The Return of the Native: Narratives of Ethnicity in Contemporary Indigenous Novels

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ABSTRACT

Much of the discourse of ethnicity centers on the politics of identity formation particularly for members of ethnic groups who live dispersed among cosmopolitan societies. Although assimilated into the new culture, the diasporic self sometimes longs for a home to return to, a problematic issue that is complicated with concepts of belonging, identity and community. This paper examines the ways that the native's return to the homeplace can take by investigating two contemporary indigenous novels: *Driftwood on Dry Land* by Telesforo Sungkit Jr. and *Igorotdō: The Enlightened Warrior Within* by Rexcrisanto Delson. The paper unpacks the process that the diasporic return takes and how identity functions in this return. The analysis shows that the mode of return undergoes different stages starting with the impetus to go back and ending with the decision to stay in the native home or to return back to one's second home. The phases of this return are undertaken as journeys to the cultural past, a search for one's origins, for ethnic identity. This reconstruction is not just a journey through a personal past but the collective past of the tribe. The paper posits that one's ethnic identity is a product of historically contingent forces and that the return to the past is a metaphorical and not necessarily a physical journey one takes to make sense of this evolving identity.

Keywords: diaspora, ethnic identity, Higaonon, Igorot, indigenous peoples, return

Introduction

Ethnicity is arguably one of the most significant domains of cultural difference in the modern world. It is an index of identity, which is necessarily a collective identity as it is grounded on shared characteristics and beliefs among persons of a certain ethnic group. It is a sense of solidarity shared between people (usually related through real or fictive kinship) who see themselves as distinct from others

(Eriksen in Wan and Vanderwerf 2009, 2). Despite colonization and globalization, ethnic groups persist in the modern world (Smith 1988, 130) reclaiming their history and culture as a means of defining their current identity.

Considered as among the most marginalized groups to emerge from the colonizer and colonized encounter (Ashcroft et. al. 1995, 214), ethnic groups face more challenges of marginalization than the usual immigrant. In the act of adapting to the new culture, they are laden with both a national identity, tying them to their country, and an ethnic identity binding them to their indigenous roots. The instances of colonization and nationalism open avenues of construction and reconstruction of identities where the individual affiliates with different communities and adapts himself/herself to different cultures. The act of traversing between and among these cultures creates what Homi Bhabha (1994, 34) calls the "Third Space of Enunciation," an interstitial space which is a merging of the individual's native culture and that of the new society's. In this process of identity negotiation, the indigene's ethnic identity is not totally lost as it merges with the new identity that is fashioned to survive the domination from external forces.

This situation is further complicated by the advent of globalization and migration that sees members of ethnic groups living dispersed among cosmopolitan societies far from their ancestral homes. For these immigrants, the very act of joining mainstream society carries with it certain problems of identity negotiation. A duality, or even multiplicity, of self emerges when a person from one space with its unique culture lives in another space with its own different culture. Du Bois (2007, xiii) refers to this fragmentation of the self as "double consciousness" which he describes thus:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

This dualistic sense within a single identity goes beyond the simple notion of mixture, as some would understand hybridity. In the context of ethnic peoples for example, particularly those who are diasporic, this implies a complex process of identity negotiation where one is astride two cultural identity positions without being definitely tied to either one. This is how Samir Dayal (1996, 47) conceptualizes 'doubleness' when he says "it is less a "both/and" and more "neither just this/nor just that."" He adds that doubleness is often tinged with nostalgia, the desire to go home which sometimes can be just the desire to belong.

Although assimilated into the new culture, the diasporic self never fully belongs and at times, longs for a home to return to. This nostalgia is a problematic issue complicated with concepts of belonging, identity, and community. As one assimilates into a new culture, definitions of home become more vague, creating a desire that prompts the search for certainty—certainty often found in remembered places and times in the past.

This nostalgia for the past, sometimes an imagined past as the immigrant may have grown up in a different community other than his/her parents' home, is a search not only for a community to belong to but also a search for an identity. The articulations of this longing for an ethnic identity in cultural products like literature have become avenues of contestations of how this ethnicity can or ought to be represented. Ethnicity is often viewed as a sense of solidarity shared between people who see themselves as distinct and different from others. Eller (1997, 552) defines ethnicity as "a social and psychological process whereby individuals come to identify and affiliate with a group and some aspect(s) of its culture." Representing this ethnic identity in nostalgic narratives can be problematic as nostalgia has been seen as biased and is said to produce "erroneous representations" (Boym 2001, 19).

Walder (2011, 1) avers that nostalgia "connects people across historical as well as national and personal boundaries." He adds that as one journeys into the past, one enters a space that is a meeting point of one's personal past and the collective past of one's family, community and history. This echoes Hobsbawm's (1989, 3) concept of a twilight zone, a zone "between history and memory; between the past as a generalized record which is open to relatively dispassionate inspection and the past as a remembered part of, or background to, one's own life."

