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Savage Vernacular: Performing Race, Memory, and Hip Hop in Filipino America

DISSERTATION

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for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Culture and Theory

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Savage Vernacular: Performing Race, Memory, and Hip Hop in Filipino America

by

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By observing and analyzing live performances, music, visual art, interviews, television shows, and online discourse, this dissertation traces the ways in which Filipino American hip hop performance remembers the racialized histories of the Filipino body. Through both quotidian and spectacular performances in hip hop, Filipino Americans have been contributing to crucial forms of knowledge that help unpack the terms of Filipino and American culture. Hip hop culture, I argue, operates as a productive and popular site for Filipino Americans to investigate their racial position in history and the world, expanding the opportunities for practitioners to author their own terms of popular representation. I refer to these sets of cultural practices as a *Filipino American hip hop vernacular*. I define vernacular as a language operating within a field of power located at the interstices of dominant and subordinate groups, thus mediating a friction between the legibility and officialdom of multicultural politics and the invisibility of subaltern groups. As such, a Filipino American hip hop vernacular articulates a cultural grammar emanating from the material conditions inherited from Philippine history. My title "Savage Vernacular" references hip hop's linkages between contemporary popular cultural practices and a long history of colonial and racial violence applied to "uncivilized" people. I give examples of how these cultural practices operate within the following arenas: the cultures of militarization

that form the spatial and cultural apparatus of hip hop among Filipino Americans, the alternative modernities with which practitioners find spiritual, cosmic, and political redemption, and the queered belongings among dancers seeking a sense of affiliation while pursuing wider racial legibility.

INTRODUCTION

Small stages, broad networks

He would haul his luggage into his bedroom and shut the door. Before I snuck into his room to look through his luggage's contents, I would wait patiently until he went out with his boys who drove around in dropped Hondas. With the entitlement of the youngest sibling, I gently "borrowed" my oldest brother's clothes. My closet soon became populated with his oversized t-shirts, Dickies, and Ben Davis button-ups. Visiting from Long Beach, California, Thom joined us periodically to try living in our family's new residence in Jacksonville, Florida. My navy father settled us in the Sunshine State after the closure of the navy base in Long Beach, but Thom, who is almost ten years older than me, stayed behind in Long Beach to continue school and start a family. As a relocated navy brat, I was nostalgic for the vibes of our Long Beach lifestyle: I sought anything that would mark me as a California Filipino kid to assert my difference in my new, mostly White suburban Northeast Florida community. His extra-large Tribal Pinoy, Long Beach City College Filipino Club, and Downright Pinoy short-sleeved t-shirts drooped down past my skinny middle schooler elbows.[1] My favorite was dark maroon with a large graphic in the center of a graffiti character guy wearing big clothes and a beanie and holding a spray can. I wore it so much that other kids would clown me.

Because Jacksonville is a navy community, most of my friends in Jacksonville (Filipino and non-Filipino) grew up in navy communities from around the world. The mix of fashion, music sensibilities, and dance styles seemed to be grounded in our immediate context yet we also glanced in the direction of other cities where we had lived. My schools were also very racially-mixed, in terms of both the Census-based demographics (Jacksonville is one-third African

[1] The terms Pinoy and Pinay are colloquial for Filipino and Filipina. I understand that Filipina/o, Filipin@, Pilipina/o, and Pilipin@ are common scholarly appellations. Throughout this project, I use "Filipino" and "Filipino American" for consistency.

American) and the racial diversity within families as many kids had parents from varying racial backgrounds. Due in large part to overseas military contact, being "mestizo" with a White, African American, or Latino father and a Pinay mother was (and still is) quite common.

It was within this context that young Filipino Americans in my city engaged in hip hop culture. Constantly migrating bodies, styles, and reference points informed our understanding of the world and the shape of our expressions. From the mid-1980s to 1990s, regional African American musical vernaculars like Miami bass were central to our musical diet. After all, the bass legends 69 Boyz, 95 South, and Quad City DJs came out of Jacksonville. New York hip hop and Bad Boy Records dominated the radio waves until Master P, No Limit Records, and Southern rap took over the nation. At parties, young Filipino American DJs were spinning dancehall reggae a decade before *reggaetón* (dancehall's heir) became a "thing." Filipino kids from other cities would also introduce us to new music, such as Beat Junkies mixtapes and CDs from the exploding Filipino American freestyle and R&B scene in California. VHS tapes also traveled. My brother would show off a VHS tape of Kaba Modern dancers performing at car shows and my friends had on repeat an over-dubbed tape of breakers from Seattle.

In 1997, at my middle school dance, I brought a stack of CDs to show off my music collection. It seemed every young Pinay on the laser-lighted cafeteria floor wore dark lipstick and had hair long in the front and short in the back like T-Boz from TLC. The young Pinoys wore big jeans and had shaved heads or long bangs dangling in their face. After some deliberation, I settled on handing the DJ (a middle-aged White guy) "Give Me a Reason" by Buffy, a rising Filipina American freestyle singer from the San Francisco Bay Area. Before the DJ hit play, he announced, "And by request, here's *mister* Buffy!" I slapped my forehead.

Within this environment in the U.S. South where Filipinos are relative newcomers, we fostered our own public and private spaces through hip hop expressions. Pinoy breakers flexed breaking moves on the navy base basketball courts, in single-family home garages, and on the multicolored tiled floors of Jacksonville's Regency Square Mall. One summer day, an epic battle between crosstown rival crews took place at the Orange Park Mall. With some skillful tweaking of a loose door, we trespassed into the fitness room of a luxury apartment complex to practice windmills. Before the homeroom bell, the drum section of our high school band threw down beats for dancers getting in an early morning sweat. In church halls and living rooms, Pinays rehearsed their hip hop routines for the next debut or birthday party. Long before Filipino Americans "made it" on the stages of MTV's America's Best Dance Crew or American Idol or on the screens of YouTube, these were the small stages where we performed ephemeral acts and built durable cultural foundations. Before flashing moments in which "you felt that tremor of recognition," to quote Jeff Chang, we recognized each other as talented and dedicated practitioners of hip hop without being compelled to reflect upon the magnitude of our cultural productions.[2]

For young Filipino Americans, Jacksonville in the 1980s and 90s could have been Virginia Beach, San Diego, Honolulu, or Bremerton. Across the country, concentrations of young Filipino Americans were producing everyday culture with various forms of hip hop practices that happened to be our dominant mode of expression and affiliation. Even outside navy communities, urban locales like Queens, New York and Jersey City, New Jersey fostered vibrant Filipino American hip hop scenes.[3] With our bodies, art, and music, we shared a cultural vernacular that continues to pervade among current generations of Filipino American youth.

[2] Jeff Chang, "Foreword: For the Moment," in *Empire of Funk: Hip Hop and Representation in Filipina/o America*, ed. Mark R. Villegas, Kuttin' Kandi, Roderick N. Labrador (San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2014), xi.
[3] Kuttin' Kandi, "Introduction: A Hip Hop Story to Tell: It's Just Begun," in Villegas, Kandi, and Labrador (2014).

Especially talented Filipino American hip hop practitioners shook the larger world of hip hop and popular American culture: the avant-garde turntablists in the mid-1990s, politically-charged emcees of the mid-2000s, and virtuoso hip hop dancers in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

This research project was born from these small, local stages. "Savage Vernacular: Performing Race, Memory, and Hip Hop in Filipino America" traces the ways in which Filipino American hip hop performance remembers the racialized histories of the Filipino body. Through both quotidian and spectacular performances in hip hop, Filipino Americans have been contributing to crucial forms of knowledge that help unpack the terms of Filipino and American culture. Hip hop culture, I argue, operates as a productive and popular site for Filipino Americans to investigate their racial position in history and the world, expanding the opportunities for practitioners to author their own terms of popular representation. I refer to these sets of cultural practices as a *Filipino American hip hop vernacular*. I define vernacular as a language operating within a field of power located at the interstices of dominant and subordinate groups, thus mediating a friction between the legibility and officialdom of multicultural politics and the invisibility of subaltern groups. A Filipino American hip hop vernacular articulates a cultural grammar emanating from the material conditions inherited from Philippine history.

For the past few decades, a Filipino American hip hop vernacular has narrated a multivalent, historically situated, and bottom-up cultural language of Filipino racial belonging. Racialized for four centuries as child-like, uncivilized, and inferior to Europeans and White Americans, native bodies in the Philippines (most now identified as "Filipino") are important resources in decoding ongoing narrations of Filipino Americans' sense of racial belonging. During the same past few centuries, Black bodies have been ascribed primitivized racial

disparagements under white supremacist colonialism and slavery, becoming, in Paul Gilroy's words, "expelled from the official dramas of civilization."[4] With blackness and Black people constituting the genre's primary racial politics, hip hop culture consults a long-range knowledge of racial domination that unsettles white supremacy's fundamental debasement of the black body. Filipinos were inaugurated into a U.S. civic status as colonial savages, whose bodies were scrutinized under a white supremacist anthropological scope. This encounter, I contend, travels through a series of paternalistic and neocolonial relationship that develops into contemporary manifestations of American racialization of Filipinos and, in turn, Filipinos' own counter-discourses. My title "Savage Vernacular," therefore, references hip hop's linkages between contemporary popular cultural practices and a long history of colonial and racial violence applied to "uncivilized" people. For me, hip hop performance among Filipino Americans is embedded with the memory of racial domination over native bodies in the Philippines. I make the case that a Filipino American hip hop vernacular remains a key popular cultural arena in which practitioners contemplate, decode, and provoke centuries'-long debates on Filipino racialization.

As this project outlines, young Filipino Americans were instrumental in shaping the contours of hip hop as a broader cultural phenomenon while they fashioned creative modes of expressions to make intelligible a condition of colonial trauma and diasporic fragmentation. In my chapters (which I further elaborate later in this introduction), I give examples of how these hip hop performances operate within the following arenas: the cultures of militarization that form the spatial and cultural apparatus of hip hop among Filipino Americans, the alternative modernities with which practitioners find spiritual, cosmic, and political redemption, and the queered belongings among dancers seeking a sense of affiliation while pursuing wider racial legibility.

[4] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 83.

For the record

How does one attempt to theorize complex processes of Filipino racialization emanating from the expressions of (mainly) young Filipino Americans? How does one entrust the monumental task of unpacking four centuries of Filipino racial discourse to young practitioners' dance moves, rap lyrics, and crew allegiances? I take the stance that practitioners' vernacular culture proves profoundly instructive in helping to understand race, colonialism, and nation among Filipino Americans. In their performances, which include a broad range of expressions, Filipino American hip hop practitioners have been prolific (albeit often unheralded) authors of Filipino racial discourse.

My study consults recent scholarly literature that regards performance as offering crucial modes of knowledge. In *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York University Press, 2012), which explores Filipino performance across historical periods and in varied sites of U.S. empire, Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns "[s]ituates Filipino/a performing bodies within the contexts of nation building and community formation, and highlights the imbrication of Filipino/a racialization with histories of colonialism and imperialism."[5] My study borrows from Burns's contribution to the growing body of scholarly work on Filipino performance studies in applying these racial and historical processes to Filipino American bodies performing hip hop.[6] Relatedly, Diana Taylor's concept of repertoire is key to the study of Filipino performance. According to Taylor, repertoire "enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral,

[5] Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 3.
[6] See also Christine Balance, *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

nonreproducible knowledge."[7] Like the varied performances throughout the Americas of which Taylor is concerned, the multiple modes of expressions in a Filipino American hip hop vernacular "functions as an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis."[8] So, too, does Burns's work stand "in solidarity with Taylor, not only foregrounding the ongoing, 'shared history of power relations and cultural domination' but also in celebrating the acts of survival and imagination that undergird such histories."[9]

Also focusing on a Filipino performative episteme that offers what Taylor calls "vital acts of transfer," in *The Day the Dancers Stayed: Performing in the Filipino/American Diaspora* (Temple University Press, 2009), Theodore S. Gonzalves demonstrates Filipino American college student cultural show dancers' "lateral" (rather than "literal") practice of remembering alternative times and locations that counter "official" accounts.[10] Here, Gonzalves belies his earlier denouncements of Filipino Americans' participation in hip hop as "not even necessarily terribly interesting" (which I discuss in-depth below) by affording cultural show dancers with substantive and multivalent embodiments where they otherwise seem to perform frozen and essentialized versions of Filipino culture. Like these college students' counter-intuitive pronouncements of critical memory, in *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), Sarita Echavez See examines Filipino American performance and abstract art, maintaining that performance "does not yield evidence so easily or directly. It does not precede knowledge but rather shapes knowledge."[11]

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[7] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 20.
[8] Ibid, xvi.
[9] Burns (2012), 7.
[10] Theodore S. Gonzalves, *The Day the Dancers Stayed: Performing in the Filipino/American Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 14.
[11] Sarita Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 140.

For me, Taylor's repertoire and its threading throughout the works of Burns, Gonzalves, and See helps reinforce the links that imagine hip hop performance as a knowledge-producing repertoire, which I show provides the spiritual, community, and aesthetic resources with which Filipino Americans transfer vital knowledge for a circuit of histories and embodiments. Yet, in these acts of knowledge transfer, the "official record" of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular is almost always famously elusive. Colluding with U.S. exceptionalism's tendency to erase its history of colonial violence, the erasure of culture, bodies, and history occurs due to the subordinating of more ephemeral culture, such as oral and kinetic expressions, into "savage" forms of knowledge. If only "civilized" people can build architecturally sound monuments and temples, record their sacred universe, and inscribe the coherency of an "original" nation, Filipinos can only be deemed savage for their painful lack of documentation and absence of a pre-colonial archive. Aside from rare cases, such as the Laguna Copper Plate discovered in 1989 documenting a record of debt-release inscribed centuries before the arrival of the Spanish, the people in the Philippines only came to into "civilizational" purview after Spanish contact and the thorough process of Hispanicization that resulted in the erecting of more "permanent" cultural artifacts such as the Philippines' ancient and renowned circuit of Catholic churches.[12] The tangible archive of Filipino culture, then, is much indebted to Spanish conquest. See writes, "Historically configured as the object of Western anthropological study, Filipinos cannot 'have' culture. Filipinos instead 'are' culture, displayed as dehumanized objects in past World's Fairs and present-day natural history museums in the United States."[13]

Despite its ephemeral qualities, a Filipino American hip hop vernacular creates a thriving and expansive culture that responds to the exigencies of colonial and civilizational erasure. This

[12] Luis Francia, *A History of the Philippines: From Indios Bravos to Filipinos* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2013).
[13] See (2009), xxxiii.

vernacular is a testament to a vibrant Filipino presence in the face of supposed invisibility. Rather than arresting a Filipino American cultural repertoire, the exigencies of imperial erasure enables and punctuates it. Invisibility, then, should not be regarded as scarring Filipino Americans with a mark of cultural deficiency. Instead, the discourse of invisibility offers an abundance of cultural and temporal resources that contribute to their imaginative and transformative projects of postcolonial subject-making. As See states, "There is precious little recognition of the variety of sophistication of the cultural forms that have withstood the violence of American forgetting and that continue to proliferate in the twenty-first century."[14] The gaps that make up Filipino culture could be reimagined as neurological synapses: the emptiness in between memory actually facilitates the crucial transference of knowledge and creativity. Within these gaps, then, Filipino American cultural forms—their savage vernacular—flourish.

