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SOMA Pilipinas Is in the Heart:

Examining Cultural Districts as Tools for Resistance and Transformation

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Urban & Regional Planning

by

Caroline Dungao Calderon

2019

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

SOMA Pilipinas Is in the Heart:  
Examining Cultural Districts as Tools for Resistance and Transformation

by

Caroline Dungao Calderon

Master of Urban & Regional Planning

University of California, Los Angeles 2019

Professor Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Chair

On April 12, 2016, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors approved a resolution to create SOMA Pilipinas, the city's Filipino Cultural Heritage District. With more attention to the idea of establishing and preserving cultural districts, this research interrogates: How do strategies practiced by SOMA Pilipinas challenge legacies of displacement and dispossession of the Filipino American community in San Francisco? How do their efforts behind the creation of a cultural district reclaim and reimagine space for the Filipino American community and other historically oppressed people that call the South of Market home? The following study is a historical, narrative and spatial analysis of the development of SOMA Pilipinas from the perspectives of Filipino youth, families, seniors, workers and allies through archival research, content analysis, participant observation and thick mapping. The story of SOMA Pilipinas shows us the possibilities and challenges in community planning that centers culture and adds to the conversation on the role of state and local governments to preserve ethnic, immigrant and "othered" neighborhoods.

The thesis for Caroline Dungao Calderon is approved.

Kian Goh

Karen Umemoto

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

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#DawnMabalonIsintheHeart

## 1. Introduction

*she touches the map of the city  
its concrete texture and hilly hips  
translated into grids and line and zoning codes  
she touches the place called south of market  
where I remember village cousins  
playing in the alley ways  
and the young brown people  
leaning against the sharp changing winds  
walking the streets to a revolution  
somewhere between the alleys of minna and sixth  
and the narrow dirt paths of tondo*

*...is there a place on the map  
for the unemployed to sleep and eat?  
is there a zone for immigrants and refugees  
to seek democracy and freedom? ...*

Excerpt from “at city planning” poem by Virginia Cerenio (1989)

Late into the evening on September 17, 2015, Ms. Lorna Velasco approached the speaker podium inside of San Francisco’s City Hall Room 400. She testified for two minutes during public comment of a Planning Commission hearing sharing her concern for the proposed luxury development known as the 5M Project—a development located one block away from the small black box theater that she and many volunteers help run, Bindlestiff Studio. Ms. Velasco expressed her frustration in how the 5M Project failed to “[invite] to the table” the Filipino arts community and shared her fears of how the project may exacerbate gentrification and cultural erasure in the South of Market (SOMA)<sup>1</sup> neighborhood of San Francisco, home to Filipinos, immigrants and houseless individuals and families. She ended her comments with “Our community has already been decided for us.”<sup>2</sup> Viewpoints such as Ms. Velasco’s were not new to the SOMA community, but rather are part of a deep history of displacement experienced

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<sup>1</sup> The South of Market neighborhood is a section of San Francisco’s supervisorial district 6. It is sometimes referred to in shorthand as SOMA, SoMa or SoMA.

<sup>2</sup> City & County of San Francisco. (2015). SFGOVTV. Planning Commission Hearing. Retrieved, from: [http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=20&clip\\_id=23673](http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=20&clip_id=23673)

by Filipino<sup>3</sup> Americans living in San Francisco. After seven hours of public comment from both supporters and opponents of the development, the Planning Commission approved the controversial 5M Project. In the following months this particular decision fueled a fire in the Filipino youth, families and seniors living and working in SOMA to find ways to preserve their community, people, history and legacy.

On April 12, 2016, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a resolution to create SOMA Pilipinas, the city's Filipino Cultural Heritage District. The resolution called for the involvement of city agencies, community-based organizations and stakeholders "to contribute to the sustainability, cultural visibility, vibrancy and economic opportunity for Filipinos and Filipino Americans in the South of Market neighborhood."<sup>4</sup> The resolution declared the boundaries of SOMA Pilipinas to be bordered by Market Street (to the north), Brannan Street (south), 11th Street (east), and 2nd Street (west) occupying 1.5 square miles within the SOMA neighborhood.

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<sup>3</sup> This research uses the term "Filipino" or "Filipino American" to refer to people who have immigrated to the United States from the Philippines or are descended from Philippine migrants. In some instances, "Pilipino" or "Pilipina" may be used because the western letter "F" has no precedent in the language of the Philippines. The use of "Pilipina/o" is also associated with anti-colonialist sentiments and a conscientious effort to establish cultural identity. "Pilipinx" may also be used as a gender-neutral and inclusive alternative to Filipino and Pilipina/o recognizing trans, queer, agender, non-binary, gender non-conforming or gender fluid people who are from the Philippines or are descendants of Philippine migrants.

Another commonly used term is "pinay" or "pinoy" which refers to the people of the Philippines, as well as Filipinos in the United States and around the world. This term first originated by expatriate Filipinos living in the United States and Hawaii, but has since been adopted by Filipinos elsewhere.

<sup>4</sup> City & County of San Francisco. (2016). SFGOVTV. Board of Supervisors Meeting. Retrieved, from: [http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/GeneratedAgendaViewer.php?view\\_id=10&clip\\_id=25120](http://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/GeneratedAgendaViewer.php?view_id=10&clip_id=25120)



The logo for SOMA PILIPINAS features a stylized 'S' composed of two overlapping shapes, followed by a solid yellow circle, and then three black geometric shapes: a square, a triangle, and a square. Below this graphic, the words 'SOMA PILIPINAS' are written in a bold, black, sans-serif font.



Map 1: Cropped map of SOMA Pilipinas (Source: SOMA Pilipinas)<sup>5</sup>

The following study is a historical, narrative and spatial analysis of the development of SOMA Pilipinas from the perspectives of Filipino youth, families, seniors, workers and allies. This research will explore: How do strategies practiced by SOMA Pilipinas challenge and resist legacies of displacement

<sup>5</sup> Perez, A. (2018). "SOMA PILIPINAS Filipino Cultural Heritage District (San Francisco's Filipinotown)." Retrieved, from <http://somapilipinas.org>.

and dispossession of the Filipino American community in San Francisco? How do their efforts behind the creation of a cultural district reclaim and reimagine space for the Filipino American community and other historically oppressed people who call the South of Market neighborhood home?

Drawing from oral histories, archival data, media and documents related to the district and history of Filipinos in San Francisco, I will compile a community narrative that highlights strategies employed by community members to preserve spaces and people within the SOMA neighborhood. This research will explore historical barriers and efforts to establish and maintain SOMA Pilipinas as a cultural heritage district by utilizing methods such as content analysis, thick mapping and participant observation.

My approach to this research is rooted in my identity as a queer Pinay and my experience directly working and collaborating with organizations, residents and workers in SOMA Pilipinas since 2008. I volunteered with the Galing Bata After School Program and West Bay Pilipino Multi-Service Center, working with a group of volunteers and staff to provide tutoring to elementary school youth. From 2012 to 2017, I worked for the Bill Sorro Housing Program, a program under the Bayanihan Equity Center (formerly known as the Veterans Equity Center) to help individuals and families find and protect their housing in San Francisco. I participated and organized meetings and events focused on forming SOMA Pilipinas from 2015 to 2017. Lastly, I have been an active supporter of community events, spaces and grassroots organizations in SOMA Pilipinas such as Barrio Fiesta, Migrante South of Market/Tenderloin, Bindlestiff Studio, to name a few. I have had the privilege to listen to the stories situated in SOMA Pilipinas and have been mentored by community members about the importance of community building, activism and remembering.

The purpose of this research is to center the voices and actions of cultural workers like Lorna Velasco and their passion to preserve Filipino tenants, businesses and spaces especially during a time when gentrification, displacement and affordability pose risks to low-income residents and ethnic communities. Members and supporters of SOMA Pilipinas are active participants in resisting the legacies of displacement and dispossession of the Filipino community in San Francisco as evident in their

activism, community organizing, cultural production and storytelling. *SOMA Pilipinas Is in the Heart* highlights how a cultural district can be a reclamation of power—it is a lived reality where we see artists, residents and workers paying homage to the past; holding each other, elected officials and city agencies accountable; but also reclaiming space and redefining urban planning and placemaking where culture is at its core. I hope that this research will add to the growing literature, practices and strategies around Pilipinx American design and planning issues.

## 2. Enclaves, Ethnoscapes and Imagined Communities

*“All borders and boundaries are socially produced and reproduced, and thus are always susceptible to being modified, transformed, erased, recreated, reimagined, transgressed.”*

Edward Soja (2005)<sup>6</sup>

The story of SOMA Pilipinas should not be seen as separate from the formation and existence of other ethnic communities; rather they are tied together in history and narrative: immigrants leaving their homeland, domestic migration among seasonal workers or communities seeking refuge from social and political oppression. Scholars, professionals and political leaders have attempted to make sense of the social order of ethnic communities like SOMA Pilipinas, labeling them as “enclaves.” Sociologist Mark Abrahamson defines enclave as a place where residents “who share a significant commonality on wealth, life-style or a combination of the attributes” exist, live and congregate.<sup>7</sup> Enclaves can contain a geographic area that focuses or serves a particular group. They can be distinct in terms of their physical setting, social histories, commercial enterprises and institutions. They can also define one’s individual or collective identity where place becomes representative of status, role and interpersonal relationships.<sup>8</sup> According to Abrahamson, enclaves can be neighborhoods that have a concentration of a specific ethnic or minority status. Examining the creation of Japantowns, Chinatowns, Little Italies, or Little Saigons across the United States—Abrahamson refers to these places as ethnic enclaves. The notion of enclave has been used by scholars such as Abrahamson to understand how ethnic minorities and immigrants create communities that have specific geographic boundaries, local economies, distinct cultural services and lifestyles. In the case of San Francisco’s Chinatown, an ethnic enclave bordered by the towers of the city’s financial district and situated near downtown, city planners designated this Chinese American community as both a residential area and a tourist site.<sup>9</sup> Abrahamson describes Chinatown as being a

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<sup>6</sup> Soja, E. (2005). “Globalization, Regionalism, and the Postmetropolitan Transition.” *Borders Unbound*.

<sup>7</sup> Abrahamson, M. (1996). *Urban Enclaves: Identity and Place in America*. 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.



place where Chinese Americans can access culturally appropriate networks, food and services; it is also a site of employment for Chinese Americans. Here, ethnic enclaves are seen as “magnets” that pull residents, workers and visitors, adding to the unique character of a city like San Francisco.

Ethnic neighborhoods should be understood as more than just places where specific ethnic groups live and work. Arjun Appadurai pushes the notion of enclaves by situating ethnic neighborhoods as part of global cultural flows or globalization. These flows can be represented in five dimensions: ethnoscares, mediascape, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes.<sup>10</sup> Each dimension uses the suffix of *-scape* to represent landscapes impacted by migration and dominant culture.<sup>11</sup> Ethnic groups who are forced to migrate from their origin countries must meet the challenge of resisting or assimilating to the dominant culture of the place they settle in. In doing so, they create ethnoscares that represent “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers and other moving groups and persons...”<sup>12</sup> These landscapes are not static; rather they are dynamic because of the “historical, linguistic, and political situatedness” of migrants and moving persons who settle in a particular place.<sup>13</sup> Clara Irazábal builds upon this work and defines ethnoscares as “material expressions of culture” that allow us to understand the “historical trajectories and contemporary conditions of communities in and through place.”<sup>14</sup> She categorizes ethnoscares into three dimensions that emphasize the relationship between people and place:

1. *Socio-cultural and subjective dimensions* represent how designing and occupying a place can allow communities to cope with the conditions that oppress or marginalize ethnic groups. Culture can also be used as a mechanism for hope or reimagination of a better future.

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<sup>10</sup> Appadurai, Arjun. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Irazabal, C. (2011). “Ethnoscares.” In Banerjee, T. and Loukaitou-Sideris, A. *Companion to Urban Design*. Routledge. pp. 563.

2. *Spatial and temporal dimensions* focus on the “everyday life” practices of the people who occupy and activate a place. These dimensions are materialized in past and present community festivals, public art and other activities.
3. *Political dimensions* can be understood as the invented and invited spaces<sup>15</sup> that disrupt or perpetuate notions of citizenship and call into question “how is private, semi-private, and public space” physically and socially appropriated?<sup>16</sup>

These dimensions expand our understanding of enclaves by providing a framework for how and why migrants make space, claim place and imagine community. Appadurai relates ethnoscapes to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* which challenge notions of nation and nationalism by ringing in the question, “how are we able to feel kinship with people we have never seen face-to-face?” In his work, nations are imagined communities that are socially constructed and practiced where “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>17</sup> Individuals may identify with a particular community because they have similar interests or shared identity with other individuals and groups. In the context of urban design and planning, Irazábal asserts that ethnoscapes and communities must be supported by strategies that are culturally-sensitive and allow for the creation of adaptable, inclusive public spaces. In what ways do residents, workers and other stakeholders of ethnic communities “partake in the process of placemaking with/for them?”<sup>18</sup> Looking beyond theories of enclaves which focus on identity and status, ethnic communities must be situated in the social, historical and political landscapes they exist in and their relationships to place—in the global processes that push and pull them to specific geographies. This allows us to better understand their creation and survival.

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<sup>15</sup> Miraftab, F. (2009). “Insurgent Planning: Situating Radical Planning in the Global South.” *Planning Theory*, 8(1), 32-50. doi:10.1177/1473095208099297

<sup>16</sup> Irazabal, C. (2011). “Ethnoscapes.” In Banerjee, T. and Loukaitou-Sideris, A. *Companion to Urban Design*. Routledge. pp. 563.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities*. p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 568.

### 3. Displacement and Dispossession

*“This land is too valuable to permit poor people to park on it...”*

Quote from Justin Herman (1970)  
Former Head of SFRA  
(San Francisco Redevelopment Agency)

While ethnic neighborhoods, ethnoscaples and enclaves are sites of cultural placemaking, expression and exchange, they are also products and sites for displacement and dispossession. In highlighting these issues, I want to note that many of the ethnic communities mentioned in this section exist because of white settlers and settler colonialism in United States that justified the murder, incarceration and dispossession of indigenous people. While some ethnic communities may have faced displacement and dispossession in the 20th and 21st centuries, it is important to acknowledge that they are also beneficiaries of US settler colonialism.<sup>19</sup> Although settler colonialism is not a focus of this research, it places research subjects such as SOMA Pilipinas as neighborhoods located on stolen, Ohlone<sup>20</sup> land. So when we think about the displacement and dispossession of ethnic communities in the United States, we must remember that US colonialism has created this precedence. The displacement and dispossession that I will highlight examines 1) the causes of migration of Asian communities from their origin countries and the enclaves that form because of this migration and 2) more recent instances of neighborhood change in communities of color.

What pushes individuals and families to emigrate from their home countries to nations such as the United States? Nayan Shah’s essay in the *Asian American Pacific Islander National Historic Landmarks Theme Study* focuses on the impact of imperial wars and expansion of market capitalism in Asia during the 19th and 20th centuries. She explains that conquest, foreign trade agreements, invasion and globalization in Asia displaced millions of people from China, Japan, India, Korea and the Philippines,

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<sup>19</sup> Fujikane, C. (2008). *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai’i*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ohlone* represents the indigenous people that inhabited Northern California including areas such as San Francisco.

forcing many to migrate to foreign countries to escape political turmoil, poverty or to access more opportunities promised and romanticized in the United States.<sup>21</sup> Large-scale migrations to North America from Asian countries took place from 1848 to World War II, with the first large-scale waves of migration for the “Chinese in the 1850s to 1870s; for the Japanese in the 1880s to 1920s; for Koreans, 1900 to 1910; for South Asians, 1900 to 1910s; and for Filipinos in the 1910s to 1920s.”<sup>22</sup> Early Asian immigrants became employed in major infrastructure projects such as railroads across the United States or were recruited to work in the plantations of southern states and Hawai’i or in farms located in California and other states of the west coast. Asian immigrants “worked alongside European immigrants, Native Americans, African Americans, Native-born whites, and Mexicans and Chicanos”<sup>23</sup> and like some of their peers, faced racist, anti-immigrant sentiment causing many of them to move to other cities where they could access the services and refuge that ethnic enclaves offered. These communities were home to “social, mutual aid and spiritual institutions” such as San Francisco Chinatown’s Chinese associations, also known as *huiguan*, that provided services including legal counsel or organized community events and celebrations.<sup>24</sup> Ethnic communities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries also offered commercial businesses and entertainment that were culturally relevant to different immigrant groups. These ethnoscaapes, although impacted because of displacement from origin countries, provided spaces for individuals and families in diaspora to live and to participate in the creation of American cities.

The second form of displacement I want to discuss focuses on how ethnic communities and ethnoscaapes have been displaced because of state power manifested in dispossession, redevelopment and investment. For example, in the 1850s, the city of New York exercised eminent domain<sup>25</sup> to acquire Seneca Village, a community mostly comprised of African American residences, churches and a school.

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<sup>21</sup> Shah, N. (2017). “Establishing Communities, 1848-1941.” *Finding a Path Forward: Asian American Pacific Islander National Historic Landmarks Theme Study*.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>25</sup> Eminent domain allows the government to take private property for public use. It is expected that “just compensation” to be paid to the owner, but that has not always been the case in the history of the United States.

Seneca Village existed between 1825 and 1857 and represented the largest community of African American property owners in New York City during the 19th century.<sup>26</sup> Today the famous Central Park is built over Seneca Village and still remains a site of land dispossession and cultural erasure of the African American community that once lived and owned property there. Eminent domain has been used to displace countless communities of color in the name of progress. In Los Angeles, residents of a neighborhood comprised of mostly Mexican American property owners and renters known as Chavez Ravine, were displaced “to make way for public housing projects (which never materialized) [and] Dodger Stadium.”<sup>27</sup> The dispossession of minority landowners is ever present in the history of urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s. Seneca Village and Chavez Ravine are just two examples from a long history of communities of color displaced and deprived of land and property because of the construction of sports arenas, large-scale parks, new housing, business districts and major infrastructure projects including freeways.

In understanding more recent events of displacement, we must remember the historic conditions and trauma faced by ethnic communities and interrogate how local and state governments have invested and disinvested in certain communities. Today’s headlines around displacement in urban ethnic communities highlight processes such as gentrification. This process is understood as a type of neighborhood change where higher income newcomers displace long-term low-income tenants. It is manifested in rent increases, escalated evictions, cultural conflicts between existing residents and higher-income newcomers and the replacement of businesses and spaces that have served existing residents. Case studies from the *Urban Displacement Project* at UC Berkeley provided a comprehensive analysis on gentrification and displacement in ethnic communities including San Francisco’s Mission District. A site of community organizing, affordable housing and minority-owned businesses, the Mission District has

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<sup>26</sup> Central Park Conservancy. “Seneca Village Site.” Retrieved April 16, 2019, from <http://www.centralparknyc.org/things-to-see-and-do/attractions/seneca-village-site.html>

<sup>27</sup> SurveyLA. (2015). “Latino Los Angeles Historic Context Statement.” Retrieved, from <https://preservation.lacity.org/sites/default/files/Latino%20Los%20Angeles%20Historic%20Context%20FINAL%2009-23-15.pdf>

seen a “decrease in the proportion of family households and Latino population” and increases in household median income and populations with a bachelor degree or higher—all of which are indicators of gentrification.<sup>28</sup> In July 2014, a video was released that showed a group of middle school and high school students playing a game of soccer at Mission Playground, a public park located in the Mission District. Their game was interrupted by a group of adults, mostly white males, who asked the students to end their game. In this confrontation, the youth explained the local agreements around playing at the soccer field but were met with a frustration from the group of adults who claimed they had reserved the field and so the youth needed to leave.



*Image 1: Screenshot of Youtube Video showing tech employee showing field permit to youth<sup>29</sup>*

The group of adults are employees of two tech companies, AirBnb and Dropbox, and ultimately represent newcomers of a gentrifying neighborhood asserting their claims to public space. The youth represent existing residents who were not informed of the city’s new permit system which required reservation and payment to access public spaces like the field at Mission Playground. Since the incident, San Francisco Parks & Recreation has removed this policy for this site, especially because of accusations that the department was enabling gentrification in the Mission. Incidents such as these show the conflicts experienced by residents of ethnic communities and ethnoscares. While places like the Mission are home

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<sup>28</sup> Cespedes, S., et al. (2015). “Mission: Community Organizing and Resistance in SF’s Mission District.” Retrieved, from [https://www.urbandisplacement.org/sites/default/files/mission\\_district\\_final.pdf](https://www.urbandisplacement.org/sites/default/files/mission_district_final.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> MissionCreekVideo. (2014). “Mission Playground is Not for Sale.” Retrieved, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awPVY1DcupE>.

to events, art, businesses and spaces that serve the Latinx community, they have also attracted more affluent residents and non-Latinx groups. Here lies the risk faced by ethnic communities: displacement from the places that they have helped cultivate—places that were once a refuge are becoming less affordable, accessible and safe. SOMA Pilipinas and other ethnic enclaves mentioned previously are facing the same risks and some experience the feelings and realities of loss. Displacement and dispossession mean that a community loses its people, places of significance, capital and connections.

