to use the audiovisuals in looking at both quotidian and spectacular events in my hometown to contribute to scholarship that pushes for the understanding of particularly local practices such as kinship, ritual, etc., as simultaneously global and intimate (Pratt and Rosner

27 I am not alone in drawing attention to the negative, absence, failings, silences, collapses, disappearance, and other negative descriptors. Fatima Tobing Rony (1996, 212) in fact points out that a central theme in the works by non-Western filmmakers is their “not-photographing (of) certain subjects, whether profane or sacred.” In her auto-ethnographic account of the Jewish-Cuban diaspora, Ruth Behar (2013, 19) evocatively writes that sometimes even the worthiest of stories can “vanish without leaving a trace, as if they never existed.”
Following phenomenological scholarship (Ahmed et al. 2003; Fabian 1990; M. Jackson 2013) that has pushed for a nuancing of the lived experience, my initial idea was to use the audiovisual in reflecting on intimacy in rigorous ways. I also wrote that these could be used in “fleshing out narratives, daily life, and (other) events” that are now inflected by migration. But arriving in Nabua, locally valued concepts such as “supog” (shame) and the respondents’ ideas of self-representation, as well as my concerns with maintaining social relations, point to the discomforting potential of academic creative practices, especially when involving and directed to my kababayans. In the following section, I write about the impact that these mobilities have had on my academic creative practice. I then describe two “negative productions” from my fieldwork: the non-screening of my film “Baad ng Pauno” (Docot 2009), and the non-filming of one of the many events to which I had access. In my discussion, I reflect on the “non-productive” effects of researching in the intimate hometown on academic creative ambitions and on the ways that place-based concerns about “relational accountability” (S. Wilson 2001) affect knowledge production. In the conclusion, I bring up the hauntings of knowledge production (Fabian 1990) as we remove ourselves from our hometowns to return to our work as authors. For one researching the hometown, this crisis often includes the emotionally laborious weighing of accountability for kin and other relations.

2.2 Researching Migration at Home

My overseas education and the increased integration of many of my kin in the urban and global economy have informed my interests centered on Filipino migration. My intention is to study the effects of migration at home, as a way of addressing the gap in the existing literature (Chapter 1). However, our intentions sometimes do not unfold as imagined and as
anthropologist-turned-conceptual artist Susan Hiller (1985) has stated, intentionality is but “an interesting fallacy.” At the end of my first year of fieldwork in Nabua, I reported to my dissertation supervising committee, “My filming in Nabua so far has been limited to publicly held events. The filming of personal life involved in migration is tough even at this point. I am realizing that the filming of everyday family life is in some ways exploitative, and I am finding it hard to explain to my potential film ‘subjects’ the purpose of my filming…” During fieldwork, I began to doubt my rigor as researcher. I wondered whether my retreat from plans for ethnographic documentation and creative work were simply effects of demotivation, or even laziness. Below, I present a write-up of the two negative productions during my fieldwork at home to elaborate this cryptic email.

2.3 Non-Screening: *Baad ng Pauno*

I returned to Nabua for research but also with plans to screen my film *Baad ng Pauno*, a 30-minute film documenting my mother’s two-day preparation for her application for a tourist visa at the U.S. Embassy in Manila. The film was made before I entered my doctoral studies, and by the time that I returned to Nabua, it had already been shown in various venues in the Philippines and overseas.\(^{28}\) I hoped to bring the film home as a tool for self-reintroduction.\(^{29}\) I was also motivated by the desire to “share” my work along Jean Rouch’s idea of “shared anthropology” (Henley 2009), by ambitions to inspire creative production at home, and to hopefully open up conversations on the prevalence of migration from Nabua. But in Nabua and

\(^{28}\) The worldwide screening was in 2009, under a contract with a Filipino satellite TV channel that caters to overseas Filipino subscribers.

\(^{29}\) The couple whose homecoming story and whose family participated in the ton-ton ritual (Chapter 4) brought up during my initial request to interview them that they had seen *Baad ng Pauno* in their home in Seattle.
in other small towns where the American project of “benevolent assimilation” has crafted familial goals of producing educated workers embedded in the wage economy, art is often seen as “uda kamutangan” (useless). It is also commonly heard that artists belong to the category of “sa kinapay” (the crazies). The plan to screen my film back home revealed to me how our academic creative work, complicated by our often intertwining subject positions (as researcher, neighbor, kin, and others), could unfold in messy ways.

The film opens with my mother dressed in a polka-dot dress, preparing to steam rice. She stands next to the small kitchen counter of the apartment that I had been renting in Manila. My voice behind the camera is heard, “Ma, let’s practice!,” referring to our rehearsals for her visa interview. In another scene, she asks annoyed, “Why are you taking videos of my wrinkled feet?” She follows this up laughing, “I’ll make you take videos of my vagina so others can see the scars you gave me when you were born.” A few minutes into the film, my mother begins to talk to me through the camera in a mix of sentimentality, wit and sarcasm. In one scene, the film cuts to a photograph of my newly born niece. This transitions to a medium shot of my mother who gestures with her hand, as if holding the photograph to show it to an embassy officer during an interview, “This is my first grandson, I don’t want to see him in picture alone, I want to see him and kiss him!” My mother looks at the space off-frame in quiet contemplation. She steps out of this moment of feeling, and practices a spiel which she would not dare say to the consul in real life: “If you don’t pass me, this will be my last. I don’t want to be interviewed by you fools!”

My mother is among the many people of Nabua whose dreams about mobility have been greatly influenced by the first migrations of our navy men. But the route for those who are not direct descendants of navy men is potentially a difficult one. As ambitions for the “American Dream” are reflected in everyday life in Nabua, I imagined that the film would resonate with the
experiences of many Nabueños. Rather unexpectedly, my mother retracted the consent that I received earlier to screen the film in several venues in the Philippines and overseas. It was not immediately clear to me why a film that has already circulated elsewhere could not be warmly welcomed home.

2.4 Non-Filming: Fleet Reserve Association’s (FRA) Elections

On the 24th of April 2014, some of the members of the FRA Branch 127 in Nabua gathered to elect new officers. Uncle William announced the opening of the nominations for the elections.30 Looking at me, he said, “We vote without the ladies,” referring to their wives. A retiree turned and mockingly pointed his finger at me (the only “lady” in the room), and giggled. After former FRA president Manoy Nick seconded the motion, Uncle William excitedly raised his own hand and nominated Mr. Ballester. Amid his shipmates’ enthused ramblings, Mr. Ballester spoke tersely, “I respectfully decline the nomination.” An uproar of “Why?” was heard. Looking dejected, he replied, “Because I have a disability.” But instead of offering sympathy, his shipmates erupted into laughter. “We all have disability!” Uncle William exclaimed. Mr. Ballester reasoned further, “I cannot handle the position. I cannot hear well.” Somebody asked, “What do you mean you cannot hear, what is wrong with your ear?” Uncle Pio, their treasurer and youngest member at age 61 and who sat beside Mr. Ballester, comically cupped his ear and said, “What?!” Once again, a roar of laughter erupted in the room. Mr. Moreno, the group’s advocate for social dancing, said, “I will volunteer as your VP if you accept your presidency.”

30 I called those who have expressed kinship or other non-consanguineal connections with my family “uncle” or “grandfather” ("Lolo") and those who share some connections with my family, “Manoy” (elder brother). I called members of the club Mister or Sir if we have not established direct kinship ties or other connections. These terms of respect were flexible and also depended on what the retirees’ preferences. “Manoy” and “Manay” are honorific terms in Nabua used to refer men and women, respectively, who are older than the speaker.
He added, “In fact, my other ear can also no longer hear!” Uncle William gave his own advice, “Your disability does not disqualify you from being elected because we all have disability.”

Realizing that he cannot escape the nomination, Mr. Ballester tried harder, “There is another physical disability. It’s a new one which the doctor just told me about.” Laughter filled the room again. Uncle Pio motioned to his chest as if he is having a heart attack. Mr. Ballester, in a serious tone, gave one last reason for declining the nomination, “If we have a member called by the Supreme Commander, it gets very difficult.” Upon saying this, the teasing mood immediately faded into an awkward silence. Manoy Nick asked, “Why, it affects you?” Mr. Ballester, we began to understand, was anxious about being president not only because of his weakening health, but because his role would hardly ever include planning homecomings and extravagant dances that the FRA was once famous for. Mr. Ballester replied, “Yes, it’s a very difficult job.” Trying harder to convince his shipmate, Uncle William argued, “Just imagine, you are leading 83 retired officers and marines. It is something to be proud of.” Mr. Ballester said that in case the job becomes stressful, there might be no one to help him. Mr. Moreno assured Mr. Ballester, “I will be here. If I am not here, I am just at the “bulangan” (cockfight arena),” leading everyone to an explosive laughter. With their membership base thinning, the duties of the FRA president now mostly include being responsible for organizing hospital visits, or upcoming farewells for their shipmates’ voyage into the next world. They are running out of members to recruit. Uncle William once told me that their “species” is nearing extinction – a subject that I return to in Chapter 3.

Prior to arriving in Nabua, I imagined being guided by decolonizing research methods that provided insights into how to become more sensitive to the culture and people that you are researching. I thought that the metaphor of the snowball in recruiting research participants
seemed unsuitable in a tropical country! I was attracted to the categorization of the two main kinds of researchers in the Philippines into ‘ibang-tao’ (not one of us) and ‘hindi-ibang-tao’ (one of us) (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000; Pe-Pua 2006). Identifying already very close to the “one of us” category, I hoped to settle comfortably within the “one of us” zone and eventually collect data more easily. During my first home visit to Uncle William’s house, he suggested that I should make a documentary film about them. He had also prepared an outline titled “For Dollar Town – Feedback,” which I examine further in Chapter 3. As my research with the U.S. Navy in Nabua proceeded, I learned that the themes in Uncle William’s outline and those told by his shipmates, were centered on the positive accounts of their lives. “Don’t include that,” one told me in a hushed tone upon learning that I had interviewed his shipmate who had submitted fraudulent documents in their youth just to join the U.S. Navy. “Are you a communist or what?,” another asked when I asked them to clarify what seemed like frictions in their allegiance to the U.S. with their identities as Philippine-born retirees in Nabua (Figure 2.4.1). Uncertain how to negotiate the ways that the retirees want to be memorialized in my ethnography with the critical literature on empire, war, and the military, I found it increasingly difficult to take up the work of rigorous audiovisual documentation. Such a method, that I had thought would be relatively easy as an “insider,” seemed to further emphasize the distance between me as a researcher and these men who proudly served in the U.S. Navy. It turned out that how relations unfold in the field is much messier than the “one of us/not of us” binary that I had read about before returning to Nabua.
Figure 2.4.1 Entangled American and Philippine flags at the FRA Branch 127 being readied for a flag-raising ceremony.

How can we understand these two negative productions? Below, I continue to discuss forces that exerted pressure on my work. First, I reflect on how the local value of supog (shame) materially pressed upon my intentions to screen my film in Nabua. Second, I think about authoring an account of relations inextricably linked to place. The importance of place in Nabua manifests in the term “ginikanan” which translates as both place of origin and descent. In my two accounts on negative production discussed above, we discern ways by which the conversions of “findings into artefact” (Strathern 1987, 28) also simultaneously involve the act of making aspects of one’s research recede. In the conclusions, I discuss how the relational forces of supog and ginikanan are forms of careful and empathic sensing of other people’s concerns and
predicaments. The empathic route may lead one to retreat from knowledge production, moving efforts at rigorous data gathering and sharing towards negative productions.

2.5 The Force of Supog in the Non-Screening of Baad ng Pauno

Many scholars have deployed visuals as cues in complicating our understanding of relationships, sensibilities, interpersonal activities, and the realm of the experiential (El Guindi 2004; Pink 2006). Audiovisual production cultivates socialities between people who surround the camera (MacDougall 2006), and delivers “implicit and multi-sensorial dimensions” at the same time that it also enriches the process of witnessing and theorizing (Torresan 2011). The production and experience of the visual also affect people in ways that challenge the visualist mode of appreciation in the West (Naficy 2001; Edwards 2005; Marks 2007). However, critique and theorization of the audiovisual often come after the production of an intended output. The kinds of relationships and the dimensions of positionalities that could undo or unsettle an intended academic creative project need to be further problematized. In particular, my retreat to negative productions leads to a culture-specific discussion of interpersonal relations that potentially broadens the discussion of empathy with our informants. This realization needs to be framed within Philippine personhood theory, to reflect on the implications that locally operating values may have for our data gathering and other pursuits during fieldwork.31

My mother said, “Nagsupog na” (It will be so shameful), when I first mentioned my intention to screen the film in Nabua. My mother’s identities as a desperate seeker of an

31 I am aware that some critics have dismissed indigenous psychology for carrying the dangerous card of nativist essentialism. I am more inclined to follow E. San Juan (2006, 52–54) who writes about indigenous theorizing in the Philippines as “a Filipino response...to continuing U.S. interference in Philippine society, culture, and politics...it is not equivalent to nativization since it involves a radical political program to democratize the social structure and its undergirding fabric of norms, beliefs, and constitutive behavioral elements...”
American tourist visa and as a sentimental grandmother that are projected in *Baad ng Pauno* starkly contrast with the unwavering spirit that she projects in Nabua as a respected elder who has a record of 13 years of political service as head of our barangay. Supog, which is translated to ‘hiya’ in Filipino, has equivalence in other parts of the Philippines. Jaime Bulatao (1964, 426) observes that hiya is often simplistically translated as “shame,” but more than that, it is “a painful emotion” that has “soul-shaking” effects when it threatens to mar one’s ego and sense of self-worth. It “is a kind of anxiety, a fear of being left exposed, unprotected, and unaccepted” (Bulatao 1964, 428). Meanwhile, Fenella Cannell (1999) finds that in the Bicol region, hiya is positively valued and therefore to be called shameless is a very serious accusation. Emil Tabbada (2005) grounds hiya differently, linking it to the value of honor. Therefore, the viling of another person’s honor is injurious to the larger social world in which a person is embedded. Jocano (1997) argues that hiya is not a value, but is instead a dominant norm that prescribes how people should act and behave in relation to each other and therefore, it is concerned not only with the maintenance of relationships, but with care for feelings.

In *Baad ng Pauno*, an uncle’s unsuccessful visa application was brought up. The reason for the visa rejection, said my aunt who is one of the only two characters appearing in the film, must have been my uncle’s thick gold necklace which could get struck by lightning and which could cause fires all over America! My aunt also mentioned the case of a great aunt’s five-time visa rejection. In relatively small towns like Nabua, it is difficult to keep secrets where residents can claim relations. Unable to empathize with my mother’s worries about the responses that the film may elicit from our relatives, her peers and former constituents, I countered my mother’s refusal to screen the film. I told her that the film only reveals the “real” as visa refusal as a fact of life in Nabua. During my fieldwork in Nabua, I helped with the visa applications of my brother, a
neighbor, and my mother’s two siblings – and only my brother was successful in his attempt. Also holding ideas about how artistic engagements by academics have nurtured conversations and relations, and sometimes even spur action (Rouch and Feld 2003; MacDougall 2006), I initially contested my mother’s arguments about the supog that a public screening of the film could engender. I doubted my mother’s worries about the gossip that a film screening would generate, especially in regard to individuals whose local status, wealth, and prestige, did not translate to an ability to cross the great American borders.

But during fieldwork, I saw how my mother’s position as a retired local politician has granted me easy access to many events, spaces, and relations. In March 2013, we were invited to the home of a family in one of the outskirt villages in Nabua to watch the annual reenactment of the Last Supper. In this religious celebration, the parish priest of the nearby church played the role of the Jesus Christ and the duly costumed “twelve disciplines” around him were barangay leaders and patrons. Noticing my mother in the audience, the owner of the house, who was dressed as one of Jesus Christ’s discipline, invited her to join them at the table, to partake in the rich feast of wine, roasted pig and native delights that followed shortly after the ceremonies. I kidded my mother afterwards that she was the 13th and the only female disciple, and she proudly beamed. During the municipal electoral campaigns in April 2013, upon learning that I was not receiving replies when I called the mobile number for the mayoral candidate that she had earlier given me, my mother advised me to text instead from her phone, prefacing this with, “This is ex-captain Lydia Docot.” Within seconds, a response came in acknowledging receipt of the message that I had typed. A text detailing the party’s campaign route which was otherwise private for security reasons was quickly received on my mother’s phone. The next day, I was picked up from our apartment by a tricycle adorned by colorful political campaign posters, a ride that I
shared with the candidate’s wife.32 The next month, my mother accompanied me to the house of the vice governor whom she said was her “best friend.” Arriving at the vice governor’s residence early in the morning, I was struck by the crowd of at least a hundred waiting at the gate hoping to personally deliver their requests to the vice governor. A lady in the crowd told me that she wanted to ask the vice governor to be the baptismal godfather of her newborn which she held in her arms. An old woman from the town of Bula (about 15 kilometers away from Nabua) said that it is her fifth attempt to see the vice governor to ask for money so she could have electricity installed in their home. The private homes of political figures turn into sites where the powerful and the powerless negotiate patronage. With the disbursement of public funds transacted in the realm of the politicians’ homes, government transactions transform into intimate negotiations between patrons and their clients/voters. Unlike the other clients who fell in line for their names and requests to be listed on the visitors’ logbook, my mother and I quietly slipped into the wooden door that led us to the living room of the politician’s home. There we were met by the vice governor himself who greeted my mother with a friendly kiss on her cheek. Village captains like my mother are often mediators between high-level politicians and the ordinary townsfolk.

At first I thought that my mother sometimes exaggerated the weight of her political influence and the intimacy of her relations with others, because after all, she held only a local political position that had little power outside the bounds of Nabua. Pioneer of Philippine “liberation psychology” Virgilio Enriquez (2008, 57) writes that one’s self-evaluation may be “puffed up with self-importance,” sometimes clashing with how society evaluates the person. As

32 A tricycle is a motorized public utility vehicle commonly used in the Philippines that is comparable to an auto rickshaw.
my mother’s responses to my proposal to screen *Baad ng Pauno* at home show, her desire for self-representation became more pronounced with the prospect of her story becoming re-embedded in her social world at home. In one scene, my mother practices her interview at the embassy by answering questions that she imagined might be asked by the consul: “How much do you earn?” She follows this with, “Ay, very small, but I want also to serve!” My mother received a monthly honorarium of only about USD90 during her service as barangay captain. The power that one derives from holding barangay leadership loses its relevance when converted to monetary benefits. But my mother also knew that her income was also often redistributed to her constituents as donations to wakes and funerals, festivals, and hospitalization, among others. Just as I initially undervalued her self-understood importance, I also underestimated her worries about her expressed “dangers” of *Baad ng Pauno* when screened at home – home being a relational space where her consanguineal and ritual ties are strong and stable. I failed to realize that my mother’s worries about supog that could injure the ego, hurt other people’s feelings, or disturb local social relations, were her preferred modes of self-representation that are linked to her valuation of herself and others’ valuation of her status in Nabua.

However, my mother’s desire to protect her self-evaluated status by shielding it from supog also clashed with her ambitions for her children to continue to accumulate social and cultural capital through their education and urban and overseas mobilities. In fact, she decided to run for village office to avail of the benefits stipulated in Republic Act No. 7160 of the Local Government Code of 1991, under which the dependents of public officials can take advantage of up to 90 percent reductions from their matriculation fees in state colleges and universities. She also calculates the ventures of her four children spread out in Manila and three countries, whom she raised by herself upon the untimely death of her husband, as linked to her own retirement.
prospects. In the film, she says that in New Zealand (where one of my sisters lived during the time of filming), she was “happily bored, simply enjoying life....” Resting from practicing her lines to be delivered to the consul, she turns away from the camera and says, “I have been so poor. Now that I have grown old, and my children are all abroad, I want to reap the fruit of my labor. I want to reap the fruits!” My mother knows that my becoming artist-scholar has become increasingly disassociated from the category of the “crazies” as it manifests increasingly in Nabua as a step into the world of the educated and cultured elite.

Nabua is located in the district of Rinconada which literally means “corner.” In the Bicol region in which Nabua is located, intellectual elites and their cultural production often come from the larger cities while “smaller” towns such as Nabua, and the even more peripheral island towns such as Catanduanes and Masbate, remain on the fringes. My mother recognized Baad ng Pauno as a material that represents to the world a Nabueño story crafted by her own daughter who has some exciting adventures to share just like the well-travelled U.S. Navy men.

Calculating the degree of support she can offer to me while diminishing her own concerns, she began to negotiate or compromise supog.

Evaluating her position and succumbing to my arguments made no longer as a disobedient child but as a scholar, my mother let her worries about being subjected to supog recede, and finally agreed to my proposal. Her agreement, however, came with conditions. I was to censor the few seconds when the names of those whose visas had been rejected were mentioned. In her opinion, a public screening would be insane and she suggested that I invite only about 20 guests to our apartment for an intimate screening (Figure 2.5.1). Perhaps wanting to escape unwanted attention, my mother asked for the event to be held after she departed again for California. I began to realize that for my mother, the stories of migration and the anxieties and insecurities
imbued in them, need not become objects of spectacle in Nabua. For my mother, it is better that my academic creative output, especially when intended for consumption at home, not mirror the real.

Figure 2.5.1 Unused invitation to screen films during fieldwork at home

I began to understand that when carried back home, *Baad ng Pauno* is potentially an injurious liability. Reflecting on her responses, I decided to back out from the “exclusive” screening of the film in Nabua. It was my responsibility to care for my mother’s concerns, but it is also part of my self-reflexive work as a postcolonial researcher to continuously learn how to be attentive to the ways that emotions press upon my work – sometimes to the point of negative
production. Beyond an empathic understanding of her predicament, I argue that the process of understanding the events surrounding the plans to screen *Baad ng Pauno* in Nabua must involve a reflection on the intermingling of supog (or other values) with the very work of knowledge production. John Brough (2011, 197) writes that film, like phenomenology, is not merely descriptive, rather, it articulates what is deemed by the author to be essential. He says that as a “prepared particular,” film works as a “richly complex image created precisely to present something” (198). Brough argues that films privilege a particular narrative and therefore a selected reconstruction of a larger reality. This is related to visual anthropologist David MacDougall’s (2006) view that film must be contemplated beyond serving as a tool for documenting communities. MacDougall proposes to investigate the “multidimensionality of the subject itself” and to consider film in the “realm of interpersonal relations” (50). Brough’s and MacDougall’s approach to film are useful in reflecting about how narratives – the trope of the “American Dream” depicted in *Baad ng Pauno*, for example – become solidified in our work. Listening to our subjects’/respondents’/collaborators’ multiple responses to our work may tell us how supog and other values may be felt and expressed to different degrees in various times and spaces. As I have learned, as long as the film is circulated outside Nabua, my mother sees the film harmless to the honor that she protects and projects in our hometown.

With these lessons in mind, my suggestion is that we look at retreats to negative productions as empathic routes for *being/becoming in relation* with others. Negative productions open spaces into which we could roll back from individualized Western subjectivity to an axiology that considers our relationality with others. For Strathern (1987), the kind of author that one “becomes” is *not* determined by an act of will but in part by the kinds of representations that researchers end up producing. This means that intentionality becomes displaced by the
researcher’s constructivist reading of “culture.” Further, the researcher’s rendering may end up being unreadable by the people from which data had been extracted. Strathern observes that an author eventually ends up writing not so much for those they study, but for their academic colleagues who are the audience of highly specialist accounts. In light of this disjuncture between intentionality and end product, Strathern writes that what is significant is the way the writer “becomes author in relation to those being studied” (26, italics in original).

While I initially worried that my surrender to non-screening was leaving negative impressions on my larger fieldwork in Nabua, I venture that the non-screening of Baad ng Pauno was productive in respecting my mother’s feelings and concerns about self-representation that were oriented towards maintaining social relations. Feelings associated with shame (and other expressions we may encounter) often are not immediately recognizable as they may be articulated subtly, sometimes in non-revelatory cultural codes which certainly point to difficulties in “reading” or studying intimacy. On the other hand, the dangers of supog are often explicitly verbalized by those concerned about its possible adverse effects. Considering autoethnographic reflections on the anxiety-inducing process of becoming authors and in sensing interpersonal relations, I finally refer to Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson’s (2001, 176–77) research paradigm where he writes about methods as needing to be constantly checked so that “I am not just gaining in some abstract pursuit; I am gaining knowledge in order to fulfill my end of the research relationship.” I continue these conversations below by suggesting that place exerts force in this process that may lead to negative productions, should we hold on to our fieldsites as spaces where our past, current and future relations are grounded.
2.6 The Force of Ginikanan in the Non-Filming of the FRA Elections

On the day that I first came to introduce myself to the retirees, FRA president Uncle William added that my great granduncle, Cleto Descalso, was a navy man and philanthropist in Nabua. With my consanguineous links to their respected shipmate, I was welcomed to observe their meetings, which none of their “ladies” are allowed to attend. But researching elders at the hometown could be a taxing enterprise because of the pressure to produce critical academic work while remaining sensitive to their age, disabilities, and to their concerns about how to be remembered. Researchers learn individualist ways of knowledge accumulation and production through different forms of disciplining. Many scholars have already problematized their locations as “natives” returning to study their home communities (D’Alisera 1999; Kim 1990; Kondo 1990; Moss 2001; Motzafi-Haller 1997; Reed-Danahay 1997), supporting Strathern’s (1987, 16) observation that research at home “can recede infinitely.” Scholars have written about how de/familiarization, un/masking of degrees of nativity, and emotional dis/engagement, may be deployed for the purposes of data collection at home. Others have also written about the “slipperiness of nativity” that opens up “exploitative potential” when (Jackson 2004) returning to their own communities to film friend-informants.33 There are those such as Liam Buckley (2005) who suggest a new kind of interpretation of the fieldsite as a site of postcolonial contestation. More specifically, on the decaying photographic archives of The Gambia, Buckley proposes to

33 Jackson thinks that desires for a “shared anthropology” (Rouch and Feld 2003) are possible but his solution is antithetical to the ethnographic work of rigorous documentation. Instead, he proposes that sharing could be possible through the creation of an archive that is intentionally neither ethnographic nor academic.
consider culture-specific perceptions on materiality that leave impressions on how Gambians care, or do not care, for their colonial archives.\textsuperscript{34}

This brings me to contemplating how researchers of communities other than their own have resolved some of the dilemmas that they faced. Some have recognized their outsider status (Gilbert 1994), while others hold on to their politics and intentions despite the strains that their research bears upon their relations and everyday lives (Katz 1994).\textsuperscript{35} Gillian Rose (1997, 305) is doubtful of “transparent reflexivity” as an effective route in recognizing and situating locatedness in relation to research participants.\textsuperscript{36} Kim England (1994) writes of the discomfort in issues of appropriation and power that are inherent in academic production, even for those who are intent on translating their academic work into political action.\textsuperscript{37} Birgitt Röttger-Rössler (1993) reflects on the biases that we carry to the field that frame our ambitions to collect data.\textsuperscript{38} Some have become suspicious of their disciplines such as Donna Jean Young (2005, 209) who, after a falling out with her friend-informant, began to think of anthropology as an “impolite discipline.”

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\textsuperscript{34} For instance, Buckley writes that posthumous bequests remain a major challenge for the Gambian archival project, because for one, caring for the left-behind property (including photographs) of the deceased is a private affair and not a civic duty. Second, entering into a gifting and reciprocal relationship with the state, which for the Gambians does not assume an anthropomorphic form, is a rather strange practice.

\textsuperscript{35} More particularly, Melissa Gilbert (1994) began to place the word “home” in quotes, realizing that her experiences and location based on race, class and profession, finally mark her as an outsider even in her home city. Facing a similar dilemma, Cindy Katz (1994) found that by focusing on the common structures of dominance in our places of study, researchers may be able to conduct a “politically committed research that is true to its intent” (70).

\textsuperscript{36} Admitting that figuring situatedness is “an extremely difficult thing to do,” Rose suggests that uncertainties and anxieties arising from self-reflexivity could also weigh down on academic work, leading to what she calls knowledge production from a “sense of failure” (305–306).

\textsuperscript{37} In her research about lesbians in Toronto, England read the community leaders’ non-response to her phone calls as cues of their disinterest in participating in her project. In the end, she dropped her project and called it “failed research.” She thought that she might be colonizing lesbians by researching them as a white straight professor.

\textsuperscript{38} Röttger-Rössler’s requests frequently fell on deaf ears as not a single villager was willing to speak about their own lives. She dropped the project eventually, realizing that actions and events, rather than the work of the individual, are more prominently highlighted in her respondents’ narratives.
Linking this kind of literature to research on the Philippines, F. Landa Jocano (1997, 10) points out that the difference between those who study others and those who study their own community, lies in the ways that the latter “labor under a heavy psychological burden.” Jocano thinks about the difficulty in evading the consequences of actions also as kin, neighbor, and member of the same community. Within such contexts, Jocano suggests that one tends to take extra care to maintain harmonious relations with others. Given these conversations, I suggest that the process of self-reflexive thinking could consider more carefully the production of critical work when we study in fieldsites where we trace our roots and life-long relations. Through thinking about place, we might find new routes in bearing in mind relationships that we might want to give space for flourishing.

How must I then film the U.S. Navy men who expressed excitement in their stories being recorded on film? In documenting the stories of the U.S. Navy men in Nabua, I felt crippled by the demands of producing a decolonizing approach to the study of Filipino migration which Robyn Rodriquez (2016) suggests must be linked to the American project of empire-building. Catherine Lutz (2006), in her study of American intervention in the Philippines, suggests that it is the task of anthropologists to produce ethnographies that highlight that the “empire is in the details.” The expectations of academia to produce searing analytical work often clashed with relational practices at home, for example, of kinship and generational respect. Uncle William had told me that we are kin because in the 70s my grandfather had purchased farm land from his father. He said that one sold property only to a relative because who would want to share a community with a stranger? Uncle Pio told me that my grandparents were his godparents for their wedding. Clarifying my genealogy, a retiree told me that one of my elders was a member of the guerilla movement during the Japanese occupation. He refused to elaborate saying, “Oh,
never mind, they might get angry at you. This might be a personal issue.” On another occasion, as I handed my calling card to an FRA Branch 127 retiree, he excitedly grinned to tell me that his departed brother was “linked” to my mother.\textsuperscript{39} I exclaimed automatically the name of my mother’s childhood love. The only son of an “ancient mariner” – the term that retirees use in describing older shipmates – this man once held a historic position as the first Filipino-American chief of the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG).\textsuperscript{40} Sitting beside him in their home, I shied away from asking pointed questions on Philippine-American bilateral relations as surrounding family members playfully inquired why I had turned down the affection of their nephew during our high school days. “Personal” stories from the past flowed into conversations, stalling interviews but also enlivening them.

The degrees of intimacy brought up during my exchanges with the FRA elders and their kin as well as by my own kin, hinted at a common rootedness in Nabua but also at the fragility of relations. At a funeral rite held at the town’s church, an aunt saw me perform bisa to a whole group of navy retirees all seated on one pew. My aunt passed by my mother’s apartment in the same afternoon to remind me in between jokes that I should be careful in performing such displays of respect because people might think that I am fabricating kinship with the town’s wealthiest elders. In Nabua, showing gestures of reverence for the elders is still very much an observed tradition, but accumulated wealth, class, and migration histories, have already interceded with its public performance. I began to understand that just as I tapped into these relations to access the elite group of the FRA Branch 127 elders for research purposes (i.e., by

\textsuperscript{39} The word “link” is used in Philippine show business to refer to love teams or couples.\textsuperscript{40} Established in 1947, JUSMAG is the agency tasked to oversee U.S.-Philippine agreements on military training and financing, humanitarian aid, and others. The chief of JUSMAG also plays a key role as adviser to the U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines (Gittler 2004).
recalling to them my kinship with Lolo Cleto), they also built or emphasized degrees of affiliations with me and my relations. This was a form of articulating their expectations of respect for their preferred ways of memorialization. As Uncle William proudly exclaimed, “Nabua has become synonymous with sailors.” Despite this, many retirees are concerned that their contributions might fizzle out as their “species” approaches “extinction.” Lolo George lamented, “So every time I’m reading the papers, they always mention the OFWs. What about the retired navy?”

In a context where age and health threaten life in retirement, memory-making in the hometown becomes an important project. The two war memorial monuments at the centro (Chapter 1) offer conflicting historical narratives about Nabueño-American cooperation and Filipino martyrdom during WWII. Such contradictions are also reflected in the elders’ assessment of their current identities as American citizens who want to enjoy their remaining days in their land of birth. As we sat in his brother’s (also a U.S. Navy man) penthouse of a building in Nabua that was built from dollar pensions, a retiree told me, “I am always a Filipino at heart, at first… But America is not my enemy.” The accounts of retirees in Nabua differed starkly from accounts of those who have retired in the U.S., with the latter focusing on feelings of discontent, racialization and feminization in the navy (Espiritu 2002, 2003). Former navy man Ray L. Burdeos (2008) writes about his experiences of political disenfranchisement by having pledged allegiance, but not citizenship, to the United States. Narratives similar to Burdeos’ also sometimes appeared in the stories told by the retirees in Nabua but these conflicted with their

41 Burdeos also gives an account of colonial policies that cultivated the systematic racialization of Filipinos in the U.S. Navy, such as the Cooper Act of 1902, which restricted Filipinos from many aspects of political and daily life while remaining U.S. colonial subjects, and the Antimiscegenation Law of 1926.
celebrated status as epitomes of success in the town, and with what they would like to have recorded in the first anthropological ethnography of our common hometown.

Uncle William told me about his dream of commissioning a mural painting for their headquarters that will depict their collective narrative. To be titled “Carabao Boy’s Dream of Success,” the mural will show a boy riding a water buffalo that is surrounded by thought balloons showing the many adventures and accomplishments that retirees now take pride in, like travel, having married the town’s most beautiful women, land ownership, and mansions built from their salaries and pensions. They are glad to have escaped from tenant farming, and they wish for other Nabueños to someday have the same opportunity should their wish for the reinstallation of the American Naval Bases in the Philippines come true. Their “painful” experiences in the U.S. Navy that I hoped to collect – a “conviction” that I held, following Spivak – refused to come out in their self-chronicling. Their recollections that favored the positive over critical accounts are reminiscent of the words of Marc Augé (2004, 3) on oblivion, “One must know how to forget in order to taste the full flavor of the present, of the moment, and of expectation…”

The vignette on the FRA Branch 127 elections described above is only one of the many moments during which conversations among retirees retain light-heartedness even when discussing sensitive topics such as disability and death. But the jovial mood in FRA meetings also tend to eclipse tones of melancholia – the kind of mood that is often aestheticized and metaphorized in Third World cinema (Marks 2007). Collecting “death aid” was the most consistently brought up topic in the FRA meetings that I attended. On January 26, 2014, unable to decide as a group the best way to show their condolences to their shipmates’ left-behind kin, Uncle William mediated, “I think we are being emotional with this issue.” Some wanted to
donate individually to the bereaved, while some preferred to donate as a group because “the use of FRA is also for publicity.” To calm down the heated discussion about how to, as Lolo George said, “give a face and spirit to the donation,” they resolved that to keep talking about it is “paligsok” – a bad omen that could invite death. At a home visit, Dr. A. Gimenez Fajardo, the only son of a Nabueño navy man who was killed during the bombing of Pearl Harbor and whose name is inscribed on the “Tablets of the Missing” memorial in the Manila American Cemetery, shed a tear when I asked him if he had discussed his father’s tragic death with his mother. “One does not rub fresh wounds,” he told me softly yet instructively. Laura Marks (2007, 57) writes about the films produced in the postcolonial period as sometimes difficult to read to “acknowledge the fact that the most important things that happened are invisible and unvisualizable.” While there are ways of translating the FRA elections and similar moments into film, I worried about the spectacularizing effect that it would bring, and that my rendering of their story would be disrespectful to the ways that they want to “ethnographize” themselves (Chow 1995, 180).

If kinships could be fabricated in the same way that my aunt told me, they could also be disentangled. The fluidity of kinship materializes in Nabua in the use of the term “pag-iiba” which roughly translates to “still (my) kin.” One would say “pag-iiba ta pa yan” (We are still kindred) even if not sure (this is discussed further in Chapter 5, but with auto-ethnographic examples). Drawing attention to this is crucial because it directs us to the hard work that is put into maintaining relations at home. An identified kin, whether proximate or distant, when not acting within the relations expected of them, becomes identified as “iba” (other). It can be said the person is “iyan sa iba” (acting like other), connoting the person’s othering of the self by acting like a stranger. A person is identified as iba in situations, for example, when not greeting
someone even during a brief encounter on the streets, or when not responding to requests for support. A film that is not compatible with the elders’ projected optimist account would potentially render me as “iba man” (different). On the other hand, a person who remembers to care and who is empathic is called “marinumrom” (thoughtful, knowing). Those who have failed, or who refuse, to remember, are described as “iba na” (has become other) which means that the act of not remembering (“lingaw na” or they have already forgotten) make them fall away from a group, family, or any kind of social organization. Those who remember are applauded through affection, speech or commendation by members of the group and they are described as “tat-tao” (knowing), and are therefore “uragon” (excellent).42 Considering these, I realized the rigidity of the earlier categorization of Philippine researchers premised on the insider/outsider binary. I was conflicted that I might inflict injuries on the collective and individual labors of the FRA Branch 127 retirees in regrounding themselves in Nabua during their retirement. At home, to be called “iba na man” (has become other) especially by one’s elders will possibly create for me feelings of uprootedness from Nabua. But this feeling cannot be held individually as the self is often linked back to the social world of the family and the community – in the same way that my mother worried that the screening of Baad ng Pauno would bring supog and eventually impact her (and our family’s) modes of representation in relation with others.

42 The concept of the uragon as used in Nabua as well as in the larger Bicol region (‘orag’), is a value that alludes to one’s excellence in several aspects of life – excellence here may be related to skills, technical abilities, intelligence, and interpersonal relations, etc. Paz Santos (2004) provides a rich analysis of the concept of orag in the Bicol region as an aesthetic deployed by Bicolano artists. The concept of orag as used in everyday speech and experience still needs further investigation.
Therefore, negative productions such as the non-filming of the FRA elections had the effect of emplacing relations that would otherwise be rendered abstract through the individualizing process of research and academic creative production. Thinking about the fieldsite as common ginikanan, research becomes re-folded into a relational field. The conversations with FRA elders all point out that they returned to Nabua upon retirement not only to enjoy their hardearned pensions in a small town where these could be exchanged for a bigger value, but also because it is in the ginikanan that they wish to be remembered kindly. Annually, on November 1st, relatives offer candles, prayers, and food to the deceased in Nabua’s Catholic cemeteries. Through their savings and pensions U.S. Navy men have built for themselves and their families Nabua’s most monumental mausoleums (Figure 2.6.1). “We are all getting old at 83, 85, 86,” Mr. Moreno said during the FRA elections as he pointed towards his shipmates of these ages. “Great if the rest could reach this age. Some will die earlier and we’d have to send you off to the cemetery,” and his shipmates giggled in response. In Nabua, not only the former U.S. Navy men hope that stories about lives that were lived well will be circulated and remembered. Meanwhile, the idea of the fieldsite as ginikinan to which I will be frequently returning, to reconnect with kin, childhood friends, and with my new kinships discovered and made, such as those with the FRA elders, looms over the research process, beckoning to be considered.
2.7 Conclusions: Positively Valuing Negative Productions

My desire as anthropologist was to “re-discover” my hometown beyond my comfort zone. I wrote in my fieldnotes in April 2013, “At just a few minutes before 7am, most of the farmers have already returned to their homes as they have finished their morning round of work…The morning mist is made more spectacular by the smoke from the pyres built by the villagers out of fallen leaves and twigs… A flock of wild geese passed by us and fed on the snails on the side of
the rice paddies, and they drank water that irrigate the land. Pretty view, and I snapped a shot” (Figure 2.7.1). A friend of my mother’s named Boni had biked with me to this farming village called La Purisima (The Purest). But he told me that up close, the story is not as pretty. “Life is tough here,” he said. During the typhoon season, these rice fields turn into a sea and residents take out their canoes to sail to safe ground. Towards the end of my fieldwork, I had biked through all of Nabua’s 42 barangays. Boni kept on reminding me that I should see beyond the centro and beyond the narratives of those who, like me and my mother, the migrants, and the U.S. Navy elders, have the privilege to leave. The more I “re-discovered” Nabua, the less frequently I carried my camera around. In Chapter 6, I write about crafts in Nabua, a venture that I started exploring as I increasingly put down my camera.

![Figure 2.7.1 A photograph taken on my first bike ride to one of Nabua’s farm areas](image)
I have discussed in this chapter the discomforts and disorienting effects that an understanding of supog can cause to the extent that they can unmake our academic creative plans during fieldwork. Expectations for rigor and productivity clashed with my mother’s feelings of supog, leading to the re-orientation and re-negotiation of my increasingly individualized ambitions for sharing work in the hometown. The ethnographic vignette of the FRA elections that happened approximately a year after my return, illustrates some of the many moments in which I have opted out of visual documentation, despite the kinships and other connections that could have made access possibly easy to obtain. The non-screening of *Baad ng Pauno* has led to this writing up on some of the film’s contents and on some of the social relations that the plans for its screening engendered. This process revealed dimensions that are not discernible from the film itself.

It is true that the intimate conversations brought up here about my mother’s and the FRA elders’ concerns end up in a public but inaccessible (for the people in my hometown) academic circulation. How might we think about this paradox? What happens when we finally remove ourselves from the field and return to the fact of inevitable authorship? Answering these questions requires a quick reflection on authoring the visual and the textual. Macdougall (2006) writes that the visual’s temporality preserves experiences “more concretely than writing does” (54). Brough (2011) meanwhile writes that films construct the world in a “unique and heightened way.” Others write how films engage viewers phenomenologically by creating the effect of being drawn to the movements happening on screen (Pink 2011), while they also encode power relations between the bodies that appear in them (Marks 2007). The visual also has the quality of open-endedness such that images are always subject to reinterpretation, while the academic text, “despite its caution and qualifications, is a discourse that advances always toward conclusions”
But rather than focusing in this chapter on the differences between the visual and the textual such as their interpretation of knowledge, how they are received by audiences, and others, my arguments here have taken the route of reflecting on the intermingling of our subjects’ concerns about self-representation, reception of our work in various geographies and contexts, and our intentions in knowledge production. I have drawn from a phenomenology of the lived experience where the investigation inquires into relationalities and socialities (S. Wilson 2001; Edwards 2005). By drawing my attention to the worries of my mother about supog, and to the assertions of the retirees about how they want to be memorialized in the ginikanan, I came to think about the audiovisual not as an indispensable tool in contemporary ethnography, but as an artifact that has material effects on social relations. While Baad ng Pauno was screenable elsewhere, and while a film about the elders could contribute to evocative works on ageing and disappearance, as other anthropological films have done (Kaminsky and Myerhoff 1992; Nakamura 2010), centering empathy with the people whose stories are implicated in my narrative-making led me to eventually let go of my initial plans involving film.

I agree with Fabian (1990) who foresees an eventual abandonment of “representationism” (similar to Spivak’s reductionism, but mainly pertaining to the ethnographic depiction of the “real”) to be replaced with praxis that is based on a dialogic experience with our subject of study. The ways of conveying such praxis, for Fabian, “would be those that transform that experience in a struggle with ‘means of production’ of discourse” (765). My idea of negative production involves this similar struggle in thinking about possible productivities in the eventuality of not-doing. My retreat from filming would only be perceived as non-productive if we were to insist on producing work within the often meticulous and critical demands of our disciplines. Indeed,
Fabian writes, “ethnographic representations that are (or pretend to be) isomorphic with that which is being represented should be met with suspicion” (765). In the two cases above, it has been inconsequential to debate the usefulness of this text over what could have been accomplished by a screening or a new film. To do so is to misunderstand negative productions as merely a derivative phenomenon of another work or event (screening or film), and to gloss over the force of supog, ginikanan, and others. When resolving conundrums that might take us to the path of negative production, Fabian’s suggestion is to think about “not-writing as part of writing,” or we could translate this to “not-doing as part of doing.” Fabian suggests to “dissociate these data from any scheme or purpose and to treat them as necessary but gratuitous, like the air we breathe...” (769). For Fabian, data that is not written are among the elements that “nourish” our disciplines, and like air, it is productive as we move forward in our respective fields. But I have not taken the route of simply not-writing/not doing. Rather, in a comparable sense, the two negative productions cited here were the paths that I have taken while in the field to be respectful of, and to be sensitive to, the concerns of people whose personal lives animate this ethnography of Nabua.

Negative productions during fieldwork also led me to re-thinking my positionality as an “anthropologist of the hometown,” and have encouraged me to reflect on “routine reflexivity” (Strathern 1987). Self-reflexivity needs to include unsettling reflections on the eventuality of our authorship and participation in knowledge production. In the end, we bid our farewells to our family, friends, and informants, and we perhaps promise them another homecoming or visit. Returning to our desks and retreating from the face-to-face demands of maintaining our social relations with others, we put on our academic masks and go back to the task of authoring representation because it is “something that we actually do, as our praxis” (Fabian, 765). Should
we proceed to tread on our respective professional routes, the crafting of representation of others will be consistent in our everyday emotional, and hopefully productive, labor. Fabian writes about the eventuality of praxis as “...acting on, making, transforming (giving form to), not regrettably so or incidentally...but inevitably” (762–3). But Fabian also admits that his retreat to not-writing came after gaining considerable security in the academic world. Would negative productions then be doubly negative or simply impossible for those who are in the beginnings of their chosen careers?

As Michael Lambek (2005) reflects, academic work is “(relatively) unalienated,” and it is a “life sentence” (237). Leaving the field and facing the inevitability of knowledge production can spur a crisis as it will require the inescapable transcendence of supog and the ginikanan. Different scholars have offered different advice. Bulatao (1964, 438) argues that it is possible to transcend values such as supog if one is a “mature, individuated person, sensitive to the feelings of others yet autonomous in his own right.” Bulatao’s description of a person who will be able to transcend shame describes authors trained to be sensitive to ethics and empathic to feelings and social relations and yet, within the cultivating powers of neoliberal disciplining, individuated and autonomous in knowledge production. Cannell (1999) writes of the transcendence of shame more positively, writing that feelings of it can be reduced, overcome, eliminated, and eventually set aside (208), leading to “almost-impossible acts of self-transformations” (223). Like Fabian (1990, 769), I would like to simply retreat to “not-writing” or to what I have called here negative production, and breathe in, and be nourished by, the raw data and lessons that I have gathered from my hometown. The transcendence of shame leading to self-transformation as Cannell puts it, seems like a promising prospect. This transcendence, however, ends up being consistently checked with the readiness to underplay the value of the ginikanan.
I am transnationally dis/located without a permanent address and I am most attached to Nabua. Constantly, I am perturbed by the prospect of facing my elders when I return home in the future. The transcendence of supog that I undertake through this writing carries the extra weight of obtaining what would be the family’s first “collectively earned” doctoral degree. To be in perpetual harmonious relation with my mother and with the FRA elders is what I certainly desire, but would the demands of my scholarly pursuits eventually lead to this desire’s languishing and retreat? Negative productions may have non-productive effects on our research ambitions, but at the same time, they create possibilities for re-thinking the ends of our work as intimately linked with a larger and messier social life. Therefore, following the call of scholars to decolonize research (Wilson 2001; Enriquez 2008), I suggest that we re-think relationality as a form of knowledge itself. Negative productions could unsettle and undo our academic creative work, yet as I have hopefully demonstrated here, they could also lead to a positive and productive contemplation of feelings, values and relations that should exert a force on our production.

3.1 U.S. Memorial Day in Nabua

On the 25th of May 2014 at the centro of Nabua, the members of the FRA Branch 127 commemorated the U.S. Memorial Day. Every year, retirees of the U.S. Navy gather in our hometown during this American federal holiday to pay respects to those who have served in the American military forces. The ceremony was held in front of the FRA Branch 127 Building, where two flagpoles stood in front of a strip of native *santan* bushes whose red umbels were in full bloom. Embedded in the wall and nestled between the two flagpoles is the cement relief of their organization’s logo that bears the initials for the Navy, Marine Corps and the Coast Guard, not of the Philippines’ but the United States. While waiting for the ceremony to begin, the FRA elders exchanged greetings and updates using a mix of English and Rinconada and watched out for newly arriving shipmates and “ladies” – the term the retirees use to refer to their wives – in their private cars, some of which are already collectors’ items. Uncle Pio, the treasurer of the FRA Branch 127 and their youngest member at age 61, emerged from the hall, holding in his hands tasseled American and Philippine flags. Listed on the walls of the hall are the names of the

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43 The FRA Branch 127 was established through the efforts of 15 men from Nabua who joined the Navy, and who returned as WWII veterans. The FRA building in Nabua is owned by the branch itself and constructed through the fundraising efforts of its earlier members.

44 Most of the retirees came dressed in their white-collared shirts that bear their organization’s logo on the left side of the chest. Unlike on other days, no funny shirts were worn, like the one with the organization’s logo on the front, and colorful text on the back that read: “Retirees know it and have plenty of time to tell you about it.” I once kidded someone who was wearing that design if he could later tell me about his story in the navy, and he grinned excitedly and quoted his shirt in response.
members of the local FRA branch, and over the years, crosses (“†”) had been added next to names of the deceased. Enclosing these walls is a vast dance floor. In my conversations with the elders, they fondly recalled those years when they were younger in the interwar years (between World War I and II), when they often had gatherings and danced in this hall with their ladies. It was also a time when the FRA Branch 127 could still hope for a steady flow of new members, as Philippine-American bilateral relations still allowed the recruitment of Filipinos to the American Navy. Many of the retirees returned to Nabua after their retirement, to make the most of their veteran pensions, and with the self-awareness that it is in this town that they wish to spend their remaining days.