Juan Flores, in his inaugural book on Puerto Rican racial identity and representation in hip hop, understands memory as a practice. He writes,

> It is not so much the record itself as the putting-on-record, the gathering and sorting of materials from the past in accordance with the needs and interests of the present. Remembering thus always involves selecting and shaping, constituting out of what was something new that never was, yet now assuredly is, in the imaginary of the present, and in the memory of the future.[15]

The supposed lack of Filipino culture and history enables the practice of "putting-on-record." My project is not so much concerned with a cataloging of the contributions of Filipino American artists within hip hop. To do so would concede colonial documentation's authority to stand as the official source of historical fact. Instead, it is the prevalence of erasure that I find productive. Cultural practices abound despite a lack of documentation and permanence. The varieties of

[14] Ibid, xxxiv.
[15] Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press), 49.

creative expressions emanating from Filipino American culture thrive because of their present-tense nature. In this way, a Filipino American hip hop vernacular works as an agentive mode of expression as much as a critical project of remembering. The savages are the folklorists, the authors of history.

Even though the synapsis and action-oriented nature of Filipino American culture facilitates creative acts of remembering, formal scholarship still largely relies on a set of written publications in order to advance arguments. My study therefore draws much material from my anthology *Empire of Funk: Hip Hop and Representation in Filipina/o America* (Cognella Academic Publications, 2014). Co-edited with DJ Kuttin Kandi and Roderick N. Labrador, the collection attempts to fill in the void of printed material on Filipino American hip hop cultural practices in an effort to address the "problem" of erasure while at the same time unsettling the practices of colonial documentation. For example, the volume curates Filipino American hip hop performance by centering the voices of practitioners themselves and by appreciating their expressions on a broad scale: women, gay, and queer voices are highlighted; the contributors hail from California, New York, New Jersey, Hawai'i, Washington, Virginia, and Florida; they represent various hip hop crafts as dancers, emcees, graphic artists, DJs, poets; and their ages span well into the forties to mid-twenties. Featuring over sixty performers, essayists, journalists, fans, and educators, the volume includes a range of views and expressions that testify to the complexity of Filipino American hip hop performance. My study offers a theoretical lens to congeal and make intelligible this termed "empire of funk," which alludes to imperialisms' imbrication in Filipino American creative expression.

Vernacular presences

> Particularly in the case of black cultures, where there has been, as Paul Gilroy hints at, a vernacular ethics, a vernacular history, and a vernacular version of 'modernism,' it is vital to recognize that there are material inheritances—such as slavery—whose reverberations need not be recorded by a seismograph in a sealed laboratory, but can be and are felt in the everyday life of black diasporic cultures.[16]
>
> -Russell Potter

Figure 1.0. Flyer for a Filipino American party in Carson, CA occurring on the eve of the Los Angeles Riots in 1992. Courtesy of Thom Villegas.

1992 was a big year for hip hop. Seminal albums dropped: Nas's *Illmatic*, Dr. Dre's *The Chronic*, the Pharcyde's *Bizarre Ride II the Pharcyde*, Ice Cube's *The Predator*, Pete Rock and C.L. Smooth's *Mecca and the Soul Brother*, Kriss Kross's *Totally Krossed Out*… The anger leading up to the Los Angeles riots in 1992 and the attempts at healing after the riots are well-documented in the music of NWA, Ice Cube, and Boogie Down Productions. In a way, hip hop brought the problems of urban racial inequality to the shocked attention of America (and the world) through its visceral rage as well as its calls for peace. 1992 was also a big year for young

[16] Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 6.

Filipino Americans. Participants and witnesses to hip hop's broader universe at the time, including as leaders rallying for peace in the ashes of post-riots LA, a generation of Filipino American youth took the reigns in innovation and creation in various cities across the United States.[17] Already a decade immersed in hip hop culture (and disco, funk, and older forms of Black American music before that), they laid permanent groundwork to a larger Filipino American hip hop network.[18] The now-world famous dance company Kaba Modern and the all-star DJ crew the Beat Junkies pioneered, respectively, hip hop dance and turntablism communities in Southern California. Both organizations celebrated their twentieth-year anniversaries in 2012.[19] The avant-garde DJ crew Shadow Posse formed and were featured in the San Francisco Bay Area's public-access television show *Home Turf*.[20] Mark Pulido (currently the mayor of Cerritos), as president of the University of California, Los Angeles's Samahang Pilipino student group in 1992, organized the "Unity Jam" hip hop event, bringing together Filipino American dancers and DJs from across California to party for peace as gang violence plagued Filipino American communities in the Los Angeles area. The success of this event helped launch Pulido's political ambitions to run and eventually win the university's student government presidency position.

[17] Victor H. Viesca, "Native Guns and Stray Bullets: Cultural Activism and Filipino American Rap Music in Post-Riot Los Angeles," *Amerasia Journal*, 38.1 (2012).
[18] Oliver Wang, *Legions of Boom: Filipino American Mobile DJ Crews in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
[19] *The Beat Junkies-For the Record*, online documentary (LRG Clothing, 2012), https://vimeo.com/44995287. Last accessed on July 29, 2015; *Kaba Modern: The First 20 Years*, DVD (Red 5 Studios, 2012).
[20] Oliver Wang, *Legions of Boom: Filipino American Mobile DJ Crews in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Rob Nasty, "Building Hip Hop from the Bay to the World," in Villegas, Kandi, and Labrador (2014).

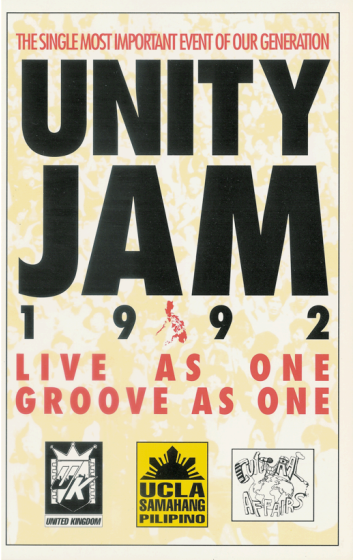

Figure 1.1. Unity Jam flyer. Courtsey of Mark Pulido.

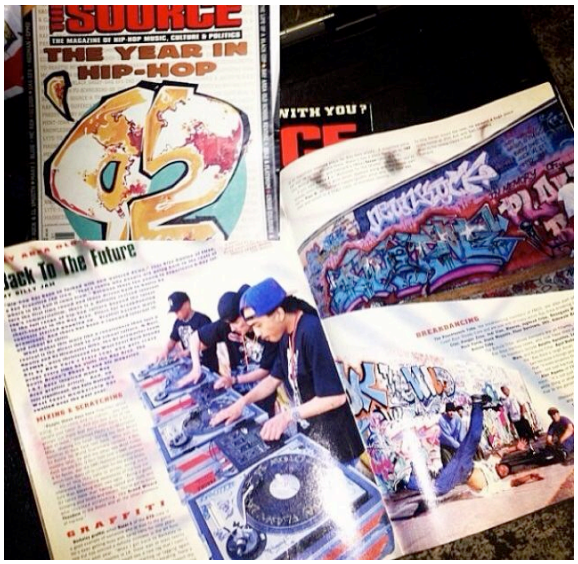

Figure 1.2. *Source* magazine image from Facebook post by Alfred David.

In addition to these Filipino American innovators making noise in 1992, the most astute hip hop enthusiasts can cite "important" Filipino American hip hop artists who contributed to the culture over the past few decades. DJ Nasty Nes, partner to Sir-Mix-A-Lot of "Baby Got Back" fame, is credited with starting the first West Coast hip hop radio show.[21] Apl.de.Ap of the group The Black Eyed Peas is often celebrated for being the first Filipino American emcee to "make it

[21] Chang (2014).

big" globally. Grammy-award winning Chad Hugo, partner to the more-famous Pharrell Williams, boasts unquestionable influence on hip hop beatmaking and is credited for "elevating" its sound.[22] Also, in recent years since Filipino Americans have embraced the legendary Latin soul crooner Joe Bataan, they have taken pride in Bataan's claim to have pressed the early rap record "Rap-O-Clap-O" before the Sugar Hill Gang's iconic "Rapper's Delight."[23]

The list of influential Filipino American hip hop artists can go on. But what is just as important are the unrecognized, anonymous Filipino American practitioners and fans who promote events, share music, show-off dance moves, recite spiritual philosophy, create hip hop groups, and buy merchandise. Hip hop endures as a vernacular culture among recent generations of Filipino Americans because of its large-scale horizontal appeal and mobility; it is largely quotidian, percolating largely from the "bottom" of Filipino American cultural spaces; it is shared repertoire that circulates without a decided commitment to permanence or mainstream legibility. It is a way of inhabiting the world, a recognition not measured by graphs and surveys but "felt in their everyday lives," to restate Russell Potter.

Despite a number of "breakthrough" artists as well as more anonymous hip hop practitioners, in the U.S. popular imaginary Filipino Americans may not be thought of as the first or the most influential people in hip hop. As the second largest Asian American demographic in the nation—and the largest in a few states, including California—who have had a more than century-long migratory, cultural, and juridical relationship with the United States, Filipino

[22] "Pharrell Williams On Juxtaposition And Seeing Sounds," *NPR Music*, December 31, 2013, http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2013/12/31/258406317/pharrell-williams-on-juxtaposition-and-seeing-sounds?sc=17&f=3. Last accessed on July 29, 2015.
[23] Oliver Wang, "Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity, and the Asian American MC," in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, ed. M. Nguyen, T. Tu. Durham (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Chang (2014).

Americans certainly hold a demographic and historical significance.[24] But in the recent past and in the contemporary moment, their cultural significance remains disproportionately unrecognized. In hip hop culture, this discrepancy between statistical representation and cultural representation is especially stark. It seems regardless of the scale of Filipino American participation in hip hop, this groups' cultural contributions remain perpetually unnoticed.

For many outside observers, the cultural synapses that helps propel creativity and memory-making among Filipino American hip hop practitioners is rendered irrelevant, thus erasing their presence and contributions in very real historical moments. For example, in a 2007 *L.A. Weekly* article entitled "The Fil-Am Invasion: Embedded With the Hip-Hop Movement That's Taking Over Hollywood," the author is struck by the novelty of the presence of Filipino American DJs performing in the area.[25] His language of "taking over" suggests that Hollywood was "someone else's" and Fil-Ams are invading, even when Filipino American DJs have been immersed in Hollywood's club scene—in fact in numerous crevices of Los Angeles nightlife—for two decades prior to 2007.[26] For Filipino Americans involved in the clubbing scene, they were not surprised at all by the extent to which Filipino Americans have asserted their presence. To say the least, the comments section of the *L.A. Weekly* flooded with letters of "correction" sent by L.A.-based Filipino Americans involved in the scene who wanted to set the record straight. DJ Icy Ice, a veteran of this scene, comments about the *L.A. Weekly* article in my short documentary film *Legend* (2008): "We have so many talented brothers and sisters within our community that represent out there, but they're not being heard. They're not being exposed out

[24] "Filipino Americans," *Pew Research Center*, website, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/asianamericans-graphics/filipinos/. Last accessed on July 29, 2015.
[25] Sam Slovick, "The Fil-Am Invasion: Embedded With the Hip-Hop Movement That's Taking Over Hollywood," *LA Weekly*, August 8, 2007, http://www.laweekly.com/music/the-fil-am-invasion-2149983. Last accessed on July 29, 2015.
[26] Mark Villegas, *Legend*, online documentary (Mark Villegas, 2008), https://vimeo.com/6393958. Last accessed on July 29, 2015.

there. We're like that invisible community there. So it's hardly an invasion now. It's just an invasion in that writer's mind."[27] For some performers, Filipino American presence in the DJ scene is "common sense." In the dance world, this "common sense" of Filipino American hip hop involvement also rings true for those who have closer knowledge of less-visible hip hop culture. In *B-girling in a B-boy's World* (2010), a short documentary on Filipino American b-girl Shaboogie, the dancer opens the film saying, "You always knew if you were gonna go to a dance competition that there would be a dope Filipino crew that was gonna be in the finals or win the thing. It was just always an understanding from, I don't know, I guess from years of being in the scene. Filipinos have always put it down." Of the Jabbawockeez dance crew, who won the first season of the dance competition show MTV's America's Best Dance Crew in 2008, Shaboogie remarks, "When they got on TV they put on the masks. People were forced to recognize the way they danced as opposed to them being Filipino. But when they took off the masks and everybody saw they were Filipino, most of the dance community was just like, 'duh.' We already know them and we already knew how dope they were."[28]

Certainly, whether Filipino Americans routinely "represent out there" or regularly "put it down" does not guarantee the legibility of Filipino bodies in hip hop. They have been "putting it down" for so long but have never "stood up" tall enough to be seen. In order to flourish, a vernacular does not need the sanction of legibility—or recognition of the firsts or the big names. Filipino Americans have for decades been "speaking" this vernacular regardless and asserted a presence despite a pervading discourse of invisibility.[29] As a way of living and performing that

[27] Ibid.
[28] Angela J. Bass, *B-girling in a B-boy's World*, online video, 2010, https://vimeo.com/11516937. Last accessed on July 28, 2015.
[29] Elizabeth H. Pisares, "Do You Mis(recognize) Me: Filipina Americans in Popular Music and the Problem of Invisibility," in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, ed. Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr., Edgardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

has been reverberating among recent generations of Filipino Americans, a hip hop vernacular is not exclusive to pioneers and celebrities; it is defined by its status as a shared, quotidian practice.

