# Tahao/Middle Road: From Imagining Nation to Embodying Transnation

Merlinda Bobis

**Abstract**

This is a creative-critical discussion of my expatriate arts practice (literature and performance) using re/conceptualisations of the border as the underpinning framework. The Tahao Road ("Middle/Border Road") is a very busy road in my original home, Legazpi. The road cuts across the heart of the city. It was built in the late 90s (long after I left home) to relocate and ease the congested traffic from the old road. Using this as a metaphor for my "border practice" away from home and the national/ist imaginary, I will trace how the expatriate writer relocates "the traffic" of the imaginary from the nation to the transnation in order to help it survive between its new and old home. This survival strategy de-territorialises the sensibility but also renders it "suspect," in terms of loyalty and currency, to both sides of the border: Australia and the Philippines. More dangerously, it cuts/fragments the heart of the artist; the only way to "make whole" is to embody the border. To live the "Tahao Road," thus find a way back home.

*mapa-lati na si 'tay,*
*naggagaro-garo si 'may—*
*inadal ko an mga ini giraray.*
*tinukal an mansanas ki tambis,*
*nagpatuod gilayon magbitis,*
*nilinig an talinga,*
*pigturuan an mata.*
*hanggang airport, binaklay pa*
*ining lumang dalan;*
*linakaw paduman-pabuwelta,*
*paduman-pabuwelta*
*an sakuyang daghan.*

*papunta na sa bukid si 'tay,*
*nag-aayos ng bahay si 'nay—*
*muli kong binuhay ang alaala.*
*pinalitan ng tambis ang mansanas,*
*muling naglakad nang nakapaa,*
*nilinis ang tainga,*
*tinuruan pati na ang mata.*
*hanggang airport, nilakbay pa*
*itong lumang daan;*
*linakad yao't dito,*
*yao't dito*
*itong dibdib ko.*

father leaves for the farm,
mother tends the house—
i studied these scenes again.
swapped the apple with a tambis,
re-learned how to walk on bare feet,
cleaned my ears,
taught my eyes.
until the airport, i trekked
this old path;
how i paced back and forth,
back and forth
this breast of mine. (Bobis, 2004, pp. 21-27)

To this day, I am still pacing, attempting to clarify the road I have taken as a Filipino-Australian writer. This attempt is at the heart of this paper and

the above excerpts from my poem "*Pagbalik sa Estancia*" ["Coming Home to Estancia"] in Bikol, Filipino, and English. These excerpts introduce my arguments on how I have navigated the *lumang dalan* [old road], re-living and re-articulating this old road anew according to my present reality as a transnational. "*Pagbalik sa Estancia*" is a poem about the return of the native from the West. I wrote it in Bikol first, strangely enough even before I left for Australia in 1991, as if wiring my brain not to lose myself in my forays into roads outside the Philippines and not to forget the old road home. In 2004 I translated this poem to Filipino then to English, and the poem in three languages became part of my trilingual poetry collection, "*Pag-uli*, *Pag-uwi*, Homecoming." Writing in the West is a homecoming in my imaginary, a re-trekking of the old road. Interestingly and perhaps problematically for some, I come home not necessarily to the Philippine nation but to Bikol, my home region. Pinoy expatriates tend to gather by regions; in Australia, Filipino organisations are often delineated by region: the Bicol Inc, Ilocano Association, Waray-Samarnon Association, Ilonggo Association, etc. Clearly our internal sense of regional borders "migrate" transnationally. Is it because we have an inherent archipelagic sensibility wired with multiple local borders, by land and sea, so "imagining nation" outside it is, in fact, imagining one's family home in a specific region? Even so, is it not that this local-global imagining is, in itself, a transnational enactment of location and identity? These questions could underpin a more extensive research on imagining nation *vis-à-vis* creative practice and I do not have time to do such research for this paper. I can only unpack my own homecoming to my region Bikol through the old-new road in my embodied occupation as storyteller and performer.

Storytelling is performance, and the body is core to my practice: I write and perform my texts, and even my written texts are composed in the spirit of orality and aurality.[1] Thus, in this paper, I will tell a story as I argue. I will attempt to physicalize my arguments and hopefully you will engage them with your own body so our story circle may be completed. For there is no story without a teller and a listener,[2] both present in body and sensibility. I invite you then to listen to this expatriate's walk on this "*lumang dalan*" [old road] *in your own breast*, to fall in pace with me so we can collaborate in knowledge production—which is *not* the sole domain of the intellect. Instead, it is an embodied process that I call "a grassroots theorizing,"[3] an organic "feeling-thinking-doing"[4] that is a story-making from the ground up, moving from the *lived story* to produce knowledge and modes of knowledge production. Storytelling is grassroots theorizing, because every story and its mode of telling are, in fact, discourse: stories are arguments. "We hear them in the 'philosophizing' about local and world events at the corner

store, in the political debate at the barbershop, or in the storytelling about a wedding or a war in the kitchen" (Bobis, 2013, p. 154), or in the writing of a poem. These stories are not simply cultural products for scholars to discourse about; they are themselves equally valuable discourses in thinking and rethinking our world. Moreover, the gestures and vocal tones of the storytelling body are arguments in progress, as cogent as the intellectual explications in a scholarly paper. Note this example:

> *Paghaya.* Deep weeping. *Pag-haaaa-ya.* The wail is in the middle syllable. For some, a stifled exhalation; for others, a near-scream, but always the breath travels the full distance from the groin to the gut, welling up to the throat. It is a weeping that is not about this or that moment. It has a history as long as the distance covered by that breath.
>
> [The gravedigger] Pay Inyo told me not to forget this lesson of weeping: "You have to weep not from the throat but from lower down, just as in singing, so you don't grow hoarse, because it takes forever to get to the last note. Remember, weeping is like singing and vice-versa, so everyone can sing, truly-truly, so let's hear you, Eya, take it from lower down, a lot of breath in there, and it does not run out, go on, sing!" our Holarawnd Man urged us in his strange logic. (Bobis, 2012, pp. 137-138)

In my novel *Fish-Hair Woman* (2012), the gravedigger Pay Inyo is my *Pilosopo* Tasyo discoursing, in this instance about mourning in a time of war—telling the story of the inexhaustible breath. The body is the source of his argument about the fact that, thank God, grief will not kill us. Because weeping is like singing, his strange but subversive logic. It comes not from an intellectual light bulb above our heads but from below, deeper down: the grassroots of the body.