#### **4. Resistance: Imagining and Claiming Space**

*“...the geographical imagination...enables the individual to recognize the role of space and place in his own biography, to relate the spaces he sees around him, and to recognize how transactions between individuals and between organizations are affected by the space that separates them.”*

Excerpt from *Social Justice and the City* by David Harvey (1973)

While ethnic and minority communities face certain challenges when finding, creating and protecting their homes, they also find opportunities to progress towards spatial justice alongside other oppressed peoples at risk of displacement. George Lipsitz’s work on spatial imaginaries asserted that “society is structured by a white spatial imaginary”<sup>30</sup> that gives and justifies power and privilege for white communities. Space is racialized in ways that it should not be. The black spatial imaginary opposes the ownership of land that privileges profits over people. It also takes value in spaces that are invisible, undervalued or underestimated. Black spatial imaginaries look beyond the exclusivity and oppression constructed by white spatial imaginaries by creating new opportunities for black communities to move freely across space—a public good and site for creativity, democracy and livelihood. What does this mean for low-income residents and communities of color experiencing displacement? Alternative spatial imaginaries are necessary so that communities can create a vision and reclaim space through transformative action and policies meant to disrupt the norm and status quo.

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<sup>30</sup> Lipsitz, G. (2011). *How racism takes place*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

The acts of reimagination and reclamation are rooted in the desire to change and address the inequity that one may experience. This desire echoes Henri Lefebvre's 1967 essay *The Right to the City* in that capitalism has created spaces of exclusivity. The right to the city is a demand and cry for cities to design spaces that accommodate all people. David Harvey expands upon this vision:

The right to the city is therefore, far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire. It is...a collective rather than individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of collective power over the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. How best then to exercise that right?<sup>31</sup>

Some individuals and groups that have felt excluded or oppressed in cities have organized and mobilized, demanding that local governments respond to the needs of their communities.

The Mission Action Plan 2020<sup>32</sup> is an example of an alternative spatial imaginary and geography that challenges legacies of displacement and gentrification that the Mission neighborhood in San Francisco is currently experiencing. The plan was created by a coalition of community organizations such as the Mission Economic Development Agency, Dolores Street Community Services/Mission SRO Collaborative, SF Tenants Union, Cultural Action Network and the Calle 24 Latino Cultural District to spark dialogue and to generate strategies that would “retain low to moderate income residents and community-serving businesses (including PDR) artists, and nonprofits in order to strengthen and preserve the socioeconomic diversity of the Mission neighborhood.”<sup>33</sup> The plan is informed by regular meetings with community organizations and City staff; public meetings, focus groups and other participatory activities with residents and business owners. Mission Action Plan 2020 contains a vision for what Mission residents and workers hope to see in their community; but it also acknowledges the different forms of displacement that is being experienced in the area: residential, commercial and psychological. With that, the community, in collaboration with city agencies, developed a vision, goals and strategies to

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<sup>31</sup> Harvey, D. (2013). *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> San Francisco Planning Department. (2017). Mission Action Plan 2020. Retrieved, from [http://default.sfplanning.org/Citywide/Mission2020/MAP2020\\_Plan\\_Final.pdf](http://default.sfplanning.org/Citywide/Mission2020/MAP2020_Plan_Final.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., ii.



address these forms of displacement. The creation of this plan is a testament to the Latinx community's desire to remain in the Mission but also to preserve significant places and traditions. Community members do not want the Mission to be a museum of Latinx culture, but they want to expand opportunities for residents, artists and workers to engage in cultural expression and healing from neighborhood trauma and distrust.

## 5. Philippine Diaspora, Displacement and Resistance

*"Filipinos learn about the American dream from the time they enter elementary school."*

Romeo Arguelles, Former Consul General (1985)  
Philippine Consulate General of San Francisco

The creation of SOMA Pilipinas is not a natural phenomenon. Its roots are represented in its name: *SOMA* means the South of Market, a neighborhood in San Francisco once dubbed as the warehouse district now represents a tale of two cities: it is home to big tech companies such as Twitter and Salesforce whose employees can pay an average rent of \$4,641 per month, but it is also a neighborhood where 49% of the city's homeless population live.<sup>34</sup> *Pilipinas* represents the Philippines<sup>35</sup>, an archipelago of over 7,000 islands located in southeast Asia. It is a country rich in natural resources but also a country where 21% of the total population live below the poverty line.<sup>36</sup> When we think about the formation of SOMA Pilipinas we must consider the role of forced migration from the Philippines. In the Philippine Diaspora, 6,000 Filipinos leave their homeland every day to move and work abroad.<sup>37</sup> Many are pulled to the United States for promises of a better standard of living and employment opportunities.

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<sup>34</sup> Applied Survey Research. (2017). San Francisco County Homeless Count & Survey. Retrieved, from <http://hsh.sfgov.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/San-Francisco-PIT-Executive-Summary-FINAL-6.21.17.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> The Philippines is named after King Philip II of Spain. The Philippines was colonized by Spain for over 300 years starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>36</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority. (2019). Retrieved May 9, 2019, from <https://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases/nid/138411>

<sup>37</sup> Philippine Overseas Employment Administration. (2017). "Overseas Employment Statistics." Retrieved October 10, 2018, from <http://www.poea.gov.ph/ofwstat/compendium/deployment%202006-2018S1.pdf>

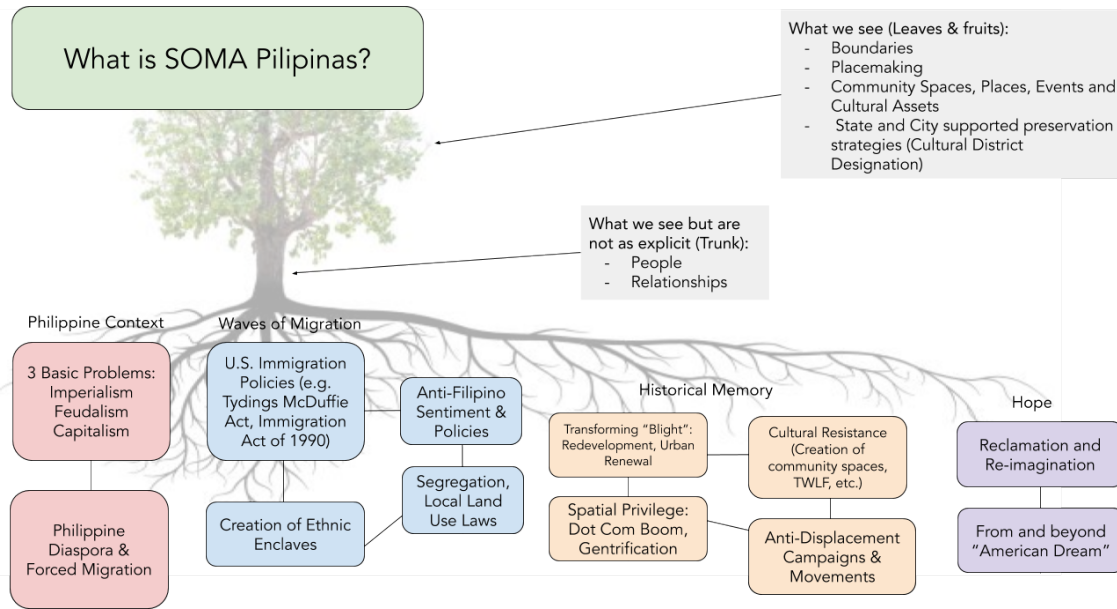


Figure 1: The roots of SOMA Pilipinas

I argue that in order to address displacement and dispossession in the Filipino community, we must acknowledge and learn from its roots. Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales used the metaphor of a tree to define culture as ways of being, doing and seeing.<sup>38</sup> The leaves and fruits represent ways of seeing as they show us the visible parts of culture such dress, language, artifacts, symbols, music, art, dance, food, etc. The trunk and branches represent ways of doing: the visible, yet ignored parts of culture such as behaviors, traditions, rituals and relationships. The roots represent ways of being and ultimately determines what the tree will look like and how it will grow—they represent history, beliefs, values, and norms.

The same metaphor can be adapted to define SOMA Pilipinas. With its leaves, branches and trunk, one can see how culture is materialized in the built environment and the people who occupy it. At first glance, one may recognize the boundaries of the district, its community events and places, all of which are held together and advocated by the people of the neighborhood, the trunk and branches. But what shapes and allows this culture to grow are its roots. SOMA Pilipinas is rooted in the Philippine

<sup>38</sup> Tintiangco-Cubales, A. (2013). "Ethnography Workshop." San Francisco State University.

context of forced migration caused by imperialism, feudalism and capitalism. The figure highlights U.S. immigration policies that allowed Filipinos to enter the United States throughout the 1900s after the Philippine American War. Migration created ethnic enclaves and communities where Filipinos built connections and place but faced anti-Filipino sentiment and policies. These very enclaves also became targets for redevelopment, urban renewal and spatial injustice which will be discussed later in the Findings section. Oppression breeds resistance. Urban planning policies are met with community action, cultural resistance and anti-displacement campaigns; and out of Filipino neighborhoods arise new forms of art, expression and imagination. SOMA Pilipinas is rooted in the hope of either attaining or challenging the American Dream, but also in hope that allows Filipinos to reimagine and reclaim the spaces where they can build a future. These roots are not meant to be separate from each other, rather they are all connected in order to give life to the various groups and perspectives in the Filipino American community.

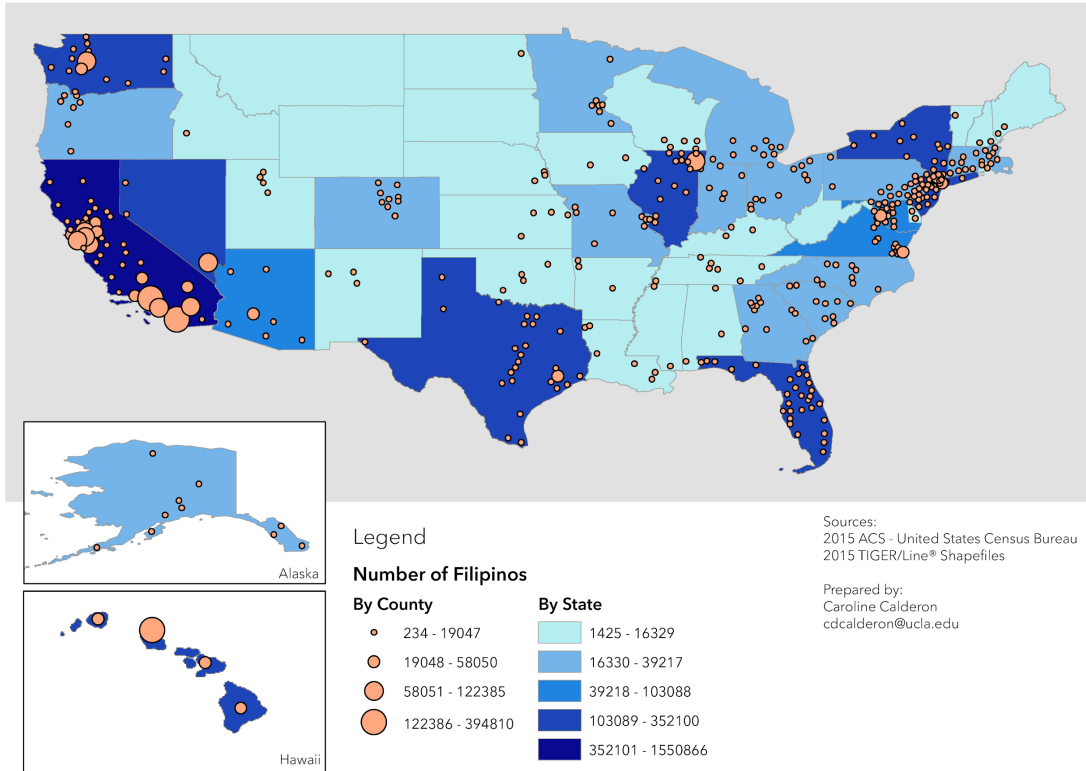
When we talk about the Philippine Diaspora, we must look to the first Filipino enclaves in the United States which existed as early as the 1700s in the bayous of Saint Malo, Louisiana—these enclaves hidden from the master narrative of the early American cities and landscapes.<sup>39</sup> In the early 1900s, over 100,000 Filipinos immigrated to the United States to attend American schools or to work in the canneries of Alaska, the sugarcane fields of Hawaii and the agriculture industry of California.<sup>40</sup> This migration was made possible when the Philippines fell under U.S. colonial rule from 1899 to 1946. With each wave of the Philippine migration to the United States, Filipino enclaves formed in major cities including Stockton, Seattle, San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco—all of these cities had their own responses to accommodate or to exclude this population.

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<sup>39</sup> Mabalon, D. & Tintiangco-Cubales, A. (2007). “A General Timeline of Filipina/o American History.” *Pin@y Educational Partnerships A Filipina/o American Studies Sourcebook Series Volume 1 Philippine and Filipina/o American History*. Santa Clara, CA: Phoenix Publishing House International.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

### Filipinos Living in the United States



Map 2: Number of Filipinos Living in the United States by State & County (2015 ACS Data)

“Pilipino Towns” or “Little Manilas”<sup>41</sup> exist in the American landscape but are not as widely recognized as Chinatowns or Japantowns. Romel Pascual attributes this invisibility of Filipinos to 1) the constant domestic migration of Filipinos who worked in the agricultural industry and who were unable to establish roots generationally, 2) the lack of “entrepreneurial enterprises” to establish long-standing commercial corridors in areas occupied by Filipinos, 3) colonial mentality that supported assimilation to American culture and values, and 4) conflicts and differences in political ideologies from Filipinos who originate from different regions in the Philippines.<sup>42</sup> Pascual’s points are important in understanding the formation of Filipino enclaves but we should also consider the impact of laws such as the Alien Land Act of 1913 which prohibited “aliens ineligible for citizenship” from owning land, anti-

<sup>41</sup> Filipino communities or enclaves located outside of the Philippines are often referred to as “Pilipinotown,” “Filipinotown,” “Little Manila” or “Manilatown.”

<sup>42</sup> Pascual, R. (1996). “Pilipino Towns.” *Filipino American Architecture, Design & Planning Issues*. p. 41-52.

miscegenation laws, or anti-Filipino sentiment promoted during and after the Philippine American War.<sup>43</sup> These political landscapes impacted the Filipino American psyche and the ability for many to build generational wealth; however, Filipinos continued to build community and connections despite these barriers.

Eighty miles east of SOMA Filipinas is Stockton's Little Manila, which became the largest community of Filipinas/os outside of the Philippines after the Philippine Revolution of 1898. Dr. Dawn Mabalon's *Little Manila Is in the Heart* delineates the history of Stockton's Filipina/o American community in Little Manila. Three themes arise from her work: setting roots (1898-1940s), building community (1930s-60s) and community displacement (1950s-2010). Little Manila became the mecca for Filipinos working in the agricultural industries of California. On Lafayette and El Dorado streets, you could visit hotels, pool halls, dance halls, restaurants, grocery stores, churches, union halls, and barbershops. Not only did Filipinos cultivate gathering spaces but they also put on neighborhood events and upheld traditions that were reminiscent of their homeland. Filipinos in Stockton created a community that was "impacted by their racialization as brown people... their identities as colonial subjects of the United States, and their collective experiences in the fields and the Little Manila neighborhood."<sup>44</sup> Little Manila, like many other low-income communities across the United States, fell victim to the racialization of space induced by suburbanization,<sup>45</sup> redevelopment in the 1950s and major infrastructure improvements such as the Crosstown Freeway from 1961 to 1975 which destroyed and displaced the Filipino neighborhood. In 1999, Little Manila Rising (formerly Little Manila Foundation) was established to preserve the remaining sites of Little Manila and advocate for historic site designation from the city of Stockton.<sup>46</sup> Although designation was formalized in 2002, it lacked regulatory controls to address

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<sup>43</sup> Orpilla, M. (1996). "Segregation and Identity." *Filipino American Architecture, Design and Planning Issues*. p. 161-170.

<sup>44</sup> Mabalon, Dawn. (2013). *Little Manila Is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California*.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 274-275.

<sup>46</sup> Little Manila Rising. Retrieved, from <https://www.littlemanila.org/advocacy>

redevelopment or displacement. But the process of remembering and recognizing Little Manila has raised a lineage of community leaders and activism not just in Stockton but across the nation where Filipinos also found themselves uprooted from the places they helped cultivate.

The creation of SOMA Pilipinas, like Little Manila, can be seen as an act of resistance especially in light of its relationship with urban renewal from the 1950s to 1970s. Before SOMA Pilipinas, there was Manilatown, a Filipino enclave popularized in the 1920s where Filipino day laborers and service workers rented rooms around Kearny Street—a street that was historically home to Filipino-owned small businesses and residences.<sup>47</sup> What was once Manilatown, a 3-block radius from Kearny Street,<sup>48</sup> is now San Francisco’s Chinatown and Financial District. Starting in the 1950s, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency planned for Manilatown to transform into a financial district without any reparations to community members along Kearny Street who were forced to leave because of increased rents and eviction notices.<sup>49</sup> In the 1970s, the development of Yerba Buena Gardens and the Moscone Center, two of San Francisco’s iconic tourist spots in SOMA, displaced over 4,000 small businesses and low-income residents, many of whom were Filipino.<sup>50</sup> Although Manilatown and the old Yerba Buena are physically gone, we learn about their people and places through stories passed down from our elders and their children.

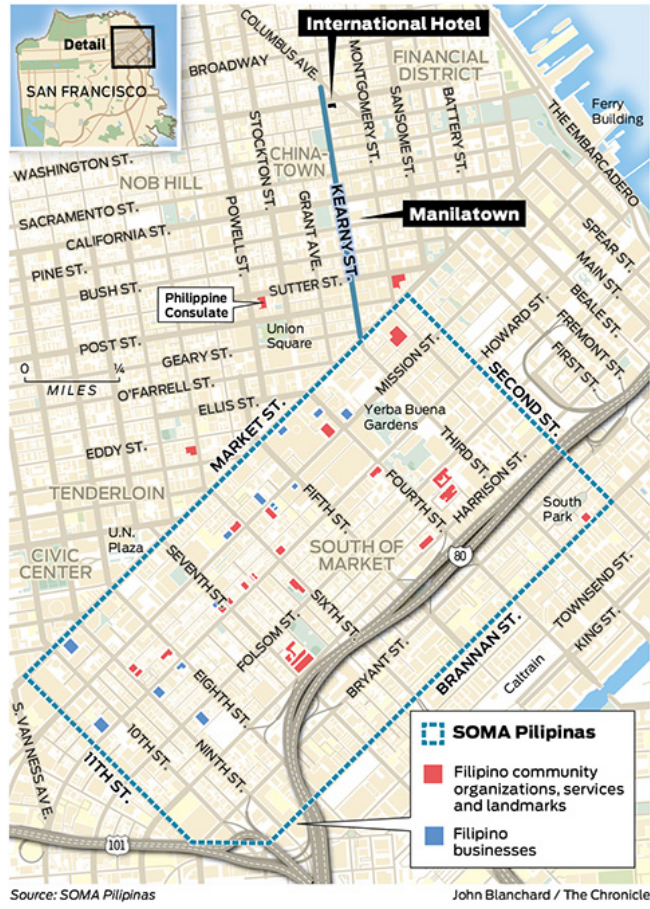
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<sup>47</sup> Filipino American National Historical Society et al. (2011). *Images of America: Filipinos in San Francisco*. p. 8-10.

<sup>48</sup> Sobredo, J. FoundSF. Retrieved December 10, 2018, from <http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=MANILATOWN>.

<sup>49</sup> Yu, B. (2017, August 11). “A community loss, a movement born: Historic development battle still shaping San Francisco.” Retrieved, from <https://projects.sfchronicle.com/2017/international-hotel/>

<sup>50</sup> Filipino-American Development Foundation. (2002). *SOMA Pilipinas: Uncovering the cultural assets and social heritage of Filipinos in San Francisco*. San Francisco, CA: Arkipelago Books.



Map 3: Map of SOMA Pilipinas in relation to Manilatown

While the legacy of displacement exists within the Filipino community of San Francisco, there are also narratives of resistance. Urban renewal in Manilatown was met by the protests from the 1977 Third World Liberation Front, a student-led movement from San Francisco State University composed of different ethnic groups who stood in solidarity with Filipino and Chinese residents and workers who were at risk of eviction and displacement in Manilatown. Today, we remember that struggle as the “Fight for the International Hotel,” an event that helped spark the tenants’ rights movement in San Francisco, and for which Filipinos were some of its lead organizers.

