Introduction

“Charity Begins at Home”

Filipino Americans give back, not only to families in the Philippines but also to communities, projects, and organizations. Filipino Americans may give back to provide relief to poor or vulnerable Filipinos or to address the forces that maintain poverty, vulnerability, or exploitative relationships in the Philippines. These various acts of giving provide a source of cohesion and purpose for Filipino America. Jocelyn Alvarez, for example, a community organizer and president of her Filipino American regional association, describes her relationship to charitable giving:

Philippine culture is very important. We should all value charity because if you are charitable, it comes back to you many times. It’s payback. Charity should always be a part because no matter what, that feeling of sharing is something that makes you complete. It gives you meaning. We as a people have a beautiful way of sharing and community that is sometimes lacking in America.¹

Giving back, a prominent feature of Filipino American identity and communities, is central to the moral economies of Filipino migration, immigration, and diasporic return.
Efforts to participate in the social development of the Philippines or to improve the lives of Filipinos in the Philippines have become more visible over the past several decades. This is a result of both the increasing flow of economic globalization and the post-1965 migration of Filipino professionals to the United States. These immigrants’ personal and financial situations have allowed them to organize and participate in philanthropic, charitable, and social-development projects. The rise in the promotion of philanthropy and its frequency within Filipino America coincides with a global shift in governance that pushes the burdens of social welfare away from state governments and onto private organizations and individuals. This privatization of public welfare ensures the precarity of poor people, whose welfare is left to the whims of donors and the cycles of large foundations, but it also broadens the realm of social responsibility for those with ties to a particular place. Filipino Americans accept at least a degree of this responsibility in the Philippines, as evidenced by the prominence of giving back in Filipino American association newsletters, Filipino American newspapers, and community achievement awards.

While Filipino Americans pursue opportunities to support projects in the Philippines and cultivate a culture of giving back, broader claims about economic development on national and international levels can make instrumental use of these personal and community efforts. State bodies within the Philippine government; regional financial organizations such as the Asian Development Bank; and multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, engage in dialogue, promote policies, and create legislation “targeting diasporas as development actors.” In other words, the desire and action on the part of migrants and immigrants to help improve the futures of their respective countries of origin are seen as significant enough to warrant coordinated efforts to guide potential results toward the interests of national economies and the first world’s coordination of the global economy. By targeting migrants and immigrants as development actors, these state and financial bodies recode “giving back” to the Philippines in terms of national development, as an international political and economic phenomenon. Giving practices are central to contemporary expressions of Filipino American diasporic belonging and subjectivity, and it is through giving back that Filipino Americans are recruited as development actors and participants in
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Filipino Americans have created hundreds of charity, social-development, philanthropic, humanitarian, and social-movement organizations that support ongoing projects in the Philippines. Additionally, Filipino American student and social groups, alumni charters, professional organizations, hometown and regional associations, and fraternal clubs—the variety of social groupings that are commonplace among Asian, Caribbean, and other racialized migrant and immigrant populations—initiate small-scale projects in the Philippines through the donations and organizing efforts of their members. While this is not necessarily their primary or founding mission, they give back to the Philippines as a Filipino American group. For example, the St. Luke’s Alumni Nursing Foundation USA raises money to support an endowed scholarship for its members’ alma mater in Quezon City. The Filipino American Association of Central New Jersey holds charity balls and golf tournaments to support the Alouette Foundation of the Philippines, which serves underprivileged children in Pasay City. The New Orleans Filipino American Lions Club collects surplus textbooks from the New Orleans school district to donate to elementary schools in Batangas and La Union. Filipinos from Rizal and San Pablo City in Laguna now living in the United States and Canada formed Seven Lakes International to work with the San Pablo City mayor and community organizations to fund local development initiatives, including the construction of facilities to produce oil and fiber from coconuts. Thousands of medical missions to the Philippines have been organized, many led by doctors who trained in the Philippines, immigrated to the United States, and now return to the Philippines to provide surgical, medical, and dental services with groups such as the Philippine American Medical Mission Foundation of Michigan, Aloha Medical Mission, and Philippine Medical Society of Northern California. The vast majority of the Filipino American groups I have come across call out to members and the broader public to provide assistance whenever natural disasters erupt in the Philippines.

Filipino Americans, not unlike other diasporic populations who initiate projects and programs in countries of origin, are called on by
homeland governments, national cultures, international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and religious institutions to give back. The desire and drive to give back to the Philippines can feel universal in certain segments of Filipino America, so much so that giving-related practices and concerns—and the bonds maintained through giving—infuse what it means to be Filipino in America. The risk, however, is in perceiving the act of giving back as its own end—as proof in and of itself that Filipino Americans remain “Filipino” in their hearts because they choose to give. Erased are the consequences of the ways that giving is imagined and responsibility is placed and the existence of gross inequalities and their global reproduction. Pushing against an understanding of giving back’s self-evident goodness and the blind spots that accompany its ubiquity, this book explores the cultural, social, economic, and political conditions of giving back.

I use “diaspora giving” to name the centrality of giving back in Filipino diaspora formation and the questions and analysis that emerge from this focus. The bonds and obligations that give meaning to the Filipino American diaspora do not exist outside culture or history; instead, they are implicated in a complex web of power relationships and conflicting identities. Metaphors, customs, laws, and subjectivities related to giving practices and institutions bind Filipino Americans as a diaspora—and also in relationship to homeland, to Filipinos in the Philippines, to Filipinos in other diasporic nodes, and to each other.

The centrality of giving relationships to social forms and values is explored at length in Marcel Mauss’s foundational essay The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies. Mauss’s work is vital within the fields of sociology and anthropology; it elaborates how the exchange of gifts involves “the totality of society and its institutions,” which are “phenomena [that] are at the same time juridical, economic, religious, and even aesthetic and morphological.” Mauss begins his essay with a study of “archaic” societies but concludes with an extension of his “general theory of obligation”—to reciprocate, to give, and to receive—in his own interwar time. Mauss identifies a paradox related to giving in which the giver must choose the obligation or duty to give, which he describes as “the atmosphere of the gift,
where obligation and liberty intermingle.” Elaborating on the under-theorization of solidarity in Maussian scholarship, bioethicist and sociologist Simone Bateman explains, “Indeed, whereas giving (as opposed to selling) is usually perceived as a voluntary, disinterested, and spontaneous form of exchange, it is fundamentally an obligation because giving expresses the ties that bind us to others.” In the words of Mary Douglas, who writes in the foreword to the 1990 translation of *The Gift*, “A gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction.” A gift seen to be pure and free is a contradiction because it attempts to extract the gift from the chains of obligation, putting “the act of giving outside any mutual ties.”