Grassroots theorizing is a counter-hegemonic discourse to the usual theorizing direction from above: globalized epistemology (often authored by the West) applied to a specific cultural experience. As a discursive alternative, grassroots theorizing is my decolonizing stance against two positions in the academy: 1) the intellectually driven theorizing that 'fixes' the living body in text; 2) the postcolonial theory that developed from the European academy then was globalized as the *lingua franca* for reading and articulating specific colonized experiences even outside the West. In the decolonizing stance of this paper, I pay tribute to the pillars of decolonization that we are honouring

in this conference: Apolinario Mabini and Isabelo de los Reyes. Writing in a body confined by paralysis, Mabini would have understood the "un-fixing" of the body and making it a major player in decolonizing the imaginary. As a revolutionary thinker against Spanish and American colonization, Don Belong would have supported the decolonizing of West-centered postcolonialism.

In an earlier essay, I wrote:

> [West-centered/grown] postcolonialism has been applied to the reading of literature and art around the world, universalizing and housing all culturally specific colonial experiences. Is this not a bizarre case of colonizing the colonial experience? In this light, is it possible that, in its application, postcolonial epistemology has also become paradoxically neo-colonial? (Bobis, 2013, pp. 148-149)

To decolonize, I propose we overturn theorizing from above. As I tell stories and you kindly listen, let us collaborate with our feeling-thinking-doing bodies from the ground up. *Lakarin nating nang nakapaa ang lumang daan—yao't dito, yao't dito—sa ating dibdib* [Let us walk barefoot the old road—back and forth, back and forth—in our breasts]. I articulate this walk as I strike my chest and mutter *"yao't dito, yao't dito"* to spur the Bikolano *kusog nin boot* [inner strength] or perhaps to invoke the Catholic gesture of *mea culpa*—for there is a niggling guilt that attends departures. But of course, my lived road is different to your own roads, and your own departures and homecomings. Having lived in Australia for more than twenty years, I cannot presume to know of or speak for your navigations. I can only tell the story about where I am coming from and where I am trying to go in my *Tahao Road/Middle Road: From Imagining Nation to Embodying Transnation*.

Geography is crucial to my arguments; thus these two versions of the map locating Tahao Road in Legazpi city. On the right is the newer and popular map with Tahao Road as the vertical road at the center, cutting across Alternate Road. The map on the left shows an unnamed Tahao (with red mark; used to be Imelda Roces Avenue) bisecting F. Imperial Street (renamed as Alternate Road).[5] Note that the blue part of this map is the Pacific.

In Bikol, *tahao* means "middle" or "central," each with a different connotation. Middle evokes an "in-between road," an interstitial space bisecting the wider space. "Central" means "main" as opposed to "a marginal road." Tahao Road is parallel to Washington Drive (or F. Aquende Drive) that leads to the home of my parents, where I return each time I come home to the Philippines. In this paper, I will be working with these geographical

notions to articulate my knowledge production, in the private and public arena, as transnational writer, performer, and scholar shuttling between Legazpi and Wollongong. Legazpi has been home to me and my family since the 60s[6] and I lived in Wollongong for nearly 24 years before moving to Canberra in 2015.

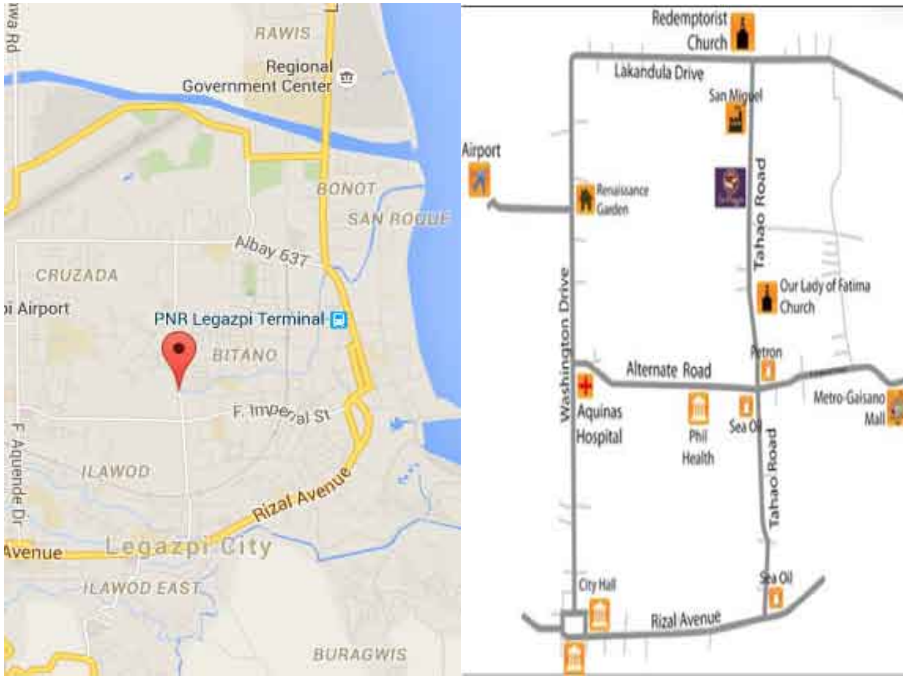


**Figure 1**. Old and new geographies: Two maps of Tahao Road, Legazpi (Albay, Bikol region). (Maps retrived from https://www.google.com.au/maps/@13.1355749,123.7203312,14z and http://www.fnetravel.com/english/legazpihotels/la-piazza-hotel-and-convention-center.html).

In 1991 I left the Philippines for a doctorate program in Australia, in the city of Wollongong, which uncannily echoes the geography of Legazpi. Legazpi is nestled between the Pacific and the slopes of Mayon volcano; Wollongong is also between the Pacific and the escarpment, "a steep slope or cliff, such as one that marks the edge of a range of hills." ("escarpment," 2015) Both cities are coastal: at the edge of land and of water. Both cities are regional, at the margins of the nation: Legazpi in Bikol; Wollongong in the Illawarra. As the Legazpi map shows, in relation to the geography of the city and the Pacific, Tahao Road is very much a central and a border road. Studying both Legazpi and Wollongong maps now, I find it even more uncanny that where I lived most of the time in Wollongong (Corrimal Street) somehow echoes the vertical Tahao, both are like a border between land and water. However, because of domicile, Corrimal and Tahao are central and often my point of reference when I locate my body and imaginary.