My use of vernacular takes cue from Potter's *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (State University of New York Press, 1995), which, through the framework of postmodernist theory, recuperates hip hop as a vernacular that re-invokes "its own history as well of the history of African-American and black expressive culture in general."[30] As a popular, mostly youth-directed expression, a Filipino American hip hop vernacular eschews an elitist, "enlightened," top-down cultural agenda, aligning with Potter's description of hip hop culture as postmodern. The racialized history re-invoked in hip hop—the "material inheritances" of centuries of slavery or colonialism—circulate horizontally among practitioners. In Filipino American studies, Martin Manalansan offers an apt description of the quotidian characteristics of vernacular culture. In *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2003), he studied the coded language and modes of everyday survival among Filipino gay men in New York City for whom the use of vernacular signals both spoken language and cultural practices. Manalansan writes, "I would argue that everyday life then is the space for examining the creation and rearticulation of queer selves in the diaspora." [31]

Borrowing from Manalansan's take on vernacular, it bears repeating that it is precisely because certain language and performances are expressed in "everyday life" that has made a Filipino American hip hop vernacular so enduring and expansive. The notable Filipino American hip hop artists mentioned earlier represent only a tiny sample of performers, fans, and organizers from Hawai`i to New York (and beyond) who were instrumental in promoting a Filipino American hip hop vernacular's sustainable base through their creativity, community-

[30] Potter (1995), 26.
[31] Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 17.

building, and love of the craft. Perhaps a Filipino American hip hop vernacular could not have thrived to the extent that it has without these noted leaders, innovators, and "firsts." Maybe their influence as role models and cultural vanguards was just that substantial. Although it would be exciting to catalogue these figures' contributions, I am more interested in the broad nature of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular, which has functioned over the decades alongside the celebrity of "big names." More pervasive than the cultural productions of a dozen or so Filipino American male performers, the larger phenomenon of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular stretches out as a network whose support by an often unrecognized set of participants such as women, fans, and queers help sustain its existence.

Participants in this network serve important roles in the localization of these sites. Focusing on a local spatial configuration of hip hop culture, in *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Raquel Z. Rivera defines "hip hop as vernacular" by its localness (her case concerns New York City). She notes how mass mediated forms of hip hop distance themselves from "localized, neighborhood-based hip hop experiences and creativity." The "vernacular experience" describes the street-based, grassroots nature of "localized historical memories" in New York's multiethnic hip hop zone, particularly the historical memories of Puerto Ricans in generating this zone.[32] As a "fluid cultural space," zones allow for hip hop's heterogeneity. Contingent within these zones are "subzones" (or "fringes") that involve the Island-style rap or *reggaetón* more associated with the music of Puerto Rico and a "core New York hip hop music scene in which African Americans are the most commercially visible group but in which West Indians and Caribbean Latinos (particularly Puerto Ricans) have participated to a substantial extent."[33] The metaphor of the "zone" is useful for its capacity to account for

[32] Raquel Z. Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 13-15.
[33] Ibid, 16.

gradients of belonging, whereas, she notes, the more popular spatial designations of "hip hop community" and "hip hop nation" can suggest spaces of exclusivity.

Rivera's concept of zone, however, only works when representing modes of belonging that are specific to an urban center, such as New York City. Filipino American hip hop sites also develop local "vernacular experiences," but these experiences are defined by their localness as much as their globalness. A Filipino American hip hop vernacular, as a global circuit, does not locate San Francisco or New York as the "core" of Filipino American hip hop experience, or even the Philippines as the "core" of Filipino American cultural formation. Echoing Gilroy, for this vernacular, "movement, relocation, displacement, and restlessness are the norms rather than the exceptions."[34] In this vein, Filipino Americans have only modestly recognized themselves as being part of a much-larger phenomenon; instead of mutual recognition of one another's connectivity, performers have for a while been rapping, dancing, writing, and DJing in their own dispersed, diverse, local pockets. For example, despite military connections or other migratory networks mentioned earlier, many practitioners in New York City have been unaware of the thriving Filipino American hip hop site in Bremerton, Washington, and vice versa. This phenomenon that has thrived for decades without centrality (a "core" to use Rivera's term) or strong connectivity yields an amorphous yet durable cultural edifice.[35] *Empire of Funk* certainly labors the notion that Filipino American hip hop practitioners are multi-regional in its inclusion of artists from geographically disparate cities. Where Rivera's "vernacular knowledge" concerns the "authentic" experiences of local New York hip hop as street-based and "underground," a Filipino American hip hop vernacular operates as a more capacious expression of exploring

[34] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 133.
[35] Of course, as I write about in my chapters, the nature of this connectivity changes with the advent of a digital network, where artists and fans increasingly rely on virtual connectivity via Myspace, Facebook, Youtube, and Instagram.

authenticity, where knowledge is mobilized by the circuits of the local and global, the past, present, and future.

Nonetheless, Rivera's work provides an important entryway to observing U.S. empire's cultural influence on racialized diasporic postcolonial subjects. In hip hop, Filipino Americans are often referred to as the "Puerto Ricans of the West Coast" because of Filipinos' tight commitment to hip hop and high concentrations in California and Washington. Jeff Chang writes, "Certainly Filipinos and Puerto Ricans share a common history of American imperialism, with all of its consequential impacts on language and vernacular culture…"[36] Inspired by Rivera's work, my project is the first in-depth attempt to investigate the ways in which Filipino American hip hop performance stimulates discourses and counter-discourses on race and imperialism.

Politics of multiplicity

In order to develop my study, I turn to recent publications that focus on the pervasiveness of hip hop among Filipino Americans. Most of these contributions, however, strictly focus on Filipino American DJs and only tangentially touch on the significance of imperialism. Although it mainly concerns mobile DJs who performed prior to hip hop's large-scale arrival on the West Coast, Oliver Wang's *Legions of Boom: Filipino American Mobile DJ Crews in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Duke University Press, 2015) offers a sophisticated ethnographic study of Filipino American mobile DJs, some of whom would later become hip hop icons. Wang, though, is more attentive to "how" the Filipino American mobile DJ scene in the San Francisco Bay Area functioned and prospered, such as the development of social infrastructures that nurtured the scene. I, on the other hand, address the deeper cultural meanings of these scenes by

[36] Chang (2014), xii.

appreciating the roles of colonialism and displacement on practitioners. I take up Wang's prescient suggestion: "[I]t is essential to emphasize how Filipino American immigration and community formation and identity development have been shaped by empire—both Spanish and American—and its influence on Philippine and Filipino American history, society, and diaspora."[37]

Another recently published text that more directly engages Filipino American hip hop performance is Antonio T. Tiongson Jr.'s *Filipinos Represent: DJs, Racial Authenticity, and the Hip-hop Nation* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013). Tiongson argues that Filipino American DJs' cultural narratives exhibit complicity with a colorblind racial discourse. These DJs, he contends, contribute to rather than combat the deracinating cultural narratives prevalent in the post-civil rights era. Where the Philippine homeland ceases to operate as a primary cultural reference point, Filipino Americans have been forming new modes of diasporic culture: "What it means to be Filipino, therefore, cannot be reduced to conventional markers of Filipinoness. Rather, Filipino youth involvement in DJing is emblematic of the need to reconceptualize in broad terms the contours of Filipino diasporic identity and culture."[38] Tiongson's text is an important intervention in illustrating the possibilities of agentive self-authoring among diasporic Filipino subjects. Furthermore, in opening these possibilities, he rightly problematizes the masculinist exclusion of women DJs and the prominence of colorblindness among Filipino American DJs. Appreciating much of his analysis, I nonetheless provide a critical response to Tiongson. For one, I view Filipino Americans not simply as minoritized U.S. subjects who tend to perpetuate colorblindness. Rather, I expand their status as subjects of empire; they are cultural agents emerging out of colonial history who are responding to power dynamics that reach further

[37] Wang (2015), 160.
[38] Antonio T. Tiongson, *Filipinos Represent: DJs, Racial Authenticity, and the Hip-hop Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), xiii.

past U.S. civic belonging. When placed in the context of imperial violence, discourses spoken by artists that are ostensibly colorblind may communicate information that is actually much more complex and illuminating than an alleged disavowal of race. Instead of plainly colorblind, I situate their expressions as profoundly race conscious. To this end, I explore the multitude of practitioners' messages beyond interviews, allowing their creative performances and modes of belonging to "speak"—as funky, contradictory, romanticized, and mystifying as they may seem at times.

In an interview with Tiongson, Theodore Gonzalves states that Filipino American participation in hip hop is "not even necessarily terribly interesting." Calling the phenomenon a "fetish," he goes on to say, "[Y]ou can travel to Los Angeles and find Filipinos participating in hip-hop, which has absolutely nothing to do with politics… It's just that hip-hop ensnares middle-class white kids that have actually popularized the music to the rest of the world."[39] Gonzalves's opinion of Filipino Americans' participation in hip hop (which since the publication of Tiongson's interview has become much warmer) is plainly evident if by "politics" one expects only a defined (or encaged) set of actions and ideologies. This goes without saying that Gonzalves implies that the participation of middle-class white kids in hip hop is equal to (or perhaps more valuable than) Filipino Americans' contributions.

As much as Filipino American hip hop participation has prompted criticisms of this phenomenon's unproductive or counter-conscious political contributions, it has also compelled scholars and observers to over-promote the linear progressive, revolutionary, or anti-colonial politics aspects of Filipino American hip hop performance. In "Filipinotown and the DJ Scene: Cultural Expression and Identity Affirmation of Filipino American Youth in Los Angeles,"

[39] Antonio T. Tiongson, "On the Politics of (Filipino) Youth Culture: Interview with Theodore S. Gonzalves," in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, ed. Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr., Edgardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 121.

Lakandiwa M. de Leon responds to the "cultural limbo" of Filipino American youth who are not taught Filipino culture or history by their parents, who themselves harbor a "colonial mentality" and apply strategies of social invisibility in the United States. For de Leon, hip hop and gang culture in Los Angeles provided an alternative for Filipino American youth to their parents' worldviews: "By inspiring Filipino youth to envision new possibilities, the DJ scene and broader hip-hop culture provide role models who have created an original, distinct, and positive culture for Filipino American youth."[40] De Leon's chapter pioneers critical inquiry into Filipino American hip hop performance and its linkages to Philippine colonial history and has certainly motivated my own methodologies. Yet, for De Leon, hip hop culture seems to only operate according to a pure resistance model that equips Filipino Americans to "fight racism."[41]

As de Leon aptly demonstrates, the politics-as-resistance dimension of Filipino American hip hop performance has given some scholars credence to champion or elevate a kind of Filipino American cultural legibility premised on leftist ideology. To be sure, since the early 2000s, Filipino American emcees have been respected for their defiant messages of hope, empowerment, and revolution. Their important cultural labor in this area should without a doubt be acknowledged. For example, Victor Viesca sharply connects the upheaval of the Los Angeles riots in 1992 to the activist and cultural work of Kiwi and Bambu of the group Native Guns. He writes, "Their instrumental use of rap music as a consciousness-raising tool suggests how hip hop is being used to organize youth in the twenty-first century… Kiwi, Bambu, and the Filipino American youth with whom they work do not separate the tradition of U.S. black liberation from

[40] Lakandiwa M. de Leon, "Filipinotown and the DJ Scene: Cultural Expression and Identity Affirmation of Filipino American Youth in Los Angeles," in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity*, ed. Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (New York: Routledge, 2004), 192.
[41] Ibid, 205.

global anti-imperialist movements, but rather see them as part of the same struggle."[42] Also highlighting Filipino American emcees' role in critical consciousness-raising, Michael Viola rightly situates the music of the Blue Scholars as a counter-pedagogy to colonial and neoconservative education. Of hip hop as a musical genre, he writes earnestly: "Hip-hop artists often speak 'in active participation in practical life' revealing people's present needs for adequate food, shelter, and security. Furthermore, hip-hop is an important musical outlet that possesses the ability to leave a lasting imprint in the hearts and minds of the struggling."[43] For Viola, the Blue Scholars "use their music as an organizing tool to reclaim history, challenge what is viewed as 'natural,' and engage with the masses in charting alternatives to capitalism." Similarly, Anthony Kwame Harrison emphasizes the "oppositional thrust" of hip hop among Filipino Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area. In his book *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (Temple University Press, 2009), Harrison spends time focusing on Filipino American hip hop practitioners, who express a "Filipino hip hop script" that helps in a "reawakening of Filipino consciousness" in light of social invisibility and the lasting impact of colonialism.[44]

Problematic, apolitical, and uber-political are only a few qualities that circulate within a wide range of hip hop expressions among Filipino Americans. I don't discount that these qualities are prevalent in specific locales and contexts. Rather, I seek to complicate academic discourses that risk caricaturing participants. My study values the vernacular attributes of hip hop performance and does not wish to either categorically dismiss performers' expressions or

[42] Victor Hugo Viesca, "Native Guns and Stray Bullets: Cultural Activism and Filipino American Rap Music in Post-Riot Los Angeles," *Amerasia Journal*, 38:1 (2012), 135.
[43] Michael Viola, "Hip-Hop and Critical Revolutionary Pedagogy: Blue Scholarship to Challenge 'The Miseducation of the Filipino,'" *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 4.2 (2006), 182.
[44] Anthony Kwame Harrison *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 134.

simply venerate "proper" political subjects. The latter specifically, I believe, risks replicating the political propriety and elitism of late-nineteenth century Philippine nationalists who welcomed a defined political subject into their aspired nation while abjecting those who diverge from a constructed Philippine national narrative, such as non-Hispanicized people.[45]

In any vernacular culture there is not one script nor is there no script. Therefore, I consider "politics" in a messier, more capacious framework by provoking hip hop's more varied, complex, and contested meanings for practitioners who inhabit multiple positionalities and cultural stakes. A range of politics are expressed by the hip-switching gay male hip hop dancer and the DJ entranced by UFOs and extraterrestrials. Subjects' narratives are not simple nor are they always legible (nor do they necessarily desire to be). I find more productive theoretical value in the varied and agile politics of performers' artifacts, texts, gestures, and bodies in motion. In this way, the application of "politics" takes on more flexible yet powerful roles.[46]

Scholarly literature on South Asian American hip hop participation also often leans on a "politics-as-resistance" paradigm, hailing the term "polyculturalism" to understand Asian Americans' investment in hip hop culture and in Black politics. Popularized by Vijay Prashad, whose pioneering book *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Beacon Press, 2002) assumed a canonical status in literature on hip hop multiracial politics, polyculturalism entered hip hop scholarly lingo. Polyculturalism, Prahad writes, is "a provisional concept grounded in antiracism rather than in diversity. Polyculturalism,

[45] I address this type of Philippine nationalism in my chapter "Civilize the Savage." See Aguilar, Jr., Filomeno V., "'Ilustrado' Nationalism and the Racial Science of Migration Waves", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 64.3 (2005); Salman, Michael, *The Embarrassment of Slavery: Controversies over Bondage and Nationalism in the American Colonial Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Resil B. Mojares, "Claiming Malayness: Civilizational Discourse in Colonial Philippines," in *More Hispanic Than We Admit: Insights into Philippine Cultural History*, ed. Isaac Donoso, (Quezon City, Vibal Foundation, 2008).