Filipino studies scholars address the contradictions of the gift and the obligations of Filipino migrants most predominantly through remittance giving—money from Filipinos living and working outside the Philippines sent to family members in the Philippines to make consumer purchases, build homes, create small businesses, and pay for educational or health expenses. These scholars illustrate the contradictions of remittances in relationship to a Philippine national culture that celebrates Filipinos’ willingness to work abroad so they can send back a portion of their earnings to float the national economy. Many scholars, notably including sociologists Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, Anna Romina Guevarra, and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, have written about remittances and the dependence on overseas migrant labor in sustaining the Philippine national economy. As these authors show, the Philippines produces the structures that facilitate the migration of Filipinos to work outside the country and to give back through remittances from abroad. These obligations work together in transnational Filipino subjectivities, whether or not one actually secures an opportunity to work abroad, and in the celebration of Filipino labor migrants by the Philippine government for their mobility and their remittance giving, a biopolitics that undergirds global capitalism and the Philippines’ role in the global order. Any work on giving back to the Philippines by Filipino Americans must account for the obligations of migrant laborers to give back through remittances. Because charitable, philanthropic, and social-development giving is usually perceived as voluntary, particularly in comparison to the history and culture of remittance giving, there is,
perhaps, an even greater risk of understanding giving to recipients outside one’s family, or nonremittance giving, as disconnected from both the logics of global capitalism and the Philippine remittance economy.16

Filipino Americans work to address the social, economic, and environmental challenges facing the Philippines, and this book takes an interdisciplinary approach to reveal how power operates through the personal, institutional, and economic character of those desires and efforts. Giving Back: Filipino America and the Politics of Diaspora Giving examines narratives, representations, and practices of giving back not only in but also about Filipino America diaspora, occurring within and against nationalisms that shape the terms of diasporic belonging for Filipino immigrants and migrants. It understands Filipino American diaspora to be produced in part through U.S. and Philippine state policies and histories regarding migration, citizenship, labor, and racial formation and in relation to other diasporic nodes and trajectories. It analyzes project descriptions, mission statements, organization reports, newsletters, participant observations, and personal and group interviews related to giving back for the frameworks of social transformation that they offer—narratives of multiple and simultaneous homes, identities, and obligations, their meanings and materiality. As visions of society’s betterment or advancement, project descriptions and mission statements delineate an organization’s choices regarding the best way to help or serve the Philippines or fellow Filipinos; examining frameworks of social transformation and mobility illuminates the logics informing those politics. I do not read frameworks of social transformation and mobility as proof of a migrant’s or expatriate’s continued love of the homeland but rather as signals of how distance, migration, memory, place, and time translate and inform one’s ideas about responsibility and obligation. Alongside materials from Filipino Americans and Filipino American organizations that pursue projects in the Philippines, I analyze writing on diasporic return in policy and personal narratives that prominently feature giving back to comment on the cultural, social, economic, and political dimensions and implications of their representations of giving, migration, and return. Conceived in this way, they narrativize the subject, object, and processes of both diaspora and giving.
“Charity Begins at Home”

The Philippines has made strong ideological and institutional investments in the reproduction of transnational subjectivities, partly through a Filipino population that is willing to work abroad to send back remittances. The ways in which Filipino Americans situate their giving offers a lens through which to analyze diaspora formation under global capitalism. Giving back also creates opportunities for Filipino Americans to shape the terms of diasporic belonging. To build toward these analytical concerns, I turn to the repeated use of the expression “charity begins at home” to describe and elaborate on the centrality of giving back to the moral economies of the Filipino American diaspora.

“Charity begins at home,” biblical in origins, is a common expression in general musings about ethical traditions and altruism. It can serve as demand or admonishment, as a stern reminder that we were all once the beneficiaries of someone else’s care, and requires a performance of charitability to demonstrate respect of lasting bonds. In another way, acts described as “assistance” or “help” may also operate as a form of claims making by the giver, an insistence that one retains her place in a family or community or nation despite the passage of time, distance, or lack of communication if she abides by a culture of giving.

The expression’s incorporation of “home” lends itself well to Filipino American musings about the Philippine “homeland” and the obligations of Filipino Americans to give to those “back home.” From my interviews with Filipino American founders, presidents, and leaders of U.S.-based organizations (both informal and registered) that support projects in the Philippines, two particular respondents stand out for their use of “charity begins at home.” Instead of justification for why they, Filipino American immigrants, choose to focus their activist and philanthropic work in the Philippines (as the place where charity begins), these respondents use the expression to introduce the significance of giving back in the Filipino American diaspora and, importantly, to frame their own interventions in dominant or exclusionary giving practices in diaspora.

Lydia Tanguilig, a Minnesota-based Filipino immigrant, organizes a group of mostly professional Filipino Americans like herself
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to connect with Philippine-based community organizations. Tanguilig and other members make trips to the Philippines to learn how partner community organizations frame the problems they face, which are often related to livelihood, safety, and access to everyday necessities. Filipino American members report back to the group on what they learned about community organizations’ projects and needs in the Philippines, and the group makes decisions about how to support these community organizations in the Philippines. In addition to the knowledge gained from these trips, the Filipino American group holds learning sessions about U.S.-Philippine relations and history and Philippine political economy to make informed and purposeful decisions for the group’s time and resources.

Over a shared meal at a restaurant in the Twin Cities, Tanguilig discussed the Philippine-related mission and goals of her group with me. She critiqued Filipino American giving in general terms, situating the goals of her group as an alternative: “Unfortunately, Filipinos here always say charity begins at home, and that means supporting families. . . . We don’t want to deliver charity in the Philippines. We want to work with the people.” Tanguilig identifies the obligation of many Filipino migrants and immigrants who live and work abroad to support family members in the Philippines. As the literature on Filipino migration and labor documents, this obligation infuses contemporary Filipino society and culture, whether one lives in the Philippines or outside its borders. Tanguilig bemoans this obligation to family as a social norm within transnational Filipino culture because it narrows the extent and practice of giving back.

