

KAPWA IN THE LAND of MILK AND HONEY:
BAY AREA FILIPINO AMERICAN IDENTITY, COMMUNITY AND MUSIC

A University Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of
California State University, East Bay

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
M.A. In Music

By
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August 2018

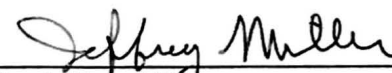
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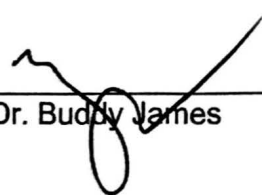
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7/11/18

7/11/18

7/19/18

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Introduction

Filipinos are the largest Asian American group in North America with, according to data from 2000-2010 US Census and 2016 American Community Surveys, a population of 3,899,000. This number makes the United States the home to the largest number of Filipinos abroad, with California having the highest concentration of Filipino immigrants with 44%. The San Francisco Bay Area, where I was born and raised and where I have lived my whole twenty-eight years, as of this writing, is itself the second largest metropolitan area of Filipino immigrants with a number of 163,000.¹ The number of those with Filipino lineage and ethnic mixture is far greater and is still growing, with 1,529,086 a part of California's 38,332,521 total population from 2000-2015.²

Despite the gravity of these numbers the definition of Filipino American identity remains a vague concept in itself. Filipino Americans in the mainstream consciousness in American culture remain a "invisible majority." There are countless examples of Filipino involvement in many of the defining historical moments of the Bay Area in the twenty and twenty-first centuries. Representation of Asian Americans in general for a long time has been limited to the "model minority" myth, which characterizes the population as the

¹ Jeanne Batalova and Jie Zong, "Filipino Immigrants in the United States." Migrationpolicy.org. March 29, 2018. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/filipino-immigrants-united-states>.

² Ariana Rodriguez-Gitler, "Filipinos in the U.S. Fact Sheet." Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. September 08, 2017. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/fact-sheet/Asian-Americans-filipinos-in-the-u-s/>.

industrious yet perpetual foreigner in the landscape of popular Black and White binary American identities.³ Filipino characters are largely absent in mainstream American media and culture. For many generations this has created a cognitive dissonance for first generation Filipino Americans like myself in relating our own likenesses to the world we are living in.

As a child and creative adolescent growing up in Vallejo, California (which ranked #3 in the state if California for total Filipino population according to 2000 US Census data)⁴ I wondered why I never saw something like my own life on television or movies or music. If there were so many Filipinos where I was living with whom I interacted on a daily basis, why didn't I ever see any Filipino characters represented on the programs, films and recording that I would talk about with my peers? Did Filipinos even do art or music I wondered? My feelings are echoed by Elizabeth Pisares, who wrote:

Filipino American identity is characterized by a sense of metaphorical invisibility: though the largest Asian American group, Filipino Americans are not represented in mainstream culture as often as other even smaller and more recently arrived Asian American groups. Indeed, the fact of Filipino Americans' status as the largest Asian American group is usually received with surprise and skepticism. This invisibility may be attributed to their categorization as Asian American and their experience of racial ambiguity upon not conforming to other's perceptual expectations of Asian Americans.⁵

³ Daryl J Maeda, *Critical American Studies: Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2009, 11.

⁴ "California Filipino Population Percentage City Rank." USA.com. <http://www.usa.com/rank/california-state-filipino-population-percentage-city-rank.htm?hl=Vallejo&hlst=CA&yr=1000>, accessed March 15, 2018.

⁵ Edgardo V. Gutierrez, Ricardo V. Gutierrez and Antonio T. Tiongson, eds. *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006, 173.

In my own journey, I encountered an artistic and more visible Filipino American identity in the South of Market (SoMa) district of San Francisco. There I encountered Filipinos involved in political rallies, community art events and interacted with original, rising Filipino American artists who seemed to appear out of the thought processes of my childhood. By being around many of the grassroots community building organizations such as Gabriela-USA and Anakbayan, which were outgrowths of political movements of 1960s-70s, I was exposed to new discussions about untaught Filipino American history.

I heard about imperialism, colonization, and the intricate socio-economic and political history that intertwine the Philippines and the United States and that produced my own existence. I learned to investigate this complicated, violent and necessary history, as the institutions I had been attending up to that time seemed to skirt around these particular narratives I was hearing about. I realized through gaining this knowledge that when enough “invisible” people manage to find each other, they eventually make a community that makes itself visible to the world around them.

One of the most startling revelations I had from those times was learning that there was a Filipino American war which resulted in the Philippines (along with Cuba, Puerto Rico and Guam) being ceded to America from Spain for \$20 million dollars. Why was I never taught about this first major war in Asia, which lasted from 1899-1913? Why was I never taught about Filipinos who resisted for fourteen years the intentions of a government that promised to help them obtain sovereignty from one ruling country but then deceived them with justifications called ‘Benevolent Assimilation’ and ‘Manifest Destiny?’ I was never told that

President McKinley stated on November 21, 1899 that God had counseled him to “educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them.”⁶ None of my American history teachers up to that point had informed me that indigenous Filipino people of northern Luzon Igorot descent were put on display during the St. Louis World’s Fair of 1904 to support this narrative of savagery and a need for a Western “savior.”

The Philippines had won the initial battle with Spain with aid from American troops. American forces became involved in the Filipino-Spanish war only after a mishap explosion of the USS Maine in Havana influenced public opinion to view Spain as the responsible party and justified them as an enemy to the country. The Philippines won independence from Spanish rule on June 12, 1898 and had declared itself an independent republic, the first in Southeast Asia, on January 23, 1899. But because, in the words of United States senator Alfred J. Beveridge, these Filipinos “are not capable of self-government in the Anglo-Saxon sense” American ground troops began arriving in July of that year, revealing to the newly independent country that their “allies” had plans of their own.⁷ The war that ensued claimed 20,000 Filipino combatants and somewhere between 250,000 and 600,000 civilian lives. Stories surfaced after the conflict that detailed activities by the Americans that today could be identified as war crimes including the use of water-cure torture methods to extract information.⁸

⁶ Enrique B. De La Cruz, et al., *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons*. Berkeley, CA: Eastwind Books, 65.

⁷ Ibid, 19.

⁸ Phillip Ablett, "Colonialism In Denial: US Propaganda in the Philippine-American War." *Social Alternatives* 23, no. 3 (2004): 26-27.

This knowledge is important for me to include as a precursor for the findings I will present in this research. The outcome of the Filipino American war, with the Philippines becoming an American property, is the reason Filipinos came to the United States. It is what led to the Philippines being the only country in Asia with English as a national language, creating a cultural hierarchy between English and non-English-speaking Filipinos. This dichotomy that also exists here in the United States.⁹ This war and the ensuing colonization of the country has had a lingering effect on Filipinos living in the United States and the Philippines and in both a mental and political space. American ownership led to Americanization of the school systems of the Philippines and of a reworking of how the country's history is taught. My mother recalls being in elementary school in her hometown of Cavite and only being taught American history and never hearing of a Filipino American war. In my travels to the country many commercial tour guides when speaking about the history of the country also skip over this event and praise Americans as heroes who helped the Philippines be free from Spanish rule.

These historical distortions have created the need for Filipinos to undergo a process of decolonization. This process of decolonization teaches through acknowledgement and recognition of Filipino historical and cultural practices. It allows for Filipinos to learn the reasons why their place of origin can feel foreign to them and why an internal narrative of identity confusion and inferiority exists

⁹ Kevin L. Nadal, *Filipino American Psychology: A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice*. Hoboken, NJ: 2011, 12.

when comparing their home to that of their colonizers.¹⁰ This is explored more in Chapter 3.

It was after the Filipino American war that the first wave of Filipinos began arriving on the west coast of the United States in California and Hawaii. Many of the first Filipinos came as government sponsored students called *Pensionados* and later others came as labor workers. These labor workers played a pivotal role in not only developing the “economic miracle” of West Coast agricultural production but also in completing the geopolitical incorporation of the Pacific frontier into the United States¹¹ and in laying the roots for what would become the first Filipino American communities.

The intent of this research project is to recognize the questions I had as a youth looking for my Filipino American identity and to begin a conversation about how much there is to know about Filipino American history. This research is intended to as an introduction to nourish the curiosities to of those with a similar disposition. I also intend it to be a resource to explain the events and circumstances that caused a Filipino American population to exist in the Bay Area. None of this should remain a buried history. The research is also a continuation of and contribution to a situation described by Lisa Lowe as:

Individuals have forgotten wars, eras of colonial rule, sojourns, settlements, sufferings, and survivals. With memories left unrecorded, locations destroyed or abandoned, and sequences of events disrupted, the past is lost to narrative history. Yet while a past defined and constituted by such forgetting can never be made available whole and transparent, it may often reappear in fragments.

¹⁰ Maria P. P. Root, *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 63.

¹¹ Glen M. Mimura, *Ghostlife of Third Cinema : Asian American Film and Video*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 26.

It may perhaps be read in the cultural practices, social spaces, scholarly and political work of immigrant formations.¹²

Music as a Response

Appearing through each of the struggles I have chronicled in the three chapters of this work is the common thread of *kapwa*, a Tagalog characteristic that is best translated as “kindred” or “shared identity. Kapwa allows for the formation of new continuing generations. “The Land of Milk and Honey” is how my parents and indeed many immigrants first viewed America before building a life in its harsh realities. Though a land of opportunity, certain attitudes and circumstances are found to be reserved only for only a select few. From the first wave of immigrants in the early 1920s who settled as labor workers in Hawaii and in the coasts of California, to the activist Third World Liberation students who fought for ethnic studies in the 1970s, to the community workers and torch bearers of the officially recognized SoMA Pilipinas in the South of Market District of San Francisco today, a search for a shared identity and an inherent familiarity bonded these people into communities that held each other up for common causes and created new identities from the remnants of a common past. I view the practice and presence of music as a prime and trustworthy

¹² Gutierrez, et al., *No Filipinos Allowed*, 2006, ix.

representation of the consciousness of each specific time period under study. I do this in agreement to the idea of Paul DiMaggio & Maria Fernandez-Kelly that:

The arts serve a variety of functions for the migrant men and women who create and consume them: they provide the comfort of familiarity, helping them to interpret personal experience; they communicate about the old world to the young; and they serve as foci of rituals of solidarity and communion that bring immigrants together. The arts also enable immigrants to represent themselves to the host country, affirming public as well as private identities, for purposes both commercial and political. A final dimension of diversity, especially crucial for members of the immigrant second generation, spans the space between pursuit of traditional cultural forms to wholesale adoption of host-country genres— or, more often, the production and consumption of hybrid forms, reworking traditional ones to express new realities.¹³

Oliver Wang writes that music, “isn’t a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them. In other words, the act of performing and listening to music produces, maintains, and transforms relationships that shape group identity, not as some fixed ‘end’ product but as a process.”¹⁴ Each period covered in this research demonstrates how the musicians featured used music as a response to the environment around them and as a survival mechanism. The Filipino-owned and operated punk rock label Aklasan Records, discussed in Chapter 3, came into being solely to find like-minded Filipino punk rockers and to create a space for them in what is normally a musical genre dominated by a homogenous racial “white” identity. This is similar to singer Josie Canion in the early 1960s who

¹³ Paul DiMaggio and Maria Patricia Fernández-Kelly. *Art in the Lives of Immigrant Communities in the United States*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010, 2.

¹⁴ Oliver Wang, *Legions of Boom: Filipino American Mobile DJ Crews of the San Francisco Bay Area*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015, 12.

comments on Filipino jazz musicians of that era keeping watch of each other in a music genre that usually racially identified as Black or White.

Since music and art become for immigrants and their offspring a tool for place making and remembering, an investigation into how, as Christine Bacareza describes it, “musical tradition or culture is politicized; and how the place of the Philippines is imagined through music”¹⁵ is necessary to further see how the Filipino American identity has been formed and carried.

I explore this in Chapter 1, which talks about the first wave of labor migrant workers who settled in the Bay Area. Jazz musicians Josie Canion, Flip Nunez and the group Third Wave (comprised of Josie’s daughters) were direct descendants of these immigrants. They show how traditions and memories learned from with elder generations, who banded together to form their own worker compounds, were carried those memories from the Philippines to the new land of America to guide their formation of Filipino American identity.

I am also influenced by Adelaida Reyes’ commentary that:

In the last decade ethnomusicology has been confronting the modern and postmodern world’s challenge to its space-bound view of subject matter; to its dichotomization of self and other, of insider and outsider, to its ambivalence toward Western influences and their effects on the Orientalized others; to its use of hegemony, colonialism and power relations in general as explanatory frame for musical phenomena-most, if not all, of which springs from the increased mobility of people, the music makers and users, responding to political, market and natural forces that either disrupt lives or offer better alternatives to what they have. Where people go, music goes.¹⁶

¹⁵ Christine Bacareza Balance, *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016, 7.

¹⁶ Adelaida Reyes, *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free: Music and the Vietnamese Refugee Experience*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999, 14.

In interviewing subjects from each period and gathering historical accounts I noticed how deep the influence and expectations of immigration plays into the formation of identity. The first wave of Filipino immigrants in Chapter 1 never planned on staying long in America. They left their home simply for the promise of richer, alternative opportunities for economic advancement and planned eventually bring those back home. The Filipinos in Chapter 2 were the offspring of this generation, now calling America their home while still dealing with a sense of alienation. Chapter 3 explores Filipinos finally having a representative space and acknowledging the forces that brought them there. Through it all, the people always had music.

Chapter 2 chronicles the musical and political and gender identity radicalism of the bands Dakila and Fanny, whose identity was shaped by the radical political atmosphere in the Bay Area of the 1960s-70s. They were the first Filipino American bands to be signed to major label distribution. The ideas of identity and expression they embodied such as using the Tagalog language in their songs or, in the case of Fanny, being one of the first all-woman hard rock bands of their stature, came as a byproduct of the resistance fueled atmosphere of the Bay Area in the 1970s.

I also aim to express how music and the community it helps to build becomes a tool for creating historical narratives concerning where individuals came from and where they aim to be. As ethnomusicologist Theo Gonzalvez states:

Students of expressive forms of culture understand that performances are 'vital acts of transfer,' that the things we do with our bodies to learn and share repertoires are also ways to

communicate histories, lessons, identities, affinities and commitments of all sorts...[there] is a three-sided relationship of memory, performance and substitution.¹⁷

An example of this is shown in Chapter 3, which highlights the current SoMa Pilipinas community in San Francisco, which was officially recognized in 2016 by the California Arts Council as a cultural and historical landmark. This is the community where I first discovered and experienced what Gonzalvez called “vital acts of transfers”; I found an active artistic performance scene that continues to provide a space of creation and place-making for present and future generations. It is here that identity and community participate freely in memory and performance, building new narratives from for a once invisible minority and substituting a lost history with one we are in the process of building for ourselves.