This borderline space between what is a recorded past (often a collective past) and one's individual recollection of the past is a complex zone, as one's individual memories is inextricably woven with the memories of the group one belongs to. As members of groups, individuals become enmeshed in the shared thoughts and beliefs of a given group and if one is a part of an indigenous group, this involves becoming part of the traditions that the community upholds as part of its heritage. If a member is detached from this community, his/her link with it is often only through memory of this place and the

identity forged in this space. This link and the longing for the past are often represented in cultural artifacts such as literature in varying degrees of bittersweet recollections of the homeland, of the traditions that used to be a normal part of life at home. In works that narrate ethnicity, the portrayal of the past is often couched in history—based on collective memories of a group—retracing the past in an attempt to locate ethnic identity.

Some studies (Ivancu 2010; Miguela 2001; Zeng 2003) have been conducted on nostalgia and the strategies of adaptation taken by immigrants to adapt to the new culture but few have dwelt in the actual return of the indigene to the ancestral home. Is this return motivated by nostalgia or is it moved by a political agenda—an intent to reclaim a lost ethnicity? How is the return undertaken and what role does identity play in this process? These are some of the questions that this paper intends to answer as it problematizes the native's return home in two contemporary indigenous novels, *Driftwood on Dry Land* by Telesforo Sungkit, Jr. whose diasporic central character returns home to reconnect with his ethnic heritage and *Igorotdō: The Enlightened Warrior Within* by Rexcrisanto Delson, whose Igorot-American character returns home to discover more than an ethnic heritage. The two novels written by Filipino ethnic authors, one a Higaonon and the other an Igorot, are historical fictions in the sense that the novels trace the history of their particular tribes as narrative backdrop for the return of the native to their homelands. In (re)writing the history of their own people, these indigenous writers carve out an important space for their ethnic tribes against the larger framework of Filipino history.

The two novels explore two possible ways for the indigene to return to the homeland of his/her ancestors. By blending history with memory, the novel *Driftwood on Dry Land* (hereafter, *Driftwood*) describes not only the glory and the prestige of the Higaonon, one of the ethnic tribes of Mindanao, but also describes the alienation, pain, and rootlessness that the descendants of that race experienced. As a historical novel, it traces the history of the Higaonon from the precolonial period to the contemporary times through the eyes of Ramon, the story's central character. The second novel, *Igorotdō: The Enlightened Warrior Within* (hereafter, *Igorotdō*) tracks the return of an Ilocano immigrant from America to his hometown. A blend of fantasy and history, this novel portrays the Igorot ancestry as viewed through the eyes of Alex, its central character who inhabits the bodies of his ancestors as he travels through different periods in the history of the Igorot. In both novels, the return to the past is not simply a walk down memory lane where the indigenous writer glorifies an imagined great

heritage, but is a reinterpretation of the past, which can affect present understanding of it.

To contextualize the discussion of ethnic identity and nostalgia, I described the formation of ethnic identity first as well as how this identity is complicated by colonization and diaspora. I then investigated the role of return in the "recovery" of this identity. The narratives of ethnicity in both novels describe the stages of this return and the ideologies forwarded by both novels. The paper posits that one's ethnic identity is a product of historically contingent forces and the return to the past is a significant and necessary journey one makes to make sense of this evolving identity. It reimagines the two central characters of the novels as heroes who return with new understanding of who they are as members of an ethnic tribe.

Reclaiming Ethnic Identity

The postcolonial search for identity in the modern world is complicated with problems of location. Many members of ethnic groups now live dispersed among the larger groups in society and even outside of the nation. The concept of return to an indigenous past is an intricate journey as diaspora has its own dimensions of identity negotiation different from the ones caused by colonization.

This desire for the past is not entirely a sentimental journey as some see it as a way to reclaim a lost ethnic identity. This notion of return to an ethnic past hinges on an idea that culture is a constant, and that one's identification to this ethnic heritage is just a matter of belonging to a certain group. This concept of a primordial past is one of two ways to view cultural identity, which Stuart Hall (1994, 223) discusses as the ways or positions by which this identity is formed. The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture of a people with a common history and ancestry. The identity of the members of the group is tied to this shared historicity, which provides each member with a stable frame of reference even in the face of external changes. To return to this past then is a simple matter of retrieving old traditions and beliefs. The second position is the opposite of this primordial view. In Hall's words:

> Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give

> to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (ibid.)

This position is a postmodern stance of viewing culture as always in flux, which presents identity formation as contextual. It hinges on the varied social, economic, and political realities confronting each member of a community. This implies that identity is constructed and not handed down from a primordial source, static and unchanged since before the advent of colonizers. Reconstructed identity is internally, as well as externally caused, and is the result of the members themselves adjusting to new circumstances in the way they interact with outsiders and with each other.

In the context of indigenous peoples, the nostalgic notion of return to a place and a time when ethnic identity is still intact is a view that is in accord with Hall's first position by which cultural identity is formed. This position sees the return to an indigenous past by acknowledging the heritage accorded by this past. A type of return that would acknowledge the changes that colonization and globalization have wrought in the ethnic self is more in consonance with the second position of cultural identity formation.