The social norm to support one’s family or contribute to a family household is not usually deemed “unfortunate,” even if migrants and immigrants may resent or be overwhelmed by the pressure to remit. However, this resentment is not the locus of Tanguilig’s critique. In her estimation, the dominance of remittance giving comes at the expense of other potential bonds in migration, such as the grassroots, community-level efforts in which her group participates. While Tanguilig did not clarify her critique of charity in the interview, many arguments against charity are consistent with her framing of her group as an alternative to remittances as the dominant form of giving back. Common ethical arguments against charity as an institution include how charity works to alleviate symptoms but not root causes of social
problems and how charity depends on the donors’ understanding of social needs and disregards those of the potential recipients. Tanguilig’s brief presentation of giving back, with its focus on working with Philippine communities in person instead of dictating what they need from afar, seems to speak to both arguments. Tanguilig uses “charity begins at home” to illustrate the existence and critique of a giving norm within the Filipino American diaspora. Thus, Tanguilig frames her group as offering an alternative giving practice, and in so doing, she shines a light on what is commonplace and expected to expose what she sees as a roadblock to diasporic participation in a broader vision of social transformation for the Philippines.

Geraldine Bigay, a Filipino immigrant living in the Atlanta area, also acknowledges a normative element in “charity begins at home,” offering a critique of dominant “Filipinoness” in giving practices and transnational communities. “In an organization, it’s a tendency for individuals to want to overextend,” says Bigay. “But charity begins at home. For us that is Bicol [a region in the Philippines].” Bigay connects “charity begins at home” to her alienation from Filipino America and to the rationale for starting her own organization to give back to the Philippines on her own terms. Home, in Bigay’s understanding, refers not to the Philippines but to Bicol, the respondent’s home region in the central Philippines. Bigay explains that she once belonged to a broad Filipino American association in the Atlanta area but left the group after experiencing the exclusions of ethnic, linguistic, racial, and class norms of belonging within Filipino America: “The other Filipinos pushed us [Bicolanos] out of the Filipino group because we didn’t speak Tagalog and a bunch of us married Thai men. We want to create projects for Bicol anyway.”

Bigay references an assumption that Filipino migrants and immigrants in the United States, particularly those who are middle class, can speak or at least understand Tagalog, the historical language of the capital region and the basis of the Filipino language. These assumptions can be understood in terms of Filipino migrant history in the United States—early twentieth-century migrants largely came from Ilokano- and Visayan-speaking regions, whereas many of the immigrants who are professionals and their families who came to the United States through the 1965 immigration legislation migrated from Tagalog regions. For these and related reasons, Tagalog has since
become associated with upward mobility and educational attainment, which contributes to Bigay’s alienation from the broad Filipino American association in Atlanta and from normative Filipinoness in the United States. Faced with racism and regional/linguistic hierarchies within her Filipino American community, Bigay cofounded an organization that supports medical and dental missions, creates and funds scholarships for priests, and establishes libraries, all in her home province of Bicol.

These two examples demonstrate that Filipino Americans understand giving back as part of larger traditions—they both use the expression “charity begins at home.” Lydia Tanguilig and Geraldine Bigay draw on personal and community resources to support community organizations in the Philippines and confront issues of access and inequality in the Philippines. Issues related to remittance economies, social responsibility, and cultural nationalism surface in these exchanges about their respective organizational missions and founding moments. But the reverse is also true: issues and histories related to global capitalism, the migration of both labor migrants and Filipino American immigrants, and the difficulties of migration and of homeland return can be examined through the close study of Filipino Americans giving back to the Philippines.

The following section brings together multiple histories to narrate U.S.-Philippine relations and the capitalist bases of largesse in relationship to the postwar multilateral and bilateral programs of official development implemented by the first world and imposed on the third. Giving back from Filipino America bears the trace of all these histories, which undergird the subjectivities produced through giving-related institutions and discourse. The history of Filipino American migration and immigration begins with the colonization of the Philippines by the United States. Because of the “underdevelopment [in the Philippines] that has resulted as a consequence of neocolonialism and the active role the neocolonial state would eventually play in both promoting and facilitating out-migration,” contemporary migration and diasporic return must also be understood as the legacy of U.S. colonialism. In the political debate regarding the fate of the Philippines following the colonial exchange and the signing of the Treaty of Paris of 1898, in which Spain ceded to the United States its dominion over the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam,
as well as control over the process of independence of Cuba, virtues of charity and obligation were, paradoxically, used to justify territorial expansion and the violence of the Philippine-American War for the American public. Giving back from Filipino America to the Philippines does not overcome histories of colonialism and imperialism that produced desires, relationships, and metaphors of giving between the United States and the Philippines, which cathect in the contemporary moment through development and the developmentalist logics that shape Filipino American subjectivities. This book connects giving back to those histories and works to reckon with the imperialist relations in which it is entangled.

“It Is Not True That Charity Begins at Home”: Charity, Development, and Philanthropy and the Global Order

In a speech to the Senate in 1900, Senator Albert Beveridge, one of Washington’s most ardent advocates of U.S. overseas expansion, inverted the conventional meaning of “charity begins at home”: “It is not true that charity begins at home... Selfishness begins there; but charity begins abroad and ends in its full glory in the home.” The charitable opportunity prompting this speech was U.S. colonial control over the Philippines, acquired in 1898 following America’s victory in the Spanish-American War. During the first stage of the Philippine-American War, which eventually resulted in more than one million Filipino civilian casualties according to some estimates, Beveridge and fellow pro-imperialists attempted to reconcile overseas expansion and military colonial violence across the Pacific with American liberty and democracy, articulating ideals related to the virtuous exceptionalism of the country to a professed benevolence that would characterize its version of empire. The American colonial project in the Philippines, they argued, sought to develop the country and deliver it from centuries of colonial misrule by Spain. To refuse America’s own duty to develop Philippine institutions and infrastructure and guide the Filipino people toward modernity would be, in Beveridge’s words, “selfishness.” As America stood on the international stage, ready to claim its authority as a colonial master set apart from the cruelty of the European model, “charity” was used as a unifying principle for the American nation.
The relationship with the Philippines was established through charitable exchange, offering American-style development and institutions in the Philippines and, in exchange, receiving glory and comfort in the righteousness of its world leadership. Those who study U.S. colonial history in the Philippines or the cultural politics of American empire often remind us of Beveridge’s bold pro-imperialist politics, frequently paired with denouncements of President William McKinley’s policy of benevolent assimilation, in their scholarly critiques of racialized modernity and colonial social formations. Beveridge’s most oft-quoted passage in this literature demonstrates the ease with which he justifies the colonization of the Philippines through empire’s access to new markets, gendered claims to property, and entitlements of whiteness and racial subjection, as well as the duties and burdens of civilization:

The Philippines are ours forever, “territory belonging to the United States,” as the Constitution calls them. And just beyond the Philippines are China’s illimitable markets. We will not retreat from either. We will not repudiate our duty in the archipelago. We will not abandon our opportunity in the Orient. We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world. And we will move forward to our work, not howling our regrets like slaves whipped to their burdens, but with gratitude for a task worthy of our strength, and thanksgiving to Almighty God that He has marked us as His chosen people, henceforth to lead in the regeneration of the world.27

Beveridge’s speech puts into context how the historic use of “charity begins at home” could be used to rally white Americans to see their colonial relationship to the Philippines as an honorable duty, even when and where such a duty must be forcibly imposed in the pursuit of market expansion and profit.

This imposition of charity was inseparable from empire as a racial project. Drawing on the racial discourses readily accessible to the American public at that time, Beveridge extols the virtues of a country willing to use violence to rescue the people of the Philippines,
whose inability to consent to their colonial submission was proof of their savagery:

The rule of liberty that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-government. We govern the Indians without their consent, we govern our territories without their consent, and we govern our children without their consent. How do they know what our government would be without their consent? Would not the people of the Philippines prefer the just, humane, civilizing government of this Republic to the savage, bloody rule of pillage and extortion from which we have rescued them?28

These justifications require the Philippines to be read through the absence of modern and democratic institutions to enable a benevolent American mission alongside the violence of colonialism. Written as benevolence, self-interested but also charitable, the contradictions of the giving exchange are clear. To enable the declaration of an American charitable impulse toward the Philippines, Beveridge relied on the work of “civilization” to locate Filipinos and the Philippines as among the world’s savage in both human evolution and territory.29 This colonial discourse incites white Americans to imagine the Philippines in the same way as the New World, as populated by a people incapable of self-governance, of a territory that was valuable for resource extraction and access to new markets. Charity brings abstract citizens together into nations, constructing home or the domestic in relation to foreign spaces populated by the colonial other, even when territorial divisions between domestic and foreign are obscured, such as in the forced governance of Native Americans.

The usefulness of Beveridge and his discursive and rhetorical address in studies of American empire in the current literature can be broadly characterized by three primary emphases. Scholars draw from Beveridge’s oratory and editorial oeuvre to build claims regarding the role of Asia and the Pacific in establishing American-style development and modernization, particularly in terms of territorial expansion, but also in facilitating access to international markets
for American goods and capital. Scholars use Beveridge to theorize empire through the intersections of racial formation, American colonial encounters, and the politics of immigration. Scholars also emphasize the mutual constitution of American and Filipino subjects and spaces simultaneously racialized, gendered, and sexualized in American empire.

These takeaways from the literature can also be addressed to social processes that endure and inform the relationships produced in giving and that motivate “the gift.” Historian Renato Constantino famously writes in his essay “The Miseducation of the Filipino” that “the most eloquent testimony to the success of the education for colonials which we have undergone” is the enduring myth of America’s altruism. The faith in America as the “altruistic benefactor” replaces American economic interests in the Philippines, the history of Philippine resistance to American force, and the carnage of the Philippine-American War in the education of Filipinos. Colonial formations transform in reach and scale in their contemporary presence. International relationships shaped in official development programs extend and retool the rhetorical strategies, spatialities, and temporalities of colonial rule. Forces that lead to the underdevelopment of the Philippines and structure the global order are covered over or softened by official development and contribute to the discourses that mobilize diasporic populations toward developmental goals.

The idea of official development was born in the post–World War II “project of intervention in the ‘third world’ that emerged in the context of decolonization and the cold war.” The institutions of official development such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were shaped through their professed responsibility “for ensuring a more just and equitable world order,” subjecting third-world nations and their perceived political, economic, and cultural precariousness to the standards of progress and modernity achieved by the West. Official development named and measured developing countries and proposed solutions to poverty in terms of economic growth, imposing programs of structural adjustment to stimulate export industries and deregulate financial sectors under the guidance of the World Bank and IMF. These institutions regarded macrolevels of poverty as a stage of development or a “state of
undevelopment,” dehistoricizing poverty as integral to postcolonial capitalist relations, even in its perpetuation.37

Observing the failure of official development programs, international and multilateral agencies now herald migrants and immigrants as the new development actors of the twenty-first century. Researchers working for multilateral labor and financial organizations and scholars across the disciplines have taken up issues related to diaspora development, citing the potential of giving back to homelands that circulate between homelands and diasporas.38 In working groups, conferences, policy papers, partnerships, and organizational structure of the United Nations, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Asian Development Bank, political and economic agencies tout diasporas as “a potent force for development for their countries of origin.”39 The World Bank, for example, maintains a unit implemented “to monitor and forecast remittance and migration flows, and to provide timely analysis on topics such as remittances, migration, and diaspora issues.”40

The Global Development Professionals Network, a partnership between the Guardian newspaper and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, contributes to the international representation of diaspora in the global imaginary: “Diaspora-driven development aims to explore how diaspora groups are gaining more traction as development actors.”41 USAID recognizes diaspora communities as “potentially powerful actors in international affairs and foreign assistance,” using categories such as “diaspora philanthropy,” “diaspora volunteerism,” and the curiously named “diaspora tourism and nostalgic trade” in its organizational materials.42 It includes diasporas among its list of “working partnerships,” a prospective community-based opportunity for development: “Diasporas represent a vast and diverse community that have not only powered the development of the United States, but also hold the potential for transforming developing countries around the world. . . . Whether growing businesses in India, responding to a disaster in Haiti, or supporting peacebuilding efforts in Liberia, diasporas have a uniquely important role in addressing diplomatic, development and humanitarian challenges abroad.”43 Here is a slight shift in the multicultural discourse that
has historically celebrated the contributions of immigrants to various labor sectors and industries of the United States. Instead of immigrants, it is the diasporans who power the economic growth of the country while simultaneously holding “the potential for transforming developing countries around the world.” Diaspora development, in other words, is the incorporation of diasporic-giving subjects within a global order.

