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About Alon

The mission of *Alon* is to provide an on-line forum for publishing original essays, artwork, reviews, and moderated reflections that productively and critically engage with Filipinx American and Filipinx Diasporic Studies. Its founding home is the Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies at the Department of Asian American Studies at the University of California, Davis. Its publisher is Escholarship, an open-access e-journal platform hosted by the University of California. *Alon* is e-published three times a year: in March, July, and November.



About the Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies

The Bulosan Center's mission draws from the life's work of Carlos Bulosan, worker, writer and activist. We produce, preserve, and disseminate knowledge about the Filipinx experience in the United States and the broader diaspora. Our research and education programs are driven by our close partnerships with community-based organizations. We focus particularly on the most marginalized, underserved, and vulnerable populations in the Filipino community. <https://bulosancenter.ucdavis.edu>.



Title - *Battlefield I*
Jenifer K Wofford

About the Cover

Left half of the diptych “Battlefield I + II”; both halves are highly stylized schematics of a basketball court. From the Portals and Battlefields series, 2022. More information in the Leese Street Studio section.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE



We launch ALON's third year as an online academic journal—the first of its kind in our field—with so much excitement and celebration, as we continue to receive words of interest, encouragement, and recognition from our valued collectives and individual enthusiasts. There is so much to bask in and look forward to, and all of us involved in producing ALON are so appreciative and delighted. At the same time, beseeching your permission for us to be candid and reflexive, we're also quite weary from the exacting responsibilities of journal publication and anxious about our survival as a small-staffed crew of committed (mostly, volunteer) workers navigating what for us are the high stakes and costs of sustaining our ALON communities of scholars, artists, writers, readers, and supporters in ways that will enrich and deepen our field. So far, each issue has been, and continues to be, an exhilarating and labor-intensive tightrope walk whose eventual product, just like most text-based works, constitute stuff that fills us with pride and joy, but also conceals the conditions under which all of our work was produced.

Saying these is not intended to invite a profusion of mercy for the work we do; it is rather to provide you with a glimpse into the otherwise hidden labor of journal production that may partially or fully explain why an issue has been delayed or why certain sections are missing or only partially filled. For a young journal that's still trying to find its steps at just under three years old, ALON does not yet

possess a robust trove of manuscripts on its back burner, or an editorial staff that has been stably emplaced, or a funding structure that's been sufficiently endowed to last for many years ahead. Of course, we hope to get there someday, and we remain positive that ALON will, with your continued support of, and care for, our field and collective.

ALON's lone article for this issue confronts the complexities and oftentimes indeterminate conditions of performing research fieldwork as itself an exercise in observing ethical responsibility. Andi T. Remoquillo offers a thoughtful proposal here, from a Filipina American feminist critique, that may help us navigate through arduous questions that touch on values, research methodologies, and the enterprise of writing about others.

Our featured artist in Leese Street Studio is Jenifer K Wofford, someone whose eye-catching and thought-provoking work I've personally seen and experienced. Do pay attention to the constellations of history, memory, and patterns of uneven disruptions and flows in their choices of colors and line, and you'll see what I mean. In Reviews, we have a solid line-up of engaging and provocative writings from three genres: Marianne Chan's book of poetry, *All Heathens* (thoughtfully reviewed by editor Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr. through a conversation he held with her); Gina K. Velasco's *Queering the Global Filipina Body: Contested Nationalism in the Filipina/o Diaspora, a cultural studies take on nationalisms across transnational sites and their disruptions*; and M. Evelina Galang's *Lola's House: Filipino Women Living with War*, her latest "creative nonfiction" work that tackles the fraught histories of Filipino "comfort women" during World War II. Forum opens with yet another collection of stimulating ideas rounded up by editor Joseph Allen Ruanto-Ramirez, and features Michael Viola's ruminations "On Filipinx: Who Gets to Name Whom?"; Stacey

Salinas and Angel Trazo’s account of a conference paper presentation on the complexities of “The Asian Baby Girl Through a Filipina American Lens”; and insightful notes from a conference panel on “The Celine Archive: Decolonial and Feminist Approaches to Filipina Lives,” skillfully transcribed and edited by Rachael Joo.

We have some transitions in ALON beginning with this issue: Angel Trazo, our layout designer, has moved on to other ventures, and will be replaced by Keezia Dotimas; Jean Vengua, our copy editor, is also working on other opportunities for her writing and art. Our new copy editor is Anna Alves. Thank you so much Angel and Jean, and welcome to ALON, Keezia and Anna!

Wishing you all a happy and invigorating read!

Rick Bonus
University of Washington

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THE PROBLEM WITH KAPWA: CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS OF COMMUNITY, SAMENESS, AND UNITY IN FILIPINA AMERICAN FEMINIST FIELDWORK

Andi T. Remoquillo

ABSTRACT

This article brings into question the ethics of conducting feminist research on and with Filipina American women as a Filipina American researcher. Through identifying and challenging the assumptions of *kapwa*—a “pillar” of Filipino cultural values that refers to viewing the “self-in-the-other”¹—I ask, how does one research communities they have deep and personal stakes in without reproducing the existing “fissures and hierarchies of power” existing in Filipinx American studies?² Drawing from personal experiences of navigating research-participant conflict during fieldwork, I center this methodological question to interrogate the affective assumptions of sameness and unity amongst Fil-Ams in diaspora and to address what responsibilities we might have as Fil-Am feminist researchers to challenge such assumptions in our research and writing. In order to center women’s complex lived experiences and disrupt positivist, static representations of Filipinx American diaspora, *kapwa* must be reimagined as a critical standpoint and “sameness” de-centered through the feminist methodological tool of critical self-reflection.

INTRODUCTION

I first learned to identify sameness through my deep familiarity

¹ Reyes, Jeremiah, “Loób and Kapwa: An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics.” *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2015): 149.

² Bonus, Rick and Antonio Tiongson (Eds.), *Filipinx American Studies: Reckoning, Reclamation, Transformation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022)

with difference. I understood my brownness as defined by being neither White or Black, and that “Filipino” was perceived as not Asian “enough” since “Asian” really meant Chinese or Japanese (according to my predominantly White friends and classmates). Difference became the default state of existence as I grew up in the Chicago suburbs, and it seemed to determine the ways in which I was oriented—distanced—from those around me. On the other hand, sameness came in the form of recognition: recognizing another Filipino American family across the restaurant, or hearing a familiar accent that I learned to solely associate with my parents and lola who lived with us. On most occasions, my recognition was met with their own: we saw each other, or perhaps, we felt that we saw ourselves in each other. During my time at graduate school, I would learn that this feeling of recognition amongst other Filipinos was called *kapwa*. While these moments of experiencing sameness felt few and far in between, they held deep emotional components and spoke a great deal about how Filipinx³ Americans’ search for sameness is rooted in hopes of countering internal struggles of difference and disconnection. I see the same patterns of yearning for recognition across generations, and I begin a discussion on *kapwa* as a Filipina American researcher with my personal memories as a way to reflect on how our everyday emotions and longings shape the fields we step in and out of as researchers.

Although she was still too young to fully grapple with the meanings of ethnic identity and sameness, one of my favorite stories about my niece Ada is when she was two years old and saw a Filipino family on a beach in South Carolina while vacationing with my sister-in-law’s family. Ada’s dad (my second older brother) is a second-generation Filipino American like myself; his wife is a White American who grew up outside of Columbus, Ohio, where they currently live. Despite Ada’s attempts to rebel against any rules put in place by my brother, she shares his dark brown-black hair, round brown eyes, tan complexion, and endless excited energy with a good helping of stubbornness (traits my mom insists come from her Waray ancestry). Their

³ I use variations of the term Filipino/Filipino American (i.e. “Filipina” or “Filipinx”). “Filipino” is used when I am talking generally about culture, or when referring to texts that intentionally used “Filipino.” “Filipinx” is always paired with “Americans” as a gender-neutral way of referring to people in the United States diaspora, and “Filipina” (or Pinay) when I’m referring to a self-identifying woman of Filipino descent.

small town of Lancaster is predominantly White, conservative, and working- to middle-class, with their family being the only non-White/interracial family in their neighborhood. This all goes to show that my niece had (and has) very little exposure to other non-White children such as herself, outside of her visits to Illinois where her Filipino American relatives live.

For this reason, my sister-in-law—a very caring woman who always embraced our family’s cultural differences with compassion—was both surprised and humored when Ada ran to a group of brown people on the beach in South Carolina, inserting herself into their afternoon picnic with such ease and comfort. “I was a little mortified,” she said with laughter. “We had no idea who they were, and then some random little girl just runs up to them thinking she knows them, like that’s her family!” It wasn’t until my brother and his wife spoke to the other family that they learned they were also, in fact, Filipino Americans. Ada’s seemingly intuitive comfort around other Filipinos garnered amusement, adoration, and an unanticipated moment of cultural camaraderie on the beach. Upon hearing this story at the kitchen table, my mom and I laughed as she said, “I can’t believe she recognized that they were Filipino! She must have thought that because they looked like us, she knew them.” After the laughter died down my mom continued to say, “I guess that’s a pretty typical Filipino thing though... always saying ‘hi’ even if we don’t know each other. I’m just surprised she recognized that already.”

I was also familiar with the unspoken practice of giving a smile, hello, or “Are you Filipino?” when coming across another Fil-Am in the store, classroom, or non-family social gathering. I came to intellectualize this cultural characteristic after learning about *kapwa*, a concept popularized by psychologist Virgilio Enriquez in the 1970s to explain Filipinos’ interpersonal behaviors as rooted in an internal view of another not as separate from ourselves, but connected through a “shared self.” Similar to my niece, I remember the first time I saw another Fil-Am girl in my predominantly white elementary school in the Chicago suburbs and the excitement I felt when realizing I wasn’t the only Filipino at our school. I immediately approached her during recess and asked if she wanted to be friends. During our first playdate her mom made us *lumpia* and *torta*; for some reason, this is the only part of the hours spent together I can actually

remember. However, after my mom picked me up, met Marie's mom, and drove us back to our house she told me that Marie seemed like a nice girl, but she wasn't sure if we should keep being friends outside of school. Upset and confused, I asked her why: "Her family is different from ours," she explained. Although I still couldn't understand my mom's desire to distance her family from theirs, she remained steadfast in her decision. For reasons of her own, my mother had assumptions about our differences that ended the playdates with Marie.

The memory of hearing about Ada's adorable mistake and the one of my last playdates with Marie now exist in juxtaposition, illuminating the dark underbelly of 'typical' Filipino behavior and the assumptions of community, sameness, and unity that comes with it. On the one hand, it's 'typical' – and perhaps even expected – for complete strangers to warmly embrace the other as a friend, or to at least acknowledge each other as a fellow member of the Filipino American diaspora. In private, however, unspoken divisions rooted in classism, colorism, homophobia, etc. highlight the ways in which ethnic-sameness is complicated by the internalization of Western colonialism and its practices for enforcing (dis)empowerment. Put simply: Filipino cultural values, such as *kapwa*, are rooted in a strong belief in community, but when left unchallenged, they can also be the source of intra-community conflict. Without a critical interrogation of what *kapwa* actually means or looks like in practice, solutions for healing from histories of colonization, assimilation, and the power-laden hierarchies within the Filipino American diaspora are limited.

In this article I explore and challenge the assumptions of *kapwa* in our daily lives and in the field as Filipinx American researchers. My ultimate goal is to propose a new understanding of *kapwa* outside of the traditional frameworks of Filipino Psychology or Filipino Virtue Ethics, which treat *kapwa* as a defining characteristic of a homogenously defined Filipino identity. Rather, I draw from feminist methodologies to conceptualize *kapwa* as a critical positioning that de-centers sameness when working with other Filipina American women. Such a methodology, I argue, requires deep introspection and an interrogation of what Philippine personhood really entails.

In this discussion I conduct a literature review of *kapwa* and detail their contributions and limitations; I then bring

in scholarship on feminist methodologies that call for critical self-reflection and standpoint epistemologies. As I discuss in the literature review, feminist theory directly challenges the universality of knowledge production (which I argue is present in the literature on *kapwa*), and can disrupt assumptions of sameness in the field. Following this trajectory and the actions of feminist researchers before me, I place myself under a speculative scope as I reflect on a personal experience of conflict with a research participant that was in large part caused by my internalized assumptions of sameness based on an imagined notion of Filipina American womanhood. By discussing my own methodological mistakes, I hope to exemplify how intentional research methods are central to producing innovative scholarship that highlights the complexities of Filipinx American identity and the field.

I began to think more critically about the implications of *kapwa*, community, and diaspora when conducting fieldwork for my dissertation on the Filipina American diaspora in Chicago, a project deeply rooted at the intersection of Asian American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies. Overall, I worry about the dangerous implications that 'sameness' has when conducting feminist research in Filipinx American Studies, specifically the danger of replicating an over-romanticized view of a diasporic community that does not always challenge power dynamics in the field, but simply masks it. This would be the complete opposite of what I originally set out to do in my research on Filipina American women in the Chicago metro area — an ethnic, gendered, and geographical community that I identify as belonging to. However, one's belongingness to the communities they research can become an assumption when there is not enough critical interrogation on how community is defined in the first place. These assumptions can lead to the reproduction of systemic violence and further marginalize or exploit the women that I interact with and analyze — women that I may see myself as similar to, but whose own intersectional identities and life experiences make them inherently different than me.

As an "intimate insider,"⁴ how do I translate my belongingness to that community as I step into the role as a researcher? Cultural studies scholar Jodie Taylor describes the interrelation dynamics between a researcher and those they research when

⁴Jodie Taylor, "The Intimate Insider: Negotiating the Ethics of Friendship When Doing Insider Research," *Qualitative Research*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2011): 3-22.

friendship becomes a factor shaping fieldwork, particularly when it comes to “the liberties that friends take with each other; their sometimes insightful gazes; their sometimes myopic familiarity; their choices between honesty and flattery; and their levels of reciprocity among other things.”⁵ What boundaries should be made as to not overly blur the lines between myself and my interviewees, subsequently masking the always-existing power dynamics that are at play in the field? How can I apply feminist methodologies in “the field” when that field becomes the Filipina American diaspora—a concept, feeling, and history rather than a physical location?

When conducting interviews with other second-generation Filipina American women in the Chicago metro area, I had to ask myself, “What does an anti-racist, feminist methodology look like when conducting research that I see myself intimately implicated in?” I used to believe that by sharing an identity with those I wrote about, I could more easily conduct feminist research the “right” way. Our shared identity would allow me to speak with them, not for them; I wouldn’t just be representing their stories, but our stories. Perhaps, I thought, sharing an identity with my participants would prevent me from playing the same God Trick produced by Whiteness within the academy—my sameness would protect me from being a voyeuristic outsider peeping into marginalized communities without representing them in nuanced, multidimensional ways.⁶

However, during the first few weeks of conducting interviews I quickly learned that having an (assumed) shared identity presented an even more urgent need to recognize my responsibility as a researcher producing scholarship on an already under-represented community; I needed to pay even closer attention to the ways in which power is always at play when conducting interviews, even when bonding over shared experiences with sexism, racism, and immigrant family life veiled those power dynamics. Furthermore, I learned that an important part of conducting feminist research on one’s own community requires a conscious introspection of any internalized beliefs of a homogenous dias-

⁵ Taylor, “The Intimate Insider,” 4.

⁶ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599; Juanita Sundberg, “Masculinist Epistemologies and the Politics of Fieldwork in Latin Americanist Geography,” *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2003): 180–190.

poric identity.

DEMYSTIFYING THE FILIPINO ORIENTATION & SIKOLOHIYANG PILIPINO

In recent years, scholars writing in and on the field of Filipinx American Studies have increasingly challenged homogenous understandings of “Filipino”/x American identity, or what American studies scholar Martin Manalansan refers to as “Philippine peoplehood.”⁷ According to Manalansan, this new wave of scholars signals the “Filipino turn” in Asian American studies, as well as a rising critical mass of Filipinx American activist and artists who share a strong commitment to and investment in the project of Filipinx American Studies.⁸ However, Manalansan warns against treating this Filipino turn as simply a cause for celebration and instead urges scholars to use this as “an occasion to grapple with existing intellectual fissures and structural hierarchies that have animated and continue to animate the field.”⁹ Similarly, when challenging *hiya*—another cultural value in Filipino Virtue Ethics (FVE) that roughly translates to social shame or guilt—Manalansan argues that any monolithic notion of a national character or identity becomes “a particularly ‘Filipino’ problematic character flaw, an ingredient for a putative national personality trait, and a collective feeling caused by some deficiency or lack.”¹⁰ I understand this “lack” or “deficiency” as related to displacement in a postcolonial landscape, both in the Philippines and in diaspora. However, rather than completely doing away with *hiya*, or any other term that seeks to encapsulate the “meaning” of Philippine peoplehood, Manalansan urges us to think of a more productive use of such terms, one that involves “a sensitivity to agents and contexts.”¹¹ Following this epistemological approach allows me to reflect on memories of my niece, my childhood classmate, my mom, and my present-day research through a more inquisitive lens that reframes *kapwa* as an emotional positioning, and not a cultural value. *Kapwa* can therefore be more accurately described as a search for oneself in another in response to feelings of isolation, confusion, and disconnection from one’s Filip-

⁷ Martin Manalansan, “Unpacking *Hiya*: (Trans)national ‘Traits’ and the (Un)making of Filipinxness” in *Filipinx American Studies: Reckoning, Reclamation, Transformation*, edited by Rick Bonus and Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr. (pp. 362-369, New York: Fordham University Press, 2022), 362.

⁸ Bonus and Tiongson, “Filipinx American Critique: An Introduction” in *Filipinx American Studies: Reckoning, Reclamation, Transformation*, edited by Rick Bonus and Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2022), 11.

⁹Ibid, 11.

¹⁰ Manalansan, “Unpacking *Hiya*,” 364.

¹¹ Ibid., 367.

inx/o/a identity.

Following this trajectory, my present analysis of *kapwa* and its limitations is meant to highlight the need for Filipinx American studies to think deeper about our approach to conducting research on and in diaspora, beginning with the work of feminist researchers whose innovative methodologies disrupted masculinist practices across disciplines. While Filipinx American studies is becoming increasingly intersectional and transnational, scholarship concerning the Filipino American diaspora and history often engage with gender in relation to labor (i.e., the feminization and exploitation of overseas Filipino workers) or roles in a heteropatriarchal family (i.e. mothers as guardians of their children), but not always as a methodological and epistemological lens that calls for the critical self-reflection of researchers ourselves.

In contrast to Manalansan's call for an interrogation of Philippine Peoplehood, the dominating literature surrounding *kapwa* has not taken a critical positioning towards the assumption of sameness. I first learned about *loób* and *kapwa* when conducting research on Filipino American Postcolonial Studies, which was also one of my first introductions to work on the Filipinx American diaspora. The oversimplified English translation of *kapwa* ("another person") does not adequately describe the cultural significance of the term. In more non-academic spaces, *kapwa* has increasingly become a popular theme in Filipinx American social media platforms, branding, and marketing. For Filipinx American content creators on platforms such as Instagram, the concept of *kapwa* is represented as a unique feature of Filipino American community practices and diasporic identity that sets us apart from other Asian Americans. *Loób* refers to one's "relational will" towards another, or *kapwa*. When in practice, *kapwa* can be more accurately understood as a feeling of an inseparable, spiritual connection to others in the community. In order to better grasp how Filipinx Americans engage with *kapwa* (as a phrase, conscious practice, or behavior), we must first understand the historical and institutional roots from which the concept emerged.

Although *kapwa* first emerged during pre-Spanish colonization, the most common understandings of *kapwa* are based

on Virgilio Enriquez's construction of Sikolohiyang Pilipino, or Filipino Psychology, which "is anchored on Filipino thought and experience as understood from a Filipino perspective."¹² The core of Sikolohiyang Pilipino is *kapwa* and it is used to describe "the Filipino personality" as always shaped by interpersonal values and social interactions. Similarly, Filipino Virtue Ethics (developed out of a Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective) interprets *kapwa* as "together with the person" and is positioned as one of the foundational pillars that aims to support a "special collection of virtues dedicated to the strengthening and preserving human relationships" in Filipino culture.¹³

After receiving his master's and doctoral degrees in Psychology from Northwestern University, Enriquez returned to the Philippines in 1971 with the goal of decolonizing Western psychology that led to "the native Filipino invariably [suffering] from the comparison [to American categories and standards] in not too subtle attempts to put forward Western behavior patterns as models for the Filipino." Alternatively, Sikolohiyang Pilipino focuses on "identity and national consciousness, social awareness and involvement, psychology of language and culture, and applications and bases of Filipino psychology in health practices, agriculture, art, mass media, religion" and more.¹⁴ Enriquez also drew from indigenous techniques of healing, religion, politics, and more to conceptualize the Filipino Orientation of Sikolohiyang Pilipino.¹⁵

According to Enriquez, while Filipino behavior has been studied and interpreted by Western institutions for centuries, these interpretations are always-already informed by histories of domination and have either reinforced Orientalist notions of Filipino infantilization or ignored the unique cultural factors in the Philippines that creates the Filipino Orientation. Therefore, the Filipino Orientation stresses an "indigenization from within" that is "based on assessing historical and socio-cultural realities, understanding the local language, unraveling Filipino characteristics, and explaining them through the eyes of the native Filipi-

¹²Rogelia Pe-Pua and Elizabeth Protacio-Marcelino, "Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino psychology): A legacy of Virgilio G. Enriquez," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2000): 2.

