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Essay#3

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Final Draft

**Essay 3: Benito Vergara Jr’s**

**Pinoy Capital: The Filipino Nation in Daly City**

**“Snapshot Portraits of a true “Reina””**

**-A Moment with Erlinda dela Cruz Urquico**

To be considered a “Reina” in the Filipino culture is a great accomplishment when a young lady is of age. She is considered to be the most beautiful as well as independent, headstrong, intelligent in all ways and most of all hardworking and kind. My grandmother was considered the lady matron or “Reina” in her province and for her many children, they were considered blessed and pushed at all costs towards accomplishment like their Reina Elena, their mother. For many Filipinos, immigrating has become an extreme resort to a means to an end. Throughout the Philippines, conditions continue to grow worse and worse due to governmental corruption and a crumbling economy which forces millions of Filipinos to find an alternative means to survival and though that may be the case to a lot of overseas Filipinos workers, that was only a partial reason to why Erlinda Urquico decided to leave her beloved motherland.

The decision to immigrate isn’t a decision to take so lightly and it takes a great many factors before one decides to up and leave their hometown, often experiencing feelings of homesickness, nostalgia and familial obligation but for Erlinda Urquico the decision to embark upon a perilous new life comes none other than the theme of obligation and the sincerity of love and family. Through an intimate interview with Erlinda Urquico, I learned about another side of the immigrant experience as one woman dives out of affluence and into a world of self dependence all the while mentioning concepts from Vergara’s Pinoy Capital such us homesickness, nostalgia, obligation and her transition of attitude towards coping with her version of the immigrant experience. [Erlinda first left the Philippines at the age of 24 to pursue a demand of obligation from family. Coming from affluence and encountering the difficult struggles that many overseas workers encountered such as education, finances, and employment, Erlinda found life in New York and Detroit, extremely difficult; disinterested she left to return to her more comfortable life back in Caloocan. Unlike most overseas Filipino workers, opportunities of wealth was not the primary reason why Erlinda Urquico choose to leave her beloved homeland, instead it was the ultimatum and new beginnings of love and family sacrifice that later led to an experience of years of financial struggle, familial obligation, difficulty in educational equivalences, the highs and lows of employment and finally the self independence that truly made her the real “Reina” that she knew she had the possibility to be. The major theme that Erlinda as had undergone radiated from her growth in attitude, self sacrifice, and perspectives of obligation that greatly changed her perspective of struggle, despite the concept that most filipinos *only* come in search of opportunity.]

“Nostalgia” is a central theme in Pinoy Capital in which Vergara discusses the variation between the extent of a longing desire to return back to their homeland versus the reality and need to which most Filipinos choose to stay in their immigrating country. Through a series of interviews, Vergara found out that most Filipinos did not fit the mold that he had previously predicted but rather eventually learned to cope or actually enjoy their new life because of a possibility for a better life. Vergara also states “Crucial to the emotion of nostalgia are the recognition of differences between two places, (here and home) and the heightening of those differences. Intrustic to the nostalgic impulse is an act of self-delusion, where the faraway (or the past) is reconfigured as closer to the ideal. The work of nostalgia involves rewriting the past that selectively discards experiences that may not be pleasurable”(Vergara 170). Vergara’s concept of “repeated turning” is certainly dependent upon feelings of “here” and “home” (Vergara 170) in which Filipinos subconsciously and selectively find themselves in a state of reminiscing in which a comparison of the lives they had back in the Philippines and the life they had now are suddenly presented to them. Varying perspectives of “here” and “home” becomes muted in a sense that despite whatever hardships they encountered at “home” were remembered in a sense that was simpler or bearable compared to the hardships occurring in the now and whatever times they become nostalgic with are nothing compared to the actual reality.

