



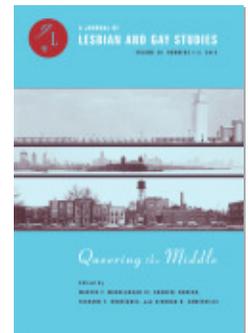
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Queering and Transing the Great Lakes: Filipino/a Tomboy Masculinities and Manhoods across Waters

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QUEERING AND TRANSING THE GREAT LAKES

Filipino/a Tomboy Masculinities and Manhoods across Waters

Kale Bantigue Fajardo

According to William W. Warren, a Native historian whose *History of the Ojibway People* was published posthumously in 1885, the Indigenous Ojibwe have an origins and migration story that chronicles their move from the Great Salt Water to present-day Lake Superior.¹ In their story, the great Megis (a seashell) illuminates and directs their way from the present-day Atlantic or east coast of the United States to the “great river” (the present-day St. Lawrence River). With the help of the seashell, the Ojibwe safely traveled to the first great lake, then eventually moved to Bow-e-ting (present-day Sault Ste. Marie). The Megis stayed at this location for a while until the seashell floated again, directing them to Mo-ning-wun-akaun-ing (present-day La Pointe Island). With the population scattered and settled on both sides and shores of the Great Lakes, the rays of the Megis continue to “reach the remotest village of the wide-spread Ojibways.”

Warren suggests that Ojibwe have been known as Ojibwe for approximately three centuries, becoming distinct from the Ottaways and Potta-wat-um-ies as they migrated north and south along Lake Superior’s coastline. In present-day Minnesota, where I currently live, the northern group of Ojibwe created settlements at Grand Portage at the far end of the (Minnesotan) North Shore of Lake Superior, as well as Thunder Bay, which is farther north on the shoreline, just across the Minnesota-Ontario, US-Canadian border (see fig. 1). The southern Ojibwe, a much larger group than their northern counterparts, followed the southern shore of Superior, eventually settling in present-day Michigan, Wisconsin, and central and northern Minnesota.



Figure 1. Map of Great Lakes Basin (produced by the Detroit office of the US Army Corps of Engineers)

This Indigenous (Ojibwe) history and knowledge stresses how the Great Lakes and surrounding areas are Indigenous/First Nations waters and lands.² The Ojibwe migration and origins history that Warren describes illustrates how the Great Lakes are Indigenous/First Nations geographies, but as a result of settler colonialisms and genocides in Canada and the United States, the Great Lakes are now a trinational (Indigenous/First Nations, Canadian, and US American) lacustrine border zone, as well as a transnational or translocal space for Natives, immigrants, and migrants who have other/multiple national and local affiliations, politics, and/or lived experiences in multiple geographies.

Native studies scholars such as Andrea Smith suggest that it is important for queer theory and queer of color critique to address the “normalizing logics of settler colonialism” where indigeneity uncritically disappears or where Natives or Indians continue to be constructed as Primitives.³ (Queer and gender-nonconforming) Filipino/as (central subjects in this essay) have been and remain complicit in the settler colonialisms of Canada and the United States in that immigrant or migrant Filipino/as are part of the settler populations that have greatly

displaced—*but not disappeared*—Native communities in both nations. According to the Philippine-based journalist Jerome Aning, “The Philippines has . . . become Canada’s No. 1 source of immigrants and overseas workers, with over 800,000 Filipinos now residing in that country.”⁴ In the United States, Filipino/as are the second-largest Asian population (the first are Chinese/Chinese Americans), numbering 3.2 million.⁵ While these statistics reveal Filipino/a participation in settler colonialism in North America, it is also important to historically complicate this settler colonial narrative by also acknowledging that “Filipino/as” were also once “Indio/as” (the term Spanish colonizers used to identify the Indigenous peoples of the archipelago now known as the Philippines during the Spanish colonial regime), and that the US colonial state largely treated Filipino/as as “Natives unfit for democratic self-rule” in the nineteenth century and for most of the twentieth.⁶ Filipino/a immigration or migration to North America has largely been a direct result of US colonialism in the Philippines.⁷ This is less so for Canada, but definitely for the United States, a nation that was in neo/colonial power in the Philippines for much of the last century. As such, I believe Filipino/a histories of settler colonialism in North America are complicated and need further analysis and explication.⁸ While it is beyond the scope of this essay to fully address the implications and complexities of Filipino/a American or Filipino/a Canadian settler colonialisms in the Great Lakes region, I begin with an important Ojibwe historical narrative, to show respect for Indigenous/First Nation epistemologies and histories and for Native communities in the Great Lakes region, as well as to introduce possible future/ongoing lines of dialogue and debate between queer/Filipino/a North American diaspora studies and queer/Native studies.⁹

In addition to understanding the Great Lakes as an Indigenous/First Nations space, we can imagine the Great Lakes region as a transnational and translake geography or as a site of queer Filipino/a crosscurrents. *Crosscurrents* is a term and framework that I developed that describes and theorizes alternative maritime or water-based borders where coconstitutive axes of identity (race, class, gender, sexuality) potentially or regularly get reconfigured through movement, travel, and migration. Crosscurrents also signal alternative racialized and classed genders and sexualities, as well as marginalized trajectories, temporalities, and epistemologies of migration and globalization.¹⁰ I theorized and developed this term as a result of ethnographically documenting and analyzing alternative masculinities and manhoods trans-pacifically (Manila, Oakland, and at sea) in the context of Filipino seafaring (i.e., migrant labor in the global shipping industry) and Philippine neoliberal economic development plans at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first. I evoke my crosscurrents framework

here in hopes that it will be useful in theorizing the “queering of the middle,” a queer Great Lakes, and a queer Midwest.

In this essay, I first show how a focus on water, and specifically the Great Lakes region, brings into view a queer, transgender, and transnational Midwest. This approach challenges the ways that the Midwest has historically been imagined in Asian American studies and queer studies. I address how and why the Great Lakes region and the Midwest can be understood as queer, particularly in the context of queer Asian American studies, a field in which I am professionally and epistemologically situated as a professor of American studies and Asian American studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Asian American studies, like queer theory/studies, is currently concerned with the cultural politics of geography, which includes trying to understand how and why the Midwest is significant in a field dominated by West Coast and East Coast Asian/Asian American immigrant histories of settlement. This kind of Asian American critique has some similarities to the queer critique of metronormativity, that is, the dominance of gay and lesbian spaces, identities, politics, and practices in coastal cities such as New York and San Francisco.¹¹