¹³Jeremiah Reyes, "Loób and Kapwa : An Introduction to a Filipino Virtue Ethics," *Asian Philosophy*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2015): 149, 151; Virgilio G. Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1992), 57.

¹⁴Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, "Sikolohiyang Pilipino," 53

¹⁵Ibid., 53.

no.”¹⁶

Similarly, Jeremiah Reyes wrote about Filipino Virtue Ethics (FVE) as a “revised interpretation” of twentieth century American scholarship produced on Filipino values. Such an interpretation was necessary after American social scientists observed Filipino behavior without a deeper cultural and historical understanding of the Philippines. For example, American anthropologist, Frank Lynch, coined the term “smooth interpersonal relationships” when describing “the greatest value of Filipino culture.”¹⁷ However, Lynch’s seemingly positive evaluation of Filipino culture and behavior exemplifies the historically White-centricity of Western social sciences and the reproduction of colonialist perspectives of Filipino people as willing subjects of Western colonization whose presumed submissiveness and docility created harmonious relationships between Filipinos and their colonial aggressors. Reyes instead points to the ways in which Filipino cultural values are a product of Southeast Asian tribal and animist traditions and the traditions of Spanish colonial culture that lasted for over 300 years. In contrast to Enriquez, however, Reyes does not place a critical lens on Western colonialism, which can be noted through his tendency to refer to Spanish colonizers as passing on their “traditions” to the native Filipinos, and not violently erasing the existing cultures of the islands and replacing it with their own religious, educational, and political institutions that disrupted family and community networks.

The persistence of kapwa in and outside of scholarly spaces illustrates the impact of Enriquez’s work nearly fifty years after *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* was established, and I want to acknowledge the importance and power of studying the emotive processes that organize our interpersonal connection and identity-formation, something that I think both Enriquez and Reyes aim to do in at least some ways.¹⁸ However, my feminist critiques of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* and FVE’s conceptualization of kapwa targets their homogenization of Filipino culture, identity, and behavior through the concept of the Filipino Orientation and a

¹⁶ Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, 51.

¹⁷ Frank Lynch, “Philippine values II: Social acceptance,” *Philippine Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1962): 89.

¹⁸ In more recent years, kapwa has transcended academic borders and become increasingly popularized in Filipinx American popular culture. Filipinx American social media influencers, tattoo studios, yoga collectives, and more have used kapwa to promote themselves and their brand as dedicated to Filipino culture, traditions, and history.

reliance on “the native Filipino.” While I believe that decolonizing the social sciences and humanities to revise Orientalist constructions of Filipino culture is a necessary task, I take issue with the over-romanticizing of a “native” perspective that constructs indigeneity in universalist terms and the tendency to portray Filipinos born and/or still living in the Philippines as the only “authentic” producers of cultural knowledge.

For example, *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* stresses that part of our socialization is “being sensitive to non-verbal cues, having concern for the feelings of others, being truthful but not at the expense of hurting others’ feelings” that result in an “indirect pattern of communication of Filipinos.”¹⁹ However, Enriquez suggests that the Westernized Filipino is “impatient” with this mode of communication (due to their cultural detachment from the native Filipino perspective) and is therefore insensitive to such non-verbal cues. Enriquez also uses this to describe “the great cultural divide” caused by Westernized Filipinos’ elitism and apparent rejection of all things Filipino.²⁰ Therefore, the Westernized Filipino (such as the Filipino American) is unable to truly understand or feel *kapwa*. However, conflating Filipinx Americans’ Westernization with elitism or cultural ignorance ignores the ways that Filipinx experience identity, self, and community differently based on one’s geographic location. Using his theory of “positions in process,” ethnic studies scholar Rick Bonus argues that Filipinx identity is never singular, and that Filipinx American identity must be understood as a spatial and temporal negotiation.²¹ The “cultural ignorance” and disconnection Enriquez critiques are not voluntary; rather, they are the direct products of socio-emotional pressures of assimilating to the dominant culture, intergenerational trauma, and internalized perceptions of Filipino inferiority/Western superiority.

Additionally, Filipino Psychology and FVE are predominantly male-dominated and adopt a gender-neutral approach when defining *kapwa* as a racial or ethnic construct. In reality, identity is an intersectional experience shaped by one’s gender, socio-economic class, geographical positioning and more. While colonization negatively impacted all Filipinos, the introduction of

¹⁹ Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino, “*Sikolohiyang Pilipino*,” 56.

²⁰ Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, 22.

²¹ Rick Bonus, *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 7.

Western heteropatriarchy was particularly damaging for women and girls who occupied a “displaced position” as second-class citizens in the Philippines and the Filipino diaspora.²² Therefore, I argue that the scholarship dominating conversations about kapwa are illustrative of how ethnic-sameness is treated as the organizing category for understanding Filipino interpersonal behaviors and cultural norms, while ignoring the ways in which women and girls experience Filipino culture as subjects of heteropatriarchy.

In the Filipino American diaspora, Filipina immigrant women and their contributions to uplifting Filipino culture in the United States have been recorded as directly tied to their roles as dutiful wives and attentive mothers who raise children in accordance to “respectable” Filipino behavior.²³ As feminist scholars have showcased, however, Filipina American girls continue to experience higher pressures to behave in respectable manners through hyper-surveillance of their sexuality and expectations to silently obey their parents’ orders. Such gendered disparities in parenting is one of the most persistent ways that Filipino immigrants have countered Orientalist notions of Filipina women’s alleged hypersexuality and immorality.²⁴ In turn, women and girls are expected to carry quite a heavy load when it comes to not only cultural preservation, but ethnic representation when faced with the threats of Western colonialism and White supremacy. Therefore, without a critical understanding of how masculinist standpoints dominate narratives of the Filipino orientation and experience, methodological approaches to conducting research and understandings of kapwa fail to adequately and accurately represent women’s experiences in diaspora.

POSITIONALITY AND THE GOD TRICK: FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS INTO POSITIVIST METHODOLOGIES

Feminist scholars have developed their own set of methodologies to challenge the heteropatriarchal gaze and positivism that dominated research in the humanities and social sciences; while traditional schools of thinking in psychology favor measur-

²² Lou Collette S. Felipe, “The Relationship of Colonial Mentality with Filipina American Experiences with Racism and Sexism,” *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2016): 25.

²³ Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans. A Pictorial Essay / 1763-Circa-1963* (Seattle: Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, 1983), 147.

²⁴ Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 157.

able, quantitative data to understand behavior, feminists have promoted qualitative methods. Since the 1980s, feminists collaborated, debated, and disagreed as they attempted to create a new set of ethical research practices that could produce “authentic” feminist scholarship, or scholarship that was produced by women and for women with the intention of challenging the masculinist and positivist representations of The Human Experience, a universalist construction of human relations and society through the perspective of a select few.²⁵ I argue that drawing from these interventions can disrupt the male-dominated narratives and methodologies surrounding Filipino culture and kapwa.

Urban planning and policy scholar Shirley Hune explains, “In Asian American Studies, race is the organizing category and the master narrative remains male-centered. Hence, the historical significance of women is rendered invisible when their lives, interests, and activities are subsumed within or considered to be the same as those of men.”²⁶ In the same trajectory, other anti-racist feminists developed their own methods for conducting ethical research by engaging with an intersectional lens that not only addressed the gendering, racialization, and sexualization that informed the positions of their research subjects, but also encouraged researchers themselves to reflect on how their intersectional identities rearranged the centers and margins of the communities they were working with and within.²⁷ Feminist geographers in particular challenged the very notion of “the field” in fieldwork as they drew from feminist methodologies as a tool for dismantling the assumptions that the researcher and researched are inherently separate (opposite), and that the field is somewhere “over there” or “back then,” rather than being in the here and now.²⁸

Overall, feminist interventions in conducting fieldwork have gone great lengths to reinvent the ways in which traditionally White, masculinist disciplines produce scholarship on marginalized communities, disavowing the God Trick that

²⁵ Melissa R. Gilbert, “The Politics of Location: Doing Feminist Research at ‘Home,’” *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1994): 90–96.

²⁶ Shirley Hune and Gail M. Nomura (Eds.), *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 2.

²⁷ Audrey Kobayashi, “Coloring the Field: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Fieldwork,” *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1994): 73–80.

²⁸ Jennifer Hyndman, “The Field as Here and Now, Not There and Then,” *Geographical Review*, vol. 91, no. 1 (2001): 262–272; Cindi Katz, “Playing the Field: Question of Fieldwork in Geography,” *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1994): 67–72; Mimi E. Kim, “Anti-Carceral Feminism: The Contradictions of Progress and the Possibilities of Counter-Hegemonic Struggle,” *Journal of Women and Social Work*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2020): 309–326.

attempted to produce “authentic” knowledge about already real people, systems, and socio-political networks.²⁹ According to Haraway, the God Trick signified the ways in which the social sciences, dominated by masculinist perspectives, attempted to create universal truths regarding the human experience without any consideration of how their power and privilege through gender, race, and class skewed their world view. The theory of situated knowledges, however, helped open up epistemological spaces for the voices and perspectives of women of color researchers who invested in feminist scholarship as a way to represent the marginalized communities they came from. Such a return, however, requires “the emotionally laborious weighing of accountability for kin and other relations”³⁰ when the researcher’s presence transforms “home” into the field. Anthropology scholar Dada Docot’s examination of the conflicts and crises of returning to her hometown of Nabua in the Philippines as an expat and researcher calls into question the meanings of home, belongingness, and ultimately, power. Such questions are at the root of feminist methodologies, and can offer a new and critical perspective to approaching ethnographic research in Filipinx American studies not only by disrupting masculinist approaches to conceptualizing ethnic identity, but by focusing on the responsibility of researchers to reflect on the complex, power-laden relationships between researchers and research subjects.

My feminist critiques of Sikolohiyang Pilipino’s or Filipino Virtue Ethics’ theorization of kapwa are not meant to act as a distraction from my own assumptions of sameness based on a shared ethnic identity. In fact, it was feminist scholar Donna Haraway herself who cautioned feminists from assuming that they were safe from playing the God Trick simply because they were women conducting research on other women.³¹ Rather, my personal reflections of conducting fieldwork aim to show that any person is capable of falling into the comforting assumptions of sameness (be it race, ethnicity, gender, or age), and that such slippages are symptoms of larger problems or realities: the minoritized presence of Filipinx American Studies in Asian American

²⁹ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-599.

³⁰ Dada Docot, “Negative Productions during Fieldwork in the Hometown,” *GeoHumanities*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2017): 308.

³¹ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 580.

Studies; the newness of Filipinx American Studies as separate from Philippines Studies; and the struggles that Filipinx American women and nonheteronormative folks face when attempting to find accessible representations of their unique experiences in diaspora. Therefore, without a critical feminist understanding of the intersectionality of Filipino culture and diaspora, such shortcomings are reincarnated through everyday practices of kapwa and can create damaging interpersonal environments when reimagining psychological models of behavior, conducting Filipinx American fieldwork, and building community.

In essence, I hope to convey the notion that kapwa is less of a reality for Filipinx Americans, and more symbolic of how minoritized groups in the United States engage in practices of (be)longing, or the acts of longing to belong to a larger group and place.³² My experiences when conducting fieldwork articulate those same longings, and call attention to the dire need of feminist interventions into how we understand and practice kapwa. As I shared in my opening vignette, as a Pinay³³ I often-times view myself and other Pinays as having a shared identity, which fed into my belief that I am naturally more fit than someone outside of our ethnic and gender communities to conduct feminist research on our experiences. However, as educator and scholar Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales suggests, we must work towards community-building through a critical Pinayist standpoint that pushes us to “check [ourselves] and how [we] wish to seek out and keep allegiances with allies, including each other.”³⁴ Following Tintiangco-Cubales’s call for a critical Pinayist standpoint, I’ve learned that assumptions about a community without an internal interrogation of what community actually means and looks like when conducting field work may cause us, as Peminist scholars, to run the risk of reinforcing the fissures and hierarchies in Filipinx American studies rather than challenging them.

In this article, I place my own assumptions of community and diasporic connectivity under an analytical microscope as (1) an example of the dangers of treating kapwa as an inherent Filipinx trait or virtue, and (2) a launching point from which

³² Amy Carillo Rowe, “Be Longing: Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation,” *Journal of the National Women’s Studies Association*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2005), 15-46.

³³ Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales and other Peminist scholars have used the term “Pinay” to refer to the gendered positioning of Filipina women in the United States. Peminism/Pinayism refers to Filipina American feminism. See Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales and Jocyl Sacramento, “Practicing Pinayist Pedagogy,” *Amerasia*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2009): 179-187.

³⁴ Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, “Pinayism” in *Pinay Power: Theorizing the Filipina/American Experience*, edited by Melinda L. De Jesús (New York: Routledge, 2005), 124.

new conversations surrounding feminist methodologies in Filipinx American fieldwork can ensue. As powerful of a sensation kapwa can be, particularly for those who very rarely had conversations with others who had similar gendered experiences as an ethnic minority, this was also where I found the limitations and dangers of kapwa when specific boundaries weren't kept in place. Although we emotionally resonated with similar experiences, cultural norms, and colloquialisms, my subconscious temptation to find sameness in these conversations also led to the assumption of sameness. While I believed my intentions to be altruistic and for the sake of creating a community with those involved in the project, such assumptions also highlight the limitations of imagining a diasporic community based on sameness and camaraderie. Rather than regarding such limitations—and my own experience of navigating through conflict in the field—as an obstacle in the search for writing about diasporic community, I hope to shed light on the importance of embracing moments of difference, contention, and confusion when exploring new terrains of Filipinx American identity and diaspora.

RETHINKING “THE FIELD” & METHODOLOGY

Recruiting research participants in the middle of a pandemic inevitably changed the geographical and conceptual terrains of what is considered “the field,” and therefore directly altered the ways I maneuvered through the formative stages of fieldwork. Rather than physically traveling to Chicago to meet with participants in person, sit in on meetings organized by Filipina American clubs, or attend social events with the participants and their organizations, I arranged Zoom meetings or socially-distanced interviews in outdoor coffee shops in neighborhoods such as Hyde Park, Bridgeport, and Lakeview. However, in my research, I position these virtual spaces and short windows of moments as “the field” by use of theories written on emotional geographies, ethnic belonging, and imagined communities.

Scholars in the field of Emotional Geographies contend that our emotions directly shape how we experience spaces, and that “We live in worlds of pain or of pleasure; emotional environs that we sense can expand or contract in response to our experience of events—though there is rarely a clear or consistent sense of simple “cause” and “affect,” further reiterating the ways

in which emotion creates immaterial spaces that “can clearly alter the way the world is for us, affecting our sense of time as well as space. Our sense of who and what we are is continually (re)shaped by how we feel.”³⁵ Furthermore, theories on Asian American ethnic enclaves draw from anthropological concepts of primordialism and instrumentalism in immigrant communities, the former explaining immigrant-ethnic cohesion in a host country as rooted in biological and ancestral sameness because of their origins, whereas instrumentalism typically explains ethnic cohesion as more of a choice dictated by shared goals and interests.³⁶ Lastly, Benedict Anderson’s oft-cited theory of “imagined communities” continues to inform the ways in which scholars conceptualize national belonging as more of an intellectual, imaginative, and emotional process than a geographically determined one. For Anderson, “[The community] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion,” further explaining the characteristics of being imaginative because the “finite, if elastic, boundaries” of a community are shaped by the personalized image constructed by different members, therefore creating multiple definitions and boundaries of that community occurring all at once yet in the same “space.”

³⁷ The emotional and reflective conversations held with my Filipina American interviewees, paired with my own positioning as a Filipina American who grew up in similar circumstances, created an immaterial diasporic space in which a type of imagined community was fostered. Discussing similar memories and shared feelings created a space that challenged the notion of fieldwork as geographically rooted, and instead introduced an emotional terrain in which we all could step into and explore.

The women in my study were all second-generation Filipina Americans born and/or raised in the Chicago metro area. I met several of them through Filipino/a/x American organizations and clubs based in Chicago, while others I met through word of mouth—posting electronic flyers on my social media

³⁵ Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan, “Embodying Emotion Sensing Space: Introducing Emotional Geographies,” *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2004): 524.

³⁶ Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 4-5.

³⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 6-7.

pages, asking friends to pass on my information to anyone who would fit recruitment criteria for my research. Within two weeks, I quickly accumulated almost fifteen volunteers who all expressed interest in talking about their experiences as Filipina American women and daughters of immigrants. The virtual and distanced interviews I conducted and the virtual events I attended were all tied together through their feelings of belonging to a gendered and ethnic community that they felt was separate from the Filipino American community at large because they were women. Comments were often made that signaled participants' identification with me as a part of their imagined Filipina American community as they would say things like, "Oh, you know how Filipino moms are..." or "You know Filipina titas (aunties), they all like tsismis (gossip)." One of my favorite interactions with a participant was when she talked about her past relationships with men, referring to them as "basura (trash) boys." This colloquial use of "trash" in the contemporary English language to describe her past partners—one she assumed I'd be familiar with because of my age—was translated to Tagalog when used in conversation with me. Even though neither one of us spoke Tagalog fluently, we both knew exactly what she was talking about and were able to share a moment of laughter.

Our interactions created a space shaped by emotions, memories, and imaginations of gendered diasporic belonging, a space in which we each stepped into as we logged onto Zoom or sat six feet apart with masks on at a coffee shop. The more I listened to them talk about their experiences—and we found that we shared many of them—the more our imagined diasporic community grew and the more the field developed around us and from us, momentarily creating what felt like kapwa. However, as my experience with one participant in particular revealed, the feelings of kapwa are temporal and subjectively experienced: what may have been a positive experience for me ended up as an emotionally triggering one for her. It is through my first experience with confrontation in the field that I learned more about the meaning of conducting feminist fieldwork, building community, and seeking connection in the Filipinx American diaspora.

THE DISILLUSIONMENT OF KAPWA THROUGH CONFLICT IN THE FIELD

In August 2020, I sat at the dining table in my apartment with my open laptop and notepad, ready to jot down any memora-

ble quotes and observations to be used in the dissertation. As I launched the Zoom meeting room designated for interviews, I reviewed my short list of opening questions to get our conversation going: did you grow up around other Filipinx Americans? How was culture talked about in your household? When and why did your parents immigrate to the United States? Sam* was one of the first women who responded to my call for participants after receiving a flyer through the Filipino American Historical Society's (FANHS) listserv. It should be noted that I do not use her real name, provide any personal information, nor do I discuss any specific interview materials gathered during our conversations. I draw from my experiences with Sam to further examine the politics of *kapwa* in the field, but not to reveal any sensitive information regarding her personal experiences that were shared with me during the conversations.

Much like the other participants, Sam sent me an email briefly explaining her participation in FANHS and expressed her interest in getting involved in the project. She briefly described her upbringing as a second-generation Filipina American in a Chicago suburb about an hour from where I grew up, although for several years now she had been living out of state for school and work. In her message, Sam wrote about her excitement to talk about her experiences because she felt that that “more representation of Filipina Americans’ experiences need to be shared.” After scheduling a time to meet, I sent Sam a more detailed description of the project—its goals, focuses, and methodological scope. I included a list of the general, open-ended questions I’d ask in the interviews, but clarified that it would be mostly a conversation that could go in any direction that she as the participant would like it to go. Because I was exempt from IRB approval, I was not required to obtain written consent, although I received recorded, verbal consent indicating that they understood that if the topics became too sensitive or emotionally difficult for them, they had the right to refuse to answer a question, end the interview at any point, and say things off record that would be left out of the dissertation. Once she acknowledged and accepted these terms, I began the interview: “tell me about yourself.”

I could immediately tell that Sam was highly intelligent and not afraid of voicing her opinions or expressing her emotions. There were very rarely (if any) lulls in our conversations as we seemed to swiftly move from one topic to another as she let her

stories of high school and college friends, her immigrant parents, and relationship with her brother flow so freely. Other than a few words of acknowledgment, I was almost completely silent for the first twenty or so minutes, giving her the space to take things in the direction she wanted and allowing myself to gauge her energy and adjust to her pace. As her nerves seemed to calm down and she began asking questions about myself and my own up-bringing, I noticed a shift in our dynamic. We became much more conversational, transitioning into more of a back and forth dialogue as we compared and contrasted the neighborhoods and schools we grew up in. I then asked Sam the same question I ask all participants: how did you come to learn about your identity as a Filipina? In the interviews before and after this one, participants had a tendency to refer to their relationships with their immigrant parents (usually their moms who they were closest to) who passed down cultural values and shared family histories. Similarly, Sam talked about the close relationship that she and her younger brother had with their mom who was a Filipina immigrant. Soon after, however, she began talking about the contentious relationship she had with her dad while growing up. As she seemed to get deeper into the memories of her childhood, Sam's pace began to speed up again as she shared memories of an immigrant household affected by alcoholism, domestic disputes, violence, the trauma of being sexually abused by a family friend, and the deep-seated pain of feeling abandoned by her mother, who she felt didn't protect her and brother enough.