By tracing historical events, piecing together the political influences of an era, interviewing musicians, exploring their works and speaking to cultural workers of many generations from the Bay Area Filipino American community (whose roots span the twenty and twenty-first centuries) I have found the Bay Area Filipino American community across time periods has always had an artistic, resilient and expressive sense of identity that expresses itself through art and music. Some of the artists interviewed are personal friends of mine whose work influenced strongly my own interpretation of Filipino American artistry and reminded me why the Bay Area remains an important place of reference in

¹⁷ Theodore S. Gonzalves, *The Day the Dancers Stayed: Performing in the Filipino/American Diaspora*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010, 13

the discussion of immigrant artists. I also analyze and interpret lyrics, song titles and intentions to further illustrate how music plays a key role in affirming identity for Filipino Americans.

The trauma and struggles caused by colonization, war, immigration and assimilation have all played key roles in shaping many generations of Filipino American identity and community for Filipino Americans of each generation. I argue that despite these challenges, and in some cases because of them, Filipino Americans have always had a strong artistic and musical community which functioned as way to define themselves in relation to the historical events through which they were living.

Chapter One

Children of the First Wave & the 100-Pound Ear

The first wave of Filipino Americans to the west coast came as *pensionados*, students sponsored by the United States government to learn the ways and ideologies of the West and to bring them back home as teachers and “colonial bureaucrats.”¹⁸ Sending these students abroad for westernized education was done to further extend the American ideological influence over the country of the Philippines in the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898. With the Philippines being newly annexed to the United States, 600 American teachers onboard the army transport ship *Thomas* in 1901 were integrated into the Philippine school system. These teachers introduced new education plans that portrayed America as a prosperous and bountiful country.¹⁹ *Pensionados* came from upper class backgrounds and attended prestigious universities of the west such as the University of Berkeley and the University of the Pacific.

When labor demands grew for the expanding industrialized farms in the Central Valley of California in the early 1900s, American recruiters sought out an increasing number of other overseas Filipinos willing to do the work, thus increasing the Filipino population.²⁰ The Hawaiian Sugar Plantation Association

¹⁸ Fabros Jr., Alex. *When Hilario Met Sally: Our Past as Prologue*. Filipinas Magazine, February 1995.

¹⁹ Enrique B. De La Cruz, et al., *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons*. San Francisco: T'Boli, 2004, 66.

²⁰ Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, *Little Manila Is in the Heart*. Duke University Press Books, 2013, 5.

began searching for labor workers from the Philippines when local communities expressed distress over “Oriental heathen” workers in 1910. These workers were Chinese and Japanese immigrants who came when demands for labor work arose during and after the California gold rush. These Filipino recruits, mostly single men, were known as *sakadas*; they worked for three years, after which they were entitled to a ticket back home.²¹

As the Philippines became an American colony in the aftermath of the Filipino and American war, Filipinos in turn became nationals of the country, making it much easier for them to cross borders and thus less hassle for employers to bring them over for work. These Filipinos came from abroad expecting an America filled with boundless prosperity, where all men and women were equal under the law and opportunities to succeed were only limited by one’s own ambition. This vision of America was taught to them in their Americanized classrooms²²

What many Filipinos found however was much different than what had been promised them from their American educators. Filipinos often faced hostility from xenophobic white locals who blamed them for job shortages and exhibited fears of racial mixing and foreign influence that existed prior with California Chinese and Japanese labor workers. The attitudes that created the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first significant law to limit immigration of a particular race to the United States, influenced these feelings.

²¹ Fabros Jr., 1995.

²² Ibid

Filipinos were used as a means of cheap manual labor, often exploited by their employers and by state laws. The California Alien Land Law of 1913, for instance, made aliens ineligible for citizenship and forbade them from owning agricultural land or claiming a long-term lease. Anti-miscegenation laws also afflicted the first wave of Filipino immigrants. Many workers who came from the Philippines were bachelors and, with very few Filipina women around, they were not legally allowed to marry or, in the eyes of the society, even court women of American origin. Filipinos were victim to being viewed as sexual deviants and as a threat to the health of the general public and to the communities they inhabited due to the widespread belief of the physical inferiority of the Filipino. As the Commonwealth Club, a progressive era's men club based in the Bay Area that touted itself as "the nation's oldest and largest public forum," stated in 1929:

Physically [the Filipino] is not a very good specimen; [he] is undersized and frequently under-nourished. Employers in Hawaii have found it necessary to instruct the Filipinos in the ordinary rules of health, to show him how to eat and live²³

People who shared this belief also described the Filipinos as dangerous due to diseases they carried over from their origin islands, their boat trip that brought them abroad or stemming from a natural physical and mental disability. Dr. William Hobdy, a public health official and chief quarantine officer in Hawaii, spoke about this at public health forum in San Francisco in 1928:

²³ Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946*. New York: NYU Press, 2011, 116.

When transplanted from their native islands, the Filipinos commonly develop tuberculosis. Pneumonia is also common; sometimes twenty Filipinos will die of pneumonia en route from the Philippine Islands to the Hawaiian Islands. . . . The Filipinos of both sexes smoke. The women smoke cigars and even small children of three years of age are seen toddling around smoking cigars as long as their forearm. . . . The typical Filipino child is short of stature, underweight, malnourished, bandy-shanked and afflicted with intestinal parasites. I can hardly conceive of my son or daughter or any of my grandchildren intermarrying with these people. I believe that they should be excluded from this country."²⁴

Filipinos were heavily demonized in Hawaii where they were presented in mainstream newspapers, such as the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, as nefarious crime prone individuals. Headlines such as, 'Filipinos expiate murders' or 'Filipino youth is hanged for girl's murder,' were familiar sights, bringing attention specifically not only to the exact nationality of the alleged guilty person but also of the heinous crimes committed. According to Jonathan Okamura, from 1911 to 1944 80% of those executed in the state were of Filipino descent.²⁵ This was not because they were the ones committing the crime, but because they were likely to be accused and convicted. Prosecutors were more likely to bring murder charges against Filipinos than a lesser charge of manslaughter. Okamura writes that instead of handing down a judgment of innocence or imposing a long-term prison sentence, juries were more likely to agree to a death sentence for Filipinos.²⁶ Juries in some trials were reported to have used no more than 10 minutes of deliberation time to agree on a guilty conviction for the Filipinos accused of crimes.²⁷

²⁴ Baldoz, 118.

²⁵ Jonathan Y. Okamura, "From running amok to eating dogs: a century of misrepresenting Filipino Americans in Hawai'i." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 3 (2010), 501.

²⁶ Ibid

These discriminatory behaviors, along with the added pressure of the Great Depression of the 1930s and increasing social tension between Filipinos and Whites, culminated in Anti-Filipino riots in Watsonville, California, in 1930. As written about by Howard De Witt, one resident of the time period is quoted as referencing the then named taxi- dance halls where many of the Filipino bachelors would spend their off-work hours mingling with the single women, many of them White, which in turn enraged local white males who were repulsed by the idea of colored men mixing with the women. The observer commented that “taxi-dance halls where white girls dance with Orientals may be all right in San Francisco or Los Angeles but not in our community. We won’t stand for anything of the kind.”²⁸ Filipinos were puzzled by this circumstance as Americans who came to the Philippines would court the women there with no upfront opposition from locals. From January 19 until January 23, 1930, angry mobs of 200 to 700 searched for Filipinos in the streets of Watsonville and beat them up; they also raided the taxi-dance halls and local ranches. A carload of eight men shot into a bunkhouse at the John Murphy Ranch in nearby Stockton, killing twenty-two-year old Filipino named Fermin Tobera.²⁹

Still, in the midst of this environment, this generation, which would later become known as the *manongs* (meaning older brother in *Ilokano*, a dialect of the Philippines, where many labor workers first originated from), managed to create a

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Howard A. De Witt, "The Watsonville Anti-Filipino Riot of 1930: A Case Study of the Great Depression and Ethnic Conflict in California." *Southern California Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (1979), 296.

²⁹ Ibid

space of their own. The city of Stockton, in particular, became a significant haven for Filipino workers as the cash crops of the area provided year-round work in the west coast migratory labor circuit, which also included salmon canneries in Alaska and the vineyards of southern California.³⁰ In Stockton, a community district was formed that is remembered as “Little Manila” wherein working-class Filipinos owned their own shops, churches, barber shops and other community gathering points. This community became a home away from home for Filipino immigrants.

In his memoir *Growing Up Brown* civic leader Peter Jamero recalls living on his family’s farm in Stockton and growing up with the *manongs*, who would share with him stories of back home and the uncensored details of their bachelor hoods. Jamero also remembers his family’s camp as the center of celebrations. Every new baby was given a baptism party complete with *lechon* (barbequed whole pig, common for Filipino fiestas) and *adobo* (the Filipino national dish).³¹

Jamero adds:

Music was an integral part of our celebrations. Many of the men had learned how to play instruments in the Philippines. The musicians always seemed to know the latest tunes. Someone always had a songbook, so someone could jump if. Music was also a way for the *manongs* to remember loved ones back home. When Filipino Love songs like ‘Ikaw’(You) were sung, conversations suddenly stopped, and eyes became misty.³²

³⁰ Mabalon, 5.

³¹ Peter M. Jamero Sr, *Growing Up Brown: Memoirs of a Filipino American*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015, 23.

³² Ibid

It was into these circumstances that Josephine Tenio was born; she was later to be known as Jo Canion. Her parents came from the Bohol region in the Philippines and were among those who immigrated to Hawaii for work in the early 1900s. Afterwards they went to California. Josie was born in Stockton in 1932 and had seven brothers and sisters.

She has received numerous lifetime achievement awards for her work as a Filipino American musician in the Bay Area. Josie performed around the West Coast in the late 1950s and 1960s, singing solo gigs and also performing with “The Preludes” a jazz vocal quartet with her brothers. Josie grew up in a musical household with a mother who was an accomplished musician of her own right back home in the Philippines whom also sang and played piano.

She referred to her mother’s uncanny ability to catch off-tune notes and inauthentic musical expressions: “My mom, we used to all call her the ‘100-Pound Ear.’ If you were playing a tune in the wrong key she’d shout from the other room ‘No, that’s supposed to be *Me-nor!* [minor]”³³. Josie continued, “There was always music in our house. It really just ran in the family.” She spoke of her brother Jimmy, who was a saxophonist, and her other brother Rudy who was a pianist; they would later encourage Josie to have a career of her own in music. She recalled their lack of money for formal music lessons and how the siblings would gain their musical knowledge by listening to the radio and watching others. Josie would accompany her siblings to the local late-night jazz jam sessions, where she

³³ Josie Canion. Interview by Joshua Icban. In person. Stockton, CA, May 2, 2017.

would be prompted to “scat like a horn!” Josie stood out among the other musicians as she was often the only female performing in those jam sessions.

Josie recalls living at her family’s farm and spending time with the *manongs* as well. Josie’s family owned the *Legionarios Del Trabajo*, which was a fraternal organization for Filipinos in the Stockton community. Josie mentions that this establishment and others like it formed in the community and “took care of the sick, buried the dead with dignity, and provided small loans for crises or small businesses. Some also helped organize unions to protect the rights of farm and cannery workers and participated in the union organizing drives of the time.”³⁴

Josie’s professional music career didn’t begin until she became a mother. She was married after high school, as was tradition, and proceeded to have six kids in five years. It was only when friend and jazz keyboardist Mike Montano, another esteemed Filipino jazz musician of the time, heard her singing along to his piano playing while Josie was folding diapers that she was exposed to a life outside of traditional womanhood in the 1950s. Josie, laughing, recalls Mike saying to her, ““Hey Josie! Do you know this tune too?’ [She mimics piano playing] ‘Ok, get dressed! You’re coming with me to the gig!”

Josie would continue to play the myriad of jazz clubs in the Stockton area. In the early 1960s Josie and her kids moved to San Francisco where she continued to gig and frequent local venues, clubs and hotels. According to Josie, Filipino musicians of that time kept a close-knit circle as they were a rare sight in most jazz clubs, but they made it a point to regularly attend each other’s gigs: “We

³⁴Evangeline Canonizado Buell, *Filipinos in the East Bay*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub, 2008, 8.

always knew when so-and-so was playing and where. And when a new Filipino cat would show up word would spread, and we would flock to go meet them.”

According to Josie, in the eyes of showbiz bookers and concert promoters, Filipinos at this time were put under the identity umbrella of oriental. As can still be the case in today, this was a crucial factor in booking acts and attracting a particular paying crowd. Josie recounted to me a situation that preceded a potential gig in Chinatown, San Francisco:

So, this promoter says to me ‘Ok, you got the gig. You don’t got to dance or none of that. Just singing. But... you have to change your name. to Josie Chan.’ I said, ‘Wait! That’s not my name! I’m not signing this contract’. Me and Larry [Chen, Jo’s occasional piano accompanist and also Chinese] stomped right outta there.

She remembers other artists of that time who had to suffer this fate:

“Anna Rubio became Anna Lee. Primo’s real name is Villarose, but he changed his name to Primo Kim. A lot of people would be okay with doing that just to get their foot in the door. But you know once you do that, you’re stuck with it! I never did it.”

Josie also recounted discrimination coming from the local non-Asian musicians in regard to her racial identity. “If you’re White, you’re alright. If you’re Black, you can sing. If you’re Asian? No, you can’t sing.”

She recalled one particular instance of this mentality:

One time I was asked to sit in for a tune at a club and the band was supposed to back me. This piano player had a problem though, I won’t share his name because he’s kind of famous [laughs]. Man, he didn’t even want to hear me sing! Just because of how I looked. So, I took another player in the room, who was Chinese, and had him accompany me. I mean the other guy was a lot better, because, you know, he was black [laughs], but he left because he had some bad experiences backing up these white girls. So, he’s at the bar

drinking with his back turned, but as soon as I start singing, all of sudden, he turns around and his face *changes*. Now he's all ears. Afterwards the band wants me to do another tune and the piano player comes back and wants to back me up now. But I said to him 'Oh no, it's okay you just stay at the bar.' You know I wasn't going to accept that kind of treatment. I didn't even talk to him. To heck with him.