Interviewing Erlinda as a case study to Vergara’s concept, Erlinda very much fits the mold of obscuring the real reasons why she first left the Philippines to simply reminiscing the good times instead. In an interview with Erlinda, I presented her with a series of questions involving the concept of nostalgia as a basis for her memories towards first coming to the United States. I asked her what it felt like first leaving the Philippines, what were here reasons, what it was like assimilating here, if she missed anyone or anything and if she has any regrets. Instead of starting with the answers to those questions, she started speaking of all the good times in the Philippines. Erlinda states “In the Philippines, I had maid, big house, thriving business, my friends, sisters and brothers and of course good food. (Urquico)” Erlinda instead of answering my question simply brought herself back to a time before she left her country to a time where despite modern conveniences, times were simpler showing me how evident Vergara’s concept of obscuring the “here” and “home”. Attempting to dig deeper into the interview, knowing how shy my own mother is, I asked her if there was any difficulties that persuaded her to come to the U.S. This suddenly became a touchy subject and I learned that she was met with an ultimatum between her family and her cheating first love who vowed to leave her if she did not come. Vergara was correct in saying that when Filipinos become nostalgic of their past, they become nostalgic of their former lives that included the good times versus the real realities, whatever it is. Vergara notes nostalgia “an act of self-delusion where the faraway or past is reconfigured as closer to the ideal” (Vergara 170), a concept in which the reality is obscured to cover up the tragedy. My mother choose my father and met her new life here in the United States.

Once she arrived in the United States, she found life to be struggling, coping with “homesickness”, a concept that Vergara greatly elaborates upon, as well as having to cope with my fathers drinking problems, the rise and fall of our family business, work and her kids growing up. She eventually learns to cope with her problems through self independence with the support of her blood family via keeping in touch through homesickness.

In Pinoy Capital, Vergara, states that many of his interviewees revealed, a “wide range of attitudes towards life in the U.S” and that to “return” back to their native land would be through the concepts of “nostalgia, homesickness, and the simple assertion of ethnic identity, methods of which can include long distance phone calls, balikbayan boxes, money and letters”(Vergara 161). Vergara compliments his commentary towards a simple idea of “keepin in touch” (Urquico) as my mom would say it. Erlinda Urquco states in our interview “Through the years, since you know your dad and I got married, I would always always be making daily calls to your Tita Sonia or Tita Baby and my other siblings in the Philippines as well as you know our yearly Christmas balikbayan boxes with the ummm….you know old clothes, spam, toys, lotions and perfumes, laundry detergent and whatever they need.(Urquico)” Erlinda learned to cope with her homesickness through what almost every Filipino immigrant does to cope---phone calls, balikbayan boxes, letters etc.

As the interview continues on my mom revealed the circumstances of her current life that she struggled to live compared to her affluent life back home. “After you know, your dad ruined our business, he ruined our life and I divorced him. We have no money, we have no life but you know, life no stop, I call your aunt and your lola everyday and they make me feel better”(Urquico). Through a series of phone calls and quick connections to her mother land, Erlinda was able to find a piece of home that not only kept her going on with life but a support system that allowed her to become self independent without relying to much on a single individual being. Erlinda Urquico now resides as a single mom with a home and an automobile of her own as well as three kids and despite the struggles of her past, lives happily knowing that she did it on her own. She finally became the independent “Reina” that she always knew she was capable to be! In Pinoy Capital, Vergara notes “What the United States offers, is a possibility to improve one’s life, a possibility that even outweighed an already stable life in the Philippines” (Vergara 58). My mother was already living a privileged life with her family back in the Philippines but because she was forced to deal with circumstances and struggles beyond superficial things, she grew in terms of self attitude and gained her own independence and that in itself outweighed her stable life in the Philippines.

As I concluded my interview with my mother, I learned a lot about the immigrant experience and that no matter how different each story and each background was, most immigrants came for the sole reason of happiness. Though it is claimed by social cliché that Filipinos only come to the United States in search of material riches, I learned that not everyone thinks this way. Yes though that at first that may be the case, everyone comes to terms with their own version of happiness in search of that material wealth. My father came here in search of material wealth but as he did that he gave my mother an obstacle, a challenge to truly confront herself and that gave her the independence that she needed to find her own. I also learned about the strong essence of nostalgia and the bonds of home and despite the distance that may occur between your roots and your reality, they’ll always be that connection that ties you back to your true home…no matter where you are in the world. Struggle comes in all forms but its not about the destination, but rather the journey to it and for my “Reina” Erlinda, she sailed the greatest journey of a lifetime.

**Works Cited:**

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