Since the Great Lakes are the specific and “peculiar” area of the “Midwest” I am critically examining and because, as I previously discussed, the Great Lakes are a transnational border zone that strongly directs us to think transnationally and translocally, I analyze the writer Nice Rodriguez’s narratives of transnational and translocal queer and immigrant Filipino imaginaries situated in Toronto (and Manila). If we think transnationally and translocally, we are able to see that Toronto is geographically and intimately connected to what we conventionally understand as the US Midwest. Toronto, situated on Lake Ontario, is also an important Great Lakes queer and Asian and immigrant diasporic metropolis. As such, we are able to include locations such as Toronto in studies of a “queer middle” or a transnational Midwest. To show an example of how to do this, I analyze stories and narratives from Rodriguez’s *Throw It to the River*, a collection of short stories published by Women’s Press in Toronto in 1993. I argue that Rodriguez’s semiautobiographical fiction in *Throw It to the River*, as well as his/her life experiences in Canada and the Philippines, reveals alternative Filipino/a queer and gender-nonconforming masculinities and manhoods that creatively critique and resist dominant North American notions and narratives of LGBT racialized and classed genders, sex, and sexualities. In the process, I also illustrate how queer Filipino/a genders and sexualities can be analyzed transnationally across the Great Lakes, the Pacific, and in local waters in the Philippines, subsequently revealing other examples, spaces, and figures of contemporary Filipino/a cross-

currents. The first half of the section on Rodriguez's writing emphasizes interpretations of his/her transnational and transgender imaginaries of the Philippines and Canada and the significance of how and why Rodriguez writes about the Philippines and Canada in hybrid, transculturated, queer, ambivalent, and unstable ways. I address how and why Rodriguez narrates and interweaves various fragmented and scattered perspectives on the meanings of butch, dyke, macho, lesbian, and immigrant (all terms used by Rodriguez), which illustrates a queer, transnational, and transgender midwestern and Great Lakes Filipino/a North American cultural politics of representation.

I move from one body of water (Great Lakes) to another (Pasig River in Metro Manila), to develop a transnational and translocal analysis that moves analytically and geographically beyond traditional midwestern and North American spaces. In this final section, I focus on Rodriguez's queer Filipino/a aesthetics of "gulo" (political disorder and gender trouble) in the context of the US-sponsored (Ferdinand) Marcos dictatorship (1972–86). By moving across waters, borders, and regions, and thinking transnationally and translocally through Rodriguez's semiautobiographical fiction, I aim to push queer studies and Asian American studies scholars who want to theorize or document a queer Midwest to think and write across and beyond the boundaries of the regional Midwest, the US nation-state, and even beyond North America because transnational and translocal experiences, histories, politics, and imaginaries are important to Native, immigrant, and migrant queers and gender-nonconforming peoples who are partly, ambivalently, or transnationally situated in the Midwest, Great Lakes, and North American continent. A brief comment on methodology: this essay includes close readings of short stories by Rodriguez, as well as analyses based on an e-interview I conducted with the author in September 2010.

Queer Waters, Queer Geographies—the Great Lakes

What makes the Great Lakes queer or nonnormative? Here, queer means geographically, socially, and epistemologically alternative or oppositional in the broader sense of nonconforming nonnormativity, that is, a site of alternative geographic, social, and epistemological formations that challenges or resists dominant paradigms. Equally important, queer here also signals nonconforming or nonnormative racialized and classed genders and sexualities that move beyond compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity, productively resisting dominant racialized and classed gender and sexual formations in specific situated contexts.

Although perhaps normative in Indigenous/First Nations geographies and

epistemologies—especially in the sense of historical, geographic, and cosmological familiarity and intimacy—if one is unfamiliar with the Great Lakes, and more specifically Lake Superior, my point of entry into thinking about the Great Lakes region is that the Great Lakes are a powerfully queer, transnational, trans-regional lacustrine or even oceanic waterscape. I say oceanic because the Great Lakes are sometimes described as “Inland Seas.”¹² As I addressed in the opening of this essay, the Great Lakes are a water boundary between the United States and Canada and Indigenous/First Nations. As such, analyzing the lakes through transnational or translocal frames or optics instead of engaging purely national or domestic perspectives is critical. On a personal note, prior to moving to the Great Lakes region (or the Mississippi River region, another way I read the area in which I live—the Twin Cities—but that is another essay), I lived primarily on the West Coast, growing up in Portland, Oregon, after immigrating from the Philippines as a child, and later, in my twenties and thirties, living in Santa Cruz and Oakland, California. In these West Coast locations, I regularly or habitually oriented myself in relation to the Pacific Ocean. The Pacific was positioned in “the west.” I was definitely used to it. In the Twin Cities, going to “the coast” now means heading north two hours to the North Shore of Lake Superior, what some Minnesota residents ironically or mischievously call the “North Coast” of the United States.

My outsider experience and positionality with this queer geography unfortunately (for me) recalls a bit of the British imperialist writer Rudyard Kipling’s reactions to the Great Lakes and Lake Superior. Similar to my experiences, Kipling was also unfamiliar with Great Lakes geographies, but when he wrote about the region and his observations, he was much more intolerant, negative, and colonial. In the late nineteenth century, Kipling lived for a time in Vermont with his wife, which is where his early musings for his *Jungle Books* began. He traveled from the West Coast to the East Coast (to return to his Vermont home), and his observations of US American life during his cross-country journey, filtered through a white supremacist British colonial optics, are memorialized in *American Notes and Letters of Travel*.¹³ In the introduction to book, written by “G.P.T” (the full name is not included in the text), G.P.T states, “These ‘Notes’ aroused much protest and severe criticism when they appeared in 1891 and are considered so far beneath Mr. Kipling’s real work that they have been nearly suppressed and are rarely found in a list of his writings.” I learned of Kipling’s “suppressed” writing on the Great Lakes when reading “*A Fully Accredited Ocean*”: *Essays on the Great Lakes*, edited by Victoria Brehm. Our similar outsider experiences and positionality and unfamiliarity with Great Lakes geographies are unfortunate (for me)

because Kipling was an imperialist and I am anti-imperialist, but his commentary on the Great Lakes is useful for what I aim to develop here. Kipling wrote:

There is a quiet horror about the Great Lakes which grows as one revisits them. Fresh water has no right or call to dip over the horizon, pulling down and pushing up hulls of big steamers, no right to tread the slow, deep sea dance-step between wrinkled cliffs; nor to roar in on weed and sand beaches between vast headlands that run out for leagues into bays and sea fog. Lake Superior is all the same stuff towns pay taxes for (fresh water), but it engulfs and wrecks and drives ashore like *a fully accredited ocean—a hideous thing to find in the heart of a continent*.¹⁴

Like his contemporary, Joseph Conrad, Kipling evokes the “horror” not of the colonial Congo but of Superior’s contradictions and the lake’s monstrous and freakish out-of-place-ness as he tries to comprehend a body of water he is unfamiliar with. Kipling traveled much more extensively on the high seas, and as a result, he was more familiar with oceans. Upon reaching “the heart of the continent” (note its echoes of Conrad’s “heart of darkness”), Kipling’s narrative suggests that Lake Superior makes no sense in a normative continental and US nationalist geography where the region is imagined as the center of the United States. Kipling’s perspective is directly opposite to Warren’s and other Ojibwe and Native understandings of the Great Lakes, which are considered and imagined as “home-waters” and which are understood to be central geographies and waterscapes in personal, regional, and national Native identity-formations.