Josie and her kids eventually moved to Grove Street in San Francisco and in remembering this period of her life recounted the playing of one of her closest friends, one whom she considers a brother. This was Joseph "Flip" Nunez, another one of the children of this "bridge generation" (a term coined by writer Peter Jamero to identify the first-generation children of the first wave of immigrants) who became a prominent figure of the Bay Area music scene.

Flip was also born in Stockton and spent much of his career in San Francisco. He was backing pianist for such luminaries as Carmen McRae, Harry Belafonte, Jon Hendricks and Wes Montgomery. He also played in the seminal Mission San Francisco-based jazz /Latin rock band "Azteca" which also featured Bay Area icon percussionist Pete Escovedo. In his long performing career, which spanned three decades until his death in 1995, Flip was a familiar fixture in San Francisco jazz clubs and served as the house pianist for Bop City, a famed jazz club in the Fillmore district infamous for its reputation as a hangout spot for high standard players. He released one solo record on Catalyst Records entitled *My Own Space and Time* (1976).

It was around the time he was living in San Francisco that Flip would come over and play the piano while Josie's five daughters would sing along. To Flip's astonishment it seemed the children had inherited the lineage of

their grandmother's '100-Pound Ear.' Josie remembered how: "One day, Flip calls me and says, 'Josie, I'm taking the kids...to my gig!'"

Along with us at the time of my interview with Josie was her daughter Stevie, who herself has led a life in music. Along with her four other sisters she sang internationally as a youth with a vocal group called "Third Wave." The younger girls were put under the wing of by Bay Area jazz legend George Duke who produced, arranged and performed on their 1969 album *Here and Now* which was recorded in Germany on the MPS Record Label.

Stevie remembers this period well, saying, "I was in fourth grade at the time when Uncle Flip took us to those jam sessions," Stevie remembers, "They were usually mom-and-pop places, really late nights. Everyone there though loved us and were so protective. They would give us hot chocolate [and] things like that."

The young girl's first professional gig took place at a jazz club in San Francisco called Trident, where they filled in for jazz saxophonist Stan Getz. A friend of the family and Jo's sometime bass player, John Heard, took George Duke to see them and he was instantly floored. Soon the girls started going over to his place to begin work on an album of his arrangements. Stevie comments: "George used to say, 'Their ears are so fast!'"

Third wave would go on to perform internationally, even at the illustrious Monterey Jazz Festival, preceding such jazz greats as Carmen McRae and Dizzy Gillespie. Before taking the stage to follow them, Carmen is reported to have turned to mother Jo and with a smile said, "Don't let me follow them ever again."

Josie remembers this time and the sacrifices she had to make for her daughter's musical careers. "I had to put myself on hold to go with them when they recorded and toured in Europe with George," Josie says, "He was a real genius. I remember him writing all the string parts for the album on the train the day before the sessions. I introduced him to his wife too, Corrine."

Third Wave would not last too long. As Stevie puts it: "Well, people didn't know how to market us. We looked different. We didn't do pop tunes conventionally. I think we were a great success. I was successful to have a wealth of experiences. Whenever I share my experiences with my daughter though I always say, 'Well at least we're going to be Jeopardy trivia one day!'"

Though both women have toured and performed internationally and became respected members of musician circles, Stevie and Josie also share with me the issues that have come up for them with fellow Filipino community members. "There would also be a thing between Philippines-born and American-born folks. To the Filipinos you were never Filipino enough and especially if you didn't speak the language. You know I am proud that I am Filipino American. I know the culture as it was shared to me."

Josie added: "Back in the days though many of the *manongs* wanted to learn English. It was a necessity to survival here. Especially since many of those who came didn't finish school back home, learning the language would be their foot in the door. My parents even had only about a first or second grade education."

This is a situation that exists for Filipino Americans of my generation, i.e. those born post-1989. In the process of assimilation to American culture, many

Filipino parents experience difficulties in passing on the dialects from back home. During my childhood, Tagalog (the national language of the Philippines) and Kapampangan (the language of my parent's region) were only spoken to me and my brother in times of discipline or at family parties when conversing with relatives. It is common for many first-wave immigrant Filipinos to have a negative reaction and even chastise American-born Filipinos when they find they have not learned the national language. Vergara suggests "language becomes a potent national symbol in a foreign context, and it is used to patrol the perimeter of national belonging."³⁵ This scenario yields an irony as the Philippines is the only country in Asia to have English as a national language, a result of American colonialization.³⁶

Stevie adds: "Sometimes too people in our [Filipino] community wouldn't even show up to our events. It was always *haoles* [White People] and just our families. Whenever we may get asked to play an event it was always for free, to donate our time. It makes me feel like they don't respect our craft enough. Like, they don't act that way when playing an electrician or a plumber."³⁷

As a performing musician, I have also experienced attitudes expressed by Stevie and Josie. Not only feeling like an "Other" with those outside your immediate community and nationality, but also among the people inside of it. I

³⁵ Benito Manalo Vergara, *Pinoy Capital: The Filipino Nation in Daly City*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009, 146.

³⁶ Kevin L. Nadal, *Filipino American Psychology: A Collection of Personal Narratives*. Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2010, 45.

³⁷ Stevie Canion. Interview by Joshua Icban. In person. Stockton, CA, May 2, 2017.

too have felt the lack of support within the Filipino community or shame that I am American-born and do not speak the language of my forbearers. However, I feel this is the normal consequence of the initial action of immigration, that is, of the need to leave your homeland and resettle somewhere else. To try and survive in a space in which you're not always welcome has a daunting effect on the psyche. Filipinos born in the Philippines can never fully take one place to the other; they are only able to transfer certain fragments of the place and identity they had there. Those memories are what become our collective histories that we share and build new collective memory from. I connect personally with Stevie's notion shared with me during our talk that she "knows the culture as it was shown to her."³⁸ This statement recalls ethnomusicologist Adelaida Reyes's idea that "tragic dislocations [due to immigration], which all too often seem irreversible, nonetheless revive and nurture cultural traditions, albeit in a form different from those in the home country."³⁹ This revival can be seen in the formation of "Little Manila" in Stockton, California and in the continued musical legacy of Jo and Stevie, including the legacy of Josie's mother's "100-Pound Ear" and the musicianship from Filipino folk music to American jazz, that was brought all the way from Bohol, a province in the Central Visayas region of the Philippines, to Stockton.

During my time at their home I also met Stevie's daughter and her kids. For that afternoon, I was surrounded by four generations of Filipino Americans,

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Adelaida Reyes, *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free: Music and the Vietnamese Refugee Experience*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999, 14.

all born in Stockton. I later found out that they are all singers. Stevie's daughters showed me her recordings and we engaged in a light jam session. Even Josie's great grandson sang his favorite song for me while we had lunch in the kitchen, and in doing so, was instantly channeling and keeping alive the memories of his great-great grandmother.

Chapter 2:

Filipino American Radicals of the 1970s

The Filipino population in the United States ballooned in the 1960s due to the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act which eliminated prior immigration quotas and contributed to the Philippines eventually becoming the largest source of Asian immigration to the United States.⁴⁰ Filipinos were allowed to be naturalized citizens in the United States in 1946, post-WWII, with large-scale immigration continuing into the labor demands for agricultural work in California and Hawaii. The act focused on family reunification, with a preference system that favored children and spouses over professionals and labor workers. This resulted in the doubling of the Filipino American population, as indicated in the 1980 census, with Filipinos comprising nearly one quarter of the total Asian immigration.⁴¹

For Filipino Americans in the Bay Area, the cultural zeitgeist of this period influenced the formation of a new identity. Because it was a hotbed of the counterculture and where new ideas were forming around the rights of marginalized communities in terms of race, identity and sexuality, Filipino American communities were active participants in the discussion. A whole

⁴⁰ John M. Liu, Paul M. Ong, and Carolyn Rosenstein. "Dual Chain Migration: Post-1965 Filipino Immigration to the United States." *International Migration Review* 25, no. 3 (1991): 487-513.

⁴¹ Ibid

generation of people hungry for a new definition of civil rights at home, both in theory and in action, stepped in to redefine who they thought they were and wanted to become. The attitudes and actions that formed in San Francisco and the Bay Area were not by chance. As writer Mat Callahan notes, “the powerful civil rights movement in the Bay Area mobilized a large number of people of all ethnicities in the battle to end discrimination in employment and housing.”⁴² The “prevailing notions of white-middle class dropouts [the popular image of the San Francisco ‘Hippie’] from elsewhere suddenly appearing en masse to create a utopia in Golden Gate Park are misleading on several counts.”⁴³ Callahan continues:

[this mobilization] quickly linked with the farmworkers organizing in the Central Valley of California and established bases of popular opposition in the Fillmore, Hunters Point, and Mission districts of San Francisco. This connection led to the April 1965 launch of The Movement newspaper in San Francisco by ‘Friends of SNCC’ (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), a forerunner of what came to be known as the underground press. Second, the corresponding artistic movements, especially music, theater, and graphic art (posters and murals), were never confined to any single constituency or neighborhood.⁴⁴

These movements and ideas played a key role in influencing the creation of a number of grassroots organizations in the Asian American community. A growing adamancy about identity and cultural heritage were spurred by radical nationalistic groups like the Black Panthers of Oakland, California and gave birth

⁴² Mat Callahan, *The Explosion of Deferred Dreams: musical renaissance and social revolution in San Francisco, 1965-1975*. Oakland: PM Press, 2017, pg. 104.

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

to organizations and businesses like the Kearny Street Workshop for artists in 1972, Third World Liberation Front student coalition in 1969, and Eastwind Books in Berkeley which opened its doors in 1970. The Civil Rights movement was sparked by:

African Americans [who] felt that the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s did not address the racist practices that affected their lives. They argued that rigid housing segregation, underfunded inner-city schools, rampant job discrimination, poor transportation, discriminatory banking, credit, and mortgage practices, and unequal protection before the law locked millions of African Americans into lives of despair and poverty.⁴⁵

The woes cited by the movement struck a chord with other immigrant communities who faced similar discriminations and other violations of basic civil rights. Most Filipinos had already experienced anti-miscegenation laws and racist fueled mob violence during the first wave of immigration. Furthermore:

The American consciousness in the late 1960s did not view the militant turn by some African-American activists as an isolated event...they perceived the black power movement and the uprisings in the America's black ghettos as part of a major ongoing rupture in American politics and culture.⁴⁶

Bay Area Asian American identity politics was undoubtedly influenced by The Black Panther party which started in Oakland. The party took to armed defense in response to ongoing police brutality against the African American community and outlined a Ten-Point program which framed their demands for equity in terms of basic social needs for their community local and abroad. The

⁴⁵ Beth L. Bailey and David R. Farber. *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, 94.

⁴⁶ Ibid

party also provided a breakfast program for children and transportation for the elderly even though they had been labeled a terrorist organization by the FBI.⁴⁷ African American student militants also voiced demands for classes that studied African American history and literature. This grievance was echoed by the Third World Liberation Front of the University of California, Berkeley, which was a coalition of multi-ethnic college students who rallied for ethnic studies courses in higher education. This marked for the first time Asian Americans in the California diaspora came together for a common cause.

For many of the Bay Area Asian American community, “adopting black power’s antipathy toward assimilation marked a significant departure from previous modes of political mobilization.”⁴⁸ Maeda suggests that community members also:

Viewed racial oppression as a systemic rather than aberrant feature of American society. They believed that the racial oppression of Asian Americans stemmed from and served to justify their economic exploitation, and they sought to build Asian American power and culture autonomous of white approval⁴⁹

This started with the formation of the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) in Berkeley, formed by couple Yuji Ichioka and Emma Cee, a couple who were also civil rights activists and who started the political affiliate by phoning every Asian-sounding name listed on party petitions in the Berkeley and East Bay area. They “envisioned AAPA as a broader, all-inclusive, community grassroots

⁴⁷ Stanley Nelson, *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of a Revolution*. Film. Directed by Stanley Nelson. 2015, Firelight Films.

⁴⁸ Daryl J Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: the rise of Asian America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 78.

⁴⁹ Ibid

alliance,” with members who, “from their working-class youths had been involved with the United Farm Workers and other labor organizing.”⁵⁰ Other members included an “Army veteran and Black Panther member, and all were involved in the ongoing civil rights/Black Power, anti-war and anti-poverty movement.”⁵¹

The formation of the AAPA led further to the formation of the Third World Liberation Front. Comprised of African American, Asian American, Chicano and Native American students from San Francisco State and UC Berkeley, the coalition led strikes that succeeded in uniting minority students uniting against institutional discrimination and laid the foundation for the establishment of collegiate Ethnic Studies programs.⁵² In the fall of 1968 the San Francisco State group demanded a faculty of 50 for an ethnic studies program as well as acceptance all applications of Non-white students. The group also demanded a school of ethnic studies with curriculums in specific areas of study as well as authority over hiring and retention of key faculty members.⁵³

In this period one of the most crucial and uniting events for Filipino American political identities occurred in the fight against eviction of International Hotel tenants, which lasted from 1968-1977. The International Hotel, or I-Hotel, as it was known, was located in the “Manilatown” district of downtown San

⁵⁰ Asian Community Center Archive Group, *Stand Up: An Archive Collection of the Bay Area Asian American Movement 1968-1974*. Berkeley, CA: Eastwind Books, 2009, 23.

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid pg. 43.

⁵³ Ibid

Francisco and housed many of the first-generation bachelor *manongs* in a low income, senior living situation. The building was sold to investors who threatened its tenants with an eviction notice on October 28, 1968. Walter Shorenstein, president of Milton Meyer Co., wanted to demolish and redevelop the site into a multi-leveled parking lot. The plight of these elderly residents was picked up by the younger generation of Filipino American students and social workers who saw the removal of the residents in this way as gentrification and as showing the city's blatant disregard towards the situation of these elderly immigrants. These two generations met for the first time and found a renewed sense of identity through each other; the younger Filipino Americans discovering a history of labor discrimination and immigration reality within the *manongs* and the elders finding a new sense of worth through the care expressed by these young people. As Estella Habal, who was a part of this younger generation that took on the cause, explains in her writings about the event:

The struggle to keep the Filipino immigrants, affectionately known as the 'manongs'., in their homes for almost a decade created deep ties between these impoverished pioneers and the college-age Filipino activists who came to their aid. For the youth, the I-Hotel invoked an active recovery of the past, the honoring of injured forefathers; for the elderly tenants, it meant recognition and a glimpse of the promise of American democracy that their generation had long cherished. In the course of resisting eviction, working and personal relations grew, and a family consciousness rooted in Filipino values of respect for the elderly developed. For the young people, this sharply contrasted with the narrowly youth-oriented expressions of the mainly white antiwar and counterculture movements.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Estella Habal, *San Francisco's International Hotel: mobilizing the Filipino American community in the anti-eviction movement*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008, 10.