These two views coincide with Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan's (1993, 750) concept of the two forms of return, which he presented in his essay "Postcoloniality and the Boundaries of Identity." He postulates two ways with which the attempt to return to the indigenous past can happen. In his words:

> This return itself could be coded in two ways: a) embark on the return as though colonialism-nationalism had not happened at all; and b) retrace the histories of colonialism-nationalism in a spirit of revisionism, read these histories "against the grain" as a necessary precondition for one's own authentic emergence.

For Radhakrishnan, nationalism along with colonialism is a factor in the deterritorialization of ethnicity. After the colonizers have left, indigenous peoples are conscripted to become members of the new nation as well as to assume a national identity, one that homogenizes all members of the society in order to maintain that nation. In the two ways of return he discussed, the first way suggests of a recuperation of a precolonial past or a restoration of origins. It also evokes an idealization of an ethnic heritage, which is deemed superior to any developments gained during the period of invasion. The second way of return suggests a reinterpretation of history, one that allows the essentialized and marginalized indigene to reassess his/her own identity.

But the longing for home may not always result in a physical return. In a globalized world where the diasporic is a displaced entity, the impossibility of return is sometimes outweighed by the desire for an idealized past. Svetlana Boym (2001) opines that there is danger in such longing. She says that the danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one, the former referring to the real physical home of one's ancestors and the latter being the idealized place which may not correspond to present reality. Boym (2007, 13) offers two ways to clarify how nostalgia works.

> I distinguish between two main types of nostalgia: the restorative and the reflective. Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives on *algia* (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately.

The two types somehow echo Radhakrishnan's two forms of return, with restorative nostalgia reflecting a kind of return that seeks to reconstruct the past and restores the home as if the intervening events of colonialism, nationalism and globalization have not happened. For members of ethnic communities, this can be reclaiming an ethnic identity thought to have been lost in time. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, makes sense of one's longing and loss. It is more interested not with restoring an irrevocable past but on fostering the creation of an aesthetic individuality, continually deferring the homecoming in the meditation of the past and the passage of time. For diasporic individuals with roots in indigenous communities, this can mean making sense of the identity wrought by one's encounters with various cultural, economic, political, and other societal forces.

The Return of the Native

Ethnicity is not just a label for a national identity but also a recognition of the subcultures and the heterogeneity of ethnic groups. The heterogeneity of ethnic communities in countries like a multicultural Philippines cannot be denied. The uniqueness of each tribe can be seen in the way they responded to forces like colonialism, nationalism and globalization. Their assimilation can be seen in the ways they adapted to the culture of mainstream society and their continued self-definition can be seen in the ways they reclaim their identities in protest to external forces.

This self-definition is manifested in the two novels through their central characters who take on the heroic quest of returning home after drifting in other worlds. The following section discusses the stages of the return as manifested in the two novels where the hero, the central character, goes home with knowledge and powers acquired during their journey. I label the first stage as the *Call to Return*, the second as

the stage of *Remembering the Past*, and the last stage as the instance of *Locating an Ethnic Identity*.

Call to Return

The decision to go back home does not come out of the blue but usually motivated by an incident and which undergoes certain processes. The first step in the return is the call that made the indigene decide to undertake the journey back. In both novels, the return was preceded by a motivating force, which served as a stimulus for the central characters to return to their ancestral home. For Ramon (*Driftwood*) and Alex (*Igorotdō*), it was the death of their grandfathers that served as the impetus for the return. In Alex's case however, the news of his grandfather's death did not immediately result in plans to go home. He was a successful businessman in America and saw no reason to reconnect with his Igorot heritage even with such a short visit as attending a funeral. Moreover, his refusal to return was aggravated by bad memories of his relatives who often expect money from his parents and even quarrelled with them after receiving little financial support. This is illustrated in the novel in the following manner:

> Alex had once entertained thoughts of visiting the Philippines but after his parents' bad experience had no real interest in visiting his homeland. Instead, he remained in America, where he assimilated completely into its melting pot society and eventually identified himself as American, not Filipino. (18)

The incidence of Filipino kin expecting to be given money by their Filipino American relatives has become a common tale in many immigrant narratives so much so that the money-hungry relative has become a trope. The expectation that the American relative is rich and therefore must support them financially paints the immigrant as a cash cow that is duty bound to provide for his/her kin. It is a real situation, nevertheless, for many immigrants, one that adds to the perception that life in foreign lands is much better than life back home. Family relations are an important connection when we talk of ethnicities but even more so for the diasporic individual. Distance softens the impact of this connection while the financial factor further lessens bonds between family members.

It is also significant to note that Alex identifies as Filipino in the novel rather than Igorot. The blurring of a national identity and the ethnic identity is not uncommon for some immigrants as the former is easier to explain than talking about the many ethnic groups in

one's country. Alex's preference for his American identity is a result of his geographical distance from the Philippines, exacerbated by the strained relationship between his parents and the relatives back home.

In Ramon's case (*Driftwood*), his grandfather has become his closest family, as Ramon's own father became too absorbed with the legacy of their race to take care of him. His intimation of his grandfather's death was a sudden revelation that came to him during his stay in a big city.