Like celebratory multiculturalism and racial liberalism, this discourse of diaspora development offers minoritarian forms of inclusion within dominant nationalisms and capitalist relations. In this sense, the turn to diasporas for new development actors is the current trajectory of global capitalism, particularly in U.S.-dominated agencies and the postwar rise of neoliberalism. The rearticulation of migrant subjects from “immigrant” to “diasporic” is not necessarily a move away from the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis and toward the acknowledgment of the transnational scope of migrants’ lives but rather the resubjectivization of their roles for national development under globalization.

This book forgoes policy-oriented evaluations that measure the impact that diasporic investments, remittances, and philanthropy have or potentially have on homeland states; instead, the cultural analytics it employs disrupt the dominance of development-related categories such as “impact,” “best practices,” and “efficiency” as transparent metrics of diaspora-homeland relations. Neoliberalism redefines diaspora and homeland in relation to the market, creating “new forms of inclusion, setting apart some citizen-subjects, and creating new spaces” in diaspora and homeland development. Diaspora development discourse contributes to a political economic moment infused with logics that promote efficiency, privatization, and commodification, not only as a matter of state policy but also in everyday transnational lives.

While multilateral and international bodies work to harness diaspora-driven development from above, Filipino Americans do not necessarily accept development’s dictates in how they give back or draw meaning from their giving practices. I am primarily concerned with how Filipino American giving practices stand in opposition to neoliberal market logics and the dehistoricization of poverty. Giving back in the context of Filipino America expresses the bonds of
diaspora, ties that bind, which could undergird the hierarchies of development or challenge those terms of belonging. The complexity and contingencies of philanthropy and charity, however, are lost in the congratulatory celebration of giving back and their normalization in global capitalist economies.

Many critics note that charity and philanthropy perpetuate inequalities that are produced in capitalistic relations, which is compounded by the undertheorization of the nonprofit sector in critiques of capitalism. Drawing on Marx and Engels’s condemnation of bourgeois society, Joan Roelofs argues that the nonprofit sector enables capitalism: “Those who wish to promote change should look closely at what sustains the present system. One reason capitalism doesn’t collapse despite its many weaknesses and valiant opposition movements is because of the ‘nonprofit sector.’ Yet philanthropic capital, its investment and its distribution, are generally neglected by the critics of capitalism.” Quoting Marx and Engels, Roelofs claims that researchers have largely failed to address their points in the context of charity and philanthropy, the relations of production, and the way that sectors of the bourgeoisie are “desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society.” Safeguarding bourgeois society, philanthropy and charity guide the missions of formal organizations that deliver services or execute other programs for those in need, and, as social and cultural institutions, they promulgate dominant perceptions of society and social change. This captures the history of modern philanthropy in the United States, which originally sprang from the need of monopoly capitalists to protect their wealth.

In the first half of the twentieth century, John D. Rockefeller Sr. created his world-renowned, eponymous foundation in response to fears of the power of flourishing monopolies. In other words, the moral force and social reformism of progressivism also manufactured a system for mitigating social ills through “the application of rational social planning and scientific expertise” that provided legitimacy and purpose to these foundations. As foundation head, Rockefeller created philanthropic programs that funded research and contributed to policies that would continue to shape society according to the needs of rampant capitalist accumulation. Philanthropic foundations thus epitomize largely unregulated concentrations of
power that help maintain a global political and economic order, encouraging considerations of who or what philanthropy ultimately serves.49

Most Filipino Americans would not see their small-scale giving practices as part of the same conversation as corporate foundations or billionaire benefactors. However, values related to giving and assumptions of the unadulterated good of giving are deeply woven into the fabric of American culture and society. As seen in Beveridge, appeals to charity in the Philippines operate in the interpellation of national subjects on both sides of the Pacific. Giving in the contemporary Filipino American diaspora must be understood along with the nonprofit sector’s ability to conceal social injustice and operate as both complement and supplement to capitalism, betraying communitarian claims of the “nonprofit” as if it were singularly devoid of the violence of profit-driven institutions.50

I understand giving back in terms of frameworks for imagining social transformation and Philippine futures, inseparable from genealogies and political economies of charity, philanthropy, and development. In Fantasy-Production, Neferti Tadiar argues, “Imagination, as culturally organized social practice, is an intrinsic, constitutive part of political economy.”51 For Tadiar, fantasy-production denotes “the imaginary of a regime of accumulation and representation of universal value, under the sway of which capitalist nations organize themselves individually and collectively in the ‘system’ of the Free World.” She explains:

The dreams of Filipinos, rulers and ruled, cannot be understood apart from the global material imaginary, this dominant field of reality, on which they play out. To cast these dreams as the expressions of autonomous, self-contained Filipino subjects (whether they aspire to or resist world power) is to ignore the global order of dreamwork in which the international media system, the source of many of our interpretative representations of the world, plays a constitutive and paradigmatic role.52

Some in nonprofit studies situate charity and philanthropy at opposite poles, “the one concrete and individual, the other abstract and
institutional.” However, in aligning charity with concrete and individual practice, nonprofit studies contribute to the “ongoing pattern of denial” of American empire across the disciplines. That is, such studies ignore the cultural and political work of charitable discourse in national and imperial formations, subjectivization, and the dreamwork of the global order. Reading Beveridge’s example through Tadiar’s conceptual analysis, the telos of charity as civilizing mission can be understood as “the reconciliation of the individual with the social order.” Charity, philanthropy, and development are foundational to international and global dreamwork.