For the Filipino American community, this was a period of intergenerational bonding between elders and youth and of the development of a distinct Filipino American left wing rooted in community politics. The International Hotel was also crucial for the development of the Asian American movement that had emerged during the student upheavals at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, and San Francisco State in 1968– 69.⁵⁵

The basement of the I-Hotel also functioned as a meeting space for different community groups to hold meetings. As Maeda writes:

Its [the I-Hotel's] labyrinthine basements comprised multiple spaces, both divided and shared, occupied by many organizations, including the I-Hotel Tenants Association, the cultural organization Kearny Street Workshop, the Chinatown Draft Help Center, Kalayaan (the Filipino group that evolved into KDP or Katipunan Ng Ma Demokratikong, the Union of Democratic Pilipinos), Wei Min She (WMS) and its affiliates, Everybody's Bookstore and Asian Community Center, and I Wor Kuen (IWK) and its affiliate, the Chinese Progressive Association.⁵⁶

Eviction would eventually occur in on August 4,1977, with thousands of student and community activists showing up to sit in and demonstrate in passive resistance against the eviction. Police would eventually round up the weeping elderly tenants and place them outside, most had no other place to go. Though the building was destroyed, the site was never redeveloped. After a lengthy negotiation between the city and the site's new owners, The I-Hotel was eventually resurrected in 2005 as a place to provide senior housing. In present time, the ground floor functions as a community space for Tagalog language and music lessons as well as for various workshops and historical remembrances.

⁵⁵ Habal, 55.

⁵⁶ Maeda, 14.

This renewed sense of identity and militancy by the older and younger generation that was part of the I-Hotel cause is expressed in the following poem entitled *For My Street Brothers* by Bill Sorro, an I-Hotel tenant and activist of the time:

*If I told you it's the system that we've eaten in
The mush in the morning you'd tell me to go fuck myself*

*If I told you it's the system that fixed and overdosed
Our dead brothers and keeps our sister n the corner
You'd tell me bullshit!*

*It's life
And we're just the fuckups*

*Our people are getting their shit together
All Over this country*

*Through the struggle beginning to understand
The plight of their lives and evils in this system
Has fixed into their arms and souls*

The eart turns

*Seasons pass
We have learned to heal our wounds
We must!*

*Mabuhay Brothers and Sisters
Of the Streets of the world*

*Take the man's dope hope and stick it in his arms his system
Mabuhay! Struggling revolutionary people of the world*

*Our time has come
Seize it!
Mabuhay Ang Causa
All Power to the people ⁵⁷*

⁵⁷ Mariano Bayani and Serafin Syquia, eds. *Flips: A Filipino American Anthology*. San Francisco, CA: Philippine American Writers and Artists, 2015

Oscar Penaranda, a prominent Bay Area educator, award winning author, immigrant, and migrant labor worker was part of the I-Hotel struggle. He also recalls the events of this period: "In those days you were aware of your place in the margins. You either chose to resist, ignore or fight against that marginalization."⁵⁸ Oscar came overseas with his family from Leyte, Samar, which is located in the eastern Visayan region of the Philippines, to Vancouver, British Columbia, when his father was tasked with opening the first Philippines Consulate in that city. At age 17, he and his family moved to San Francisco, where he recalled "I finally heard *Tagalog* there," and he found a community and hooked up quickly with the neighboring Filipinos.

Oscar was himself a part of a generation that was developing a new Filipino American consciousness that used writing and theatrical expression to redefine the Filipino identity in that period in the United States. Much of his knowledge of the plight of Filipino labor workers came from his interacting directly with them, as he himself worked the seasonal labor chain in the canneries of Alaska and asparagus fields of Fairfield, California. He remembers meeting with other writers in the basements of the I-Hotel and being a part of the energy of that time. Much of the writing of this artistic renaissance took place in the basement of the I-Hotel. During our interview Oscar named Asian American writers Frank Chin, Sean Wong and Lawson Funado as "Japanese and Chinese writers who opened the door for this kind of writing. They fought a lot of publishers to be heard. They also knew the best writers were Filipinos."

⁵⁸ Oscar Penaranda. Interview by Joshua Icban. In Person. Hayward, CA. Dec 12, 2017.

Oscar also found himself in the midst of the struggle of the Ethnic Studies strikers. At the time Oscar was twenty-four years of age and a new professor at San Francisco State University. He had also achieved a master's degree in creative writing from the same institution. Along with other writers of the time, they published *Flips: A Filipino American Anthology*, in 1971, which featured contemporary writers and poets who were, as Oscar put it, "using the power of words to define ourselves." He continued during the interview:

Our generation was different than the first generation of Filipinos that were here [in America]. They were more sojourners, waiting to return home, even though for many that was never materialized. Us, we wanted to lay claim to this land and cultivate our identity in relation to that.

The title of the anthology, *Flips*, is a redefinition of a derogatory term towards Filipinos. "A *flip* is a Filthy Little Island Person," Oscar tells me, "we wanted to reclaim the word. Similar, I suppose, to what African-Americans do with the word 'nigger.' We were influenced a lot by what The Last Poets and Gil-Scot Heron were doing, that kind of language of searching and defining yourself."

The atmosphere of this time is also recalled by Terry Bautista, a community worker and longtime advocate for Filipino Americans in the Bay Area, who has lived there for most of her life working for hospitals and schools and serving the immigrant communities for most of her life. "This was an explosive environment. 24/7. Everything that was going on, it was either something you were going to be a part of or [something you] just ignore."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Terry Bautista. Interview by Joshua Icban. In Person. Oakland, CA. Aug 12, 2017.

Terry Bautista was a foreign student adviser for most of the 1970s and a daughter of a 1st Filipino Infantry World War II Army veteran father and a mother born in Leyte. She recalls experiencing a protest in Berkeley that was so large that it shook her house. She described to me during our interview:

There was this stampede one time, or what felt like a stampede. I mean, the house shook. There was this anti-war protest by the campus [U.C. Berkley] and there was this mass dispersal after they were all pepper sprayed.

This new militancy also existed in her home life and she clearly remembered and shared with me that her and her Swedish-American husband, himself a Vietnam draft dodger, “used to sleep with an Ak-47 underneath the bed.”

It was in these circumstances that two musical bands comprised of Filipino Americans came into fruition, representing and embodying the ideas of the times. Members of both bands, however, ended up realizing that though their artistic contributions were essential to the artistic world, these pioneers still became victims of improper ethnic representation and mainstream perception. The American mainstream music culture was still unready to accept bands of different ethnic or sexual configuration.

From the Mission district of San Francisco, the band Dakila became one of the first Filipino-fronted bands from the area to be signed to a major record label, Epic Records, and one of the first to include a Filipino name and include Tagalog lyrics in their music. From farther up north in Sacramento, though originally from Manila and the offspring of an American WWII GI and Filipina war bride, sisters June and Jean Millington fronted the band Fanny, the first all-female hard rock band to be signed onto a major recording label. As I will point out, both

groups faced issues in breaking through to larger audiences due to their alterity or “Otherness.” The existence of these two groups transfers to audiences the ideologies of this particular time of the Bay Area Filipino American experience. Their music acts, to reference the words of ethnomusicologist Theodore Gonzalves, can be seen as “as vital acts of transfer,” using their platform “to communicate histories, lessons, identities, affinities and commitments” to listeners.⁶⁰

Dakila

The activism surrounding ethnic identity and civil rights in the Bay Area shaped the music and message of the band Dakila directly. Formed in the Mission in 1972 and fronted by guitarist David Bustamante, Dakila would be the first Filipino band to gain the platform provided by Epic Records. Dakila was also one of the very first recorded American bands to feature Filipino symbols and lyrics in their work. The name itself means “nobility” in Tagalog, and it was bestowed upon the band by David’s father. The band was mainly a family affair, with bass guitar handled by Bustamante’s cousin and the timbale, keyboard and managerial duties handled by older brothers and drums handled by a nephew.

I sat down David Bustamante one evening in Concord, California where his daughter owns a dance studio and teaches Tahitian dance. I had only recently

⁶⁰ Theodore S. Gonzalves, *The Day the Dancers Stayed: Performing in the Filipino/American Diaspora*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010, 13.

learned of Dakila via an internet blog curated by Bay Area cultural researcher Oliver Wang which highlighted overlooked Filipino bands of past eras whose music now who lays in the open waters of the internet.

The Bustamante family came from Bataan, located in the central Luzon region of the Philippines. It was also the starting point of the brutal Death March in World War II in which Japanese soldiers marched POW's 70 miles in an act that was later deemed a Japanese War Crime. David's father served in the military with the U.S. Air Force and was a musician and conductor for a regional band for thirty-three years. The family moved from Texas to Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California and then to the nearby city of Vallejo, before finally settling in the Mission district of San Francisco. David's family was naturally musical.

Bustamante recalls growing up in the ethnically diverse make-up of the Mission district and the origins of the band, particularly after the 1969 Woodstock festival performance and success of fellow Mission district musicians in the band Santana, fronted by Mexican American guitarist Carlos Santana. He shared the following memory.

My brother had a band called 'Soul Sacrifice.' We did a lot of covers, [Carlos] Santana stuff. After a while though we got tired of that whole thing. We decided to write our own songs, and since most of us in the band were Filipino, [we] wanted to work that angle. The music could be the Latin thing that was so popular in our area, but just Filipino. I was about seventeen years old at this time. I had been playing guitar since I was twelve.⁶¹

⁶¹ David Bustamante. Interview by Joshua Icban. In person. Concord, CA. Nov 6, 2016.

This desire to “Filipino-ize” the sound of “the Latin thing” is heard in the first track. “Makibaka/Ikalat,” from the group’s self-titled debut album released in 1972. The term *makibaka* means to fight and *ikalat* means to spread. *Makibaka* begins with the roll of a lone conguero before settling into a heavy Latinized R&B groove with a cascading dual harmony guitar line. In the opening of the song band members chant, in call-and-response from, the words “*Makibaka, hurwag ma takot!*” (Struggle! Do Not Be Afraid!). This was a call of Filipino activists made in the U.S. and abroad in response to the brutal and corrupt twenty-one-year martial law regime of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. The authoritarian control of this regime eventually led to his public ousting, in February 1986, which is remembered as the cause of the People Power Revolution.

Including Tagalog in the lyrics of the opening track shows the band’s consciousness and awareness of current events affecting the Filipino community, in the Bay Area and abroad. In this song the use of Tagalog demonstrates what E. San Juan describes as “language usage or behavior [that] is closely connected with the individual’s perception of herself and her own identity.”⁶² The song *Ikalat* has a more direct commentary with the Tagalog lyrics. As Bustamante told me during our interview:

A lot of Dakila’s lyrics dealt with the consciousness issues of that time period. So much was unfolding. If you listen to *Ikalat* the Tagalog translates to ‘why are you all like this? You’re acting like you don’t exist. Come on and say

⁶² E. San. Juan, *Toward Filipino self-determination: beyond transnational globalization*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010.

something! It's pretty radical. It's saying, 'come on lets band together.

The band's musical style also came from multiple generations of playing. The lyrics are primarily sung in a group setting and the layers of Latin and African percussion pervade each of the songs. Bustamante commented to me regarding this, "My brothers were older, so the vocal styles are really reminiscent of early 60s-style, kind of 'doo wop' thing. And the younger ones, well we liked all the stuff that was happening at the time. [Jazz guitarist] Wes Montgomery, Jimi Hendrix and all that. And of course, the Mission was just such a hybrid of all the communities that were living there at the time, African- American, Chicano and Filipino."

Even the album cover is a commentary on the band's ethnic identity. The image of long-haired Filipino San Franciscans in what looks to be a "jungle" seems definitely a PR move to exaggerate the "exotic" quality of the band.

David fondly recalled the late-night music scene of the Bay Area at this time with groups such as Tower of Power, Sly and the Family Stone and the Grateful Dead, which are now considered legendary and integral pieces of the "Bay Area sound," performing nightly. It was around this time, in 1972, that the success of Santana led record executives to capitalize on this hot and popular sound and scout the bands of the Mission district. As Bustamante recalls of the Dakila's initial reception and expectations:

We were lumped into the whole Latin rock thing. The club scene back then though was open to anything; you heard all these great bands back then everywhere. Around that time, though, people, meaning record label executives, were looking for the 'Mission sound.' We started to get a local following. [We were] writing and

performing our own songs and we were just waiting to get in on a record deal. We all knew Santana made it, so most of the bands around were just waiting to get a piece of the success and that demand. Some of our first musicians actually left to go to Malo [contemporary San Francisco Mission band whose front person was Jorge Santana, brother of Carlos] because they got a record deal first. But Clive Davis [famed American record executive] ended up coming to one of our rehearsals and liked us and got us signed up to Epic records.

Commenting on the identity of the band Bustamante says, “Well if you look at the record cover you could see [racially speaking] we were some kind of Asian, which was strange at the time. They [Epic Records]] didn’t quite know how to market us. Back then it seemed like you were either black or white. When Santana made it, it was cool because now here was a Hispanic thing getting some attention.”

Evidence of how the band was marketed is heard on the B-side on their first single released by Epic in 1972 entitled “Language Lesson.” The track featured recorded audio narration meant for radio listeners and to help other fellow radio disc jockeys of the time with the proper pronunciation of the band’s name and song titles. The narrator proclaims in the track that disc jockeys have been reluctant to play the band’s music due to a fear of complaints by the “small but wiry people,” referring to Filipinos who would complain of mispronunciation. Though there is a definite racial tinge to a comment such as this, it is interesting to note Epic’s effort to market Dakila as a Filipino band. That said, one must call into question the need for the line, “Disc jockeys need not be afraid of the onslaught of *Taga-lug* [a sarcastic attempt to say Tagalog] to *fa-lug..er..follow.*” The seemingly purposeful and joking way of pronouncing the

words was meant to make disc jockeys and listeners feel more comfortable with the exotic language.