> But even without news, people like him would still know when a loved one dies…It happened one day during his chemistry class inside a spacious lecture hall in a university in Luzon where he studied. He was surprised because he felt very light and his blood seemed to boil. And then he stood up, looked up to the skies and raised his hands towards the heavens. And suddenly he spoke in his own language. Everyone was surprised when he suddenly chanted in a language nobody could understand. (6)

Ramon's reaction to his grandfather's death is much more intense than Alex's reaction. That he suddenly was able to speak *Binukid*, the Higaonon language, one he has long stopped using after moving to the city, manifests the intensity of Ramon's bond to his ethnic heritage. Hearing his native tongue not only reminded him of his grandfather but also his race and thus, his difference from other people.

But like Alex, even this reminder of his ethnic background did not immediately result in Ramon going back home. Boym (2007, 7) describes nostalgia as "coming 'from two Greek roots, *nostos* meaning 'return home' and *algia* 'longing'…a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed." This bald description of a sentimental yearning for something is true at certain levels. What we remember of the past is usually colored by what we want to remember. A sentiment of loss, nostalgia is also a fantasy of better times.

But though yearning for home and family, at the heart of Ramon's longing is perhaps the subconscious knowledge that there is really nothing to go back to anymore. His immediate family is now dead and as far as land or property is concerned, all has been lost in the ravages of invasion by foreign and local tyrants. Moreover, a pressing concern weighs on Ramon, contributing to his inaction. In ordinary circumstances, it is normal to think of an inheritance when an ancestor dies but Ramon is hoping for a different legacy:

> "What is my inheritance?" he heard it again from behind him. (228)
> "The reading of the stars is only for those who knew their story," was the whisper he heard. At that moment, he felt that a warm presence hovered over his shoulders. He felt it penetrate his whole body and mind. Afterwards, Ramon's mind became clear. (231)

The facility of reading the stars is a legacy from Ramon's ancestors who possessed that magical ability. The epiphany that Ramon gained from this experience is that he must know the history of his race before accessing the power to read the stars. Ramon then started writing the stories of his people and only when he could not seem to finish what he was writing that he decided to go home.

If the idea of inheritance somehow is a barrier for Ramon's return home, it is the opposite in Alex's case. The news that there is an inheritance waiting for him if he attends his grandfather's funeral eventually pushed Alex to return to the Philippines. With his own company in financial trouble, Alex was lured by the promise of a special inheritance from his grandfather, an inheritance that he interpreted in terms of money and that could perhaps save his company. His interpretation of legacy in material terms is in accord with his new lifestyle in the fast lane. The distance that separates the two characters from their homeland is a factor in their respective response. While Ramon being closer to his ancestral home interprets legacy in terms of his ethnic heritage while Alex who is much farther, and is in fact in another country, interprets legacy in terms of the lifestyle he has now which measures things in monetary terms.

Remembrance of Things Past

In deciding to return, the diasporic individual goes through a phase where s/he recalls the history of his/her tribe. The return home implies a movement from one space to another but also a re-vision, to look at this space with different eyes. To recall Hobsbawm's (1989) borderline between history and memory, the returnee enters a zone that is a mix of the factual and the imagined. The diasporic person who comes home after being away for so long sees this space through the lens of memory or from stories told him/her about the homeland. Remembering means recreating the past, bringing into presence what has become an absence.

In the case of Ramon, the stories were told him by his grandfather when he was still a little boy. A large portion of the novel is dedicated to this journey to the past, a narrative of the Higaonon history from pre-colonial times to the present era. The narrative is cultural memory mediated through fiction and is a necessary stage that the indigene undertakes to reconnect with his/her roots. The retelling was a mixture of the realistic and the fantastic mode and is episodic in nature. The different historical periods in the story then are different historical narratives told from different points of view. Alex undertakes the same journey with *Igorotdō* narrating the history

of the Igorot from precolonial times to the present. The retelling of this history is also an amalgam of fantastical and the realistic but told from the perspective of the central character. As focalizer, he journeys through the Igorot past using bodies of his ancestors as conduit.

Driftwood is epic in scope in that it traces the history of the Higaonon tribe as it runs parallel with the history of the Philippines from the precolonial times to the Spanish, American and Japanese occupations, down to the contemporary period. The style of narration mimics this evolution from the past to the present with the first chapters on the precolonial period narrated in the form of myths and legends and the more recent periods narrated in a realistic mode.

In the recounting of the precolonial past of the Higaonon tribe, the style of narration appropriates the fantasy genre. The period was shrouded in mists of legend peopled by heroic warriors with supernatural powers starting with Buuy Pigsudan, the progenitor of the tribe down to the *datus* who continued his legacy. They were portrayed in the stories as a cohesive and proud race who bravely faced inter-ethnic conflicts and triumphed over would-be conquerors. The significant page time devoted to the precolonial era, which covers eight chapters of the novel, underscores the ancient heritage of the Higaonon as they survived even the invasion of the Islamized indigenous groups in Mindanao. The bond of the different *datus* against these other tribes is a manifestation of solidarity, a common ethnic identity that serves as their strength against invaders. As befits a legend, the stories of victory were interspersed with fantasy as Higaonon warriors utilized magical items that eventually became treasured possessions of the descendants of the tribe.