Giving Back intervenes in the reification of diasporic homeland benevolence and altruism, arguing that homeland giving practices both regulate and produce alternative Filipino American and diasporic subjects and formations. At the same time, charity, philanthropy, and development from the United States to the Philippines or from the Filipino American diaspora to the homeland do not operate solely from positions of unilateral power. Cultural studies theorizations of diaspora underscore the multidirectionality, materiality, and economies of diaspora that revise many of the assumptions of development, what it means to help, and what is gained in the processes, practices, and institutions of giving “situated against a backdrop of the global economy of giving” established in colonial, development, and philanthropic relations.

Diaspora Giving

Late modernity shapes contemporary giving practices, which nonetheless bear the material histories of colonialism, monopoly capitalist philanthropy, and official development, which in turn are infused with neoliberal emphases on personal responsibility, the privatization of social welfare, and market solutions to problems of injustice. Geographer Gillian Hart usefully differentiates official development or “big D” development from nonofficial or “small d” development, referring to the “small d” “development of capitalism as geographically uneven, [a] profoundly contradictory set of historical processes.” “The moral concern for Filipino society,” writes Tadiar, “translates into an economic concern for its competitive advancement,” an economism that structures definitions of poverty and solutions for
eradicating macrolevel suffering. Developmentalist and extractive market logics compel states and subjects to integrate into the global economy through the ethics and social relations of charity, philanthropy, and development.

The founders and leaders of Filipino American organizations I interview and whose writings I analyze bear little resemblance to the clamor of a pro-imperialist politician rallying the American public over a century ago. Previously quoted organizational leaders Lydia Tanguilig and Geraldine Bigay, in their respective use of “charity begins at home,” do not offer pleas for national unity through military and economic control of the Philippines and the colonial uplift of the Filipino people but instead evidence a keen awareness of the obligations of giving back structured by Philippine and Filipino American nationalisms. In their own ways, both display a desire to create relationships of giving, home, and belonging to counter dominant nationalisms and migrant economies; both comment on their own efforts to work with or assist communities in the Philippines as interventions in Filipinoness. Despite the forces that structure giving-related institutions in global capitalism, Filipino Americans envision giving practices and imagine Philippine futures that work within, alongside, and against the hegemony of charity, philanthropy, development, and the imperialist divisions of global space.

Shifting the object of research from development or philanthropy to diaspora giving, I examine the operations of neoliberalism and the aftermath of American empire in transnational diaspora formation. Diaspora giving endeavors to resituate questions of love (love for the homeland and the etymological roots of philanthropy, which refers to the love of humanity), homeland and home, and obligation (to families, communities, the poor, the nation) in the economies and logics of global capital. Diaspora giving and these issues of love, home, and obligation exist simultaneously with the global capitalist reproduction of poverty and U.S. militarism in the Philippines. They exist simultaneously with the racialized exploitation of Filipino laborers in international labor markets and the racialized order of the United States. Diaspora giving encompasses forces of subjection as well as alternative ways of imagining diasporic returns and Philippine futures from afar. Discursively, diaspora giving figures in broad markers of cultural authenticity for Filipinos in how giving so
frequently measures Filipinoness in diaspora. Hierarchies emerge be-
tween diaspora and homeland and between Filipino America and the 
Philippines in how the giver draws authority (or is given authority) 
through cultural values placed on American citizenship and mobil-
ity, an ironic legacy of Senator Beveridge and his ilk.

The rapidity in the increase of migration spurred by late capital-
ism coincides with shifts in the humanitarian imagination. Just as 
rates and networks of migration have created new diasporas of mo-
bile populations whose movements are guided by the transformations 
of global capital and production, such as the generalized shift in the 
United States away from intensive industrial production to service-
and finance-oriented economies, a reconfiguration in the public dis-
course of humanitarian crises has also occurred. An “international 
moral discourse” supported by the international media that connects 
local efforts to systems of international NGOs now influences how 
everyday people—those whose jobs or training are not primarily in 
NGO program management or development research—respond to 
humanitarian crises. Practices and processes related to Filipino 
American diaspora giving tell a part of this multifaceted story, at the 
very least for the zeal with which the Philippine state, development 
agencies, news media, nonprofit organizations, NGOs, and Filipino 
Americans have all taken up the language of diaspora development 
and diaspora philanthropy.

I read giving, including remittance giving, as comprising forms 
of diasporic return. In this sense, my work is a companion to Eric J. 
Pido’s book on real estate “returns,” which Filipino Americans make 
when buying land and property in the Philippines for their retirement 
years, as a growing strategy of Philippine development. In terms 
of monetary diasporic returns to the Philippines, overseas Filipinos 
send more money from the United States to family in the Philippines 
than from any other country. In terms of location, over one-third of 
all overseas Filipinos are in the United States, and they initiate the 
vast majority of philanthropic projects and medical missions to the 
Philippines. This book does not use these statistics alone to speak to 
the analytical purchase of Filipino American diaspora giving. Rather, 
it begins with the premise that diaspora development in the Global 
South is enacted and imagined through negotiations with and in re-
lation to the Global North, especially given the neocolonial alliance
between the Philippines and the United States. The exceptionalism of American empire was made through its professed commitment to benevolence; that official development in the third world was integral to U.S. cold war strategies to ensure its spread of democratic capitalism; and that philanthropy is as complementary to global capitalism today as it was to monopoly capitalism. These premises inform my critique of the power and meaning of giving back.

Nermeen Shaikh addresses the cultural work of America’s exceptionalism that mediates the contradictions of colonialism, development, and capitalism: “It must be assumed that the U.S. is always acting with good intentions, and if events unfold in such a way as to suggest otherwise, then each instance is simply a betrayal of the original intent, which is itself beyond reproach or at the very least, absolved of the worst offences.”62 “Who,” Shaikh asks, “after all, can apprehend the world, the idea of humanity, as a whole? What enables such a perspective? Who can desire to change that ‘world’?”63 Good intentions aside, historical and material conditions dictate who is and who is not allowed or encouraged to apprehend solutions to poverty or to intervene in social suffering. This book brings to light these perspectives and desires, as well as their mutability—how such perspectives and desires, such as benevolence and American exceptionalism, are transformed and mediated in migration, immigration, and diaspora.