The Midwest, in dominant US understandings, is imagined as the “heartland” for some specific reasons. Asian American studies scholar Gary Okihiro suggests that because of the dominance of the East Coast “maritime tradition” and the West Coast “frontier narrative” (in the context of a nationalist US American historiography), midwestern writers and political leaders often emphasized agricultural lands instead of waters, stressing that the region’s farming tradition was the true and authentic cultural and geographic heart and soul of the nation.¹⁵ From this vantage point, as well as Kipling’s situated position as a tourist or an outsider, a “fully accredited ocean” should not exist at the center of the continent, a key space of agricultural production. Kipling’s horror upon encountering Lake Superior highlights the dominance of the heartland agricultural model embedded in the idea of the Midwest as a region. His narrative also cautions against improper, unconventional, and strange geographies, positionalities, subjectivities,

and performances. In other words, the Midwest—the heartland—is about land, not water, and damn it, a lake should not act like an ocean!

In the context of Asian American studies, the Midwest and the Great Lakes region, as well as Toronto and Canada, read as queer because of the field's historical centering of what the Asian American studies scholar Stephen Sumida calls the dominant "Californic paradigm" in Asian American studies. Sumida (along with Okihiro and Lee C. Lee) is often credited with this epistemological critique, as Okihiro and Lee organized the first "East of California" conference at Cornell University in 1991, while Sumida's groundbreaking "East of California: Points of Origin in Asian American Studies" circulated in the mid-1990s and was eventually published in the *Journal for Asian American Studies* in 1998. Revealing and highlighting different entry points, regional literatures and histories, "East of California" mapped alternative "scattered" and "decentralized" roots and routes to imagining and understanding Asian America. Sumida writes:

Not boundedness but the vastness of the places to the east—as well as to the north, south, and west—of California in Asian American studies resists centralization. The seemingly scattered evidence of whatever concerns Asian American studies East of California—and all the better because it seems scattered—speaks of not one but many centers, many points of origin and departure, for narratives that constitute the field.

Here, Sumida suggests a queer, dynamic, fluid, and unconventional way to conceptualize Asian American studies and the geographies of Asian America. To summarize: the Midwest and the Great Lakes region are underdeveloped and atypical sites of study in Asian American and, I would add, queer studies and Filipino/a studies cultural critique, which offers possibilities to develop new theoretical insights and approaches in the field.¹⁶ For one, even in Sumida's smart and highly generative essay, he still largely maintains the logics of US nationalism and nationhood for understanding "Asian America." That is, he stresses US states and regions within the territorial lands of the United States, reinforcing a bounded national paradigm for Asian American studies. The Great Lakes, as I stressed earlier, however, are both a lacustrine boundary and a connection with Canada and First Nations, so the lakes beg for a transnational or translocal approach, thus moving us beyond Sumida's initial alternative mapping of Asian America.

In a more recent article, the Asian American studies scholar Erika Lee productively builds on Sumida's work in her recent essay "Asian American Studies in the Midwest."¹⁷ Lee compellingly maps the state of the field in the Midwest,

particularly from where she is situated at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, while also addressing the transnational aspects of doing Asian American studies in the Midwest. For example, Lee discusses the importance of addressing US imperialisms in Asia and their effects on Southeast Asians who later escaped war, violence, and poverty as refugees, as well as the local and national contexts of international adoption in South Korea, which has propelled thousands of Korean children to the United States in states such as Minnesota, largely as transracial adoptees. Interestingly, as a way to address how her geographic positioning in Minneapolis positively affects her scholarship, Lee reflexively notes that her work has become more comparative and transnational. She mentions that her first book addresses “Chinese immigration during the exclusion era . . . explor[ing] Angel Island, but also examine[s] illegal immigration and border enforcement along the US-Mexico and US-Canadian borders,” while her current research focuses on Asian migration and exclusion in the broader context of the Americas, engaging, for example, spaces in Canada and Mexico. Though clearly contributing to and advocating for hemispheric approaches, because of the essay’s overview nature Lee is not fully able to elaborate on the analytic potential to implement transnational or translocal analyses of the Midwest in relation to other locales in the Americas or other geographies.

Focusing on water—and specifically the Great Lakes—is a useful way to make visible a transnational Midwest history of Filipino/a migration that has been largely ignored or unaddressed. In the history of Filipino/a migration or immigration to Minnesota, for example, Lake Superior figured prominently for the first documented Filipino to migrate to Minnesota as a college student. Although there is historical evidence that suggests Filipinos may have arrived in Minnesota in 1910 or earlier, 1917 marks the first relatively larger wave of Filipinos coming to the state as students. Juan C. Orendain is currently acknowledged as the first in this wave. He left the Visayan region in the Philippine in 1917 after attending a missionary high school in Iloilo Province, where teachers from the Swedish Baptist General Conference in Minnesota suggested he attend Bethel Academy in St. Paul. Orendain studied at Bethel during 1917–18 but then transferred to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and St. Paul and later studied at St. Paul College of Law and the College of St. Thomas. Like many other Filipino/as in the early twentieth century, Orendain quickly learned that the only jobs open to Filipino/as were service position jobs. In the Twin Cities, Orendain worked as a dishwasher, hospital orderly, and gardener, as well as a butler for several wealthy businessmen. Later, as a law student, he passed the civil service examination and

worked as a navigation inspector in Duluth, the principal Lake Superior port in Minnesota. Although it is unclear why he left this maritime position in Duluth, Sarah R. Mason's historical account suggests that afterward, "he sold magazine subscriptions and brushes door to door."¹⁸ Going against the antimiscegenatist, white supremacist social norms of early twentieth-century Filipino/a-California experience, Orendain married a Scandinavian American woman. Minnesota is one of nine states that never had antimiscegenation laws. (Wisconsin is the other Great Lakes state that never had antimiscegenation laws.) I speculate that because of the smaller Filipino/a immigrant presence in Minnesota, there was less competition with white labor in the early twentieth century, which significantly fueled (but was not the only reason for) much of the anti-Filipino racism on the West Coast during this time. In 1925 Orendain moved to Florida for health reasons, and there he completed his law degree at Stetson University. In 1930 he returned to the Philippines, where he had a "distinguished career as a lawyer, writer, and advisor to Filipino and American officials."¹⁹ This historical example reveals the potential to study other marginalized and alternative Filipino/a histories and subjects in the (Upper) Midwest or the Great Lakes, further supporting Sumida's concept of scattered and decentralized Asian American geographies and knowledge-production.