## 6. Cultural Districts: Addressing Displacement through Culture

*“We have to put a line in the sand. People need to know that they’re coming into a Latino community. Because we’re getting a lot of people moving in telling us, ‘Well you know what? Carnival, we don’t like you guys doing that here anymore.’ I’m like, ‘Hell no! We’ve been doing it forever and a day. We got to do it.’ And then they say, ‘Well you know what? The neighborhood is changing.’ But wait a minute, we grew up in the Mission when either people were too afraid to come in or too racist to care about us.”<sup>51</sup>*

Miguel Bustos (2019)  
on Calle 24 Latino Cultural District

What does it mean to form a cultural district? Why should communities center their culture in community development? Culture is a part of human livelihood that shapes people’s beliefs, behaviors, interactions and expression. It is dynamic, not static, it constantly changes through time, space and individual or collective growth. Inspired by cities in the United Kingdom, American urban planners paired culture with policy as a means of production and consumption or in some places as a tool to promote “empowerment, local identity, and social cohesion.”<sup>52</sup> Policies that included culture were materialized in the creation of cultural districts which were defined as a “consortium of organizations working together for economic gain to form a larger cultural identity in a given city or region.”<sup>53</sup> In 1998, Americans for the Arts published a strategy guide for revitalization in urban cities. The guide was shared during the U.S. Conference of Mayors and made a case for the designation and implementation of cultural districts in order to “attract residents and tourists.”<sup>54</sup> The guide revealed five types of cultural districts:

1. **Cultural Art Compounds** which include areas with museums, large performing halls and auditoriums, schools, colleges, libraries and zoos;
2. **Major Arts Institution Focus** which include large museums and concert halls or smaller arts organizations such as nightclubs or cinemas;
3. **Arts & Entertainment Focus** which include attractions for younger audiences such as art galleries or cinemas;

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<sup>51</sup> California Historical Society. (2019). “San Francisco Cultural Districts, What They Are and Why They Matter.” Retrieved, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehMvn0R17hE>.

<sup>52</sup> Ponzini, D. (2009). “Urban implications of cultural policy networks: the case of the Mount Vernon Cultural District in Baltimore.”

<sup>53</sup> Thornton, S. (2012). “Cultural Districts and the Potential for Urban Development.” The Advocates Forum, University of Chicago SSA Magazine.

<sup>54</sup> Americans for the Arts. (1998). “Cultural Districts: The Arts as a Strategy for Revitalizing Our Cities.” <https://www.mayorsinnovation.org/images/uploads/pdf/9 - Cultural Districts.pdf>



4. **Downtown Focus** which includes a central business district and have major arts institutions, tourist attractions, restaurants, etc.;
5. **Cultural Production Focus** which includes spaces for artists, dance and music studios, arts education and other “maker” spaces.<sup>55</sup>

These definitions and typologies for cultural districts are very top-down. The guide briefly mentioned ethnic communities as benefactors of cultural districts but failed to recognize the role of low-income residents and communities of color in the cultivation of these areas and how they have historically been excluded in planning and development processes.

Approaches and intentions in the creation of these districts vary by city and state but for the purposes of this research, I will focus on the state of California’s definition of cultural districts: “a well-defined geographic area with a high concentration of cultural resources and activities.”<sup>56</sup> In 2015, Assemblyman Richard Bloom adopted Assembly Bill 189 creating the California Cultural Districts program which aims to leverage the state’s artistic and cultural assets. Aligning with the mission and values of the California Arts Council (CAC), the districts will “celebrate the diversity of California while unifying under an umbrella of shared values—helping to grow and sustain authentic grassroots arts and cultural opportunities, increasing the visibility of local artists and community participation in local arts and culture, and promoting socioeconomic and ethnic diversity.”<sup>57</sup> SOMA Pilipinas is one of the 14 cultural districts in this first cohort under the state program. The cultural districts included in CAC’s program exist in either rural, suburban or urban cities and define culture in different ways. What ties some of these cultural districts together is that they are seen as key players in addressing displacement; however, not all cultural district designations are rooted in anti-displacement efforts as we have seen in the strategy guides published by Americans for the Arts. Whatever the intent, this is a state-wide movement with cities strategizing on how to both retain and enhance neighborhoods known for their arts

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> California Arts Council. (2017). Retrieved October 10, 2018, from <https://www.caculturaldistricts.org/announcement/>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

and culture and are at risk of displacement. The actual implementation strategies speak volumes as to who is being served and invited to participate.

The development of Leimert Park in Los Angeles highlights the difficulties of inclusion when creating a cultural district. Based on a series of interviews, Yolanda Hester examines what happens when Black communities pursue cultural tourism and seek the formal establishment of an ethnically-branded cultural district. Not only can cultural districts provide economic benefits, but motivations behind their creation are also symbolic where a neighborhood can “preserve cultural traditions...acknowledge the historical importance of communities whose formations were subjected to segregation and discriminatory practices...allow communities, whose existence is at mercy of external political and economic forces, to feel rooted and legitimate.”<sup>58</sup> In the case of Leimert Park, the creation of a cultural district is a community process where both unity and challenges arise especially when there are discussions around naming, authenticity, access and gentrification. Several attempts in renaming Leimert Park occurred among business owners, residents and workers but stakeholders could not reach a consensus because of disagreements on branding, historical memory and even identity politics. In using cultural assets for commercial gains, Leimert Park faces the challenge of “attraction, creating a district that appeals to outsiders and issues of authenticity, creating a district that remains true to itself and its residents.”<sup>59</sup> Leimert Park does not have access to capital that would allow business owners and black residents to be property owners and control land use in the neighborhood. The efforts in Leimert Park are guided by preservation and growth but also invite gentrification—community members in Leimert Park disagree about gentrification as being either a threat or potential benefit.<sup>60</sup> The conversations around authenticity, access and gentrification reiterate the need for more research on how to “measure or assess factors that contribute to success” of the impact of cultural districts.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Hester, Y. (2017). “Leimert Park, An African Village: The Possibility of an Ethnically Branded Cultural District.” (Unpublished MA thesis). University of California Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 30.

In 2016, District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim introduced a resolution to establish SOMA Pilipinas as San Francisco’s Cultural Heritage District which passed unanimously by the city’s Board of Supervisors. The resolution not only recognized the long history of Filipinos in the city, but recommended for the Planning Department and other city agencies to work directly with stakeholders to establish the district.<sup>62</sup> The “cultural district” designation meant that SOMA Pilipinas met the criteria of having “unique social and historical associations and living traditions...activities that occur within them, including commerce, services, arts, events and practices.”<sup>63</sup> While cultural heritage districts do not have any regulatory controls under a resolution, their designation prompted efforts to develop strategies for sustaining and preserving the culture and people of specific neighborhoods such as the Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District in SOMA (which overlaps with SOMA Pilipinas) and Calle 24 in the Mission. In June 2017, District 9 Supervisor Hilary Ronen, who represents neighborhoods including Bernal Heights, the Mission, and Portola, sponsored an ordinance that would amend the city’s Administrative Code to

...create a process for the establishment of cultural districts in the City to acknowledge and preserve neighborhoods with unique cultural heritage, and to require the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development to report to the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor regarding existing cultural districts previously established by resolution.<sup>64</sup>

This ordinance moves beyond recommendations and officially institutionalizes the participation of city agencies to preserve ethnic and cultural heritage. It puts “teeth” to the resolution by potentially moving beyond recognition and creating an overlay of resources and special uses that a community can access such as funding for planning and capacity-building.

New state and local programs are steps forward for ethnic communities in California to be officially recognized by a municipality but they have also raised a contradiction: in naming and promoting the culture of a community, there is a possibility to reproduce the very conditions and practices that have oppressed its people. We see this process materialized in ethnic or arts communities that have

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<sup>62</sup> City and County of San Francisco. (2016). Resolution No. 119-16.

<sup>63</sup> San Francisco Planning Department. (2016). SoMa Pilipinas Progress Report Case No. 2016-008314CWP.

<sup>64</sup> San Francisco Planning Department. (2018). Case Number: 2017-014684PCA. Retrieved December 10, 2018, from <http://commissions.sfplanning.org/hpcpackets/2017-014684PCA.pdf>.

been or are being gentrified. SOMA Pilipinas is not the only community using cultural district designation as a tool to address displacement. We are seeing designation being used in the Excelsior's International Cultural District, Tenderloin's Compton Transgender Cultural District and SOMA's Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District. This research will explore the contradictions and challenges being experienced in SOMA Pilipinas.

## 7. Methodology

*“To locate enclaves with any precision requires detailed, first-hand information about a place that can be obtained only by walking its streets.”*

Excerpt from *Urban Enclaves* by Mark Abrahamson (1996)

### Data

This research calls for an approach rooted in narrative; I trace how historical events and lived realities have created SOMA Pilipinas. In *The Power of Place*, Dolores Hayden argues that “identity is intimately tied to memory: both our personal memories (where we have come from and where we have dwelt) and the collective or social memories interconnected with the histories of our families, neighbors, fellow workers and ethnic communities,” and “urban landscapes are storehouses for these social memories.”<sup>65</sup> I analyze oral histories, personal archives, city documents and participant observation to understand:

- the historical, social and spatial context of the Filipino Cultural Heritage District
- preservation efforts to identify, uplift and maintain community, history, legacy, people (as identified in the vision of SOMA Pilipinas)
- the motivation behind these efforts and community action
- the power dynamics in changing the local community in SOMA (which include city agencies such as the San Francisco Planning Department, neighborhood groups, etc.)

The following data collection process was approved by the UCLA Institutional Review Board (UCLA IRB).

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<sup>65</sup> Hayden, D. (1995). *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. MIT Press. p. 9.

a. Participant Observation

Since 2008, I have been an active member and supporter of SOMA Pilipinas. I attended community meetings and events in order to provide a “reflexive perspective”<sup>66</sup> and understand how Filipinos are engaging in reclamation and reimagination. As someone who identifies as Pilipina American, I believe it is essential to participate and to support the efforts of SOMA Pilipinas so we can expand and spread the knowledge generated in this process for other Filipino and non-Filipino communities of color. The background history and analysis I present in this research are rooted in my personal experiences with the district since 2008. I also wrote field notes, took photographs and recorded videos during five visits to SOMA Pilipinas from May 2018 to April 2019. These mediums reflected my observations at community events such as Barrio Fiesta, a theater production at Bindlestiff Studios, presentations regarding SOMA Pilipinas at two conferences and a community-led walking tour of the district. UCLA IRB waived the requirement to obtain assent, informed consent and parental permission for my field visits because I did not reveal the identities of the people I interacted with.

In November 2018, I participated in a forum focused on historic preservation in Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) communities—this event was located in San Francisco and was open to the public. I drew from the discussions and presentations on SOMA Pilipinas, cultural districts in San Francisco and other topics related to preservation of ethnic communities including:

- Federal Efforts in Elevating APIA Representation and Engagement – a panel on how “federal efforts [can] be used to encourage future designation of historical and cultural resources associated with [Asian Pacific Islander Americans, safeguard these resources, and promote more community participation” (APIAHiP 2018 Forum Book)
- Interlocking Approaches: Historic and Cultural Heritage Preservation Three-Way in San Francisco – A panel focused on answering: “With the ongoing changes and threats to San Francisco’s historical and cultural resources, how are local government agencies addressing this

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<sup>66</sup> Burawoy, M. (1998). “The Extended Case Method.” *Sociological Theory* 16:1, p. 4-33.

through policy and planning approaches?” (APIAHiP 2018 Forum Book). This particular panel had representatives from the San Francisco Planning Department, San Francisco Heritage and the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development.

- Preservation Efforts in SOMA Pilipinas – A panel I moderated that asked, “How does community engagement and participation strengthen efforts in SOMA Pilipinas?”

I recorded the three presentations mentioned previously which are available online at the Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Historic Preservation’s (APIAHiP) facebook. Each recording lasted for a duration of one hour. These panels provided important insight on the strategies employed by the San Francisco Planning Department and other city agencies in working with ethnic communities such as Japantown, Chinatown and SOMA Pilipinas—additionally these panels shed light on people’s perceptions of these strategies.

In March 2019, I joined a group of UCLA students during a SOMA Pilipinas EthnoTour led by a nonprofit community worker from the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN). The walking tour comprised of visits to cultural landmarks, community-based organizations, open space and public art. The tour guide explained the historical and social significance of each site. Walking tours give local residents and workers a platform to introduce their neighborhoods from the lens they want their participants to view. In Irazábal and Huerta’s research with LGBTQ youth of color (YOC) in the West Village, they used participant observation and analysis of an LGBTQ YOC tour to learn about the conditions of these youth and how they engaged in planning processes.<sup>67</sup> Their approach shed light on the “pedagogical significance and potential of the tour as an advocacy, organizing and educational instrument for the needs of LGBTQ YOC in NYC.”<sup>68</sup> Immersion into the spaces of research subjects creates possibilities for researchers to humanize space they are unfamiliar with by learning about the history and significance of a place.

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<sup>67</sup>Irazábal, C. & Huerta, C. (2016). “Intersectionality and planning at the margins: LGBTQ youth of color in New York.” *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23:5, 714-732, DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2015.1058755

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

b. Oral Histories

Building off of the work of Ericka Martynovych,<sup>69</sup> I reviewed and analyzed oral histories conducted by community members from San Francisco and the Bay Area between October 2016 and December 2016, five months after the approval of the resolution to establish SOMA Pilipinas. These recordings were made possible through a collaboration between SOMA Pilipinas, StoryCorps and the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM), where 26 oral histories were conducted to record the history and experiences in SOMA Pilipinas. Participants signed a release form that allowed for public use of the recordings. A majority of the oral histories took place at the Bayanihan Community Center, a neighborhood staple of SOMA Pilipinas or at another location in SOMA. Interviews were semi-structured and included questions such as:

- 1) What is the story of coming to America? What brought you here to San Francisco?
- 2) What do you remember about San Francisco growing up?
- 3) What does SOMA mean to you and what has it done to shape you as a person?
- 4) What brought you here to the South of Market?
- 5) What is your relationship with the South of Market?
- 6) How do you see the future of SOMA? Especially with the cultural heritage district?
- 7) What do you hope to see for the future of SOMA?

Participants shared their knowledge and experiences with current and historical community-based organizations, spaces, landmarks and annual events. They also shared moments in the community's history, including those related to the Filipino community working with (or sometimes against) the San Francisco Planning Department and other city agencies. See Appendix A for a description of each oral history and demographics of participants.

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<sup>69</sup> Martynovych, Ericka. 2017. "The Intersection of Culture and Activism in the Filipino Community in SoMa." (Unpublished MA thesis). University of San Francisco San Francisco, CA.



The duration of these recordings ranged from ten minutes to one hour. Members of the Filipino community and allies ranging from youth to seniors having lived or worked in SOMA Pilipinas conducted these oral histories. These oral histories represent a sample of SOMA Pilipinas residents, workers and the members of the district's coalition which consists of nonprofits, grassroots organizations, tenant associations, community spaces, and businesses. Twenty-three of the oral histories were transcribed using temi.com. Three of the oral histories are available on CAAM's website and are accompanied by an article summarizing and highlighting the main points of the conversations. I used Dedoose, a cloud-based qualitative data analysis application, to code and find themes across the recordings.

c. Personal Archives

The third set of data are my personal archives which contain documents (e.g. community meeting minutes, flyers, information sheets), newspaper articles, visual art, photographs, poetry, music and other mediums that describe events, people, places and issues in SOMA Pilipinas since the late 1990s to present. My personal archives date back to 2008. They are organized using Google Drive to store and manage literature, music and videos relevant to SOMA Pilipinas. Some of the data in my personal archives were collected using search queries and hashtags such as "SOMA Pilipinas" and "Filipinos in San Francisco" on popular websites including newspapers.com, archive.org, Youtube and Vimeo.

Inspired by Hunter and Robinson's *chocolate cities*, the use of these archives provided a comprehensive way to understand Filipino communities and how they "occupy place and form [community]." For example, SOMA Pilipinas completed a photo series of "What I want to see in my neighborhood" that had youth and seniors expressing their hopes for the district. Photographs are primary sources that can represent arguments, memory, or medium of thought—this research used photographs and other mediums to understand narrative, perspective and positionality.

d. City Documents

During the month of February, I accessed archives at the San Francisco Main Public Library History Center: San Francisco Department of City Planning Records SFH 465 and San Francisco Ephemera Collection SF SUB COLL. These collections contain documents, photographs and maps dated as early as the 1950s and relate to activities in Manilatown and SOMA Pilipinas. I also utilized the SF Planning Department website to do a search of more current studies and plans under the department. I used keyword searches such as “SOMA Pilipinas” and found documents dating as early as April 2002.

The city and county of San Francisco also holds a video archive of various commission hearings. I reviewed hearings related to SOMA Pilipinas since 2015 and the particular development controversies that preceded the resolution to establish the district to understand how community members presented their plans for the district in public comment and the response of commission members. Video selection was based on agendas published by the Planning Commission containing the words “SOMA Pilipinas,” “SOMA” or “South of Market.”

*Framework*

For this research I used Critical Race Theory (CRT) to analyze how SOMA Pilipinas is challenging, reclaiming and reimagining space in San Francisco. CRT provides a framework for how structural racism and public affairs issues impact low-income communities, communities of color, and underserved neighborhoods. I have seen CRT applied in the field of education to challenge Eurocentric knowledge and deficit-model approaches to school improvement by centering alternative forms of capital possessed by students and their families.<sup>70</sup> CRT has been applied in critiquing “educators, policy makers, and community workers to better understand how students engage in resistance strategies that attempt to

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<sup>70</sup> Yosso, T. J. (2005). “Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth.” *Race ethnicity and education*, 8(1), 69-91.

counteract the conditions and results of ineffective educational practices.”<sup>71</sup> Transformational resistance is a possibility where students and teachers critique and change social oppression as long as they are motivated by social justice. This framework can be adapted to community development and urban planning practice to show how various groups in SOMA Pilipinas resist oppression or assimilate to the status quo. I adapted the tenets of CRT to create guiding questions that helped me analyze each data set:

- How does SOMA Pilipinas recognize race, racism and other forms of subordination?
- How does SOMA Pilipinas challenge dominant ideologies in planning, design and development?
- What is SOMA Pilipinas’s commitment to social justice?
- How does SOMA Pilipinas recognize and draw from the knowledge and lived experiences of people of color?
- Who is involved in SOMA Pilipinas? Which disciplines are or are not represented in the process of cultural district designation?

When appropriate, these data sets were analyzed and set in conversation with one another using thick mapping which is “about exploring, participating, and listening, something that transforms our conception of mapping into a practice of ethics.”<sup>72</sup> Presner et al. believe that mapping is not just a “one-time thing” but rather they are “visual arguments and stories” that “make claims and harbor ideals, hopes, desires, biases, prejudices, and violences.”<sup>73</sup> Thick mapping can help provide human “texture” or layers to physical and digital maps in the form of narrative, sound, visual art to show personal stories or spatial patterns. In regard to cultural districts, it is important to understand the various layers of power and perspective that shape and mold these neighborhoods. Thick mapping combined with CRT can show us the inclusivity and exclusivity of space from the lens of migrants and communities of color. It can also expand our understanding of how neighborhoods are perceived and how people move and change the

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<sup>71</sup> Solorzano, D. G., & Bernal, D. D. (2001). Examining Transformational Resistance Through a Critical Race and Latcrit Theory Framework. *Urban Education*, 36(3), 308-342. doi:10.1177/0042085901363002

<sup>72</sup> Presner, T. S., Shepard, D., & Kawano, Y. (2014). *HyperCities: Thick mapping in the digital humanities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 15.

spaces they occupy. For example, Image 2 shows four maps of areas in SOMA. The maps on the top right represent the site for the 5M Project. One of the maps was designed by 5M to show the massings of the proposed buildings, while the map above shows the layout of UndiscoveredSF, the Filipino night market in SOMA Pilipinas. The two bottom maps represent the Central SOMA plan area. One map was generated by the Planning Department, the other map was altered by SOMA Pilipinas to include the legislated cultural district and site of the former Manilatown. On the top left, there is a screenshot of a Youtube video posted by the South of Market Action Committee (SMAC), who opposed the 5M Project and the “supersizing of SOMA.” The video and maps together show different representations of power and claims to space.



Image 2: Sample “Thick Mapping” of Maps and Video in SOMA Pilipinas

### Limitations

*SOMA Pilipinas Is in the Heart* focuses on the experiences of Filipino American youth, adults, seniors, families, migrants, workers and allies in their efforts to reimagine and reclaim space for their people. This research is based on over twenty years of oral history and community organizing. I believe it is important that I share my findings and analysis of how SOMA Pilipinas challenges displacement and

dispossession, but recognize there are other histories that I do not go into depth such as the displacement of Bindlestiff Studio, the community politics around the SOMArts Cultural Center, the passing of the 2014 Filipino Language Ordinance, the purchase of the United Playaz Clubhouse and the impact of the Westfield Mall, Intercontinental Hotel and 2011 Twitter Tax break. These are just a few events that deserve further data collection and analysis. Additional time should be spent to collect and to co-write this history to get a wider picture of the dedication, passion, skills and knowledge of this community.