Diaspora giving provides a lens through which to read my archive, allowing an examination of the simultaneities of unity and hierarchy, discourse and practice, the global and deeply personal, mobility and rootedness, home and abroad. Inserting Filipino Americans and the Philippines into this conversation expands not only a reflection on the forms of philanthropy that are practiced by Filipino Americans. An examination of Filipino Americans and the Philippines requires a consideration of the systemic causes of migration from the Philippines and to the United States, the structure of desires for homeland return, the economic stagnation of the Philippines, and the global maintenance of gross inequality. In this context, neocolonialism, developmentalism, and neoliberal global capitalism have normalized philanthropy as the solution to social problems: problems that neocolonialism, structural adjustment and the repayment of third-world debt, the privatization of social welfare and dismantling of the welfare
state, the normalization of corporate interests in social relations, and the violence endemic to global capitalism created, reproduce, and exacerbate. Critical scholars in transnational feminist studies, queer studies, and Asian American cultural studies cogently illustrate how power operates in the diasporic contexts of global capitalism, and my work contributes to this conversation, highlighting the developmentalist logics that pervade the discourse of giving back and its links to Filipinoness. Diaspora giving highlights the forces and processes that attempt to stabilize homeland and Filipinoness as well as the developmentalist logics of globalization—in and in the name of diaspora. This project suggests that sanctioned forms of giving back contain or circumscribe other forms of transnational responsibility, obligation, and mobility and alternative imaginings and modes of homeland return. It elaborates on the cultural elements, the socialities that are produced, and the broader implications of giving back.

This project was inspired in part by Isagani Sarmiento’s 2002 self-published book, *Re-building the Roots of a Nation*. A founder and president of a Filipino American NGO with the goal of uniting Filipino Americans in a fight against poverty in the Philippines, Sarmiento argues there can be no economic or social development in the Philippines without first addressing cultural traits of Filipinos in the Philippines. Sarmiento conveys his purview through a curious expression: “If you live in a garlic house all your life, you will smell like garlic and not know it.” The garlic house symbolizes that which prevents the Philippines from being an economically viable and independent nation. “Is the Philippines a ‘garlic house,’ or is the ‘garlic house’ within the Filipino?” he asks. Having left the Philippines to work in the United States, Sarmiento narrates himself as having escaped the damaging Philippine culture. His migration produced the ability to identify the problems of Filipinos and to help others out of their own garlic houses and out of poverty. His motivation for giving back is to teach other Filipinos that they too can learn how to do this for themselves:

Come! Let us all come out of our garlic houses, and when we are already outside [them], let us then reason together! Join me in coming out of our cages. There is our country, the Philippines, who is waiting for us to serve her. Our country needs
help to extricate our nation from its economic and political mud hole. Only those outside the “garlic house,” those who are free and independent from their cages, possess the privilege of recognizing, knowing and dealing with the “garlic” taste and smell. Let us help each other to find the right reason. Let us derive more meaning and purpose for what we do. . . . I no longer possess the wings of a caged bird, but the wings that can fly in the sky, as high as I want. From above my cage, I could see the many harmful paradigms that shaped my psyche, those that virtually caged me from being free within.

Sarmiento wants to help Filipinos in the Philippines recognize their flaws. He imagines a Filipino diaspora that is unified through service to this desire. However, the culture-of-poverty thesis of the garlic house fails to examine the concentration of land and political and economic control in the Philippines in a small handful of families or the reproduction of inequality in global capitalist relations. Sarmiento’s observations demonstrate that the “roots of the nation” produce morally differentiated spaces, developmentally arranged according to a framework of social transformation that has long shaped the hope for Philippine futures.

The context of contemporary Filipino American diaspora giving must be understood through American imperialism and genealogies of benevolence and development, global capitalism, the politics of immigration and migration, and dominant spatial and subject formations. Giving Back asks questions such as these: In what ways does giving from Filipino America articulate home (and the multiplicity of homes and homeland), duty, and benevolence in diaspora formation? Given neocolonial relations that extract labor from the Philippines in new ways for the global market, how do Filipino Americans—in relationship to Filipinos in the Philippines as well as to Filipino contract laborers in countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe—mobilize their American cultural citizenship to authorize their social-development projects in the Philippines and thus their ability to return to the homeland? Relatedly, how does the Philippine state construct differentiated diaspora-giving subjects who are amenable to American exceptionalism?
Diaspora giving points to how the space of diaspora, its emotional resonance, its role in globalized economies, and its borders are produced in and through various Filipino American transnational efforts to improve the conditions and futures of the Philippine homeland. I use the attributional noun “diaspora” rather than the adjectival “diasporic” in “diaspora giving” to privilege a deliberation on the multiplicity of giving practices, identities, and subjectivities in processes of diaspora formation. In a similar vein, this work employs the verbal noun “giving” (and not the noun “gifts”) to address the complex cultural politics that arise when organizations position themselves as not only the voice of the Filipino American community but also as authorities on social development in the Philippines. To give speaks not only to a gift that is given but also to the relationships and divisions between giver and receiver and the social, political, ethical, and economic contexts of those relationships and divisions. How Filipino American organizations negotiate those contexts and relationships tells us something about contemporary diaspora formation and discourses of Filipinoness. To give also speaks to a yielding, a giving way of a position or a force that may have at one time been seen as natural or impenetrable. Diaspora-giving critique points to the contestations of hegemonic giving institutions and logics. It marks alternative imaginaries of social transformation that disrupt normative geographies of the Global North and the Global South from the space of diaspora.

A motivating concern of this book is how giving back can stabilize overlapping systems of inequality. In this, I draw on scholars in philanthropy, nonprofit, and foundation studies such as Patricia Mooney Nickel and Angela Eikenberry, who show how the current market-based discourse of philanthropy depoliticizes the negative effects of the market that marketized philanthropy then seeks to rectify. Nickel and Eikenberry work to subject marketized philanthropy—and everything that this philanthropic practice seeks to transform in society—to a discourse about its meaning, arguing that “in order for philanthropy to instigate a transformative discourse aimed at improving everyday life, it must stand apart from the systemic causes of poverty—namely, the market and the neoliberal state.” All Filipino Americans who commit their time and resources to giving
back express a desire for transformation. I examine diaspora giving to work against not only the marketization of philanthropic relationships but also the subordination of diasporic relationships to the market and development, which confine the nature of transformation.

