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**FIGURES OF TRANSNATIONAL BELONGING: GENDER, SEXUALITY,
AND THE NATION IN THE FILIPINO DIASPORA**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....iv

Abstract.....v

Dedication.....vii

Acknowledgements.....viii

Introduction.....1

Chapter One: Mapping Diasporic Nationalisms: The Filipino American *Balibayan* in the Philippines.....46

Chapter Two: Representing the Filipina ‘Mail Order Bride’.....105

Chapter Three: The ‘Exploited Filipina Body,’ National Affects, and Transnational Belonging.....151

Chapter Four: Reimagining the Transnational Filipina Body: Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s *Cosmic Blood*.....189

Bibliography.....239

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Poster from *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.....108

Figure 1.2 Still from *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*.....109

Figure 2.1 “Advertisement” for “Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride”.....124

Figure 2.2 Photo image of the Mail Order Brides in whiteface from “Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride.”.....131

Figure 2.3 “Have You Eaten?”.....134

Figure 2.4 Photo image of the Mail Order Brides at a queer wedding from “Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride”.....145

Figure 3.1 Still of Glenda from *Sin City Diary*.....172

Figure 4.1 Image of the “gourd in the shape of a womb” from *Cosmic Blood*.....193

Figure 4.2 Image of conquistador character from *Cosmic Blood*. Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa. 3 March 2002. Bindlestiff Studio, San Francisco, CA.....195

Figure 5.1 Still from *Bontoc Eulogy*.204

Figure 4.3 Image of blue cyborg character (“wings” extended) from *Cosmic Blood*
222

Figure 4.4 Image of the head of the blue cyborg character (“wings” extended) from *Cosmic Blood*.....223

Figures of Transnational Belonging: Gender, Sexuality, and the Nation in the Filipino
Diaspora

Gina Velasco

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes *figures of transnational belonging* found within Filipino diasporic cultural production. I explore how each figure of transnational belonging reveals the broader cultural politics of gender, sexuality, and nation in the Filipino diaspora. The figures of transnational Filipino belonging I examine include the “*mail order bride*,” the *domestic helper (DH)/overseas contract worker (OCW)*, the *balikbayan* (the Filipino expatriate who returns to the Philippines), and the *cyborg* as a hybrid figure for utopic visions of transnational belonging. My dissertation focuses on representations found within Philippine and Filipino American film, video, performance, heritage language programs, and the Internet. I focus primarily on Filipino American cultural production, due to the historical role of the Philippines within the U.S. imperial imagination, as well as the constitutive position of the U.S. within contemporary notions of Philippine national identity. As diasporic subjects, Filipino Americans are uniquely situated between the imperial center of the U.S. and the neo-colony of the Philippines. My research incorporates a range of methodologies, bringing together ethnographic interviews and participant observation with textual and visual analysis of cultural and visual texts. I argue that diasporic notions of nation, kinship, and home are embodied within the racialized and gendered figure of the transnational Filipina body. As such, the Filipina body serves as a

gendered trope for both national and transnational belonging within a Filipino American imagination. Ultimately, this dissertation argues for a politics of representation that challenges the inherent heteronormativity and masculinism of dominant tropes of nation and diaspora.

In memory of my grandmother, Lody Queyangco Kummer (1937-2003),
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Introduction

I arrived in the Philippines for the Tagalog on Site (TOS) program in June of 2003 with no idea of what the summer held in store for me. My decision to participate in the TOS program was primarily a practical one. I needed to fulfill my language requirement for my Ph.D. program, and TOS was the only intensive summer Tagalog language program affiliated with the University of California at the time. Little did I know that most of the college-age Filipino American students in the program were on a roots journey to discover their Filipino heritage. On one of the first days of the program, as we were touring Intramuros in Manila, one of my classmates said to me, “Couldn’t you just imagine busting out the *tinikling* right here?” I looked at him, not sure how to respond. The thought of Filipino American students performing the iconic traditional Philippine dance, the *tinikling*, seemed ridiculous to me, a Filipina American born and raised in an urban area in Texas. The earnestness of my classmate’s statement, and of other students’ invocation of the notion of the “motherland” both surprised and fascinated me. My experience in the TOS program introduced me to both Filipino American cultural nationalism and emergent forms of diasporic nationalisms. I lived and experienced this alongside my Filipino American classmates, who were primarily undergraduate students from across the University of California system. The affective and material connections formed that summer between Filipino American students and their nation of origin are phenomena that I both observed and participated in. Although I felt a sense of distance from the experiences of the Filipino American students around me, I too,

participated in my own kind of roots journey. The messy, complicated relationship of Filipino Americans to the idea of home fascinated me, as I learned about Alibata tattoos¹ and traditional Philippine dance and music. Although critical of what I perceived as the “poverty tourism”² of the program, I also had the opportunity to witness a side of the Philippines that my privileged cousins in Manila had never seen. Our visits to indigenous communities and to bars in the city of Olongapo (the destination for many foreign sex tourists) disturbed me deeply. On the one hand, I felt that this “poverty tourism” created an imperialist relationship between Filipino American students and the Filipino community members, promoting a liberal discourse of saving their Filipino brethren.³ On the other hand, I knew that this was a rare experience for me, a middle class Filipina American, to learn about the life stories of sex workers in Olongapo, despite the problematic power dynamic of this encounter. This experience gave a different dimension to my academic studies of capitalist globalization, gendered labor, and the international division of labor. Hearing the life stories of teenage sex workers allowed me to put a human face on the women whose lives are theorized in the halls of academe. Through my experiences I became fascinated with the gaps and fissures in both the narrative of “returning to the homeland,” as well the official Philippine state’s narrative of the nation.

¹ Alibata is a precolonial script used in the Philippines. The practice of obtaining tattoos in Alibata is popular among cultural nationalist Filipino American youth, particularly on the west coast of the U.S.

² Explain “exposure” or immersion trips (not sure what this footnote means)

³ After their summer in the Philippines, many TOS participants sought ways to improve the situation of these communities through material means, such as the creation of Filipino American aid organizations.

My discomfort with Filipino American cultural nationalism and my own complicated relationship to the notion of “home” compels both my intellectual and activist endeavors within Filipino diasporic cultural politics, including this dissertation project. I am both uneasy with the ethnic absolutism, masculinism, and heteronormativity that characterizes most forms of cultural nationalism, and interpellated within these forms of belonging. My deep commitment to anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist social movements and my intellectual interests in emergent forms of diasporic nationalisms form the foundation for this research project. Further, my investment in feminist theory and practice informs the analytical lens through which I examine the politics of gender and sexuality in articulating the relationship between nation and diaspora.

The relationship between the nation and the diaspora is fundamental to my dissertation project. As a study of the politics of gender and sexuality in imagining a Filipino diaspora, this dissertation explores the ways in which diasporic subjects imagine their relationship to both the Philippines and to its diaspora. As such, this project is focused on the experience and articulation of a Filipino transnational subjectivity, as it is expressed through Filipino diasporic cultural production. My analysis of Filipino diasporic cultural production is grounded in the co-constitutive relationship between the material and the discursive. Thus, my study of Filipino American and Philippine film, video, performance, websites, and heritage language programs is contextualized within both a history of outward migration from the Philippines (with a particular emphasis on migration to the U.S.), as well as the

contemporary reality of transnational labor. The existence of transnational Filipino subjectivities, and diasporic cultural production, is made possible and delimited by existing processes and discourses of capitalist globalization.

In particular, this dissertation examines notions of transnational belonging within specific gendered figures in the transnational imagination. I use the term “transnational belonging” to signify the ways in which diasporic subjects develop affective and material connections to the idea of a Filipino diaspora. The modes of transnational belonging that I examine are found primarily in Filipino diasporic cultural production, including Filipino American and Philippine film/video, performance, websites, and heritage language programs. Focusing first on the Filipino American *balikbayan*, the “mail order bride,” and the “exploited Filipina body,”⁴ I explore how these figures of Philippine transnationalism reveal the gendered and sexual politics of imagining a Filipino diaspora. I end with an analysis of the figure of the “cyborg” as a utopic vision for alternative visions of a transnational belonging, beyond the confines of heteronormative and masculinist notions of nation and family.

Archive and Methodology

Rather than focus on genres or types of cultural production, I organize my dissertation around specific figures of Filipino transnational belonging: the “mail

⁴ I use the term “exploited Filipina body” to refer to representations of Filipina women who provide commodified sexual and domestic labor within a global capitalist economy, including Filipina “mail order brides,” domestic helpers/overseas contract workers, and sex workers.

order bride,” the “exploited Filipina body,” the *balikbayan*, and the cyborg. I focus on the representation of these figures of transnational belonging in order to foreground their ubiquity across a range of genres and technologies, forming a common diasporic archive.⁵ The archive of Filipino diasporic cultural production that I examine – film/video, performance, websites, and heritage language programs – contributes to a broader conversation about the meaning of a Filipino diaspora, particularly among Filipino Americans. Through my emphasis on specific figures, rather than forms or genres, I analyze the politics of gender and sexuality in representing the nation in the diasporic context. My focus on *figures*, rather than genres, allows me to analyze the critical sites of tension and convergence that these figures incite *across* forms of diasporic cultural production, encouraging a more dialogic understanding of Filipino diasporic political culture. Each of these figures reveals crucial insights into how representations of the Filipina body shape forms of national and transnational belonging.

The diverse sites of cultural production that constitute my archive – Filipino American and Philippine film, video, performance, websites, and heritage language programs – differ in terms of their geographic site of origin, form, and content. Multiple research methodologies are necessary to analyze the range of cultural objects that constitute my archive. Each of these different cultural objects tells a story through different means, and each contributes to the broader transnational

⁵ By “archive,” I mean a set of cultural objects that I examine in relation to each other. Together, Filipino American/Philippine film, video, performance, websites, and heritage language programs form a collective set of cultural productions in which a transnational Filipino imagination is articulated. I draw on conversations with Anjali Arondekar in my use of the term “archive.”

imagination of a Filipino diaspora. While some of my cultural objects are primarily visual (such as the visual art of *The Mail Order Brides*), other sites, such as heritage language programs, lend themselves to a dialogic engagement through participant observation and interviews. In order to examine such a range of sites, I utilize both humanities and social science oriented methods, including textual and visual analyses, participant observation, and interviews. I include the ethnographic methods of participant observation and interviews because I believe that such methods are necessary in order to delve more deeply into the subjective experiences, thoughts, and motivations of individuals. While not self-evident articulations of an authentic reality, interviews allow me to develop a dialogic relationship to the people participating in and creating diasporic cultural production. My ethnographic research is complemented by textual and visual analyses, which allow me to develop more detailed theoretical arguments and frameworks. Further, textual and visual analyses allow me to develop extended, focused readings of specific cultural and/or visual texts. The thick description of my ethnographic research is complemented by my analysis of images, visuality, and texts. Cultural and visual texts lend themselves to both discursive and formal analyses, giving me a multivalent sense of the broader conversations and points of reference that characterize a Filipino American diasporic culture. Bringing together analysis of interviews and participant observation with formal analysis of film, visual art, and performance gives a richness to my study that would be impossible using a singular methodology. In contrast to a singular disciplinary methodology, my interdisciplinary and multi-genre approach allows me

to develop a polyvocal and dialogic analysis, which in turn helps me to see both the common tropes and the elided meanings within diasporic cultural texts. This breadth of methodologies also allows me to organize my dissertation around the loci of my theoretical questions and interventions, rather than emphasize the genre or form of cultural production.

Filipino America, U.S.-Philippine Relations, and the Filipino Diaspora

As my earlier personal narrative reveals, my experience as a student in a heritage language program introduced me to forms of Filipino American cultural nationalism and Filipino diasporic nationalism that circulate within Filipino America. As a second generation, middle class Filipina American born and raised in Dallas, Texas, my experiences differed greatly from the undergraduate students who participated with me in the TOS program. The other TOS participants were mainly second and third generation Filipino American undergraduate students from urban areas in California. This difference in background points to the heterogeneity of the Filipino American communities in the U.S., in terms of both location and class. Although there are many large Filipino American communities on the west coast of the U.S., including communities in San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, and San Diego, Filipino American communities range from first generation immigrants in Queens, New York, to third generation families in San Francisco, California. As a Filipina American raised in a relatively small, mainly first generation Filipino American community in Dallas, I arrived in northern California to encounter

unfamiliar notions of Filipino American cultural nationalism. Growing up, I was aware of the racial difference between me and white Americans; however, Filipino American cultural nationalism was not available as an option. I have heard my experience refracted in my interactions with other Filipino Americans from other areas of the U.S. with relatively small Filipino American populations, such as the Midwest and the South. Without a cohesive Filipino American community, many of us found belonging in an Asian American racial identity. Contextualized within the resurgence of Asian American Studies-focused student activism in the late 1990s, this political identity offered a sense of collectivity and common political goals in the absence of a visible Filipino American identity. Such differences in experience reveal the heterogeneity of what is often termed the “Filipino American experience.”⁶ While much Filipino American cultural production emerges from either the west coast (centered in California and to a lesser extent, in Washington state) or the east coast (in New Jersey and New York), it is crucial to also emphasize the perspectives of Filipino Americans from other regions of the U.S. The diversity of migration histories, socioeconomic classes, regions of origin (in the Philippines), and locations in the U.S. reveal the diversity of Filipino American communities. It is that heterogeneity which forms the foundation for my study of Filipino American diasporic cultural politics. Rather than arguing for a unitary or stable Filipino American culture, this dissertation emphasizes the specific figures of transnational

⁶ In my interactions with participants in Pilipino Cultural Nights and Pilipino Cultural Celebrations., my informants often referred to their goal of representing the “Filipino American experience,” thus homogenizing and totalizing a diverse set of experiences, socioeconomic backgrounds, etc.

belonging which signal the contradictions and tensions inherent to the imagination of a diaspora among Filipino Americans.

Employing a specifically diasporic and transnational framework, this dissertation emphasizes both the Filipino American imagination of a Filipino diaspora, as well as the representation of the figure of the Filipino American *balikbayan* within the Philippine national imaginary. This multidirectional relationship is foundational to the transnational subjectivities articulated within Filipino diasporic cultural production. Although the Filipino diaspora spans many nations across the globe, this study focuses primarily on the national sites of the Philippines and the U.S. I limit my geopolitical sites to the Philippines and the U.S. to foreground the co-constitutive (although not equivalent) relationship of historical and contemporary discourses of nation in both the U.S. and the Philippines. That is, just as the Philippines played a crucial role in the consolidation of American imperial identity at the beginning of the 20th century, the U.S. plays a consistent role in the popular imagination of contemporary Filipinos. Situated at the crossroads are Filipino Americans, whose transnational identifications and subjectivities traverse the geographic space of these two national sites. More specifically, I focus on Filipino American cultural politics, within a diasporic framework, in order to highlight the triangulated relationship of Filipino Americans to both the feminized Philippines and the masculine might of the U.S. As a figure which reveals the broader gender politics of the U.S./Philippine relationship, the Filipino/a American exists at the boundary lines between the exceptionalism of narratives of the U.S. nation and the Philippine

struggle for national sovereignty in the context of ongoing neo-imperialism. Thus, the transnational perspective of Filipino Americans provides a crucial mirror through which forms of both Philippine and U.S. nationalisms can be understood.

This project conceptualizes belonging through a diasporic framework in order to unsettle hegemonic and absolutist forms of (trans)national identity and community. The framework of diaspora is especially crucial for unsettling static notions of ethnic/racial identity. Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy describe the utility of notions of diaspora for conceptualizing anti-essentialist forms of identity. Gilroy argues for “the study of black culture within the framework of diaspora as an alternative to the different varieties of absolutism which could confine culture in “racial”, ethnic, or national essences” (Gilroy 155). Stuart Hall also reiterates this need for non-essentialist understandings of blackness, “The fact is “black” has never been just there either. It has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally, and politically. It, too, is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found” (Hall 1). Similarly, I argue for a diasporic understanding of Filipino American belonging in order to unsettle the ethnic absolutism inherent to many cultural nationalist articulations of Filipino American identity.

However, I recognize that diasporic forms of belonging can and do reproduce the ethnic absolutism of the nation. Citing the courting of Non Resident Indian financial capital by the Hindu nationalist government in India during the 1990s, Gayatri Gopinath argues that “while the diaspora within nationalist discourse is often positioned as the abjected and disavowed Other to the nation, the nation also

simultaneously recruits the diaspora into its absolutist logic” (7). Likewise, notions of diaspora may reify absolutist notions of ethnic belonging. In her discussion of online notions of diaspora, Ien Ang describes how the website huaren.org served as a locus for the expression of a diasporic Chinese identity united in support of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. According to Ang, “Here the idea of diaspora — Chinese diaspora — enables the projection of a vast, dispersed, transnational, borderless, technologically savvy yet ultimately bounded imagined community” (69). Ang further argues, “Against the current tendency to objectify and dehistoricize diasporas as if they were given, always-already existing formations, it is useful to suggest, paraphrasing Raymond Williams, that there are no diasporas, only ways of thinking about groups of people as diasporas” (55). As Ang cautions, the Internet also can function as a site in which absolutist notions of cultural or ethnic identity, what Ang terms “ethnic absolutism,” can emerge (59). Likewise, my use of diaspora as a conceptual framework is attentive to the risks of ethnic absolutism in notions of transnational Filipina belonging. In my analysis, I explore both the epistemic risks and progressive potential of the nation and the diaspora as forms of belonging.

In addition, I suggest the possibility of forms of diasporic belonging which can exceed the masculinism and heteronormativity of cultural nationalism. In *Against Race*, Paul Gilroy describes how notions of diaspora challenge the heteronormativity of the nation,

The idea of diaspora offers a ready alternative to the stern discipline of primordial kinship and rooted belonging. It rejects the popular image

of natural nations spontaneously endowed with self-consciousness, tidily composed of uniform families: those interchangeable collections of ordered bodies that express and reproduce absolutely distinctive cultures as well as perfectly formed heterosexual pairings (23).

While not as optimistic as Gilroy, I do think that the framework of diaspora has the capacity to encompass anti-essentialist, feminist, and queer forms of belonging. The relationship between (trans)national forms of belonging and sexuality (both hetero and homo) is a crucial site of inquiry for this project. Gopinath argues that a “consideration of queerness...becomes a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, the inauthentic, nonreproductive potential to the diaspora” (11). It is these notions of inauthenticity and impurity that are crucial to my use of “diaspora” and “queer” as salient theoretical concepts. In contrast to the authentic ethnic identity of Filipino American cultural nationalism, the impure and inauthentic can serve as a model for alternative modes of belonging to a Filipino diaspora.

My critique of cultural nationalism also draws on existing conversations with Asian American Queer Studies, which call for a queer and diasporic approach to the traditionally cultural nationalist academic field of Asian American Studies. In her 1994 landmark essay “Maiden Voyage: Excursion into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America,” Dana Takagi issued a call for the integration of studies of queer sexuality into the study of Asian American identity. Pointing to the intersectional nature of identity, Takagi notes that “as many writers, most notably feminists, have argued, identities whether sourced from sexual desire, racial origins, languages of gender, or class roots, are simply not additive” (3). Takagi argues for an

understanding of sexuality as co-constitutive with racial and ethnic forms of identity. More recent Asian American Studies scholarship has critiqued the implicit heteronormativity and masculinism of an Asian American identity. In his critique of the 1975 Asian American group Aiiieeee! David Eng argues that,

by staking their cultural nationalist project on such an inflexible and strict notion of identity – on the recuperation of a strident Asian American masculinity and a “pure” heroic martial arts tradition – the Aiiieeee! Group reinscribes a dominant system of compulsory heterosexuality with all its attendant misogyny and homophobia (210).

This dissertation builds on and expands upon these existing critiques of Asian American cultural national forms of belonging. However, my study also goes beyond the boundaries of the U.S. nation state; I interrogate a foundational investment in belonging to the U.S. nation, a characteristic of both Filipino American cultural nationalism and Asian American Studies.

My perspective as a second generation, middle class Filipina American is contextualized in relationship to multiple forms of nationalism: U.S. nationalism, Filipino American cultural nationalism, Filipino diasporic nationalisms, and Philippine state and popular nationalisms. U.S. nationalism is the dominant narrative of a mainstream U.S. political culture. As such, Filipino Americans are not immune to notions of U.S. exceptionalism. Within this context of U.S. nationalism, Filipino American cultural nationalism emerged in conjunction with the Asian American movement from the late 1960s onward. Filipino American cultural nationalism implicitly engages with narratives of American nationalism and identity, whether

through a bi-national identification⁷ or through an emphasis on a specifically *Filipino* American identity.

Diasporic nationalisms express an explicit connection to the Philippine nation, what Benedict Anderson has termed “long distance nationalism.”⁸ Although they draw on nationalist forms from the nation origin, diasporic nationalisms are inherently more multifaceted, as diasporic subjects possess multiple and at times contradictory national attachments. As James Clifford has noted,

Whatever their ideologies of purity, diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist. They are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments, and they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms (251).

Filipino diasporic nationalisms exist as the current iteration of a long history of transnational solidarity movements in the U.S., to Bayan USA.⁹ In the 1960s, the Filipino American anti-imperialist organization, the KDP (the Union of Democratic Filipinos/*Katipunan ng Mga Demokratikong Pilipinos*), supported the National Democratic movement in the Philippines, as well as the development of socialism in the U.S. Currently, BAYAN USA, the international chapter of the Philippine mass organization, BAYAN (which coordinates the National Democratic movement in the Philippines), is comprised of Filipino American activists from across the U.S. With

⁷ The notion of bi-national identification is suggested through practices such as the playing of both the U.S. and Philippine national anthems at the beginning of Pilipino Cultural Nights/Pilipino Cultural Celebrations.

⁸ See Anderson, Benedict. "Exodus." *Critical Inquiry* 20.2 (1994): 314-27.

⁹ See Bayan USA's website at <http://www.bayanusa.org/index.php>

chapters in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Honolulu, BAYAN USA functions as a transnational political network. Filipino diasporic nationalisms draw on popular narratives of Philippine nationalisms, in particular the notion of the “unfinished revolution,” a persistent trope within the Philippine national imagination. The notion of an “unfinished revolution” invokes the anti-Spanish revolution in 1896, and the subsequent invasion of the Philippines by the U.S., to critique the current lack of national sovereignty of the Philippine nation (as a neo-colony to the U.S.). The trope of revolution as a mode of national progress is mobilized by different sectors of the Philippine Left, and has, at times, also been co-opted by official Philippine state discourse.¹⁰

Given the continued neo-imperial relationship of the U.S. to the Philippines in the present moment, this study of Filipino diasporic cultural production is situated in relation to the history of U.S. imperialism and the migration of Filipinos to the U.S. In 1898, the U.S. took possession of the Philippines, despite fierce opposition from Filipinos. The ensuing Philippine American War (1899-1902) resulted in the death of over a million Filipinos, the destruction of the nationalist forces, and the U.S. territorial annexation of the Philippines – ostensibly to prepare the Philippines for eventual independence (Espiritu 25). Waves of Filipino migration to the U.S. in the

¹⁰ See Reynaldo Ileto’s discussion of the two main Marxist critiques of “statist” approaches to Philippine history: 1) Renato Constantino, through his text *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*; and 2) the NDF, through Amado Guerrero’s *Philippine Society and Revolution*. Both texts argue against the “great hero” narrative of national history, emphasizing the social and economic conditions which have lead to the development of a national consciousness. See Reynaldo Constantino, “Outlines of a Non-Linear Emplotment of Philippine History,” *Reflections on Development in Southeast Asia*, ed. Lim Teck Gnee (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998).

1920s and 1970s established large Filipino American communities in the U.S., forming the foundation for a contemporary Filipino American identity.

Scholars within Filipino American Studies and Philippine Studies have argued that the invasion and occupation of the Philippines by the U.S. is the elided historical condition of possibility for a contemporary Filipino American identity. Oscar Campomanes argues that the notion of a Filipino American identity relies on the purposeful amnesia of the U.S. colonization of the Philippines, contributing to the notion of American exceptionalism (Campomanes 8). Dylan Rodriguez contends that the pursuit of Filipino American Studies as an academic discipline entails a disavowal of the genocide enacted by the U.S. military during the Philippine American War (Rodriguez 148). This history of violent conquest and colonization by the U.S. distinguishes Filipino American Studies from the broader field of Asian American Studies. Campomanes argues that the “(post)colonial relations and entanglements between the Philippine and the United States as imagining communities – and the pressures that they exert on U.S. Filipino formations – have not been substantively raised within...[the] discursive fields” of Asian American Studies (8). As E. San Juan, Jr. argues,

The chief distinction of Filipinos from other Asians residing in the United States is that their country of origin was the object of violent colonization and unmitigated subjugation by U.S. monopoly capital. It is this foundational circumstance, not the settling of Filipino fugitives in Louisiana or anywhere else, that establishes the limit and the potential of the Filipino life world here (San Juan cited in Rodriguez 155).

Drawing on Campomanes, Rodriguez, and San Juan, I position this study within the strand of Filipino American Studies which foregrounds U.S. imperialism in the Philippines as both the historical condition of possibility for both the notion of a Filipino America and the origin of the current neo-imperial relationship between the two nations. I emphasize how the gendered U.S./Philippines relationship shapes the imagination of both diaspora and nation among Filipino Americans. The imagination (or elision) of histories of U.S. imperialism within Filipino American cultural production is a key site of inquiry for this dissertation. This project contributes to the existing Filipino American Studies and Philippine Studies scholarship which emphasizes the past and present imperial relationship of the U.S. to the Philippines as constitutive of both a Philippine national imagination, as well as the transnational imagination articulated within the diaspora (Balce, Campomanes, Gonzalvez, Hau, Isaac, Rafael, Rodriguez, Rodriguez, Tadiar). Although my project is in conversation with Asian American Studies, I share Campomanes' view that Asian American Studies, with its historic emphasis on the integration of Asians into the U.S. nation, can not fully encompass the historic and contemporary imperialist relationship of the U.S. to the Philippines. Kandace Chuh describes how the field of Asian American studies has been complicit in the U.S. national "forgetting" of Filipino Americans,

because... Asian American] strategic identities have been organized largely through paradigms of inclusion and exclusion most often articulated through the trope of immigration in Asian Americanist discourse, Filipino Americans have been repeatedly cast out into the space of difference that must be forgotten rather than the identity to be sustained (34).

Arguing against a dominant trope of immigration and assimilation into the U.S. nation-state, my dissertation is both a conversation with Asian American Studies and an attempt to push the boundaries of this discursive field.

As a project within Filipino American Studies, I also frame my analysis of Filipino American cultural production within the history of Filipino migration to the U.S., which emerged out of the material conditions of the U.S. occupation of the Philippines. The development of an unindustrialized export economy under U.S. rule created the material conditions for the eventual outward migration of many Filipinos (Espiritu 25). Initiated under Spanish rule, the Philippines developed an economy oriented towards agricultural exports, with sugar being a major export, while basic necessities such as rice and textiles had to be imported (Espiritu 25). The U.S.'s use of tariffs to enforce "free trade" ensured the underdevelopment of the Philippines and the depletion of its economic resources (Espiritu 25). Yen Le Espiritu argues that the "enduring legacies of U.S. empire are present in the Philippine economy, its political structure, its educational system, and its cultural institutions – all of which continue to be dominated or influenced by the United States" (Espiritu 26). Despite formal independence from the U.S. in 1946, the U.S. continues to dominate the Philippines politically, economically, and culturally.

From the 1920s through the present, Filipino migration to the U.S. has increased exponentially, although the mechanisms through which this migration has happened have varied according to U.S. immigration policies. Until 1992, the U.S. Navy was one of the main mechanisms through which Filipinos migrated to the U.S.,

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due to the former recruitment of Filipinos into the U.S. Navy, as well as the stipulation that allowed Filipinos into the Navy.¹¹ The 1965 Immigration Act ended national-origins quotas and permitted entry into the U.S. based on family reunification and occupational characteristics, which increased the number of Filipino migrants to the U.S. According to Espiritu, more than forty thousand Filipinos have been admitted to the U.S. annually since 1979, making the Philippines the second largest source of immigration, surpassed only by Mexico (Carino, Fawcett, Gardner, and Arnold cited in Espiritu 31).

The existing class diversity of Filipino American communities results from the varied histories and mechanisms by which Filipinos have migrated to the U.S. While the U.S. Navy brought many Filipinos to the U.S., the 1965 Immigration Act also had a substantial impact on the class make up of the Filipino American community. As Espiritu notes, the 1965 Immigration Act resulted in “two diverse chains of emigration: one of the relatives of Filipinos who had left for the Philippines before 1965 and another chain of highly trained immigrants who entered during the late 1960s and 1970s” (33). From 1976 to 1988, the proportion of occupational-preference immigrants dropped to 19-20 percent of the Filipino total, while the proportion of family-preference immigrants rose to 90 percent, due to a tightening of entry requirements for professionals in the mid-1970s (Espiritu 33). In addition,

¹¹ From 1902 to 1936 to the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, Filipinos were considered U.S. nationals due to the status of the Philippines as a U.S. territory. After Philippine independence, a provision in the Military Bases Agreement of 1947 allowed Filipinos to enlist in the Navy. The recruitment of Filipinos into the U.S. Navy ended in 1992, with the ending of the 1947 Military Bases Agreement. See Yen Le Espiritu, Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

many professional Filipino migrants experience downward social mobility after their arrival in the U.S. A survey of a random sample of persons issued visas from Korea and the Philippines in 1986 shows that 60% “of all professional and technical workers experienced downward mobility after entry” (Lowell cited in Parrenas 7). Filipino Americans exhibit a broad range of socioeconomic status, ranging from first generation upper middle-class professionals to second and third generation members of the working class.

Although I situate this study within a history of Filipino migration to the Philippines, this project departs from migration histories within Asian American Studies in that it emphasizes a diasporic framework rather than an assimilation narrative. This project focuses less on Filipino assimilation into the dominant U.S. culture, and more on the transnational imagination produced within various forms of Filipino diasporic cultural production. The transnational subjectivities articulated within Filipino American and Philippine performance, film, websites, and heritage language programs resist an analysis shaped solely by frameworks of migration and integration into the host nation. The content, form, and location of these cultural productions place them outside of a narrative of migration. For example, my ethnographic study of Filipino Americans who travel to the Philippines to express Filipino American cultural nationalism and to support revolutionary nationalist movements in the Philippines through their participation in heritage language programs, defies a narrative of U.S.-bound migration and assimilation. Similarly, my analysis of the discourse about “mail order brides” on the website NewFilipina.com,

based on online discussions among Filipinos from a range of national sites, requires a diasporic, transnational framework of analysis.

In addition to the circulation of transnational Philippine and Filipino American cultural production, the contemporary phenomenon of extensive outward labor migration from the Philippines fundamentally informs my analysis. Temporary labor migration to various parts of the world has characterized Filipino migration since the 1970s. In 2007, there were approximately 8 million Filipino migrants spread across the globe.¹² This expanded outward migration is mainly the effect of capitalist globalization, particularly the intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in the Philippine economy. In the 1960s, in conjunction with the IMF and World Bank, the Philippine state dismantled import substitution industries and injected foreign capital (i.e., structural adjustment loans) to turn the Philippine economy towards export-led growth (Basch cited in Parreñas 52). In 1974, former Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos introduced the “manpower exchange program” in the Philippines, which focused on the development, promotion, and regulation of overseas employment (Basch cited in Parreñas 52). Repressive labor conditions during Marcos’ regime set the foundation for the current reliance on Filipina migrant labor, as well as the practice of multinational corporations of hiring Filipinas as devalued, temporary labor (Tyner 136). The erosion of subsistence-level wages within local labor markets served to incorporate workers into the global labor

¹² See Philippine Overseas Employment Administration. Available: <http://www.poea.gov.ph/html/statistics.html>, February 13 2007. As of 2006, the population of the Philippines was approximately 90 million.

market (Tyner 136). Currently, the Philippine economy is reliant on remittances from Filipino workers abroad. Remittances from Filipino workers abroad equal six billion U.S. dollars a year (Karp cited in Parreñas 53). It is estimated that without labor outmigration, the unemployment rate in the Philippines would rise by forty percent (Castles and Miller cited in Parreñas 52).

There are significant differences between two major classes of Filipino diasporic subjects: Filipino American *balikbayans* and Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs)/Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Vicente Rafael notes that Filipino OCWs are hailed as “national heroes” within a Philippine state discourse that seeks to legitimize the Philippines’ reliance on remittances, while Filipino American *balikbayans* are sometimes viewed as “neo-colonizers” who signify the failure of the Philippine nation to remain whole (Rafael 209). The material and social capital of Filipino Americans distinguishes them from OCWs, who often work in exploitative conditions without the security of citizenship within their host country. In contrast, Filipino Americans with U.S. residency and/or citizenship benefit from the mobility that their U.S. citizenship/residency allows. Access to the material and institutional power of the U.S. state distinguishes Filipino Americans from their counterparts throughout the Filipino diaspora. While many Filipino communities in the U.S. are constituted of second or third generation Filipino Americans, OCWs working abroad must leave after their temporary contracts are over (often within a few years). Despite the gap in social capital between Filipino Americans and OCWs, it is also necessary to keep in mind the wide range of socioeconomic class within both groups.

While some Filipino Americans may have the privilege of U.S. citizenship or residence, they may barely survive economically as a member of the U.S. working class. Similarly, the remittances of OCWs allow their families in the Philippines to live at a higher material level of comfort than they would otherwise. The decrease in Filipino professionals who have migrated to the U.S. since 1965, transnational downward social mobility, and the high rates of education among OCWs complicates the socioeconomic distinction between Filipino American *balikbayans* and OCWs.

I use a dialogic approach to analyze the relationship between the material context of transnational labor migration and the discursive context of Filipino diasporic cultural production. Within these material and discursive contexts, I emphasize the representation of the transnational Filipina body within dominant discourses of global capitalism. The discursive construction of the racialized and gendered Filipina body reveals the role of gendered and devalued labor within an international division of labor. Contemporary labor migration from the Philippines has a decidedly feminized characteristic, as Filipino migrants perform labor that has traditionally been gendered female, including work as nurses, domestic helpers, nannies, caretakers, sex workers, and “mail order brides.” Although overseas Filipino workers are not all female-bodied, the kinds of domestic, sexual, and affective labor that Filipino workers perform within a global economy has historically been devalued as “women’s work.” Martin Manalansan critiques the equation of gendered forms of work with biologically female bodies, noting that transgendered and queer bodies increasingly perform forms of gendered labor (Manalansan 2008). Despite the

overall gendering of Philippine labor as feminine within a dominant global popular culture, many Filipino men work abroad as construction workers, seamen, and other occupations that are not associated with feminized labor. While this dissertation focuses on female figures of transnational belonging, I do not mean to suggest that men are excluded from the forms of belonging and subjectivity that I discuss. Nor do I intend to belittle the contributions of men to transnational labor, transnational political movements, or other forms of diasporic collectivity. Rather, I focus on the female Filipina body in order to 1) present a critique of the ways in which the transnational Filipina body serves as a geobody¹³ for the Philippine nation, revealing the logic of dominant racialized and gendered discourses under global capitalism; and 2) turn a reflexive, critical eye towards the masculinism and heteronormativity of gendered representations of the nation as female within Filipino diasporic cultural production.

The U.S. War on Terror in the Philippines

As part of the Southeast Asian region – what has been considered the next front of the global “War on Terror” – the Philippines has historically functioned as a center of power for U.S. military forces in the Pacific. With large Muslim communities and armed Muslim resistance/separatist movements across the region, Southeast Asia is a key region in the Bush administration’s ongoing War on Terror.

¹³ Roland Tolentino describes how the transnational Filipina body (“mail order brides,” domestic helpers, etc.) stands in for the Philippine nation, within a dominant global imagination. See “Bodies, Letters, Catalogs: Filipinas in Transnational Space” in *Transnational Asia Pacific: Gender, Culture, and the Public Sphere*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

Thousands of U.S. troops were illegally stationed in the Philippines in 2002, after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.¹⁴ In November of 2004, the Asia Pacific Economic Forum (APEC), which includes the U.S. and Asian and Latin American nations, met in Santiago, Chile, to affirm its commitment to creating a “free trade area” in the Asia Pacific region, as well as to affirm its continued support for a U.S.-lead “War on Terror”.¹⁵

The political and economic effects of the U.S. War on Terror, including the presence of U.S. troops in the Philippines, are the latest reiteration of the U.S.’s neo-imperial relationship to the Philippines. As such, the Philippine state has taken advantage of the U.S.-initiated discourse of “anti-terrorism” to crack down on activists, journalists, students, and other critics of Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s totalitarian administration. Under the rubric of “anti-terrorism,” armed gunmen linked to the Philippine military have committed almost a thousand extra-judicial killings of activists, journalists, students, and clergy people. The categorization of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) as a “terrorist” organization by the U.S. has given the current Philippine government the excuse to

¹⁴ Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. multi-country War on Terror effort, stationed troops in the Philippines in order to advise the Armed Forces of the Philippines in “combating terrorism.” See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/defense/enduringfreedom.html> available July 8, 2008.

¹⁵ According to the APEC website, its purpose is to serve as the “premier forum for facilitating economic growth, cooperation, trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific region.” APEC works to increase “free trade” in the Pacific Rim region, and includes the following countries as “member economies”: Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Republic of the Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; Viet Nam. See http://www.apec.org/apec/about_apec.html Available on July 8, 2008.

repress and even kill anyone associated with the CPP or other “terrorist” organizations.

The state violence and political repression in the Philippines is the current geopolitical context in which a Filipino diaspora is imagined. Filipino American participation in transnational solidarity movements, in particular the National Democratic movement in the Philippines, is shaped by the threat of abduction, torture, and death that face their comrades in the Philippines. The recent “Stop the Killings” campaigns by the prominent Filipino American organizations Bayan USA and Gabriela Network reveal how Filipino Americans have organized to resist state violence and repression in the Philippines. Popular Filipino American hip hop musicians such as Kiwi (San Francisco, California) and the Blue Scholars (Seattle, Washington) have toured the U.S. in order to raise awareness about the political situation in the Philippines and raise funds for the victims of violence. In this sense, Filipino American diasporic cultural production is intimately tied to the existing state of violence and repression in the Philippines. Indeed, recent events have demonstrated that even U.S. citizens are not completely exempt from the repressive force of the state. In 2007, three leaders of the U.S. women’s solidarity organization, Gabriela Network, were detained and prevented from leaving the Philippines. All three of the women are U.S. citizens, and two are Filipina American. Filipino American organizations in the U.S. responded to the detainment of GABNet activists with protests and denunciations. In addition, the creation of blacklists of Filipino American activists by the Arroyo administration, in collusion with the U.S. state,

reveals how the global police state¹⁶ has turned its attention to the surveillance of diasporic political movements as well.

In this moment of the U.S. lead War on Terror, in which capitalist globalization, neo-imperialism, and a global police state mark contemporary international relations, a study of Filipino transnationalism is especially significant. As one of the primary sources of migrant labor for a global capitalist economy, the Philippines occupies a unique position within both the neo-imperial U.S. imaginary and the global economy. As a critique of the discourses through which discourses of global capitalism taxonomize, discipline, and exploit gendered and racialized bodies, my project functions as both a critique of global capital and an articulation of a counter-imagination – through my work I hope to elaborate the ways in which diasporic subjects imagine and enact anti-capitalist worlds.