In the flagpole area, the retirees handled both the American and Philippine flags with great care: their tassels untangled, and their surfaces smoothed and cleaned of specks of dust. Somebody exclaimed: “Don’t let the flag touch the ground!” A street vendor driving a “padyak” filled with umbrellas and assorted plastic household wares slowed down to observe the three elders gathered around the Philippine flag. Jeepneys, motorcycles, and private vehicles passed by, and their passengers craned their necks to see what was unfolding in front of the FRA building, which otherwise no longer sees much activity. With the flags ready, Mrs. Guanzon – widow of a navy man – faced the shipmates, who were called out from their conversations by the building’s entrance to stand in formation under the sun. Manoy Nick was among the branch’s most dedicated members and that day, he was tasked to raise the American flag. Still recovering from a stroke which left his right arm paralyzed, he held the rope of the flag with his left hand as he kept his right arm stable by keeping it folded close to his chest.

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45 A manually pedalled bike with a sidecar.
Nine shipmates, out of the remaining 83 members, and ten ladies were in attendance. The FRA elders put on their garrison hats, decorated with various pins awarded over the decades of active duty as well as during retirement, and they raised their right hands to their brow in a calculated salute to the wavering symbols of the two nations (Figures 3.1.1). Mrs. Guanzon gave the cue for everyone to start singing *The Star-Spangled Banner*. After this, a quiet pause. They retained their salute, and again guided by the downward beat of Mrs. Guanzon’s arms, the singing of the *Lupang Hinirang* ensued. Barbara Myerhoff (1992, 223) finds that the elderly Jews in a retirement home in Venice, California, often seek “opportunities for self- and collective proclamations of being” through sharing a community life. Like the elders in Myerhoff’s ethnography, the retirees of FRA Branch 127 hope to leave an impression on local history, and they do so by continuing to make memories with their shipmates and pay respects to their “mothership” – the U.S. – during their retirement in Nabua, their “motherland.” They gather at events that they plan monthly, not only as part of the fulfillment of their duties as Philippine-based members of the FRA but also to celebrate birthdays and maintain friendships. Each shipmate’s attachment and dedication to keeping the FRA Branch 127 and its stories alive, run very deep. Their solidarity is anchored in their shared stories of adventure of their youth, separation from and eventual reunification with kin, and homecoming to Nabua. Additionally, they visit ailing shipmates in the hospitals, and witness their membership decline as shipmates – borrowing the FRA retirees’ frequently used metaphor – “sail away” before them. The retired

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46 On first hearing this metaphor on parting as related to sailing away, I recalled one of the Philippines’ most important archaeological artefacts – the *manunggal* jar – which depicts how the *kaluluwa*, or souls, board boats and pass through many rivers and seas until they reach what is beyond those waters. The indigenous idea of sailing away upon death has now become layered with the Philippines’ colonial experience. This parallelism is a subject that I hope to explore in a future work.
elders of FRA Branch 127 make valuable use of their time left, and they are persistent in their efforts aimed at maintaining community and crafting collective memory for as long as they can. FRA Branch 127 president Uncle William told me, they are a “near-extinct, endangered species.”

![Flag-raising ceremony in commemoration of the U.S. Memorial Day held in Nabua](image)

**Figure 3.1.1 Flag-raising ceremony in commemoration of the U.S. Memorial Day held in Nabua**

### 3.2 Chapter Organization

In discussing memory-making by those on the verge of “extinction,” including public rituals such the flag-raising ceremony illustrated above, it needs to be asked: What relevance does this kind of memory-making hold for the retired elders, but also for Nabua as proclaimed by its residents as the Town of Dollars? Agreeing with Frederick Harrod (1978, ix) who writes of enlistees being “the forgotten men of naval history” and considering the often confusing ways that the retirees highlight, diminish, or elide parts of history and their personal histories, how
must we understand them as “situated individuals with rights to historicity” (Trouillot 2003, 10)? Consequently, what are the implications of these benevolent articulations about the Philippines’ troubled colonial past for the postcolonial Philippines?

To answer these questions, I first set the context for the enlistment of Nabueños in the U.S. Navy. I focus on the years of colonial transition from the Spanish to the American period, and on how events unfolded in Nabua and the Bicol peninsula. I use secondary historical resources interspersed with the Cuaderno, to respond to the “permanent condition of bare familiarity” that Dylan Rodriguez (2016, 158; italics in original) evaluates as structuring modern Filipino subjectivity and political discourse, especially in relation with the American colonial project. This is followed by a discussion of the “research outline” written by Uncle William, linking the listed keywords and keynames with each other and with the Cuaderno and secondary sources as a way of reflecting on only some of the numerous narratives about Nabua’s “naval history.” By teasing out Uncle William’s outline, I hope to make sense of the multiple identifications (Lugones 2003) of the retirees as Nabueño, American, Filipino, poor, successful, racialized navy men, and respected veterans. At the same time that the accounts of the U.S. Navy men co-produce stories of running away from the “impasse” of agricultural life, of adventure in the Navy, of individual and familial success, and of resting comfortably as dollar pensioners in their place of origin, the FRA Branch 127 elders also hint at intimate histories located within a turbulent context in which colonial arrival could be received as a gift. This leads me to chronicle Lolo George’s life story that intertwines a history of the local effects of colonialism with the intimate realm of his love story.

Reynaldo Ileto (1979) writes that Philippine history can be enriched by further investigating how the common ‘tao’ (people) perceive events and ideas, “in terms of their own
experience.”\textsuperscript{47} However, in a later work, Ileto (2001, 108) advises scholars to “avoid being ‘captured’” by the hegemonic renderings of events and to “not take the existing narratives of progress and modernity at face value.” Taking note of this, I write an “interruption” about an event from my fieldwork that has haunted me up to the time of dissertation writing.\textsuperscript{48} One might think that this interruption, which takes the form of an ethnographic vignette, is completely unrelated to this chapter’s topic, but this vignette kept on drawing me back to thinking about the contiguity of a melancholic past that has become subdued by the retirees’ fonder memories of the beginnings of Philippine-American relations. This circles me back to the Cuaderno, highlighting accounts which I believe “present an ontological dilemma that continues to structure Filipino social being” (Rodriguez 2016, 164). The interruption prompts a discussion about the nuanced ways that retirees think about their enlistment to the U.S. Navy – which include expressions of their “non-involvement” in the American wars despite having worked on the American naval ships. I draw from the literature on migration, history, military, labor, postcolonial memory, and consciousness in my attempt at understanding the postcolonial experience in my hometown, as lived by the elders on the verge of disappearance.

### 3.3 Home, Memory, War in the Postcolony

Nabua is the place for the homecoming of retired U.S. Navy men who ultimately returned as war veterans. Like my dissertation overall, this chapter contributes to the literature on what

\textsuperscript{47} Ileto uses references “from below” such as the “pasyon,” the printed epic narratives of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

\textsuperscript{48} My use of “interruption” is inspired by Rafael (2000) who, in his reading of the four-volume colonial census of 1903-1905, found himself frequently interrupted by “gaps” and “hesitations,” as he was “so taken with and by the fragments and leftovers of texts, and so drawn to what escapes of power rather than what fulfills or definitely overturns it…” (16).
happens at “home” (Gamburd 2000; Levitt 2001; Aguilar et al. 2009) – home being a source of migrant labor to various global destinations. Anders H. Stefansson (2004) writes that earlier studies on return migration tended to become peripheralized by the discussions on migrant uprootedness, the multicultural policies of host countries, and the theorizing of mobility in the age of transnationalism and globalization. In such formulations, the return of migrants to their respective homes becomes conceptualized as “unproblematic” and “natural” (Stefansson, 5). Stefansson proposes a reorientation of return migration – which he calls “homemaking” – as “a creative effort oriented towards constructing better and more satisfying futures” (11-12). By this, Stefansson diverges from the earlier understanding of return migration as related to migrants’ nostalgic attachments to home that scholars analyze as destined to fail, and he puts forward an understanding of homecomings as “pragmatic and future-oriented” acts that are not “impossible projects.” The U.S. Navy men in Nabua have already come home, but as can be seen in their various projects at memory-making in the hometown, their process of homemaking continues to be “emergent” (Markowitz 2004, 23).

The U.S. Navy men ’s home- and memory-making in the hometown connect with their understanding that the writing of Nabua’s history, and their part in it, still needs to be recorded. Resil Mojares (1980, 35) insists on the importance of “citing gaps in historical knowledge.” In his study of how Cebuano elites viewed local immigration to Hawaii, Mojares (2015) finds that news accounts published between 1909 to 1934 were strongly negative. He points out the lack

49 According to Mojares (2015), journalists’ coverage on Cebuano migration to Hawaii centered on the illegal practices of recruiting Cebuanos, exploitative labor conditions in Hawaii, the harmful effects of overseas migration on the local economy, and finally, the lack of patriotism of those who have left (33). Mojares finds that there is “a sense of embarrassment” (44) in the ways that journalistic accounts produced by the intellectual elites portrayed earlier Cebuano overseas migrants.
of attention to the insights of migrants and their explanations of their motivations for migration (40). It could be that listening to the accounts of the FRA Branch 127 retirees could shed light not only on their self-understood contributions to the town’s history but also on some of the local responses to the American occupation of the Philippines. Mojares’ focus on the highly local impressions of migration leads me to consider some of the ways that retired navy elders want Nabueños to remember their journeys and successes via their participation in the U.S. Navy. Nabueño men were enlistees in the U.S. Navy’s racially segregated ranks where African-Americans and Filipinos worked together and where no white Americans could work, but this is a side of the story that they often do not want to highlight. The stories told by the U.S. Navy men in Nabua may be in tension with some of those told in Yen Le Espiritu’s (2003) now foundational Home Bound: Filipino American Lives. The retirees hold a sentiment of neutrality about their participation in the work of American “empire” and they are also often strikingly at odds with the accounts of turbulence in other historical accounts of the Philippine-American War in other regions (Delmendo 2004; Ileto 1979).

Other researchers of the colonial years of the Philippines also find themselves puzzled by the ways that people forget or selectively remember the past. Researching the “colonial wars” in Southern Luzon, Ileto (2001) discovered an intercepted letter in the American archives written by his grandfather whom he learned was a spy for the revolutionary Filipino army. Ileto thought that this was “surely an exciting historical episode,” but he wonders why this revolutionary past was not proudly passed on to the younger generations of his family (103). Instead, his elders

50 The accounts by postcolonial scholars such as William E.B. Du Bois, Franz Fanon, Paolo Freire, and others, tell us that these perplexing questions about postcolonial identity are not exclusive to Filipinos.

51 Ileto (2001, 103) postulates that his grandfather began his silence after he was recruited as a teacher in the American-established school newly established school in their province. Ileto writes, “In his eagerness to
commonly reiterated that the wars between the Filipinos and the Americans were a “non-event,” or that they knew nothing, or that if they recalled “something,” it was about the American’s multiple acts of kindness and generosity (104-105).52 His wife’s grandmother “did remember something” when asked about the early years of American arrival: “the American post commander… was a “kind fellow (mabait) who had even danced with her at a public ball (baile)” (104, italics in original). The U.S. Navy men in Nabua’s positive recollection on American colonization is certainly not unique to the town. As Ileto writes, the official history of the Philippines is “built upon the forgetting of the war that brought the nation-state into being” (104). Scholarship on Philippine-American colonial relations (Baldoz 2011; Rafael 2000; San Juan 2000; Gavilan 2012; Tadiar 2015) is useful in thinking about this puzzle, but at the same time, I am also confronted by the tensions in researching in my hometown and its respected elders, as I have already discussed in Chapter 2.

Methodological and theoretical interventions – including the distancing – of anthropology in studying the military and war are necessary points of discussion given that the retired U.S. Navy men and an active FRA branch are at the center of this chapter. We recall that anthropology and the military have a history of mutual distrust and tension, which eventually led anthropologists to retreat from researching the military for decades (C. Lutz 2001). Robert Rubenstein (2003) comments that the frictions between anthropology and the military are mainly due to the former’s “collective distrust” of the people involved in the latter. The collection

52 Ileto locates the formation of this perception within the expressions on kinship between the two both in popular and government discourse, the official memorialization of these bilateral friendships, colonial education, and the American propagandizing of their arrival as a trajectory towards independence and modernity.
Anthropology and the United States Military: Coming of Age in the Twenty-first Century is an especially important contributor to the needed rejuvenation of conversations on the anthropology and the military. The authors in this collection have personal connections with the military, complicating, even more, the study of the military at a time of anthropology’s postmodern turn that seriously considers author’s subjectivity and voice. Overall, the authors in the collection note that there has been little progress in anthropological conversations on the military despite Laura Nader’s (1972) challenge for anthropologists to “study up” institutions of power including state apparati such as military institutions, including the people who work in them. Catherine Lutz (1999, 612) reasons that topics that touch on war currently fail to attract attention from anthropologists as war “seems to explode truth and meaningfulness” because people involved in war tend to surround themselves with secrecy. Anthropological accounts of the military take up persuasions of “normalcy” and “innocence,” such that they end up becoming “less imperial ethnographies, but not ethnographies of imperialism” (Lutz 2002, 732). In this age where the work of the empire has gone “truly global,” it has been suggested that ethnography must locate the empire’s effects on daily life (C. Lutz 2006, 597). On the other hand, Tadiar (2015) also reminds us to take note of “practices of dissolution”—human agencies to survive what she calls a “remaindered life” (Chapter 1). I engage with these conversations by understanding the retirees

53 Margaret C. Harrell (2003) admits anxieties about having the military—some of them her close kin—as among the audience of her work but she writes that their responses are also anthropologically interesting. That members of the military are an educated audience is itself a constraint that prevents anthropologists in choosing the military as a research site (Harrell 2003). It is also often the case that kin of members of the military who decide to write about the military in their scholarship experience difficulties in balancing empathy with objectivity. Alfred McCoy (2002, xiii), a historian of the Philippine military but also a son of a U.S. military officer, reflects: “I was compelled…to weigh each adverb and adjective for a tone that tempered the warmth of personal feelings with the cool of professional judgment.” Jason Gavilan (2012), a Filipino-American kin of U.S. Navy men writing on U.S. Naval bases in the Philippines expresses a similar sentiment: “I still do not know how the contents of this dissertation project will be received...especially...in moments as private as dinners and phone calls with my navy parents and relatives.”
as post/colonial subjects whose enlistment was complicated by America’s imperial ambitions. This colonially implicated enlistment is not unique to the Philippines as we have seen in the case of Colombians’ (Theidon 2009) and Latino migrants’ enlistment in the U.S. Military (Plascencia 2009). The social and material effects of colonialism need to be factored in when investigating the often-perplexing accounts told by the colonial subjects-veterans such as those retired in Nabua.

Fred Myers (1994, 692) suggests that in writing an ethnography that is “postcolonial,” anthropologists must aim to be attentive to the “actors’ considerations over our own critical judgments.” The academy often expects and demands the production of a critical account that brings to the fore the oppressive force of empires – of “permanences” (Harvey 1996) – on the everyday lives of the post-/neo-/colonized. E. San Juan (2000) critiques scholars’ understanding of Filipino Americans as transnationals who simultaneously “conform to and resist the hegemonic racializing ideology,” as if they have a “reservoir of free choices that does not exist for most colonized subjects” (56). Nilda Rimonte (1997, 42) writes of Filipino colonized consciousness as the “common fate of the oppressed,” but we may also raise the critique that the centering of ideology tends to produce a predictable reading of experience. But with colonized consciousness as the premise of our investigation, how might one respond to Tadiar’s (2015, 156) question: “how do we set the stage (create the platforms) for radical departure from the given conditions of life under empire now?”

The task of Filipinos today, Rimonte (1997, 59) suggests, is to “acknowledge themselves as victims and how they are victimized.” However, ethnographic examples tell us that awareness and agencies in the postcolony are often not straightforward. In his ethnography among an Australian Aboriginal community, Myers argues that aboriginal artists are “not naïve” even if
they craft performances in a “nonconfrontational fashion” (1994, 692). For Myers, it is crucial to understand Aboriginal artistic productions as connected to Australian Aborigines’ economic (i.e., making a living) and cultural concerns (i.e., exhibiting their culture to the world). This approach to the understanding of postcolonial consciousness as a complex amalgamation of personal experience with politics and economics also applies to the narratives of indigenous Evenk women which reflect the “widespread nostalgia associated with the residential school” in Central Siberia as studied by Alexia Bloch (2005). Anthropologists, Bloch suggests, need “to pay attention to competing ideologies and systems of meaning that give life to shifting subjectivities and the place of ideology in the multiple forms that modernity takes” (556). The same ambivalent responses are also reflected in the narratives by non-citizens who enlisted in the military in their places of migration. Luis FB Plascencia (2009) observes that there need to be conversations about “what motivates non-citizens to assume the patriotism that is meant to be held by America-borne citizens” (54) (my emphasis). Empirical work on postcolonial consciousness can potentially nuance our understanding about the ways that people want to represent themselves, and in the process, highlight/diminish and remember/forget parts of a story from which they cull their preferred histories.

My interest in memory-making by the retired U.S. Navy men links to my orientation of Nabua as a postcolonial hometown from which migrants had departed and to which they have now returned (Chapter 1). Anthropologists have already investigated how memory is “constructed and reconstructed by the dialectics of remembering and forgetting, shaped by

54 Plascencia discusses the limits of migration as an analytical category in looking at the cases of the so called non-citizen and green card soldiers who, under the stipulations of the U.S. Code of Regulations, may be assigned active military duty and later be granted American citizenship.
semantic and interpretative frames, and subject to a panoply of distortions” (Climo and Cattell 2002, 1). Janet Carsten (2007, 16–17) also writes of articulations about the past and the self as involving a process in which “forgetting…takes an active part” because “retrospection is painful or impossible.” How we remember the past, Carsten adds, involves the selection of events that are “particularly formative,” eliding other elements that do not blend well with people’s preferred narratives. This selective remembering was also the case for the Anglo-Indians who dodged questions about the effects of the Raj on their sense of self and feelings of humiliation about their “mixed and illegitimate origins” (Bear 2007, 47). Julie Cruikshank (1997) has also written about how First Nations storytellers structure their narrative in different ways, tying them to stories about land and displacement, kinship, and materiality. Patrick Moore (2007) writes of Kaska contact narratives as either humorous or non-humorous. Analyzing the linguistic features of First Nations stories, Moore finds that humorous stories provide a “surreal context of exaggeration” which allows the listener to understand the story in a range of interpretation. On the other hand, non-humorous stories are “solidly anchored on descriptive details” which means that listeners are directed to a definite understanding of the story. The ways that indigenous narratives are told show how indigenous people want to frame their recollection of the colonial encounter (that produced injustice but also some amusing moments) within their values, terms, and understanding. Meanwhile, in another part of the world, Indians’ approach to the past is one that is a “spirited negation” of the Western ambitions to completely lay bare the past (Nandy 1995, 66). Thinking about postcolonial India, Ashis Nandy (1995) writes that “the construction of the past can sometimes be… guided not by memories alone, but by tacit theories of principled forgetfulness and silences.” These examples call for a need for sensitivity in our ethnographic writing so as not to fall into what Myers (1994, 694) has called the “double erasure” of people’s
agency – firstly, by colonization and the conditions it created, and secondly, by postcolonial academic critical analyses. Talal Asad (1986) reminds anthropologists to go beyond the work of translating and decoding the culture that they study. For Myers (1994, 681), an ethnographic perspective that hopes to not doubly erase people’s agency needs an analysis of the “historical trajectories that bring various players together.”

The existing literature suggests that more work needs to be done on the question of the puzzling articulations by subjects such as the retired U.S. Navy men in Nabua. This range of literature about memory-work of the colonized is productive in thinking of what might be locally grounded and future-oriented labors and projects of the U.S. Navy men in Nabua. I draw from theorizations of the lived experience within structures of oppressions by phenomenologists such as Mariana Ortega (2016) and María Lugones (2003). Ortega and Lugones forward a phenomenological approach to the postcolonial experience that argues for viewing memory as fragile and confusing such that one experiences a “thick sense of not being-at-ease” (Ortega 2016, 101; italics in original). Lugones’ (2003, 55) recommends a “contradictory desiderata for oppression theory.” For Lugones, the possibility for liberation in a time of pervasiveness of empire lies in the embrace of ontological pluralism – but she notes that these are “desiderata that are in both logical and psychological tension” (55). Lugones argues that there is also the potential for liberation even if the articulated versions of memories are perplexing. Lugones (2003, 57) argues for understanding people as:

“…experiencing themselves as more than one: having desires, character, and personality traits that are different in one reality than in the other, and acting, enacting, animating their bodies, having thoughts, feeling the emotions, in ways that are different in one reality than in the other.”
Within this pluralist ontology, people are seen to understand themselves and each other within different realities. Lugones gives the example of a servant who articulates their oppression only among people experiencing similar oppressions. The master, meanwhile, thinks of the self as fair and not as oppressive. Within such multiple renderings of the self, Lugones argues that memory is crucial. Lugones (2003, 57) adds, “The libertory possibility lies in resistant readings of history that reveal unified historical lines as enacting dominations through both linearity and erasure.” I agree with Lugones that understanding how memory is deployed by individuals and by collectives is crucial to understanding the postcolonial experience.55 I add that memory-making must center “interruptions” that I will discuss in more detail below. I foreground memory-making by the retirees as a form of labor that, I will argue later, links with hopes for a promising future – linking us back to the literature on home-making. I find Ortega’s and Lugones’ ideas on the “multiplicitous self” and “dispersed intentionality” – that understand the self as flexible and intentionality as relational – as valuable in reflecting on this postcolonial conundrum, while hoping to remain mindful of warnings by scholars such as Asad, Myers, and Nandy against the erasure of people’s agency and flattening of complexity.

55 Many scholars have already looked at how memory is tied to: kinship (Carsten 2004, 2007); performance (Roach 1996); knowledge production in the post-colonial period (Carr 2003; MacClancy 2007; Robertson and The Kwagu’l Gixsam Clan 2012); emotions (Rosaldo 1989; Brettel 1997; Climo and Cattell 2002; Behar 2014); experiences of trauma and displacement (Behar 2013); concerns about age, death, and disappearance (Myerhoff and Tufte 1992; Myerhoff 1992); and landscapes (Basso 1996), among a range of concepts. Authors have also investigated how the making and passing on of memory might be understood outside Western modes of interpretation, for example, by paying attention to multi-sensoriality, orality, and affect (J. Katz and Csordas 2003; Edwards 2005; Irving 2007).
3.4 Nabua at a Time of Colonial Transition

In 1876, to prepare for its colonial expansion the U.S. Congress began its investigation of its Navy Department. By 1889, the construction of 34 new vessels was already approved (Harrod 1978, 5). And then in 1898, the U.S. Navy’s Asiatic Squadron led by the U.S.S. Olympia arrived in Manila to eventually defeat the Spanish fleet already debilitated by the forces of the Filipino revolution. It is important to note here that the “war” happening in the Philippines from before and after American arrival must be understood as three separate conflicts: between the Spanish and the allied forces of Americans and Filipinos; between the American military and the forces of the First Philippine Republic, and finally; a guerilla war between the American military and some defectors from the Philippine revolutionary force and other groups (Silbey 2007, xv).

Despite the confusing context of security at that time, the American forces continued to advance on Manila, because, as a U.S. military commander during the Spanish-American War of 1898 proclaimed, the “control of the sea may depend upon who rules the Philippines” (in Morris 1984, 391). The Spanish armada found itself wanting in comparison to the modern warships bearing the American flag, and soon, the Philippines was “won” by the newly arrived colonists.

Proclaiming victory, U.S. President William McKinley (1898) delivered his famous Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation on December 21 that rationalized the encroachment of the American empire on the Philippines: “It will be the duty of the commander of the forces of occupation to announce and proclaim in the most public manner that we come, not as invaders or conquerors, but as friends, to protect the natives in their homes, in their employments, and in their personal and religious rights” (italics in original). While McKinley framed American arrival on Philippine shores within the discourses of generosity and goodwill, the acquisition of the Philippines also

McKinley’s proclamation was also an edict that foretold what economic arrangements were to come to the Philippines under American military rule after transitioning from the Spanish colonial government. McKinley continued: “All persons who, either by active aid or by honest submission, co-operate with the Government of the United States to give effect to these beneficent purposes will receive the reward of its support and protection” (italics in original). 

Rick Baldoz (2011) presents a superb historical analysis of trade acts between the Philippines and the U.S. that were more effectively linked to the latter’s exclusionist agenda which sought to limit Filipino immigration to the U.S. and to restrict the export of Philippine goods. Having arrived in the Philippines and having secured strategic bases, the U.S. charted new destinations and new wars to fight under their doctrine of “manifest destiny.” Interestingly, when the U.S. annexed the Philippines as the most distant of its colonized territories, “Filipinos were consigned to the status of wards, unfit for self-government and thus in need of American instruction” (Rafael 2011, 347). Frederick S. Harrod (1978) chronicles the U.S. Navy’s recruitment strategy that moved from the U.S. main ports to inland, but his account does not include the recruitment of Filipinos as new colonial subjects at the turn of the 20th century. Young men in Nabua found

56 McKinley also said: “The taxes and duties heretofore payable by the inhabitants to the late government become payable to the authorities of the United States unless it be seen fit to substitute for them other reasonable rates or modes of contribution to the expenses of government, whether general or local... All ports and places in the Philippine Islands in the actual possession of the land and naval forces of the United States will be opened to the commerce of all friendly nations. All goods and wares not prohibited for military reasons by due announcement of the military authority will be admitted upon payment of such duties and other charges as shall be in force at the time of their importation.” As seen in this clause, James Morris’s (1984) observation is on point that the U.S. Navy’s operation of “Maritime Access” that embodied the idea of the “freedom of the seas” was a policy rooted in mercantilism, and thus more than its ambitions to expand its seapower, American naval policies have more strongly worked as a “servant of particular foreign policy goals and interests” (xii).
themselves enlisting in the U.S. Navy, becoming “active aid” (in McKinley’s words) in America’s “golden age” of wars (Frese 2003). Filipinos became “racial wards” of the U.S. military state (C. Lutz 2002, 726) and their work as mess boys “added a touch of luxury and class” to the dining halls that were exclusive to high-ranking officials in these American warships (Ingram 1970, 18). It could be said that it was within the context of American expansionism assisted by its modernizing seapower that the recruitment of young Filipino men from many parts of the Philippines (including in Nabua) began. Filipino enlistees could be understood as becoming molded into subjugated yet modern and civilized subjects. While there exists a broad literature on the rise of American seapower and imperial power, it still needs to be asked how the “origin community” of these enlistees became implicated in this phase of the colonial encounter. In the case of Nabua, this unassuming inland rurality transformed into what is now called the Town of Dollars. Mojares (1980, 35) tells us that local histories will inform us about “variations in historical experience,” and inquiry into Nabua’s history presents only one of the many unwritten local responses – “undeveloped exposures,” borrowing from photographic language – to the American arrival in the Philippines.

Historians document that the Americans landed in Bicol in 1900, 18 months after they first arrived in Manila Bay, with the objective of exploiting abaca or hemp which was abundant in the region and in demand by the American market’s cordage industry (Linn 2000; Owen 1999).57 There are varied accounts about how Bicolanos responded to the arrival of the American colonists. Bryan Linn (2000) writes that the American delegation was faced with a military

57 According to Eviota (1992, 49), abaca from Bicol was in fact traded mainly with the U.S. as early as the 1800s for the marine cordage needs of the American Navy.
stalemate as they found the towns deserted as locals had fled to the hills, while Norman Owen (1999, 142–43) writes that Americans were met with “brave but ineffectual” local revolutionary forces. According to Linn, the American forces in Bicol launched a predominantly non-military “pacification” campaign. In the case of Nabua, juxtaposing the accounts in the Cuaderno with the historical record provides insight as to how this pacification campaign unfolded in the town.58

The Cuaderno recounts that it was from 1897 to 1898, under the town headship of Domingo Baylon, that the Revolucion Filipino started. The Cuaderno records that when the alarms about the revolution were first sounded, there were fears that the insurectus (insurgents) would come to Nabua and thus guards were deployed around the town. The chronicler of the Cuaderno appears to sympathize with the Spanish stronghold in the town, tagging the revolutionary forces as threats to the town’s colonial organization under the Spanish government. In 1899, Sebastian Priela was appointed as Nabua’s presidente upon the orders of Emilio Aguinaldo, the general of the Philippine revolution who would later more closely cooperate with the American government in exchange for the establishment of the first Philippine Republic, and with the prospect of eventual Philippine independence.59 According to the Cuaderno, the events upon American arrival took a radical turn in Nabua: Priela refused to honor the newly established Philippine Republic led by Aguinaldo, and along with supporters, Priela fled to the hills.60 But soon enough,

58 Under General Order No. 7, a presidente was appointed in each town and city and they were to act as middlemen between the American forces and the locals. The presidente position was appointed by the American post commander, and they held authority and worked together in their assigned area. In Nabua’s neighboring town of Iriga, the appointed presidente exercised his newly found liberties that came with his appointment (Linn 108).

59 Emilio Aguinaldo was the first president of the Philippine Republic. Coming from a landowning class, the force under his command had conflicts with the leadership of Andres Bonifacio who led peasant uprisings in the Tagalog-speaking regions (De los Santos and Agoncillo 2009).

60 Linn (2000, 101), on the arrival of the American forces in Bicol, writes that it became a common strategy in Bicol for the revolutionary forces to withdraw the civilian population into the hills and steep terrains and “to frustrate American control.” For Linn, this was a defensive strategy that led to a military stalemate as revolutionaries refused to engage with the American forces in a battle. The desertion of Nabua that was led by Priela, as
resistance against the Americans was eventually placated through its violent suppression, reinforced by the town’s local elites who were keen on securing political positions at the outset of the American rule. The Americans soon learned how to mobilize local patronage politics (Owen 1999, 164). In 1900, Eugenio Ocampo, Sr. was appointed by the Americans as the town’s presidente as he was the first to volunteer to the American General in Iriga. The Cuaderno records for that year:

Following the orders of the Americans, the presidente ordered the town’s inhabitants to come home finally. The town was in chaos because of the activities of the insurrectionists. Former town heads were pursued in Nabua. Those captured were imprisoned, and they were tasked to scythe grass for feeding to the horses. The captains were suspected of helping the insurrectionists and of discouraging people from returning to the town... The first order of American Governor Ross was to organize a body of volunteers who were tasked to search for the insurrectionists which were declared bandits as they did not surrender themselves during the period of amnesty.

Within the timeline of “unhurried campaign offensive” strategy in the Bicol region (1900 to 1901), the Americans “had time to demonstrate to the wavering Bicolanos that their rule was tolerable and even potentially beneficent” (Owen 1999, 154). However, the beginning of the 20th century in Nabua, the Cuaderno reveals, is punctuated by resistance against the incoming American colonial government. In the account above, we see the machinations of the U.S. in suppressing local resistance in Nabua. The Cuaderno records American military tactics of intimidation, imprisonment, punishment – including its political elites who refused to surrender to the new American rule. Linn (2000, 112) notes that in Nabua, the townspeople “returned only after an American campaign had destroyed most of the food in the countryside and the presidente recorded in the Cuaderno, may have been aligned with this desertion tactic. Given that the Bicolanos were among the last to surrender to the Americans, I would agree with other observers that the Bicolanos’ retreat to the hills was a strategy of protracted resistance, rather than of escape or refuge. The revolutionary forces General Malvar in Tagalog-speaking Batangas surrendered in April 16, 1902 while the Bicol-led force led by General Simeon Ola went on until surrender in September 21, 1903 (Andres 2005, 60).
had threatened to go after them with his own forces.” Reflecting on the events that unfolded in the region during the early years of the American colonial period, Linn (2000, 118) concludes: “As a result, many influential Filipinos abandoned the revolutionaries and cooperated with Americans.”

According to Owen (1999, 151):

Military superiority was translated into a self-sustaining colonial rule that the people from Bicol apparently accepted. The sequence is important; in American policy, the military aspect was always primary. The initial goal was to enforce the supremacy of the United States; only afterwards would the putative benefits of colonialism, including the return of partial autonomy, be granted to Filipinos.

Entering the new century, and the Philippine-American War (1899-1902) having officially ended in 1902, the Americans launched administrative and infrastructural changes in Nabua. The Cuaderno records the re-shuffling of Nabua’s districts from 1902 to 1905, coinciding with the first census of the Philippines (Rafael 2000). The municipal office was constructed between 1915 to 1916. The public market was also rebuilt at its original location. Between 1917 and 1919, three artesian wells were built in central sites, and in 1920 to 1922, the roads from the centro to Nabua’s outskirt villages of Santo Domingo and Lourdes were repaired. For Ileto (2001, 109), the American programs implemented from the end of the Philippine-American War such as the ones in Nabua transformed the lingering Filipino resistance to a “condition of banditry” at the

61 This is not to deny the many other factors, other than elite collaboration, that led to the success of pacification. I quote Owen’s (1999, 161–62) analysis of the situation that the U.S. colonists found themselves in at a time of colonial transition: “The values derived from 18th century liberalism, which for Americans was enshrined in the Constitution and for Filipinos appeared as a 19th century reaction to Spanish medievalism. They were lucky that the world prices for abaca were rising, so that the putative economic benefits of colonial peace were immediately apparent. They were lucky that indigenous culture had so long been suppressed that Filipinos could accept a new colonial culture as their own, once the apparent threat to Roman Catholicism was defused. They were lucky to deal with a people who had for centuries been forced to accommodate to colonialism and who were therefore willing to settle for local autonomy if independence proved impossible.”

62 Unfortunately, the historical account of the Cuaderno stops in 1922. The final documented period in the Cuaderno occurred when the Insular Government of the Philippines under American tutelage was already installed. The Insular government evolved from the First Philippine Commission, both operating within a mission of tutelage (Baldoz 2011).
same time that developing towns “came to signify the vanguard of progress and democratic tutelage.” With these Martin Meadows (1971, 338) adds, “the comparatively benign American colonial policy, at least as contrasted with that of Spain, had served to win Filipino loyalty and gratitude.”

The history of colonial transition that FRA Branch 127 elders recall during our conversations are congruent with Linn’s account of American “non-military pacification” in Bicol and with the discourses of American benevolence and so-called American-gifted development. The Cuaderno records that in 1915 and 1916, there was a typhoon that destroyed many houses and “and the people suffered.” The Cuaderno writes, “The Government doled out donations to the poor,” but at the same time, “the prices of industry rose.” The accounts on American presence in Nabua as told by the retired elders of FRA Branch 127 reinforce congenial perceptions about the Americans, but omit stories such as the consequences of these capitalist developments for the poor. The elders told me that the Americans had built the much-used road networks in Nabua, recorded in the Cuaderno as constructed from 1902 to 1912, which helped improve mobility within the region.

I argue that the memories inscribed in the minds of navy retirees are not isolated cases, and their perceptions of American benevolence must be understood as structured by the calamitous economic conditions of their generation. Pointing to how material conditions have influenced the ways that people often recall oppressive pasts, Alexia Bloch (2005) writes that it would seem obvious that the indigenous Evenk women who were displaced by the collectivization process during the Soviet Union would critically approach that history. However, it was not the case as many Evenk women looked back at the past with nostalgia, remembering the past kindly. Bloch shows how these baffling responses reflect perspectives that are both gendered and generation-
specific; the residential school system operated within a discourse of nation-building that scripted women as productive contributors to a shifting economy and society, and that created a space for the improvement of the indigenous women’s “material conditions.” Likewise, Owen’s (1999) account of the towns and cities south of Nabua that were dependent on the trading of abaca (hemp), coconut, and rice, speaks of the circumstances in which the locals openly welcomed American projects. Writing about the interwar years in the region, Owen makes it clear that the time of American colonial rule was one of immense instability as the region plummeted to economic depression. During these years of region-wide economic unrest, Owen notes that local wages fell, returns from cedulas (taxes) were recorded to be at their lowest, and government revenue from cockfights declined. To mitigate hunger, people reverted to planting root crops when the price of rice surged. The chronicling of Nabua’s conditions in the Cuaderno is limited but annually published souvenir programs in Nabua aid us in further understanding Nabua’s past. The 1978 souvenir program of Nabua includes a historicization of Don Gregorio Balatan’s headship in Nabua at a time of interwar scarcity: “Food was scarce while the circulation of money was at its lowest ebb…”

A crucial recuperating strategy that Bicolanos took on was the “conscious reallocation of their labor” (Owen 1999, 167). Owen writes, “The poor people…who lived from day to day by toil in the fields or on the docks, had little real choice but to continue seeking a livelihood, regardless of the race of their rulers” (143). Therefore, in a context of lack in the entire Bicol region, internal migration became a viable option. Owen writes that Bicolanos moved within the region for construction work, mining, lumbering, cattle-ranching, and gold-mining. With inter-

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63 Owen (1999, 163–65) presents an exhaustive account of the abaca production in the Bicol region.
regional road networks now in better condition than at the end of the 19th century, Bicolanos slowly began to move to Manila, to leave agricultural work for any other available wage labor (Owen 1999, 167–68). Bicolanos, in the beginning, were “far less mobile than the Ilocanos who emigrated to Hawaii and California or even than the Bisayans who populated northern Mindanao...” (Owen 1999, 168). However, during this period of decline of income from agricultural produce in the region, Nabueño young men, like their fellow Bicolanos, “demonstrated that they were willing to transplant themselves when conditions looked better elsewhere” (Owen 1999, 168).

There is no official record of who might have been the Nabueños who first joined the American Navy, but the retired navy men and their descendants tell me that it was certainly before the 1920s. Some of Nabua’s first navy men were veterans of World War I, as can be seen in the image below (Figure 3.4.1). Within this pre-World War I timeline, the enlistment of Nabueño men into the U.S. Navy’s racialized wards began less than two decades after Priela’s escape to the hills of Libon to evade the growing American presence in the region.64

64 The first time that I sat in the monthly meetings at FRA Branch 127, I asked for the names of the Nabueños who first enlisted in the U.S. Navy. FRA Branch 127 has many times lost their records due to the typhoons that often come to flood their headquarters. Despite the disappearance of their archives, the FRA Branch 127 elders could still collectively recall the names of shipmates that add to the list of those whom Uncle William regards as ancient mariners: the Repollo brothers from barangay San Ramon (possibly joined in 1911); a certain Belles from barangay Antipolo (possibly joined in 1919), and; Siam Basillo (enlistment unknown).
Within this continued condition of want in the region, the U.S. Navy emerged as a new form of livelihood that young men from the farming class could potentially tap. At a home visit, former town councilor Jun Dinero told me of his father’s predicament about joining the navy: to escape poverty “ta uda man mingyari sadi Nabua” (because there is nothing to anticipate in Nabua). His father, hearing that the navy was recruiting Filipinos, traveled to Sangley Point in Cavite when he was 18 or 19, with the hope of becoming enlisted, and his father was eventually able to join in the 1920s. The Dinero son told me that at that time, there were “no other resources but to join the U.S. Navy.” The military as a route for self-improvement is of course not unique to the men of Nabua. Rhoda Kanaaneh (2009) writes about Palestinian (Arab) veterans of the Israeli military who enlisted with the hope of being included in the Jewish state, for meritocracy.
for finding new opportunities for upward mobility, and for improving their economic conditions – similar to the reasons also relayed by the retirees. With the culture of internal migration having taken root, heading to the recruitment offices in Bicol and Manila seemed to Nabua’s young men like an adventure as well as a promising route out of poverty.

F.C. Fisher (1927, 2), former Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines, in his opening statement made before the General Session of the Institute of Pacific Relations Conference held in Honolulu, echoed the American government’s sentiments about Filipinos upon their arrival: “At the end of the nineteenth century the Filipinos, as a whole, were woefully ignorant… This, however, was due only to lack of opportunity.” To open up “opportunities” for their new colony, the education of the Filipino natives was used by the American colonial government as part of their civilizing mission. Speaking nearly three decades after American arrival in the Philippines, Fisher evaluated the degree to which the Philippines benefited from American governance: “…the Filipinos have been quick to profit by the facilities for education made available to them under the new order.” However, the creation of opportunity and profit needs to be checked against the larger hierarchy of benefits operating within the colonial order. For example, historian Rick Baldoz (2011) persuasively shows how the historic Tydings-McDuffie Act, whose supposed purpose was to establish an equal footing relationship between the Philippines and the U.S., was in fact linked to the U.S.’s exclusionist agenda, which sought to limit Filipino immigration and to restrict the exportation of Philippine goods. Commenting on the first textbooks of the American colonial period, Ileto (2001, 115–16) argues that “historical writing itself was made a weapon of war,” adding to the “rigorous disciplining as befitted a people under so-called tutelage.” It was within this context of rural scarcity, heightened mobilities around and from the region, and deepening American influence and colonial rule in
the Philippines that Nabueño men found the U.S. Navy as opening doors to new opportunities. The American colonists correspondingly saw the archipelago as a pool for young, “able-bodied” men who could fill out demands for labor in the U.S. warships’ galleys and wardrooms. Nabueño men who began their education in the schools built by the Americans were equipped with the faculties of the English language, meeting the basic requirements for entering the U.S. Navy’s steward rank. Similar to the other colonial subjects in Central Siberia, Australia, and others mentioned in my brief literature review above, the challenging economic conditions in Nabua fostered the eventual participation of Nabueño young men to at least partially embrace colonial power, in this case, the U.S. Navy, and perhaps effectively, also the American colonial force. At a time of economic upheaval during the colonial transition, Nabueños, like many Filipinos of that generation, struggled to sustain themselves and their kin during turbulent times of imperialist interests in the Philippines.

Below, I interweave accounts told by the FRA Branch 127 elders, using as a thread an “outline” of memory written by one of their own. These are statements that craft collective memory and that very curiously forward a positive account of the American colonial period, and of their work in the racially segregated rank of its naval forces.

65 In 1901, the troopship Thomas arrived in Manila Bay with the first 500 American teachers (the Thomasites) assigned to different parts of the Philippines, including in the Bicol region (Taylor 1964, 233). The Thomasites were assigned all over the Philippines. The American government also began building schools around the Philippines. According to the Cuaderno, the Gabaldon Schoolhouse financed by the American government opened in 1913.
3.5 Outlining Memory

It was in June 2013 when I did a “courtesy call” at the home of Uncle William, the president of the FRA Branch 127 during my research in Nabua. He had passed by my grandparents’ house a few days earlier saying that he had heard of a scholar from Canada who is in town looking for retired navy men to interview. He told Auntie Dianne, the carer of my grandparents’ house (Chapter 5), that I should visit him in his home for an interview. I set an appointment via text message and headed to his home, a concrete bungalow located just across from my former high school. I let myself in as the gates were left ajar, walking past the bush of lemongrass at the front yard. I left my slippers on the porch, and a familiar American love song drifted in the air. Their home appliances and ornamentations were all mostly installed up to three meters from the ground, placed on customized racks which, like in my mother’s apartment, were set up to prevent damage during the frequent flooding during the monsoon season. I performed bisa to the elder whom I was sure would be the FRA president. We exchanged greetings, and he led me to the dining area and offered oatmeal cookies which he said were specially baked by his wife. After proudly showing me an issue of the official Fleet Reserve Association magazine titled *FRA Today* that featured an activity held at FRA Branch 127, Uncle William took out from a stack of papers a page with handwritten text. Looking at this sheet of paper, he told me that he prefers to be organized for the “interview” so he has prepared some notes. I told him that I came to only introduce myself and my research and that we could hold the interview later.

However, Uncle William did not want to waste time, and he began to read the sheet of paper which I realized is a research outline. Above the first page was the outline’s title: “*For Dollar Town – Feedback.*” Listed under it were two main headings titled: 1) Carabao boy’s
dream of success, and; 2) Successful migrants.66 As I explained my research, he turned to the reverse page to add some afterthoughts. After I finished my spiel about my research, Uncle William proceeded to tell me the history of the U.S. Navy, occasionally glancing at his outline. In an instructive voice, he began by telling me that there were two kinds of recruitment by the U.S. Navy: insular and regular.67 Nabueños like him, before 1946, were recruited only to the U.S. Navy’s steward position – working as mess boys, kitchen staff, and personal assistants to Navy officials.68 Uncle William told me that teenagers in Nabua desired to escape to Manila as “planting rice is no fun,” and he smiled remembering a folk song about the backbreaking labor in the farms. Uncle William recalled with fondness the adventure of the Parco brothers. Rumor has it that the Parco brothers only heard about the possibility of joining the U.S. Navy at a “patupada” (small-scale cockfight) in the rural village of San Antonio Ogbon. He said that young men in the past like the Parco brothers entertained themselves in the patupada when not working in the rice fields. He told me it was because of this condition of impasse where men either farmed or gambled small amounts, that young men like the Parco brothers ran away. Retired U.S. Navy men frequently repeated this narrative of escape from Nabua during our conversations, and as one retiree told me, all men of his generation pursued the same dream: “to join the navy.”

66 The indented sub-headings under “Successful migrants” included: A. Education; B. Medicine; C. Military; D. Terpsichorean, and; E. Sports.
67 During the Philippine “insurrection,” the U.S. Navy patrolled the Philippine seas with the help of local recruits and guides. This arrangement was formalized in 1901 by McKinley’s proclamation which opened the Insular Force of the U.S. Navy (United States Naval Institute 2011). On the other hand, the regular Navy was the branch to which Filipinos were recruited as mess attendants. The Naval Historical Institute records that there were approximately 6,000 Filipinos working in the service rank at the end of World War I.
68 In 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt passed a bill granting full citizenship rights for Filipinos serving in the US military (Baldoz 2011).
After the liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese in 1946, mass recruitment to the U.S. Navy was carried out, and Uncle William said that it became so widespread that Americans even set up recruitment tables around Manila. American tutelage however, continued, and on March 14, 1947, the U.S. and the Philippines signed the Military Bases Agreement (MBA) that allowed the U.S. to maintain military facilities in the Philippines and to recruit 1,000 Filipinos as “voluntary enlistees” (Bureau of Naval Personnel 2014). In the following year, U.S. President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981 that established equality of treatment and opportunity for all those serving in the U.S. Forces, and that was meant to end the racialized recruitment in the navy. Ray Burdeos (2008, 14–16), a retired steward who chronicled his participation in the navy, recalls that not enough stewards could be recruited after the changes introduced by Truman. In 1953, the U.S. Navy relaunched its efforts to recruit Filipinos to fill the widening gap in the steward position. Truman’s orders ended up not being enforced as Filipinos continued to enlist as stewards (Burdeos). Uncle William’s retelling of this history coincides with Burdeos’ timeline. He told me that the next recruitment after WWII that he remembers occurred in 1953, in several locations in the Philippines.

69 On July 4th of the same year, the Philippines celebrated its independence after a decade of commonwealth government under the watch of the U.S. colonial administration.
70 Instead of “tutelage,” the FRA elders would prefer to use the words “kindness” or “aid.”
71 The retired elders of FRA Branch 127 often referred to their year of enlistment as a significant marker in their life history. Uncle William told me that he was enlisted in 1956. Juxtaposing Uncle William’s recollection of his enlistment, he must have joined the cap of 2,000 Filipinos that was approved for enlistment a year before, under the stipulations of the Military Bases Agreement. In the same year, the Nationality Act was repealed by the Immigration and Nationality Act, which now stipulates that those who served in the U.S. military also need to be admitted for permanent residence, but under the Immigration’s quota system. Under this system, Filipinos could serve in the U.S. Navy for many years without becoming a U.S. citizen, until their citizenship is approved in accordance to the U.S. Immigration quota. Their enlistment however came with the requirement of pledging their allegiance to the U.S., paradoxically enabling them to participate in U.S. military operations, at the same time disabling them from participating in Philippine public affairs such as voting in the elections (Burdeos 2008).
Uncle William wrote new headings as we proceeded with our conversation: Family Naval Traditions; Religion; Ancient Mariners, and; Arts. Some families encouraged their sons to enlist producing these new “naval traditions,” and he added in his outline the following: Lastrella Bros.; Neglerio Bros.; Agnas Bros., and; Villareal Bros (Figure 3.5.1). This new tradition of joining the U.S. Navy, Uncle William implied, has created an opportunity for Nabueño families to produce a new genealogy of successful sons on par with the educated elites of the Spanish period. Five sons out of the seven Lastrella siblings, for example, all became U.S. Navy men. Uncle William told me, “Tinitingala ku kadto ku Spanish period mga padi, doktor...” (During the Spanish period, people looked up to priests, doctors...”). He contrasted his occupation with the respected ones from the olden days, “Dakul a silbi ka mga serviceman ku kadto ta nagsisilbi sa mga opisyal, sa mga relatives” (The servicemen in the past greatly served their officials as well as their relatives). By “serve,” Uncle William referred to the gendered expectations from men to provide for their family. Joining the navy meant being of service not only to the American naval officers. As these sons also swore allegiance to the American flag, eventually gaining American citizenship, opportunities for U.S.-bound immigration also opened up for family members left behind in Nabua. As Uncle William said, “the battle cry of the Filipino was to help the family.”
Uncle William’s discourse on the making of naval family traditions inextricably links with the production of everyday life structured around age and gender during both the Spanish and American occupation. To become a navy man, for Uncle William, was a significant leap from the first main heading in Uncle William’s outline – the boy on the carabao who would eventually end up tilling Nabua’s rice fields, another “casualty” of the vicious cycle of rural scarcity and precarity. In the last 150 years of the Spanish period, Elizabeth Eviota (1992, 55) writes that people in the Philippines were still mainly peasant-type living within a largely subsistence economy. Eviota calls “domesticity and familialism” the organizing ideologies inherited from the 19th-century frameworks introduced by Spain that were reinforced during the American period (72–3). Eviota (1992, 14–15) also argues that the wage-labor system during the colonial periods
established the separation of the home and the workplace, restructuring the household with men now becoming the main wage-earners and with women and children becoming dependents.\(^{72}\)

The end of the Spanish period in the Philippines, according to Eviota, saw the intensified production of crop commodities linked to an international economy. It was in this context that members of the peasant class were “therefore forced to sell their labour and make profit from it” (Eviota 1992, 60). Thus, the making of these new naval families links with the shift to the preference for a wage economy. The U.S. Navy provided new attraction as wages came in dollars and with the added possibility of recruiting brothers and male cousins, thus expanding the family’s wealth and locally celebrated prestige.