The chapters work together to delineate and thematize the multiple and contradictory approaches to giving back as a discourse of diasporic belonging. Chapter 1 draws attention to the Philippines as a neocolonial state, with implications for Filipino migration and for the structures that guide remittances and philanthropy from Filipinos back to the Philippines. When the state empowers its citizens to work abroad and celebrates the remittances and philanthropic returns from migrants and immigrants, it deflects attention regarding the state’s responsibility in addressing the material conditions of poverty and need. Chapter 2 historicizes the diasporic turn to social development and philanthropy as a respite from the messiness of politics. As a result of this faith in social development, social and collective issues are depoliticized, and so is the homeland orientation of diaspora. Chapter 3 works to understand the contradictions of corporate social-responsibility programs in diaspora, drawing attention to the tragically close relationship between giving to assuage or remedy social needs and profiting from the production of need. Corporate foundations and state development push diaspora toward certain approaches to giving back over others. Chapter 4 reflects on the challenges in navigating diaspora giving with a purposeful and critical sense of responsibility that takes account of the differences, places, and relationships produced by the Philippines’ remittance economy, the global recruitment of racialized and gendered Filipino care workers, the antipolitics of social development, and the neoliberal erasure of the roots of poverty.

Overview of the Book

Chapter 1 connects the frameworks presented in this Introduction to an analysis of American dream ideology in Filipino diaspora giving. The “charitable gift” of American democratic institutions marked the difference between American colonialism in the Pacific and older European empires, and the country’s dreams of exceptionalism rested on the subjectivization of the Filipino colonial body. In
more recent decades, American dream ideology incorporates Filipino subjects through moral figurations of migration and homeland returns. Emphasizing the plural form of homeland *returns* rather than a singular and definitive homeland return, I attend to the social and cultural values placed on the *economic returns* of migration, which I interpret as giving back to the homeland through philanthropy, social development, and remittances. The chapter demonstrates that expectations for non-U.S.-based Filipino migrants differ considerably from those of Filipino American immigrants. It shows that overseas Filipino labor migrants are required by both the Philippine state and national culture to provide economic remittance returns, while Filipino Americans are celebrated for their voluntary philanthropic efforts. By making remittance returns, philanthropic returns, and volunteer returns to the homeland an obligation of diasporic belonging, the Philippine state asserts that social needs can be remedied from the diaspora. In my analysis, I challenge normative valuations of overseas Filipino migrant laborers and Filipino Americans through an extended examination of homeland returns. I argue that these two figures of Filipino migration and mobility are mutually constituted and deployed through discourses, institutions, and practices of “doing good”—a dominant formation that relies on norms and relationships of beneficence, morality, and sacrifice.

Chapter 2 proposes a countercritique that actively attends to the political consequences of migration for diaspora. A consequence of contemporary migration is that political and social commitments are channeled primarily to the homeland and not toward the Filipino American’s home in the United States. Filipino Americans are conditioned to split their diasporic practice from the transnational forces that tie the United States to the Philippines, Filipinos in the United States to Filipinos elsewhere in the diaspora, and Filipinos in the United States to other racialized and exploited peoples in the places where they live. U.S.-based Filipina novelist, journalist, activist, and organizer Ninotchka Rosca refers to this phenomenon as the bifurcation of transnational lives, and this chapter utilizes her commentary as a springboard to develop a critique of dominant homeland orientation for Filipino American diaspora giving. The chapter turns to the history of martial law in the Marcos-era Philippines to contextualize Filipino American homeland orientation since the 1970s.
and discusses how a dominant Filipino American homeland orientation, given meaning through its antipolitics, emerged immediately after the fall of Ferdinand Marcos. I analyze how Rosca’s political discourse disorients dominant homeland orientation and the force of developmentalism.

Chapter 3 deconstructs a dominant discourse of poverty in Filipino American diaspora giving: the normalization of market solutions to poverty and inequality. To display the limits of developmentalist discourse introduced in dominant diaspora-giving frameworks of social transformation in Chapter 2, I read the self-representation of the Ayala Foundation and the Ayala Foundation USA (now called Philippine Development Foundation) and their significant contributions to shaping Filipino American diaspora philanthropy. I contend that the diaspora giving promoted by these foundations consolidates this dominant discourse of poverty with a corporate sense of responsibility. I point to Ayala’s dominance in the Philippine economy, bringing attention to the role corporate conglomerates play in the creation of poverty, to indicate how the discourse on poverty engaged by Ayala Foundation USA cannot account for the rich getting so much richer in neoliberal capitalism. Chapter 3 contextualizes the ideological work performed by the corporate foundations and considers the material implications of their ideals and practices regarding the politics of Filipino American diaspora giving.

Chapter 4 offers another example of counterhegemonic diaspora-giving practice. I analyze the Philippine environment to guide the critique toward a transnational ecological mindedness that connects the urgency of responses compelled by environmental disaster to diasporic frameworks of social transformation that account for the production of third-world vulnerability and the reproduction of poverty in global capital. In this homeland reorientation, one would account for the genealogy of developmentalism in the Philippines and chart responsibility that stems from the hierarchies of global capitalism. The first part of the chapter considers a tendency to narrate the environmental space of the Philippines through its beauty and the consequence of this tendency for diaspora giving. The chapter then turns to an examination of the Filipino/American Coalition for Environmental Solidarity (FACES), a U.S.-based environmental-justice organization originally founded to bring attention and reparations
to the environmental devastation wrought by the former U.S. military bases in the Philippines. I argue that FACES disorients dominant diaspora-giving practices by connecting environmental issues in the Philippines to environmental issues in the United States and elsewhere. FACES imagines counterhegemonic ways of giving that address the inequalities that diaspora giving, in the abstract, purportedly sets itself to combat.

The Epilogue is a brief rumination on the messiness of diasporic return and the affective forces that drive Filipino Americans toward action. “Love” serves as a mantra for many diaspora-giving organizations and projects, but this idea of love requires that critical attention be paid to how such complex expressions of loyalty, intimacy, and attachment translate in the institutionalization and practice of diaspora giving. I end the book by narrating how the idea for this project began. I turn to its origin story, so to speak, to show that diaspora giving, for me, has always been about the dreams, limitations, and ineffability of love.