Gender, Sexuality, and the Nation

In 2002 I watched the performance and video art piece, *Cosmic Blood*, for the first time. This futuristic blend of dialogue, movement, percussion, and video art by the queer Filipina and Colombian American artist Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa explored themes of postcolonial hybridity, queer sexuality, and the embodiment of racial and ethnic difference. I was struck by the artist's use of video sequences, animation, dialogue, and embodied movement to re-imagine the moment of colonization through

¹⁶ Increased attention to the maintenance of borders, surveillance, and policing marks the contemporary global police state.

a lens of queer sexuality. Otalvaro-Hormillosa's exploration of the same themes that I had been exploring in the academic context of my graduate studies compelled me to write. Months later, I found myself returning to the images and embodied presence I experienced in *Cosmic Blood*. For me, *Cosmic Blood* invoked both a visceral and intellectual response, through its blending of the conceptual themes of postcolonial hybridity, mestizaje, and embodiment with its representation of queer sex and desire.

Cosmic Blood exemplifies the intersections between cultural production, the cultural politics of gender and sexuality, and academic theory. Otalvaro-Hormillosa's engagement with academic and popular theories of hybridity and mestizaje in her performance shed light on my own ruminations on belonging, kinship, and diaspora. The experience of watching and writing about *Cosmic Blood* served as my introduction to analyzing the complex engagement between cultural production, cultural politics, and academic theory. My analysis of *Cosmic Blood* allowed me to foreground my own investment in examining the politics of gender and sexuality as fundamental to the imagination of a diaspora.

An analysis of the cultural politics of gender, sexuality, and nation forms the analytical lens through which I approach my study of forms of Filipino transnational belonging. I examine the cultural politics of gender and sexuality within articulations of home, nation, and kinship in Filipino diasporic cultural production. My study of the gendered and sexual tropes through which transnational belonging is imagined contributes to the development of a broader Filipina American feminist archive, as well as the articulation of a Filipino American diasporic feminist theory. I build on

Filipina American feminist theory (De Jesus et. al, Rodriguez and Gonzalez), as well as critiques of the gendering of the Philippine nation (Tadiar, Hau). Filipino Americans' relationship to "home" is always already shaped through gendered and sexualized tropes of nation. Simultaneously, the global political economic context is one in which the Philippines plays a feminized role, as a provider of devalued gendered and racialized labor.

Secondly, this project is an engagement with queer politics and theory. In particular, I draw on scholarship from Queer Globalization Studies/Queer Diaspora Studies and Queers of Color Scholarship to articulate a critique of the heteronormativity and masculinism of various forms of nationalism – cultural nationalism, diasporic nationalism, and revolutionary nationalism – within the context of Filipino diasporic cultural production. This dissertation also critiques a U.S.-centered liberal queer agenda, what Lisa Duggan has termed "homonormative" politics, as complicit with a neoliberalism.¹⁷ In my analysis of the film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, I critique how the film's mainstream queer liberal agenda represents acceptance and freedom for First World queers at the expense of the Third World woman. In addition, I emphasize the necessity of integrating a study of sexuality (both normative and non-normative) with the study of diaspora. Gayatri Gopinath argues for the need to "queer" the concept of diaspora in order to unmask and undercut diaspora's "dependence on a genealogical, implicitly

¹⁷ See Duggan's discussion of homonormativity in "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," *Materializing Democracy: Towards a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo, and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002).

heteronormative logic” (Gopinath 10). Similarly, this dissertation foregrounds the constitutive role of sexuality within the imagination of a Filipino diaspora. I reveal how the gendered tropes through which the nation is invoked in Filipino diasporic cultural production are implicitly framed within a heteronormative framework. I also analyze forms of Filipino diasporic cultural production that “queer” the dominant kinship-based models of nationalism within the diaspora. The Filipina American art ensemble the Mail Order Brides critiques the hetero- and homonormative institution of marriage through their campy performative aesthetic. Their parodies of same sex marriage implicitly critique the mainstream queer movement’s focus on marriage equality. Simultaneously, the Mail Order Brides destabilize the notion of an authentic ethnic identity inherent to a heteronormative Filipino American cultural nationalism. Their performance of a campy, inauthentic mode of being Filipino enacts a kind of “queering” of cultural nationalism. In my first chapter on diasporic nationalisms, I describe the ways in which Filipino Americans imagine their relationship to home through masculinist and heteronormative tropes of the Philippine nation. I then analyzes the ways in which queer and female diasporic subjects negotiate the politics of representation within heritage language programs, suggesting the possibility for non-heteronormative modes of participation in the revolutionary nationalist movement in the Philippines.

This dissertation also explores the possibility of other forms of transnational belonging, beyond the heteronormative confines of nation and kinship. In my concluding chapter, an analysis of Gigi Oltavaro-Hormillosa’s performance piece

Cosmic Blood, I depict the artist's vision of an alternative form of belonging based on shared historical trauma and hope for the future. I draw on Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of a "mestiza consciousness" to highlight the interstices of sexuality, nation, and race that exceed contemporary forms of homophobia and histories of colonial domination. Anzaldúa argues for a "mestiza consciousness,"

As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless, because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos (102).

Anzaldúa's notion of a "mestiza consciousness" suggests modes of belonging beyond the familial paradigms of the nation. Similarly, Jose Muñoz's concept of "queer hybridity" is especially useful for describing the conceptual interlocation that the notions of queerness and hybridity offer for an understanding of postcolonial subjectivity. Muñoz describes this relationship,

To perform queerness is to constantly disidentify, to constantly find oneself thriving on the sites where meaning does not properly "line up." This is equally true of hybridity, another modality where meaning and identifications do not properly line up. The postcolonial hybrid is a subject whose identity practices are structured around an ambivalent relationship to the signs of empire and the signs of the "native," a subject who occupies a space between the West and the rest (78).

I also build on the germinal work of Martin Manalansan in his ethnography of gay Filipino migrants in New York City. Manalansan emphasizes the relationship between belonging, citizenship, the state, migration, and queer sexuality, arguing that “queer immigrants, like the Filipino gay men I consider in this book, perform between competing ideologies of belonging and citizenship to offset the multiple forms of displacements of life away from the homeland” (13).

My research contributes to an exploration of the relationship between both normative and non-normative sexualities to (trans)national forms of belonging. In addition, I critique the heteronormativity and masculinism of dominant national and diasporic models of belonging. Simultaneously, I argue that the nation as a form of belonging is integral to collective movements for self-determination and economic justice within the Philippines and its diaspora. Despite academic critiques of the nation as implicitly heteronormative and masculinist, within the geopolitical context of the Philippines, the nation continues to serve as a crucial mode of organizing against capitalist globalization and neo-imperialism. Although queer and female subjects are an active part of the Philippine revolutionary nationalist movement (and its counterparts within the diaspora), the larger politics of representation, in regard to gender and sexuality, are often not emphasized within a Filipino diasporic political culture. I argue that queer and feminist diasporic subjects committed to an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist politics of solidarity must engage with the discursive politics of gender, sexuality, and nation. In my engagement with queer theory and methodology, my intention is twofold, to present an analysis of how queer subjects

intervene in heteronormative modes of (trans)national belonging, and to describe how alternative forms of Filipino diasporic cultural production “queer” forms of national and transnational belonging.

The Transnational Filipina Body

As Philippine feminist Neferti Tadiar has argued, the transnational figure of the Filipina domestic helper serves as a sign for the Philippine nation, particularly its gendered position within an international economic order (Tadiar 113). This dissertation examines how the figure of the transnational Filipina body functions as a sign of both the Philippine nation and the Filipino diaspora within Filipino American cultural production. My analysis of representations of Filipina “mail order brides,” domestic helpers, and other “exploited Filipina bodies” explores how such gendered and racialized figures are invoked and circulated as a sign of nation within the diasporic context of Filipino American film, video, performance, and websites. Such an analysis of these figures reveals how the politics of sexuality and gender are intimately intertwined with Filipino Americans’ imagination of home – signified by the Philippine nation – and a diaspora. While often imagined as the romanticized “motherland” or *inangbayan*, Caroline Hau points out that, within the Filipino American imaginary, the Philippines is also figured as the abject maternal body, in that the maternal figure of the Philippine nation “stands for what she teaches her child to avoid within the signifying practices of the symbolic” (Hau 199). As such, the Philippine nation also represents a third world past which some middle-class

Filipino Americans want to leave behind. This study is in conversation with a larger field of critical Philippine/Filipina American feminist theory which focuses on the intersections between gender and nation in both the contemporary context of transnational capital, and the historical legacy of imperialism and militarization.

Beyond Filipino diasporic cultural production, this dissertation examines global popular culture as the dominant ideological framework through which logics of global capitalism are reproduced. The internet, in particular, reveals the logic of commodification, in which the racialized and gendered Filipina body is figured as a source of devalued sexual, domestic, and affective labor for an international division of labor. In their discussion of “mail order bride” and domestic helpers websites, Vernadette V. Gonzalez and Robyn Rodriguez note, “On the Internet, representations of Filipinas become synonymous with the Philippine nation-state” (Gonzalez and Rodriguez 219). As such, the laboring bodies of Filipinas function as a geobody for the Philippine nation. This figuring of the Filipina body reflects histories of imperialism and militarization, “Images of Filipinas on the Internet sustain old imperial fictions, fantasies, and imaginaries that shape desires for relaxation, wives, prostitutes and ultimately domestics and low-wage workers” (Kang, Enloe, and Ignacio cited in Gonzalez and Rodriguez 220). I analyze examples of this dominant representation of Filipina bodies (such as the film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*), as well as counter-imaginings and critiques from Filipino diasporic cultural production (such as the website NewFilipina.com and the performance/visual art of The Mail Order Brides). This project is both an analysis of the dominant

representation of Filipina bodies within global popular culture, as well as the counter-imaginings offered by Filipino Americans.

As such, this dissertation also argues that Filipino American political culture is complicit in perpetuating the racialized and gendered figure of the “exploited Filipina body” within attempts to ameliorate the actual conditions of Filipinas working worldwide in exploitative situations. The “exploited Filipina body” is an ambivalent figure in which affective notions of national and diasporic belonging are cathected. My analysis of the organization Gabriela Network’s Purple Rose Campaign describes how efforts to end the “trafficking of Filipino women and girls” risk the reproduction of imperialist relationships between Filipina Americans and Filipinas in the Philippines.¹⁸ This analysis is situated within my larger concern with how and why Filipino Americans participate in transnational solidarity movements based in the Philippines. How do we participate in these movements without reproducing imperialist relationships, or drawing on heteronormative or masculinist notions of the nation? Drawing on the work of Jo Doezema and Kamala Kempadoo, I argue that the “traffic in women” discourse creates a “damaged Other” in need of saving (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). Doezema argues that first world feminists create a “damaged Other” through the figure of Third World Women in order to justify their own political interventions. The creation of a “damaged Other” is a risk

¹⁸ See Gabriela Network’s website <http://www.gabnet.org> for more information on GABNet’s Purple Rose Campaign, which seeks to end the “traffic in Filipina women and girls.”

that Filipina American activists must negotiate in their efforts to create political solidarity.

Given this transnational frame of analysis, I position this project within what Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal have termed “transnational feminist cultural studies.” Kaplan and Grewal use this term to describe scholarship that integrates Marxist, poststructuralist, and feminist approaches. Kaplan and Grewal stress the necessity of combining an emphasis on political economy with the politics of representation in a gendered analysis (Kaplan and Grewal 358). While Kaplan and Grewal emphasize the transnational and the diasporic as frames of reference, they emphasize the necessity of analyzing nationalism as the “condition of possibility for various forms of feminism,” noting that studies of imperialism and decolonization must take nationalism into account (352). Similarly, I position this study of Filipino diasporic cultural production within the framework of transnational feminist cultural studies, foregrounding the need for a “feminist analysis that refuses to choose between economic, cultural, and political concerns” (Kaplan and Grewal 358). I combine a concern with the contemporary manifestations of nationalism within a diasporic framework that emphasizes material and affective transnational connections.

Political Stakes of the Project

I situate this project within a broader political-economic context in which Philippine nationalist movements’ struggles against neo-feudalism, neo-imperialism,

and capitalist globalization continue, despite the increasing government oppression masked by the “War on Terror” rhetoric. Filipino Americans participate in transnational solidarity organizations in support of nationalist movements in the Philippines, particularly in support of the National Democratic movement. Given the worldwide “War on Terror,” the complicity of Philippine president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo’s administration with U.S. foreign policy, and the extrajudicial killings of hundreds of Philippine activists, the politics of nation and diaspora are especially significant in the current moment. How and why Filipino American articulate their affective, material and conceptual connections to the Philippines are crucial sites of inquiry in the current political moment. Given a current context of U.S. neo-imperialism and global War on Terror, it is equally important to interrogate the forms of U.S. national narration that are implicit in the notion of a Filipino American identity.

The notion of a Filipino diaspora has gained critical purchase within the Filipino American and Philippine popular imaginary. The establishment of dual U.S./Philippine citizenship is both an effect of affective connections between Filipino Americans and Filipinos, as well as an institutionalized means of preserving the ownership of property by U.S. citizens of Philippine descent. Filipino American sites of cultural production, such as Pilipino Cultural Nights and heritage language programs, reveal how discourses about Philippine transnationalism – such as the

“National Heroes” discourse¹⁹ – travel across borders. New and old forms of nationalism intersect and come into tension at these sites of transnational contact. As I argue in my first chapter, the articulation of diasporic nationalisms among Filipino Americans emerges at the intersection of Filipino American cultural nationalism, Philippine revolutionary nationalism, and Philippine state nationalism. While critiquing the gendered and sexualized tropes through which the nation is represented in the diasporic context, I also point to the nationalist movement in the Philippines as one of the most powerful social collectives resisting capitalist globalization and neo-imperialism.

Similarly, the negotiation of Filipino American affective and material connections to the idea of “America” is an important site of inquiry for this project. How and why Filipino Americans participate in dominant narratives of U.S. nationhood, even as they reclaim belonging to a Filipino diaspora, is crucial to exploring transnational subjectivities. Thus, Filipino American claims to Filipino diasporic belonging must also be situated within the larger stakes of belonging to the U.S. nation. A study of Filipino American cultural politics must not only emphasize the politics of belonging to the Philippine nation and its diaspora, but to the U.S. nation as well. As Oscar Campomanes and Dylan Rodriguez have noted, the reproduction of narratives of U.S. exceptionalism and the disavowal of U.S.

¹⁹ The discourse of Overseas Filipino Workers as “national heroes” was initiated by the Philippine state and has been disseminated throughout Philippine popular culture through films such as *Anak* and *The Flor Contemplacion Story*. This discourse positions OFWs, in particular female domestic workers, as both heroines and martyrs for their home nation, implicitly justifying the state’s reliance on labor migration for economic remittances.

imperialism are endemic to the collective notion of a Filipino American identity. As such, the multidirectional nature of a Filipino American diasporic political culture requires an interrogation of the politics of belonging to multiple, contradictory forms of nationhood.

Throughout these diverse geopolitical sites, the relationship between national and transnational belonging is narrated and visualized through gendered and sexualized tropes of nation and diaspora. These forms of belonging are fundamentally shaped by a contemporary material context in which the Philippine nation serves as a source of gendered and racialized labor for a global capitalist economy. Thus, it is crucial to foreground a material and discursive analysis of the politics of gender and sexuality in imagining both the Philippine nation and its diaspora. This project analyzes how Filipino Americans' relationships to the Philippine nation and its diaspora are narrated through heteronormative and masculinist tropes. Ultimately, this project is a contribution to a feminist, queer Filipino diasporic political project – one that is attuned to both the liberatory potential of nationalisms in the decolonizing process, as well as the risks of both epistemic and literal violence that such a process entails.

Chapter Descriptions

My first chapter, “Mapping Diasporic Nationalisms: The Filipino American *Balikbayan* in the Philippines” introduces the figure of the Filipino American

*balikbayan*²⁰ in the Philippines. Combining ethnographic research in two intersecting field sites – heritage language programs for Filipino Americans in Manila, Philippines, and Pilipino Cultural Celebrations/Pilipino Cultural Nights at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of California, Santa Cruz – this chapter maps the contours of diasporic nationalisms among Filipino Americans. I argue that diasporic nationalisms emerge at the juncture of Filipino American cultural nationalism and Philippine revolutionary nationalism. In particular, this chapter critiques the masculinist and heteronormative tropes through which diasporic nationalisms are articulated by Filipino Americans, describing the gendered and sexualized tropes through which diasporic and national belonging are imagined.

Further, this chapter explores the tensions between critiques of the nation as implicitly heteronormative and masculinist, and queer and feminist support for nationalist movements. In particular, I examine the tensions between Philippine nationalist feminists calls for national liberation as the prerequisite for gender equality, and first world feminists' emphasis on gender as the primary axis of difference. Philippine nationalist feminists base their analysis on a critique of the state (both the Philippine and U.S.), as well as a larger critique of the neo-imperial relationship of the U.S. to the Philippines. Chapter One ends with a consideration of

²⁰ As Vicente Rafael states, the term “balikbayan” “joins the Tagalog words *balik* (to return) and *bayan* (town, and at least from the nineteenth century onwards, nation)...being a balikbayan depends on one’s permanent residence abroad. It means that one lives somewhere else and that one’s appearance in the Philippines is temporary and intermittent, as if one were a tourist” (208). See Vicente Rafael, White Love and Other Events in Filipino History (London: Duke University Press, 2000).

the role of Filipino Americans in transnational political solidarity movements, which are manifestations of the diasporic nationalisms that I describe.

My second chapter, “Representing the Filipina ‘Mail Order Bride,’” explores the representation of the Filipina “mail order bride” through a comparative analysis of two sites of Filipino diasporic cultural production – the website NewFilipina.com and the performance art ensemble The Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. – and one example of global popular culture, film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. I begin with an analysis of the character Cynthia (a Filipina bride) in the popular film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* in order to describe the dominant representation of Filipina bodies as devalued gendered labor within global popular culture. The representation of the character Cynthia reveals the way in which the third world woman, as a provider of domestic, sexual, and affective labor, is positioned in relation to first world queers within a liberal queer agenda. Within this homonormative logic, acceptance and tolerance of first world queers comes at the expense of the third world women. I then transition to Filipino diasporic cultural production in my analysis of the website NewFilipina.com. While NewFilipina.com endeavors to create a transnational Filipino community online, it also seeks to transform the dominant representation of Filipinas online as “mail order brides,” domestic helpers, and sex workers. Through an analysis of posts to bulletin boards on the website, I analyze the affective politics of representing the “mail order bride” within the broader notion of a Filipino diaspora. In contrast to NewFilipina.com’s attempts to transform the image of Filipinas in popular culture, the work of The Mail

Order Brides uses the performative methods of camp and drag to denaturalize this dominant trope of Filipina bodies. Utilizing a form of feminist camp, The Mail Order Brides denaturalize the forms of affective, domestic, and sexual labor that are corporealized within the Filipina body. In addition, The Mail Order Brides play with ethnic drag to destabilize dominant notions of Filipina femininity, ethnicity, and domesticity. Lastly, The Mail Order Brides reveal and critique the forms of affective labor necessary to reproduce the heteronormative institution of marriage within same sex weddings. As such, the Mail Order Brides's work is both an implicit critique a liberal queer political agenda, as well as an intervention into the dominant construction of Filipina laboring bodies under global capitalism.

My third chapter, "The 'Exploited Filipina Body,' National Affects, and Transnational Belonging," examines the politics of representing the "exploited Filipina body" within Filipino diasporic political culture. I use the term "exploited Filipina body" to refer to representations of Filipina women who provide commodified sexual and domestic labor within a global capitalist economy, including Filipina "mail order brides," domestic helpers/overseas contract workers, and sex workers. The invocation of this figure within Filipino American political organizing, film, and performance incites both national and transnational affective structures of belonging. The "exploited Filipina body" serves as a gendered trope of the Philippine nation in the diasporic context of Filipino American cultural production. In particular, I examine Gabriela Network's Purple Rose Campaign, the Filipina American documentary film *Sin City Diary*, and the vignette "National Heroes," from

ReCreation, the 2006 Pilipino Cultural Night at the University of California at Berkeley. My analysis of these sites reveals how the “exploited Filipina body” is figured as both a victim to be saved, as well as a “national hero” in the context of transnational labor migration.

Gabriela Network (GABNet) invokes the “exploited Filipina body” in its Purple Rose Campaign, which works to end the “trafficking of Filipino women and girls.” Within this discourse of the “traffic in women,” GABNet includes “mail order brides,” domestic workers, and sex workers. In doing so, GABNet conflates these diverse modalities of migration and labor under the discourse of the “traffic in women.” Chapter Three argues that the representation of “mail order brides,” domestic workers, and sex workers as “trafficked women” suggests an imperialist relationship, in which Filipina migrant workers need to be saved by their Filipina American counterparts. As such, “trafficked Filipina women” function as the “damaged Other” of Filipina American activists. Chapter Three then presents an analysis of *Sin City Diary*, a documentary by Filipina American filmmaker Rachel Rivera. *Sin City Diary* is both a narrative of the filmmaker’s personal history of migration, as well as a documentary of the lives of Filipina sex workers in Olongapo, Philippines. As such, *Sin City Diary* represents the stories of Filipina sex workers through the affective lens of the Rivera’s sense of loss and guilt, feelings which structure her relationship to the Philippines, and to the women whose lives she portrays in the film. In my discussion of “National Heroes,” I describe how the state discourse of Filipina overseas contract workers/domestic helpers as the “heroes” of

the Philippine nation is reiterated in the Filipino American context of a Pilipino Cultural Night. As such, “National Heroes” is complicit in reproducing the logic of capital, while legitimizing the Philippine state’s role as recruiter and pimp for global flows of gendered migrant labor. In all three sites, the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” invokes affective structures of both national and transnational belonging among Filipino Americans.

Chapter Four, “(Re)imagining the Transnational Filipina Body: Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s *Cosmic Blood*,” focuses on the figure of the *cyborg* as a utopian figure for alternative formulations of a transnational imagination. This chapter describes the performance and video art piece, *Cosmic Blood*, by the queer Colombian/Filipina American artist Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa. *Cosmic Blood* parodies racialized, gendered, and sexualized codes of reading the mixed race, ambiguously gendered Filipina body within the contemporary context of the multicultural San Francisco Bay Area, utilizing a science fictional mode to present a retelling of the moment of first contact between the colonizer and the colonized. In doing so, *Cosmic Blood* challenges both the taxonomy of racial difference, a legacy of colonization, and contemporary modes of reading the racialized, gendered body within a global capitalist system. Chapter Four argues that *Cosmic Blood* presents a reimaging of the relationship of the racialized, gendered Filipina body to discourses of global capitalism. In contrast to the commodification of Filipina bodies within a global capitalist economy (the Filipina as “mail order bride” or domestic helper), *Cosmic Blood* presents a vision of Filipina subjectivity determined by her own queer desire

and sexuality. The alien/robot hybrid character, a central focus of the piece, functions both as a figure for racial and gender hybridity, as well as a figure for a *utopian transnational imagination*, one in which Filipina subjectivity is determined by one's status as a desiring subject, rather than one's existence as a corporeal commodity within a global circuits of labor migration.

Chapter One:

Mapping Diasporic Nationalisms: The Filipino American *Balikbayan* in the Philippines

The term “*balikbayan*” combines the term “*balik*” (to return) with the term “*bayan*” (nation). As *balikbayans*, Filipino Americans are uniquely situated between the Philippines, as the national site of origin for the Filipino diaspora, and the U.S., the heart of the imperial center. This chapter will focus on the figure of the Filipino American *balikbayan* within heritage language programs, or “Balik-Aral²¹” (back to study) programs in the Philippines. “Balik-Aral” programs are geared towards Filipino Americans who have a desire to study Philippine language and culture. Heritage language programs offer a combination of courses in Philippine language, history, and culture, and “immersion” or “exposure trips”²² which allow students to learn about various social issues in the Philippines, and give students the opportunity to interact with marginalized groups and communities. The discourse of returning to the motherland is crucial to the transnational imagination produced within heritage language programs. S. Lily Mendoza comments on notions of the “homeland” among Filipino Americans visiting Philippines through “Balik-Aral” programs,

²¹ S. Lily Mendoza coined the term “Balik-Aral” to describe heritage language programs for Filipino Americans. See S. Lily Mendoza, “A Different Breed of Filipino Balikbayans: The Ambiguities of (Re)-Turning,” *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, ed. Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr., Edgardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Guitierrez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

²² The term “exposure trip” has its origin in the ongoing practice of “exposing” nationalist youth and students to the conditions of poverty and dispossession in the Philippine countryside.

Curiously enough, this is the homeland that these U.S.-born Filipino American youth are seeking to (re-)turn – whether in the imaginary or in actual space and time. It is a place that, for all its grief and unending sorrows (and, some say, its perversely high happiness quotient), they seem to actively, proudly, desire to get to know (206).

Whether literal or figural, the trope of return permeates the transnational space of heritage language programs. Within Filipino American/Filipino Canadian cultural production more broadly, including the performing arts, literature, and film, the trope of returning home, and the consequent reclaiming of identity and culture, is prevalent.²³

This chapter maps the gendered and sexualized discourses through which diasporic nationalisms emerge in the context of heritage language programs for Filipino Americans. More specifically, I will examine how these articulations of diasporic nationalisms link notions of home, kinship, and belonging to heteronormative and masculinist discourses of the nation. Focusing on the Filipino American *balikbayan*, both as a figure within the Philippine popular imaginary and as an actor within transnational solidarity movements, this chapter also analyzes the

²³ There are multiple examples of the trope of returning/finding home within Filipino American/Filipino Canadian culture. The theater/movement piece *Pagbabalik/Return* by Aimee Suzara, a San Francisco Bay Area based performer, poet, and cultural activist, explores the theme of return. The play follows the spiritual journey of the main character, Diwata, to the Philippines after growing up in the U.S. The Filipino Canadian horror film, *Ang Pamana/The Inheritance* (Romeo Candido, 2006) tells the story of two Filipino Canadians who visit a haunted house in a rural Philippine province, which they have inherited from their Filipina grandmother. During their visit to the Philippines, they come to turn with both their cultural heritage and the spirits of the past. The short experimental documentary *Balikbayan Confessions* (2006), directed by Tina Bartolome, documents the journey of a group of queer Filipina Americans to an international lesbian and gay conference in the Philippines. The film weaves together reflections on sexuality, gender, and race with the experiences of Filipina Americans visiting the Philippines for the first time. The trope of visiting/returning to the Philippines is also a common theme of Pilipino Cultural Nights/Pilipino Cultural Celebrations at universities across the U.S.

forms of *diasporic nationalisms* that emerge at the nexus of several discourses of the Philippine nation: Filipino American cultural nationalism, Philippine popular nationalism, and Philippine state nationalism. As diasporic subjects who negotiate complex relationships to both U.S. imperialism and Philippine popular nationalism, Filipino Americans occupy a multi-faceted position within the Filipino diaspora. This chapter explores the possibility and potential for a politically engaged, yet critical, analysis of multiple forms of Filipino nationalism, articulated from the diasporic position of the Filipino American *balikbayan*.

Intersecting Fieldsites: “Balik-Aral” Programs and Pilipino Cultural Nights/ Pilipino Cultural Celebrations

Heritage language programs geared towards Filipino Americans have been in existence for over a decade. Only recently have heritage language programs been institutionalized within the U.S. university system; the Philippine Studies Program at the University of the Philippines, Diliman was affiliated with the University of California Education Abroad Program from 2004-2005.²⁴ This study will focus on the Philippine Studies Program (PSP) at the University of the Philippines (UP), Diliman, located in Quezon City, Metro Manila. This chapter is based on participant observation and seventeen open-ended interviews with students and faculty in the

²⁴ The University of California’s Education Abroad Program in the Philippines has been suspended since Spring 2006 due to the U.S. State Department’s March 23, 2006 travel advisory against Americans traveling in the Philippines. See the article posted on the website of the UCLA International Institute <http://www.international.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=32406>. See the current U.S. State Department against travel to the Philippines (posted on April 27, 2007) at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_2190.html.

PSP program. As a research fellow at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, I had the opportunity to observe classes, lectures, and field trips, interview students, and socialize with both students and faculty at various curricular and extra-curricular events. In addition, I developed social relationships with students and faculty, and had the opportunity to get to know them beyond the confines of the classroom. Overall, I chose to emphasize interviews and participant observation as my primary methodological tools in analyzing heritage language programs due to the necessity of engaging with the everyday discussions and negotiations through which diasporic nationalisms emerge.

The Philippines Studies Program (PSP) has been in existence at UP Diliman since 2003, and was affiliated with the University of California from 2004 to 2005. The program is a joint project of UP Diliman and Philippine Forum, a U.S.-based non-profit organization that operates out of the New York City area. Philippine Forum administers the U.S. end of the program, including advertisement of the program, selection of participants, and other logistical matters. Philippine Forum is an education and advocacy-based organization which works on various Filipino American issues, from organizing Filipino workers to producing cultural events.

The twenty-five students in the Philippine Studies Program during the summer of my research came from across the U.S., ranging from fourth generation students from large Filipino American communities to students who were born in the Philippines but migrated to the U.S. in their childhood or adolescence. Students came from a diversity of geographic regions in the U.S., from the San Francisco Bay Area

and Los Angeles, areas with large Filipino American communities, to parts of the U.S. south and southeast with relatively small Filipino populations, such as Missouri, Texas, and Florida. The students ranged in age from seventeen to twenty-seven years of age. While one student was a senior in high school, most participants were undergraduate level students. A few students were in graduate school, or had graduated from college and were working full time. While some students chose the PSP program primarily to study Philippine language and history, others came for the independent research component of the trip, which matched students with a faculty mentor.. Students completing independent research had the option of not attending the language classes and lectures.

I also interviewed several faculty members in the Philippine Studies Program. I sought out both interviews and more casual interactions with faculty members in order to gauge their investments in and interaction with their Filipino American students. In order to understand the emergence of diasporic nationalisms within the space of heritage language programs, it was crucial to obtain the perspective of the teachers, as the primary political and cultural interlocutors between the students and various discourses of the Philippine nation.

In addition to drawing on ethnographic research on heritage language programs for Filipino Americans in the Philippines, this chapter will integrate ethnographic research I conducted among participants in Pilipino Cultural Celebrations (PCCs) and Pilipino Cultural Nights (PCNs), which are cultural performances organized by Filipino American student organizations at many

universities.²⁵ I conducted eighteen interviews with participants and audience members of PCCs and PCNs at the University of California at Santa Cruz and the University of California at Berkeley. Mainly focusing on the articulation of a Filipino American cultural nationalism through PCCs/PCNs, I intersperse this ethnographic research throughout my discussion of intersecting nationalisms in the context of heritage language programs.

In choosing personal narratives to highlight in this chapter, I decided to foreground interview subjects whose experiences revealed the key differences among the range of students in the PSP program. While many of my interview subjects (in both the PSP program and PCC/PCN participants) are from California, are active in Filipino American student organizations, are conversant with discourses of Filipino American cultural nationalism, and participate in community events such as Pilipino Cultural Nights or traditional Philippine dance performances, I chose not to emphasize their stories here. I made this decision primarily because this experience of Filipino American subjectivity has often been represented within Filipino American Studies scholarship.²⁶ I wanted to tell the stories of those students whose experiences did not fit the hegemonic norm of dominant notions of Filipino American identity, which, as it is presented within popular forms of cultural production such as

²⁵ PCNs and PCCs are most common at high schools and universities on the west coast of the U.S., particularly in California.

²⁶ Academic texts by scholars such as Yen Le Espiritu and Theodore Gonzalvez provide accounts of Filipino American life in California. Gonzalvez, in particular, examines the phenomena of Pilipino Cultural Nights in Northern and Southern California. See Yen Le Espiritu, Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), Theodore Gonzalvez, "'The Show Must Go On': Production Notes on the Pilipino Cultural Night," Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism 2.2 (1995).

PCCs/PCNs is implicitly masculinist, heteronormative, and cultural nationalist. I was particularly interested in those students who identified more with a notion of transnational Philippine solidarity, and less with more depoliticized notions of Filipino American cultural nationalism.²⁷ In contrast, I also chose to represent subjects whose viewpoints were decidedly anti-nationalist, including students who identified more as “global citizens” (within a cosmopolitan framework) and less as Filipino/Filipino American. Ultimately, my reasons for this decision stem from my desire to present a more complex and multifaceted portrayal of Filipino Americans’ negotiation of national attachments that is attentive to the ways in which gender, sexuality, and transnational belonging inform Filipino American subjectivity.

The Figure of the Filipino American *Balikbayan*

The Filipino American *balikbayan* is an ambivalent figure within the popular Philippine imaginary. While official state discourse defines a *balikbayan* as someone who was born in the Philippines, immigrated to another country (usually in the Global North, possibly obtaining a different national citizenship), then returned “home”, popular use of the term may or may not include Filipino Americans²⁸. More often,

²⁷ See my critique of cultural nationalism in the introduction to this dissertation.

²⁸ The Philippine state defines *balikbayans* as Filipinos who were born in the Philippines and migrated elsewhere, regardless of their current citizenship. According to Philippine Republic Act 6768 (passed on Nov. 3, 1989):

(a) The term "*balikbayan*" shall mean a Filipino citizen who has been continuously out of the Philippines for a period of at least one (1) year, a Filipino overseas worker, or a former Filipino citizen and his family, as this term is defined hereunder, who had been naturalized in a foreign country and comes or returns to the Philippines; and

(b) The term "family" shall mean the spouse and the children of the *balikbayan* who are not *balikbayan* in their own right traveling with the latter to the Philippines.

this term refers to Filipinos within two categories: 1) those who have permanently settled outside of the Philippines, often in the U.S., Canada, or western Europe; and 2) Overseas Contract Workers, migrant workers who have left the Philippines for temporary amount of time to earn money abroad. Obviously, there are significant differences in socioeconomic class, cultural capital, and transnational mobility between the two groups. However, for the purposes of this study, I include Filipino American youth, whether born in the U.S. or the Philippines, within the term *balikbayan*. Although some of the participants in the Philippine Studies Program were born in the Philippines, almost all of the students identified as Filipino American, having spent a large portion of their lives in the U.S. As Filipino Americans “returning” to the Philippines, they both fit within and exist apart from common discourses about *balikbayans* in the Philippines. S. Lily Mendoza describes young Filipino Americans who “return” to the Philippines, as a “different breed of Filipino *balikbayans*”, in which one encounters “the diaspora in reverse” (200).

Mendoza asks,

But what of U.S.-born Filipino Americans who travel to the Philippines for the first time? Surely, they could not be *balikbayans* in the same sense of the word? Given that such persons – save perhaps for the color of their skin – would not be marked by a “native” identity, it isn’t likely that their (re-)turn would be imbued with the same “authenticity” as a native born like me? And yet, on another level, might one not say that a virtual (re-)turn is possible even for Pinoys who have never set foot on Philippine soil? (200).

The enthusiasm with which Mendoza, a self-described “native born” Filipino, responds to the presence of Filipino American *balikbayans* contrasts with a more ambivalent popular discourse about U.S. Filipinos in the Philippines. As a site of both anxiety and envy, especially among middle and upper class Filipinos, the Filipino American *balikbayan* occupies an uneasy position within the idea of a transnational Filipino diaspora. Unlike the Filipino OCW²⁹ (Overseas Contract Worker), who is hailed as a “national hero” within Philippine state discourse, the Filipino American *balikbayan* is seen as both a traitor to the nation, as well as a figure to admire and emulate. Vincent Rafael distinguishes between these two classes of overseas Filipinos, “Whereas overseas contract workers (OCWs) are seen to return from conditions of near abjection, *balikbayans* are frequently viewed to be steeped in their own sense of superiority, serving only to fill others with a sense of envy” (Rafael 208). Rafael cites the popular Philippine journalist Conrado de Quiros’ comparison of arrogant Filipinos to the Thomasites³⁰, “Balikbayans as Thomasites are thus positioned as neocolonizers whose ambitions lie in setting themselves apart from the rest of the so-called natives rather than affiliating with them” (Rafael). In contrast to Mendoza’s positive description of Filipino American youth’s desire to

²⁹ Filipino OCWs leave the Philippines to complete temporary work contracts abroad. Often working as domestic helpers, nurses, or construction workers, OCWs send remittances back to the Philippines, providing a crucial source of income for the Philippine economy.

³⁰ According to Rafael, “The Thomasites were the first group of U.S. schoolteachers who arrived in the Philippines at the beginning of this century and who figure in nationalist narrative not as benevolent instructors but as purveyors of the miseducation of the Filipino” (208). See Rafael, White Love and Other Events in Filipino History.

“return” to the Philippines, the popular criticism of *balikbayans* represented by de Quiros’ statement reveals the tensions evoked by the presence of U.S. Filipinos in the Philippines. Rafael presents the figure of the *balikbayan* as both a sign of the failure of the Philippine nation, as well as a persistent reminder of the difference in social and material capital between the U.S. and the Philippines (208).

As Rafael has demonstrated, the Filipino American *balikbayan* occupies an uneasy position within the popular Philippine imagination. Caroline Hau describes the position of Filipino American *balikbayans* within the popular Philippine imagination,

These Filipino Americans’ skin color, awkward Filipino, and life experiences “abroad” mark them as privileged outsiders whose connections to an imagined “America” – land of opportunities, consumer goods, middle-class or upper middle-class lifestyles, Hollywood – grant them special access to the Philippine social, literary, and mass-media circles (193).

Despite the cultural capital granted to Filipino Americans, they are simultaneously seen as without culture, inauthentic, privileged, First World versions of authentic Filipinos. The presence of Filipino Americans in the Philippines evokes mixed responses. Hau notes,

Filipinos in America by their very presence evoke anxieties and fantasies on the part of the middle classes and intellectuals in Manila. Their departure for greener pastures abroad is characteristically seen by these Filipinos as an act of selfishness, a “betrayal” of the Philippine nation (193).

This sense of “betrayal” may or may not transfer to the children of Philippine expatriates. Although viewed with both envy and scorn for their inherent and inherited social capital, Filipino Americans who were born and/or raised in the States have a different relationship to this narrative of national betrayal. Within the context of heritage language programs, the young Filipino Americans narrate their journey to the Philippines as “coming home,” “finding their Filipino culture,” and assuming a Philippine national identity that they lacked as racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S. As one of the PSP students, Jeremy, commented,

I had never been to the Philippines, and I wanted to come home for the first time...You have all these expectations. You want it to be the best...I wanted to let to country enter me...I wanted to feel at home, and I did.³¹

From Jeremy’s perspective, his affective connection to the Philippines overrides the geopolitical difference between him as a Filipino American and the people with whom he wants to connect. Despite the fact that he had never been to the Philippines, he refers to the Philippines as “home” and seeks a sense of completion through his experience with the PSP program.

As the previous quote demonstrates, heritage language programs reproduce narratives of return and finding one’s cultural/national authenticity. The programs respond to a very real desire, on the part of young Filipino Americans, to experience an affective connection to their nation of origin. In particular, many students seek

³¹ Jeremy, personal interview, 10 August 2006.

material ways to participate in social justice movements in the Philippines. While some students develop feelings of solidarity with the Philippine revolutionary nationalist movement through exposure to Filipino American organizations in the U.S., others are galvanized by their exposure to the social conditions in the Philippines, which is made possible through exposure programs such as PSP. Within an affective context in which the Philippines is imagined as one's home or site of origin, the Filipino American *balikbayan* is triangulated between revolutionary nationalist discourses of the Philippine Left, as they are articulated within the transnational setting of heritage language programs, and an identity-based Filipino American cultural nationalism. In the crucible of these contradictory discourses of the nation, diasporic nationalisms emerge.