## 8. Findings

*SoMa Pilipinas fam, you cannot relate  
Baon my Tselogs get Kusina ni Tess  
SOMCAN where the party? YOHANA in Bindlestiff Bay-  
-anihan all over the City like Mission and 6th  
Throwing yuppies hella shine now they look ITM  
Shoutout to you Google and the rest of you techs  
This is not ya City it belongs to the kids  
Chano in Chicago we got Mav in the West/I got Mav on the left  
You don't got a Chance if you keep raising the rent  
I Hotel we still won't move, Migrante marching avenues  
West Bay, Galing Bata, UP, see your kids right after school  
We should read some books at Arkipelago like Kuya Bam  
Grab ya rifle, point at Central SoMa Plan, aim and shoot, braat*

*No matter where I go  
No matter where you'll be  
I will leave my heart*

*With you, with you  
With (soma, soma SO-MA-HAL)  
With you, with you  
With (soma, soma SO-MA-HAL)*

Excerpt from “somahal” song by ITM featuring Alexa, Mavy-E, Saico of Doble Bara (2018)

As previously discussed, the purpose of this research is to center the voices and actions of Filipino residents and workers in their efforts to fight against gentrification and displacement by creating a cultural district. It is meant to highlight how the strategies utilized by community members are tools in preserving and building upon significant places, services, histories, relationships and connections that ultimately make SOMA Pilipinas. The following findings are organized by the research questions that led to this inquiry:

- Part 1: *How do strategies practiced by SOMA Pilipinas challenge and resist legacies of displacement and dispossession of the Filipino American community in San Francisco?* This section delves into the importance of community anchors and their roles during various moments of urban development and displacement in SOMA. The section also highlights the various

strategies employed by SOMA Pilipinas to prevent eviction, to increase community assets and capital and to build community participation and leadership.

- Part 2: *How do their efforts behind the creation of a cultural district reclaim and reimagine space for the Filipino American community and other historically oppressed people who call the South of Market neighborhood home?* Here I will discuss emerging themes of Pilipinx American spatial imagination as it pertains to urban design, community planning, placemaking and storytelling.

While SOMA Pilipinas has progressed in creating and sustaining the cultural district, it also faces challenges at interpersonal and institutional levels. Each section investigates these challenges and the contradictions that arise when imagining and materializing a cultural district. Throughout the findings, I also inserted maps, images and quotes so that readers can visualize people, places and spaces in SOMA Pilipinas.

### ***Part 1: Challenging Displacement & Dispossession***

*“We are the ghosts of Yerba Buena...No one knows we’re here.”<sup>74</sup>*

Ed De la Cruz, Former Executive Director (1985)  
West Bay Pilipino Multi-Service Center

To understand how displacement and dispossession have been challenged by SOMA Pilipinas, it is important to identify key events in the timeline of the cultural district. Although, these events occur before the 2016 resolution, they represent the history and legacy of Filipinos and non-Filipinos in SOMA who were displaced because of natural disasters, changes in zoning and large-scale development. But these moments also comprise a rich history of community organizing and capacity building of tenant and community-based organizations. I argue that current strategies employed by SOMA Pilipinas are

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<sup>74</sup> Seligman, K. (1985, December 29). “Wave of immigrants rolls in from Philippines.” *San Francisco Examiner*. Retrieved, from newspapers.com

informed by the creation of community anchors. I will highlight three community anchors as they were mentioned in multiple oral histories and are predominant in my personal archives. For additional events and details in the SOMA Pilipinas timeline, see Appendix B. Afterwards, I will focus on seven strategies utilized by SOMA Pilipinas including: participation, coalition building, housing advocacy and acquisition, civic policy, community and economic development and urban design.

### *Community Anchors*

I define community anchors as places or spaces that help ground residents, workers and visitors of a neighborhood. In his book about SOMA Pilipinas published in 2000, MC Canlas called places where “people gather or come together” as “center of gravity.” Anchors are like magnets that allow people to connect and exchange resources, goods, services, knowledge, etc. There is a lot of history and memory associated with anchors in SOMA Pilipinas. The following community anchors are vital to the district’s creation as they are sites for community building where people are invited to celebrate Pilipinx American culture; to mobilize youth, families and seniors; and to deepen connections across class and culture.

#### **1) Mint Mall and Hall (951 - 957 Mission Street)**



*Image 3: Photo of Front Entrance of the Mint Mall (Source: Yelp)<sup>75</sup>*

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<sup>75</sup> Yelp. (2009). Mint Mall. Retrieved, from <https://www.yelp.com/biz/mint-mall-san-francisco>



The Mint Mall is a mixed-use commercial and residential building located on Mission Street between 5th and 6th Street and named after the old US Mint building on 5th Street. The upper floors contain 124 residential units and are home to mostly newly-arrived Filipino families. The ground floor and basement include Filipino organizations and Filipino-serving businesses. Community-based organizations and businesses such as the West Bay Pilipino Multi-Service Center, Filipino American Music and Arts Society (FAMAS), LIKHA Pilipino Folk Ensemble, Pilipino AIDS Project and Arkipelago Books were once tenants of the Mint Mall.<sup>76</sup>

The rise of the internet in the late 1990s sent a new wave of tenants to the South of Market: companies in need of office space and housing. During this time, rents and property values skyrocketed; new dot-com companies and workers replaced long-term tenants who were evicted from industrial buildings that were converted to office use. The construction of live/work lofts surged because of a loophole in the Planning Code that allowed live/work units for artists and “exempted a developer from having to comply with residential planning regulations.”<sup>77</sup> The tenants of Mint Mall also fell victim to this change. In 2000, Filipino business owners were served with eviction notices. Some of these businesses were replaced with offices for dot-com companies. The Filipino community united and fought the evictions of these tenants through the “Save Mint Mall” campaign which exposed illegal retail-to-office conversions and helped establish long-term leases for Arkipelago Books and New Filipinas Restaurant (today known as JT Restaurant).<sup>78</sup> That same year, the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN) formed and has since been a force in the community to organize and mobilize against gentrification and displacement.

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<sup>76</sup> Page & Turnbull. (2013, March 13). San Francisco Filipino Heritage Addendum to the South of Market Historic Context Statement.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>78</sup> SOMA Pilipinas. “Roots.” Retrieved, from <http://www.somafilipinas.org/history>.

# HUB IN CRISIS / Evictions Dispersing Filipino American Businesses / Mint Mall on Mission St. down to 5 firms rally will publicize plight

Ryan Kim, Chronicle Staff Writer Published 4:00 am PST, Thursday, December 14, 2000



Photo: THE CHRONICLE



Image 4: Screenshot of SF Gate Article on Mint Mall Evictions<sup>79</sup>

Although many Filipino businesses left Mint Mall over the years, it continues to be a place where Filipinos gravitate. Today, Mint Hall remains a primarily Filipino-occupied residential building and provides tenants close proximity to major transit, job opportunities, shopping and cultural amenities. It is still a site for continued tenant education and organizing as tenants face the challenge of rent increases and advocating for better living conditions. From the ground level and basement of Mint Mall, small business tenants must find innovative ways to grow or change their business in order to compete with new startups or cuisine trends such as food trucks. Despite the remnants of the dot-com bust and today's tech boom, residents can still get services from the Pilipino Senior Resource Center (PSRC) or grab Filipino

<sup>79</sup> Kim, R. (2000, December 14). "HUB IN CRISIS / Evictions Dispersing Filipino American Businesses / Mint Mall on Mission Street down to 5 firms rally will publicize plight." Retrieved, from <https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/HUB-IN-CRISIS-Evictions-Dispersing-Filipino-3236232.php#photo-2379435>

food from Tita<sup>80</sup> Tess at JT Restaurant which is also a site for a number of community celebrations and meetings.<sup>81</sup>

## 2) Bessie Carmichael School/Filipino Education Center

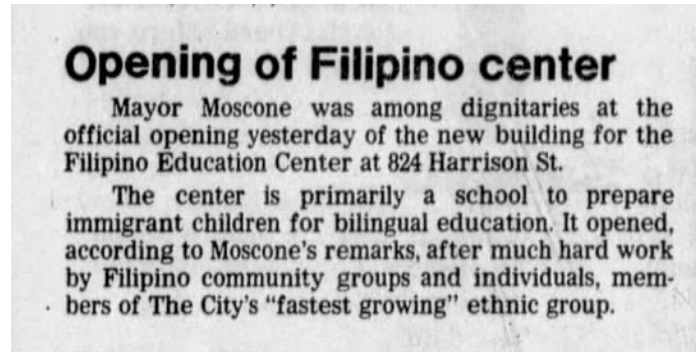


Image 5: Newspaper Clipping about FEC opening (Source: San Francisco Examiner)<sup>82</sup>

Established in 1970s, the Filipino Education Center (FEC) is the first Filipino newcomer and Filipino/English bilingual school in the United States. It was one of three schools in San Francisco for newcomers including Mission Education Center and Chinatown Education Center<sup>83</sup> and was a “feeder school” to Franklin Elementary School, the only school in SOMA under the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD). In the 1950s, Franklin Elementary was at-risk of displacement during the construction of the 101 freeway. Then principal, Bessie Carmichael, advocated that the school be relocated from 8th and Harrison to Columbia Square at 7th and Howard. In 1954, temporary trailers were set-up to serve students for the relocation and eventually the school was renamed Bessie Carmichael School (locally known as Bessie). In the 1990s and early 2000s, Bessie parents and students organized to improve the conditions of the campus. At the same time, SFUSD aimed to shut down FEC because of declining enrollment. Through parent and student advocacy, Bessie and FEC combined into one school and negotiated a land swap with the San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department for the new site of

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<sup>80</sup> Tita is the Filipino term for “aunt” or “auntie.” It can also be used as a sign of respect to older women.

<sup>81</sup> Challet, A. (2014). “San Francisco’s ‘Mama Tess’ Serves Filipino Elders Taste of Home, Community.” Retrieved, from <http://newamericamedia.org/trending/2014/03/san-franciscos-mama-tess-serves-filipino-elders-taste-of-home-community.php>

<sup>82</sup> San Francisco Examiner. (1976, Dec 19). “Opening of Filipino center.” p. 13.

<sup>83</sup> SotoGrondona, S. (2009, September 15). “SoMa Philippines, a Filipino social cultural heritage District.”

Bessie Carmichael Elementary and Middle School/FEC. In 2004, the elementary school relocated to a new facility at 375 7th Street and in 2009, FEC was rebuilt and included the new Bessie Carmichael Middle School. One former nonprofit worker from the oral histories recalled these events:

there was a eight trailers that had existed, um, for many 50 years I believe, and the children went to school in trailers that leaked in the winter and they had been promised a new elementary school in 1988 and the promise was broken many times and until Patrice and other leaders in the community, other families came together and pressured the school district to fulfill their commitment to the children and families in the South of Market. So in 2004, the center was opened along with the Filipino Education Center ...some of the children said they were just amazed that at their new bathrooms and that they had a cafeteria. In other words, they had things that other children in other communities took for granted.<sup>84</sup>

From 1999 to 2006, the Filipino community also lobbied for a new two-acre park, located near the old site of Columbia Square Park, and advocated for the park to be named Victoria Manalo Draves Park (VMD Park) after the 1948 Filipina American Olympic gold medalist who had once attended the old Franklin Elementary School.<sup>85</sup> VMD Park is situated between the Bessie elementary campus and the Columbia Park Apartments, a 100% affordable, 50-unit multifamily development through Mercy Housing (which was also completed in 2006).



*Image 6: Newspaper clipping showing opening of Victoria Manalo Draves Park<sup>86</sup>*

Today, Bessie and FEC provide Filipino culture and language curriculum for elementary to middle school students. They serve over 600 students, 31.5% Filipino, 14.3% African American and 24% Hispanic or Latino. Although Bessie is an anchor that has withstood two waves of displacement (1950s

<sup>84</sup> Martynovych, Ericka. (2016). "sfd001629." [.wav file of oral history].

<sup>85</sup> Sisto, Carrie. (2017, June 21). Retrieved, from <https://hoodline.com/2017/06/diving-into-history-soma-s-victoria-manalo-draves>

<sup>86</sup> San Francisco Examiner. (2006, Oct 28). "Heart of the City." San Francisco, California. p. 4.

and 1990s), it must also deal with the statistics that 77% of its students are socioeconomically disadvantaged, 42% are English learners and the school has one of the highest rates of homeless families in the district.<sup>87</sup> Thus, Bessie is supported by a deep network of service providers (partial list):

- Bill Sorro Housing Program
- Embarcadero YMCA
- Filipino Mental Health Initiative
- Galing Bata After School Program
- Gene Friend Recreation Center (SOMA Recreation Center)
- South of Market Community Action Network
- SOMA Childcare Center
- SOMA Health Center
- United Playaz
- West Bay Pilipino Multi-Service Center

All of these programs and organizations help form a network that help Bessie students, teachers and families navigate through issues of affordable housing, employment, health services and after school programs. The school and the park are essential spaces for youth in SOMA.

### **3) Bayanihan Community Center**

In 1976, Dr. Mario Borja purchased the Delta Hotel, a Single-Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel that transformed in affordable housing for very low-income residents including Filipino WWII Veterans. In 1997, a four-alarm fire broke out at the Delta Hotel, displacing 225 residents. Supporters from across the city came to SOMA to assist these residents providing food and other basic necessities for households that were relocated to homeless shelters. The Filipino American Development Foundation (FADF) was created and partnered with TODCO to revitalize the building, renamed Bayanihan<sup>88</sup> House, so that it

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<sup>87</sup> SFUSD. School Accountability Report Card School Year 2017-18. Retrieved, from <http://www.sfusd.edu/assets/sfusd-staff/rpa/sarcs2/sarc-449.pdf>.

<sup>88</sup> Bayanihan is a Filipino term rooted in indigenous Philippine psychology meaning “the spirit of community.”

included 40 units of Section 8 housing and 152 SRO rooms, many of which continued to be occupied by Filipino WWII Veterans.<sup>89</sup>



Image 7: Newspaper clipping regarding Delta Hotel fire<sup>90</sup>

In addition to the affordable housing units, the revitalization project also included the creation of a new community center that would serve the Filipino American community in San Francisco. In 2000, FADF released a needs assessment report of Filipinos in the South of Market which created an inventory of community assets, services and programs. What came out of this historic report were recommendations

<sup>89</sup> Page & Turnbull. (2013). San Francisco Filipino Heritage Addendum to the South of Market Historic Context Statement. p. 29.

<sup>90</sup> San Francisco Examiner. (1997, August 15). "Hotel fire victims coping with loss." San Francisco. p. 18.

for how the community center should be utilized. After a series of surveys, workshops, focus groups, statistical analysis, interviews and participant observations, the report presented a vision for the community center:

It is recommended that the Bayanihan Community Center will be:

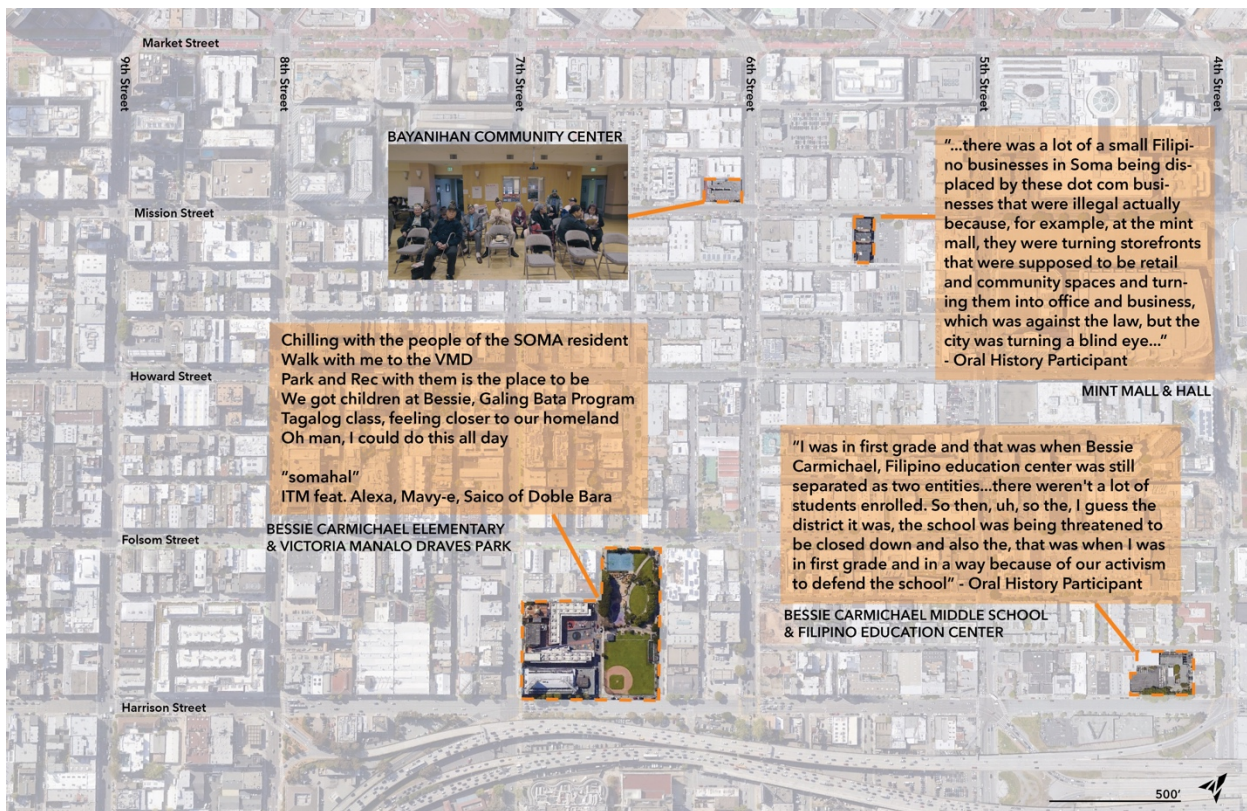
- a multi-purpose and multi-functional center for Filipinos.
- a plaza for the Filipino community, a magnet where all Filipino can all be together. A center where people can go to learn and education about themselves and others. A place where they can rekindle bayanihan spirit.
- a center where they can go for help or get information how to access and avail programs and services in the community. The center will be an available site for community events and agency activities, from service programs, town hall meetings, to economic development. A center that can facilitate the community outreach of service agencies and service providers.
- a center to hold family, organization and community celebrations. A center that is accessible to all walks of life, including the low income Filipinos. A center that promotes intergenerational programs. A center open for all ages. Create programs so youth and seniors can interact.
- a center that can link Filipinos to the larger community, and build bridges among communities.
- a landmark to enhance the visibility and presence of Filipinos in San Francisco. A center that nurtures culture and heritage by displaying artworks, creative talents and craftsmanship of Filipinos, and place for cultural performances, activities and group rehearsals.
- a physical symbol and a catalyst to spur further economic development in SoMa.<sup>91</sup>

In 2005, the Bayanihan Community Center (BCC), located on Mission and 6th Street, opened its doors to the community. Some of its first tenants were Arkipelago Bookstore, Filipino American Development Foundation, Veterans Equity Center and PS Print. Since then, the Bayanihan Community Center has stayed true to the 2000 report recommendations and has been a space for a wide-range of community programs, events and celebrations, not just targeted towards the Filipino community but other groups such as nonprofits, unions, student and tenant groups. Because of its proximity to Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) stations and Muni bus and rail stops, it is a site that is accessible to different neighborhoods across the city and throughout the region. A short film by R.J. Lozada (2017) titled “a place on sixth and mission” captured the beauty of the Bayanihan Community Center and its dynamic users comprising of

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<sup>91</sup> Filipino American Development Foundation, MC Canlas. (2000, January 31). “Executive Summary.” Filipinos in South of Market. p. 17-18.

students, seniors, artists and many more. BCC is a testament to the Filipino community’s resilience even after a tragic event and a changing neighborhood. Many of the community meetings and workshops around SOMA Pilipinas took place at the community center. It is a hub that allows various groups to educate community members on a variety of topics such as mental health, workers’ rights and personal finance. It also gives visitors access to direct services offered by the Bayanihan Equity Center (BEC, formerly Veterans Equity Center) and the Filipino American Development Foundation. Through BEC, San Francisco families can access a weekly food distribution or get assistance in applying for affordable housing. Patrons of BCC can also visit Arkipelago Bookstore, which is one of two Filipino bookstores in the United States, providing access to Philippine and Filipino American history, literature, culture, food, music and art.



Map 4: Narratives and Community Anchors Overlay



These three community anchors connect other neighborhood assets and landmarks in SOMA Pilipinas. They are physical proof that Filipinos exist and that there are spaces for San Francisco residents and workers to learn, dialogue, organize and mobilize.