Taking a transnational queer midwestern and Great Lakes approach also allows us to more broadly address Asian American and Asian Canadian histories, literatures, and cultural, economic, and political phenomena, via connections and differences among and between different cities and locales on the Great Lakes (and the St. Lawrence Seaway) border zone: for example, Duluth; Thunder Bay, Ontario; Detroit, Michigan; Buffalo, New York; Toledo, Ohio; Chicago, Illinois; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Montreal, Quebec; and Toronto, among other possible sites, including rural and suburban areas. In other words, through a transnational and translocal approach, we can imagine and analyze the Great Lakes as a diasporic "web of connections," much like Paul Gilroy's theory of a "Black Atlantic."²⁰ And as I have written elsewhere, oceanic/water spaces like the Pacific Ocean are also Filipino/a, queer and gender-nonconforming and/or transgender spaces, places, and routes of mobility.²¹ Similarly, it is also possible and productive to queer and "trans" the Great Lakes as a Filipino/a space, place, or route of mobility. Moreover, transnational, translocal, and/or transwater perspectives direct us to other locales that are situated *beyond* the Great Lakes, the United States, and Canada. While I believe a local/regional focus on the Great Lakes is necessary and will surely produce interesting scholarship about the coconstitutiveness of race, class, gender, and sexuality, along with space, place, and mobility *in* the Great Lakes

region, and thus I advocate for scholars and cultural workers to address some of the cities or areas previously outlined, it is just as critical to address other transnational and translocal connections beyond the Great Lakes, United States, and Canada because the people who live, work, and/or move through these spaces and places (e.g., Native, immigrant, migrant, and refugee queers/of color) often have other complex geographic, epistemological, political, and economic connections to “elsewheres” that will productively enrich and complicate our understanding of racialized and classed genders and sexualities that are only partly, ambivalently, and transnationally situated in a queer Midwest or Great Lakes region.

The Writing of Nice Rodriguez: Imagining Filipino/a Tomboy Masculinities in Toronto

This Great Lakes regional approach directs and enables me then to geographically and analytically move from Duluth (Orendian’s story) across the Great Lakes and the US/Canadian/Indigenous/First Nations border to Toronto to address the queer Filipino/a immigrant narratives and imaginaries of the once-Toronto-now-Manila-based writer Nice Rodriguez, a writer who addresses both Canada and the Philippines in his/her work.²² Rodriguez was born in Naga City, Camarines Sur, in the Philippines in 1958 and raised in Singalong, Manila, near the border of Manila, Makati, and Pasay Cities in Metro Manila. Wanting to pursue other career and social possibilities, Rodriguez immigrated to Toronto in 1988 and lived in this city for sixteen years. After getting laid off from his/her journalism job, Rodriguez returned to the Philippines (specifically Metro Manila) in 2004. Rodriguez is known for writing that poignantly imagines and engages the pleasures and dangers of being Filipino, butch, lesbian, dyke (all terms used in Rodriguez’s published short stories), as well as poor or working class, and also immigrant. Revealing the relevance of Rodriguez’s writing, queer studies scholars such as Jack Halberstam and Eithne Luibheid discuss Rodriguez’s narratives of “female masculinity” and “lesbian immigration,” respectively.²³

Rodriguez’s stories in *Throw It to the River* largely take place in the Philippines, often in Manila, but several of the stories also evoke Canada, and as he/she indicated in my e-interview, Rodriguez had a Canadian/North American audience in mind when he/she wrote the stories and published the book. Toronto was thus the site of production for Rodriguez’s short story collection. It was in this city in the diaspora situated on Lake Ontario in the Great Lakes region that Rodriguez critically reflected on and innovatively imagined queer and gender-nonconforming lives, desires, loves, and livelihoods in the Philippines, as well

as Canada. Although the Philippines plays a more prominent role in Rodriguez's stories, Canada remains significant because as a queer writer of color in Canada, he/she had to navigate dominant (white) gay and lesbian discourse in Toronto. While living and writing in this Canadian city, Rodriguez addressed multiple cultural logics (e.g., Philippine, Canadian, and US American) in *Throw It to the River*, particularly in relation to how racialized and classed genders and sexualities are understood in different, but linked national, local, and metropolitan spaces.²⁴ As I reveal, as a significant outcome of his/her immigrant and transnational/translocal life experiences, Rodriguez writes about Filipino/a queer lives, identities, desires, and practices in the Philippines and Canada in hybrid, transculturated, ambivalent, and unstable ways. That is, precisely because of living and writing as a transnational and translocal queer gender-nonconforming immigrant, Rodriguez stitches together various fragmented and scattered perspectives on what it means to be butch, dyke, macho, lesbian, and immigrant (again, all terms used by Rodriguez). In doing so, one way to productively read *Throw It to the River* (the collection of short stories) is that it is a queer, Great Lakes, Filipino/a Canadian and/or North American text that stresses hybrid transnational and translocal queer, and at times, transgender identities, gender and sexual practices, and cultural imaginaries, which complicate essentialist notions of sex-gender, including, for example, dominant (white) US-based or Canadian notions of LGBT sex-gender and sex-gender practices.²⁵

Speaking to this point, in the story "When You're Six," written from the perspective of a six-year-old Filipino butch, Rodriguez writes:

Parents raise boys and girls, but not butches. You're better off fending for yourself. When you let them take care of you, you'll grow up wrong. You'll be a fine woman, curling your hair and slipping a petticoat under your lace dress. You always say no to their ways. You say no to almost everything, so they don't bother you anymore. You can't be like mother. You can't be like father. You try to be bits and piece of people, like Frankenstein. It doesn't matter if you are raising yourself to be a monster, because butches scare people away. At six, you know that.²⁶

Here, Rodriguez emphasizes the in-between-ness and no-man's-land-ness of being a butch-child socially and familiarly out of place in the context of the Philippines. Making a reference to where the six-year-old butch is geographically located earlier in the story, Rodriguez writes, "You are six years old already, you know you're butch, because you always wait for the banana fritter girl." The Frankenstein existence Rodriguez imagines, then, is about nonconforming sex-gender,

as well as queer desire; that is, the young Filipino butch waits patiently for the banana fritter girl (the kid's crush), a street vendor more likely to be found in the Philippines than in Toronto in the 1980s or 1990s.

The question of audience and geographic positioning is also important to understanding Rodriguez's transculturated use of the term *butch*, which Rodriguez sees as an "approximation" of "tomboy," and which I argue elsewhere can be read as a kind of gender-nonconforming, transgender Filipino masculinity/maleness/manhood, in addition to female masculinity or lesbianism.²⁷ As a reminder, in the Philippines and other places in Southeast Asia, sex-gender are not separated in the same way that sex/gender have been historically separated or teased out in European/European American knowledge production. Recall, too, that Filipino is a gender-neutral language. Filipino, for example, does not have feminine or masculine pronouns. In short, social contexts are often more important than anatomy, and the social and cultural space exists for "females" to be read and interacted with as "males" or "men."²⁸

According to my e-interview, as a Filipino/a immigrant writer situated in Toronto, Rodriguez understands North America to be the primary audience for his/her writing and thus uses the term *butch* to culturally translate or explain "tomboy" histories, realities, everyday practice, and identity-formations in a diasporic context. Rodriguez comments:

I was invited by friends [in Toronto] to participate in group readings. Many of the stories are semi-autobiographical since although I found it easy and safe to write about fables, I realized it was not what I was being called to do. I hit an audience and caught a wave or surge of interest in feminist and lesbian writings. I looked around and although there were other Filipino lesbian writers in Toronto at that time, I was the only one who seemed to be effortlessly "connecting" to an audience in North America.²⁹

Elaborating on the term *tomboy* and why it was an inadequate term to use in Canada, Rodriguez comments further:

Tomboy is such a lame word in North America. It doesn't have the same meaning in Tagalog [the language which Filipino is largely based on] Butch, lesbian and dyke were approximations of what I meant. I learned about transgender and transsexual much later after the book was published. It took me a while to know the difference between the two. I am more comfortable with Tibo and Pars [Filipino variations or equivalents of "tomboy"] but like I said the terms I used were approximations.³⁰

Thus there are moments in *Throw It to the River* that reveal that Rodriguez is navigating or making sense of issues of transculturation and transnationalism, including relationships to place or displacement, lesbianism, transgenderism, and transsexualism. In the story “Innocent Lust” (one of the stories Rodriguez described in my e-interview as semi-autobiographical), Rodriguez tells the story of what he/she went through before he/she immigrated to Canada. Although his/her lover was denied an immigrant visa to Canada, Rodriguez was “lucky” and was granted a visa. Rodriguez immigrated to Canada in 1988. Before leaving Manila, he/she decided to get some resolution with a girl/woman he/she was erotically attracted to in high school. Rodriguez finally gets the nerve to tell “Ki” exactly how he/she felt about her when they were younger. Explaining his/her erotic desires, in the story, Rodriguez narrates:

As I got older, I learned it was mainly instinct—that when confronted with a nude female, I naturally knew what to do next.