Setting the Scene: Local, National, and Transnational Contexts

The University of the Philippines, Diliman, (UP) where the Philippine Studies Program is located, has historically been a locus of militant nationalist activism. The founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), Jose Maria Sison, was a student and instructor at UP Diliman, and many leaders and participants in both the CPP and the New People's Army (the armed sector of the CPP), were originally students at UP. Thus, within the popular metropolitan Manila imaginary, UP Diliman is thought of as bohemian, militant, and extremely nationalist. As the flagship institution for the national university system, UP Diliman boasts of highly regarded programs in various fields, from medicine, to law and business, drawing students

from across the Philippine archipelago. Despite a larger national context in which the CPP is now officially considered a “terrorist” organization by the U.S., and by extension the current presidential administration of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, many students and faculty participate in organizations either directly linked to the National Democratic Front (NDF), or that espouse a national democratic framework. Within the territorial confines of the Philippines, popular nationalism has most often been represented by the National Democratic movement. The NDF is connected to local, national, and international organizations. Since the early 1970s, the National Democratic movement has been one of the most consistent and vocal critics of U.S. imperialism and capitalist globalization. As a mass movement, the NDF functions through a multitude of organizations geared towards improving the welfare of various sectors of society, including peasants, workers, women, youth, etc. The NDF calls for a societal revolution as the solution for the poverty and dispossession that is the result of what they critique as a semi-feudal and neocolonial system.³²

The very location of the PSP program within the politically charged environment of UP Diliman, and the program’s location within the historically nationalist discipline of Philippine Studies, speaks to the political and academic orientation of the program. Philippine Forum, the co-sponsoring organization that administers the PSP program on the U.S. end, is a New York-based group that has ties to Bayan USA, an international solidarity group that works closely with the NDF.

³² See the National Democratic Front of the Philippines website. Available at <http://home.casema.nl/ndf/>

The Philippine Studies Program could be expected to present an explicitly and militantly nationalist agenda, as well as attract Filipino American students who espouse such a framework. Although some PSP students came specifically because of the program's reputation for radical politics, as well as their own investments in the National Democratic movement in the Philippines, many students chose the program primarily for academic reasons. In the current iteration of the PSP program, the Philippine Studies Program curriculum presents a range of political, ideological, and academic perspectives, rather than a narrow focus on revolutionary nationalist politics. This more academic focus of the PSP program could be due to its institutionalization as an official partner institution of the University of California Education Abroad Program from 2004-2005. At any rate, the reputation of both UP Diliman and the Philippine Studies Program as "radical" is more exaggerated than factual, since the program has changed some of the more overtly "political" aspects of the program.³³

The Philippine Studies Program website describes PSP as an intensive Philippine Studies and Filipino language program for Filipino American students, as well as international students interested in Philippine Studies. Further, it presents testimonials from former students, in which they describe how their experience in PSP gave them a renewed commitment to working towards social justice in the Philippines. According to one testimonial from the PSP website,

³³ For example, in past years, students were matched with a political organization, such as Anakbayan or Gabriela, in order to facilitate their interest in working with Philippine political movements. Faculty also mentioned that in past years, the speakers came from political organizing backgrounds, rather than academic institutions.

As a Filipino-American concerned with social justice, attending the Philippine Studies program at UP Diliman was the best thing I could do. Studying the historical perspective of how Philippine society has evolved, coupled with the stories told to us first-hand by various communities, has really opened my eyes to the daily struggles of poverty and hardship experienced by an overwhelming majority of the population.

I learned that Filipino-Americans hold enormous power to affect change among our community both here and in the Philippines. And that even the smallest action can make a huge difference.³⁴

The central narratives presented through these testimonials are of the possibility for both personal and political transformation, as well as the development of an affective connection to the Philippines. Often, the forms of personal and political transformation that PSP students experience involve a shift from a more cultural nationalist, U.S.-centric version of Filipino American identity, to a feeling of transnational solidarity with the struggles of peoples' movements in the Philippines. This shift is both affective and material, as often students return to the Philippines to participate in the work of the National Democratic movement. Former PSP students also organize in the U.S. through the alumni organization, Sandiwa: National Alliance of Filipino American Youth, which organizes youth and students in support of Philippine economic and cultural sovereignty.³⁵ Although the PSP website invokes a commitment to social justice in its self-representation through the student

³⁴ Philippine Studies Program, University of the Philippines, Diliman website. Available at <http://www.philippinestudies.org>

³⁵ See the Sandiwa page on the social networking site Facebook. Available at <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=14525194161>

testimonials, the website emphasizes the academic nature of the program, listing a number of well-known Philippine scholars as lecturers in the program's Philippine Studies Lecture Series. The PSP website focuses on the proximity of students to established scholars in Philippine Studies and other fields, and highlights the opportunity for graduate students to conduct research at UP Diliman.

It is crucial to note that the current state violence in the Philippines, which draws on the rhetoric of the U.S.-led War on Terror, informs the experiences of both faculty and students in the Philippine Studies Program. Adopting the U.S. rhetoric of "fighting terrorism," the Arroyo administration has cracked down on suspected "terrorists." As a result, hundreds of activists, workers, journalists, lawyers, community organizers, and students have been the victims of extra-judicial killings, abduction, and torture. The academy, and UP Diliman in particular, are not exempt from this environment of state violence and political repression. Three weeks prior to my arrival at UP Diliman, two female students were abducted by masked gunmen, and were thought to be dead. Both women were active in nationalist youth organizations at UP Diliman, and were doing volunteer work in a rural community at the time of their abduction. The University community responded with outrage and demands for justice, ranging from official statements by the President of the University to mass student protests. Since the PSP program is affiliated with one of the more politically progressive colleges at UP, the College of Arts and Letters, the PSP students routinely encountered protests, teach-ins, and other modes of resistance to this state violence. Indeed, at the College of Arts of Letters, intellectual production

was often explicitly linked to social justice work. Within this politicized environment, PSP students were exposed to multiple strains of nationalist thought.

The political participation of PSP students in the National Democratic movement in the Philippines must be situated within a long history of Filipino American political organizing against U.S. imperialism in the Philippines, and against Marcos' regime of martial law (1972-1981), since the 1970s. As Helen Toribio notes in her history of the Filipino American anti-imperialist organization, KDP (the Union of Democratic Filipinos/*Katipunan ng Mga Demokratikong Pilipinos*), the 1960s labor organizing by Filipino American farmworkers such as Philip Vera Cruz was influenced by an awareness of socialism as the only viable alternative to capitalism (Toribio 157). Toribio locates the development of anti-imperialist groups such as the KDP within a lineage of anti-capitalist, socialist political organizing among Filipino Americans and other ethnic groups in the U.S. that identified with Mao's idea of "third worldism" (Toribio 158). As an anti-imperialist organization, the KDP worked to support the National Democratic movement in the Philippines, as well as the development of socialism in the U.S. During Marcos' regime of martial law in the Philippines, the KDP worked with a coalition of anti-Marcos activists in the U.S. through the umbrella organization, the Movement for a Free Philippines (MFP) (Toribio 170). Catherine Choy describes women's participation in several Filipino American anti-imperialist organizations in the 1970s, including the Support Committee for a Democratic Philippines (New York-based), SAMAPI – Association of Nationalist Filipinos (*Samahan ng Makabayang Pilipino*) in Chicago, and the

National Committee for the Restoration of Civil Rights in the Philippines (Choy). More recently, groups such as BAYAN³⁶ (*Bagong Alyansang Makabayan*/New Patriotic Alliance) USA and *Anakbayan*³⁷ (Sons and Daughters of the Nation) have continued Filipino American solidarity work for the National Democratic cause in the Philippines.

Discourses of the Nation in the Filipino Diaspora

The notion of the “unfinished revolution”³⁸ has been a persistent trope within the Philippine national imagination since the War of 1896, in which anti-Spanish revolutionaries fought the colonial dominance of Spain. Throughout the U.S. occupation, and into the current moment of U.S. neocolonialism, the trope of revolution persists as a primary mode of imagining anti-colonial and anti-capitalist resistance; revolution is routinely invoked in the service of national progress and liberation. Calls for national progress often invoke historical figures of the anti-Spanish revolutionary movement, the Katipunan. The trope of revolution as a mode of national progress is mobilized by different sectors of the Left, and has, at times, also been co-opted by official Philippine state discourse.³⁹

³⁶ BAYAN USA is the only international chapter of the Philippine mass organization, BAYAN, which coordinates the National Democratic movement in the Philippines. BAYAN USA has chapters in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Honolulu. See Bayan USA’s website at <http://www.bayanusa.org/index.php>

³⁷ *Anakbayan* is a nationalist youth organization that works to support the National Democratic movement in the Philippines. *Anakbayan* has chapters in various cities in the Philippines, as well as in the U.S. (San Francisco, East Bay, Seattle, Los Angeles, Honolulu).

³⁸ See my discussion of the trope of the “unfinished revolution” in the introduction to this dissertation.

³⁹ See Reynaldo Ileto’s discussion of the two main Marxist critiques of “statist” approaches to Philippine history: 1) Renato Constantino, through his text *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*; and 2)

However, in considering the relationship of the trope of revolution to the nation, we must first distinguish the various modes of nationalism, as well as their relationships to the state apparatus. Pheng Cheah foregrounds the flexibility of the relationship between state and nation in his discussion of what he terms “cosmopolitics.” Cheah draws on both historical and contemporary notions of cosmopolitanism to posit an understanding of the role of the nation in a transnational context of global capital. Cheah understands cosmopolitics to mean a “popular global political consciousness and community” in which the nation and nationalisms are not necessarily yoked to the apparatus of the state or notions of ethnic belonging (36). Cheah emphasizes the “loosening of the hyphen between nation and state” implicit in the idea of cosmopolitics (31). Rather than arguing for what he terms “postnationalism,” Cheah argues for the salience of the nation as a political unit for progressive change in a global capitalist order. In his discussion of Karl Marx, Cheah points to the possibility of the nation as a collective form of resistance to global capital.

Here Cheah differentiates between state and popular nationalisms. In Cheah’s vision, it is through popular nationalism, as opposed to state nationalism, that resistance to global capitalism can emerge. Cheah understands “popular nationalism” as a form of collectivity, which distends the hyphen between nation and state (11).

the NDF, through Amado Guerrero’s *Philippine Society and Revolution*. Both texts argue against the “great hero” narrative of national history, emphasizing the social and economic conditions which have lead to the development of a national consciousness. See Reynaldo Constantino, “Outlines of a Non-Linear Emplotment of Philippine History,” *Reflections on Development in Southeast Asia*, ed. Lim Teck Gnee (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998).

Cheah cites the decolonizing nation as a prime example of the potential of popular nationalisms,

No longer just an ideological tool of the state, the decolonizing nation can now serve as an agent of socialist cosmopolitanism to the extent that it attempts to save the state from the clutches of cosmopolitan capital (11).

Cheah's notion of "cosmopolitical" popular nationalisms as a possible site of resistance against global capital is especially useful for contextualizing revolutionary nationalist movements in the Philippines, as well as the corresponding transnational solidarity politics of Filipino Americans. Rather than existing as "postnationalist" political formations, Filipino American solidarity movements articulate a kind of diasporic nationalism that is unique to their position as diasporic subjects – as citizens of the imperial center, yet racial minorities within an American racial formation. In their bi-national position as diasporic subjects, Filipino Americans negotiate the implicit investment in U.S. exceptionalism – which disavows U.S. imperialism – characteristic of a U.S. national imaginary, as well as a transnational feeling of solidarity with national sovereignty movements in the Philippines. Filipino Americans in support of the National Democratic movement support a version of popular nationalism that is explicitly *against the state*. As a popular social movement, the National Democratic movement is critical of the Philippine state, and its neocolonial relationship with the U.S., as well as a larger system of global capitalism.

In order to consider forms of Philippine nationalisms as dynamic social movements within an international anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle, academics in the Global North must re-orient their understanding of nationalisms as they are represented within the Western academy. According to David Lloyd, current forms of anti-nationalism in the West draw on older forms of metropolitan antagonism towards anticolonial movements in the third world (174). Thus, current scholarly critiques of nationalism must be located within a framework that is inherently inhospitable towards anticolonial and anti-neocolonial movements in the Global South. Within this context, it is useful to consider Lloyd's discussion of anti-state nationalisms in relation to Cheah's notion of "cosmopolitics;" both are frameworks for understanding certain forms of nationalism as popular anti-state social movements, rather than forms of belonging mediated by the apparatus of the state. As such, we can understand anti-imperialist people's movements in the Philippines, such as the National Democratic Front, and their corresponding Filipino American solidarity organizations, as participating in a kind of revolutionary anti-state nationalism. Anti-state nationalisms such as the ND movement invoke the nation as a sign of collective struggle and liberation while also working against the state apparatus. Here, the hyphen between nation and state is stretched to its limits.

It may be useful to distinguish, as Cheah does, among different forms of nationalism within the Filipino diaspora. For the purposes of this discussion, I delineate three different modes of Philippine nationalism: 1) *state nationalism*: this is exemplified by state discourse, particularly in reference to Philippine

transnationalism, i.e. state discourse concerning balikbayans, OCW's, etc.⁴⁰; 2) *popular nationalism*: here I refer to both a popular understanding and invocation of historical movements, such as the revolutionary anti-Spanish movement, the Katipunan⁴¹, and contemporary anti-state nationalist movements, including the National Democratic Front and the New People's Army; and 3) *diasporic nationalism*: by this I mean the ways in which the nation is invoked as a mode of solidarity and belonging among Filipino Americans, particular in relation to the Philippines as the "homeland," or site of origin for the Filipino diaspora. Here I focus on the discourses of the Philippine nation invoked by Filipino American solidarity organizations that support the National Democratic movement in the Philippines, such as Bayan USA and Anakbayan. These three forms of nationalism are by no means exclusive; they intersect and exist in tension with each other within the transnational space of heritage language programs.

⁴⁰ Vicente Rafael describes the discourse about OCWs as "national heroes," by both the Aquino and Ramos administrations in Rafael, White Love and Other Events in Filipino History. President Cory Quino introduced the term when addressing a group of domestic helpers in Hong Kong in 1998 by telling them, "Kayo po ang mga bagong bayani" ("You are the new heroes") (Maglipon cited in Rafael 211). After the execution of Filipina domestic helper Flor Contemplacion by the Singaporean state in 1995, President Ramos described Contemplacion's death as the beginning "of our own soul searching... We have been reborn as a *national family*, mindful of our obligations to take care for one another, especially for those without the means to sustain or protect themselves" (Rafael 215, emphasis mine).

⁴¹ I emphasize the invocation of historical movements such as the Katipunan within a state-dominated discourse of nationalism. I do not intend to imply that the Katipuneros themselves were engaged in a project of nation-building, but rather, that individual figures of the Katipunan, and the movement itself, are invoked within popular discourses of nationalism in the contemporary Philippines. For example, the existence of Katipunan Avenue near the UP Diliman campus is evidence of such a discourse.

Filipino American Cultural Nationalism

Within the space of heritage language programs, these three strands of Philippine nationalism come into contact with another related form of nationalism, Filipino American cultural nationalism. Unlike the previous forms of nationalism I discuss, Filipino American cultural nationalism is intrinsically tied to a U.S. racial formation in which Filipino Americans are positioned as racial and ethnic minorities. Given a context in which Filipino Americans experience discrimination and are positioned as racialized subjects, cultural nationalism is both a means to articulate a specific racial/ethnic identity within a white supremacist culture, as well as a point of identification for community building and notions of belonging. Filipino American cultural nationalism is often articulated within a framework that foregrounds racial/ethnic identity as the primary category of both analysis and belonging.

Filipino American cultural nationalism is perhaps most apparent through forms of cultural production such as Pilipino Cultural Nights (PCNs) and Pilipino Cultural Celebrations (PCCs). According to many PCCs and PCNs participants, performing in these cultural celebrations allow Filipino American youth to gain a sense of belonging to a Filipino community and “learning about Filipino culture.” Bong, a participant in a PCC at University of California at Santa Cruz, described the sense of belonging that PCC gave him,

It was a sense of home, something to share. I was the only one from my high school to come here. PCC was a big thing because I have common bonds with people.⁴²

Through the experience of performing in PCCs, Bong gains both a sense of belonging and an identity as a Filipino American within a white supremacist culture. Although Bong feels a sense of connection to being Filipino through participating in PCCs, he distances himself from what he understands as the “past,”

I’m doing it [participating in a PCC] to learn more about where I come from, but not necessarily to change the past.⁴³

Bong’s statement reveals that while notions of identity are central to the articulation of a Filipino American cultural nationalism within PCCs and PCNs, this notion of identity is not necessarily engaged with the historical conditions of possibility for the existence of Filipinos – the U.S. invasion and occupation of the Philippines. Few participants in PCCs and PCNs demonstrate a comprehensive understanding or critique of the U.S. imperialist occupation of the Philippines as a foundational event in both Philippine and American history.⁴⁴

As several Filipino American Studies/Philippine Studies scholars (Campomanes; Rodriguez; Isaac) have noted, the very notion of a Filipino American ethnic identity relies on the erasure of U.S. imperialism as its constitutive historical

⁴² Bong, Personal Interview, 1 October 2006.

⁴³ Bong, Personal Interview, 1 October 2006.

⁴⁴ While some PCCs and PCNs foreground the role of U.S. imperialism to a Filipino American identity, most present a bi-cultural, bi-national approach, exemplified by the playing of both the Philippine and American national anthems at the beginning of many PCCs and PCNs.

condition of possibility.⁴⁵ Indeed, as Dylan Rodriguez argues, the pursuit of Filipino American Studies as an academic discipline entails a disavowal of the genocide enacted by the U.S. military during the Philippine American War (146). The very articulation of a Filipino American identity, within the national context of the U.S., implies the epistemic violence of the erasure of American imperialism from both the U.S. national and Filipino American psyches. Inversely, Allen Punzalan Isaac argues that the “operation and production of empire is predicated on the legislative and cultural institutionalization of the disavowal of these American subjects [Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, Guamanians]” (7). The constitution of a U.S. national identity requires the disavowal of America’s imperial subjects. In this way, the U.S. empire is maintained as invisible to itself. The articulation of a Filipino American ethnic/racial identity within Filipino American cultural production, such as PCNs/ PCCs and heritage language programs, must be situated within a broader cultural milieu in which the violence of U.S. imperialism (not only in the Philippines, but throughout the “unincorporated territories”) is made invisible, despite the fact that this violence remains the historical condition of possibility for such a claim to identity. Arguing against the dominant narrative of immigration and assimilation within Asian American Studies, scholars such as Campomanes, Rodriguez, and Isaac emphasize instead the violent quasi-incorporation of Filipinos into the U.S. national body through the invasion and occupation of the Philippine nation.

⁴⁵ See my extended discussion of the work of Dylan Rodriguez and Oscar Campomanes in the introduction to this dissertation.

With this in mind, the figure of the Filipino American *balikbayan* functions as both a symbol of the failure for the Philippine nation to control its excess within a global capitalist order, as well as an “imperial remainder or ghost”⁴⁶ of the erasure of a U.S. imperialist history. Filipino American cultural nationalist claims to identity, as they are expressed within the diasporic space of heritage language programs and PCCs/PCNs, must contend with this history of epistemic and literal violence. Filipino American students at programs such as PSP negotiate a complex and contradictory relationship to multiple histories and nationalist narratives: a U.S. national identity which disavows its imperialist history and neocolonial present, Philippine revolutionary nationalism, Philippine state nationalism, and emergent diasporic nationalisms. These various strands of both U.S. and Philippine nationalism coalesce in the experiences of Filipino American youth studying in the Philippines. As figures within the Philippine national imaginary, as well as actors in transnational solidarity movements, Filipino Americans weave together narratives of Filipino American cultural nationalism and Philippine revolutionary nationalism in their articulation of emergent diasporic nationalisms.

Filipino American Cultural Nationalism and Philippine Revolutionary Nationalism: Reconciling the Politics of Gender and Sexuality

⁴⁶ Isaac describes “imperial remainder or ghosts” as the “persistent but constitutive elements [of an imperial history] that are incorporated, however uncomfortably, into Filipino *and* Filipino American narratives. This uneasy incorporation shapes the lives and imagination of American postcolonial subjects” (Isaac 12).

The nation (and cultural nationalism) has long been critiqued for its tendency towards masculinism and heteronormativity. David Eng critiques the heteronormativity and implicit homophobia of Asian American cultural nationalism in his discussion of Asian American masculinity. Critiquing the 1975 anthology of Asian American writing, *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, David Eng argues that,

Cultural nationalism's energies focused on not merely defining but prescribing who a recognizable and recognizably legitimate Asian American racial subject should be: male, heterosexual, working class, American born, and English speaking (209).

While Eng's criticisms of cultural nationalism as heteronormative and masculinist are not new, they do point to how notions of gender and sexuality are imbricated in the ways in which Asian Americans imagine themselves as racial and ethnic subjects in the U.S. Further, representations of the (home) nation in the Filipino diaspora are often implicitly gendered and sexualized, as the Philippine nation is discursively embodied in the heterosexual Filipina body. Many feminist scholars have discussed the corporealization of the nation in the female body, citing the ways in which national and transnational belonging are represented through the gendered and sexualized bodies of women.⁴⁷ Feminist scholars in Philippine Studies have examined how tropes of the Filipina body have been mobilized to signify the nation,

⁴⁷ See Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Mino Moallem, eds., *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999).

both in the diaspora (through the figure of the Filipina domestic helper) and within revolutionary nationalist movements in the Philippines.⁴⁸

While a concern with gender equality has been incorporated into the official National Democratic policy, the actual practice of gender and sexual equality within the movement, as well as the ND movement's relationship to Philippine feminist movements, is complex and varied. Responding to a dominant U.S. academic feminism, Philippine feminist scholar Delia Aguilar has argued,

Freedom from oppression as women can become possible only when the nation is liberated from U.S. domination and when the majority of the people can be released from poverty, illness, malnutrition, and other forms of deprivation rampant in a neocolony (Aguilar).

Aguilar argues against a dominant, white, middle class, U.S.-based feminism, which understands issues of nationalism as separate from the notion of gender justice. Indeed, Aguilar calls for a Philippine nationalist feminism that foregrounds the nationalist movement as a necessary and central vehicle for social justice, including the achievement of women's liberation from oppressive discourses of gender and sexuality.

Caroline Hau notes that the Communist Party of the Philippines has revised its policies in regards to gender and sexuality in response to criticism, including the lifting of disciplinary sanctions on premarital sexual relations between affianced cadres, abolition of the one-year transition period before the granting of a formal

⁴⁸ See Neferti Tadiar, *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).; and Caroline Hau, *On the Subject of the Nation: Filipino Writings from the Margins 1981 to 2004* (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2004).

divorce, and recognition of same sex marriage (175). Despite academic critiques of the nation as heteronormative and masculinist, within the actual National Democratic movement the relationship between nationalism and the politics of gender and sexuality is a complicated one. Unlike mainstream feminist discourses in the U.S., some Philippine feminists foreground anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles as the necessary foundation for feminist (and other liberation) struggles. As Hau has noted, "...what is noteworthy about the twentieth-century articulation between Philippine nationalism and feminism is the fact that it is made within the context of socialist and communist political movements, which positioned themselves in opposition to the (neocolonial) state" (168). Unlike many mainstream feminist movements in the U.S. and other parts of the Global North, nationalist feminisms in the Philippines are explicitly *anti-state*, given that the state represents the neocolonial relationship of the Philippines to the U.S. Indeed, the neocolonial relationship of the Philippines to the U.S. is a primary site of struggle for many Philippine feminists.

Cultural Nationalism and Heteronormativity

PSP students also described their experiences with the heteronormativity of Filipino American cultural nationalist formations in the U.S. As a predominant example of Filipino American cultural nationalism, Pilipino Cultural Celebrations and Pilipino Cultural Nights often reflect the larger community's negotiation of issues of gender and sexuality. Several of the PCC and PCN participants that I interviewed questioned the validity of representing homosexuality within PCCs and PCNs. These

participants argued that homosexuality was not specifically a “Filipino thing,” and as such, did not necessarily fit within a Filipino cultural celebration. Bong, a PCC participant, commented on the inclusion of a skit about lesbianism in the previous year’s PCC at his university,

I’m not sure if it’s really touching on the culture, it’s more about the issue of homosexuality.⁴⁹

In Bong’s view, the representation of Filipina lesbians does not “really touch on the culture,” as he understands one’s sexuality to be unrelated to the representation of an authentic “Filipino culture.” Other participants, such as Trina, reiterated this sentiment. In commenting on a PCC skit about a young Filipino American man’s coming out process, she asked, “There are homosexuals in every culture. How is that specific to Filipinos?”⁵⁰ Trina then expressed the use of homosexuality as an issue that was brought up to demonstrate intergenerational differences between Filipino Americans youth and their parents, who are portrayed as “backwards” or “traditional”:

[Homosexuality] is mostly talked about in the idea that we’re moving away from the traditional. We’re modernizing. Obviously, we’re all okay with it [homosexuality], but our parents might not accept it.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Bong, Personal Interview, 1 October 2006.

⁵⁰ Trina, Personal Interview, 10 October 2006.

⁵¹ Trina, Personal Interview, 10 October 2006.

Despite her earlier questioning of the validity of coming out stories within PCNs, Trina stresses the “acceptance” of homosexuality within the Filipino American student community at her university. Statements such as those made by Bong and Trina reveal the heteronormative tendencies of representations of “Filipino culture” within PCCs and PCNs. However, despite the heteronormativity of articulations of Filipino American cultural nationalism within PCCs and PCNs, queer-identified Filipino American students have made efforts to assert their presence within a larger Filipino American student community.⁵²

One PSP student, Joey, who openly identified as gay, spoke of his early experiences growing up queer in a Filipino American community in California. He described his experiences, “It was much easier for me to deal with being queer [than being Filipino]. I couldn’t deal with all my identities at once. The reason I couldn’t deal with the Filipino community at first was because I was queer.”⁵³ He went on to say that as a teenager, perhaps because he was openly gay, he felt like an outsider in his local Filipino American community. Despite the fact that Joey’s socioeconomic status is similar to the rest of the upper middle class community in which was raised, Joey felt like he did not fit in. Joey described how he participated in similar activities, such as playing tennis with other Filipino American boys his age, but did not feel comfortable at the community gatherings. As a teenager, Joey was openly

⁵² Despite the tendency for many Filipino Cultural Nights to represent a heteronormative culture, recently several PCNs and PCCs in Northern California (including UC Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz) have included queer characters and issues in the vignettes presented. However, the overall storyline often revolves around a heterosexual romance as a vehicle for finding one’s cultural and ethnic identity as a Filipino American.

⁵³ Joey, Personal Interview, 25 July 2006.

gay and involved with queer youth organizations in high school. However, it wasn't until college that Joey felt like he was part of a Filipino American community, when he found queer allies at the Filipino American student organization at his university.

Joey also articulated a critique of the implicit heteronormativity within narratives of the Philippine nation, as they are reiterated within Filipino American culture. He described how he had questioned the use of the Malakas and Maganda myth in the Pilipino Cultural Night at his university. The story of Malakas and Maganda is a Philippine origin myth in which the Philippine nation is descended from two deities, the male Malakas (strong) and the female Maganda (beautiful). At an organizational meeting, Joey asked why the group should present an origin myth that was centered on a heterosexual pairing. Another student responded, "Well, it's about a family. You have to have a man and a woman to have a family." Joey responded, "Where do I fit in within the story of Malakas and Maganda?"⁵⁴ As a gay man, Joey felt alienated from a national origin myth that presented the nation through the paradigm of the heteronormative family. Although Joey is an active part of his Filipino American student community, and a well known activist on campus, he is also critical of the ways in which national origins are narrated through heteronormative frameworks of gender and sexuality, and reiterated in the diasporic space of Filipino American cultural performances. The response of the Filipino American student organization to Joey's critique of the use of the Malakas and Maganda origin myth reveals how the queer subject is often unrepresentable within

⁵⁴ Joey, Personal Interview, 25 July 2006.

the heteronormative logic of the nation, as it is narrated in the diasporic context of Filipino American culture. This logic of national origins is both reiterated and reaffirmed in the diasporic context of Filipino American cultural nationalism. Further, the representation of the Malakas and Maganda myth in a PCN in Southern California demonstrates that the reproductive logic of the nation, which is implicitly heteronormative and gendered as female, is reiterated in diasporic nation-building projects.

Despite his earlier difficulty with reconciling his queer identity with his identity as a Filipino American, Joey both mobilizes and critiques narratives of the Philippine nation, as a mode of organization for social justice, as well as an uneasy site of belonging for queer subjects. He recognizes that the nation necessarily produces its Others, commenting on groups that have been historically excluded from the official Philippine nation-state, “Muslim, NPA, activist – they don’t matter to society...The idea of nation suppresses the minority. It calls for a homogeneous society.”⁵⁵ Yet, despite his critique, Joey believes strongly in the National Democratic vision for the Philippine nation. In some ways, Joey seeks reconciliation between two oppositional understandings of the nation: the nation-state as a regulatory and excluding entity; and revolutionary nationalist movements as a vehicle for enacting social justice. While Joey is critical of the tendency for nation-building projects to present a homogenized dominant culture, he also believes in the potential for the nation as a mode of organizing for minority subjects, including queer subjects.

⁵⁵ Joey, Personal Interview, 25 July 2006.

For example, Joey commented positively on the use of the rainbow American flag, a symbol that has been taken up by more and more queers in the U.S., especially after 9/11, saying “Some people want to re-take Americanism.”⁵⁶ The rainbow flag is an emblem of the GLBT movement, and serves, in the U.S. and more recently, in other parts of the world, as a symbol of gay rights. By pairing the rainbow flag with an American flag, queer subjects stake a claim to national belonging and the rights of U.S. citizenship. While some queer groups have participated in a public discourse on the relationship between queer sexuality and the U.S. nation (Queer Nation), other GLBT groups have been less critical in their pairing of “queer” with the U.S. nation.⁵⁷

In the Filipino American context, few examples of cultural production pair queer sexuality and/or a queer analysis with a discussion of forms of nationalism. One exception was a skit I watched as part of *The Bakla Show*, a performance at the Filipino American theater space, Bindlestiff Studio, in San Francisco.⁵⁸ Written by Lolan Sevilla and Aimee Espiritu, the skit described the love found between two women involved with a Filipino American nationalist youth organization. The skit presents a critique of the heteronormativity and implicit homophobia of the culture of Filipino American nationalist youth organizations. However, rather than critiquing the nation, or nationalism, as a mode of organizing, the skit calls for the inclusion of queer subjects within such transnational political formations. Beyond a critique of homophobia and heteronormativity, few forms of Filipino American diasporic

⁵⁶ Joey, Personal Interview, 25 July 2006.

⁵⁷ See Lauren and Elizabeth Freeman Berlant, “Queer Nationality,” *Boundary 2* 19.1 (1992).

⁵⁸ Sevilla, Loan and Aimee Espiritu. *The Bakla Show*. 25 January 2007. Bindlestiff Studio, San Francisco. *Bakla* is a Tagalog term used to describe queer men in the Philippines.

cultural production actively “queer” a dominant understanding of nation. For this reason, I argue that a greater emphasis must be placed on the gendered and sexualized politics of representation within a diasporic political culture. A queer analysis of Filipino diasporic cultural politics would include not just a consideration of queer subjects, but also “queer” forms of belonging and collectivity.

Gender, Nation, and Diasporic Belonging

My experience as a participant observer in both the classroom as well as the more casual social spaces of the PSP program allowed me to observe the everyday ways in which diasporic belonging were articulated by Filipino American students. I observed that students often narrated emerging forms of diasporic belonging through the discourses of gender and sexuality which linked the Philippine nation to the heterosexual Filipina body. One telling example involved a discussion that occurred after a lecture on Philippine history, in which one student, Joshua, asked a question about the historical legitimacy of Philippine national heroes. Joshua questioned whether Jose Rizal should be considered a legitimate national hero, given that he wrote his works in Spanish and had a European girlfriend.

Joshua’s invocation of the debate over whether Rizal should be enshrined as a legitimate national hero, versus the more “egalitarian” Bonifacio echoes the nationalist debates in the Philippines in the 1960s, in which many historians argued for an emphasis on the more plebian Bonifacio as the actual leader of the anti-Spanish

revolutionary movement.⁵⁹ Joshua was not unique in his concern with legitimate national heroes. Filipino-American organizations, such as Anakbayan Seattle, part of the international Bayan-USA network, reproduce such discourses within the transnational context. On the AnakBayan website, their mission statement states: “We hope to improve our conditions by studying and educating others about the rich culture and *proud revolutionary heritage of the Filipino people’s continuing struggle...in the spirit of Andres Bonifacio*” (emphasis mine)⁶⁰. Invoking one of the heroes of the 1896 revolution against Spain, Andres Bonifacio, Anakbayan’s mission statement mobilizes the language of solidarity in struggle as a common basis for ethnic and national belonging. Anakbayan’s choice of Andres Bonifacio, as opposed to the more often-cited Jose Rizal, demonstrates how the language of 1960s radical movements in the Philippines, including both student movements and armed groups such as the New People’s Army, has been incorporated into Filipino American cultural nationalist discourse as well.

In his discussion of the anti-Marcos movements of the 1960s, Reynaldo Ileto discusses the “rediscovery” of Andres Bonifacio by Filipino nationalist historians such as Teodoro Agoncillo and Renato Constantino (185). In a context in which student movements and radical nationalist movements were gaining more popular support, a break in popular historical consciousness occurred, “This “break” consisted of the displacement of the “reformist Rizal” (a construct of the church/state

⁵⁹ See Reynaldo Ileto, *Filipinos and Their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography*. (Manila, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998).

⁶⁰ See the AnakBayan Seattle website www.anakbayan.org.

establishment) by the “revolutionary Bonifacio” (a construct of labor/peasant labor movements and the radical left)” (189). Within this discourse, Bonifacio serves as a symbol of the revolutionary struggle of the common people, while Rizal represents the reformism of the elite class.

However, what is most striking about Joshua’s comment is how national authenticity is legitimized through the body of a woman. Thus, Rizal’s authenticity as a national hero is delegitimized by his choice of sexual partner – a European woman, not a Filipina woman. Within this gendered understanding of national authenticity, one’s belonging to the Philippine nation is legitimized through the (masculine) subject’s sexual relationships with women. Here, the sexualized body of the Filipina stands in for national belonging and authenticity, while the male revolutionary is the historical actor who is cited as the inspiration of Filipino American diasporic nationalisms. This is not to say that female nationalist figures are not also cited by Filipino Americans, but rather, to point out how the bodies of women continue to function as the tropes through which national identity and authenticity are imagined, even in the diasporic context.

Gendered and sexualized representations of the nation are reiterated in the diasporic context of heritage language programs. The gendered and sexualized body of the heterosexual Filipina becomes the ground upon which claims to authenticity and diasporic belonging are narrated. At one social event for the PSP program, a student, John, performed a spoken word piece which represented the Philippines as a female body to be sexually claimed by the returning Filipino American *balikbayan*,

and to be *taken back* from the greedy hands of white male imperialists. In addition, at least one male student expressed his rage at seeing Filipina women with men of European descent in the streets and malls of Manila.

The previous examples reveal how a dominant national subjectivity –as it is imagined within the Filipino diasporic imagination – is *implicitly male*; simultaneously, the hegemonic logic of global capitalism corporealizes the Philippine nation within the specifically female *geobody* of the transnational Filipina. An analysis of dominant forms of masculine national belonging, as well as a critique of the ubiquity of the trope of woman as nation, is necessary within both Filipino diasporic political culture and a global popular culture. My intent is not to exclude men from subjectivity, but to emphasize how a male (trans)national subjectivity reifies the reductive narrativization of the Philippine nation as implicitly female. The overdetermined trope of “woman as nation” is complicit with a global capitalist logic which reduces Filipina women to the corporeal labor, making them “bodies without subjectivity.”⁶¹ Thus, in order to make forms of subjectivity possible for Filipina women, an analysis of the representation of the transnational Filipina body is crucial.

Within such gendered and sexualized narrations of national authenticity, mixed race subjects often represent an uneasy site of belonging. Lisa, a biracial PSP student whose mother is Filipina and whose father is a white American, told me of the rude comments she would hear about interracial couples on Manila streets. While in

⁶¹ See my discussion of Neferti Tadiar’s notion of “bodies without subjectivity” in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

a cab with her mother and sister, a cabdriver pointed to a Filipina woman with a white American man and remarked on how American men only chose “ugly” Filipina women. The cabdriver went on to comment on how the “ugly” Filipina woman’s face was “as flat as a spoon.” Lisa was disturbed by the cabdriver’s indirect insult to her family, as she felt that she and her sister were obviously the result of an interracial union. Lisa remarked on the discomfort and animosity towards interracial relationships between white American men and Filipina women,

There’s animosity from both sides – the Filipino community in the States and the community in the Philippines. So where do these people go for any kind of community?...It makes me wonder why my mom doesn’t have a lot of Filipino friends [in the U.S.].⁶²

Lisa’s personal narratives demonstrate how the children of a white American fathers and a Filipina mothers serve as a persistent reminder of both a gendered and racialized international division of labor (in which Filipina women provide sexual and domestic labor), and masculinist narratives of national sovereignty, in which the Philippine nation is represented through the bodies of Filipina women.

In these various narratives, the nation of origin – the home of the diaspora – is represented as a female, heterosexual body to be claimed by men, whether by Philippine revolutionary nationalists, or white American imperialists. In claiming the authentic Filipina body, the (male) *balikbayan* can achieve a kind of authenticity impossible in the racial context of the U.S., in which Asian American men are feminized and emasculated in relation to white American men. Yet, these masculinist

⁶² Lisa, Personal Interview, 25 August 2006.

articulations of national belonging did not go unchallenged within the program. Several feminist-minded students articulated their critiques of such gendered representations of the nation by their fellow Filipino American students. In casual conversation with me, Lisa expressed her anger and frustration at the equation of national belonging with sexual conquest/possession that characterized her some of her classmates' comments. Comments such as Lisa's reveal how heritage language programs function as a space in which gendered and sexualized narratives of national and transnational belonging are contested and negotiated.

Teaching the Nation

In addition to negotiating gendered forms of Filipino American cultural nationalism and diasporic nationalisms, PSP students were introduced to discourses of revolutionary Philippine nationalism through their classes and field trips. Some faculty members were more explicit in their goal of exposing Filipino American students to the idea of revolutionary nationalism. One faculty member, Bea, described the need for a nationalist framework in order to work towards social justice:

We need this [national] culture, this identity, these symbols as a starting off point for a more comprehensive analysis of the situation and the realities... *This nationalism will espouse social justice*, identifying yourself with the oppressed, the marginalized, those who can not go to school, those who are less fortunate. I think it's very important to the academic community to have your knowledge production oriented towards the less fortunate. It's a starting process of social justice in the Philippines (emphasis mine).⁶³

⁶³ Bea, personal interview, 15 August 2006.

Here Bea described the inherent relationship between discourses of nationalism in the Philippines and the process of working towards social justice. To Bea, nationalist culture, identity, and symbols are a starting point for building a collective movement that will work towards a more just society.

Bea's statement reflects the broader political climate of the Philippine academic left, in which one's scholarly/teaching labor is seen as deeply intertwined with the building of a people's movement. In the deeply politicized context of Philippine Studies at UP Diliman, the connection between social movements and the academic left is intrinsic to the intellectual and political labor of many faculty and students. One professor, Joy, described her decades long involvement with Philippine Studies as a "political crusade," not merely an academic pursuit.⁶⁴ This extremely politicized academic environment contrasted with the experiences of many of the PSP students at U.S. universities. The U.S. academic left has a much more distant relationship to popular social movements, and is constrained by a liberal hegemonic discourse on U.S. campus colleges which insists on "presenting both sides fairly." Within some of the classes (although not all) of the PSP program, Filipino American students were introduced to curriculum which sought to galvanize a revolutionary nationalist sensibility. Over lunch one day, a student named Alex mentioned to me that his mentor, a graduate student at U.C. Berkeley, had warned him not to enroll in the PSP program because it was "too radical." Despite this warning, Alex, who did not consider himself to be a deeply "political person," chose to participate in PSP.