### *Strategies*

The resolution for SOMA Pilipinas came out of a political conjuncture when community members used cultural district designation as a road map and strategy for youth, families and seniors impacted by displacement, mega-development and gentrification in SOMA. SOMA Pilipinas is not just a place, but it is a movement that comprises of Filipinos and allies from all walks of life. It is also a vision for the SOMA community to recognize the contributions of Filipinos and it is a coalition of tenant and community-based organizations. SOMA Pilipinas as a political strategy addresses displacement in its approaches to participation, housing advocacy, civic policy, community and economic development. These strategies should not be seen as separate from each other, but rather overlap in their planning and execution.

#### **1) Participation**

SOMA Pilipinas would not be possible without the participation of residents, youth, seniors, nonprofit workers, entrepreneurs, artists and other community advocates. SOMA Pilipinas is a movement that invites individuals to support the Filipino community whether it is by attending community meetings and events, speaking at city hall in support of the district or other related initiatives, being a patron of one of the local small businesses or volunteering at one of the local community organizations. Individuals are given the opportunity to participate in the cultural district at different levels. There are countless photographs in my archives showing individuals and groups engaging with each other, discussing their hopes for the district or even being present at community events—some of these photos are also included in Part 2 of the findings section. There are different forms of participation that are both formal and

informal in the establishment of the district that were present in the oral histories, my personal archives and participant observation:

- Investment: donating to grassroots or community-based organizations that serve Filipinos; being a patron of Filipino restaurants and businesses in SOMA Pilipinas
- Attending Events & Meetings: participating in events hosted by SOMA Pilipinas and its coalition members; providing input at a public town hall meeting or SOMA Pilipinas workshop
- Direct Action: joining rallies in support of SOMA Pilipinas and its residents, speaking at public comment during Board of Supervisors meetings or commission hearings in support of the district
- Volunteering / Service-learning: supporting the work of a local nonprofit or community initiative

It is interesting to trace how community members got involved in SOMA Pilipinas in the first place. People who end up living in SOMA Pilipinas are pulled into the area because they have relatives who already live in the district or hear about the Filipino community that exists there. Others are pulled into the neighborhood because of service-learning courses and programs offered at local universities and colleges including San Francisco State University, City College of San Francisco, University of San Francisco and UC Berkeley. Students who volunteer at a community organization based in SOMA Pilipinas learn about the history of Filipino WWII Veterans or tutor youth at Bessie Carmichael. These relationships with the universities and colleges raise awareness on what is happening in SOMA Pilipinas to students who are not from the area and creates a network of supporters and allies that are committed to protecting the neighborhood or apply values that they learn in the district into their own lives. Some of these students, like myself, graduate from their programs and continue to work in SOMA Pilipinas. The cultural district values participation and leadership as those two things ultimately help build the base of the coalition who are devoted to seeing the Filipino community thrive. Participation in the local

community occurred long before the cultural district designation. One oral history participant reflected on how they viewed the role of the Filipinos:

...we deserve to have this area as a Filipino heritage district because the fact that, you know, uh, this neighborhood, not just SOMA but even outside SOMA, predominantly Filipino residents live here and we contributed a lot to the city of San Francisco to where they are at now, you know and they need to acknowledge our existence here.<sup>92</sup>

Here we see that participants acknowledge the contributions of Filipinos in the city fabric of San Francisco and call for the city to support these efforts. Pilipinxs are entitled to a cultural district that interrogates who deserves to live and work in the changing neighborhood.

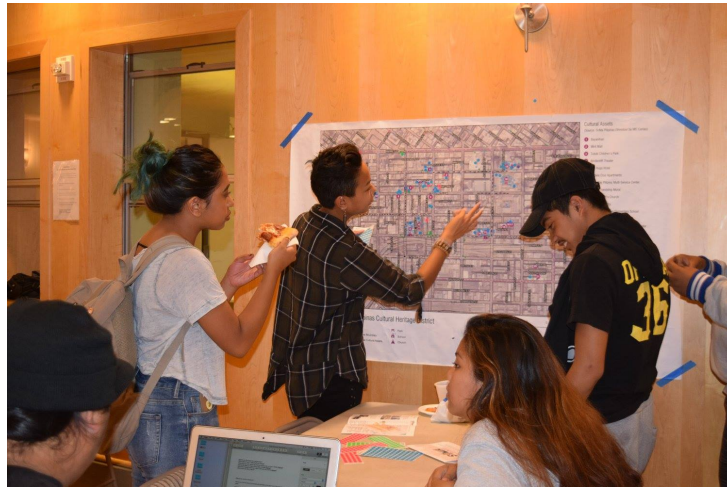
Participation in the cultural district reigns in the question, “Are all voices being heard?” Difficulties in promoting and sustaining SOMA Pilipinas arise when community members feel left out or when their voices are not included in literature and media published by SOMA Pilipinas. During the first six months after the resolution, community-based organizations banded together to host meetings that would cater to different audiences such as youth, seniors, workers, artists and service providers. These initial meetings included mapping activities where participants would identify places and paths of significance in the area. Participants were also invited to engage in discussions that answered: 1) Why is SOMA Pilipinas important to you? and 2) What do you want to see in the cultural district? Accessibility to these meetings is always on the radar for organizers in SOMA Pilipinas. The district must find creative ways to disseminate and gather information beyond online tools, and that is where coalition building becomes essential in this work.

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<sup>92</sup> Martynovych, Ericka. (2016). “sfd001573.” [.wav file of oral history].



*Image 8: SOMA Pilipinas Artist Meeting*



*Image 9: Community Mapping with SOMA youth*

## **2) Coalition Building**

The 2016 resolution called for the Planning Department to work with the SOMA Pilipinas Working Group which consisted of community members representing different sectors such as arts and culture, business, schools, affordable housing, workers and community and land use. The working group was tasked with initiating contact with various city agencies to assist in the planning and execution of the goals and vision of SOMA Pilipinas. Each working group would head a committee where members of the SOMA Pilipinas coalition could participate. The coalition itself is essential to SOMA Pilipinas as it comprises of over 20 organizations that serve the Filipino community across San Francisco. What is

amazing about the coalition is that it brings in the leaders of organizations, who are not always on the same side of various issues, to the table. Here, we see the importance of inclusivity and community accountability in decision-making. But such a structure is also challenging because any decision that the district wishes to commit to requires buy-in from a wide range of community members. Community members during the oral histories commented on this particular process:

Participant #1: I feel like we... created kind of that space where we want to allow more people to come in... I think we're all trying to hold everyone accountable to the group, to, to everyone to making sure that not one person actually does everything. I mean like makes the decisions on everything because everything like is a community process, should be a community process and I think that's a learning thing for everybody. It is for me even because some things may not be the way you think they should go. But sometimes you have to take the longer route and make everyone realize that.

Participant #2: It's the process. It's more learning and what it is then what the ultimate outcome is. So I think that's one thing that's changed also in dynamic-wise because back when I started it was kind of more top-down. There's usually specific leaders that people would turn to versus, I think because of your leadership and the way you, your vision is and how you go about doing it is for more inclusive, more consensus based because you're trying to get input from everybody and I think that dynamic is definitely evident in the kind of the, the organizations and the relationships and the strength of the community as it stands now is because of things, you know, the, the work that you do and also just the way you go about doing it to.<sup>93</sup>

It takes time to assess the needs of various groups within the coalition and to dialogue around controversial issues; however, community members believe that it is necessary because ultimately it gives members ownership of the district and opportunities to participate in the planning process. A coalition structure helps cultivate leaders of all ages and from different walks of life because it does not rely on the expertise of one person but rather, it relies on the collective knowledge of a committee.

### **3) Housing Advocacy and Acquisition**

Another component of the strategies employed by SOMA Pilipinas is advocacy. There are several member organizations of the coalition that are committed to the creation of more affordable housing that

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<sup>93</sup> Martynovych, Ericka. (2016). "sfd001567." [.wav file of oral history].

serves very low income to moderate income households. Below is a list of tactics practiced by members of the SOMA Pilipinas coalition:

- a) **Access to Housing:** One way to combat displacement is to place residents in residential buildings that have subsidized rents. Organizations such as the Bill Sorro Housing Program (BiSHoP) assist households in applying for affordable housing opportunities in San Francisco, many of the projects are located in District 6—the Tenderloin and SOMA. BiSHoP has been successful in housing a number of SOMA residents, workers and Bessie families in below market rate (BMR) rental, nonprofit and public housing; however, this process is not easy. SOMA residents who are applying to affordable housing are also competing with other households city-wide. Being placed in affordable housing can take years and requires perseverance to keep applying and entering the lottery system that composes affordable housing in San Francisco.
- b) **Anti-Eviction Campaigns:** In the late 1990s, residential buildings such as Trinity Plaza at Mission and 8th Street, home to over four hundred people of color and low-income households, were set to be demolished and replaced with new condominiums. Organizations such as the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN) and the Central City SRO Collaborative united to organize Trinity Plaza residents and negotiated a deal with the owner to replace all three hundred and sixty units that would be lost and provide rent-controlled housing and lifetime leases for current residents. It is through this fight, that SOMA organizers learned that development without displacement is possible and can be done in conjunction with protecting the residents that make SOMA home for artists, immigrants, low-income and working-class households.



Image 10: Newspaper clipping detailing the lifetime rent control lease deals at Trinity Plaza (2004)<sup>94</sup>

c) Small Suites Acquisition: In 2012 and 2013, SOMA service providers witnessed a significant spike in eviction notices issued in the neighborhood. Evictions became common in the alleyways of SOMA including Russ Street, Minna Street, Clementina Street and Natoma Street which is comprised of two to five-unit residential buildings, many of which are rent-controlled. SOMCAN partnered with the San Francisco Community Land Trust (SFCLT) to purchase a 5-unit property at risk of Ellis Act evictions. This type of community purchase is significant because it allows SFCLT to subsidize the rents for lower income households. In April 2016, SFCLT accessed the city’s Small Sites Program to purchase units

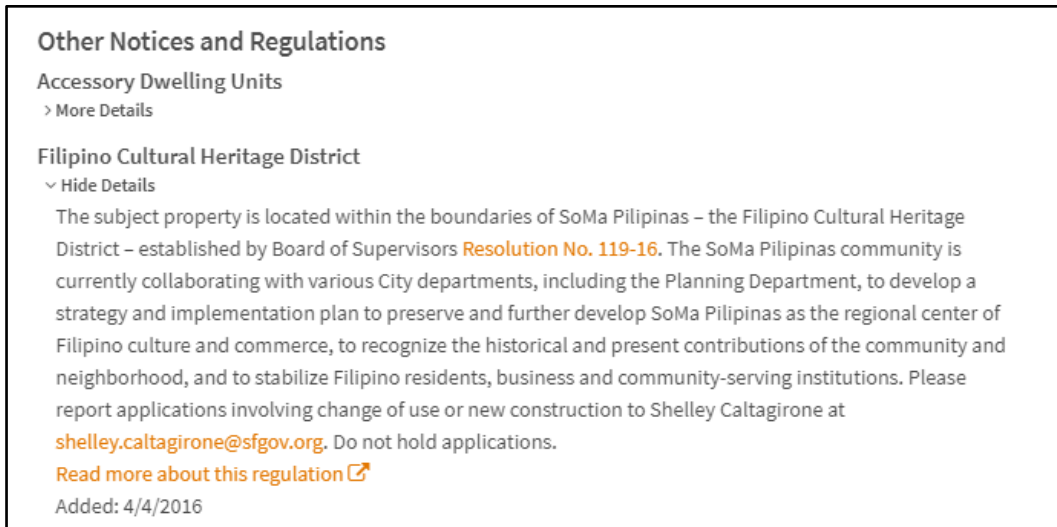
<sup>94</sup> San Francisco Examiner. “Trinity Battle Continues.” (2004, March 29). p. 4.

at 568-570 Natoma. These tactics are meant to preserve rent-controlled housing by getting community ownership of a building so they can have control over the pricing and management. SFCLT manages a third property in SOMA at 1353-1357 Folsom Street. While this type of ownership directly addresses displacement, it is costly and relies on a property owner's willingness to sell to a community organization like SFCLT.

#### **4) Civic Policy**

The materialization of SOMA Pilipinas requires participation not only from community members, but also civic leaders and city agencies who ultimately draft and execute legislation and policy that impact SOMA Pilipinas. Building relationships with staff in the Planning Department, the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) and the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD) has been crucial for SOMA Pilipinas in creating an implementation plan and measures so that the vision of the district comes into fruition. SOMA Pilipinas has also pushed civic policy to the ballot. In 2018, the district, alongside other community organizations, advocated for Proposition E, the Partial Allocation Hotel Tax for Arts and Culture. Prop E designated 1.5% of the base hotel tax for arts and cultural purposes. This local ballot measure passed and is meant to allocate \$3 million to cultural districts. This is an important source of funding for the work and resources of cultural districts like SOMA Pilipinas. The 2016 resolution has created regulatory controls for SOMA Pilipinas. Should developers change the use or construct a new building in SOMA Pilipinas, they are required to report their projects to assigned planner for SOMA Pilipinas. This provides an opportunity for SOMA Pilipinas to negotiate with developers to ensure that any new development or rehabilitation is aligned with the values and vision of the district.





*Image 11: Screenshot of 953 Mission Zoning Information from SF Property Information Map*

Designation has provided resources for SOMA Pilipinas to build local power to address displacement through funding and zoning regulations. The challenge for SOMA Pilipinas and coalition members is to diversify funding because over-reliance on city funding can be problematic and unsustainable if funding is cut in the future.

### 5) Community Development

SOMA Pilipinas is committed to brainstorming, drafting and implementing plans that will prevent the displacement of Filipino residents and businesses. It builds off of the purpose of the SOMA Stabilization Fund which was created in 2005 under Ordinance 217-05. The SoMa Fund was created in response to the Rincon Hill Area Plan which rezoned parts of SOMA for residential development.<sup>95</sup> The ordinance imposed an impact fee of \$14 per square foot on residential development in the plan area—these fees are deposited into the fund and are meant to be used for:

affordable housing and community asset building, small business rental assistance, development of new affordable homes for rental units for low income households, rental subsidies for low income households, down payment assistance for home ownership for low income households, eviction prevention, employment development and capacity building for SOMA residents, job growth and job placement, small business assistance, leadership development, community cohesion, civic participation, and community based programs and economic development.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Housing & Community Development. Retrieved, from <https://sfmohcd.org/history-soma-fund>

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

From 2016 to 2017, the SoMa Fund invested \$1.2 million in 22 projects related to capacity building, social services, economic development and other areas. The Fund also supported the purchase of the Gran Oriente Filipino at 41-49 South Park Street, giving \$5 million to stabilize 24 units of affordable housing on-site. The Gran Oriente (formerly Hotel Omiya) was purchased in 1921 by a group of Filipino merchant marines, farm workers and other workers who used the property as a meeting place and boarding house for members of their masonic lodge. The preservation of this community landmark was a huge victory for SOMA Pilipinas and has set precedent to preserve other historically and culturally significant buildings in the district. While the SoMa Fund is not officially part of the strategies for SOMA Pilipinas, the district directly benefits from it because it has received funding for Gran Oriente and organizational capacity building. Other coalition members have also received funding in other areas to continue their work and services. There are benefits and drawbacks to this type of funding. One oral history participant recalled,

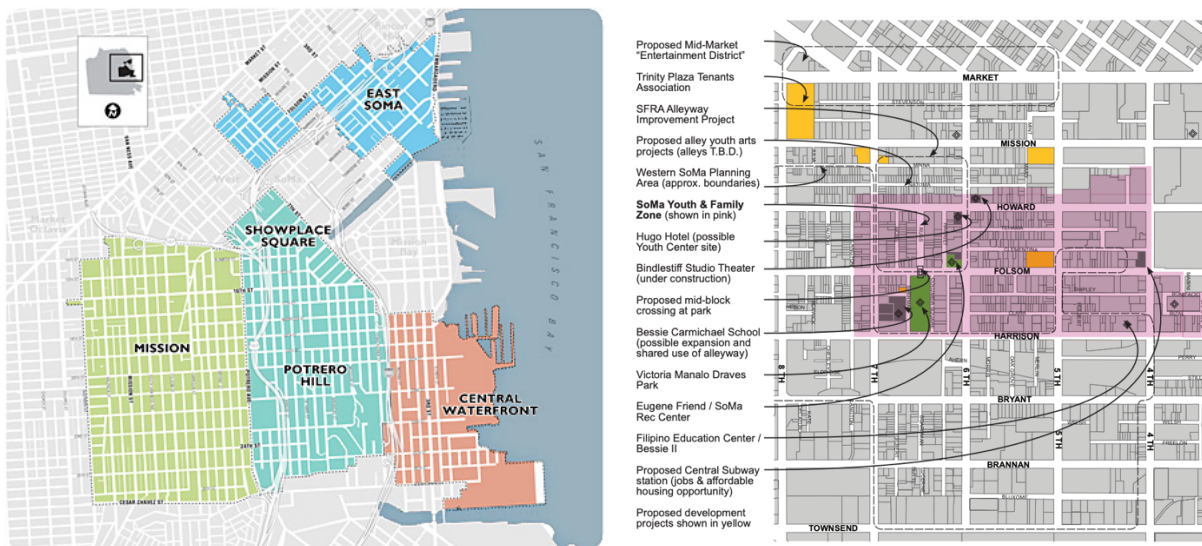
...[the fund] was a game changer and unfortunately, the profits that a lot of the types of investment companies that were able to get out of the Rincon Hill, I think really drove a lot more types of towers too. I don't know if anything could have stopped them, but at least we were able to interject that destabilization that occurs as a result of this hyper capitalism and commodification of land basically.<sup>97</sup>

The speaker acknowledges that one approach to neighborhood stabilization in a capitalist society requires developers to pay fees that would go towards affordable housing and other community programs. This brings up another contradiction: community development that relies on funding from the very companies and developments that displace or exclude low-income residents and communities of color. While contradictions arise, this type of funding approach should not be dismissed or ignored as they are very common and heavily embedded into the municipal code, not just in SOMA but throughout neighborhoods in San Francisco. Community members acknowledge this contradiction and are radically pushing the boundaries of how they can challenge “hyper capitalism and [the] commodification of land.”

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<sup>97</sup> Martynovych, Ericka. (2016). “sfd001633.” [.wav file of oral history].

In January 2009, the City and County of San Francisco adopted the SoMa Youth and Family Special Use District (SUD) as part of the Eastern Neighborhoods Plan, a plan that dramatically changed the industrial zoning of East SOMA to allow for additional housing and “Production, Distribution and Repair.” The SoMa Youth and Family SUD was created to “to protect and enhance the health and environment of youth and families by adopting policies that focus on certain lower density areas of this District for the expansion of affordable housing opportunities.”<sup>98</sup> With the SUD, conditional use approval is required for certain uses such as restaurants, bars, liquor stores, movie theatres and adult entertainment. Additionally, any building beyond 45 feet in the SUD is subject to “Tier C” affordable housing requirements which requires “17.6 percent of the total units constructed shall be affordable to and occupied by qualifying persons and families.” If a building is for non-residential use, they must pay a fee or build off-site residential units to meet these requirements. This special use district gives the SOMA community power within the planning process to advocate for future projects that build affordable housing and are aligned with the goals of the SoMa Youth and Family SUD.



Map 5: Eastern Neighborhoods Plan Areas and Youth & Family Zone Special Use District<sup>99</sup>

<sup>98</sup> San Francisco Planning Code. (2008). “SEC. 249.40A. SOMA YOUTH AND FAMILY SPECIAL USE DISTRICT.”

<sup>99</sup> San Francisco Planning Department. (2009). “Eastern Neighborhoods.” Retrieved, from <https://sfplanning.org/eastern-neighborhoods-plans>

## 6) Economic Development

One of the goals of SOMA Pilipinas is to build a strong commercial corridor that will both attract new businesses and stabilize legacy businesses. Their economic development plan looks to “place [the] community in high wage jobs to address the income inequality that is the fundamental driver of displacement”<sup>100</sup>—SOMA has the largest income disparity in the city. Some community members are eager to be part of the new “Filipino Business Renaissance”<sup>101</sup> and we are seeing it come into fruition because of the emergence of more Filipino-owned restaurants in SOMA since the designation. These businesses are part of a Filipino Food Movement that is slowly being recognized by the mainstream. The district aims at providing technical assistance to existing Filipino businesses to “pivot and refine their products and services” and utilize marketing and events to raise the visibility of the district.