It was only in Canada, at age thirty, that I got to read lesbian erotica. As an adolescent, I read heterosexual books and fantasized about having a cock and a hard-on. The illusion was so strong I even dreamed of having a sex transplant someday.

There were only two sexes in the Philippines. No institution ever recognized the third sex. Since I could not be myself, I must believe I was a man. I told friends that I would save lots of money to get myself the biggest cock transplant ever.³¹

Here, there appears to be slippage or overlap between “lesbian” desire and sex and tomboy transgenderism or transsexualism. That is, Rodriguez mentions lesbian erotica in the context of Canada alongside Philippine understandings of tomboy transgenderism or transsexualism, which can be read in the discussion about his/her cock. Rodriguez notes that it was only in Canada that he/she got to read “lesbian erotica.” This is not to say that “lesbian” as a category or cultural translation did not exist in the Philippines, or that lesbian writings were unavailable in the Philippines in the 1980s or 1990s. In another publication, I have written about how lesbian has emerged as a dominant identity and narrative, particularly in middle-class and upper-middle-class lesbian-feminist political and scholarly communities in the Philippines, specifically, Metro Manila.³² Also, as mentioned previously, when writing to a “Canadian audience,” Rodriguez states he/she did not find the term *tomboy* to be useful (because of misunderstandings about the term/identity/practices in Canada). Although Rodriguez does not use

the term throughout *Throw It to the River* (and as I mentioned, he/she uses a variety of sex-gender terms when discussing fe/male masculinities), when the work is contextualized through his/her other narratives from my e-interview with him/her and interpreted with a queer Filipino/a studies optic, tomboy or transgenderism is often present in his/her writing, despite the absence of the specific word or term. Moreover, in my reading, it is unclear what specifically Rodriguez means in the previous quote—dominant notions of gender-conforming (white Canadian) lesbianism or Filipino/Canadian transgressive and nonconforming sex-gender tomboy-ness. The lack of absolute clarity or transparency (or his/her attempts to mediate a kind of “middle ground” in his/her stories) precisely reveals Rodriguez’s own struggle as a transnational and diasporic Filipino/a writer whose writing navigates multiple, complex, and fluid racialized, classed, and transnational sex-gender and sexuality meanings.

In 2004, after losing his/her journalism job in Toronto, Rodriguez returned to Manila. During our e-interview, Rodriguez comments further on his/her sense of “outsiderness” in “gay and lesbian” subcultures; the meaning of his/her current life in Manila; and his/her understanding of queer/trans identities and desires more broadly. Rodriguez writes:

Living in Canada for a long time, I saw the rainbow of sexualities and possibilities. . . . Honestly, I don’t know what the lesbian scene in Manila is [like] or what the lesbian scene was in Toronto when I left. I’ve always felt like an outsider. When I arrived [i.e., returned to Manila] I just found myself among animal rights activists and the Benedictine. I also go to a Buddhist temple nearby. It’s probably a mid-life crisis. When I look in the mirror, I don’t see a lesbian. I just see myself without the labels. I know I still like women but sometimes, waxing philosophical, if I don’t have a woman, am I still a lesbian? Sometimes, lesbian is too femmy [*sic*] for me. I’d rather go for transgender but who cares?³³

Rodriguez’s narrative here again stresses and highlights Filipino queer or transgender transnational sex-gender fluidities where Rodriguez is again navigating a queer scene in Toronto and a queer scene in Manila and where local/global definitions of sex-gender and sexuality circulate. His/her recent comments in the e-interview continue to resonate with his/her short story “When You’re Six.” That is, Rodriguez emphasizes how tomboy masculinities may be transnationally and translocally transculturated, Frankensteinish, queer, unstable, and displaced, reflecting how the Great Lakes are powerfully queer, monstrous, and out-of-place

vis-à-vis dominant understandings of region and the Midwest in American studies and Asian American studies.

Great Lakes-Pasig River, Toronto-Manila: Political Disorder and Gender Trouble during the Marcos Dictatorship

Continuing my queer Filipino/a transnational, translocal, and transwaters analysis, I now move geographically and analytically to another one of Rodriguez's short stories, "Throw It to the River" (the short-story collection also has the same title), to connect the Great Lakes to Manila Bay and the Pasig River in Metro Manila. In the story, writing at the time in Toronto, Rodriguez continues to remember and reimagine life in his/her former city, Manila. In "Throw It to the River" a working-class Filipino tomboy (who is constructed in the narrative to be both butch and transgender male) named Tess works as a car body painter, living, surviving, and struggling in an urban-poor community situated on the banks of a "zigzaggy" river (presumably the Pasig River) several blocks west of Manila Bay in Metro Manila. The river and its polluted waters, as well as an urban-poor community (derogatorily identified as a "slum"), are prominent spaces and places in the eight-pages-long short story. Indeed, talk of the river and the urban-poor location takes up nearly three pages, which is also about Tess's relationship with a Filipina woman named Lucita who lives with Tess in the urban-poor river settlement, and the social and economic challenges they face. Although living with Tess for approximately three years and helping Tess's family make ends meet by working as a waitress, Lucita leaves Tess "in a rush," marrying a visiting *balikbayan*, a Filipino American cisman. Historically, the term refers to Filipino/as who immigrated to the United States or Canada but began returning to the Philippines in the 1970s to visit relatives and also to travel as tourists. The Marcos dictatorship sought to increase tourism in the Philippines by targeting foreigners and Filipino/a immigrants in the United States and Canada. With his/her lover leaving, the story concludes with Tess trying to understand the recent painful events and what these events mean to Tess.