⁶⁴ Joy, Personal Interview, 6 August 2006.

In our conversation about Philippine nationalism, Bea was careful to distinguish Philippine, and other decolonial nationalist movements, from the state nationalisms of countries in the global North,

Nationalism in the third world is very different to citizens of a first world country. For us, with an experience of colonialism, it [nationalism] means sovereignty, freedom. For citizens of rich countries, the nationalism [of countries in the global South] might mean losing your power.⁶⁵

Bea brought her understandings of an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial popular nationalism to the classroom, integrating language instruction with discussions of the Philippine left and class relations in Philippine society. At times, the invocation of national liberation was explicitly gendered. One day in Pilipino language class, Bea played a CD of songs from the revolutionary nationalist movement. Bea distributed handouts with the lyrics of a nationalist love song, in which an NPA cadre sings of his romantic love for his beloved, which, as Bea informed the class, was simultaneously an expression of his patriotic love for the nation. As Bea explained to the class, the male NPA soldier's expression of romantic love for his female lover stands in for the revolutionary's love for the Philippine nation. This example reveals how PSP students became inculcated within revolutionary nationalist narratives shaped by a masculinist and heteronormative framework.

However, despite Bea's political views, I observed the faculty in the program to possess a range of political and academic perspectives. Bea commented that the

⁶⁵ Bea, personal interview, 15 August 2006.

range of political opinions was partially due to recent changes in the program. She described the institutionalization of the program, from one that was originally focused on building links between the people's movement and the academy, to one which is now more squarely based within the institution of the university,

Before, it was intended to give a more comprehensive approach. Later it was institutionalized. Before it had more of a framework of the people's movement. [Now] it has to be patterned within the framework of the academic community, with the idea of an intellectual, an expert, people with Ph.D.s. Now most of the speakers are known to be academic "experts" in their fields. [Before] the immersion programs were basically a National Democratic framework.⁶⁶

Despite this change in the political and academic orientation of the program, Bea has continued to integrate a concern with social justice and revolutionary nationalism into her teaching, partially because she recognizes that many of her Filipino American students are seeking a progressive, anti-imperialist political analysis. She described her teaching methodology,

I tried to make language instruction more discursive, but I know my limitations. *I'm not in a position to change the program, but I tried to make the discussion in the language class more substantial. The students were asking for more.* It was really different from the last year. At this point, most of the students are more involved with organizations inclined towards the ND [National Democratic] line (emphasis mine).⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Bea, personal interview, 15 August 2006.

⁶⁷ Bea, personal interview, 15 August 2006.

Bea recognizes that many of her students are seeking more than language instruction; they are searching for a way to connect to their culture of origin, as well as a means of participating and contributing to the National Democratic movement in the Philippines. Bea's primary goal in teaching is to instill a sense of social justice and responsibility in her students. When I asked her about the relationship between social justice and students' search for a Filipino identity, she responded, "That [a commitment to social justice] is more important [than a Filipino identity]".⁶⁸ Bea's statement is particularly telling of the disjuncture between a Marxist class-based critique of neo-colonialism and feudalism (the National Democratic analysis), and the racial/ethnic identity-based politics of Filipino American cultural nationalism. While the revolutionary nationalist approach of the National Democratic movement aims for a social revolution and a more equitable society, Filipino American cultural nationalism invokes the notion of Filipino identity and culture in response to the broader systemic racism of U.S. society.

Narratives of (Trans)national Belonging

During the course of my research, PSP students expressed a range of ethnic and national sentiments of belonging. While some students, especially those from large Filipino American communities on the west coast of the U.S., had a static definition of what it means to be "Filipino" and "Filipino American," others negotiated a less fixed relationship to the idea of being "Filipino American." Many

⁶⁸ Bea, personal interview, 15 August 2006.

students, especially from California, grew up in primarily Filipino communities and have participated in Filipino American organizations since childhood. Other students were raised in areas of the U.S. with smaller Filipino populations, such as the U.S. South, and felt more identification with the term “Asian American” than a specifically Filipino American identity. For students from areas with large Filipino communities, much of their identity is based on experiences in community events such as Filipino Cultural Nights or performing with a traditional Philippine dance group. As such, much of what they understand to be “Filipino” is formed by specific performances of “Filipino-ness” in community-based spaces.

While some arrived in the Philippines with relatively static notions of how to be “Filipino,” stereotypically associated with traditional Philippine dances, such as the *tinikling*, or eating Filipino foods, others have a more complicated relationship to their culture of origin. More often than not, Filipino American students’ relationship to the Philippines, both as an imagined place and a site of affective belonging, transforms over the course of their time in the Philippines. I asked John, a student from Southern California, how his experience in PSP matched his expectation of the Philippines. He responded,

I think that it has changed it, but not in the way that I thought it would change. I had imagined that I wouldn’t want to come back to the States. I thought that I would be surrounded by my *kababayan* [countrymen], that I would be at home, essentially. But you can tell by the way that you interact with people that you’re a Filipino American, because you have experienced [racial] discrimination [in the U.S.].⁶⁹

⁶⁹ John, Personal Interview, 1 August 2006.

Here John describes how his experiences as a racialized subject in the U.S. distinguished him from Filipinos he met in the Philippines. The diasporic space of heritage language programs allows for a multidirectional dialogue about notions of “Filipino-ness” and “Filipino American-ness.” Some students critiqued the emphasis on “identity” within many Filipino American communities, feeling that it was either culturally essentialist, or not politically relevant. Others viewed their summer in the Philippines as an opportunity to gain *both* a Filipino and a Filipino American identity, especially if they did not have the opportunity to interact with a Filipino American community in the U.S.⁷⁰

One student in the program, Amanda, expressed a decidedly cosmopolitan (in Cheah’s sense of the term) notion of her identity as a diasporic subject. Although she spent the first few years of her life in Manila, Amanda was raised primarily in the U.S. Amanda grew up in an urban area of the east coast of the U.S., in a community which was not predominantly Filipino. Amanda has spent many summers in the Philippines with family. She is a dual U.S./Philippine citizen, although her permanent residence is in the U.S. Unlike many of the other Filipino American students, Amanda visits the Philippines regularly – every one to two years. Amanda’s socioeconomic position, as an upper middle class Filipino American, as well as the upper class lifestyle of her family in the Philippines, determines both her experience of the Philippines, as well as her existence as a transnational subject with

⁷⁰ Lisa, a PSP student, remarked that she “came to the Philippine to gain a *Filipino American* identity,” since she did not have a Filipino American community in the U.S. Lisa, Personal Interview, 25 August 2006.

dual citizenship. Her relationship to the Philippines is constituted by her everyday experiences of spending time with her cousins and grandmother, maneuvering through Manila via public transportation (to the chagrin of her family in Manila), and visiting with her father, who lives and works in Manila. Although she does not closely identify with a Filipino American community in the U.S., Amanda feels that she has a more grounded sense of being “Filipino” than most of her classmates in the program, both in terms of her dual citizenship, as well as her everyday relationships in the Philippines.

For Amanda, being in a group of all Filipino Americans was a new experience.

As Amanda commented, “It’s kind of weird to be in a homogenous group of all Fil Ams. I think people make assumptions about us...that we’re all from the West Coast, etc.”

Me: “Do you mean Filipinos from the Philippines [make assumptions about you]?”

Amanda: “More teachers [in the PSP classes], and [assumptions] with each other, at least in the beginning.”

Me: “What is it like to not be from the West Coast?”

Amanda: “Well, they [the Fil Am students from the West Coast] are all in Filipino clubs...I’m glad that I’m not from an all-Filipino neighborhood, because I wouldn’t be the same person... I feel like they [Fil Ams from the West Coast] didn’t have the pressure to assimilate that I did⁷¹.”

Here Amanda seems to be critiquing a kind of cultural essentialism that is characteristic of some Filipino American communities, especially in U.S. cities with

⁷¹ Amanda, Personal Interview, 4 August 2006.

large numbers of Filipinos, such as the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles, in which their notions of being “Filipino” are based on group affiliation, such as Filipino American student organizations. Amanda seemed to imply that such group affiliation would limit her understanding of herself, as an ethnic subject in the multiracial setting of the U.S. Simultaneously, the lack of a Filipino American community may increase the pressure to assimilate to a dominant U.S. multiculturalism. Amanda described how, growing up, she went to five different schools, due to the fact that she was part of a Gifted and Talented program. The communities in which the schools were located ranged from poor, primarily African American communities to mostly white, affluent areas. As a result, Amanda feels that she was exposed to people of varied racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Amanda’s observations reflect the logic of U.S. multiculturalism, in which diversity is valued more than an affiliation to one particular ethnic group. However, what lies unchallenged within multiculturalist logic is the unspoken hegemony of a white dominant culture.

Unlike many of the other Filipino American students, Amanda did not view her experience in the program as a “roots journey,” or a time to “find her Filipino identity.” As someone who is from a transnational family and who speaks conversational Tagalog, her experiences in the program were more about coming to terms with Filipino American cultural nationalism, with its prefixed notions of “Filipino-ness,” and less about understanding her relationship to the Philippines. Amanda’s critique of “West Coast” Filipinos implicitly challenges the notion of a totalizing Filipino American identity, and troubles the dominant narrative of the

Filipino American *balikbayan* coming “home” to find her authentic culture. Rather, Amanda’s experiences are indicative of a more transnational subjectivity, formed in the interstices of home and nation. In contrast to the explicitly nationalist politicizing project of PSP, Amanda’s transnational subjectivity is a more “cosmopolitan” in nature, in the sense that Amanda sees herself as less of a Philippine or U.S. citizen, and more as a “global citizen.” Paradoxically, Amanda’s investment in a dominant logic of U.S. multiculturalism allows her to forego notions of Filipino Americanness for a more “global” Philippine identity. Rather than identifying as a U.S. racialized minority, Amanda identifies more with a Philippine national identity, made possible by the transnational mobility that her social and material capital allow.

Another student, Patricia, resisted the identity-based politics of Filipino American cultural nationalism. Patricia was born and raised in Manila until she was a teenager, then attended college in the U.S. Unlike most of the students in the program, Patricia does not identify as Filipino American. Instead, she thinks of herself as simply Filipino. Her perspective gave her a unique vantage point from which to understand the other students’ experiences. Patricia described her observations,

A lot of them [Fil Am students] are struggling to figure out what a Filipino American identity is. For a lot of them, their trip here is a search for who they are, for their ethnicity, and I think this is really narrowly defined in American ethnic terms. But then their experience is [also] very transnational. The fact that they are here, in itself, is very transnational, in a geographic sense. I guess they’re not conscious of their transnational experience, but their search for an American identity could be narrowly defined. I guess there are two different things: their experiences here, and that search [for an

identity]. Your question could be translated as, 'Could Filipino American identity be transnational in itself?'⁷²

As an outsider-insider, as someone who identifies as Filipina, yet is participating in a cultural immersion program for Filipino Americans, Patricia has a dual understanding of the Filipino American search for an ethnic identity, as well as her own understanding of the U.S. racial context which compels minority subjects to find forms of belonging outside of the white dominant culture. However, Patricia also felt a sense of distance from the "search for identity" and the broader issues affecting Filipino Americans. She commented,

Yeah, for me, when I said I don't identify as Fil Am, I'm also informed by a lot of what I've read about identity being fluid. I guess I say that [I'm not Filipino American] because it's easier for me...because *there are already expectations [about being Filipino American]*. By saying that I don't identify as Fil Am, I'm saying that I don't have the same issues that are affecting Fil Ams, because I think of identity as more fluid. *For me, the search for identity is not important* (emphasis mine).⁷³

Patricia disidentifies with the Filipino American search for identity partially because of the expectations or assumptions about Filipino Americans in the Philippines. Due to the social capital attributed to Filipino Americans, as well as their material and economic privilege, Filipino Americans are viewed with both envy, as well as scorn, in the popular Philippine imaginary. Many students and teachers told stories about the surprise and lack of understanding with which Filipinos in the Philippines responded when Filipino Americans mentioned that they were studying Philippine

⁷² Patricia, personal interview, 8 August 2006.

⁷³ Patricia, personal interview, 8 August 2006.

language and culture. Filipino Americans in the Philippines are often represented, by Filipino Americans themselves as well as Filipinos in the Philippines, as coming to the Philippines to “find their culture.” Patricia disassociates herself from this trope, while also recognizing the similarity of her subject position to that of Filipino Americans, as racialized minorities in the U.S. Despite the fact that Patricia understands her similar racial positioning as a person of Filipino descent within a white dominant U.S. racial formation, she purposefully distances herself from the dominant emphasis on identity-based politics characteristic of Filipino American cultural nationalism.

Some PSP students expressed a more direct and purposeful distancing from notions of U.S. national belonging. Jill, a biracial student from the U.S. south whose mother is Filipina and whose father is a white American, described her ambivalence towards Filipino American formations of identity, “I think people say ‘I’m Filipino American’ because they want to emphasize the American part...I’ve been thinking about using the term ‘Filipinos in the U.S.’ instead.”⁷⁴ Others felt a more explicit distancing from the U.S. during the course of their experiences in the Philippines. Victor, a student from the northeast part of the U.S. commented, “I’m going to feel bad when I leave here. The way I’m thinking is that *I shouldn’t even be in America*” (emphasis mine).⁷⁵ Victor also felt a responsibility towards the Philippines, based on his social and economic privilege as a Filipino American, stating, “Now that I’m in

⁷⁴ Jill, Personal Interview, 31 July 2006.

⁷⁵ Victor, Personal Interview, 8 August 2006.

this position [of being a Filipino American with access to financial and cultural resources], if I don't come back and help the Philippines, I make it look like my parents left for selfish reasons."⁷⁶ Through this statement, Victor demonstrates his own embeddedness, as a Filipino American child of Filipino expatriates, in the discourse of returning to the homeland to contribute to national progress, as opposed to those who leave for "selfish" reasons, such as material wealth and stability in the Global North.

"Filipino Americans Are More Inclined to Be Nationalists"

As Benedict Anderson has noted, diasporic subjects both reproduce and reiterate forms of long distance nationalism.⁷⁷ In the context of heritage language programs, PSP faculty responded in various, affective modes to the articulations of Philippine nationalism by Filipino American students. Many PSP teachers were surprised and moved by the level of nationalist sentiment among their Filipino American students. Leah, a Filipino language instructor, has taught language courses in PSP for the past three years. She described how, over the past three years, her impressions of Filipino American students have transformed from her original critique of Filipino Americans (Fil Ams) as "spoiled brats" to her admiration for her students' love of the Philippine nation. Leah commented, "I used to say [about Filipino Americans], 'I think they're brats. Why would they want to learn the

⁷⁶ Victor, Personal Interview, 8 August 2006.

⁷⁷ Benedict Anderson notes the tendency for exiled subjects to reproduce extreme forms of nationalism outside of the territory of the nation-state. See Benedict Anderson, "Exodus," *Critical Inquiry* 20.2 (1994).

language?’ ... Well, that’s the usual impression of Fil Ams.”⁷⁸ Over the course of time, Leah’s attitude towards her Filipino American students changed, “I realized that there is really a thirst to learn about their identity, or to learn the language, because their families never taught them, or never wanted them to speak in Filipino. I was empathetic.”⁷⁹

Leah views her role as a language teacher as a cultural interlocutor for her Filipino American students, a role that goes beyond the more pedantic aspects of language instruction. She critiqued other language teachers’ more utilitarian attitudes, “They just see their students as students. They don’t see that the student may have a need for a deeper understanding of culture.” She then went on to comment,

You see, even if they don’t tell you, that *there’s a need [among Fil Ams] to find themselves*. They feel that something’s missing, but they don’t understand why. Maybe it’s the language, or wanting to see the country for the first time... They learn something from each experience here (emphasis mine).⁸⁰

Leah understands her role as a language teacher to include imparting cultural knowledge to her Filipino American students, motivated by her empathy for her students’ desire to learn more about their Filipino culture. She commented on the daily interactions in class, “As a teacher, I see them responding. I try to get them to

⁷⁸ Leah, Personal Interview, 1 August 2006.

⁷⁹ Leah, Personal Interview, 1 August 2006.

⁸⁰ Leah, Personal Interview, 1 August 2006.

connect in some way [to the Philippine culture].”⁸¹ In the classroom, Leah has observed the ways that her Filipino American students attempt to “become Filipino.” She commented, “I appreciate the Fil Ams, when I see them imitating other [Filipino] people’s movements, or using colloquial slang. *In that little way, or with that gesture, they’re showing nationalism*” (emphasis mine).⁸² Through everyday interactions in language class, Leah observes how Filipino American students perform and practice what they understand to be their Filipino identity.

Leah was also touched by cultural nationalist practices unique to Filipino American culture, such as obtaining tattoos in *Alibata*, a precolonial Philippine script. Many Filipino American youth, especially on the west coast of the U.S. have *Alibata* characters or words tattooed on their bodies. This trend is unique to Filipino Americans, as it is not a common practice among Filipino youth in the Philippines. In fact, it is sometime viewed as extreme or strange by Filipinos in the Philippines. Leah described how surprised and touched she was by her students’ *Alibata* tattoos, “When I saw the alibata tattoo, I thought ‘Wow!’ It really meant a lot to me...because tattoos are forever.”⁸³ The use of *Alibata* tattoos demonstrates an invocation of precolonial indigeneity that is common in Filipino American youth culture.

In some cases, PSP faculty perceive Filipino American students to be even more likely to develop nationalist sentiments than Filipino students from the

⁸¹ Leah, Personal Interview, 1 August 2006.

⁸² Leah, Personal Interview, 1 August 2006.

⁸³ Leah, Personal Interview, 1 August 2006.

Philippines. A language teacher, Bea, commented, "Teaching in PSP has confirmed my original impression that Filipinos who weren't born in the Philippines are more inclined to be nationalists."⁸⁴ Bea's observation resonates with Benedict Anderson's assertion that diasporic subjects, those who have left the nation of origin, are more likely to express a form of long distance nationalism (Anderson 315).

Bea was sincerely touched by her students' expression of affective sentiment towards the Philippine nation. She commented on the PSP graduation ceremony, in which students gave speeches about what they had learned over the course of the summer, in addition to performing traditional Philippine dance and music. Bea described her emotional response to the graduation ceremony,

Before the graduation ceremony was like a tourist package. But this time the discussions and reflections by the participants were quite substantial. It was nice having both of those things, so you could educate the relatives and the faculty. It was a good opportunity to reflect. Imagine, these students are only here for five weeks, and yet they have these transformative experiences. *It was a really humbling experience* for the faculty...especially for the non-politicized faculty...*For language faculty, meeting these young people who grew up in the States, yet have this perspective...It can be very enlightening* (emphasis mine).⁸⁵

In this passage, Bea comments on the dialogic nature of the Filipino American students relationships with their teachers. While some faculty thought of themselves as cultural interlocutors between Filipino Americans and their "native" culture, other faculty viewed their teaching as a chance to build political solidarity across national

⁸⁴ Bea, personal interview, 15 August 2006.

⁸⁵ Bea, personal interview, 15 August 2006.

borders. Bea expressed caution in this regard, stating that Filipino Americans had to go beyond a mere utterance of nationalist sentiments in order to stand in solidarity with people's movements in the Philippines,

You have to really feel the situation, immerse yourself with the people. This takes time. Sometimes you have to confront your internal struggle, your internal contradiction...even if you're announcing all these nationalist sentiments. It has to be transformed into consistency and practice. It means sacrifice and commitment.⁸⁶

Although Bea, a faculty member who has long standing affiliations with various sectors of the National Democratic movement in the Philippines, supported the nationalist sentiment among Filipino American youth, she stressed that students needed to express these sentiments through consistent work with organizations affiliated with the movement.

Students' views on their role in the people's movement in the Philippines ranged; some felt that their place was in the Philippines, "serving the people," while others were ambivalent about the role of Filipino Americans within the National Democratic movement in the Philippines. One student, Jill, was critical of the Marxist framework espoused by the Communist Party of the Philippines. She questioned the rigidity of Marxist frameworks within Philippine nationalist movements, commenting, "Marxism can be like a religion; you can't question it."⁸⁷ Jill critiqued what she perceived as the unchallenged reproduction of Marxist

⁸⁶ Bea, personal interview, 15 August 2006.

⁸⁷ Jill, Personal Interview, 31 July 2006.

discourse within Filipino American organizations in the U.S. Although generally supportive of National Democratic movements in the Philippines, Jill critiqued other Filipino Americans' ignorance of the politics of Philippine people's movements, commenting that some Filipino Americans may not know that international solidarity groups they belong to in the U.S. are linked to Philippine groups who may espouse an explicitly Marxist doctrine.

Victor, a student who chose the program primarily because of his interest in political organizing in the Philippines, presented an antithetical view. When I asked him what he thought about the role of Filipino Americans in nationalist movements in the Philippines, he responded,

To me [being a Filipino nationalist] is the only step forward. I mean, what are Filipino American issues? Identity? World War II veterans? All this stuff that doesn't really matter when everyone here is dying, and they don't have the money to feed their kids or send their kids to school... The only way to get involved [with the people's movements in the Philippines] is to join a group like Bayan.⁸⁸

Victor's statement reveals his larger criticism of the identity-based politics of Filipino American cultural nationalism. Instead, he advocates for Filipino American involvement with National Democratic solidarity organizations, such as Bayan USA. Victor reiterated Jill's critique of Filipino Americans' ignorance of the economic and political crisis in the Philippines, arguing that "the majority of the leaders of Fil Am student organizations don't know anything about the situation in the Philippines."⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Victor, Personal Interview, 8 August 2006.

⁸⁹ Victor, Personal Interview, 8 August 2006.

Victor's critique reveals the primary tension between Filipino American cultural nationalism, with its emphasis on a unique ethnic/racial identity, and revolutionary nationalisms, which seeks national liberation through a restructuring of Philippine society from a neocolonial and semi-feudal state to a more equitable and just society. However, Jill's concerns reveal the tension in incorporating Filipino Americans, as citizens of the imperial center, into such popular movements. Jill's critique that "Marxism can be like a religion; you can't question it," reveals a larger discomfort among some Filipino American youth with the explicitly class-based Marxist analysis of the National Democratic movement, as well as its hierarchical structure. Other Filipino American activists have expressed to me their discomfort with the language of the National Democratic movement, as well as the lack of a critical discourse around Marxist analysis. One activist, Emily, who attended the U.S. National Democratic conference in 2007, critiqued the ideological framework of the U.S. solidarity movement, stating, "They don't encourage critical discussion. Ideology functions only as propaganda."

Towards an Anti-Imperialist Diasporic Politics

Towards the end of my stay in Manila, I was asked by the PSP program to give a lecture on the topic, "Being Filipino American." I chose to give a lecture with a slightly different twist on the topic, which I titled, "Being Filipino/a American: Towards an Anti-Imperialist Diasporic Politics." Through that lecture and this resulting chapter, my goal has been to illuminate the range of Filipino Americans'

political, material, and affective connections to the Philippines, as the imagined site of home, and an actual place that Filipino Americans must negotiate in their daily experiences in the streets of metro Manila. In doing so, I wanted to unsettle hegemonic narratives of the “Filipino American experience,” as well as challenge dominant notions of Filipino American cultural nationalism. Further, I set out to map the emergence of diasporic nationalisms through the confluence of multiple discourses: Philippine revolutionary nationalism, Filipino American cultural nationalism, and Philippine state discourse. Overall, I argue that diasporic nationalisms articulated by Filipino Americans, which emerge from the crucible of transnational spaces such as heritage language programs, are implicitly steeped within heteronormative and masculinist discourses which link the gendered Filipina body to notions of nation, kinship, and belonging. In response to these multiple discourses of the nation, I envision a new kind of diasporic politics among Filipino Americans, one that is explicitly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, yet can work from within the heart of the imperial center, the U.S. Further, I yearn for a kind of diasporic politics that, while located in the interstitial space between empire and the neocolony, operates with a critical self-reflexivity attuned to the inherent masculinist and homophobic violence that is the risk of any nation-building project. Ultimately, I hope for an anti-imperialist diasporic politics that is in solidarity with revolutionary nationalist movements in the Philippines, while also foregrounding the need for a feminist and queer approach to transnational coalitional politics, both at home and in the world.

Chapter Two:

Representing the Filipina “Mail Order Bride”

The Filipina “mail order bride” is a pervasive figure within a U.S.-dominated global popular culture. I understand the term “global popular culture” to encompass a range of popular media – including film, television, and websites – dominated by the U.S. and other countries of the global North. There are multiple references to the commodified sexual and domestic labor of Filipina bodies within dominant popular cultural representations. For example, on an episode of the popular U.S. television sitcom *Frasier*, Frasier’s father tells him that for “that amount of money, you could buy a Filipino wife” (Frasier 94). A simple search for the word “Filipina” on an internet search engine brings up dozens of internet dating sites, offering every kind of Filipina bride imaginable. These examples demonstrate a dominant capitalist logic in which Filipina bodies are naturalized as sources of easily available sexual, domestic, and affective labor. Within this logic, Filipina bodies (and their corporeal labor) are devalued due to the racialization and sexualization of their bodies as sexually available wives, domestic helpers, and sex workers.

Such representations of “mail order brides” are by no means unique. Filipino American activists, artists, and cultural producers have responded to the popular cultural representations of Filipina “mail order brides” in a range of ways – from protests and calls for “positive” images of Filipinas within popular culture, to kitschy reappropriations of the term “mail order bride.” This chapter presents a comparative

analysis of two sites of Filipino diasporic cultural production – the website NewFilipina.com and the performance art ensemble the Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. – and one example of global popular culture, film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Elliott 1994). I begin with an analysis of the film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* as an example of the dominant popular cultural representation of Filipina “mail order bride” as a devalued source of easily available sexual labor. I then examine how NewFilipina.com and The Mail Order Brides intervene in the dominant discourse about Filipina “mail order brides” within global popular culture. While NewFilipina.com attempts to create “positive” images of Filipinas online through a counter-identification with the dominant representation of “mail order brides,” the art ensemble The Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. uses humorous gendered and ethnic parodies as a performative strategy to critique the dominant discourses through which Filipina bodies are represented within a global popular culture. Through their use of feminist camp and ethnic drag, The Mail Order Brides reveal the forms of affective, gendered labor conflated with Filipina bodies within a global capitalist logic.

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert

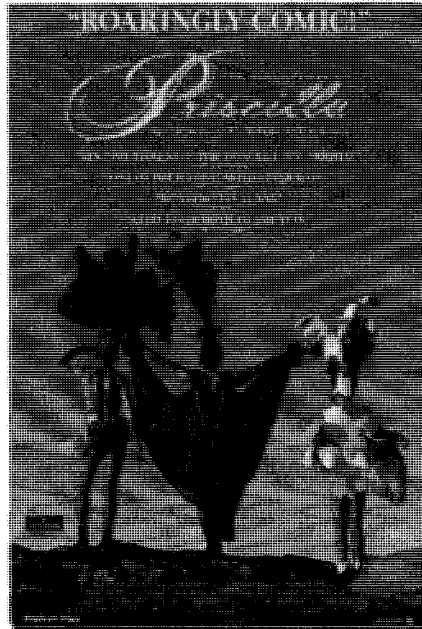
The film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* is a well-known examples of the representation of Filipina “mail order brides” within contemporary popular culture. *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* is an Australian

film which brought drag culture to mainstream popular culture.⁹⁰ Often cited for its representation of gay male drag culture, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* incited an outcry among Filipino American communities, who were incensed by the portrayal of Filipina women in the film. The queer women's organization Kilawin Kolektibo staged protests of the film's screenings in New York City.⁹¹ The "mail order bride"⁹² character in the film, Cynthia (Julia Cortez), is portrayed as a conniving, sex-crazed woman who tricks Bob, a gullible, yet kind-hearted, white Australian mechanic into marrying her. Through its positive, yet complicated, portrayals of three drag queens, the film presents a message of acceptance and celebration of queer culture. Within the logic of the film, however, this celebration of (white) gay male culture occurs at the expense of the Third World woman.

⁹⁰ *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* began a trend of male drag films within mainstream popular culture. Other mid-1990s mainstream drag films include *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (Kidron 1995) and *The Bird Cage* (Nichols 1996).

⁹¹ Personal correspondence with Christine Lipat, former member of Kilawin Kolektibo. April 4, 2008.

⁹² Although the marriage of the characters Cynthia and Bob was not orchestrated by a "mail order bride" service, the relationship between the two characters – the Third World wife and the First World husband – represent the broader relationship of power within "mail order" marriages.



The main “straight” character, Bob, decides to organize a drag performance at the local pub in his small town in Australia, where the three drag queens, Bernice/Ralph, Felicia/Adam, and Mitzi/Teak have been stranded due to their van’s break down. Cynthia wants to perform at the drag show, declaring, “Me like to sing. Me perform for you.” Bob refuses to allow her to perform, explaining that his wife isn’t allowed in the pub anymore. In a subsequent scene, a wild-eyed Cynthia declares to herself, “I will dance!” Cynthia breaks into a locked cabinet, laughing maniacally as hundreds of ping pong balls spill down on her. The next scene shows Bernice, Felicia, and Mitzi taking the stage at the local pub, to the confusion and disgust of the mainly heterosexual male clientele. Suddenly, Cynthia bursts onto

stage, interrupting the drag performance, to the delight of the straight male customers. Wearing a leopard-printed bustier, thigh high boots, and garter belt, Cynthia performs a strip tease for the audience. Her performance culminates with the unlikely act of popping ping pong balls out of her vagina to the enthusiastic audience.



The character of Cynthia in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* reflects a broader discourse within global popular culture about the sexual availability of Filipina bodies for domestic and sexual labor. Like Frasier's father statement, "For that amount of money, you can buy a Filipino wife!" the film demonstrates a dominant ideological framework in which Filipina bodies represent commodified sexual and domestic labor. Within this framework, Filipina bodies are seen as

sources of devalued, easily available forms of gendered labor. Indeed, Filipina bodies are conflated with the forms of bodily labor they provide within a global economic order. Jokes about “mail order brides” in *Frasier* reveal a commonsensical attitude towards the racialized and gendered order of global capitalism, in which the inequity of an international division of labor is naturalized as a given. Thus, the racialized and sexualized bodies of Filipina women are valued solely for their existence as sources of easily available domestic, affective, and sexual labor. Within this dominant ideological framework, the “mail order bride” joke on *Frasier* “makes sense” (and is humorous to some), as the audience expects to see a Filipina woman performing domestic and sexual labor for white American men. The equation of such easily available (and devalued) sexual labor with the racialized body of the Filipina demonstrates how notions of affective, domestic, and sexual labor are embodied in the representations of Third World women. Chandra Mohanty describes the social location of Third World women workers as one in which racialized ideologies of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality naturalize the gendered labor of women from the Third World (Mohanty). Within the film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, notions of sexual availability and racialized alterity are embodied in the one dimensional character of Cynthia, whose chief desire is to perform a striptease. Mohanty describes the role of such third world women workers within a global capitalist economy,

At this time in the development and operation of a “new” world order, Third World women workers...occupy a specific location in the international division of labor which illuminates and explains crucial features of the capitalist processes of exploitation and domination (Mohanty).

Popular representations of the Filipina “mail order brides,” such as the character of Cynthia, reveal the larger logic of global capitalism, in which the racialized and sexualized bodies of Third World women are equated with easily available forms of domestic, sexual, and affective labor.⁹³

The first scene of Cynthia shows her arguing with Bob, cursing at him in Tagalog. Although the specificity of Cynthia’s national origin is not revealed in the film, Tagalog-speakers can easily recognize her speech as Tagalog. However, when not speaking Tagalog, Cynthia has a generic “Asian” accent (most likely an approximation of a Chinese-Australian accent), rather than Filipino-accented English. The use of a generic “Asian” accent reveals the exchangeability of Asian women’s bodies within the hegemonic logic of the film. The logic of the film reproduces a broader discourse of global capitalism, which devalues the labor of Third World women while it simultaneously forecloses their subjectivity, rendering them replaceable and exchangeable.

⁹³ While this essay focuses on the figure of the Filipina “mail order bride” within Filipino diasporic cultural production and global popular culture, the phenomenon of “mail order brides” is a global one. Brides from across Asia, Latin America, the former Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe seek husbands from countries of the Global North. See the following relevant scholarship: Nicole Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and “Mail-Order” Marriages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Felicity Schaeffer-Grabiell, “Planet-Love.Com: Cyberbrides in the Americas and the Transnational Routes of U.S. Masculinity,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31.2 (2006).

Cynthia's character in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* shows a Filipina who is not only sexually available, but scheming and deceptive. Her excessive sexuality exists for the visual pleasure of straight men, who she seeks to titillate and arouse. Her manic desire to perform a striptease implies a logic in which her abject position as a "mail order bride" is the result of her own excessive sexuality and ambition, as well as her position as a commodified source of heteronormative erotic pleasure. In a flashback scene, Bob recounts how Cynthia "tricked" him into marrying her. Bob wakes up from a drunken stupor to see Cynthia beside him, in what the viewer can assume is an Asian country, although the exact location is not specified in the film. With a purposeful and possessive tone, Cynthia declares to Bob, "I your wife now!" The narrative suggests that Cynthia has orchestrated a drunken escapade with Bob in order to facilitate her migration to Australia. Despite the one dimensional characterization of Cynthia as deceptive and manipulative, Cynthia is presented as a character with agency, who pursues her own desires and follows her own best interest.

The film's narration of the circumstances of the marriage suggests that Bob, not Cynthia, is the true victim of such an arrangement. Instead of critiquing an international order in which Filipina women are forced to search abroad for an adequate source of income, it is the poor, hapless men from the Global North who are the victims within the film's logic. While the film's ultimate message is one of acceptance and affirmation of queer sexualities, the film achieves this at the expense of the third world woman. Within the logic of the film, it is Cynthia's own excessive

sexuality, as well as her position as a source of heteronormative erotic pleasure, which serves as the ideological justification for her abject position as a “mail order bride.” Simultaneously, Cynthia is juxtaposed with Bernice, a middle-aged, proper white queen, who becomes Bob’s love interest after Cynthia’s departure. Ironically, it is the heteronormative woman (Cynthia) who displays a more flamboyant and aggressive sexuality in comparison to the stodgy drag queen Bernice, who is reluctant to pursue her interest in Bob (Tolentino).

NewFilipina.com

Despite the hegemony of a global popular culture in which Filipina women are equated with sexual and domestic labor, Filipina Americans have worked to create alternative representations of Filipinas in the popular sphere. Responding to the representations of Filipinas as “mail order brides” and sex workers within popular film, television, and the Internet, Filipino American cultural production has endeavored to create a counter-imaginal to the dominant representations of Filipinas within popular culture. Created in 1998 by Perla Daly, a Filipina-American woman living in New Jersey, the now defunct website Bagong Pinay (New Filipina.com) was designed for the purpose of creating an online community for Filipina women worldwide. Bagong Pinay included editorials, advice columns, message boards that serve as open forums, an online art gallery, and articles on current issues. The creator of NewFilipina.com, Perla Daly, described her vision for NewFilipina.com,

From the beginning, I envisioned it to be an online community for Filipinas so that any Filipina who visited the site could also inject the site with their own views, opinions and experiences. The site contains Open Forums and message boards, Art and poetry, web pages on Filipina achievers, self-improvement articles, tips, links, book recommendations.⁹⁴

Here the creator of NewFilipina.com envisions it as a virtual public space, made possible through the particular sociality of the Internet. The site is interactive in that it allows for discussions through the multiple message boards on the site, which serve as open forums for conversation. Perla Daly described the purpose of NewFilipina.com,

The goal of Bagong Pinay was to help *redefine the identity of Filipinas* on the Internet and in the world, but also to redefine it in Philippine society and Filipino communities. Most importantly of all it attempts to open up doors to ideas and options for Filipinas so that they can create their own identity and better decide who they can be for themselves...

The biggest thing that stands out for me now about this initial body of work is that *there is a driving desire to connect Filipinas to other Filipinas around the world*, to connect Filipinas to ideas old and new, and to connect to the means to take action for themselves and for others (emphasis mine).⁹⁵

Perla Daly describes Bagong Pinay as a public space in which Filipinas can negotiate and articulate a form of transnational identity, one that “connect[s] Filipinas to other Filipinas around the world.” NewFilipina.com is explicitly described as a site in which a transnational identity is articulated. The stated goal of the website is “to help

⁹⁴ New Filipina/Bagong Pinay. Available: www.NewFilipina.com, December 2002.

⁹⁵ New Filipina/Bagong Pinay.

redefine the identity of Filipinas on the Internet and in the world, but also to redefine it in Philippine society and Filipino communities.”⁹⁶ In doing so, the website attempts to reinscribe a mode of national belonging in the transnational space of cyberspace. Daly’s effort towards “redefining the identities of Filipinas” within a dominant logic of global capitalism reveals a utopian impulse, reflecting a common trope of the Internet as a site of possibility for more equitable social relations.

Although the goal of “redefining the identities of Filipinas” online may be overly utopian, NewFilipina.com does allow for Filipinos located in multiple geopolitical locations to interact via discussion boards on the website. Although limited to those who have access to the Internet, NewFilipina.com does allow for collective discussions across national borders. From my observation of the site, participants on the site seemed to be primarily Filipino American, although some participants identified themselves as living in Canada and the Philippines. Although the site was oriented towards an explicitly female audience, men did participate in the online discussion boards.

Despite Daly’s vision of Bagong Pinay as a global Filipino community, the website suggests a form of community that is predominantly middle class and heterosexual⁹⁷. In describing her reasons for creating the site, Daly states,

It was during that time that I was learning web design, that I looked up www.filipina.com and I found out that it was a mail-order bride site. I

⁹⁶ New Filipina/Bagong Pinay.

⁹⁷ Although NewFilipina.com did include a section titled, “Our Lesbian Sisters,” the title itself reinforced the heteronormativity of the site, as it presumed a straight female audience.

was deeply offended, dismayed and angered to discovered [sic] that the representation of Filipinas on the Internet was direly lacking in quality and scope. In 1996, a query done on the word “filipina” at major Internet search engines resulted in the appalling amounts of 1) Filipina mail-order-bride sites, 2) pen-pal service sites, 3) personal web pages of Filipina women looking for men-friends, and 4) porn sites that overwhelmed the number of very few web pages that mentioned Filipinas in alternative ways.

Daly’s motivation for starting the website is to intervene in a dominant visual economy of the Internet, in which Filipina women are primarily represented as “mail order brides” or sex workers. Originally, Daly focused her anger towards women find foreign husbands in order to leave the Philippines. Daly described her previous “biased, angry attitude toward MOB’s.” However, this anger is also indignation at being perceived as a “mail order bride;” her anger is a response to the lack of distinction between her proper position as a middle class Filipina subject and the abject social location of a “mail order bride.” In an online discussion on NewFilipina.com, Daly describes her concerns about being perceived as a “mail order bride,”

I also won’t forget the time when I met my future sister in law...I couldn’t help but notice her disdainful inspection of my person, looking me up and down haughtily as her brother introduced us. *I pushed down the feeling of embarrassment and hurt at being possibly stereotyped as a maid*, or gold-digging Filipina looking for a “rich” husband. I gathered every ounce of my personal dignity and held my chin up and smiled at her nicely. It took a few more encounters over a course of months before she withdrew her initial assumptions of whatever she thought me out to be...(emphasis mine).⁹⁸

⁹⁸ New Filipina/Bagong Pinay.