This action, highlighting the band's unfamiliar identity with the general public, is in line with Grace Wang's observation that:

The racialized landscape in which all music making takes place underscores a critical point: There is no pure mode of listening. Music education studies have shown that beliefs about race and music genre influence how listeners—even music experts—evaluate musical performance. Put differently, what we think and see influences how we hear.⁶³

Even on the liner notes of the original 1972 album, producer Bruce Good wrote: "The music on this album presents a flavor that Latin freaks will not immediately recognize. They'll hear congas and timbales, the organs and guitars they know and love. But a subtle spice has been added to the pot, and it's a whole new stew. The new flavor is Tagalog; it is the Philippines. Just a taste more jungle than you're used to, but then, who wants the same dish all the time?"⁶⁴

Though the band benefitted from their chance to be signed to a major label they did not possess full artistic control of their sound. The producers and record label representatives changed a lot of the bands songs and Bustamante remembered during our interview:

[They] had us play all the songs much faster, faster than we usually would do them and faster than we thought it should be. A lot of strings were overdubbed, and our record producer was experimenting. They cut up some of the songs, spliced certain parts together. A lot of songs had a much different arrangement. They just used whatever they felt they needed.⁶⁵

⁶³ Grace Wang, *Soundtracks of Asian America : Navigating Race Through Musical Performance*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015, 13.

⁶⁴ Bruce Good, liner notes to *Dakila*. Dakila. Epic Records EPC S 65317, 1972, LP.

⁶⁵ David Bustamante. Interview by Joshua Icbán. In person. Concord, CA. Nov 6, 2016.

Dakila would tour with other esteemed local acts such as Buddy Miles and Malo, including a tour of Hawaii. Locally, in the 1970s, the band toured mainly on the University circuit and for the increasing number of Filipino social college clubs. Bustamante recalled the time and shared with me that:

At that time, it was a time of identity. These clubs were popping up all over the place. So, the smart thing to do for us [to get exposure] was to play these places. A lot of our touring was done here. Also, a lot of us were in tune with each other, we were in the same headspace. So much was happening in that time, not only here but [also] in the Philippines.

Dakila also played benefits for Delano *manongs* and the striking farmworkers as well as for organizations supporting the I-Hotel and local Filipino protest movements. These events also played a part in the band developing a following amongst college student radicals. David also shares the point that Dakila was slated to tour the Philippines in 1972 at the height of their popularity, at the invitation of First Lady Imelda Marcos. The band had secured their needed medical shots and passports, but President Ferdinand ultimately denied them passage. Bustamante commented on this time, sharing with me that:

Marcos probably thought we were radicals. I mean we had long hair, from San Francisco. Plus, when the Beatles went there it was a disaster and it didn't reflect on him well that they hated their visit there went [Bustamante is referring to the band's chaotic stay in the Philippine in 1966]. It's a shame though, I think if that show went through things would've been different maybe...we could've toured Europe and got an international presence. It would've kept things moving, probably even kept the band together.

The band would eventually slow down, as the gigs and its members' faith in further success got smaller. The record company no longer seemed to support them, and band members started leaving. For a band that took on and

experimented with expressions of Filipino identity, it seemed as though the record label gave more support on other groups from the Mission district, such as Malo, which was already pushing a more familiar “Latin” sound and identity. Bustamante lamented of this circumstance and his frustration about it during our talk, noting there wasn’t always a sure way to proceed as a band of their circumstance and message:

“We were learning. I wish we had somebody who could’ve taught us how to do things. Promoting and everything. We really had no direction, we were young and just trying to follow our hearts.”

His sentiment is reflected in the lyrics of “Make Me a Man,” which say:

*When time comes you’re all alone
Times are hard on your own
It’s your future or your past
Somehow you think you won’t last
And I keep thinking every day, there’s nothing coming my way
If only someone could help me through, show me what I’m supposed to do
Is there anybody?⁶⁶*

Bustamante penned with lyrics, which deal with a sense of lack of encouragement in direction and feeling lost. The lyrics also seem to comment directly with the struggle of an ethnically ambiguous band, and perhaps even bigger the whole generational population, looking for direction in a strange place. When Bustamante sings, “Times are hard on your own/It’s your future or your past/Somehow you think you won’t last,” there is a resonance with the Bay Area activists of the period who were fighting for equal treatment in a country

⁶⁶ Dakila. *Dakila*. Dakila. Epic Records EPC S 65317, 1972, LP.

they were born in. The “future” referring to what these activists were fighting for and the “past” referring to many of their parent’s immigrant beginnings and struggles.

It is Bustamante’s current wish for the band to still play in the Philippines. Dakila has been resurrected on many instances in various forms throughout the past few years with different members. They continue to play Bay Area Filipino festival circuits and “Sounds of Latin Rock” remembrances events in the Mission. I even attended their recent performance in Benicia, California in early 2018 which featured a line-up of new members and some friends of the band from the Mission. An article by Rick Oliveares written for Filipino Media Outlet ABS-CBN news had the headline “After 40- year delay Fil-Am Band Dakila hopes to finally hold Manila concert.”⁶⁷

When asked about the current trend of new Filipino artists and the bands nostalgic internet popularity, Bustamante commented during our talk: “It’s cool now to say you’re Filipino. I’m surprised that we pop up on blogs. People from Germany are asking me if we’re together. I didn’t know people liked the music still [laughs]. I like that there is a presence in the entertainment industry for Filipinos. There is success going on. I think Dakila’s legacy can be that we were one of the first to try and do it, unabashedly, and put it into the forefront our Filipino identity.”

⁶⁷ Rick Olivares. “After 40-year Delay, Fil-Am Band Dakila Hopes to Finally Hold Manila Concert.” ABS-CBN News. March 31, 2018. <http://news.abs-cbn.com/entertainment/04/01/18/after-40-year-delay-fil-am-band-dakila-hopes-to-finally-hold-manila-concert>, accessed April 15, 2018.

Fanny

The time period of the 1960s and 1970s were zones for the redefinition of not only political and ethnic identities but also for gender norms. In 1968, the book *The Second Sex* by French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir took a new popularity as it brought into popular attention the perspective the unequal treatment women faced in terms of work pay, sexual freedom and societal expectations. The world of rock-n-roll, with its emphasis on liberated identities, sexual freedom, parties and loud guitars, was largely an all-boys club. Women associated within this rock-n-roll culture were often viewed only as “girlfriends” or “groupies” for bands. The appearance of female rock-n-roll musicians who were neither Black nor White on mainstream media was a rarity and an even rarer sight would be sisters who could play guitar, sing and write their own songs. This was the world that June and Jean Millington came into and one which they challenged with their artistic contributions.

Fanny was the first band of its kind: an all -female hard rock group that played and composed its own material. The group earned major label distribution, released four length albums and toured the world, performing at generational music venue landmarks, such as the Fillmore West in San Francisco and the Fillmore East in New York. They jammed, toured and exchanged musical ideas with the brightest of the generation including Dr. John, the Staple Sisters, David Bowie and Sly Stone. Their third album *Fanny Hill*, released in 1972, was even recorded at the famed Apple studios in England and engineered

by Beatles collaborator Geoff Emerick. Their fourth album, *Mother's Pride*, featured production work by famed 70s superstar Todd Rundgren. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1999, David Bowie even proclaimed that, "They were one of the finest fucking rock bands of their time, in about 1973. They were extraordinary: they wrote everything, they played like motherfuckers, they were just colossal and wonderful, and nobody's ever mentioned them. They're as important as anybody else who's ever been, ever; it just wasn't their time."⁶⁸

June Millington reflected on this period during our interview at her sister Jean's home in Davis, California (where they, along with original band member Brie Howard, were working on what would be a forthcoming album of new material). "We worked so hard. I remember Jean saying in some English magazine interview after I had left the group, 'What else do we have to do?' We had played all the major venues with all these accolades, toured with all those names and were still just a 'chick band.'"⁶⁹

Timing seems to be an essential factor in the Fanny story. Learning of them in the canon of Filipino American Bay Area musical history yields further evidence that the burgeoning population of Filipino immigrants who came to the United States produced representatives in many of the movements that shaped American political and social consciousness. As Dakila was a product of the

⁶⁸ Gavin Edwards. "20 Rock Albums We Loved in the 1970s That You Never Heard." *Rolling Stone*, Rolling Stone. June 11, 2015. www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/20-rock-albums-rolling-stone-loved-in-the-1970s-that-you-never-heard-20150611/fanny-fanny-hill-20150611, accessed April 15, 2018.

⁶⁹ Brie Howard, Jean Millington and June Millington. Interview by Joshua Icban. In Person. Davis, CA. Nov 6, 2016.

growing identity politics and radicalism prevalent in the Bay Area of the 1970s, so too was Fanny. However, there is an extra layer in Fanny's story. Being a serious and talented all-female rock-n-roll band was a severe and distinct anomaly at this time.

Fanny's story is important in the broader story of Asian American women, whose stories and narratives are rarely seen in the forefront of mainstream historical accounts. Women's points of views are often presented as secondary, which is something that the formation of the band Fanny wanted to do away with. As Gary Okihiro writes:

The exclusion of Asian women from the 'pages of paper' is not without meaning or effect. Their omission serves to bolster a system of male dominance, a system of privilege and oppression. The inclusion of women on those 'pages of paper'-their recentering-challenges those relations of power and presents a truer account of our collective past... it illuminates possibilities for the future as well as criticizes the limitations of the present"⁷⁰

June and Jean Millington were both born in Manila. They grew up there until their teen years when they immigrated to Sacramento. They were daughters of two worlds from birth, having an American father and a Filipino mother who met in the aftermath of World War II in Manila. June recalls her GI father's John Millington's aunt's reaction to his intention to marry local Manila woman Yolanda Limjoco. "But your children will be heathen!"⁷¹ she said. In the memoir, June lovingly recalls growing up in Manila with images of blue skies

⁷⁰ Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2014, 103.

⁷¹ June Millington, *Land of a thousand bridges: island girl in a rock & roll world*. Goshen, MA: Institute for the Musical Arts, 2015. 80.

and Filipino family customs such as eating together and spending time with her *lola* and *lolo* (grandparents). They had a well to do household complete with maids and house boys as her grandfather “made a fortune selling ice to GI’s who needed it for their Coca-Colas. Everything after the war was decimated *except* for my grandfather’s ice plant, which was down the street from where we lived.”⁷² Though they lived in the upper-class society of Manila, June and Jean recall that the biggest challenge they faced was being biracial and attending American schools in the Philippines. In Sacramento, where the family first settled, Jean recalls a disconnected identity as well while attending the new schools in their new immigrated home: “Our classmates used to say ‘Oh from the Philippines? You had to hack your way to your house huh?’ I hated that!”

June further recalled the childhood of the sisters and the feeling of disconnection between their peers during our interview, saying that, “there were maids and blah blah blah, but it wasn’t easy. It was hard being biracial. We went to an American school with all the white kids, kids of other GI’s so when we were at school we were looked at differently, kind of shunned. We’d go home and be treated normal but at school we were invisible.”

The cultural split also continued with the language as Jean shared during our talk: “We spoke Tagalog as kids but then dad said the kids have to start speaking English, so I can understand what they’re saying. English was a status thing. Tagalog and American were interchangeable when we were kids.”

⁷² Ibid

Another major memory of growing up in the Philippines which the sisters carried with them came in the form of inherited trauma from older relatives. Being children in the company of people who had just lived through the horrors of war, June and Jean heard “the stories of war.” Jean recalled during our talk:

They [our family] had just lived through this trauma and they had to tell somebody, they had to talk about it. They told the stories as if we were adults. They would point to the spots where these things happened, and it was frightening because it had just happened! All the boys and men being rounded up in the village of Lian in Batangas, beaten and killed, forced to be informants by the Japanese. One of our uncles escaped and swam for days to some remote island to hide from the Japanese. Everyone thought he was dead.

June also relates the story of an uncle who had a tooth pulled during the war with no Novocain: “I couldn’t fathom that at all since I hated going to the dentist! I couldn’t imagine someone just putting the pain out of their mind. Later I realized I had learned to do the same thing.” Being able to put pain out of mind was a technique it June learned from her uncle to deal with excruciating circumstances. In regard to the ordeals that surrounded the career of Fanny and the pressure of being the lone contenders in their field, it seems this technique came in handy in many areas of their story.

The sisters began to get serious about their music while still in the Philippines. They began with ukuleles and performing for relatives before switching to electric guitar for June and bass for Jean, learning the newest American music from the radio and performing for school talent shows. A year after immigrating, the sisters formed their own group called The Svelts along with another half-Filipina musician Brie Howard, who was Folsom, California.

She became their drummer until a future pregnancy forced her to take time off. As Brie recalls during our interview, “It was such a trip to meet y’all. I remember the audition thinking, ‘Hey, who were these other half-Filipina girls who could also play?’ And wow there were no brown people at all in Folsom. We used to go out every night and prove people wrong about our playing ability. Still my favorite thing to do.”

The teenage girls became so well known that they would regularly be in demand and able to tour clubs from Sacramento down over to San Francisco. Their mother providing the loan to acquire their gear and was their sole mean of transportation. Being underage ladies, they also had to sport fake ID’s to play in some of the music clubs. All three women recall with great pride that “Not only could we play but we knew how to set up a PA [sound system] as well.” The band would drive the local audiences crazy, not only with the “novelty” of being an all -girl group, but the with their musical abilities.

The help they received from their immigrant mother to pursue an artistic goal particularly supports an idea by Paul DiMaggio and Maria Kelley about immigrant children being able to find a different means of employment and identity by way of their parents. They write:

Even immigrant children in prosperous and educated families now see art as a channel not only to prosper but to instill life with meaning. Immigrant parents toil and sacrifice, opening up paths for economic and social mobility; their children take a measure of prosperity for granted while yearning for something more than survival—prominence, pleasure, and even fame. The result is expressive entrepreneurship— that is, a type of self-employment that relies on artistic inventiveness to produce or disseminate goods and services.⁷³

⁷³ Paul DiMaggio and Maria Patricia Fernández-Kelly. *Art in the Lives of Immigrant Communities in the United States*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010, 6.

The alienation that June, Jean and Brie felt faded away on the band stand. As June recalls: “Music helped to integrate all our pieces of ourselves that weren’t relating in normal society.” In this way their music and art were their path to “repair stereotypes” and “humanize strangers.”⁷⁴ The women no longer felt outside of the crowd. When they played music, they felt equal to everybody else, regardless of race or gender.