The dirty river and urban-poor or working-poor community Rodriguez imagines in "Throw It to the River" are extremely significant when analyzed in the context of Manila's political and gender landscape during the US-sponsored Marcos dictatorship (1972–86), a historical and political period that deeply influenced Rodriguez (a self-proclaimed "Marcos Baby") even after he/she had immigrated to Toronto. Although not precisely dated, a few key references in Rodriguez's story suggest that the time period for "Throw It to the River" is during

the Marcos dictatorship. Rodriguez's dirty river and "slum" can be read as part of a transnational anti-US imperialist and antidictatorship Manila aesthetics and politics, aesthetics and politics that are also Filipino/a queer. To understand this, it is important to link Rodriguez's transnational Manila aesthetics with another queer Manila artist and filmmaker—Lino Brocka—as I suggest that both artists use an aesthetics and politics of "gulo." In Filipino (the language), *gulo* is a noun that refers variously to commotion, tumult, trouble, public disturbance, confusion, panic, turmoil, violent disturbance or disorder, uproar, complication, tangle, and/or mess.³⁴ This Filipino/a queer (and transnational and translocal in the case of Rodriguez) Manila aesthetics of *gulo* seeks to critically disrupt through art (specifically, film and literature) the Marcos dictatorship and the regime's Bagong Lipunan, or New Society, policy. Similar to General Suharto's New Order national policy in Indonesia, Marcos's Bagong Lipunan policy sought to advance "modernist development" through neoliberal economic programs (such as the expansion of free-trade zones) and discourse and policies of "social discipline" such as the declaration of martial law in 1972, which was the political foundation for the dictatorship. To be clear, I suggest that Rodriguez's aesthetics are "transnational and translocal Manila-Toronto" and not just simply another example of Manila aesthetics precisely because of Rodriguez's immigrant life trajectory and transnationally/translocally situated positionality. That is, Rodriguez came of age in the Philippines, in Manila, the mega-metropolis through which the Pasig River runs, but he/she continues with his/her life as an immigrant writer in Toronto, the site of his/her literary production, on Lake Ontario in the Great Lakes region. As Rodriguez communicated to me during my e-interview, his/her life experiences in Toronto significantly influenced his/her writing.

In "Throw It to the River," Rodriguez imagines and shoots a cinematic image of Tess's urban-poor neighborhood. Rodriguez writes, "From our second-floor window, I could see the river. Most people would not want to live near a riverbank. There's always the menace of a flood in a sinking city like Manila. The stench, one got used to after a while. The slums flourished like algae along the waterway, for land was expensive and the river was a natural sewer." The banks of the river, the river itself, and the urban-poor settlement rise in their densities, overflowing with organic and inorganic matter, garbage, household waste, blood, feces, shards of domestic violence, all that is refused. The river is also a site of metaphor and material site of gender trouble or *gulo*.³⁵ Rodriguez mentions, "To throw a girl in the river" meant she had been "bad" (e.g., perhaps she had disobeyed traditional gender practices, patriarchal authority, or compulsory heterosexuality). By opening with the dirty river and "slum," Rodriguez highlights

the economic poverty and societal desperation that intensified during the Marcos dictatorship, a historical period marked by extreme state violence, martial law, human rights abuses, Philippine and US American militarization, censorship, corruption, political spectacle and excess, that is, spectacle and excess created and signified by Marcos's wife, Imelda.

The scene that Rodriguez imagines visually, therefore, resonates with the queer anti-US imperialist and antidictatorship Manila aesthetic and politics of Lino Brocka, a filmmaker who hit the international stage with his film *Insiang*, released in 1976, and which was the first Philippine film to screen at the Cannes Film Festival. As Christopher Bourne writes, "*Insiang* remains a stinging indictment of the squalor and desperate conditions suffered by the poor during the martial law era of Ferdinand Marcos' regime. The film opens with graphic footage of pigs being gutted in a slaughterhouse, a potent metaphor for the cheapness and brutality of life in the squalid slum areas of the film's setting."³⁶ Brocka's Manila cinematic aesthetics, which showed the horrors of US neocolonialism and poverty during the dictatorship, and which I am calling a Filipino/a queer Manila aesthetics of *gulo*, are important precursors to Rodriguez's similar transnational, Filipino/a, queer, Manila-Toronto imaginary of a dirty Pasig River. Like Brocka's Manila "slum" and pig slaughter in *Insiang* (both metaphor and material reality), Rodriguez's river reveals the ugliness of urban poverty during the dictatorship. This is when the Marcos dictatorship sought to implement Bagong Lipunan, or New Society, policies; when the United States freely operated two of the largest military bases in Asia; when the First Couple (Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos) promoted heteronormative notions of family; and when Imelda Marcos promoted the national project of "beautification" through Philippine and international high fashion and high art. "Beautification" also included the tearing down and forced relocation of urban-poor communities in Manila in order to develop, build, and promote a high art cultural space: the Philippine Cultural Center.³⁷ Brocka's and Rodriguez's Filipino/a, queer, Manila/Manila-Toronto aesthetics of *gulo* are important because they strongly sought or seek to turn local and international optics directly toward the unsightly realities and social and economic failures and inhumanity of the Marcos dictatorship.

According to Bienvenido Lumbera, the New Society program was a "cultural construction fashioned out of colonial education, feudal economy, anti-communist nationalism and fascist ideology."³⁸ It was the dictatorship's response to a social movement that youth activists of Kabataang Makabayan of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas began in 1964 and which by the late 1960s included youth and students from multiple colleges and universities in Metro Manila,

and which eventually grew more militant, aligning themselves with the national democratic ideological line of the reestablished Communist Party of the Philippines in 1968. In 1971 Ferdinand Marcos attempted to stop the momentum of the national democratic movement through state-organized violence (e.g., bombings, kidnappings, “disappearances,” and torture) in Manila and the lifting of the writ of habeas corpus. The movement had, however, already expanded beyond the youth/student movement, as labor unions, peasant organizations, the urban poor, and women joined forces. On September 21, 1972, Marcos declared martial law through Proclamation 1081 and continued to implement New Society policies and rhetoric.³⁹

Read against discourses and policies of the Marcoses’ New Society, Rodriguez’s and Brocka’s Filipino/a, queer, Manila aesthetics of urban *gulo* seek to artistically and politically disrupt the artificial facade of the US-sponsored dictatorship and the regime’s use of state terror and beautification to violently oppose radical social movements in the Philippines. Indeed, as the Filipino/a studies scholar Nerissa Balce points out, Imelda Marcos was outraged and embarrassed by Brocka’s success at Cannes, later asking the international media why Brocka couldn’t make films about the Philippines that highlighted the beauty of the islands and the City of Man (Imelda’s name for Manila).⁴⁰ Recall too that Imelda infamously once said, “Filipinos want beauty. I have to look beautiful so that the poor Filipinos will have a star to look at from their slums.”⁴¹ In other words, the “Iron Butterfly” (this was Mrs. Marcos’s nickname) sought to deny, ignore, or disavow the harsh realities of Philippine poverty (which deepened during the Marcos dictatorship), US neocolonialism, and capitalist “modernization,” and she hoped that Filipino/a artists would do the same. Instead, as critical and politically engaged cultural workers, Brocka and Rodriguez created oppositional cinematic optics and literary imaginaries that sought to examine and expose the inhumane violence of the Marcos dictatorship in a neo-colonized Philippines.