In response to her future sister-in-law's haughtiness, Daly feels embarrassment at the possible misreading of her proper middle class position. Despite her initial embarrassment at being mistaken for a "mail order bride," Daly transforms her message to one of "tolerance" for her Filipina sisters who choose to use online matchmaking sites in order to meet a husband from abroad, declaring, "We must keep on hearing the stories of our fellow Filipinas who have gone the path of matchmaking services, AKA mail-order bride services. We must listen, learn, and let love in."⁹⁹

Other participants on NewFilipina.com had a less accepting view of "mail order brides," responding with harsh indictments such as the following post directed towards "mail order brides,"

What happened to dignity and honor? What's the matter with you?
GIRLS like you give Filipinos a bad name. Why don't you just
#####ing go to school and make a life for yourself rather than using
your body to get what you want? Life is hard, yes, but it doesn't mean
you have to give up your dignity just to survive! Get a life!
(emphasis mine)¹⁰⁰

In the writer's admonition to potential "mail order brides" to "go to school and make a life for yourself," she replicates the myth of bourgeois American culture – if one is industrious and educated, then one can lift one up by one's boot straps and achieve a materially comfortable middle class life. This post reveals the middle class Filipino American subject's underlying anxiety regarding the transnational figure of the Filipina "mail order bride," an abject and subservient figure within a global capitalist

⁹⁹ New Filipina/Bagong Pinay.

¹⁰⁰ New Filipina/Bagong Pinay.

order. Such discourses must be situated within a material context in which the outward flows of labor migration are necessary to maintain the Philippine economy. Posts such as the one above reveal little recognition of the structural connection between Filipino migration to the U.S., the neocolonial relationship of the U.S. to the Philippine state, and the current state of the Philippine economy, which relies on remittances from migrant labor abroad. Further, the post above reveals how the intended subject of the imagined community of NewFilipina.com is a Filipino with social and material capital, not “mail order brides.”

These online discussions reveal how figure of the Filipina “mail order bride” serves as an ambivalent figure for notions of transnational belonging invoked on websites such as NewFilipina.com. Within the diasporic community invoked on NewFilipina.com, the figure of the “mail order bride” represents the abject status of the Philippine nation within a global economy, rather than the success of Filipino expatriates in the Global North. To many Filipino expatriates in the Global North, the “mail order bride” is a persistent reminder of the gendered and subservient position of the Philippine nation within a global capitalist order. The hyper-visible presence of the figure of the “mail order bride” reminds Filipino expatriates how few immigrants actually have access to the American dream. The embarrassment that the middle class Filipino American subject experiences in response to the figure of the “mail order bride” is also a feeling of national shame – shame that the country of one’s origin functions within a subservient position within the global capitalist order, as a

provider of devalued domestic, sexual, and affective labor to nations of the Global North.

The previous post to NewFilipina.com reveals a reactionary, as well as moralistic framework, which fails to acknowledge the material context of transnational labor migration. This moralistic tone towards forms of gendered domestic and sexual labor is reproduced within activist narratives as well. As I argue in my subsequent chapter on the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” within Filipino diaspora political organizing, the general outrage of activist organizations such as Gabriela Network towards what they term the “trafficking in women” relies on a moralistic framework which positions sexual labor as implicitly immoral and degrading.¹⁰¹ Within the discourse of the “trafficking in women,” Filipina women who use matchmaking services to meet husbands from abroad, or work as migrant domestic workers, are conflated with coerced sexual labor. Overall, the posts on NewFilipina.com demonstrate a discourse about “mail order brides” that vacillates between embarrassment at being associated with such figures (a reflection of the middle to upper middle class position of participants on the site), to moralistic outrage at Filipina women’s participation in online matchmaking, which many equate with prostitution. However, while the “mail order bride” is represented as a greedy “gold-digger,” the “trafficked woman” is presented primarily as the victims of the international sex trade. The affective structures of shame and indignation delimit the

¹⁰¹ Gabriela Network. Available: <http://www.gabnet.org>, 9/29/07. See this website for more information on Gabriela Network’s Purple Rose campaign.

possibilities for forms of transnational belonging within NewFilipina.com. While NewFilipina.com attempts to transform Filipina identity through the production of a utopian counter-discourse, the website actually serves to reinscribe a hegemonic notion of Filipino identity as predominantly heterosexual and implicitly middle class. The liberal counter-discourse articulated on the site is one of “tolerance and acceptance” towards those who do not fit within the boundaries of the hegemonic diasporic community – “our lesbian sisters,”¹⁰² “mail order brides,” and sex workers. Exhorting fellow diasporic Filipinos to “listen, learn, and let love in,” rather than judging Filipina “mail order brides,” the website also introduces the notions of tolerance and liberal acceptance as guiding directives for the site.

The Mail Order Brides/ M.O.B.

While NewFilipina.com attempts to create a counter-discourse to the dominant representations of Filipinas within the global capitalist logic of the Internet, the art ensemble the Mail Order Brides/ M.O.B. uses humor and camp as performative strategies to critique the dominant representations of the Filipina “mail order bride” within global popular culture. Filipina American artists Eliza Barrios, Jenifer Wofford, and Reanne Estrada make up the San Francisco Bay Area-based performance and visual art ensemble the Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. Although responding primarily to U.S. popular culture, M.O.B.’s work also addresses the broader racialized and gendered discourses through which Filipina bodies are

¹⁰² One of the sections on the NewFilipina.com was titled “Our Lesbian Sisters.”

constituted and made visible under global capitalism. The Mail Order Brides create work in a variety of media, ranging from installation art to photography, video art, karaoke videos, and performance. The group formed in response to a joke on the television sitcom *Frasier*, which I discuss earlier in the chapter. In their Artist's Statement, M.O.B. describe their collective work,

We, The Mail Order Brides/M.O.B., are a trio of young Filipina-American artists engaged in (wedded to) a collaborative process of cultural investigation. We have taken our name in response to the common misconception that Filipina women make ideal (*read: submissive, obedient*) brides, a myth borne from the unfortunate economic reality that makes women and their labor the Philippines' leading export. It had not escaped our attention that, acronymically speaking, "Mail Order Brides" abbreviates down to a more sinister series of initials which inform the darker subtext of our connivings and conspirings.

We have taken matters into our own (well-manicured) hands, using our innate graciousness, good fashion sense, and interior decorating/*inner decorum* skills to gently pry open the eyes of the closeminded. Our humble vision is a Technicolor reality, a luminous queendom where hospitality reigns supreme, aesthetic etiquette is the law of the land, and everything is set to music. We pursue this vision through creative endeavors such as photographic psycho-dramas, parade performances, public service posters, and panel discussions, plus karaoke music videos, museum makeovers, and educational workshops (emphasis in the original).¹⁰³

The Mail Order Brides performances are humorous parodies of stereotypes of Filipina women within a U.S.-dominated global popular culture. Calling attention to what they term the "women in distress" persona of Filipina women within popular

¹⁰³ The Mail Order Brides, Artist's Statement. Available: <<http://www.wofflehouse.com/mob.html>>, April 4 2008.

culture¹⁰⁴, M.O.B. makes fun of hegemonic notions of Filipino American femininity and ethnic identity. The Mail Order Brides use humor as a performative strategy to call attention to dominant discourses which naturalize the domestic and affective labor provided by Filipina bodies within a global capitalist system.

While their work draws on their training as artists, their intended sites of reception are varied, ranging from karaoke bars to the local Chinatown parade in downtown Oakland. The Mail Order Brides' use of humor and parody makes their work accessible to a range of audiences, beyond the confines of the art world. As Wofford states, "Our photos are so ridiculously campy, and they exist on a level where it's meant to be fun for everybody."¹⁰⁵ Their cultural references address both a popular cultural notion of Filipino-ness, such as their focus on shoes (and the popular association of the Philippines with Imelda Marcos), as well as cultural references specific to a Filipino and Filipino American audience (such as *terno*¹⁰⁶ dresses, and their use of the form of karaoke, an activity popular among many Filipinos and Filipino Americans). Their use of genres such as the karaoke videos, infomercials, and public poster art allows their work to reach a broader audience than those who regularly attend art galleries.

¹⁰⁴ Christine Brenneman, "Mail Order Brides Engage SF with Their Unusual Brand of Campy, Goofy Fun," *The Metropolitan* October 19 - November 1 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Brenneman, "Mail Order Brides Engage SF with Their Unusual Brand of Campy, Goofy Fun."

¹⁰⁶ Terno dresses are emblematic Philippine dresses which feature butterfly-shaped sleeves.

Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride

The Mail Order Brides have produced and distributed glossy color brochures, info-mercials, and postcards “advertising” the fictional bridesmaid services of Always a Bridesmaid, Never A Bride (2005). The info-mercial advertising the services of Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride, begins with video vignettes of the group’s past successful weddings, ranging from same-sex weddings to weddings for purposes of immigration. Part II of the info-mercial features still shots of the Mail Order Brides in their various bridesmaid costumes, while voiceover “testimonials” are heard. As one satisfied client exclaims, “Their confetti cleanup was impeccable! Those girls must come from a long line of domestic workers...*They put the ‘maid’ into ‘bridesmaid’!*” (“Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride” emphasis mine). Images of the Mail Order Brides in whiteface makeup and long, colorful terno gowns come on screen. Each scene portrays the women of Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride enacting their “trademarked” services, including Sycophancy™, Sentimental Toasts™, Flattery™, Fawning™, Tears of Emotion™, Best Friends Forever™, Confetti Cleanup™, and Aisle Service™. In each scene, the Mail Order Brides appear in their signature camp attire, wearing whiteface, heart-shaped drawn in lips, ostentatiously feminine ball gowns, and matching pink suits and dresses. In the background of the voiceover testimonials, saccharine electronic music plays, much like the musical accompaniment of a karaoke video (another genre that the M.O.B. employ in their art).



Rather than presenting a simple affiliation with or counter-identification with the figure of the “mail order bride,” the M.O.B. call attention to the social construction of Filipina and Filipina American bodies in relation to forms of affective and domestic labor. The Mail Order Brides use gender and ethnic parody to reveal the racialized and gendered discourses which naturalize the affective and domestic labor that Filipina bodies perform within a global capitalist economy. As Filipina Americans, their performance of Filipino-ness is also a form of ethnic/national drag; they realize that they are both distanced from Filipino-ness (as second-generation

Filipina Americans), yet collapsed with Filipino-ness, as their ethnically and racially marked gendered bodies are positioned within a global popular culture which equates the term “Filipina” with domestic and/or sexual labor.¹⁰⁷

M.O.B.’s use of humor, and their repetition of quotidian scenarios from everyday life, allows for a critical distance from the normalized gendered labor of the private sphere – the site in which Filipina women provide affective, domestic, and sexual labor within an economic context of transnational labor migration. Diana Taylor describes the discursive work of scenarios, “Scenarios...foreground the *critical distance* between social actors and characters...the scenario more fully allows us to keep both the social actor and the role in view simultaneously, and thus recognize the areas of resistance and tension” (Taylor 30). It is this critical distance that reveals the discourses which naturalize Filipina bodies as gendered providers of domestic and affective labor within a global capitalist economy, as wives, nurses, domestic helpers, nannies, and providers of eldercare. Taylor argues that scenarios require viewers to “deal with the embodiment of social actors...the scenario requires us to wrestle with the social construction of bodies in particular contexts” (29). This critical distance requires the viewer to confront notions of labor, femininity, and domesticity which are corporealized within the Filipina body.

¹⁰⁷ Odine de Guzman notes that a recent Greek dictionary defined the word “Filipineza” as “a woman from the Philippines, but also a domestic worker from the Philippines; or a person who performs nonessential auxiliary tasks.” The dictionary, published by George Babinotis, is cited in Ma. Odine De Guzman, “Testimonial Narratives: Memory and Self-Representation in Letters by Women Migrant Workers,” Women and Gender Relations in the Philippines: Selected Readings in Women's Studies, ed. Jeanne Frances I. Ilo, vol. 1 (Quezon City, Philippines: Women's Studies Association of the Philippines, 1999).

The Mail Order Brides as Feminist Camp

As a genre, camp has historically been associated with white gay male culture. However, theorists such as Pamela Robertson and Jose Muñoz have shifted the notion of camp to discuss women, both queer and straight. Robertson argues that the performative practice of camp allows women to critique dominant notions of femininity through gender parody, allowing camp to function in the service of feminist political projects (Robertson). Muñoz, in his discussion of the work of performance artist Carmelita Tropicana, argues for a specifically Cuban lesbian camp that enacts a disidentificatory political practice in its negotiation of Latina identity practices, queer/lesbian humor, and the dominant culture (124). Muñoz argues that Carmelita Tropicana's self-titled film "refigures camp and rescues it from a position as fetishized white queer sensibility" (127). Drawing on both Muñoz's and Robertson's arguments, I argue that the Mail Order Brides enact a form of feminist camp through their gendered and ethnic parodies of the figure of the Filipina "mail order bride." Through their use of the camp aesthetic, the Mail Order Brides denaturalize hegemonic notions of femininity, womanhood, domesticity, and labor which are conflated within the figure of the bride within a U.S. cultural context.

The Mail Order Brides' form of feminist camp departs from the association of camp with white gay male culture through their emphasis on the representation of gendered labor and the Filipina body. Pamela Robinson discusses the progressive potential of feminist camp, suggesting that

camp as a structural activity that has an affinity with feminist discussions of gender construction, performance, and enactment; and that, as such, we can examine a form of camp as a feminist practice. In taking on camp for women, I reclaim a form of female aestheticism, related to female masquerade, that articulates and subverts the image- and culture-making process to which women have been traditionally been given access (Robertson cited in Muñoz 121).

The Mail Order Brides use humor and a feminist camp aesthetic to reveal the gendered modes of affective labor that Filipinas provide as wives, maids, nannies, and nurses within a global capitalist economy. Further, the work of the Mail Order Brides reveals how notions of racial/ethnic and gender performativity are inherent in the discursive construction of the third world woman worker. In doing so, their work denaturalizes a conflation of ethnic/racial and gender difference with the corporeal labor that Filipina bodies provide. As such, they divert control away from the dominant image-making apparatus of global popular culture, which represents Filipina women as either demure, tragic victims or sex-hungry man-eaters (as in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*). Simultaneously, the Mail Order Brides denaturalize absolutist notions of gendered ethnicity, suggesting an anti-essentialist form of belonging beyond Filipino cultural nationalism.

Robertson delineates the distinction between male drag and what she terms “same-sex female masquerade,”

In opposition to [male] drag, the surprise and incongruity of same-sex female masquerade consists in the identity between she who masquerades and the role she plays – *she plays at what she is already perceived to be* (274).

The Mail Order Brides' performances of characters such as the Mail Order Bride of Frankenstein and the Professional Bridesmaids (of the fictional service Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride) "play at what they are already perceived to be." Through these over the top performances, the M.O.B. use an absurdist, feminist camp aesthetic to destabilize the overdetermined relationship between domesticity, femininity, and authentic ethnic identities.

In addition, the Mail Order Brides' use of advertising materials, such as infomercials, glossy brochures, and postcards, emphasizes the commodified nature of the domestic and affective labor that their fictional bridesmaid service provides. Their use of the trademark symbol TM emphasizes how "services" such as "SycophancyTM, Sentimental ToastsTM, FlatteryTM, FawningTM, and Tears of EmotionTM" are commodified forms of affective labor that Filipinas provide in their role as sources of gendered transnational labor, whether as nannies or "mail order brides." Pamela Robertson describes the appeal of camp as a performative strategy, "For feminists, camp's appeal resides in its potential to function as a form of gender parody" (Robertson 292). In this way, the Mail Order Brides use parody to destabilize the overdetermined relationship of gendered forms of ethnicity to affective and domestic labor.

The Mail Order Brides' work points to the performative nature of forms of affective labor. Michael Hardt highlights the centrality of what he terms "immaterial

labor,”¹⁰⁸ and affective labor in particular, to a contemporary global capitalist system (Hardt). As such, Hardt argues that within a global capitalist economy that is geared towards the circulation and exchange of information and services, rather than durable goods, affective labor is the most value-producing form of labor for global capital (90). Within this framework, affective labor performed by Filipina wives, maids, and nannies produces the most surplus value for their employers, despite the fact that forms of labor such as caregiving and nurturing are often the most devalued within a popular discourse of value. The Mail Order Brides’ performance of gendered and racialized/ethnic forms of femininity and domesticity point to the significance of affective labor as both a source of value for global capital, and a commodification of Filipina’s bodily labor. Through their “marketing” of forms of affective labor – “Sycophancy™, Sentimental Toasts™, Flattery™, Fawning™, and Tears of Emotion™” – the Mail Order Brides emphasize the surplus value created by these forms of affective labor. In a global capitalist system that relies on affective labor to produce forms of sociality and collectivity (Hardt 90), Filipina wives, nannies, and maids are perhaps the ultimate source of value. Through their work as wives, maids, and nannies, Filipina migrant workers provide the affective labor necessary to create and maintain the heteronormative social institutions of marriage, the family, etc. This affective labor in the service of producing the social is what Michael Hardt, drawing on Foucault, terms “biopower” (Hardt 98).

¹⁰⁸ Hardt describes “immaterial labor” as labor that produces immaterial goods, such as service, knowledge, or communication. See Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor,” *boundary 2* 26.2 (1999).

Performing “What They Are Already Perceived to Be”

While The Mail Order Brides’ fabulous *terno* gowns and matching candy-pink suits function as a form of feminist gender parody, their use of whiteface calls attention to the performative nature of their perceived ethnic and racial identity. Playing at “what they are already perceived to be,” the Mail Order Brides’ use of whiteface emphasizes the relationship between the perceived ethnic/racial identity of the performers and the structural position of Filipina women as providers of gendered labor in a transnational political economy. Within a global capitalist logic, these two social locations are collapsed. However, the Mail Order Brides’ work suggests a critical distance between the two social locations. The Mail Order Brides’ use of whiteface forces the viewer to contend with the nature of dominant categories of race and ethnicity, as they are attached to forms of gendered labor. Within the dominant logic of global capitalism, one can not simply choose to perform (to not perform) “Filipino-ness”; rather dominant discourses of race, ethnicity, and gendered labor delimit the possibilities of subjectivity for Filipina women.



The Mail Order Brides use of whiteface also points to how forms of affective, domestic, and sexual labor done by third world workers rely on performances of race, ethnicity, and nation. As I argue in subsequent chapters¹⁰⁹ in my discussion of Rey Chow, a global capitalist system requires ethnic/racialized subjects to perform popular notions of ethnicity and race in relation to forms of labor. As such, Filipina wives, maids, and nannies must perform the role of the “third world woman worker,” and in particular the role of a specifically *Filipina* wife, maid, or nanny. The association of the Philippine nation-state with forms of domestic, sexual, and

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter Four of this dissertation.

affective labor¹¹⁰ within a global popular culture requires a performance of national identity which is collapsed into forms of corporeal labor within a capitalist logic. As Roland Tolentino has argued, Filipina “mail order brides” function as *geobodies* – bodies “made allegorical for a sexualized and gendered, nationalized and racialized body of people” (64). As such, the Filipina wife or domestic helper is required to perform tropes which collapse the Philippine nation into the Filipina body, whether it is the docile, yet sexually skilled, traditional wife, or the English-speaking (and therefore superior) domestic helper. In contrast, the Mail Order Brides use the performative strategies of feminist camp and ethnic drag to introduce forms of subjectivity and belonging beyond the dominant racializing and gendering discourses of global capitalism. The Mail Order Brides suggest a form of belonging to Filipino America that is not already constrained by cultural nationalist forms of authentic identity, or discourses of the Filipina as the embodiment of labor.

The M.O.B. as Ethnic Drag, Queering the “Mail Order Bride”

In the visual art piece “Have You Eaten? (Comfort)”¹¹¹ (1999) The Mail Order Brides present a scenario of Filipino American domesticity. Viewed through the frame of a window looking into a family dining room, the Mail Order Brides hold up plates of food, asking the question, “Have you eaten?” to the viewer. Wearing brightly colored *terno* gowns, bouffant hairstyles, and spotless white aprons, the Mail

¹¹⁰ See De Guzman, “Testimonial Narratives: Memory and Self-Representation in Letters by Women Migrant Workers.”

¹¹¹ “Have You Eaten? (Comfort)” appeared in the Art in Transit public art project, which presented art along Market Street in downtown San Francisco.

Order Brides present a campy version of Filipino hospitality associated with the gendered roles of Filipina wives and mothers. The black and white checked floor of the dining room and crocheted table cloth suggest an old-fashioned family scene, while the painting of the Virgin Mary prominently displayed on the wall suggests the predominant Catholicism of many Filipino families. While the title suggests the comfort that such a domestic scene might invoke, the campy aesthetic forecloses an automatic sense of identification by the viewer. The viewer is all too aware of the artifice of such a scene. Through their camp aesthetic, the Mail Order Brides present a gendered and ethnic parody of notions of traditional hospitality in Filipino American culture. Their parody also functions as a form of counter-affective labor, in that the image actually refuses to provide the “comfort” that the title suggests. In this image, the Mail Order Brides implicitly critique the forms of affective labor required to hold together the “traditional Filipino family.”



The Mail Order Brides also perform ethnic drag through their exaggerated parody of Filipina femininity. Although drag usually entails a conscious performance of gender, most often an exaggerated form of femininity, I use the term “ethnic drag” to refer to the conscious performance of exaggerated ethnicity. Jose Muñoz discusses the politics of drag in his analysis of the performance and video artist Vaginal Davis,

The drag queen is disidentifying, sometimes critically and sometimes not, with not only the ideal of woman but the a priori relationship of woman and femininity that is a tenet of gender-normative thinking.

The “woman” produced in drag is not a woman, but instead a public disidentification with woman (Muñoz 108).

Muñoz points to the use of drag as a “public disidentification with woman,” and a critique of dominant notions of femininity inherent to the ideal of woman. Through their use of a drag aesthetic, the Mail Order Brides critique the association of domesticity with feminized ethnicity. Further, their work implicitly critiques the conflation of domestic and affective labor with the notion of womanhood. Martin Manalansan challenges the association of affective labor with the bodies of women in his discussion of the heteronormativity of scholarship on gender and migration (Manalansan 4). Manlansan critiques notions of affective labor that assume a gendering based on normative conceptions of care, love, and other emotions (4). He suggests an analysis of gendered labor migration and affective labor which is not centered on the biological bodies of women or the dominant framework of heterosexuality. Similarly, the Mail Order Brides’ work destabilizes the link between heteronormative femininity and affective labor by calling into question the very construction of dominant notions of Filipina womanhood. By hyperbolizing the very construction of woman, and the attachment of femininity to affective labor, the Mail Order Brides present a queering of the figure of the “mail order bride.” As such, their work not only critiques the representation of Filipina women, but also the notion of womanhood itself, particularly in relation to forms of gendered labor.

In his analysis of drag, Muñoz argues, “The subject who passes can be simultaneously identifying with and rejecting a dominant form” (108). Similarly, the

Mail Order Brides enact a form of gendered, ethnic drag to both identify with Filipino identity, and to reject the dominant forms of femininity and domesticity associated with Filipino-ness. Through their embodied performances of Filipino ethnicity, they are both claiming a Filipino American identity, as well as critiquing cultural nationalist understanding of the relationship between identity and culture.

As Reanne Estrada states in an interview,

Apart from the obvious “drag” clothes that we put on – *because we’re basically American* – when we’re doing that sort of stuff it’s a very conscious thing to put on a dress and be like, OK, we’re playing at being Filipino (emphasis mine).¹¹²

As self-identified Filipina *Americans*, the Mail Order Brides consciously perform a hegemonic form of Filipina femininity, one that is often associated with food and hospitality. In doing so, their work implicitly critiques notions of Filipino culture which assume gendered notions of domesticity. Estrada’s comment reveals her acknowledgement of the disjuncture between the social location of the artists themselves, as second-generation Filipina American artists, and the social location of the actual domestic helpers and “mail order brides” to which their work alludes. Yet, this critical distance also implies the *national* difference between Filipino Americans and Filipinos. By “playing at being Filipino,” the Mail Order Brides foreground their own position as Filipina Americans, whose cultural context and audience are centered in the U.S. –specifically the Filipino American community and art audience in the San Francisco Bay Area – and their citizenship as Americans. The difference in

¹¹² Brenneman, "Mail Order Brides Engage SF with Their Unusual Brand of Campy, Goofy Fun."

social location between the Mail Order Brides and the women who migrate from the Philippines in order to work allows for the *critical distance* created through the performative strategies of drag and camp scenarios. This critical distance also points to the disjuncture between the Mail Order Brides conscious national affiliation as Americans, and their critique of the representation of Filipina women within discourses of global capitalism. What the Mail Order Brides fail to do is denaturalize their own investment in a U.S. national identity as a dominant trope of belonging in their work. In failing to do so, the Mail Order Brides implicitly reproduce exceptionalist narratives of U.S. national identity.

As second-generation Filipina Americans and self-described feminists, the Mail Order Brides conceptualize their performances as a form of gendered, ethnic drag. Jenifer Wofford describes the drag aesthetic of their work,

I think all of us are these urban, Westernized, feminist chicks. The whole ritual of playing dress-up and getting super femme is very much like getting into drag. It's a very ritualistic sort of role-playing, and we're just a little bit more into it than we ought to be.¹¹³

Wofford's statement presumes a dichotomy between a U.S.-based, second-generation, feminist identity, and an "authentic" Filipino identity. Within the logic of Wofford's statement, the assumed distance between these two social locations – the second-generation Filipina American feminist and the "authentic" Filipino/a – is what constitutes the "drag" of their work. What Wofford alludes to in is not the actual

¹¹³ Breneman, "Mail Order Brides Engage SF with Their Unusual Brand of Campy, Goofy Fun."

existence of a vibrant women's movement in the Philippines, but rather the dominant representation of the Third World woman as pre-modern, traditional, and completely foreign. Chandra Mohanty describes the dominant representation of Third World women within academic social-scientific frameworks,

Besides being normed on a white, Western (read: progressive/modern) or non-Western (read: backward/traditional) hierarchy, these analyses freeze Third World women in time, space, and history (Mohanty 48).

The Mail Order Brides explicitly confront a hegemonic notion of Third World women as traditional and pre-modern. However, they also risk the reification of an essential difference between themselves, as self-described "urban, Westernized, feminist chicks" and the Filipina women whose lives they parody. The form of subjectivity suggested by the Mail Order Brides seems limited to Filipino *Americans*, as their work relies on the critical distance between themselves, as Filipina Americans, and "Third World" Filipinas.

Through their use of gendered "Filipina" drag, the Mail Order Brides refuse a simple identification with an "authentic" Filipino identity. Their parody of Filipina femininity requires the viewer to question the gendered notions of cultural authenticity. Rather than invoking "authentic" cultural practices as a sign of identity, the M.O.B. make fun of dominant notions of what it means to "be Filipino." Their work is the antithesis of authenticity-based discourses of Filipino American identity, while also a critique of the social construction of Filipina bodies under global capitalism. As such, their work serves as an alternative to the cultural nationalist

practice of displaying and performing an authentic “culture” as a form of discovering one’s “pride in being Filipino.” In doing so, their work suggests forms of belonging and subjectivity beyond the essentialism of Filipino American cultural nationalism.

However, a tacit affiliation with a U.S. national identity is implicit in the work of the Mail Order Brides. As Reanne Estrada comments, “We’re basically American – when we’re doing that sort of stuff it’s a very conscious thing to put on a dress and be like, OK, we’re playing at being Filipino.”¹¹⁴ Through this statement, Estrada articulates the Mail Order Brides’ fundamental affiliation as Americans “playing at” being Filipino. Implicit in this statement, and in their larger body of work, is an overt identification with the cultural project of Filipino *America*. As I argue in my earlier chapter on diasporic nationalisms, notions of Filipino American identity are complicit in the invisibilization of U.S. imperialism as the historical condition of possibility for the presence of Filipinos in the U.S. As such, claims to American-ness on the part of Filipino Americans rely on the obfuscation of the genocide of Filipinos by the U.S. military (Rodriguez 148). This affiliation with a U.S. national identity by Filipino Americans is complicit with a popular disavowal of the co-constitutive nature of the relationship between a U.S. national identity and U.S. imperialism.

The epistemic risk of the work of the Mail Order Brides is that the critical distance created through their performances will result in a simplistic affirmation of a U.S. national identity, and the reification of a static, hegemonic representation of the Filipina as “third world woman.” By emphasizing the essential difference between

¹¹⁴ Brenneman, “Mail Order Brides Engage SF with Their Unusual Brand of Campy, Goofy Fun.”

their identity as Filipina *Americans* and the social locations of the women who they parody, the work of the Mail Order Brides affirms an investment in a U.S. national identity. Rather than complicating the representation of Filipinas within a global popular culture, this critical distance runs the risk of emphasizing the distinction between a U.S. national identity among Filipino Americans, and the functioning of dominant discourses of race, gender, and sexuality which construct the figure of the “third world woman worker.” The material and discursive reality demonstrates that the opposite is true. Despite claims to belonging to the U.S. nation-state by Filipino Americans, the Mail Order Brides – like other U.S. Filipinos – are subject to the overdetermined discourses of race, gender, and labor which link the Filipina body to gendered forms of affective, domestic, and sexual labor within a global capitalist logic. Claims to identity notwithstanding, race/ethnicity and gendered labor are corporealized within the Filipina body, whether Filipina American or not.

Reconsidering the Filipina “Mail Order Bride”: A Comparative Analysis

The portrayal of Cynthia in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* exemplifies a dominant popular cultural representation of Filipinas as “mail order brides.” Represented as sex-crazed and conniving, Cynthia exists for the visual and erotic pleasure of heterosexual men. Bob, her Australian husband, is portrayed as the kind-hearted, yet gullible, victim of Cynthia’s sexual wiles. Cynthia also serves as the foil to the character of Bernice, the proper white queen who seeks the romantic attention of Bob, Cynthia’s husband. The overall political project of the film is a

message of liberal pluralism, in which drag queens and other queers seek respect and acceptance within a heteronormative dominant culture. However, this message of acceptance comes at the expense of the Third World woman, represented through the “mail order bride” figure of Cynthia.

The film’s depoliticized message of homonormative acceptance and liberal pluralism is synonymous with the introduction of drag culture into the mainstream media. Jose Muñoz describes this phenomenon as “commercial drag,” citing films such as *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (Kidron 1995) and *The Bird Cage* (Nichols 1996), as well as the VH-1 broadcast of drag queen RuPaul’s television show,

Commercial drag presents a sanitized and desexualized queer subject for mass consumption. Such drag represents a certain strand of integrationist liberal pluralism. The sanitized queen is meant to be enjoyed as an entertainer who will hopefully lead to social understanding and tolerance (Muñoz 99).

Muñoz notes that despite the message of integrationist liberal pluralism within commercial drag, homophobic legislation and violence still pervades the nation’s streets, arguing that the “erosion of gay civil rights is simultaneous with the advent of higher degrees of queer visibility in the mainstream media” (99).

Lacking first world citizenship, the experiences of Third World women reveals the underside of a global capitalist system, in which queers in the global

North reap material benefits.¹¹⁵ Thus, the racialized and gendered international division of labor is again made invisible to mainstream consumers of popular culture. The position of the racialized Third World woman is subjugated to the experiences of first world queers within the liberal pluralist logic of *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. As Roland Tolentino argues in his critique of the film, “In liberalism, marginal positions are made to compete for limited dominant space” (65). Thus, a queer liberal pluralist discourse takes precedence in the film, while the concerns of Third World women workers who provide sexual, domestic, and affective labor for the global North remains invisible. Tolentino remarks upon the prevalence of images of the Filipina “mail order bride” within popular culture, “The maneuver of making the mail-order bride network more overt in popular culture inevitably produces further sedimentation in the concealment of life stories of the women” (65). He goes on to cite multiple incidents in which Filipina “mail order brides” in the U.S. and Australia have been killed by their husbands (Tolentino 65). The hypervisibility of Filipina “mail order brides” within films such as *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* serves to obscure the actual conditions of violence and death faced by these women.

¹¹⁵ David Eng presents a similar critique of the film *The Wedding Banquet*, in which the undocumented Chinese woman Wei-Wei is made subservient to the need of her queer landlord, Wai-Tung (a U.S. citizen), who stages a marriage to her for the benefit of his parents visiting from Taiwan. When Wai-Tung impregnates Wei-Wei, he then implores that she keep the male child, for the benefit of his parents’ ideal of a heteronormative family. Eng argues that the film’s presentation of a queer male Asian American subjectivity relies on the subservience of the undocumented Third World woman to the desires of the First World (by the privilege of U.S. citizenship) queer male. See David Eng, “Out There and over There: Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies,” *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

Through their use of camp and drag, which are historically gay male cultural forms, the Mail Order Brides emphasize the subjugated position of the third world woman within a First World liberal queer political agenda. Their inclusion of same sex weddings in their “Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride” info-mercials presents an implicit critique of the position of the third world woman within a neoliberal, homonormative¹¹⁶ political project. While gay marriage has been held up by progressive queers and straights alike as a sign of equality within a rights-based framework, such an emphasis on marriage equality simply serves to obfuscate more radical political goals. Within the assimilationist narrative of the movement for “marriage equality,” queers seek a homonormative acceptance in their search for state-sanctioned relationships. In contrast, the Mail Order Brides’ work highlights the affective and domestic labor required to produce such forms of state-sanctioned sociality. Indeed, Michael Hardt utilizes Foucault’s notion of biopower to describe the creation of life (and human sociality) through the production and reproduction of affects (Hardt 98). Within this understanding of biopower, marriage can be understood as a public act which produces and reproduces affective labor in the service of communal forms of sociality (the family, the community, etc.). As such, the Mail Order Brides’ campy performances of same sex marriages use humor to critique the forms of affective labor required to institutionalize queer relationships.

¹¹⁶ Lisa Duggan coined the term “homonormative” to describe the movement for a mainstream neoliberal gay politics, which emphasizes domesticity and acceptance by a heteronormative culture. See Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” Materializing Democracy: Towards a Revitalized Cultural Politics, ed. Russ Castronovo, and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002).

As part of their “Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride” info-mercial, the Mail Order Brides present video vignettes of their work as “Professional Bridesmaids” or “PBMs” for same-sex marriages at the San Francisco City Hall, featuring the wedding ceremonies of happy lesbian couples. In their “Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride” glossy color brochure, the Mail Order Brides describe one of their wedding services as “Bearing Witness™ as Members of a Community™,” highlighting the forms of affective labor (what Hardt terms “biopower”) required to produce marriages as forms of communality. The “Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride” brochure also states, “Specific Needs (LGBT, Green Card) are always welcome and gladly accommodated. Multi-cultural/Pan-Sexuality/Omnivorous Sensitivity Enthusiastically Practiced.”¹¹⁷ Here, the brochure alludes to both same-sex marriage as an issue within a U.S. homonormative agenda, as well as the practice of marriage for residency and citizenship purposes. Within their humorous representations of same-sex marriages, the Mail Order Brides foreground the naturalization of forms of domestic and affective labor with the Filipina body. As such, The Mail Order Brides present an implicit critique of the subjugated and invisible position of the third world woman worker within a First World liberal queer agenda.

¹¹⁷ The Mail Order Brides, Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride.



In contrast to the Mail Order Brides' critique of the dominant representations of the Filipina laboring body, NewFilipina.com seeks to produce a *counter-discourse* to the dominant representations of transnational Filipina bodies within popular culture, typified by characters such as Cynthia in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. Specifically created as an online community for Filipinas worldwide, the creators of NewFilipina.com attempt to transform the dominant representation of Filipinas on the internet as "mail order brides," domestic helpers, and sex workers. NewFilipina.com seeks to accomplish this through the presentation of "positive"

images of Filipinas on the site, as well as through interactive forums about “issues” such as “mail order brides.” While NewFilipina.com does present a possibility for creating a form of transnational sociality online, its attempts to create a “transformed” Filipina identity only reaffirm the heteronormative and middle class privilege of the majority of participants on the site.

The online discussions reveal the privilege of class and First World citizenship of many participants on the site. Although I did see a few posts from actual “mail order brides,” as well as a few posts by feminists who suggested a more structural analysis of the situation, the majority of the posts portrayed Filipina “mail order brides” as deserving pity at best, or lacking morals or greedy at worst. The site’s creator, Perla Daly, articulates a personal narrative in which she shifts from her initial shame and indignation at being perceived as a “mail order bride” to a greater tolerance for the struggles of mail order brides. Daly’s narrative, and the posts of other participants on NewFilipina.com, reveal how affects such as shame, indignation, and pity serve as structures of feeling around which a sense of transnational belonging coalesces. However, such affects also point to the privilege of class and citizenship inherent to the notion of a Filipino diaspora invoked within NewFilipina.com. Rather than creating a “transformed” notion of Filipino identity, the site actually serves to reaffirm a notion of transnational belonging that is implicitly middle-class, heterosexual, and oriented towards those with First World citizenship.

Unlike the work of the Mail Order Brides/ M.O.B., NewFilipina.com fails to intervene in the dominant gendered and racialized discourses under global capitalism which function to naturalize the domestic, sexual, and affective labor of Filipina women. Instead, the site predominantly reflects the privileged position of the Filipino expatriate, now living in the U.S., Canada, or other First World nations, to whom “mail order brides” represent the abjectness of the Philippines as a Third World country. The existence of “mail order brides” threatens the ideology of achieving the American Dream, an ideology to which many middle and upper middle class Filipino Americans subscribe.

While NewFilipina.com attempts to present a counter-identification with the dominant images of Filipina “mail order brides” within popular culture, the work of the art ensemble the Mail Order Brides/M.O.B. presents a performative intervention into the dominant discourses of race and gender which conflate forms of domestic, sexual, and affective labor with Filipina body. Utilizing the performative strategies of feminist camp and ethnic drag, suggest forms of belonging that exceed both the essentialism of Filipino American cultural nationalism, and the overdetermined construction of the transnational Filipina body under global capitalism. In contrast to NewFilipina.com, the Mail Order Brides do not simply attempt to create “positive” images of “mail order brides,” nor do they claim to represent the actual experiences of women who have migrated as “mail order brides.” Instead, their work uses humor as a strategy to reveal the absurdity, the un-naturalness, of the embodiment of domestic and affective labor within Filipina bodies. Rather than consolidating a

transnational Filipino identity, as NewFilipina.com attempts to do, the Mail Order Brides point to the instability of notions of Filipino-ness, especially as they are linked to notions of domesticity and femininity. Instead, the Mail Order Brides use humor as a performative strategy to make visible the discursive functioning of race and gender in the representation of the laboring Filipina body.

Despite their destabilization of Filipino American cultural nationalism, the Mail Order Brides re-affirm a U.S. national identity through their artistic work. Their intended audience is specifically Filipino American, and the artists emphasize their position as second generation Filipino Americans. As such, the Mail Order Brides participate in the political project of Filipino *America*, which emphasizes the inclusion of Filipinos within a dominant U.S. culture. As I argue earlier in this and other chapters, such notions of Filipino American-ness are complicit in the enduring invisibilization of the constitutive role of imperialism within a U.S. national identity. Indeed, claims to Filipino American identity require the purposeful amnesia of the U.S. invasion and occupation of the Philippines as the historical condition of possibility for the presence of Filipinos in the U.S.