As I tried to process Sam's pain and remember all the training I received in my graduate methodologies courses, I felt my own emotions and memories of a similar past come flooding in. I told her that I understood the confusion she must have felt from having a "close knit" family that was also the source of a lot her pain and trauma. I also mentioned to her that, unfortunately, these were common occurrences in Filipino American families. Some theorists explain the common occurrence of domestic violence as a result of Western colonialism and the forced implementation of Eurocentric gender roles organized by heteropatriarchal domination (Espiritu, 1997, p. 13), while others explain issues with mental health and substance abuse amongst Filipino Americans as symptoms of colonial mentality.³⁸ I wanted

³⁸ E.J.R. David and Sumie Okazaki, "Activation and Automaticity of Colonial Mentality," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 4 (2010): 850-887.

her to know that she wasn't alone in this trauma, that I also grew up in a household where yelling, physical fights, and substance abuse deeply shaped my experiences as a child and adolescent. However, my responses remained vague and non-specific as I found myself tiptoeing around the unspoken expectation to share my own stories with the same detail that Sam gave me. I wasn't ready to confront my own traumas and accept that my pain and that of my families' were always-already implicated in the project. Perhaps out of panic and stress, I chose to intellectualize our feelings, treating them representative of a shared cultural issue explained by postcolonial theory and psychology. By doing so, I was able to extract myself from the surprising and uncomfortable emotive space we now found ourselves in and fall back into the role of The Researcher. However, I didn't realize that while I had the ability to "pull out," Sam was stuck, and unready to make an intellectual pivot when remembering her traumas. As I made the split-second call to take this turn away from my own discomfort and anxiety, I unknowingly exercised my power as a researcher in a way that prioritized my emotions above hers.

Although the rapid pace of our conversations made it difficult, I did my best to check in on how she was feeling, asking her if she would like to stop to take a breather before continuing on. At the end of our hour and a half long conversation, we were both physically and emotionally spent. I thanked her again for her time, and she expressed her desire to have a follow-up discussion during my second round of interviews—she even texted me the names of a few different Filipino American podcasts that she felt I would be interested in. I felt relieved that things had gone smoothly—that I had handled such difficult moments correctly—and that she wanted to keep participating in the project. However, less than a week later, I received an email from Sam that was starkly different than our last interactions. This email was filled with panic, worry, anger, and accusations. She asked what my methodology was; what feminist scholarship I was using to support my analyses (and included a list of sources that I "should follow next time [you] interview someone"); how I was storing all of the interview materials; and asked for proof that my project was exempt from IRB approval. She asked how I would protect her identity in my research, and then made a comment that as a researcher herself, she felt that I didn't know what I was

doing. Shocked and embarrassed, I typed out my answers to her questions and apologized for any discomfort she felt during or after the interview process. I told her that it was okay if there were parts of the interview she wanted to be left out, and that there would be no animosity if she wanted to withdraw from the project all together. I never heard from her again, but ultimately decided to leave her out in an attempt to respect her feelings of discomfort and regret.

After reviewing all the steps, I took the issue to my advisor and an IRB officer at the University of Texas at Austin. Ultimately, they came to the conclusion that I did everything I was supposed to do, and that I handled the situation with as much care and caution as I could have. My advisor told me that things like this happen in the research process, and to treat it as an experience to learn from rather than fearing that it would be detrimental to my entire project. In retrospect, my fear of being seen as a faulty researcher by my advisor and the university took precedent as I relied on them to affirm my credibility. Reexamining my reaction to Sam's emails reveals how I unconsciously reassumed the position of a researcher (not just a fellow Filipina American to Sam) because I knew that I could receive some degree of institutional protection, when really what I was feeling was extreme emotional vulnerability. Not only was I worried about my dissertation, but I was also plagued with very real, raw emotions. I was shocked—even angry—by what felt like an abrupt change in her view of me. I felt the discomforts of rejection as I realized that I misinterpreted or overestimated a connection with Sam, when she did not feel the same as me. I originally left the interview feeling like we talked about such important and revelatory topics and shared such vulnerable parts of ourselves to each other. Once leaving that space, however, Sam re-oriented herself in opposition to me. To her, we were no longer two Filipina American women from Illinois who were trying to figure out our own identities through family memories, but I was the researcher and she was the researched; she was the vulnerable one while I was a threat to her safety. As the reality of our complicated relationship dawned on me, I felt my cheeks burn as I thought about the shame and embarrassment I would feel if word got back to my advisor that I wasn't good at my job—that I wasn't a trustworthy researcher and community member. The *kapwa* I thought existed through our similarities was demystified, and out of our attempts

for self-preservation, we turned on each other and retreated into our own anxieties, fears, and pain.

Now, I can reflect on our interactions and my internal reactions to her emails following the interview out of the terrains of “good” or “bad.” Rather, I see it as an outcome of a complicated web of different feelings, people, and positionalities. Even though I never intended to express the sentiments of *kapwa* in my interviews by treating the interviewees and myself as one in the same person, connected by our shared identities as Filipina Americans, the underlying assumptions of *kapwa* and Filipino American diasporic community still informed our interactions. At first, these assumptions provided a space in which we were able to share the burden of familial trauma. Once leaving, however, those assumptions made Sam feel unsafe and too vulnerable—feelings not acknowledged when *kapwa* and community are imagined. Yet, these difficult emotions and the interpersonal conflicts became equally important when exploring new definitions of the Filipinx American diaspora in my research. Although my project ended up going in a different direction that no longer included multiple narratives of Filipina Americans (including Sam’s), my experience with Sam challenged my assumptions of conducting feminist research with(in) a community I identified with, while also initiating the implementation of boundaries in the field—for my protection and the participants’.

Surface-level understandings of *kapwa* can over-emphasize unity and connection at the expense of one’s boundaries as well as mental and emotional safety. Creating boundaries—or establishing a clear sense of self as distinct from another—helps ensure the safety and care without sacrificing interpersonal connections that humanize our research. Feminist geographers Dana Cuomo and Vanessa Massaro similarly found that reconstituting and reconstructing the physical and emotional boundaries of field space was essential when researching their resident community in Philadelphia. Their reflections on conducting fieldwork in their own community, and with people they had friendly ties to as neighbors and not researchers, illustrated the much-needed yet under-discussed topic of boundary-making as a methodological practice in feminist research. In Cuomo and Massaro’s joint introduction they wrote, “While such blurred lines may be desirable for geographers looking to get ‘inside’ their research site, we found that we needed to create physical and

emotional boundaries to construct us explicitly as researchers in the eyes of our participants.”³⁹ The “blurred lines” that the geographers mention refer to the ways in which “the field” that was subject to their analytical eyes was not physically distinguishable from “home,” thus blurring the lines between insider or outsider, friend or neutral third party. Similar to Cuomo and Massaro, my emotional and physical closeness to my participants constructed “the field” as both “spatially and temporally messy and difficult to discern,” and therefore resulted in the unintentional collapsing between myself as the researcher and those that I was still researching.⁴⁰

While un-blurring the lines between the researcher and participant—and exposing the assumptions of *kapwa*—may spark anxieties about producing work that leans too far into the formality of oppositional positionalities, the work of feminist geographers sets an example of how boundary-making can be one solution to nuancing Filipinx American methodological entanglements with *kapwa*. Implementing boundaries to create some degree of distance could have helped keep Sam emotionally and physically safe; boundaries would have also helped me better navigate these feelings of confusion, loss, and hurt. Furthermore, having clear set boundaries can benefit participants by allowing them to “imagine how the outside world would receive their stories,” rather than forgetting that our conversations would not necessarily remain within the immaterial walls of our temporal diasporic community.

KAPWA: A CRITICAL STANDPOINT & METHODOLOGY

I do not suggest that boundary-making and *kapwa* are mutually exclusive—that researchers must choose between a consciousness of (dis)empowerment in the field or seeking a deeper connection with those we research on and for. Rather, I propose a reframing of *kapwa* as a critical standpoint that actively interrogates the meanings of community and sameness: what if *kapwa* did not begin and end with the assumption of sameness, but with a commitment to representing the diversity of diasporic identities and intra-community healing? *Kapwa* as a critical

³⁹ Dana Cuomo and Vanessa A. Massaro, “Boundary-making in Feminist Research: New Methodologies for ‘Intimate Insiders,’” *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2014): 95.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

standpoint challenges the notion that interpersonal and internal conflict are antithetical to community, and resembles Manalansan's call to embrace the "wildness" and "mess" of qualitative research in order to better obtain a "sensitive, visceral, affective, and emotional literacy about the struggles of queer subjects such as immigrants, people of color, and single mother on welfare."⁴¹ Similar to Manalansan, I argue that embracing the ambiguity of identity and discomforts of conflict are crucial methods toward healing the pains of disconnection and producing work that truly represents the multifaceted and complex positionalities of the Filipinx American diaspora.

After deeply reflecting on my experience with Sam, I now believe that there is a way to un-romanticize kapwa when conducting research with—and on—other Filipina American women, while simultaneously remaining true to the feminist ideologies of practicing empathy and creating emotional connections in the field. Over the years and dozens of interviews conducted since Sam, I have learned how to take a critical positioning towards kapwa while still paying close attention to the ways in which emotions are ever-present in the field. I am careful about the pace at which our conversations move to ensure that they are in charge of what is shared and when they choose to share it; I check myself whenever I have the urge to finish their sentences, or reframe what they are saying in a way that mirrors my own internal dialogue. I also try to take better care of myself through the interview processes by listening to my body when it tells me that we are emotionally charged, exhausted, content, or confused. Like all other qualitative researchers, I will continue to face challenges in the field that make me question myself—I like this. As feminist researchers teaching and contributing to the growing field of Filipinx American Studies, we must continue to produce and practice ethical methodologies that keep our participants and ourselves safe. We must continue to challenge the assumptions of community, grieve the pains of disunity, and search for new modes and methods of finding connection and fostering kapwa.

⁴¹ Martin Manalansan, "Messy Mismeasures," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 3 (2018): 492.

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LEESE STREET STUDIO

The logo for Leese Street Studio features a large, stylized blue letter 'A' that is partially obscured by a blue wave-like shape. Below the 'A' is a blue wave-like shape that resembles a stylized 'L' or a wave.

Named for the work space of Filipino American artist, educator, and activist Carlos Villa (1936–2013), Leese Street Studio presents interdisciplinary visual work by artists of the Filipinx diaspora.

Alon is thrilled to feature some of the visual work of Jenifer K Wofford—a skilled educator and interdisciplinary artist. So much of her work is infused with a collaborative spirit, especially evident in her many years as one-third of the performance group, Mail Order Brides/M.O.B., where they play with conventions and cultural commitments to gender, sexuality, corporate identity, and popular culture. There is in Wofford’s work a vibrant sense of humor and play—where strict definitions cannot hold—as well as a deep appreciation for traditions of Asian American artmaking. You’ll see this especially in her mural which adorns a wall at San Francisco’s Asian Art Museum—the names of ancestors call out to you on the sidewalk. Gone but not forgotten. Wofford helps us stay anchored while our imaginations take flight.

Jenifer K Wofford

Jenifer K Wofford is a San Francisco-based artist and educator whose work investigates hybridity, history, calamity, and global culture, often with a humorous bent. She is also 1/3 of the Filipina-American artist trio Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. Her work has been exhibited in the San Francisco Bay Area at the Asian Art Museum, Berkeley Art Museum, Oakland Museum of California, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA), San Jose Museum of Art, Southern Exposure, and Kearny Street Workshop. Wofford’s work has appeared at New Image Art (Los Angeles), Wing Luke Museum (Seattle), DePaul Museum (Chicago), Silverlens Galleries (Philippines), VWFA (Malaysia), and Osage Gallery (Hong Kong).

Wofford is a 2023 YBCA 100 Honoree and a recent recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. Her other awards include the Eureka Fellowship, the Murphy Fellowship, and grants from the San Francisco Arts Commission, the Art Matters Foundation, and the Center for Cultural Innovation. She has also been artist-in-residence at The Living Room (Philippines), Liguria Study Center (Italy), and KinoKino (Norway).

Wofford teaches in the Fine Arts and Philippine Studies programs of the University of San Francisco. She has also taught at UC Berkeley, Mills College, SFAI, California College of the Arts, and San Francisco State University. She holds degrees from the San Francisco Art Institute (BFA) and UC Berkeley (MFA). Born in San Francisco and raised in Hong Kong, Dubai, Malaysia, and the Bay Area, Wofford has also lived in Oakland and Prague in addition to San Francisco. A committed and active member of the Bay Area art community, Wofford currently serves as Vice President of the Board of Directors of Southern Exposure. For more information, visit www.wofflehouse.com.

PORTALS + BATTLEFIELDS (2022)

Jenifer K Wofford

Portals + Battlefields (2022)

Paintings: acrylic on canvas
as exhibited at Silverlens Gallery, Manila

Six paintings included in “Aquifer,” an exhibition with MM Yu and Dina Gadia at Silverlens Gallery, Philippines. These paintings evolve Wofford’s “Rupturre” project which speaks to history and crisis. This recent work is less about abrupt rupture while still being about change and other unstable, mutable energies shifting beneath the surface. Images or terms that have informed this work, and the shapes and patterns within them: Energy. Mysteries. Spells. Portals. Power. Protection. Containment. Liminality. Neuroplasticity. Electricity. Psychedelia. Vision. Rage. Grief. Loss. Calamity. Battlefields. Flow vs break. Fluidity vs rigidity.



Battlefield I



Battlefield II



Portal I: Vas Hermeticum



Portal II: The Humors



Portal III: The Humors



Portal IV: Protection Spell

Pattern Recognition (2020-2022)

Mural (acrylic paint on aluminum panel), 2020

Digital mural (print on textile), 2022

Speech bubbles shout out the names of nine early Asian American artists who lived and worked in the San Francisco Bay Area.

These familiar cartoon graphics combine with recognizable Asian decorative patterns and a festive 1980s design vocabulary to celebrate Asian American immigrant histories and cultures.

Motifs were found in works in the collection of the Asian Art Museum as well as traditional designs drawn from Asian cultures represented in the museum's surrounding communities. Originally commissioned for and displayed on the museum's rear wall in San Francisco, later reproduced digitally, printed and displayed on the front exterior of the Asia Society building in Houston, Texas.



[Sekimachi] Pattern Recognition (detail)



[Obata] Pattern Recognition (detail)



[Wong] Pattern Recognition (detail)



[Asawa] Pattern Recognition (detail)



[Villa] Pattern Recognition (detail)



[Bing] Pattern Recognition (detail)



[Okamura] Pattern Recognition (detail)



[Kim] Pattern Recognition (detail)



[Valendor] Pattern Recognition (detail)



Jenifer K Wofford on "Pattern Recognition"

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An Interview with Marianne Chan

***All Heathens*, by Marianne Chan. Louisville, Kentucky: Sarabande Books, 2020. 96 pp. \$15.95 paper. ISBN: 978-1946448521.**

First and foremost, congratulations on the publication of All Heathens as well as the overwhelmingly positive critical response! What do you make of the reception of your book and how do you go about processing it? What would you like readers to get out of All Heathens? How would you like readers to engage with All Heathens?

Thank you so much for your congratulations! I've been surprised and absolutely delighted by the way *All Heathens* has been received by readers and critics. While writing this book, I didn't think too much about readership; I wrote these poems—selfishly—as a way to unpack and better understand my history, both personal and cultural. However, as the book made its way to publication, I began to think more about how readers might respond. I hoped that this book would reach people in the Philippine diaspora, who might read these poems and find that they have some things in common with my speaker. For non-Filipino readers, I hoped the poems would serve as an opening of sorts. While my book offers some information about the history of the Spanish colonization of the Philippines and the narrative of Magellan's voyage around the world, it is not a complete history by any means. I hoped that readers of these poems would become interested in Filipino history, or might, perhaps, feel encouraged to explore their own personal or ancestral histories. I also hoped that my

poems would show how histories of colonization continue to impact colonized groups in the present.

As a collection of poems, All Heathens constitutes a critical engagement with history, specifically histories of imperialism as inextricably linked with the history of Filipinos. Why did you feel compelled to directly address Antonio Pigafetta's account of "history" and specifically, the notion of Ferdinand Magellan as the first individual to circumnavigate the globe? What would you say are the challenges and risks of engaging with Antonio Pigafetta's text as a source material and how did you deal with them? Is there a poem or two in your collection that speaks to this kind of engagement with history?

I grew up learning about the story of Magellan in the Philippines. My parents loved Yoyoy Villame, a Bisaya comedic singer, who had a song called "Magellan," which details the history of Magellan in the Philippines. When my older brother was around four or five, he learned and memorized the song, and my mother, who was such a fan of our performances, regularly asked him to sing in front of friends. However, learning about that history from a three-minute comedic song left me with lots of questions: How could Magellan "discover" the Philippines if people were already there? Who is the hero in this story—Magellan or Lapu-Lapu? What does it mean that Rajah Humabon was happy to meet Magellan? The history puzzled me through adulthood, and eventually, I read Antonio Pigafetta's narrative account of Magellan's voyage. While reading that text, I wrote poems that allowed me to process that narrative and try to understand that history better; I also listened to lectures and read other texts about Magellan. I was frustrated with the fact that published writing about pre-colonial Filipinos was often from the perspective of Western explorers, colonizers, and anthropologists. I wanted to write poems in which the Filipina speaker centers her own experience, taking control of her personal narrative and attempting to reverse the uneven power dynamic. An example of this is in "Love Song for Antonio Pigafetta," in which the speaker becomes the chronicler of her family's travels and writes about Vicenza, Italy, Pigafetta's ancestral home.

How does poetry complicate the way we think about and understand history? How is poetry a powerful vehicle for telling stories? What is distinct and compelling about it as a genre that provides a unique vantage point to understand and (re)narrate history?

I think poetry is a vital genre for examining history because of the way poems often engage with the materiality of language. Unlike fiction, which is driven by plot and linearity, poems are arrangements of language, and their various systems of organization create layers of meaning. As you'll see in contemporary publications of documentary poetry, such as Robin Coste Lewis's *Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems* and Mai Der Vang's *Yellow Rain*, the genre of poetry gives space for the engagement, examination, and rearrangement of archival language, which I think sheds new light on history. I tried to do this a bit in *All Heathens*; I wanted to engage with the language used in Antonio Pigafetta's text, particularly in "Some Words of the Aforesaid Heathen Peoples," which is a poem that thinks about the Cebuano words Pigafetta chooses to translate in his chronicles.

I'm struck by the phrase "materiality of language." Is it possible to elaborate on your use of the phrase? What, exactly, do you mean by that phrase particularly in relation to poetry?

Absolutely. I'm very interested in the ways in which poets take language from older texts, sometimes nonliterary texts, to reveal something new. When I say "materiality of language," I'm thinking about poets who use the words from other source material as a palette of sorts that can be examined in a different light or manipulated. For example, in the title poem of Robin Coste Lewis's *Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems*, Coste Lewis creates a poem out of the language from descriptions or titles of works of Western art that depict the bodies of Black women. This cataloging of language becomes a meditation on how the Black body is perceived by Western arts institutions and how these institutions try to claim ownership over the Black

female form. In *Look*, Solmaz Sharif writes poems using the language from the Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms to reveal how the government sterilizes the language of war. Writing and reading poetry involves slowing down and observing how language is arranged, which makes it an important artistic genre for examining language of all kinds.

*What would you say is the relationship between poetry and affect, or the potential of poetry to tease emotions out of the reader? In what ways does your work evoke emotions in you and among readers? Is there a poem or two in *All Heathens* that best exemplifies this relationship?*

I think many of the poems in *All Heathens* do elicit emotional responses from readers because much of the book is driven by loss, not only the loss of loved ones, but the various losses that accompany living in the diaspora—loss of language, culture, religion, and relationships with family members. I think the robust history of the elegy demonstrates how poetry is such an important genre for grappling with grief. Some of the more elegiac poems in the book include: “My Mother Tells Me About Lolo” and “Viewing Service.”

In addition, I hoped that the book maintained a balance of brighter and darker poems. I wanted the book to show the resilience (and joy!) of my Filipino community in Michigan, especially in the poem “Lansing Sinulog Rehearsal, 2010.”

Michigan is not the first place that comes to mind when you think of places in the Filipino diaspora. Why do you feel compelled to amplify the experiences of Filipinos in a place like Michigan? How does it illuminate the complexities and contingencies of the Philippine diaspora?

Great question. People don’t think of the Midwest as a region where Filipinos live, but here we are! This might sound silly, but it wasn’t until I was in my early twenties, living in Las Vegas, that I realized how small my Filipino American community in Michigan truly was. I was so naïve. I didn’t know that Filipinos on the coasts experienced their

Filipino-ness differently, that there are varying degrees of feelings of minority-ness and alienation. I went to high school in a mostly white suburban town, and I think I have a very particular and complicated relationship to my Asian identity that many of my Asian students who grew up in Las Vegas didn't have. Also, I think Filipinos immigrate to Michigan for reasons that are different from Filipinos living in the larger cities of Nevada, California, or New York. Friends in my community mostly moved to the States through marriage or through work in the STEM field, and there were very few Filipinos who'd been in Michigan for more than two generations. In my own work, I believe it's important to share the particularities of my diasporic experience. The Filipino identity in the U.S. is not monolithic, and regions can change the shape of our identities and communities.

