

Reina Hernandez
JPNT 177
December 18, 2019
Final Project Self-Critique

Inspired by class discussions centered around themes of identity, memory, family, and what it means to be Japanese, “Ako Si” (which translates into “I am” in Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines) is an approximately six-minute video about Lita Perdon. Born in August 1943 in the Philippines, Lita Perdon is currently an American citizen and the video creator’s grandmother. The video was edited together from a recorded interview with Lita, in which Reina, the interviewer and director, asks Lita about her father. Though Lita is an American citizen and speaks English, the entire video and interview is conducted in Tagalog, her native language – the language Lita feels most comfortable in. The recorded interview spans roughly about an hour, but is compressed into a six-minute video to portray themes of memory, childhood, and how does Lita self-identify as a mixed woman of color who immigrated to the United States from the Philippines. Moreover, Lita’s relationship with her father, Fausto Noma, serves as the guiding topic in the interview and video.

As can be seen in the video and Lita’s emotional temperament when talking about her father, Fausto Noma has always been an enigma. Though he was present in her early childhood, her parents had separated and her dad had left them behind. When asked about it, Lita never knew her dad had left them, and she admitted that they never had a close relationship. Her only memories of him are of the days she’d visit him at the store asking for some allowance. Though her father had been absent from most of her life and she did not know much about him and his family, Lita still keeps a photo of him in her wallet and still tries to connect to her Japanese heritage by researching the name Noma on Google, in hopes of finding possible relatives. She realizes, however, that because her father is dead and she doesn’t know any one else on her dad’s side of

the family, who her family is remains a mystery that she might never find a resolution to. Nonetheless, she holds on to his photo and the memories she has of him. She refers to herself as Filipino-Japanese American – Filipino-Japanese by blood, and American by nationality. In her heart, however, she feels mixed and not *one* identity.

Opening with an instrumental of “Body and Soul” by Coleman Hawkins, the audience is introduced to Lita as she walks through her backyard. Throughout the video as she speaks, she lets herself be vulnerable, having moments to pause and reflect and tear up a little. She also speaks easily and laughs from time to time with jokes, indicating her comfort with the person she’s speaking with and the camera. One of the video’s strongest features is allowing Lita to speak – the interviewer doesn’t lead or fill in for the speaker. Though Lita doesn’t extrapolate or share too much, the questions asked are open ended enough for her story to slowly shine through. The end result is a series of vignettes of Lita’s thoughts, reflections, and memories of the father she didn’t really know. Through these questions and conversations, Lita begins to construct who her father was, and in doing so reflects on who she is and ways she can connect to a culture and side of her family she didn’t get many chances to know.

Although the narrative is strong, the video has a few technical errors or areas of negligence. For example, more b-roll could have been incorporated throughout the video. The video opens with some b-roll and establishing shots, and continuing this streak could help with amplifying the viewers’ experience of constructing who Lita is, constructing Fausto, and constructing the video’s narrative arc. For example, the video includes Lita going through a photo album and then showing the wallet sized image of her father. The video then concludes with Lita placing her wallet back into her purse and then closes it. It serves as a potentially strong symbol and image that could have been further explored in the middle section of the video. Other technical aspects of the video that

could be improved upon include evening out the sound levels throughout the interview (such as lowering Reina's voice, and amplifying Lita's) as well as removing the white noise in the background. Though the lighting and white balance is decent throughout the video, it doesn't stay consistent and some simple color corrections would create a more finished, cohesive look. Lastly, more things could have been explored through the use of music.

To conclude, "Ako Si" carries plays to the emotions and vulnerability of Lola, its speaker. She speaks genuinely and comfortably, allowing for her story, her ruminations, hopes, wishes, and questions to flow through. Part of this is due to her comfort with the person she's speaking to, and she's speaking in her native language. As a result, she doesn't have to think as much about her words and can focus on her storytelling. Though there are a few technical things and negligences throughout the video, they are minor and do not distract from the message and sentiment of the video. It would be super interesting to see a follow up video, or another video including the rest of this interview, as there is much more to see and hear from Lita. The b-roll in the beginning only offers a bit into her personality, and it would be intriguing to see more of her personality shine through as she tackles these questions of what it means to be Filipino-Japanese American and what it means to be a mixed woman of color. Lastly, her aches and questions for her family's mystery offers an avenue for further exploration, and possibly an imagined reconstruction of who her family might be had she had more information.