Conclusion

The figure of the Filipina “mail order bride” is an ambivalent one within Filipino diasporic cultural production. As a figure that circulates within both Filipino diasporic cultural production and global popular culture, the Filipina “mail order bride” represents both the gendered position of the Philippines within a global

capitalist order, and the naturalization of discourses of sexual availability, racialization, and devalued labor within the Filipina body. In the website NewFilipina.com, the “mail order bride” incites multiple affects, from embarrassment and indignation to shame and disgust. Each of these affects contributes to a structure of feeling for imagining a Filipino diaspora. Such structures of feeling reveal the elitist nature of the form of transnational belonging articulated on NewFilipina.com. In contrast, the Mail Order Brides utilize the affects of humor to create a sense of belonging to the cultural and political project of Filipino America. Through their use of forms familiar to Filipino Americans, such as karaoke, as well as their camp aesthetic, the Mail Order Brides invoke a sense of commonality through humor. The work of the Mail Order Brides points to the inherent tension between claims to Filipino American identity, which rely on the obfuscation of U.S. imperialism, and the notion of a transnational Filipino diaspora. As my analysis of the Mail Order Brides suggests, notions of both Filipino American and Filipino diasporic belonging must contend with the ways in which the Filipina body is constructed within discourses of global capitalism. As such, the Mail Order Brides’ use of feminist camp and ethnic drag is a crucial performative intervention into these dominant discourses. However, the Mail Order Brides’ work risks the possible reification of the difference in social location between Filipino Americans (as citizens of the heart of empire, the U.S.) and the actual women who perform domestic, sexual, and affective labor within a global capitalist economy. This risk reflects the larger political stakes of the project of Filipino America within the notion of a Filipino

diaspora, suggesting the broader questions: Why Filipino America? Whose America? While the Mail Order Brides do not provide answers to these questions, their work builds a foundation for a discursive intervention into the logic of global capital, from the perspective of Filipino America.

Chapter Three:

The “Exploited Filipina Body,” National Affects, and Transnational Belonging

This chapter examines the circulation of the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” within three sites of Filipino diasporic cultural production: Gabriela Network’s Purple Rose Campaign, the documentary film *Sin City Diary*, and “National Heroes,” a vignette in *ReCreation*, the 2006 Filipino Cultural Night at the University of California at Berkeley. I use the term “exploited Filipina body” to refer to representations of Filipina women who provide commodified sexual and domestic labor within a global capitalist economy, including Filipina “mail order brides,” domestic helpers/overseas contract workers, and sex workers. An analysis of the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” reveals the ways in which gendered tropes of nation invoke national affects in the Filipino diaspora. In particular, representations of the “exploited Filipina body” invoke notions of pity, anger, mourning, and guilt, affects which structure Filipino Americans’ relationship to the Philippine nation and to a Filipino diaspora.

Each of the forms of Filipino diasporic cultural production that I analyze in this chapter, Gabriela Network’s Purple Rose Campaign, the film *Sin City Diary*, and the vignette “National Heroes,” represents a different facet of the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” within the Filipino American imagination. In all three sites, the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” functions as a gendered sign of the Philippine nation within the Filipino American imagination. As such, the “exploited

Filipina body” also functions as a point of cathexis for affective notions of transnational belonging among Filipino Americans. Rather than focusing on different genres of cultural production (film, performance, political organizing), I chose to juxtapose these different forms of cultural production in order to examine how and for what purposes the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” is invoked. Each of these sites of cultural production contribute to a broader Filipino American transnational imagination, in that they each reveal the ways in which Filipino Americans imagine and articulate their relationship to the Philippine nation and to the Filipino diaspora. While some of these sites invoke the “exploited Filipina body” in relation to the “traffic in women” discourse, other sites reiterate the Philippine state discourse of exploited Filipina women as “national heroes.” In all of these sites, the “exploited Filipina body” functions a gendered sign of the Philippine nation within Filipino American culture, given a material context in which the Philippines relies on the export of gendered labor.

In this chapter, I choose to differentiate the figure of the “mail order bride” from Chapter Three from the “exploited Filipina body” in order to explore the broader discourse that the “exploited Filipina body” suggests. Within these broader discourses, the distinct social locations of “mail order brides,” Overseas Contract Workers, and sex workers are collapsed into the generic figure of the “exploited Filipina body.” This logic represents the Philippine nation as synonymous with the gendered and racialized transnational Filipina body as a victim of capitalist globalization. The “exploited Filipina body” circulates within both global popular

culture and Filipino diasporic culture, although the meaning shifts depending on social context.

Further, I argue that the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” is crucial to the development and articulation of a transnational Filipino American subjectivity. The ways in which Filipino Americans articulate their relationship to a Filipino diaspora, as well as their participation within transnational solidarity movements, are structured through an affective relationship to the figure of the “exploited Filipina body.” The articulation of a transnational Filipino American political subjectivity is structured through the relationship to the “exploited Filipina body” as a gendered and racialized sign of the Philippine nation. Whether the emotion is anger, pity, or mourning, the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” incites national affects among Filipino Americans. It is through the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” that Filipino Americans develop a sense of, and feeling for, the notion of the Philippines as “home.” In my analysis I foreground the following questions: What are the political stakes of representing the “exploited Filipina body” within transnational organizing among Filipino Americans? How does the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” symbolize the Philippine nation within the Filipino American imagination? My intention in analyzing the manifestations of the “exploited Filipina body” is not only to critique the gendered politics of representing the nation, but also to explore how affect serves as a means of creating and articulating forms of transnational belonging. As a self-identified Filipina American scholar activist, I am

implicated within, and participate in, such transnational structures of feeling. This essay is therefore both a critical analysis, as well as an exercise in self-reflexivity.

Gabriela Network's Purple Rose Campaign

Established in 1989 in Chicago, GABRIELA Network (GABNet) is a multiracial network of primarily Filipina-American women¹¹⁸ who work in solidarity with the Philippine women's organization, GABRIELA. Gabriela Philippines is the oldest and largest multisectoral women's alliance in the Philippines, with over 200 affiliated member organizations.¹¹⁹ At the time of its inception, GABNet worked with Gabriela Philippines as part of the movement to oust the U.S. military bases in Clark (Air Force) and Subic Bay (Navy) in the Philippines.¹²⁰ According to the GABNet website,

Since our inception we have focused our efforts on organizing, educating, networking, and advocating around the issues of sex trafficking, globalization, militarism, labor export and other structural adjustment programs imposed by international finance agencies like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Gabriela Network).

GABNet's political work is explicitly framed through a gendered critique of both global capitalism and neo-imperialism. There are currently six GabNet chapters in the U.S.: in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, New York/New Jersey,

¹¹⁸ Although Gabriela Networks focuses on Filipina women's issues, the membership of the organization is not limited to Filipina American women. Women of multiple ethnic backgrounds, including white American women, are involved with the organization.

¹¹⁹ Gabriela Network, Available: <http://www.gabnet.org>, 9/29/07.

¹²⁰ Gabriela Network.

Chicago, Seattle, and Washington DC. GabNet is an example of diasporic nationalism, in that the organization invokes the Philippine nation as a sign of transnational belonging, as well as a motivation for political action among diasporic Filipinos in the U.S. A major focus of the organization for the past decade has been the international Purple Rose Campaign, which works to “stop the trafficking of Filipino women and children” (Gabriela Network). GabNet works with Gabriela Philippines on the Purple Rose Campaign.

As a form of diasporic nationalism, GabNet invokes the nation as well as the diaspora as a sign of resistance to the gendered effects of capitalist globalization. In particular, GabNet works to end the exploitative global economic system which requires the transnational migration of Filipina women as domestic workers, “mail order brides,” and sex workers.¹²¹ Representations of the “exploited Filipina body” invoke structures of feeling of anger, pity, mourning and loss among Filipino Americans. In the Purple Rose Campaign, various forms of domestic, sexual, and affective transnational labor are conflated within the discourse of the “traffic of

¹²¹ I use the term “sex worker,” although GabNet does not use this term. The term “sex worker” signals a particular position among the debates around “the trafficking in women” discourse. In particular, the term “sex worker” implies that sex for money is a legitimate form of work that should entail decent working conditions, protection from abuse, etc. Kamala Kempadoo defines “sex worker” as a “term that suggests we view prostitution not as an identity – a social or psychological characteristic of women, often indicated by “whore” – but as an income-generating activity or form of labor for women and men. The definition stresses the social location of those engaged in sex industries as working people.” See Kamala Kempadoo, “Introduction: Globalizing Sex Workers’ Rights,” Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Definition, ed. Kamala and Jo Doezema Kempadoo (New York: Routledge, 1998). For a critique of the discourse of the “trafficking in women,” see Alison Murray, “Debt-Bondage and Trafficking: Don’t Believe the Hype,” Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition, ed. Jo Doezema and Kamala Kempadoo (New York: Routledge, 1998). Murray critiques the collapsing of terms such as “prostitution,” “trafficking,” and “sexual exploitation” in relation to Asian sex workers. For a related critique of the discourse of “global feminism,” see Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, “*Warrior Marks*: Global Womanism’s Neo-Colonial Discourse in a Multicultural Context,” Camera Obscura 39 (1996).

Filipino women and children.” On GabNet’s website, statistics and descriptions of the dire conditions of domestic helpers, sex workers, and “mail order brides” are included under the sections titled, “Why Campaign Against Trafficking of Filipino Women and Children” and “Trafficking in the United States” (Gabriela Network). On GABNet website, women who marry American men through online dating websites are equated with sex workers in the sex tourism industry in the Philippines, as well as “trafficked women” in the U.S. Citing the violence that many “mail order brides” face at the hands of their American husbands, GABNet conflates being a “mail order bride” with paid and coerced prostitution. By including “mail order brides,” domestic workers, and sex workers within the discourse of the “trafficking in Filipino women and children,” these various forms of domestic, sexual, and affective labor are collapsed within the “exploited Filipina body” of the “trafficked woman.” As such, “mail order brides,” domestic workers, and sex workers are assumed to be victims without choice or agency. While transnational sex work can not be reduced to the issue of choice or agency, the discourse of “trafficking” assumes that all transnational migrant workers are victims of either physical coercion or the “coercion” of poverty.¹²²

GABNet critiques the response of the U.S. women’s movement to the “trafficking in women” as dismissive and implicitly racist, arguing that “the issue of

¹²² Jo Doezema argues that the dichotomy of coerced versus voluntary sex work perpetuates a logic in which the victims of forced sex work are viewed as “innocent” and deserving of state protection, while those who choose to do sexual labor are implicitly immoral and undeserving of rights or protection by the state. See Jo Doezema, “Forced to Choose: Beyond the Voluntary V. Forced Prostitution Dichotomy,” *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, ed. Kamala and Jo Doezema Kempadoo (New York: Routledge, 1998).

trafficking has been dismissed an 'international' issue and not a domestic one...until trafficking, particularly the mail-order bride practice, started affecting white Eastern European women" (Gabriela Network). GABNet also criticizes the U.S. women's movement inability to link processes of global capitalism to the lack of women's rights, arguing that the U.S. women's movement has "ignore[d] the function of the International Monetary Fund/World Bank and the World Trade Organization in warping the economies of countries like the Philippines, so that poverty becomes endemic and an endless supply of poor and desperate women are created, for the global sex trade and the international labor market" (Gabriela Network). GABNet responds to the debate on "sex work" versus "trafficked women" in the following critique of the U.S.-based women's movement's response to the issue of "trafficking,"

To treat the issue as a philosophical question, arguing whether it is a matter of "choice" on the part of the individual women or not, whether prostitution is "work" or not, whether unionization is the answer or not (Gabriela Network).

GABNet critiques the emphasis on the distinction between forced and voluntary prostitution as merely a "philosophical" one. Within GABNet's logic, the movement for sex workers' rights is a trivialization of the broader material reality of labor exportation. GABNet's critique subsumes the question of choice among domestic helpers, "mail order brides," and sex workers within the larger discourse of the "trafficking of Filipino women and children." The "trafficking" discourse seeks to

abolish forms of migrant labor such as domestic work, sex work, and “mail order brides,” rather than focusing on improving the working conditions of Filipinas abroad. While GABNet’s critique of the global economy, particularly structural adjustment policies, demonstrates a necessary material analysis of the conditions which compel forms of gendered transnational labor, the use of the “traffic in women” discourse does not actually focus on the improvement of the working conditions of these women. As the previous quote demonstrates, GabNet presents debates between choice versus coercion, work versus slavery, as merely a “philosophical” issue. Such an absolutist position obscures efforts to ameliorate the exploitative conditions of Filipinas abroad.

Regardless, the political work of GABNet is crucial to creating a transnational resistance to the gendered effects of capitalist globalization, as well as the U.S.’s ongoing neo-imperialist relationship with the Philippines. The existence of GABNet chapters across the U.S. demonstrates how Filipina Americans have become a part of this transnational solidarity movement. Through their participation in GABNet and other Philippine political movements, many Filipina Americans have developed a critique of capitalism in direct contradiction to the conflation of “democracy” with the free market in U.S. national culture. Despite the progressive potential of such movements, it is crucial to examine the politics of representation within transnational political organizing. Although the membership of GABNet is limited to women, the political stakes of representing the “exploited Filipina body” within a Filipino diasporic political culture affect men and women alike. The risk of reproducing the

imperialist feminist trope of the oppressed Third World woman makes an emphasis on the politics of representation necessary. The circulation of the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” within a diasporic political culture risks the reification of Western imperialist feminist tropes of “Third World women needing saving.” The recent uproar among Philippine and Filipina American activists in response to the Subic Rape Case¹²³ demonstrates the power of the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” as a sign of the feminized victimization of the Philippine nation to both U.S. imperialism and global capital.

The representation of the figure of the “exploited Filipina body” by GABNet and other Filipino American organizations risks the reiteration of what Gayatri Spivak terms “white [wo]men saving brown women from brown men,” (Spivak 285). Spivak points to the position of the “Third World woman” within an imperialist framework, “The protection of woman (today the “third-world woman”) becomes the signifier for the establishment of a good society (now a good planet)” (Spivak 288 emphasis in the original). Thus, within an imperialist feminist framework, the well being of the “Third World woman” – or, in the case of the Filipino diaspora, the “exploited Filipina body” – becomes the marker of a good and just global society. While the intention of Filipino/a American activists is the pursuit of economic justice, the narrative of *all* Filipina labor migrants as “victims” to global capital risks the

¹²³ Filipino American organizations such as Babae San Francisco organized protests in response to the Subic Rape Case, in which a Filipina woman was raped by U.S. servicemen. This case has served as a high profile example of the way in which the “exploited Filipina body” is invoked within both Philippine nationalist feminist discourses and within Filipino American political solidarity work.

positioning of Filipina American women in collusion white women in Spivak's well-known statement.

GABNet's use of the discourse of human rights echoes the language of international organizations such as the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW).¹²⁴ Within the rhetoric of CATW's website, the "third world prostitute" serves as a sign of the need for women's human rights. Accompanying the description of CATW as "the first international non-governmental organization to focus on human trafficking, especially sex trafficking of women and girls" are images of "young girls in prostitution on the streets of Bombay" (CATW). Within the logic of CATW's campaign, third world women are visualized as the victims in need of saving. Third world prostitutes serve as visual signifiers of the need for global human rights, and particularly, the intervention of Western feminists. The discourse of "human trafficking" by non-governmental organizations such as CATW is directly contested by the sex workers' rights movement, which works to improve the conditions of sex workers within the U.S., Europe, and various parts of the world.¹²⁵ Although strongest in the U.S. and Europe, the framework of sex workers' rights has been taken up by organizations in the Global South. Sex workers' rights movements emphasize the distinction between "human trafficking" and sex work as a chosen and legitimate occupation. Working to decriminalize and legalize prostitution, this

¹²⁴ Founded in 1988, the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) is "the first international non-governmental organization to focus on human trafficking, especially sex trafficking of women and girls." See The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, Available: <http://www.catwinternational.org/>, June 12 2008.

¹²⁵ See the following organizations: International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (www.sexworkerurope.org), the Sex Workers Project (www.sexworkersproject.org).

movement focuses on improved working conditions and access to social services for sex workers. In contrast, the “traffic in women” discourse represents all women who perform sex work as victims. In particular, GABNet’s Purple Rose Campaign includes Filipina OCWs and “mail order brides” within a discourse of “human trafficking.”

Filipino Americans must take care not to reproduce imperialist discourses of “saving brown women” in our pursuit of economic justice. While the racialization of Filipino American activists within a U.S. racial hierarchy differs from white women and men from the Global North, the social location of Filipino Americans as residents/citizens of the U.S. provides material and institutional privilege – in terms of citizenship, transborder mobility, social and material capital, etc. Despite our position as racialized minorities in the U.S., Filipino Americans can and do reproduce imperialist relationships with Filipinos in the Philippines.¹²⁶ A reductive analysis of transnational gendered labor, signified by the figure of the “exploited Filipina body,” is the effect of such an imperialist tendency. Such an analysis prohibits a more nuanced differentiation between various forms of transnational labor, both chosen and coerced – the OCW who works as a maid in Dubai to pay for her siblings’ education in the Philippines, the middle class Filipina who marries a man she met online, or the underage Filipina who is coerced into providing sexual labor for her captors.

¹²⁶ Spivak notes that “Imperialism is not identical with chromatism, or more prejudice against people of color” (291). Here, Spivak differentiates between a U.S.-based “people of color” politics based on geopolitically specific racial discrimination, and broader imperialist relationships of power. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a Histor of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Varying material conditions, geopolitical locations, and degrees of mobility characterize the lives of Filipina domestic helpers, sex workers, and “mail order brides.” While it is certainly true that an overarching economic system of global capitalism –and its racializing and gendered logic – compels transnational labor, the actually existing material conditions of labor, and the subjective experiences of workers, can differ significantly. An attention to the differences in the experiences of transnational women workers is necessary to avoid a reductive feminist analysis which reproduces the representational violence of Western imperialist feminism. In her critique of Western feminists’ use of the “trafficking in women” discourse, Kamala Kempadoo argues that,

Reducing sex work to a violence inflicted upon women due to notions of a universality of patriarchy and masculinist ideologies and structures, or through the privileging of gender as the primary factor in shaping social relations, dismisses the great variety of historical and socio-economic conditions, as well as cultural histories, that produce sexual relations and desire (Kempadoo 3).

While Kempadoo is addressing a Western feminist critique of prostitution as reducible to gendered violence, such an analysis is also useful for my argument. Kempadoo points to the necessity of addressing a range of socio-economic conditions in an analysis of sexual labor. Similarly, I argue that the conditions of labor and subjective experiences of Filipina domestic workers, “mail order brides,” and sex workers can not be reduced to the discourse of the “trafficking in Filipino women and children.” To do so would be to ignore the agency, personal motivations, and actual

experiences of these women (and men¹²⁷). While I recognize that conditions of exploitation, abuse, and death face many Filipinas who work abroad, the subjectivity of these women can not be reduced to their conditions of exploitation.

In order to create truly anti-imperialist transnational political movements, Filipino Americans must be attuned to the politics of representation in campaigns for women's rights. In doing so, we must avoid the appropriation of problematic discourses of "human trafficking," which implicitly draw on the rhetoric of imperialist feminisms. Jo Doezema argues that the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women's "construction of 'third-world prostitutes' is part of a wider western feminist impulse to construct a damaged 'other' as justification for its own interventionist impulses" (Doezema 16). Doezema describes the history of British colonial feminism, which created a racialized, "damaged other" to justify colonial feminists' participation in the political sphere (16). Similarly, the affective representation of Filipina domestic workers, sex workers, and "mail order brides" as solely victims in need of saving suggests a "damaged other" of the Western subject (and by social location, the Filipino American activist). I suggest a form of Filipino American feminist subjectivity that does not presuppose an affect of "saving." This form of feminist subjectivity, while attentive to the representational politics of gender and sexuality, is not limited to women.

¹²⁷ Martin Manalansan critiques existing scholarship on gendered labor migration. He argues that the existing literature assumes a female-bodied subject and relies on heteronormative notion of affects such as love, care, etc. He argues for an analysis that takes into account male-bodied workers, in addition to queer, gay, bisexual, and transgendered subjects. See Martin Manalansan, *Queering the Chain of Care Paradigm*.

While Filipino American activists do not occupy the same position as Western feminists, we do occupy a significantly different social location from our Filipina sisters in the diaspora. GABNet recognizes the difference in social location between Filipino American and Filipinos in the Philippines in their statement,

Historically, whatever group/organization/center established in the US supposedly as part of the progressive movement in the Philippines has ended up trying to change the style, course and tactic of the Philippine movement itself. Out of respect for and in recognition of the sovereignty of the Philippine movement, GABNet elected to remain a half-step removed from the organizational parameters of that movement, electing instead to work on U.S. foreign policy decisions that impact women and children of the Philippines. The issue of who should wield political power in the Philippines was a question we viewed as the exclusive preserve of the Filipino people, because first and foremost, we are NOT there.¹²⁸

In this statement, GABNet acknowledges the need to recognize and account for a difference in geopolitical location among Filipino American and Philippines-based activists, in order to avoid reproducing an imperialist relationship within transnational political networks. Despite this recognition, the trope of the “traffic in women” implicitly produces Filipino American subjects as the “saviors” of “trafficked women.” The trope of “trafficked women,” as the “damaged Other” of Filipino American activists, serves to legitimize the subjectivity of Filipino Americans as “saviors.”

Sin City Diary

¹²⁸ Gabriela Network.

The figure of the “exploited Filipina body” circulates within many formats in Filipino diasporic political culture. The documentary film, in particular, is a primary means of documenting the experiences of exploited Filipina women. Two films that interweave a journey into one’s personal history and heritage with the plight of Filipina women are *Sin City Diary* and *Memories of a Forgotten War*, both made by Filipina American women. The documentary film *Sin City Diary* (1992), directed by Filipina American Rachel Rivera, represents the figure the “exploited Filipina body” through interviews with Filipina sex workers near the former U.S. naval base in Olongapo City, Philippines. On one level, the documentary describes the journey of a Filipina American *balikbayan* returning to the Philippines after a seventeen year absence. The film narrates the Rivera’s own familial and personal history as a Filipina American who left the Philippines during childhood to migrate to the U.S. with her Filipina mother and white American stepfather. On another level, *Sin City Diary* presents a narrative of betrayal and abandonment, loss and mourning. The frequent presence of Amerasian children in the film serves as an embodied reminder of the betrayal and abandonment of the Philippines by the U.S. The relationship of the white American serviceman to his spurned Filipina lover/prostitute is the gendered trope through which the director, Rivera, narrates the relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines. Within this familial narrative, the Philippine nation is figured through the “exploited Filipina bodies” of sex workers in Olongapo. This narrative is reiterated in the experimental documentary film by Sari Lluch Dalena and Camilla Griggers, *Memories of a Forgotten War*, which tells the story of the

filmmaker's mother and grandmother, who were both married to white American servicemen. *Memories of a Forgotten War* tells the history of the Philippine American War through the relationships of the filmmaker's mother and grandmother to white American servicemen. Like *Sin City Diary*, *Memories of a Forgotten War* frames the relationship of the U.S. to the Philippines within a tale of abandonment and betrayal, in which the Filipina American filmmaker, Camilla Griggers, attempts to make sense of her mixed race heritage. In *Sin City Diary* and *Memories of a Forgotten War*, the colonial history and neo-imperial present of the U.S.'s relationship to the Philippines is framed through a search for Filipino American identity. Both films are narrated through the Filipina American *balikbayan*'s literal and figurative search for origins, as the Filipina American subject is triangulated between the masculinist power of the U.S. military and the feminized Philippine nation.

The search for origins through the journey "home" is a common trope within diasporic cultural production. In her discussion of the diasporic Puerto Rican film, *Brincando el Charco: Portrait of a Puerto Rican* (Negrón-Muntaner), Ann Cvetkovich cites Spivak's notion of the "nostalgia for lost origins" as "the way that return depends on and posits as authentic nation based on *affective need*" (Cvetkovich 130 emphasis mine). This affective need for an authentic nation of origins frames the figuring of the "exploited Filipina body" within *Sin City Diary*. The lives of Filipina sex workers are seen through the affective lens of Rivera's anger, pity, and guilt towards the nation she left behind. Rivera juxtaposes images of

her adolescence with scenes of Olongapo, Philippines, in order to come to terms with what Jose Muñoz terms “exilic memories.” Muñoz describes exilic memories as “the ephemera and personal narratives that signify ‘Cuba’ for me...not only possessing a certain materiality, but also providing a sense of ‘place’” (Muñoz 76). Rivera’s affective need and exilic memories form the framework through which the viewer sees the lives of Filipina sex workers and Amerasian children. Rivera’s voiceover narration forms the unifying thread which links Rivera’s exposé of the plight of Filipina sex workers with her affective need to return to her origins. Rivera’s voiceover narration of her “journey home” threads together the disparate components of the film: scenes of sex workers, images of U.S. Navy aircraft, historical photographs, U.S. pop songs, and images of Rivera’s childhood. The film uses quick editing from long shots of the Olongapo streets to still images of Rivera as a child to merge Rivera’s “exilic memories” with the documentary goals of the film. The voiceover narration functions as a guide to Rivera’s emotional landscape, revealing how her affective need structures the film’s narrative of return, loss, and abandonment.

Sin City Diary begins with a scene of children playing in a shantytown in the Philippines. This scene of poverty and destitution is repeated in several scenes through the film. The next scene shows a U.S. military helicopter flying above, as a voiceover narration introduces the viewer to the narrator/filmmaker, Rachel Rivera, a Filipina American who migrated from the Philippines seventeen years prior to the making of the film. *Sin City Diary* was filmed in 1989, shortly before the closure of

the naval base in Subic Bay, Philippines. The next few scenes show street scenes of sex workers and their American johns walking the streets of Olongapo. Haunting music plays in the background of a scene of women waiting in line. The images of women waiting reverberate through out the film, creating a tone of longing and loss. In a voiceover narration, Rivera describes her return to the Philippines, while still photographs of herself as a child and young adult fill the screen,

Summer 1989. After being away for seventeen years, I return to the land of my childhood, to see a city known to sailors as Liberty City, Sin City...where America meets my homeland in massage parlors and night clubs...Thousands of women have come here, drawn by the promise of opportunity, the dream of the American rescue. (Rivera).

Rivera's narration and childhood images frame the film as both an autobiographical story of a *balikbayan* returning to the homeland, as well as a narrative of the dream of American rescue within the lives of Filipina sex workers. Rivera goes on to describe her personal history of migration, as images of her parents and her college graduation fill the screen while Rivera narrates, "Childhood. I grew up never knowing my own language" (*Sin City Diary*). Quick editing juxtaposes images of Rivera's personal history with scenes of women walking in the streets in Olongapo. The images of Olongapo fill in the gaps of Rivera's "exilic memory," as her personal history of migration and childhood memories of the Philippines become superimposed onto the daily reality of Filipina sex workers.

Within the narrative of the film, Rivera positions herself as the envied *balikbayan*, who embodies the American dream of rescue. Shifting from images of her childhood to a scene of a class for prospective Filipina wives of American servicemen, Rivera's voiceover narration remarks, "I was one of the lucky ones... I see that it is stories like mine that keep the dream alive for *those of us* who were left here" (*Sin City Diary*, emphasis mine). This narration both critiques and reifies the teleological narrative of migration to the U.S., the American dream, as the desired material goal for Filipina women. Through her use of the phrase "those of us," Rivera positions herself as a member of the collective Philippine nation, while simultaneously differentiating herself as the *balikbayan* who "made it." Rivera's self-representation of her self as a source of envy and a sign of material success reveals how, within both the Filipino American and Philippine popular imaginary, the Filipino American *balikbayan* is triangulated between the exploited, feminized Philippine nation and the masculine military might of the U.S. This relationship is visualized in Rivera's familial history in a photograph of her mother and white American stepfather, who provided the means for her family's migration to the U.S. Rivera's narrativization of herself as a Filipina American *balikbayan* reveals the key differences between how Filipino American *balikbayans* represent themselves in relation to the Philippine nation, and the popular representation of Filipino American *balikbayans* in the Philippine national imaginary. While Rivera presents herself as the Filipino American who journeys home to discover an inextricable connection to the place she left, popular conceptions of *balikbayans* in the Philippines are more

critical. Vicente Rafael cites the Philippine journalist De Quiros, describing how, within the Philippine popular imaginary, the figure of the Filipino American *balikbayan* “marks the pathos and poignancy of a nationalism deferred as part of the condition of being a Filipino today.” (Rafael 209). As such, Rivera’s presence as a Filipino American *balikbayan* in the Philippines punctuates the mourning for a sovereign Philippine nation. Caroline Hau cites Benito Vergara in her analysis of the popular conception of Filipino Americans in the Philippines, describing how

their ‘money’ contaminates their national belonging, opening them to charges of having benefited from the “luxury of distance” away from the pollution and poverty and despair of the country they have left behind, at the same time that the state, through its recognition of dual citizenship and granting of permanent residency status to qualified investors, commodifies nationality in hopes of channeling much-needed capital into the Philippines (Vergara cited in Hau 194).

Like the ambivalence towards Filipino Americans within the Philippine national imaginary, ambivalence structures Rivera’s emotional landscape in the film. She feels both an affective sense of belonging to the Philippine nation, as well as a sense of guilt and frustration at her own position as a Filipino American in the Philippines. The affective structure of the film assumes an audience which can empathize with Rivera’s positionality as a Filipino expatriate, rather than the positionality of the sex workers in the film.

Sin City Diary is structured through the interrelated stories of three women, Glenda, Juliet, and Josephine. Interweaving interviews with scenes of the women's daily lives, the film relies mainly on interviews that utilize direct address. Glenda, who came to Olongapo from a rural province in the Philippines, works as a go-go dancer/sex worker. Juliet, who works as a seamstress/sex worker, has a three-year-old child by an African American serviceman. Josephine, whose face is obscured from the camera throughout the film, is an HIV-positive former sex worker who now works in a public health clinic. Through the stories of Glenda, Juliet, and Josephine, the film weaves a narrative of betrayal and abandonment. As Juliet shows pictures of her son, AJ, and James, the African American father of her son who has returned to the U.S., the film creates a tone of longing and loss. Juliet is then shown attending church with her son A.J., while stating to the camera, "I pray that the baby's father comes back for him." Juliet describes her feelings of hopelessness after the departure of her baby's father. Josephine, too, reiterates a theme of faith as the only recourse to hopelessness, given her HIV-positive status.

While the stories of Juliet and Josephine create an affect of longing and loss, Glenda's narrative resists this affective framing. In a scene which shows Glenda applying make up, she remarks, "I have respect for myself, even if they don't have respect for me" (Rivera). Glenda goes on to describe how she doesn't listen to the "bullshit" of her American clients. Despite the film's structure – which does not allow for the point of view of the women themselves – this scene reveals Glenda's resistance to the narrative of loss and longing which structure the film. Although

Glenda relates an earlier experience of “falling in love” with a U.S. serviceman, she refuses to be framed within a narrative of abandonment. Glenda presents herself as headstrong and independent, a direct contrast from the other representations of Filipina women in the film. Glenda’s character provides a possibility for subjectivity that is submerged within the larger narrative of the “exploited Filipina body” in *Sin City Diary*. The overdetermined representations of Juliet (as the mother of a fatherless child) and Josephine (as an HIV positive former sex worker) within the film inhibit the articulation of subjectivities other than as an “exploited Filipina body.” Both the filmmaker’s voiceover narration and the images of poor and destitute children in the film incite an affect of pity for the viewer. Seeking respect, and not pity, Glenda’s self-representation challenges the affective framing of the film.



Sin City Diary's structure of feeling is constructed primarily through the narrative authority of the filmmaker. The film's use of voiceover narration positions the filmmaker as an omniscient figure within the narrative, who creates the emotional

tone of the film. Rivera's voiceover narration also provides the narrative thread which links together quick editing of disparate images into a cohesive affective structure of longing and loss. In addition, the use of direct address (in which the interview subjects are presented as "talking heads" while the filmmaker is invisible behind the camera) strengthens Rivera's narrative authority, while reifying the objectification of the women interviewed. These visual strategies reinforce a relation of power in which the women interviewed are presented as victims to be pitied.

Always focused *on* the women, the camera does not allow the point of view of the women to be visualized on screen. In contrast, images and scenes through the eyes of the women themselves would shift the narrative authority in the film. However, Glenda's interviews exceed the narrative authority of the film through her refusal to be figured within the trope of "American rescue." Her resistance to the "bullshit" of her American clients, and her insistence on self-respect despite the conditions of her life, provides a stark contrast to the victim narratives of Juliet and Josephine.

Through her character, another form of Filipina subjectivity, beyond the overdetermined figure of the "exploited Filipina body," is introduced. Glenda's self-description refuses the pity of the Filipino American gaze; in doing so, her self-representation resists the dominant structure of feeling of the film.

Within *Sin City Diary*, the narrative of betrayal and abandonment is most poignantly embodied in Amerasian children. The sequence begins with a scene of Amerasian street children who have been abandoned by their Filipina mothers, while their plight is described by Rivera in a voiceover narration. In the following scene,

Amerasian children are shown playing baseball through a church-organized program in Olongapo. One shy young girl, Michelle, states to the camera, "I would like to meet my father" (*Sin City Diary*). While the children laugh and enjoy their game, Rivera describes the children's "shared longing concealed in laughter" (*Sin City Diary*). During the children's baseball game the camera pans across the field, following two white American servicemen who are jogging through the park. Off screen, a voice says, "There are many American guys here we don't even know. They could be our fathers." Visually, the shot of the white American servicemen reiterates the lost object, the source of mourning for the Amerasian children. In the last scene of the documentary, Rivera describes her feelings when saying goodbye to the children, "In the end, I turned around and left them, just like another visitor from America" (*Sin City Diary*). Here, the viewer is positioned within the affective structures of guilt which shape Rivera's response, as well as the longing and loss experienced by the Amerasian children. The abandonment of the Amerasian children by their fathers is visualized through the anonymous American joggers. Within the logic of the film, the children's mourning for their absent fathers is also the feminized Philippine nation's mourning for the paternal presence of the U.S.

While *Sin City Diary* critiques the narrative of American rescue, the film also reaffirms this narrative through its positioning of the Filipina sex worker as a betrayed and abandoned figure. As the children of the spurned Philippine nation/mother, Amerasian children are the ultimate embodiment of this mourning and loss. Their Euro-American and African American facial features and skin tone echo

the legacy of their American fathers. Through the paradigm of spurned woman and absent father, the film presents Amerasian children as the bastard offspring of the Philippine/U.S. union. Conversely, the Filipino American *balikbayan* is figured as the legitimate heir to such a union, with both American material privilege and Filipino cultural heritage. With such privilege comes a sense of responsibility, within the logic of the film. Rivera expresses the frustration and guilt she feels because of her inability to “save” the Amerasian children from the fate of abandonment by the absent U.S. nation/father. Rivera ultimately presents the Filipino American *balikbayan* as a frustrated would-be savior, who struggles with her mixed heritage as the heir to both U.S. masculinist power and Philippine feminized subjection.

National Heroes

While *Sin City Diary* represents the “exploited Filipina bodies” of Filipina sex workers and their Amerasian children as victims to be saved from exploitation and abandonment, Filipina OCWs are figured as “national heroes” within Philippine-state sponsored discourse. Former Philippine president Cory Aquino introduced the discourse of “national heroes” in 1988, when she addressed a group of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong, “Kayo po ang mga bagong bayani” (“You are the new heroes”). (Maglipon cited in Rafael 211). The “new heroes” discourse has circulated throughout Philippine popular culture, through Philippine films such as *Anak* and *The Flor Contemplacion Story*, as well as throughout the diaspora. The

“new heroes” discourse exemplifies the Philippine state’s attempts to ameliorate the increasing popular criticism of the Philippine government’s inability to protect its workers from physical and sexual abuse abroad (Hau 231). As I discuss in my fourth chapter, the execution of Filipina domestic worker Flor Contemplacion by the Singaporean state in 1995 provoked an outcry among the Filipino public. Contemplacion’s death also invoked a sense of collective mourning for the Philippine nation’s failure to keep itself whole against the onslaught of global capital (Rafael 213). This outcry prompted former Philippine president Fidel Ramos to push for the passing of the Republic Act (RA) 8042 (The Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995), which marked a shift in government policy from exporting labor to “managing” labor migration (Soriano cited in Hau 231). Despite the fact that RA 8042 explicitly states that the Philippine state “does not promote overseas employment as a means to sustain economic growth and achieve national development,” the Act institutionalized policies of overseas employment (Hau). Within this larger context of criticism of the Philippine state and its promotion of labor migration, the discourse of “national heroes” has served to justify the state’s reliance on remittances from abroad, as well as valorize the women and men who choose to work abroad.

In this section of the chapter, I focus on a vignette titled “National Heroes” from *ReCreation*, the 2006 Pilipino Cultural Night (PCN) organized by the Pilipino American Alliance, a student organization at the University of California at Berkeley. This vignette is a dramatic interpretation of the fictional stories of two Filipina

domestic helpers (DHs) working abroad in order to support their families in the Philippines. I examine the “National Heroes” vignette in order to 1) analyze how the “national heroes” discourse has circulated within a Filipino American context; and 2) discuss how the reiteration of the “national heroes” discourse intersects with the representation of the “exploited Filipina body.” In contrast to the representations of “exploited Filipina bodies” in the political organizing of Gabriela Network and the Filipino American film *Sin City Diary*, popular representations of domestic helpers within Philippine films such as *Anak* and *The Flor Contemplacion Story* present these women as both martyrs and heroines. While the film *The Flor Contemplacion Story* tells the story of the Filipina domestic helper who was convicted and executed by the Singaporean state for allegedly murdering another Filipina DH, *Anak* describes a Filipina DH who returns to the Philippines to find her family estranged from her. *The Flor Contemplacion Story* was immensely popular throughout the Filipino diaspora. Patrick Flores describes the reception of the film in Hong Kong,

An eyewitness recounts that when the *The Flor Contemplacion Story* was shown in Hong Kong at the Mandarin Theater inside the second-class mall Pinoy World, the reception of Filipina maids to the event was tremendous. The films played for four weekends, two screenings a day, to standing-room crowds. The theater accommodates 1,500-3,000 people and tickets were priced at HK\$50. The film grossed US \$3.3 million worldwide (Flores 92).

Through the dissemination of popular films such as *The Flor Contemplacion Story* and *Anak*, the “national heroes” discourse gains critical purchase across the range of geopolitical sites within the Filipino diaspora, including locations such as New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Toronto (Flores 82).

Within popular films such as *Anak* and *The Flor Contemplacion Story*, Filipina DHs are represented as women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for their family, and by extension, the Philippine nation. Within this framework, the Philippine nation is figured through the trope of the nuclear, heteronormative family. The “National Heroes” vignette reproduces the tropes of “heroine” and “martyr” through its representation of Filipina DHs. In doing so, “National Heroes” perpetuates what Sarah Raymundo describes as “a cultural logic that participates in the production and reproduction of capital, rather than a mirror of its logic” (Raymundo 6). Raymundo argues that the ideological framework of the film *Anak* implicitly legitimizes the Philippine state’s policies of labor migration, thereby affirming the Philippine state’s collusion with transnational capital (Raymundo). As such, cultural productions such as *Anak* participate in the production of what Raymundo terms the “transnational imaginary” of the state, which she defines as a discourses that “normalize and render as natural the exploitative conditions of neoliberal globalization” (Raymundo 3). Drawing on the Philippine state’s “transnational imaginary” of domestic workers as national heroes, the vignette “National Heroes” implicitly reproduces the logic of global capital which naturalizes the exportation of feminized labor. As Filipino American actors embody the “exploited Filipina bodies” of Filipina domestic workers on stage, the audience is interpellated into the affective structures which position DHs as signs of national mourning. In this way, this logic of capital, as mediated by the Philippine state, is reproduced within the diasporic context of Filipino American performance.