Uncle William also listed the names of his shipmates who joined the U.S. Navy before his time under a category that he called “Ancient Mariners.” I recognized the listed surnames as among Nabua’s first U.S.-bound families who are to this day associated with success and dollar income: Dinero, Estiller, Almazan, Velasco, and Masculino.\(^{73}\) I was able to visit Lolo Matias Velasco, one of the ancient mariners that Uncle William strongly recommended that I interview. Lolo Matias joined the U.S. Navy in 1946, retired in 1966, and transferred to the local fleet reserve as a decorated veteran of the Korean and Vietnam Wars.\(^{74}\) Towards the end of my fieldwork, he grew weaker, and in 2014 at age 88, he finally sailed on to the next world. Lolo

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\(^{72}\) According to Eviota (1992, 14–15), in poor and peasant classes, “the norm was a family household organized primarily around dependence on the productive work of more than one member. In these households, women were never full-time housewives and were never fully dependent on men; rather they were engaged in both productive and reproductive work to ensure the survival of the family.” This arrangement changed with the spread of wage labor practice. I discuss more of this in Chapter 6, in my discussion of farming and crafts industry in Nabua.

\(^{73}\) Below this list, Uncle William wrote that the “purpose” of the Ancient Mariners in relation to FRA Branch 127 is “To preserve the memories and incidents of our association.”

\(^{74}\) Matias Velasco was awarded with the U.S. National Defense Service Medal, China Service Medal, United Nations Service Medal, Navy Unit commendation, Good Conduct Medal (5 times).
Matias, his shipmates eulogized, “put into use his educational benefits,” pursuing university and masters degrees in business in the Philippines upon his retirement. He was able to travel the world, serving in several naval stations in California, Korea, the Philippines, Newport, and Taiwan. The eulogy for him written by his shipmates highlighted not only his 20-year service in the U.S. Navy, attaining the rank of Yeoman First Class, but more importantly reiterated the labor for the local FRA community that he had fulfilled as one of its most active leaders for nearly five decades. His shipmates remembered that six years after joining FRA Branch 127, Typhoon Sening destroyed their original headquarters. Lolo Matias immediately launched a worldwide fundraising campaign that led to the restoration of their headquarters. Lolo Matias served as president of the local FRA Branch for seven consecutive terms. Although not mentioned in his eulogy, he was also an active force in the region’s business community for establishing its first multi-story tourist inn funded by his earnings and pension from the U.S. Navy. The recognition “ancient mariner,” it seems, does not translate to seniority due to age, but to the unparalleled labor one has done for the FRA community and to the wealth brought back to Nabua. His story surpasses the trope of “naval family traditions” that circulates in Nabua as his only son not only became a regular naval enlistee, but also a highly ranked Westpoint-educated U.S. army colonel, who served for two terms as chief of the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) at the U.S. Embassy in Manila.\footnote{The son of the U.S. navy man headed the U.S.-Philippine military counter-terrorism training program, his role including advisorship to the U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines (Gittler 2004).} In the national political arena, the JUSMAG program was heavily critiqued by Filipino nationalists to be a form of the persistent meddling of the U.S. in the post-colonial Philippines. Looking at his outline, Uncle William advised me to
make sure that I take note of the military achievements of the two Velascos who are a source of pride for their own family, FRA Branch 127, and larger Nabua. However, being so close to this position of power seems to be an unreachable dream, especially from the vantage point of a former “carabao boy.” Born into a poor farming family in Paloyon in 1926 during the interwar years, and living a good life in his retirement age, Lolo Matias stood as an exemplary example of an “ancient mariner.” The wealth and cultural capital accumulated by the Velascos works as a testimony to the respectable futures that could be had via the U.S. Navy.

Throughout my fieldwork, many names from Uncle William’s list reappeared during conversations with the retirees, or in everyday hangouts with family and friends. I began to understand that the outline that Uncle William wrote was not only his “feedback” on what I told him was going to be research on Nabua as the “Town of Dollars.” I wrote in my field notes after my visit to Uncle William’s home, “He is an elder, and he acted like one, directing the direction of my work.” His outline lists meaningful and strong recommendations about what counts as successful occupations that helped engender the Town of Dollars – and his ideas are reiterated and reproduced by his shipmates and many Nabueños. As what might be called a “framing device,” the outline drafted by Uncle William wants to tell a local brand of history that is good, respectable and circulatable – composed of narratives that retirees in Nabua would like to leave behind. Many stories from the outline – such as youthful adventures, eventual success, and others – were echoed many times by other retirees. Thus, the outline reflects an aspiration for a consensus about how the elders’ contributions must appear in Nabua’s history and my ethnography. The individual accounts told by the elders corroborate the keynames and keywords in the outline, reflecting a general preference for an optimistic account about the U.S. Navy, the navy men, and their part in Nabua’s history.
Uncle William’s outline also wants to frame the FRA retirees’ extraordinary role in the making of Nabua. The FRA elders’ invocation of the successes enabled by the U.S. Navy for themselves, their kin, and larger Nabua subordinates discourses about the turbulence of colonial transition experienced in Nabua and the reach of violence by the U.S. empire. The elders of the FRA also live in a privileged present, and in the remaining days of their lives, they are active and persistent in their efforts to memorialize their collective history, trying to remain visible in the town through performances such as the flag-raising ceremony and also actively articulating their preferred narratives when opportunities to tell their story arise. However, I argue that to merely focus on the celebrated local consensus told by the retired navy men would be to disappear some of the narratives that other navy men do express but in more subdued tones. I continue below by zooming in on one life story as narrated by one of FRA Branch 127’s most respected ancient mariners.

3.6 Lolo George Masculino’s Story

On the 17th of September 2013, Uncle William and I visited Lolo George in his fully air-conditioned home nestled in the farmlands of Nabua. We entered the living area furnished with Western amenities, and Matt Munro’s ‘60s song “Born Free” was playing on the stereo. He loves this song, he exclaimed as he emerged from his room. He was wearing a UCLA blue t-shirt, and he told us later that some of his grandchildren attend this prestigious school. He had woken up early this morning as he had come from a commercial cemetery that he owns, built

76 For example, they build public monuments around the town that I mentioned in Chapter 1.
using his U.S. Navy retirement pension and investment earnings. He told us that he brings flowers to his departed wife monthly. “I never miss it,” he said with a mix of pride and longing.

After delivering my greetings of respect and telling him the purpose of my visit, Lolo George sat across from me to narrate the story of his life. His family, he began, was “in a very bad situation.” His mother was widowed right after he was born and he grew up helping on the farms of their wealthier neighbors. Lolo George also smuggled produce in the Manila-bound trains as a younger enterprising man who sought opportunities when the Japanese placed an embargo on farm produce from the regions surrounding Manila. He recalled, “Believe it or not, I was only 13, 14 years old, I already had my own business. I was buying eggs here (in Nabua), and you know, at that time, meat was so scarce in Manila, so I smuggled some butchered meat, and then eggs, and then take them to Manila.” Uncle William added that the embargo acted as a regulation that was meant to starve Manila “to submission.” Lolo George remembered that somewhere in Ragay or Sipocot in Bicol, travelers on the way to Manila were no longer allowed to carry food. His fellow young business partner was tasked to carry the baskets with their goods down to the platform to hide them from the inspecting Japanese officers, and his partner would come back on the train right before the train departed again.

However, being a poor yet non-disabled young man during a time of war also meant becoming part of a fungible population whose labor could also be forcibly recruited and whose strength could be expropriated. Lolo George told me about the Japanese occupation during which young men in Nabua were forced to work in the Japanese camps, mainly in Pili, Camarines Sur (45 kilometers from Nabua), where the Imperial Japanese Imperial Army (IJA), was building an airport. Many young men like him tried hard to run away from being recruited to the Japanese labor camps, he told me. In response, the Japanese devised a quota system that required town
leaders to provide the IJA with their needed – he paused, and Uncle William added – “warm bodies.” It was because of this that then-mayor Gregorio Balatan – Nabua’s leader during the interwar years that I mentioned above – assigned a local police officer to do the work. Lolo George narrated: “One time, I was walking going to Baras because we were gonna watch the harvest, and the son of a gun grabbed me and took me to the mayor’s office! There were about 10, 12 of us, and the oldest one was only a teenager.” Lolo George said his mother and aunt came to the town hall “crying like a son of a gun,” pleading to withdraw him from the forced draft. A young man from the influential Duran family who would later become mayor of Nabua for two decades during the Marcos dictatorship (1964-1986), was among those “captured.” This scion of a land-owning clan, according to Lolo George, in fact, volunteered to fulfill the quota, but Balatan refused his offer. To placate the distressed parents who were pleading for their sons to be spared from recruitment, the mayor promised that when these young men come home from work in the Japanese camps, the town would hold a dance in their honor. “If you come back alive!,,” Uncle William responded with bitter laughter. Lolo George said that in this quota system, men came from poor families like him were at a disadvantage because the “big shots” in Nabua like the young Duran were shielded from the draft.

Lolo George, being poor, had no bargaining power and so began his trek through the forests, following the Agos River, to guide and aid Japanese soldiers in transporting ammunition from the caves and war tunnels in Camalig (about 60 kilometers from Nabua) where they had been stored. This was 1944, and Lolo George recalled the American forces had already arrived in Leyte Gulf, the historic location of World War II’s most massive and most destructive naval battle. At the Camalig camp, Lolo George worked with the other forced laborers, and he said that these were occasions when he starved. He recalled that he was especially scared for his life when
awoken in the late evenings by the air raids. After working for three months in the camp, it was finally his convoy’s turn – and they were the very last one – to head back to the IJA’s airport in Pili. His voice quivered in what seemed like a mixed feeling of dread as well as exhilaration for surviving a frightening moment: “We were traveling at night of course, and as soon as we reached Guinobatan, you know with the trees and everything, so scary… The Japanese stood there, and just machine-gunned everything that was out there…just to make sure that nobody was there.” In the following months, the IJA would suffer a string of defeats in their so-called “Philippine Campaign.” The Japanese finally surrendered in 1945, and the combined American and the Philippine Commonwealth military forces celebrated what came to be known as the “Liberation of the Philippines.”

Lives agitated by the war slowly needed to find calm. Lolo George told me that he began to think about his future upon returning to high school. The first teachers in the primary educational institutions that the American government had set up around the Philippines were Americans, but there were never enough teachers and soon teaching was turned over to Filipinos who by then already learned to speak English as part of the requirements in the American colonial government’s educational system (Hunt 1988, 355). With the Spanish language spoken by not more than 20 percent of the Philippine population at that time, and formal education not a priority during most of the Spanish colonial period, with universal primary education approved

77 In the unfortunate days of August 6 and 9, 1945, in their final and deadliest military strategy, the U.S. dropped nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Harry S. Truman (1945) wrote that year, “The Filipino people went through the ordeals of war and of Japanese occupation in a manner to their immortal credit. It was a credit to them, and to us, who led the Philippines along the 40-year road from serfdom under Spain to commonwealth status. But more than that it was a credit to those ideals of democracy and human dignity which America introduced into the Philippines in 1898, ideals which took root there so firmly as to survive every savage effort of the Japanese to uproot them.” This discourse of cooperation and alliance is repeated in Philippine history textbooks.
only in 1863 (Hunt 1988), the American project of benevolent assimilation that forwarded English language learning and educational advancement easily appealed to Filipinos. Becoming a teacher in the American-established public schools thus became an alternative to working in the farms, but Lolo George was not excited by these prospects. Coming home from school one day, he announced to his mother his decision to stop attending the local high school, saying that Nabua offered few prospects for lifting him and his family from hardship. He said that during that time, many “old timers” – or ancient mariners in Uncle William’s language – were vacationing or retiring in Nabua from the recently concluded war. Those returning brought home dollar salaries and many new fine things that were rare in a country recently ravaged by war. Lolo George was fascinated by these returnees’ display of abundance, and they were also coming home to marry the town’s most beautiful women. I was not able to follow up if the homecoming dance for the forced laborers in the Japanese camps that the mayor had promised ever happened, but the U.S. navy returnees received a warm welcome. Supporting his decision to try out for the navy, his mother sold a small farm. His classmate Militon Petalio volunteered to travel with him to Manila to join the U.S. Navy. They recruited another friend at the centro, who by some circumstance, was also named Militon. The three teenagers set off for an adventure, carrying borrowed baskets filled with rice and clothes.

Getting out of Nabua was difficult, Lolo George recalled, as public buses bound to Manila were scarce as the Japanese had confiscated them during the Japanese occupation of the region. Hitching on a truck that only went as far as Naga City, Lolo George and the two Militons

78 In 1900, the Philippine Commission that was appointed by President William McKinley pronounced: “They should regard as first importance, the extension of a system of primary education which should be free to all” (in Hunt 1988, 354).
decided they would walk all the way to Manila if there were no other options. Luckily, they were able to catch a launch in the coastal town of Libmanan which brought them to the tip of Quezon and from there they followed the train tracks that Lolo George had already mastered – thanks to his smuggling business when he was younger. He proudly concluded, “We got to Manila fine!”

Lolo George and the two Militons split ways in Manila. The war heavily destroyed Manila, and many laborers were needed for repairing the city. Lolo George applied for any kind of temporary job he could find like digging ditches and any other available work while waiting for the U.S. Navy to reopen enlistment. In Chapter 5, I write about the city home of my family which helped produce overseas migrants in our family. Lolo George and other Nabueños seeking to join the U.S. Navy also found for themselves a transition home in Manila – among the home of the Filios. The doors of the home of the Filios were open without fees or obligation to young men hoping to join the Navy. Lolo George recalled with gratitude, “I was 17, 18 years old. So, what now? There’s a couple in Manila who were so nice to us, very nice, even if their place was so small, they accommodated everybody that they could.” During my conversations with other retired navy men, the home of the Filios was often brought up as an important hub for Nabueños seeking their luck in the U.S. Navy. One day at the Filio home, when he said he was perhaps looking very forlorn, the mother-in-law of Mr. Filio approached him to ask if he knew a certain Manuel Arce. This Mr. Arce, the old lady told him, is a retired navy man from Nabua who had moved to Manila and a baptismal godson of his father. This introduction to ritual kin consequently opened a bigger possibility for Lolo George as he now had additional support in

79 Naga City is the business capital of the province of Camarines Sur.
Manila. On the day that they met, Mr. Arce offered his home to Lolo George, advising him to concentrate on his application to the Navy. Lolo George left his temporary job as a clerk typist at the Nichols Field, a U.S. military airfield in Pasay City to stand daily in the long queue of aspirants in front of the Wilson Building in Escolta, Manila, retreating in the evenings either in the homes of the Arces or the Filios. Lolo George beamed as he approached the part of his story about that day when he “suddenly got lucky”:

They started recruiting, and boy! I think the office of the recruitment of the navy was up in the fifth floor, and then, the line continued down the stairs. So, finally, I was at the door now, getting interviewed. There’s a guy there that was big. I don’t know if he was an officer or what, but anyway, we have all our papers, all these birth certificates in our hands. As soon as it was my turn, that son of a gun blocked me, and tells me ‘You’re not going in. You go home.’ ‘Why?’ Because I was wearing only a t-shirt! It was a shirt given to me by my uncle. White t-shirt. Nice, a new one, but you’re supposed to put a shirt over it. So, I turned around, went downstairs, and on the next floor, a janitor is wiping the floor. He got a nice shirt! So I said, “Hey, ‘kabayan’ (friend), can I borrow your shirt?” He undressed and gave it to me, and I ran back upstairs. The funny thing was, everybody, all the townmates – Los Baños, Regala – were all ahead of me. They got these documentations, birth certificates, mother’s consent, high school certificate. I placed my Nabua High School document on top. Nabua High School! I’ve been wracking my mother to send me a birth certificate, and I had none! I said, what the heck! So I was following Regala and Los Baños, no…rejected, you know, rejected! When it was my turn, the first paper that they see is Nabua High School, and they thought that it was Mapua. Mapua! Oh, this guy’s good, from Mapua! They look at the papers and everything, looked at me, and okay! Oh, God! Boy, it worked!

Lolo George had quit his high school in September and entered the U.S. Navy in December 1945 as the third Nabueño to enlist in the U.S. Navy after the war. Hearing the story, Uncle

80 Mapua Institute of Technology in Manila, founded in 1925, is one of the Philippines’ top school for architecture and engineering.
81 In 1947, a treaty between the U.S and the Philippines was signed that allowed the former to extend their stay in the Philippines (Bureau of Naval Personnel 2014). Within this intensified Military Bases Agreement, Filipino recruitment to the American Forces was renegotiated, and under the provisions of Article XXVII of this revitalized agreement, an annual cap of 1,000 “voluntary” enlistees were set. Consequently, an agreement was negotiated in 1952 based upon the 1947 agreement whereby up to 1,000 Filipino citizens could be enlisted in the U.S. Navy each year (Bureau of Naval Personnel 2014).
William recited the formula for his shipmate’s success, “Determination, goodwill, luck.” He remembered with pride that day when he crossed the main avenue to the home of Mr. Filio. He said it did not matter if his naval uniform was too big for his five-foot frame, or if his shoes 2 sizes bigger, or if his oversized sailor cap tipped sideways. He told me about his extended luck of being assigned “easy” work for his initial placement:

As soon as I reported, this chief said, “Son, I’m gonna assign you to the executive officer, the second command captain...he’s a big guy. But you know what, he’s really picky. He wants his coffee just right. He said that he wants it half hot water, half coffee. You know, half and half? No one can please him.” So I told him I’d try. First thing in the morning, I was there with my best jacket and everything, he came in and sat down, and I gave the coffee, shoved it to his right side. Without looking at me, he sipped the coffee, and oh, he looked at me. So from then on, we were buddy-buddies already. The chief assigned me to that room, saying I was going be exclusive to the commander. Stewards, sometimes, they got three or four rooms to fix, to clean everything, not me.

“What luck!,” Uncle William exclaimed upon hearing about his shipmate’s first assignment. Three years after his enlistment, in 1948, Truman signed the Equality Bill, ending the automatic assignment of Filipinos to the steward position. Lolo George continued to say that it was in 1950, with good recommendations from the commander for whom he worked, that he could swiftly change his rating from steward to yeoman. Upon promotion, he received an order to join the United States Pacific Command, the unified combatant command of the U.S. Armed Forces that covered the Indo-Asia-Pacific Region. This promotion meant he was no longer serving the officers, making up their bunks, or shining their shoes, but that he would leave his station in Pearl Harbor to return to the Sangley Point naval bases in the Philippines where he could be reunited with his wife whom he married two years earlier. “I was so darned happy. I couldn’t say anything,” he recalled exploding into hearty laughter. He told me that his wife was a
treasured childhood love. In 1948, he returned to Nabua already as a U.S. navy man, now able to afford a ‘harana,’ a tradition of courtship that involves the serenading of a woman into the dark of the night. He emerged triumphant in what the local navy men call ‘ligaw-marinero’ (mariner’s style of courtship) – a high-speed expression and performance of desire for love and intimacy before the navy man leaves again for his post at the U.S Bases in Sangley Point, or elsewhere (Figure 3.6.1).

Figure 3.6.1 George Masculino marries childhood love, Cecilia Zuñiga, in 1948. Photo courtesy of George Masculino.

82 He was only 10, he timidly admitted when he said to himself that he would later find this beautiful girl who had caught his attention while he was playing with friends in Nabua’s river. The girl was the year’s selected sole participant in the ton-ton which meant that she came from a privileged class while he belonged to one of Nabua’s poor farming families. See Figure 4.6.3 for a photograph of the ton-ton in which Lolo George’s wife, Cecilia Zuñiga, was the invited Easter Angel.
However, when Lolo George was waiting to transfer in Sangley Point in 1950, the Korean War suddenly broke out. The American battleships and their men stationed around the world were moving towards the Pacific. Lolo George recalls, “Oh gosh, oh my gosh, after all, it’s not funny. It’s not luck anymore… I want to see my wife, you know.” He had asked a shipmate to send a telegram to his wife to come to Manila right away, taking a chance as they had no clue when the heavy cruiser USS Rochester (CA-124) was departing to invade the port of Incheon in Korea’s west coast. His mother and his wife scrambled for money to travel to Manila as it may be the last time to see him. Tears welled in Lolo George eyes as he recalled, “I was in Sangley Point waiting for the ship… She was on the way. The train arrived with the whistle. My ship also did the whistle. We didn’t see each other. I felt so sad. We invaded Inchon….” He paused to wipe tears running down his cheeks, and he laments, “Every time I tell this story, I get so sad.” He was fortunate in the navy and was able to change citizenships and ratings quickly (Figure 3.6.2), he told me, but continued that it was also within the U.S. Navy’s premises that he experienced the “lowest point” of his life. Reflecting on his shipmate’s gloomy narrative that he had not known before, Uncle William said, “I learned there.” Lolo George replied, “I learned more.”
Lolo George’s story elucidates the turbulent colonial context before enlistment that crafted the dispositions of young men of his time. Like many men of his generation, Lolo George desired to “escape” from the layers of postcolonial and colonial desperation and forced labor during the Japanese occupation in Bicol, to join the naval forces of the newly arrived American colonizer which for him, and for many young men of his time, promised upward mobility. A closer look into the narrative of a Nabueño navy man in Nabua tells us that the stories that the members of the FRA Branch 127 commonly tell are not that of empty escapism and adventurism. Their stories link intimately with multiple colonial histories and with the conditions in Nabua and the Philippines that influenced the decisions they made in their youth in a context of a perceived deadlock of agricultural work, in favour of the seeming potential of wage work in the U.S. Navy. It was also a time of continued nuclearization of the family with intensified gendered
expectations from its male members to enter the wage economy as educated, English-speaking men equipped to perform work other than farming. However, it could also be read that, in fact, Lolo George’s story does not fall too far away from the commonly shared narrative such as the one highlighted in Uncle William’s outline that frames the positive and inspirational. However, Lolo George’s story articulates that from the impasse of suffering and destruction emerge irrepressible ambitions that “could not be burdened by history,” as the people face “still another period of accommodation to colonial rule” (Ileto 2001, 116, italics in original). Below, I think about the conundrum in which postcolonial subjects launched into modernity such as the U.S. navy retirees affirm American “benevolence,” recall an impoverished and turbulent past and elide conversations about their involvement in America’s wars. I explore their testimonies of “non-involvement” in America’s imperial ambitions as a kind of labor that was deployed in the context of multiple exposures to colonial disruptions. The ethnographic vignette and an entry from the Cuaderno ignite an extended problematization of postcolonial consciousness of U.S. naval retirees in Nabua.

3.7 Uninvolved Labors?

In May 2014, I attended a distant relation’s wake held in one of Nabua’s distant barangays. I paid respects to an elder couple who are among the bereaved family. Just about a year ago, I attended this couple’s golden wedding anniversary held at the centro. I thought they came back from the U.S. to attend our common relative’s wake and funeral rites, but I learned as we talked that they had in fact already returned to Nabua for good. The Philippines has no comprehensive health care system and the best hospitals in the Bicol region are located an hour away from Nabua. Thus, I was curious as to why they would come home in their elderly years when their health
conditions are more fragile. I asked, “Why, wasn’t life in the U.S. good?” My distant granduncle replied smiling, “Takot kayang masubsuban” (Because we are scared to get burned). I was confused. Was he referring to a string of dangerous odd jobs in the United States that I did not know about? Was he traumatized by the recurring wildfires in California where they also lived? He laughed as my face perhaps showed cluelessness about what he meant. I shuddered upon realizing: they are afraid of being cremated! Their homecoming meant giving up the U.S. health care benefits available to them as American citizens. Instead, when the time comes, they hope to be laid to rest with their kin who have sailed away before them, and not be “burned” and shipped back home in an urn.

In his classic work *Pasyon and Revolution*, Ileto (1979) reminds us, “… when sources are biased in a consistent way we are in fact offered the opportunity to study the workings of the popular mind.” Ileto suggests for scholars to pay attention to “acts of compassion, weeping, and empathy.” This vignette and Ileto’s reminder compel me to return to an entry in the Cuaderno for the year 1902. The Cuaderno records:

Cholera, the disease which the elders called “pests” arrived. A hospital was built in Cagas. Many died, and they were immediately brought to the cemetery for incineration as this was the command of the Americans. The streets of the town were named after Filipino heroes. The town was divided into 12 districts, each district headed by one municipal councilor. The town was assigned its first Justice of the Peace – Don Eugenio Ocampo, Sr.

As I already mentioned, it was in 1902 that the Philippine-American war officially ended. The last strokes of resistance were wiped out at the same time that Americans launched their project of benevolent assimilation and “democratic tutelage” (Ileto 2001, 108). During the time of intense pacification, what better way to quell the remaining desires and passions to fight for independence than to impose upon traditions, which, as can be culled from the “interruption”
above about rituals concerning death, grieving, and honoring the departed, continue to be carried on by Nabueños until today? The Cuaderno continues that between 1904 to 1905, the diseases were finally gone, “thanks to the typhoon that came, submerging the rice fields, which the elders said cleansed the town before the new presidente assumed his post” (my translation). Reynaldo Ileto (2001, 115) writes of the condition of “utter dependence” in which it is “not difficult to imagine how ‘resistance’ could be forgotten, and the generosity, the kindness, of the US commissaries remembered.” I read this occurrence of a flood that “cleansed” Nabua as an allegory for a new and promising era where an unburdening from the memories of violences – brought by Spanish colonization, wars and American pacification – could finally happen. In Nabua, it could be that such measures under the “command of the Americans” that threatened locally protected traditions prompted the “ultimate surrender” of the revolutionary army in Nabua (Ileto 1979, 115). The importance of death rituals continues today in Nabua, as can be seen for example in the U.S. Navy men’s investments in their family’s impressive mausoleums. Lolo George has gone to the extent of building a private cemetery nestled in Nabua’s rice fields, at the center of which lies the remains of his most treasured love. In Nabua, elders and their kin remain to honor the departed, and stories about good lives lived by the next generations materialize through the respectable spaces for their final rest.

I cast a spotlight on this interruption as an opportunity to extend my discussion of the perceptions of the retirees’ generally positive recollection of the American period, their statements about their “non-involvement” in America’s wars, and their hopes to pass on a “naval history” in Nabua. Uncle William’s outline echoes positive accounts of the American colonial transition and their easy and rewarding labor in the American ships even if they entered its racialized ranks. The optimistic accounts communicated by the outline and the retirees, I believe,
call for a consideration of the problematics of class, ontology, and labor.

The retired U.S. Navy men in Nabua often acknowledge themselves as originating from the poor (“tíos”) peasant class. All of the retirees I interviewed identify with the ordinary farming folk. However, it needs to be pointed out that becoming a navy man appealed even to the young men of Nabua who already held wealth and status inherited from the Spanish period, and in a rural town where only a small number of families controlled big landholdings, class played an important role in social organization. The story of Elias Orías who descended from a local ilustrado family is one example. He was the first Nabueño navy man promoted to a professional position in the U.S. Navy as photographer and publicist. His name does not appear in Uncle William’s outline, but the retirees occasionally recalled his adventures in the navy. Uncle William said that even after obtaining his qualifications to become a lawyer, and even after receiving offers to become mayor of Nabua, his shipmate Elias still opted to join the U.S. Navy, like him, as “paraugas!” (dishwasher). Uncle William let out a loud chuckle, amused by this anecdote. By telling this story, Uncle William makes a point that while the U.S. Navy offered only racialized positions to Filipinos, the young men who enlisted (at least those from Nabua) did not all come from common backgrounds of poverty. For those who trace roots from the lowest ranks of Nabua’s social organization, the mess halls in the naval ships where they all began from the rank of “dishwasher” and where they worked alongside some shipmates born into

83 The Orías clan owns one of the antique religious icons commissioned during the Spanish period. The “Santo Entiero” owned by the Orías family is made of ivory, and with other icons, it is paraded around the town during special religious occasions such as the Holy Week (Chapter 4). The possession of religious status is an indicator of wealth. Cannell (1999) writes of how the care for religious icons is inflected by social class and power. U.S. Navy men, returning home with dollars, were able to afford the commissioning of icons. Nowadays, the parade of saintly icons in Nabua has become quite extended as returning migrants, the “new rich,” are also able to afford the costly care for such religious icons. This topic is outside the scope of this chapter but it deserves a future discussion.
privileged families, served as an equalizer of social class. In the navy, Nabueño men found an opportunity to be on an equal footing with the local “old rich.” Rafael (2011, 349) writes that U.S. pacification was consolidated by the American-organized public system that sought to produce the population into a “common ‘average.’” It was also in the schools where discourses of modern subjectivity and liberalism were enculturated into the minds of Filipinos, whose labors would be eventually appropriated into wage labor as the new American colony integrated into a global economy securitized by the growing presence of the American military of that era.

The naval ships opened a space for breaking down social class and potentially diffusing wealth and power held by the landed elites (Figure 3.7.1). However, the retirees also expressed to different degrees the “paradox of imperial liberalism” (Rafael 2011, 348) arising from their work in the naval ships. A retiree told me that the steward rank was the “lowest in the totem pole.” Another retiree appeared acutely conscious of the racialized recruitment system in the U.S. Navy which took advantage of power relations in which the U.S. as colonizer brooded over their “little brown brothers” when he recognized that, “When the Filipinos were colonized by the Americans, the Filipinos replaced the negros.” This retiree used what is now a politically loaded term, but this reflects his own experience of racialized hierarchy in the U.S. Navy. Despite recognizing their racialization, the FRA Branch 127 elders favored crafting stories about their endurance and agility. Uncle William said that Filipinos are “intelihente” (intelligent), “easier to stretch,” and “maurot” (hardworking). He added that Filipinos were “resisting what were said about them during the time of Rizal that they were lazy.” He rationalized that

84 U.S. President William Howard Taft coined the term “Little Brown Brothers,” reflecting the paternalist and racist politics that underlined the U.S.’ mission in the Philippines at the turn of the 20th century (Kramer 1999, 78).
Nabueños begin their work in the farms very early, stopping at about 10 in the morning when the sun becomes oppressive. Like his shipmates, Uncle William likened his participation as not of indolence and mere subservience, but one that served as a passage into self-improvement (they were “easier to stretch,” in his own words), applying the language and education acquired via the American project of benevolent assimilation. Navy men, he said, were “madaling tuturuan” (easy to teach), pointing out their active labor of tapping into the new possibilities for a “good life” that became available to the men of his generation.

Figure 3.7.1 Officers and enlisted men aboard a ship.
Photo courtesy of George Masculino.
While the retirees highlight their good qualities such as adaptability, intelligence, dedication, and strong will to transcend the conditions into which they were born, they assess their labor as that of “non-involvement.” Manoy Juan, a veteran of the Vietnam War (1954 to 1975), hinted at the refusal of his partaking in this protracted and costly conflict. He told me, “I wasn’t even involved. It was ending already.” He assessed his work as a navy man as non-violent, non-complicit, and unproblematic – a theme that I also frequently heard from the retirees but they often chose to move on to a more fun-filled anecdote. Manoy Juan had joined in 1972, only two months after the declaration of Martial Law in the Philippines, and the Fall/Liberation of Saigon in Vietnam followed three years after that. “It was the fear of not being employed. More of it was job security,” he told me. Enlisting two or three decades after the other retirees that I interviewed, this retiree finds again a situation of impasse, this time wrought by the insecure political and economic climate of the Marcos dictatorship. Hearing his story, I asked if he might consider himself as a political refugee, and he replied rather quickly, “Parang” (It seems so). Successful in his application, he was then stationed in Subic from 1974, the same year that the steward rating came to an end, or rather, was renamed “Mess Management Specialist.” Manoy Juan was later assigned to the Western Pacific route. He recalled that they received orders to join the “line” which meant the “Vietnam War Zone.” He said, “It was a big operation. We were part of that fleet. When the navy was deployed for six months, we were a task force, two carriers.” But even if this retiree’s memory of his deployment orders remains vibrant, he simultaneously eschewed questions about his concrete involvement in these military operations.

85 This is an alias as requested by the retiree.
Manoy Juan likened the ships to sites of ordinary labor when he said, “What’s funny is when you look at the U.S. Navy, it’s just like you are getting your job done every day.” He told me that the captain of a ship is just like a mayor who has personnel working in the medical, legal and engineering units under his command. He argued that the steward’s work is a kind of service, and “If you shine someone’s shoes, you tend to be liked.” In such work where one’s contribution is service-oriented rather than tactical, he suggested that stewards were “not really involved” and that the “U.S. Navy is not so much of a military job.” By stressing the mundaneness of labor in these massive warships, Manoy Juan actively glosses over questions of his involvement and complicity in America’s imperial ambitions. He told me that navy men do not go to the battleground and engage in warfare like the U.S. Marines who have “to carry guns everyday, kill…” Within the naval force in which stewards work in the invisible backend, he said that “Somehow Filipinos are incognito, they never get seen.” This statement links with other retirees’ expressions about the in-betweenness of Filipinos as “jokers” in the navy, as being “between black and white.” A retiree told me that occupying the space that is “in-between” has some advantages. “We are out of the trouble. If you are in trouble with the whites, the Blacks will defend you. The Blacks were just discriminated outright,” he told me. Remarkably, even if they recognize their racialized status in the navy, FRA elders talk about their identities as safely in-between where their status is negotiable.

This ambivalence also manifests in some of the ways that retirees think about their assumption of American citizenship. Lolo Matias, for example, enlisted in 1946, after the
approval of the Nationality Act of 1940. Lolo Matias quickly changed merit from steward to yeoman only four years after his enlistment. However, becoming a yeoman included the handling of top secret data; a yeoman position is reserved for those holding American citizenship. For Lolo Matias, changing citizenship blended with his desires for upward mobility. The higher merits were attached to American citizenship. I asked him if he had second thoughts about swearing allegiance to the American flag and quite assuredly he replied, “No, because it is a demand for my job.” He also told me, “I cannot feel good; I cannot feel bad,” seeming to give himself space for interpreting his narrative within a broad range of experience. Lolo Matias’ statement also relates to how labor and other acts are perceived differently from different points of view.

This differentiation of the U.S. Navy as a place of work versus being navy man as a patriotic profession has some resemblance to the “process of compartmentalization” observed by Kimberly Theidon (2009, 11) in her interviews with former combatants in Colombia who “cordon off” their participation in a violent past by locating violent actions elsewhere – in a “combat” which is a distant space, time, inhabited by a former self. Jill Dubisch (2009) also addresses how talking about violence could become elided by those who were active participants in the war. Writing about the collective rite of mourning and public declaration of Vietnam veteranship which, for some, was difficult to claim before, Dubisch has no doubts about the power of this pilgrimage in bridging solidarities and in healing traumatized veterans, but at the same time, she poses the question about the elision of talking about the implications of the war in

86 This Act allowed aliens who served in the U.S. Forces for three years to become naturalized as U.S. citizens without having to undergo a regular naturalization process such as first acquiring permanent residence in the United States.
which the veterans had fought. The navy men from Nabua do not see their participation as ensanguined nor did they ever face social stigma upon return in Nabua.

It could be that non-involvement relates to local perceptions on different kinds of labor – for example, when one labors with passion and commitment for a specific cause, versus laboring mechanically and less ardently for wages. Ileto (1979, 42) writes that the soldiers of the Filipino revolutionary army defeated the Spanish because of the former’s unwavering conviction to win in the war despite their lack of arms. Drawing from historical records, Ileto reports that the Spanish were often surprised by the revolutionaries’ “state of excitement or frenzy in which they fought,” as if they welcomed death and had no worries about personal attachments that they might leave behind. This “passion” for the revolution contrasts with wage-based labor among the Bicolanos as observed by Tomas Andres (2005) and parallels with some of the Nabueños’ perceptions about labor on the American ships. On the value that Bicolanos accord to wage work, Andres observes, “When work is seen as end in itself,’ labor becomes a “matter of routine that has to be done as a matter of practical exigency. To him, it is simply doing what is supposed to be done” (49). In reflecting on their experiences on the American naval vessels heading out to wars or militarization projects around the world, Nabueños’ accounts do not feature violence that they may have witnessed or taken part in. These expressions also link with contemporary examples, for example, as Kale Fajardo (2011) shows in his ethnography of the ways that Filipino seamen “create, embody, and imagine” other kinds of masculinities than the ones “sanctioned,” and expected, by the state. Kale Fajardo writes that “deserters” who “have jumped ship” are constructed by the state as weak men who have abandoned their duties. On the other hand, through the concept of ‘lakas ng loob’ (gut), Fajardo argues that desertion can also be
understood as a strategy to escape and resist violences. It is an unconventional act in which one removes the self from the state-sanctioned neoliberal developmental agenda.

The retirees’ various articulations about their work on the naval ships – as inflected by issues of class, race, degrees of non/involvement – tell us about the different conditions in Nabua that they inhabited and eventually “escaped from” in their youth. Their narratives tell of the multiple layers of locally-felt predicaments that have propelled desires for a “good life.” In understanding the ways that they remember, forget, highlight, and elide certain parts of the narrative, I find it useful to draw from María Lugones’ (2003) notion of the “multiplicitous self.” Frustrated with the western notion of the unfragmented self and theories of oppression that fail to see a possibility for liberation, Lugones writes, “If oppression theory is not liberatory, it is useless from the point of view of the oppressed person. It is discouraging, demoralizing.” It is here that she says that the “ontological possibility of liberation, depends on embracing ontological pluralism.” She illustrates this with the case of a person whose “substance” is arrogated for use by another person. Lugones calls the person whose substance is arrogated “the arrogantly perceived person” and the person who arrogates another person’s substance “the arrogant perceiver.” I understand “substance” as “labor.” For purposes of simplifying these labels, I use “A” to refer to “the arrogantly perceived person” (colonized) and “B” to refer to “the arrogant perceiver” (colonizer).

Lugones begins with the premise that “A” is capable of reason, but this is capacity is altered or manipulated by “B” who is in the position to curtail available alternatives, leaving out choices that do not work with his interests. “A” then proceeds to “choose” between these available, yet, mediated and limited choices. Lugones writes that “practical reasoning” occurs again at this stage but it is often that “A” finally chooses the choice that “B” favors in the first
place. Lugones calls this “practical syllogism,” a rationalization of the oppressed that produces what she calls “‘subservient’ or ‘servile’ syllogisms.” In the case of American colonialism of the Philippines, I suggest that the choice for independence – what the revolutionary army had already won from Spain only to be taken away again by the Americans – was stripped out of the array of choices for the Filipino subjects as soon as the American battleships landed on the Philippines shores. The possibilities that opened up for Filipinos from the American period, following Lugones, were therefore laid out within a context of oppression where choices were mediated and conditional.

Supporting Lugones’ proposition, Mariana Ortega (2016, 96) writes that in the postcolonial era, the multiplicitous self is “necessary so that oppressed people can have the open-endedness or the ability to know themselves in different realities in which they can be and act differently than the alternatives offered in those worlds in which they are oppressed and marginalized.” Anthropologists have also argued along the same lines, as seen for example in Leslie Robertson’s (2006, 323) suggestion that “there are no pure narratives,” referring to the discourses about war and health told by women drug users in Downtown Vancouver. The participant in Robertson’s ethnography spoke of the ways that people’s diverse interpretations that are nonetheless “grounded in history, in experience, and in larger economic and political processes” (323).

Returning to the case of the U.S. Navy men in Nabua, trusting perceptions of themselves as adventurous, intelligent, and hardworking, I argue that they deployed what Lugones calls “world-traveling.” Ortega proposes a renewed conceptualization of “world-traveling,” citing it as key to unravelling the “multiplicitous self’s flexibility, decenteredness, and intersectionality” (12). It is through “world-traveling” that the multiplicitous self can have “access to an opening or
aperture to different worlds” (89), thus “finding alternative visions of oneself and of worlds” (100). The process of self-deception, for Lugones, is deployed by “A” when assuming a version out of the multiplicitous self. Lugones writes that “the practical syllogisms that they go through in one reality are not possible for them in the other… given that the realities hold such different possibilities for them.”

I agree with Ortega that world-traveling is not a reactionary form of resistance as it is (100, italics in original):

connected to new possibilities of understanding oneself as having different attributes, of seeing oneself as capable of overcoming fear and domination, and as being creative and skillful in spite of the perception from the dominant group that considers the self as unworthy, inferior, and expendable. It is also a matter of envisioning different worlds in which these selves have possibilities of not merely surviving or resisting but of flourishing.

Lugones argues that “A,” the oppressed, “can testify only in the world of the dominated, the only world where that testimony is understood and recognized.” Curiously, even if all interviews and ethnographic research with the retirees of FRA Branch 127 were in held in Nabua, and even if they recall their adventures among themselves, the navy men still generally favored to recall the positive accounts of their lives. Considering the prospects for flourishing that Ortega writes, I suggest that the retired navy men’s idea of flourishing is not individuated. Lugones’ proposition about the “dispersed intentionality of the subject” is useful here (227). Lugones suggests a shift from understanding intentionality as a self-conscious act that occurs in the individuated mind, to understanding selfhood as relational. In this case, the modern/ized subject – “A” – must be perceived as no longer the center of the story, and our orientation must be directed towards elucidating the consequences of one’s actions, and how these consequences are meant to be distributed and shared.

Therefore, I believe that understanding these confounding narratives calls for a decentering
of the story oriented from the retirees, to the many other lifeworlds and relations implicated in their mobilities. The ways that the FRA Branch 127 retirees narrate their histories are not masterful stories of self-deception that selfishly aim to propel themselves as celebrated local elites, as the new “big men” in the Town of Dollars, and as the center of Nabua’s history. As the naval ships’ commanders strategized for wars, invasions, and imperial landings around the world, the U.S. Navy men from Nabua working in the kitchens, mess halls, or for high-ranking officers, sought to organize for themselves and their kin, a trajectory towards further education and economic gain – actions organized within a situation of mediated choices. The retirees elaborated how they were on the lookout for each other, maintaining and building solidarities while away from Nabua. Eliding discussions about American empire and colonialism, their narratives that they want to appear in my ethnography instead hope to render visible and remarkable the “multiplier effect” – the Keynesian term that Uncle William used while looking at his completed outline – of their contributions that helped produce Nabua as the “dollar town” of the region. These are some identities out of their multiplicitous selves that they would like to appear more prominently in my ethnography. These are identities of post/colonial recuperation. Where the American colonial past becomes remembered kindly, present dispositions about good life lived in the space in an imagined “Philippine-American nation” (Gavilan 2012) is one that settles for a relatively improved condition, despite potentially holding less critical impressions on the work on empire in our postcolonial subjectivities. Work for the U.S. Navy was a long route of adventure that has allowed elders to return home with wealth and prestige in their retirement years. The way that the past is crafted as “pragmatic and future-oriented” (Markowitz 2004) links with the personal, familial, and the broader community, and this kind of history-making works to interweave narratives about good lives that could be retold with pride, affection, and veneration
by the next generations.

3.8 Conclusions: Centering Interruptions

The narratives that the elders of FRA Branch 127 want to leave behind elide their involvement in the work of empire through assertions that their participation in the U.S. Navy, like their racialized ratings, were also merely peripheral. Uncle William’s outline points to a kind of memory-making that highlights the sense of adventure among the U.S. Navy men during their younger years, hard work, and perseverance; this enabled them to invest in a good life for themselves and their families, and eventually, produce to the Town of Dollars. Lolo George’s story, meanwhile, is a closer account of a retiree’s lived experience during the interwar years. His story links with some of the retirees’ recollections of a past troubled by the colonial encounter. But even if the retired U.S. Navy men’s narratives commonly reflect a positive account of American benevolence, they still very consistently talk about the past as temporally marked by periods of insecurities brought about by poverty, wars, and martial law – tragedies that come in a series and that appear to have no ending. I investigated these gaps in their narratives as a means of understanding postcolonial narratives told in the hometown, a place of retirement where the retirees hope to be memorialized kindly.

I argued for understanding the multiplicitous selves of the post/colonized. The U.S. Navy was a space for disproving the trope of the indio’s – the derogatory term used by the Spanish to refer to the colonized natives – supposed incapability and indolence. In the eyes of retired navy men in Nabua, the U.S. Navy was a sure passage through which they could strategize their labor. On the American naval ships, they could re-organize themselves as equal members of a common social class, even as they quite paradoxically all entered the navy’s racialized hierarchy –
inevitably entangling their rationalization into what Lugones describes as practical syllogism. On the naval ships, their tactics played up their peripherality, in-betweenness, and invisibility in relation to the non-Filipino shipmates in the navy. The retirees further orient their labors on the ships as linked with the family, their shipmates, and Nabua. Their narratives disrupt assumptions about the “modern” Filipino subject that was meant to be individualized by colonial education. Their ambivalent discourses present an occasion for investigating the postcolonial Filipino identity and consciousness.

On the other hand, it would seem that by not wanting to talk about their racialized status, the retirees are in the end emphasizing coevalness with their non-racialized shipmates in the U.S. military. Working for the U.S. Navy, for instance in the America’s imperial wars in Cuba, Lebanon, Vietnam, and others, it could be read that Nabueños in the U.S. Navy clamor for the same respect for their service to the U.S. as would be accorded to their American-born fellow veterans. Lutz (2002, 724) refers to “supercitizenship” in discussing the status of people who participated in America’s grand wars, and similarly, it is true that retirees in Nabua call up this privilege. However, it is also clear from the narratives above that the lifeworlds of the FRA Branch 127 elders extend beyond their experiences of racialized labor on the naval ships. Similar to the Jewish elders Myerhoff (1992, 233) interviewed, the FRA Branch 127 elders also face “death, impotence, [and] invisibility” as ubiquitous threats to their memorialization. Members of FRA Branch 127 relay through their stories and annually held activities such as the commemoration of American war heroes – which also include their Nabueño shipmates – their conflicting affections for both the U.S. and the Philippines.

My discussion contributes to the ongoing conversations on the after-effects of war and empire in the neo/postcolonies. Catherine Lutz (2002, 724) writes about the effect of
militarization permeating everyday aspects of life in the U.S. such as the: molding of social institutions; creation of norms about war; redefinition of masculinity and sexuality; the organization of gender and race; the marketing of a particular form of nostalgia and desire for war to citizens, in effect turning war into popular culture, and then the granting of supercitizenship to those who have served in the war. Nabua’s social life has also become organized significantly around the extensive American militarization in the Pacific. Investigating these confounding articulations of memory is crucial if we were to consider very seriously the genealogies of oppression and the enduring effects of the colonial encounter. Only eight years after the last U.S. Bases were closed in the Philippines, the Philippines-U.S. Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) was signed, reaffirming the Mutual Defense Treaty signed in August 30, 1951. The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), meanwhile, is a supplemental mutual defense treaty signed on April 28, 2014, following questions about the constitutionality of the earlier VFA. Under the EDCA, the U.S. military is allowed to build and operate non-permanent bases in the Philippines for purposes of mutual defense (Thayer 2014). The concern about the significance of the Philippines as a gateway to the Pacific reverberates until today with both countries continuing to re-negotiate naval base agreements within the euphemistic label of “enhanced defense cooperation” (Chan Robles Virtual Law Library n.d.).

The continued securitization of the Pacific sponsored by the U.S. is not unlinked to the sustained American interest in the Philippines – and this relationship between the two countries continues to impinge on the everyday life of people even in unassuming towns like Nabua, one of the “peripheries” in the current neoliberal order (Ahmed 2010; Tadiar 2013, 2015). The impasse of rural life from which many Nabueños continue to want to run away, reflects the general indifference to farming today as aspirations for overseas mobility continue to soar,
propelled by state policies and capitalist regimes that extend yet again the practical syllogisms that reproduce the arrogation of Filipino labor. Baldoz argues that U.S. policymakers and American corporations now use soft power to shape Philippine politics and economics. He writes, the “specter of the empire continues to haunt Philippine-American relations” (236), with contemporary recruitment practices of Filipino workers to low wage occupations bearing a “striking resemblance to those that characterized the age of the empire” (239). Rodriguez (2016, 41) also writes, “The globalization of Filipino labor is crucially linked to the globalization of US empire as well as US capital. The Philippine state plays an active role in facilitating the placement of Filipino workers in the various sites where the US military and firms are located around the world.” In Nabua, the tensions and disorganization brought by the colonial encounter have become erased in popular consciousness, subjugated by more dominant discourses about the benefits reaped from the American benevolent project aimed at modernizing Nabua and civilizing its peoples. Colonial entrapments such as the taxation of the poor that lingered on from the Spanish to the American period, are often not echoed in many Nabueños’ recollections of a past involving colonial impositions of power. The Cuaderno, and possibly many other colonial archives about Nabua that we have yet to retrieve, as well as the reverberations of traditions that can be discerned from everyday life such as the vignette that haunted me, tell us about other identities that could be recuperated by the multiplicitous self. These interruptions must be centered to recuperate disappearing and subordinated memory. These phenomena – memories about oppressions and active resistance – that are also on the verge of extinction from Nabueño consciousness may open new spaces for creativity and possibility.
Chapter 4: “Balo-balo”: Rehearsing Faith, Migrants’ Homecoming, and Kinship with the Sacred

4.1 Christ Has Risen

For many practitioners of the Catholic faith in the Philippines, Black Saturday is reserved for reflecting on the sins of mankind that led to Christ’s demise on the cross. On this day that Christ is prostrate in his tomb, it is said that the wind carries with it the scent of flowers or candles – making the death of Christ manifest through a supposed sensorial witnessing of it. The elders say that the summer breeze cools down, and the birds perched on the branches of the hushed trees are grieving with the people. On this day, there is a nationwide liquor ban, commercial and public establishments are closed, and most of the archipelago is supposed to be in mourning. But in Nabua, the evening of Black Saturday is not one of solemn silence. Quite the opposite, people await the performance of the “balo-balo.” The balo-balo is a publicly performed yet spectacular rehearsal of the “ton-ton” – the meeting of the resurrected Christ with his mother held in the dawn of Easter Sunday. The star of the ton-ton and its rehearsal is a child with the title of “Easter Angel,” the first place winner in a money contest for children organized by the local church. Dressed in a shimmering white costume complete with fluffy wings made of cotton glued on cardboard, the Easter Angel whose family has solicited the highest amount of donations is the last among all angels to descend from the bell tower of Nabua’s Holy Cross Parish, to lift the black veil of the icon of the Mater Dolorosa (The Sorrowful Mother) and to sing to the awaiting crowd the good news: “Hallelujah! Let us all rejoice, because Christ has risen. Hallelujah, hallelujah!” (Figure 4.1.1). The angels’ descent is accompanied by butterflies,
fireworks, smoke or bubble machines and other gimmicks prepared by their respective families. The following day, when all the angels are dressed in simpler gowns, and when gimmicks are no longer allowed, an officiated mass follows the angels’ descent practiced the night before, and the mood becomes decidedly more solemn. Gossips about the “tipan” or covenant that is being fulfilled through the angels’ participation in the Holy Week rituals as well as the total amount of donations collected by the family of each angel, temporarily subside as devotees renew their faith in the resurrected Christ.  