Why pursue a PhD in English & Creative Writing at the University of Cincinnati? What do you hope to get out of a PhD in English and Creative Writing? What does the future hold for you in terms of current and potential projects?

I love poetry, and I'm so glad that I was able to pursue a PhD to spend more time learning about it. When I applied to grad school, I hoped that time in a PhD program would give me the space to read and write and learn, and it certainly has done that. I'm currently in my dissertation year, and I'm working on a collection of prose poems about a strange, fictionalized version of my hometown in Michigan.

Thank you so much for these wonderful questions, Tony!

Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr.

***Queering the Global Filipina Body: Contested Nationalisms in the Filipina/o Diaspora*, by Gina K. Velasco. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020, 176 pp. \$26.00 paper, ISBN 978-0-252-04347-5.**

Gina K. Velasco's *Queering the Global Filipina Body: Contested Nationalisms in the Filipina/o Diaspora* takes to task how tropes of the global Filipina body—as mail-order bride, the balikbayan, the sex worker/trafficked woman, or cyborg—highlight the heteronormative and masculinist nationalisms in the makings of the Philippine nation across the diaspora. Focusing on contemporary cultural productions created between the 1990s to the mid-2010s, Velasco argues the figure of the global Filipina body is paramount to understanding heteropatriarchal nationalisms under global capitalism, as well as the gendered, sexualized, and affective dimensions of labor and nation-building. By examining cultural and political nationalisms across transnational sites within the Philippine diaspora—particularly Manila and San Francisco—Velasco skillfully critiques how heteropatriarchal nationalisms instate the global Filipina body as the Philippine nation itself, while transnational queer and feminist visual artists, filmmakers, and performers alternatively use the sign of the global Filipina body to disrupt those notions.

Velasco navigates these contradictory terrains by implementing interdisciplinary methods from cultural studies and anthropology. Using “queer diasporic approaches,” Velasco’s central argument contends that “even as the figure of the global Filipina body signifies the failure of the heteropatriarchal nation under global capitalism, the ‘queering’ of this figure within Filipina/o American diasporic cultural production can destabilize the gendered and sexual politics of diasporic nationalisms” (7). Her vast archive stretches across mediums and forms, from films, texts, and performances, and to everyday programs and policies enacted across the Philippines and the United States. Velasco’s dialogic approach includes “visual and performance texts [that] are put into conversation with everyday interactions among Filipino/a Americans” (13). Velasco’s book is divided into two parts and each chapter focuses on a different gendered trope: the balikbayan, the “trafficked woman,” the mail-order bride, and the cyborg.

In Part I, in her first two chapters, she outlines the “heteropatriarchal politics” that assigns the global Filipina body as representative of the Philippine nation. In Chapter 1, “Mapping Diasporic Nationalisms: The Filipina/o American Balikbayan in the Philippines” studies heritage language programs primarily catered towards Filipino/a American youth. Employing skillful ethnographic methods, she analyzes how the figure of the balikbayan—the returned immigrant—plays a crucial role in diasporic nationalist movements and the Philippine national imaginary. In turn, she writes about how heteronormative and masculinist nationalisms are articulated and contested in the heritage programs.

In Chapter 2, “Imagining the Filipina Trafficked Woman/Sex Worker: The Politics of Filipina/o American Solidarity,” one of the strongest chapters of the book, Velasco writes about how the “trafficked woman” and “sex worker” becomes collapsed, and how this figure circulates across Filipino/a American Pilipino Cultural Nights (PCNs) in the United States to films across the diaspora. Velasco intervenes in analysis of the “trafficked woman” as national heroes by focusing on Rachel Rivera’s film *Sin City Diary* (1992). In the film, Filipina American balikbayan Rivera travels to the Philippines and interviews three sex workers in Olongapo City, site of the Subic Naval Base. Velasco untangles how the “trafficked woman/sex worker stands in for sexual exploitation of the Philippine labor while balikbayan symbolizes the figure of the American dream and upward mobility” (56). Velasco expertly examines how Rivera’s film includes “exilic memories” to confront the mourning and loss she uses to frame the Filipina sex worker and to create a “Filipina/o American diasporic subjectivity in the film” (57). The narrator’s positionality is set in contrast to the three interviewees and sex workers, Glenda, Juliet, and Josephine, that Velasco argues are depicted as “damaged Others.” However, Velasco interprets Glenda as one interviewee who introduces a “sex worker subjectivity that fractures the narrative of sex worker as damaged Other” (61).

In Part II, Velasco analyzes queer Filipina/o cultural productions that disrupt the gendered and sexual politics of nationalism. In Chapter 3, “Performing the Filipina Mail-Order Bride: Queer Neoliberalism, Affective Labor, and Homonationalism,” Velasco examines the video art group Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. Velasco close reads their video *Always a Bridesmaid, Never*

a *Bride*, and (AABNAB). Velasco theorizes how M.O.B. draws on performances of “feminist camp” and “ethnic drag” to queer the Filipina mail-order bride by arguing that AABNAB “links a critique of the heteropatriarchal politics of Filipina/o American respectability to an analysis of the inability of US homonationalist politics to account for racialized labor” (67). Looking at marriage scenes at City Hall, Velasco calls into question the affective dimensions of labor and sexuality that M.O.B. parodies throughout their piece.

Lastly, Chapter 4, “The Queer Cyborg in Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s *Cosmic Blood*,” examines the figure of queer Filipina cyborg as a way to think about queer Filipina futurity. Drawing from José Esteban Muñoz’s theories of queer of color utopias, Velasco studies how Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s *Cosmic Blood* enacts a reimagination of the global Filipina body. Velasco conducts a fantastic close reading of Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s performance *Cosmic Blood*, a melismatic science fiction rewriting of “contact” zones between European colonizers and indigenous peoples across Asia, the Americas, and Africa. In this performance, Otálvaro-Hormillosa crafts alternative origin stories of the “cosmic blood” myth. According to Velasco, by centering queer cyborg bodies and desires, rather than the violence and dichotomies of colonizer/colonized, Otálvaro-Hormillosa subverts the heteropatriarchal makings of women as nation. Through eroticisms and the rewritings of the mestiza figures as nation-building projects, *Cosmic Blood* fashions new worlds of being and kinship relations for queer Filipina women that “exceed the nation” (99).

Velasco’s monograph further contributes to Filipinx studies scholarship on the gendered and laboring Filipina body such as those engaged by Rhacel Parreñas, Neferti Tadiar, Denise Cruz, Nerissa Balce, and Valerie Francisco-Menchavez. In particular, her astute theorizations of the global Filipina as a “geobody” expertly situates how Filipina bodies and their feminized labor are exploited and devalued within contemporary neoliberalization. Velasco’s study could have been further nuanced with attention to cultural productions and performances outside the common entry points of Manila to San Francisco. For instance, her study could have examined how the Filipina geobody traffics differently across the Philippine diaspora in lesser studied spaces like the U.S. Midwest, South, and East Coast, in rural or suburban places such as the work of Karen Tongson or transnationally

across the Asia-Pacific and Middle East such as Rhacel Parreñas' work. Nonetheless, Velasco's stunning critiques of contemporary Philippine nationalisms and queer globalization across the Philippines and the States greatly contribute to debates revolving around the politics of queer Filipinx bodies, nationalism, and affective labor in Filipinx Studies as seen in the works of Martin Manalansan, Martin Joseph Ponce, Emmanuel David, Robert Diaz, Marissa Largo, and Fritz Pino, while offering incisive feminist models of critique through visual culture and performance studies. Scholars particularly in Philippine and Filipinx American Studies, Transnational Feminisms, Queer Globalization Studies, American Studies, Performance Studies, and U.S. Empire Studies would greatly learn from this truly original and exciting monograph.

Jewel Pereyra

***Lolas' House: Filipino Women Living with War*, by M. Evelina Galang. Evanston, Illinois: Curbstone Books/Northwestern University Press, 2017. 267 pp. \$18.95 paper. ISBN: 978-0-8101-3586-4.**

M. Evelina Galang's *Lolas' House: Filipino Women Living with War* is a work that places the consent of the Filipino "comfort women" and accountability of the Japanese for their collective experiences at its very core. As the Japanese Imperial Army waged war during World War II, the term "comfort women" became a euphemism for the sex slaves throughout the Pacific Rim. From its onset, Galang minces no words in directly referring to the "comfort stations" as "military rape camps." Belonging to the genre of creative nonfiction, Galang weaves the sixteen testimonies of Filipino women, the lolas ("grannies" in English), with their individual stories as she entwines her own role as a storyteller within their narratives in order to engage with an otherwise little-known history of the "comfort women" of World War II (8). Quoting Lola Catalina, Galang notes that the Pacific front became a battlefield between Japan's imperialist war throughout Asia and the aftermath of United States' colonialism in the Philippines: "She says the war was between the Japanese and the Americans. The foreigners came and disrupted their lives, destroyed their city and all the Philippines" (18). Broadly, this work redresses an imposed silence on this history and endeavors to not only engender the empathy of the reader but also issue a call for justice—"LABAN MGA LOLA!"—on behalf of these "Filipino women living with war" (45).

What extant information that is known of the "comfort women" resides with the justice movement in South Korea. Studies of the "comfort women," particularly in South Korea and China, typically situate this work in the academic disciplines of history and sociology. Galang attempts to shift the focus onto the "comfort women" of the Philippines and enacts a timely, and time-sensitive, intervention in Asian Diasporic Studies through the field of literature. Its time-sensitive nature poignantly shows itself in the temporal nature of the lives of the lolas themselves—as they age and as they pass on. Galang herself gives a nod to Maria Rosa Henson who, in March of 1992, answered the call of the Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women (TFFCW), and called

upon other Filipinas to come forward ... which they did only for their cases to be dismissed by the Japanese courts. Galang's work confronts this disputation of history, this coercion of the Japanese, and what was not provable nor evidential regarding their abductions and rapes, with a periodization of what is known and communicable through the testimonies themselves of the lolas, which, as she tells the reader, remain intact, verified by existing information offered by witness accounts. Galang acts as a proto-ethnographer cum journalist who justifies her approach in rendering their stories as such because "The words cannot stand on their own. They must sit in a nest of context. They must be explained in action. In story. In cultures we enter only through character" (125).

To focus on the primacy of the testimonies themselves, Galang frames their stories with her approach as an academician of the humanities, combining ethnographic research with storytelling: "I made a promise to the lolas. I told them I would write their stories. I told them I would document their experiences so that the world would have a record of what happened, so that we would have an understanding of what happens to women in war" (11). Originally begun in 1999 as a Fulbright-funded research project, *The Dalaga Project*, Galang initially paired a lola with a dalaga, defining dalaga as "that in-between moment when a girl is no longer a girl and not quite a woman," because she wanted to know what the lola could teach the dalaga about being a woman" (8). In so doing, Galang positions herself as a feminist/peminist Filipina American scholar and writer with her mission for the lolas outlined in the following: 1. A formal apology 2. Compensation for their suffering 3. Documentation in official histories (7). In light of the bilateral agreement between Japan and Korea in 2015, which nullified the basic human rights of former "comfort women" of different Asian nationalities, Galang relegates the key historical resolutions and political statements for the end of this work, most notably, in her direct address, "An Invitation to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe," and a reference to the House of Representatives' resolution for Japan "to formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces' coercion of young women into sexual slavery," shepherded by Congressman Mike Honda (from Pyong Gap Min's Korean "Comfort Women: Military Brothers, Brutality, and the Redress Movement," 2019). As

an amplification of the historical challenges and legal struggles at the end of the novel, after the testimonies of the sixteen Filipino “comfort women,” Galang’s framing through trauma attests to the many challenges she faced as a writer: drawing upon the creative arts as healing practices to draw out their testimonies, confirming the veracity of their stories, confronting the problems of translation, and being questioned by the lolas themselves.

However, through Galang’s rendering, the words of the lolas speak for themselves, thus allowing the reader to meet each lola and her, the writer, on their own terms because history has not done as much. And, this is where the limitations of *Lolas’ House* betray themselves: it follows a kind of traumatic loop depicting episodes of coercion and, at times, the collaboration of family members with the Japanese, and the cultural stigma of the lolas by their compatriots. It does not present itself as an academic study analyzing why the experiences of the lolas were distinct from other Asian “comfort women” and why they were specifically targeted. As a work of creative nonfiction, *Lolas’ House* does not claim to be historiography even though the testimonies themselves act as exemplars of historiography. Through Galang, each lola becomes a storyteller in her own right. Thus, its limitations bespeak to their possibilities for the reader, and a wider audience, to confront their own ignorance of this history—for the reader to, in fact, gauge how they read and listen to trauma and how each reader can deploy empathy rather than judgment in this call for justice. Despite the ephemerality of each lola’s life, the impressions of each testimony grants them an authority that is lasting. We bear witness to not only one hero, one battle, one journey, but a diffusion of experiences from one awful phenomenon of “Filipino women living with war.”

Marie-Therese C. Sulit

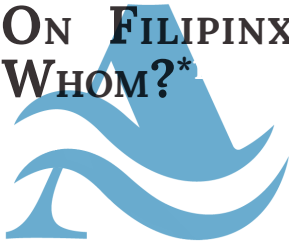
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FORUM: PAGANNINAWAN



An Ilocano word meaning “the act of reflecting,” these submissions look at how identity and Filipino/a/x histories are shaped, first, through the act of self-reflection and then a reflection on the space and place where Filipinxness manifest. The three submissions in this Forum look at how Asian Baby Girls (ABGs) complicate a gendered aesthetic of Asian American youth culture, specifically through a Filipina American intervention (Trazo), the on-going discussion of the use of, or the refusal of, the “x” in “Filipinx” by diasporic activists from the Philippines (Viola), and how a group of scholars reflect on the stories of Filipinas in Filipinx American history through the use of the film *The Celine Archive* (Joo et al.). These reflections connect the individual with the community and the community with the self, but more important, raises the question—“How do we see and use the complexities of Filipinx American Studies in the ways we imagine and form identity in diaspora?”

ON FILIPINX: WHO GETS TO NAME WHOM?*



Michael Joseph Viola

Growing up during the late 1980s and early 1990s, my immigrant mom would at times confuse her gender pronouns. I would at times say to her impatiently, “I am a ‘he’” or “Susan is a ‘she.’” My mom’s native language is Filipino, which does not have gender specific pronouns. For example, the Filipino word for sibling is “kapatid,” which is interchangeably used for “brother” or “sister.” While I did not always see it this way as a youth, I now understand that navigating the Filipino culture—its linguistic practices and its history of struggle—has provided me with an important ontology, a way of being and seeing in this country. For instance, as a professor in California’s Bay Area, it feels familiar, if not like a homecoming of sorts, when my students articulate their preferred gender pronouns in my classes as they normalize more inclusive learning environments for transgender and gender-queer classmates of color. What other ways can the culture of my mother’s homeland assist in not only navigating but more so transforming the deeply engrained hierarchies of racialized-gendered capitalism? What other forms of collective intelligence informed by struggle can the wisdom of our ancestors proffer so that we can participate in the deconstruction of a settler and (neo)colonial architecture that this country is built upon while co-creating a new, more peaceful world?

These are some of the questions I am exploring in my book, currently titled *v*. In this work in progress, I argue that the descendants of colonial subjects from the Philippines occupy both a peculiar and powerful place in this country. As a racialized formation, Filipino/as in this country have been instrumental to the development of U.S. society—from agribusiness to healthcare to our educational systems—yet we have been peripheralized in

* Thank you to Donna Denina and Jill Mangaliman for their insights shared here and informed by their activist commitments that I have the privilege of uplifting in this short piece.

such sites and a broader national consciousness. As a result, we are often disregarded as agents of transformative change. Meanwhile, our unique histories, experiences, and aspirations for the future too often have been defined by others, labeled as “Little Brown Brothers” at the turn of the 20th century and more recently as “Junior Partners” to White folks in the reproduction of Black suffering.¹ It is in this peripheralized place that U.S.-born children of Filipino/as are redefining themselves as Filipinx.



Activists with the Third World Resistance coalition blockading the Oakland, California Federal Building on January 15, 2015 in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Photo by Sunshine Velasco via @sunshinevelascoimages.

The move to Filipinx follows the example set forth by their Latino/a counterparts who in the early 2000s coined Latinx for a variety of reasons not limited to: a rejection of the gender binary reproduced in the Spanish language; signification of a shared pan-ethnic identity; and to represent a more fluid, multifaceted border-crossing identity.² Shortly after the appearance of Latinx, the term Filipinx emerged largely from a U.S.-based context in the mid to late 2010s, circulating in social media accounts and online posts of LGBTQI+ artists, activists, allies, and academics. While its intent has been a linguistic expression of inclusion and solidarity with queer, transgender, and gender non-conforming

¹ The first Governor-General of the Philippines and later President of the United States, William Howard Taft is recognized as popularizing the term, “Little Brown Brother,” in describing the people of the Philippines at the onset of the Philippine American War. Black intellectual Frank Wilderson in his ambitious manuscript, *Afropessimism*, plots an immutable color line where Blackfolk are structural antagonists to White people and all other non-Black people of color. Wilderson refers to non-Black folks of color as “junior partners.” See: Frank Wilderson, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020).

² See: Ed Morales, *Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 2018).

(QTGNC) individuals and especially youth, the use of both Latinx and Filipinx have not been widely embraced beyond U.S. borders or outside campuses of higher education. A recent Pew Research Center study reports that only 23% of U.S. adults who self-identify specifically as Latino are familiar with the term Latinx and only 3% use it to describe their own identity.³ While a similar study has not yet been conducted focusing on the use of Filipinx, it is fair to assume that it is less accepted considering that a substantial segment of Filipino American voters supported Trump in the 2020 election and his administration's perspicuous record of anti-transgender and anti-LGBTQI+ policies.⁴ A critique of rightist ideological tendencies entrenched within the Filipino American community and its dangerous consequences for trans and queer youth is an urgent endeavor that is beyond the scope of what I can offer here.

My intention in this short piece is to offer further insight as to why there is opposition to Filipinx for different political reasons that deserve our careful attention. Many radical activists and Filipino intellectuals, including renowned critical theorist, E. San Juan, do not embrace the turn to Filipinx. By no means is such a position grounded in resistance to a project of inclusion for those who are transgender, genderqueer, or non-binary. Rather, such a response is in recognition of the assiduous and unequal cultural-linguistic exchanges undergirded by an enduring legacy of U.S. colonial relations in the Philippines.

I am in community with, and my scholarship is partially informed by, U.S.-based activists who are organizing in solidarity with a Philippine social movement active against imperialism, racism, heteropatriarchy, and other forms of structural violence. I appreciate how community organizers understand the necessity of meeting people where they are politically in order to build relationships, develop campaigns, and nurture the vitality of social movement praxis. In their efforts, activists and cultural workers have shared their challenges in building community and bridging generations with many second and third generation

³ Luis Noe-Bustamante, Lauren Mora, and Mark Hugo Lopez, "About One-in-Four U.S. Hispanics Have Heard of Latinx, but Just 3% Use it." Pew Research Center, August 11, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/11/about-one-in-four-u-s-hispanics-have-heard-of-latinx-but-just-3-use-it/>.

⁴ "2020 Asian American Voter Survey," (September 15, 2020), which reports that 34% of the Filipino Americans surveyed indicated their support for Trump in the 2020 presidential election. <https://aapidata.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Slides-AAVS-2020-sep15.pdf>. In regards to the Trump administration's attacks on transgender and LGBTQI+ peoples, see The National Center for Transgender Equality. <https://transequality.org/the-discrimination-administration>

youth and college students openly identifying as Filipinx, while undocumented, migrant care workers, and Filipino elders feel alienated by this identification. For many who identify as Filipino, the source of their alienation is that the term Filipinx is not culturally and linguistically relevant. The term denies Filipino as a gender-neutral language reflecting the lived realities of people in the Philippines and throughout the global diaspora (without denying the brutalities of patriarchy, macho-fascism, anti-trans, and other forms of gendered violence expressed in that country).

Toward a shared objective of abolishing oppression in its various manifestations and in the spirit of comradeship, solidarity, and dialogue, I turn to E. San Juan's latest works. Through his writings, activists and scholars located in the U.S. who are engaged in political and knowledge projects with grassroots organizations and social movement formations in the Philippines can distill important precautions as well as questions worth pursuing. Ultimately, how we define ourselves, whether it is Filipinx, Filipino/a Americans, or anything else (will it be Philippine in the near future?) has implications for how we make sense of our past, what we seek to decolonize in the present, and with whom, as well as toward what, we will build in the future.

While E. San Juan's scholarly interventions span more than five decades and is highly regarded by radical intellectuals throughout the world, his work is not widely engaged by a new cadre of scholar activists within the academies of the United States.⁵ *Racism and the Filipino Diaspora* (2017) is a collection of three essays, with insights spanning the time period of 1998 to 2017.⁶ These essays elaborate upon his groundbreaking text, *Racism and Cultural Studies* (2002), where he examines Filipino racial formation through a global analytic. More specifically, E. San Juan draws upon an open and creative Marxist tradition to examine the racialized conditions facing a subjugated Filipino/a polity in the Philippines and dispersed throughout the world.⁷ *Racism and the Filipino Diaspora* provides an important counter-narrative to the widely held perspective that Marxist thought treats race, gender, and culture as epiphenomenon in its analysis.