This paradox of "central-border road" mirrors the story of my knowledge production. My private interstitial reality as a Filipino-Australian (shaped by a regional sensibility) is at the margins of the national imaginary of the Philippines and of Australia. I produce border stories outside of the dominant national framework that often subsumes the regional or the migrant experience and body, or worse makes them invisible within the literary or the academic hegemony. But as writer and scholar, I "center" these marginal stories of the Bikolano in the Philippine national arena, and the Filipino migrant's stories (written in regional Wollongong) in the Australian national arena. To illustrate this border-center framework and strategy, and to advance my argument, let us enact the transnational movement while taking a side street, a marginal geography: Let us move across the Pacific from Tahao Road in Legazpi to Bessel Street in Wollongong, a street that inspired my wishful story about this multicultural city:

> The residents of Bessel Street were kin in tongue. The pink flesh toured up and down that street, went into homes, into mouths of different origins. There was the baker from Turkey, the Filipino cook, the Australian couple with the fish shop, the Italian butcher and the Sri Lankan tailor.
>
> One tongue for five homes. Not really an inconvenient arrangement, mind you. Of course, when the tongue was accommodated elsewhere, one could not eat with the usual joys of the palate. But the pleasure of the ear was enough compensation. Every tongue-owner's soundings, especially those that were heard as foreign noises, seemed to orchestrate in everyone else's middle ear into something intimate and comforting. This was inevitable for, muted at different times, they learned how to listen intently to whoever had the chance for speech or song—and how they spoke and sang and even told stories, usually with words of beauty and kindness. The moment of speech was too dear to be wasted on loose, heart-less talk. It was a shame not to do justice to the little, pink animal in the mouth. (Bobis, 1999/2013)

This illustration of an embodied transnational enactment, which is local-global, is an excerpt from "An Earnest Parable," one of the short stories in my collection *White Turtle* (Bobis, 2013) that was first published in Australia. This parable of the tongue is an earnest argument on a multiculturalism


**Figure 2.** Across the Pacific: Wollongong (Illawarra region), a similar geography. (Map retrieved from http://www.whereis.com/nsw/wollongong-2500).

that is grounded in the body. A single tongue is shared by different cultures; so the tongue tastes different languages and cuisines, becomes hybridized, transnational, in fact—in the regional city of Wollongong at the outskirts of the nation. In writing this short story about multicultural negotiation in regional Australia—and in writing the novel *Fish-Hair Woman* (Bobis, 2012) about a war in the Philippine countryside, which impacts on Australian characters[7]—I attempt to "center" border stories not only in the national, but more so in the transnational imaginary. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (1996) write that the transnational imaginary comprises:

> The as-yet-unfigured horizon of contemporary cultural production by which national spaces/identities of political allegiance and economic regulation are being undone and imagined communities of modernity are being reshaped at the macropolitical (global) and micropolitical (cultural) levels of everyday existence. (p. 6)

In the tongue parable, it is the body that affirms and undoes cultural identities and allegiances, and reshapes them within the body of the landscape, this side-street, this marginal artery of the nation, thus deterritorializing the centrality of the national body/imaginary—and consequently expanding the playing field for both migrant and native. From

the writing of that parable during my early years in Australia and up until now, I have navigated a transnational imaginary, which I have interrogated in my critical work. In a joint paper with Spanish scholar Dolores Herrero on our collaborative translation of the short story version of "Fish-Hair Woman" (Bobis, 1999, 2013) from English to Spanish,[8] I frame my own transnational imaginary, taking off from years of lived cultural production and the argument of Wilson and Dissanayake(1996):

> "As-yet-unfigured" and therefore unterritorialized, the transnational imaginary is a liminal space of agency which can serve a decolonizing function as it facilitates the creative *collision-collaboration*[9] [italics and endnote added] of diverse cultural identities—and consequently the infinite imagining and re-imagining of cultural products and culture itself. In the creative process, the transnational imaginary is a sensing space before it is constituted into a fixed sensibility, a fixed culture, a fixed story/discourse. It is disruptive and expansive. It has latitude. It is open to play between Self and Other. (Bobis & Herrero, 2010a, p. 231)

Latitude: "freedom from narrowness" (Fowler, 1911, p. 453), geographically or psychologically; thus the freedom from exclusion or from being fixed into stereotypes. In publishing nationally (in Australia) the short story collection *White Turtle* (Bobis, 2013), I make visible what is often regarded as border/marginal stories in Australian national literature. In extending the publication of the book to the Philippines and the US[10]—and incidentally it was taught in Spain more recently—I deterritorialize national literature itself. The "border-hopping tongue" is now in a wider expanse, tasted and further deterritorialized by other mouths from other cultures beyond the Philippines and Australia. Consider this border-yet-centered practice as, in itself, an enactment of grassroots theorizing about cultural production; it serves as a counter-hegemonic discourse that is now offered as an alternative main road. Moreover, I disorient the hegemony (be it national literature or scholarship) from its fixed and dominant text by centralizing my border stories *in performance*, with a "feeling-thinking-doing" body that the dominant center cannot fix.[11]

Listen: "*Ay Iraya*!"

This is the central lament in my one-woman play, *River, River,*[12] my dramatic adaptation of *Fish-Hair Woman* (Bobis, 2012), which is about the 1987-1989 total war that militarized the Bikol countryside, including my grandmother's village of Estancia, the point of departure of this paper. The

novel is about the loves and losses of that war: with her twelve-meter hair, the Fish-Hair Woman retrieves corpses, the victims of the war, from a river in the village of Iraya. As a transnational story crossing between the Philippines and Australia, it is also about the loves and losses of an Australian family implicated in the war. A metaphor for memory, the Fish-Hair Woman's hair keeps growing each time she remembers the devastation of that war, which echoes the older wars in Philippine history, because, as she argues, "Some things are never outdated. War is a face that ages well. Its features are always terrifyingly young and familiar." (p. 157) The Philippines' history of violence brought about by armed conflict (from colonization and home-grown wars) flows like a river across different periods in time, impacting not only its citizens but also its diaspora around the world. Likewise, as embodied memory, in the novel the hair flows from Iraya all the way beyond Bikol and the Philippines, and across the Pacific to Australia and America—and even further back to the nation's colonization under Spain and Japan—retrieving all the griefs and losses along the way, and then flowing back, returning to where the story began—"*Ay, Iraya*!" I sing this circular flow in my one-woman play, *River, River*, in the tradition of the Bikol Pasyon.[13] Geography is of the body, a reality that I cannot sufficiently articulate even in the physical act of writing. Thus, it must be literally enacted; it must be performed. If I am to return home.

In an earlier paper[14] on writing and performing *Fish-Hair Woman*, I map geography in the Bikol language:

> In my native language Bikol, [Iraya] means "from where the water flows, the wellspring in the hills"—as opposed to Ilawod, which means "away from the water source." Consider this framework: if water is the physical basis of survival, story is its psychic heart. Daily we move to Iraya or Ilawod, towards and away from the original source of water or story, but always our frame of reference is water and story. (Bobis, 2011, p. 57)

This too is the framework of my transnational imaginary, flowing between Iraya and Ilawod. The flow is circuituous and complex thus uncontainable, and in continuous flux—outwards and away, then back, and away again, while creating multiple tangential flows and tributaries in its journey. Therefore, for all my arguments on and enactments of deterritorializing or decentering, perhaps as writer, performer, or even scholar, all my re-mapping attempts of the terrain (i.e., establishing a new center) cannot re-fix the location of either center or border. Suffice it to say that it is my body

that momentarily centers itself wherever it is in the navigated geography/ies, but always in reference to the source of water and story: home. And home is Iraya.