![Easter Angel of 2014](image)

**Figure 4.1.1** The Easter Angel of 2014. At a balo-balo held the night before Easter Sunday, the winning Easter Angel practices her descent from the bell tower to announce the rising of Christ.

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87 Tipan translates to ‘panata’ in Filipino. The word “panuga” is also used in Nabua, which roots from “tuga” (promise or truth).
4.2 Ritual, a “Term of the Trade”?

Since the evolutionist rhetoric on ritual of the 19th century, scholars have looked at ritual as an “unconscious” act or phenomenon that reflects a society’s and people’s worshipping of their own reflection (Durkheim 2001). It has been seen as: a rite of passage enveloped in ceremonies conjured by the “semicivilized mind” (Van Gennep 1972); part of a cultural system that reinforces a community’s worldviews on both the real and the imagined (Geertz 1993); and enactments of ideology that legitimate structures of hierarchy and domination (M. Bloch 1989), among other interpretations. After WWII when formerly colonized/missionized countries were modernizing and secularizing, Max Gluckman (1962) observed that the theorization of ritual that was founded on the idea that religion and society were inevitably interlocked seemed increasingly irrelevant. The term ritual has become a “term of the trade” (Brandes 1988, 7) that is imbuéd with predetermined categories that inadvertently craft knowledge production (Asad 1993). There also seems to be an emergence of a “global discourse on ritual” that flattens ritual practice by studying it as a phenomenon using commonly used symbolical analyses (Bell 1997, 263–66). One example is Victor Turner’s (1957) idea of the communitas which has become a definitive concept in ritual studies, dangerously leading to the universalization of the understanding of ritual (Asad 1993; Bell 1997).

For Catherine Bell (1997, 266), the study of contemporary ritual calls for revised methodologies that will “minimize the amount of preliminary selecting and framing of the data in terms of…powerful categories” and she sees potential in a “reconstructed phenomenology – a phenomenology for the post-postmodern era.” For Lila Abu Lughod (1991, 147), “writing against culture” includes the investigation of connections, the “ethnographies of the particular,” and finally, practice and discourse. With the participants of the balo-balo now located
transnationally, and with the fulfillment of a sacred contract that is inherent in the ritual as necessitating the homecoming of overseas migrants, the discussion of the particularities of the event inevitably becomes an investigation into “phenomena of connections” (Abu-Lughod 1991). Therefore, along with others who study the lived experience (Fabian 1983; Strathern 1987; M. Jackson 1996; Ahmed 2007; M. Jackson 2013; Fanon 2017), I take inspiration from phenomenology in investigating the dimensions of life that have engendered the present, including the celebration of ritual. Hoping to move away from the “deconstructive impetus” in anthropological analyses which gives anthropologists the “hubristic” confidence in generalizations of human practice (Bowman 1988), I explore the balo-balo as reflecting a richer background than might be apparent if understood merely as religious dramas.

My examination of the balo-balo begins by exploring the overseas migration background of the Easter Angel’s family as their homecoming is necessary in completing the “tipan” or covenant. This is followed by a discussion of “kinning practices” with the locally venerated Inang Katipanan (Mother of the Covenant) as a space that opens opportunities for overseas Nabueños to continue to deepen their intimacy with the sacred, despite distances. However, it is also the case that personal ambitions to actualize promises made to the sacred may inevitably become folded into the larger familial project of maintaining solidarities, even during the time when families are increasingly transnationally separated. The balo-balo does more than affirm transnational family solidarities during ritual. To deepen my discussion of the balo-balo, I follow Barbara Myerhoff’s (1982, 118) suggestion to look into the realm of the “private, subjective, 

88 My translation of the local icon’s name – “Mother of the Covenant” – draws attention to the covenant or contract that is the origin of Nabueños relationship with her and to the kinning practices between the two.
psychological, conscious and unconscious.” This attention to consciousness production is linked with Talal Asad’s (1993) suggestion of “analyzing practices” by investigating ritual as underlined with “technologies of power.” Myerhoff’s and Asad’s suggestions are particularly relevant to formerly colonized societies whose contemporary rituals are hybridized by multiple layers of indigenous and internalized practices. I also examine how a religious novena in veneration of a local Marian icon Inang Katipanan, through its assemblage of borrowings from the Cuaderno, materializes an image of the sacred in ways that matter locally. Finally, that the balo-balo is in fact only a rehearsal which is nonetheless spectacularly performed in public must be problematized. If various strands are interwoven into contemporary ritual, what do we make of the iteration of all these occurrences during a moment of mere rehearsal? The balo-balo has similarities with theatrical rehearsal processes as mechanisms for disciplining, problem solving, and developing craft (Lyon 1982; Sloan 2012), but its quality of “rehearsality” while being simultaneously understood as part of a fulfillment of an intimate contract with the divine as well as a public spectacle, calls for an understanding of the balo-balo as a complex dynamic.

4.3 Migrants’ Contract with the Sacred

In the evening of the balo-balo, the Easter Angel of 2014 was being readied for the event. She sat in front of a mirror while trying to pluck the pink curlers out of her hair. She turned to me to say in a mix of English and Filipino that there’s a lot of dirt on her face, and she puckered her

89 In the Catholic practice of devotion, novenas are publicly recited prayers often held for nine consecutive days.
90 The word balo-balo can be nuanced further. I use balo-balo here to mean “rehearsal,” but in everyday use, it could be simply translated as “to test” something. In the case of the balo-balo ritual, there are many technical aspects of the event that need to be tested, aside from the angels’ descent and ascent from the bell tower using a bamboo pole. The accompanying band of musicians and choir, emcees’ speech, spotlighting, and others – are all tested and coordinated during the night of the balo-balo.
lips to remove the light red “dirt” (Figure 4.3.1). I complimented this Filipino-American child’s bilingualism, and Manay Ruby said that they are also trying to teach her a few words from our town’s distinct language. Before the start of the Holy Week of 2014, this family of three came home to Nabua from the U.S. because about a decade ago, the parents of the angel had entered into a covenant with Inang Katipanan. The Easter Angel is the only child of a Nabueño immigrant couple to the U.S. Manoy Allan, the angel’s father, works in a drugstore, and Manay Ruby, her mother, is a full-time hospital nurse. The life trajectories of the Easter Angel’s parents leading to their homecoming in Nabua for the fulfilment of their contract with Inang Katipanan reflect some of the postcolonial experiences of Filipinos pursuing education, job searches, family-making, and ritual practices that are now heavily inflected by global forces affecting the movement of people and their families.

Figure 4.3.1 The 2014 Easter Angel making faces while being made up for the balo-balo.
Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby both completed their elementary education in the province. Like many Nabueños pursuing “better” college education, Manoy Allan graduated from a medical technical college in Manila, with qualifications to become an X-ray technician. Manay Ruby, stayed in the province, and her desires for higher education mirrored global demands for labor in the medical profession. Observing the growing demand for nurses in the early 1990s, she shifted from studying dentistry to nursing. However, the supply of nurses was beginning to balloon and finding work was more difficult than she had imagined. The abundance of nursing graduates also led to an exploitative labor practice in the Philippines where fresh graduates could only “volunteer” at the hospitals without pay. During an interview in her parents’ home in Nabua, she told me that at that time, not having a “backer” made finding work even more difficult. She enumerated to me her seemingly endless list of failed applications and I playfully teased, “Luya ay!” (What a weakling!). She chuckled loudly. Recovering from our shared laughter, she told me, “An kaya kintana abo man akong mag-abroad, ‘gin. Uda sana opportunity sadi” (I would not have wanted to go abroad, dear. But there was no opportunity here).

It was in 1998, five years after graduating from nursing that she gave up on finding a local job (whether in the medical profession or not), and she finally flew to Saudi Arabia where she worked as a nurse for almost three years. Returning to Nabua in 2002 for her annual holiday, she was informed by an aunt vacationing from the U.S. about an opening in a nursing home in Seattle. This time, with the needed backer from her own kin network and with a connection who could help her adjust in a foreign land, she could move to the U.S. sooner than she had expected.

91 A “backer” is a person in a position of power who can often endorse people to improve chances for getting jobs and other ventures.
In 2004, after only a year of work in the U.S., she returned to Nabua to marry Manoy Allan. But without the needed documents for reunification in the U.S., Manoy Allan was left-behind in Nabua. The following years were spent sorting out the legalities and the conditions for building an immigrant family life in the U.S. They had been wanting a child but she was unable to conceive during her annual visits from the U.S.

Timothy Church (1986, 56) finds that in the Philippines, the family is “generally the basic unit of production” not only in work, but also in religious activities. As Church writes, religious activities such as the maintenance of saintly icons and participation in religious processions are of familial, and not of individual, concern. Researchers have also written about social expectations around kinship in the Philippines where children play an important role in the household such as helping as soon as they can with work, in taking care of both the young and the elderly, and later, perpetuating familial assets and lineage. Manoy Allan’s and Manay Ruby’s prospects were finally looking good because of promising work in the U.S., but family life seemed incomplete without a child of their own. It is often heard in Nabua that not having children of your own is “kanugon” (wasteful) because couples will be unable to pass on their good genetic or character traits or the fruits of their hard work. Without a child, couples are thought to miss the opportunity for receiving affection, care and support in the future. Facing the anxieties of transnational separation, a child would also serve as a bind between the couple that can strengthen their efforts to build togetherness.

Manoy Allan told me that while he was left-behind in Nabua, he often heard from his elders and from the local church that devotees could enter into a covenant with Inang Katipanan, Nabua’s Marian icon with whom the parents or relatives of the participating angels often make covenants. She can be likened to Mexico’s Lady of Guadalupe (Brandes 1988), as she is believed
to speak in the local tongue, and listen to the prayers of the faithful in the town. On the third year of their marriage, hoping for a miraculous intervention, Manoy Allan who was still in Nabua, made a vow with the local icon: should they be blessed with a child, they would one day return to Nabua and have their child participate in the balo-balo. For Manoy Allan who was residing in Nabua while his wife was overseas, a locally housed patron saint could be reached out to during times of uncertainty and insecurity as they built a new and, at that time, long-distance, partnership. After his contract with Inang Katipanan was sealed, things began to settle more easily. Manay Ruby’s nursing job was well-paying and stable and soon she was able to buy a house. She quickly received her American citizenship that allowed her to start the process of Manoy Allan’s immigration to the United States. It was in 2009, the fifth year of their marriage, that Manoy Allan was finally able to join Manay Ruby in their new home. On top of all this good fortune, they say thanks to the generosity of Inang Katipanan, Manay Ruby bore a child in the same year of their reunification.

In her analysis of the fulfillment of religious vows made to the Amang Hinulid or the “dead Christ” in lowland Bicol, Cannell (1999) brings up the concepts of ‘utang’ (debt) and ‘tabang’ (help) in the process of making promises to the sacred. Cannell finds parallelisms with such sacred vows with requests for aid made by a family member from their kin in everyday secular life. For example, money that is borrowed from family members during times of extreme need tends to be perceived as help rather than debt. With the loan seen as help, the borrower may express gratitude for it, pay later in monetary or in kind, or sometimes, the debt is simply dissolved or forgotten. Cannell finds that in cases where debts are forgotten, the lender of assistance sees the unpaid debt as a shared resource, or support for a family in need which means that debts are not negatively valued. In the same way that I argued in Chapter 2 that not-doing
might be productive, Cannell argues that the non-payment of debts can be productive as they perpetuate relations between family and community members who provide aid to each other as long as the conditions of the relations are seen by both parties as mutually beneficial. Cannell finds an ambiguity in the forging of Bicolanos’ contracts with the dead Christ where the sacred is understood as a willing giver of aid who does not expect anything in return. But Cannell also describes the vows made by Bicolanos with the dead Christ as a form of “conditional exchange” as they are conditioned upon the fulfilment of the request. Meanwhile, Koki Seki (2002) characterized the vows made by the migrant fisherfolk in Cebu as “proposed exchanged” in that the contents of the vow are articulated by the devotee. The individual crafts the contents of the proposal, and can even withdraw from it, should they desire. Thus, even if the concept of “supernatural sanction” looms while the petitioner’s promise is unfulfilled, the devotees in Seki’s ethnography are aware that relations with the sacred can be changed through acts of “imploring, appeasing, and negotiating” (127) which means that devotees have “flexible interaction with the saints” (126).\textsuperscript{92} Scholarship on Southeast Asia has pointed to a similar fluidity, mutability, and negotiability of the power of the sacred in everyday life across a number of locations. In these areas power is not hierarchical and absolute but rather relationally and contextually constructed (Errington 1990; Cannell 1995; Wolters 1999).

The sense of ambiguity and variability in the acts of forging and fulfilling a contract with the sacred is also evident in Manoy Allan’s decision to forge a contract with Inang Katipanan. Proximity and place affect the devotees’ desire to forge covenants and build intimacy with the

\textsuperscript{92} Seki (2002) found that there are three kinds of vows made by Cebuano migrant fishermen in their making of a contract with their local icon. Contracts forged during life crises are completed through the making of an offering. Offerings or sacrifices can also be made to the local saint as a way of asking for good returns, and finally, the perpetual vows comprise consistent offerings or annual pilgrimage done to honor the local saint.
sacred, as seen in the case of Manoy Allan, but there is also a looming sense of ambiguity in maintaining faith in the contract made with the sacred. As can be discerned from the couple’s planning of their return, there is also flexibility in fulfilling one’s part of the covenant – a flexibility that may be compared to how contracts are perceived and negotiated by other devotees in the Philippines. Asked about the covenant he had made with Inang Katipanan, Manoy Allan told me, “Uda man nganako mauuda” (I thought there would be nothing to lose anyway).

Manay Ruby added that it was probably because of the icon’s proximity that she has earned many local followers in Nabua, including her husband. Manoy Allan added, “Kumbaga bistado. Bistado ko na si Inang Katipanan…” (It’s because she is familiar to me. I already know Inang Katipanan). But Manoy Allan also finished his sentence with a joke that his familiarity with her is in fact “buko man masyado” (not too intense).

Manoy Allan asked for Inang Katipanan’s divine intervention thinking that he had “nothing to lose” by doing so. Inang Katipanan was “just there” during the moment that his prayers needed to be heard, even if he recognized that his familiarity with her is “not too intense.” Nabueño elders may have already testified to the trustworthiness of the local icon in granting her devotees’ wishes, but present-day believers also do not unreasonably succumb to a kind of faith until they personally experience the potency of the sacred (Figure 4.3.2). But with Inang Katipanan having already demonstrated her power by granting Manoy Allan’s request for a child, Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby will need to demonstrate their reliability and capacity to fulfill their side of the contract. In their case, the actualization of the contract necessitated the long-term planning of their homecoming that involved first working towards family reunification and financial readiness. Having solidified their beginnings in the U.S., they were finally ready to
return to Nabua. Besides, Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby are ready to forge a new contract with the divine as they now hope for another miracle: to be blessed with a second child.

Figure 4.3.2 A family tree showing devotion to Inang Katipanan through the generations. This is printed in the festival souvenir program commemorating the 300 years of the veneration of Inang Katipanan in Nabua.
Writing before the beginning of the exportation of Filipino labor in the 1970s, Jocano (1967a, 44) saw that the “cabecera-visita” (center-periphery) orientation of Catholicism “has not substantially changed.” The Catholic doctrine of course is an underlying element of Philippine religious ritual. Jocano draws a distinction between “urban” and “rural” versions of Catholicism in the Philippines. But a reading based on geographical delineation is increasingly problematic especially in an era when the borders between the rural and urban are dissolving into each other. Global migration continually impacts human solidarities and social organizations, as well as kin and community relations, furthering complicating the itinerary of our analyses. With the effects of migration so prevalent in the everyday lives of Filipinos, literature needs to shift towards considering the transnational circulation of religious belief and ritual, corresponding with Clifford Geertz’s (2005, 12) assessment about religion as now having “a series of directed flows” which means that people carry with them their faiths as they move. How mobilities transform religious practice is certainly important but the literature has mostly focused on how Filipino migrants practice religion in diasporic space. In the case of the balo-balo, the experiences of ritual participants need to be situated within the conditions in the Town of Dollars that have

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93 Jocano (1967a, 45) calls “urban” the kind of Catholicism in which “indigenous beliefs are attenuated in Church-allowed, though not sanctioned rites.” Meanwhile in “rural Catholicism,” Catholic beliefs are attenuated in locally-sanctioned practices.

94 Research on the practice of faith among Filipino migrants have shown religion as increasingly negotiated within hybridized beliefs. Researchers have looked at traditional ritual practices that threaten transnational kinship, for example, in the case of Ifugao migrants who are now Christians in Hong Kong (McKay 2010), at the Sto. Nino Festival in New Zealand as a form of cultural expression of the Filipino diaspora that seeks to interweave notions of family, home, the sacred, national/regional identity, and transnational settlement (Tondo 2010), at Filipinos’ intersecting identities as pilgrims, migrants, and tourists that transform the pilgrimage site overseas in dynamic ways (Liebelt 2010), and at how religion crafts and transforms ideas about the self, womanhood, and marriage while working in the Middle East (Pingol 2010), among many others. Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot (2010) shows how Filipino migrants, their precarious and irregular status as laborers notwithstanding, reanimate and enliven churches in France. Faier (2009) brings up how the Catholicism of Filipinos in a rural village in Japan craft an image of themselves as good brides.
engendered their migration, and later, their participation in ritual. Weaving migration studies into local ritual practice is a necessary route that must be taken in the contemporary ethnography of ritual in the Philippines.

One could argue that the balo-balo announces the emergence of “new elites” during a time that agriculture and other land-based industries are considered less prestigious sources of income, and when individualized professional work has become the most desired occupation as it promises outward migration (to the cities or overseas) and thus upward mobility. However, it is important to note that Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby in fact do not descend from either the landed old elites from the Spanish colonial period or the first generation of migrants in Nabua related directly to the U.S. Navy men. Instead they belong to the wave of overseas Filipino overseas workers who responded to the high global demand for healthcare industry professionals. The couple’s narrative of struggle experienced prior to their attainment of the “good life,” a life rendered possible by their overseas migration, was made public by their only daughter’s participation in ritual. This trajectory is directly related to the professionalization of Filipino labor that began in the American colonial period, and that has resulted in the bulk export of “competitively-priced” Filipino migrant labor. Manoy Allan’s and Manay Ruby’s shared narrative is one imbued with a sense of the difficult road taken towards overseas migration. As the winning angel descends from the bell tower to announce the awaited news that Christ has risen, the viewing public recalls the reason for the child’s participation and the donations that the family has raised for the church; these reflections circulate in the town as narratives of success, prestige, wealth, good health, and influence – and as evidence of a good life that was achieved with the intervention of Nabua’s very own protector and divine mother.
4.4 Forging Kinships with Inang Katipanan

Son of U.S. navy man and Nabueño scholar of religion A. Gimenez Fajardo (2011) writes, “In their [Nabueños] own particular historical situation, they clearly experienced Mary as actively involved in their lives and personally concerned with their plight in Nabua.” From the above discussion of the migration context of the 2014 Easter Angel’s family, I move to explore Nabueño faith in Inang Katipanan as clearly understood by its contemporary believers in Nabua and beyond as intensified by Inang Katipanan’s and Nabueños’ mutual work of nurturing intimacies with each other. The image of the local Mother Mary with whom Nabueños make a contract is embodied in an icon standing in a glassed ambry beside the main retablo of the church of Nabua; alongside Mary is the equally revered sculpture of Inang Angustia (Figure 4.4.1). For Asad (1993), religions and their associated rituals have historically shaped modern constructions of the self, the people’s embodiment of ritual practices, and their relationship with the sacred. “Folk” Catholic rituals such as the ton-ton can be found today in formerly colonized countries in which religion was used as a powerful ideologizing tool that aided in the casting of the empires’ wider reach over indigenous populations (Beezley, Martin, and French 1994; Seki 2002; Gross 2009; Kendall 2009; Llana 2009; De la Cruz 2015). In Nabua, testimonies about the benevolence of the sacred are passed on from generation to generation, just as Manoy Allan heard from his own elders about Inang Katipanan. These testimonies inform us about the ways that consciousness becomes embedded in the minds of ritual practitioners whose desires (e.g., to

95 The “Inang Angustia” (Mother of Sorrows) is a pieta said to have mysteriously appeared during a volcanic eruption in the neighboring city of Iriga. The miracles, myths and histories surrounding Inang Angustia deserves a separate discussion that I hope to follow through in a future work. Reverend Zosimo Ma. Sañado (1997) suggests that Inang Angustia and Inang Katipanan “are two different titles attributed by Nabueños to the same person of Mary.”
have a child, to be healed, to work overseas, etc.) enable the creation of intimate connections through covenants made with the divine such as Inang Katipanan.

Figure 4.4.1 The image of Inang Katipanan in Nabua, with the altar of Nabua’s Holy Cross Parish in the background. Source: (Katipanan 300: 1711-2011 2011)

Deirdre de la Cruz (2015) has already demonstrated that cultural religious productions, such as songs, rituals, performances, novenas, and medallions, are indispensable to the spread of faith in the Philippines. In this section, I discuss how a novena carries the message about Inang
Katipanan’s undying love for her children. The novena can be recited by devotees anytime and anywhere, but the church facilitates its larger community recital annually for nine days in the months of May and July. Its contents can be grouped into two parts. The first part is recited only by the person leading the novena. The leader reads ‘Kabtang kan Historia’ (Chapters of History) each day of the novena which narrates different local historical events (I will return to the novena’s work of religio-historical interpretation further below). The second part includes the ‘gozos’ or couplets which are sung in chorus during each day of the novena. On the last and ninth day, the ‘Pagbabago Inang Katipanan nin Pagtipan’ (Renewal of the Covenant) is recited in chorus. All verses reiterate the miracles and blessings said to have been granted by God, through the intercession of Inang Katipanan, in response to the persistent supplication of the locals.

The devotion of Nabueños to Inang Katipanan traces its beginnings to the Spanish colonization of the Philippines. The text of the novena written to revere the local Mother references the Cuaderno, the only known document that tells us about the town’s way of life during the early years of colonial encounter. The Cuaderno begins its documentation of events affecting the group of settlements in 1571, 50 years after explorer Ferdinand Magellan landed on the shores of the Philippine archipelago. This is also when Augustinian Friar Alonzo Gimenez, accompanied by other Spaniards, began to survey Lupa (which came to be called Nabua), a hamlet which was headed by a chieftain called Panga. Nabua’s past as recorded in the Cuaderno

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96 There are two church-facilitated readings of the novena. The first one is held from April 25 (after the Holy Week celebrations) until May 4 (the second day of the town’s three-day festival). It is during this time that Nabua celebrates its official town festival when there are many community feasts, processions, public social dancing, and beauty pageants. The second reading leads up to July 28, the day of religious festival held in honor of Inang Katipanan.
is effectively a history of the founding of the local Catholic Church which today hosts the balo-balo and ton-ton.

The Cuaderno marks the earthquake in Nabua in 1711 as the beginning of the Nabueños’ veneration of Inang Katipanan and their making of a perpetual covenant with her. In the Cuaderno, the account depicting the beginnings of the covenant with Inang Katipanan depicts Parish Priest Vicente Bastillo as a central figure who organized the gathering of the people in Nabua following the destructive earthquake. The Cuaderno and the novena reflect nuances in the crafting of local history and memory. The novena elides the organizing role that the parish priest played, highlighting instead the locals’ unwavering faith and agency in forging a covenant with Inang Katipanan. The novena records:

In the year 1711, when the parish priest was Fr. Vicente Bastillo and the town captain was Don Domingo Pagtimbangan, there occurred an earthquake so intense that people thought it was the beginning of the town’s end. The elders knelt and prayed by the beloved altar of the Sacred Sacrament which cradled the Virgin Mary, Our Mother of the Immaculate Conception, and they begged for the forgiveness of their sins and they entered themselves into a covenant with her. They vowed that all of the town’s people henceforth will celebrate an annual festival in her honor every July 28, and everybody will give alms to the church including their children, in accordance with what makes them happy… It was due to the pleading of all the townspeople that the intense earthquake stopped, with the help of God and with the intercession of the Holiest Mary, the Virgin of the Covenant.\(^{97}\)

\(^{97}\) Each entry in the Cuaderno begins with the year that that the entry was written, followed by the capitán de banuaan (captain of the town) of the time or period being chronicled. For comparative purposes, I write here an excerpt of the account for 1711, as recorded in the Cuaderno: “DON DOMINGO PAGTEMBANGAN – …Parish Priest FR. Vicente Bastillo (1711-1712) called upon everyone to enter the church and to kneel by the altar, to ask for God’s forgiveness and to be adopted by the Virgin Mary, Our Mother of the Immaculate Conception, to save them from the tragedies. They were heard by Our Mother of the Immaculate Conception whose ambry was facing the Sacred Sacrament. The elders, upon witnessing the grandeur of her holy ambry, made a covenant that the town will celebrate a festival every year and celebrate mass in her honor. On the second day of the month of July, the town’s patron will be offered a festival during the town’s annual feast. On the third day after the town’s annual feast will be held the festival for the Mother of the Covenant and all the parents will offer alms, and the children who are part of their parents’ covenant, will also offer alms from the depth of their best intentions.”
According to the Cuaderno, the earthquake caused a fissure of about 40 “arms’ lengths” in depth near the church’s grounds (Figure 4.4.2). During such disasters in Nabua, as the novena wants to communicate, assistance from the heavens comes through Nabua’s divine kin. Inang Katipanan, beginning with this disaster, has sought on behalf of her children in Nabua, the assistance of ‘Dios na Makakamhan, kag-gibo nin Langit asin daga’ (God Almighty, creator of Heaven and earth). For example, the mention of her name ‘nakakabawas kan kaanggotan nin Dios asin nakataong kapatawaran kan samong mga kasalanan’ (reduces the wrath of God and gives pardon to us sinners). The novena portrays Inang Katipanan as bearing the power to influence, to impact change, and to command attention. The novena conjures her image as that of an approachable mother who is steadfast in extending help to those who seek her intercession, placing her in contrast with a male God who holds the power to create but is wrathful and inflicts damage.
Figure 4.4.2 An excerpt from a comic drawn by a devotee of Inang Katipanan. The comic is an adaptation of the account told in the Cuaderno. Source: (Katipanan 300: 1711-2011 2011)
As different kinds of epidemics and natural calamities are faced and overcome by the town (and also recorded in the Cuaderno), they are reiterated in the novena and Inang Katipanan’s gendered affection is repeatedly emphasized. She is portrayed as: ‘*Ina namong paalawan*’ (our mother of refuge), ‘*nag-ampon satuya*’ (one who adopted us), ‘*Inang mamoton*’ (our mother who loves us), ‘*nagdarang ugay satuya*’ (one who brought us compassion), and ‘*paratabang kaining banwaan*’ (helper of our town). Her affection overflows as she is ‘*maugayon*’ (full of compassion), ‘*maherakon*’ (full of pity), and ‘*mabansayon*’ (virtuous). The novena crafts the message that Inang Katipanan has many forms of motherly love that she demonstrates to Nabueños in response to their calls for help coupled with their dutiful embrace of the Catholic faith. The novena also brings to the fore the Catholic virtue of purity, but it arguably intermingles with Nabua’s local valuations about maintaining an untainted name. She preserves a ‘*ngaran*’ (name) that is ‘*mahamis*’ (the sweetest) and ‘*malinig asin may dakulang halaga*’ (of the cleanest and highest value). Having a pure and respected ngaran means that she could be relied upon in fulfilling her part of the contract. The Catholic sense of the Virgin Mother’s purity through immaculate conception is underplayed in the novena and instead the novena draws attention to the Virgin Mother’s “*malinig na ngaran*” (unblemished name) that is not intrinsic but that was *accumulatively earned* by always abiding by her word to protect her children in Nabua.

On the other hand, the people of Nabua – Inang Katipanan’s children – are portrayed in the novena as ‘*nagngangayo-ngayo*’ (pleading), ‘*umarang*’ (asking for something), ‘*nakikimaherak*’ (begging), and asking for ‘*pangataman*’ (care or adoption), among others. But the novena also expresses the expectations Nabueños have of Inang Katipanan. They demand to be ‘*soroga kami ni marhay*’ (defended dutifully) by the Holy Mother who is ‘*parasorog kaining banwaan*’ (defender of the town), and they express desires to ‘*kami man mapamuraway*’ (have a
comfortable life). The hopefuls pray ‘padanayon mo an samong marhay na pagkabuhay’ (bless our good livelihood), so that they may have a stable life to look forward to. They also appeal, ‘tawan mo kami nin malinaw asin matoninong na pagkagadan’ (give us a clear and peaceful death), to lessen the insecurities of life in Nabua which both Cuaderno and novena show has always been plagued by endless tribulations. The relationship between Inang Katipanan and Nabueños that the novena illustrates is one that is circumscribed by ideals about respectful relations between generations. The positioning of the sacred as mother in the novena could also be linked to the practice of intergenerational relations in everyday life where the “relational packaging of gender is not based on contrast but on comparability and equivalence” (C. Blanc-Szanton 1990, 382). The elder – in this case, Inang Katipanan – is respected, valued, adored, and her love and protection is constantly sought after by Nabueños. The couplets in the novena were written as if they are speaking the voice of the ancestors, and the readers of the novena express the relief of those before them: ‘Garadan na kuta kami kun di an saimong mabagsik na tabang’ (We would have already perished if it were not for your fierce propensity to help). The recurring epidemics and disasters in Nabua printed on the novena’s pages serve as reminders of the dangers that the town may confront should people forget the mutual covenant. Nabueños are depicted in the novena as pleading, but they hold and practice faith within their terms; they also demand aid, and should conditions become stable, they know how to remember her good deeds by circulating their gratefulness and faith.

The local novena deploys Inang Katipanan as a powerful mother who has the capacity to mediate and engender miracles. The power of Inang Katipanan arguably enters Nabueño consciousness through playing up gendered ideals about kinship that are repeatedly articulated in religious productions such as the local novena. However, the very concept of the covenant
transforms the relationship between Inang Katipanan and Nabueños from a hierarchical inter-generational relationship between mother and children into that of individuals who are accountable negotiators of contracts with the divine. Just as the saint has the power to grant miracles, her followers also accumulate prestige and power in the community. This kind of intimacy between the sacred Mother and her devotees in Nabua is also one that is passed on from one generation to another, and that is bound by divine contracts to ensure a long-lasting efficacy.

De la Cruz (2015, 6) has shown that since the introduction of the Marian icon in the Philippines in the 16th century, “Mary presided over communities in various incarnations and iconographies, terrestrially rooted, each possessing its own discrete titles, powers, and legends.” De la Cruz argues that this diversity of iconography of the Virgin Mother tells us that while “sacredness was plural,” devotion is “deeply tethered” to an iconographic representation of her that is “attached to land and geographically bound.”

As both the Cuarderno and the novena collaboratively iterate, even if there always seems to be an unfortunate tribulation that needs to be overcome, the intimacy between Inang Katipanan and her children in Nabua that was sustained since 1711 by their mutual observance of their covenant, could be relied upon. As Fajardo (2011) continues to write, “This intense and overwhelming perception of Mary’s presence and mercy was something that no outsider could understand or appreciate.” Writing about the 300th year of Nabua’s veneration of Inang Katipanan, Lilette P. Manauis (2011) writes that the enduring observance of Nabueños of their tipan were “years of faithfulness, perseverance

98 De la Cruz has observed a tendency in scholarship on Filipino Catholicism in demonstrating the uniqueness of religious practice in the Philippines. Such claims, De la Cruz (2015, 11) writes, often linked Filipinos’ faith in the “undue supremacy of Mary” to precolonial accounts that accorded women high status and mediating power. However, she notes that in her ethnography, references to respected women such as the ‘babaylans’ (shamans) who held high social status in precolonial Philippines were not casually referenced in devotees’ everyday practice of their faith.
and hope.” Manauis suggests that these were formative years that produced the people of Nabua. Manauis also suggests that the 300 years of faith in Inang Katipanan also marks the period during which the people of the town demonstrated their commitment to the promises they had made, as well as their unbreakable resilience in the face of never-ending tribulations.99

This nurtured intimacy between Inang Katipanan and the people in the Town of Dollars now crosses boundaries, but Nabua remains an important site for the fulfilment of the covenant made with her. Despite having moved overseas, believers such as Manoy Allan who sometimes think that intimacy with her is “not too intense,” foresee in ritual and its rehearsal an opportunity for a deepened kinship with the sacred. A contract that was made earlier needs to be fulfilled after prayers are heard, because after all, life that is frequently riddled with insecurities is better anchored in hope. In the face of anxieties in everyday life, people turn to the sacred, a realm that is conceived of in the form of an approachable and kind mother.

4.5 Production of Consciousness in the Novena

To focus only on the strength of one’s belief in Inang Katipanan may elide a critical discussion of the layers of consciousness that have become embedded in acts of fulfilling contracts such as the performance of the balo-balo and through the recitation of novenas such as those in Nabua.100 Pointing to the dates and references to the Cuaderno that appear on the pages

99 Here I use to term “resilience” with caution, in agreement with Ninotchka Rosca (2013) who writes of resilience as a commonly used characterization of the Filipino people that tends to depict a shared “worldview which has to be lived in situ.” Rosca suggests that Filipinos do not “spring back” to a condition “sans sharpness, inert and passive, non-evaluating of what happens...” Rosca therefore asserts that the concept of resilience diverges from a discourse on the Filipino subject as transformable, and also as breakable, by tragedies.

100 The souvenir programs on which the Cuaderno are printed are not publicly available as copies are only given to the donors or sponsors who help pay for their printing. In contrast, the novena can be readily purchased from vendors at the church’s entrance.
of the novena for Inang Katipanan, a devout community leader in Nabua told me during an interview, “O bayda na, Dada, nangyari talaga ‘di!” (Look, Dada, this really happened!). In this section, I continue by returning to the novena for the Inang Katipanan to examine what it omits and adds in its appropriation of historical text, following De la Cruz (2015, 15) that “to ignore this cornerstone of the faith is to overlook the motive power that accounts not only for conversion’s ‘successes’ but also for its violence when it comes to dealing with the particularities of human experience.”

The novena repeatedly cites naturally-occurring tragedies and disasters experienced by Nabueños, portraying their effects to be so unpredictable and devastating that one could only rely on the empathy of the divine to perhaps scale down their impact. For example, the Cuaderno records outbreaks of cholera and smallpox that were inadvertently introduced to the local population and that caused numerous deaths. The high mortality rate during the Spanish colonial era in Nabua recorded in the Cuaderno reflects Ken de Bevoise’s (1995) arguments that the processes of organization under the colonial government (e.g., improvement of transportation, sex trade, crop management, etc.) came hand in hand with the spread of infectious diseases to the local population. However, whatever anguish felt in Nabua from these colonially-inflicted losses is absent in the novena, in effect painting a picture of Nabua’s past as one that is underscored by a long history of grieving mostly caused by natural disasters, while circumventing the darker side of history in which the local population was often rendered

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[^101]: The Cuaderno indicates the highest number of recorded deaths from cholera as 1,340, from the years 1881 to 1882. The Cuaderno is peppered with accounts of death from epidemics. Some recorded accounts of mortality include those in the years: 1696 (203, from cholera), 1704 (207, from smallpox), 1724 (72, from smallpox), 1750 (147, from cholera), 1808 (762, smallpox), 1830 (367, from cholera), 1856 (238, from cholera), 1863-1864 (172 from cholera.), 1879-1880 (388, smallpox).
vulnerable by tragic epidemics that were introduced by colonizers. These deaths from fatal
diseases are repeatedly emphasized in the Cuaderno, but minimized in the novena – even if the
novena sources its integrity from the same historical text.

The novena exploits the instability of the environment to motivate and strengthen people’s
trust in Inang Katipanan, consistent with how Bicolanos find “spiritual significance” (Andres
2005, 37) and with how they deploy a “notion of sharedness” in the experience of natural
calamities that frequently devastate the region. While the novena emphasizes local worldviews
on the power of natural calamities to organize human solidarity and faith in divine intervention,
it leaves out an account of history focused on colonizer-inflicted violences during the Spanish
and early American colonial periods that the Cuaderno also records. In 1845 the Cuaderno
notes, “The rice fields were dry, and all the people ran out of rice, and those who had rice stored
were the only ones who were happy…. ” For 1791, the Cuaderno draws another clear picture of
the local condition during the Spanish colonization, “The people are starving, and they are being
whipped by those in power in the town under the belief that they are indolent…” Such lack, if
not absence, of political critique or commentary in local religious content is by no means unique
to Nabua. Peterson (2007, 320) observes a similar tendency in the Central Philippines with the
‘sinakulo,’ whose narratives are crafted by local elites and so tend to subsume religious
experience as retold by the rural poor and the indigenous peoples. 102

In its deployment of historical text, the novena overlooks some narratives while
strengthening ideas about the power of the sacred. With this in mind, it begs to be asked: why
does the narrative of the Holy Mother’s grief over the death of her only son that is often

102 The sinakulo is a dramatization of the passion of Christ performed in the Philippines during the Holy Week.
highlighted during the Holy Week not appear more strongly in the novena? This same narrative has inspired different forms of iconographic representation and religious dramas in the Philippines and around the world, and yet this is not so much accentuated in the novena.

Fernandez (1996, 169) locates the relatability of Mother Mary’s grief that is narrativized in the Holy Week as deriving from a “Filipino folk understanding” of mother-child affections. If the announcement made by the Easter Angel revolves around the story of the reunification of mother and child, and if the novena largely capitalizes on the motherly love of Inang Katipanan for her children in Nabua, then it is only fair to ask: why are the accounts of the forced separation of families in the Cuaderno absent in the novena? In the Cuaderno, we read about the ‘garo bahang luha’ (tears that flowed like flood) shed by families in 1805 that lost their unmarried young men to mass conscription with no clear purpose.103 The Cuaderno also chronicles: “Consider the pain that parents went through upon learning about the fate of their children. It is as if death has come to each house in the Province who had their young men taken.” We might leap to the American colonial period, to briefly recall Lolo George Masculino’s story about his mother and aunt who went to the town hall “crying like a son of a gun,” to appeal for his release from his forced enlistment into the IJA’s labor camp (Chapter 3). However, such anguish and colonial aftermaths are not retold in the novena as the novena concentrates on tragedies caused by acts of God. The

103 The Cuaderno also records the recruitment of soldiers for fighting in the Moro resistance, such as the one in 1834. Able-bodied young men were also conscripted as soldiers and laborers to build infrastructure in the region and in Manila. When families began to hide their young men from random conscription, the colonial government ensured that the supply of able-bodied men continued, and they held a lottery with the names of the young men in the town, with the selected ones being required to present themselves at the centro (in 1837). The Cuaderno records that in 1805, the young men recruited were of “three sizes,” presumably for different kinds of labor. Young men were also taken from Nabua for various purposes in the years 1771, 1797, 1804, 1835, 1842 and many others.
The religious messages that are authored into religious texts such as the novena to Inang Katipanan, I suggest, are also linked to how the American occupation panned out locally in Nabua. The impact of the American occupation in Nabua is very thinly mentioned in the novena, creating an impression of that period as rather uneventful, as if all forms of social and cultural transition and engineering had almost come to a halt. In the ensuing 50 years of American rule, the novena mentions only the years 1902 (cholera), 1915 (typhoon), 1917 and 1919 (flu), and 1929 (flood). But the Cuaderno has a significant record during the period of transition to the American colonial government. While the novena circumvents all forms of governance and organization introduced under the American period that were mentioned in the Cuaderno, what it curiously adds to its own history-making is an account of the Japanese colonial period:

[Over] four years during World War II, beginning December 8, 1941 until April 1945, with the help of God and the Beloved Virgin, Mother of the Covenant, the Japanese were unable to settle in Nabua. Arriving from Legazpi, they planned to set up headquarters at the Central School, but it seemed that a force was pushing them to Iriga. In Iriga, they built a cemetery on a hilltop, which we know today is home to the grotto for Our Mother of Lourdes. The Japanese were angry to find Nabua deserted as the people have already fled to the farther villages and hills. They wanted to burn the church, the schools, and the houses. But when they entered the church, they saw the Mother of the Covenant and her beloved Son, and as if a bomb had been dropped on them, they all hurriedly returned to Iriga. It was due to the people’s strong petition to God and to Our Mother of the Covenant that there were no casualties in Nabua.

This fragment in the novena’s text about the Japanese occupation returns us to the celebration of the balo-balo and more particularly, its “commercialization” that Manoy Allan and

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104 For example, the creation of the first public schoolhouse in the town, and the creation of public markets, among others, are noted in the Cuaderno.
Manay Ruby talked about during an interview, and to which I will return below. The American colonial period facilitated the opening of U.S. Navy jobs for residents of small agricultural towns such as Nabua, impacting local perceptions of wealth and success. The FRA Branch 127 (Chapter 3) in fact contributed donations for the construction of the bell tower used during the balo-balo. With the dollars that the U.S. Navy men from Nabua earned during active service and with their monthly retirement pension, they were able to extend financial support to many extended family members, and to easily afford to sponsor feasts for the entire community that accompany Holy Week events such as the balo-balo.

The American colonial government’s “high mission” in the Philippines was meant to create what could be called “benevolent ripples” in different aspects of local life in their newly controlled territory. U.S. President McKinley’s speech delivered in December 21, 1898 in Washington after the defeat and surrender of the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay, speaks of the distinctive brand of benevolence that existed under the “free flag of the USA.” This assimilationist discourse was folded into the U.S. civilizing and Christianizing mission but at the same time, as McKinley’s speech indicates, Americans were also careful not to uproot the Catholicism-based order in the archipelago. Beyond proselytization, which was among the core projects of the Spanish colonizers, Americans were focused on making good use of the Philippines’ seapower and strategic location to benefit its expanding naval force – an important arm of the U.S. empire in which Nabueño men came to participate at the turn of the 20th century. As McKinley also says in his speech: “All ports and places in the Philippine Islands in the actual possession of the land and naval forces of the United States will be opened to the commerce of all friendly nations.” McKinley adds that those who aid and submit to their mission in the archipelago “will receive the reward of its support and protection” (italics in original). This
discourse of “American benevolence” trickled down to Nabua. Fragments of the past came to be interwoven with faith in the novena, rendering a religio-historical narrative in which the violences brought by multiple colonizations are selectively sanitized, elided, and emphasized.

4.6 Familial Solidarity in (a “Commercialized”? ) Rehearsal of Ritual

In the evening of the balo-balo, the Easter Angel’s costumes were neatly laid out on the bed: two pairs of bloomers; a customized harness (called ‘palaka’ or frog); a golden necklace; two kinds of white shoes (one with soles, and one like soft socks), and; a pair of white stockings. Two white gowns are hung on the handles of the closet. Manoy Allan entered the room and rearranged the objects on the bed and smoothened each with his palms. He told me that the grander and more sequined gown will be worn in tonight’s balo-balo although this occasion is a mere rehearsal, while the simpler gown is reserved for tomorrow’s actual ton-ton ritual. I asked the parents of the Easter Angel how their daughter will arrive at the church grounds and if they have prepared any gimmicks that will accompany their daughter’s descent. They were confused by what I meant, so I told them about the entrance procession that I saw during the previous year, in which a participating angel (a runner-up) rode a sidecar decorated with flowers and balloons, trailed by family members and supporters, and then escorted by a marching band. Some of the angels’ descents were accompanied by butterflies, bubbles, and fireworks. The Easter Angel’s parents are critically aware that the Search for Easter Angel is a “popularity contest” and that it has become “commercialized,” as they told me in their own words. But having lived overseas for nearly a decade, Manay Ruby and Manoy Allan have already forgotten

105 The harness is worn under the gown and it serves to hold the child as they ascend and descend the bell tower while attached to the tip of a bamboo pole.
about the spectacularization of prestige and wealth that is often made manifest during balo-balo. They told me that they will just arrive at the church grounds in their car, without additional extravaganza.

Doreen Fernandez (1996, 168–69) writes that there are three types of religious dramas in the Philippines. The first type includes reenactments of the liturgy. The second type are those which have absolutely no liturgical basis, but are held as part of the feasts listed in the local liturgical calendars. The ton-ton belongs to the third type which are spin-offs from the liturgy, which, through re-framing and re-telling, have become the narratives of publicly and widely held religious dramas. The story of Christ meeting his mother after his resurrection, which is rehearsed during the balo-balo and solemnly theatricalized in the ton-ton does not exist in the New Testament, where Christ only appeared to Mary Magdalene and the apostles. Therefore, the balo-balo falls outside of the three categories of religious rituals in the Philippines described by Fernandez as it is only a practice of a spin-off from the scripture that seeks to perfect the biblical story. I have translated the balo-balo as “rehearsal” for it is popularly recognized locally as the dry run of the ton-ton. In everyday use, however, the word balo-balo could also mean “not real.” Interestingly, even if the balo-balo is known by everyone in Nabua as being “not real,” it is during its staging that the angels don more elaborate gowns, and additional effects such as fireworks are allowed and even anticipated by the excited crowd.

Much of the literature on religious performances in the Philippines has ethnographized rituals during the moments that they are celebrated or they are reflections on ritual and spiritual

106 An example of the first type is dramatization of the “Washing of the Feet” (Christ’s). The “dotoc,” a “novena-performance” held for nine consecutive nights to dramatize the search for the Holy Cross, is one example of the second type (Llana 2009).
practice (Ileto 1979; Mulder 1992; Trimillos 1992; Cannell 1995; Seki 2002; Peterson 2007, 2011; Bautista and Bräunlein 2014). There remains a wide gap in scholarship on the process of crafting, of becoming “ready,” and of rehearsing, contemporary hybrid religious rituals such as the ton-ton. The balo-balo is also a practice or dry run of what is arguably a theatrical spectacle but the idea of readiness, perfecting a “craft,” directorial vision, and other elements, do not fit neatly into the process of rehearsal. Thus, it could be asked: Why is there still a need to stage a public and grand rehearsal of the ton-ton if the important message about Christ’s resurrection is theatricalized anyway in the dawn of Easter Sunday? Apart from the kinning and religious narratives that I have discussed above, what is being reiterated in the balo-balo that is not, or that cannot be, articulated in the “more serious” ton-ton? To answer these questions, I turn to the familial and economic dimensions that have become encoded into the project of fulfilling a sacred contract. I develop reflections on how commitments to ideas about the family, particularly in regard to familial honor and solidarity, intersect with the balo-balo, and how the balo-balo as a “commercialized” and spectacular rehearsal facilitates the public performance of such familial projects.

The balo-balo, in fact, has its own series of rehearsals held in the church grounds or in the homes of the participating families. Two days before the staging of the 2014 balo-balo, all the participating angels and their parents and guardians were invited to a rehearsal at a shed in the

107 The word “rehearsal,” originates from old French word “re-herser” which means “preparing the soil before planting seeds” (McAuley 1998, 1). The rehearsal is held in a private room without audiences and in spaces that are not very grand. During rehearsal, the self (actor) engages in a process of “becoming” (Sloan 2012) often under the watchful eye of the director who ties all production details with their vision for the show (Lyon 1982). It is during the rehearsal process that the director, performers, and other members of the crew, expect from each other a commitment to refining “bits” and “business” of the production (Lyon, 83). The rehearsal process is also understudied even in the study of Western theater (Stern 2007).
church grounds. A trainer-volunteer moderated the rehearsal, directing the angels who took turns standing on a table, to imagine that they are suspended from the bell tower. The trainer-volunteer reminded the guardians of each angel that they need not worry about their child’s readiness for the event (Figure 4.6.1). The church has already organized a children’s choir whose members are tasked to deliver the angels’ assigned lines and songs should the angels, hovering over what could be an overwhelming crowd of spectators, forget their spiel out of nervousness and panic.108 In other locations in the Philippines, some Holy Week penitents engage in self-flagellation (Peterson 2007; Bautista 2017) or in radical acts of self-transformation, as in the case of the transvestite elders in Cebu (Alcedo 2007). In Nabua, such public exhibition of suffering through self-flagellation is not visible nor practiced during the Holy Week, especially not in the balo-balo.109 The fact that no such pain and suffering are publicly performed in the balo-balo needs to be understood within the particular context of both balo-balo and ton-ton – events which feature neither the narrative of the meeting of Christ and his mother, nor the two eminent holy icons that are publicly appearing on this day, but instead the participating angels who serve as vehicles to the actualization of their parents’ covenant with the sacred.