⁵ For example, the late Amiri Baraka describes E. San Juan as "one of the sharpest and most clarifying voices vis-à-vis Filipino/U.S. and Filipino/world relationships extant." Kenyan novelist, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, calls E. San Juan's theoretical interventions in the wide-ranging debates on cultural studies over the years as "both necessary and significant." See: E. San Juan, *Maelstrom Over the Killing Fields* (Quezon City: Pantas Publishing, 2021).

⁶ E. San Juan, *Racism and the Filipino Diaspora: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Naga City: Ateneo de Naga University Press, 2017).

⁷ E. San Juan, *Racism and Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

In this text, E. San Juan builds upon the idea that theory must always be useful for Filipino/as as opposed to making Filipino/as useful for theory. His historical materialist analysis proves prophetic in light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of anti-Asian violence in this country. E. San Juan's argument is emphatically clear: the racism expressed toward Asian immigrants and their descendants in North America is not new and its manifestations have always been fundamentally linked to the expansion, maintenance, and perceived threats to U.S. global hegemony. With a U.S. empire in drastic decline and the dangerous maneuvering and rise of authoritarian regimes throughout the globe, E. San Juan takes the position that the geopolitical role of the Philippines will continue to be a crucial site or a "first-line defense against perceived threats from China and others... from Asia up to the Middle East."⁸ Thus, if we are to intervene in theory or in our activism to the heightened conditions of anti-Asian racism in this country, we must grasp the dialectic of racial and global antagonisms propelled by the totalizing imperatives of capitalist imperialism.

Building upon a tradition of Global South Marxism(s), E. San Juan demonstrates that the epistemic is useful in not only mapping the linkages between Filipino racial formation and an ongoing project of imperialism but to also problematize the "universality of American nationalism."⁹ The move to Filipinx by U.S.-born immigrants is certainly a rejection of a dominant form of U.S. nationalism that has seen a resurgence exemplified in the refashioned credo of "America First" (used by the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s) now seeking to unify a U.S. polity around a culture war platform of xenophobia, heteronormativity, and white supremacy. E. San Juan's *Maelstrom Over the Killing Fields* (2021) reminds the reader that other forms of nationalism exist, including an emancipatory form of belonging in the Philippines that has never been allowed to breathe outside of its own unique breed of despotism and conditions of foreign domination.

E. San Juan's *Maelstrom Over the Killing Fields* is organized around eight chapters and includes an especially insightful afterword by his life and thought partner, Delia Aguilar. E. San Juan centers the alter/native forms of knowledge production enfolded in the ongoing resistances to (neo)colonial and author-

⁸ San Juan, *Racism and the Filipino Diaspora*, 57.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

itarian regimes in the Philippines. His position is that a people's struggle in the Philippines offers an important curriculum for the world to learn from with its orientation toward socialism, science, and solidarity; motivation to end foreign rule; and mobilization for the material and social betterment of a broad sector of subaltern peoples. The realities of a people in the Philippines persistent in their struggles for sovereignty is why the use of Latinx is not compatible for Filipinx. Specifically, Latino/a, and by extension, Latinx, does not seek to identify with a nation but rather identifies a disparate people located within the U.S. who share a common language and cultural ties to the region of Latin America. The term Filipino is an identification with the Philippine nation. Thus, there are implications for Filipino/x/as located within the United States. Specifically, what is our relationship for those within the United States to the historic and ongoing struggles taking place in the Philippines? What needs further clarification is the relationship between a Filipinx collective identity being enunciated within the United States and an anti-colonial sense of belonging, or what E. San Juan (per Antonio Gramsci) describes as a "national popular" that persists in the Philippines. Does Filipinx (dis)identify with such a project?

I appreciated reading Barrett, Hanna, and Palomar's recent essay, "In Defense of the X," where the authors discuss the politics of naming and the potentials of Filipinx in centering "an evolving nomenclature which more deeply reflects the lived experiences" of queer, trans, and non-binary peoples of Philippine descent.¹⁰ I look forward to further scholarship that elaborates how many people who identify with the "X" in the U.S. and the Philippines see Filipinx representing an "overarching demand for dignity, rights, and humanity for LGBTQI+ people that are currently being undermined through the structures that shape our society."¹¹ We must never forget that the enunciations of activist subjects who are bravely renaming themselves and their world also require collective organization, a social force behind it for such demands to become reality. In this light, I was surprised that in their respective analysis, Barrett et al. make no mention of the transnational activist response to the murder of transgender

¹⁰ Kay Ulanday Barrett, Karen Buenavista Hanna, and Anang Palomar, "Centering Queer, Trans and Non-Binary Pilipina/x/os, Queer Vernacular, and the Politics of Naming," *Alon: Journal for Filipinx American and Diasporic Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (July 2021): 125-148. Gratitude to Valerie Francisco-Menchavez for sharing their article with me at our Critical Filipino Studies Collective (CFSC) retreat.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

Filipina, Jennifer Laude, by U.S. Marine, Lance Cpl. Joseph Scott Pemberton, superbly documented by P.J. Raval in his documentary film, *Call Her Ganda* (2018)¹².

The Laude murder and aftermath offers a case in point to the intertwining of anti-trans violence and U.S. neocolonialism on the other side of freedom in the Philippines. On the night of October 11, 2014, Pemberton, who was stationed in the islands for joint military exercises, met Laude at a nightclub and together they left for a motel room. After discovering that Laude was transgender, Pemberton choked her and forced her head into a toilet bowl until she drowned. Pemberton was found guilty of homicide and was sentenced to serve time in a large Philippine prison. Yet, in deference to the longstanding Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) between the U.S. and the Philippines, Pemberton was detained in a private air-conditioned cell at a special facility inside a Philippine military headquarters. After serving less than six years, Pemberton was placed aboard a U.S. military cargo plane and flown out of the Philippines as he received an absolute pardon from Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. The attorney of the Laude family, Virginia Lacsua Suarez, was quoted in *The New York Times* responding to the Philippine court order and Duterte's pardon of Pemberton: "It shows that the U.S. looks down on us, that the U.S. does not even respect our laws." Suarez continues, "This [case] should give us a lesson that the U.S. has no respect for our sovereignty."¹³

The grassroots women's organization, GABRIELA, was at the forefront of this struggle articulating global demands of justice for Jennifer Laude, all the while making visible how anti-trans violence is intertwined with a history of U.S. militarism in the Philippines. Not only did Barrett et al. elide the important contributions of GABRIELA in propelling this campaign throughout the world, they inferred that GABRIELA youth in the Philippines enact a form of "trans-exclusionary" feminism.¹⁴ I spoke with the current chairperson of GABRIELA Seattle, Jill Mangaliman, as well as its founder, Donna Denina. Denina explains, "I can't speak to what was said by the GABRIELA youth in the Philippines. Just like in any organization, there can be members

¹² *Call Her Ganda*, directed by P.J. Raval (Unravel Pictures, 2018).

¹³ Corinne Redfern, "He Killed A Transgender Woman in the Philippines. Why Was He Freed?" *New York Times*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/17/magazine/philippines-marine-pardon-duterte.html>.

¹⁴ Barrett et al., "Centering Queer, Trans and Non-Binary Pilipina/x/os," 143.

who are not exposed to queer politics and certainly transphobic comments can be made. Yet, as a political organization, I can attest that GABRIELA is not an anti-trans organization.”¹⁵ In reflecting upon their organizing practice, Mangaliman shared the challenges of organizing as a “queer, non-binary Filipino/a” and how too often a trans rights movement in the United States expresses little interest in “connecting transphobia and gender violence with the calls for liberation in the Philippines and the removal of the U.S. military on the islands.”¹⁶ Drawing upon their activism, both Mangaliman and Denina point to how Filipino/x/a Americans must carefully consider the enduring colonial relations that endure between the United States and the Philippines and how the experiences, strategies, political directives, and visions, even in international organizing, can too often reproduce U.S. power relations. This asymmetrical relationship between the two countries is also the reason why English is the widely accepted language used in schools, popular culture, news, and government correspondence throughout the Philippine islands yet I, like so many of my Filipino American brethren and mga kapatid in this country, are unable to speak the native language of our ancestors. Activist interventions in dialogue with people of the Philippines and throughout the Global South ultimately call for greater discernment of who has the power to name whom, who gets to define whose justice.

I believe a generative dialogue can take place between those who reside in the “belly of the beast” and Filipino/as in the Philippines—two interconnected yet distinct histories and experiences. Two years ago, Delia Aguilar attempted to create such a space with E. San Juan to explore the emergence of Filipinx by convening an email exchange that included a diverse range of perspectives (educators, activists, and intellectuals) and places (United States, Canada, and in the Philippines). This dialogue was later published online and much of what I have written here, elaborates upon the analysis shared in that exchange.¹⁷ Based upon the reactions and comments that were made on social media, the core arguments of that dialogue seemed to be dismissed by those

¹⁵ Interview with Donna Denina on May 11, 2022.

¹⁶ Interview with Jill Mangaliman on May 11, 2022.

¹⁷ Freedom Siyam, May Penuela, Charlie Samuya Veric, Jeffrey Cabusao, Michael Viola, and Delia Aguilar, initiated by Delia D. Aguilar with the collaboration of E. San Juan, Jr., “A conversation on ‘Filipinx’ and its vicissitudes,” *Bulatlat* (October 5, 2020). https://www.bulatlat.com/2020/10/05/a-conversation-on-filipinx-and-its-vicissitudes/?fbclid=IwARIfKwzX9qkmuIdbPvacc8vgRNjxkHmbxLPUBzh_UIVfmMQFbXeQx3Q5BDM

residing in the United States. Rather than engaging the arguments presented, much attention was directed upon queries of representation. More precisely, Filipinx Americans seemed more invested in deciphering whether or not gender non-conforming or trans individuals were represented in the dialogue, eliding an engagement with the analysis presented, including the insights of Filipino intellectual, Charlie Veric, who explains,

Filipino and Filipinx are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they both need to flourish. But if one cancels the other, then that's where the problem begins. Filipino is founded on identification with the Philippine nation whereas Filipinx dis-identify themselves from the heteronormative and white supremacist American state. There's a crucial difference between identifying with a young Philippine nation and distancing oneself from the long imperial history of the US. So, if we force Filipinx on Filipinos in the Philippines, that creates more trouble than needed. Give the Filipino nation its time in the sun. Let it grow and mature first. Then we can start denying it. One cannot deconstruct what is not fully constructed.¹⁸

To be clear, I embrace the powerful intentions for those who self-identify as Filipinx. I will continue to use it as the name uplifts an emerging vision and lived reality, particularly those in the United States that do not fit the binaries of gender and sexuality and face various forms of violence. I honor the fluidity of language recognizing that in our collective strategies to create a more just world, we must always be adaptive, inquisitive, and willing to embrace change. The world we seek to create will not come about in our naming alone, but also through the active struggles to realize the aspirations of women, genderqueers, and trans people inside the United States in solidarity with the peoples in the country of our mothers, and their mothers. E. San Juan's writing and the activism of GABRIELA continue to remind us that we must connect the myriad struggles that we face, wherever we may be located, to those bearing the most brutal marks of (ongoing) colonial relations. In light of the recent Philippine elections, where the son of a U.S.-supported dictator and daugh-

¹⁸ Siyam, et al., "A Conversation on 'Filipinx'"

ter of an autocrat claim the highest seats of power, perhaps the timeless Filipino cultural worker in the U.S., Carlos Bulosan, said it best,

Never forget your people, your country, wherever you go. Your greatness lies in them...Do not misuse your gift; apply it toward the safeguarding of our great heritage, the grandeur of our history, the realization of our great heroes' dream for a free and good Philippines.¹⁹

Building upon such a perspective and as a means to conclude, when I tell you that I'm Filipino American, I'm not negating Filipinx. I cite our geographies to highlight where my mother was born, to bring forward a culture of struggle that I have inherited from my ancestors; to clarify where we are surviving now, and to honor the greatness of a people whose dreams, if realized, can help us all to get free.

¹⁹ Quoted in San Juan, *Maelstrom*, 90.

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THE ASIAN BABY GIRL (ABG) THROUGH A FILIPINA AMERICAN LENS*



*Stacey Anne Baterina Salinas and Talitha Angelica (Angel)
Acaylar Trazo*

ABSTRACT

The gendered violence exacerbated by the racist rhetoric of the Covid pandemic left many in the Asian American community scarred, angry, and frightened. Our panel's speakers trace the histories of gendered violence that women of Asian descent have faced in the United States, covering the intersecting topics of race, gender, sexuality, cultural heteropatriarchy, and the ongoing legacies of Orientalism and neo-imperialism. We then link these histories to the Asian American youth culture known as the Asian Baby Girl or Asian Baby Gangster (ABG), an intergenerational form of resistance that has strongly challenged, or in some cases capriciously and enigmatically adhered to, gendered expectations of the ideal Asian woman in America.* We assess the ABG as a complicated and gendered aesthetic in Asian youth culture that, despite receiving criticisms from both within and outside communities of Asian descent, continues to provide a constructive platform for discussions on Asian women's agency and socio-political and cultural visibility.

GENDERED AND RACIALIZED STEREOTYPES OF ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN: A BRIEF HISTORY

For Women's History Month in 2021, I (Stacey Salinas) offered a free virtual lecture and workshop series on BIPOC Feminisms because I was concerned with the rise in violence against Asian women during the pandemic. Over the course of three weeks, I taught on the historic types of violence that women of

* This paper is an adaptation of our 2022 Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) Panel: "Undoing the Model Minority Myth Through the Asian Baby Girl Aesthetic" presented by Stacey Salinas, Angel Trazo, and Allyson Remigio.

Asian descent have witnessed over the centuries, and I wanted to create a space for Asian American women to speak on their anger and grief so that we could together combat the hypersexual and fetishized depictions of Asian women in media. All of these sexist stereotypes in one way or another have affected how we view and express our own sexual agency as women of color.

I dedicated the workshop series to exploring the origins and development of the Asian woman as “Oriental fetish” during the Age of Imperialism.¹ I discussed the histories of human trafficking and its effect on women from Asia and other parts of the Global South, the purpose and legacy of the Page Act (1875), the voyeuristic nature of travel guides and post card culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the formation of R&R stations located near American military bases, and the gendered violence of major colonial and neo-imperialist wars. The majority of the audience had never heard these colonial histories of the Pacific, let alone the gendered nature of them. I wanted to make sure to point out that the victimization of our Asian sisters continues to be immense and speaks to a darker history of victimization and exploitation. But within that narrative of violence, I also wanted to address the movements in Asian women’s history of resistance against gendered and racialized stereotypes via survivance.²

The majority of millennial and Gen Z audience members who registered for the workshop had never heard of the China doll, lotus blossom, Madame Butterfly, nor dragon lady stereotypes.³ What initially became a set of public lectures and workshops on radical Asian American feminisms and BIPOC women’s history became a collective moment between myself and the audience to reflect on all of the ways we, as Asian women, had been treated and judged as Orientalist fantasies. I wanted the

¹ Paul H. Pratoska, ed., *South East Asia, Colonial History: High Imperialism (1890s-1930s)* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Tina Chen, *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 64, 72; Leslie Bow, “Fetish (Part I: Keywords)” in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature* (2014), 138-147.

² Drawing from Native American and Indigenous Studies’ scholars, “survivance” is “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimmy. Simply, survivance is survival + resistance.” Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), p. vii The caricatures born out of imperialist violence have indeed created victims out of Asian women, and in these same histories of gendered violence and stereotyping, Asian women have been forced to fulfill these stereotypes to survive. But they have also re-tooled them to make themselves visible and heard, and they have also tried to abolish them altogether.

³ Based on the definitions provided by the Pew Research Center, millennial refers to the generation born between 1981 and 1996 and “GenZ” refers to the generation born between 1997 and 2009.

participants to consider the alternative ways we have stood against and within those tropes by presenting our collective and transpacific histories; it was my discussion of the Asian Baby Girl (ABG) as a contemporary opportunity to tackle our traumas and pains as Asian women that received the most confusion, surprise, disbelief, and even pride from the audience. What I had realized from the audience's reactions was that, similar to the stereotype of the model minority myth, the ABG had become a stereotype that millennials and GenZ'ers had also internalized in complicated, and, in some cases, potentially harmful ways.

Reviewing Asian American representation in American pop culture via American cinema in the last century, we can clearly see these stereotypes and how they grew from one caricature to the next into the model minority girl nympho. Orientalist fantasies continued to follow this more recent stereotype, as they did with the dragon lady and China doll caricatures of centuries past. What we see historically emerge for Generation X and millennials is the creation of the model minority girl, born from the brain drain of 1965, who cannot disentangle herself from a previous sexist trope: the Asian nerdy-girl-nympho. We see her in *Mean Girls* (2004) as the Vietnamese American women labeled the "cool Asian nerds" who sleep with the high school coach. We see her in the *Austin Powers* (1997-2002) films as the Japanese twins called "Fook Me" and "Fook U." We see her in the *Fast and Furious* (2001-2011) film franchise as car-loving but deadly LA gang girls, who in their downtime are studious but provocatively dressed, mere sexual accessories to both the White and Asian male gang leaders of the films. Similar to other moments in Asian American history, this new take on the Asian American woman as a sexy gang member lackey speaks to the real gendered and racialized violence Asian American women were experiencing in the 1980s to 2000s.

ASIAN BABY GANGSTERS

I remember very clearly as a high schooler then college undergraduate that the Asian Baby Gangster title usually had the connotation of an Asian woman who was rebellious, wore provocative clothing and too much eyeliner, was open to having a good time, was quite vocal with her opinions, and prone to instigating

fight or gossip. As an undergrad, I saw these Asian American women as brave, as I was brought up in a traditional Filipino household. But many other Asian American college youths did not share my opinions of the ABG; they were quick to lambast the presence or personalities of ABGs as unrefined “hoes” with poor taste. Most preferred the model student performance and were quick to verbally destroy anything outside of that stereotype. Growing up in the Bay Area, I was familiar with seeing 1990s Asian American woman representation in the Asian pop culture trends surrounding me. One of the cultural moments I remember being exposed to was the presence of Asian American gangs. The women who were part of these circles were particularly different from Lea Salonga’s Miss Saigon and the well-spoken beauty pageant queen, Miss Philippines, that I was taught to admire and aspire to be.

As scholars like Kevin D. Lam and Bangele Deguzman Alsaybar have explained, the 1980s–1990s was an era where many first- and second-generation Asian American youths were coming of age.⁴ Southeast Asian and East Asian refugees and immigrants who had left their homes, due to the postcolonial and political violences and instability in their homelands, were rearing their children in urban sectors of the United States that historically were and continue to be underfunded BIPOC spaces.⁵ Many Southeast Asian and East Asian American youths who were coming of age during this period did not identify with the traditional culture and beliefs of their war-torn parents. They also did not find warm and inviting spaces in their schools and other public spaces, as they were seen as “too Asian” and not American. Many Asian American youths who have witnessed or took part in Asian American gangs have explained in multiple studies some of the many reasons behind the growth of Asian American gang culture including: (1) shortcomings in the home environment; (2) alienation from school; (3) estrangement from American culture; and (4) peer pressure.

⁴ Kevin D. Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling: Vietnamese American Youth in a Postcolonial Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Bangele Deguzman Alsaybar, “Satanas Ethnography of a Filipino American Street Brotherhood in Los Angeles,” Masters thesis, (University of California at Los Angeles, 1993).

⁵ Kevin D. Lam, “Asian American Youth Violence as Genocide: A Critical Approach and its Pedagogical Significance,” *Equity and Excellence in Education* 52, no. 2-3 (2019): 255-270, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1672594>; Bangele Deguzman Alsaybar, “Youth Groups and Youth Savers: Gangs, Crews, and the Rise of Filipino American Youth Culture in Los Angeles,” PhD dissertation, (University of California, Los Angeles, 2007).

Gang culture became a space for Asian American male youths to talk back to the racist and emasculating narratives and stereotypes they experienced. It also provided structure and a type of chosen family support system, one that many Asian American refugee and immigrant households did not necessarily have because of the grueling day to day of working to make ends meet, and lack of healthy conversation between first-gen parents and second-gen youths. Filipinas and other Southeast Asian women who were part of these gangs were also mingling and sharing space and coalitions with Chicana and Black sister gangs. Thus, the look and makeup aesthetics that the ABG took on became an amalgamation of multiple cultural influences.

Within this social context, the ABG became a chance for Asian American female youths to also find their own support system to escape from the many complicated traumas and personal, cultural, and social issues they faced. ABGs that I grew up with and saw were the alternative to the model minority student. The ABG was a fast-talking, scissor- or razor blade-carrying, eyeliner- and lip liner-wearing phenomenon that our principals and teachers (who were majority white) could not wrap their minds around.