As Fanny came together, the girls knew they were doing something different. Adding Alice De Buhr on drums and Nicky Barclay on piano and organ and co-songwriting duties, the group began diligently working on their sound and craft, taking what they had learned through the years of performing the hits of the day and incorporating them into their own vision. June adds:

Everything was an event horizon: an all-girl band in the mid-60’s couldn’t escape the gravitational pull of people’s prejudices, although we tried: the best we could do was to move fiercely [and] constantly ignore them... That took a lot of energy... We had to prove we could play like guys, and we couldn’t use a can opener to sway public opinion. We needed a buzz sat. We didn’t just want to conquer the world. We wanted to be immortal.⁷⁵

Their need to prove themselves over and over again eventually wore out the band members. As progressive a time period as it was, it seemed mainstream American audiences weren’t ready to accept an all-female band and hold them to the same standard male rock bands were held to. Indeed, an example of a New York Times article from May 30, 1971 was titled as “Fanny, a Four girl rock

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ June Millington, *Land of a thousand bridges: island girl in a rock & roll world*. Goshen, MA: Institute for the Musical Arts, 2015. 198.

group, poses a Challenge to Male Ego.”⁷⁶ The title of this headline shows that the male-dominated world of rock-n-roll was challenged by a female presence that could outplay and stand toe-to-toe with them artistically. Though the band enjoyed success and respect amongst its male peers in the Los Angeles and New York music scenes, where they would move eventually after outgrowing the Bay Area, the fact that they were held to a different and steeper standard than other all-male bands affected the women of Fanny as time wore on. June and Jean both shared with me during our talk that “it was always more the fact that we were women that bothered people more than our race.”

This story of women in the music industry being seen as nothing more than objects for pleasure (or as June put it during our interview, “vaginas on stage”) is not uncommon in the music industry; it is so much a normal part of our usual perceptions that it seems to be the only norm. Similar feelings and accounts for this type of treatment are echoed in recent memoirs from successful women who made it through the music business. Kim Gordon, bassist for New York art rock luminaries Sonic Youth, describes she was told to stand in the center of the stage during performances by the band’s record label in order to draw attention to her as the sole female of the band. She says that this was when her band Sonic Youth “learned that for high-end music labels, the music matters, but a lot comes down to how the girl looks. The girl anchors the stage, sucks in the male gaze, and depending on who she is, throws her own gaze back into the audience.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Millington, 354.

⁷⁷ Kim Gordon, *Girl in a Band*. London: Faber And Faber, 2016, 13.

Bay Area born musician Sheila E. shares her own experiences about her struggles as a successful female musician in bands:

Some of the attention I was getting from men only made things harder. Playing on that tour [with Marvin Gaye] signified another level in my career, and yet I quickly discovered that with these new opportunities came new challenges. I had to navigate some unsavory invitations from music industry insiders who attended the shows. Different tour, same proposal: sleep with me and I'll advance your career. And backstage after a gig, the fellas [bandmates] would flatter me and say, 'You were amazing girl!' Then they'd offer me drugs and alcohol. Eventually their talk would turn to sex.⁷⁸

June recounts in her memoir the exhaustion inherent in this experience that ultimately led her to depart from the band first after four years:

We had no one to look at as our peers. We had to be our own peers. Hard to explain how difficult it was for a young woman to shred like that every night in those times. I never had an off night. I couldn't have an off night. If a girl so much as flinched at the starting line, it was all over. Like the saying goes, A woman has to practically play (do anything) better than a man to be perceived as anywhere near as good...we were the battering ram. And we cheered each other on with a mantra, despite all our struggles and differences: that we knew other girls would need our work down the line. Geez, we were digging ditches, backbreaking labor, tossing the dirt of thousands of years off our backs. Prejudice weighs a lot. Just didn't know we wouldn't be given credit for it. We were feminists before feminism.⁷⁹

The fact that two island girls from Manila, each sibling barely twenty-one years of age, were signed by Reprise records and became international touring rock-n-roll musicians in the 1970s is a phenomenal feat. To embody the experiences of their family, which lived through World War II, and to

⁷⁸ Sheila E. and Wendy Holden. *The Beat of My Own Drum: A Memoir*. New York: Atria Books, 2015, 120.

⁷⁹ Millington, 270.

communicate their history and stories through the public platform of recorded music is itself a miracle. Since their father was a GI and their parents met because of the war, the sister are, themselves, a byproduct of merging cultures and historical events.

The legacy of Fanny can be seen in many of the progressive stances taken in their lyrics as well. Fanny focused on subjects that hadn't a song yet to express their narrative. One such song is "You've Got a Home" which is a ballad from their 1972 album *Fanny Hill*. The lyrics are written from the point of view of a single mother singing for her child after tucking him into sleep and waiting out a winter storm. A Beatles-esque bass line drone and lilting slide guitar line begin the song and form a foundation for the simple lullaby-like melody, which lends itself to describing this parental, sheltering scene. The chorus of the song states:

*Someday I'll have to tell you
The reason we live alone
You may not have a father, but you have a home.*⁸⁰

This point of view from a single mother was not commonly explored or put into song. The reality and struggle of being the head of a single parent household and raising a child is not in accord with the vision of the nuclear family with dutifully married heterosexual parents and a suburban home with a white picket fence suburban home was still normative in the mainstream consciousness.

⁸⁰ Fanny. *Fanny Hill*. Fanny. Reprise Records REP M 52058, 1972. LP.

Their song “Think About the Children,” also from *Fanny Hill*, reflects an interest in the impacts of one’s actions onto the future:

*Are you ready think of the future
To think about somebody else
They may be your children’s children and not just self
The children stop to listen to the melody in the air
They never heard the pain/ they never knew it was there.”⁸¹*

The song features a prominent “wah-wah” guitar line and mellow R&B style feel from the band, and there is a particularly shining moment of guitar playing from June. June has jammed with and learned from celebrated guitar players of this period Jeff “Skunk” Baxter and Sneaky Pete Kleinow. Other performance elements, like Jean’s vocal growls and riveting bass playing in “Young and Dumb” and “Special Care,” from their 1971 album *Charity Ball*, reveal a confidence and attitude that identified a new type of presence and definition of femininity in the rock-n-roll world. My first exposure to Fanny was watching them play “Special Care” via YouTube on the BBC. It was shocking to me to see them elevate this organ-driven rock tune with Jean singing the lines, “And it’s time for all that special care to be taken, to make you aware of the forsaken & if you don’t care then we’ll come and burn your house down,” accompanied with June’s incendiary guitar leads. I had never known there was a Filipina-fronted rock-n-roll band that was doing this kind of work. The track “Soulchild,” also from their 1973 album *Fanny Hill*, is sung from the viewpoint of a female free spirit and paints the picture of the modern woman who is “going to

⁸¹ Ibid

school on her daddy's bill and who "knows she is cool cause she's on the pill."

The lyrics then proclaims:

*Go on and play, girl
Take a swing on a slide
What do you say girl?
How does it feel on the inside?
Look out girl
You got to learn how to get along in this world.*⁸²

This kind of privilege of being able to afford school from a parent's pocketbook and commentary of sexual freedom with the line about sexual contraception i.e. "she's on the pill" were sentiments that were not commonplace for female artists up until the 1970s.

June talked about Fanny's subject matter in their songs during our interview and shared: "We wanted to be smart. We wanted to do smart music and be known as the musicians we were. For a long time, we just couldn't accept that that's not what the general people were ready for."

After the release of their fourth album *Mother's Pride* in 1973, their record company suggested a different look for the band, one where they were to wear skimpier clothes and adorn themselves with glitter. This look was to conform them to the standards of females in rock-n-roll that they were avoiding.⁸³

After this June recalls thinking to herself, "Are the songs just not enough? It was then that I couldn't do it anymore. The nagging feeling that this just wasn't right I couldn't put aside anymore."

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Millington, 499.

During the band's height of popularity in 1973, *Playboy* magazine proposed to the members of Fanny to pose nude in their centerfolds, to which Jean replied in an interview with English publication *CREAM* magazine "We'll pose nude when Hugh Hefner poses nude for the centerfold with a hard-on."⁸⁴

It can be said that Fanny's contributions to female identity and community extended beyond the scope of the Bay Area. Wherever they went the sisters brought along the memories of their upbringing in Manila and the music they absorbed in their travels across the globe. Their role as serious pioneering women musicians in a male-dominated world also carries along important merit in the history of rock-n-roll, preceding the rise of other female-fronted groups to follow such as the Runaways and the Bangles.

Fanny has experienced a resurgence of interest and recognition in recent years. A new incarnation of the group called *Fanny Walks the Earth* comprised of June, Jean and Brie (the original Svelts members) released a new album of recordings in March 2018 called *Fanny Walked The Earth* and the new group was also featured in the March 2018 issue of *Rolling Stone* in an article titled "Fanny Lives: Inside the Return of the Pioneering All-Female Rock Band."⁸⁵ June was also featured and honored for her contributions as a guitarist in the September 2016 issue of *Vintage Guitar* magazine and in a November 2017 article in *Guitar*

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Eric R. Danton. "Fanny Lives: Inside the Return of the Pioneering All-Female Rock Band." *Rolling Stone*. March 16, 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/fanny-lives-inside-return-of-pioneering-female-rock-band-w517583>, accessed April 15, 2018.

Player magazine entitled “50 Years of Extraordinary Players.”⁸⁶ Ann Powers wrote about her for NPR in 2015 in an online feature called “June Millington’s Lifelong Journey in Rock,”⁸⁷ chronicling not only Fanny but also June’s work as co-founder of the Institute of Musical Arts in Boston, which specializes in providing an encouraging atmosphere for female musicians, something Fanny lacked in their day. June also commented in the article on her place now in music history: “I’m now old enough where I have become the subject of college dissertations.”⁸⁸

Both Dakila and Fanny epitomize the identity of Filipino Americans who were a part of the Bay Area in the 1970s. As the consciousness of Americans changed in 1970 so too in accord did Filipino Americans in establishing a new identity and sense of belonging. Being artists in a period when few around them shared a similar look or heritage, these two groups forged ahead and created their own identities in the midst what was going on. Fanny perhaps best represents the quality of sticking together with your community through adversity, much like the activist actions of Filipino American community organizers did with their activism. The breakthrough artistic spirit of the two groups is now celebrated and lives on, intrinsically, in the artists of the next

⁸⁶ Michael Molenda. “50 Years of Extraordinary Players.” *Guitar Player*. November 21, 2017. <https://www.guitarplayer.com/players/50-years-of-extraordinary-players>, accessed April 16, 2018.

⁸⁷ Ann Powers. “You’ve Got A Home: June Millington’s Lifelong Journey In Rock.” *NPR*, NPR, November 19, 2015. <https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2015/11/19/456581427/youve-got-a-home-june-millingtons-lifelong-journey-in-rock>, accessed April 17, 2018.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*

generation, which has since learned from the example of these earlier bands and are now defining themselves on their own terms.

Chapter 3

SoMa Pilipinas and the Continuing Generation

On July 13, 2017 the South of Market district in San Francisco was recognized by the California Arts Council as a new Cultural District. Supervisor Jane Kim commented that the recognition “underlies the critical role the arts and innovative expressions play in recognizing communities who have long contributed to the building and culture of San Francisco and California”⁸⁹ Indeed, this passage marked a milestone in the history of Filipino American identity and contributes to a growing need of visibility for the story of those who gave to the fulfillment of the prosperity of California and endured to become visible. Filipino Americans as well as the wider demographic of Asian Americans have contributed greatly to the wealth of the United States. Though Asian Americans and many immigrants have played pivotal roles in developing this wealth through contributions in various fields of work and labor, the recognition of such efforts at a public scale is something of a rarity. This lack of acknowledgment keeps Asian Americans from being recognized as part of a whole national American identity. Lisa Lowe refers to this when she says:

the contradictions of Asian immigration, which at different moments in the last century and a half of Asian entry into the United States have placed Asians ‘within’ the U.S. nation-state, its workplaces, and its markets, yet linguistically, culturally, and

⁸⁹ Ladale Anderson, "Communities Become Part of CA Cultural Districts Program." San Francisco News. July 19, 2017. <http://www.thesfnews.com/communities-become-part-ca-cultural-districts-program/39297>, accessed March 20, 2018.

racially marked Asians as ‘foreign’ and ‘outside’ the national polity.⁹⁰

The designation of SoMa Pilipinas is vital for future generations as it actively acknowledges the long history of Filipino Americans in United States. The plight of both the *manongs*, who experienced race riots, anti-miscegenation laws and brutally low wages, and the grassroots Filipino American activists, who created spaces to allow for cultural growth, is celebrated through the support of public Asian American organizations in SoMa Pilipinas that still exist today in downtown San Francisco, such as the Kearny Street Workshop.

The mission of SoMa Pilipinas includes cultural celebration, community development and creating economic opportunity. This creates a greater opportunity for visibility and community different than past generations. The homepage of its website states this mission: “Filipinos have lived South of Market for over a century. Our struggle to make home, preserve culture, and build community is the story of SOMA Pilipinas.”⁹¹

This chapter will focus on a select few artists who to me contribute to the vanguard of Filipino American artistic identity expression that is prevalent and ongoing in the Bay Area. What is special about these artists is that this creative work is linked explicitly with the work they do as community servants. They not only contribute to the culture and community as identified artists but also as community organizers and business owners who readily give back to the spaces

⁹⁰ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, 7-8.

⁹¹ "About." SOMA Pilipinas, <http://www.somapilipinas.org>, accessed April 1, 2018.

they inhabit. They provide a space, opportunities for representation and access to resources for Filipino Americans interested in exploring indigenous culture as well the creation of new music and art works. These artists close the distance between theory, pedagogy and activism by helping place representations back into the hands of those affected by them.⁹² These are the people who help to actively foster further growth and artistic exploration of Filipino American identity. Through their artistry and work, the artists discussed in this chapter are representative of what Faye Caronan writes about. They effectively:

Model how to misidentify with hegemonic narratives of U.S. exceptionalism and encourage others to create and share their own stories...they are committed to reaching and teaching those who do not have access to traditional education. They complete their genealogical project by arguing, in fact, that their genealogical projects are never finished and thereby authorizing a diverse public to contribute their perspectives. They urge those who have been taught that their perspectives are unimportant to believe that their views are significant.⁹³

Increased visibility of the contributions of Bay Area Filipino American artists to the Bay Area came in October of 2017 with the recognition of dance artist Alleluia Panis by the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC). Panis, a Filipino immigrant, is the recipient of the SFAC's first ever Artistic Legacy Grant award and was recognized for her work as founder and director of her arts organization Kulintang Arts, Inc., which is popularly known as Kularts. Panis work began when started the Kulintang Arts Ensemble, a collection of dancers and musicians, in order to bridge connections between indigenous southern

⁹² Deborah Anne Wong, *Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music*. New York: Routledge, 2004, 134.

⁹³ Faye Caronan, *Legitimizing Empire : Filipino American and U.S. Puerto Rican Cultural Critique*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015, 140.