After Lucita runs away to the United States with the *balikbayan* cisman, Tess recalls an incident when Tess and Lucita were held up and robbed in the city. Two clean-cut guys hold knives to their necks and then run off with their watches and jewelry. Rodriguez writes, “The guy cornered me mistook me for a woman, and made off with my bag which only had my lunch. I always kept my wallet in my back pocket, just like a man.” This sentence reveals a gender-nonconforming or transgender understanding of tomboy, as Tess clearly does not identify as a woman (but the thieves and muggers mistake him for one). Friends and coworkers later disparage Tess and Lucita, telling them that Lucita needed a “real man” and that was the main reason they were robbed (and victimized because Tess was unable

to protect them). Tess previously notes, however, that he did try to resist, but that “one crook had threatened to slit [his] throat.” As a result of the robbery, personal assault, and unkind words (later described by Tess as “macho mockery”), Tess’s “ego shatter[s].” In this part of the story, Tess’s sense of self as a tomboy, as transgender and male, begins to fall apart because of how people “[told him] you’re not a real man.” In this section of the story, Rodriguez also indicates the fluidity of the category tomboy. Similar to “When You’re Six,” here tomboy includes a transgender performance of masculinity and maleness. Rodriguez writes, “I have lived this male fantasy longer than I have known how to tie my own shoelace [*sic*].” Rodriguez uses the term *butch* in this part of the short story, writing, “Nothing could make a butch like me cry, only a girl rejecting me and saying ‘I wish you were a man.’” Tess lives life as a man, but feels deep pain as he believes he has a failed masculinity, manhood, and maleness based on his ex-lover’s and his neighbors’ sex-gender assessments. Rodriguez reminds us, however, that life is not always tragic or painful for a Filipino working-class tomboy living in Manila. Rodriguez (in the same paragraph) also writes, “Joy always came when people backed up my illusion. Like when strangers addressed me as ‘sir.’ Or when Mama endearingly called me her *soltero*.” In other words, there are moments of pleasure (joy) when Tess’s performance, just like any other sex-gender performance, is supported or validated as a private and public “truth.”

Trying to put himself (i.e., his sense of masculinity and maleness) back together again, Tess later does “a personal inventory, thr[owing] everything out that reminded [Tess] of [Lucita], like his dildo, which [he] hurled into the river” because Tess was disloyal to him. I do not read the last scene as a castration moment because Rodriguez writes that the dildo was “wasted money,” a piece of “plastic” he threw into the river, despite perhaps initially buying it to please himself and his lover. To me, the dildo does not symbolize his (phallic) maleness or manhood, as it was a “gadget” sitting next to “Minoltas and Nikons” in a “camera store on Hildalgo [Street],” just like other East Asian consumer items that flooded Philippine markets in the 1970s and 1980s and that continue to dominate the present Philippine economy. Rather, it was Tess who misbehaved and acted selfishly and cruelly, choosing upward economic mobility and conventional heterosexuality in the global north. Rodriguez writes, “She wanted a visa [to the United States] so badly, she picked a (cis)man,” so to heal himself, Tess needs to dispose of objects and possessions associated with Lucita; thus, allowing the river to ironically cleanse or purify him from the homo- and transphobia he experienced with so-called friends and coworkers and with his ex-lover. As such, the river and the riverbanks are simultaneously a site of remembering, re-creating, or reinvigorat-

ing a working-class, queer, Filipino, tomboy masculinity and manhood that has been recently damaged or injured. It is a poignant moment of self-reflection where Tess appears to be strengthening his inner spirit (described in Filipino [the language] as “*lakas na loob*,” or internal/spiritual strength), to reclaim a sense of trans male and masculine dignity, thus refusing to become a piece of refuse, that is, a rejected and/or victimized butch or tomboy who happens to live in an urban-poor area of Manila.⁴²

Although I read the purging at the river not as an act of castration or a moment of tomboy victimhood but as a moment that opens up a space for tomboy dignity, hope, and renewal, Rodriguez concludes the story with Tess’s perplexing thoughts of “vengeance” and competitive hypermasculinity. Rodriguez writes, “I had to take vengeance for my dishonour. I had to be better than any man. I had to win a girl in less than eleven days, the time it took Apo [Ferdinand Marcos] to woo Imelda. [Ferdinand and Imelda made headlines when they got married almost immediately after dating.] I had to be better than the Number One man in the country. I had to be better than any butch alive. I had to be. Or the river would take me away.” Like the Great Lakes, in this final unit of the story, the Pasig River is a waterspace through which to understand Rodriguez’s complex transnational cultural translations of Filipino transgender or tomboy masculinities and manhoods. The river is a site where Tess’s queer Filipino tomboy manhood can be potentially resurrected through a renewing cleanse, but is also a site of danger, gender policing, and competitive and potentially violent hypermasculinity. That is, “the river [c]ould take [him] away” because as mentioned earlier, gender-nonconforming or transgressive subjects (e.g., “bad girls” and perhaps “bad boys”) are sometimes thrown in the waters as a form of material and symbolic discipline and punishment.

To critically and more fully understand Tess’s contradictory thoughts—that trans masculinities and trans manhoods can be alternative and resistant, but may also aspire to perform dominant masculine practices (e.g., hypercompetitiveness and violence)—we must not forget that the story takes place during the US-sponsored Marcos dictatorship. As a politically conscious writer who came of age during the dictatorship, Rodriguez develops a Filipino/a queer cultural critique through his/her writing. The closing narrative suggests that there were some real limitations to the kind of liberatory or radical masculinities that were possible in Manila during the dictatorship period. Evoking “Apo,” or Ferdinand Marcos, in the final unit of the story, Rodriguez indicates to readers that although queer and transgender masculinities may be ironically recuperated or healed at a dirty river, the everyday realities, violence, and spectacles of the dictatorship contin-

ued to exist and dominate the Philippines in the 1970s and 1980s, a location that Filipino/a writers Gina Apostol, Eric Gamalinda, and Lara Stapleton provocatively evoke as “The Thirdest World.”⁴³ Although perhaps desiring an alternative or redeemed Filipino (trans) masculinity, during the time of the US-sponsored Marcos dictatorship, the author suggests that the possibilities for radical masculinities and manhoods were limited or forestalled because state violence was rampant in Manila and that tropes and practices of dominant macho Filipino masculinity remained powerful ideologies. The Marcoses and the Philippine military (funded by the United States, the International Monetary Fund, and World Bank) attempted to hide or violently destroy the political *gulo* and grassroots protests in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the armed communist insurgency that waged war against the dictatorship and US imperialists. Through state policies such as Bagong Lipunan; martial law; the murder, “disappearance,” or imprisonment of communist leaders, student leaders, and other “agitators”; the displacement of urban-poor people; and through tropes, imaginaries, and cultural practices of romance, beauty, fashion, and high art symbolized by the Dictatorial Couple and Imelda’s hyperconsumption and hyperfabulousness, the dictatorship sought to perform or mimic a sanitized and oppressive pseudo-first-world-ness, to attract foreign investors and abide by its so-called special (neocolonial) relationship with the United States, which absolutely required procapitalist and anticommunist national policies during the Cold War. Read with this history in mind, Rodriguez’s transnational Manila-Toronto aesthetics of *gulo*—that is, political disorder *and* gender trouble—precisely disrupt the dictatorship’s desire for a New Society in the context of a US-lead post-Fordist New World Order, directing readers to examine and reflect on the ugliness of the dictatorship, Third World poverty, US imperialism, and political and consumer excess.