[46] By observing the nuances of Filipino American hip hop artist Bambu's musical autobiography, Roderick Labrador accomplishes centralizing such complexity in political meanings. See Roderick N. Labrador, "'The Rock, Rock On': Musical Autobiography as National Counter-Story," *Popular Music and Society*, 38.2 (2015).

unlike multiculturalism, assumes that people live coherent lives that are made up of a host of lineages."[47] A defiant and politically-charged call towards antiracism, polyculturalism acknowledges difference among racial and ethnic groups, but regards these differences as produced within a history of racism. Prashad's notion of "Afro-Asia" seeks to reconcile these differences in service of "the possibility of an enhanced solidarity."[48] The polyculturalism infusing Prashad's Afro-Asia hinges multiracial hip hop culture to a politics of liberation.

Prashad's concept reverberates for Nitasha Sharma, whose ethnographic study, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness* (Duke University Press, 2010), outlines how hip hop represents a method of global race consciousness for a small segment of desis (South Asian Americans). For Sharma, "The racially explicit and counterhegemonic messages of hip hop that analyze and challenge racism are taken up by these desis who apply them to their own experiences as distinctly racialized subjects."[49] According to Prashad and Sharma, it seems that hip hop must be "taken up" as in its radical, antiracist, and Afro-Asian solidarity form in order to legitimate their participation. Sharma continues, "[I]t is precisely desis' non-Whiteness that radicalizes them and links them to hip hop."[50] For Sharma, desis' racial status along with an ideology of "global race consciousness" grant some hip hop desis radical partnership in a global movement for racial justice.

For Prashad and Sharma, polyculturalism attempts to repair the broken racial lineages through Afro-Asian solidarity. But in doing so, I contend, such a repair ironically reifies the differences of "Afro" and "Asia." Polyculturalism redeploys multiculturalism's model of racial

[47] Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), xii.
[48] Ibid, xii.
[49] Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 25.
[50] Ibid, 200.

difference, but inserts elements of antiracist radicalism to suture these differences. On the other hand, my account suggests that Filipino American hip hop performances exercise cultural maneuvers that contest binaries constructing Filipinoness and its other, such as U.S. blackness or a broader Americanness. Because "Filipino" is at once thoroughly westernized (Spanish and American) yet is often proximate to "Asian," I ask, who is the Filipino's categorical other in polyculturalism's multiple lineages? Filipino, Indian, South Asian, and desi are invented national and diasporic categories whose reification as different between and among other categories ought to be treated cautiously. To repair these differences with antiracist radicalism limits polyculturalism only to those "small segment" (to cite Sharma) of artists and practitioners whose politics align with those principles.[51] What about the hip hop dancer, DJ, or fan who does not adopt the language of leftism or liberation? What about those who take pleasure in hip hop, yet don't want to uphold hip hop as liberatory? Can liberatory politics come via other ways, not necessarily from achieving the cerebral-centricity of "consciousness?" A Filipino American hip hop vernacular invites the multiple politics and pleasures from a variety of participants. It is not an ideology wholly glued to a certain brand of radical liberation.

For Sunaina Maira in *Desis In The House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (Temple University Press, 2002), desis' involvement in hip hop is one less premised on radical, pro-black, and Afro-Asian solidarity. Maira looks at hip hop-influenced Indian party scenes beyond rappers, desis negotiate their ethnic identity in their chosen incorporations of Black popular culture in fashion, music, and speech, especially in regards to masculine and feminine sexual expressions enabled through hip hop. Rather than minimizing their ethnic Indian identity in favor for a hip hop identity, as Sharma observes in her desi subjects, Maira

[51] Ibid, 24.

investigates this group's process of negotiations and reinventions in what she calls "remix youth culture":

> This subculture helps produce a notion of what it means to be "cool," for a young person in New York, that is (re)worked into the nostalgia for India yet not seamless with it. The role of remix music in the subculture of Indian parties is a critical site for analysis, opening up debates about reinventing ethnicities, performing gender roles, and enacting class aspirations.[52]

Like polyculturalism, remix youth culture still falls into the trap of essentialized difference where Indian nostalgia and Black popular culture must be "mixed" together in a process of "reinvention." While Maira affords her subjects the agency to reinvent themselves in light of an essentialized and often gender constricting notions of Indian ethnicity, her analysis is premised on categorizing what is understood as either Indian or Black in the production of a remixed culture. In the end, the stakes of Maira's study emphasizes desi youth's cultural agency—their expression of capacious politics—rather than a remix culture that aspires for racial liberation. These stakes, of course, can be considered hardly polycultural, yet the dichotomous compartmentalization of desi and Black is still operational.

I understand that Filipino American hip hop practitioners, like the desi and Indian youth above, tend to uphold ideas of essentialism, as seen in my chapters on Filipino Americans' turn to Islam in their search for ethnic authenticity, thus reifying constructed and romanticized notions of Filipino difference. To make sense of this methodological bind, I borrow from Stuart Hall, who, in theorizing Afro-diasporic cultural identities, writes,

> Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, [cultural identities] are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are

[52] Sunaina Maira, *Desis In The House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 12.

> the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.[53]

Hall's understanding of cultural identities as involved in "'play' of history, culture and power," unfreezes a strict methodological dependency on practitioners' interpretations of their performances, thus inviting a productive scrutiny of practitioners complex identities in relation to their historical and localized contexts. This methodological approach, I remind, squares with Gonzalves's generous treatment of Filipino American cultural show dancers. Treating Filipino American performance as a vernacular circulating within a cultural repertoire, then, allows a critical distance that invites the suspension of essentialisms while interrogating the discursive purposes of reifying differences. Like the categories desi, Indian, Afro, and Asian are invented at various times for various purposes, "Filipino" has operated as a useful, politically-endowed construction, such as its usage among nation-aspiring Philippine elites and contemporary Filipino leftist activists who congeal disparate and asymmetrical Philippine populations as "Filipino." The ways in which the narrations of "Filipino" are authored in hip hop imaginaries illuminate processes of Filipino American subject-making where terms of difference are always contested, where boundaries are already scandalized. Yet, I maintain, "Filipino" is not an arbitrary construct; for more than a century, it has been a category that has responded to the racial vortex of colonialism.

Summary and order of chapters

I begin this project with the chapter "Currents of Militarization, Flows of Hip Hop: Expanding the Geographies of Filipino American Culture," which examines how the geographic

[53] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 225.

vastness and the cultural politics of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular are made possible through the U.S.'s century-long pivot to Asia and the consequential installation of Filipino communities in military bases worldwide. This geographic and cultural arrangement sets the stage for understanding the structural contexts of this vernacular. Filipino American hip hop performers testify to this context in their political articulations emerging from what I call a "Filipino American military class." This chapter aptly ushers in my project as a whole given that U.S. militarization and war in the Philippines greatly defined the formation of "Filipino" as a racialized and colonized subject constituted by universalizing projects of U.S. white supremacy. A critical consideration of this "Filipino" status appears throughout my remaining chapters.

The next two chapters elaborate on the vernacular qualities of Filipino American hip hop performance by focusing on the intersections of the introspective messages of hip hop culture and its outwardly manifested political expressions. Specifically, I examine how the intimately linked spiritual, cosmological, and racial codes in hip hop contribute precious resources for the ongoing processes of Filipino subject-making and the fostering of counter-modernities for Filipino American hip hop performers. "'Civilize the Savage': Towards Islam, Filipino Origin, and the Golden Age" reveals how Filipino Americans' encounter with Islam comes mainly by way of hip hop. In this chapter, I argue that Filipino Americans' recuperation of Muslims in the Philippines is an ironic iteration of late-nineteenthth century Philippine nationalists' quest for a Filipino race and civilization, a quest that decidedly disavowed Muslims and upheld Hispanicized Filipinos. Through either their "return" to or political admiration of Islam, Filipino American hip hop performers exemplify the fragmented and contested nature of Filipino ethnic and racial authenticity. "Nation in the Universe: The Cosmic Vision of Afro-Filipino Futurism," observes Filipino Americans' extraterrestrial and cosmic imagination, a mode of performance

that consults hip hop's links to the 1960s Black Arts Movement and Afrofuturism. Some Filipino American hip hop artists, I show, embrace alternative worlds of civilization and temporality to counter Filipinos' historical suspension from "civilization" and the modern nation.

My final chapter, "Postcolonial Bodies, Modern Postures: The Queered Positioning of Filipino American Hip Hop Dance Culture," reveals vernacular culture's friction between subaltern counter-discourses and performers' legibility in mainstream media. Through their performances and alternative forms of affiliation, which I view as queer due to their divergences from both sexual and community conventions, Filipino American hip hop dancers contribute an embodied episteme to Filipino subjectivity and subjection stemming from American colonial encounter. I argue that understanding Filipino American hip hop dance performances as a continuation of a long-standing and intimate engagement with American culture instead of an inauguration into it—as mainstream, multicultural discourse upholds—re-narrates the terms of modern Filipino American embodiment.

Savage standing: On becoming "Filipino"

Figure 1.3. Flyer images of Bambu shows from Facebook posts by Bambu and Rocky Rivera.

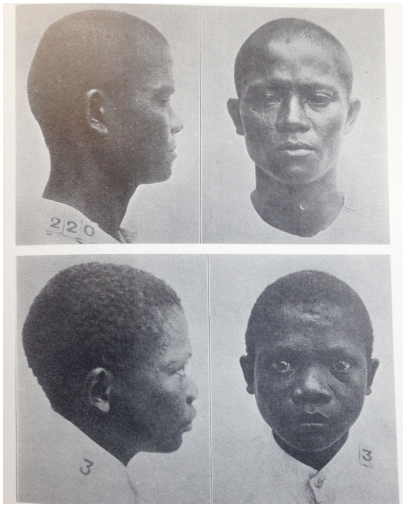

Figure 1.4. Anthropological photos from *Confrontations, Crossings, & Convergence: Photographs of the Philippines and the United States, 1898-1998*[54]

In August of 2013, Filipino American emcees performed sold-out shows in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Filipino American emcee Bambu headlined in both cities, summoning a gathering of veteran and up-and-coming Filipino American emcees and their contingencies of fans. Prior to the shows, flyers circulated throughout social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram. Several versions of the flyer were disseminated, some with just one artist facing side-profiled and unsmiling and others with multiple artists boxed-in by panels posing in the same fashion. Two artists in the collage were not Filipino American: Reverie is Latina and Artie McCraft is African American. In all versions, the artists give the impression they are posing for a mug shot, complete with a blank canvas in the back and a harsh flash aimed directly at the subjects, accentuating the shot's documentation effect. The photos record the details and shapes of the artists' nose and jaw structure, as if their unsmiling features can be measured and compared.

[54] Enrique de la Cruz, Pearlie Rose S. Baluyut, and Rico J. Reyes (eds.), *Confrontations, Crossings, & Convergence: Photographs of the Philippines and the United States, 1898-1998* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 1998), 31.

The flyers recall the photos taken by white American colonial administrators and scientists at the outset of American rule in the Philippines. A primary function of colonial photography in the Philippines was to organize a variety of people into "racial types," all of which were shown to be subordinate to the white body.[55] Editor of *Confrontations, Crossings, and Convergence: Photographs of the Philippines and the United States, 1898-1998*, Pearlie Rose S. Baluyut writes, "Under American colonial rule, the photographs of the Philippines and its people were regarded as ocular templates of truth—scientific records of both the ideal and the stereotype."[56] Photography, therefore, served as a technology that secured a sense of white American modernity, which was constituted by the primitiveness of America's subaltern others. Along with the grand spectacle of the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, which exhibited in its "Philippine Reservation" the warm-body spoils won during the Philippine-American War, photography gave visual evidence to a white American public of the need for racial uplift of "primitive" people in the new colony. Yet, colonial photographs are not simply stagnant documents. As part of an archive of U.S.-Philippine relations, they are artifacts that contribute to continuing discourses on these relations. The editors of *Confrontations* write, "Loquacious and never silent, photographs are versed narrators that tell many stories and, simultaneously, pose historical riddles. As such, they no longer remain as objective, unchanging evidence of history, but are encounters in the making."[57] Baluyut displayed this "loquaciousness" in her exhibit *The (Dis)Embodied Filipina: Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire* (2009) in the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, which critiques the binary of primitive versus modern in juxtaposing items

[55] For more on colonial photography and race, see: Anne Maxwell, *Picture Imperfect: Photography and Eugenics, 1879-1940* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); David Green, "Veins of Resemblance: Photography and Eugenics," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Photography (1984), 3-16; Benito M. Vergara, *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in Early 20th-Century Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1995).
[56] De la Cruz, Baluyut, and Reyes (1998), 6-7.
[57] Ibid, 7.

invoking primitivism, such as nude anthropological photos of women in the Philippines, with those that are seen as modern, such as the Maria Clara terno dress.

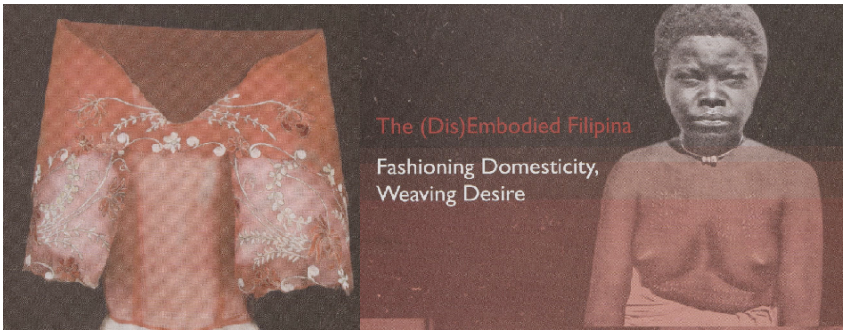

Figure 1.5. ***The (Dis)Embodied Filipina: Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire*** **(2009) exhibition brochure**[58]

The concert flyers for Bambu and company re-author a colonial history's creation of the savage Filipino body. Like Baluyut, they visualize a Philippine-American imperial encounter. The flyers recast the artists as physiological racial "types" who are objects of surveillance, criminalization, and spectacle, but who are also hip hop stars to be celebrated on stage. Where colonial photography offered an early twentieth century American viewing public evidence of Filipinos' inability for self-governance, the artists playfully portray themselves as cultural icons. The emcees' noms-de-plume written on the flyers assert a counter-identity responding to their colonized names and bodies. Furthermore, the paneling of the artists gathered into a single flyer organizes the artists to gaze upon each other, as if they are standing in a circle of mutual acknowledgment. Therefore, while they mirror that of the scientific objectification documenting the colonized, criminalized, non-White racial other, the flyers perform sly work in re-positioning the artists' agency by satirizing the absurdity of colonial documentation.