In *Fish-Hair Woman* (Bobis, 2012), the militarized village of Iraya is home: my mythologized Estancia. I opened this paper with the poem "*Pagbalik sa Estancia,*" written before I left in 1991. More than two decades later, I return and come full circle with this novel and my ongoing critical explorations that attend its creative process and attempt to center Bikol and Philippine worldviews in the global imaginary. Performing *River, River* as a one-woman play in the Philippines, Australia, Spain, US, Canada, and Singapore[15] is literally an enactment of "trans*nation*alism" but not one that springs from the nation/the center, but from the region/the border, from a space and cultural concept that is utterly local (what can be more local than the Bikolana body?) and may otherwise be invisible to the nations that host the performances. It is this process of physical enactment that has taken me to the road of decolonizing my creative practice, and which has eventually led to my critical writing. The feeling-thinking-doing body is the wellspring of my scholarship. Thus, in any research enterprise that I undertake now, especially in collaborations with the community,[16] I make sure that the "theoretical framework" is partnered with a "lived and liveable framework": the creative or critical research must accommodate the living of the researchers and participating subjects, and must be liveable/sustainable for both of them and their bodies. The participating subjects must not simply be a source of knowledge but involved in knowledge production with the researchers. Moreover, the theoretical framework must return to Iraya, the wellspring of who I am: what I learned in Bikol and the Philippines until I left for Australia at thirty-one years old—and continue to learn and re-learn in my shuttling between these two geographies across the Pacific. Because knowledge and the process of knowing, from and in whatever location, is not fixed; it continuously shifts and evolves. Even so, always there is a need to keep returning to my "tahao," my center, my home in order to survive as writer and person.

*Itahao mo-Itahoy mo!* This imperative statement literally means: "Center it-Flaunt it!" In Bikol, we have this notion of "*tahoy*" [flaunt], which often comes into play when you have just acquired a new pair of shoes: you wear it with pride, you show it off—you *tahoy* it! And your friends and schoolmates acknowledge your new acquisition by "baptizing your shoes"—*bubunyagan ang sapatos mo*—by stepping on and dirtying them with their own feet. So to *tahoy* or *tahao* with pride one's local culture means it could get "baptized," sullied or even trampled by the others' feet. Therefore one needs *kusog nin*

*boot* in order to *tahoy* one's first culture, especially within another dominant culture that is foreign to yours.

I note that this *kusog nin boot* is evident in the current thriving Bikol literature and scholarship. As well, the preservation/patronage of regional and indigenous cultures and languages is now at the forefront of the Philippine national imaginary. One can *tahoy* a regional language or dialect without anyone batting an eyelid. Unlike in the early days of my writing life in the Philippines, now the regional cultures and their cultural products seem to have become the *tahao* of literary and artistic production. It is now trendy and cool to be a *probinsiyana* [provincial] in one's cultural production, unlike those years when I was made acutely aware that my regional sensibility was not quite as developed and informed, or not as sophisticated as the sensibility of writers from Manila, then the literary center. Each time I come home now, I meet exciting regional writers and cultural producers, and their accomplishments are celebrated. So, have the regions decolonized themselves from the literary primacy and patronage of the Center? Are the regions now their own respective centers? It seems the Filipino's archipelagic sensibility, this cultural fragmentation because of geography, has united its cultural producers towards a trend of diversity. Listening to different voices and stories across borders, across multiple islands (and across nations where Filipino OFWs and diasporics still sweat for the nation) is now embraced—thus, it might be safe to presume that the Filipino is no longer as worried about reconciling all storytelling into a hegemonic "National Literature." However, in a multicultural continent like Australia, with its first-world means of access across cultural and geographical borders and where diversity is continuously invoked and battled over, the reception of different voices is still underpinned by this framework: (national/hegemonic and often white) center vs margins/borders (the others who do not sound like us).[17] In fact, still grappling with its colonial history, the nation's celebration of the writing of its first peoples (Australian Aborigines) has only been a recent development, in this century, as I have witnessed. Moreover, research into literatures not written in English is only in its infancy stage in the academy.

From the transnational/transcultural contexts that I have been unpacking until now, allow me to pursue a different yet related argument. An expatriate producing knowledge in the West (in this case, Australia) using Bikol local culture perhaps experiences a more complex and fraught process, and with more attendant risks. One has to deal with two "battlefronts": the Western and the Philippine front. In the Philippine front, the expat writer's "imagining nation" from an ocean away could be suspect: "*Hoy*, you are exoticizing the Philippines for the Western audience!" But let us unpack the premise of "the

exotic." Is anything other or alien, especially if a little bit more colorful than usual, necessarily exoticized for the West? What if one's local experience was already colorful even before one left the Philippines, and the writing can only render it as such? While this "exoticizing" accusation in the Philippine front is disconcerting and even hurtful to the expatriate writer, in the Western front the same reading from a critic/theorist can be utterly perplexing, especially if the critic/theorist has never lived in the Philippines, even if s/he makes the declaration from a moral-intellectual high ground duly informed by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978).[18] These reflections on reception of culture/literature is, at their heart, about listening to story. What is the reader-critic-theorist really hearing: her/himself in the color/s of national literature,[19] or the writer's voice that has been shaped by the color or colorfulness of her transnational life—or, perhaps more appropriately, by her transregional living-shuttling between Legazpi and Wollongong?

Allow me to mix metaphors at this point: listen with the palate of the sensibility—

> How to shred a heart.
>
> It must be the right heart, it must be the soft core of the right heart, it must be the yellowish part of the soft core of the right heart. It is this that must be thinly sliced, or shredded if you will, then crushed to let the water out, to bleed it. But how do you flavour a shredded heart? How do you get the pitch right? With a bit of dried fish, a bit of shrimp paste, a bit of little red chilli, a bit of garlic, a bit of onion and the milk of one or two mature coconuts. A bit of, just right, not too much, enough to induce that perfect chemistry in the palate. But how can you tell or taste perfect chemistry? When you desire a second helping before you have even finished your first. When the second helping inspires a third. When you don't get the shits after too much inspiration. (Bobis, 2005, p. 11)

This is an excerpt from my first novel *Banana Heart Summer* (Bobis, 2005). The book is replete with Filipino food in lyrical renditions, so it might be suspected as an exotic marketing of Philippine culture for the West's consumption. Perhaps in a way, it is. Because *Fish-Hair Woman*, which was the very first novel that I was writing then, long before I began dreaming of *Banana Heart Summer*, kept getting rejected by Australian publishers. So I had to strategize: I had to entice the literary industry through the gustatory road. What was current at that time?