But with the arrival of western colonizers, this cohesion was threatened and the slow disintegration of the tribe began. This part of the recollection is more realistic in its storytelling than the previous chapters. It recounts that despite the natives' resistance to the Spanish invasion, the

> Castilians kept winning…[They] would retreat sometimes but they would come back right away. (91)

> The Castilians continued their armed excursions. They slowly but continuously advanced because there were datus who helped them. (93)

This new form of subjugation is something different from the physical forms of attack that the Higaonon warriors were used to. The new belief system created divisions among the members of the tribe, which were aggravated when the colonizers started owning lands. The

succeeding American and Japanese invasions, as well as nationalism itself as Filipinos tried to forge a new national identity, dispossessed the natives not only of their lands but also of their ethnic heritage. In the words of the novel: "The exodus of Gaun's descendants began" (122).

The diaspora of ethnic communities is addressed in the novel through its section on American period narratives, when many Indios migrated to the United States. The Americans packaged this as an act of benevolence to lure the natives into seeing them as friends instead of colonizers. In the novel, some Higaonon moved to America and came back arrogant and disdainful of old traditions. The natives who did not go to America were forced to work in plantations and eventually became dispossessed of their lands.

This came about because the *datus* who refused to work in the plantations went uphill to resist the presence of the landowners and capitalist Americans. Migrants from Visayas and Luzon eventually occupied the plots of land they left behind. In actual history, these events in the novel refer to the government-sponsored Land Settlement Program based on the Homestead Act of 1903 that was implemented in 1913. Also known as the Public Land Act No. 926 of 1903, this policy led to the setting up of the homestead resettlement areas, opening up Mindanao as the "Land of Promise" to landless peasants and corporations planning to set up plantations (Gaspar 2000, 20). The arrival of settlers through this decree opened the vast expanse of Mindanao to large-scale transfer of people from different parts of the Philippines.

The hybrid identities constructed among indigenous peoples during these times resulted in confusion for some members. This part of Ramon's journey into the past paints the dilemma thus: "As the influx of people who sought their luck in the island continue, the natives became even more confused about their identity" (205). Many natives could not even speak the Higaonon language and called themselves *lumad*, a collective term for the ethnic tribes of Mindanao, instead of Higaonon, a name distinct from the other tribes.

The importance of speaking the native language is given space in the novel as a necessary characteristic of one's ethnic identity. In *Driftwood*, when Ramon suddenly chanted an old prophecy in the old Higaonon language, it was the catalyst that started his journey back to his homeland.

> Hearing his native tongue made Ramon think of his grandfather, Tatang Isyong. He thought of the night when the sky was filled with many stars while they were in their swidden field in Palawpaw. (228)

This does not mean that one loses one's ethnic identity if one does not speak one's native language. As Fishman (1999, 4) puts it, "Although language has rarely been equated with the totality of ethnicity, it has, in certain historical, regional and disciplinary contexts, been accorded priority within that totality." In Ramon's case, the path to rediscovering his ethnic identity was facilitated by his native language but this is only one of the factors that helped him uncover and maintain the totality of his Higaonon identity.

That this identity took a beating under the shadow of the foreign and local masters can be seen in the succeeding narratives. During the American regime, details of the woes of marginalization and oppression that the Higaonon experienced were part of the cultural memories that Ramon recreates:

> In the eyes of the populace, the respect for *datus* had waned. They had no more lands to distribute to their men. The persons who were once their men were already workers in the plantations. It became an ordinary thing to see the true landowner become a mere farmhand. Because of this situation, both the *datus* and the natives had become objects of ridicule in the eyes of the populace. (200)

Another instance of ridicule is an encounter with soldiers during the Martial Law times:

> "Father, they manhandled Kaamayan then they shot him," sobbed Uto Mangakes when his father found him. Uto Mangakes' face was all back and blue from being manhandled by three soldiers. Moreover, his hair and clothes smelled of urine for the soldiers had urinated on him. (196)

The degradation that the natives suffered resulted in some members of the community accommodating themselves to the invaders in order to survive. A new ethnic identity emerged as the *datus* tried to locate a place for themselves in the new nation. One funny but tragic narrative included in the novel is the tale of *Datu* Monding who, instead of wallowing in his impoverished, degraded position as the town drunkard eked out a new space in the new tribal structure. He made money from his own followers whenever these would ask advice from him. For example, *Datu* Monding would name a certain time of the month as the best time for planting according to the old ways. When this prediction came true for one farmer, other farmers flocked to *Datu* Monding and he then made them understand that this advice is not for free. "So this is how to play the game now" (203).