American exceptionalism, as a discourse that washes away the sins of America's imperial violence, ironically invisibilizes history and the formerly hypervisible, photographed bodies that

[58] Pearlie Rose S. Baluyot and Agnes A. Bertiz, *The (Dis)Embodied Filipina: Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire*, exhibition brochure (Pacific Asia Museum, 2009).

were objects of the colonial gaze. A Filipino American hip hop vernacular establishes a process of naming Filipino bodies in history while asserting a Filipino presence in the here-and-now. Where the "savage" Filipino body is seen as devoid of history, culture, and a place in modernity, a "loquacious" Filipino American hip hop vernacular defiantly announces American empire's well-kept secret: the subaltern has always been present, always watching, listening, and doing.

As bodies resulting from imperial encounter, Filipino American hip hop performers utilize strategies of memory-making through their music, record scratches, bodily movements, and murals, as well as in the communities they create, the knowledge they speak, and alternative ways they author their souls in the universe. A Filipino American hip hop vernacular cites the aftermath of U.S. and Spanish colonization, whereby descendants of racial subjugation cultivate the ongoing project of articulating a Filipino postcolonial subjectivity.

More than a century ago, whereas "Filipino" formerly applied to people of Spanish ancestry born in the archipelago, elite nationalists appropriated "Filipino" to describe members of an emerging Philippine nation. With the curtailing of Philippine national development due to U.S. colonial occupation, "Filipino" became sanctified under the administration of U.S. colonial statecraft, becoming reserved for "fit" and "modern" racial and ethnic groups in the proto-nation. "Filipino's" origins in Spanish anti-colonialism and U.S. colonialism are manifested in persisting struggles for Filipino subjectivity and representation. The fractured, wounded trajectory of Philippine nation-state building, then, constitutes the current iterations of Filipino culture. The category continues to be contested, as a heterogeneous Philippine society and a global Filipino diaspora continue to raise questions about Filipino belonging.

In recent decades, hip hop has proven vital in enabling a set of imaginaries for Filipino Americans in light of the over century-long disputed Filipino ethnic, racial, and national status.

Since the civic category "Filipino" developed out of American colonial statecraft as much as it emerged out of the preceding anticolonial consciousness of elite, exiled, mestizo Philippine nationalists, "Filipino," then, remains a contested category proceeding along a larger historical arc of a racial project rooted in colonial racist practices.[59] As such, Filipino Americans, as with other racialized groups in the United States, exceed the categorical strictures adopted in U.S. liberal multiculturalism that situates racial difference as well-defined and horizontally equal in a field of power. Rather than representing simply as people of Philippine national origin or ethnicity, Filipinos, as formerly colonized subjects with multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds, complicate the neatness of their own "Filipino" label.

Instead of appropriating the vocabulary of U.S. liberal multiculturalism that espouses clean national and ethnic boundaries, Filipino American hip hop performers testify to the historical and geographic excessiveness of Filipino bodies. Rather than treating "Filipino" as constituted by a timeless, coherent, and homogenous Philippine nation, these performers express the tentativeness, incompleteness, and gradients of Filipinoness. Just as "Filipino" began as a racial project useful for Philippine nationalists or American colonizers, Filipino American hip hop performers continue a legacy of exploring "Filipino" as a racial project but in service of understanding their own belonging inside and outside of the modern nation. In a Filipino American hip hop vernacular, the dynamics of racial power come into relief, particularly a historical memory recalling the influence Spanish and American colonialism. In this way, a Filipino American hip hop vernacular isn't simply a whimsical experiment with varying identities made possible by Filipinos' racial ambiguities. Quite the opposite: it provides a grounded, history-laden language of postcolonial memory. Traditionally, hip hop's political

[59] For more on Philippine colonial statecraft and the creation of the Filipino racial subject, see: Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

imperatives embrace a "knowledge of self" mantra that helps reclaim the dignity of African Americans whose history, homes, names, and relationship to the sacred were destroyed by the violence of white supremacy. Hip hop's tools for racial reclamation has become useful in the exploration of a Filipino racial project. A Filipino American hip hop vernacular is not simply the voice of group x rebelling against their parents or seeking resistance against oppression. Rather, it is a cultural practice inserted within the ongoing racial project of Filipino emergence; it is a recent iteration of Filipino postcolonial culture.

CHAPTER 1

Currents of Militarization, Flows of Hip Hop: Expanding the Geographies of Filipino American Culture

On October 11, 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton penned her op-ed "America's Pacific Century" in *Foreign Policy*, signaling President Barack Obama's desire to rebalance American economic and military interests away from Iraq and Afghanistan and towards Asia.[60] On April 28, 2014, helping fulfill the President's geopolitical "pivot to Asia," the United States and Philippine governments signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), calling for an increased U.S. military presence in the former U.S. colony. The agreement allows U.S. troops, warships, and aircraft to share existing Philippine military infrastructures—rent-free—for a ten-year period, authorizing a large-scale U.S. military presence not seen since prior to the closings of Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base in 1992. The EDCA purports to improve response times for natural disasters in the region and to provide greater security during a heightened time of maritime disputes in the South China Sea between the Philippines and China.[61] As President Obama intensifies U.S. military dominance in Asia in the name of humanitarian aid and regional security, the Philippines finds itself in a familiar twentieth century drama: the capitalization of U.S. foreign expansion in exchange for the abridgment of Philippine sovereignty. For Filipinos, President Obama's pivot to Asia rehearses a century-long relationship that brought U.S. military personnel to Philippine shores while recruiting young Filipino men into the military labor force. Throughout this period, Filipinos

[60] Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2011, http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/. Last accessed on January 29, 2015.
[61] Ankita Panda, "US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement Bolsters 'Pivot to Asia,'" *TheDiplomat.com*, April 29, 2014, http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/us-philippines-enhanced-defense-cooperation-agreement-bolsters-pivot-to-asia/. Last accessed on June 30, 2014; Christi Parsons and David Cloud, "Philippines agrees to large-scale return of U.S. military forces," *LATimes.com*, April 27, 2014, http://latimes.com/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-us-philippines-defense-cooperation-20140427,0,6497128.story. Last accessed on June 25, 2014.

migrated along the global currents of U.S. militarization, becoming seasoned travelers of U.S. empire and essentially suturing the category "Filipino American" to its U.S. colonial genealogy.

In this chapter, I examine how the geographic vastness and the politics of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular are made possible through the U.S.'s century-long pivot to Asia and the consequential installation of Filipino communities in military bases worldwide. Furthermore, I investigate this vernacular's response to these migratory and spatial formations. U.S. bases in the Philippines, the Pacific, and throughout the U.S. continent have served as cultural conduits to the growth of hip hop within Filipino communities. The overwhelming number of influential Filipino American hip hop artists who have connections to the U.S. military, especially those whose fathers migrated via U.S. recruitment in the Philippines, suggests how militarization has shaped the expressions, movements, and embodiments of recent generations of Filipino Americans who have embraced hip hop culture as their dominant mode of expression and identification since the early 1980s.

The metaphor of currents helps congeal together the symbiotic epistemological flow between the cultural politics of Filipino American hip hop performance and the structural determinations of militarization. Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho use the metaphor of currents to "signal how militarization operates across temporal and spatial boundaries."[62] Similarly, Kale Bantigue Fajardo's develops a crosscurrent framework (in part) to imagine oceanic migratory flows on a global-scale.[63] I, too, find currents useful in demonstrating the ways in which the contours of Filipino American culture is formed by the global flows of U.S. militarization, especially flows via U.S. Navy migrations. Not simply about the "guns and

[62] Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho (ed.), *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv.
[63] Kale Bantigue Fajardo, *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

troops," I echo Vernadette Vicuna Gonzalez's concerns in recognizing militarization's process of "ideological, political, and cultural control."[64] As such, militarization is an essential component to the aesthetics, politics, and embodiments circulating within Filipino American hip hop performance. Hip hop, therefore, offers a crucial counter-discourse to the U.S.'s racialized and colonial history and geographies. In this way, a Filipino American hip hop vernacular is contoured by a colonial legacy—it can be described as postcolonial culture.

Geologic and Bambu proficiently testify to the reverberations between U.S. militarized currents and a Filipino American hip hop vernacular. The two artists' biographies provide a critical lesson of the interlocking between Filipino American hip hop performance and military migration. Geo's father migrated along militarized currents as a U.S. Navy serviceman, which brought his family around the world. Mirroring the postcolonial nature of his father's migration, Geo's mother was also a participant of global flows of labor as an early recruit for domestic work in Italy. She met Geo's father in Italy, where he was stationed at the time. Because of his father's navy career, Geo was born in Long Beach, California and grew up in Honolulu, Hawai`i and Bremerton, Washington.[65] Geo's geographic migrations and proletarian sensibilities offer a critical reimagining of Filipino American communities, especially in regards to this community's class dynamics and spatial mapping. As a sailor, Bambu's father also migrated to Bremerton. But, Bambu's story differs slightly because the emcee grew up in several districts in Los Angeles, which were not necessarily navy or military communities. Yet, as Bambu shows, these areas were still highly militarized in the sense that young men of color have been aggressively

[64] Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, "Touring Military Masculinities: U.S.-Philippines Circuits of Sacrifice and Gratitude in Corregedor and Bataan," in Shigematsu and Camacho (2010), 71. Gonzalez gives a thorough study on what she calls the "tropical cartography of American desire" as it relates to the "mutual deployment of tourism and militarism" in *Securing Paradise: Tourism and Militarism in Hawai`i and the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 9.
[65] Author's interview with Geologic, Irvine, California, May 23, 2014.

sought as recruits. Having served in the Marines, Bambu's experiences reflect the realities of military presence in poor and racialized urban areas.

I begin by outlining U.S.-Philippine "Special Relations," which resulted in the long-term military occupation of the former U.S. colony. Understanding this relationship, I propose military bases broadly function as conduits of cultural interactions—as imperial contact zones—among diasporic Filipinos and similarly displaced and vulnerable communities. Secondly, expanding on the culture of inhabitants of these imperial contact zones, I examine Geo's proletarian narratives. Geo's poetics reflect the experiences of what I call the "Filipino American military class," a positionality that shapes the aesthetics and political stakes of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular by offering a critical "bottom-up" perspective of Filipino American culture. Next, in observing Geo and Bambu's interviews and music, I propose that the military communities assemble a larger imperial "home" that resides within a globally expansive violence of geography. Finally, I analyze the Blue Scholars' anti-war anthem "Back Home," which further elaborates these artists' discursive symbiosis between home and empire. The music video for "Back Home" visualizes the struggles and gendered relations of members of the Filipino American military class. This video bears witness to ongoing U.S. overseas war-making that found its footing in military excursions in the Philippines, inviting memory of the U.S.'s "Special Relations" with the Philippines.

Imperial Contact Zones and "Special Relations"

A Filipino American hip hop vernacular testifies to the development and intimacies of racialized communities emerging out of the militarized violence of the expanding American state. Within militarized spaces, Filipino Americans have been remaking military towns into a

social landscape productive for their hip hop cultural expressions by taking advantage of military community centers, gyms, and recreation halls. Given these resources, young Filipino Americans have created rich cultural spaces and shared community among otherwise disparate racial and regional groups. Alluding to Fiona I.B. Ngô's study on the intimacies produced among imperial diasporas in New York's jazz culture, these military bases functioned as imperial contact zones of interaction and collaboration.[66] Yet, rather than concentrated in a single metropolis, such as New York, these imperial contact zones where young Filipino Americans live are spread throughout a variety of geographies, including small port cities in militarized geographies around the world. Therefore, my version is also inspired by the capacious and varied contact zones theorized by Lucy Burns and Mary Louise Pratt whereby colonial interaction and encounter occur in multiple spaces and venues inside and beyond the metropole.[67]

The sheer magnitude of Filipino presence in these militarized spaces brings the former subjects of U.S. empire to the postcolonial center. It is outside this chapter's scope to catalogue even a sliver of Filipino American hip hop performers who are associated with the military. But it is worth mentioning a few notable performers in order to sketch this connection. Garnering from interviews and observing their music, over the years I have taken note of these performers' military backgrounds. Rocky Rivera, who hails from the Filipino American hip hop artist factory of the Excelsior District in San Francisco, was born on Clark Air Base in Pampanga, Philippines. Her family relocated to the Bay Area where her father was stationed on Treasure Island. Bay Area-based hip hop photographer Leo Docuyanan was raised in the military

[66] Fiona I.B. Ngô, *Imperial Blues: Geographies of Race and Sex in Jazz Age New York* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
[67] Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 22; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 7.

community of Southeast San Diego. The Digital Martyrs, who are based in Oakland and are making a career as Bay Area artists, come also from a navy community in San Diego. Emcees Son of Ran and Pele also hail from San Diego but are now performing in the Bay Area. Hip Hop dance activist and original Kaba Modern member Cheryl Cambay comes from a navy background in Cerritos, California. Jojo and Bobby Gaon, founders of Isangmahal Arts Kollective in Seattle, migrated along a navy base route from Charleston, South Carolina to San Diego, California, and to Bremerton, Washington. Apl.de.ap, whose African American father was stationed in Clark Air Base, is perhaps the most celebrated Filipino American hip hop artist as a member of the pop group the Black Eyed Peas. Chad Hugo of N.E.R.D., music partner to renowned African American hip hop artist Pharrell Williams, boasts a lucrative and award-winning musical career as a beat producer. Having a navy background, Hugo is from Virginia Beach, Virginia.