Food books. Then, let us write a book about food. But let us also write about the absence of food, about hunger, about poverty in Bikol, about something close to my heart: the street of the protagonist Nining based on my 'home street' in Legazpi—Rizal Street where I grew up, before my family moved to the airport district. So much in this novel is about my own body as a child in that street, about my obsession with food even then.

But what if, to Filipinos, these embodied Bikol experiences and memories are deemed as "only performed for" the West? What if the expatriate's body and imaginary are now adjudged alien/other by the Philippines—thus, you become your original nation's exotic? Or is it because you have left—thus you are regarded as having no claim on your lived history and your first home that is still, in fact, the home of all your family and your imaginary? The reality is the transnational writer or scholar has multiple publics and can never control how they receive her produced knowledge or cultural artefact. But does the nation not embrace the dollars sent from the labor of its Overseas Foreign Workers to enrich the national coffers? Surely the nation, especially its critical intelligentsia, can do the same for the cultural products of its expatriate creative laborers.

In the Philippine national/nationalistic imaginary, the doubts about "the exotic expatriate" are understandable: Because in the public arena, no one knows what happens in the privacy of my Wollongong desk. No one sees that in writing, in grappling with English sentences so they retain the geography and heartbeat of Bikol, the expatriate comes home. No one knows that in eating, in the Filipino-Australian community's obsession with parties replete with food from home, we "come home." This homecoming is an appeasement of the body and the loss that attends migration, much like the loss of limbs; so to come home, one grows phantom limbs in order to walk the old road home.

The transnational reality of this homecoming is in my short story "Ten Fingers" which I wrote for the collection, *Agam. Filipino Narratives on Uncertainty and Climate Change.* (Bobis, 2014b) Written after super typhoon Yolanda, this micro-fiction is about a Filipina PhD student at Los Angeles airport, going home right after a super typhoon that devastated her village. Waiting to board the plane with great trepidation about the impact of the storm on her home, she holds on, as if for dear life, to a photograph of her father, which she took in front of their house before she left for America. This face is *her center* that, she hopes, will still be there when she lands—

> *Kaso sarong aldaw, nagabot kang paros, kang uran su kadakol na harong hale sa dagâ. Superstorm: nahiling ko sa computer, kang pigtatapos ko su sakong conference paper.*

*Pero dae ki nakahiling sa library: kung pâno nagabot su sakong puso hale sa sakuyang daghan.*

*Kaya anion ako sa LA airport ngunyan, pauli sa dae ko pa aram. Sa dae ko nahihiling sa mga bareta: ang samuyang harong, umá, si Pay, si May*. I can't see them, or the impending landfall in my chest. But I see you — you, gasping at the tragedy on TV, in your laptops and iphones as we wait to take off. Please, I beg you. Look closer. It is my father, my mother, and all of twenty fingers holding back this storm. (2014b: p 38)

[The other day, the wind, the rain wrenched a multitude of houses from the earth. Superstorm: I saw in my computer, when I was finishing my conference paper. But no one saw in the library: how my heart was wrenched out of my chest.

So now, I'm at LA airport, going home to what I don't know. To what I can't see in the news: our house, our farm, my father, my mother.] (2014b: p 40)

The story is in two versions: Bikol and English. But the Bikol version ends with a deliberate language twist, shifting to English. The protagonist wonders if she could show the photograph of her father to the other passengers, *to the West—so they could see the invisible*. So they could see that, when she saw in a computer at the library in Los Angeles how the storm wrenched houses from the earth in her village, her heart was also wrenched out of her chest. So they could see that now, in this chest, there is an impending landfall, for when she finds out if her loved ones, *her center*, have survived, or not. The story's interior monologue ends with a direct address to the West: "Please, see the invisible." The same appeal, or protest, that the Filipino expatriate makes towards a West-centered knowledge production.

For a moment, let us imagine that I am giving this paper in the West/West-oriented academy; and at this point in my delivery, my theoretical framework (or lack of it, as may be deemed) is interrogated. The only way I can respond is to return the interrogation: to counter the following series of questions by the academy with my corresponding queries in bold text.

Have you read Homi Bhabha's third (interstitial) space?
**Have you lived in Tahao Road?**
Have you read Levinas's ethical formulation of self and other?

**Have you lived with kapwa?**
Have you read Derrida's hauntology?
**Have you lived through nagtawo?**
Have you read Deleuze and Guattari's theory on the rhizome?
**Have you lived with ugat-asin-supang?**

When you present a paper at international conferences, or submit it to an international journal, you are queried about your theoretical currency, often with West-oriented epistemology in mind. To these queries, I want to retort: But my framework is my own lived culture!

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (1993) re-formulated the notion of hybridity and wrote about a "Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (p. 55). It is "neither the one nor the other but something else beside, in-between" (p. 219). These conceptualizations have resonances with the lives of Bessel Street's multicultural community (in the story "The Earnest Parable"); they have lived in the interstitial cultural space between Australia and their respective first cultures, thus growing a hybridized tongue. Also, my own lived Tahao Road is a "third space," between the Philippines and Australia, between the region and the nation, between the local and the global—an in-between site, a new location of my cultural production that has become as hybridized as its products; i.e., a short story has become a radio play, a solo stage performance, a novel, all with elements of each other. The self is now a hybrid of multiple selves and others, difficult to fix, to unify.

Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1961) writes about the self's hospitality to the other as an ethical imperative: "I welcome the Other who presents himself in my home by opening my home to him" (p. 171). Hospitality to the other (as ethical imperative and as a political act) is embedded in all my novels, and this theme aligns with but did not spring from Levinas. The origin of such a theme, I realize now, is the Filipino value of hospitality in the spirit of *kapwa*. Pay Inyo knows hospitality to the other in his culture, in his geography, in his bones; he has embraced the white man and his son, as *kapwa*, with all their flaws and initial condescencion towards Iraya's worldviews, welcoming them to his home with unflinching loyalty. Moreover, in a war in which "self versus other" has become the battleground even among kin, this gravedigger has buried and comforted many *kapwa* without navigating through the conjunctions "versus" or "and"—because, unlike the West's formulation of otherness, *kapwa* is "selfother," a "shared

identity," as Virgilio Enriquez (1992), father of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* [Filipino Psychology], proposes:

> The *ako* (ego) and the *iba-sa-akin* (others) are one and the same in *kapwa* psychology: *Hindi ako iba sa aking kapwa*. Once *ako* starts thinking of himself as separate from *kapwa*, the Filipino "self" gets to be individuated in the Western sense and, in effect, denies the status of *kapwa* to the other. By the same token, the status of *kapwa* is also denied to the self. (p. 43)