Datu Monding extended this realization to political matters as he also gained a certain power among the new government's agents

who asked his advice whenever an assembly of *lumad* is called for by the government. The hybrid identity that Datu Monding negotiated is a mix of the old ways, where he dispensed advice based on old traditions and beliefs, and also the capitalistic tendencies brought by the foreigners. If one goes back to Stuart Hall's positions of cultural formation, one sees that what Datu Monding did to reconstruct his identity is in accord with Hall's concept that ethnic identity is flexible and is reconstructed over time due to the demands of certain societal factors. However, as a hybrid, Datu Monding does not totally let go of the old ways, using them instead as opportunities to survive in the new social landscape.

The memory of oppression suffered by the tribe is part of the remembering that an indigene undergoes as s/he returns to the past. Nostalgia often leads one to dwell on happy memories, and in *Driftwood*, the grandiose beginnings of the tribe were highlighted. But the novel also draws attention to the discrimination they suffered which puts into question why this grand heritage was lost.

This questioning is concretized in some members of the tribe who clung to the hope that they could rebuild their community of old and go back to pre-colonial conditions. When Ramon's father talked to the *Tagbaya*, their ancestral spirit guardian, the latter said: "I know what's in your heart. You want to build again the house of *Tagoloan*. You want your race to rise once more" (203).

This sentiment echoes one form of return postulated by Radhakrishnan (1993, 750), the kind that reconstructs the past as if colonialism and nationalism had never happened. This particular avenue was never really materialized in the novel as the younger generation of the tribe has either been assimilated into the modern society or has left the place.

In *Igorotdō*, the same combination of good and bad memories permeates Alex's journey into the past. The primary difference between his own journey of remembrance and Ramon's is that Alex's glimpse into Igorot history is through a magical looking glass - a blanket that enables him to time travel and inhabit the bodies of his ancestors at a particular period of their history. This magic blanket was the legacy left him by his grandfather, one he finds to be useless at first, but one that ultimately became the catalyst that enabled Alex to understand his Igorot heritage better.

The first body that his consciousness occupied was Fanusan, an Igorot boy who lived during the time of Spain's conquest of the Philippines.

> When his head glanced down to check the trail, he saw that his body was that of a teenage boy—a practically naked one. Apparently, the only clothing he wore was a small loincloth that covered his genitals. He wanted to pinch himself to see if he was dreaming, but his body wouldn't answer his mind's demands. Struggling to make sense of what was happening, Alex finally reached the realization that he was mentally himself but physically someone else. Somehow. (87)

The free use of fantasy interspersed with historical events is a form of magic realism employed by the author to present a landscape of an alternative past. The possession of an Igorot body allowed Alex to physically, if not mentally, bond with his ancestors and to live their lifestyle as if his migration and his American identity have not taken place. He literally returned back in time creating a space in his consciousness that made him eventually accept the Igorot worldviews as part of his heritage.

When Alex coexisted with Bolee, another ancestor who lived in a small village as part of living exhibits in an American World Fair, he was able to discern how they really felt being exhibited like animals. The narrative presented the Igorots as always being gifted with dogs in order to mesmerize visitors who gaped at the Igorot brutality of butchering and eating animals. When Bolee questioned the village chief about this, the latter answered: "I think we're eating dogs because this is what the white man wants to see. Do you see how it amuses and offends so many of them?" (123). The Igorots in that village accommodated themselves to the wishes of the Americans as an act of survival in a land where they are dependent on the white man's whims. Angered on Bolee's and his tribesmen's behalf, Alex saw the Americans through new eyes and this enabled him to dwell in the Igorot consciousness as the tribe related with the foreigners.

Unlike Ramon's tribe however, the Igorot were really never conquered by the Spanish colonizers (Florendo 2016, 1) and thus, did not have the baggage of marginalization and oppression that other tribes had. Nevertheless, being part of a minority has its own angst. When he inhabited Brian's body, an Igorot boy who was forced to study in Manila in the more modern times of the narratives, he internalized the boy's strategies of accommodation in order to fit in the modern society.

> As Brian continued practicing his Tagalog, he began thinking about his hair and clothes. He wanted a normal haircut, like the rest of the boys, and he knew he needed to buy new clothes in the fashion of the day. Perhaps he could start avoiding the sun too. His head bent in an attitude of prayer, he began thinking of as many ways as possible to hide his Igorot heritage. (199)

The act of mimicry is one that is common among many individuals trying to survive in a different and often 'superior' culture. In order to adapt to his surroundings and stop the bullying and persecution he is experiencing, Brian succumbed and found it easier to blend with the majority instead of remaining different. Alex found this particular memory fascinating as he himself experienced it while growing up in the United States.

> Alex knew his lack of interest was rooted in the fact that he'd grown up a minority in a mostly white society. He didn't want to learn how different he was because he didn't like being different. Being different was the source of most of the teasing he'd suffered from kids at school. (100)

If we recall the concept of double consciousness, one finds that Alex's conflict and adjustment to a new culture are much more complex than what Brian experienced. Alex had two identities with which to confront American discrimination—his national identity of being Filipino and his ethnic identity of being Igorot. To a boy who must survive in this peripheral position in a new environment, he must constantly reconstruct his identity in order to survive.