108 The pre-balo-balo rehearsals are also occasions for other participants of the ritual to practice their own roles. For example, the choir and orchestra also gather during such rehearsals but there appears to be no all-encompassing requirement that all individual roles which makeup the balo-balo need to perfect their roles. During the pre-balo-balo rehearsal that I attended, less than twenty musicians showed up and the number ballooned to exactly 100 during the evening of the balo-balo itself.

109 Among the elderly transvestite performers in the Ati-Atihan Festival for the Child Christ in Cebu City, the fulfilment of vows includes the public display of “suffering” through the combined labor of transformation by donning heavy costumes and suffering through intense street dancing (Alcedo 2007). Self-flagellants and nailees to the cross during Holy Week demonstrate even more intense suffering (Zialcita 1986; Bautista 2017).
Figure 4.6.1 The 2014 Easter Angel during a pre-balo-balo rehearsal. 
She practiced sliding a bracelet into her arm that was attached to the black veil of grief.

In Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby’s covenant with Inang Katipanan, their petition for a child was granted. The fulfilment of their part of the covenant required their family’s homecoming to Nabua and their daughter’s participation in the ritual. When a child that is requested from a sacred contract is born, the child automatically becomes “ipinanuga” – an offering to a religious ritual that the petitioner must take part in eventually. The “stars” of the balo-balo are not sanctioned for their mistakes for, not only are they understood to be too young to seriously commit to perfecting their roles, but they are also physical embodiments of miracles of the power of the sacred. The angels are left to cry or perform other unscripted acts to the
amusement of their kin and the audience, inadvertently becoming part of the spectacle. In Nabua, an unforgettable moment that is told until today occurred about three decades ago. It had involved Joenin Masculino Orias, who has several retired navy men on both sides of his family, when he descended from the bell tower in a tantrum, letting out a litany of curse words in the local tongue. Such incidences involving children’s imperfect performances during a ritual would not be seen as sacrilegious, but instead they add to the novelty of what becomes for the audience a delightful spectacle. While all participants understand that mistakes made during the balo-balo are tolerated, the Easter Angel is repeatedly reminded that dropping the black veil of the Virgin Mother during the actual ton-ton might bring bad luck to the family or community (Figure 4.6.2). The Easter Angel is not only a vehicle for the completion of their parents’ or kin’s covenant, but a bearer of omens anticipated by the community. But for a child to be granted this role, a family must first “win” the year’s Easter Angel contest. It is within this mode of flexibility that the realm of the secular, such as the public demonstration of success and wealth, emerges as a space that is allowed to blend with the sacred in extravagant ways, even if they may clash with the Catholic virtues of simplicity and prudence. The balo-balo’s quality of “rehearsality” opens space for the “non-sacred” elements of ritual such as the accumulation of

\[\text{110} \text{ The deployment of children in rituals arguably descends from the Judeo-Christian doctrine of sacrificing the firstborn; the firstborn is the best offering that could be made so that God would listen. It could be argued that children participants are pulled into the Easter rituals by the promises often made by their parents, rendering them as non-consenting vehicles deployed for the fulfilment of a covenant that they were not party to. However, the “rehearsality” of balo-balo undermines a reading of the ritual as tending to diminish children’s agency and voice. I credit theater director and performance scholar Dennis Gupa for this insight, as well as for enriching my discussion on the rehearsality of the balo-balo.}\]

\[\text{111} \text{ William Beeman’s (1993) distinction between theater and spectacle appears inapplicable in this discussion of the balo-balo because of the balo-balo’s palimpsestic dynamic. Filipino audiences look forward to Holy Week rituals as entertainment rather than as time for deepening religious belief (Peterson 2007) and therefore they could be seen as simultaneously theatrical and spectacular.}\]
prestige and capital. For both audiences and participants, such demonstrations of accumulated power and wealth are effective in demonstrating familial solidarity.

The Easter Angel contest in Nabua became monetized in 1971, a year before the Philippines launched its overseas employment program. Earlier participants were from the town’s list of elites whose wealth would usually derive from land ownership during the Spanish colonial period, or from the economic capital coming from former U.S. Navy men. Hermina Niosco, a medical doctor in the Philippines who immigrated to the U.S. was the last Easter Angel before the event became a fund-raising pageant organized by the local parish (Figure 4.6.3). She recalls that prior to its monetization, only one child participated in the ritual. The child’s participation was agreed privately between the family and the church. The families from which the angel came were the ones who could afford to make a generous donation of at least USD1,000 to the local parish – a rather large amount for an agricultural town at that time, and even today.
Figure 4.6.2 The last Easter Angel before the ritual’s monetization in 1971.
Photo courtesy of Hermina Niosco-Orbita, the Easter Angel of 1970.

Figure 4.6.3 A family photograph taken in 1938 with the Easter Angel at the center.
The child is related to a U.S. Navy retiree in Nabua. The Easter Angel eventually married Retired U.S.N. George Masculino, the source of this photograph.
The year that the ritual became a pageant or contest revolving around which family could collect the most money for the church, 13 children were enlisted to participate. However, it must be pointed out that the increase of child-participants in the balo-balo was also partly a response of the church to accommodate the growing number of requests from families who do not trace their lineage to elite families but who also have sacred contracts to fulfill. Along with the ritual’s monetization began the culture of “bugbugan” (literally, boxing) by families who have divine contracts to fulfill with Inang Katipanan. In one way, the balo-balo became a stage for the public affirmation of new elites which include families with U.S. Navy genealogy and other rural to urban or overseas migration histories.

Three months before the Holy Week, I told Manay Allan over Facebook that one of the facets of the balo-balo that I am interested in is its economic dimension. Uncertain about the direction that their donation campaign would take, Manoy Allan replied that they had no intentions of winning first place as they only wanted to complete their contract with Inang Katipanan and they only had a few relatives to solicit donations from. They planned to donate only PhP50,000 (USD960) from their own savings because they still needed to “vote” for their own child. They said that it also seemed too time-consuming to solicit help from their American friends and colleagues, even from fellow Filipinos in the U.S., as they would have to explain the purpose of what might seem a rather strange money-making religious pageant. But to their

112 The balo-balo as a money-raising religious ritual and as a mere rehearsal of an actual ritual would be challenging to explain to Catholic Filipinos coming from other regions as it does not have many analogues in other parts of the Philippines. For example, in Tagalog-speaking Angono City, Rizal province, where the salubong is also a very popular religious event, no grand rehearsal such as the one held in Nabua is performed. However, also on Black Saturday, a mass that integrates a play of the resurrection is held. The most spectacular event in Angono is held on Easter, after the performance of their local version of salubong—a street procession whose highlight is two dancing women who later announce the miraculous resurrection of Christ. I am grateful to poet Richard Gappi for discussing with me salubong as practiced in his home province of Rizal.
The couple utilized Facebook to circulate a photograph of the official envelop. Envelopes were distributed by their parents to their family members and friends who were willing to help collect donations. Manay Ruby’s mother delivered and sent around envelopes accompanied by personalized greetings that included a plea to aid in her granddaughter’s victory. Her mother even solicited votes from those for whom they had acted as ritual godparents long ago and who are now professionals; they documented all contributions so they would know who to thank later.
The church has designed a system for counting all collected donations. The system of “canvassing” or counting of the “ballots” in a single evening a week or two before the balo-balo emulates the manual counting and tabulation of ballots once done during elections. The counting of the money is designed to create suspense and it is common for tension to build up, with families nervously awaiting who will ultimately have raised the highest amount. The event is held at the church’s community hall at the centro and is open to the public; the total amounts raised are tabulated on a board for everyone to see. There are three stages of counting donations during the evening of the “canvassing” and families who are keen on winning the title for their child take on different strategies in revealing how much money they have collected. The common strategy, according to Manoy Allan is: “Su first counting ngaya, kumbaga di mo pa man ngaya ibubugbog. Pangarwa di pa nanggad. Su pangatlo, amo adto su iubos mo na” (During the first counting, you do not reveal all your ‘boxing moves’ yet. During the second, still
not yet. On the third, you pour out all [the money] that you have). Families can keep 50 percent of their collection. To stir more excitement, in recent years the local church has introduced a rather interesting twist in the third stage of counting “ballots”: competing families are given a few minutes to decide the percent of the amount that they will donate to the parish, which they then submit as their final sealed ballot. On the evening of the counting, the family thus enters into a new contract, this time a financial one, with the church. The sum of votes collected by the Easter Angel’s family is an enormous amount in Nabua. However, it is important to point out that the total amount that Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby’s families collected was, in fact, not the highest collected amount by competing families that evening.¹¹⁴ To eliminate the need to explain to donors and to remove doubts that they might be keeping half of the received donations, Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby resolved to donate everything to the church. The competing family meanwhile, made the “mistake” of donating only 50 percent of their collected amount, thus falling far behind, despite having initially collected more money than Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby’s combined families.

Manay Ruby recognized the seeming peculiarity in winning a “money contest” whose winner becomes the star of a religious ritual: “Kung iisipin mo, tauno ka ta migtao kan? Diri ngaya ta arog ngaya kan” (If you really think about it, why would you give that much money? They say that’s just how things are). “That’s the situation in Nabua,” Manoy Allan concluded in

¹¹⁴ The votes gathered during money-making contests such as the one described in this chapter are amounts that ordinary laborers and even professional workers in Nabua will have difficulty in saving during their lifetime. To give an idea about the enormity of this collected amount when compared to local earnings, drivers of padyak or manually pedaled passenger sidecars in Nabua earn about P100 to 150 (USD2-3) per day. Skilled laborers such as carpenters earn about P300 to 400 per day. These earnings are significantly lower than the daily minimum wage at PhP454 to 491 for a range of occupations, as approved by the Department of Labor and Employment, and as listed on the website of the National Wages and Productivity Commission (2017). According to the Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines (2015), government-employed teachers earn approximately PhP19,000 to 22,000 (USD390 to 455) per month.
recognition of the inevitable interweaving of their covenant with their larger kin’s continuous work of strengthening their solidarity, despite distances, in Nabua. This orientation about the shared work in fulfilling a covenant relates to Julius Bautista’s (2017) conceptualization of physical pain as not only individually experienced by the nailee on the cross, but as intersubjectively facilitated and as profoundly based on trust. It is also crucial to point out the difference between the idea of the “vow” and the “covenant,” the latter signifying a relationship between at least two parties. Bicolano priest Manny H. Zagada (2011) writes that the Nabueño devotion to the local mother is “no mere private vow (panata) but a communal oath (sumpâ).” Nabueño scholar of religion, Fajardo (2011), has already observed that if the root word “tipan” means covenant, then the word “Katipanan” can be more directly translated to “covenantedness” or the “state of being in a covenanted relationship.” In this case, Fajardo argues that considering the mutual making of a covenant, “Inang Nakipagtipan” (Mother Who Had Made a Covenant [with Us]) would be the more accurate title for the local icon. But on the other hand, he also argues that this “linguistic hybrid” for a Marian title only points out Nabueños’ “peculiar relationship” with the Mother of Christ – one that is kept intimate through the observance of the terms of a 300-year old contract made between two parties. Different icons of the Virgin Mother in the Philippines meanwhile are often named after the places where Marian apparitions appeared or after the common occupation or agricultural products in the area (De la Cruz).

Considering Bautista’s move towards theorizing ritual practice using affect theory, Zagada and Fajardo’s propositions about the relational quality of the religious covenant, and Peggy Levitt’s (2001) reflection that villagers now nurture social relationships that span borders, I find it important to foreground the sharedness of intentions in the study of contemporary ritual. In the balo-balo, the couple’s desire to “simply” fulfil their side of the covenant became inevitably
subsumed by the desires of the kin network to demonstrate to the community their flourishing transnational family solidarity.

Having already immigrated to the U.S. and being increasingly removed from local affairs, Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby have already forgotten about how rituals such as the ones celebrated during the Holy Week, build, reiterate, and publicize prestige. Their elders in Nabua who witnessed the Holy Week events every year understood in a different way the honor the occasion could bring, first of all, to the child who is given the important task to dramatize the delivery of the good news about Christ’s resurrection (Figure 4.6.5). The child’s participation in the ritual will be remembered by the town in the years to come, but the child’s victory was only made possible by the coordinated fundraising efforts of the larger kin, and thus the honor is shared by the family as well. The Easter Angel is the first from both sides of the family to participate in this ritual, and winning the contest could only be possible if winning in the Search for Easter Angel is going to be treated as a family project. But Manay Ruby said that it is honra (honor) that elders in Nabua are “really chasing after.” The couple was able to solicit only PhP100,000 (USD1,920) via their own efforts, and they said that they would have been content with that amount. The larger kin network, meanwhile, led by its elders, knew that the Easter Angel contest is a central Holy Week event during which old, new, or emerging familial influence and power – and solidarities that make these possible – are made manifest to the spectating crowd.
Figure 4.6.5 Nabua’s image of the Risen Christ, one of the holy icons owned by Nabua’s elite families, makes an annual appearance in the churchyard of Nabua on Easter Sunday.

“To attract an audience is to attract politically,” Sherry Errington (1990, 43) writes about the performance of power in Southeast Asia through performances such as ritual. Errington tells us that in such activities, when the powerful demonstrate their potency, the “center is still; its periphery is active.” My ethnography shows that the center of the balo-balo ritual shifts as participation is now open to those who would like to return to fulfill their covenant; therefore, the center is dynamic. The members of participating families whose covenants, homecoming, motivations, and donations, make up the spectacle, may hold diverging ambitions and interests. The financial donations and various elaborate gimmicks during the balo-balo in Nabua convey the message of a family’s combined energy and purchasing power to commit to an elaborate
fulfillment of one’s divine contract. As an angel takes her turn to descend, the audience talks not only about the child’s genealogy, or the reason for the contract being fulfilled through the child’s participation, but also about the total donations that were raised by the family for the occasion and that will go to the church.\(^{115}\) Both the balo-balo and ton-ton require the participation of all angels and their families, rendering these rituals as performative spaces for those who can afford to \textit{doubly} commit resources, efforts, and time – with these aspects interwoven into their respective sacred contracts. Commanding awe and fascination from the viewing public, the balo-balo creates a space for self-affirmation for Nabua residents, promising a good life for the faithful in this unassuming agricultural area. With winning families coming home from overseas, and with the dollars used for sponsoring feasts and public spectacle, the balo-balo effectively works as a platform for the circulation of stories about successful migrants’ and their kin’s continued commitment to fulfilling their 300-year old covenant with Inang Katipanan.

In 2014, on the night of the balo-balo, spotlights lit up the bell tower decorated with stalks of anthurium and chrysanthemum and yellow and green balloons. Her family having collected the highest amount, the year’s Easter Angel earned the right to be the only one among the angels dressed in a gown of pure white.\(^{116}\) As she descended, a hot air balloon rose to the air and fireworks burst in colors above us against the star-studded summer skies. It turned out that on the same evening, the Easter Angel’s grandparents were able to place an urgent order for the hot air balloon bearing the family’s surnames, as well as for the fireworks, providing the community

\(^{115}\) The Easter Angel is the last to descend from the bell tower, but all other participating angels also do so, with shorter descents as they also have shorter hymns to deliver. Other angels descend in reverse chronological order, based on the amount that their respective families have raised.

\(^{116}\) The possibilities for enhancing the spectacularity of a child’s descent are endless and there are no restrictions as long as these are held during the balo-balo, and not during the ton-ton. For example, the bamboo poles are all adorned differently. No child, including boys, descends the bell tower without professionally executed make up.
with additional spectacle. The winning Easter Angel’s full name was painted in brilliant red on the bell tower, framing the opening of the bell tower from which she descended, and it would remain there for the whole year to aid everyone in remembering her family name – a kin’s shared honorable ngaran which will henceforth be associated with her parents’ dutiful fulfilment of a contract, and her larger family’s victory, prestige, transnational resources, and solidarity. The following day, when all the angels are dressed in simpler gowns, and when an officiated mass follows the ton-ton, the conversations among the audience become more solemn (Figure 4.6.6). Many rush to the icons’ carrozas to wipe their handkerchiefs on the limbs of the perfumed saints, or to take a few stalks of flowers home from the carrozas, motivated by the belief that these have been blessed by the presence of the sacred. The decorated bamboo poles from which the angels descended are coveted items that devotees take home as protective charms for the renewed liturgical year. Other believers bury shreds of the bamboo poles in their farm lots, hoping that the blessed poles will bring them a plentiful harvest.

Figure 4.6.6 The actual ton-ton is held at the crack of dawn on Easter Sunday.
4.7 Conclusions: Troubling Ritual

Anthropological studies on the Philippines have produced now-classic texts on religion and ritual such as Rosaldo’s (1989) research on headhunting practices of “pagan” Ilonggots and Cannell’s (1995) ethnography of lowland Bicolanos’ healing practices syncretized by Catholic belief, multiple colonial encounters, and indigenous knowledges. Alongside postcolonial scholarly efforts around the world to provincialize the West (Chakrabarty 2009) and to localize/indigenize history, many Filipino scholars are approaching the study of ritual and religion in new and imaginative ways. Some have pushed for understanding ritual as mirroring indigenous creativity (Fernandez 1996), for instance, as a crucial tool in organizing revolt by the masses (Ileto 1979), or as vehicles for retelling ancient legends and epics (Tiongson 1975), among other interpretations. Others push for analyzing the “acculturated genre” of Philippine religious performances as belonging to the Southeast Asian theatrical domain, asserting a cultural relevance that is on par with those in Indonesia and other areas which are more widely explored by academics (Trimillos 1992). My analysis of the balo-balo in this chapter extends these ongoing conversations, offering a postcolonial approach to the study of ritual beyond its “folk” elements. Going beyond the often-used categories in ritual, I showed that a family’s religious fulfilment of the covenant with the sacred, the maintenance of solidarities across consanguineal, ritual kin and community, and the re-orientation of histories and prayers, all together work to make the Town of Dollars.

My investigation of the balo-balo troubles the categories often used in the study of ritual and nuances the meaning of rehearsal that is often understood using literature from performance studies. In Nabua, overseas migration has created what one of my informants has called “new families” who are seeking avenues to participate in public rituals. Prior to the construction of the
bell tower donated by the U.S. Navy men, the balo-balo and ton-ton were held on a makeshift tower made of coco lumber, on a private lot at the centro owned by one of Nabua’s Spanish-descended elites. Because of the new wealth coming in from overseas, more families have been able to afford the commissioning of new saintly icons that have become integrated into the Holy Week processions, to add to the centuries-old ivory icons owned by the “old families” (Figure 4.7.1). The balo-balo – a spectacular dramatization of a religious narrative – creates a space for the community to bear witness to a kin’s public re/introduction of success, prestige and solidarity, and to fulfill their vow to Inang Katipanan, who is in turn believed to keep Nabueños – whether they are still residing in the town or already overseas – from harm. The balo-balo opens a stage for the transmission of the news about Inang Katipanan’s continued granting of miracles to Nabueños who, over generations, remain consistent in their faith. It is during events such as the balo-balo that economic, political, and familial strands all intersect in the realm of the religious. I have shown in this chapter how this flexibility of the balo-balo as rehearsal has interesting parallels with Manoy Allan’s expressions of his own faith that is “not too intense,” and of his contract-making as not too serious for there is “nothing to lose” anyway.
Mary Douglas (1988, 481) reminds us that the “real challenge of being modern is not so much in any reduced possibility of religious belief but in accepting the increased opportunities of inquiry.” Adding migration processes into my inquiry, I argued that labeling the winning families as simply the town’s new elites uncritically erases the more problematic and messy migration processes that certainly affect peoples’ practices, including the forging of a sacred covenant that binds them to a calculated homecoming. As seen in the story of Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby, the fulfillment of a covenant shows people’s embeddedness in a larger social world in which relations with a local icon continue to be guarded since 1711. In the process of the kin’s mobilization to achieve a common goal, such as winning the Easter Angel contest, the desire of the pledgers themselves for a quiet fulfillment of the covenant becomes muted to give way to grander plans to activate and celebrate family unity and success garnered through
overseas migration by publicly performing victory through religious ritual. Transnationally separated kin, as in the case of Manoy Allan and Manay Ruby who have already immigrated to the U.S., but the majority of whose kin are still based in Nabua, reunite in efforts leading to the balo-balo and thereby reactivate their consanguineous and ritual kin network. The devotion to Nabua’s own icon Inang Katipanan is increasingly practiced beyond the borders of the local but the fulfilment of covenants made with her often necessitate the homecoming of her devotees. Thus, migration has become an undeniable force that not only pulls people away from the hometown but migration also regrounds them to practices in their originating hometowns.

Despite the individualizing effect that overseas migration tends to bring, the fulfilment of the covenant at home ends up reinforcing family values that maintain communities and that persist through and despite layers of colonial history and colonized/post-colonial consciousness.

Former parish priest of Nabua’s church, Fr. Zosimo Ma. Sañado (1997, 56), writes that the original date of the annual festival held in veneration of Inang Katipanan was July 28, and not May 4. He adds that according to oral sources, “the change happened when Nabueños who were already abroad requested that the date be moved to a more convenient day and month” (56). This means that the reading of the novena for Inang Katipanan that is held in May began to be facilitated for the benefit of Nabueños coming home from overseas. This shows that the church seriously considers the power and agency of overseas migrants in the propagation of faith. Money earned overseas has a profound impact on the practice and celebration of local rituals, and of re/organizing local social relations, clearly showing that paying attention to migration could be used in de-romanticizing ritual and understanding it beyond abstract conceptions about religious belief and consciousness. Anthropologists of Mexico have also observed that studies on “folk” religion often leave impressions on the readers that indigenous believers are “virtually
free of psychic and social conflict” (Brandes 1988, 3) while Catholic religious icons continue to be interpreted as ancient deities (Gross 2009). Anthropologists need to do the rigorous labor of layering the various elements that make up today’s religious practice.

I analyzed the novena as an archive that reflects the process of collaboration between faith and history/myth-making, conjuring ideas of kinship between the sacred and townspeople, and facilitating continuity of the community through ritual. My investigation of how religious text appropriates the history of the town’s devotion to its local patroness opens conversations about the layers of history that underlie contemporary religious ritual in the Philippines and elsewhere. For faith in the benevolence of Inang Katipanan to spread, and for the testimonies to her unwavering goodwill and compassion to be perpetuated from one generation to another, public performances such as ritual and recited texts such as novena collaborate with each other by creatively appropriating historical text. Additionally, the doubly reinforcing act of omission and addition in the novena reflects reinterpretations of history that are linked to the local imaginings about how Nabua has adapted to and survived multiple colonizations. No matter how arguably strong the novena’s message is (which would encourage its transmission through the generations), faith in the sacred survives inter-generationally by becoming performed in rituals such as the ton-ton and even more spectacularized in events such as the balo-balo. In the public demonstration of the devotees’ fulfillment of their side of a sacred contract, manifestations and ideas about family, community, power, and others, become ingrained in ritual. The town’s, and effectively, its people’s, encounters with Spain, the U.S. and Japan, the susceptibility of the region to natural calamities, and the effects of globalization on Filipino labor and mobilities all converge in a family’s fulfillment of their covenant within the context of today’s dynamic ritual.
Chapter 5: Of Houses, Care, and Kinship: From Nabua to Manila to Los Angeles

5.1 Kinship and Going Abroad

Calling my mother while I was in Vancouver and my mother in Los Angeles, California, I asked her what kinship means to her. Without hesitation, she replied, “Kinship is when you help your family go abroad.” My mother’s definition complicates the concept of kinship as it extends conversations about the deepened effects of migration on family relations – the Filipino family is now increasingly mobile yet, for my mother, it is still attached to expectations and obligations of aid and cooperation. Janet Carsten (2004), in her influential work on kinship, suggests the necessity in “redoing kinship,” which involves the investigation of its “many new guises.” Carsten (2004, 6) writes that kinship “may be seen as shaped by the ordinary, everyday activities of family life,” suggesting that to contribute to this area of kinship studies necessitates the dissection of the mundane and the familiar. Carsten talks about kinship as an “area of life in which people invest their emotions, their creative energy, and their new imaginings” (9).

Drawing from Carsten’s work on the everydayness of kinship practices, Filomeno Aguilar (2009), in his study of Filipino migration, inquires into the new kinds of negotiations that are transacted by transnationally separated family members, creating new “ties of relatedness.” The efforts at unity, according to Aguilar, are forms of everyday “hard work” that include: the emotional strategizing of family members across boundaries; shared caring of kin; and the celebration of rituals supported mutually across borders, among others (7). Reflecting on the
impact of migration in the Philippines, Aguilar (2014) then describes migration as the “yeast”
that has permeated many aspects of everyday lives of Filipinos in the Philippines and beyond.

Migration is a robust theme through which kinship could be rethought and redone. The
migration trajectories of my siblings and the other members of our extended family have
certainly transformed the ways that my family members think about kinship and the ways we act
“in solidarity” towards certain ambitions, for example, education and eventual overseas
migration. My mother’s quick response to my question alludes to the ordinariness of migration in
the everyday workings of our family as my siblings and I now reside in four different countries.
My mother takes pride in the migratory routes that her children have so far taken, but she also
regularly repeats to us that we all work towards her last wish, family reunification, even if very
briefly. The last time that we all gathered on the same day, at the same place, was 22 years ago.
That was when I was only 13, during the funeral rights of my father.

I approach the mundaneness of migration in the contemporary Filipino family inspired by
anthropologists who have problematized their positionalities through self-reflexive writing
use of the term “family” in this chapter includes my “extended consanguineal family” whose
members are spread in a network of houses in rural, urban, and overseas spaces. I distinguish this
from “nuclear family” which I occasionally use for a lack of a better term. By investigating at the
intimate level of my family, I reflect on how desires for the “good life” are cultivated across
“houses” intergenerationally. An exploration of the history of my family means inquiring into
relationships and transactions of care, nurturance, assistance, and fulfillment of reciprocal
obligations – now increasingly, within transnational conditions. Clifford Geertz (1994, 222)
writes that the “determining question” for ethnography must be whether or not it “sorts winks
from twitches and real winks from mimicked ones.” Further, he adds, “It is not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions, that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers” (222). A study of kinship that spans borders and that involves personal stories, I suggest, draws from “deep embeddedness,” rather than from the much-lauded Geertzian thick description that has been historically deployed in anthropology when interpreting cultures other than one’s own. This deep embeddedness in the personal comes with heavy responsibility. Bianca Brijnath (2009) reflects on the emotional labor that is negotiated between both real and fictive kin in the case of her transnationally located family, confessing that the full account cannot be written. The ethnographic account that I present here is admittedly but a fraction of what can be shared. I set here only some angles of a multi-dimensional story, withholding many elements within and around it, out of respect for the private lives of my own kin whose life stories are implicated in this act of academic/public re-telling.

5.2 Organizing Family History

In unpacking the workings of my increasingly transnational family, I begin by problematizing the universalized “Filipino family.” A review of the broader literature on the house as discussed in anthropology leads me to a route for understanding the house, and effectively, the family, as no longer fixed in space but as moveable and unfolding across geographies. By doing this, I link the literature on the house to scholarship on diasporas as families increasingly have diasporic connections. I then turn to discuss my family’s three houses located in: the “ginikanan” (place of origin which is Nabua); the city house in Cubao, Metro Manila, which accommodated family members for nearly three decades, mostly for their
university education, and the “destination” home in Los Angeles, U.S., where family members began to settle as immigrants. In tracing my family’s migration itinerary, I show an example of a contemporary family’s tendency to cooperate intergenerationally and in solidarity across multiple geographical locations, towards the fulfilment of ambitions of upward social mobility. I offer an approach to investigating transnational familial entanglements by looking through the lens of “pasali” (subdued performance). By focusing my analysis on an instance of a family drama during an aunt’s homecoming from L.A., I propose pasali as a means of theorizing intimate theatrics within a transnational dynamic that continues to be stubbornly anchored in “traditional” ethics. It is through these reflections that draw on my deep embeddedness in my family’s migration stories that I respond to Carsten’s call to redo the study of kinship.

5.3 Logics of the Filipino Family?

Gloria Javillonar (1978, 348) writes of the Filipino “family” as bilaterally extended, as founded on hierarchy of authority that is age-based, as following an egalitarian relationship between husband and wife, as having mate selection patterns that are based on romantic love or with consideration of the choice of the family, and as endogamous based on roots, class, linguistic-ethnic affiliations, or religion. Previous research also agrees that early records show no hierarchical distinction between the paternal and maternal lineages of the ego (Santiago 1996) and others have shown that class does not necessarily affect the structure of the family.

117 I recognize that scholars have also already acknowledged that there may be different formulations of the concept of the family in an archipelago where there may be diverse practices. Robert Fox writes that the “Filipino family,” along with “Filipino” or the “Filipino society,” reflect a “belief in” and “basic likeness” shared only at least, by the 8 major linguistic Christian groups in the archipelago that are the common subjects of research (in Javillonar 1978, 347). With 8 in 10 Filipinos being Catholic (Lipka 2015), it follows that accounts on the “Filipino family” generally represent the majority.
Many researchers have also looked at the Filipino family’s function where the family is viewed as an important institution that organizes everyday life. For example, F. Landa Jocano (1969) argues that kinship, whether based on blood, affinity or religion, serves as the blueprint for the social order in the village. In a study of 708 households in Metro Manila, Mendez and Jocano (1979) write that there are four types of families: household-type; extended that includes both family of orientation and procreation; special type, headed by a married or unmarried sibling, and; the dual worker type, with both people in a couple being career-oriented. Literature such as this shows the family in rural and urban spaces in the Philippines to be flexible in its composition, orientation and function, making it difficult to have a single unified definition.

The family has been called the “center of the universe” of each Filipino (Jocano 1998, 3:11) and the “wellspring of a meaningful existence, of identity and fulfillment” (Mulder 1992, 7f). The 1987 Philippine Constitution establishes the value of the family in nation-building, citing it as its very “foundation.” Other researchers have echoed this family-state connection, writing that the former serves as the latter’s backbone (Carandang and Lee 2008), its “basic building block” (Mendez and Jocano 1979, vi), and the “most significant institution in Philippine society” (G. T. Castillo and Pua 1963, 2). The Filipino family is “seen as being opposed to the impersonal state” (Kaelin 2012, 83). In these various formulations, the importance of the family in crafting the self and in organizing communities and the modern nation-state, is repeatedly projected.

While I agree with Filipino scholars who insist on the centrality of the family in everyday life in the Philippines, I believe that there is a heightened need to reflect on the family as inflected by migration. The constructs of the Filipino family show enduring traces of dated
functionalism that has trickled from Western scholarship’s ways of neatly describing and organizing the ways of the Other, including their familiar “organization.” In Nabua, there is no indigenous term for the domestic unit of the family, thus the use of the Spanish-derived term, *familia*. The word that alludes to the family in Nabua is “*pag-iriban*” which translates to ‘kamag-anakan’ in Filipino or “clan” in English. “Family” as it is used in Nabua today, refers to the lineally descended nuclear unit composed of parents and children. While consanguinity is often a qualifier for identifying persons as “*pag-iiba*” (member of a clan), this does not mean that membership is restricted to consanguinity, as it can also include those who have been initiated into the kin group through religious rites, or who have become recognized as part of it through long-term co-habitation, adoption, and other conditions.118

Some research on Filipino families embedded in migration processes that intensified in the 1970s highlights the flourishing of kin relationships despite geographical distance, while other research reflects how distances have broken family relations apart. Publishing a compilation of his work on migration over two decades, Aguilar (2014, 6) finds that there is “no stigma attached to the geographically dispersed forms of the family.” Meanwhile, in their work on Filipino transnational families, Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller (2013, 146) explore the relationships mediated by “polymedia” which provide the space and means for the creation of an “ideal distance” within which transnational family members from the Philippines are able to manage emotions and intimacies, rather than break them apart. That transnational families suffer “no

118 It must also be noted that there is also not one meaning of “family” in other parts of Southeast Asia. The word “khopkhua” used by the Isan of Northeast Thailand is close to the term family but its literal translation is “covered by the kitchen” (Trankell 2003). The Borgo of Sulawesi meanwhile uses the term “keluarga” which means “living under one roof” (Cedercreutz 2003). These examples reflect the importance of the sharing of resources and of living together in a house (or in an organized network of houses) in understanding the membership and values of what can be regarded as family.
“stigma” does not mean that members of families experience no pain and trauma from Global North-structured mobilities that Geraldine Pratt (2012) argues “seals the faith” of women and children who become bound to joining the low-income class in their countries of work and immigration. I participate in these conversations on Filipino transnational families, taking the discussion in a direction that considers desired solidarities across geographical spaces, yet with the recognition that such familial work is not uncomplicated by stories that Ruth Behar (2014) says, “break your heart.”

As Javillonar (1978, 356) writes, “[a]n aspect of the extended-family that needs systematic study is the degree of fluidity of its membership.” The discussion that follows takes up the challenge of Javillonar to dig deeper into the fluidity of the Filipino family, but not just of its membership, but of the ways that the family maintains relationships and takes on transactions and obligations for the attainment of identified familial goals and ambitions. I see the “house” as a useful concept in examining the Filipino family that now increasingly expands, moves, and unfolds across space and geographies. Like many Nabueños, my family uses the concept of the “house” as an important space within which histories – personal or familial – are located. In Nabua, houses more often mark geographies, instead of rivers, mountains, and other natural formations. Some neighborhoods located in the farming barangays have retained their indigenous names which point to the centrality of houses inhabited by historically important persons or families. For example, a neighborhood called “Ki Gatos” means “owned by Gatos.” The term “kingurang” means “house owned by the elders.” More recently, migrants’ mansions built with dollar remittances that easily stand out in a landscape of ricefields are used as signposts when giving directions. These houses are often called “maduag na baloy” (big house) or “sementadong baloy” (concrete house). The idea of the house needs to be brought into
conversations on the Filipino family. I continue my discussion with a brief review of the literature on the “house” in anthropology, to be followed by an account about the three houses of my family to show not only how the “root” home is maintained, but also how new ones are created and imagined in relation to the upward mobility of its residents.

5.4 The House in Anthropology

As anthropologists continued to make sense of their fieldsites, the work of deconstructing the inhabited space of the house became a major focus of their scholarship. In Southeast Asia, Signe Howell (2003, 16) writes that the region is suited to the study of the house because of the “great variation in house styles and in principles of social organization,” bearing “complex and rich semantic and moral loads.” In the literature on the house in the Southeast Asian context, Claude Levi-Strauss’s concept of “sociétés à maison” or “house societies” is often cited. Levi-Strauss (1983, in Howell 2003, 18) defines the house as: “a corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods and its titles down a real or imaginary line considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both…. When considered as a “moral person,” Levi-Strauss suggests that the concept of the house can replace the earlier theoretical gravitation towards consanguinity in relation to a group’s identity and its members’ sense of belonging. By reconsidering analytical oppositions such as descent/alliance, patriliney/matriliney, and filiation/residence, among others, Levi-Strauss proposes to look at the aspects that both create tensions and solidarities in, and that

119 For example, see Frederick Barth (1966) who thinks of the house in relation to transacting members.
perpetuate, a house. Levi-Strauss conceptualizes the house as not merely a physical structure, but also as including aspects of lineage, name, and responsibilities – which are then reflected in the larger community in which the house belongs.

Janet Carsten (2004) revisits the Levi-Straussian concept of the house, investigating it as an everyday space in which memories, practices, and understandings of the world are shared. Beyond the “everydayness” of the house, Carsten (2004, 27) calls attention to how houses “exercise a call on our imaginations and embody our personal histories.” In the collection About the House: Levi-Strauss and Beyond (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, 2), the authors propose to investigate houses “in the round” and beyond the categories of kinship and economy. Critiquing Levi-Strauss’s focus on descent group and alliance, Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995, 19) write that the analytical model of the house society “raises as many problems as it solves.” Through looking at the houses in Southeast Asia, the collection demonstrates a cultural fluidity that often clashes with the earlier proposed analytical models. Also departing from Levi-Straussian structuralism, Roxanna Waterson (1997) introduces the idea of the “living house” to show the house and its residents as complementing and mutually reinforcing each other. Not only composed of identifiable structures, the house is an organism that has a life force that affects the everyday life of its residents and the community. Attention to space and structure in relation to cosmological and social configurations reappear, such as the collection Inside Austronesian Houses: Perspectives on Domestic Design for Living (J. J. Fox 2006). In Power and Difference: Gender in Island Southeast Asia, Shelly Errington (1990) proposes a rethinking of the Levi-Straussian reading of the house in Southeast Asia, this time adding the under-discussed aspects of sex, gender, and power.
Following the increasing engagement with feminist concerns that reoriented anthropological analysis from the 1970s onwards, the genealogy mentioned above on the study of the house in Southeast Asia shows a focus on particularities and fluidity, rather than on the formulation of generalized types and models. Houses are no longer seen merely as physical dwellings and buildings, but also as homes with memories and attachments, as spaces containing symbols and cosmologies, as markers of social status, and as living testimonies of kin and a community’s history. Therefore, moving away from houses as “goldmines of symbols and meanings” (Howell 2003, 21), I investigate the house of the extended/extendable family as now increasingly geographically expanding. I recognize the problem posed in *The House in Southeast Asia*, that the house today has become a “somewhat problematic conceptual tool in relation to the interpretation of ethnographic material” (Sparkes 2003, 2). Among the documented changes in the house in Southeast Asia is the nuclearization of the family, which supplants the ideology of solidarity, and affects changes in age-old practices related to the house (Rodenburg 2003, 119). For instance, in the case of the Toba Batak families, the nuclear family promoted by the New Order government refers to the husband-wife couple and their children as comprising one economic unit that “works, sleeps, and eats together” (Rodenburg 2003, 119). The broader landscapes in which houses are built are also consequently affected and transformed by economic, political, and other forces. Instead of doing away with the concept of the house as an analytical category, I highlight migration as an important underlying aspect of the construction and maintenance of the contemporary Filipino house or its expanding network.

The conceptualizations of the house in relation to migration tend to be unidimensional, as the house in the home country becomes the focus of scholarly orientation. The house as discussed in transnational migration literature often refers to the migrant’s “dream home” located
in the origin country that is aggregately built through remittance money (Aguilar et al. 2009). In such scholarship, the house is treated as a material that is among the products of a sender-recipient relationship. The remittance sender is often conceptualized as someone who is oriented towards building a “better” house for his or her left-behind kin, or for his or her eventual return and retirement. The house that is built in the origin country is often read as the space created for the shared caring for the left-behind children, or it may be the space where left-behind partners negotiate their parental roles, masculinities/femininities, etc. I argue that how the house is viewed today needs to be problematized more multi-spatially especially in this age during which the mobilities of various family members can swell to multiple local and global destinations. In the following section, I refer to the term “house” as a physical structure based in a specific location, but also as a site in which dynamic, inter-generational, and processual relations between kin members unfold. In my discussion, I use the term “house” instead of “household.” The Filipino “household,” as Jocano (1969) describes it, often means extended family whose members are engaged in reciprocal obligations and duties. For example, out of a sense of duty, older people or children from the extended family or non-consanguineal kin may be taken into the household. This same arrangement may indeed be called a household within the definitions set by government surveys that aim to track resource circulation and exchange in the barangay level.\footnote{The term household recalls associations with the past colonial administrations, census, and population studies, where the function of building relations around, gathering, and consuming, resources become central to its definition.} However, in Nabua, those who live in a common space and who share resources (food, bills, duties, etc.) are considered to be “magkakaiba sa baloy” (living in the same house), which points to the centrality of the house and place – and not of the functions operating within it – in
thinking about family relations. By operationalizing the concept of the house, I call up the
timportance of place-based relations in thinking about the family and the ways that its members
act upon shared goals and ambitions. These houses form a network that, in cooperation,
contributes to the family’s making of “success.” Focusing on houses also provides insight into
some of the “life cycle” of a family (Mendez and Jocano 1979, i).

5.5 The Three Houses of My Family

The “houses” of my extended family are located in three geographical locations: the
Ginikanan (origin place which is Nabua); the City (in Cubao District, Metro Manila), and
finally; Overseas (Los Angeles, California). I begin from the origin location, charting along the
way the cultural values and familial “traditions,” ambitions for overseas mobility, and social
lives that are embedded in, and that circulate, in this house and others that came to be built. I
present the network of homes as showing more than the work of propagating lineage or
procreation, but instead the familial orientation toward the maintenance of solidarity – solidarity
as necessary in the achievement of the familial goals of upward mobility primarily through
education and overseas migration. I use the phrase “first generation” to refer to my mother and
her siblings. “Second generation” refers to my set of first cousins descended from the same
grandparents.

121 It is common practice for Filipino families to have distant family member/s join the household as helpers.
Diasporic families may deploy the practice of having distant family members reside in their house in their
absence. This is certainly another issue that needs to be discussed as such relations are often embedded in
complex relations of reciprocity and inequality. Un/paid relations of care is a topic I hope to explore more
closely in the future.
122 Mendez and Jocano (1979) write of the family’s life cycle as passing through developmental stages: cohabitation
as conjugal pair; expansion into a nuclear family as children are born; narrowing down as children create their
own nuclear families, and finally, dissolution, marked when the original pair (grandparents), age and pass away.
5.5.1 The Ginikanan

Located centrally in Nabua town proper, our home barangay is classified as “urban,” having a population of about 700 (Philippine Statistics Authority 2015). The ginikanan does not refer to a single house but to a network of houses all located in the town where the family traces its roots. I anchor my discussion in one era in my family history, namely when the network of houses came to be established by my maternal grandparents through savings earned from their bamboo crafts venture. ‘Tatay’ (father), our grandfather, built up his career from being a street peddler in his youth to being a successful bamboo basket supplier for export from the late 1960s until the end of the 1990s. Throughout his life, until his death in 1992, Tatay was based in our hometown. ‘Nanay’ (mother), our grandmother, ran the house and oversaw its resources until she passed away in 2006. She lived for a while in the U.S., but was emotionally tied to the hometown, just like Tatay, and returned there during her later years. The core of the network of houses is a two-story concrete house located right at the center of our barangay. This was the

123 According to the Philippines’ National Statistics Authority (2003), a barangay is urban if it has any of the following: a population of more than 5,000 or more; at least one establishment with a minimum of 100 employees; five or more establishments with a minimum of 10 employees, and five or more facilities. Our barangay is composed of mostly houses and a few public structures such as the village hall, chapel, basketball court, one public elementary school, and one recently established private elementary school. Its qualification as urban is due to its proximity to the town’s available facilities (market, town hall, entertainment hall, cemetery, college, etc.) which are within the NSA’s required two kilometer radius distance.

124 It is common practice in the Philippines for the descending kin to regard the grandfather as tatay or father, and not lolo or grandfather. In this case, the grandmother is also called nanay, rather than lola. Often, the attribute is related to the recognition that the grandparents remain as the center of the extended family.

125 Nanay was a full-time housewife from the day of her marriage at age 15 but her domestic role should be understood here as a direct contribution to the family’s economic production. She was also in charge of various financial matters, from everyday household spending to rental collection, and lease arrangements. On distinguishing the roles of my grandparents, I take note of Laurel Bossen’s (1989) warning against the depiction of responsibilities according to a male-female dichotomy, in which men are depicted as dynamic, and women as essentially static. Wally Secombe, meanwhile (1974, 9), suggests that housework is a necessary form of labor in the household economy that converts raw commodities into “regenerated labour power.” Further, her domestic role, rather than being seen as a form of misrecognized oppression, as often explained using the Western discourse on rationality and individualism, must be understood as also linked to a kind of political economy where gender roles also change with the frictions of colonial governments and external influences (Eviota 1992; Roces 1998).
first tangible asset obtained with the profit from the baskets business, and it was here that my grandparents raised their 12 children. It was from the bamboo business that this grandparents’ house – locally called “kingurang” (literally, the elders’ house) – and the next houses in the same barangay owned by the family were built, and the lots on which they stand were bought. Some people I have met during my fieldwork told me that the family’s network of houses in Nabua attests to the possibilities for success that can be had, without leaving Nabua for urban or overseas work.

The house in which one’s elders resided could be called “ancestral house” elsewhere. Like the Isan in Northeast Thailand, there is no term in Nabua for ancestral house. The Isan people use the term “baan” or “heun” which is similar to Nabua’s kingurang (Trankell 2003, 160). When Isan people say that they are going home, home means either village or the parent’s physical home (“baan phaumae”) which means that there is “no distinction between the physical structure and the sense of belonging” (Trankell 2003, 160). The English word “ancestral house” as used today in Nabua in everyday conversations would refer to a house owned by the “old and educated rich” who often have ilustrado (mestizo) roots. Houses that are called ancestral are exclusively structures that exhibit colonial architectural heritage. Meanwhile, houses made of indigenous materials such as bamboo and nipa grass are not deemed in Nabua as ancestral, but are instead often as indicators of poverty. During my fieldwork, a new house built from overseas labor money had inscribed on its tall iron gates the family name followed by the inscription: “Ancestral House.” Passing by it one day, my friend pointed out the inappropriateness of this

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126 The ilustrado class includes the privileged few who had been educated during the Spanish period when only the elites could afford education. The mestizos include those who have Spanish or Chinese lineage.
self-ascription and claims to “old rich heritage”; my friend asked in a mocking tone: “How could new houses be ancestral?” Certainly, this self-labeling is aspirational: migratory success is publicly announced through monumental houses that also bridge a family’s growing prestige with that of the local elites from the colonial period. In this case, the term kingurang is a more appropriate term to refer to the house to which family activity gravitates. During the lifetime of the family’s craft business, the kingurang also served as the main office for business transactions.127

The term kingurang transcends wealth and social status as the focus becomes the recognition of the genealogical and consanguineous roots of the family, as well as the energies exerted by the elders for its construction. Therefore, the materiality of the house as a structure that attests to wealth accumulation is subsumed by the respect that is attributed to the elders who labored in and inhabited the space, and who gained enough resources to keep the family “together.” As explained by my mother, Tatay and Nanay wanted their children to stick closely together. Thus, their wedding gifts to the first generation that returned or opted to stay in Nabua after their education were small residential lots in the barangay, where they then built their own homes. For example, an uncle who became a high school teacher was gifted a residential lot a block away from the kingurang. This practice is not gendered as even women members of the family have the right to demand space for their families. An aunt who had already established a retail business in the centro found it beneficial to stay in Nabua when she married. With no lots for building a house left, she was given an apartment in a building owned by my grandparents –

127 During the peak of its success, the business commissioned baskets from over 2,000 people from all over Nabua. This family business flourished in the context of both the Spanish and American colonial government’s ventures into the exportation of resources from the Philippines. I explain this context in more detail in Chapter 6.
also built from the profits of the business. This practice of staying in one vicinity influenced the daily life of those living in Nabua in a profound way. Everyday, Nanay would make rounds to deliver home-made afternoon snacks to her children who lived just a block or two away. The members of the family could easily walk to the kingurang, whether for business or for days of celebration with the larger kin group. Through this arrangement of networked houses, the family was able to effectively accommodate both business and care, equally central to the everyday life of the Nabua-based kin. In his study of houses in relation to overseas migration, Filomeno Aguilar (2009) shows the house in the migrant’s home villages as continuing to be a crux of the emotional strategizing of dispersed family members. Aguilar’s research and the example of the kingurang show the centrality of the house in maintaining family attachments.

The basket business finally folded in the late 90s after four decades of operation. This led to the transformation of the kingurang into an income-generating building with at least ten dormitory rooms for rent catering to those coming from the rural villages to the centro for work or education in the local college. Tatay and Nanay had left behind inheritance for their children, but without a will, for it is among the superstitions in Nabua that to write one’s last will is thought to precipitate one’s death. On Nanay’s deathbed, my mother – being the eldest – was asked to take charge in leading the division of the property among her siblings.128 Being a respected elder of the family comes with privileges due to age rank, but with it also comes heavy emotional labor. While my mother holds certain rights to be heard regarding property and other familial matters, it is common knowledge among my family that the rightful owners of the

128 This practice of appointing the eldest child the jural rights in splitting the inheritance is common to many ethno-linguistic groups all throughout the Philippine islands, as reflected, for instance, in Melanie Wiber’s (1993) discussion of the property politics among the upland Ibaloi.
kingurang are the two single women in the family: the carer of the Cubao house, and the
widowed aunt without children who is now an American citizen – and I shall return to these two
aunts later as they are the main characters of the homecoming theatrics that I will be discussing.

Today, some of the family’s houses in Nabua are either empty or missing their residents
who are now migrants in Manila or overseas. The kingurang still sees some activity, especially
during holidays and some special occasions. During the annually held commemorative days for
the departed held on November 1 and 2, candles are lit and native snacks are set out as offerings
in front of my grandparents’ photographs. These celebrations keep the relationships of our family
active, despite the dwindling physical attendance of its members who are residing elsewhere.

5.5.2 The City House

Stories of migration, like the course of history itself, are swayed by the intimate stories
treasured by the family, the larger life of the nation, and increasingly, various global factors. The
beginning of my family’s rural to urban migration can be traced back to 1964, when my mother,
accompanied by Tatay, first went to Manila to enroll in the University of the Philippines. The
basket business was flourishing and there was finally a possibility to send the first generation to
the best schools in the country. To Tatay’s disappointment, my mother married before she could
finish her university education, and her homecoming to Nabua – a “sag-uli” – was not received
warmly. The beginning of my parents’ married life in Nabua proved increasingly difficult, and
they soon decided to move to Manila. Searching out support from his cousin already settled in
Metro Manila, my father found work in LVN Pictures, which was the center of the Philippines’
movie industry that was booming within the context of the new technologies and modern cultural forms brought in by the United States (Capino 2010).