Similar to the films *Anak* and *The Flor Contemplacion Story*, the “National Heroes” vignette presents the “exploited Filipina body” of the Filipina domestic helper as both heroine and martyr. “National Heroes” accomplishes this through invoking the structures of feeling which create a feeling of transnational connection within its primarily Filipino American audience. As I discuss in my earlier chapter on diasporic nationalisms, Pilipino Cultural Nights and Pilipino Cultural Celebrations serve as means to consolidate a cultural nationalist form of ethnic belonging among Filipino Americans. As such, these performances serve as an important means of creating community within the white supremacist racial formations of the U.S., within which Filipino Americans are racialized minorities. In this chapter, I argue that PCCs and PCNs also create forms of transnational belonging through the creation of collective affects among its Filipino American audience. Within the vignette “National Heroes,” a sense of national mourning is cathected in the “exploited Filipina body” of the domestic helper. This representation of overseas domestic helpers is unique within PCNs and PCCs. PCNs and PCCs have historically focused on the Filipino American experience, primarily drawing on the experiences of second generation Filipino American youth (Gonzalvez 1). The inclusion of a vignette on Filipina overseas contract workers in a PCN is a departure from the usual storylines based on excavating one’s cultural/ethnic identity within a white dominant culture. Shifting the focus from belonging to the collective body of the U.S. nation, “National Heroes” instead incites a form of affective affiliation with the millions of Filipino OCWs worldwide. This marks a shift from an emphasis on minority identity

formations in the U.S. (Asian American, Filipino American) to belonging to a transnational diaspora.

“National Heroes” tells the story of two Filipina domestic helpers working abroad, Flor and Baby. Flor must work to support her sick mother and son in the Philippines, while Baby must pay for medicine and healthcare for her sick daughter. “National Heroes” alternates between scenes of Flor and Baby. While Baby takes care of her employer’s child, her interaction with her own daughter is limited to transnational phone calls. Flor’s son is angry at her for leaving, but happy when he receives a video game system from Flor in the mail. Through these stories, “National Heroes” reiterates the theme of familial separation and sacrifice that is central to the storyline of both *Anak* and *The Flor Contemplacion Story*. The sending of material gifts to dependents is a primary means of ameliorating the physical distance between parents and children. In both *Anak* and *The Flor Contemplacion Story*, the main characters attempt to maintain and improve their relationship with their estranged children by bringing their children material goods from abroad. This logic of material consumption reiterates the “OFWs’ enthusiastic embrace of dreams and desires generated by the global capitalist imaginary and projected through global mass media, entertainment, and consumer industries” (Tadiar cited in Hau 248). The repetition of this theme within “National Heroes” reveals how such logics are reproduced within Filipino American cultural production as well. In its representation of DHs as martyrs who sacrifice for their families, and by extension, the Philippine nation, “National Heroes” functions to implicitly naturalize the function of the Philippine

nation as a source of labor for a global capitalist economy. While implicitly critiquing the exploitative conditions of this labor, “National Heroes” reiterates the Philippine state’s lauding of DHs as the saviors of the Philippine economy, thereby shifting attention from the state’s role as the arbiter of outward flows of gendered labor.

“National Heroes” incites affects of pity and outrage through its depiction of the sexual and physical abuse that Flor experiences at the hands of her foreign employers. While her husband is having an affair with another woman in the Philippines, Flor suffers physical and emotional pain. In one particularly disturbing scene, Flor is raped by her employer. The next scene shows Flor’s female employer beating her and withholding her passport, in order to prevent Flor from escaping. While these scenes serve a pedagogical purpose within PCNs, in that they “educate” Filipino American youth about the hardships experienced by Filipina DHs overseas, the vignette fails to address the reasons for such exploitation – the collusion of the Philippine state with processes of global capitalism. Without a critical analysis, representations such as these reproduce the notion of “exploited Filipina bodies” as primarily victims to be pitied, or martyrs to be admired for their sacrifice for the Philippine nation. Narratives of the “exploited Filipina body” as martyrs and heroes function to instill an affective sense of diasporic belonging among young Filipino Americans, by inciting feelings of pity and outrage. Through affective structures of pity and outrage, Filipino Americans are sutured into collective national affects of mourning for a sovereign Philippine nation.

In the last scene of “National Heroes,” the stage appears completely dark. As haunting orchestral music plays in the background, one by one, figures are lit on stage. Baby emerges with tears streaming down her face, as she cries,

This is not my country. This is not my home. This is not my family.
This is not my daughter. My daughter is far away, sick, dreaming of
me holding her in my arms. Yet I hold someone else’s child. It does
not matter how much my bones ache, or that I am so tired. I will work
as hard as I can to pay for her school, and her medicine, and her
clothes (National Heroes).

This short monologue creates the feeling of loss and mourning, encouraging the primarily Filipino American audience to feel the pain that Filipina DHs experience. The Filipino American audience is encouraged to identify *with* the Filipina DH, despite their difference in social location.

Flor is then spotlighted on stage. She too, cries, lamenting her husband’s inability to find a job in the Philippines. She then cries, “My country depends on my remittances, yet can not protect me from the fists of my employer” (*National Heroes*). Here, “National Heroes” presents an oblique reference to the impotence of the Philippine state within an international order, and implicitly references the execution of Flor Contemplacion. Following their short monologues, the spotlight shifts from one female figure to another. The figures on stage take turns stating the following lines,

I work...for my country.
I persevere...for my family.

I endure...for my children.
I cry...for myself (National Heroes).

This scene is the culmination of the process of suturing which interpellates Filipino American youth into the collective affects of mourning and longing for a complete and sovereign nation. Pedagogically, “National Heroes” functions to incite an empathic experience of the pain of separation of Filipina DHs from the family of the nation. For the Filipino American audience, the pain and sacrifice of the “exploited Filipina body” of the domestic helper is simultaneously the pain of the Philippine nation. This affective structure sutures its Filipino American audience into a sense of collective belonging to the diasporic nation. Here the sense of belonging shifts from the cultural nationalist claiming of a specifically Filipino American identity to the recognition of membership in a diasporic community.

“Exploited Filipina Bodies” and National Heroes

The representations of the “exploited Filipina body” in the three sites of Filipino American cultural production that I examine, Gabriela Network’s Purple Rose Campaign, the film *Sin City Diary*, and the PCN vignette “National Heroes,” articulate multiple forms of national and transnational belonging. As a figure for the Philippine nation within the diaspora, “the exploited Filipina body” incites a multiplicity of affects in the Filipino American context. Gabriela Network’s Purple Rose Campaign presents the “exploited Filipina body” of domestic workers, sex workers, and “mail order brides” as primarily as victims of the “trafficking of Filipino

women and children.” This figuring of domestic workers, sex workers, and “mail order brides” as victims to be saved reproduces an imperialist trope within Western imperialist feminisms, in which the “third world prostitute” is an oppressed figure that requires the political intervention of First World feminists.¹²⁹ As such, the Purple Rose Campaign produces a notion of the “damaged Other” that requires the intervention of Filipino American activists. Drawing on narratives of transnational solidarity, GABNet encourages Filipino Americans to feel an affective sense of responsibility to the victims of “human trafficking.” In doing so, GABNet produces a Filipina American activist subject whose role is to “save” the “trafficked” Filipina woman. Simultaneously, solidarity organizations such as GABNet function as a form of diasporic nationalism for Filipino Americans, invoking the Philippine nation as a sign of belonging to a larger Filipino diaspora. Through their use of the “traffic in women” discourse, GABNet incites a form of diasporic belonging based on notions of solidarity with the Philippine nation. This framework of solidarity incorporates Filipino Americans into a transnational vision of political organizing.

In contrast to the framework of solidarity, the film *Sin City Diary* suggests a form of transnational belonging which emphasizes the triangulation of the Filipino American *balikbayan* as a key figure within the gendered relationship of the U.S. to the Philippines. *Sin City Diary* presents a gendered narrative in which the figure of the Filipino American *balikbayan* is triangulated between the feminized Philippine

¹²⁹ See Doezema’s discussion of the “third world prostitute.” Jo Doezema, “Ouch! Western Feminists’ ‘Wounded Attachment’ to the ‘Third World Prostitute,’” *Feminist Review* Spring.67 (2001).

nation and the masculine imperial power of the U.S. As the child of two nations, the Filipino American *balikbayan* has a troubled relationship to the “exploited Filipina body” of the Filipina sex worker. In contrast to the Filipino American *balikbayan*, the Amerasian child is figured as the bastard child of the U.S./Philippine union. *Sin City Diary* suggests that the search for diasporic belonging requires the resolution of the Filipino American *balikbayan*’s mixed inheritance – U.S. social and material capital, as well as the sexual exploitation of the Filipina body.

Lastly, the vignette “National Heroes” suggests a form of belonging founded on a common affect of mourning for a sovereign Philippine nation. “National Heroes” co-opts the Philippine state discourse of OCWs as heroes for the nation. In doing so, “National Heroes” perpetuates a state discourse which legitimizes and affirms the Philippine state’s role as a recruiter and pimp for transnational flows of Filipino migrant labor. As Sarah Raymundo demonstrates in her acute analysis of the film *Anak*, the film serves to both legitimize the discourse of “national heroes” and naturalize the logic of labor migration within Philippine popular culture. *Anak* not only reflects a popular narrative, but actually participates in creating and perpetuating a capitalist logic. In presenting Filipina domestic helpers as national heroes and martyrs, “National Heroes” incites a sense of diasporic belonging which draws on affective structures of mourning the victims of global capital. This affective structure marks a shift from cultural nationalist modes of belonging, to identification with the exploited and feminized Philippine nation. This identification with the state-initiated discourse of Filipina DHs as national heroes buttresses the Philippine state’s

justification for a policy of exporting migrant labor. As such, Filipino Americans become complicit in supporting the workings of global capital through the conduit of the Philippine state.

Personal, Political, and Intellectual Stakes

As a self-identified Filipina American activist, my personal response to the multitude of representations of the “exploited Filipina body” is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, I support anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements to resist the gendered effects of capitalist globalization on Filipina women. I find inspiration in the rich history of women’s and people’s organizing in the Philippines. On the other hand, I recognize that there is a form of epistemic violence happening when Filipina women are reduced to the figure of the “trafficked woman” within Filipino American cultural production. These representations subsume the subjectivity of Filipina workers within the need for affective structures which connect Filipino Americans to social movements in the Philippines. However, I am always aware of my social location and privilege as a highly educated, middle class U.S. citizen, academic, and cultural critic. Thus, I position this analysis within the perspective that my social location and cultural/material privilege allow. My concerns are framed within the need for transnational political movements to combat structures of global capitalism and neo-imperialism. This essay is an effort towards developing forms of Filipino diasporic political culture in which we can incorporate an analysis of politics of representation within grassroots social movements.

I argue that the reduction of all forms of sex work to “human trafficking” obfuscates vital concerns regarding exploitative and dangerous working conditions, choice vs. coerced labor, and the decriminalization of sex work. Such a simplistic analysis of the material conditions of Filipina women’s participation in the global sex trade and labor markets enacts a kind of epistemic violence. This mode of representation forecloses the subjectivity of the very women whose rights they are working towards. While some may argue that the politics of representation are outside to (and less important than) the material reality of the political economy, I argue that modes of representation, whether in Filipino American cultural production or within mainstream global popular culture, produce and enact logics of global capitalism. These logics of global capitalism are the ideological frameworks through which material violence is enacted. As Jonathan Beller has pointed out, forms of cultural production such as film mediate between the two orders of production: political economy and the psycho-symbolic (Beller cited in Raymundo 5). As I have demonstrated, Filipino Americans’ representations of the “exploited Filipina body” enact both the state violence of the Philippine state, with its policy of outwards labor migration, as well as the representational violence of imperialist feminisms. As Filipino Americans, our representation of the “exploited Filipina body” has material effects in the world. The ways in which we imagine our relationship to the Philippine nation matter. The existence of dual U.S./Philippine citizenship and the work of vibrant transnational political movements are just a few examples of the material ways in which Filipino Americans participate in the life of the Philippine nation.

Weaving together my personal, political, and intellectual stakes in the politics of representation, I end here by emphasizing that as Filipino Americans, our affective connections to the Philippines need and deserve analysis. The politics of affect are deeply entwined with the politics of imagining “home,” an act that we are endlessly repeating in a multitude of forms and permutations. Our complicity and resistance to masculinist forms of cultural imperialism and capitalist globalization are mediated through the gendered images and tropes we invoke to describe our relationship to the Philippine nation. In order to avoid reproducing the masculinist and imperialist violence of representing the “exploited Filipina body,” we must be committed to a self-reflexive and critical analysis. I submit this essay as a preliminary contribution to that collective effort.

Chapter Four:

(Re)imagining the Transnational Filipina Body: Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa's *Cosmic Blood*

The search is for art forms which express the experience of the body (*and* the 'soul'), not as vehicles of labor power and resignation, but as vehicles of liberation. This is the search for a *sensuous culture*, 'sensuous' inasmuch as it involves the radical transformation of man's sense experience and receptivity: their emancipation from a self-propelling, profitable, and mutilating productivity.
Herbert Marcuse, "Art and Revolution"

Given the reliance of the Philippine national economy on remittances from gendered labor abroad, Filipina bodies are discursively constructed in relation to dominant discourses of racial and gender difference under global capital. Whether as domestic helpers, "mail order brides," or sew workers, the *excessive visibility* of the Filipina body within a global popular culture dominated by the global North reveals the logic of global capitalist discourses of racial and gender difference in relation to gendered labor. This essay examines two examples of Filipino American cultural production which confront the legacy of colonial and imperialist taxonomies of difference in the global capitalist present. While I focus mainly on the queer Colombian/Filipina American artist Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa's video and performance art piece *Cosmic Blood*, I also examine Marlon Fuentes's independent film *Bontoc Eulogy*. Fuentes' film points to the significance of tropes of memory and visibility to Filipino American representations of U.S. imperialism; Otalvaro-

Hormillosa's *Cosmic Blood* presents a performative intervention into the workings of contemporary global capitalist logic by its reimagining of colonization through the lens of queer desire. Both Otalvaro-Hormillosa's and Fuentes' pieces demonstrate the ongoing negotiation of legacies of Spanish colonialism and U.S. imperialism within Filipino American cultural production. Further, while both pieces address the historical and contemporary modes of imaging the Filipino body, *Cosmic Blood* specifically examines the imbrication of gender and racial difference with sexuality and desire.

The performance of *Cosmic Blood* that I attended took place on March 1, 2003, at Bindlestiff Studio, a small theater in the South of Market neighborhood of San Francisco. Described as the "epicenter of Filipino American arts," Bindlestiff Studio serves as a center for Filipino American theater, live music, spoken word, dance and other performing arts.¹³⁰ Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa's piece, which combined video art with performance art and live electronic music, was accompanied by Melissa Dougherty, a DJ and electronic music composer. As part of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's larger body of work, which explores themes of historical memory, racial performativity, sexuality, and belonging, *Cosmic Blood* foregrounds hybridity as a mode of resistance to colonial paradigms of racial and gender difference. Hybridity is a central theme throughout Otalvaro-Hormillosa's body of work. In her artist's statement, Otalvaro-Hormillosa describes her work,

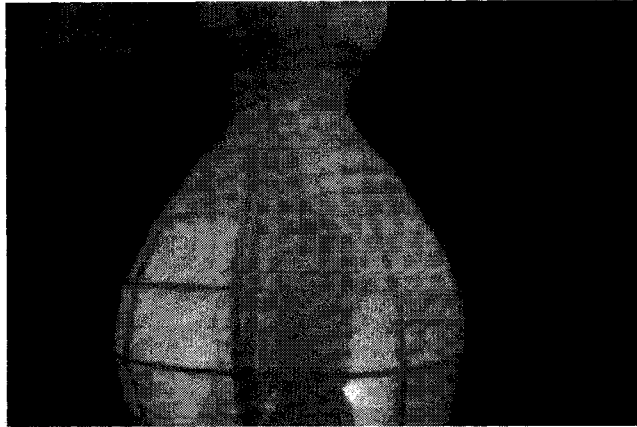
¹³⁰ Bindlestiff Studio, San Francisco (cited January 2004); available from www.bindlestiff.org.

I combine movement, text, video and percussion in performances that create possibilities for transformation in understanding the fluid, ethereal and sex-positive manifestations of subversive hybridity. My concept of (a)eromestizaje challenges stereotypical representations of identity, community and sexuality that I explore through the aerodynamic filter of a new "mestizaje" (the term that describes the Spanish/indigenous race mixture of Latin America and the Philippines) in which there is a constant, yet shifting interplay between racial and sexual identities (www.devilbunny.org).

Cosmic Blood can be contextualized within a larger project of exploring the “shifting interplay between racial and sexual identities” (Otalvaro-Hormillosa, www.devilbunny.org). In particular, *Cosmic Blood* retropes the narrative of colonization in order to reimagine the past and question how belonging is constructed in a postcolonial present.

Beginning with visual metaphors of gestation and birth, *Cosmic Blood* reimagines a past by evoking a utopian future. The text, “Change is God” is projected onto a video screen at the back of the stage. The text then rearranges itself to form the statement “God is change.” On stage, an eight foot high, hollow, white gourd-shaped object is visible, lit from within. The outline of a pulsing figure can be seen through the gourd’s semi-translucent white walls. A disembodied voice is amplified throughout the theater, describing a scene of birth/emergence, in which “a girl with a tail in her ass” emerges from “a gourd in the shape of a womb.” The voice continues, stating, “the girl with the tail in her ass, a transformative being she was...their civilizations were in different stages of evolutionary process...the earth people were quite young in the cosmic scheme of existence.” Meanwhile, Otalvaro-

Hormillosa cavorts about stage with a make believe “tail,” chanting, “girl with a tail in her ass” while holding a Jew’s harp behind her to represent the “tail” of the foreign, half animal, half human, native Other. This scene of gestation is followed by the second scene, which begins with the text “The Approach” projected onto the video screen at the back of the stage. Otalvaro-Hormillosa writhes on the ground, covered by what appears to be a fur skin, a birthing scene of pain and transformation. While the performer writhes underneath the fur, mechanical sounds accompany her robotic, jerky movements. Still underneath the fur skin, Otalvaro-Hormillosa begins to crawl across the floor, rolling on the ground and partially crawling up the walls. This period of movement seems to stretch temporally, lasting for at least fifteen minutes without dialogue. The tempo is slow and consistent, drawing out the movement on stage. Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s character suggests both the birth of a new figure, a mestiza of mixed “cosmic blood,” as well as the animalistic corporeality of the Native Other within colonial paradigms of racial and gender difference.



Described as “young in the cosmic scheme of existence,” Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s “girl with the tail in her ass” invokes a colonial past through a reimagining of first contact. Referring to evolutionist paradigms of the period of colonization, and to the figure of a native, primitive Other, Otalvaro-Hormillosa reimagines the moment of colonization through a speculative, science fictional mode. Analogizing evolutionist paradigms of the native Other to scenes of gestation and birth, Otalvaro-Hormillosa performs the birthing scene of “the girl with the tail in her ass.” The gestation and birth represented onstage is a corporeal manifestation of Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s vision of a new mestiza, a figure whose subjectivity – in which race, ethnicity, and sexuality are co-constitutive – emerges as the painful result of histories of colonization, genocide, and forced assimilation. As a mixed race, queer woman of Colombian and Filipino descent, Otalvaro-Hormillosa draws on

her own experiences to posit a theory of what she terms “hybridity as survival.”¹³¹

Cosmic Blood is both a reimagining of the past, a remembering of the colonizer/colonized dichotomy, and a hopeful vision of the future, one in which racial/ethnic/gender/sexual hybridity is necessary to survival.

Central to this retroping of the past is a focus on queer bodily desire as a locus for reimagining the point of first contact. This reimagining of the relationship of colonization to the queer racialized body is most apparent through the images and text Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents in her video work. These video images are projected on a screen at the back of the stage throughout the duration of the performance. Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s dialogue, movement, and percussion occur in a dialogic relationship to the images presented on the video screen behind her. The sequence of images presented are composed of a series of short scenes, about 3-5 seconds long, with quick editing from one disparate image to another. The first scene shows a barely clad young Filipina woman with long flowing hair standing on a beach, ostensibly signifying virgin, unspoiled land. The next scene represents both a symbolic and literal conquest/rape. In this scene, Otalvaro-Hormillosa, wearing a helmet and cape, represents an androgynous figure of the conquistador as she straddles the now naked young woman from the previous scene. Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s conquistador figure struggles with the naked woman as she straddles her. The scene invokes a feeling of bondage and sadomasochism, as the sensual, violent interactions between the two women vacillate between eroticism and

¹³¹ Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa, (cited January 2004); available from www.devilbunny.org.

domination. At one point, the naked woman strikes the conquistador figure with her helmet. The naked woman then straddles the conquistador figure while she ties her up with a silky scarf. Interspersed between these scenes of violence and eroticism is a scene of the Filipina woman walking hand in hand with a light-skinned Latino man on a beach. Breaking up the sequence is a close up image of a miniature Nipa hut, a sign of Filipino rural/indigenous culture that is made ironic by its representation as a piece of tourist art. Meanwhile, Otalvaro-Hormillosa is on stage, performing what appear to be sexual gestures on stage while wearing a conquistador helmet. In the background, the video scene then switches to Otalvaro-Hormillosa's conquistador character pantomiming anal penetration of the naked Latino man. The next video scene shifts to an image of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's conquistador figure passionately kissing the naked young Filipina woman. On stage, Otalvaro-Hormillosa ends this portion of the performance lying on her back. Is she defeated or merely sated with corporeal pleasure?



The next scene begins with the following text projected on the video screen,

“El Otro Encuentro
A neo-queer
precolonial imaginary”

In the proceeding video image, Otalvaro-Hormillosa, dressed in a sarong, is sitting on a blanket in an open field, playing the Jew’s harp, followed by the text,

“When did you see me first?”

The subsequent scene shows an African American woman, dressed in a white gauzy material, cautiously approaching Otalvaro-Hormillosa. The following text then appears,

“How would we see each other now”

In the accompanying video image, Otalvaro-Hormillosa and the African American woman carefully consider each other as they draw closer, followed by the text,

“if we had never been taught to see each other?”

In between the lines of text on the screen, are images of the two women embracing, of the two men (Latino and Filipino) struggling and having sex, a close up of two

women's bodies moving against each other, of the men engaging in oral sex, of hands gripping a back and caressing it from behind, and finally a return to the original scene in the open field, in which Otalvaro-Hormillosa is lying on top of the African American woman. Throughout this scene, the electronic music shifts from a slow and ethereal mood, to a quicker, more frenetic beat as the intensity increases and the tempo of the editing between the images becomes faster.

In these video images, Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents an alternative figuring of the point of contact, what she terms a "neo-queer precolonial imaginary." Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents a reimagining of the past in which queer desire figures as a locus of relations of power between the colonizer and the colonized. Through the temporal disjuncture implied by the juxtaposition of "neo-queer" with "precolonial" ("across time and space"), Otalvaro-Hormillosa suggests both a different moment of contact and an alternative mode of recognition between colonized peoples – one that is shaped by queer desire. She asks, "How would we see each other now, if we had never been taught to see each other?" Otalvaro-Hormillosa foregrounds the queer, racialized body as the site in which a different history of colonization can be envisioned. In doing so, Otalvaro-Hormillosa challenges the equation of colonized bodies to territory. As the text on screen states, "Our bodies once land," Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents images of the colonized, queer body which challenge the conflation of body with land. Further, the images presented in *Cosmic Blood* challenge the equation of woman with territory, nation, and land. The nude Filipina woman presented in these images exists as a *desiring subject*, that is, a subject who

both desires and resists the violence of the colonizer. As a desiring queer subject, the nude Filipina woman functions neither as a figure for the nation, nor as a passive victim of colonial violence.

As Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, and Minoó Moallem remark in their introduction to the collection *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, "...notions such as country, homeland, region, locality, and ethnicity and *their construction through racialization, sexualization, and the genderization of female corporeality* become crucial sites of inquiry and investigation" (Kaplan et. al 14, emphasis mine). As such, the bodies of women have historically been constructed as signs of national belonging. In contrast, the figure of the Filipina body presented in these video images resists the overdetermined tropes of woman as territory or woman as nation — heteronormative and masculinist tropes which typify colonial paradigms, as well as more recent anti-colonial nationalist movements. Interspersed between scenes of the nude Filipina woman walking hand in hand with a white man are scenes of physical conflict and eroticized violence between the nude Filipina woman and Otaño-Hormillosa's androgynous conquistador figure, as well as explicit gay male sex. Through the sequence titled "El Otro Encuentro: a neo-queer precolonial imaginary," *Cosmic Blood* presents images of queer bodies struggling to both dominate and recognize each other, an intimate act that is ultimately a dance of recognition. The animated sequence that follows, which shows two figures, one emerging from the Americas, the other from the African continent, superimposed upon a map of the world,

suggesting an imagining of the past in which colonized subjects learn to see each other's racialized bodies across national and hemispheric borders. Here the sensual exploration of bodies functions as a different way of *knowing each other*, beyond the colonizer/colonized paradigm.

U.S. Imperialist Discourse and Filipino American Cultural Politics

Although Otalvaro-Hormillosa situates *Cosmic Blood* in relation to the historical process of colonization, dominant discourses of corporeal difference — primarily race and gender — are fundamental to the contemporary logic of global capitalism. Here I focus on the historical relationship of the Filipina body to imperialism and militarization within the current neocolonial relationship of the Philippines to the U.S. As Gonzalez and Rodriguez state in their discussion of Filipina bodies on the Internet, “In its present anti-terrorist reincarnation, U.S. militarization of the Philippines slips comfortably into long-established infrastructures and cultures of imperialism” (Gonzalez and Rodriguez 218). Within a context of U.S. militarization of the Asia Pacific region, Filipina bodies have functioned as the source of sexual labor in cities such as Olongapo, Philippines, for over a century. Despite the closing of the Subic and Clark U.S. military bases in the Philippines in 1992, a thriving sexual industry still exists in Olongapo, which now caters to Australian, Japanese, and European sexual tourists. The commodification of Filipina bodies as a source of sexual labor is not a new phenomenon, but one that is historically contextualized within a long history of colonization, imperialism, and

militarization. As Gonzalez and Rodriguez comment, “Even while there are important differences between the colonialism of old and globalization today, we believe it is necessary to draw out the connections that continue to enable the logic of capitalism as it changes over time – if only to create responsive and responsible strategies of resistance” (Gonzalez and Rodriguez 229).

We can contextualize *Cosmic Blood*'s treatment of the production of modes of recognizing and taxonomizing racialized bodies within a historical process exemplified in the current moment by the functioning of processes of global capital. In the neocolonial present, popular representations of the Filipina body make evident the workings of dominant visual discourses of racial and gender difference in the context of global capitalism. Commodified for her very corporeality, the Filipina migrant laborer typifies a visual regime of race and ethnicity, upon which an international division of labor relies. The trope of the Filipina body as an easily accessible source of corporeal labor – both domestic and sexual – is prevalent throughout contemporary U.S. popular culture. The *excessive visibility* of the Filipina body as a racialized and sexualized commodity within global popular culture reflects the everyday logic through which a global capitalist ideology functions.

While the effects of both historical and contemporary visual discourses of racial and gender difference are evident in the many examples of commodified Filipina bodies¹³² within U.S. popular culture, what is less apparent is the recognition

¹³² Vernadette V. Gonzalez and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez discuss the multiplicity of porn, mail order bride, and domestic worker websites focused on Filipina women in “Filipina.com: Wives, Workers,

of the imperialist origins of such discourses within articulations of Filipino American identity. Within this vacuity of representations of U.S. imperialism in Filipino American culture, the work of Gigi Otaľvaro-Hormillosa and Marlon Fuentes are particularly significant for their foregrounding of U.S. imperialism as central to Filipino American identity. Oscar Campomanes cites this historical amnesia on the part of Filipino Americans in their claims of belonging to the U.S. nation-state:

It is as if future U.S. Filipino visibility requires no less than U.S. American self-recognition that the U.S.-Philippine colonial encounter proved central to the strategic formulations and transformations of 20th-century American imperial modernity and nationality; or that the *politics of recognition* pursued by Filipino Americans is fatally entwined with an effective *unrecognizability* of the U.S. Empire (secured by exceptionalist ideologies) after its discernible germination in U.S. (neo)colonial rule over the Philippines (Campomanes 1995, 8, emphasis mine).

Forgetting the historical position of the Filipino body, as that which can never be assimilated into the U.S. national body, Filipino Americans often stake a claim of belonging to the U.S. nation-state, utilizing the rhetoric of cultural citizenship. In doing so, according to Campomanes, Filipino Americans then become complicit in the perpetuation of the myth of U.S. exceptionalism (“Americanism”) (Campomanes 7). In his critique of “Asian Americanist and multiculturalist” scholarship on Filipinos in the U.S., Campomanes asks “How do these exceptionalist emplotments of

and Whores on the Cyberfrontier” in *Asian America.Net: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cyberspace*. Rachel C. Lee and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, eds. (London: Routledge, 2003).

U.S. imperial nationality constrain and implicate present day Filipino American *politics of recognition and identities?*" (Campomanes 8, emphasis mine). In response to Campomanes' questions, we can ask: do Filipino American articulations of collectivity take into account the contemporary effects of historical discourses of corporeal difference, rooted as they are in imperialist and colonialist ways of seeing the Filipino body? In this context, how do Filipino diasporic subjects articulate a politics of belonging? Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa's *Cosmic Blood* addresses these questions by suggesting that hybridity/ *mestizaje* can function as both a strategy for survival, as well as a basis for modes of belonging in the postcolonial present. Rather than ignoring the implication of U.S. imperialism in contemporary notions of Filipino American identity, Otalvaro-Hormillosa foregrounds this common history of subjugation and domination as the basis for hybrid strategies of resistance in the global capitalist present. *Cosmic Blood* points to a shared history of trauma and collective pain, one that is bounded not by nation or ethnicity, but rather by shared hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the future.

Despite Campomanes' claims of historical amnesia on the part of Filipino Americans — in both the Asian American Studies model and in Filipino American cultural politics more broadly — *Cosmic Blood* and *Bontoc Eulogy* are examples of Filipino diasporic cultural production which are precisely focused on the act of remembering the imbrication of U.S. imperialism within the emergence and consolidation of Filipino American identity. Marlon Fuentes' *Bontoc Eulogy* addresses the historical events of the Philippine-American War and the Philippine

Reservation at the World's Fair of 1904 as pivotal moments in both the personal history of the filmmakers, and Filipino American identity more broadly. *Bontoc Eulogy* tells a fictional tale in which the narrator, a Filipino American who left Manila some twenty years prior, narrates the story of his grandfather, Marcod, a Bontoc Igorot, who traveled to the U.S. to live on the Philippine Reservation at the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904. Combining found footage, ethnological photographs, family photographs, and recent black and white video footage, *Bontoc Eulogy* functions as a historical reimagining, a project similar to Otalvaro-Hormillosa's *Cosmic Blood*, that foregrounds the imperial taxonomies of seeing and imaging the Filipino body. In *Bontoc Eulogy*, the relationship between the imperial power of the U.S. and the Philippines is crucial to the narrator's telling of his family history. In the film's visual portrayal of the World's Fair, in which Filipinos endured a *compulsory visibility*, Filipinos were forced to perform a vision of Filipino indigeneity that reflected and perpetuated the dominant imaginary of Filipinos within the U.S. imperial project. Similarly, *Cosmic Blood* evokes this imaging of the Filipino body as an animalistic, Native Other. However, unlike *Bontoc Eulogy*, *Cosmic Blood* foregrounds queer desire as a mode of reimagining the relationship between colonizer and colonized. Within Otalvaro-Hormillosa's reimagining of colonization, the Native subject is constructed through discourses of gender, sexuality, and desire.



In *Bontoc Eulogy*, the filmmaker, Marlon Fuentes, remarks upon a shift in the visibility of the Filipino body in the contemporary context of Filipinos in the U.S. As the narrator of *Bontoc Eulogy* states in a voiceover narration, “We Pilipinos wear this cloak of silence, to render us invisible to one another, yet it is this very invisibility that makes us recognizable to one another... now we must remember in order to survive.” Yet, the Filipino body in the U.S. popular imagination is *both invisible and hyper-visible*. While the history of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines is often occluded in a contemporary context in which Filipino Americans lack visibility in U.S. political culture, the commodified, gendered body of the Filipina woman is hyper-visible in figures such as the “mail-order bride” or domestic helper, found not only in the U.S., but throughout the global North (De Guzman; Gonzalez and Rodriguez; Rafael; Tadiar; Tolentino). Historically, the imaging of Filipino bodies has shifted from the “compulsory visibility” of the colonial paradigm (Rafael), exemplified by the display of Filipino villages at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis and parodied in Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s *Cosmic Blood*, to the *excessive visibility* of the

commodified Filipina body, which is most evident within the visual economy of the Internet (Gonzalez and Rodriguez). Simultaneously, as Fuentes remarks, a different mode of political visibility is required within the Filipino American context. As racialized minorities in a white dominant culture, Filipino Americans must learn to be visible to one another, as a mode of recognition, as well as a means of developing political solidarity. The trope of memory as a strategy for survival in the postcolonial context is pervasive in Filipino diasporic cultural production, from the films of Celine Salazar Parreñas¹³³ to Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa's performance piece *Cosmic Blood*. In this context, memory functions as a mode of recognizing commonality. With this mode of recognition in mind, both *Bontoc Eulogoy* and *Cosmic Blood* remember and (re)imagine the colonial past as an essential strategy for survival in a global capitalist present.

“Hybridity as Creation, as Destruction, as Transformation”

The theme of hybridity as a strategy of survival is foregrounded in Otalvaro-Hormillosa's writing, performance, and video work. Positioned as a site of resistance, hybridity functions within the realm of the utopian in *Cosmic Blood*. In the fourth scene, Otalvaro-Hormillosa plays conga drums as she states, “Cumbia! A product of mestizaje,” invoking the Afro-Latin dance, the “Cumbia” as a metaphor for postcolonial hybridity. In this act, Otalvaro-Hormillosa exhorts the audience to

¹³³ Celine Salazar Parreñas has directed several films focused on the Filipino American experience, dealing with themes of women's sexuality, women's bodies, historical memory, diaspora, migration, and postcolonial identity. See *Mahal Means Love and Expensive* 1993, *Her Uprooting Plants Her* 1995, *SuperFlip* 1997.

begin a “mixed race movement.” She begins a litany of praises of ethnic and racial mixes in the San Francisco Bay Area, “Thank Creator for the Bay Area! Thank Creator for Mexipinos! Thank creator for Chicanoriquenos! Thank Creator for Afro-Korean military children! Thank creator for JaimaicArgentinians!” She then goes on to discuss her own body as a sign of mestizaje, by humorously referencing the racial and ethnic stereotypes that her queer Filipina-Colombian body negotiates in the context of the U.S. Shifting from her self-description as “petite Oriental girl” to “macho/a oversexualized Hispanic -- whoops, I mean Latino!” Otalvaro-Hormillosa demonstrates the shifting codes through which her queer, mixed-race body is read within discourses of U.S. multiculturalism. Although located in a humorous monologue, Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s call for a mixed race movement is earnest in its yearning for forms of belonging that exceed the existing modes of reading the racialized queer body. The colonized subject survives the sexual violence of the colonial past through a hybrid existence in the present.

The title of the performance, *Cosmic Blood*, is a play on Jose Vasconcelos’ idea that the mix of European, indigenous, Asian, and African peoples in the Americas creates a “cosmic race.”¹³⁴ Within the piece, Vasconcelos’s notion of “the cosmic race” is emblematic of a reimagined past and a hopeful future, both of which rely on a perhaps overly utopian notion of hybridity as survival, hybridity as

¹³⁴ Vasconcelos’ notion of mestizaje was integral to the Mexican nationalist project of the early 20th century. In positioning the mestizo as the ideal national subject, the indigenous element of this hereditary mix was implicitly negated. Anzaldúa’s use of the notion of mestizaje has been critiqued by indigenous scholars for this reason. See José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race/La Raza Cósmica: A Bilingual Edition with an Introduction and Notes.*, ed. Didier T. Jaén (Los Angeles: Pace Publications, 1979).

resistance. Otalvaro-Hormillosa's use of the terms "cosmic blood" and "mestizaje" implicitly references Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "mestiza consciousness." In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa quotes Jack Forbes in her discussion of Jose Vasconcelos's notion of "the cosmic race,"

'Jose Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher, envisaged una raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color – la primera raza sintesis del globo. He called it a cosmic race, la raza cosmica, a fifth race embracing the four major races of the world.' Opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan, and to the policy of racial purity that white America practices, his theory is one of inclusivity. At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an "alien" consciousness is presently in the making – a new mestiza consciousness, una consciencia de mujer. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands (Forbes cited in Anzaldúa 99 my emphasis).

Anzaldúa utilizes the metaphor of racial/blood mixing in her positing of a feminist, queer understanding of belonging in relation to race and ethnicity. While invoking corporeal metaphors of blood and genes, Anzaldúa's notion of mixing occurs not at the level of the corporeal, but rather, at the level of consciousness. A "mestiza consciousness" relates less to biologist notions of blood/genetic mixing and more to an understanding of subjectivity, and of belonging, that foregrounds queer sexuality as a destabilizing site, one that unfixes stable notions of race or ethnicity. Otalvaro-Hormillosa implicitly draws on Anzaldúa's notion of "mestiza consciousness" in her use of queer sexuality as a deconstructive lever for unfixing the overdetermined

relationship between gender, nation, and belonging. Resisting masculinist and heteronormative cultural nationalist formations, Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" proposes a different mode of belonging, one that resists the trope of woman as a maternal figure for the nation. Anzaldúa states,

As mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races)...I am participating in the creation of yet another culture; a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet (Anzaldúa 102 emphasis mine).

Here Anzaldúa proposes a mode of belonging that produces different narratives of ethnic or national belonging. Anzaldúa's notion of "mestiza consciousness" is one that foregrounds queer sexuality as a destabilizing intervention into cultural nationalist modes of collectivity constituted by masculinist and heteronormative understandings of the relationship between race, ethnicity, kinship, and nation. In doing so, Anzaldúa creates the possibility for other origin stories.

Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" is a more theoretically specific notion of mixing than the more generalized notion of hybridity. A term that has been mobilized by many postcolonial and diaspora theorists, hybridity is a dominant model for understanding postcolonial subjectivity (Bhabha; Muñoz; Clifford). Embedded as it is within racialized discourses of eugenics and miscegenation, hybridity is a problematic metaphor for theorizing alternative relationships between corporeal

difference, bodies, and belonging. Alternatively, concepts such as “mestiza consciousness” and Jose Muñoz’s “queer hybridity” foreground the constitutive role of queer sexuality in destabilizing notions of difference and belonging in the postcolonial/neocolonial present. Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness” and Muñoz’s “queer hybridity” allow for a deconstruction of the binaries produced both by cultural nationalist modes of belonging and paradigms of the colonizer/colonized. Refusing the cultural nationalist paradigms which conflate women with nation, and subsequently reify the colonizer/colonized distinction, Anzaldúa calls for a “border consciousness” that remains attentive to postcolonial subjectivities produced across the interstitial spaces between race, nation, gender, and sexuality. The diasporic subjects that I discuss in this dissertation – such as Joey, the queer diasporic nationalist, and the Mail Order Brides, who perform an inauthentic version of gendered Filipino ethnicity – inhabit similar interstitial spaces. In contrast to teleological narratives of belonging, Anzaldúa calls for other origin stories, beyond the heteronormative framework of kinship, which position women as the (re)producers of a stable national culture. *Cosmic Blood* is another kind of origin story, one that reimagines the colonial past through queer desire, while presenting a future in which alternative modes of kinship and belonging can exist.