The concept of ethnicity, which highlights a group's difference from other groups, is one that is eschewed by a transplanted indigene as s/he attempts to be accepted by the majority. In Alex's case, his ethnic identity is submerged under the Filipino nationalist identity he presents to the world. This effort to blend with the majority is an identity negotiation act, one that sometimes diminishes the connection to the homeland and native culture.

Contact with people outside of one's culture is a factor contributing to the loss of connection and with the Igorot, their interactions with the Americans and Japanese are instances of identity negotiation that are metaphors for the changes in their personality as a people. After Bolee, Alex inhabited the body of an American officer. This episode in the narrative portrays the Igorot's relationship with Americans. The body he inhabited was that of Sergeant Tebow, who saw the Igorot scouts fighting alongside the American soldiers during World War II. Physically, Alex now has blond hair and blue eyes, and mentally, he sees events with the consciousness of an American.

His next incarnation is far more complex as Alex inhabits the body of a Japanese warrior while actually being in Japan. The Japanese warrior, a samurai inspired Alex to take up his own *dō* after witnessing the warrior's honorable acts. The shift from inhabiting the bodies of his Igorot ancestors to inhabiting a foreigner's body seems at first to be a jarring episode in the quest for ethnic ancestry. But seen from the perspective of identity formation, this is a recognition of the influence that these foreigners have on the Igorot culture. The foreigners were not portrayed as colonizers nor were the Igorot portrayed as slaves in these narratives. There was an egalitarian relationship between the two cultures with the Igorot accommodating themselves to the foreigners without letting go of their tribal ways and worldviews. This resonates with the second position that Hall posited—that identity is in a constant cultural formation.

Locating an Ethnic Identity

After the return to his/her native land, the diasporic self has to decide whether to stay or to go back to his/her new home. This is the epiphany that makes the process of returning complete. The decision is aided by realizations made during the journey to the past, which is usually a revelation of one's ethnic heritage. In *Igorotdō*, Alex was transported back to significant moments of the Igorot people's history and he came back from his magical adventure with a deeper appreciation of his ethnic identity.

> "The eye is your heritage," his Igorot self continued. "Too many people in your world do not understand the power that their heritages contain. You are Igorot and your connection to your heritage will keep you grounded. (254)

The distinction between his Igorot self and his present self is a testimony to the many permutations that Alex's identity has undergone over the years. The process of going back is not just a nostalgic longing for the past but a confirmation of an identity, which Alex has ignored or denied during his stay in America. His Igorot identity is at the core of his personality and this confrontation between his ethnic and Filipino-American self is a process of negotiation, one that has become a cure to the holes in his hybrid identity. His conversation with his Igorot self ended in a literal merging of the two and in embracing his ethnic self, Alex is recognizing his multicultural background.

The distinctions of different selves in his personality explain Alex's decision to go back to America instead of remaining in the Philippines. Using fantasy to underscore this decision, Alex woke up from his recent transmigration as a fifth grader in the United States. Relieved to be in his own body again, he went about his daily routine with a new respect for his ethnic heritage—speaking Kankanaey to his mother and going to school without putting on a robe to hide the smell of Filipino food. The new body he inhabits is that of his young self, a metaphor for being born again, a symbol for starting over a new life much better than his previous one.

The decision to stay in his new home while at the same time practicing the traditions of his people is a path undertaken by many indigenous peoples living in other countries. They are assimilated into the mainstream culture but do so without relinquishing their ethnic roots. Although his return to his homeland is a performance of his ethnic identity, Alex embraces the many sides of his multicultural self. This decision also resonates with Stuart Hall's (1994) second position as far as the formation of cultural identity is concerned. Ethnicity is a constructed process and is a product of one's interaction with people and other structural factors.

In *Driftwood*, the decision taken by Ramon during his return journey is a much more complex action than the path Alex took. When Ramon went home to reconnect with his ethnic heritage, he met no familiar face upon his arrival. Worse, he discovered what happened to his relatives:

> He learned that Tatang Isyong died when he struggled to take the lands of Kaamayan Dikong, that he gathered all nephews and relatives and occupied a parcel of Kaamayan Dikong's lands. Because of that they were massacred. Tatang Isyong was one of those who were slain. The rest fled into the mountains. (238)

The issue of ancestral domain is subtly inserted into the narrative and this highlights one of the problems experienced by the *Lumad* of Mindanao—the loss of their lands in the advent of colonization and other acts of aggression. Also included in the narratives is the issue of indigenous peoples joining the New People's Army although this was countered in the novel as being incompatible with the objectives of the rebels:

> They had different aims. The aims of Those With No Shoes went against Uto Mangkes' desire to rebuild the old talugan. Their teachings would not fit in with his longing to build and strengthen the system of Datuship. (207)

Talugan literally means a great house but is also a metaphor for the Higaonon race. To rebuild it therefore implies the resurrection of the old ways and beliefs that declined or faded with the ensuing invasions.