Filipino music and contemporary stylings. *Kulintang* is the ancient and powerful gong music that exists in the southern most Muslim majority region of the Philippines called Mindanao. She founded Kulintang Arts Organization in 1985 and describes it as “the premier presenter of contemporary and tribal Filipino Arts.”⁹⁴ Her intention was to use the arts “to investigate beyond celebratory elements of the culture and expand work into the important functions of the dance and music within the society as it is related to rituals, designs and mythologies.”⁹⁵

After immigrating to the United States at the age of twelve, Panis found a passion for dance and creating in the Bay Area. Her perspective on the medium was changed after she experienced the indigenous dance and music of Mindanao, the second largest island of the Philippines. She regularly brings master artists of the region to do workshops and artistic exchanges with local artists of the Bay Area. Panis also organizes a bi-yearly trip to indigenous societies in Mindanao, allowing for a direct interaction and immersion for Filipinos from abroad who are unaware of the pre-colonial traditions and societies of the Philippines. A key component of the trip showcases an “affirmation of the complexities of our pre-Islamic and pre-colonial spiritual beliefs and a confirmation of our commonality with other spiritual traditions of the world.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ “Our Story.” Kularts. <https://www.kularts-sf.org/about/>, accessed April 1, 2018.

⁹⁵ Theodore S. Gonzalves, *Stage Presence: Conversations with Filipino American Performing Artists*. San Francisco: Meritage Press, 2007, 112.

⁹⁶ Gonzalvez, 123.

I was a participant of this trip in February 2018 and am thankful to her for the experience to see, hear and be amongst a people who come from a history I likely would have never seen or known otherwise. The experiences of seeing the direct influence of other Southeast Asian cultures, the Muslim religion, animistic religions, struggles for political autonomy and the crippling encroachment of land-hungry corporate interests on the indigenous peoples of Mindanao affected the way I understood the Philippines. Mindanao has been the subject of much controversy and fear due to activity including the siege and resulting destruction of the town of Marawi City by Islamic extremist group ISIS in 2017. Many people with whom I shared my intention to go to Mindanao reacted in a negative way, often asking why I wanted to go to “stay with terrorists.” I however found there many stories and people misunderstood by the general population in both the Philippines and the United States.

The early people of Mindanao fought for their autonomy during the time of Spanish invasion in the 1600s and stifled the spread of Catholicism there. Philippine national hero Sultan Dipatuan Kudrat, 7th Sultan of the Maguindanao Tribe in Mindanao from 1619-1671, is most famously recognized for this. The people of Mindanao’s history of fighting for sovereignty carries on today and has created many political rifts on the island. The arts, music and culture of Mindanao, however, continue to be passed on to younger generations and my discovery of it for myself has opened my eyes to even more pathways I may take in interpreting my Filipino identity. Seeing non-Catholic religious traditions and music had led me to reevaluate many of the ideas I had around Filipino cultural traditions and practices.

The Tribal Tour program is one of Kularts' important contributions to SoMa Pilipinas and the Bay Area. Through the work produced and resources offered by Kularts, the organization and Panis provide for many U.S.-born Filipino Americans largely unacquainted with their home country a way to navigate what Yen Le Espiritu calls, their "emotional transnationalism." Espiritu writes that emotional transnationalism "situates them [U.S.-born Filipino Americans] between different generational and locational points of reference."⁹⁷ By providing a way to experience a culture lost to them, those of the Filipino diaspora are able to heal and reclaim new points of cultural reference and identity. By referencing and being influenced by the rituals and spiritual practices of indigenous Filipino culture, Panis and Kularts allows for creation of spaces that allow us, in diaspora, to remember and preserve these practices in present times. This makes portions of Panis' works a "site of alternative history."⁹⁸ Her 2018 dance film for example, entitled *She Who Can See*, is a narrative of an individual who is able to communicate with spirits. Though looked at as a medical condition in Western contemporary society, many aboriginal cultures, including those in the Philippines, see this ability to communicate with a spiritual world-to reach beyond a normal person's grasp of reality- as a gift. This work serves to, as Panis expresses, "enlighten and lay bare the hardships when how ancient beliefs collide with modern world."⁹⁹ *She Who*

⁹⁷ Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound : Filipino Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 14.

⁹⁸ Caronan, 107.

⁹⁹ "Screening Debut of Alleluia Panis' Dance Film, *She Who Can See*." Kularts. <http://www.kularts.org/kularts-presents/she-who-can-see/>, accessed June 1, 2018.

Can See also recognizes that alternative narratives of spirituality exist in Filipino history and informs the premise of the artwork and artistic expression. It remains a vital part of the work she does that “in teaching ritual performances to subsequent generations, memories are likewise transmitted from one generation to the next” and acts “like an archive for embodied culture.”¹⁰⁰

Panis describes her credo in this way:

I want people to aspire for the best, to be excellent and not settle for less because I think that is also kind of a way for us to decolonize ourselves by saying, ‘You can be good. You can be on the main stage without giving up your identity.’ Having a different rendering [and] letting ourselves believe that we are capable of and that we are deserving of being in a place.¹⁰¹

She supports the notion that being oneself is enough of a definition of identity. The identity lives and thrives as we decide it be. This is her motivation on living and creating art through a Filipino American focus and inside the Filipino American community in the Bay Area. Commenting on the official recognition of SoMa Pilipinas, she has stated: “I think the visibility of Filipino Americans is now finally at the forefront because we’re finally realizing, we have really arrived. We’ve been arriving since the early part of the last century and time to take space, time to accept it.”¹⁰²

Another artist who shares Panis’ belief that Filipino Americans are ready and deserving of greater visibility and acknowledgment is poet, singer and theatre artist Golda Supernova. During a sit-down interview I asked her what it

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Interview with Alleluia Panis, “StoryCorps: Exploring Filipino Arts in SoMa”. *CAAM Presents Filipino American History Month*, Podcast Audio, October 20, 2016.

¹⁰² Ibid.

means to be Filipino American. She answered, “our bodies are Filipino-America. It’s our blood. Our body is our land. Our stories are the collections, our breath. Just through living it, that’s our history.”¹⁰³

Golda has been a part of the Bay Area art scene for almost twenty years, arriving in 1999 from Alaska and settling in Oakland, California, after looking for her place as an artist. She immediately felt a connection to the Bay Area, sharing with me during our interview that “art made the Bay Area home. There’s an audience for it, there’s a connection that gets to be made and people show up for it. That’s what art means here.”

Though born in the Philippines, her family moved to Alaska when she was three years old. Her father worked in canneries and her mother worked closely with the Filipino community of Anchorage, forming groups for cultural and political representation. She became an admirer of the work of Bay Area Filipino playwrights but settled into poetry and what became known as spoken word in the early 2000s. She encountered other artists at spaces like the Cellar Door in San Francisco and became acquainted with the multiple facets of identity present in the poet scene including a collective of performance artists of Filipino descent called “Overseas Artists.” Golda recalled that it was “so strange to meet Filipinos who were Buddhist or vegan or performance artists.” Eventually Golda realized that “these were my peers, as long as I had the guts to keep showing up,” as she told me during our personal talk.

¹⁰³ Golda Sargento. Interview by Joshua Icban. In Person. Oakland, CA. October 24, 2016.

She eventually became a part of the Filipino American spoken word group 8th Wonder which would toured nationally and allowed her to experiment with music and song building in collaboration with fellow member and beatboxer Jason Mateo. She would go on to form a more rock-oriented band called Golda and the Guns with guitarist Brandon Bigelow, whom she met at Bindlestiff Studio, a Filipino American run black box theatre which is also a part of the newly christened SoMa Pilipinas. Golda's band would go on to play outside of Filipino or Asian-centric events, where she found herself confronted with the same problems as Fanny faced before. She remembers:

When we started playing with these other groups from outside the community we'd get into it. It's a lot more level now but back then there were definitely words exchanged. All of a sudden there'd be this rock band from Utah looking at us funny because they thought we didn't deserve to be there, whispering to each other and all. It was because I'm a girl and we're all Filipino. It's like we're not real. But then we would play and then they'd apologize. I love doing that, making people think twice. I love educating them.

For my own personal story, Golda and the Guns introduced me into a Filipino American world I had not known existed but for which I had been searching for very long time during my early 20s. I was the guitar player for a band called The Savages (coincidentally a band with all-Filipino members) when we shared a bill with Golda and the Guns during a show at the Mission Theatre on Broadway Street in San Francisco in 2011. When she took the stage, I experienced a sight neither I nor my band mates had ever seen before. Our singer at the time, Minnie, was particularly struck by the presence of a Filipina rock singer on-stage who wrote and performed her own songs and did so with a loud

and raw-sounding band blazing behind her. Her songs outlined a powerful proclamation of unashamed identity and embraced the freedom of art.

Like Panis, Golda views songwriting and performing as a sort of communal ritual. Golda described to me during the interview that “it’s my job. I learn through it. Art is my lover. I get to offer it as a medicine and we all get to create something new from that.” Her feelings on her craft mirror Doreen Fernandez’s concept of theatricality, which she called *palabas*, in which an act of performing becomes an act of living and where the audience and performer coming under a similar context to serve a singular purpose and need.¹⁰⁴ Her composition “*Lollipops and Rum*”, released and circulated independently by the band in 2007, lyrically showcases Golda’s belief in the purpose of music as medicine for all:

Unicorns and Mermaids
Dark-Haired Isis
Shadows, Ninjas, Robots
All the Nymphs and Hobbits

Aliens and Supernatural Creatures
The Guardians of the Trees
Giants Beasts of the Seas

Break out your mixtapes
And all your smokey things

Welcome Home
The Gangs all here

Lollipops & Rum

The calling in of “supernatural creatures” and “shadows, ninjas and robots” that happens in the song implies that all are welcome to partake in Golda’s music.

When she sings “welcome home/the gang’s all here,” Golda is highlighting that

¹⁰⁴ Lucy San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stage of Empire*. New York: New York City University Press, 2013, 8.

all of these seemingly fantastical creatures belong together and when her music provides an opportunity for them to “break out your mixtapes/and all your smoky things.” This is referencing recreational activities that a group can partake in together in a communal and trusting atmosphere. The science fiction and fantasy aspect of this song’s narrative can also be interpreted as personifying the personalities of people listening to the music and how they feel about themselves; this is a song for those that feel like “guardians of the trees” or “beasts of the seas” and are looking for their kindred identities.

It was through this show that I also met the band’s manager and longtime friend Eric Ivan Fructuoso. I later found out that he was well-respected and had been a beloved community worker for the SoMa district for years, mentoring youth and participating frequently in the formation of bands and new artistic projects, be it through music or theatre. Both Golda and Eric invited me into Bindlestiff Studios where I was introduced to new artistic pursuits such as acting and theatre craft. With Bindlestiff being a Filipino American run theatre, its productions largely focused on stories put through that lens. It was here that I experienced stories about Filipino American identity that were independently produced by artists and put on a stage for the public to view. It was at Bindlestiff that I first saw Tagalog being spoken in front of an audience for comedic purposes and to tell and communicate a story. Those were the first times I had ever heard or seen Tagalog used as a language outside of family parties or my parents scolding me. More so, it was the first instance I had seen the language being used as an artistic tool. Being at Bindlestiff made me feel at home amongst other creatives interested in sharing life experiences through artistic endeavor

and a Filipino American viewpoint. I learned at Bindlestiff that there is an invaluable purpose in Filipino Americans being able to tell Filipino American stories not only for each other, but for anyone able to walk through the door and listen. History, I would argue, is best preserved and passed on when done by those who have lived through it. Filipino American experiences should be talked about and represented by Filipino American voices.

Golda also continues her artistic work through owning a book store, being a co-owner and publishing director of Arkipelago Books, located in SoMa Pilipinas. The store functions as a resource not only for books and content sourced from the Philippines but also a place where people can purchase culturally Filipino items, such as musical instruments and traditional clothing. According to Golda, the long-term goal of Arkipelago Books is to publish and sell new Filipino American literature by emerging writers. The store offers author readings and workshops. Golda describes the space as crucial for “having even more reflections for people to see themselves in. We want people to see patterns of themselves in this place, in the store and our work.”¹⁰⁵ Golda’s work here seems to suggest what Hsu writes as the need for “a distinctive legacy by creating a new chapter of history and redefining what it means to be both Asian American and American,” especially in this version of America that is still “characterized by its manic celebration of race and culture.”¹⁰⁶ Commenting on

¹⁰⁵ Wilfred Galila, "Arkipelago Books – SF's Filipino Cultural Mecca Passes the Torch." INQUIRER.net USA. April 12, 2017. <http://usa.inquirer.net/2850/arkipelago-books-sfs-filipino-cultural-mecca-passes-torc>, accessed June 2, 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Arar Han and John Hsu, eds. *Asian American X : An Intersection of Twenty-First Century Asian American Voices*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010, 3.

the state of racial identity in the Bay Area for Filipino Americans, Golda shares during our interview:

It's important to know what to say. The mainstream still doesn't get why the concept of race is so divisive and menacing. It's so politicized here in the Bay that you can't avoid it. If you don't like what people are saying you have to study yourself and figure out what you want to say. Sometimes you get a turn and sometimes you have to interrupt people. But you have to know what to say.

A similar artist and community worker in this vein is hip hop MC Nomi of the group Power Struggle. Originally from St. Paul, Minnesota but now a long-time resident of San Francisco, Nomi tells me during my meeting with him that he "can't write a normal song that's not related to an issue that's not political."¹⁰⁷ Like myself, Nomi found himself becoming increasingly politicized after moving to the Bay Area. Beginning as a touring rapper in a group from New York called the Oddjobs, Nomi moved with the group to California after gaining a local following from touring and releasing self-produced albums. A study of their fan base and record sales showed that they were particularly popular with the California geographic, which prompted the members to move to the other coast. Though the group broke up shortly thereafter, Nomi decided to stay in the Bay Area; they said that a determining factor for this decision was the Bay Area Filipino American community he found. It was the first time for him he had met Filipinos who talked about current societal issues, worker's rights, imperialism and history. Meeting them showed him that "these were the people I've been looking for my entire life." He adds during my interview with

¹⁰⁷ Mario Nomi. Interview by Joshua Icban. In Person. San Francisco, CA. September 6, 2016.

him: “To be surrounded by activists and organizations was something different than where I came from.”

What was so empowering to Nomi was to find that groups organized for the mutual progress of the Filipino American community such as the grassroots organizations ALAY and Gabriela-USA. The organizations are a carry-over from the work done by the activists and communities in the 1960s and 1970s. Nomi shared with me during our talk that, “It was very powerful to see a collective of people, flexing a group power, as opposed to just one person.”