My father worked in LVN in the 70s, during the final years of the golden age of Philippine cinema. My father eventually left the film industry after a decade of working there, and with the help of my mother, who was a housewife, turned to Manila-based native crafts and furniture production. My mother’s residence in Metro Manila made it possible for the family to plan for building an extension of family life outside Nabua. One of my unmarried aunts, Auntie Dianne, was assigned by Tatay and Nanay to move to Metro Manila to establish the city office and outlet of the baskets business. Following the family’s dwelling practices in Nabua, Auntie Dianne moved to a two-story house directly opposite LVN where my parents had lived and worked. My parents meanwhile had moved to a residential-commercial apartment that could accommodate their new business also within a convenient two-kilometer distance from LVN.

Cubao, the district where the city house was established, is also the location of the terminus for overnight buses to/from Nabua. It is due to this convenience that many Nabueños found themselves settling down in the area. It was declared as the Philippines’ capital after WWII, and until 1976, 4 years after the declaration of Martial Law by the Marcos dictatorship. Cubao flourished as one of the Philippines’ commercial centers, and it was here that the first fully air-conditioned mall in the Philippines opened in 1976. When I was a child we flocked with other families right to the heart of Cubao for the automated nativity scene that was popular all throughout Metro Manila during Christmas. In fact, much fiction and poetry have been inspired

129 The final closure and demolition of LVN in 2005 was a sad moment for the Philippines’ history of cinema. The demise of the LVN, for our family, evokes memories of a local industry that created a profound impact on our family’s unified work that enabled outward mobilities.
by Cubao, especially up to the early 90s, when its once glorious cityscape slowly fell into ghetto-like disrepair.\textsuperscript{130} The establishment of the city house reveals the intertwining of family ambitions, kinship politics and relations with the changing cultural landscapes of the country in general.

Like the U.S. Navy men discussed in Chapter 3, who aspired for an occupation other than farming, my grandparents also imagined their children as having white-collar professions. An education in Manila was supposed to ensure the first generation’s future, the same as Manay Allan in Chapter 4 who also studied in Metro Manila to expand his prospects. In various schools in Manila, my mother and her siblings studied English, interior design, law, criminology, radio communication, biology, nursing, and architecture. Eight out of the 10 surviving children of Tatay and Nanay lived in the Cubao house at some point, mostly for university education, and later for work in the city. Those who stayed in Bicol studied accounting, education, and commerce. Overall, these educational backgrounds of the first generation are emblematic of the effects of America’s “policy of benevolent assimilation” on the Philippines, which emphasized the production of white-collar professionals and technical specialists through educational reform.\textsuperscript{131} Both Tatay and Nanay were literate and able to speak English as a consequence of the earlier American education campaign to implement universal primary education throughout the Philippines; this effort was in initial stages when their parents were raising them during the time

\textsuperscript{130} In his poem ‘Walang Kalabaw sa Cubao’ (No Carabao in Cubao), poet and activist Ericson Acosta (2011) renders Cubao as a fantastical land. Kim Nepomuceno translates Acosta’s poem: “There are baby blue horses / And a humpback Tyrannosaurus Rex / While the opposing ends / Of Goldilocks and the showroom / Of Automatic Center /.” But Acosta also writes that this glimmer has already faded: “Cubao itself is the carabao / And they, high on its back, the pompous roosting flies.”

\textsuperscript{131} Once denied education during the Spanish period, the educational system established by the U.S. was a realization of what the Filipinos under Spain had long vied for (Smith 1945).
of colonial transition of power from Spain to the United States. To be aligned with these changes brought in by the American colonial rule, families such as ours shifted their ambitions from agricultural labor to obtaining higher education and work in the city, and later, to seeking social mobility overseas.

The high valuation of education was passed on to the second generation and many of us in the second generation also moved to the city house at various times, for varying durations, to pursue education. New residents came after others had left to return to Nabua or to leave for overseas work. Of my 23 cousins on the maternal side of the family, 14 lived in the city house at one time or another. As more residents from Nabua flowed into the city, smaller rooms were carved out of the previously spacious rooms to accommodate dorm beds. The plywood walls separating the makeshift rooms were thin and did not reach up to the ceiling so that there was no such thing as a private conversation. The occupation of rooms and beds was assigned according to rank and age, and the best room (with the biggest bed and windows) would always go to the eldest in the generation currently in residence. For example, among the second generation, my eldest sister who is also the eldest of all grandchildren, stayed with Auntie Dianne in the only air-conditioned room which younger cousins jokingly called the “spinsters’ room.” Our laundry was done by Auntie Dianne, and nothing was expected from us in return, except for following the house rules, which included the no-boyfriend/girlfriend-while-studying rule. These rules were primarily defined by Auntie Dianne, and her decisions were often final and incontestable. Issues that could not be resolved were raised in consultation with my mother who also held generational

\[132\] Some of the people raised during this period later became important pillars of the state-structured program for emigration, which is one of the cornerstones in the Philippine government’s neoliberal policies (McHale 1961, 337–38).
rank, meaning that her decisions were often respected by the younger members of the family even if they resided elsewhere. The city house was also strictly gender-segregated. The upper floor was the girls’ sleeping area, while the first floor was for the boys. While the female residents could spend time in any of the spaces downstairs, the male residents were to come upstairs only for errands, or with the permission of the female residents. The dishwashing was assigned by default to whoever the youngest resident (male or female) of the house was at the moment. This was understood by everyone as a lesson about gendered boundaries and generational respect, even for rules that sometimes did not make much sense, especially for the youngest ones.

All throughout the nearly three-decade lifespan of the city house, all immediate family members were accommodated without charge. The city-based second generation’s university fees were paid for by their nuclear families, either by parents or their working siblings and with the assistance of care provided by Auntie Dianne in the city home. The living expenses of the first and second generations who studied in Manila were partly covered by the family business until the business could sustain itself. The basket business began to slow in the 90s, with competition from the cheaper products coming out of China and rising costs of raw materials due to the increasing deforestation of the Philippines. Towards the time of the business’ collapse, the head of the city house maintained a regional specialty canteen offering home-cooked meals whose earnings continued to partly contribute to the needs of the second generation studying in Manila. Main cooking ingredients such as taro leaves were shipped weekly from Nabua, facilitated by family members in the kingurang house. The canteen was frequented by film industry professionals, including the big names, as LVN Studio was located just across. The
family’s canteen was also once hailed by the *Asian Wall Street Journal* as one of Manila’s hidden gems (Krich and Sesser 2005).

The establishment of the city house expands current discussions on the Filipino family as it expands across space. Researchers have found that non-nuclear kin groups are more common in urban and economically stable families who receive the influx of family members coming from the rural areas for work or study. These families tend to become non-nuclear as they become embedded in an extended system of familial reciprocity, care obligations, and rights. Meanwhile, nuclearity is revealed to be more common among lower class families (Liu, Rubel, and Yu 1969). Relatedly, Jocano (1969) writes that as understood by a certain farming community in Panay Island, Central Philippines, family membership often includes those who live outside the village yet continue to return or send back financial help to sustain the household.† These family linkages do not seem to disappear despite distances, as Deirdre Mckay (2005) shows in her analysis of “remittance landscapes” in Northern Philippines and Nicole Constable (1999) demonstrates in her discussion of Hong Kong as a site for Filipinos to extend familial and community obligations. Shifting to other transnational examples, Mary Chamberlain (2006) writes about the extending reach of the Afro-Caribbean “household” across continents, while Alexia Bloch (2017a, 53) investigates the “complex ways that families and households provide for children by combining historical caregiving practices with investment in transnational circuits of mobility.” Central to these discussions is the recognition of the strengthening, rather than disintegration, of links and attachments (whether emotional or economic) between the

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† Defining the household is another matter. The Filipino household, as Jocano (1969) describes it, often means extended family whose members are engaged in reciprocal obligations and duties. For example, out of a sense of duty, older people or children from the extended family or non-consanguineal kin may be taken into the household.
increasingly mobile members of the family that see themselves as emerging from geographic-, house-based histories.

However, more than an indicator of social class and more than understanding the relations of internally migrating families as circumscribed within rural-directed remittance of resources, the expenditure of resources – including care – across rural-urban spaces as seen in the case of my family also reflect efforts at working towards a goal clearly understood by the larger kin: the attainment of a good life for the next generation. The attainment of this goal could only be made possible through an education subsidized by earnings from the grandparents’ business, but also very importantly, with Auntie Dianne’s care in the city house – a key resource to which two generations of family members gravitated. This labor continues to exert power and influence in the family, as I will discuss later in the section on an aunt’s homecoming.

Nena Eslao (1966, in Javillonar 1978, 356) identifies the expanding network of Filipino families as having a “built-in mechanism” that allows for the accommodation of “strains and stresses” of migration. Motivating this mobility are the aspirations of family members for improving their social status, and this possibility is often imagined coming to fruition through rural to urban mobility. This means that a family that is spread to various locations becomes an asset to the family. Thus, the family characterized by the fluidity and mobility of its members, as Javillonar (1978, 372) writes, “more than evidences of one’s roots, is also a major source of labor power and financial assistance in a country where access to such aid from institutional sources is highly limited.” Further, “the extended family or kinship… is the sole or major source of insurance against crisis situations and old age, since public welfare and public or private insurance systems are not yet fully institutionalized.” Javillonar writes of the Filipino family as being “forced to its own devices” to be able to adapt to the changing conditions in which they are
often embedded, often laced with crises given the weak institutional support that the Philippine government offers to its citizens (372).

Additionally, Mendez and Jocano (1979) found that urban households in Metro Manila expand as more relatives study or work in the city. This was not the case for my family as the city home can only be characterized by its transience. Not one among the first generation ultimately settled in Metro Manila, as most have returned to Nabua while others have moved to other countries. Of the 23 second generation family members who were once residents of the city home, only two continue to reside in Metro Manila, and they aspire to leave for overseas. My grandparents had no intention of purchasing any property in Metro Manila, and during the peak of the business, they accumulated farm lots in Nabua with the hopes that their children or grandchildren would someday return and till them. Today, these properties are either idle or have been rented out or pawned, as none of the later generation has learned the ways of the land.134 Towards the end of their lives, our grandparents would see the repercussions of the career trajectories they had designed for their children. Three of them are now American citizens, and one is still awaiting the results of her citizenship application. Our grandparents founded a local business and developed it from scratch into a relatively respectable venture. However, none of their children desired to seriously pursue the business – and instead aspired to overseas or white-collar employment, pursuits that seemed more secure. Nevertheless, the family, especially Auntie Dianne, is profoundly proud of its members’ educational attainments and overseas mobilities made possible in large part by the foundation of the city house.

134 Pawnning property involves using land property or other valuable materials as collateral in exchange for immediate cash.
5.5.3 Desired Destination

Many Nabueños retain pride in the connections that their townmates have created through their participation in the U.S. Navy. Public celebrations invoke the economic power that American dollar earners can bring to Nabua, as I have shown in my discussion of the Holy Week rituals in Nabua (Chapter 4). America as a desired destination country becomes even more desired as its borders become less porous. The Philippines used to be in the list of countries with the highest non-immigrant B-visa refusal rate, at 37.7 percent (U.S. Department of State-Bureau of Consular Affairs 2006).135 Those who triumph in their visa applications, or those who manage to obtain American citizenships, are lauded for such seemingly impossible achievements. Having obtained a multiple-entry U.S. visa, I am seen by my family as an expert in this technical field of visa applications.

The house of the family in Los Angeles, like in the ginikanan, comprises a network of houses with family activity also centered on one of these houses. This time, the node of family activity is the house of an aunt who was the first among the first generation to immigrate to the United States. Before immigrating to the U.S., this aunt had also lived in Cubao, under the care of Auntie Dianne. Having settled in Los Angeles, my U.S.-based aunt arranged for my grandparents to follow. Tatay refused the approved petition to immigrate while Nanay alternated between Nabua and Los Angeles, contributing intimate labor as a grandmother caring for the three hyphenated children of my aunt in Los Angeles. Securing employment through an H-1B visa, my eldest sister moved out of the city home, and soon she established her residence also in

135 In 2017, the refusal rate for B-visas went down significantly to 25.54 percent (U.S. Department of State-Bureau of Consular Affairs 2017).
Los Angeles. In the years to come, other relatives tried to visit or work in the U.S. but failed to obtain a U.S. visa in the Philippines. Some family members continue to aspire to move to the U.S., but chances look stark at a time of tightened U.S. borders that increasingly disfavors family reunification (Gjelten 2018).

The house of my aunt in the U.S. combines the characteristics of the family homes in Nabua and Cubao. Like the kingurang, it is the default site for family reunions, and for Nabua festival celebrations attended by friends from our hometown now residing in California. It is also the place where visitors, such as myself, can be housed when visiting the U.S., to be offered a taste of the great American dream. It also serves as a material testimony to success, this time not based on a local business venture, but on overseas migration. Similar to the city house, the L.A. house supports family members by providing a place for transition for the first or second generation family members who have already obtained their targeted professional qualifications back in the Philippines. Arriving in the U.S., they endure precarious labor conditions, multiple shifts, sometimes unpaid wages, and explicit and subtle practices of racism, to establish a good employment history as part of the “model minority” (Hartlep 2013), as they hope to gradually realize social mobility. Members of my family endure conditions that are “more struggle than success, more pariah than paragon, more failure than fame and fortune, and certainly more trial than triumph” (Hartlep 2013, xvii).

In the network of homes in L.A., the growing number of American second and third generation members of our family are raised only speaking English, and they are taught neither Rinconada nor Filipino. This upbringing interestingly follows the trend of language loss among second and third generation Asians in North America, including Filipino-Americans (Espiritu 2003). However, the younger family members in L.A. are being enculturated in select values of
“Filipino-ness.” Education continues to be invaluable with the first generation’s constant emphasis on the primacy of academic excellence. The familial preference for education that would lead them to professional occupations continues to be loudly trumpeted among the L.A.-based family. In the desired destination country, the family project focused on the production of professionals becomes even more aligned with the American neoliberal project of producing the “good immigrant” (Hsu 2015).

Having found stability for their own nuclear families, the members of the family who used to live in proximity to each other have now scattered all over the greater Los Angeles area. All the houses occupied by the expanding kin in L.A. reflect their different statuses, as well as the structuring effects that their occupations have on the future of the America-based family. My sister lives in a one-bedroom apartment in downtown L.A., the best housing that she could afford as a newly minted citizen. An uncle’s new suburban home is two hours away from the family circuit of homes. This move was met with resistance because of its possible effect on their attendance in family affairs. However, the relative affordability of houses in this far-flung neighborhood offered them a chance to purchase their own dream home. A cousin has purchased a new house with an outdoor pool, attesting to the monetary benefits of the nursing profession. The high-ceilinged house of the family’s first immigrant to the U.S., located in an upper-class suburb, is the most splendid of all the houses. Rhacel Parreñas (2001a, 14) writes about the formation of a transnational household structure within which money is circulated, especially to the Philippines where “economically dependent family members usually reside.” The growing network of houses of my family in L.A. shows the different degrees of “success” of family members who occupy different economic statuses. But more importantly, this network
exemplifies persisting familial expectations of interdependent care, and hopes of reproducing solidarities that were made possible by proximity in Nabua and Cubao.

The various kinds of economic achievements of U.S.-based family members serve as the gauge for the good life that is repeatedly ingrained in the minds of family members remaining in Nabua. “There is no place like America,” is a phrase often invoked during family gatherings. But the former residents of the city house have not all moved to the U.S., and they can now be found across the globe. The places they have called home, other than Nabua, include Manila, Beijing, Jakarta, Melbourne, Shenzhen, Sydney, Dubai, Riyadh, Auckland, Liverpool, Osaka, Tokyo, and Vancouver. China now hosts four of my cousins, and others may follow to work as English teachers, taking advantage of the shift of global wealth to Asia, as well as the cultural capital of being able to speak English that they have earned from their Westernized education in the Philippines. The achievements related to the overseas mobility of family members whether they reside in L.A. or elsewhere, it is always recalled, were not made possible simply by individual efforts but instead required layers of care and shared resources between generations and spread across houses in expanding geographies.

Felicidad Cordero and Isabel Panopio (in Jocano 1967b) find that care, as practiced in the Filipino consanguineal family, flows along the extended kin network, and not only vertically in nuclear families. Cordero and Panopio, however, advance the idea that Filipino families are “authoritarian,” an analysis that Jocano (1967b) refutes. According to Jocano, this generalization stems from comparing Filipino family relations with Western practice (e.g. the practice of sharing the parents’ residence for a long time). Instead, Jocano (1967b, 170) suggests that the bilateral Filipino family is more “supportive than authoritarian in character,” with members of the kin group “enjoy(ing) support of his kin group rather than being thrown into conformity by
virtue of authority.” I believe that this perspective on the Filipino family as inclusive, supportive, and flexible, remains productive in analyzing contemporary families with many mobile members. My family was primarily oriented along a rural to urban migration trajectory, but it has now already expanded transnationally. My family is flexible in terms of its ideas about home-making and sharing of care and resources – in a sense “functionally extended,” to use a description of the Filipino family by Stella Go (1993, 14) – or “dynamic, functional,” as discussed by Judy Seville (1982). The network of my family’s houses acted as, or continues to act as, locations for the maintenance of the social life of the family and the larger kin. Furthermore, decision-making and the fulfillment of familial duties and obligations are spread throughout the expanding family network. Based on the description of the three houses above, my family is bilaterally extended, heavily based on consanguinity, and to achieve ambitions of upward mobility, expands its geographical reach by mobilizing and spreading familial resources, including care. The creation, maintenance, and dissolution of these houses also came with the assignment of gendered roles that was necessary for the propagation of kin unity and success. The idea of success has also shifted over time, becoming increasingly oriented towards overseas mobility.

From this discussion, it could be asked: How should we understand cases such as Auntie Dianne’s whose care extended to many members of our kin, and whose investments in terms of time and emotions were aimed at the attainment of higher success for the present generation, and for the next ones to come? This question leads me to problematize so-called Filipino “values” or ethics of care. Looking at how relational ethics and values might play out across geographies can help us understand how the members of our kin group, despite vast distances, continue to be entangled in the lives of the now geographically dispersed family.
5.6 Smooth Relations of Care?

It is often said during family gatherings that it was due to Auntie Dianne’s prolonged role as a carer for the city house that she had “missed out” on marriage. Auntie Dianne has in fact chosen to remain single, and whenever the issue of her singlehood is brought up during conversations, she says with apparent pride that she “has never been kissed, never been touched.” She takes pride in all her contributions to the family in general, especially in those who have found work and residence overseas. She would argue that she had many suitors, but singlehood was a prerequisite for having the capacity to care for many others. In Nabua, the equivalent word for an unmarried individual is “angot,” and it is gender-neutral. Depending on usage, the term may be perceived derogatorily, but it also connotes values that are perceived positively. For example, an angot woman may be seen as virtuous and strict, and sometimes, unapproachable but she may also be regarded as “maboot” (kind), “maurot” (hardworking), “matinao” (giving), and “matinabang” (helpful).

Feminists have critiqued earlier literature on nurturance and caregiving as tending to perpetuate the male-female divide that supports the structuring of a heteropatriarchal capitalist society. Rhacel Parreñas (2001b), in her influential work on mothering from a distance, writes that the notion of sacrifice is frequently brought up by the children left behind and by the mothers who have left for work overseas. Parreñas convincingly argues that the structural inequalities of globalization are the force behind the sacrificing of emotional needs in exchange for material goods. Alexia Bloch (2017a) shows in her ethnography of “other mothers” in southern Moldova that it is likewise important to look into the interweaving themes – of financial crises affecting households, diminished state roles, historical practices of nurturing, and women’s aspirations – that inflect care practices of the contemporary family. These discussions are
productive in my thinking about Auntie Dianne’s care for the family. Along the same lines as
Bloch’s ethnography about the complexity of care that proceeds “without suggesting a universal
experience of nurturing,” I push for a discussion of “sacrifice” that considers a careful context-
based unpacking. In contributing to these debates, I take note of Marilyn Strathern’s (1987)
critique of anthropologists’ tendency to compartmentalize their informants into categories often
informed by their home cultures, as well as her suggestion to pay more attention to how
informants perceive themselves.

Auntie Dianne’s case can be understood not only within the discourse of sacrifice and of
care and nurturance where women are often theorized as subordinated and left without choice
within patriarchal conditions and gendered expectations. Her actions may also be understood
according to how she perceives her role as important to herself both as an individual and as a
member of a larger family. In this sense, rather than dismissing Auntie Dianne’s role as an
oppressed female-nurturer whose labor is structured by patriarchy, one may investigate her
valuation of her own labor for the family as negotiated within the context of rural-urban-
international migration. Auntie Dianne sees her provision of care as essential to the fulfilment of
familial ambitions. She told me over the phone in 2012: “I have no regrets. Sometimes even
those who have professions are not happy, am I not right? I was able to help, and because of that,
I am extremely happy. Now I see that my nephews, my nieces, and my siblings are all in good
standing. It is my number one goal until this hour to just serve all of you.” It needs to be pointed
out that Auntie Dianne’s self-perceived labor for the family is also very closely linked to the
family’s ideals for success that eventually led to the migration of many who lived under her care.
This means that it is also within these ideals that Auntie Dianne’s role in the family was
produced.
Unmarried family members assuming caretaker roles can be found in many regions of the Philippines. Charles Kaut (1960, 39), in his study of a Tagalog-speaking agricultural settlement in Luzon, writes that marriage arrangements worked so that there would always be a ‘matandang dalaga’ (old maiden) or a ‘matandang binata’ (old bachelor) left to care for the family home. In my family, the story of Lola Trini (the elder sister of Nanay) is often told with profound reverence. Lola Trini was an angot who ran a modest vegetable stall at the city market for over twenty years. During times of need, relatives would go to her store to get food supplies, which she would give away for free. Lola Carlita, Tatay’s youngest sibling, is another figure that Auntie Dianne likens her role to. Lola Carlita also used the profit from her small store to help with the education of her nephews and nieces. Lola Carlita lived until her 90s, and she was held in high esteem for the care she gave in the past. Auntie Dianne is now retired from her work in the city home and she lives in the elders’ home in Nabua. She calls herself “well-traveled.” Her trips to Hong Kong, New Zealand, the United States, Mexico, and to popular tourist destinations in the Philippines were all gifts of gratitude from her kin for the care that she has given to the family in the past.

American Jesuit priest and anthropologist Frank Lynch is known to be one of the pioneers of the study of Filipino “values.” Lynch (1962) proposes “standards” of looking at values and norms of the Filipino whose actions are oriented towards always achieving what he calls Smooth Interpersonal Relations (SIR).\textsuperscript{136} The framework SIR conceptualizes Filipinos as working

\textsuperscript{136} Lynch (1962, 88) conducted his research in a rural settlement, but the details of his data are not clear. He writes rather generally that he “develops one theme in a set of basic values held by most inhabitants of the lowland Philippines” (italics in original). He writes that the “model portrait” that he wants to describe then needs to “represent as faithfully as possible 80 percent who live in rural settlements of 1,000 or less, and not necessarily the minority living in large urban centers.”
towards social acceptance which he defined as “be(ing) accepted by one’s fellows for what one is, or thinks oneself to be, or would like to be, and given the treatment due to one’s station” (86). Lynch’s work made significant contributions to the study of personality in the Philippines, with an emphasis on the ethics of being in relation with others, rather than on individually-held values and context-specific responses. Literature on Philippine values has formed a body of work that presents alternative ways of theorizing relations outside Western hegemonic schools of thought. For example, Natividad Manauat (2005, 131) argues that the many forms of caring that can be seen in daily life such as ‘pag-aaruga’ (taking care of), ‘pagtangkilik’ (appreciation), ‘paglingap’ (to protect with carefulness), ‘pagkalinga’ (taking someone under one’s care), and even ‘pakialam’ (meddling), among others, are “highly relational, emotive, and very similar to the Feminist ethics of care.” These values play out in Auntie Dianne’s extended care for those who lived in the city house.

Thinking about care in terms of the SIR framework means care that is given comes with expectations to be returned in the future. Manauat (2005, 130) defines ‘utang na loob’ (debt of gratitude) the mindfulness about others that arises from the concern for the people around us. A person who does not recognize utang na loob may be called ‘walang hiya’ (shameless), and calling a person walang hiya is deeply injurious (Roces 1998, 11). Utang na loob connections thus serve as “regulators that pressure individuals to conform to their social obligations” (Roces

137 Lynch (1962, 89) writes that SIR connotes: “…the smile, the friendly lift of the eyebrow, the pat on the back, the squeeze of the arm, the word of praise or friendly concern. It means being agreeable, even under difficult circumstances, or keeping quiet or out of sight when discretion passes the word. It means sensitivity to what other people feel at any given moment, and a willingness and ability to change tack (if not direction) to catch the lightest favoring breeze.”
138 On the “feminist ethics of care,” see Carol Gilligan (1982).
139 As Mina Roces (1998, 11) also writes, “A Filipino is expected to be aware of his or her utang na loob obligations and although repayment cannot be measured, he or she should always attempt to repay it.”
It is possible to analyze Auntie Dianne’s care for the family using the SIR framework that sees smoothness as a goal of interpersonal relations: Auntie Dianne’s perception of her role as a necessary foundation for familial success can be seen as “heavily relational” and it “finds expression in looking out for the welfare of others (‘kapwa’) in emotional terms (‘damdamin’) and moral terms (‘dangal’)” (Manauat 2005, 133). Within SIR formulations and vocabulary, Auntie Dianne trusts that her expectations will be met, even if the care and support that she has given are not backed by any actual contracts insuring eventual reciprocity. The gifts she has received and the future ones that she anticipates may be understood along the reciprocal practices of utang na loob. Within utang na loob ethics, Auntie Dianne does not need to worry about the future as her debtors will desire to protect their social status and thus the care that she has given in the past can be expected to be kindly reciprocated.

Jocano (1966, 283) re-examines what became a classic work by Lynch, commenting on its “common-sense anthropology” approach and simplified methods that produced results which generalized about Filipino values and orientations. Jocano argues that the evidence from rural and urban communities instead shows that Filipinos tend to disregard the arrival at SIR. He contends, “the apparent need for survival is given top priority over peace and tranquility obtained through silence” (286). Like Jocano, I find the universalization of the “Filipino experience” problematic when, on the other hand, there may be different operating values and practices – external influences on these notwithstanding – around the archipelago. These categories of values can also elide the more complex task of peeling away the different layers of what could be

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140 In the context of the continued migration of Filipinos, these same concepts, particularly utang na loob, are mobilized by the Philippine state in appealing to the overseas workers to honor their debt and pay tribute to their country by sending remittances that could help boost its national incomes (Guevarra 2003, 18).
highly particular and situational events. SIR analysis also has intersections with the ideas of exchange and reciprocity such as Fredrik Barth’s (1966) theory of transactionalism, where the notion of reciprocity governs transactions such that interacting parties negotiate so that the value gained is greater than the value lost. SIR and transactionalist analyses both suggest that the values to be gained or lost during exchange may often be calculated, implying the predictability of human relations. This school of analysis tends to see non-confrontation as the primary goal and result of relationships.

I concur with propositions to rethink the supposed “smoothness” of relationships in the Philippines. I agree with efforts to reconsider values and actions “in terms of exclusiveness and directness of relationship” (Jocano 1966, 290–91) and to look into the “situational variables – the context of action” (Hennig 1983). While the conceptualizations about Filipino personhood, such as SIR theory and others that followed, provide insights into thinking about people’s actions, I suggest that seeing smoothness as the underlying principle in understanding human relations tends to ignore less than ironed-out human relations. I continue by drawing an example from my fieldwork, using memory and the practice of “pasali” (subdued performance) as productive analytical concepts that problematize generalized “values,” and that instead orient us towards thinking about particular contexts and situations. I see memory and pasali as intersecting categories that are often missed when one’s analytical focus has the predetermined goal of illustrating the smoothness of Filipino interpersonal relations. I hope to go beyond considering the labor of care given by Auntie Dianne as primarily a calculated action involving expectations of exchange and reciprocity. I complicate further the stories about the three houses that I have written above, showing that familial and interpersonal transactions are imbued with affects, emotions, performances, attachments, and reinforcements of “traditions.” These are in turn
inextricably entangled with familial ambitions of success and mobility crafted within a postcolonial and neoliberal set of desires that frame people’s actions towards certain futures.

5.7 Theatrics During a Homecoming

In September 2013, Auntie Lou, one of the U.S.-based aunts, returned to the Philippines for a vacation. She had decided to go on a tour in another town before arriving in Nabua and had invited Auntie Dianne and her friend from the U.S., who was also vacationing during the same period. These travels are among the gifts-in-kind that Auntie Dianne takes pride in. To be invited is a form of recognition of one’s importance, and it is one way of incrementally repaying one’s infinite utang na loob. However, in the middle of their holiday away from Nabua, Auntie Lou called to tell me in frustration: “Nagpasali na naman si Auntie Dianne mo” (Your Auntie Dianne did a pasali once again). In Chaper 4, I discussed the balo-balo ritual as a kind of pasali that impresses, that appeals to people’s attention, and that can be the subject of conversations and gossip. But when used to describe people’s actions, pasali as a spectacle takes on a negative meaning. Auntie Lou continued: Auntie Dianne was acting like a child (“iyan sa igin”), and her pasali included not wanting to get out of the car and not participating in the group tour, which for Auntie Lou was “kamakasusupog” (shameful) as it communicated to her invited friend their lack of sibling solidarity. Annoyed by the disruption of her travel schedule, Auntie Lou reproached Auntie Dianne for not participating, leading Auntie Dianne to stage an even grander spectacle: she began to skip meals. Auntie Lou wanted to maximize her one-month vacation from her job as a nurse in L.A., and she hoped for Auntie Dianne to take part in what she imagined to be a memorable homecoming. Auntie Lou also felt that her incremental gift was being taken lightly by Auntie Dianne, as if it had no value.
Meanwhile, for Auntie Dianne, her pasali was a relevant performance through which she could open up a space for re-asserting her authority. She wanted to communicate that she was still in command of her own time, and even disrupt others’ if the conditions did not suit her preferences. Through such pasali, she demanded that her debtors remember the care that she had once, in the city home, extended to help them attain success and that she still maintains some power by troubling time and exhausting their energy. In Nabua, tradition dictates a mode of interaction based on age. For example, younger siblings often cannot exercise liberty in pinpointing their older sibling’s mistakes or if this must be done, actions need to be carefully calculated so as not to appear disrespectful to the guarded sibling relations based on age rank.

Shelly Errington (1990) writes that relationships in Southeast Asia can be understood within two types of difference: difference as it relates to seniority, and; difference as it relates to sex. Age marks seniority, and therefore sibling order often comes as a useful principle in organizing kin relations. Auntie Dianne, used to being in command of situations especially involving those who lived under her care, felt the decline of her rank as she now merely tags along without the financial capacity that she once held in the city house. There is often no hierarchy between siblings based on their sex. This equality of the sexes among siblings creates an environment of unity, aiding the creation of a healthy and positive sibling relationship. As I mentioned above, Auntie Dianne and Auntie Lou, angot and widowed without children, respectively, are understood to be the co-heirs of the kingurang house even if their male siblings occasionally dispute their rights to this family property. But only Auntie Dianne currently lives in Nabua as Auntie Lou is U.S.-based. While my mother might have rights to mediate in regard to family property, only Auntie Dianne as angot has the right to use incomes, such as rent collections from the still-undistributed property, for her own daily sustenance. With the properties of the elders
still undivided, only Auntie Dianne who is angot holds rights to access these resources. Unable to produce children of her own due to the early demise of her husband, Auntie Lou holds rights to share residence in this house should she demand it in the future. This means that children are expected to provide for their elders when the time of need comes. At the same time, this expectation communicates to the younger generations of our family the responsibility that they must take in the future in caring for their own parents. Unmarried family members who also do not have their own children are often given more access to the left-behind property of the elders. This means that unmarried and childless family members can expect to have some property to use or sell during their older years. Occasionally, Auntie Dianne also receives additional remittances from overseas relatives, such as Auntie Lou and her nephews and nieces now living in Manila or elsewhere, who once lived under her care in the city home.

Auntie Dianne and Auntie Lou are now approaching their senior years and the prospect of living together in the kinangurang, without children of their own, is in sight. Auntie Dianne realizes that without a pension and savings, as her previous labor as the carer of the city home had no direct monetary returns, she might in fact not become the kinangurang’s main decision-maker, despite her age rank over Auntie Lou, and despite being an angot who is often left with the responsibility to oversee the affairs of the elders’ house. With a pension from the U.S. to look forward to, Auntie Lou’s future looks secure while Auntie Dianne knows that her old age will depend on the agreeability of her attitude with Auntie Lou, her siblings, and the rest of her kin who, as everyone in the family already knows, “owe” her.

Pasali, such as the one acted out by Auntie Dianne, compels others to remember their debts but one’s debts cannot be verbally demanded from their debtors. When it happens that someone mentions somebody else’s debts, one often exclaims: “Kaparasara-sambit man na!” (How dare
them to bring it up!). An example of this would be Auntie Dianne’s fosterage of one of my cousins. The cousin resided with Auntie Dianne from pre-school years until she obtained her university degree in nursing. Such forms of consanguineal fosterage are not founded on legality and are only based on a verbal agreement between consenting parties, in this case, between Auntie Dianne and my cousin’s biological parents. Previous research has documented this kind of “open system” where the care for children is transferred within the family as a “doubling” strategy for different purposes – “the way of sheltering one’s children against life’s unforeseen exigencies…” (Yu and Liu 1980, 226) and children who have been claimed or “taken in” can later return to their biological parents if they desire.141 Unlike legal adoption, “taking” or claiming children does not mean that the duties and privileges of the originating family have already been forfeited. Finishing her degree under the care of Auntie Dianne, and later with the additional financial support for her university education through overseas remittances from Auntie Lou, my cousin “returned” to her family of origin when the city house finally dissolved.

Unmarried individuals like Auntie Dianne may benefit from the flexibility of their status in the family. Should their economic capacities allow it, they may “take in” family members under their care, and often, when no longer able to, the role of carer may be dissolved. As carer across nuclear families and sometimes through generations, they are able to spread their influence and insist on their methods of care for others. Later, they take pride in their efforts should people who had been in their care “make it.” They may even benefit from the utang na loob that

141 This research on Cebu families found three ways by which family members are circulated: spend-for pattern (the child resides with biological parents but the child’s expenses are paid for by a relative residing at another place); borrowing or depositing children (children are left under the care of another family living elsewhere for an agreed period of time), and; taken or claimed (when upon verbal agreement, children are removed from their biological parents’ household or when children are “claimed” by other members of the clan as their “child”) (Yu and Liu 1980, 249–52).
relatives who were once in their care would eventually want to repay. However, as seen in the
case of Auntie Dianne, it may also be that contexts change as they become inflected by other
factors such as age, proximity, mobility, retirement prospects, etc. Despite having cared for this
cousin for nearly two decades until she finished her university degree, Auntie Dianne cannot
demand financial support from this cousin when she reaches her elderly years in the same way
that parents can expect care from their own children. In the end, Auntie Dianne can only
anticipate “gifts” as it is up to this once-adopted cousin to consistently recall the “debts” that she
might want to repay, but she does not have to. When Auntie Dianne receives gifts from my
cousin during special occasions as a form of expressing gratitude for the care she once received,
and to show that my cousin remembers her past in the city home, it would be said, “maray man”
(It is just right). When my cousin fails to remember, Auntie Dianne does pasali by not replying
to text messages, not attending family gatherings, and by muttering in a pained voice: “Ku
kadto...” (In the past…), trailing off to suggest that the listener should already know what must
be remembered. During this cousin’s “pamalayi,” a key part of wedding negotiations (as the
symbolic gathering of the parents of the engaged partners), rumor has it that Auntie Dianne was
upset by not being invited to participate and that the event was held at a restaurant. While the
location may seem irrelevant to some, for Auntie Dianne, intimate events such as wedding
negotiations must be held in the elders’ residence in which she now resides, especially if it
involves my cousin who was under her care for two decades.

The person to whom the debt is owed commands power and respect by not mentioning the
extent of one’s debts. Auntie Dianne and others who might feel that they are being bypassed or
forgotten may resort to pasali – a spectacle as well as a strategy to reanimate fading memories
about the time, care, and nurturance that others have given in the past. The performance of what
might seem like an unreasonable drama invokes memory among one’s debtors. It is through a public act that gathers witnesses, and that could potentially disrupt family relations and solidarities, that one’s acting up works to pull people back to their “proper” places. However, it is risky as it does not work all the time. Auntie Dianne’s pasali to her siblings would occasionally impact her relations with them. Instances have occurred when those living overseas have cut off support in the form of financial remittances when hurt or disappointed by the pasali of their left-behind relatives. Pasali, a staging of one’s feelings, is becoming less negotiated within and less resolved through traditional organizational codes. Whereas in the past elders who acted up were often appeased and given the stage and space for their performances of drama, in the contemporary times, not infrequently, the previously expected responses to the pasali are now subsumed by external factors such as economy and finances, troubling kinship expectations as locally practiced in a rural town like Nabua.

5.8 Conclusions: Migration as a Family Project

The concept of the “Filipino family” has been left generalized and unproblematised in the context of the country’s multiple colonial histories and fast-changing times. Migration nuances the meaning and intimate practice of the contemporary family. The complex dynamics of migration of the Filipino family is only beginning to be extensively studied, especially from the perspective of researchers who are deeply embedded in the same stories as they write about. Through the migration history of my family, I showed how the creation, maintenance, and dissolution of houses was, and continues to be, necessary for the propagation of kin unity and success. The idea of success also shifts but it is increasingly oriented towards overseas mobility. Migration is desired by the family but migration also shapes familial practices. We have seen in
the case of Auntie Dianne how the family’s desires for upward mobility through rural and overseas migration have transformed the family’s practice of intergenerational care. I showed that the family can devise its own mechanisms for encouraging family members to cooperate in fulfilling familial ambitions towards an envisioned better future for the present and next generations.

The “house” is a useful analytical concept in especially looking at a family that expands and unfolds across geographies. Houses point to kinship practices in this age where the family nurtures a “common” desire for the “good life.” The three houses of my family, more particularly, were/are also sites in which power and roles held by some members of the family have emerged or shifted, as they were/are also locations in which the “traditional” could be rearticulated and reinforced for various purposes. These houses host “values” that have been carried over from traditions that refuse to let go. Family life, especially when continuing to be grounded in the originating locality, remains entrenched in what can be called “traditional” kinship practices, but these ongoing traditions are also in constant tension with the changes in everyday life brought about by global economic forces.

Our grandparents’ persistent mantra to maximize our cultural capital through education has pushed my generation to seek out university education that would make us more marketable in the global economy. San Juan (2000) argues that the expansion of economic horizons for a country divided by class was achieved through plunging Filipinos into the global labor market – and this is exactly the route that my family has taken. The inflection of class in these familial ambitions can be seen in how family members, for example, value the educational qualifications that they had obtained in the past. When Auntie Dianne is asked why she did not pursue a teaching career, she would respond that she was content to obtain a university degree merely,
“tanganing di ma-menos” (so as not to be mocked). The term menos derives from Spanish, meaning “less” or “inferior,” and its use in Nabua is loaded with a layered colonial past. People who are looked down upon – “namemenos” – often include those who have not gained enough cultural and economic capital that could have afforded them social mobility. As education was once reserved for the elites, my family perceives the educational attainment of its members as a treasure that cannot be taken away, especially after the collapse of the family’s once prosperous business. The first generation would say that the family as a whole would never be mocked by fellow Nabueños because the education that the family has collectively invested in (both in terms of monetary expenses and care) has become part of their status and prestige. This thinking reflects a shift of consciousness around how status is cultivated; during the Spanish period importance was accorded to land ownership, whereas during American colonization the civilizing discourse centered on educating the Filipinos. These familial investments in education eventually enabled the overseas mobility of many members of my family.

In understanding familial entanglements more deeply, I used the concept of pasali which I discussed as a kind of subdued performance that draws from an archive of “traditions.” The pasali is useful as a framework in challenging the supposed “smoothness” of Filipino relations – what has become a formulaic form of analysis that illustrates the Filipino “ways of doing.” Through the pasali, family members, despite being individuated by education, personal agencies, and neoliberal ambitions, are entangled in processes which pull them back into, and re-orientate them to, the past, “traditions,” collective concerns such as familial success that concern the larger family. Pasali opens a space for thinking about how family members negotiate and strategize in the context of complex and increasingly transnational family dynamics. Kinship studies in the
Philippines need to consider the work of performance in family relations and I hope that the concept of the pasali will contribute to this discussion.

Finally, it is here that I return to my mother’s definition of kinship mentioned in the introduction. My mother currently awaits her interview schedule for her much-desired American citizenship. She needs an American citizenship, she told me during an online chat conversation. But the citizenship that she so desires is not for gaining prestige accorded to U.S. immigrants – a status that is much-celebrated in Nabua. Needing to undergo hemodialysis three times a week, and with her worsening health due to diabetes and various complications, the possibility of returning to the Philippines – where comprehensive national health care is non-existent – she is painfully aware, is a distant possibility. The reunion in L.A. with all four of her children that she wished for in 2016 did not happen as my brother, her only left-behind child in the Philippines, was denied a tourist visa for re-entering the United States. She told us that she hopes our family reunion will not happen during the “final viewing” – her funeral. With American citizenship, she would finally be able to legally sponsor the U.S. immigration application of my brother, whose upward mobility is “delayed” as he remains in the Philippines. While she worries about our empty apartment in Nabua, occasionally sending money for its upkeep, she clearly envisions her children to permanently reside “abroad.” She wants her children to move elsewhere even if she hopes to retire in Nabua. She frequently reminds her three daughters residing overseas to remember to help their sibling left-behind in Manila. At the same time, she eagerly awaits her citizenship interview despite knowing that her son’s immigration application is co-terminus with her life. Visa sponsorship applications are terminated upon the passing of those who sponsor them. Obtaining an American citizenship is therefore my mother’s final kin work.
Chapter 6. Bare Subsistence in the Age of Rural and Overseas Mobilities

6.1 The Subsistence Villagers

In May 2014, I participated in a “feeding program” at a municipality classified “indigent village” called Agikikan. I found myself accompanying volunteers who are members of an online group, and who that day distributed school supplies to the children of the barangay, using all the donations that a family collected via their participation in the year’s “Search for Easter Angel” (Figure 6.1.1.). After we distributed the bowls of freshly cooked rice porridge to the children of the barangay, a local official approached me to ask if there were also medicines that would be given out that day. As pre-instructed by the organizers of the event, I told her that we indeed brought boxes of antibiotics but that they would have to claim their share later at the health center where we would be dropping them off. She frowned and told me with evident anguish, “Life is hard.” The main sources of livelihood, she proceeded to say, include only “nigo-nigo” (weaving winnowing baskets) and “lote-lote” (plot farming). In the local language, words are doubled to change their meaning, which may end up being completely different from the original. For example, the word “kulang” which means “lacking” or “scarce” is doubled to refer to “often-experienced scarcity.” When used in a different context, “kulang-kulang” could also mean “gone crazy.” Words are also doubled to imply that some activity is not actually “real” such as “nigo-nigo” or “balo-balo.” Each nigo-nigo, depending on the size, costs from PhP8-15 (USD.15-.28); for daily farm work, farmers receive from PhP200-350 (USD3.8-6.6) per day.

142 Unlike other parents, the family of the runner-up angel decided to donate their collected money not to the church but to the children of “indigent” families in Agikikan identified in a census prepared by the local government and shared with the volunteer group.
which is 30-50 percent lower than the nationally approved rates for agricultural work (National Wages and Productivity Commission, Department of Labor and Employment 2017). In this case, some economic value derives from both basket weaving and farming, but the financial returns are too meager to be considered real. She told me that making baskets provides for their everyday necessities. Farming is seasonal and precarious due to the unpredictable weather. Their farming arrangements with landowners, she told me, had already shifted to the daily wage system that is common in the bigger cities in the Bicol region. She heaved a sigh saying, “Irak man talaga kadi mga tios” (How unfortunate it is for us, the poor). Perhaps wondering if she could now receive medicines after this brief yet intimate conversation, she asked again about them, but I could only repeat my answer. She responded with a heart-breaking reflection about their condition in Agikikan, “Kin pwede sanang imanda a awak na magpundo na sa paginga-inga” (If we could only command our bodies to stop breathing).

![Figure 6.1.1 Children sit on a plow while waiting for the feeding program to begin.](image)
In writing this final chapter, I risk, in Sara Ahmed’s (2010) words, “to kill joy.” Like Alexia Bloch’s (2017b, 5) ethnography about gendered mobilities from post-Soviet Russia to Istanbul, the stories here are not “of progression, of people mastering the ways of capitalism.” I highlight the stories of the majority of Nabueño villagers who are strangers to the moniker of their hometown.\textsuperscript{143} The villagers in Nabua have indeed heard that Nabua is the Town of Dollars, and they ask while laughing if I could show them any samples. The everyday life of the villagers that I present here creeps from the “unhappy archive” (Ahmed 2010, 17) of my field notes but echoing Sara Ahmed’s orientation, they surface in my ethnography as an effort to “make room for possibility, for chance” (20). Aspirations for a better future would appear hollow without elucidating the experience of those who nurture them. The farmer-basketmakers in Nabua are among the Bicolano population who continue to be “silent in the records” (Owen 1974).\textsuperscript{144} So here I ask: What does life look like for those who struggle amid migration-oriented state imaginings and neoliberal orientations? What kinds of futures do the “kanagtitos” or the extremely poor such as the villagers in Agikikan hope for?

Below, I first contextualize bare subsistence as experienced in Nabua within the historical and larger national situations. The push for overseas migration has material effects on the rural economy, producing lives of bare subsistence from which many poor Nabueños often do not desire to run away. I turn later to the stories of several villagers who identify themselves as both

\textsuperscript{143} I use the term “villagers” not to reinforce a binary nor to contain them in the space of rurality, but to recognize that Nabueños until today in fact distinguish themselves as coming from the centro (center or the urbanized parts of the town) or the “uma” (the farming village). These dualistic identifications or labels are burdened with stereotypes that are outside the scope of this chapter but could be discussed in another venue.

\textsuperscript{144} In his effort to piece together Bicol’s past by investigating the colonial archives, Owen (1974) finds that the worries and visions of the majority of the Bicolanos were voiced only occasionally by some concerned elites of that time.
farmers and basketmakers – living a life of bare subsistence within these dwindling means. They hold – as their narratives below will tell us – shared aspirations for improved lives. These are desires reminiscent of the enduring clamor for the poor people’s “right to survive” illuminated by Christina Blanc-Szanton (1972) in her ethnography of Estancia, a Philippine village where ¾ of the residents live in poverty. In the final discussion section, I problematize my methodological intervention as a craft entrepreneur during fieldwork. I hope for this attempt at troubling the anthropological toolkit to “add a layer of complexity to the stories” (Johnston and Pratt 2017, 988) about bare subsistence in Nabua. Ruth Behar (2007) suggests that anthropologists write without fear in “a time of blurred genres.” I hope my methodological intervention that blurs ethnography into business and personal/familial history will not be perceived as a classic case of navel-gazing – a common critique on works produced by feminist “native” researchers (Kondo 1990; Narayan 1993; Strobel 2005; Behar 2013). I am also taken with Behar’s question (2007, 16): “Is there still some lingering shame in today’s self-conscious pursuit of ethnography?” Eliding a reflection on the interweaving of my embeddedness in the craft production and the intersections of class and familial history in my ethnography, I would miss a discussion of the complexities of doing an anthropology “at home.”

6.2 Roots of Landlessness

Today, many Nabueños are landless laborers belonging to the “agrarian proletariat” (Aguilar 1983) who subsist on selling their labor to small farms and other agriculture-based enterprises. It has been 35 years since Filomeno Aguilar wrote of his bleak prognosis for the expanding class of “surplus people” whose energies will become more oppressively expropriated and expended by capitalism. Three decades after Aguilar’s chilling forecast, Neferti Tadiar
(2013, 36) wrote about the “slow, long-drawn process that now appears to be an enduring condition” of neoliberalism in the Philippines that began in the 60s, and which continues to generate “disposable populations” (Tadiar 2013, 27). I momentarily turn to Nabua’s distant past to contextualize the contemporary condition of bare subsistence experienced by its villagers. Recalling this history is important if we are to seriously consider the tendency of the residents in the rural barangays in Nabua to classify themselves as “landless,” in opposition to the “landed” or those who have dollars, or “at least something.”

Fenella Cannell (1999), in her ethnography of Calabanga town also in Bicol, writes about the people who identify themselves as ‘kami mayong-mayo’ (we who have nothing at all), contrasting themselves with the ‘an mga mayaman’ (the rich) or “those who have something.”

In a much earlier anthropological work in another Bicol town, Frank Lynch (1959) has observed that Bicolanos classify themselves as either “little people” (dependents) or “big people” (those with power). The poor people of Nabua invoke the same bifurcated power binary, classifying themselves as tios (poor) while identifying others as having the capacity to draw from some material resource such as landholdings, regular employment, remittances from Manila or overseas, and others. Along with Cannell, I find that this social division deployed by Nabueño villagers continues to flow from the historical transformations that occurred in the region.