		Jacksonville, FL		**Virginia Beach, VA**		**San Diego County, CA**		**Bremerton, WA**	
Total Population		821,784		436,979		3,095,313		37,933	
White	White %	488,473	59.4%	301,492	69.0%	1,981,442	64.0%	28,615	75.4%
African American	African American %	252,421	30.7%	84,807	19.4%	158,213	5.1%	2,388	6.3%
Asian (total)	Asian (total) %	35,222	4.3%	26,720	6.1%	336,091	10.9%	1,656	4.4%
Filipino	**Filipino %**	**14,458**	**1.8%**	**17,003**	**3.9%**	**146,618**	**4.7%**	**1,053**	**2.8%**
Filipino % of Asian		***41.0%***		***63.6%***		***43.6%***		***63.6%***	
Chinese	Chinese %	2,500	0.3%	2,138	0.5%	49,395	1.6%	50	0.1%
Chinese % of Asian		*7.1%*		*8.0%*		*14.7%*		*3.0%*	

Racial and Ethnic demographics of select cities/counties with a large U.S. Navy base, 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau)
Table 1.0. Compiled by author.

The development of Filipino-populated contact zones located in disparate militarized cities gives evidence of an imperial mapping resulting from the United States' serial propensity for overseas war. Before Bush and Obama's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there was McKinley and Roosevelt's war in the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The Philippines was subjected as a U.S. colony after the pacification and genocide of people in the Philippines. As a result, Filipinos, legally designated as U.S. nationals until the passing of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934, began their migration to the U.S. metropole to labor in agriculture, nursing, and the military.[68] The recruitment of Filipino men into the lowest ranks of the navy began during the early 1900s, continued after Philippine independence under the U.S. diplomatic mantra of "Special Relations" with the former colony, and lasted until 1992.[69]

Jesse Quinsaat documents the extent with which Filipinos became a "brown skinned servant force"[70]: nine Filipinos were recorded as navy personnel in 1903, 178 by 1905, 2,000 by 1917, 6,000 by 1919, and dropping to a constant number of 4,000 or 4.5% of the navy after World War I. During World War II, the Japanese occupied the archipelago and Filipinos engaged a guerilla campaign against the invaders until American forces returned to conscript Filipinos into the military. After U.S. Naval bases were secured from the Japanese, 2,000 enlisted between 1944 and 1946. Between World War II and 1973, over 22,000 enlisted, with an

[68] Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Migration and Empire in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
[69] Espiritu (2003), 28; Jesse Quinsaat, "An Exercise on How to Join the Navy and Still Not See the World," in *Letters in Exile: An Introductory Reader on the History of Pilipinos in America* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1976), 102-103; William Pomeroy, "The Philippines—A Case History of Neo-Colonialism," in *Remaking Asia: Essays on the American Uses of Power*, ed. Mark Selden (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974).
[70] Quinsaat (1976), 108. For more on Filipinos' political status and military service during World War II, see Baldoz (2011), 194-236.

annual quota of 2,000 Filipino enlistees set in 1954.[71] The legal authorization that enabled the significant jump in enlistment in the latter years, even after Filipinos became citizens of their own nation after independence in 1946, was due to the signing Military Bases Agreement of 1947 between the United States and the new Republic of the Philippines, which heralded the era of euphemistic "Special Relations" between the two nations.[72] According to the agreement, the U.S. military could lease twenty-three sites in the Philippines for ninety-nine years and continue to recruit Filipinos.[73] Enlistment dropped over the decades, the annual quota on Filipino enlistees steadying at 400 in the 1980s.[74]

As signatures of American power, military bases in the Philippines significantly transformed Philippine society in what Yen Le Espiritu calls "centers of wealth amid local poverty."[75] The physical proximity of America via the military was palpable for many Filipinos so much that Roberto, one of Martin Manalansan's informants in his study on gay Filipino migrant men, commented that while growing up he believed "America was just an hour bus ride away[.]"[76] In spaces like Sangley Point, Subic Bay, and Clark Air Base, the real and symbolic aspirations of grasping a real and imagined America molded everyday social relations. In terms of labor and social mobility, young men's hopes were influenced by enlisted and retired Filipino navy men who came back home to "coach" and conduct seminars on joining the navy, this on top of the opulence exuded by retired navy men who settled in their hometowns flaunting their

[71] Quinsaat (1976), 102, 104, 105, 108; Luisito G. Maligat, "Study of the U.S. Navy's Philippines Enlistment Program, 1981-1991," master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California (2000), 40.
[72] Espiritu (2003), 28-29; Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Rosskamm Shalom (ed.), *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1987), 96-103.
[73] Quinsaat (1976), 96-97.
[74] Maligat (2000), 40.
[75] Espiritu (2003), 28.
[76] Martin F. Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 12.

Americanized excess.[77] In terms of sexual relations and work, prostitution became a staple industry for Filipina women and Filipino men in these contact zones.[78] The possibilities of sexual relations and reproduction resulted in a population of mixed-race Filipinos, as shown by the biography of Apl.de.ap, who, after gaining worldwide accolades as a member of the pop group the Black Eyed Peas, has become a Pampangan hometown hero.

U.S. military presence did not just transform the Philippine urban environment, it shaped militarized cities on the U.S. continent, in Hawai`i, East Asia, Europe, and wherever else U.S. military boots and ships landed. Imagining contact zones as more globally dispersed than the American military towns of Sangley Point, Subic Bay, or Clark Air Base blurs the global boundaries that distinguish where the United States ends and where the "foreign" begins. These contact zones share an existing as well as constantly flowing population of colonized, racialized (for example, Filipino and African American servicemen used as feminized labor on ships), and cyclically recruited groups. Throughout the twentieth century, Filipino men and their families traveled along imperial routes, creating a circuitry of U.S. militarized Filipino communities. Within these spaces, Filipinos from this military diaspora have mingled, culturally collaborated, and sexually reproduced with people of varying racial backgrounds who share their environment. American servicemen and their families stationed at bases in the Philippines (and throughout Asia) have played a vital role in socializing hip hop (and African American culture in general) to local inhabitants.[79] Much more, Filipino Americans flowing along the currents of U.S. bases

[77] Espiritu (2003), 106; Quinsaat (1976), 106.
[78] Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Saundra Pollack Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia* (New York: The New Press, 1993); Lino Brocka (director), *Macho Dancer* (Philippines: Viva Films, 1988).
[79] J. Lorenzo Perillo, "An Empire State of Mind: Hip-Hop Dance in the Philippines," in *Hip-Hop(e): The Cultural Practice and Critical Pedagogy of International Hip-Hop*, ed. Brad J. Porfilio and Michael J. Viola (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012), 49; Joe Wood, "The Yellow Negro," in *Blacks and Asians: Crossings, Conflict and*

interacted with each other and with non-Filipinos, as I will describe below. "Special Relations" bred another kind of special relations.

"Plantation style: yellow, brown, black majority"

> Bagging groceries on base for just tips, no salary. Wouldn't even make enough to buy a CD. And next thing you know, moms is picking me up from jail for stealing CDs from Blockbuster.[80]
>
> -Blue Scholars, "Proletariat Blues"

The complex set of power relations associated with these migratory and multiracial contact zones generate a cultural politics particular to Filipino Americans living within these social landscapes. Many Filipino Americans who have a parent who migrated via military recruitment, I suggest, tend to inhabit a social and economic stratum in many ways distinct from those occupied by Filipinos who obtained professional degrees prior to migrating to the United States. In his music (which I unpack later), Geo brings attention to what I call the "Filipino American military class," opening the discourse of post-1965 Filipino migration that should be appreciated for its diversity educationally, geographically, and socioeconomically. This diversity gives more complex texture to the post-1965 Filipino cohort, which is often referred to as the Filipino "professional class," or what Dylan Rodriguez calls the "post-1965 Filipino American national bourgeoisie."[81] Conventional post-1965 Asian American and Filipino American narrative touts the emergence of highly-skilled, highly-educated workers who received training in Asia and as a result benefited from U.S. immigration preferences. However, as the

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Commonality, ed. Hazel M. McFerson (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2006), 465; Ian Condry, *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 64.

[80] Blue Scholars, "Proletariat Blues," *The Long March EP*, CD (Blue Scholars, 2006).

[81] Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino American Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 180.

scholarship of Theresa Cenidoza-Suarez, Yen Le Espiritu, Jocelyn Pacleb, and Riz Oades reveals, preceding, concurrent, and mixing with these post-1965 migrants (and family-sponsored and undocumented migrants) are less-formally educated Filipino men and their families settling and migrating within a network of military towns.[82] These studies, as well as Kale Fajardo's ethnography of Filipino international maritime transportation workers, help elucidate the role of Filipino men and masculinities in post-1965 Filipina/o global migration, whose recent scholarly discourse has been in some ways defined by the global migration of Filipina domestic workers and nurses.[83]

To better appreciate the cultural significance of Filipino military men's migration, it is important to bring attention to the structures linking militarization and masculinity. For example, Oliver Wang's glimpse at the social, disciplinary, and even aesthetic significance of Filipino American DJs' participation in Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps exemplifies the interweaving of militarized life and these predominantly male DJs' hip hop socialization.[84] The functioning of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular (which I remind includes performances beyond DJing), however, is not exclusive to Filipino male practitioners—certainly, Filipina artists, promoters, and fans have proved integral to the fostering of this vernacular (contributions that I further elaborate in my larger research project). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to give a more robust and necessary examination of men and masculinity in Filipino American hip

[82] Theresa Cenidoza-Suarez, "Militarized Filipino Masculinity and the Language of Citizenship in San Diego," in Shigematsu and Camacho (2010); Espiritu (2003); Jocelyn Pacleb, "Gender, Family Labor, and the United States Navy: The Post-World War II San Diego Filipina/o American Immigrant Navy Community," unpublished dissertation (UC Irvine, 2003); Riz A. Oades, *Beyond the Mask: Untold Stories of U.S. Navy Filipinos* (National City, CA: KCS Publishing, 2004).

[83] These scholarly books prove instructive: Choy (2003); Robyn Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Rhacel Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and Globalization* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Rhacel Parreñas, *Children of Global Migration: Transnational Families and Gendered Woes* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2005); Rhacel Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[84] See "Appendix 1: Captains of the Field: San Francisco Drill Teams," in Oliver Wang, *Legions of Boom: Filipino American Mobile DJ Crews in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 163-165.

hop performance, an endeavor initiated by Antonio Tiongson's study on Filipino American DJ culture.[85] Regardless, militarized masculinity can offer a model to investigate the workings of social relations in Filipino American hip hop performance. Particularly instructive is Suarez's study on Filipino navy men's self-making through intergenerational kinship and peer networks as shaped in imperial spaces. My investigation borrows Suarez's outlining of vertical and horizontal social relations, but extends these forms of Filipino American cultural mediations to the workings of commercialized leisure and popular culture (which I later address using Geo's song "Proletariat Blues").

The set of gender, sexual, and class power relationships emanating from the Filipino American military class provokes queries into the historical conditions that prompt Filipino migration. The racialized, gendered, and working-class hierarchies produced by military migration offer a "bottom-up" genealogy of Filipino American culture and class identification. For a while, the only foreign nationals allowed enlistment into the service, Filipino men performed the menial and dirty work as the "brown-skinned servant force" of what reporter Timothy Ingram of *The Washington Monthly* in 1970 called a "The Floating Plantation."[86] Abundant, low-paid, and racially segregated, Filipino men supplied the labor for the military to grow and function. Filipino men were prohibited from elevating from this labor stratum before the relaxing of restrictions on Filipino rank mobility in 1973. When on shore duty, Filipino labor appeared in other sectors of the federal government. With a sense of pride, my father and his navy buddies would tell stories of Filipinos serving "as high up" as cooks and servants in the White House for the office of the president of the United States.[87] The irony, of course, is that

[85] Antonio T. Tiongson, *Filipinos Represent: DJs, Racial Authenticity, and the Hip-hop Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
[86] Quinsaat (1976), 108.
[87] Shore duty assignments also mentioned in Oades (2004), 15.

the pride felt by Filipino men who worked in such esteemed institutions—and their buddies who aspired to these positions—was only be made possible for them as racialized, feminized, and menial workers. As Suarez shows, through heteronormative family formation and fatherhood, these men reauthorized meanings of Filipino masculinity, manhood, and citizenship as patriotic navy men within these otherwise devalued positions.[88] Yet, their sense of belonging to the U.S. nation was always conditioned by their subordinate status; their patriotic subjectivity was conditioned by their segmented labor on the "floating plantation."

I do not disagree that there exists a post-1965 Filipino American discourse that, according to Rodriguez, aspires for "civil recognition" and post-civil rights "cultural valorization" that "can and must be understood as an essentially deformed nation-building project."[89] In fact, I would oblige that many Filipino Americans in the military class—including patriotic navy men and their children—do comply with a type of conservative Filipino Americanism. However, by focusing on the colonial and neocolonial particularities of the Filipino American military class, I want to attribute more complexity to the culture and demographic characteristics of post-1965 Filipino American communities. I consider the multiplicity of Filipino American culture in foregrounding the symbolic and demographic significance of a Filipino American proletarianism—a working-class sensibility—constituting the Filipino American military class.

Filipino migrants embody what James Clifford describes as "discrepant cosmopolitanisms, " or diasporic displacements inseparable from histories of often violent economic, political, and cultural interaction.[90] For Filipino migrants, "discrepant cosmopolitanism" varies according to their avenue of travel. Unlike members of the post-1965

[88] Suarez (2010).
[89] Dylan Rodriguez (2010), 33-34.
[90] James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992).

professional class who were educated in the Philippines and may often bring with them a sense of civic and national propriety and educational exceptionalism (they were the ones who "made it"), the Filipino American military class carries a much more mixed educational and civic experience, with these Filipino men historically having less higher education degrees due to their being recruited for the purpose of the navy's low-ranked positions. In her interviews, Espiritu gives a glimpse of the educational backgrounds of these men:

> As one of the "early Navy people," Ricardo Reyes referred to the post-1960s Filipino recruits as "a different breed": "During my time [the 1930s], the schooling is very low, like I know one of my shipmates could not write his name. He just put an 'X' on his paycheck… After about 1960, there are a lot of highly educated Filipinos that join."[91]

Although the educational backgrounds of Filipino navy men shifted over time, with more degree holders enlisting around the 1960s, this demographic remained largely without college experience. Much more, regardless of their education, Filipinos were assigned steward positions, sharing the same location within the "brown-skinned servant force" and thus inhabiting the status of modern citizen-subject was not about migrating as an exceptional professional but about becoming an expendable body for the neocolonial U.S. state.[92]

In addition to the challenges brought by a limited amount of social and economic resources, many Filipino Americans of the military class have faced disillusionment and instability in the domestic sphere. Having to move around because of their navy parent being stationed at another base, Filipino American youth would be frequently forced to adjust. Geo states that part of being a military brat involves "not knowing where we're going to be next year, who my friends are gonna be, and even living in a community where people are coming in and

[91] Espiritu (2003), 107.
[92] Ibid.

out. You'd have friends for two years, and then your best friend is gone forever."[93] In addition, with the navy father often "on duty" on the navy base and, for months on end, serving overseas, Filipino American youth can testify to the impact of not having a father figure around at critical moments in their lives. Riz Oades documents these "downsides" of growing up in a military family, which include "periodic travel or relocation, constant struggle to make new friends and leave them behind, and the hardship of not having a father or a father figure during extended periods of absence."[94] Upon returning, many Filipino navy fathers would attempt to assert their patriarchal authority over their children despite having experienced physical and emotional distance. One of Oades's interviewees describes his navy father as resembling a "barking drill sergeant." "I almost find myself saluting him," Michael Simpao states.[95] After retiring, Filipino navy men, especially those without a skill outside of the navy, can become burdensome to the family, who is not used to his everyday presence in the household. Oades also notes that these men can also have social, economic, and occupational problems due to their unpreparedness in civilian life.[96]

It is important to emphasize that even if members of the Filipino American military class do have less privilege when it comes to family stability and economic resources, they are able to access exclusive federal benefits available only to military families. Through its paternalistic accommodations, the militarized federal sector granted a plethora of resources, such as funding for higher education and additional economic entitlements. Oades notes the financial security and exclusive benefits afforded to military households:

[93] Geo in "Translocal Cultural Flows" panel at the Empire of Funk Conference, University of California, Irvine, May 23, 2014.
[94] Oades (2004), 118.
[95] Ibid, 123.
[96] Ibid, 120.

