

DELIBERATING
assimilating

i have discovered that i do not
know anything about my people.

the other day,
i met another filipina.
she asked me
what type of filipino i was.
it had never been asked of me like that before:
had always been asked,
“where are your parents from?”
“what part of the philippines?”
never:

“what type of
filipino are you?”

For a small portion of my primary education,
I was enrolled in a small private Catholic school.
My church had a significant Filipino, Hispanic,
and Vietnamese population. In turn, all my
fellow classmates until the age of eight were
almost always one of the three. At this stage
in my life, all my best friends were of Filipino
descent and ultimately their family had also
become my family. There was no question of
who or what I was; I was Filipino and Filipinos
as just Filipinos were all I knew until I transi-
tioned into public school.

never have i faced the acknowledgement
that more groups than i know how to comprehend
call the archipelago i consider home theirs as well.
i did not know what to say, at first,
before i managed to stammer out,
“my mother is boholano,
my dad is from cagayan de oro.”
and she replied, “oh,
my family is visayan also.”

i nodded and smiled,
as if i understood her words' significance
beyond knowing
what that meant geographically.
i did not know what that meant.

As I made this transition, I was introduced to
and experienced a whole new world of diversity.
The classroom was no longer predominantly

Filipino, but rather predominantly Hispanic.

Soon enough, my Filipino best friends were
replaced with friends of Hispanic, particularly
of El Salvadorian, Mexican, and/or Guatemalan,
descent. Despite this distinction, the change
felt seamless and for the most part, I couldn't
even tell the difference; our skin was brown,
our food tasted similar, our religious values
aligned, etc. For all intents and purposes, my
Latino friends were Filipino to me.

i looked up 'boholano' today for the first time
and learned that they are also considered visayan.

looked up 'cagayan de oro' and learned it
means 'river of gold.'

it shamed me to realize i had never known
this before.

shamed me to realize that all i knew of my
ancestors' heritage

was the food and a smattering of language

i can only understand in some contexts.

In this sense, I strongly identified with the Latino
community and still strongly do. It really wasn't
until high school when I started to connect with
my Asian peers. A lot of my interests aligned with
theirs and I could relate with them on levels I
couldn't with my Latino friends. It actually wasn't
until college where the phrases like "you're not
even Asian" came into play. I didn't take much
offense to it and I'm sure my friends didn't mean
any offense when they said that, but it sparked a
sudden realization that

**MY RACIAL IDENTITY IS A
MUDDLED HYBRID BETWEEN
TWO OPPOSING CULTURES**

because I am Asian and Latino.

for a while,

*i hesitated to call myself
'filipina - american';*

as if hyphenating my identity was laying
claim to something false.

i do not feel 'american':

blonde-haired, blue-eyed, white-skinned

with an inexplicable love for football and hamburgers

but i do not feel i can call myself 'filipina'

when i cannot even count to ten in tagalog.

I feel like I've always been aware of this, but I
never considered it's effects until now. Some-
where along the line my Filipino identity and
connection to the culture vanished.

my great-great-uncle was a president of the philippines.
i wonder sometimes if he is ashamed of this girl
who calls him relative
when she cannot tell someone how to cook adobo.

my family
told me stories about individuals:
how my grandfather met his first wife hiding in a well,
how my other grandfather rejected japanese treasure
but i do not know if i had other ancestors
who fought against the americans when they came.

I was arguably a whole lot more culturally connected to my Filipino heritage as a child than I am now. I thrived off of watching TFC (The Filipino Channel) programs like *Wansapanataym* (pronounced *Once Upon a Time*) and *Maalaala Mo Kaya* with Charo Santos, had the biggest crushes on Filipino heart throbs like Piolo Pascual and John Prats, and aspired to be just like Sharon Cuneta or Lea Salonga.

If you ask me to name a new emerging artist or actor in the Philippines, I'd draw a complete blank.

i was told stories
about glass slippers and princes turning into frogs
but i do not know the folklore of my homeland
beyond the half-truth tales my father told me
about the 'dwarf' in his basement.

my parents
did not speak tagalog to me after a certain age.
i think they told me once
it was because they did not want me to have an accent

Aside from popular culture, I flourished from understanding and speaking Tagalog. From a young age, I was excited to learn about the Philippines and how this shaped who I was as a person. I appreciated the gestural *mano po*, as opposed to just doing it out of habit.

i do not know if that is truth or false memory,
but i know
i can speak the languages of the countries that
colonized us:

leave me in the streets of madrid or milwaukee,
and i will get on fine,
but if you take me into the heart of manila,
i may only just get by.

I was proud to call myself Filipino and not
to say I no longer have that pride, but it's
dwindled significantly as I've grown older and
though part of it has to do with my inability
to no longer speak Tagalog, it's also due to a
sense of confusion.

and i cannot say

even in poetry

what it feels like not to know these things.

*there is a fundamental part
of myself missing*

that i can never regain

like i am failing the people who came before me—

my family—

even as i assimilate into the world they longed

or were forced to be a part of.

i do not know anything about my people.

but i know enough to know it feels so much

like not knowing anything about

myself.

—Drea O.

Throughout high school, I often found myself uncomfortable associating myself with Filipinos who were “too Filipino,” and to be honest this feeling still lingers. I intentionally distanced myself from these people, but regardless of this feeling there was always a impassioned yearning to relate.

This internal struggle has been repressed for a long time. I don't know who I am or who I can turn to.

But through this all, I've learned to

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