The ABG as an auxiliary to Asian male gangs also took on the same hobbies and cultural spaces as their brothers. Souping up cars into “rice rockets,” attending public dances and DJ spaces in public community cultural events like barrio fiestas, wearing outfits that traditional Asian parents would not approve of, or wearing the particular male outfit that Asian gang members wore as part of their gang’s signature—all of these trends of ABG culture became part of other mainstream entities where Asian American counter-culture began to grow. We see the ABG look in *For Him Magazine* (FHM), we see the ABG as part of the car model import scene began to reach overseas, and we see the ABG look promoted in the Singaporean and Philippines FHM covers. But just like the lotus blossom, Madame Butterfly, dragon lady, and model minority nympho girl, the ABG also became targeted and labeled as hypersexual. The Asian American community would also label her as such, and American cinema would take notice and commodify her in the *Fast and Furious* franchise. The re-tooled and re-packaged Asian Baby Gangster imagined onscreen again was silent, with few lines, but heavy sex appeal. This newer fetish or spectacle of the Asian woman onscreen

would obscure the real issues that Asian American women were facing on the ground in the streets of neglected Asian American communities of California like Los Angeles, San Diego, and Hercules. These commodified movie gangster girls had little to no lines in these films. Thus the real stories of Asian Baby Gangsters and their issues within underfunded but heavily policed communities, their lack of public education and health resources, and the real sexual violence they experienced as sexual accessories in some of these gang circles also went unheard while their images onscreen became more remakes of America's fascination with the oversexed Asian woman.

THE ABG IN ASIAN AMERICAN SOCIAL MEDIA

A new digital era emerged in the 1990s with the global introduction of the Internet. Asian American youths utilized technology to communicate their interpretations of Asian America in the multicultural era of the nineties. We see the slang and language of ABG emerge and spread through the beginnings of instant messaging platforms like AOL Instant Messenger, chatrooms, MySpace, Friendster, and Xanga.⁶ The music scene of the 1990s also was reimagined and widely available through programs like Napster, Limewire, and Kazaa, allowing people to download and share music. Asian American youth created their own musical aesthetic and style and situated themselves in the evolving and diverse music scene that Black female artists like TLC, SWV, and XSCAPE paved the way for during the early nineties through platforms like MTV. AZN for youths growing up in the 1990s and 2000s was in reference to Asian American pride movements and led to hip hop anthems like "Got Rice?"

Amidst the growing network of Asian American digital counter spaces, the Internet—coupled with television—made more available the fetishization of Asian women via websites that promoted mail-order bride and Asian women in sex work. Despite these challenges, Asian American youths continued to use their digital creative resources to (re)interpret what it meant to be Asian in America. Filipina American artists like Pinay and

⁶ Xanga was a blog website created in 1999. The website gained more popularity during the early 2000s and the majority of its subscribers were Millennial Asian American youth (ages 12-18). Xanga was a personal blog and photoblog website where subscribers treated it as their own personal, but public, virtual diary. Millennial youths could share their personal page with their friends and the broader online community. The Xanga platform was also highly personable as subscribers could choose for free which music to play on their page, which decorations, gifs, font, photographs and more that they could use to decorate their page to suit their particular tastes.

Jocelyn Enriquez refashioned their culture, femininity, and sexuality for broader audiences through music, challenging the model minority and mail-order bride stereotypes. Filipina artists challenged gendered, racialized expectations through hair, make-up, styling choices, lyrics, and music video aesthetics. Digital spaces allowed Asian American youths to explore their identities, divesting from the model minority expectations. AZN Pinay artists' contributions during the 1990s and early 2000s allowed for other Asian American women to express themselves beyond the caricatures of the dragon lady, model minority myth, and mail-order bride. By putting their own cultural spin on pop culture, Pinay artists produced a counter space to the model minority by entering BIPOC hip hop and RnB spaces, thus creating a pathway to the modern day Asian Baby Girl.

Once a niche, local, California-based Asian American subculture in the 1990s to early 2000s, the Asian Baby Girl has become a highly-viral Internet aesthetic among Asian American young women since the 2010s. In the 2010s, the ABG was popularized on a national scale by Asian American YouTube videos such as the Fung Bros' "Types of Asian Girls" (2014)⁷ and Chow Mane's "Asian Baby Girl" (2018).⁸ The ABG went viral again in 2018 through the proliferation of ABG memes circulating the global Asian imaginary on the 1.9-million-member Facebook page Subtle Asian Traits (SAT).⁹ The ABG aesthetic continued to spread in 2020 as the top Asian American makeup and fashion content creators, mostly East Asians, transformed themselves via "ABG Transformation" makeup tutorials. Uprooted from its local California context, the ABG subculture has been aestheticized, commercialized, and globalized with Singapore Nylon advertising "ABG makeup products" and #abg spreading on Instagram and TikTok.¹⁰ The impact of the ABG on Asian American young women is evidenced by a plethora of online publications describ-

⁷ Fung Bros, "18 Types of Asian Girls," YouTube. July 22, 2014, video, 12:35, <https://youtu.be/WI-YPEQb6rQ>.

⁸ Chow Mane, "Chow Mane—ABG (Music Video) *OFFICIAL ABG ANTHEM.*" YouTube, March 18, 2018, video, 3:14, <https://youtu.be/YZpdMBYmkeA>.

⁹ Isabella Kwai, "How 'Subtle Asian Traits' Became a Global Hit," *New York Times*, December 11, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/11/world/australia/subtle-asian-traits-facebook-group.html>.

¹⁰ "Everything You Need to Know About The Asia Baby Girl Trend That's Taking Over the Internet," *Singapore Nylon*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.nylon.com.sg/2020/03/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-asian-baby-girl-trend-thats-taking-over-the-internet/>.

ing the ABG on college campuses across the country.¹¹

The current ABG aesthetic involves winged eyeliner and false eyelashes on an Asian female face, trendy outfits paired with hoop earrings and a floral or dragon tattoo on a thin (but curvy, often courtesy of breast implants) body, and a “baddie”/“bad-ass” attitude and “party girl” lifestyle. She is seen at the center of Yelp-worthy Asian eateries and boba shops, electronic dance music (EDM) raves, Asian Greek Life, and Asian night clubs across the country.¹² The ABG acronym has also recently been utilized by Asian Boss Girl, a popular Asian American podcast that leans into the model minority myth as it features millennial East Asian American media personalities who interview successful Asian American entrepreneurs. However, some references to the ABG’s Southeast Asian origins remain, with the stereotypical ABG female named “Vivian Tran” and her Asian Baby Boy (ABB)/“Asian fuckboy” counterpart named “Kevin Nguyen,” as both Tran and Nguyen are ethnically Vietnamese surnames.¹³

Unlike other stereotypes created by white, mainstream U.S. culture that have been imposed onto Asian American youth, namely the model minority myth and gendered typecasts such as the lotus blossom or dragon lady, I argue that the ABG subculture is a youth-created set of racialized, gendered, and sexualized constructions that simultaneously defy and reify hegemonic perceptions of Asian American women in the United States. For my dissertation, I (Angel Trazo) hope to: 1) historicize the development of the ABG subculture in 1990s California, and 2) compare how the ABG subculture has changed over time through shifts in local California culture as well as through social media. My main research question is: How does the figure of the Asian Baby Girl influence how Asian American women conceptualize their own race, gender, and sexuality in the United States?

The following preliminary research findings are based on thirty-two surveys and five interviews with GenZ (ages 18-24) and Millennial (ages 25-38) Filipina/o/x Americans conducted

¹¹ “The Rise of the ABG,” *U Penn The F-Word Magazine*, March 7, 2020, <https://upennfword.com/2020/03/07/the-rise-of-the-abg/>; Mai Tran, “It was a cultural reset: a short history of the ABG aesthetic,” *i-D Vice*, October 7, 2020, https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/g5p44x/it-was-a-cultural-reset-a-short-history-of-the-abg-aesthetic; Zoe Zhang, “What the ‘ABG’ identity says about ESEA femininity,” *The Michigan Daily*, September 15, 2021, <https://www.michigandaily.com/michigan-in-color/what-the-abg-identity-says-about-esea-femininity/>.

¹² Jacquelyn Tran, “Boba, Chè and ABGs: A San Jose Local’s Guide to Vietnamese Drinks,” *KQED*, October 22, 2021, <https://www.kqed.org/arts/13904913/vietnamese-drinks-boba-che-guide-san-jose>; Talitha Angelica Acaylar Trazo, “Wanna Get Boba?: The Bond Between Boba and Asian American Youth in San José, California,” MA thesis, (University of California, Los Angeles, 2020).

¹³ Ku Kim, “The Official ABG & ABB Test,” 2020, <https://abgcalculator.com/>.

between March 2022 to May 2022. Of the survey respondents, twenty-seven identified as female and five identified as male; one identified as first-generation, four identified as 1.5-generation, twenty-two identified as second-generation, and five identified as third-generation. Several key themes emerged in regard to the ABG.

Participation in Panethnic Asian American Communities. The ABG is considered a panethnic Asian American subculture, though panethnicity is limited to East Asians and Southeast Asians (to the exclusion of South Asians). The 1990s and 2000s ABG was thought to be affiliated with an Asian gang, be involved in the Asian American import car scene, and from a California ethnic enclave (in the Bay Area, the OC, or LA). The post-2010s ABG can be found anywhere in the country and even abroad. She is part of the Asian Greek community or affiliated with Asian cultural clubs in college, or part of a “rave family” comprised of Asian Americans at electronic music festivals. Throughout the years, to participate in the ABG subculture is to find a sense of belonging within various panethnic Asian American communities and subcultures.

Hypersexualization and Hyperfemininity. Asian women in mainstream American media remain implicated in the Orientalist fantasies of White men. However, the Asian Baby Girl wants the Asian Baby Boy. While this gendered trope unproblematically reinforces heteronormativity, it also disrupts past notions of the White man’s imperial claim over the Asian woman’s body. Nevertheless, the ABG is critiqued for not disrupting the objectification of Asian American women, despite this being a feat that no Asian woman can overcome within the systems of imperialism, racism, and heteropatriarchy.

Furthermore, the ABG asserts her hyperfemininity and hypersexualization through her cultural consumption and, borrowing the term Jillian Hernandez uses to describe the Latina “chonga,” “aesthetic excess.”¹⁴ For the ABG, aesthetic excess is a practice of consumption that is both extremely local and global. She goes to Asian-owned boba shops and night clubs (typically located in Asian ethnic enclaves such as NYC Koreatown or Eastside San José) and patronizes Asian American ethnic niches, needing a nail girl, eyelash girl, and hair girl in order to maintain

¹⁴ Jillian Hernandez, *Aesthetics of Excess: The Art and Politics of Black and Latina Embodiment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 12.

her aesthetic and lifestyle. These local spots become hallmarks of Asian American youth culture and sustain the local Asian American community economy. But the ABG is also a global consumer with a passion for fast-fashion, purchasing from online retailers that source their clothing from Asian sweatshops, or whose lash extension kits, Korean cosmetics, or circle lenses come from Asian production factories abroad. The ABG also been “meme-fied”; social media has flattened to a stereotype and an aesthetic that no longer has the historical origins attached to her. ABG can mean “Asian Basic Girl,” emphasizing the shallow superficiality of this subculture.

Racialization. The ABG is not White. Rather, she refuses assimilation to Whiteness by drawing on aesthetics and youth cultural scenes associated with people of color, namely the Latinx and African American communities. This is highlighted by Asian Americans in hip hop and HyPhy culture, positively noted in collaborations between P-Lo and E-40 or critiqued in reference to Asian Americans’ use of AAVE or the N-word. This is also seen in Asian American youths’ participation in the import car scene, a derivative of the Chicano low-rider scene.¹⁵ However, the newer generation of the ABG leans into the model minority due to stereotypes associated with college (being pre-nursing majors and rushing Asian sororities). In addition, the ABG remains a perpetual foreigner, a trait rooted in the visibility of her Asian racialization. Interestingly, what get stereotyped as “ABG hub” cities are in predominantly-White nations: San José in the U.S., Sydney in Australia, Toronto in Canada. The ABG aesthetic can be seen as resistance within predominantly-White societies. However, is solidarity possible through shared aesthetics alone? Can this connection based on racialization among Asian women be enough for transnational coalition building in the next generation?

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Asian women have had many historic responses to the gender-based violence committed upon her communities for the last three centuries. Asian American women have responded critically to such Orientalist depictions and have demonstrated their

¹⁵ Soo Ah Kwon, “Autoexoticizing: Asian American youth and the import car scene,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 7, no. 1 (2004): 1-26, doi: 10.1353/jaas.2005.0004

ownership of their sexuality while also discarding or, in many cases, re-working interpretations and expectations of the western and traditional Asian ideals of what counts as feminine. These long histories of survivance have culminated in the Asian Baby Girl, a culturally syncretic avatar that in some ways upends the colonial framing and practice of containing the Asian woman under the White male gaze. This is an ongoing project. In our research and recollecting of Asian American women's history, we found that the form--the persona--of the ABG had always been present. The culmination of generations of Asian women's struggle against settler colonialism and Orientalism simply has brought us to one of our more recent responses, or incarnations, of our contempt for the violence and objectification we have received.

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THE CELINE ARCHIVE: DECOLONIAL AND FEMINIST APPROACHES TO FILIPINA LIVES



Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Rick Baldoz, José B. Capino, Denise Cruz, and Rachael Joo

Transcribed and edited by Rachael Joo.

The following are edited transcript excerpts from a conference panel titled, “The Celine Archive: Decolonial and Feminist Approaches to Filipina Lives” that took place on Zoom during the annual Association for Asian American Studies Conference on April 12, 2022, in Denver, Colorado, and was recorded with permission by all the presenters.

The Celine Archive (Women Make Movies, 2020) is a documentary film directed by Celine Parreñas Shimizu that covers the life and times of Celine Navarro, a Filipina woman who was killed in 1932 by her own community in California. As Shimizu grieves the loss of her son, Lakas, she tells a multidimensional story that worlds the legacy of Celine Navarro. The film explores themes of gendered violence, inter-generational trauma, and healing from devastating loss.

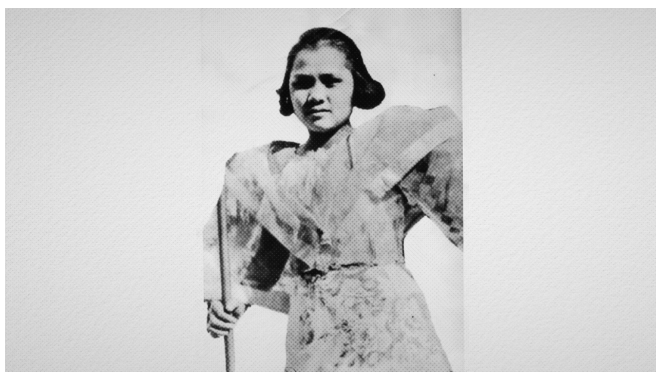
Chaired by Rachael Joo (Middlebury College), the remotely-convened panel on the film gathered luminaries in Filipinx American Studies including Celine Parreñas Shimizu (Dean of the Arts at UCSC), Rick Baldoz (Brown University, then Oberlin College), J.B. Capino (University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign), and Denise Cruz (Columbia University). The Zoom conversation was lively and engaging, covering critical theory, feminist methodology, and historiography. The following transcription highlights the productive intellectual conversations that we had about and around the film. This transcription acts as a critical companion piece to the film for scholars of feminist film and Asian American Studies.

Rick Baldoz:

I wanted to start off [with] the film's powerful mediation on grief and loss, and how we address those things in our lives. I just wanted to briefly acknowledge two beautiful souls who we see in the film, Lakas Parreñas Shimizu¹ and Dawn Mabalon,² whose imprint and legacy in our worlds remain deeply felt and I miss them both. This film was a nice way to kind of reconnect with the importance of those two people in our lives.

WHERE ARE THE STORIES OF WOMEN IN FILIPINX AMERICAN HISTORY?

Let me talk about my response to the film and why I think it's an important contribution to Asian American Studies. One of the things that I find remarkable about the film is the amazing amount of detective work that went into piecing together the life, death, and legacy of Celine Navarro's story, who is a relatively obscure historical figure, who nonetheless offers important insights into the complexity of early Filipino American community and culture. I know in the film we learn that the story itself got a lot of media traction, but I think in some ways [in] those media depictions from the 1930s, Celine Navarro was in the background of the story. She was just the victim. I think this film does a good job of drawing out the importance of her life and what it can tell us about telling stories about Asian America.



Celine Navarro, 1932. Film still from *The Celine Archives*. A grainy image of Celine Navarro taken in 1932. The image is a black and white image of a young Filipinx woman in a dress holding a cane (<http://celinearchive.wordpress.com/images>). Used with permission.

¹ Lakas Shimizu is the son of Celine Parreñas Shimizu who died suddenly due to a virus that attacked his heart on December 25, 2013. He was eight years old.

² Dawn Mabalon, a professor of Asian American history at San Francisco State University, centered her work on the history of Filipinx communities in Stockton, California. Her work, *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) is a critically important work of social history that maps the contours of Filipinx American life throughout the twentieth century. Dawn Mabalon was an important figure in the film who died suddenly on a family vacation in 2018 prior to the completion of the film.

One of the most common critiques of my book, *The Third Asiatic Invasion*, was that it was a very male-centered project, and that the role of Filipino American women was muted.³ One way I responded to that critique was to note that the Filipino population in the US during the time period I study was overwhelmingly male. Most estimates say around 96 percent men, so the majority of archival material and public records were about men. That's one way I've tried to explain that blind spot or shortcoming. At the same time, I've tried to acknowledge the blind spots in my work and admit that just because I didn't find a lot of material about Filipino American women doesn't mean that it's not out there waiting to be discovered. I think *The Celine Archive* is a wonderful example of someone who committed themselves to centering the stories of Filipino American women.

The film amasses what I consider an impressive treasure trove of ephemera about the gender politics surrounding the Maria Clara Lodge as well as the CDA (Caballeros de Dimas-Alang). Just the amount of photos that she was able to uncover offers a fascinating window into the world of Filipino America. People just doing everyday activities: hamming it up for the camera, wearing swimsuits, going out on the town. This film is a great catalyst for other scholars to follow Celine's lead and uncover more Filipino or Filipina American stories.⁴ Hopefully, ones that are a little less violent than this one, but I do think there's a new generation of young Fil-Am scholars who are doing the work, and we'll see a lot more great, important work about Filipina America in the coming years.

COMMUNITY AS BULWARK

One thread from the film that I wanted to comment on was how do we make sense of the fact that Filipina women played such a central role in meting out violence and retribution against Celine Navarro? Why would women turn on another woman in their community? I think the CDA (and obviously the Maria

³ Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011).

⁴ The Maria Clara Lodge was the women's auxiliary of the Caballeros Dimas Alang. The name of the organization was inspired by a character in Jose Rizal's historical novel *Noli Me Tangere*. The CDA is the acronym for the Caballeros de Dimas-Alang, a Filipino American fraternal organization founded in California in the early 1920s. "Dimas Alang" was one of Jose Rizal's pseudonyms for his political writings. The CDA was an early mutual aid organization for Filipinos living in the United States and advocated for Philippine independence during the US colonial period.

Clara is an auxiliary of the CDA) can be understood as a quasi-messianic fraternal organization. The cloistered nature of these organizations gave rise to certain cult-like features that close ranks in response to perceived threats to their community standing. Consequently, because of the way they closed ranks and had these very maximalist attitudes about ingroup/outgroup behavior, loyalty was paramount. For the women of Maria Clara, the issue of loyalty was particularly intense, because the penalty for disloyalty was severe. Let's remember that these are people living in a deeply racist society that despises Filipinos, so the idea of betraying the community, going against the leaders of the community, would have invited a type of exile that must have been very terrifying. I think the most compelling explanation to me about why members of Maria Clara participated in the murder [of Celine Navarro] is because of the fear that they themselves would be exiled or punished if they didn't comply with the edicts of the leadership. We have to remember here that it wasn't like you could just say, "You know I'm through with this community. I'm going to go start over somewhere." To be a Filipino in the United States in the 1930s, there was no place to go. You couldn't just disappear and reinvent yourself as a flapper girl. The racial and class stigma associated with being Filipino meant that you were relegated to the margins of US society that faced the constant threat of nativist violence and surveillance. To be a Filipino woman was even more dangerous. In trying to make sense of why the members of the Maria Clara lodge were willing participants can be understood through the context of the clannish loyalty demanded in cult-like organizations.

Celine Parreñas Shimizu:

CENTERING THE FAMILY OF CELINE NAVARRO

Thank you so much, Rick. I really appreciate your trust in me in including you in the film and putting you in debate with Dawn Mabalon and Dorothy Cordova⁵. It is precisely what you said. They couldn't just leave, and there was definitely fear around where you couldn't go. They really did not have the ability to leave. I also appreciate your discussing the multiple kinds of archival materials that were there.

⁵ Dorothy Cordova, along with her partner Fred Cordova, was the founder and long-time director of Filipino American National Historical Society.

The family was very cooperative, and it was almost like they were waiting for somebody to come around. Mike Dagampat, who is the grandson of Asun, Celine's sister, has organized the Juana Montayre Facebook page, where they gather all their family photos, perhaps knowing that somebody at some point was going to come around and talk to them about it. They were ready for this to be discussed, to be engaged, to be dissected, to be uncovered, to be wrestled with. They wanted to hand everything over. So, to answer your second question first, I think they really appreciated that. There were about ninety people invited for a family screening of the film before I even submitted to film festivals. I wanted to make sure they were okay with [it], letting them know that if they didn't like it, I wasn't going to go forward. For me, it's always that way as a filmmaker. If they don't like it, I'm not going to be able to move forward because I don't want film to harm them further, to harm anyone, but to harm them, in particular, further.