And true, Pay Inyo does not know Jacques Derrida's hauntology, but he knows hauntings. Derrida coined the term "hauntology" in *Specters of Marx* (1993). I am still trying to make sense of hauntology, while thinking that the concept is as spectral as it wants to be: slippery, unpinnable, "irreducible," like Derrida's theorizing—and unreachable for the likes of a village gravedigger. Suffice it to say that hauntology is premised on the idea that hauntings can happen across past, present, and future (the past can haunt the present, just as the future can haunt the past), and thus they always work deconstructively against any totalizing framework/thought/element. This notion of the spectral defying time and being (and space) happens in the Bikolano's indigenous belief of *nagtawo* [literally "to be a person"], which is not a conceptual construct but a lived worldview. Moreover, *nagtawo* is driven not by deconstruction but by repair/reconstruction. *Nagtawo* happens when the dying transports him/herself to another space and time, and appears in the presence of the absent beloved, in order to be witnessed, to make known his/her impending death—and perhaps to witness, too, the impending loss of the beloved who cannot attend this departure. As they are about to lose each other, the living and the dying both witness each other, even as they are separated by time, space, and being. Moreover the beloved can engage the spectral presence beyond witnessing; the beloved can cloak this presence in an embrace, so s/he is made real—a *tawo*, a person—and thus is saved from dying. This is *nagtawo*, which I discuss in "'Weeping is Singing': After War, a Transnational Lament." (2014a) I propose *nagtawo* as an ethical framework for the production and reception of a real presence of the other in the context of loss and mourning. I propose that the haunting become an ethical imperative to witness the other's past, present or future suffering, not to discourse but to act on it.

The materiality of the concept, the event, the *tawo* is paramount. The gravedigger Pay Inyo will never know or understand the conceptualization of the rhizome by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2004), but knowing the

earth, the gravedigger recognizes a rhizome, this "underground rootlike stem bearing both roots and shoots." ("Rhizome," 1996) However, he recognizes it in his own language and reality as *ugat-asin-supang* [roots-and-shoots]. So does it matter that the gravedigger has never heard of what these French thinkers wrote on the rhizome? Indeed Deleuze and Guattari (2004) make a brilliant argument on it:

> A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo* [ . . . ] the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance [ . . . ] the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and . . . and . . . and . . . " (p. 25)

But the gravedigger Pay Inyo *lives* the rhizome in community storytelling, which is underpinned by alliance in loss: someone's telling about loss is a root sprouting into someone else's storying of loss, a new root also sprouting into another's, and yet another's story—*ugat-asin-supang* interconnected in grief and testimony, and not in a hierarchical growth. In war-ravaged Iraya, Pay Inyo knows inter-being too, in the disastrous alliance of the present war with past wars, how they grow from and into each other, like roots and shoots, like the bodies of the dead haunting their sweet potatoes:

> How strange that the motions of harvest and burial are so alike. We always dig with fervour. Wrists flex, palms scoop and fingers clutch then let go. . . . Ay, how inconsequential the mound looked, but after a year the vines would engulf it and the leaves would grow thicker, the roots fuller: sweet potatoes in his eyes, cheeks, belly, groin, even in his little toes—when this war ends, Sergeant Ramon will be garnished with grated young coconut and served with a cup of rice-coffee.
>
> Tony, let me serve you the sweetest of potatoes. Let me take you back to the time when my great aunt [Tiya Dami] was forced to flee to the hills in World War Two, when the Philippines was occupied by Japan for over three years . . . .
>
> [Now my brother] Bolodoy's farm could have been Tiya Dami's sweet potato kingdom where she was found lying on a cushion of green and purple vines, as if having a siesta. The bayonet wound was tiny and clean . . . . (Bobis, 2012, p. 156-157)

In this excerpt from *Fish-Hair Woman* (Bobis, 2012), the ghosts of World War II haunt the 1987 Total War, and the grieving is rhizomatic. And so is repair. The loss and mourning of different, multiple, and conflicting selves and others is rhizomatic rather than hierarchical—because they are conjoined in roots and shoots as *kapwa* of each other. And where they have ruptured the growth, because of war, there too will they proliferate to restore the *ugat-asin-supang*, the rhizome.

It would seem that I have been pitting the West's (and the academy's) worldviews against Pay Inyo's local wisdom—that I have been affirming the old binary of East/West. But I am not proposing that we ditch the discourse of the West. I value it in my work as I evolve as a transnational knowledge and cultural producer. Shuttling between Bikol and Wollongong physically, emotionally, intellectually, and creatively has enriched my practice as writer, performer, and scholar. I would have never written about Bikol the way I write about it now had I not left Bikol and the Philippines, and come to Wollongong, Australia. This paper is not about debunking West-oriented knowledge production, but decentering it. I am arguing that if the Western academy is serious about critical thinking, it must think beyond itself—and collaborate with the worldviews of other cultures as *equal players* in thinking and rethinking our world. It must "think-feel-do" alliance and recognize, value, and practice it as a lived growth from the ground up: the rhizome or *ugat-asin-supang* can then become the sprouting of multiple and varied worldviews from and into each other outside of a hierarchical structure.

On critical thinking, Hannah Arendt (1982) wrote:

> Critical thinking is possible only where the standpoints of all others are open to inspection. Hence, critical thinking, while still a solitary business, does not cut itself off from "all others." To be sure, it still goes on in isolation, but by the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides; in other words, it adopts the position of Kant's world citizen. To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting. (p. 43)

But to be enlarged, the imagination must go visiting through other roads beyond critical thinking. Critical thinking is impoverished without feeling and doing. Again, I return to materiality as crucial to the ethical imperative: the doing realizes the public potentiality of thinking; and feeling for others opens up our thinking about them in relation to ourselves. This organic feeling-thinking-doing is the methodology of ongoing river projects that

I have formulated and implemented with communities on the ground in Bikol and British Columbia. These projects involve a three-tiered research: creative practice, critical scholarship, and community engagement that partner a theoretical framework with the community's lived and liveable framework. In Naga City, Bikol, I have worked with writers, artists, cultural thinkers and community organizers, the Naga local government, and the Catholic church on *Susog Salog* [Follow River],[20] an environmental and cultural project to save the ecologically compromised Naga river. In British Columbia, the project is *Rethinking River Regions* (RRR)[21] involving the University of British Columbia and its Filipino-Canadian community as well as academics and students from other cultures addressing the "crossing over" relationship (in terms of geography and culture) of the rivers/waters from their respective first homes with Vancouver's Fraser river. In both collaborative endeavors, critical thinking crosses over to creative practice and social action within the theoretical framework of *creative-critical empathy* (CCE),[22] a formulation that I shaped from writing the novel *Fish-Hair Woman* and eventually performing it as *River, River*.