Ramon's knowledge of the demise and dispersion of his people would have precluded any reason to stay because there is nothing now—no tribe or land—to connect with. The novel's end however suggests an alternative path for the indigene who longs to return to his native place. As Ramon slept, he had a vision of a portal overlooking a great river and then heard a voice intoning a prophecy:

> You shall be driven away by different waves until the day when from your womb, descendants shall rise who will seek their inheritance. (239)

The hope of resurrecting the house of the Higaonon is embedded in this prophecy, which sees Ramon's descendants returning to reclaim their legacy. This dream triggered a remembrance of all the stories that his grandfather told him and Ramon vowed then to put all this stories—the history of his tribe—on paper. The act of codifying his tribe's history, hoping that his descendants will read them, indicates that he embraces his ethnic heritage and hopes that this heritage will rise again in future generations. The decision to metaphorically stay in the place then acquires political implication tantamount to an advocacy in which he invites the Higaonon race into action to make it great again.

> After several days, I have finished our history at last. This shall be read by my descendants until the time when a new great house shall rise from *Tagoloan's* womb. (240)

This aspiration echoes the nativist view of identity formation that Hall proposes. Seeing the Higaonon ancestry as something that can be revived despite the advent of colonization and nationalism is a hope that the bonds that tie an ethnic group together are strong enough to overcome any barrier.

Conclusion

Home has many meanings for a diasporic individual and can be negotiated in different and multiple locations and contexts. It can stay in the mind as a figurative space or it can be a real physical space. For some ethnic groups, ethnic identity is tied to location, a physical space they can call their own. There are some however whose concept of home exists more in the mind and the examination of the two novels show that the returnee's journey does not always end in a return to the original place where the journey started. While the return represents a performance of ethnic identity, the question remains as to what identity the ethnic person bears. The hybrid selves constructed and reconstructed during the sojourn in other lands influence the decision on whether to stay in the homeland of the ancestors or to go back to the second home.

The return often involves a remembering, a reconstruction of the past, filtered through memory and mapped out through actual historical events. This reconstruction is not a journey through a personal past but the past of the entire tribe. In both novels, the central charac-

ters went through the history of the Igorot (*Igorotdō)* and the Higaonon (*Driftwood)* presenting a counter memory of these historical events as seen from the perspective of indigenous peoples. This journey to the past is a search of origin and identity, a process necessary in order to make sense of one's ethnic identity that is tied to the collective identity of the tribe.

The two novels present two forms of return - one is the form taken by Alex in *Igorotdō*, an acknowledgment of his ethnic identity and carrying it with him as he continues his life in mainstream society. It is assimilation without relinquishing his ethnic roots—a blending of his ethnic heritage and his modern self—a hybridity that recognizes the multiple identities an ethnic person undergoes as he interacts with others outside of his native place. It is to take pride in one's Igorot identity and making this part of his essence as he takes his place among the majority. The journey back to the motherland portrayed in the novel is more of a reflective type of nostalgia, one that makes room for flexibility as well as a recognition that home is not just the physical space of his ancestors. The homecoming that Alex experiences is a recognition of his evolving Igorot identity, one that is not only Igorot but also Filipino, Japanese and American. But while all of these, Alex is somehow also not any of these, having undertaken a spiritual journey where he at last makes sense of his identity and makes peace with the multiple consciousness inhabiting his self.

The second form is the one taken by Ramon in *Driftwood*, a reconstruction of one's ethnic past and continuing this self-definition for him and his descendants. In a certain sense, the novel posits a reactionary agenda, which advocates a restoration of one's home. It offers a solution to the marginalization of the *Lumad* in Mindanao but whether this self-definition is through armed struggle or overt political action is up to the members of the ethnic tribe. The nativist construction of identity forwarded by the novel is an alternative path for the indigene to take which sees the driftwood—the diasporic members travelling to other lands—coming home to reclaim their ethnic heritage. This longing for home is more in accord with a restorative type of nostalgia, which seeks to reestablish the grand heritage of the tribe seeking to reclaim a common past in a homecoming that is equated with the recovery of an ethnic identity. But the end of the novel also acknowledges that the Higaonon tribe still has to take action in order for the recovery of their great heritage to happen. The novel's end offers this hope but the tribes' descendants must become one again for this restoration to happen. This implies a Higaonon identity that has been reconstructed over the years making a simple return to the past not so simple at all.

While this paper is not an attempt to compare the two novel's expression of ethnic identity as far as the act of returning is concerned, it does see a similarity. Central to both forms of return is the concept of ethnic identity as part of one's indigenous roots. Yet whether these roots are tied to a place is something that members of ethnic tribes living in modern times must decide for themselves. Return to one's indigenous past is a matter of choice by a people on behalf of their own ethnicity in acknowledgement of the many selves and identities they have constructed through the years. While there is nothing atavistic about reclaiming the past, one must also consider that the performance of one's indigenous identity can be done even outside of one's native place. There is a tragic sense in one's inability to go back home, and the indigene who struggles with different identities and consciousness must come to the realization that the goal of a journey to the past is not simply arriving at a physical place but also having a rendezvous with one's self.

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