Another component to the economic development strategy was the creation of the monthly Filipino night market known as UndiscoveredSF which brought over 35,000 attendees in its first year. The first UndiscoveredSF night markets took place at the historic Mint Building on 5th and Mission Street, a building not normally accessible to community groups because of its rental cost. In 2018, UndiscoveredSF continued its night markets in the parking lot of the proposed 5M Project, the development that community members originally organized against as mentioned in the introduction. Depending on which narrative you follow, some may say this is a reclamation of space, others believe that it is assimilation into the agenda of developers such as Forest City (the developers of the 5M Project). The contradictions around the Filipino night market are part of a continuous dialogue in the coalition: Who are we doing this for? Because SOMA Pilipinas is meant to be an inclusive process, these are difficult questions to be addressed in the district especially when members have created tactics that may conflict with other strategies practiced in the coalition. These contradictions are opportunities for the

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Asian Neighborhood Design. (2008). “The SoMa Youth & Family Zone.” Retrieved, from <http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/633596/9137850/1288129428633/SoMa+Youth++Family+>

<sup>100</sup> SOMA Pilipinas. “Mission.” Retrieved, from <https://www.somapilipinas.org/mission-1>

<sup>101</sup> San Francisco Planning Department. (2016). SoMa Pilipinas Progress Report Case No. 2016-008314CWP. p. B21

SOMA Pilipinas coalition to assess their strategies by revisiting their vision and values and creating action plans to hold each other accountable.

## **7) Urban Design**

The last component of SOMA Pilipinas's strategy is focused on urban design. One of the challenges in designing SOMA Pilipinas is the sheer size of the district's boundaries that overlap with multiple plan areas in SOMA. On February 4, 2017, SOMA Pilipinas hosted a design charrette open to residents, designers and community stakeholders. At the end of the charrette, participants developed a list of 21 community ideas and design concepts such as:

- Directional signage posts that point to areas in the Philippine Diaspora or other Filipinotowns
- Painted crosswalks that integrate Philippine symbols such as the sun, rice terraces, or tinikling<sup>102</sup>
- Plaques and markers that tell the Filipino migration story or cultural figures
- Tilework and pavers that use traditional Filipino patterns and mosaics
- Quotes from past and present Philippine leaders that line streets or sides of buildings
- Gateway or entry arches to welcome people to SOMA Pilipinas.

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<sup>102</sup> Tinikling is a popular Filipino folk dance that involves dancers step in and out of two bamboo sticks.



*Image 12: SOMA Pilipinas Design Charrette (Source: Evelyn Obamos)*

These ideas challenge dominant approaches to urban design in San Francisco as they cater and utilize a Filipino aesthetic. All of the proposed strategies center the experiences and knowledge of Filipinos, a perspective that has not always been taken into consideration throughout the development history of SOMA. The section that follows discusses additional approaches to urban design in SOMA Pilipinas.

***Part 2: Cultural Districts as Projects for Reclamation and Reimagination***

CREATURE: You can't stop us...We are the **inevitable**.

Why continue to fight when you can't possibly win?

BIRDIE: Because this is our city...Because this is our home.

Excerpt from *Clan of Saints Bay* (2016)

*Clan of Saints Bay* is a comic book series released in 2016 by Filipino graphic artists Rafael Salazar and Don Ellis Aguillo. This comic told the story of SOMA nonprofit workers, writers, youth leaders and residents during the fight against the 5M project. Under the guidance of KulArts, a Filipino arts organization based in SOMA Pilipinas, this particular series was created using a participatory art-making process and highlighted the efforts of SOMA local heroes in defending the community. Participants were depicted as having their own form of superpowers fighting against the “5 Monoliths” (representing the 5M Project).



*Image 13: Snapshot of super heroes from Clans of Saint Bay.*

I start the second part of my findings with the story of the *Clan of Saints Bay* because it is a medium that reimagined the role of Filipinos and the outcome of the 5M project. It tells the tale of a community fight from the perspectives of Filipinos and allies. Since the cultural district designation of SOMA Pilipinas, there has been an emergence of art that has not only increased the visibility of Filipinos in SOMA but has revealed the hopes and perspectives of Filipinos on their own terms. Filipinos are reimagining their place in SOMA by claiming spaces that have excluded poor people and communities of color—this is evident in the changing built environment molded by SOMA Pilipinas, the future community plans for the district and continued efforts in planning community events, preserving spaces and storytelling.

### *A Pilipinx Spatial Imagination*

The spatial imaginary of Pilipinx Americans uses SOMA Pilipinas as a vehicle to reclaim space and reimagine land use and the built environment in SOMA. Rooted in histories of Diaspora, displacement and resistance, SOMA Pilipinas promotes and centers Pilipinx American history, culture, people and legacy. The following section highlights the various streetscape and urban design elements that have been utilized by SOMA Pilipinas before and after the 2016 resolution:

#### **1) Pole Banners**

In 2018, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) awarded SOMA Pilipinas, the \$100,000 “Our Town” arts grant.<sup>103</sup> With this new grant, the cultural district launched its project, “SOMA Pilipinas Is in the Heart,” focused on branding the neighborhood with pole banners installed throughout the neighborhood. The banners feature portraits of local residents and workers by Joe Ramos, a Mexican and Filipino artist born and raised in Salinas Valley.

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<sup>103</sup> INQUIRER.net US Bureau. (2018, September 4). “SF’s SOMA Pilipinas gets \$100k NEA grant for higher Fil-Am visibility.” Retrieved, from <https://usa.inquirer.net/15219/sfs-soma-pilipinas-gets-100k-nea-grant-higher-fil-visibility?fbclid=IwAR3ODShqvFYMw2p3VxL1DUfTikCDNgBkfGujWtzhecQ2mGruIvLV7OSRcR4>





*Image 14: Photos of Pole Banners in SOMA Pilipinas<sup>104</sup>*

Each banner contains baybayin, an indigenous Filipino script, accompanied with the English translation. The use of baybayin is a political statement because it is a script that the Spanish tried to erase and destroy during Spanish colonialism in the Philippines. The banners are material expressions of Pilipinxs challenging cultural erasure and physically claiming space by making themselves known. Each pole focuses on people as representing culture and history. These pole banners help SOMA Pilipinas establish a unique, neighborhood identity and define the district as an area occupied by Pilipinxs.

<sup>104</sup> INQUIRER.net US Bureau. (2018, October 3). “Banners with images of Filipinos fly over SF streets for Fil-Am History Month.” Retrieved, from <https://usa.inquirer.net/15764/banners-images-filipinos-fly-sf-streets-fli-history-month>

Diokno, Ed. (2018, October 14). “Sunday Read: New banners stake out Filipino American district in San Francisco.” Retrieved, from <https://dioknoed.blogspot.com/2018/10/sunday-read-new-banners-stake-out.html>



Map 6: The thick gray and black lines represent the proposed pole banner placement<sup>105</sup>

The images seen on the banners are also part of a collection of photos by Ramos called “SOMALAKAS: The Strength of SOMA.” *SOMALAKAS* is a play on words. SOMA represents the neighborhood and lakas translates into strength. Malakas means mighty or strong. These banners and photos show that “SOMA mother-and-daughters, community organizers, artists, workers, volunteers, Ate’s and Kuya’s,<sup>106</sup> workers and parents”<sup>107</sup> are strong and help build the strength of SOMA Pilipinas. This is not the first time that “SOMA” has been mixed with other Filipino words. *SOMAGANDA*, is often used as a hashtag and has been the title of a stage reading and play featuring Filipina women at Bindlestiff Studio, a Filipino American black box theater located on 185 6th Street. Maganda (beautiful) or ganda (beauty) combined

<sup>105</sup> SOMA Pilipinas. (2018). “Pole Banners.” Retrieved, from <https://www.somapilipinas.org/placemaking-1/2018/7/5/pole-banners>

<sup>106</sup> Ate is a Filipino word meaning older sister. Kuya means older brother. It is also used as a sign of respect to acknowledge older relatives, friends, acquaintances and even strangers.

<sup>107</sup> Ramos, J. and SOMA Pilipinas. (2018). *SOMALAKAS: The Strength of SOMA*.

with SOMA means that the South of Market is beautiful. A new vernacular has emerged in the creation of the cultural district. The meaning of “SOMA” changes or is enhanced when combined with Filipino terms.

## 2) Abeyance

In 2017, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony for YBCA’s newest public art piece, “Abeyance (Draves y Robles y Vargas).” The artist, Jerome Reyes, is Filipino and a native San Franciscan who received the 2016 YBCA / Art Practical artist residency.<sup>108</sup> *Abeyance* contains an altered image of San Francisco’s water at Ocean Beach and quotes that honor three Bay Area natives: Jose Antonio Vargas, Al Robles and Victoria Manalo Draves.



Image 15: Photo of *Abeyance* at YBCA (Source: Jerome Reyes)

Not only does this billboard “blend the voices of the past and the present through a tapestry that alludes equally to care, despair, endurance, fear, and hope,” it also stands as a political statement at the Yerba Buena Gardens, the site where the SFRA demolished and displaced over 4,000 residents. While the

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<sup>108</sup> Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. (2017). Retrieved, from <https://ybc.org/whats-on/jerome-reyes>

billboard is only expected to remain until 2019, it is yet another representation of the contributions and progress of Pilipinx Americans. Even though Filipinos were displaced from Yerba Buena, they continue to make their presence known in public space and institutions such as YBCA.

### **3) Murals**

Before the 2016 resolution, SOMA Pilipinas was already adorned with murals highlighting Filipino culture and community. These murals are part of the Pilipinx imaginary in SOMA Pilipinas as they provide historical timelines, expressions of identity and connections:

- “Ang Lipi ni Lapu Lapu” was painted by Johanna Poethig, with Vic Clemente and Presco Tabios, in 1984. It is located on the side of the San Lorenzo Ruiz Center, a senior housing at 50 Rizal Street. The mural represents Filipina/o political and cultural heroes from different points in Philippine and Filipino American History. The mural is also located in Philippine Heroes Square, an area where the streets are named after Philippine revolutionaries including Jose Rizal, Tandang Sora, Lapu Lapu, Andres Bonifacio and Apolinario Mabini. These streets and mural were created after the redevelopment of Yerba Buena and remain the only area in San Francisco with streets named after Filipinos.



*Image 16: Photo of Ang Lipi ni Lapu Lapu Mural by from the Alice Street Community Gardens (Source: Author)*



*Image 17: 2016 VEC Staff posing and wearing malongs at the corner of Lapu Lapu and Bonifacio Street in Philippine Heroes Square (Source: Author)*

- “Filipino American Friendship Mural” created by the Fil-Am South of Market Neighborhood Association in the mid-1970s and completed in 1983. It is located in the Howard Langton Community Gardens on Langton Street and Howard. The mural represents images of Philippine landscape such as rice terraces and local Filipino celebrations.<sup>109</sup> The mural is hidden from the public eye because of the community garden.

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<sup>109</sup> Filipino American Development Foundation. (2002). *SOMA Pilipinas: Uncovering the cultural assets and social heritage of Filipinos in San Francisco*. San Francisco, CA: Arkipelago Books.



*Image 18: Partial View of Filipino America Friendship Mural (Source: Google Streetview)*

- “Tuloy Po Kayo” means welcome. It is an 80-foot mural located at Bessie Carmichael Middle School/Filipino Education Center at 824 Harrison Street. The mural was designed and painted by Cece Carpio, Miguel Perez, James Ganyoan Garcia, Oree Original, Thavin Rajanokehan, Robert Trujillo, Bessie students and other artists in 2011. It pays homage to ancestors and “those who have come before.”<sup>110</sup> Situated at the Filipino Education Center, this mural invites students to ask questions about the symbols and imagery on its wall, opening conversations about Filipino culture and history with youth and educators. While Bessie Carmichael School has experienced its displacement and neglect, the mural shows that the school is part of the Filipino community.

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<sup>110</sup> Pueblo Nuevo Gallery. (2011). “Tuloy Po Kayo.” Retrieved, from <https://vimeo.com/34122334>



*Image 19: Tuloy Po Kayo Mural at Filipino Education Center<sup>111</sup>*

Murals play an important role in building community through art. After the 2016 resolution, SOMA Pilipinas has seen three new murals materialize in the neighborhood. The three murals: Kapwa Rising, Bloom and Heroes in Our Windows were all created through participatory processes that involved a range of people from youth to seniors. These processes also required research of Philippine textile patterns, symbology and leaders.

- “Kapwa Rising” is a mural by Samantha “Sami See” Schilf and Monica Magtoto located at 4th and Bryant on top of Mestiza Restaurant, a Filipino-influenced restaurant located in SOMA Pilipinas. The mural interrogates “How we can amplify the value of KAPWA to talk more freely about mental health and promote community health?” Kapwa is a core value of indigenous Filipino psychology meaning shared identity where you see yourself in others. The mural weaves the experiences of participants shedding light on much-needed conversations around mental health in the Pilipinx American community.

One of the artists of the mural, Magtoto, commented: “This idea of mental health is really seeing ourselves in other people; that’s kapwa. And it really is true. If you never see anybody that looks like you, or you never experience anyone that has shared lived experiences with you, then how could you ever

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<sup>111</sup> Sierra, J.A. (2012). “South of Market Bessie Carmichael School.” Retrieved, from <http://graffitistf.com/galleries/SOMA-14.html>



know how to get better?”<sup>112</sup> Mental health is a topic that is taboo in many communities of color. The meaning behind this mural, its process and collaboration with organizations such as the Filipino Mental Health Initiative imagines new ways of being for Pilipinx Americans and others who confront the stigma of mental health. Kapwa Rising can be seen from across the street of Mestiza; but it can also be seen from the 80 freeway by thousands of drivers and riders—it is as if the eyes of the mural acknowledge and validate each of its viewers.



*Image 20: Photo of Kapwa Rising Mural (Source: Sami See)<sup>113</sup>*

- Bloom (Bangkit/Arise) is the second mural to come into fruition after the 2016 resolution and is located next to SOMCAN at Howard Street and 7th. It is an international collaboration of artists from San Francisco’s Clarion Alley Mural Project and Yogyakarta Indonesia. These articles collaborated with SOMCAN to paint a mural that depicts flowers representing “the various

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<sup>112</sup> Conclara, R. (2018, June 27). “Kapwa Rising: The First Mural in SF’s Filipino Cultural Heritage District.” Retrieved, from <https://balitangamerica.tv/kapwa-rising-the-first-mural-in-sfs-filipino-cultural-heritage-district/>

<sup>113</sup> Sami See. (2018). “Kapwa Mural.” Retrieved, from <https://www.samisee.com/kapwamural-photos>

communities that live in the SoMa neighborhood.”<sup>114</sup> Each flower has the name written in English with the associated language of the nationality it represents.<sup>115</sup>

This particular project represents international and cross-cultural solidarity where artists focused on subjects such as community development and the role of art in supporting civic design and “the need for radical inclusion and understanding differences and similarities as a means of strength and the goal of collectively dismantling local and global inequities/oppression.”<sup>116</sup> Youth, seniors, parents and workers are represented iconically using flowers:

- The chicory flower represents the Ohlone nation
- the rumduol represents Cambodia and Thailand
- the jasmine or sampaguita represents the Philippines
- the plum blossom represents China
- the dahlia represents North/Central/South America.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Clarion Alley Mural Project. (2019, May 10). “Bangkit/Arise – SOMCAN.” Retrieved May 15, 2019, from <https://clarionalleymuralproject.org/mural/bangkit-arise-somcan/>

<sup>115</sup> SOMCAN. (2018, October 27). “Bangkit/Arise - CAMP - SOMCAN Bloom Mural.” Retrieved, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIyUzDkp3HQ>

<sup>116</sup> Clarion Alley Mural Project. (2019, May 10).

<sup>117</sup> SOMCAN. (2018, October 27).



Image 21: Photo of Bloom Mural (Source: Author)

- “Heroes in Our Windows” is a project of SOMCAN and is the most recent mural in SOMA Pilipinas. The mural is situated at the facade of the Bayanihan Community Center at 1010 Mission Street and depicting eight local leaders that were selected by community members: Violeta BulletX Marasigan, Al Robles, Dr. Mario Borja, Dawn Mabalon, Bill Sorro, Victoria Manalo Draves, Carlos Villa, and Major Demetrio M. Carino. These people influenced the SOMA community, history and legacy.<sup>118</sup>

The mural adds to the vibrance of the community center and continues the placemaking goals of the district to center the stories and experiences of Pilipinx Americans by showing the public its leaders. People walking down Mission Street or waiting at the bus stop in front of the community center will see the faces and Philippine patterns on this mural.

<sup>118</sup> Palma-Alvarez, R. (2019, April 8). “Heroes in Our Windows.” Retrieved April 20, 2019, from <https://www.somcan.org/newsletter/heroes-in-our-windows>



*Image 22: Rendering of Mural at front of the Bayanihan Community Center*

I believe what sets these murals apart from their predecessors is how they push conversations around mental health, build solidarity with non-Filipinos and recognize local heroes. These murals and other forms of placemaking show that the Pilipinx American community is not a fossilized community, they are living and breathing. The acts of installing the pole banners or painting these murals change the built environment of SOMA to include the stories of Pilipinx Americans. They enliven the streets with messages, give SOMA Pilipinas a claim to public space and invite people who are not familiar with this community to ask, “Where am I? Who are these people?” They give SOMA Pilipinas members what Lefebvre would call a “counterspace” where they can see themselves, their peers and their culture.

But are these changes to the built environment enough? As outsiders come into SOMA Pilipinas whether they are developers, new business owners or residents, how may their presence impact urban design of the district? Section 429 of the San Francisco Planning Code requires project sponsors of large developments in downtown to provide public art that equals 1% of their total construction cost. Members of the SOMA Pilipinas coalition members have expressed that this arts program is an opportunity for new development to hire Filipina/o American artists and to incorporate urban design elements chosen during multiple SOMA Pilipinas workshops and the design charrette. These conversations reign in issues of the commodification and appropriation of ethnic culture. What is crucial in these design decisions is the governance of the cultural district and the protection and oversight offered under the legislation.



## **Community Plan and Vision**

The timeline available on the SOMA Pilipinas website titled “Struggle, Survive, and Thrive” presents historic events from pre-colonial Philippines to the present-day efforts to establish the cultural district. What is also included in the timeline is a section titled “Building Our Future” that details the goals of the district from year 2020 and beyond. In the vision of SOMA Pilipinas, the district hopes to see:

- A new Arts & Culture complex
- The creation of a pop-up to permanent retail program
- A Filipino night market to raise awareness and bring economic activity to the district
- The creation of a Central SoMa Park Cluster
- A new multi-service center called the Barangay Center
- Pushing new restaurant concepts and Filipino cuisine through pop-up restaurants
- Building a commercial corridor along Mission Street and 6th Street

Pilipinx arts organizations in SOMA Pilipinas including Parangal Dance Company, KulArts, Kearny Street Workshop and Bindlestiff Studio have centered and promoted Philippine and Pilipinx American dance, literature, theater, visual art and music. There have been discussions to build an arts and culture complex that will “nurture [the] growing creative community”<sup>120</sup> and provide performance spaces for these organizations in SOMA Pilipinas. There is also emphasis on building presence and resources for Filipino small businesses through retail programs, the Filipino night market, pop-up restaurants and a commercial corridor.

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<sup>120</sup> SOMA Pilipinas. “Past, Present, and Future.” Retrieved, from <https://www.somapilipinas.org/vision>



Map 7: Proposed SOMA Pilipinas Commercial Corridor (Source: SOMA Pilipinas)<sup>121</sup>

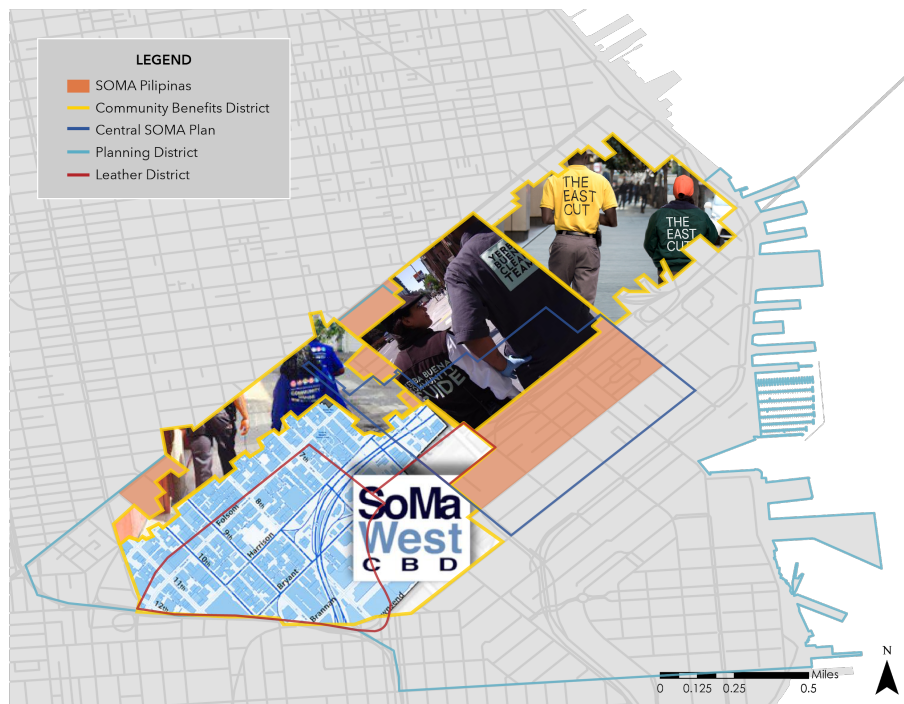


Map 8: Proposed SOMA Pilipinas Park Clusters (Source: SOMA Pilipinas)<sup>122</sup>

<sup>121</sup> SOMA Pilipinas. (2018). "Commercial Corridor." Retrieved, from <https://www.somapilipinas.org/placemaking-1/2018/7/5/commercial-corridor>

<sup>122</sup> SOMA Pilipinas. "Vision." Retrieved, from <https://www.somapilipinas.org/vision>

These plans and maps show that SOMA Pilipinas wants a place in the development of the larger SOMA and downtown district. Map 6 and 7 represent modifications and annotations to existing maps from the Central SOMA Plan, a plan adopted on May 10, 2018 that is expected to expand housing, jobs, transit, open space and offices in areas near the Moscone Center and Caltrain.<sup>123</sup> The Central SOMA Plan was approved despite community pushback from the larger SOMA community and SOMA Pilipinas coalition members who had concerns about the rezoning of the neighborhood, transit justice, jobs, affordable housing and the overwhelming figures for new office space and the ensuing traffic and density. As of April 2019, a number of community organizations filed a lawsuit against the Central SOMA Plan. Whatever the outcome, SOMA Pilipinas must continue to organize and negotiate around different interests and plans that are present in SOMA. Map 8 below shows a spatial analysis of the various plans and districts that overlap with SOMA Pilipinas. It is representative of the relationships that SOMA Pilipinas should build or be wary of.