> There were three identifiable assets of growing up in military households. First is the financial security. If the father had not joined the military, economic safety would not have existed. The second is the exclusive benefits gained, such as the ability to shop at the discounted and tax-free Navy Exchange and Commissary. The last advantage is the outstanding assistance package that the Navy provides its servicemen in the form of health care, housing subsidy, and paid college tuition.[97]

The military put up families in (often infamous) navy housing, where Geo and countless other Filipino Americans spent their childhoods socializing with other navy brats. Through the navy's Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) program, they had free access to basketball courts, pools, gym, parks, and even party spaces.[98] As crucial venues of socialization, these public spaces, fostered a production of hip hop among young Filipino Americans. Where the suburban garage was an important stage for the creation of a Filipino American DJ scene in Daly City, the military base provided a stage for hip hop on the sleek floors of community centers, racquetball courts, and officers' clubs.[99]

As described above, the class, educational, and familial dynamics of the Filipino American military class poses distinct, often-overlooked, facets of post-1965 Filipino American communities. Filipino American hip hop performance, offers a counter-discourse to narrow narrations of these communities. In his music, Geo narrates his quotidian experiences as a member of the Filipino American military class. In the intro to "Proletariat Blues" in the Blue Scholars' EP *The Long March* (2006), the emcee portrays teenage life as a grocery bagger at the Navy Commissary. His first verse describes the unhappy work environment, the way hip hop

[97] Ibid, 118.
[98] *Navy MWR*, website, http://navymwr.org/. Last accessed on September 1, 2013. Oades (2004), 127 recounts these benefits for navy brats.
[99] For more on the importance of the suburban garage in Filipino American DJ culture, see Christine Balance, *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America* (Durham: Duke University Press, in press) and Wang (2015).

became diversion, and the "plantation style" racial make-up of his fellow baggers, many who would be cycled into the military.

> Back in the days when I was a teenager
> Minimum wage earning, rocking an apron[100]
> I was pushing hella carts asking plastic or paper
> To bastard ass customers plus most of us had,
> Relatives working in the same supermarket
> When boss wasn't looking rolled the dice on the carpet
> In the lunch room, listening to Biggie and Nas
> But not as much as Snoop, Forty Water, and Pac
> Me, I rocked the Walkman instead writing rhymes
> In my head often bored, I'd recite them out loud
> And memorize a song long before I'd write it down
> In lunchroom freestyles is where I learned to clown
> Plantation style: yellow, brown, black majority
> Half the young cats either enlisted in the army
> Or the navy or marines, but I was having dreams
> And I ain't even halfway there yet

For generations, the Commissary has served as a central place for Filipino servicemen to meet other Filipinos and build a network for mutual support.[101] For the children of these men, the grocery store offered a similar function but also gave opportunities for income-making, however petty. In his verse above, Geo paints a picture of his work experience at the Commissary, replete with small moments of resistance outside the scope of the boss and during spells of boredom, such as rolling dice, listening to rap artists Biggie Smalls, Nas, Snoop Dog, E-40, and Tupac, and memorizing self-authored songs.[102] Geo suggests leisure at the Commissary, similar to leisure at MWR venues, were crucial to facilitating hip hop social practices. Employment at the Commissary by countless Filipino American youth (and, as Geo states, these youth's relatives) in

[100] In stating he was "minimum wage earning," Geo belies his earlier lyrics in "Proletariat Blues," where he states that he worked for tips only. Tips, which can earn workers less than minimum wage, was a well-known form of payment for Commissary baggers and cart collectors, to which countless former Commissary workers, including me, can confidently testify.
[101] Espiritu (2003), 110.
[102] In a racial and class context, one may call these resistant moments "infrapolitics" as described by James C. Scott and Robin D.G. Kelley. See Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

navy towns points to a common spatial and work experience that overlaps with military working-class culture. Work at the Commissary functioned as a preliminary and an auxiliary space of military working-class culture. Geo's description of a "plantation style" racial and class-structure in the Commissary composed of young people who will likely end up in the military helps to visualize the cyclical flow of militarization in these communities.

Having also grown up in navy towns, I can relate to Geo's verse. I pushed carts at the Navy Commissary in Jacksonville at the age of fifteen. My older brother, along with a cadre of blue apron-wearing Filipino American (many, if not most, who were mixed-race) high school students, worked for tips as baggers at the military-operated grocery store. At the end of the day, I would receive a fraction of their tips handed to me as a wad of cash. The high school baggers' coworkers were short, dark-skinned Filipinas who were perhaps relatives of Filipino American military families or the wives of white or black American servicemen. When we lived in Long Beach, my eldest brother also worked in this below-minimum wage industry, wearing the same blue apron, bagging groceries alongside Filipino American and African American teens. This job seemed like a rite of passage my brothers and my friends: it provided quick cash and an opportunity to socialize with peers who provided the latest knowledge about music, dance, slang, and fashion. The Commissary, with its posse of high school-aged navy brat baggers, also functioned as a conduit to cycling in young recruits. With job prospects slim and, as a navy brat, the benefits and security of the navy experienced firsthand, my oldest brother seriously considered joining, along with a number of my friends (both young men and women) who happened to work at the Commissary. Many actually enlisted and are now traveling the global network of navy towns. In the era of the U.S.-led War on Terrorism, they have made rounds in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Navy Commissary provides a starting point to imagine the stakes and sensibilities of working-class Filipino American culture. The metaphor of the plantation—the Commissary for Geo and the navy ship for Ingram—is fitting for characterizing the working spaces of Filipino Americans in the military class. The "yellow, brown, black majority" who make up the labor in the Commissary as described by Geo resonates with what Jayna Brown calls the "global reach of plantation economies and the transnational migratory patterns of exploited labor."[103] The "global reach" of the plantation, which included American slavery and indentured servitude economies across the U.S. South, Hawai`i, and the Caribbean, were populated (and are still largely populated) by a "yellow, brown, black majority." It is worth nothing that these former American plantation economies—Hawai`i, Puerto Rico, and cities in the U.S. South—are currently heavily militarized. Geo's lyrics certainly do not equate plantation labor with Commissary labor, but he draws a poetic connection to the exploitation involved in the labor extracted from racialized and colonized bodies. In this way, Geo adjacently connects (as Ingram does more directly) plantation labor to the extraction of colonial and neocolonial labor from racialized bodies in the military. The militarized and working-class experiences of Filipino sailors illuminate the process of racial structuring in what Espiritu calls differential inclusion, "whereby a group of people is deemed integral to the nation's economy, culture, identity, and power—but integral only or precisely because of their designated subordinate standing."[104] The reliance on racialized, migratory labor to guarantee the economic and military dominance of the United States animates the metropole's historical necessity of creating differentially included subordinated classes. Much more, as Geo attests by saying, "Half the young cats either enlisted in the army or the navy or marines," the Commissary is coterminous with the "floating

[103] Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 102.
[104] Espiritu (2003), 47.

plantation" in functioning as a gateway to the militarization of the children of Filipino recruits who enlisted in the Philippines.

If hip hop's cultural stakes are anchored to underclass angst, then the proletarianism of military class Filipino Americans plays a key role in shaping the contours of a broader Filipino American hip hop vernacular.[105] The Blue Scholars derives its namesake by punning "blue collar" with "scholar," thus intertwining the group's proletariat identification with its pedagogical imperative. In "Blue School," Geo raps, "I'm a Blue Scholar worker studying the art of labor to create flavor to relate to listeners." A review of Bambu, Rocky Rivera, and Son of Ran's musical catalogue would reveal these artists' proletarian sensibilities. U.S. overseas expansionism, racial segregation, and the exploitation of low-wage labor shaped the geographical vastness and social segmentation of the Filipino American military class. Given this, Geo (as well as other Filipino American hip hop artists) modifies the educated, "professional" narrative of a post-1965 Filipino Americanism. The other side of the story of post-1965 Filipino migrants includes the less-educated, more-proletarian Filipino migrants whose relationship to modernity reflects American racial segregation, differential inclusion, war-making, and overseas expansionism. By focusing on the militarized currents circulating within the cultural politics of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular, we can better understand the migration of Filipino bodies and culture flowing with the memory of U.S. empire.

"Every home that I've known, every block I've ever seen": Home in the "Violence of Geography"

> Every home that I've known
> Every block I've ever seen

[105] For more on hip hop's cultural stakes, see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beach Press, 1997); Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

Military hoods, everybody eventually leaves
Relocated to the B [Bremerton]
Right before I was a teen
98 to Seattle, settled down, finally
If I ever feel the need to retreat
To a place that's familiar
It'll either be Hawai`i or the Bay
Where the people who share
The same shade that I be[106]

-Geologic, "Come On Y'all"

In "Come On Y'all," a song by San Francisco Bay Area Filipina American emcee Ruby Ibarra featuring Geologic, Geo evokes the theme of home in the song's first verse. The emcee narrates his biography in which every "home" and "block" where he has lived is described by its migratory military culture. His impression of home or a "place that's familiar" includes "people who share the same shade that I be." For Geo, then, home involves a layering of both its militarized space and his skin's shade, that is, a racial position defined not only by color but also a set of social relationships. This layering, in effect, alludes to militarization's power to order people's spatial and social arrangements. If U.S. imperialism has determined the patterning of Filipino American communities on the U.S. continent, in Hawai`i, and virtually anywhere in the world the U.S. installs a base, then home for militarized Filipino Americans spans the expanse of U.S. empire.

A Filipino American hip hop vernacular testifies to the formation of racialized communities predicated on the violence of the expanding American state. In his examination of African American rapper Nas's album *Illmatic* (1994), Sohail Daulatzai uses the term "violence of geography" to describe the presence of slums in urban areas the world over, including New York City. In linking an American city with the ghetto conditions in the slums of the Third

[106] Ruby Ibarra (featuring Prometheus Brown), "Come on Y'all," *Lost in Translation Mixtape*, digital download (Ruby Ibarra, 2012), http://www.discogs.com/Ruby-Ibarra-Lost-In-Translation/release/4102331. Last accessed on July 31, 2015.

World, he reveals how the "politics of place" are shaped by military violence and capital flows.[107] He reminds us that "[t]hese global realities and the new landscapes of power that have emerged as a result of the global economy are deeply intertwined with hip-hop's own history."[108] The intimacy of the military and racialized urban space is documented in early hip hop lore. In the 1982 hip hop film *Wild Style*, the young Puerto Rican graffiti artist Raymond crawls through his Bronx projects bedroom window to find his brother Hector dressed in an army uniform, pointing a gun at Raymond. Hector, thinking his brother is an intruder, tells Raymond, "Stop fucking around and be a man; there's nothing out here for you!" Hector, embodying the respectable American citizen who escaped the ghetto, is disgusted at the do-rag on Raymond's head and the graffiti culture absorbing Raymond's life. Raymond responds to Hector's pessimism, gesturing to the graffiti art in his room, "Yes there is: this!" Adilifu Nama posits that this scene, whose audio sample introduces Nas's *Illmatic*, represents young black and brown youth's commitment to transform rather than flee their social space.[109] For Nas to begin his album with this scene indicates the intersections of urban blight, the militarization of poor people of color, class and gender aspirations linked to the military, and practitioners' commitments to hip hop performance despite the constraints of their environment.

The violence of geography informs the multiple and global presences of U.S. imperialism, which in this case begins with the occupation of the Philippines by the U.S. Army beginning in 1898 and the subsequent installment of military bases throughout the twentieth century (and the current re-installment of bases). Just as hip hop history references the "new landscapes of power" as evidenced in the urban blight of New York, the phenomenon of Filipino

[107] Sohail Daulatzai, *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's Illmatic* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009), 42.
[108] Ibid, 44.
[109] Adilifu Nama, "It Was Signified: 'The Genesis,'" in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's* Illmatic, ed. Sohail Daulatzai (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009).

American hip hop performance references the violence of geography by alluding to U.S. genocide during the Philippine-American War, military occupation and base installations, Filipino militarized migration, and the clustering of diasporic Filipinos in U.S. bases. Although the U.S. ghetto, Third World slum, and U.S. military base have differing historical origins and structural arrangements, imagining a violence of geography helps us critically-grasp the spread of U.S. hegemony, material inequalities, and cultural possibilities that result in the subjugated statuses of inhabitants in these geographies.

Reflecting their integral roles in further advancing imperial frontiers, military bases confuse and confound the boundaries of the U.S. nation-state. Because of their instrumentation in global conquest, "domestic" military towns within the fifty states function as annexes to U.S. militarized zones overseas. This unorthodox geographical confluence of "foreign" and "domestic" zones upsets popular understandings of the spatial composition of the U.S.A. Instead of a map that imagines a solid, coherent continental U.S.A. with visually-forced inclusions of Alaska and Hawai`i, a more complete map of the U.S. Empire should consider its scattered, overseas territories in the Pacific and Caribbean and bases worldwide. Even more, in the obverse, I contend that a world map that considers U.S. overseas installations in places like the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, Okinawa, South Korea, Germany, and Italy should be shaded the same color as military towns in Bremerton, San Diego, Honolulu, Jacksonville, Pensacola, and Virginia Beach, thus illustrating a globally scattered and amorphous (not continental) empire with citizens abroad and members of the colonized diaspora (i.e. Filipinos, Chamorros, and Puerto Ricans) living "at home."[110]

[110] Jeremy Black, *Maps and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Dennis Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010).