Writing as a queer immigrant outside Manila, and at the time living in Toronto, in the Filipino/a crosscurrents of Canada, the Philippines, and the Great Lakes–Pasig River, Rodriguez critically and powerfully remembers and reimagines Manila. The dirty river in Manila in “Throw It to the River” is exactly the site through which Rodriguez creates a literary space that potentially pushes North American diasporic audiences to similarly recall and reflect on the Marcos dictatorship and related economic and social violence in this “Third World” metropolis, and just as importantly, the author reveals the complexities and contradictions of translating Filipino/a tomboy fe/male masculinities and manhoods in transnational and translocal contexts. By doing so, Rodriguez’s semiautobiographical fiction productively queers and transes Filipino/a waters that flow in North America and the Philippine archipelago, from the Great Lakes to the Pasig River, inter-

mixing differently situated and heterogeneous narratives, practices, and identities of Filipino/a tomboyhood, along with Filipino/a queer transnational and translocal anti-US imperialist and anti-Marcos dictatorship cultural politics. Although the Great Lakes are “freakish” and “monstrous” in normative US national geographies and epistemologies, and the Pasig River is a “natural sewer” full of “stench” that people do not want to be near or look at, not to mention the fact that at first glance or first read, the Pasig does not seem to remotely fit into a map of a “queer Midwest,” as my essay hopes to show, these are precisely the kinds of local, regional, and transnational racialized and classed sex-gender spaces and places that we need to analyze if we are to critically and creatively “queer the middle” and/or “the Midwest.”

Notes

1. William W. Warren, *History of the Ojibway People* (1885; rpt. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2009). Warren uses the term *Ojibway* in his monograph, but in this essay I use the contemporary term *Ojibwe*.
2. *First Nations* is the term generally used in Canada to describe aboriginal peoples.
3. Andrea Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism,” *GLQ* 16, nos. 1–2 (2010): 41–68. See especially the section “The Disappearance of Indigeneity” (50–58) in Smith’s essay.
4. Jerome Aning, “Canadian PM Arrives in Manila Friday Night for 3-Day Visit,” *Inquirer* (Manila), November 9, 2012, globalnation.inquirer.net/55734/canadian-pm-arrives-in-manila-friday-night-for-3-day-visit.
5. US Census Bureau, “Profile America Facts for Features—Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month: May 2011,” www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb11-ff06.html (accessed January 4, 2012).
6. “Filipinos Unfit to Rule Themselves,” *New York Times*, November 3, 1899.
7. On the relationships between Filipino/a migration and US colonialism and empire, see, for example, Dorothy Fujita-Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919–1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Catherine Genize Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
8. For analyses of Asian (including Filipino/a) settler colonialism in Hawai‘i, see Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura, eds., *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to Everyday Life in Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008).
9. This understanding of the Great Lakes region as a border zone also dialogues with the Chicana, lesbian, feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa’s imaginaries of US-Mexico borderlands as sites of colonial and neocolonial violence, as well as transnational,

translocal, and queer indigenous Chicana/o cultural hybridities, and praxis as theorized in *La Frontera (Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 3rd ed. [San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 2007]).

10. Kale Bantigue Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). See also the Philippine reprint: Kale Bantigue Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2012).
11. For critiques of metronormativity, see, for example, Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); and Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).
12. Jerry Dennis, *The Living Great Lakes: Searching for the Heart of the Inland Seas* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2004).
13. Rudyard Kipling, *American Notes and Letters of Travel* (n.p.: Omnibus Select, Amazon Digital Services, 2008).
14. Rudyard Kipling, quoted in Victoria Brehm, introduction to "A Fully Accredited Ocean": *Essays on the Great Lakes*, ed. Victoria Brehm (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 4; emphasis added.
15. Gary Okihiro, *Common Ground: Reimagining American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
16. This is similar to bell hooks's theorizations of "the margins," as well as to Anna L. Tsing's theory about the potential of "out of the way places." See bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End, 2000); and Anna L. Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
17. Erika Lee, "Asian American Studies in the Midwest," *Journal for Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2009): 247–73.
18. Sarah R. Mason, "The Filipinos," in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1981), 547.
19. Mason, "Filipinos," 548.
20. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
21. Kale Bantigue Fajardo, "Transportation: Translating Filipino/Filipino American Tomboy Masculinities through Seafaring and Migration," *GLQ* 14, nos. 2–3 (2008): 403–24; and Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). On a queer and black Atlantic, see Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ* 14, nos. 2–3 (2008):

- 191–216. On how travel is constitutive of culture, see James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
22. The author, Nice Rodriguez, communicated to me that it was appropriate to use both feminine/masculine, female/male pronouns in this essay.
 23. Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Eithne Luibheid, “Looking Like a Lesbian: The Organization of Sexual Monitoring at the United States–Mexican Border,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8, no. 3 (1998): 477–506. See also Fajardo, “Transportation,” 403–24, where I briefly addressed Rodriguez’s work in relation to transculturated and transnational Filipino tomboy and transgender masculinities.
 24. Fajardo, “Transportation.” In “Transportation” I emphasize the significance of transnational mobility and the navigation of multiple cultural logics.
 25. For critiques of US-based analyses of LGBT identities and practices, see Martin F. Manalansan IV, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
 26. Nice Rodriguez, “When You’re Six,” in *Throw It to the River* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1993), 19.
 27. Fajardo, “Transportation,” 403–24; and Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents*.
 28. Fajardo, “Transportation.”
 29. Nice Rodriguez, e-mail to author, September 6, 2010.
 30. Rodriguez, e-mail to author.
 31. Nice Rodriguez, “Innocent Lust,” in *Throw It to the River*, 65.
 32. Fajardo, “Transportation,” 403–24; and Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents*.
 33. Rodriguez, e-mail to author.
 34. Leo James English, *Tagalog-English Dictionary*, (Manila: National Book Store, 1986), 547–48.
 35. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
 36. Christopher Bourne, *Review: Lino Brocka’s “Insiang,”* 2006, www.meniscuszine.com/issue18/2006nyff/insiang/index.html.
 37. *Imelda* (dir. Ramona Diaz; 2004).
 38. Bienvenido Lumbera, “Terror and Culture under Marcos’ New Society,” 2007, andrescebu.multiply.com/journal/item/19/Terror_And_Culture_Under_Marcos_New_Society.
 39. Lumbera, “Terror and Culture.”

40. Nerissa Balce, "The Artist in a Time of Dictatorship: *Lino Brocka and His Films*" (paper presented at Lino Brocka Film Festival, Philippine Studies Department, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, April 21, 2009).
41. *Imelda*.
42. For an expanded discussion on "lakas na loob," see Virgilio Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience* (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1992). See also Fajardo, "Ashore and Away: Filipino Seamen as Heroes and Deserters," in *Filipino Crosscurrents*.
43. Gina Apostol, Eric Gamalinda, and Lara Stapleton, *The Thirstiest World: Stories and Essays by Three Filipino Writers* (New York: Factory School, 2007).