This contemporary identification of the poor Nabueños opens a space for revisiting the contested academic position about the “two-tiered indigenous society” that appears consistently in historical accounts of Bicol (Owen 1974). According to Owen, most scholarly work on 18th

145 ‘Mayong-mayo’ is in the Bicol language which is different from the language spoken in Nabua. ‘Mayo’ translates as “nothing,” and when repeated, like nigo-nigo and lote-lote, means “double nothingness” which tells of the gravity of poverty expressed by the villagers in Cannell’s ethnography.
and 19th century Bicol writes of the upper tier as comprised of the *principales* or the landowners, and the lower tier as comprised of the ‘timawa’ or the non-principales.\textsuperscript{146} Owen writes that the Bicol historical record gives insight into the principalia – labelled as “Dons” – as having “a strong economic base” (307) but he argues that the category seems to have been contingent not only upon the extent of their landholdings but also upon business ownership, influence over elections, and respect accorded to them in the village, among a range of characteristics. As Owen writes, “the correlation between wealth and status, though real enough, was not perfect” (311). Some Dons, Owen learns from the archives, owned more than 100 hectares while others owned less than one. Owen suggests that there seemed to have been different “theoretical paths of upward mobility” (314) in the region, and the principalia class’s influence in the community persisted amid the presence of “outsiders,” who included the Spanish politicians and friars, the American merchants (from the abaca trade), and the Chinese businessmen of the early 19th century. This discussion directs attention to the evolution of this social organization that occurred in the second half of the 19th century. Owen proposes that the opening of the economy to commercialization and the liberalization of agriculture reorganized Bicol’s social organization.\textsuperscript{147} Owen’s proposition sheds light on the current state of land distribution and economy in Bicol today. A few families began to own vast landholdings to the extent that entire towns or villages

\textsuperscript{146} In the colonial documents, Owen finds that the non-principales were documented as laborers or “other inhabitants” but he also points out that there is no indication in the colonial archive about how the non-principales might have regarded themselves as a class or group (301-2). As Owen (1974, 301–2) writes, “We have almost no idea of what these non-principales might have called themselves; they are silent in the records, leaving an occasional priest or gobernadorcillo to claim to speak for them, articulate his view of their interests.”

\textsuperscript{147} Owen (1974) writes of four tiers. The uppermost tier was occupied by the super-principales (at most three to four families in each town of 10,000 people) who owned massive landholdings for agricultural production. Below this were the principales (about 10 percent of the population) who owned various sized parcels of land and which held political power and influence, followed by the timawas composed of small landholders, tenant farmers or laborers. Finally, there were the *vagamundos* or those, such as the indigenous Agtas of Bicol, who receded to the hills to evade the colonial arrival.
came to carry their names. Owen argues that the question of wealth and land ownership has often
been left out of historical analysis as most have focused on historicizing the *ilustrados* (Spanish-
educated local elites), *caciques* (political elites), and others who exerted influence in the national
realm, but are of “marginal relevance to the majority of the provincial population” (321). Owen’s
account traces the shifts in locally valued social distinctions that came to be contoured by
property ownership and wealth. In this narrative, difference came to be defined by class, while
other social distinctions such, such as ethnic belonging, became less defining in terms of one’s
identity.

Nabueños regard their landlessness as a contemporary condition, similar to Cannell’s
(1999) informants who trace their landlessness one or two generations back. Cannell appears to
have been similarly confused by her informants’ identification as “smallholder.” She notes that
land ownership could have been due to Calabanga once being a “frontier zone” to which people
moved before the 20th century to cultivate “free” and “unoccupied” lands (footnote 23, 262).
Owen also writes that in the historical records, it is “extraordinarily difficult to find
contemporary descriptions of Bicol agricultural labor and tenure, but there is apparently some
mix of small landholders (more than 80 percent of the landowners were not Dons)…” Nabua,
however, was not a settler town like Cannell’s fieldsite. It is also commonly told in Nabua that
every family has or had land of their own. One festival souvenir program of Nabua (*Nabua
Quadricentennial Celebration* 1978) hints of an important historical moment at the beginning of
the 20th century when a young notary public named Gregorio Balatan conducted a house-to-
house campaign to upgrade the real estate documents of Nabua. R. Bajandi and G. Fajardo
(1978, 58) write of Balatan’s historical notarial work in all of Nabua, “Landed estates are
practically unknown. Almost all inhabitants own some parcel of land.”\textsuperscript{148} This “hearsay” matches the latest figures that reveal residential lot ownership in Nabua as being “very high” at 90 percent, where the benchmark is 25-34 percent, and the national average is 33.5 percent (Department of Interior and Local Government 2009). However, that a town has the majority of its residents living in their own homes does not equate with having better standards of living. The prevalence of makeshift houses, the same report writes, is also “extremely high,” and access to piped-in water supply is “low.”

By classifying their respective families as formerly small landowners with property in Nabua, Nabueños trace their genealogies in the town. By saying that they “have no land,” villagers mean not having land to till. They would say that the only land they have left is the one on which their house stands, and residential lots are also commonly shared by several households. A basketmaker from Madawon jokingly told me that she has land – the pot of soil in which her son grows tomatoes for his school experiment. Those who still have small farmholdings are also often incapacitated by the lack of crops produced on their property. Boyet Duran, the head of Nabua’s Department of Agriculture (DA) office, told me in 2014 that the average landholding of a Nabueño family of four or five members is only .4 hectares or 4,000 sqm from which about 80 sacks of unmilled rice can be harvested annually.\textsuperscript{149} Duran also told me that there is a growing number of landowners in Nabua who do not till the land. Owning farmlands, for those who have moved or worked elsewhere, is an indication of upward mobility. Even if their land is left fallow, it serves as a material manifestation of the “good life” that one

\textsuperscript{148} Balatan would later emerge as the first mayor of a mountainous area that he proposed to be separated from Nabua in 1951, and which he named after his family.

\textsuperscript{149} This amounts to about USD1,160-1,470, a meager amount if you also account for the cost of labor, seeds, fertilizer and other expenses for the entire cropping season.
had earned, often, not by working the land. The agricultural officer told me that power imbalances felt in everyday life in Nabua have shaped a situation in which out-migration from the town continues to be, he said laughing, “trending.”

Nabueños cite what may be called the “expenditure season” – the recurring times that necessitate immediate cash – as the reason for their landlessness. I often heard of troubles when another “gagastuwan” (events that cost money) had appeared. These include paying bills, loan payments, matriculation, and other financial troubles that recur monthly or seasonally, and sometimes unexpectedly, such as emergency hospitalization. Manay Jessa, a farmer-baskemaker whom I will introduce in more detail later, told me that she had heard that her grandfather sold their farm lot many years ago. They were sick, she said, and had to sell their remaining property, unfortunately leaving her generation with nothing. But she told me this is not a story unique to her, “Amo yan kadalasan sa Pagbubungon” (This is commonplace in Pagbubungon).

Sometimes, the poor pawn, rather than sell, their farm lots, she told me. But unable to recover from debts that are bigger than their life savings, land that was pawned is often as good as gone. Within conditions of common poverty, landlessness and underemployment, Nabueños like Manay Jessa plant crops within the vicinity of their homes or fish in the rivers that snake through Nabua’s terrain. However, the report also notes that the “fish catch in river or lake has decreased over the past five years” which means that natural resources that are vital to the daily subsistence in the barangays are also under threat.

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150 Curiously, Nabua has, in fact, a high crop yield of between 4-4.99 (the highest being 5 and lowest, 1), exceeding the index of 3 which is the national average for crop production (Department of Interior and Local Government 2009). The same report indicates that the irrigation system aids in production, with Nabua’s production at 51-80 percent, higher than the national average of 46 percent. Its prime agricultural land is also assessed to be “sustained.” These agricultural productivity statistics contrast starkly with the score for “economic development” in the same report being 1.50 or “bad” (out of 5.0).
In this chapter, I introduce three stories of Nabueño villagers who subsist on waged farm work and on weaving baskets that lingers from Nabua’s craft exportation years. The subsistence lives such as those lived by the villagers in Nabua are circumscribed within the protracted issue of land reform. Article XII, Section 4 of the revised 1987 Philippine Constitution stipulates that “the State shall, by law, undertake an agrarian reform program founded on the right of farmers and regular farm workers, who are landless, to own directly or collectively the lands they till or, in the case of other farm workers, to receive a just share of the fruits thereof” (“The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines” 1987). This portion of the constitution became the basis of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) or the Republic Act 6657, which is meant to implement the redistribution of both private and public agricultural lands to landless farmers (Department of Agrarian Reform n.d.).\(^{151}\) Camarines Sur, the province in which Nabua is located, is one of the areas with the highest land distribution backlog. The Focus in the Global South and the Save Agrarian Reform Alliance (2013, 11) reports that provinces experiencing a backlog in agricultural reform also “figure prominently in the list of provinces where the poorest families have been found.” It is not an exaggeration to say that Bicol today is one of the poorest regions in the country. Bicol’s district of Camarines Sur has been identified as having the highest incidence of poverty with 1/3 of its households classified as “poor” (The Manila Times 2016).\(^{152}\) Therefore, Owen’s historical analysis from which I have drawn aids in demonstrating how

\(^{151}\) However, several presidencies later after the 1986 revolution that birthed the revised constitution, or more precisely, three decades after CARP was first introduced, complete land distribution is nowhere near the horizon. In 2009, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed Republic Act 9700 to extend the agrarian reform program. Under this extended plan to implement an already much-delayed program, CARP is given five additional years – land must be redistributed by June 30, 2014. The deadline has lapsed again, and how many more extensions need to be made remains to be seen.

\(^{152}\) The report found that 2.340 million people in the Bicol region are living in poverty, half of this population having no employment.
transformations over time contributed to a social organization in which only a handful are known to be landed, while the majority of the population eventually find themselves with nothing. The Town of Dollars is paradoxically also home to many poor Nabueños whose desires are often oriented towards everyday survival rather than urban and overseas migration. The villagers’ strategies for survival are anchored in the wages that can be earned from seasonal or temporary farm work, and in the irregular incomes that can be derived from the declining bamboo craft industry.

6.3 Manay Jessa – Unkinned in the Wage Economy

To be landless is to be incapacitated not only in the economic sense but, as I learned from hearing the stories of the villagers that I met in Nabua, also by losing mechanisms of support in a community where people could once claim different degrees of kinship and other relations. Poor villagers talk of a community that once helped ameliorate their lives. This reflection on past ways of life echoes James C. Scott’s (1977) thinking about the erosion of the “moral economy” in “peasant” villages, where he finds that the intensification of wage labor grimly impinges on the relations of mutual assistance in the community.153 Manay Jessa, whom I introduced above, occasionally works for daily wages, like many of her neighbors in Pagbubungon. She also weaves nigo-nigo (Figure 6.3.1), works as a farmhand or “paralote” (Figure 6.3.2), and has a

153 Michael Kearney (1996) argues that the category “peasant” has become outdated in contemporary times. Kearney writes that peasants (as they may be categorized by anthropologists) are now situated in complex economic global and transnational dynamics, exemplified by identities such as “peasant migrant workers,” “land-owning proletarians,” and others. This chapter shows that Nabueño villagers are engaged in different available occupations within and outside Nabua and therefore I am in agreement with Kearney on his point that the category peasant needs to be problematized. However, even if Scott uses the category peasant, his analysis remains productive in thinking about the “multiple identities emerging from the category peasant” (Kearney 1996, 8). Having stated this recognition, I use the term peasant only when referencing Scott’s analysis. Kearney also writes that the use of the term peasant reifies dualisms such as “rural-urban, modern-traditional, and peasant-nonpeasant” (3). I recognize that activists in the Philippines use the term “peasant” to refer to the farming class.
variety of “sidelines” such as working as househelp and laundress for her wealthier neighbors. She described her work as “dipisil” (difficult) and “masakit” (hard). Nabueños, even when sharing the most difficult stories of their lives, often laugh or tell jokes to uplift the somber mood of the conversation. Manay Jessa’s loud laughter echoed in my mother’s kitchen after she said, “Kin pwede sana kunong magrangay sa ‘masakit, di na kaya’...” (If only I could pray, ‘I no longer want to go on...’). Life is tough, she said, when one has to think everyday where to get the next meal.

Figure 6.3.1 Nigo-nigos or bamboo plates woven in Nabua. These are sold in the local rural markets or Manila. They are often used as serving platters for fried noodles that are sold by restaurants or caterers.
Manay Jessa has many troubles. Her husband earns very little working at a vulcanizing shop. Her eldest daughter, aged 16, is pregnant and “wasted” their investments in her education. Her youngest child is only three years old. Their village, which lies near the river, is frequently flooded during the monsoon season. Their house was “drowned” in 2013, and the canoe that her children were using capsized, and she cursed as she narrated to me how she had scolded her children for almost dying while supposedly evacuating to safety. They could not immediately return to their house because of the mud that left a putrid stench. They stayed for a month in the village chapel, all sharing a mat distributed by the provincial government, but so thin that one of her children became sick with pneumonia and asthma. She expressed

\[\text{154 Vulcanizing shops are low-cost businesses that offer services to patch tires using recycled rubber.}\]
appreciation for the generosity of her mother, a cook in a small canteen in Manila, who had sent them money as they went through the flood ordeal, one of the many her family has encountered.

Her mother had already returned to Nabua. It was a sag-uli, a return home without the sense of victory for having “made it” in the city or elsewhere (Chaper 2). Her mother suffered from cataracts, which the faith healer in Nabua could not cure. She guessed that it was perhaps the intense heat in the kitchen that damaged her mother’s eyes. “I don’t believe in doctors,” she told me, but I learned from her story that it was because of the exorbitant cost of modern medicine that her “belief” in it could not be sustained. Her mother was once hospitalized, and she cursed again, recounting her anger about the financial troubles that resulted from a costly stay in the hospital. She added, “Nagkarapanawagan baga ko. Inda! Nagsupog na!” (It was as if I had to broadcast my worries. Nevermind! It was so shameful!). She was billed PhP11,000 (USD210) for that hospitalization. The local hospital is notorious for not releasing patients who are unable to settle their bills, in effect holding them hostage, and billing patients for the extra days that they are held inside the hospital. She pleaded at the hospital, telling them that they are “tios sana” (merely poor). “Sige ko su panangis, kin sari-sari nakakadagos” (I cried a lot, begged wherever I could go), she said, only to realize in the end: “There is nothing to be done if you are poor. No matter what you do, no money will come, no matter what help you seek…” The director of the hospital finally let her take her mother home. Her mother eventually went blind. Watching over her mother was now a big challenge for her, but not a responsibility she detested. It was her turn to help. She had already negotiated with her siblings how to handle the responsibilities of caring for their mother. Her jobless brother was to be exempted from any monetary contribution, and another brother who works as a cook in the nearby city would shoulder the expenses, “when the time comes.”
Manay Jessa’s voice rang with an even more biting pessimism when I asked her about Nabua being the town of dollars. She puckered her lips and replied that she had heard of it but that she “does not believe” in the dollars. She said that it is difficult to get help even if the persons who have dollars is your “pag-iiba.” Manay Jessa thought that dollars seem to have the effect of eroding family relations. For Manay Jessa, money breaks down possibilities for kinning and becoming engaged in relations of care because when it comes to dollars, “Sadiri sana man nira” (It is only for themselves). To the rural poor in Nabua like Manay Jessa, the town’s namesake is completely out of reach, accessible only to those who are abroad or to their relations. Not embedded within the overseas remittance economy like other Nabueños, for villagers such as Manay Jessa, the idea of the dollars accentuates the chasm between the poor and landless from the landed, or from those who have something such as dollars. Local governments in Bicol also draw from naturally available resources to identify a moniker that can rally the town’s identity and that can aid in generating incomes for the residents. For example, the town of Bonbon wants to boost its tourism incomes by playing up its status as the “Home of the Leaning Bell Tower.” These monikers also work to promote eco-tourism, as can be seen in the case of Iriga that calls itself the “City of Springs.” Magarao highlights the region-wide acclaim of its traditional healers by calling itself the “Healing Capital of Bicol.” More than terms for popular amusement, these monikers are in fact taken seriously by the local governments in their projects of crafting a distinct identity for each town, to the extent of holding festivals to match the town’s moniker. These examples clearly indicate how monikers play a role in the ways

155 I wrote in Chapter 2 of pag-iiba as an expandable notion of kinship in which people are able to locate relations not only through consanguinity, but also through ritual and transactional relations, among other flexible strategies of making and invoking kinship.
that local government units deploy their past, ecology, and other strengths, in order to craft development projects that could potentially benefit the town and its residents. However, the “Town of Dollars” moniker appears to be a stalemate for the majority of Nabueños as it signifies successful migration trajectories that they cannot relate to, and it promotes and fortifies a culture of migration rather than creative and sustainable local development.

Manay Jessa’s pessimism about the economic status quo is rooted in the low cost of her labor in monetary terms. Hired farm hands such as Manay Jessa begin the process by asking around for lots they can work on during the farming season. After they have found work, “pagtatatarok” or sowing of the seeds follows for a day or two, depending on the size of the farm lot. She told me, “It is really very hard, especially planting rice. It is so hot! You bend a lot,” she laughed loudly. Paralotes like her often work in pairs, sharing all the work and three months later, the profit from the harvest. The stalks are scythed on the first day of the harvest, and then piled on the second day (“pagtatatalpok”) for feeding into the thresher. She told me, “During harvest, your back’s bent again, then you stand, get some break from the sun… Sometimes we laugh, but only among ourselves as nobody else is in the middle of the rice fields… Eventually, we finish our work.”

During the three-month wait for the harvest, Manay Jessa hopes that there are no typhoons and no pests to damage the crops. She told me that for every 11 sacks of paroy (unmilled rice) from the lot that they tended, they would be entitled to an “imulo” (share) of one sack of paroy. One sack of paroy, when sold at the market, will cost PhP800-1,000 (USD19.7-24.6),

\[156\] Manay Jessa also said that they occasionally get lucky, harvesting up to 20 sacks, which equates to a share of two sacks of paroy. But she also said that the average harvest in her experience is 15 sacks, but even then they are still paid only one sack of paroy.
depending on the local deficit/surplus. When milled for consumption, the sack of paroy will amount to ½ sack or 25 kilos of rice. This is a meager quantity/amount that the farming partners will split between themselves. Listening to her explain the returns from her labor, I asked perhaps rather naively, “Isn’t that very little?” She erupted in laughter, “We can’t do anything about it!” The tone of my voice reverberated with disbelief: “If you sell the half sack of rice for about PhP800, you would still need to split it with your friend. That leaves you PhP400 or not even PhP100 per day for your work of four, five days on the farm.” She answered matter-of-factly, “It’s a lot of sacrifices...We often lose out. Sometimes the paroy are withered by the sun or outgrown by the weeds. It is us, farmers, who lose in this.”

Scott suggests that it is useful to reflect on the relationships of the peasant within the village economy and to pose this against contemporary social relationships within the now-commercialized countryside and the (neoliberal) state. Scott calls the peasant’s moral principles that are rooted in social and economic exchanges under the traditional system a “subsistence ethic” (2). The pre-capitalist village, according to Scott, operated within “redistributive” relations. The subsistence ethic is circumscribed within a world of values from which peasants carve out a model and vision of equality and justice. Within this ethic, the peasant is more interested in stable and secure subsistence than in higher returns for their labor. In the past, the work of farmers such as Manay Jessa also included harrowing, plowing, weeding and applying fertilizer to the farmland. Manay Jessa said that the landowners these days distribute these various farm-related tasks to different people who are paid at least PhP200

\[157\] Scott recognizes the danger in romanticizing such traditional arrangements, but the range of examples from around the world that he draws from provides substantial evidence of the subsistence ethic as an important moral-economic practice that allows “peasants” to mitigate risks by developing relationships with the landowning class (or equivalent).
(USD4) per day. By spreading the work to different people, the landed cuts off any attempts by the farm workers at developing social relationships with them. Instead of being seen as farmers, the poor are labelled as laborers and paid per-diem for the “errands” (“tangran”) provided. Assessing the trifling returns for her labor, Manay Jessa said, “Our exhaustion is barely compensated.” Within such arrangements, hard and back-breaking labor is diminished to mere errands, and the persons “running the errands” receive little compensation.

Manay Jessa’s experience as a paralote shows a contemporary example of Scott’s analysis of the displacing effect of the “minimum income” on the village. Scott argues that while the minimum income may be adequate for bare survival, such an economic environment opens up new insecurities for the poor because employment opportunities are irregular and the market prices for the products of the countryside are unstable. The village that increasingly operates within standardized wages and incomes becomes one in which members of the community can retreat from transactions of care. Manay Jessa’s network of pag-iiba collapses in the face of a wage economy in which the landed or those with something disentangle themselves from a “relationship in which both the powerful and less powerful are liable to affect each other” (Cannell 1999, 25, italics in original). Manay Jessa felt shame for having to “announce” that she needed help when her mother was being held hostage by the hospital. Cannell argues that the relations between the powerful (landed) and the powerless (landless) in Bicol are not of absolute hierarchy, and instead, both parties practice “dynamic engagements” (228). Within such relations, Cannel finds that “there is always potential for negotiation and persuasion, through which the painful gap between the two may be lessened, and the power-deficit of the poor, not eliminated but ameliorated” (228). Nabua is becoming an alienating place in which the poor have fewer options for kin and patrons to call on when a situation of gagastusan beyond their means
arises. The villagers living in conditions of bare subsistence are severed from social relations in the community – an imperative relationship in which survival during times of scarcity is anchored.

Manay Jessa is thankful to be a recipient of the 4Ps or the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (Bridging Program for the Filipino Family), the conditional cash transfer project for the poorest of the poor in the Philippines. However, she worries that the program might end in 2019. Manay Jessa hopes for more consistent help that is dependent upon her pledge of support for the local politicians who always descend from the landed class and who every election season recycle their promises to uplift the lives of the poor. I asked Manay Jessa if it is true that one needs to be a supporter of the current mayor to be a 4Ps recipient, and she said that was what she heard from the “bare-bareta” (news-news). Like many towns and cities in the Philippines, Nabua is also a under a political dynasty with the current mayor holding the position in their family for nearly three decades. Where economic conditions are shaped by endless calamities and persistent precarity, the poor are often swayed to support those in seemingly permanent positions of power. As Scott (1977, 216) argues, the needs of the peasants are often operationalized by those in power, fueling political careers.

The 4Ps is a development program focused on the health and education of households with children aged 0-18 years old. The program began during the term of former President Benigno Aquino III, as part of the Philippines’ alignment with the Millennium Development Goals. The program recipients are selected from the Listahanan – the database of the poor compiled by the Department of Social Welfare and Development. Grantees of the 4Ps are required to comply with conditions, some of which include: attendance in village-held development sessions, health check-ups of pregnant women and children by trained health professionals, enrollment of children in school with classroom attendance of at least 85 percent per month, etc. Failure to comply with these requirements may lead to the suspension of the household’s grant (“Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program” 2018). Manay Jessa’s family received PhP1,200 (USD23) per month from this program.

Programs such as conditional cash transfer have been critiqued as a "crudely simplistic view of human motivation" (Dreze and Sen 2013, 198-99).
A relationship bound within the cash economy – as Manay Jessa’s story shows and Scott’s arguments elucidate – wears down the social protection of the poor and landless living on the subsistence margin. The landed who require labor for their enterprise, draw from a growing pool of surplus laborers. Concerned with retaining their positions of power, local politicians’ projects for the poor are conditioned upon their expressed loyalties. Following Scott’s argument, it would seem that the “social insurance” that was once strengthened by a village moral economy – negotiated by patrons and clients within their complex relations of power – becomes weakened or lost. According to Scott, the peasant, apart from seeking wage labor to survive within conditions of dispossession, eventually explores the market to sell or to borrow. I continue below with the story of Manay Piling who, like Manay Jessa, has become landless, and who has started selling bamboo baskets in the local market, albeit with not very promising results. Scott writes that global prices to which local products are linked, ignores the amount of local production that is often vulnerable to unpredictable forces such as weather. Trading is a means of survival that Manay Jessa is unable to rely on, as caring for her mother and children restrains her mobility. In the meantime, she waits for any available jobs. She said that there is nothing that could be done about the low cost of her labor, “It is still better than nothing.” Manay Jessa said that she constantly worries about “kin pauno magpasunod-sunod ka aro-aldow” (how to weave one day into another). “Ha! Sakit!” (Ha! It is so hard!),” she exclaimed, followed by a long melancholic pause.

6.4 Manay Piling – Subsistence in the Margins of a Lingering Industry

“How are you, elder sister?,” I greeted Manay Piling as I opened the door of my mother’s apartment to let her in. In her left hand she held a nylon sack in which she
had placed baskets, and with the other hand, she used a floral handkerchief to wipe the drops of sweat that trickled down one after another. This was a few days before the end of April 2014, the peak of summer. She complained about the relentless heat, saying that she had walked to my apartment from the terminal. I told her that she could have taken the padyak, but she replied that it was wasteful. The return fare from her house located in a farming village to my apartment in the centro would pay for a kilo of rice. Transportation is a challenge for many families like Manay Piling’s who live off the main concrete highways of Nabua. On the best days when the sun is not too hot, the walk to their house along the rain-fed rice farms is breathtaking as Mayon volcano, the world’s most perfectly conical volcano that has given birth to legends and love songs, emerges on the horizon.

Manay Piling’s house is a native hut made of bamboo and coco lumber, built on a compound with at least five families, at the center of which is a communal garden with papaya trees, camote, taro, pomelo, onion, and other fruits and vegetables. Gamecocks peck on corn kernels or paroy in triangular bamboo cages or rest while perched on wooden slabs. At the back of their family compound is an expanse of rice fields that family members have inherited from a common ancestor. Manay Piling’s sister who has moved to Manila now owns everything as those left behind in Nabua have sold their share to her during times of need. Families in their compound live with what they have, planting mung beans and taro on the edges of the rice fields, profit from which need not reach their sister in Manila. “Kanya-kanya man para mabuway” (Work on your own to be able to survive). “Kanya” means “one’s own,” so the word translates to “self-self.” For the family in the compound, other strategies for getting by on their own include betting on cockfights, selling coconuts, taro, firewood, and charcoal at the market. With 50 coconuts from their garden, for example, they can get PhP500 (USD9.5). They try to reduce
expenses by producing coconut sugar and coconut oil for their own use. When they run out of rice, they dig up root crops from their shared garden. In the afternoon, the children in the compound return home from school and peddle afternoon snacks such as steamed taro cakes. This strategy of “livelihood diversification” in order to survive is common in many communities in the Philippines (Angeles and Hill 2009). According to an informant of Leonora Angeles and Kathryn Hill (2009, 610) in their research on women and gender in two farming communities in the Philippines, “We do not concentrate only on thing; we are into everything.” Whether enough returns could be derived from these multiple forms of earning money in the hope to survive beyond bare subsistence, is however, another concern.

Their barangay is disconnected from the conveniences of shops and markets. The mobile phone that Manay Piling shares with her husband is often without pre-paid credits. Thus, Manay Piling is unable to tell her buyers beforehand that she will be coming by – just as happened with her unexpected visit that day when she came to deliver some baskets that I was planning to sell at a crafts shop in Manila – to which I will return below. Manay Piling squatted on the floor of my mother’s apartment to pull out her delivery of only 60 pieces of two kinds of baskets. For many basketmakers who started weaving at the peak of bamboo craft production in Nabua, this is a paltry number. Today’s lingering bamboo craft industry in Nabua originates from an export-oriented venture that began in the late 60s in Nabua. The bamboo baskets were trucked to Manila or other cities for further design development to suit the demands of the Western market. Baskets production in Nabua largely dependent on the orders issued by city-based exporters who in turn depended on the fluctuating demands of foreign consumers.

The Philippine export industry flourished via the promotion of native wares (Rutten 1992) based on American President Harry Truman’s post-WWII vision of sustaining the symbiotic
relationship between Third World countries and developed countries (Escobar 1995). In Truman’s vision, the key to developing the underdeveloped is “greater production” (Escobar 1995). Arturo Escobar (1995, 211) critiques this promoted relationship as one of “consumption” in which “the dark hordes of the South are consigned to a new round of gluttonous vision.” Escobar adds that the rural development discourse “reflects structural and institutionalized power relations” that commit formerly colonized countries to a brand of development that is “about growth, about capital, about technology, about becoming modern” (162). Institutions, processes and everyday life in the Global South are formed and reformed by developmental plans, which often fail as many of them are designed to mimic the industrial successes in North America and Europe (Escobar 1995). The case of bamboo craft production in Nabua shares the same fate as the collapse of crafts ventures as experienced by shawl and carpet weavers in Kashmir (Gillo 2017), by textile embroiders in Afghanistan (Speasalay 2013), by furniture makers in Indonesia (Syukra 2017), and even in developed countries, by the saw and sieve makers in the United Kingdom (Sawer 2017). The rapid rise of the bamboo craft industry in Nabua and in other centers of handicraft production in the Philippines was supported by the export-oriented policy of the American colonial period that was heightened during the Marcos administration where the export industry saw its “Filipinization” (Rutten 1992, 483). Gonzalo Jurado (2003, 20) finds that the strategies of development up until the 1970s were of “import substitution and protection”

160 The Philippines’ first development plan was for 1949-1953, for rehabilitation and industrial development in the post-war period (Jurado 2003). This is of course not to say that the history of the commercialization of crafts began in the post-war period. The rapid rise of crafts exports from the Philippines had been consistent with the ambitions for “free trade” expressed by U.S. President William McKinley (1898), which said: “All ports and places in the Philippine Islands in the actual possession of the land and naval forces of the United States will be opened to the commerce of all friendly nations.” Thus the Americans landed in Bicol in 1900 with one of their objectives being to organize the export of hemp, which was abundant in the region (Owen 1999; Linn 2000). Hemp twined in Bicol was already exported from the Philippines from as early as the 1800s for marine cordage needs around the world.
which then swiftly transformed in the Marcos period to “export promotion and liberalization.” Marcos’ neoliberal push implemented changes in the locally-based labor market and the globally oriented industries.\textsuperscript{161} It was in the midst of this economic liberalization that agriculture- and rural-based industries such as native crafts were prominently identified in the national development plans (Suratman 1991, 263).\textsuperscript{162} The development plans all throughout the Marcos era envisioned the handicraft industry as crucial to the national ambitions for low-investment industrialization that capitalizes on the available labor in the countryside. With institutions and policies set up during the Marcos period, succeeding governments sustained this rural production- and export-oriented development strategy, although challenges such as global competition arose (De Vera 2017). From 2000 onwards, the Philippine government shifted to a strategy for handicraft production that is “focused on deregulation and globalization” (Jurado 2003). This brief review suggests that the Philippine government appears consistent in identifying the handicraft industry as creating possibilities for economic growth that draws from the pool of laborers in the countryside – such as many of the people of Nabua.

\textsuperscript{161} For example, the minimum wage was eliminated as a means of welcoming companies looking for cheap labor for their labor-intensive production. To stir the competitiveness of locally operating companies, the ceiling for interest rates was eliminated and the tariff for local industries was introduced to push them into global competition. Meanwhile, in an effort to attract foreign capital, the stringent laws on foreign investments and the biases against export companies were removed (Jurado 2003, 15).

\textsuperscript{162} The plan for 1972-1976 was the first to mention the role of cottage industries in economic development. In 1973, Marcos approved Presidential Decree 279 that created that Design Center of the Philippines which was with enhancing handicraft production nationwide. At the First Metro Manila Cottage Industry in 1977, Marcos spoke of the development of cottage industries as crucial to democratizing wealth and capital, reducing poverty, and fortifying the middle class (Rutten 1982, 14). Presidential Decree 1788 or the Cottage Industries Development Decree, a policy for encouraging the export of local crafts, was passed in 1981. The plan for 1978-1982 reiterated the Marcos government’s ambitions to intensify cottage industries for achieving its vision of having an additional 191,000 workers by 1982 (Suratman 1991).
Remarkably, the Bicol abaca industry has survived its integration into the global economy, which happened as early as the 19th century. Owen (1984) calls “persistence of subsistence” the tendency of Bicolanos “to keep one foot in the subsistence sector” (i.e., agriculture), when new opportunities (e.g., crafts) are also emerging. This attachment to the subsistence economy, Owen (1984, 156) argues, is a “rational response to the seemingly irrational world of fluctuating markets.” Unlike the long-standing abaca trade in Albay, the export of bamboo crafts made in Nabua was short-lived. Unable to compete with global prices and the demand for mass production, the bamboo craft industry in Nabua eventually collapsed, producing a surplus of villagers highly skilled in the production of crafts, yet without a demand to meet. Scott (1977, 200) suggests that the commercialization of the countryside not only affects the local market that becomes dependent on fluctuations in economy, but the rural population is also likely surplussed when slumps threaten the economy. This condition links with Owen’s observation of “prosperity without progress” in Bicol. Manay Piling, like many basketmakers I came to know, hoped for a time when agriculture and basketmaking would become sustainable again, like in earlier days. Even if basketmaking is “mapagal” (tiring) and

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163 In Bicol, over 21,000 farmers cultivate abaca. The Philippines also remains the single most major supplier of abaca fiber in the world (Barcia 2012).
164 Scholars have already argued that social inequalities may be exacerbated by the handicraft industry (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2002). Mass-produced crafts that are often sourced from the Global South have been shown to be linked to developments occurring elsewhere (Tice 1995). Mapping the trajectories of craft production also reveals the continuing hegemonic relations between colonizer and the formerly colonized as shown by Harry Silver (1981) in his ethnography on crafts in Accra that were transformed by the British arrival in the 19th century. According to Silver, production originally concentrated on regalia for the local leaders. This quickly shifted to the tourism genre which appealed to the nearby Gold Coast and to European markets.
165 This is not to completely disregard the relative progress that occurred in the region. Owen also recognizes that the commercialization of agriculture in Bicol did, in fact, bring relative prosperity for over 100 years especially during the peak of abaca trade from the mid-18th to the first half of the 19th century. During this period, there was an increase in cockfight and trade revenues, rise in investments, and other economic indicators (Owen 1974).
“maul-ul” (numbing), Manay Piling said that it is “magayon man na hanapbuhay” (a good means of livelihood).

The fleeting integration of Nabua into the global economy via bamboo crafts lingers on in the memories of the craftspeople such as Manay Piling, who continue small-scale basket production. To earn extra cash, Manay Piling also gathers the baskets woven by the others in their compound, adds a peso or two for each basket as her commission, and brings the baskets to her customers in public markets. That day when she came to deliver baskets, I asked for updates about her business. She wiped the sweat off her face as she told me, visibly exasperated, that her competitors are aggressive in stealing buyers, beating her out by pricing their baskets two or three pesos cheaper. How could she afford to travel to the markets? And also, how could she get adequately compensated for her hard work? She rhetorically asked.

When unable to sell baskets at the market, she peddles them around Nabua. A cousin once texted me that their neighbor had purchased a laundry basket from Manay Piling in exchange for about two kilos of rice (amounting to USD1.3). Manay Piling was troubled by the unregulated prices of the baskets in the local market; she felt as if she were giving away the baskets for free. Sighing in frustration, she told me, “Nagpagal na kaya, ‘Da,’” (It’s so tiring, ‘Da). She looked away from where we sat and was suddenly in tears. “Loko, di ika magtangis, sabi kan ka mga tawo sa luwas pinapatangis ta ka” (Oh no, don’t cry. People passing by might think I am making you cry), I teased, trying to lighten the mood as is common in Nabua. Manay Piling hopes for fairer trading practice for herself and her community in Inapatan. She is also the founding president of a cooperative of farmer-basketmakers in their barangay. It had been over a year since their cooperative signed a document about “receiving a building” from the government that they could use as a shed for protecting their wares from the rain, but they had
not received anything yet. She continued, “Pagkarapapirma sana kami” (They just need our signature).

Eight months after Manay Piling delivered the baskets, in January 2015, I participated in a meeting held in the front yard of Manay Piling’s family compound, which was attended by about 20 basketmakers and representatives from the municipal DA and the regional Department of Trade and Industries (DTI). Manay Piling nervously held the microphone as she opened the program with the “Lord’s Prayer.” Her voice quivered as she prayed, tears rolling down her eyes as she added a plea: for God to give the people of Inapatan strength, and that they finally be given the help that they had been asking for. An “Inspirational Speech” delivered by the head of the DA followed. He began by updating them about the “promises” that Manay Piling had alluded to in her prayer as not yet materialized. The agricultural officer reminded them that the cooperative is a good start but that they need to work on establishing themselves “legalidad” (a legal entity) so that they can access more resources as a group. He gave as an example the success of one farmers’ cooperative in Nabua which had already received farming tools from government agencies. “Amo adi oportunidad, pag organisado” (Such are the opportunities that arise if you are organized). The speaker added, “Rangang-rangangan a urot, tsaka pangungulit, tanganing itao a tamang serbisyo na para kaninyo man” (Add more diligence and persistence, so that the service that is rightly yours will be given).

Anthropologists have already pointed out that development workers often see the locals’ attitudes and ways of doing things as “cultural barriers” that are counter-productive to development initiatives (Crewe and Harrison 2010). “Blueprints of development” also tend to characterize rurality as uncertain, a situation which development workers solve through the simplification of ambiguity (Roe 2010, 313) and the introduction of technologies that are free of
context (Ferguson 1994). Reviewing government programs related to the handicraft and cottage industry from the Marcos period until the end of the 90s, Suratman (1991) finds that while official discourses “appear pro-active, responsive to the needs of cottage and other small-scale enterprises, development-oriented, and encouraging of local-level initiatives” (285), there are “perceptual gaps” existing between these plans and the craftspeople’s needs (264). I learned from a DTI officer that the bamboo furniture makers in the neighboring town of Bato were afraid to use their high-tech bamboo-splitting machine provided to them by the government because it might damage their eyesight. The managers of a state-funded bamboo lamination facility in the town of Buhi complained that the items that they produce are too expensive for the local market. In the basement of Nabua’s municipal building a high-end baking oven sits idly, free for use by local producers of native rice delicacies. But like Manay Jessa and Manay Piling, the producers of native delicacies prefer to be home-based so they can also attend to their children, ailing parents, and home garden or farms. The government’s and the development workers’ hopes to improve the lives of the rural poor, these examples clearly show, need to consider a more intimate understanding of the gap between development discourses and the on-the-ground experience of the craftspeople.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I visited the home of the founding president of one of Nabua’s farmers’ cooperatives that the local DA office classifies as successful. Founded only in 2009, the cooperative today already owns several pieces of farm equipment donated by various

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166 For example, Suratman points out that Muslim women weavers resist the more efficient upright loom in favor of the traditional backstrap loom for reasons that are context-and culture-specific. The backstrap loom is smaller and fits more easily in the homes of the craftspeople who often do not have a lot of space in their houses. Suratman also finds that Muslim women are unable to weave outside the house where the larger loom might be located due to religious prohibitions.
government agencies, such as a shed, dehusker, hand tractor, thresher, flat bed grower, drum seeder, waterproof tarps, and a multipurpose drying pavement. However, government agencies often require cooperatives to put forward their “share” before releasing funding for buying requested equipment. The president of the cooperative told me that in their case, it was important to show that a space or land would be donated for common use by the members of the cooperative. Coming from a landowning family, the president of the cooperative donated her own land to the cooperative. They expected the launch of the “partnership” between their cooperative and the government agencies soon after this donation, but the president told me that to start the ball rolling, she also provided over PhP30,000 (USD572) as seed funding – which was now slowly being repaid with the earnings from the cooperative. In that cooperative, the combined resources of the cooperative’s leader and the government agencies made possible the extension of aid to the poor farmers in the cooperative, such as the affordable rate of PhP1-10 per sack of rice paid to use the range of equipment available. The president recognized the importance of having capital in initiating projects such as their cooperative. By making her resources available for shared use, the president of the cooperative in effect opened and distributed access to her wealth, becoming a contemporary patron, and arguably entered into relations of care with the poor farmers in her barangay. I do not point this out to suggest that the maintenance of hierarchical arrangement is a precondition for the poor to survive beyond bare subsistence. However, this situation must be understood clearly by development workers as a means of balancing their expectations from basketmakers whose lives they hope to ameliorate. Manay Piling, a skilled basketmaker dispossessed of land, has no surplus wealth to draw from, nor does she have resources such as land to share. She also has no spare time that could be spent
on mobilizing her fellow craftspeople, as she is frequently occupied with trying to come up with ways to provide for her family’s next meal.

6.5 Madawon Family – Labor Precarity in Manila and Beyond

Reaching the point where even bare subsistence is in peril, villagers begin to consider what Scott (1977, 212–14) calls “raiding the cash economy,” a strategy which Scott describes as a “semipermanent pattern or short-term migration.” The main feature of this “makeshift migration” mobility, according to Scott, is the “growing dependency of villagers on the marginal or scavenging possibilities in the extra-village economy” (212). This is true for many people of Nabua who find themselves in the city or overseas, working the least desirable jobs. In the Philippines, the poor people from the countryside, hailing from towns such as Nabua, are often seen as the culprits who make large cities as dreadful as they are. The cities are described as sprawling, spilling, overflowing, overcrowded, congested, and suffocating. The ‘promdis’ – an often derogatory term for the people from the provinces – are said to flood and encroach on the cities, causing further chaos upon their arrival.167

Stephen Resnick (1970) writes of the “paucity of labor, out of agriculture and the countryside and into urban areas,” a shift which Aguilar (1983) calls “mass tertiarization.” Aguilar writes that this shift served as an important resource for the poor who would have otherwise been left idle. Aguilar writes that the only alternative for the poor who stay in the countryside is to remain landless and to seek subsistence in agricultural landholdings in the same

167 Mary Grace Tirona (2013) of the Commission on Filipino Migration, speaking at the United Nations’ 46th Session of the Commission on Population and Development, talked about the “serious concerns” about the “negative effects” of rural migration, in effect placing fault with the rural migrants while ignoring the conditions that spur their mobilities in the first place.
vicinity. Despite the worsened conditions of scarcity and competition for wage-based agricultural labor for the “agrarian proletariat,” Aguilar (1983, 353) asks why more have not migrated from rural to urban areas. I revisit Aguilar’s question by writing on the “precariousness in the present” (Berlant 2011, 10) as experienced by a family of basketmakers in a village called Madawon. Theirs is a shared story of desires not to leave that are linked with an impasse of precarity that looms over the lives of the poor even if they move to Manila or elsewhere.

Madawon, a farming barangay located outside the “urbanized” part of Nabua, bears a name that means “plenty of leaves.” The steel arch at its entrance, which was labeled “under construction” all throughout my fieldwork, straddles a strip of dirt road about four meters wide. Mostly native houses flank the road, and behind the houses, the expanse of rice paddies is interrupted only by grazing water buffalos. Each house in Madawon always has a basket-related activity going on. In May 2014, I visited the basketmaker Nang Tita in Madawon. A week earlier, I had asked for permission to interview her and her sister Nang Didin who also weaves baskets. She told me that poor people like them have nothing important to say. The footpath to Nang Tita’s house is littered with fine bamboo shavings and piles of discarded knobs of bamboo (Figure 6.5.1). Detached from the main house is a “payag-payag,” a native open-air bamboo hut that serves as the family’s common area for various activities (Figure 6.5.2). Tools for basketmaking such as different sized knives, samples of their work, and weaves in progress, are stored on a rack beneath the roof. The center table doubles as their dining table. They often cook wild riverine fish caught by Nang Tita’s husband, who occasionally sets off late in the evening or before dawn to fish in the nearby river. Their main house is a one-story concrete house occupied by Nang Tita and her husband and the nuclear families of her two daughters, indicating that this is a matrilocal residence. Most of the funds for building the house, they told me once, came from
one of Nang Tita’s sons-in-law who works in Saudi Arabia as a machine operator. To save money, he has not returned home for five years. Nang Tita came out of the main house and told me that we would be walking to her sister’s house, which is just a stone’s throw away.

Figure 6.5.1 On sunny days, bamboo strips would be neatly laid out in front of some houses, and even on the roads. The bamboo strips are cut at about a feet long, the length required for making nigo-nigo.
Figure 6.5.2 A payag-payag at Nang Tita’s house used for making baskets and for other activities.

As we walked, I asked Nang Tita if there are many overseas workers in Madawon. There are only about 10 people in their village who are currently overseas for work, often in Middle Eastern countries as contract laborers, she said. I asked if she thinks that families with members overseas seem wealthier and she pointed with her lips towards a shanty which she said has three OFWs, but still, they are not wealthy and sometimes hard up. We arrived at a beautiful native hut, and Nang Tita called out for her sister, Nang Didin, whose husband was adding freshly cut bamboo poles to their fence. Nang Didin’s house bustled with pre-lunch activity. A woman cleaning vegetables on “nigo” called out to invite me to stay for lunch. I replied that I came to interview her mother today and that perhaps I will join them later. The sun was too harsh as it

168 Woven using thin strips of bamboo, nigo-nigo baskets break easily and are thus meant to be disposable. Nigo baskets, meanwhile, are made with the skin of bamboo and are kept for long-term use. Nigo baskets are staple kitchenware that can be found in every home Nabua.
was almost noon, so we collected plastic chairs from Nang Didin’s house and headed to the barangay guard’s outpost just across the way.169

We began by talking about their recollection of basketmaking in Nabua before the exportation years. Nang Tita and Nang Didin told me even before the “projects” (production orders) came, native baskets were already being produced in Nabua for everyday use. A “kararaw,” they said, was a typical food storage basket with four legs that came to be sold as nested “utility baskets” during the exportation years. Kararaw baskets, when lined with heated banana leaves, were also typically used during weddings for serving steamed rice. During the peak of Nabua’s bamboo craft industry, Madawon specialized in the production of “food bowls” while other barangays specialized in different sizes – a strategy of handicraft businesses to streamline the mass production process. Growing up in Madawon where their parents and neighbors were all rushing to meet project deadlines, Nang Tita, Nang Didin and their eight siblings were introduced to basketmaking at a young age, starting with easy tasks such as taking out the baskets for drying under the sun. Family members divide the different tasks related to making baskets which include the following: “pagnawi” (cutting the bamboo into strips), “pagsalad” (weaving), “paglidong” (framing), “paggakot” (binding).

Anthropologists studying crafts observe the ripples that different craft industries around the world have had in communities. Societal structures transform rather than vanish in the face of capitalist market expansion (Korovkin 1998). Global economies rearrange village economies, and families also tend to reconfigure kin relations and familial commitment to fit into the mold

169 The barangay outpost is guarded by ‘tanods.’ Tanods (watchmen) are appointed and supervised by barangay captains, and they receive honorarium for their service. They respond to barangay-level emergencies and incidents.
shaped by these same global forces (Tice 1995). In Lucknow, gendered relations shifted when embroidery that was a traditional occupation for men, came to be dominated by women upon this craftwork’s entry into mass production (Wilkinson-Weber 1999). In various locations villagers have found home-based craft production to be a reliable strategy for retaining a family-based economy amid the changing global economic order (Rutten 1992; Dickie and Frank 1996; Forshee 2000; Barandon 2015). Likewise, the people in the villages reflected on how the shifting global economy shaped their production of baskets. Nang Tita and Nang Didin fondly recalled the time when they had many “projects” or orders. Their recollection of “traditional” village life is one in which the distribution of work was structured around farming and crafts. However, this idea of the family activity and practice that came to be structured around piecework, also emerged from capitalist ventures that exploited “existing social arrangements that could be easily abandoned with little cost” (Creed 2000, 339). According to Gerald Creed (2000, 339), “Families fit the bill perfectly and had the added benefit of a preexisting hierarchical organization by gender and generation buttressed by emotional cultural attachments, all of which insured internal efficiency and self-exploitation.” In the meantime, it can be pointed out that for the Madawon basketmakers, Nabua’s once-active basket industry helped to keep the families together for it at least provided a flow of income coming out of craft projects that could be completed through the cooperation of the members of the family. However, even if craft production was a reliable strategy for maintaining the domestic economy, it was also subject to the unpredictable demands of the global market. Nang Didin said that back then, the people of Madawon all farmed and wove baskets, and she added with a regretful tone in her voice, “Nguwan kadaklan na mig-Manila” (These days, many leave for Manila).
They told me that in the past, leaving for Manila or overseas in search of work was not an option that families chose for their children. Young women in the family did not have to be sent to wealthier homes to work as domestic helpers. With no land to till nor inherit, the village is also seeing an increase in the number of unmarried men ("angot") while local women work and find husbands elsewhere. Nang Tita sounded triumphant when she said, "Ako nagraraga ko di ako nakatuod na magpasweldo!" (I never had to do wage work when I was young and single!). She twitched her lips to show disappoint and laughed, "Nguwan mga igin pa…" (Now, even those who are young have to [enter wage work]...), her bitter laughter trailed away suggesting her discontent. They told me that some do not have to venture too far, like one of their neighbors’ daughters who started working as a housemaid for a Nabueño businessman in the centro when she was only 13, so she could not even finish high school. Nang Didin said that when they were younger, they only had to help their parents make baskets. Nang Tita added that even if they had asked for permission to leave, their mother would not have permitted them. "Buko an na uso" (That was not a trend before), Nang Tita said about the current trend of the youth to seek employment in Manila. However, they also recognized that these days, those left-behind in the village do not have much work to do. There are many ‘tambay’ (stand-bys; waiting for work), they said, the pejorative term referring to the perpetually jobless. Their neighbors have just enough resources for themselves, and cannot afford to pay for other people’s labor. In a situation where poverty is the norm, villagers become entangled in global capitalist projects whose promise of prosperity tends to be interim, later leaving them in a “rhythm of ignominious struggle on the part of the permanently ‘idle’ and unemployed” (Tadiar 2013, 39). The production of surplus labor is exactly capitalism’s important venture: the surplussed work force in the villages are then absorbed into occupations outside the village – their flexible labor
ensuring that the circulation of capital remains uninterrupted in the urban and global centers of power and trade (Tadiar 2013).