Although not explicitly in conversation with Anzaldúa’s notion of a “mestiza consciousness,” Jose Muñoz’s discussion of queer hybridity is useful in conceptualizing the relationship between queer sexuality and the postcolonial subject. Muñoz juxtaposes the terms “queer” and “hybridity” not to essentialize the meanings

of either term, but rather to suggest that the combination of “queer hybridity” can function as a matrix of understanding for unfixed or unstable identity formations. Muñoz states, “The important point here is that identity practices like queerness and hybridity are not a priori sites of contestation but, instead, spaces of productivity where identity’s fragmentary nature is accepted and negotiated” (Muñoz 85). Muñoz posits the notion of *disidentification* as a performative mode of resisting the interpellating call of race and ethnicity issued by dominant discourses of multiculturalism in the U.S. (Muñoz 166). Within a dominant discourse of multiculturalism in the U.S., racial and ethnic differences are “celebrated” while a white dominant culture is reaffirmed as the norm. The notion of “celebrating difference” buttresses a racial hierarchy in the U.S. in which a white cultural norm is validated, while ethnic and racial difference is reduced to banal stereotypes, as well as commodities to be consumed. In contrast, Muñoz’s notion of disidentification involves not a reformulation of identity, but rather a rejection of the very discourses through which a dominant U.S. multiculturalism interpellates racialized and ethnic subjects (Muñoz 166). Muñoz understands queer hybridity as a performative act of disidentification with dominant discourses of race, nation, and belonging. He states,

Thus to perform queerness is to constantly disidentify; to constantly find oneself thriving on sites where meaning does not properly “line up.” This is equally true of hybridity, another modality where meaning or identifications do not properly line up. The postcolonial hybrid is a subject whose identity practices are structured around an ambivalent relationship to the signs of empire and the signs of “Native,” a subject who occupies a space between the West and the rest (Muñoz 84).

In relating queer performative practices of disidentification to postcolonial subjectivity, Muñoz presents a productive framework for understanding Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa's *Cosmic Blood*. Through both her video images and her performance, Otalvaro-Hormillosa conceptualizes queer sexuality as a mode of destabilizing the colonizer/colonized paradigm and cultural nationalist models of conflating race and ethnicity with belonging. Her presentation of the visual images of queer bodies and queer sex could be considered a performative act of disidentification, in Jose Muñoz's sense of the term. The desiring Filipina subject is central to this figuring of queer desire as a mode of disidentification towards colonialist modes of reading corporeal difference on racialized and gendered bodies. Further, *Cosmic Blood* presents a *resignification* of the signs of Native and Empire, framed within a lens of queer desire. These visual images — the naked Filipina woman standing on a beach, the macho, yet androgynous, conquistador figure, the “girl with tail in her ass” — reenact and resignify colonial relations of power through an eroticized same sex desire. Their struggles, to both recognize and dominate each other, are represented through the visual images of the video art projected on screen, and through the dialogue and movement on stage. In “El Otro Encuentro: A Neo-Queer Precolonial Imagining,” Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents a reimagining of the first meeting of “African” and “Native” peoples. Here Otalvaro-Hormillosa imagines an alternative mode for colonized peoples to recognize each other, one that is fundamentally shaped by queer desire. This imagining of a different kind of first

contact rejects the overdetermined discourse of colonial visuality by presenting queer, colored bodies that exceed the taxonomizing imperative of colonial visual regimes.

Cosmic Blood in the Moment of Global Capitalism

Within the contemporary context of global capitalism, perhaps we can shift our analysis to an understanding of how Otalvaro-Hormillosa's project might present a possibility of resisting global capital's modes of racial and ethnic interpellation, which produce certain bodies as racialized and gendered subjects in relation to labor. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Rey Chow introduces the notion of ethnic interpellation, in which a dominant capitalist discourse interpellates ethnic subjects as racialized laborers in relationship to global capitalism (Chow 108). The discourse of ethnic interpellation, imbricated in a history of colonization, forces the ethnic subject to continuously perform ethnicity as a mode of being recognized as human (Chow 30). This interpellating discourse of ethnicity is almost always a discourse of corporeal difference; indeed, ethnicity, like race, functions as a discourse which makes certain bodies legible to capital. While Chow argues that the notion of ethnicity can be distinguished from the biologism of race, in that the notion of ethnicity is situated within the realms of culture and representation, I would argue that both ethnicity and race operate as modes of inscribing corporeal difference on the body. Both race and ethnicity function as codes that make bodies *recognizable* to capital.

Chow discusses ethnicity as a technology of visual recognition. In her discussion of John Berger's analysis of public zoos as imperial establishments, Chow states, "What is particularly memorable about Berger's account is its visual emphasis, *its understanding that marginalized existence is a relation of visibility, that is, a relation of the coded manners in which one is being imaged*" (Chow 96, emphasis mine). Within Berger's example of the visual recognition of zoo animals as specific to their displacement in the context of the confines of the zoo, Chow draws a parallel to the postcolonial ethnic subject. Already placed in a context of displacement, the gaze towards the postcolonial ethnic subject is one that is necessarily "out of focus" (Chow 97). That is, like the zoo animals, an understanding of how ethnic bodies are recognized must take into account the "out of focus-ness" of the imperial/colonial gaze, what Chow terms the "relation of the coded manners in which one is being imaged" (96). In *Cosmic Blood*, Otaño-Hormillosa calls attention to the visual codes through which the race, ethnicity, and gender of her body are made legible. Humorously referencing the different modes of ethnic identity that she is compelled to inhabit, Otaño-Hormillosa calls attention to the very process of performing ethnicity, what Rey Chow terms "coercive mimeticism" (107). Ethnic and racialized subjects are forced to continuously perform an authentic or essential ethnic identity within the visual technology of difference in a white global capitalist system. As Chow states,

The ethnic person is expected to come to resemble what is recognizably ethnic...a process (identitarian, existential, cultural, or textual) in which those who are marginal to mainstream Western culture are expected...to resemble and replicate the very banal preconceptions that have been appended to them, a process in which they are expected to *objectify themselves* in accordance with the *already seen* and thus to authenticate the familiar imagings of them as ethnics (107, emphasis mine).

From Otalvaro-Hormillosa's "girl with the tail in her ass" to Fuentes' fictional Igorot grandfather, both artists point to the workings of coercive mimeticism in the imaging of the Filipino body within U.S. imperialist discourse *and* discourses of contemporary global capitalism. Otalvaro-Hormillosa's bodily performances of the different ethnic identities that she is compelled to occupy reveal the functioning of coercive mimeticism required by processes of ethnic interpellation. Within a context of global capital, the relationship of ethnic/racialized subjects to bodies is produced through a relationship to different forms of labor.¹³⁵ In the contemporary context of the multicultural San Francisco Bay Area, Otalvaro-Hormillosa's queer, mixed-race body is interpellated into a variety of ethnic and gender categories. Indeed, she hails these ethnic and gender categories in her performance. In a humorous monologue, Otalvaro-Hormillosa describes the shifting codes through which her queer, mixed-race body is read — "petite Oriental girl" and "macho/a oversexualized Hispanic -- whoops, I mean Latino!" — in doing so, she foregrounds the functioning of ethnic

¹³⁵ As I argue later in this essay (in my discussion of Neferti Tadiar's work) the relationship of racialized and gendered subjects (and bodies) to specific modes of labor, engendered by processes of global capitalism, is exemplified in the transnational body of the Filipina domestic helper.

interpellation within U.S. discourses of racial formation. Reversing the gaze through which ethnicity is produced as a visual technology of making difference legible on bodies, *Cosmic Blood* implicitly critiques the ethnic interpellation required of racialized subjects within the multicultural context of the U.S. Further, *Cosmic Blood* foregrounds the discursive power of such discourses of ethnic interpellation in producing popular understandings of Filipina bodies — whether as “mail order brides” or domestic helpers.

Although she occupies a vastly different social location from Filipinas working as domestic helpers or sex workers, as a middle class Colombian/Filipina American in the U.S., nonetheless Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s work intervenes in a global capitalist logic which constructs Filipina bodies in relation to gendered forms of domestic and sexual labor. While *Cosmic Blood* may not present a material intervention into such processes of global capital, the piece exposes the workings of dominant capitalist ideology, and presents an imaginative and performative vision of an alternative future. It is this very utopian imaginary which is necessary to dismantle a dominant capitalist logic of bodies, difference, and Value. Rather than performing an essentialized or authentic ethnic identity, a legacy of discourses of imperialism and an effect of contemporary discourses of global capitalism, Otalvaro-Hormillosa points to the constructed and coercive nature of this unidirectional gaze. Much like Judith Butler’s discussion of the way in which drag calls attention to the constructedness of the heteronormative gender binary, *Cosmic Blood* demonstrates the coercive nature of ethnic interpellation (Butler). In doing so, *Cosmic Blood*

functions as a form of disidentification with the dominant discourses through which gendered and racialized Filipina bodies are constructed in relation to sexual and domestic labor in a global capitalist system.

Bodies, Labor, Value

In her essay “Domestic Bodies,” Neferti Tadiar discusses the racializing discourses through which corporeal difference is made legible on Filipina bodies, within a context of global capitalism. Here racial and gender difference become the basis for determining which bodies are considered human. Tadiar describes Filipina domestic helpers as “bodies without subjectivity; that is, corporeal objects at the mercy and for the pleasure of those who buy them from the recruitment agency” (Tadiar 104). For Tadiar, the corporeality of the body is objectified as a commodity, while the subjectivity of these women is foreclosed. In the case of Filipina domestic helpers, it is their very corporeality that is sold. As Tadiar states, “Domestic helpers are paid not for a specific skill but *rather for their gendered bodies* – for their embodiment of a variety of functions and services which they are expected to provide at the beck and call of their employers” (Tadiar 104, emphasis mine). In referring to the racializing discourses which situate poor women from countries such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and other “still-not-industrializing” countries, as domestic helpers, Tadiar states,

We are apprehending a process of racialization that has not congealed into a fully-developed discourse of “race.”...The physical as well as verbal practices inscribing domestic helpers’ bodies as other and less than human... are in this moment inchoate and unsystematic. They cannot be said to be acts of branding “race” in any prior sense of a phenotypically-identifiable people, to the extent that they are as much acts of denial of gender, class and sexual sameness (or threat of equivalence within global terms) as acts of “racial” marking of deviation from any particular norm (Tadiar 106).

Tadiar describes a racializing discourse that relies on both bodily and verbal markers of difference for the foundation of an international division of labor. This racializing discourse relies both on bodily markers of difference and a denial of sameness in order to function. From the perspective of their employers, the subjectivity of this class of poor women from the global South is constituted only in relation to their ability to provide labor-power through the functioning of their bodies. Indeed, these women exist not as subjects, but as corporeal providers of labor-power. The commodification of the bodies of Filipina domestic helpers is perhaps one of the most visible examples of the relationship between racialized and gendered bodies and subjectivity produced by a dominant global capitalist logic.

This logic, which functions as a visual discourse for making racial and gender difference legible on the body, is also apparent in the visual economy of the Internet. As Rodriguez and Gonzalez show in their discussion of Filipina bodies online, racial and gender difference are reified in the commodified body of the Filipina woman (Rodriguez and Gonzalez 220). Whether as domestic helpers, “mail order brides”, or

sex workers, the images of Filipina women online present a subject whose bodily markers of difference — race/ethnicity and gender — are reified in their very corporeality. The multiplicity of tasks that their brown, female bodies provide — whether sexual and/or domestic labor — is objectified in their existence as bodies for sale. Here the dominant logic of global capitalism produces a relationship between bodies and subjects in which subjectivity is often foreclosed, while the very materiality of the body becomes the source of labor power and consequently, of Value. Functioning as providers of labor-power, and thus a source of Value, Filipina women function within a global capitalist imaginary as “bodies without subjectivity.” As forms of cultural production which reveal and reverse the imperial gaze, while contesting the dominant visual economy of global capitalism, *Cosmic Blood* and *Bontoc Eulogy* suggest an alternative relationship between Filipino/a bodies, difference, and Value.

Filipina domestic helpers function as the embodied Value of labor-power. That is, the Filipina DH functions as the embodiment of Value; they are themselves commodities (Tadiar 104). Not free to sell their own labor power (because they function as labor power in itself), domestic helpers are, in effect, slaves. Tadiar describes this condition of labor as “new industrial slavery” (Tadiar 105). Filipina women (and other women of the global South) are produced as domestic workers by a racializing and gendering discourse which produces its non-subjects as less than human. This dominant discourse produces transient labor for global capital. Within this framework, the Filipina domestic helper not only produces surplus value, she *is*

surplus value, at least in the eyes of her employers (Tadiar 106). Simultaneously, her body is coded as without value (except in its ability to provide labor-power) due to the inscription of racial and gender difference upon the materiality of her body. This inscription of difference on her body forecloses the possibility of her subjectivity; she is a corporeal commodity that exists as the very embodiment of surplus-value. If the Filipina DH possesses subjectivity, it is not in the sense of the “free” subject. That is, the Filipina DH is not “free” to sell her labor-power; she *is* labor-power, and consequently, represents an endless supply of surplus-value for her employer.

Bodies as “Vehicles for Liberation”

In *Cosmic Blood*, Otalvaro-Hormillosa suggests another mode of recognition for colonized subjects, a different relationship of selves to bodies, one that can exceed the material and discursive paradigms which overdetermine Filipinas as “bodies without subjectivity.” In the contemporary moment, *Cosmic Blood* presents the possibility of a mode of subjectivity for Filipina women, which emerges from their own desire, rather than the use-value of their corporeal bodies. A reimagined relationship between subjectivity, bodies, and desire is crucial to this vision of Filipina subjectivity. In his essay “Art and Revolution,” Herbert Marcuse foregrounds the significance of the experiences of the body as crucial to imagining relationships outside of capitalist logic; bodies can function as “vehicles of liberation,” rather than tools for maintaining “a self-propelling, profitable, and mutilating productivity” (Marcuse 82). Similarly, Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s *Cosmic*

Blood suggests an understanding of the body that disrupts the capitalist logic which equates bodies with exchange value. This reconceptualization of bodies as the “vehicles of liberation” requires the possibility of subjects whose bodies are not simply the vehicles for labor power, as a dominant capitalist logic would imply. Desire (both bodily and psychic) is crucial to this understanding of subjectivity. In *Cosmic Blood*, queer desire functions as the deconstructive lever for prying apart the overdetermined relationship of Filipina bodies to their foreclosed subjectivity under global capitalism. By presenting the possibilities for subjectivity, indeed for humanity, outside of the exchange value of the corporeal, *Cosmic Blood* presents the possibility for another corporeal logic.¹³⁶ In this anti-capitalist mode of producing humanity, Value is not equated with corporeal labor-power. Instead, desire serves as a mode of recognition. The mode of recognition suggested by *Cosmic Blood* contests both the colonial visual paradigms through which the colonized body is imaged, as well as a contemporary U.S. multiculturalist discourse which interpellates Filipina subjects in relation to corporeal modes of labor. In doing so, *Cosmic Blood* allows for the possibility of desire as a mode of recognizing each other’s humanity.

¹³⁶ Marcuse attributes art with the potential of producing counter-imaginings to capitalism, “The inner logic of the work of art terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions.” See Marcuse, Herbert. *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. Toronto: Beacon Press, 1978, p.7.

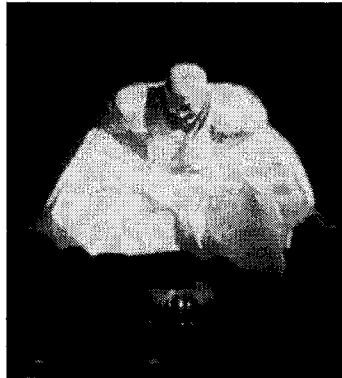
The Cyborg Body: Imagining Other Modes of (Trans)national Belonging

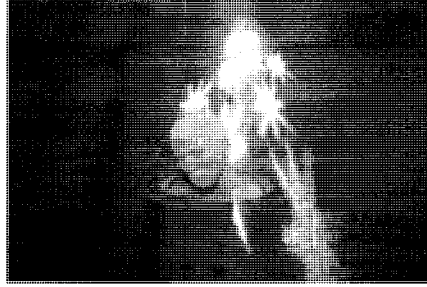
Shifting from the organic bodies of humanity to a mechanical/alien hybrid, the performance ends with Otalvaro-Hormillosa as a cyborg figure. Instead of returning to the colonial past, this scene presents a cyborg future. The scene begins with the following text on the video screen, “Beginnings of Endings,” accompanied by Otalvaro-Hormillosa stating,

“Blood
Dispersion
Thought
Time
And
Space
Hybridization as survival”

The next video scene is an animated image of a spaceship arriving on the surface of a planet, followed by the text, “Mestiza from Another Planet.” The following video scene is a close up of Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s shaved head, her entire face and scalp painted blue. Her face undergoes multiple contortions, eyes shifting back and forth in robotic, jerky movements, while mechanical noises can be heard in the background. On stage, Otalvaro-Hormillosa has transformed into an alien creature inside the huge gourd, which has been stripped of its walls and now only exists as a skeleton. The new blue alien version of Otalvaro-Hormillosa is constituted by the performer’s shaved blue head atop a compact body draped in white cloth, with a mechanical motorized contraption for “legs” and a white fur tail. With jerky, robotic movements, the blue alien travels across the stage, transported by the wheels of its mechanical

bottom half. At first the blue alien appears limbless, but later it raises its “wings,” made of shiny, metal rods. The slow, shaking movements with which the blue alien raises its “wings” seems to be a process of growth, an expansion accompanied by the facial contortions of Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s blue alien/robot creature. The last scene of *Cosmic Blood* is a dark stage with a spotlight on a hole in the floor of the stage, through which the blue alien creature’s head protrudes. The head slowly raises and lowers through the hole in the stage, as Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s face contorts. Is this pain? Growth? Transformation? The final scene then ends with words from *Parable of the Sower*, a science fiction novel by African American writer Octavia Butler, “The destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars.”





Beginning with the words “Mestiza from Another Planet,” this scene analogizes European colonization to the colonization of other planets, a move that situates Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s retroping of the past in a science fictional mode. This science fictional mode is the basis for Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s imagining of the future, one in which hybridization is a means of survival. Beginning her performance with the words “God is change...Change is God,”¹³⁷ Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa frames *Cosmic Blood* as a response to Octavia Butler’s science fiction novel *Parable of the Sower*. Throughout the performance, Otalvaro-Hormillosa references the words of the character Lauren Olamina, the African American prophet and leader of the multiracial collective called Earthseed, described in *Parable of the Sower*. In the context of a post-apocalyptic United States, the members of Earthseed gather around their shared beliefs that “God is change;” that is, the only higher power to which one can pledge one’s faith is to the inevitability of change, and to the necessity of adapting to one’s surroundings. The novel is set in the year 2025 in a town close to

¹³⁷ The phrase “God is change...Change is God”, is a central tenet of the belief system upon which the collective Earthseed is founded in Octavia Butler’s novel *Parable of the Sower*.

Los Angeles. The context is one of urban violence and decay, in which few people have access to food, water, or shelter, and the material infrastructure is deteriorating or nonexistent. Few people drive cars, as there is no more fuel, water is expensive, and the few people who can afford homes lived in walled off communities. Diseases such as cholera and measles have become epidemics, as few people have access to clean water or health care. Arson, murder, mutilation, and robbery are the everyday risks of survival. Within this dystopic setting, Lauren Olamina's collective, Earthseed, views change and adaptation as the only means of survival. As part of their beliefs, Earthseed idealizes space travel as the only path of redemption for the human race. Implicit in Octavia Butler's description of Earthseed is both an affirmation of the need to transcend race in the post-apocalyptic order, and a statement about the pervasiveness of race in all social contexts. Here, racial integration is required for survival. Through her reference to *Parable of the Sower*, Otaño-Hormillosa reiterates the theme of hybridity and racial integration as necessary for survival in the postcolonial present. In referencing Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Otaño-Hormillosa reiterates the necessity of hybridity to a vision of the future that can exceed colonial taxonomies of difference. In this utopian/dystopic vision of the future, one must adapt and become hybrid in order to survive and flourish. A multiracial coalitional politics, not a transcendence of race, must develop in order for the human race to survive the apocalypse.

Repeating Earthseed's belief in the necessity of adaptation, Otaño-Hormillosa's blue alien creature is the physical manifestation of the hybridity she

posits as both a necessity for survival and a site of subversive potential. Otalvaro-Hormillosa's transformation to the blue alien robot creature forces a shift in the audience's perception of the performer's body. This is both a shift in embodiment, and a foregrounding of the body of the colonized as the ground upon which struggles between colonizer/colonized take place. The overt bodily presence of the previous scenes, of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's writhing form draped in fur, and of the naked forms of Filipino, African American, and Latino women and men struggling/engaging in sexual acts in the video scenes shifts to the forced disembodiment of the blue alien's robotic form, whose only movement is propelled by the obviously motorized nature of its "body." The science fictional site of the future, represented through the blue alien robot, is the utopian site of possibility, where hybridity is represented both by bodily pain, through the metaphor of birth and sexual violence, and by the disembodiment of the transformation from human to machine. In this sense, the historical narrative of colonization is retroped through the imagining of a *disembodied* future – a future that produces an alternative relationship of selves to bodies.

Cosmic Blood can be understood within a larger context of Surrealism, which emphasized practices of imagination in the service of radical social change. In Robin Kelley's *Freedom Dreams*, Kelley describes Afrofuturism as the Surrealist practice of imagining a different future through a reimagining of the past (Kelley). Perhaps one of the most idealistic of utopian artistic movements, Surrealism sought to create a

different world through practices of imagination. According to the Chicago Surrealist Group,

Surrealism is the exaltation of freedom, revolt, imagination, and love...Its basic aim is to lessen and eventually to completely *resolve the contradiction between everyday life and our wildest dreams*. By definition subversive, surrealist thought and action are intended not only to discredit and destroy the forces of repression, but also to *emancipate desire* and supply it with new poetic weapons...Beginning with the abolition of imaginative slavery, it advances to the creation of a free society in which everyone will be a poet – a society in which everyone will be able to develop his or her potentialities fully and freely (Chicago Surrealist Group cited in Kelley 5 emphasis mine).

Kelley links the futurist mode of such popular musicians as Sun-Ra to Surrealist art, describing both as utopian practices that produce counter-imaginings, alternative visions of the future that escape the material conditions of the present. Afrofuturism accomplished this through a reimagining of the past in a futuristic mode. Linking the music of Sun-Ra to the “Back to Africa” movement, Kelley describes Sun Ra and his band, the Arkestra, modeled after Sun Ra’s idea of an intergalactic Ark that could return to Egypt through the metaphor of outer space. Sun Ra and other proponents of Afrofuturism “looked backward in order to look forward, finding the cosmos by way of ancient Egypt” (Kelley 31). In this way, a science fictional/futuristic mode functions as a Surrealist intervention in the present, a way to both critique and go beyond the material conditions of the present. In discussing the Afrofuturism of Sun-Ra, Kelley states, “At the heart of Sun-Ra’s vision was the notion of alter/destiny -- the idea that through the creation of new myths we have the power to redirect the

future" (Kelley 31). Otalvaro-Hormillosa's *Cosmic Blood* accomplishes a similar goal of creating new origin stories – reimagining the colonial past in order to envision a different future. As a practice of imagining that retroposes the past in order to posit a more hopeful, and perhaps revolutionary, future, *Cosmic Blood* employs the metaphors of intergalactic travel and cyborg transformation to reimagine a different relationship of the body of the colonized – specifically of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's mixed race, queer, Filipina-Colombian body – to a history of colonization and forced assimilation. Thus, the cyborg body of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's blue alien/robot becomes a corporeal manifestation of hybridity as a means of survival. A literal mix of the corporeal and the machine, Otalvaro-Hormillosa's blue, mechanized body is a science fictional mode of imagining “hybridity as creation, as destruction, as transformation” (Otalvaro-Hormillosa). Much like Sun Ra's notion of the Ark as a means of returning to both the past and to an alternative future, *Cosmic Blood* functions as a Surrealist intervention into the reality of everyday life, in which subjects are shaped by multiple histories of colonization and forced assimilation.

According to Kelley,

Surrealism recognizes that any revolution must begin with thought, with how we imagine a New World, with how we reconstruct our social and individual relationships, with unleashing our desire and building a new future on the basis of love and creativity rather than rationality” (Kelley 193).

In this sense, *Cosmic Blood* can be understood as a type of Surrealist, futurist longing, one that retroposes the past in order to imagine an alternative future — a future in which

the queer, racialized body of the Filipina possesses subjectivity outside of the logic of global capitalism. Within the logic of global capitalism, which is both an effect and extension of colonial taxonomies of difference, the Filipina body is commodified for the sexual and domestic labor that her brown body provides. In a global economy that is bolstered by gendered forms of migrant labor from the Philippines, the Filipina body is both commodified for her corporeal labor, while also rendered as a racial and ethnic Other.

As a Surrealist intervention into both the legacy of colonial difference and the everyday logic of contemporary capitalism, *Cosmic Blood* imagines other modes of subjectivity for Filipina women. Otalvaro-Hormillosa's shift to the blue, alien robot in the last scene of *Cosmic Blood* can be understood as a forced shift in the perception/recognition of embodiment. This shift in modes of recognition destabilizes the codes of racial, sexual, and gender difference that are inscribed onto the performer's (human) body. Rather than existing as the "petite Oriental girl" or "macho/a oversexualized Latino," Otalvaro-Hormillosa forces the audience to perceive her transformed body, one that is no longer anchored by the organic materiality of a human body, but rather exists as a hybrid, cyborg body. Here the codes of race, gender, and sexuality become blurry. In the realm of the surreal, the cyborg body allows for a recoding of racial and gender difference. *Cosmic Blood* can then be understood as an act of disidentification, in Munoz's sense of the term — a performative and imaginative act through which subjects resist the interpellating call

of race and ethnicity issued by both U.S. multiculturalism, as well as broader discourses of global capitalism.

Another Transnational Imagination, Other Origin Stories

In Otalvaro-Hormillosa's theorization of belonging, blood serves as both solvent and coagulant. Throughout the performance, blood serves as a metaphor for belonging, kinship, mixing. It is through the biological metaphor of blood mixing that Otalvaro-Hormillosa imagines a different past and future. Invoking Vasconcelos's notion of "the cosmic race" through the title of the piece, *Cosmic Blood*, Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents other forms of belonging that escape the solitary and cohesive boundaries of race and ethnicity.¹³⁸ Historically, blood has served as a biological referent for racial difference. A result of biological discourses which have solidified racial difference in the materiality of the body, blood is pervasive as a marker of difference, kinship, and belonging. In her juxtaposition of "cosmic" with "blood," Otalvaro-Hormillosa utilizes a science fictional mode to re-trope the meanings of "blood." This juxtaposition shifts the meaning of "blood" from the level of the flesh to the ethereal nature of the "cosmic," that which is not rooted in the material reality of the ground, but rather exists in the stars. In doing so, this juxtaposition unfixes the biologism of "blood." The ambiguous biologism suggested by Otalvaro-Hormillosa's use of the term "blood" is partially reflected by the

¹³⁸ See footnote 3 for a discussion of the problematics of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's and Anzaldúa's citation of Vasconcelos.

performer's shift in embodiment, from her ambiguously gendered, racially mixed, Filipina-Colombian body to that of the blue alien robot — a shift from the organic to the non-human realm of the mechanical. Does this shift — from the biological fleshiness of the human body to a partially inorganic, alien hybrid — destabilize the corporeal materiality of “blood”? Otalvaro-Hormillosa's notion of “cosmic blood” can be understood as an attempt to transcend the organic, biological meanings of the term “blood,” rooted as they are in discourses of miscegenation and eugenics.

What are other possibilities for conceptualizing difference and belonging, in relation to bodies? Donna Haraway calls for a mode of belonging that exceeds the framework of kinship,

I am sick to death of bonding through kinship and “the family,” and I long for models of solidarity and human unity and difference rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, *intractable collective pain*, inescapable mortality, and *persistent hope*. It is time to theorize an “unfamiliar” unconscious, a different primal scene, where everything does not stem from the drama of identity and reproduction. Ties through blood — including blood recast in the coin of genes and information — have been bloody enough already. I believe that there will be no racial or sexual peace, no livable nature, *until we learn to produce humanity through something more and less than kinship* (265, emphasis mine).

Drawing on Haraway's call for another mode of imagining belonging, *Cosmic Blood* can be understood as a different story of origins, one that exceeds the teleological framework of “the family.” As such, *Cosmic Blood* also functions as a critique of dominant cultural nationalist modes of belonging, which present a heteronormative

model of kinship as the organizing model for community. Indeed, *Cosmic Blood* challenges the teleological narratives of origins produced by such cultural nationalist formations. Further, *Cosmic Blood* presents the Filipina body as a *desiring subject*; it is through desire that *Cosmic Blood* imagines another mode of subjectivity for Filipina women, as well as a mode of humanity, that exists in opposition to the logic of global capitalism. Marcuse's call for bodies as "vehicles of liberation," not sources of a "mutilating productivity," suggest a form of bodily and psychic desire that exceeds the overdetermined construction of the Filipina body as a source of labor.

Similarly to how the juxtaposition of "cosmic" with "blood" unfixes the biologism of blood as a metaphor for belonging, perhaps Otalvaro-Hormillosa's cyborg body can serve as a provisional figure for other modes of diasporic belonging.¹³⁹ Awkward and uncomfortable in its "skin," the blue alien robot nonetheless functions as a figure for *mestizaje* that suggests modes of belonging that exceed normative gender and racial inscriptions, which are both legacies of colonial taxonomies of difference, as well as effects of global capitalist logic. I foreground a dominant capitalist logic that produces Filipina bodies as racialized and gendered commodities — as "bodies without subjectivity"¹⁴⁰ — as the *discursive and material*

¹³⁹ Thank you to Andrew Wegley for suggesting the use of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's cyborg body as a provisional figure for other modes of transnational belonging.

¹⁴⁰ Neferti Tadiar describes Filipina domestic helpers as "bodies without subjectivity". While Filipina DHs are commodified for the corporeal labor they provide within a global capitalist economy, their subjectivity is foreclosed due to the non-recognition of their humanity. See Neferti Tadiar, *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences in the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).

context in which modes of transnational or diasporic belonging are articulated. Given the national Philippine uproar following the execution of Filipina OCW Flor Contemplacion, it is clear that the gendered Filipina body continues to function as an ambivalent figure for both the Philippine nation and the Filipino diaspora.¹⁴¹ With this material context in mind, *Cosmic Blood* can be understood as a performative intervention into gendered and heteronormative modes of representing the nation in the diaspora. Rather than presenting the gendered Filipina body as a sign of national or diasporic belonging, the figure of the Filipina in *Cosmic Blood* is presented as a desiring subject. Through her queer desire, other modes of collectivity and belonging can be imagined that exceed the tropes of kinship inherent to masculinist and heteronormative formations of national belonging. The blue cyborg figure functions as the embodiment of the hybrid, queer belonging that Otalvaro-Hormillosa suggests.

Otalvaro-Hormillosa's cyborg body also serves as a provisional figure for Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness." Like Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, *Cosmic Blood* suggests that queer sexuality destabilizes the masculinism and heteronormativity inherent to both Filipino American cultural nationalism and the Filipino diasporic nationalisms. However, queer sexuality is *not* a liberatory site in *Cosmic Blood*, but rather, a site in which queer subjects negotiate tumultuous histories of sexual violence, domination, and desire. The vision presented in *Cosmic Blood* is not a multicultural utopia of racial and ethnic harmony, but rather, a form of belonging and coalition that is always already fraught with difference. Despite these differences,

¹⁴¹ See my discussion of the execution of *Flor Contemplacion* in Chapter Three.

common experiences of historical trauma and shared political goals shape the collectivity suggested in *Cosmic Blood*. In doing so, the queer diasporic imagination presented in *Cosmic Blood* resists teleological narratives of kinship and blood as belonging.

Cosmic Blood calls attention to the processes through which bodies are disciplined and constricted by dominant discourses of corporeal difference, a legacy of both colonial and contemporary capitalist visual regimes of imaging the colonized body. As a form of belonging that invokes a common ethnicity or shared nation of origin, the trope of diaspora is one that both resists a dominant discourse of ethnicity and is complicit in the perpetuation of absolutist notions of ethnic identity.¹⁴² In contrast, Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" allows for a reworking of a normative transnational imagination – more simply put, these ideas allow for the possibility of queer diasporas to emerge. Here I use the term "queer diaspora" not to essentialize a mode of transnational belonging that relies on a fixed notion of queerness as identity, but rather one that foregrounds an understanding of queer sexuality as an intervention into heteronormative cultural nationalist modes of imagining a diaspora.

By locating *Cosmic Blood* in relation to the cultural production of African American novelist Octavia Butler and Chicana cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, Otalvaro-Hormillosa positions *Cosmic Blood* as a response to multiple ethnic and

¹⁴² Ian Ang discusses the tendency for notions of diaspora to reify absolutist notions of racial and ethnic identity. See Ian Ang, "Indonesia on My Mind: Diaspora, the Internet and the Struggle for Hybridity," in *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West* (New York: Routledge, 2001). See my discussion of the limits and progressive potential of the nation and diaspora as conceptual frameworks in the introduction to this dissertation.

racial communities in the U.S. As such, *Cosmic Blood* reveals a longing for multiracial collectivity, as well as a critique of U.S. multiculturalism's imperative of coercive mimeticism. Otalvaro-Hormillosa foregrounds the experiences of the queer, colonized body as a mode of invoking collectivity across racial and ethnic differences, while not negating the specific histories of colonized subjects. *Cosmic Blood* presents another kind of origin story, a different mythology that can serve as the basis for queer (in the most capacious sense of the term) modes of diasporic belonging. Rather than establishing a familial narrative of kinship, *Cosmic Blood* recognizes commonality in shared pain, historical trauma, resistance, and desire. Much like Donna Haraway's call for a different mode of belonging, one that transcends the "family drama" of race, genetics, kinship, and biology, *Cosmic Blood* imagines a form of transnational belonging rooted less in fixed notions of ethnic nationality, and more—in Haraway's words—in "partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope" (Haraway 265). Hope is fundamental to the vision presented within *Cosmic Blood*—hope for survival, despite the genocide and sexual violence of a history of colonization. In this reimagining of the past, Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa answers Gloria Anzaldúa's call for a "a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet" (Anzaldúa 102). The transnational imagination presented in *Cosmic Blood* suggests a mode of belonging that resonates throughout the experiences of other racialized queer subjects. In doing so, *Cosmic Blood* suggests a kind of transnational imagination in

which commonality and kinship is imagined across racial and ethnic boundaries. Within the multiracial context of the U.S., this transnational imagination would include the development of a coalitional politics among minoritized subjects, calling on shared history of historical trauma and contemporary experiences of domination and subjugation as the basis for collectivity. Such a utopian vision is both a critique of contemporary Filipino American cultural politics, and a call for imagining a different kind of coalitional politics through modes of belonging beyond the nation. Through *Cosmic Blood*, Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents another logic, one in which Filipina bodies do more than labor – but rather, hope, dream, and desire.

Towards a Utopian Diasporic Politics

Cosmic Blood presents a fundamental shift in the terrain of Filipino American cultural politics that is crucial to the vision of this dissertation. Similar to *Cosmic Blood*, this dissertation introduces an analysis of the politics of gender and sexuality into hegemonic understandings of the nation, nationalisms, and the diaspora. Moving beyond discourses of cultural nationalism, this project aims to re-imagine forms of belonging (both through and beyond the nation), and to re-figure the Filipina body beyond the trope of woman as nation. Through my research, I explore how a range of nationalisms and (trans)nationalisms across the Filipino diaspora – Filipino American cultural nationalism, diasporic nationalism, revolutionary nationalism, nationalist feminisms, and transnational feminisms – negotiate the politics of representing the gendered and sexualized Philippine nation. Filipino American

diasporic cultural production, including film, video, performance, heritage language programs, and the Internet, are key sites of inquiry for examining the gendered and sexualized tropes of nation within the diasporic imaginary. The montage of these diverse sites presents a dialogic representation of a Filipino diasporic culture.

Ranging from popular culture to performance art, my analysis reveals how gendered and sexualized tropes of belonging traverse media and genres, forming a collective archive of Filipino diasporic culture.

Cosmic Blood's emphasis on the violence of colonization as integral to the hybridity and assimilation of contemporary postcolonial subjects is crucial to this dissertation's analysis of Filipino American diasporic cultural politics. Refuting the narratives of U.S. exceptionalism and imperialist amnesia inherent to American and Filipino America contemporary culture, this project foregrounds U.S. imperialism as the historical condition of possibility for both a Filipino diaspora and the presence of Filipinos in the U.S. With this framework in mind, this dissertation contributes to a shift in Filipino American cultural politics towards an emphasis on U.S. imperialism as constitutive of a Filipino American identity. As a figure that traverses the space between the U.S. and the Philippines, the Filipino American *balikbayan* embodies the traces of this imperialist history, while also suggesting new modes of diasporic nationalisms and political solidarity. As such, the figure of the Filipino American *balikbayan* is triangulated between the masculinist might of the U.S. and the feminized Philippines. Recognizing the interstitial space occupied by the Filipino American *balikbayan*, this project argues for a form of diasporic politics that is both

anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. Rather than denying our common histories of colonialism and imperialism, we can find commonality in shared historical trauma, common political goals, and a hope for the future.

The trajectory of this dissertation – from the figure of the *balikbayan*, to the “mail order bride,” to the “exploited Filipina body” and lastly, the cyborg – reveals a larger utopian politics in which the cultural nationalism of Filipino Americans transforms to the coalitional politics of a queer, feminist future. As a critique of the heteronormativity and masculinism of cultural nationalism, *Cosmic Blood* challenges the kinship models of belonging that are central to both the nation and the diaspora. While not rejecting nationalism, this dissertation seeks a form of cyborg nationalism. In contrast to “biological” or “natural” forms of belonging, a cyborg nationalism embodies a multiplicity of perhaps contradictory diasporic subjectivities within an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, queer, and feminist framework.

Like *Cosmic Blood*, this dissertation seeks to go beyond simply reiterating narratives of the exploitation and subjugation of Filipina women. An attention to the representation of the Filipina body is fundamental to this vision of diasporic politics. While grounding my argument in a material context of global capitalism, which relies on the exploited racialized and gendered labor of Filipina bodies, this dissertation also locates hope in the vision of a different future, one that exceeds a capitalist logic which corporealizes labor in racialized and gendered bodies. Similar to *Cosmic Blood*, this dissertation emphasizes the creative labor of Philippine and Filipino American cultural producers as a generative site of possibility for visualizing

alternative relationships of subjects to bodies. From the campy humor of the Mail Order Brides to the earnest critiques of young Filipina American feminists, Filipino American cultural producers are actively refiguring the dominant tropes of Filipinas as “mail order brides” and exploited bodies.

Ending with an analysis of *Cosmic Blood*, I present hope and imagination as frameworks through which other subjectivities for Filipina bodies are made possible. *Cosmic Blood*'s reconfiguration of the Filipina body challenges a global popular culture's hegemonic representation of Filipinas as providers of sexual, domestic, and affective labor for a global economy. In addition, *Cosmic Blood* introduces a shift in the representation of Filipinas within a mainstream Filipino American culture. Resisting the tropes of the “exploited Filipina body” or the “mother for the nation,” Otalvaro-Hormillosa's various characters – from the androgynous conquistador figure to the blue mechanized cyborg – challenge heteronormative representations of Filipina subjectivity, while also presenting the Filipina body as a queer desiring subject. Imagining other forms of Filipina collectivity, subjectivity, and embodiment is the fundamental intellectual and political goal of this work. Like Otalvaro-Hormillosa, I yearn for other forms of subjectivity and belonging for Filipinas. As such, this dissertation is a contribution to a larger politics of transformation. As both the Surrealists and the Afrofuturists have noted, dreams of change must dwell in hope and imagination.

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