Map 9: Plans and districts that overlap or are adjacent to SOMA Pilipinas

<sup>123</sup> San Francisco Planning Department. “South of Market Central SoMa Plan.” Retrieved, from <https://sfplanning.org/central-soma-plan>



What is missing from the timeline and vision of SOMA Pilipinas are the strides coalition members have made for the creation of affordable housing. In 2017, Mercy Housing, a national affordable housing developer, hosted an open house for their 67-unit affordable housing building that serves families and seniors. The building is named after Bill Sorro, a community activist and human rights advocate, who was active in the struggle for the I-Hotel and organized SRO tenants in the Mission and SOMA. This development is one of the few buildings in SOMA named after local Filipino heroes.<sup>124</sup> The work of organizations such as the San Francisco Community Land Trust, Bill Sorro Housing Program (BiSHoP), Senior and Disability Action, South of Market Community Action Network and Filipino Community Development Corporation should be included in this timeline as their organizational goals include advocating for affordable housing that serve low-income seniors and families.

I want to juxtapose the “year 2020 and beyond” vision with responses from an icebreaker during a 2015 SOMA Pilipinas meeting. During this meeting, participants were asked, “20 years from now, what would you want to see on the headlines for SOMA Pilipinas?” Below is a partial list of their responses:

1. SoMa Pilipinas Partnered with Asian Art Museum, YBCA and CAAM for citywide Pilipino Arts Expo
2. Bay Area Gov adopts PHD to connect to suburbs throughout the region and international
3. PHD and Philippine Government recognizes international business
4. Future mayor of SF supported by SoMa Pilipin@s
5. Future mayor makes SOMA Bow official song of SF
6. Local Pilipino artist gets housing
7. City College opens Pilipino in SoMa Campus
8. K-12 biliteracy pathway established in SoMa during historic Pilipino Heritage District anniversary
9. SOMA High School wins 33rd Annual Parol Festival
10. Bindlestiff National Tour
11. 50% Planning Commissioners Filipino
12. Arts & Seniors: Annual art & films symposium
13. Tagalog Theater festival
14. Celebrating Affordable housing and business
15. Bindlestiff buys 3rd building
16. SoMa Pilipinas achieved 10k affordable housing plan
17. VEC launches Veterano museum
18. Local Author wins Pulitzer
19. City formally apologizes for 5M Project and turns buildings to community

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<sup>124</sup> Other buildings named after Filipino heroes or use Filipino language in their names include Ed de la Cruz Apartments, Bayanihan House and Rich Sorro Commons.

- 20. SoMa Youth Center: mental health, arts, stories
- 21. Market Street closed for Lantern Festival

I believe that the responses to this question speak to the desires of participants to change the headlines of displacement and dispossession. Here we see Pilipinx in positions of power and demanding for the city to apologize for its wrong-doing. We also see the imagining of new spaces for artists, youth and community celebrations. These are the headlines that SOMA Pilipinas is fighting for.

### **Diwang**

Spatial claims to SOMA are also manifested in the community events organized by SOMA Pilipinas members including Pistahan, Parol Lantern Festival and Barrio Fiesta. *Diwang* is the Filipino term for celebration. The following section highlights the major events that take place in SOMA Pilipinas and their connections with reclamation and reimagination.

- 1) **Pistahan Parade & Festival** is the largest celebration of Filipino art, dance, music and food in the United States organized by the Filipino American Arts Exposition (FAAE). It attracts over 80,000 attendees each summer at the Yerba Buena Gardens.<sup>125</sup> It was the first festival to take place at Yerba Buena Gardens in 1993. In 2018, the community celebrated the 25th year of Pistahan with the theme ““Celebrating our History and Creating our Legacy.”
- 2) **Parol Lantern Festival** occurs each December and is organized by the Filipino American Development Foundation. Community organizations are invited to a series of parol<sup>126</sup> lantern-making workshops and to join the parade that starts in Yerba Buena Gardens and ends in Jessie Square and St. Patrick’s Church. It is an event where attendees of all ages get to witness Philippine lanterns decorated by community members and enjoy intergenerational performances that incorporate singing, dancing and poetry.

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<sup>125</sup> Pistahan. (2018, July 29). “Pistahan Parade and Festival: 25 years of ‘Celebrating our History and Creating our Legacy.’” Retrieved, from <http://www.pistahan.net/news-1/pistahan-parade-and-festival-25-years-of-celebrating-our-history-and-creating-our-legacy>

<sup>126</sup> A parol is a Philippine lantern that is a popular decoration during Christmas time. It is usually star-shaped and lit by candles or LED lights.



*Image 24: Parol of Migrante South of Market/Tenderloin at 2017 Parol Festival. It reads, "We dream of a society where families are not separated just for the need to survive." (Source: Author)*

3) **Barrio Fiesta** is a community celebration that originally started in the 1970s by Russell Robles and took place in SOMArts on 934 Brannan Street. In 2015, community members with the assistance of the SOMA Stabilization Fund, revived the tradition at the Gene Friend Recreation Center. Barrio Fiesta comprises of Filipino food, music, dancing and games.

#### 4) **Other Notable Community Events**

- a) **Stories High** is "page-to-stage" theater production that takes place at Bindlestiff Studio. This show presents short plays written by beginner and experienced writers. Bindlestiff Studio invites SOMA workers and residents to write, act or direct in this production each summer.
- b) **Flores de Mayo** occurs at Bessie Carmichael during the month of May. It is a celebration that is also held in the Philippines that is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, a saint recognized in the Catholic Church

- c) **Pasko sa SOMA** (Christmas in SOMA) is held at Bessie Carmichael during December, just before winter break begins for SFUSD. It is their annual holiday celebration hosted by the Filipino Education Center and Galing Bata After School Program.
- d) **Veterans Day Parade** is an annual event when the Bayanihan Equity Center invites students and community members to march during the Veterans Day Parade to raise awareness and support for Filipino WWII Veterans and their families.

I want to highlight Pistahan and the Parol Festival as sites of reclamation. One of the organizers of Pistahan, Al Perez, shared that the festival was created to honor the Filipinos who were displaced by redevelopment.<sup>127</sup> Perez explained,

...the reason [Pistahan] is in August, is because the I-Hotel (International Hotel) was lost on August 4. So when the organizers of the Pistahan was coming up with a date, they thought we lost something really big on August 4, now we have this opportunity to reclaim something back in the second week of August through the Pistahan. So, Pistahan is really unique because it is linked the displacement of Filipinos in South of Market, it is tied with the history of San Francisco and Filipino Americans here.<sup>128</sup>

Pistahan and the Parol Festival take place on the very grounds where poor communities of color were displaced because their neighborhood was designated as “blighted.” Although these events only occur once a year, it is a time for Pilipinx Americans to occupy one of the most visited tourist areas in San Francisco. At the 2018 Parol Festival, there was a community-wide performance inspired by traditional Philippine folk dance known as “Pandanggo sa Ilaw.” The echoes of the Philippine rondallia,<sup>129</sup> gongs and drums playing for the dancers could be heard from blocks away.

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<sup>127</sup> Hopkins, B. (2015, August 6). “This Weekend: Pistahan Festival & Parade Showcases Filipino Heritage.” Retrieved, from <https://hoodline.com/2015/08/pistahan-festival-parade-showcases-filipino-culture-heritage-this-weekend>

<sup>128</sup> Nucum, J. (2017, August 17). “Filipino pride glows at San Francisco’s 24<sup>th</sup> Pistahan parade-festival.” Retrieved, from <https://usa.inquirer.net/5999/filipino-pride-glows-san-franciscos-24th-pistahan-parade-festival>

<sup>129</sup> Rondallia is an ensemble of stringed instruments. In the case, the music being played is a genre of Philippine folk music.



*Image 25: Screenshot of Sayaw sa Illaw Dancers at the 2018 Parol Festival (Source: Parangal Dance Company)*

Barrio Fiesta started in the 1970s with the Robles family, bringing together the Filipino American community, local artists, and people of color in San Francisco. Barrio Fiesta is a tradition that originated from the Philippines where Filipinos come together in a neighborhood party filled with music, dance, food and sometimes the main feast of a roasted pig. In San Francisco, Barrio Fiesta took place on the streets of SOMA where organizers would close down Minna Street between 8th and 9th Street to join this tradition and celebrate Filipino culture. There would be intergenerational activities for youth and seniors, but also time to have discussions on issues in the neighborhood.<sup>130</sup> In the 1990s Barrio Fiesta was held at the SOMA Cultural Center (now known as SOMArts), a center that once was home to Filipino American arts programming. Even though some Filipinos have been forced from their homelands or their homes in SOMA, they continue to reconnect with the Philippines and with other Filipinos. These community events show us that the opposite of dispossession is not ownership, rather it is connection. It is important for Pilipinx Americans to feel connected—that is what inspires and motivates people to return.

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<sup>130</sup> Jimenez, C. (2018). “Luisa Antonio on Barrio Fiesta Health Is Wealth.” Retrieved, from <http://somapilipinas.squarespace.com/blog/2018/5/16/luisa-antonio-on-barrio-fiesta-health-is-wealth>



*Image 26: 2015 Barrio Fiesta attendees watch as Papa Tee roasts the lechon or pig (Source Evelyn Obamos)*



*Image 27: 2016 Barrio Fiesta Volunteers at the Gene Friend Recreation Center (Source: Evelyn Obamos)*

## **Kuwentuhan**

The creation of community narratives, glimpses of the actual struggles and triumphs of the Pilipinx American community, is an essential element of SOMA Pilipinas. Kuwentuhan<sup>131</sup> is a part of Pilipinx culture where individuals and groups tell and share stories—similarly it can be identified with what are known as “talk stories” in that they also provide insight and knowledge about a culture. Kuwentuhan can be formal or informal. The kuwentuhan of SOMA Pilipinas can be found in many places such as the stage of Bindlestiff Studio or it can be heard in passing gossip and conversation. I have shared so many strategies, plans and visions for the cultural district but what I think is at the root of all these components is kuwentuhan. The two forms of kuwentuhan that I will focus on in this section are oral history and ethnotour. I believe that these forms of storytelling drive the motivation and inspiration behind the cultural district and ultimately inform visions for Pilipinx futures and the spatial imagination.

### **a. Oral History**

There is a common proverb in the Pilipinx community that says “No History. No Self. Know History. Know Self.” Many attribute this proverb to the following quote by Jose Rizal: “Those who fail to look back to where they came from will not reach where they’re going.” The oral histories collected by Ericka Martynovych, StoryCorps and the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) in 2016 are valuable knowledge and insight into the activism and experiences that shape SOMA Pilipinas—they also help provide a roadmap of where the district has been and the possibilities it can go. These oral histories gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their migration stories, their relationship to SOMA and discuss their hopes for the neighborhood with their peers. One youth commented how he wants outsiders to perceive SOMA:

I really want to make a name for SOMA instead of just being like, oh that's SOMA Sixth Street. [I don't want] anything negative. Not that sixth street is negative, but like I just want them to see how positive that we all really work instead of just looking at us just as a bad neighborhood and then like I want them to see that we have a support system...<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *Kuwentuhan* stems from the word Filipino word *kuwento* which means story in English.

<sup>132</sup> Martynovych, Ericka. (2016). “sfd001574.” [.wav file of oral history].

Streets in SOMA such as 6th Street have a bad reputation as mainstream media characterizes them as drug-ridden, dangerous or violent. While some of these stereotypes exist as realities for SOMA residents, many outsiders fail to recognize the cultural wealth<sup>133</sup> of these streets. This type of storytelling illuminates our understanding of the Pilipinx American experience and SOMA neighborhood because it gives firsthand accounts of how individuals have navigated through the physical and social landscape of the district. When we do not look from these perspectives, we may miss opportunities to improve these conditions in meaningful and culturally-responsive ways.

The 2016 oral histories are not the first attempts at recording the histories of SOMA Pilipinas. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, members of Student Action for Veterans Equity (SAVE), which comprised of students from Bay Area schools and colleges committed to serving and advocating for Filipino WWII Veterans, and participated in a series of oral histories with Filipino WWII Veterans and their families. Students visited the homes of these veterans across the Bay Area but also in SOMA Pilipinas where they learned about the struggles and conditions that veterans had to live in—many of them treated as second-class citizens.<sup>134</sup> In 2013, San Francisco Architectural Heritage also conducted oral histories with professors, artists, writers and community activists to supplement the “South of Market Area Historic Context Statement.” These oral histories were conducted to ensure that Filipinos were included in the larger narratives of World War II and SOMA. They also serve as invitations for future generations to continue or to build upon Pilipinx language, rituals and traditions.

#### b. EthnoTour

The SOMA Pilipinas Ethnotour is a walking tour of the neighborhood developed by SOMA Community Historian, MC Canlas, in 2000. Over the years, Kuya MC and other tour guides comprised of coalition members, students, nonprofit workers and residents, have developed a tour aimed at showcasing the “cultural spaces and places, sites and streets, landmarks and community rituals that describe and

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<sup>133</sup> Yosso, T. J. (2005). “Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth.” *Race ethnicity and education*, 8(1), 69-91.

<sup>134</sup> Rocamora, R. (2008). *Filipino World War II Soldiers: America's Second-Class Veterans*.



enhance the presence or visibility, identity and vibrancy of the Filipinos in San Francisco...”<sup>135</sup> As someone who has spent years providing SOMA Ethnotours to students and volunteers to orient and welcome them to the neighborhood, I see the tours as a way for guides to share their perspectives and personal experiences with the neighborhood. Guides also have the opportunity to pass down knowledge and stories that were shared with them. Tours normally range anywhere from one to four hours, but that amount of time is simply not enough to witness and explore all the nuances of the neighborhood. The tours have changed and evolved throughout the years because organizations either move around the district or leave it altogether.

**Philippine Cultural Preservation District**

**Philippine District**

There is an on-going proposal to designate and declare a Philippine Cultural Preservation District, **Philippine District** for short, in San Francisco. It is an eight by six block area on the western region of South of Market; bounded by 9<sup>th</sup> Street to 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and from Market Street to Brannan Street.

The Philippine District is the heart and nerve center of Filipino community San Francisco; it highlights the vibrant Filipino community and long-standing cultural institutions in the South of Market neighborhood.

As in the Philippines, Filipino community in San Francisco revolves around a central plaza that functions as a community space of inter-villages and multi-generational activities such as cultural events, trade and commerce, political, social and religious activities. It is also where people come for basic health, social, educational and government services. It is a pivotal place for personal, family and community replenishment and enrichment.

The Philippine District is in the midst of major urban renewal and development in South of Market, Mid-Market, Transbay, Rincon Hill in downtown San Francisco. It has many important historical and cultural assets that need to be preserved, developed, reclaimed and enhanced for today and future generations.

Community Center is a project of the Filipino American Development Foundation.

**2 San Francisco Cultural Center.** Located on the fifth floor of the soon-to-open world class Westfield Bloomingdale Shopping Center on Market and Mission, SFFCC will showcase and exhibit the best of Filipino American and Philippine arts,

Carmichael School in 2001, the Harrison site has housed the Galing-Bata After-School Program.

**6 Victoria Manalo Draves Park.** An open space recreational park in the old site of the Bessie Carmichael School. The one-block location on Folsom and Harrison Street was originally the Columbia Square Park before the school was built. The SoMa and Filipino community are spearheading the naming of the Park after the 1948 Two time gold medalist Victoria Manalo, a SoMa native.

**8 SoMa Cultural Center-** a 30,000-square-foot warehouse arts facility that SonArts operates under contract to The San Francisco Art Commission.

**7 Mint Mall and Hall** - a Filipino owned property comprised of 135 residential units and 25 commercial sites, including the popular Arkipelago Book Store, offices of the three Filipino Centers Collaborative and Parol Lantern Festival

**9 San Lorenzo Ruiz Center**—a senior housing facility located on the square where streets are named after Philippine national heroes.

**10 West Bay Filipino Multi-service Center,** (also SoMa Teen Center and Ed dela Cruz Apartment, on 7th and Natoma St.) is one of oldest community service agencies in the City that caters to Filipino children, youth and their families.

The **Philippine District Walking Tour** seeks to highlight and promote the significance of the historical and cultural spaces to the Filipino and San Francisco community.

**1 Bayanihan Community Center** at the Bayanshan House at 1010 Mission Street. It is one of the soon-to-open cornerstones of the Philippine District. The Center includes a multi-use community room, a community technology center, a veterans and senior center, a craft and book store and a restaurant. The Bayanihan

trade and culture.

**1 Bindlestiff Theater,** renowned as the epicenter of Filipino American performing arts in the Bay Area, will have a bigger and better theater space at the Plaza Hotel Housing on the corner of Sixth and Howard. The Bindlestiff is temporarily housed at 505 Natoma Street for their continuous programming.

**4 Filipino Education Center** at 824 Harrison Street has been an educational institution for newcomers and bilingual students since the 1970s. Since the merging of FEC K-5 to Bessie

**Other Important places in the Philippine District**

10 St. Patrick's Church (756 Mission St)  
 11 Yerba Buena Gardens (bet. 3rd & 4th)  
 12 Gran Oriente Filipino (South Park)  
 13 SoMa Health Center (551 Minna St.)  
 14 Bessie Carmichael School (7th St.)  
 15 Trinity Plaza

**Also include**

16 Historic Manilatown (Kearny St)  
 17 Dewey tower at Union Square  
 18 The Presidio

Image 28: Screenshot of Filipino Social Heritage Proposal (2009)

<sup>135</sup> Filipino American Development Foundation. (2002). *SOMA Pilipinas: Uncovering the cultural assets and social heritage of Filipinos in San Francisco*. San Francisco, CA: Arkipelago Books.



Map 10: Screenshot of SOMA Pilipinas Ethnotour Map

In April 2019, I had the opportunity to participate in a SOMA Pilipinas Ethnotour with a group of UCLA students. During the tour, our guide showed us the murals and sites of SOMA but also engaged us in activities that challenged us to see different perspectives in community fights. We were brought to Victoria Manila Draves Park and learned about the “No Shadows on VMD Park” campaign. Community members organized against a 63-unit residential project at 190 Russ Street that would cast shadows on the park. While the proposed project would have 15 units of affordable housing, SOMA Pilipinas has few parks and the community did not want the 190 Russ building to set a precedent for future development to

create shadows on the park. This particular part of the tour highlighted the importance of direct action and public open space in the district. SOMA Pilipinas does not see these spaces being surrounded by towers.

**NEW SHADOWS ON VMD PARK?**  
**COMMUNITY MEETING ON PROPOSED 190 RUSS PROJECT**



Learn about the proposed luxury housing development that will cast shadows on Victoria Manalo Drives.

**Thursday March 14th, 2019 (6:30-8pm)**  
**@ United Playaz Clubhouse**  
**1038 Howard Street**

Food and Refreshments will be provided.  
For more info contact David Woo  
dwoo@somcan.org / (415) 255-7693

*Image 29: Flyer of VMD Park Community Meeting*

The SOMA Pilipinas Ethnotour is an important activity in the cultural district because it physically immerses participants in the neighborhood. It gives community members to point out significant places and areas that need improvement. SOMA Ethnotours are not meant to romanticize the neighborhood as a tourist attraction; rather the goal is for outsiders to humanize the area and to become exposed to the realities of Pilipinx American experiences and culture.