One of Nang Didin’s daughters, of her eight children, works in Manila as a maid, earning PhP2,500 (USD48) per month. Nang Tita said that Manila is “nagtakot na” (very scary), because many unexpected things could happen. Nang Didin’s daughter had run away from her previous boss after being sexually harassed. Nang Tita and Nang Didin agreed with each other that it is better to stay in Nabua where it is safe, although they also recognized that life in the village is hard without opportunities for a more regular source of income. Only very recently have people in Madawon begun to work overseas. “Takot pa man kadto” (We were scared [of working overseas] before), Nang Didin said. Nang Didin’s daughter, Cecilia, had finished removing the unwanted stalks of vegetables and had come to listen. Motioning to Cecilia, Nang Didin said that her daughter used to work in Manila and the Middle East. Cecilia said that she left Madawon for Manila right after high school and found work at a flip-flops factory under one contract, and then at a garment factory under two separate contracts – each contract always lasting less than six months. Transferring to another agency or factory after each contract meant that workers had to complete a new round of paperwork such as obtaining a new police clearance, among other documents. “Di naman nagrerregular nguwan” (No one is regularized these days), Nang Tita frowned.

With the vision of opening the local market to foreign capital, Marcos signed Presidential Decree No. 442 or the Labor Code of the Philippines on May 1, 1974 – the first with provisions for “labor contractualization.” Under Article 104 of the Labor Code, the employment agencies are “responsible to workers in the same manner and extent as if the latter were directly employed by him.” On March 21, 1989, Republic Act 6715 or the Herrera Law was passed, curiously
without amendments to Articles 106 to 109 that contained the specifications on contracting and subcontracting labor. According to labor lawyer Sonny Matula, “Article 106 was intended to balance the interest of capital and labor but as the years go by it was used by capital to circumvent the worker’s constitutional right to security of tenure” (Mendoza 2017). Under these provisions, employers could contract employment agencies to provide workers within the notorious contractualization scheme that came to be called 5-5-5 or Endo (End of Contract) in which workers’ contracts are renewed every five months. Through periodic contract renewals, employers elide employee regularization, thereby introducing cost-saving measures by not providing for health insurance payments, pension, and other benefits afforded to workers regularized after six months of work (Pasion 2017). Contractual workers are also unable to join labor unions, which are supposed to serve as the platform in collectively communicating grievances about unfair labor practices. Cecilia’s experience of 5-5-5 or Endo is shared by many other Nabueños who set off to Manila in search of work. Manay Ana, a cousin of Nang Tita and Nang Didin, worked at various factories for foreign companies in Manila for six years and was never regularized. Manay Ana said she never joined a labor union, and as a result she still received “invitations” to work. Manay Ana expressed resignation when I asked her if she regrets not joining the labor union. She said, “di magkararibok kin uda man maginibo” (there is no need to make noise if there is nothing that could be done anyway). She returned to Nabua in 1991, and like her cousins makes ends meet through the complementary incomes from farming and making baskets. I have met and interviewed many other Nabueños who preferred to return to Nabua, unwilling to surrender to an urban life structured by oppressive labor conditions.

Realizing that the prospects of working in Manila did not look very promising, Cecilia decided to apply for work overseas. At age 21, she left to work in Dubai as a domestic helper,
only to return to Nabua after 4.5 years. Cecilia had developed an eye infection that she suffers from until today, which she thinks was caused by the extreme heat and the sandstorms. Recently, she learned that her employment agencies in Manila cheated her by failing to deposit money into her pension fund. If conditions were better in Nabua, perhaps if she could earn PhP10,000 to 15,000 (USD190-286) per month, she would not have left for abroad, she told us wistfully. However, this amount is an aspirational salary for women from the countryside who are slated to be temporary workers or domestic helpers in Manila or overseas.

Research on crafts has shown its potential economic effects on the local community, such as Barandon’s (2015) report that stressed how the craft industry in Rinconada generates some social benefits to the area. Barandon recommends that the local government agencies assist the bamboo craftspeople with funding and training to enable them to compete in both local and global markets. These developments, he suggests, will possibly facilitate local employment and therefore reduce migration from the towns and villages to the cities. Angeles and Hill (2009, 624) argue that craft activities often “fall beyond the radar of local government programmes” or that if they do, government trainings often focus on “petty commodity production” and rarely on the equally necessary dimensions of marketing, innovation, and management. Farmer-craftspeople such as the ones in Madawon echo the observation that nothing looks promising for them in Nabua. While waiting for the harvest or when not working on the farms, Nang Didin said her family could complete about 100 nigo-nigo per week. Meanwhile, Nang Tita’s family

\[170\] Barandon’s survey included 160 employees of 60 entrepreneurs working in the bamboo craft industry in the Rinconada district. However, the income from this industry for over 50 percent of the workers remains only PhP1,000-5,000 (USD19-95) per month. About 35 percent of the surveyed earn PhP6,000-10,000 and 13 percent earn more than 10,000. The average income is at Ph6,250.
can produce only about 50 pieces per week.\(^{171}\) However, even if they define their lives in Nabua as lives of scarcity, their ambitions counter the dominant narrative of out-migration that is commonly heard in the Philippines, and promoted by the state; it has been officially brokering Filipino migrant labor since the Labor Code of 1974, followed by the creation of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration in 1982. Research on labor-exporting villages, such as Deborah Winslow’s (1996) ethnography among clay potters in Sri Lanka, shows how local craft production insulates villagers from the pressure to work in the cities and overseas.\(^{172}\) In Nabua, I consistently heard villagers talk about Manila and overseas as dangerous places for their kin. Stories are told and retold about the horrors of failed migrations, escape from abusive employers, unregularized contracts, and other precarious conditions experienced by those who ventured beyond Nabua. Scott (1977, 214–15) writes that the “pattern of parasitic and tenuous dependence of the leavings of the modern sector will become far more prevalent.” The narratives of precarious lives in Manila and elsewhere, at least as experienced by families in Madawon, have become cautionary tales about the everywhereness of the struggles of the poor. I often heard that there was no point in venturing outside Nabua – where their systems of support are weak, if not absent – if conditions of poverty, temporariness, and precarity are everywhere anyway.

\(^{171}\) Although baskets are paid per piece, weaving baskets is crucial to buying necessities, as even one pack of instant coffee for single use, Nang Tita said, already costs PhP7 (USD0.1) – just a peso cheaper than the price of one laboriously woven nigo-nigo. Incomes of these Madawon families earned from the baskets, even if supplemented by wages for their work on the farm, is nowhere near the monthly income of PhP10,000 (USD193.44) that families need to consider themselves not poor (Cepeda 2017).

\(^{172}\) Researchers, however, need to be careful not to romanticize local industries, as this insulation from labor exportation, for example, was not true in the case of Michelle Gamburd’s (2000, 44) research in another Sri Lankan village whose women were migrating for work to the Persian Gulf as housemaids. With the insufficient incomes from the spice and fiber industries in the village, overseas work came to be a popular option for the women in Gamburd’s ethnography.
Scott observes that the mobility of villagers is often an “individual attempt to make up the deficit in local subsistence resources” (212), and therefore, mobility is interim. Scott sheds light on the impact of these interim mobilities on the landlessness of villagers such as the cases I mentioned above. According to Scott (1977, 214):

The ‘labor-exporting village’ in Southeast Asia...eases the pressure on land and/or labor competition by sending workers away and gains the income they remit or bring back... Like the urban poor, the village is now dependent on the crumbs of the labor market, and its dependence is especially marked since its migrants typically hold marginal positions that are the first to be affected by a slump.

Tadiar (2013, 38) writes of the permanence of precariousness as “simply a mode of life.” Within their remaining, yet contracting, circle of kin and possibilities for kinning, villagers fortify among themselves their hopes for a better future that could be lived in Nabua. The hometown, despite familial attachments, is a place in which surplus laborers are “warehoused,” and in which returning residents paradoxically become subjected to “unfinished proletarianization” – that process that leaves the poor in “a condition of permanent transience and dislocation” (Tadiar 2013, 24–28).

6.6 Troubling the Anthropological Toolkit

In December 2013, I met with my Filipino and Filipino-Canadian colleagues at a restaurant in Manila. All of us knew each other from the UBCPSS (Chapter 1). I arrived at the restaurant an hour early, to not look too drenched in sweat as I had brought with me a sack full of baskets of different sizes from the small-scale handicraft production that I had begun during fieldwork. I had arranged to meet first with a friend from my university years at the same restaurant for the pickup of the set of laundry hampers that he had ordered, the design and dimensions of which were sent by my mother from Los Angeles over Facebook. I also brought the commissioned
container baskets for the organic oils project that another member of our collective had started since coming back to Manila from Vancouver. Another friend ordered a set of bamboo Christmas lanterns produced by the basketmakers in Nabua that she wanted to display in their home in Vancouver. I had earned PhP3,000 (USD74) from my friends’ purchases that day, which was barely enough to cover the cost of producing the baskets, and transporting them from Nabua to Manila. A month before on social media, a colleague commented on a photo of a freshly woven basket that I had posted, to ask if my dissertation was suddenly about baskets. “I’m confused,” he wrote. My reply was defensive, perhaps telling of my confusion. Indeed, what was I to make of my retreat from visual production to the point of “negative production” (Chapter 2), while stepping into bamboo craft entrepreneurship? Why was I “wasting time” on crafts when I could be out gathering data during the very limited fieldwork time that I had?

Data collection through ethnographic fieldwork is “based upon, and validated by, observation” that transpires within “the researcher’s time” (Fabian 1983, 107, italics in original). Johannes Fabian critiques the notion of the researcher’s time as “instituting a time-economy.” He also asks, “How does method deal with the hours of waiting, with maladroitness and gaffes due to the confusion or bad timing?” (108, italics in original). However, Fabian inquires into a form of knowledge crafted within “notions of speed and expeditiousness of procedure” (107), and into non-productivities in relation to time as anthropologists begin to explore their fieldsites. Time during fieldwork may tick differently when researching at home. The stories analyzed above are difficult to wrap up neatly because of the challenge in identifying where my work begins and where it ends. The writing of this chapter is also confounded by my entanglements with Nabua’s bamboo craft history, as a granddaughter of one of Nabua’s former bamboo craft entrepreneurs (Chapter 5). In this section, I explicate two intersecting issues: the meaning that farmer-
basketmakers “give to their acts” (Scott 1987, 37) and my intentionalities as a returning resident and anthropologist of the hometown. My reflections on these two issues are interwoven with histories and relations that preceded my fieldwork.

In May 2013, only two months into the start of my fieldwork in Nabua, I received a Facebook message from one of the organizers of a regional trade fair called “Best of Bicol.” She asked if the Nabua Home Industries Center (NHIC), my grandparents’ defunct business, would be interested in showing some baskets, not for selling, but for exhibition because Nabua was once the center of bamboo craft production in Bicol. As Bloch (2017b, 23) writes, ethnographic projects emerge from serendipity and curiosity. This phone call spurred my attempt to trace the bamboo craft production routes outside of the centro, accompanied by my uncle who used to work as a quality inspector for NHIC, and to investigate if some baskets could be produced for the fair. I browsed old catalogs in my grandparents’ house and asked for advice from my mother and relatives who used to work in the industry. The baskets were then exhibited in several trade shows during which connections with entrepreneurs, craft producers, and development workers promoting handicraft industries were made (Figure 6.6.1). Paying homage to my grandparents and realizing that the name of their defunct enterprise still faintly resonated among exporters in Bicol and Manila, I named my venture Nabua Home Industries

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173 The organizer is the wife of a Bicolano architect and friend with whom I worked almost a decade ago on a transnational campaign to prevent the municipality’s push to demolish Nabua’s historic Gabaldon Building, the town’s first schoolhouse, recorded in the Cuaderno as built in October 12, 1912. We were ultimately unsuccessful, and a shopping center now occupies the site of the school.

174 I was also later accompanied by the staff of the local DA office. Nabua’s DA office had been scouting for a “middleman” of bamboo crafts produced in Nabua which they believed was a possible “solution” for reviving Nabua’s once thriving bamboo craft industry.

175 We exhibited baskets at the Bicol Business Week in Naga City (July 14-19, 2013), the Designers’ Statement Show also in Naga City (September 28, 2013), and the OKB Regional Trade Fair in Metro Manila (October 10-13, 2013).
(NHI). In May 2014, the NHI displayed baskets at Nabua’s centro for the town’s annual fiesta celebration. We started bringing the baskets before sunrise, as the regional TV crew wanted to feature the baskets to add to their coverage of the fiesta. Our booth was set up along Nabua’s main highway where the festival parade passed (Figure 6.6.2). I wrote in my notes for that day that I was unable to record any of the festival’s parade even if they occurred just alongside our booth. I wrote, “It will be so weird to record field notes and not numbers/sales.” While conducting ethnographic research among the FRA, observing events and interviewing around town, I proceeded to visit farming-basketmaking villages for product design and development. I actively posted photographs of samples on the social media and to my surprise, began receiving inquiries and orders from Nabua-based companies and individuals looking for baskets for their special events and other needs.

In February 2015, I opened a small crafts shop in Manila that featured redesigned baskets used in everyday life such as the “bayong” (basket for shopping).176 The baskets produced for NHI fused commonly used weaving patterns (“salad” or plaiting) with those freshly introduced in the recent series of DTI skills training that Manay Piling and the members of their cooperative had attended. I also attempted to take a step into the field of sustainable home furnishing by incorporating recycled textile into the products. Diverging from the mass production model of my grandparents’ business, and realizing the associated unsustainability of export due to unpredictable market demand and its adverse effects on the environment, I took an interest in small-scale manufacture, finding clients among local and balikbayan customers who were

176 The design of this “modern bayong” basket came from the Bicol regional office of the DTI. The DTI has a design branch whose output could be used or developed by entrepreneurs and producers in the region.
looking for affordable and Philippine-made alternatives to the imported products that are dominant in the local market.

Figure 6.6.1 Baskets from Nabua displayed at the Best of Bicol Trade Fair in July 2013.
Anthropologists find that the craft industry brings not only economic returns to entrepreneurs, but also social, cultural, and political capital. In Accra, Ghana, craft entrepreneurs were disinterested in investing in the improvement of their workshops to maximize production and were instead more concerned with accumulating farmlands and building houses as a means of adapting to the new economic situation circumscribed within private property and wage labor (Silver 1981). Meanwhile, Japanese businesses were not only concerned with profit but also with maintaining “circles of attachment” that work within relationships of loyalty, mutual obligation, trust, and feelings (Kondo 1990). A comparable occurrence has been found among abaca entrepreneurs in Bicol who frequently enter politics to solidify their newly acquired social standing by getting elected to public posts (Rutten 1992). Like the entrepreneurs in Accra, the NHIC was not too invested in catching up with new technologies needed to compete in the
global economy. With a desire for social mobility that would elevate them from their previous status as poor street peddlers during World War II and owners of a ‘sari-sari’ (variety) store in the post-war period, my grandparents acquired small housing lots around in the centro and some farm lots in the rural villages, and made sure to invest in the education of their children, leading to the urban and overseas mobilities of many of our family members as discussed in Chapter 5.

Tiptoeing into the world of crafts as an anthropologist, I worried about reproducing the oppressions experienced by many workers in the Philippine handicraft industry (Miralao 1986). I was constantly perturbed by a possible future of myself as a cold-hearted capitalist that is often the subject of academic critique. My worries were exacerbated by the basketmakers’ unreadable responses that were, in the anthropological parlance, “strange.” In his other groundbreaking work titled Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance, Scott (1987, 45) comments on Geertzian cultural interpretation, for example, in distinguishing a wink from a twitch. Scott asks: “Mere observation of the physical acts gives no clue. If it is a wink, what kind of wink is it: one of conspiracy, of ridicule, of seduction?” (45). I noticed that the basketmakers often began their conversations with me with expressions of the different uncomfortable effects that the production of baskets has on their body. A varnisher of the baskets often told me after a day’s work that he no longer has to go out drinking because he is already drunk. He is an avid liquor drinker, and he meant that his inhalation of the hazardous fumes of the varnish chemicals produced effects similar to being intoxicated. Meanwhile, the seamstress complained about her back and eye pains, which she said was caused by sewing the linings of the

177 Reporting on different businesses from traditional weaving, furniture production, to baskets weaving, etc., Miralao finds that no matter the scale of production, handicraft industries typically rely on piecework wage or subcontracting system, that tend to spill into the informal labor sector “where labor conditions can become even more oppressive or exploitative.”
laundry hampers that I had commissioned from her. “It’s so painful to the point that I could not
sleep,” she would grumble. As an amateur entrepreneur, and as an anthropologist “trained” to be
attentive to people’s emotions, I did not fully understand what I was expected to do. In my
attempt to solve the varnisher’s exposure to toxic fumes, I bought a safety mask for him to use
which he refused to wear, complaining even more that it is lame for a strong man like him, and
that it is uncomfortable and too hot to use. Feeling guilty about his complaints, I gave him the
bike that I had been using as he had expressed interest in it. I paid the seamstress more than the
piecework price that she would ask for and gave additional gifts in the form of rice and other
small forms of “assistance” – thinking that it must be hard for her too as a widow. I was trying to
compensate her for the discomfort that the job was causing her. Certainly, her complaints about
the pain from craftwork stirred self-doubt about my sense of justice and fairness as an
anthropologist, as her neighbor who hoped not to be called “iba man” (other), and as descendent
of businesspeople whom the basketmakers always reminded me, were “good people.”

In contrast to their expressions of discomfort, the basketmakers appeared nostalgic when
recalling my grandparents’ successful enterprise. They often said that the business had sponsored
feasts and dances for their barangay, or that members of my family had become godparents of
their relatives’ children. Manay Piling’s brother repeatedly told me that one of my uncles who
was now in the U.S., had gifted them a “litson” (roasted pig) during his wedding. Looking at my
new designs for weaving, the basketmakers often told me that they will try to produce it because
it is “nagsupog na” (shameful) to refuse, even if they thought the designs looked “sa kinapay”
or crazy – a perception that artists in Nabua face as I mentioned in Chapter 2 (Figure 6.6.3).
Pricing the baskets was always puzzling as the basketmakers seemed embarrassed to set a price
for their labor. Their confusing complaints about pain and suffering and delaying tactics in
setting the price for their craftwork, I realized, worked as powerful devices for stirring empathy, for stressing their exceptional commitment, hard work and skills, and for initiating me into an industry that they know much better than I do. Their actions, it also became clear, were performative articulations – a form of pasali (Chapter 5) – of their awareness that cannot be said directly: my family has reaped benefits from the handicraft industry as we are now landed and are now people with something, while they remain in the margins of Nabua’s economy scrambling in the midst of bare subsistence.

Figure 6.6.3 Woven Christmas decoration of NHI. The nested Christmas decoration that I designed were thought to be “crazy” by the basketmakers because of its non-traditional weave and design. The design appropriates the nested nigo-nigo. They were sold as a nested set and were popular among balikbayan.

Becoming embedded in the baskets business opened conversations with my family members about shadowy business practices that sought to eliminate local competition. I learned that handicraft businesses in Nabua employed “secret purchasers” who would report back on the products coming out of the villages. The secret purchaser would be tasked to buy all the baskets ordered by other entrepreneurs, even if at slightly inflated prices, to encourage the basketmakers to sell these ready products effectively to NHIC, and thus to delay completing the order of the competing entrepreneurs. This would, in turn, tarnish the competition’s reputation in front of
wholesale buyers as reliable suppliers. This competition among local entrepreneurs would create a demand for labor. The surplus of laborers notwithstanding, it would seem that entrepreneurs in the past were unable to easily relocate production elsewhere due to the labor exerted by members in a community – where kinship is expandable and flexible – in establishing continued and intergenerational relations of accountability and empathy. In a situation where wages displace expectations of care such as the experience of Manay Jessa, threats to one’s livelihood become real. With craftmaking confined in the sphere of domestic production, the vulnerability of losing “orders” extends to the entire household whose members all rely on the incomes from crafts – in addition to their seasonal farm earnings. Accordingly, an entire household of workers is connected to groups of kin – a vast and expandable group whose trust and support an entrepreneur could tap but also potentially lose. Capitalist production is always catching up on deadlines and thus the relationship between basketmakers and small-scale entrepreneurs, it would seem, tends to hinge on nurturing mutual expectations.

However, it is also within such a mode of craft production in the domestic economy that several generations of craft workers come to be embedded in intergenerational relations or patronage with the owners of handicraft businesses – which, just like theirs, tend to operate within a family/domestic economy. I was to keep the names and locations of basketmakers as “secrets of the trade” – a common practice for protecting one’s business interests that starkly differs from the anthropological practice of honoring the labor and talent of artists/artisans.

Interestingly, like the U.S. Navy men in Nabua that I discussed in Chapter 3, the basketmakers were also more interested in recalling the better parts of the past; they talked about the time when the barangays were abuzz with bamboo craft activity, and when there was a potential source for
incomes that could be “advanced.” The farmer-basketmakers evaded my questions about the shadier business practices even if I told them that hearing them would help improve my entrepreneurial practice and even if I suggested that their insights could be productively used later by development workers in Nabua.

Scott (1987, 29, italics in original) found that peasants in Sedaka exercised “everyday forms of peasant resistance” which he defined as “the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them.” Scott characterizes these actions as indirect, as forms of self-help, and as expressed by individuals and therefore not collectively planned. It became clear to me that the basketmakers anticipated a continuation of the relationship established with my grandparents decades earlier, and with my mother and her siblings, a generation after, even if my efforts were nowhere near NHIC’s scale. Their rememberings of the past focused on what was gained, which points to the primacy of the “material nexus of the class struggle” (Scott 1976, 32-33). Scott (1976) suggests that circumstances in the village and their concerns for the security of their daily subsistence impel peasants to opt for “bare subsistence” over wage labor practice. Concerned with everyday survival, Scott (1976, 37-39) argues that peasants are concerned with fringe benefits; as he writes, the “interpretations of peasant politics based on their deprivation in income terms may fail to do their circumstances justice.” In Nabua, this meant that the farmer-basketmakers were,

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178 This refers to advance payments made by the entrepreneur to the craftspeople. Tadiar (2013, 22) thinking about the larger world of speculative investments, thinks about money or value that could be advanced as problematic “moments or aspects of a global dynamic of processes of accumulation set in motion, in which practices of life-making play diverse, conflicting roles as ever-diminishing resources and ever-displaced limits in the production of value.” Earlier business in Nabua have already set-up this business practice and that has transformed the expectations of craftspeople about their labor. I would agree with Tadiar’s approach to labor value that could be advanced as a form of value extraction that leads to a dispossession of “labor-time” (29).
of course, concerned with the potential economic gains, and they also expected this to happen within a system of patronage that is not based solely on monetary transactions but also includes the more personal realm of empathy and care. By bringing in concepts of shame and the continuity of past relations, I soon found myself pulled into responsibilities outside, but entangled with the operations of, the small business. I was the driver during a wedding in a basketmaker’s family. I delivered seeds from the DA office to the basketmakers in Inapatan. I felt obliged to give “death aid” – also a primary concern expressed by U.S. Navy men in honoring their friends, as I discussed in Chapter 2. There were also occasions when I provided transportation for baskets that were not for NHI but for selling at the local market, and assisted on many other occasions with various tasks.

My entry into the craft industry, together with other activities that could be considered “applied anthropology” (Willigen 2002), and my writing about the condition of bare subsistence as experienced by farmer-basketmakers in Nabua, tell of how *practice* as an anthropological project is fraught with issues of power and privilege. In Chapter 2, I proposed the force of “*supog*” (shame) and “*ginikanan*” (place of origin or descent) as affecting the researcher’s non/productivities. This chapter supports my suggestion that the fieldsite and the intimate connections and histories that we trace to/from it impact not only our research but also our field-based projects and other possibilities that occur during fieldwork time. Maurice Merleau-Ponty explicates Edmund Husserl’s use of the term “intentionality of act” to refer to “our judgments and of those occasions when we voluntarily take up a position” (Sobchack 1992, 65) – or in this case, a project within the messy world of “family business.” What becomes of our intentions, and what do “side projects” and “possibilities” look like for those returning to the hometown for fieldwork? How do familiar encounters and genealogies shape or disturb one’s research
questions and interests? If development is both “failure” and “paradox” (Escobar 1995), but also “seductive and powerful” (Yeh 2013), how could I critically reflect on my vexed position as an anthropologist, a descendant of petty capitalists, and as a returning migrant-scholar who brought to the field my conflicting intentionalities? If Scott (1977, 41) writes of peasants as deploying a “normative model of equity and justice” circumscribed within relations of shared dependencies with those in a position of power, how could I proceed in this labyrinth of intentions?

I am not alone in thinking about the conflicting positionalities/intentionalities as researcher-turned-something else. Anthropologist of Africa Collin Turnbull, who adopted the name Lobsang Rigdol (1993, 21) when he became a Buddhist monk, writes, “At least I knew that I was not becoming a monk as a device that would give me access to information I could use as an anthropologist, an unhappy kind of deceit practiced by all too many.” It was among the Mbuti, he writes, that he came to learn about “emptiness” – an important concept in Buddhism. Turnbull/Rigdol places his intentionality in becoming an “anthropologist monk” as a step away from anthropology as science to anthropology as humanity. In another case of shifting positionalities/intentionalities, Anne Allison (2009, 7) worked as a hostess in one of Tokyo’s night clubs for 4 months, deploying Butler’s argument about gender as performance as she dove deeper into her investigation of gender, corporate culture, and the commercialization of desires and leisure in post-industrial Japan. Likewise, anthropologist and MBA degree-holder Fiona Caroline Graham became a geisha to produce a film documentary and to promote the geisha world using her training in business and marketing (Nakano 2008). Some have become engaged in creative community projects such as Caleb Johnston and Geraldine Pratt (2017, 987–88), who then found themselves “taking the brunt of the mockery and resentment,” while opening avenues for thinking about their privileged positionalities in a “settler-colonial nation.” There are many
other examples, but these cases tell us of some of the ways that our fieldsites and academic ambitions become encoded into our labor – and hopes – as researchers.

In May 2014, I wrote in my field notes that I was very excited about the prospects of NHI flourishing into a sustainable business. I wrote that I began scouting for locations where the NHI shop could be set up, although my partner was worried that this would lead to us getting “stuck” in the Philippines with low incomes (and no health care), and giving up whatever academic potential I have. Returning to Nabua had stirred memories of a time of happy family reunions when we were not yet scattered around the world. I reported to Auntie Dianne when I visited her in the “kingurang” house (Chapter 5) that perhaps I could teach in Bicol or Manila or even in small college in Nabua, with the NHI operating simultaneously. Auntie Dianne frowned, clearly showing that that she was not in favor of my plan to stay in the Philippines for good, after all, she had also invested care in my education in my younger years (and therefore also in my overseas migration).

In the Introduction chapter of this dissertation, I wrote about the scenario when my mother and aunt told me about what counts as a “good” migration story. During that same conversation, I had interrupted to ask what they think of my interest in reviving the family’s collapsed bamboo business in the future after I finish my doctoral studies. Quick as lightning, my aunt and my mother replied that it is “not good’ and that “it is better to just come home from overseas.” They told me that balikbayan tend to be more respected in Nabua. My mother, herself having had a dose of failed craft entrepreneurship, told me that life in the Philippines is one of constant struggle. She advised, “Think about yourself. Everybody thinks for themselves, and you should too. Yourself first should be your motto.” My mother’s suggestion about how I should improve myself echoes the concerns expressed by Manay Jessa about the “kanya-kanya” (self-self) ethic
held by those who have “made it” or those who have something. Just as U.S. navy elders’ stories reflected a consensus on stories that are circulatable, many members of my family share the same nostalgia of the NHIC’s vibrant past. However, I heard many times during the period that I was embedded in the business that entrepreneurship, in general, is no longer seen by members of my family as a promising venture for the current and next generations of our family, especially in comparison to holding a professional occupation that is in demand in Manila and overseas. The route towards education, as the Madawon basketmakers also told me, seems to be a better prospect than working the land or weaving baskets. They said that those who have pens in their shirt pockets – like the staff at municipal office – earn regular incomes while they have to work so hard under the sun or to crouch over baskets all day. The craft industry had opened the route for my family’s upward mobility through education and urban and overseas migration. These are the routes for comfortable lives in which regular incomes more than bare subsistence could be earned. Curiously, as rural farmer-basketmakers talked about everyday precarity beyond the borders of Nabua, members of my family who had gained economic and cultural capital through the handicraft industry, reiterate rural and overseas mobilities as necessary steps toward improved lives.

In recent years, anthropologists have been giving more attention to the structuring effects of global inequalities around the world, as well as inquiring into our methodological toolkit. Arjun Appadurai (2013) calls for the assemblage of what he calls a “revitalized tool kit” – an “actual method of intervention.” Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen (2013) appeal for the “need for impatience” in advancing our political commitments, in effect suggesting the need for our commitments to fold into our ethnographic practice. Laura Nader (1972) suggests that anthropologists need to “study up” institutions of power while Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995)
calls for the primacy of “militant anthropology,” among many others. As an anthropologist who is “homebound” (Hau 2014, 51), I found that my “being at home” inescapably folded into my research in Nabua in unexpected ways. My ethnographic method came to be interwoven into various strands of intentions and positionalities – as an anthropologist of the hometown, concerned citizen, neighbor, descendant of petty capitalists, an aspiring development worker, and so on. On top of these interweaving intentions and positionalities, I was additionally a returning scholar – in perpetual pursuit of academic funding that is not available in the Philippines – who was, finally, looking for a reason to stay.

The tiny NHI shop that I had operated from February to December 2015 in Makati City finally closed down (Figure 6.6.4). I began to feel the weight of returning to my doctoral dissertation, especially when leveled against the minimal financial returns from the shop, and my mother’s deteriorating health. Hoping to keep NHI’s growing number of buyers in Nabua and Manila, I tried to recruit family members to continue the project, but I was ultimately unsuccessful. One of my cousins was leaving for China to try to work there as an English teacher. Another cousin excused herself, saying that she and her partner have sent out their work applications to Dubai. My brother who was then working night shifts at a call center agency, did not have the daytime to spare for managing a handicraft business. In Chapter 2, I wrote that I eventually retreated from my planned creative projects, leading to what I called “negative productions.” Even if NHI had folded up and failed as a business venture, I suggest that it cannot be called “negative production” because to do so would be a literal reading of my proposed rethinking of the disciplined modes of research, academic productivity and rigor. Negative production includes projects that never happened and that failed even before they began, but I also argued that rethinking the forces that caused their non-happening could be reconsidered
productively and positively.

Figure 6.6.4 The NHI shop opened along the commercial road of Kalayaan Avenue in Makati City (Left). With stocks stored in the Makati shop, the NHI was also able to occasionally appear in fundraising or small-scale business fairs, for example, those held at and sponsored by the Deutsche Bank corporate office in Taguig City (Right).

Thinking about the divide between Filipino-American/overseas-trained Filipino scholars and Philippine-based intellectuals, Caroline Hau (2014) writes that the latter’s claims on “epistemic privilege” needs to be contextualized within the changing material, political and economic contexts in the Philippines. Researchers arrive at their fieldsites with different family histories, postcolonial baggage, intentions, academic ambitions, and other factors that eventually impact methodological interventions and knowledge production. The NHI business pursuit, however small-scale and short-lived, may have inadvertently trapped Nabua in a picture of rurality – a place in which the disappearing handcrafted “treasures” continue to be woven, albeit in the margins of the local economy. As I hope to have fairly demonstrated in this chapter, this methodological intervention during fieldwork interwove with class, and with my desire as a Filipino citizen to come home “for good.” My framing of this chapter considers Neil Garcia’s
(2013, 77) critique that the perceived right to study our “own” tends to comfortably settle into “nativism” that ends up being the “most eminently appropriable discourse” – the “most convenient, most financially rewarding, most uncritical…” On the other hand, I hold García’s critique alongside the feminist insistence that the political intersects with the personal. Our intervention into the anthropological toolkit, even if unsettling, must be inscribed into our ethnography to contribute to accounts about how our identities and intentions intermingle with the communities that we study – even if we call them our own. As Michael Kearney (1996, 13–14) writes from the hill on which he had stayed with Carol Nagengast during fieldwork:

> The children of roofers are playing, and their wives are working handicrafts, which they sell in the parking lots of shopping malls… In the afternoon the men will come home in their truck with wild edible greens they have collected along the road, and they will cultivate their corn and other plants they have planted with some seeds bought in a local supermarket and with others carried from Oaxaca… Clearly, we and our visitors/neighbors – more confounded categories – share a historical moment that defies conventional anthropological categories. But it is not the case that we and they are marginal but that all of us, albeit in different ways, are assuming complex and interpenetrating identities. It is to be expected that these contemporary identities and the conditions that shape them should be reflected in anthropological thought.

Ahmed (2010, 183) suggests that there exists “intimacy between anxiety and hope,” the latter including the desire for “the ‘might,’” which is only ‘might’ if it keeps open the possibility of the ‘might not.’” Grassroots activist Gustavo Esteva (2017) expresses that “there is room for hope,” hope being the “conviction that something makes sense, whatever happens.” Geraldine Pratt, Caleb Johnston and Vanessa Banta (2017, 63) propose the deployment of the “authority of the scholarly archive” in circulating the stories of “disposable lives…consigned to the margins.” On the other hand, Escobar (1995, 222) reminds anthropologists, “One must then resist the desire to formulate alternatives at an abstract, macrolevel; one must resist the idea that the articulation of alternatives will take place in intellectual and academic circles…” I hope for my failed
venture to be read as a concrete manifestation of how “anxious-hopeful projects” (to borrow from Ahmed) might look in the field. I hope to contribute to the anthropological methodological toolkit – with the self-awareness that my positionalities, entrepreneurial complex, and capitalist-developmentalist desires, could easily be perceived as problematic. My initiation into the world of my family’s petty capitalist enterprise led me to relationships and networks that predate the research (although those early relationships were not with me, I was already embedded in them unwittingly), as well as to new research questions that I had not imagined I would face. It was through the unexpected entry into the world of crafts in my hometown that I came to learn about the common stories told outside Nabua’s centro and beyond my comfort zone. Manay Jessa’s, Manay Piling’s and the Madawon basketmakers’ narratives tell of the common landlessness and lives of bare subsistence that must be circulated and underscored as we rethink our alliances and as we advocate for the interests of the very much oppressed.

6.7 Concluding Thoughts, Moving Forward

The Duterte government envisions that by 2040, “the Philippines shall be a prosperous, predominantly middle-class society where no one is poor” (National Economic and Development Authority 2016). The document from which I lift this quote is titled Ambisyon Natin 2040 or Our Ambition 2040, the first-ever long-term development plan of the Philippines.179 According to the plan, the Duterte government targets “to triple real per capita incomes and eradicate hunger and poverty by 2040, if not sooner.” The three stories foregrounded above reflect only some of the conditions of bare subsistence that become eclipsed by national development plans and

179 The plan was signed as Executive Order No. 5, on October 12, 2016 by Philippine President Duterte.
ambitions that aim to craft a future in which Filipinos “will enjoy a stable and comfortable lifestyle, secure in the knowledge that we have enough for our daily needs and unexpected expenses…” (National Economic and Development Authority 2016). Their stories are only among some of the experiences of the poor in the rural villages who “scramble for modes of living on” (Berlant 2011, 8), amid the slow death of craft- and land-based forms of livelihood unfolding in an everyday, toxic life of deprivation.

In my dissertation proposal, I wrote that I aim to investigate how overseas migration has affected and continues to affect everyday life in Nabua. Going beyond the boundaries of my mother’s obligatory safe zone (Chapter 2), I came to know of bamboo basketmaking and farming as a paired vital source of livelihood for many Nabueño families who live outside the centro. During my fieldwork, fellow Nabueños consistently suggested “good” migration stories that I should include in my ethnography; they hoped to celebrate our hometown as an exceptional model of rural abundance and success. My mother said that my ethnography does not need to mirror the “real” (Chapter 2) while the retired U.S. Navy men stressed their desire to leave behind a positive account of their lives (Chapter 3). Urban and overseas migration have opened opportunities to my family and many Nabueños aspiring for the “good life” (Chapter 4 and 5), but the state’s brokerage of labor (Choy 2003; R. Rodriguez 2010; Tadiar 2013), as I hope to have demonstrated in this final chapter, also has debilitating consequences on the lives of the non-migrating rural poor. Mobilities, I hope to have shown here, have the effect of de-prioritizing the conditions in the rural areas and of the rural poor. The state’s push for migration has contradictory effects akin to Berlant’s (2011, 1) concept of “cruel optimism” – the conflicted state “when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing.”
The ubiquity of land dispossession lies at the heart of the narratives of Manay Jessa, Manay Piling and the family of farmer-basketmakers in Madawon. These three accounts elucidate a trajectory of mobility of the poorest of the poor within an increasingly normative condition of land dispossession. The ordinariness of landlessness and harshness of conditions of bare subsistence that villagers such as the ones in Nabua face daily demonstrate how, for many poor villagers, the benefits of “dollars” earned overseas are out of reach. Migration scholarship is rich with narratives that tell us of lives of rural and “Third World” scarcity in which the poor search for other modes of survival in the capital-driven cities and migrant-destination countries. I end this chapter with direct conversations about the common predicament of bare subsistence lives that are left-behind by unequal national and global development. The stories about the “collapse of a secure life” (A. Bloch 2017b, 28) are now defined by their everywhereness, and I suggest that these must appear in sharper tones and deeper textures in our ethnography. Along with Pratt, Johnston and Banta (2017, 68), I archive these stories “with the hope of bringing different audiences close enough to feel their import.” If the condition of dispossession and oppression in the hometown is underexposed in the migration literature, I hope for these three stories to highlight the effects of neo/capitalism that continues to flourish by producing a cycle that entraps the poorest of the poor in a permanent crisis. These are stories that need not only circulation, but persistent agitation. Crises loom over the poor – in villages where they may farm or weave or trade baskets, remaining attached to the promises of the prosperity of a once-successful export-driven craft industry. They may continue their search for a good life in the cities as they work under contracts that are never regularized, or they may find a route towards work overseas. Within these conditions in which they come to know about the fungibility of their labor, futures focused on decent lives lived “at home” remain desirable.
To push its ambitions towards 2040, the Philippine state will likely pursue its brokerage of Filipino migrant labor, even if the same development plan fails to mention that the overseas migration of Filipinos is, in fact, a significant source of national incomes. The plan also imagines that by 2040, Filipinos will enjoy a life that is ‘matagag’ (strongly rooted), ‘maginhawa’ (comfortable), and ‘panatag’ (secure). To realize these ambitions for a prosperous life for Filipinos, the plan cites as priority sectors the following: housing and urban development, manufacturing, connectivity, education services, tourism and allied services, agriculture, health and wellness, and financial services. Curiously, the plan elides land distribution and agricultural reform – protracted issues that remain central to the ways that the poorest of the poor in the peripheries of the Philippines imagine decent futures for themselves. The plan also omits mention of the brokerage of Filipino labor, something that is deleterious to the improvement of non-migrating Filipinos.

The Central Bank of the Philippines (CBP) reports that for 2017, cash remittances amounted to $28.1 billion, which was 4.3 percent higher than the total for 2016, and the highest in the Philippines overseas remittance history (Cuaresma 2018). Remittances from about 10 million Filipinos overseas also account for over 10 percent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product, higher than the revenues from the agricultural sector, which is at 9.7 percent (Central Intelligence Agency 2018). In January 2018, Duterte inaugurated the state-owned Overseas Filipino Bank (Gita 2018), a clear indication of the recognition of the “bounty of OFW remittances” (Opiniano 2017). These incomes signify the state’s optimism in the wealth that could be reaped in the expropriation of Filipino surplus labor. The economic growth in the cities will continue to be fueled by contractual and cheap labor from the rural communities. The
Philippine government’s push for policies oriented towards overseas migration will continue to devastate the lives of the people “left behind” by these national and global developments.

As the state fortifies its policies that enable Filipino mobilities, it would seem that the much-needed land reform and provision of essential social services for the poor will continue to be suspended. The moral economy that once operated in the barangay-level is worn down by ongoing neoliberal processes that have led to anti-poor policies such as the non-regularization of local labor contracts. The state overlooks the need for investments in social welfare and services that would aid in improving the lives of those living in an impasse of scarcity. These issues of historical, generational, and ongoing dispossession in the originating communities of migrants need to be linked more intimately to the conversations on the struggles of Filipino rural and overseas migrants that more often appear in the literature. The precarious lives lived in the barangays of “labor-exporting” countries such as the Philippines, and in “migrant-recipient” countries, such as the U.S., Canada, and others, need to be interwoven to defend and uphold the interests of those whose lives are relegated to bare subsistence, and agitate, and to push against, deepening global inequalities.
Afterword: New Migrations Amid Duterte’s War Against Drugs

The chapters in this dissertation illustrated the force of migration in both spectacular and mundane aspects of life in Nabua also known as the “Town of Dollars,” Southeast Luzon Island, Philippines. I contribute to self-reflexive ethnographic methods through my proposed method of “negative production” – a relational form of knowledge production that pays attention to the ways that shame (“supog”), roots or origin (“ginikanan”), and kinship press upon our work to the point of non-production. Responding to calls to bring to light the prevalence of “empire” in contemporary life, I showed how the retired U.S. navy veterans’ narratives can help nuance our understanding of postcolonial consciousness. In my discussion of a Holy Week ritual, I used a postcolonial approach that included investigating ritual beyond its folk elements. To redo kinship, I reformulated the concept of the “house” as now unfolding in different geographies, and I also troubled the often generalized “smoothness” of Filipino interpersonal relations by looking at “pasali” (subdued performance). The experience of migration, as I showed in the previous chapters, pervades both the intimate and public spheres in my hometown. However, migration and the benefits and dollars earned from it are also out of reach for many of its poor residents. I concluded by highlighting the pervasiveness of landlessness, dispossession, and precarity as experienced by many of the town’s non-migrating rural poor. For many residents who survive in modes of bare subsistence, precarity seems to be everywhere anyway, and elsewhere seems dangerous. Therefore, it is better to hope for improved lives, with their kin and community, at home.

In moving forward, I think of two directions – both leading to conversations on the unprecedented death toll brought about by Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte’s “war against
drugs” since it was launched in July 2016. First, arguments made in this dissertation can be used to interrogate the war that is concentrated on the poor. Second, it is crucial to turn attention to the dynamics of the new Filipino mobilities emerging from this context of war.

In June 2015, newspapers in Bicol reported that Nabua had become the “drug capital of Camarines Sur” (Bicol Standard 2015; Politiko 2015). The Malacañang Palace reported that there are over 20,000 drug-related deaths from July 2016 to December 2017.\footnote{A document titled “Duterte Administration Year-End Report, 2017 Key Accomplishments” reports that there had been “3,967 Drug personalities who died in anti-drug operations” and “16,355 Homicide Cases under investigation.” The emblems on the right side of these figures reiterate the legitimacy of these numbers as they come from four government agencies: the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, the Philippine National Police, the National Bureau of Investigation, and Bureau of Customs. These are staggering numbers, especially considering the already chilling count of 3,257 extrajudicial killings from 1975 to 1985 under the Marcos dictatorship (Reyes 2016). Historian Alfred McCoy (2001) says the Marcos period left a “dark legacy” in modern Philippine history.} Looking at Nabua, there appears to be a striking difference in the ways that the same campaign is unfolding in other places in the Philippines. A police officer from the Nabua Municipal Police Station (NMPS) informed me in May 2018 that they have recorded only four casualties from their own drug-related operations since Duterte’s campaign was launched. The police officer also noted there were no drug-related casualties in Nabua, even after the town was publicly outed as the new center of the regional drug trade. As of writing, there is no available data about the location of drug-related deaths since Duterte’s campaign started, but indeed, Nabua’s record for its local drug-related operations is paltry, especially when compared with Metro Manila’s death toll of 60 in a three-day period in August 2017 (Mogato 2017). If the Town of Dollars had indeed emerged as the hub for Bicol’s drug trade, then it is important to ask why the gruesome extrajudicial killings do not appear to exist in the Nabueño imaginary.
The arguments made in this dissertation about the lingering valuations for kinship, place, and community solidarities in Nabua, lead me to reflect on the unprecedented death toll in an atomized city such as Metro Manila. The Facebook page of NMPS reports local drug-related operations. On August 1, 2017, NMPS posted a photograph of an alleged drug dealer who was shot down by the local police. The face of the deceased was blurred in the photographs. A commenter asked: who were his parents? Another person asked if the local police could also investigate their neighbor who sells drugs but the NMPS answered teasingly, “Tell me, my baby, who it is so we can capture them already.” The NMPS’ photographs of their drug-related operations also radically depart from the crime scenes coming out of Manila every day. The NMPS superimpose smileys over the faces of the police appearing in the photograph – perhaps to protect their own identities or to communicate the tense moment of apprehending kababayans in a “small” town where people can locate, claim and expand kinship and other relations (see image below).

This image appears on the official Facebook page of Nabua Municipal Office Station. I blurred the image of the man caught selling drugs for privacy purposes, but the superimposed icons appear in the original photo.
In the previous chapter, I pushed for the need to archive and circulate stories that expose conditions of dispossession and oppression, as a means to push against deepening inequalities. Amnesty International (2017) reports that the “vast majority of the victims of the drug-related killings reside in the Philippines’ poorest urban neighborhoods.” With these assaults against the poor happening during Duterte’s campaign, it would seem that the Nabueño villagers’ hopes for a better future in Nabua and their impressions about the city as dangerous are justified. It is important to investigate the ways in which Duterte’s war on drugs is not only a war against the poor but also a war against the migrant poor. If communities such as Nabua continue to value rituals of grieving and death, and if familial and community solidarities are hoped to be maintained despite distances, what do we make of these senseless deaths and disposability of lives?

Duterte’s war is setting the course for new migrations at a breakneck speed, by bridging strengthened yet arguably risky bilateral relations. In January 2018, the construction of two China-sponsored drug rehabilitation facilities began (Philippines News Agency 2018). In early April 2018, Boracay Island, a world-famous tourist destination, was shut down by the Philippine government. A few days after this news erupted, it was revealed that the closure was for preparing the island for constructing a USD500-million Chinese-owned grand casino resort (Ranada 2018). The booming gaming industry in the Philippines has also very recently opened new Chinese migration routes; 100,000 Chinese migrants have arrived in Manila since 2016 (Bloomberg 2018). In April 2018, Duterte once again returned to the Philippines from Beijing with newly signed bilateral agreements, this time involving Filipino migrant labor. In the coming years, China will admit 300,000 Filipino migrants; 100,000 work visas will be granted for English Language teachers and the rest will arrive as cooks, nannies, nurses, etc. (Dacanay 2018;
Romero 2018). Given the stunted development in the HK-based Filipino domestic workers’ appeal for permanent residency and fairer labor contracts, as well as the unresolved Scarborough Shoal dispute (Agence France-Presse 2017), the opening up of this new China-bound employment for Filipino migrants, manifests as a rather curious development.181

In the same way that we need to bridge the unfair labor conditions experienced by Filipinos overseas with the conditions of bare subsistence and dispossession experienced daily in the Philippines, I believe that it is important to link these violent antagonisms against the migrant poor to the state’s misorientations in containing the flow of capital – underground economies included – in a rapidly growing megacity. The staggering number of drug-related deaths is emerging out of deepened inequalities, weakened intimacies, and atomized lives. Communities are increasingly fragmented by unnegotiable power relations, class and capital. They become patrolled by the state, police, and elites which are protected by a culture of impunity. These upcoming Filipino labor mobilities can also be compared, for example, with the case of Mexicans who are pushed out of their communities towards the heavily policed border zones (Holpuch 2017). Viridiana Rios Contreras (2014) argues that it is crucial to pay attention to people’s concerns for security as a motivating factor for their migration. However, in analyzing these future Filipino mobilities, we need to interweave several issues: the English-speaking Filipinos’ marketability as tied to the Philippines’ colonial histories; the expansion of China’s influence in the Philippines and other developing countries; the competing imperial projects of

181 The Scarborough Shoal is a disputed territory in the West Philippine Sea. It is resource-rich and strategic reef being claimed by China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Taiwan. In July 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague unanimously invalidated China’s historic claims on the territories (Poling et al. 2016). Currently, China has built a coastguard and surveillance systems in the area, projecting its “power in Asia’s most disputed waters” (Petty 2017).
U.S. and China; the Philippines’ drug trade as historically linked to the spread of China’s post-Socialist shadow economy (McCoy 2009); and the current war as the organizing frame for Duterte’s appeal for an intensified Philippine-China bilateral relations. A thread that weaves these issues together, I believe, is the subject of migration. An intertwining of migration in Duterte’s illegal drugs campaign is vital because it elucidates the state’s precaritization of Filipino labor. The state facilitates unfair local and overseas work contracts, at the same time that it devalues Filipino life by “containing” the internally occurring “migration problem” through violence.

Drawing from stories that are deeply familiar to me, as well from to narratives that I came to learn through my homecoming for anthropological research, I showed people’s remaining attachments to kinship, place, and community across time and space. The chapters presented here also reflected on the hard and consistent work, exerted by individuals, family members, and kababayans, to uphold desired solidarities, to circulate stories about good lives lived amid seemingly never-ending turulences, and to pass on to the next generation a remarkable story about a town even it is merely in the periphery of national history. In this “anthropology of the hometown,” I was unable to fulfill the wish of many of my family members and informants that I contribute to the academic archive a generally “good” story of our ginikanan. In the pages of this first anthropological ethnography of Nabua, I pushed for recuperating parts of our history that are retreating from our postcolonial consciousness, and for being affected not only by the inspirational “success” stories of upward mobility and migration, but also by narratives about the ubiquity of dispossession, precarity and multiple oppressions that haunt many lives today.
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339