Nomi’s current music and lyrics reflect his work as a community worker at the Filipino Community Center in the Excelsior District of San Francisco. His newest music video was shot and edited by local San Francisco crew of other community workers and artists. The song chosen, “In Your Hands Til the End” from his 2014 album *In Your Hands*, contains lyrics about his personal life work being a community worker. In the video, the viewer is shown aspects of Nomi’s daily life, such as waking up next to his real-life wife, making coffee in his modest San Francisco apartment kitchen and then going to work to meet with elderly Filipino members of the community. There he presents talking points on a slideshow and helps them fill out various forms for city assistance that these elderlies otherwise would have had difficulty finding a resource for.

Nomi’s art imitates his life entirely as his lyrics show his commitment to his community work:

*I’m an immigrant man
With immigrant hands
Tryna Organize workers against the plowers of land
Filipinos got flows*

*Don't care what you tell me
 Bulosan of this rap shit
 Reciting verbatim
 Stories of struggles
 Streets and cages
 They locked up my friend for her political work
 Now the petty things don't matter like selling Cd's or shirts
 Now, what's your verse really worth?*

*I stand with the masses
 Til I'm humbled and worried
 Don't live in a hurry
 Soak up every moment
 Love my woman Josefina, a good life, she deserves it.
 People are killed over pieces of bread
 High influence politics killed the programs that fed
 Poor kids in the hood from Detroit to Davao
 B-boys, crowds just want to sayaw [From Cebuano language meaning
 to dance]
 Rapping like a Marxist, talking about marches
 Talking with my father, who started as a farmer
 Living like an artist, who stated with the people
 Pretentious young hipsters and hypocrites and evil*

*I'm in your hands until the end
 We've lost some friends
 That lost their sense
 Don't forget the time we spent
 A perfect blend of blood and sweat¹⁰⁸*

In this song Nomi professes his role in the community when he raps “I stand with the masses/til I’m humbled and worried, “and that his mission as an artist is to share “stories of struggle/streets and cages.” He laments over a friend being incarcerated and how the meaning of his music has been influenced by the event when he proclaims, “they locked up my friend for her political work/nor the petty things don’t matter like selling CD’s or shirts/nor what’s your verse really worth?” Nomi’s music is meant to bring light to the ills of the Filipino

¹⁰⁸ Power Struggle, *In Your Hands*. Power Struggle. Beatrock Music. 2014, CD.

American community, not only in the Bay Area but also abroad as he says, “high influence politics killed the programs that fed/poor kids in the hood from Detroit to Davao,” referring to a city in the island of Mindanao in the Philippines.”

Nomi’s work is an example of how what Harrison writes as “the activity and production of writing an essay or poem, for the emcees of today a verse or song can serve as a revolutionary act of self-creation and inspire a collective movement around issues of social justice. “¹⁰⁹ Nomi work is highly observational and critical of Filipino American social justice issues. Nomi’s message is also influenced by his affiliation with organizations like the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines as well Salupongan International, a group that advocates for the rights of indigenous peoples in the Philippines by supporting their rights to self-determination and helping develop moral and material support for social services such as maintaining schools and improving access to basic health programs. Though Nomi started as a musician his main goal now, he tells me, is to “strengthen the movement for folks here and in the Philippines.” He shared with me during our talk that he views the music he makes as a way for others to “break down perceptions of self and address the history of Filipino Americans while also keeping it fun and funky.”

Power Struggle’s music is distributed by the Beatrock Music, an independent label based out of Los Angeles and featuring other rappers of color, including some of Filipino descent. The rappers on the Beatrock Music Label

¹⁰⁹ Anthony Kwame Harrison, "Post-colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production, and Identity Inscription within Filipino American Hip Hop Music." *Perfect Beat* 13, no. 1 (2012), 44.

share similar philosophy and geographical location with Power Struggle. Many of the artist's content and music is conscious of racialized identity is aware of the political action enacted by its artists. A recent stand out example is artist Ruby Ibarra of San Lorenzo, California, whose recent musical endeavors appeared in multiple internet features and even a guest spot on a nationally televised MasterCard advertisement and New York city billboard, which promotes her as a "rapper, poet and fighter."¹¹⁰

Ruby's latest work entitled "Us" features an all-Filipina cast with Ibarra herself directing. The images feature women in traditional and indigenous tribal T'boli and Talandingan Filipino attire, performing dances particular to the regions with the artists involved rapping in costume. The video drew wide praise for its representation and center focus of Filipina women and its showcasing of different images of Filipino history in ways that are mixed with the contemporary storytelling ability of hip hop. Her first verse is a proper summation of her message:

*Yo fuck a story arc if it don't involve no matriarchs
 Our mothers work from the ground up, they craftin air like ATR
 With the butterfly sleeves naka Filipiniana, pag nagsalita mga banat ay
 bala [Our mothers wear traditional Filipina clothing, but their words are
 like bullets]
 'Wag magtaka kung ako ay makata bulok na sistema, korakot sa pera,
 bagsak! [Don't be surprised, I know the system is corrupt and filled with
 money makers, it will fall]
 But we puttin' our heart into darkness, they puttin' these pigs into office
 Oh, you thinkin' you schoolin'? but you hellas lost 'cuz you Betsy Devos
 while I taught this*

¹¹⁰ Casey Pazzalia, "Filipino American Rapper Ruby Ibarra Gets some Grammy love in SZA ad." Slackie Brown. January, 28 2018. <http://slackiebrown.com/Filipino-American-rapper-ruby-ibarra-gets-some-grammy-love-in-sza-ad/>, accessed June 3, 2018.

*But Look at my ate she movin so cold, can't hold a candle to her when she glow
Flick of the wrist with the ilaw she hold, Pandanggo sa Ilaw [a traditional Filipino Dance], she drippin' in gold*

Ruby's lyrics also take on an activist and feminist tone. The video features an all-Filipina cast which lends a more literal visual accompaniment to her opening line "Fuck a story arc if it don't involve no matriarchs," which continues when she raps in Tagalog "*Pag nagsalita mga banat ay bala,*" translating to "the words that come from our mothers are like bullets." This is ultimately a song about Filipina American empowerment, which is especially highlighted in the chorus of the song where Ruby leads a chant of the words "Island Women rise up!" When Ruby raps "look at my ate [older sister or older respected female figure in Tagalog], she moving so cold, can't hold a candle to her when she glow / flick of the wrist with the *ilaw* [candle in Tagalog] that she hold / she drippin in gold," she is blending the two languages in a clever way, mixing Tagalog with English slang. "Moving so cold" refers to someone moving with an utmost style and "drippin in gold" means for one to be as if adorned like royalty. Ruby also cleverly plays with the word "candle" in both languages, linking it with the *Pandanggo Sa Ilaw*, a traditional Tagalog dance which includes dancers holding candles in the palms of their hands and using their wrists to twirl them.

Ruby Ibarra is an immigrant, born in Tacloban, a city in the Eastern Visayan region of the Philippines. As an artist, Ruby has been praised and garnering attention for her use of Tagalog and other dialects of the Philippines, including Cebuano and Waray, which are not often heard by artists operating in the United States. Ibarra's work is an example Christine Bacarez's observation I

have cited in my introduction of how Filipino “culture is politicized” and their “renditions [of history and present in their artwork] invoke the long history of U.S.-Philippine special relations and its enduring political, economic and cultural aftermath.”¹¹¹ Ruby and Nomi’s work is a commentary on the realities of an awakened Filipino American viewpoint, one that recognizes and aims to dismantle systematic thinking about Filipino history and how Filipino American identity can be presented and interpreted.

The artists of Beatrock also illustrate the importance in the ownership, narrative and distribution of music. As Deborah Wong writes, “who’s recording whom is a matter of central importance; *for whom is another...* the important historical point is that smaller people’s musics have almost always been recorded by bigger people.”¹¹² Wong states as well, that “almost all cultural workers are interested in the political and artistic potential of Asian Americans who could change social land and soundscapes with their mere presence.”¹¹³

This is also exhibited by the music put forward by Aklasan Records, a record label started by Filipino American punk rock musicians and community workers Rupert Estanislao and Joshua Castro. The two met as students in Vallejo, California, being the only Filipino punk aficionados of the area. After playing in various hardcore bands through the years including Echo of Bullets and Eskapo the two decided to start their label to distribute and promote other bands with

¹¹¹ Christine Bacareza Balance, *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016, 7.

¹¹² Wong, 237.

¹¹³ Ibid

POC [people-of-color] members doing alternative music. They have organized and run Aklasan Fest every year, a punk rock festival that unites bands throughout the diaspora, allowing them to connect and be visible to each other, every year since 2014.

In an August 2017 feature in punk rock publication *Maximum RockNRoll*, Joshua relates the factors that prompted he and Rupert to run the festival. Joshua shared that, "It was often really alienating for me to be one of the few people of color at those events and even more so to be a person of color who was aware of how the aforementioned issues [racism, homophobia and misogyny] were at best pushing marginalized people out of punk at worst inspiring violence against marginalized communities."¹¹⁴ Rupert adds his reasons in the article as well, saying that, "I started Aklasan Fest at first just to promote bands we release and support. After the first Aklasan Fest I think we both realized that this was important not just to the Pinoy community but to the POC/immigrant/LGBTQ community more broadly because we adamantly advocated for an inclusive space for everyone."

Indeed, the festival has been successful in being a safe, all-ages, all-identities-respected event where people of all kinds congregate to hear bands from across the Filipino diaspora such as Material Support from Brooklyn, Moxiebeat from LA or Red Horse Drunk Punk from Virginia. Rupert, Josh and other members of the festival's organizing committee all have experience

¹¹⁴ Grace Ambrose, "Aklasan Fest: Uniting the Filipino Punk Diaspora Since 2014." *Maximum RockNRoll*. August 2017.

working with the political and grassroots organizations of the Bay Area, often implementing the techniques learned there towards organizing this music festival.

Aklasan Fest has become a space for an otherwise unknown and misunderstood group of Filipino American punk rock fans to come together and shed normative beliefs about how a certain type of music becomes racialized or how one person should look or be to belong in one. Joshua and Rupert also view the festival as a way to stimulate growth in consciousness and community building. Joshua says further in the magazine feature:

Pinoy punk is ultimately about being Filipino and bringing other Filipinos together who are into punk with the intention of movement building. Aklasan fest is a failure if these efforts don't get at least Filipino punks (or anyone in the scene for that matter) to somehow examine their purpose beyond going to shows, buying merch [i.e. merchandise] and bragging about record collections. Punk also needs to be a place to build skills and foster wisdom, so we can make the world better.

Kuya Burd, a musician and Aklasan Fest committee member adds to Joshua's statements, saying that the "struggle that our people [Filipinos] endured didn't last just a few years--it's decades, and the struggle continues even today. Pinoy punk I feel helps remind us of our history as a people through an outlet that encourages conversations for change and reevaluation. Resistance is the middle item in the Pinoy and punk Venn diagram and they both span time."¹¹⁵

Burd continues on in the magazine interview and speaks of punk and rock music as being perceived as only for one group of people, that is, White people: "I was criticized for being 'whitewashed' simply because rock n roll was

¹¹⁵ Ibid

perceived as white but what they didn't know was that punk was always colored. It was always connected with people of color rebelling and questioning society's definition of what's 'normal.'"

Alex "Puzzle" Abalos, an instrument maker and experimental noise artist signed to Aklasan records, shares a similar sentiment of racial misunderstanding and stereotypes at rock shows. Puzzle comments, "I used to always think why I am the only brown face in these spaces? For a lot of folks, I was just referred to as 'punk rock Alex.'" ¹¹⁶

As an artist, however, he differs in his desire to be seen as an artist first and Filipino second. He explained this to me during my interview with him: "I am Filipino American, but I'll never be able to fully understand that whole landscape or whole picture of the Philippines. I only will know what I'm told or am able to study."

Puzzle also understands also the need for community and for people to get something greater out of the music scene than just the enjoyment of music. He offers himself as a resource for younger musicians in the community, for instance, he helps young musicians with technological needs, such as synthesizer building, electrical repairs or for logistical needs. Puzzle possesses more than twenty-years of experience in throwing independent music shows since 1999. With his knowledge and experience, he knows the generation to come will need what he knows. Puzzle shared with me:

I want to be a liaison of information. I feel like you have to be a direct resource to the good people around you. I also want to show, without going the usual scholar route, that Filipinos' are a strong

¹¹⁶ Alex Abalos. Interview by Joshua Icban. In Person. San Francisco, CA. August 2, 2016.

resource to whatever we can plug into and I want to show that through art.¹¹⁷

These stories I have shared so far represent artists who believe in communal change through artistic practice. Through performance-based creativity these “organic intellectuals,” as Caronan describes them, help “teach their local communities how to misidentify with hegemonic narratives of US exceptionalism and provide them with a repertoire of cultural tools to construct a genealogy of global power.”¹¹⁸ These artists are representatives and follow the footsteps of the artists who have come before. They are continuing the work to build a space where Filipino Americans can thrive and embody the idea that, as Grace Wong writes” a “culture of power is a culture of representation.”¹¹⁹ As generations of Filipino Americans follow, exposed to this desire by artistic leaders to see a world go beyond themselves, one can only imagine the new plateaus of identity and community to be achieved.

For myself, I hope that as more Filipino Americans continue to build a lasting and evolving artistic and musical community we also continue to reach out and connect with communities outside of our own. The story of the struggles Filipino Americans and their fore-bearers had to endure is similar to the plight of many other immigrant communities. The histories and struggles of Latino American, African American, Native American and many other communities

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Caronan, 108.

¹¹⁹ Wong, 254.

that bear an identity of two converging places share similar experiences. Through the arts and music, these communities can collaborate to keep updating and redefining what it means to live in the country of America. This is vital not only for themselves but also for those that come after and indeed to remember those that have come before.

Reflecting on this research, I realize how lucky I am to find the artistic community I had been searching for ever since I was a child. As I work on my own artistic projects and contribute, in my own way, to the growing Bay Area diaspora, I hope to also be a resource and supplier of information for those who come looking for answers in the future. As Filipino Americans continue to gain visibility in American mainstream culture, I hope, as well, that the stories of those who were doing this work (such as Josie Canion, Dakila and Fanny) of artistic expression and identity-forming in years past continue to be honored and passed on. With the broader recognitions of Filipino American communities happening at a city-level such as SoMa Pilipnas in San Francisco, it seems like that time is already on its way.