It is important to note that the SOMA Pilipinas Ethnotour is not the only walking tour of SOMA. “OUT of Site: SOMA” is a “performance-driven walking tour, placing audiences in the physical spaces of LGBTQ2+ ancestors.”<sup>136</sup> The purpose of the tour is to show how SOMA has been a site for queer organizing. Like SOMA Pilipinas, Eye Zen, the theater company that facilitates these tours, alongside their community partners such as the Leather & LGBTQ Cultural District, want to tell a counter-narrative of SOMA. There are multiple counter-narratives in SOMA; there are many individuals and groups outside of the Pilipinx community that call SOMA home. In reimagining and reclaiming space for the Pilipinx American community, does SOMA Pilipinas also create the possibility to exclude?

I believe that designating and building a cultural district is not a one-time process. It is a constant praxis of revisiting community values and goals. These are very evident in SOMA Pilipinas’s coalition structure and community advocacy. The desire for SOMA Pilipinas to center the experiences of Pilipinx American should not be mistaken for exclusivity, rather they are challenging dominant, white narratives of ownership. Storytelling empowers SOMA Pilipinas to advocate for resources, programs and services that will serve their community—it gives power to Pilipinx Americans to be culture bearers who pass on their stories and knowledge to future generations.

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<sup>136</sup> Eye Zen Presents. “OUT of Site: SOMA.” Retrieved, from <https://www.eyezen.org/out-of-site-soma>

## 9. Conclusion

*“... it's such an aggressive time that we're looking forward to next year with the new administration that's very anti-immigrant and very anti other...like a chauvinistic white kind of supremacy kind of model. And I think this is, it's all the more reason why the diversity is so important. San Francisco's almost lost a lot—most of its diversity. It's actually in comparison to the rest of the state, it's gone down in numbers of, um, communities of color. Whereas the rest of the counties have all gone up, increased in numbers. So it was already a challenge in a place like San Francisco. But I think more importantly, it's, there's so much when you really look in, if you really walk around and open your eyes, you see Filipinos in every aspect of the South of Market. Everywhere from working in the retail, to using the services, to walking around to, to driving around, to going to business meetings and seeing them in the towers. I mean, you see Filipinos everywhere, but there's no acknowledgement of the contribution or the importance of what the community is and investing in that community. And I think it's really time to do that now.”<sup>137</sup>*

Oral History Participant (2016)

SOMA Pilipinas is a place, strategy, movement and vision that centers the Pilipinx American experience. Although Pilipinx communities were displaced from Manilatown or are being evicted from the alleys of SOMA, residents and community-based organizations are continuing to mobilize against development that is unaffordable or has the potential to displace long-time businesses and tenants. Why do this work? Pilipinx and their allies recognize that the racist policies of redevelopment and urban renewal cannot be repeated. Through SOMA Pilipinas, we are witness to community members advocating for layers of protection in the forms of special use districts, funding and other legislation that provides zoning regulations that serve Pilipinx and low-income residents—that gives them planning and political power. Although community land ownership has not been fully realized in the district, SOMA Pilipinas advocates for preserving connections and relationships through the construction of affordable housing, annual celebrations and community anchors that give space for people to congregate. This advocacy relies on the participation of youth, families, seniors, workers, artists and low-income residents in the political process; it relies on a strong coalition of grassroots and community-based organizations to organize and to

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<sup>137</sup> Martynovych, Ericka. (2016). “sfd001633.” [.wav file of oral history].

keep members of the community accountable. SOMA is not just a Pilipinx neighborhood, so cross-cultural solidarity is essential in forming an inclusive and sustainable cultural district.

Pilipinx Americans are claiming SOMA as home. The streets of SOMA are being adorned with public art, murals and banners representing Pilipinx faces and histories. Pilipinx want their cultural identity and traditions from their homeland to be part of SOMA; these desires are evident in the multitude of community events that take place in the district. Pilipinx are defining what it means to be Pilipinx through the Filipino night market and the growing number of Filipino restaurants and businesses in San Francisco. All of these approaches to design and placemaking are rooted in the knowledge and lived experiences of Pilipinx Americans challenging tales of gentrification that depict San Francisco as being a place just for rich white people and high-paid workers in the tech industry.

### *Research Implications*

SOMA Pilipinas is an important story in the formation and protection of enclaves, ethnic communities and ethnoscapes. It has learned from other cultural districts such as San Francisco's Calle 24 and Los Angeles's Little Tokyo. I believe all these cultural districts are evidence that city agencies need to develop legislation and programs that have an overlay of resources attached to them such as funding or special use districts. Cities must continue to support culturally responsive services and programs and community celebrations. In my work, I referred to three historic context statements which are valuable bodies of literature to understand the historical significance of a property or area. These documents must be co-authored with residents and community organizations or else they may exclude the perspectives of others. They should also use nontraditional forms of data collection such as oral history or walking tours.

This research also calls on other Pilipinx American communities across the United States who are experiencing displacement or are at risk of it. With Filipinos being one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the United States and having the highest percentage of undocumented people among Asian

and Pacific Islander Americans, we need more strategies, case studies and theories on Pilipinx American design, architecture and planning.

*Recommendations for Planners*

*Extra extra read all about it  
SOMA sold for a couple of mil  
But who would've doubt it?*

*When you got the planning commission  
Ignoring the people's petition  
Disrespecting the people's position  
To Slow down, wait  
To hold off on your decision*

*To let a developer deforest the city  
Displace the youth, families, seniors of SOMA  
A place they call home  
this story has already been told  
Filipinos displaced from their homes*

*Divide and conquer the community with benefits  
Instead of recognizing and protecting the existing community's cultural wealth  
Sounds like imperialism*

*But it's time for you to decide  
What do you want on the headlines?  
Gentrified soma? or a commission who stopped and really listened  
to the voices who have concerns over the 5M project*

*What do you want on the headlines?  
Profits over people  
or people over profits?*

*What do you want on the headlines?  
Development that will displace or development that will give diverse working class,  
low to middle income households a chance to stay  
I say, what do you want on the headlines?*

Public Comment at the Planning Commission by Author (2015)

With the creation of the cultural districts program, many cities are looking to San Francisco to understand how designation can benefit their neighborhoods. I believe that having a cultural districts program creates new norms for urban design and planning because it forces city officials and

professionals to interact with communities in different ways. SOMA Pilipinas is a great model for community participation and planning, but planners need to continue to push these boundaries. Beyond recognition and acknowledgement that a community exists, what protections can cultural districts offer? Planners need to consider how zoning and land use amendments will impact cultural districts and at the same time use the visions of these neighborhoods as leverage to push back against development that will displace residents or add to gentrification. The poem above recalls the community campaign during the 5M Project. These struggles have occurred before the designation and will continue to occur in SOMA. Instead of having to react to each development like 5M, the cultural district offers hope, a framework and transformative process and plan that future developers need to acknowledge and recognize.

I believe that cultural district programs and the field of planning should apply Critical Race Theory in their work and practice. This framework really champions the diversity of the field—we need more planners who are culturally responsive and understand the importance of knowing the “roots” of a community. Referring back to the metaphor of the tree in Figure 1, if we are to approach different neighborhoods as trees planted in concrete cities: what are the leaves and fruits of a community? What are their branches and roots? As the poem above suggests, “what do you want on the headlines?” When we take the time to understand these histories of displacement and dispossession, we open opportunities to listen to the voices who are not typically heard. Applying CRT means that planners have an obligation to push policy and practices that challenge norms and the status quo within the field—we must decenter whiteness. If we truly want to transform the conditions faced by low-income residents and communities of color, we must commit to social justice and be open to critiquing the process and decisions that planners and other elected officials make. We can see this commitment materialized when planners ask of future projects: What is a community gaining from this project? What are they losing?



*In the Heart*

***Mahal ko ang SoMa***  
*I love South of Market*  
***Tahanan ito ng Pilipino***  
*It is the home of my people*  
***Lupain itong makasaysayan***  
*It is a landmark of our history...*  
***Kundi tayo kikilos, sinong kikilos?***  
*If we don't act and move, who will?*  
***Kundi ngayon, kailan?***  
*If we don't act act and move NOW, when?*  
***Mahan natin ang SoMa***  
*Yes, Yes, we love SoMa*  
***Ating buhay sa SoMa, Ipaglaban!***  
*For our future in SoMa, Fight!*

Excerpt from “Ang SoMa, Bow” by MC Canlas (2000)

It is important not to romanticize cultural districts, but rather to highlight the work of a communities and movements motivated by self-determination. Residents and other people who have helped shape a neighborhood should have a say in where it should go. Cultural district designation is not a one-size-fit-all mechanism, its impact in addressing the residential, commercial and psychological forms of displacement still needs further study. Cultural districts have the possibility to validate communities of color and other marginalized peoples who are entitled to stay in areas they helped cultivate. On the other side, they can become vehicles to attract tourists and capital-building schemes that do not necessarily serve long-time tenants. We need cultural districts that are structured by co-creation.

I end this work with an explanation of why I title my thesis “SOMA Pilipinas Is in the Heart.” The saying “is in the heart” comes from Filipino writer and activist, Carlos Bulosan, author of the autobiographical novel *America Is in the Heart*. Bulosan wrote about the experiences of Filipino immigrants and their migration to the United States; his book highlights the complexities of the Filipino identity in America—a place that some will eventually consider home. America cannot be bound by one single narrative, rather it is the intersection of multiple stories meeting or longing for a place in the land of the free. Dawn Mabalon titled her book *Little Manila Is in the Heart* in reference to Bulosan’s work.

Stockton's Little Manila neighborhood is "in the heart" because it is a place, a memory, a rich history worth fighting for and remembering. For a place or destination to be "in the heart," means that it holds a deep significance for an individual or group. It means that it is part of someone's being, existence and soul. SOMA Pilipinas, like many of the Pilipinx enclaves that preceded it, is central to the narratives of Pilipinx in diaspora. It is a story worth telling, preserving, loving and reimagining.

## **10. Appendix**

Appendix A - Oral History Descriptions

Appendix B - SOMA Pilipinas Timeline

## APPENDIX A

### Oral History Descriptions - Courtesy of Ericka Martynovych

With the exception of the CAAM oral histories, these descriptions have been modified to protect the identities of the participants.

1	1 Filipino adult and 1 white female senior talk about their history of working with children in the South of Market District. They also talk about how they participated in helping meet the community's needs.
2	1 Filipino male and 1 Filipina senior about the history of Canon Kip Senior Center. They also compare what the South of Market district in San Francisco was like today versus 1983.
3	2 Filipina seniors talk about the Filipino tradition of Simbang Gabi. Nellie describes the significance of this tradition to Filipino culture, and her contribution to the revival of Simbang Gabi.
4	2 Filipina adults discuss their involvement with the Filipino Mental Health Initiative. They also talk about being Filipino immigrants who are working to change the mental health system, advocate for Filipinos and help the community.
5	Two women talk about their involvement in community organizing in SoMa. They talk about fighting for affordable housing and the importance of continuing to fight.
6	Three seniors talk about their activism and advocacy work relating to youth services in the 1970s in San Francisco and the SOMA.
7	2 Filipino men talk about their different immigration stories, and how they both found their home in SoMa. They also talk about the significance of SoMa Pilipinas, especially when the community has felt threatened.
8	2 friends talk about their intersectional identities, fighting cultural erasure, intergenerational relationships, personal psychological health, and having spaces to heal.
9	2 women talk about their involvement in non-profit work in the SoMa. They also describe how SoMa offers a place of belonging, and the Philippines.
10	2 friends talk about their involvement with Filipino/Tagalog language access, the importance of culturally competent services, and immigrant rights.
11	2 Filipina women talk about their activism in fighting displacement in the SoMa. They also talk about the importance of empowering community members.
12	2 friends talk about their experiences as Filipino Americans and community organizers in the South of Market (SOMA) neighborhood.
13	2 Filipina women talk about their personal histories in the SoMa neighborhood in San Francisco. Both also describe the significance of the Galing Bata bilingual program for the Filipino community.
14	2 Filipina women talk about the history of the Veterans Equity Center (VEC) and their involvement in community organizing within the South of Market (SoMa) Filipino community.
15	2 Filipina women discuss the creation of the Bayanihan Community Center
16	2 seniors tell stories about immigrating to San Francisco from the Philippines. They also talk about their relationship to religious communities, specifically the St. Patrick's Church and St. Joseph's Church congregations.
17	2 Filipina women talk about their Filipino identity and culture and moving to the South of Market (SoMa) neighborhood.
18	2 friends talk about their experiences as Filipino Jazz musicians and their hopes for the future of SoMa Pilipinas.

19	2 friends talk about the significance of personal relationships and the history of his involvement with the SoMa Health Center.
20	2 friends talk about their experiences growing up in SoMa and their work as advocates for youth.
21	2 youth talk about what it was like to grow up in SoMa and each describes their hopes for the future of SoMa Pilipinas.
22	2 women talk about the history of Arkipelago Filipino bookstore and the importance of knowing one's culture.
23	2 friends talk about the creation of United Playaz and growing up in SOMA
24*	Allan Manalo and Oliver Saria talk about Bindlestiff Studio
25*	Alleluia Panis and Irene Faye Duller on arts organizations based in SOMA Pilipinas
26*	Eric Quema and Charity Ramilo on the founding of the Filipino Education Center.

*\*Indicates that these interviews are available online through the Center of Asian American Media (CAAM)*

## Appendix B: SOMA Pilipinas Timeline

**1950s-1970s Redevelopment:** In 1909, Jack London dubbed SOMA as “South of the Slot” because it represented “factories, slums, laundries, machine-shops, boiler works, and the abodes of the working class.”<sup>138</sup> In 1953, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency labeled SOMA as “blighted” and created plans to remove “slum” housing so that it be replaced with a new convention center. In 1967, the Yerba Buena Redevelopment Area is formed to demolish buildings and to evict residents.<sup>139</sup> In 1969, Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment (TOOR) is formed to fight the displacement of seniors and older adults and campaigned with the slogan “We Won’t Move.”<sup>140</sup> TOOR sued the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and SFRA which led to a settlement for relocation. While SFRA agreed to provide replacement housing for residents, ultimately an estimated 4,000 people and 700 businesses are displaced because of the poor efforts of SFRA in relocating residents.<sup>141</sup> Today, Yerba Buena Gardens and the Moscone Center are the physical representations of this fight.

**1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake:** A 6.9 magnitude earthquake hit the San Francisco Bay Area on October 17, 1989 causing a collapse of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. It also did impacted SOMA, especially on 6th Street, known then as San Francisco’s Skid Row, where “some five hundred households and eighty to one hundred businesses were displaced.”<sup>142</sup> Shortly before the earthquake community organizations Canon Kip Community Housing and Episcopal Sanctuary merged to form Episcopal Community Services of San Francisco (ECS). After the earthquake, ECS doubled “its number of shelter beds” by opening a homeless shelter at 525 5th Street.

**1997 Delta Hotel Fire:** A fire takes the lives of 2 residents of the SRO hotel formerly known as the Delta Hotel on 6th Street. The building is sold to TODCO (formerly TOOR) to rebuild housing for low-income adults and seniors. The building is renamed Bayanihan House and included a community center that would serve Filipino residents and workers by providing a space and on-site services.

- 1998 The VEC Task Force is formed to assist Filipino American WWII veterans and families who were displaced by the fire. Ultimately, the Task Force becomes the precursor for the Veterans Equity Center, today known as the Bayanihan Equity Center.

**1980s Westfield Mall Development:** Ed De la Cruz alongside other community advocates negotiated with officials as part of the Westfield Center/Metreon development to secure space for a center that would be home to Filipino arts and culture groups, programs and spaces. As of April 2019, the Filipino Cultural Center released this statement: The San Francisco Filipino Cultural Center (SFFCC) is not operational until the legal dispute of its board leadership is resolved. Pursuant to the 2003 Owner Participation Agreement (OPA) and Disposition and Development Agreement (DDA) between Westfield and Forest City Development Centre with the Former San Francisco Redevelopment Agency now OCII.

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<sup>138</sup> London, Jack. (1909, May). “South of the Slot.” *Saturday Evening Post*.

<sup>139</sup> Page & Turnball. (2009). SOMA Historic Context Statement. p. 68. Retrieved, from [http://archives.sfplanning.org/documents/372-SOMA\\_Historic\\_Context\\_Statement\\_06-30-2009.pdf](http://archives.sfplanning.org/documents/372-SOMA_Historic_Context_Statement_06-30-2009.pdf)

<sup>140</sup> Hartman, C. (2002). *City for Sale The Transformation of San Francisco*. p. 71

<sup>141</sup> Page & Turnball. (2009). SOMA Historic Context Statement. p. 68. Retrieved, from [http://archives.sfplanning.org/documents/372-SOMA\\_Historic\\_Context\\_Statement\\_06-30-2009.pdf](http://archives.sfplanning.org/documents/372-SOMA_Historic_Context_Statement_06-30-2009.pdf)

<sup>142</sup> Hartman, p. 220.

**Late 1990s Dot Com Boom:** Internet-related jobs create an estimated 50,000 jobs in the SOMA and the Mission.<sup>143</sup> This sent a new wave of tenants to the South of Market: companies in need of office space and housing. During this time, rents and property values skyrocketed; new dot-com companies and workers replaced long-term tenants who were evicted from industrial buildings that were converted to office use. The construction of live/work lofts surged because of a loophole in the Planning Code that allowed live/work units for artists and “exempted a developer from having to comply with residential planning regulations.

## 2000s

**2000 Save the Mint Mall:** In 2000, Filipino business owners were served with eviction notices. Some of these businesses were replaced with offices for dot-com companies. The Filipino community united and fought the evictions of these tenants through the “Save Mint Mall” campaign which exposed illegal retail-to-office conversions and helped establish long-term leases for Arkipelago Books and New Filipinas Restaurant (today known as JT Restaurant)

**2001 Intercontinental:** After a long campaign to stop the “spot-zoning” and construction of the Intercontinental hotel, community organizations entered negotiations to try to mitigate some of the negative impacts of the development.

**2004 Trinity Plaza Evictions:** Located at Mission and 8th Street, Trinity Plaza was home to over four hundred people of color and low-income households and was set to be demolished and replaced with new condominiums. Organizations such as the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN) and the Central City SRO Collaborative united to organize Trinity Plaza residents and negotiated a deal with the owner to replace all three hundred and sixty units that would be lost and provide rent-controlled housing and lifetime leases for current residents.

**2005 SOMA Stabilization Fund:** The SoMa Fund was created in response to the Rincon Hill Area Plan which rezoned parts of SOMA for residential development. The ordinance imposed an impact fee of \$14 per square foot on residential development in the plan area.

**2006 Filipino Education Center & VMD Park:** Established in 1970s, the Filipino Education Center (FEC) is the first Filipino newcomer and Filipino/English bilingual school in the United States. It was one of three schools in San Francisco for newcomers including Mission Education Center and Chinatown Education Center. After advocacy from students, parents and service providers, the elementary school relocated to a new facility at 375 7th Street in 2004 and in 2009, FEC was rebuilt and included the new Bessie Carmichael Middle School. From 1999 to 2006, the Filipino community also lobbied for a new two-acre park, located near the old site of Columbia Square Park, and advocated for the park to be named Victoria Manalo Draves Park (VMD Park).

**2008 SUD - Youth & Family Zone:** A special use district that was incorporated into the General Plan and created to address youth and family concerns and to expand affordable housing opportunities.

**2011 Twitter Tax Break:** Legislation that exempt employees that move to or remain in Mid-Market (which encompasses Market Street from 10th Street to just east of Sixth Street and, in the Tenderloin, north to Ellis Street) from paying payroll tax on new employees for 6 years.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 305.

**2014 Filipino Language Ordinance:** Filipino is named the third certified language that must be used in essential city services alongside Chinese and Spanish. During this time, San Francisco has over 10,000 Tagalog-speaking, limited English speaking residents. The Language Access Ordinance of San Francisco was established in 2001 and requires city departments to provide translated materials and interpreters for public meetings and city services.

**2012 to Present Natoma Evictions:**

- Filipino residents of privately owned multi-unit apartment complexes face buy-outs and no-fault evictions
- 657-659 Natoma (2018) Raymond Castillo “If the families are evicted from their home, what would SoMa Pilipinas be without Filipinos? We are in housing crisis. In the South of Market alone, we are losing more and more Filipinos that live here.” (2018).<sup>144</sup>

**2015 Battle for SOMA:** Community members are divided during the approvals for the 5M Project, a mega-project that would bring 1.8 million square feet of offices and apartments developed by Forest City and the Hearst Corporation. The South of Market Action Committee (SMAC) is formed challenge the “fast-tracking” of the project.

**April 2016:** SOMA Pilipinas is named San Francisco’s Filipino Cultural Heritage District through a resolution introduced by Supervisor Jane Kim.

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<sup>144</sup> People Power Media. (2018, July 5). “PPM Video Story Natoma St Evictions 5July2018.” Retrieved, from <https://youtu.be/wveuMYY-CNM>



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