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Change Is Inevitable

Have you ever experienced anxiety for moving into a new city, state, or country? Filipinos find themselves in the same position, especially when first arriving to the U.S. from the Philippines. I’ve been really eager to do my interview with Maryann Ramil because I’ve heard personal stories of her journey and life in the U.S., and it was so surreal to have not only have her confirm those personal stories, but to also have new insight on other segments of her journey in the U.S. So, I sat myself down one night with Maryann, who described herself as feeling uncomfortable in a new country where people spoke in a different language, which put her in the place of turning to American television to play as an influence to better her English speaking and feelings of hopelessness in a new country. In *Pinoy Capital* by Benito Vergara, Vergara made an argument of Filipinos in Daly City who cover up their homesickness with Filipino commodities such as Filipino television, newspaper, festivals, and foods, but homesick Filipinos use American commodities as well. Many homesick Filipinos, like Maryann Ramil, have adapted to American culture through television, technology or music to cope with homesickness, which will play a heavy influence on Filipinos in the long run on becoming Americanized.

Filipinos living a country away from the Philippines triggers homesickness because they’ve lived all of their life in the Philippines where they grew up in with friends and family, and end up migrating to a country with a different language, culture, and lifestyle. When Maryann was asked about whether or not she felt homesick every now and then, she answered, “I get homesick when I miss my parents. I call my foster mom to make me feel better.” One of the many issues that trigger homesickness is lack of communication because it puts Filipinos in the position of feeling isolated from their country or people they once knew. Maryann also commented on how Facebook became a great use of communication for her former batch mates in high school and college. Technology has served as a great tool for people that are homesick because it lessens the gap between themselves and their loved ones. It’s been made easier nowadays to communicate with people thousands of miles away because it just takes a few clicks and typing on a computer to get a message to someone. Vergara stated, “Such reminding – from everyday conversations to official state exhortation – is by no means novel, but it is intensified by the advances of communication associated with the present age.” (Vergara 47) Vergara was pointing out how Filipinos in the U.S. manifest a form of homesickness, even though communication it’s used as a tool to ease homesickness. In most phone conversations I hear from the U.S. to the Philippines, the person in the U.S. always asks, “How’s it doing there? I miss you guys, I miss the Philippines, and we’ll be coming there in a year or two.” These forms of statements can recollect the anxiety of homesickness without knowing it, thus convincing us that communication can either make or break a person’s homesickness. But even though homesickness is a major feeling for Filipinos in the U.S., culture shock plays an equal role.

Moving to a different country intimidates Filipinos because just like homesickness, Filipinos feel isolated and alienated, but also become pressured to be more American. Maryann Ramil’s attitude towards the U.S. was an uncomfortable experience because she came to the U.S. at the young age of 18, and felt isolated because Americans couldn’t understand her English. As a result of her isolation, she began to watch American television and listen to American music to help her learn English. But much like communication, the result of American media also played as a make or break strategy. The danger of American media causes people to conform to what they hear or see. Take for example the way people dress in the media; it serves as a form of example or influence towards the viewers to dress the same. Maryann may have learned how to speak English better, but she also conformed to the American culture without realizing it. Vergara mentioned, “But the regular irritation displays those who cling to Filipinoness reflects the seeming artificiality of English when spoken by a Filipino, who, regardless of location, *must* speak a Filipino language.” (Vergara 146) Vergara finds insight that Filipinos who stay true to their Filipinoness, will speak a Filipino language regardless of where they are. Although Maryann didn’t mention it in the interview, I’ve heard her complain many times of her kids not knowing how to speak a Filipino language. Based on\_\_\_\_\_, Filipino parents usually play the role of the teacher and influence when it comes to teaching their kids how to speak a Filipino language. Knowing that Maryann’s kids don’t speak a Filipino language, we can make an inference that she did not speak a Filipino language that often enough for her kids to get the hang of the Filipino language. But even though Maryann didn’t succeed in teaching her kids how to speak a Filipino language, she is proud to have taught her kids about the matters of respect.

Maryann confirmed that she did not practice any Filipino traditions or customs to cope with homesickness, but she taught a form of a tradition that involved respect towards others. There is in fact a Filipino tradition she reflected on, which was the “Mano Po.” Origins &History of the Mano Online defined Mano Po as an evolved custom in the Philippines of showing respect to elders through extending or kissing one’s hand when greeting or saying goodbye. Mano Po has been a tradition that has died down since the babyboomers era because some Filipinos in that era were forced to do the Mano Po and didn’t like being enforced to give someone respect. Maryann claimed to not practicing the Mano Po, but practicing a simpler form of it, which she described as respect towards other people. She was very proud to say it because she looked at her teaching of general respect as an importance to teach because today’s generation of young people seem so much more rebellious towards their parents. Vergara stated, “Another stereotype affirmed in these films is the widely held notion that Filipino children raised in the United States are spoiled and rude to their elders.” (Vergara 145) Unfortunately, many people find an attribution to American-born children as disrespectful just because they are not born and raised in the Philippines. It may sound true, but Vergara confirmed that it’s just a stereotype, and it could possibly be a stereotype because people find the Mano Po as a charm to keep their children from being rebellious. Some people look down on American-born children because they don’t do all the customs and traditions all Filipino children in the Philippines do. Maryann goes against the typical Filipino in Daly City like eating Filipino food, watching Filipino television, or teaching her children Filipino customs, but it’s all just a result of the American culture that made an impact on her while she dealt with homesickness as she first came to the U.S.

As a result of this interview, I’ve been given more insight on specific themes we’ve been working on in class. Two themes in particular were Filipino identity and conformity to the American culture. Filipino identity was mentioned when Maryann was having a difficult time communicating with other Americans. The English language can be a very frustrating subject to learn for Filipinos starting out in the U.S., but Maryann has given hope to people who are hopeless. I look at her now and question how she could have a difficult time because her English is so said, with no hint of an American accent. Maryann also helped me better understand the subject conformity to the American culture because she made me realize that conformity in any form is inevitable. Anyone new to the U.S. is open to conform to the American culture no matter what. I’ve learned that conformity to the American culture can also come in different forms, like how Maryann was trying to learn English, but ended up becoming Americanized through her learning experience. But most importantly, I realized that identity is something to be concerned about because it’s a representation of who you are. It isn’t right to be tossed and swayed by what others think, or changing your mind or identity because of what people say. Maryann became more Americanized, but regardless of people saying how much she’s changed, she’s still proud to be who she is. Change is inevitable, and sometimes we have to allow the inevitable to happen.

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