It's one of the greatest honors, as Rachael Joo and I talk about, for anthropologists to be adopted into the communities that they study, and this is definitely something that happened between me and the Navarro family. There was something that we detected in each other, a need for each other. We recognize in each other what it means to lose someone. This man, who is my age exactly, sat behind me during this private family screening at the Yerba Buena Center. He said to me that he has been living with the weight of his grandmother's death his whole life, and only on that day did it come off. It was the same watching it with Mama Lucia who was bawling the whole time the movie was going—not just like regular crying, but bawling. It was almost hard to watch the film because she was just... that choked up, crying, like the kind that feels sharp. You know what I mean? Not just beautiful tears, but just coughing, harsh, crying. Just this primal kind of cry. So that was hard. But the family was very happy. They continue to text me today, like in the middle of anywhere, just to say, "Thank you so much for making this film happen." I think because we went through it together. I think part of my work as a director is going there with them, going to the kernel of the emotion. When we were at the gravesite, I talked about what it meant to find their families that [didn't] even know they existed. I think we just all escalated emotionally. I think that's why the funeral in the film feels that way.



Descendants of Celine Navarro. Film still from *The Celine Archive*. The photo features a multi-generational group of thirty-eight people gathered for the funeral of Celine Navarro (<http://celinearchive.wordpress.com/images>). Used with permission.

ARCHIVES AS A COMMUNITY PROJECT

In terms of your first question, is there anything that I wish I found? I did not expect to be given the chance to go to the storage materials in Filipino American National Historical Society—Stockton. When I first went to FAHNS Stockton⁶ to access their archives, I opened the door, and they happened to have a board meeting, and they said, “Oh here’s that lady [who] is making that movie about the woman that we killed.” Maybe our inquiries over the years led to that open acknowledgment of the story [that] wasn’t there when Dawn was writing about it, when Alex Fabros⁷ was writing about it, when Jean Vengua⁸ was writing about it. I think this story was almost out for a long time. There was that openness, and they opened the archive completely. This is another testimony to how amazing Dawn Mabalon is as a scholar. She said people used to go to FAHNS and just get stuff, but now, “We have a form. For every photo you want to use. You have to pay us fifty dollars.” That was Dawn Mabalon teaching them how to do that. I was happy to fork that over because that’s what it

⁶ Filipino American National Historical Society in Stockton, California.

⁷ Alex Fabros, Jr., is a retired professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University.

⁸ Jean Vengua is a Filipina American novelist and a poet who wrote the poem “Marcelina,” recently re-released by Paloma Press in 2021.

costs to do this kind of work and to say this material is valuable.

There were actually more things that I wish I put in. It was really amazing to see the name Celine Navarro with the names of the people who were indicted for killing her in the roster of attendance at the Maria Clara Lodge and the CDA. It was messy. It was within different pages of this book, and I just couldn't figure out how to do it. To honor Dawn, the crew and I who were supposed to travel with her were all rushing to eat at the Bruce Lee restaurant, because Dawn said, "When we go to Seattle, I'm gonna take you to Bruce Lee's restaurant! We're going to order this. We're gonna order that." Our whole crew went because we all were recently with Dawn at the previous shoot just two weeks before, and we ate all the dishes that she asked us to eat. That was a priority for our grief as a crew which meant that we couldn't get the shooting right. Our mourning Dawn was a priority. Thank you so much, Rick.

J.B. Capino:

THE CELINE ARCHIVE: REMAKING THE DECOLONIAL FEMINIST DOCUMENTARY

In *The Celine Archive*, Celine Parreñas Shimizu charts a new path for decolonial feminist documentary filmmaking. For Walter Dignolo and Catherine Walsh, decoloniality entails not only a vigorous critique of Western modernity and both historical and ongoing forms of imperialism but also a complementary praxis that seeks to "confront, transgress, and undo" them.⁹ *The Celine Archive* works constantly on both elements, developing rigorous critiques of the woman's plight under empire while also reconfiguring documentary filmmaking practice in the service of progressive ends.

The critique that the film advances is multi-pronged. The first two prongs are comprised of self-reflexive analyses of contemporary ways of recuperating and representing marginalized figures who have been virtually erased from history. The third prong is an excoriation of the ideologies and practices that led to the oppression of women like Cecilia Montaire Navarro—the documentary's subject—during their time. The cinematic vehicle for this three-pronged critique is similarly intricate. First, the filmmaker draws on the resources of feminist

⁹ Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 18.

documentary filmmaking, a stream of documentary practice which Julia Lesage defines in mainly political terms as “a cinematic genre congruent with...the [then] contemporary women’s movement.”¹⁰ Though varying in “cinematic sophistication” and “quality of political analysis,” feminist documentaries tend to share certain aspects, such as the spartan visual style of cinema vérité and a soundtrack “usually told in the subjects’ own words” and filled with “women’s self-conscious, heightened, intellectual discussion of role and sexual politics.”¹¹ Second, in reconstructing the gap-riddled story of Cecilia’s tragedy and gathering multiple perspectives about it, *The Celine Archive* utilizes a rich assemblage of audio-visual techniques associated with what Linda Williams and other scholars have been calling the “new documentary.”¹² Williams attaches the term to the audio-visually dense and syncretic form of documentary that often incorporates a self-conscious¹³ postmodern questioning of truth claims.¹⁴ Through the stylistic features of the new documentary, *The Celine Archive* creates dynamic interchanges involving competing perspectives, alternations between evidence and speculation, and shifts between heightened emotions and professorial discourse. Departing from the stylistic conservativeness of many historical documentaries, Parreñas Shimizu’s film makes ample use of the lush audio-visual style, creative mise-en-scène, computer graphics, episodic structure, multiple narrators, and the use of B-roll footage associated with new documentaries such as Errol Morris’s *The Thin Blue Line*.

Apart from the impetus of retelling Cecilia’s story from a decolonial feminist perspective, the film’s search for its elusive subject seems to draw some inspiration from a key essay from an earlier era of postcolonial feminist thought, namely Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?”¹⁵ Spivak articulates the challenge of speaking about a historical subject who was so extremely marginalized in their time that her existence was rendered practically invisible to history by their class po-

¹⁰ Julia Lesage, “The Political Aesthetics of the Feminist Documentary Film,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (September 1978): 507.

¹¹ Lesage, “The Political Aesthetics,” 519.

¹² Linda Williams, “Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary,” *Film Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 3 (April 1, 1993): 9–21; Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵ Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (London: Macmillan, 1988), 66–111.

sition, gender, place within the colonial regime, and the biases of historical scholarship. Spivak describes the scholar's dilemma as "the problem of the muted subject of the subaltern woman."¹⁶ The essay has figured previously in Parreñas Shimizu's scholarship.¹⁷ In the remainder of this piece, I will read the film as an informal dialogue between the filmmaker and the essay, with the latter representing both Spivak's work and the still-vital influence that postcolonial critique can play in the advancement of the decolonial feminist documentary.

Spivak's essay and *The Celine Archive* both offer extended reflections on the outsize role that archives play in any effort to recuperate the history of the subaltern woman. The film's title—lest one forget—foregrounds the central significance not only of Cecilia but the archive as well. Near the start of the documentary, the filmmaker is shown rummaging through files at the Filipino American National Historical Society's (FAHNS) branch in Stockton, California, an area once settled by many Filipinos and the location of Historic Manilatown in the northern part of the Golden State. As it turns out, even an archive dedicated to Filipinx American history located close to where Cecilia died comes up short. It holds pictures and newspaper articles about the Filipinx community but apparently nothing revelatory about Cecilia.

Elsewhere in the documentary, the filmmaker uses computer graphics to reproduce headlines from newspaper clippings about Cecilia's death, along with the name of the publications and the dates they appeared. Most of this reportage turns out to be comprised of dubious and sensationalistic reportage. The stories are replete with racist portrayals of Filipino Americans, playing on colonialist tropes of native savagery and memorably describing Cecilia's extrajudicial killing as an act of "jungle justice." The filmmaker juxtaposes the images with interviews that use critical race theory, postcolonial critique, and feminist thought to illuminate the roles that chauvinism, yellow journalism, and "yellow peril" (anti-Asian) discourse played in Cecilia's ordeal. The documentary trains the viewer to read these words against the grain, cueing spectators to apply the same critical procedure for every subsequent instance in which the film cuts between newspaper headlines and the all-Filipinx cast

¹⁶ Ibid., 91.

¹⁷ Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 188.

of commentators. Here, the decolonial feminist documentary implants what might be described as an anti-colonial hermeneutics of suspicion within the mise-en-scène and editing.



Dr. Dorothy Cordova and Lucia Navarro. Still from *The Celine Archive* (<http://celinearchive.wordpress.com/images>). Used with permission.

The documentary also shows the few traces of Cecilia's story that she had some hand in authoring. At the Seattle area branch of FAHNS, Dorothy Cordova, who with her late husband Fred were the pioneering archivists of the Filipino American experience, keeps duplicates of Cecilia's government records along with a handful of old photographs showing Cecilia, some of her family members, and what appears to be the ramshackle dwelling made of scrap wood and metal where she lived at some point. Though she did not take most of those photos, the fact that she posed for them means that she played some role in shaping their content. Instead of lingering on, reusing, and fetishizing photographs as Ken Burns often does in his historical documentaries, *The Celine Archive* presents them as fragments in a very incomplete assemblage, no different from the shards comprising the fractured narrative of Cecilia's life. To use a different metaphor, one might say that in relation to the totality of the documentary material within the film, the photographs appear as tiny islands surrounded by far larger bodies of content produced by others, separated by time and space from the elusive historical subject.

The film is brought to a close with a final instantiation of an archive, the pauper's grave that Cecilia's sister believed to

be her final resting place. The film pivots at this point from a reckoning with the aporia of historical insignificance to a collective yearning for what Mignolo and Walsh call “resurgence” and “re-existence.” The film captures a belated funeral that the filmmakers have organized for Cecilia, with plenty of descendants and their friends in attendance. The attendees grieve for her and, in doing so, bemoan their own marginalization in US society as well. But the ending also picks up on the thread of endurance and resurgence already present at the beginning of the documentary in images of the filmmaker practicing yoga, rebuilding her family life after the demise of her son Lakas, making food for her family, visiting a memorial plaque for him at a park. The film returns to footage of Celine doing yoga and then, in a post-title sequence, draws a parallel by showing the funeral attendees doing push-ups and dancing for Cecilia. For Mignolo and Walsh, “resurgence” is a “renewal, restoration, revival or a continuing after interruption”¹⁸ and “re-existence” is “the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity.”¹⁹ They are fitting responses to the “naturalization of death” that coloniality engenders²⁰. In the film, the breath of life in yoga, dancing, and everyday existence functions as a simple but powerful metonym for the modes of thriving associated with resurgence and re-existence. Apart from anchoring life, the mindful breathing, aerobic exercise, and silliness also engender a transgenerational solidarity that counters the still-proximate forces of necropolitics and social death facing communities of color in the US, including—as seen in recent new stories of violent attacks in New York City—Filipina Americans.

¹⁸ Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.



The filmmaker practicing yoga in grief. Still from *The Celine Archive* (<http://celinearchive.wordpress.com/images>). Used with permission.

JB: My two questions for Celine: Was there ever any discussion of using DNA and forensic anthropology to look at those pauper's graves and see if perhaps those are her remains?

CPS: Thank you so much J.B. It's so amazing to hear an essay read out loud and mobilizing these giants in film theory and film documentary practice in relation to the film. These texts inform me, for sure, almost like an unconscious process. I appreciate the engagement with the body and the body remembering the trauma that somehow appears in this way. That's definitely in the family. They are a very fit family. I never saw them sing, but I definitely saw them default to working out a lot on set.

FEELING THE TRUTH

In terms of the question of the DNA, it never really occurred to me because, in some ways, I don't want to know. And I don't think they want to know either. There's such an investment in a kind of knowing that they did not want dispelled, because it would question the authority of their Aunt Asun who said, "This is where Celine was buried." It would question the authority of their own sensibilities, like the dream. Henny dreams that his grandmother Celine talked to him. I'm not sure they're even tempted to test it. It didn't occur to me at all. So, make what you want out of it, but I think you probably recognize that choice.

JB: Oh yeah.

CPS: Filipino superstition and the connection to the dead they claim is real, because they feel it.

LEGACY OF RESEARCH

Then the second question is why does Alex Fabros disappear early? It's so interesting because Alex Fabros, when he wrote in 1997 in *Filipinas Magazine*, that was the very first lifeline for the family. It was the very first thing that they saw that confirmed what they were passing down orally as their history we know within the family, so they really hung on to that. They photocopied it endlessly. If you ran into them, they would probably be like, "Oh here it is." It's so important to them and they actually did not know about Dawn's book. So, I ended up telling them about that. And of course, Jean Vengua wanted to meet them and wanted to share the epic poem, *Marcelina*. I'm also interested in your choosing to call her Cecilia because that is her name. Cecilia Villiano Montyre Navarro is her name. I can't remember, but I think most of the family called her Celing. No one ever called her Celine. It's Celing. Everybody. Not one person called her anything but. I think Henry is the only one who called her Cecilia, too, so that's interesting. But it was Celing.

Thank you so much J.B.

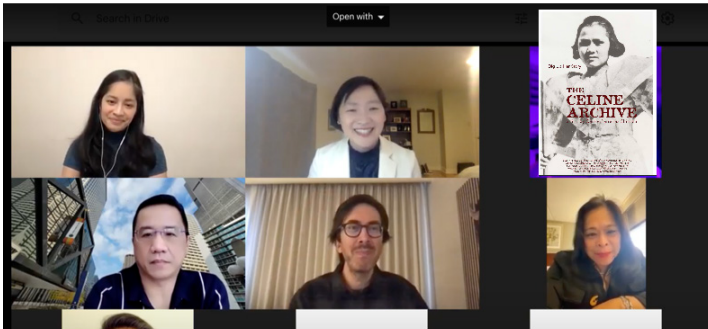
Denise Cruz:

I'm going to turn to the topic of motherhood and loss, one that's so personal and intimate for her and for me, because of what this film has really taught me about models of ethics and trust and care. I want to talk today about viewing this film in a time of grief and mourning and living, a time when I am deeply cognizant of the fact that I can't be, as we like to say "in community" with you and with each other in the way that we would like to be.

GRIEF AND CARE AS METHOD

To begin my remarks, I'd like to turn to one of the opening shots of the film. It's a still shot of Celine and her dog amid trees and yellowing leaves. We can't tell immediately what they're looking

at, and in perhaps a second the shot transitions to one of Celine walking into the house. The opening question, “Where are the women in Filipino American history?,” spoken by Celine in voiceover, is juxtaposed with this frame. We next see Shimizu on the couch. The light falls on her hair, her face, her concentrated gaze. The rest is what we assume to be her home. It’s in relative darkness. The frame, this shot, takes up maybe two or three seconds, but I’m returning to it at length because it so importantly highlights the film’s formal and feminist techniques, some of which J.B. has already talked about. The visual composition of the shot is carefully layered. As your eyes visually adjust to the image on your screen, you’ll undoubtedly see that she sits here with her son, Lakas. There is his portrait on the right of the frame, on her left. There’s his photo on her laptop. It’s Christmas time. The tree behind her is decorated with ornaments. These images will return later. Alongside hands decorating the trees, Shimizu moves into soft focus and the background image of Lakas becomes sharper, his image soon in full color and light.



Screenshot of panel from Association for Asian American Studies Annual Conference in Denver, Colorado, April 12, 2022. Clockwise from top left corner: Denise Cruz, Rachael Joo, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Rick Baldoz, José B. Capino

In its opening and throughout its progression, the film uses a method of juxtaposition of references to archival discovery, feminist scholarship, Filipina and Filipina American history. These recurring layers and assemblages drive the film, as J.B. pointed out, as we zoom in and out of collective and personal archive and memory. Shimizu’s mode of documentary is deeply intentional, for her visual and narrative techniques disrupt cycles that repeatedly cast Filipinx and Asian American women as

exotic hypersexualized objects or nurturing caregivers. Instead, *The Celine Archive* imagines what she will later call a practice of encountering lives “in all of its dimensionality,” an alternative ethical archive and documentary practice centered on modes of grief and care.

To clarify what I mean, though, about ethical archival practice, I want to turn to Shimizu’s own theorization of cinematic work in her recent book-length study of intimacies in transnational film, *The Proximity of Other Skins*.²¹ In the introduction to the book, she outlines which she calls ethical intimacy which she calls the “refusal of transcendence on the behalf of filmmakers who resist an audience’s desires for resolution especially in cinematic portrayals of global difference.” We cannot, she reminds us, create relationality that resolves radical differences in ways of life between the global north and the global south. She’s talking here about narrative cinema and work that’s different from her own, but I think the method of ethical intimacy is useful for us to consider: “Ethical intimacy describes the moments in films, the building blocks filmmakers create wherein characters face a choice that builds their character and shapes their surroundings and their futures. The factors involved in making these choices are their past, their backgrounds, and their present relations as well as the structures that limit and enable their mobility and movement. This interrogation when performed by the spectator on their viewing experience can also be transformative.”²²

The method of ethical intimacy is one that centers here and elsewhere on the model of accretion and accumulation. See, for example, the language of plurality, of moments, of blocks, shapes, structures, relations, parts that are assembled out of holes in a way that resists models of *bildung* or narrative or easy forms of empathy or relatability. Transformation is achieved not through models of linearity and unity, but rather through a viewer’s interrogation of themselves, their reaction to the films. Similarly, I am reminded of the composite layered modes presented in the film in which Shimizu assembles modes of grief that are fragmented rather than whole in ways that, as J.B. noted, craft relations with a number of feminist scholars of

²¹ Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Proximity of Other Skins: Ethical Intimacy in Global Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

²² *Ibid.*, 24.

archives, Gayatri Spivak, of course, but also Diana Taylor, Ann Laura Stoler, and Saidiya Hartman. Here, for example is Hartman: “The loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them. So it’s tempting to fill in the gaps and to provide closure where there is none. To create a space for mourning where it is prohibited. To fabricate a witness to a death not much noticed.”²³

Celine’s talents and skill as a filmmaker, an historian, a scholar, a filmmaker, a feminist, [are] able to create a space of mourning and center one family’s grief with her own [through] their encounter with documents from their mother or grandmother’s death. She does so in ways that layer along the way another set of relations by foregrounding the work of other Filipina, Filipino, and Filipinx caretakers and archivists, a community of scholars that includes her sister Rhacel Parreñas, who appears throughout the film, the music composed by our colleague Theo Gonzalves, interviews with Alex [Fabros], Jr., Jean Vengua, Rick Baldoz, and the late Dawn Mabalon, the archives at FAHNS lovingly curated and sheltered by Dorothy and Fred Cordova, and of course, Celine Navarro’s family.²⁴

Roughly an hour into the film, we return to its opening with new information. Photos and images we saw from far away or at a distance are now in close and careful attention. We hear Celine’s narration full of grief, her voice catching spoken layered over the sound of a beating heart. As she recalls what she calls Lakas’s quote “Dimensionality.” What he would say. How he would move. She wants to tell us, quote, “to give Celine’s family her facets. The thick dimensionality of her story.”

I remember the day I learned about Lakas Shimizu’s death just after Christmas. I can’t remember how I learned exactly, but I remember my own son was still a baby. I sat down on the floor with him and wept for my mentor, for my friend, my colleague, my ally in Filipina feminism and motherhood, and her family. I can tell her now that I still think of Celine and Lakas sometimes when I walk in the park and breeze catches the leaves, or every time my house fills with the scent of pine in December, or sometimes when my son’s hair falls over his eyes just so. I can tell my mentor, my friend, my colleague, my ally, and my fellow mother today that, yes, I still think of her and Lakas all the time.

²³ Saidiya Hartmann, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26, vol. 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14.

²⁴ Rhacel Salazar Parreñas is an eminent sociologist and Professor of Sociology at University of Southern California. Theo Gonzalves is a composer, scholar, and curator at the Smithsonian.

A name that, for those of you who aren't Tagalog speakers, itself has multiple thick dimensionality as force, strength, power, hardness, spirit, vitality, energy, and resistance.

I want to close then with this memory, deeply personal for me, but also for this film in a way that I hope is ethical and intimate. This film is not about the denial of grief—processing it, or overcoming it, or transcending it, but rather, of living with it and in it as individuals and as a collective, as we together craft a multidimensional archive of those we've lost and as we remember them in our living.