So the river flows back to where it began: the physical source of water: Iraya. I know Pay Inyo would find "creative-critical empathy" too much of a mouthful. But he understands the flow of rivers and what led me to this framework: my lived Bikol and Philippine worldviews in empathetic collaboration with other worldviews encountered by the current. He has always understood that the 'alternative road' is an alternative physicality: not so much land but water that defies both center and border.

To conclude, I stress that I am neither a historian nor a social scientist nor a cultural theorist; I am a creative writer and artist doing some cultural and literary scholarship on the side, and I can only speak for my own practice and navigate my own road. I have lived between the Philippines and Australia, between Bikol and Wollongong (until 2015), and I am wary of essentializing "a Filipino/Bikolano creative or critical or community process," or of dismissing the other home of my imaginary, Australia/the West. So in the spirit of transnational empathy,[23] my focus is globalizing Philippine discourses and their collaboration with worldviews outside the Philippines, an act hopefully illustrated and problematized in this paper. Also, it is only in "embodying" (in writing and performing) *Fish-Hair Woman* for seventeen years, and now interrogating those years of feeling-thinking-doing, that I realize how Bikol indigenous worldviews have, in fact, driven my processes while being away from Bikol. Mine is an uneasy recognition engendering my return to Iraya, an ethically fraught return that I am still grappling with to this day. Pay Inyo knows this. This character that I created in a novel, or so I thought, has re-created me and my view of the world—he

led me to the old road, no, to the old flow home. He knows I have lived other roads, yet he continues to lead me, all the way to Iraya, where I hear him sing as I write about the living and the dead:

> *Magdara ki balde sa danaw nin sakit*
> *Siguraduhang ruluho ini*
> *Magdara ki balde sa hararumon na danaw*
> *Iwalat mo duman ini*
> Take a pail to the pool of grief
> Make sure it has holes
> Take a pail to the deepest pool
> And leave it there (Bobis, 2012, p. 276)

This is the wake of the world: each of us standing around a pool that we have collected for centuries. We are looking in with our little pails. We try to fathom the depth of the pool until our eyes are sore. We try to find only what is ours. We wring our hands. Ay, how to go home with only my own undiluted pail of grief? To wash my rice with or my babies, to drink? But the water is my dead kin, an enemy, a beloved, a stranger, a friend, someone who loved me or broke my heart. How to tell them apart? How to cleave water from water?

> Don't query the water. Leave your pail and go home. The rice will still boil, the baby will crawl and walk, and you will drink your thirst dry, but without the burden of history. (Bobis, 2012, p. 276)

Without the burden of history? But my whole paper has just argued against this. We are always burdened and enriched by our history/ies. I am arguing with Pay Inyo now; we always argued throughout the writing and performing of this story. Even so, the *pilosopong* gravedigger rekindles hope. In *kapwa*, different selves and others intermingle in one pool. And he has a little secret: the hegemonic pail has holes. Pay Inyo has always known that, in Iraya, we cannot cleave water from water, just as we cannot fix its ever-changing centers and borders.

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## Endnotes

[1] Orality (the saying) and aurality (the hearing) are at the heart of my practice, whether I am writing a novel, a poem, a performance text, and even a critical paper. This concept is discussed in several of my published papers; i.e., "Orality in relation to memory means you have to speak the place aloud, so you remember it. You have to hear it, taste its syllables, roll them around the tongue in tactile play and, as eating is intimately bound with smell, breathe in those odors as well; only then can you see the place. The body knows, and it remembers" (Bobis, 2003, p. 131). "I found the true form of 'Cantata.' After all, it means 'song'; it celebrates orality; its heart is performance" (Bobis, 2006, p. 78). "It is harder to dismiss a body than a book. I find greater agency in orality." (Bobis, 2011, p. 73)

[2] In an earlier essay, I wrote: "Then there is no story at all, if we take story to mean a completed negotiation-affirmation between teller and listener." (2011, p. 61)

[3] I first used "grassroots theorizing" in my paper "Confounding Light: Subversion and Transnational Sympathy" (Bobis, 2013). I define it as "a theorizing grounded in the immediate and lived experience" (pp. 153-154). It is the storytelling of lived experience.

[4] I initially spoke of this concept in a lecture at Ateneo de Naga University on river governance and infrastructure, drawing from my literary and performance work on rivers (1 Feb 2014): "I have a little dream where policy collaborates with public infrastructure and human infrastructure in the feeling-thinking-doing something for our rivers and waterways." Then, I build on this concept in relation to my conceptualization of "Creative-Critical Empathy" (CCE): "CCE is more than a feeling/state of being; it is a process. A continuum that begins with grassroots cultural production. CCE is a process of 'feeling-thinking-doing' informed by *kapwa* , *nagtawo*, and *maki-agi tabi*." [*Nagtawo* and *maki-agi tabi* are Bikol indigenous beliefs.] (De La Salle University Manila lecture, 19 February 2014) These conceptualizations are discussed in my paper "'Weeping is Singing': After War, a Transnational Lament" (2014a).

[5] On my recent trip home (2016), I learned that the names (Roces and Imperial, former Mayors) have been reinstated. However, Tahao Road remains in popular usage.

[6] While I worked in Manila from 1980 to 1991, I still called Legazpi 'home.' Even now in Australia, when I say "I'm going home," I mean going home to Legazpi. Australians, even those who are also migrants, sometimes find this sense of home strange. I wonder if this is a specifically Pinoy sense of belonging.

[7] Conceptualized as a transnational novel, *Fish-Hair Woman* (Bobis, 2012) centers a national-regional conflict (1987 Total War and the consequent militarization of Bikol) and its genesis and history (also national and regional) in the story of the lives of a Filipino and an Australian protagonist, and their respective families and communities.

[8] Dolores Herrero and I had the luxury of sitting side-by-side in Wollongong and going through her translation draft (see Spanish translation, "Mujer Pelo-Pez": Bobis & Herrero 2010), and discovering how Spanish was 'co-opted' into the Bikol language in interesting and even subversive ways. This close translation process led to our co-writing a paper ("Sensing and Sensibility … ," 2010) that interrogated the translation and transnationalizing of culture, language, and sensibility across Bikol, Spanish, and Australian contexts.

[9] In an earlier article, I conceptualized "collision-collaboration" in relation to the border: "Between the body and the word, between different cultures, languages, or diverse art forms, there is a problematic borderline. When these unlike elements come together, some kind of 'collision-collaboration' happens.

Imagine two cars colliding. After the collision, the eye perceives the point of impact as an obvious gap, a fault-line, a negative space. But from my experience, I have found that this space between the two colliding elements actually emerges as a third element: hybrid, ambivalent, constantly interrogating itself." (Bobis, 2003, p. 118)

[10]*White Turtle's* border-crossing publication history: Spinifex, North Melbourne 1999, 2013; De La Salle University Manila Press 2000; (published as *The Kissing*) Aunt Lute San Francisco 2001; (published as *Dream Stories*) Anvil Manila 2014. The collection received awards in the three countries.

[11]Due to the constant rejection of my poems by literary journals in Australia in the 90s, I began doing performance readings of my poetry. As well, on my first year in Australia, the creative component of my Doctorate (*Kantada ng Babaing Mandirigma/Cantata of the Warrior Woman Daragang Magayon*, 1993, 1997) was snagged by writer's block. So I began dancing Philippine dances to comfort myself in my flat in Wollongong. These exigencies led my creative practice towards another genre, performance: I returned to the body, in order to make the text "happen" on the page. Since then, performance has become my strategy to retrieve the cultural product, the culture, and, more importantly, the body and its cultural location from invisibility/disappearance—and to sustain their currency. See "Cantata Crossing Borders" (Bobis, 2006).

[12]*River, River* is my play adaptation of *Fish-Hair Woman* (the short story with elements from the novel) for radio (Australian Broadcasting Corporation Radio, 2006) and stage (which I performed solo in Naga Bikol, Wollongong, San Francisco, Cleveland, Toronto, British Columbia, Zaragoza Spain, and Singapore: 2009-2014). *Fish-Hair Woman* is now a full-length play in Filipino, adapted by playwright Rodolfo Vera and performed by the Harlequin Theatre Guild in two seasons, March and November 2014.

[13]See my discussion on the aesthetic and political rationale behind my choice of the Pasyon as chanting style in "Passion to Pasyon: Playing Militarism" (Bobis, 2011). I write: "… the Christ story, this tool of colonization, is made to flow back to the native vocal wellspring. The Pasyon that I used to hear in our neighborhood as a non-stop lament from Holy Thursday to Good Friday is at its heart a revolutionary cry. For these reasons, I use the Pasyon in the play *River, River,* which I consider as a militant dirge. In performance, I am somehow returned to my body and its native inscriptions, and I somehow recover my agency as a migrant writer in Australia. I qualify the statement with 'somehow' because I write in the West, and, to survive, I have to operate with the story-making rules and aesthetics recognizable by the West, thus refabricating my native sensibility." (pp. 71-72)

[14]See above paper.

[15]See endnote 12.

[16]My writing and performance have led me to working on community projects (referred to later in the essay) on water as geography, resource, culture, and, more recently, as contributor to calamity. These projects have been conceptualized with a theoretical framework in partnership with a lived and liveable framework.

[17]"[Australian Language scholars] Mary Besemeres and Anna Wierzbicka write that 'the hundreds of Aboriginal languages, largely hidden from the view of the dominant English-speaking culture' and, with migration, the 'community languages, some with very large number of speakers,' have not resulted in a 'concomitant change in public consciousness of what it means to live with different languages', and 'the country remains locked in an Anglocentric view of the world.'" (Besemeres and Wierzbicka in 2007, p. xvi]).

[18]It is perplexing to hear a critic from the West declare that the diasporic is exoticizing his/her culture, based on a postcolonial theoretical framework (no matter how iconic as Edward Said's seminal

work *Orientalism* (1978) that exposed and critiqued the West's colonial and stereotypical perception of the East), but without the lived experience of said colonized culture. This evokes my earlier point about the necessary collaboration of a theoretical and a lived/liveable framework in research, and in this case, in the reading of literature.

[19]I am proposing here not only a hegemonic but a racialized reception of the literary product.

[20]For *Susog Salog*, see: [bicolstandard.com/2014/02/susog-salog-merlinda-bobis.html]; [http://naga.gov.ph/naga-smiles-2/live-in-naga-naga-smiles-2/susog-buhay-mapping-stories-of-the-naga-river/]. Employing the framework and methodology, and worldviews used for the river projects, I am now developing a related water project, *Salba Istorya*, which will address the question: How can storying typhoons from different worldviews contribute to community resilience and relevant governance in the face of natural calamity?

[21]Relevant links to *Rethinking River Regions*: [urbanizingwatersheds.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/programme.pdf]; [http://www.asianpacificpost.com/article/5830-filipina-explores-lament-through-stage-play.html]

[22]Creative-Critical Empathy (CCE) is discussed in my paper "'Weeping is Singing: After War, a Transnational Lament" (Bobis, 2014a). I developed CCE as an ethical framework for creative, then critical production of stories on loss and mourning, and eventually as the driving rationale behind the community river projects that focus on the loss of environment and culture, and the consequent mourning and repair. Basic arguments: "Tell an alternative story that engenders a creative-critical empathy, one that constantly interrogates itself and its production to facilitate new modes of relating with suffering in storying loss and its remains. … Interrogation must begin at the grassroots: at the critical moment of emergence, of creative production. No, even earlier: at the moment of emergency. It must begin with the finding of remains. It must begin with the body" (p. 241). "Creative–critical empathy is not only about critically understanding one's context and vested interest in this or that mourning, or about creatively strategizing to inspire kinship among those whom we'd rather leave at the door. It is also about making room for differences and tensions that will never be reconciled by kinship" (p. 250). "Creative-critical empathy [is] a methodology in narrating and rethinking loss around rivers in terms of ecology, culture, and social interaction" (p. 256).

[23]I initially formulated "transnational empathy" as "transnational sympathy" in my essay on the critical underpinnings of my second novel *The Solemn Lantern Maker*: "Confounding Light: Subversion and Transnational Sympathy" (2013). This formulation was rethought and reframed as "transnational empathy" as I was writing and performing *Fish-Hair Woman*; this concept is discussed in "'Weeping is Singing'…" (2014a)

**MERLINDA BOBIS** is an award-winning writer, performer, and scholar. She has published/produced four novels, five poetry books, a collection of short stories, eight performance works for stage and radio, and various literary works and critical essays in anthologies, journals, and magazines. Her latest novel *Locust Girl. A Lovesong* won the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction (2016 New South Wales Premier's Award). Her research has covered the transnational imaginary, postcoloniality, creative-critical production, cross-cultural engagement and the border, militarism, loss and water, and empathy. She has worked on international collaborative research projects with scholars and academics in Australia, Spain, USA, Canada, and China. She taught Creative Writing for 21 years at University of Wollongong, and, beforehand, English and Literature for 10 years at various universities in the Philippines. She is currently Honorary Senior Lecturer at The Australian National University. Author's website: merlindabobis.com.au (corresponding author: Merlinda.Bobis@anu.edu.au).