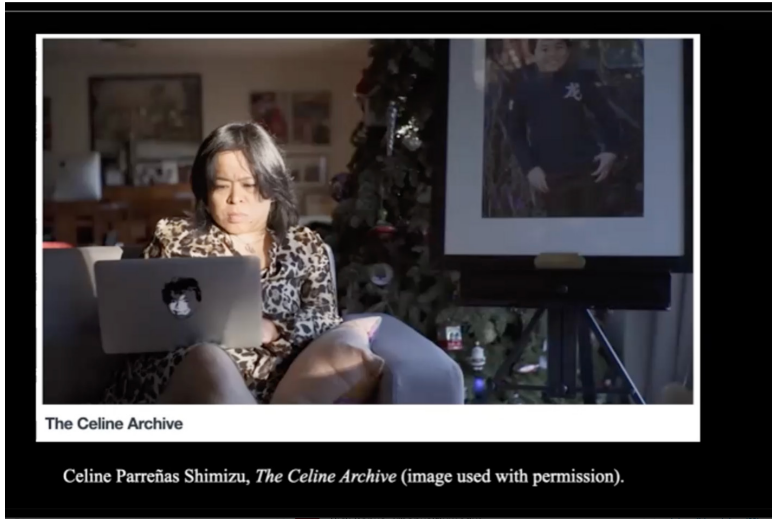
Thank you so much, Celine, for your work.

CPS

LIVING WITH GRIEF

Thank you so much for going there though, Denise. I think it makes me think about when you said today, "We don't know what she's doing when she's looking at the computer." I think we were just setting up the lights then. I think I was actually trying to sneak in some real work while directing this thing at the same time. In some ways, that was leaps and bounds away from when I first tried to start reading after he died. I remember it was maybe March or April 2014 when I first started trying to work again from the stupor and the shock of his death. I just couldn't read. Just looking at the computer, everything would just become blurry. I couldn't read words. I couldn't read books. I just really thought that I would totally fall apart, and just no longer live. I really thought that that's what would happen, like I would die because he died. So somehow I think it really was this film. Maybe because it was about going to the subject that was going to help people to figure out how to make sure Celine Navarro was given justice, was validated for her life. I was just curious about that. How would people recognize me that I was going to now be a dog walker. That's what I was going to do with my life. I was going to just walk dogs, because I no longer had mental capacity. Somehow, everything came back, like the reading and the writing, because of the movie. I quit my job, for example. So, thank you for going there because I think it just normalizes something that I want to be normalized which is the ability for

us to recognize how grief continues.



Screenshot from the presentation of panelist Denise Cruz featuring the director, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, and her tributes to Lakas, both as a portrait and on her computer.

LEARNING TO HEAR THE SOUNDS OF LIFE

There are certain sounds I don't want to be there that [are] confusing so I have to tell the sound designer, "We need to not do that. We need to figure out another sound." So it's interesting in terms of the heartbeat, the yoga, that both you and J.B. talked about. They recorded my own heartbeat as I was reading the text, so I think somehow that made it in there during the yoga part. I just really credit the sound designer, David Sandwisch.

Theo [Gonzalves] and I have been working together on music for over twenty-five years now, and I think for the first twenty years or so, we're just obsessed with one song which is *Dahil Sa Iyo*. I think for the first four films that we worked on, we just played with *Dahil Sa Iyo*, versions of it. You know, *Dahil Sa Iyo* means "because of you." We've given a theme song to everybody where it is different versions of that. Right now, I'm working with him on this new film *80 Years Later* (2022) and he just understands what it means to be an Asian American, to be a Japanese American that we're not listening to Japanese flutes.²⁵ We're actually engaging a mixed kind of music. What do Japa-

²⁵ *80 Years Later*, directed by Celine Parreñas Shimizu (2022), 50 mins. <https://www.80yearslater.film/>

nese American people listen to that we're interviewing who are in their 80s, who are in their 60s, who are in their 40s and [in] their teens? So we talked about that without really even having to talk about it. We just completely understand each other because it comes from twenty-five years of research and collaboration.

TAMING THE WILDNESS OF LIFE

One thing that Rhacel and I talked a lot about this film is why is she heroized? Is the hesitation around her being heroized because she was brutalized? Why would we heroize someone who was brutalized? This is where I appreciate the work that Rick Baldoz does about how the depth of the racism is something that can't be understated in the telling of the story.

I appreciate all of you today because I think so much of this filmmaking process is so unconscious. Documentary is like trying to tame the wildness of life. We're not trying to make judgments, but we're just trying to be as open as possible to the complexity, the ambiguity of trauma and the not knowing what it really is. The thing that I most want to avoid as a filmmaker is when documentary subjects have the tendency to say, "But this is what it means." So we tend to take things out that discipline the truth, and prefer to stay in the space of bewilderment and grappling. I think that's probably what you're capturing here. We wanted to stay and honor the epic range of emotions that are on faces, that are in places.

When I interview Jean Vengua, that was actually the site where Celine Navarro's killers were let go. It's kind of amazing to have gone there, but we were not allowed to say that in the film. We were allowed to shoot there. There were police there. They didn't want us to step on the steps. They didn't want us to show the whole building. You can see we played around with kind of showing the corners of the buildings, because we couldn't show the whole thing. When we went there, Alex Fabros was telling us that, "Oh this is where this family stayed during the trial." It was a really long trial and a lot of Filipinos were going there. When Jean Vengua and I were standing on those steps [we were] being defended by the ten San Francisco State students around us who were cajoling the police. They were negotiating: "Can we touch the hand rails? Can we stand on the first step?" We were just moved by the locations that we went to. As J.B. was saying,

the unmarked grave. I think every single place that we went to, including their homes, was so amazing. When you make a film, you come into intimate engagement with people, and I really hope that film is a gift and not a vehicle of harm. Because I think that's too easily what can happen, especially when you're contending with families. Films can unearth and shed a light on the thing that we keep in the dark in order for us to survive. If films shed a light on that thing, will people be able to watch the film? Maybe it's okay if they don't watch it. Hopefully they participated in it, and in their vulnerability experienced a new plane of existence. That's the goal.

Q & A:

J.B. Capino: One of the wonderful things about the documentary is that idea of unknowing. There's just a limit to what we can know. There are many things we really just cannot understand. But the viciousness of the women who participated in this violence for some reason, that is not something that I felt to be elusive or difficult to understand. The religious fanaticism among some Filipinos, Filipinas. We see it throughout history and so that was one of the parts that to me wasn't that difficult to sort of understand and I'm wondering if that's a kind of difference in epistemology. Of course I can imagine them doing that, really descending on her and pouncing on her.

C. Parreñas Shimizu: And I'm sure they did it in a really ceremonial, ritualistic, costumed, regal way that they tortured her almost like in a mass-like situation. I think they made a ceremony out of it. I knew it from reading and studying Filipino American history, but I think I was so stunned by the formality of the Tagalog in those books and why they made books out of them. They were making church-like, Bible-like rituals; like "You are now unleashed. You are now forgiven. You can now enter the space." It's so dramatic. I mean, J.B., I wish I could remember. I wish I shot all those pages. But they made those books themselves to document their rituals and philosophies with the super-deep Tagalog words they used.

JBC: I was also wondering how much if it draws from the Propaganda Movement, [Marcelo H.] Del Pilar, their attachment to the Masons. How much of that literature is actually just, like, im-

ported piecemeal from some of the documents that they might have brought over from the Philippines?

CPS: I mean, I have no doubt. You know, it's important enough that they probably brought all that stuff over. One thing that Dawn Mabalon really reminds us is that most of these people were so young. There was nobody really over their 30s around, so if you can imagine like age fourteen to thirty-two, what they were doing. I think they were most lost, and they were trying to redeem themselves through the scaffolding of past rituals that they knew about and recreating them in their new context.

R. Baldoz: One of the things that I was thinking about when I was watching the film was that this particular thread of Filipino American history, these more conservative kinds of organizations and groups, because I think the general disposition of Ethnic Studies scholars, tend to be downplayed. One of the largest Fil-Am organizations during this was the Filipino Federation of America. They weren't quite as nutty as, you know, the CDA and Maria Clara but they were very conservative. I think they claimed they had six- or eight-thousand members in Southern California—viciously anti-union, super anti-communist in the sense that they sort of accepted this kind of popular notion that all Filipino American labor activists were communists, work closely with the police to crack down on the vice habits of Filipino immigrants, would denounce them for betraying or making Filipinos look bad by crossing the color line. In some ways, it's a kind of blind spot, but it's a choice that I made to not talk very much about those and to celebrate the more conventional—the Bulosans and the more progressive elements of the community. I think someone's going to write a book or many articles about these more conservative elements that refract both some of the Catholicism of the Philippines married to this fraternal secret societies in the US and all the strange... I mean it's sort of a challenge, right? The secret societies—they're secret, so it's sometimes hard to know exactly what they were doing and what they were up to, but we did get a sense of the ritualistic nature of this organization.

JBC: I do have a couple of questions. This could be attached to the movie as a sort of supplement. Was it really true, that whole

thing about her hands sticking out of the grave? Because it's mentioned several times in the film. The other thing is that picture of a woman outside this really ramshackle dwelling which I found profoundly moving. Was that her or was that a kind of representative of someone in that situation?

CPS: I don't know if that first assertion is true. The person who asserts that her hands were coming out from the ground is Alex Fabros. It's in his writing. It's in the Filipinas article. And it's also in the bigger unpublished manuscript of his that's so cinematic. I don't know if it's cinematic license that he's taking but it's not in the newspapers. What is in the newspapers is that she had a bunch of jewelry on and money. She had about \$200 at the time which is a lot of money now. I looked it up and I think it's over \$1000 now and nobody took it. So those are the kinds of details that were there, but nothing about a hand sticking out of the ground. But there were details about how she died through suffocation. So she died there in their burying her alive. She was not yet dead when they buried her.

And then the picture of the ramshackle dwelling. I can't quite recall, except I do have to tell you that the family was very strict, because I do think it is from the family, so whether it's her or another person from the family, that picture was from the family. It is not from the Filipino American archives or any of the other archives that we used. So if it's not Celine, it's someone else from her community, so yes. You know, it is ramshackle as you were describing earlier, J.B. It's like super pulubi, super abject and poor and just makeshift—metal scraps, cartons, newspapers—I mean that's what the houses look like. I actually did not know that until going through the archival materials.

Alex Fabros had 200 Filipino American students doing this research. I had ten San Francisco State cinema students who were working with me across the archives. Going to them physically and also just doing a lot of research finding the material.

D. Cruz: I love that detail about the students who worked with you, because one of the things I found so striking about the film was the decentering of your role, but of you as the primary person threading all of this together. I think that you so carefully underscore the value of the collective. I was really struck by

that scene where the family is encountering the death certificate, and they say, “This made it real for me.” Where you capture those moments where the family is really having these emotional reactions to the archive. I would love to just hear a little bit more about what was happening before and after that scene.

CPS: I remember going to Chicago and finding their apartment. I was so excited to finally meet Celine Navarro’s daughter. It’s kind of unbelievable that we found her. She was willing to talk with us. It took a long time. It took weeks and weeks. I think we had a weekly phone call on Wednesday night where we would talk for a couple of hours, just talking about this until the son was finally like, “Who are you talking to on the phone? This could be like a swindler.” Then I talked to the son for so long. He was asking me, “Who are you? Why are you doing this? What do you want from my mom?” When we finally got access, it felt like it was really hard-earned. To be able to walk into the door of the apartment building and walk into the hallway. I remember getting out of the elevator. We were so nervous. It was a small elevator and there were a ton of us in it. They were at the end of the hall, and Mama Lucia was at the end, like, jumping up and down. I thought, “This woman is 94 years old! How is she jumping up and down?” Then when we got inside. As a film crew, we cater everything, but we cater everything Filipino vegan wherever we went which is so hard to do, like, just get another circus thing we had to do to ensure comfort and sustenance of the crew. But Tootsie insisted on cooking for us. So when we got there, there was a massive spread, but of course we couldn’t eat yet. They were like, “No, no eat.” We were like “Oh my god, we have to shoot!” So it was welcoming, fun, and funny to be together, right before the spilling of tears from the truths they shared.

They had all the receipts, like the death certificate that they were ready to pull out for the film. When we went to Henry’s house, he had the receipt for the headstone for his Grandma Celine’s grave. When we went to Lucia’s and Tootsie’s house, I did not know that they had the death certificates. They were just ready to show it.

When we shot in Chicago, we really make use of the Asian American Documentary Network (A-Doc). It’s a very powerful network, powerful in the sense of grassroots. That was Shuling Yong and she collaborates with everybody like Grace Lee and

being a filmmaker in her own right. I remember when we were shooting, Rhacel and I were in the back asking questions. I actually never like to interview myself. I always need to have an interviewer, because I have to deal with everything else. Rhacel and I are texting questions. When that death certificate came up, Shuling just punched in. Of course, it was so extraordinary to be able to see Rhacel in action because I think she's just one of the best ethnographers, interviewers, out there. She asked, "What did you have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner." And Lucia started crying when she was asked. I mean it just says a lot about the deprivation, and how she was really made an orphan when her mom died.

Linh Thuy Nguyen: One of my favorite quotes from your most recent book is that "The past is not the past. Not only is it not here but also is not a place of truth from whence to understand our present and our future. Our truth is more than the cold facts of where we come from. Representation is not just about authenticity and its achievement."

I think that your project really shows us an ethical mode of representation that speaks to the history. It walks us through a relationship with the history and really shows that much of what historical projects are—for folks in the diaspora or under-represented folks—is not just this act of recovery. So the past has this possibility of finding your identity, is going to give you purpose in your life or finding out something about your parents' past is going to suddenly shift your understanding of who you are, because it was your missing puzzle-piece. It's a totally different kind of relationship and I just love it because it really challenges students' desire to... when we have students in the diaspora, they're like "I don't know such and such about my parents' experience and it's such this great pain for me." Is that thing the pain or is it this gap in your relationship because of [the] thing you perceive to be the cause of the pain?

I was just thinking through how that's such a beautiful mode of representation that's really forcing me to rethink my criticisms of historiography projects. You know, reading that and seeing the way that you do it, I'm like, "Okay, there is a way that we can do it." There's so much more intentionality and care that needs to be there and it really is about building this kind of relationship. So you successfully challenged me to not be

grumpy about this thing. I don't know if you can talk a little bit more about the relationality part of representational practices, because as a documentary filmmaker, I think that is a huge part of it for you. It's not just about owning a story or claiming a story but representation is doing something specific.

Along the way that there was so much lost. It is what you say, like my students just last week came up to me and said, "I really need to know my history and I don't know it. Because to know your history is to know yourself." I said, "Actually, maybe not. I mean, maybe the question is why do you have this problem about feeling like you've betrayed something? What is the loss? Maybe that's the question." I think I'm like you in that I share that that kind of irritation.

I think filmmaking is a confrontation with history, the self, and one's relations. Filmmaking is diving deep into a relationality that you hope is ethical and responsible to the person you're engaging. Right now, my family on my husband's side, whom we are making a film about, they may be afraid or wary maybe of what the film will be. I hope, like the Navarro family, that they end up considering it a gift as well.

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CONTRIBUTORS



Rick Baldoz is a scholar of immigration, US empire, and Asian American Studies with a particular focus on the convergence of foreign and domestic policy imperatives in demarcating, delimiting, and administering the borders of the national community. More broadly, his work grapples with the politics of citizenship and national belonging and the fashioning of boundary processes (national, racial, ideological) that determine membership in American society. He teaches courses on immigration and citizenship regimes, US popular culture, and Asian American Studies. His book, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America 1898–1946* (New York University Press, 2011) won awards from the American Sociological Association and the American Library Association.

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Denise Cruz (she/hers) writes and teaches about gender and sexuality in national and transnational cultures. She uses spatial and geographic frameworks (from the transpacific, to the regional, to the Global South) to examine previously unstudied archives (from the first works of English literature by Filipina and Filipino authors, to private papers that document connections between the Midwest and US empire, to fashion shows in Manila). Her first book, *Transpacific Femininities: The Making of the Modern Filipina* (Duke University Press, 2012), analyzed connections between the rise of Philippine print culture in English and the emergence of new classes of transpacific women from the early to mid-twentieth century. She is the editor of Yay Panlilio's *The Crucible: The Autobiography by Colonel Yay, Filipina American Guerrilla* (Rutgers University Press, 2009), and has published essays in *American Literature*, *American Quarterly*, *American Literary History*, *PMLA*, *the Journal of Asian American Studies*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, and several edited collections.

Rachael Miyung Joo is Associate Professor of American Studies at Middlebury College. She is author of the forthcoming book, *National Greens: The Natures of Korean Golf* (Duke University Press) and *Transnational Sport: Gender, Media, and Global Korea* (Duke University Press, 2012). She recently published with Jose Medriano III an article titled "Imperial Run-off: Korean golf in the Clark Special Economic Zone in the Philippines" in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*. Joo has written on sport, bodies, and food in transnational Asian American and Korean American contexts. She is currently at work on an article with Kyoung-yim Kim about the Netflix reality show, *Physical 100*. She teaches courses on immigration, race and ethnicity, and Asian American Studies.

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Andi Remoquillo received her MA in Women's and Gender Studies from DePaul University and a PhD in American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, with a graduate portfolio in Asian American Studies. Andi is currently an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in American Studies at Wellesley College where she specializes in gender and Filipinx American history, Asian American diasporas, and feminist approaches to oral histories and critical ethnography. Andi is interested in how second generation Filipinx Americans grapple with notions of community, home, belonging, and reclaiming memory in the Chicago area, and her current book project explores this topic through an ethnographic, socio-cultural history of Filipina American women in mid-century Hyde Park.

Stacey Anne Baterina Salinas is an assistant professor of Ethnic Studies at College of the Redwoods. Her research focus pertains to Asian American History with an emphasis on gender, labor activism, feminism, and talk story. She has published two books, the most recent of which is *Pinay Guerrilleras: The Unsung Heroics of Filipina Resistance Fighters During the Pacific War* (Pacific Atrocities Education, 2019), which highlights the personal narratives of Filipina resistance fighters during WWII and explores how their experiences in the war shaped their community organizing efforts after they arrived in rural California as war brides and new mothers working alongside the *Manong* Generation during the Farm Worker Movement. She also teaches and volunteers for other coalitions like Chinatown's Pacific Atrocities Education, the Filipino American National Historical Society, and The Filipino American Woman Project Podcast. As a co-founder and Senior Historian of the Bulosan Center for Filipinx Studies, Salinas has also created exhibits and Ethnic Studies curriculum on Asian American history and Fil-Am labor history.

Celine Parreñas Shimizu is Dean of the Division of Arts at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Her books include *The Proximity of Other Skins: Ethical Intimacy in Global Cinema* (Oxford University Press, 2020), *Straightjacket Sexualities: Unbinding Asian American Manhoods in the Movies* (Stanford University Press, 2012), and *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Duke University Press, 2007) which won Best Book in Cultural Studies from the Association for Asian American Studies in 2009. She co-edited *The Feminist Porn Book* (The Feminist Press, 2013) and *The Unwatchability of Whiteness: A New Imperative of Representation* (Brill, 2018). Her new book, *The Movies of Racial Childhoods: Screening Self-Sovereignty in Asian / America*, is forthcoming from Duke University Press. *The Celine Archive* (2020), her film, won several festival awards and is distributed by Women Make Movies. She recently finished her new film, *80 Years Later: On Japanese American Racial Inheritance* (2022), which premiered at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival and screened at Pasadena International Film Festival, Japan Film Festival Los Angeles, International Documentary Festival in Crete, and Berlin Art Film Festival.

Marie-Therese C. Sulit received her doctorate from the University of Minnesota, where she specialized in Asian American Studies and Literature with concentrations in race/ethnicity, women writers, and popular culture. Prior, at Binghamton University, she earned a Bachelor's degree in English and General Literature and two Master's degrees in English and English with Adolescence Education. Born and raised in New York to immigrant Filipino parents, she embraced her return to the Hudson Valley in 2007 as an Assistant Professor of English at Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh, New York. A Full Professor, she teaches literature and composition courses from the introductory to the advanced levels, specializing in Contemporary Literature and Post-Colonial Studies. As a long-time multicultural practitioner, her research interests include the cross-section of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work in the classroom, academic freedom and the humanities, and Filipinx American Studies.

Angel Trazo (she/her) is a second-generation Filipina American from San Jose, California. She is currently a PhD student

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Michael Joseph Viola is Associate Professor in the Justice, Community & Leadership (JCL) program and faculty advisory board member of Ethnic Studies at Saint Mary's College of California. Dr. Viola's research contributes to the interdisciplinary fields of critical educational studies (critical pedagogy, critical race theory, popular education); ethnic studies; and critical global studies. His scholarship has been published in *Critical Ethnic Studies*, *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *the Journal of Asian American Studies*, *the Journal of Critical Educational Policy Studies*, and *Kritika Kultura*. His co-edited book on global hip hop, *Hip-Hop(e): The Cultural Practice and Critical Pedagogy of International Hip-Hop* (Peter Lang, 2012), received the Critics' Choice Award from the American Educational Studies Association. Dr. Viola is on the coordinating committee of the Critical Filipino/x/a Studies Collective (CFSC). He is currently working on a book project, under contract with the University of Washington, that examines Filipino/a American activism and solidarities from 1965 to present.

Jenifer K Wofford is a San Francisco artist and educator whose work investigates hybridity, history, calamity, and global culture, often with a humorous bent. She is also one-third of the Filipina-American artist trio, Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. Wofford is a 2023 YBCA 100 Honoree and a recent recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors Grant. She teaches in the Fine Arts and Philippine Studies programs of the University of San Francisco. A committed and active member of the Bay Area art community, Wofford currently serves as Vice President of the Board of Directors of Southern Exposure. For more information,

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