Imagining U.S. domestic militarized zones as coterminous with a global U.S. imperial apparatus expands the frontier of the U.S. "homeland," forming an omnipresent geography that serves as a reminder to the structural conditions of militarization that have shaped the possibilities of Filipino migration. Shigematsu and Camacho write of America with this type of immense reach: "[T]o circumscribe our understanding of 'America' to the continental United States—as previous paradigms have tended to emphasize—is myopic in terms of the reach of American empire." Further, the editors cite the structural dispossessions inflicted on militarized populations in Asia and the Pacific, in which U.S. militarization shapes "the historical displacements and migrations of the populations we now refer to as Asian American and Pacific Islander."[111]

Within these militarized spaces, as mentioned earlier, Filipino Americans have been remaking their military town into a landscape productive for their hip hop cultural expressions by taking advantage of Department of Defense-funded resources such as community centers, gyms, and recreation halls. Rather than a space of abject urban blight, military towns offer MWR spaces and access to health care to communities defined by state-operated violence. Given these resources, young Filipino Americans create rich cultural spaces—they create home—within a violence of geography.

Along with resources, these geographies allowed for community building among otherwise disparate racial and regional groups. For Geo, migrating along currents of these geographies meant the possibility of interacting with similarly displaced and racialized people from a military class. He believes Filipino Americans from military communities were the "first wave of people [Filipino Americans] to break out of our bubbles" and become cultural vanguards, especially in hip hop:

[111] Shigematsu and Camacho (2010), xxv-xxvi.

> In that the interaction, you're kind of forced to have [that interaction] not only with other Filipinos who are in the same situation, but with people from other backgrounds. You were in contact with people—other Americans, you know Black Americans, White Americans from all over the country. Even in Hawai`i out of all places. I'd meet someone from the South whose family grew up in New York. Then they were gone like two years later. So, there was always this movement of people from other backgrounds as well as from Filipinos from these other areas.[112]

As Geo suggests, constant movement influenced the ways militarized Filipino Americans experienced hip hop in their communities. In an example illustrating navy migratory culture on the opposite coast, DJ Kuya D, a veteran Filipino American DJ from Queens, New York and Virginia, Beach, Virginia, explains the eclectic qualities of hip hop among Filipino Americans in Virginia Beach, a navy community host to a large Filipino American population: "From what I saw and heard is the navy or the military. It's a broad mix of where people come from here. You know navy babies who travel a lot from the West Coast, back and forth, here and there."[113] Martin Briones, an emcee and music producer from Virginia Beach, also comments on the mix of styles that came through his city: "So growing up here, there was always people coming and going. We always had people from New York coming down, moving here, going to school with me. But then we also had people from California or from the South that would also come here. So it was a wide variety of influences."[114] Similarly, Leo Esclamado, a hip hop dancer from the navy town of Jacksonville, Florida, recounts the untethered and multiregional Filipino American party scene in his hometown:

> The Fil-Am party scene was a mecca of different regional influences. While Jacksonville was in North Florida, Fil-Ams were right in the center of the Miami

[112] Geo in "Translocal Cultural Flows" panel at the Empire of Funk Conference, May 23, 2014 at the University of California, Irvine.
[113] DJ Kuya D, DJ Delinger, Martin Briones, and DJ Kuttin Kandi, "A Certain Style: A Conversation on Virginia Beach," in *Empire of Funk: Hip Hop and Representation in Filipina/o America*, ed. Mark R. Villegas, Kuttin' Kandi, Roderick N. Labrador (San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2014), 100.
[114] Ibid, 101.

> Bass/Reggae scene from Orlando and Miami with its Caribbean influences. There were military families who migrated to Jacksonville from the West Coast who were "housin'" and breakin' in California…[115]

Given the constant movement of Filipino Americans in militarized currents, Filipino Americans not only "broke out of their bubbles," as Geo claims above, but different "bubbles"—regional cultures—shaped and formed the cultural dynamics of young Filipino Americans. This experience, perhaps, lends credence to the notion of militarized Filipino American hip hop performers functioning as cultural vanguards in their craft.

Bambu also illuminates the links between the military and the formations of Filipino American culture. Although he did not grow up on a military base, his biography illustrates how the violence of geography pervades beyond the base. For example, in "Moms" (2012), Bambu recounts his parents' migration from the Philippines to Bremerton, Washington and Los Angeles, California. Although a song about his mother and women in general, "Moms" opens with a description of his father, a navy man stationed in Bremerton, Washington. Bambu's mother, who remained in the Philippines after they wed, "straight dipped" to "Bremerton" upon finding out that navy "spouses fly free."

> Since she was a child she felt she did not belong
> She would pray to Jesus who she didn't believe was blonde
> She heard of America and saw it as her goal
> Met a dude named Danilo who would sing her sappy songs
> Write her sappy poems from a bodie called his home
> In the navy he was stationed all the way across the globe
> So, she said, "fuck it," took a trip,
> She was tipped, spouses fly free
> Yolanda straight dipped.
> Across the sound out in Bremerton alone
> Hit up the USO and called my Daddy on the phone
> My Daddy didn't know the quarter deck said, "Hey, yo.
> Your wife is at the airport over at the USO."

[115] Leo Esclamado, "Y'all Want This Party Started Right? Fil-Ams Getting Down in Jacksonville, Florida," Villegas, Kandi, and Labrador (2014): 95.

My Pop ain't have a car back then so he had to borrow
A friend's ride to pick up his wife
(So began the struggles)
Father hella broke, so Mama's many hopes
Of America went not the way the missionaries told her.

In an itinerant, migratory fashion, the song changes tempo, moods, and cadence in three distinct sequences that transition from funky-jazz, to slow-jam soul, and to Bay Area hip hop-hectic. The song gives an unflinching exposé of his family's hard times in Los Angeles, which included poverty, alcohol and drug use, and the murder of his cousin, lamenting the violent geography in which he was raised. Bambu hard upbringing led him to a life of crime and gang activity, resulting in him following his father's footsteps in joining the military. After six months of serving jail time for armed robbery, U.S. Marine recruiters literally waited for Bambu at his trial in order to enlist him.[116] Bambu delivers a savvy understanding in the shared role of violence in both gang and military life. In "Upset the Set Up," a frantic-sounding song featuring politically-driven, Atlanta-based African American rapper Killer Mike, Bambu recounts his transition from gang life to military service:

I went from a street gang thang
Then I joined the military fleet marine force thang
From a little bitty gang in the south of Los Angeles
To dragging bodies outta they house to help a government
Who hell bent on keeping money spent on a missile
The reality's the difference between em shits is little
We had the objective of arming up over money
And they had the objective of arming up over money
And we told kids join us we the truth
Lies of about protectin our block to get recruits[117]

[116] Victor Hugo Viesca, "Native Guns and Stray Bullets: Cultural Activism and Filipino American Rap Music in Post-Riot Los Angeles," *Amerasia Journal*, 38.1 (2012), 133; Nathan, "Q&A: Bambu, the Filipino Mos Def," *DadWagon*, February 17, 2010, http://www.dadwagon.com/2010/02/17/qa-bambu-the-filipino-mos-def/. Last accessed on September 1, 2013; Dani Burlison, "From Gangs to Glory: Bambu's Political Hip-Hop for the People," *KQED Arts*, March 9, 2015, http://ww2.kqed.org/arts/2015/03/09/from-gangs-to-glory-bambus-political-hip-hop-for-the-people/. Last accessed on July 27, 2015.
[117] Bambu (featuring Killer Mike), "Upset the Set Up," *...one rifle per family*, CD (Beatrock Music, 2012).

Gang/military recruits are called to defend their homeland, and more specifically their hood: "Then we find out we gettin killed for a hood/ And we don't own a single speck of dirt on that hood." As a postcolonial, migratory population, Filipinos and their relationship to a "hood" (or home) in "Upset the Set Up" is left ambiguous (is their home in the Philippines, the United States, Long Beach, Bremerton?). The theme of alienation in one's own hood—the violent geography which structures their life and death chances—reverberates with geographic determination in the formation of Filipino American culture. Bambu, then, articulates knowledge of geographic displacement for Filipinos in the diaspora, where locations of home and hood are forged by various moments of U.S. military violence.

As a young soldier engaging in tours overseas, Bambu became aware of global racial politics. In an interview, he describes a revelatory experience identifying with the inhabitants of East Timor:

> What it did was politicize me, especially when we went to East Timor, which is off the coast of Indonesia. There was a big conflict there and we went to support the Australians and these people [the Timorese] looked just like me. When I was a civilian without uniform, I remembered they'd double check my ID when I come back on base.[118]

Here, Bambu may not define East Timor as "home" where people are "the same shade that I be" as Geo feels in Hawai`i or the Bay, but Bambu's identification with people whose country is a landing ground for U.S. Marines' boots illustrates how the U.S. military's global reach becomes a reminder of racialized people's experiences of otherness in the U.S. In both cases, for Geo and Bambu, their shared "shade" demonstrates the commanding presence of the military in Filipino American lives and its awesome capacity to establish a global social order.

[118] Viesca (2012), 133.

As Shigematsu and Camacho note, "U.S. war waging has become an integral, if not naturalized, part of the grammar of these (im)migration narratives."[119] Geo and Bambu critique militarization's impact on displaced and vulnerable people. Their itinerant biographies as members of a militarized Filipino diaspora signify how currents of militarization situate their positionalities as imperial migrants displaced in their block, hood, or home.

"Back Home" in Empire

Off their album *Bayani* (2007), which translates in Filipino to "hero," "Back Home" contributes to the Bush-era anti-war, pro-people musical canon for which the Blue Scholars are known.[120] The Blue Scholars remind listeners in the predominantly white city that conditions are not equal in Seattle and people of color are seldom the beneficiaries of the region's technology boom or supposed cultural liberalism. "Back Home" provides an example of the duo's attempt to show the Emerald City's lesser-known underbelly by highlighting Seattle's racialized and militarized communities who live in spaces of local and global violence.

"Back Home" begins with a slow and steady kick-snare-clap. The song is laced with the croon of a woman's voice, almost weeping, responding to haunting punctuations of piano notes. The crawl of a piano chord interrupts a brief pause in the beat as Geo raps, "And it begins where we left. A brother chased after by death until he catches his breath." These words capture the song's elegiac, anguished sentiments that weave together the business of the U.S. military with the inevitable deaths of beloved family members. The music video for "Back Home," perhaps the group's most celebrated anti-war anthem, opens with Geo and the Scholars' beat-maker Sabzi standing in a green cemetery, headstones surrounding the duo like a regiment of soldiers.

[119] Shigematsu and Camacho (2010): xxvi.
[120] Blue Scholars, "Back Home," *Bayani*, CD (Blue Scholars, 2007).

The camera intercuts images of "everyday people," zooming in and out of their stoic faces as they hold up handwritten signs with words such as "Silence is Defeat," "Struggle with Love," and "Justice." Mostly people of color, they also hold portraits of their absent family members—young men and women—who have fallen as casualties of war.

Accompanying this montage of images, the video follows the steps of a young Filipina American girl who walks through a variety of public spaces including a sidewalk where a young black male is splayed across a graffiti-painted wall as he is cuffed by a police officer, a heap of rubble where a building once stood, and a school campus. The girl passes an army recruiter in the school parking lot who counsels a young man, a scene that signals the overlap of educational institutions and the militarization of youth. Harkening to Bambu's upbringing in Los Angeles, Geo acknowledges the ubiquity of recruiters in certain neighborhoods: "So next time you see recruiters in your school or your crib, tell 'em thank you for the offer but you'd rather you'd live. We got more than just our bodies to offer, so fuck a coffin." The girl acts as a witness to the conditions of her surroundings, which are interwoven with images of policing, neighborhood destruction, and a security state maintained by the recruitment of working-class youth. The camera returns to the girl's home, where at the doorstep she, her sister, and mother embrace a young father dressed in army fatigues deploying solemnly.

The video comments on the gendered positions among militarized subjects by reproducing the feminized roles of the girl as passive witness and the mother and sisters as inhabitants of the domestic sphere, or "back home." On the other hand, the young father occupies the masculinized role of the militarized yet expendable agent of the state. Geo begins his next verse: "And somewhere a soldier kissed his family goodbye. And he was walking like a warrior with water in his eyes. He left in late September, said he'll be back in July." As the

family prays at the dinner table absent the male family member, Geo continues to narrate the fate of the girl's now-broken family: "Now the child is asking, 'Mommy, why did Daddy have to die?' She says he fought for freedom but knows it's just a lie cuz her father was a veteran with benefits denied." Here, Geo references the long-standing scandal in which Filipino veterans who, as colonial subjects of America at the time, fought under the U.S. flag during World War II but were stripped of military benefits after President Truman signed the 1946 Rescission Act.[121] Many surviving Filipino veterans and younger generations of Filipino Americans continue to hold public protests in demanding a remedy and compensation for this act of injustice.[122] The music video reenacts the theme of "loss" signaled by protestors who grieve their veteran heroes' curtailed military benefits and robbed masculinity.

"Back Home" links the Filipino veterans' controversy, an earlier colonial moment of United States-Philippine relations, to current dramas in Filipino American militarization. The recruitment of young Filipino men on Philippine bases in Pampanga, Cavite, and Subic Bay preceded the practice of military recruitment in poor communities of color on the U.S. continent depicted in the music video. "Back Home," then, not only condemns U.S. militarization in contemporary contexts but also comments on the longer legacy of American militarization in the Philippines. In the chorus, Geo chants, "Bring 'em back home. For my brothers and my sisters who been gone too long, we sing, bring 'em back home. And I don't wanna keep singin' this song." The video's multiracial, seemingly immigrant cast of military families holding signs and portraits provides a mournful denouncement of the designed military pipeline for immigrants to achieve citizenship, but the Filipino American family grounds the video's critical message to the

[121] For more on the 1946 Rescission Act, see Baldoz (2011), 231-232.
[122] Mico Letargo, "Fil-Am students Veterans Day protest closes Hollywood Blvd," *Inquirer-Global Nation*, November 17, 2013, http://globalnation.inquirer.net/91381/fil-am-students-veterans-day-protest-closes-hollywood-blvd#ixzz2kverR9Qn. Last accessed on November 17, 2013.

historical particularities of U.S. militarization's presence in Filipino lives.[123] The song concludes with the woman's singing voice becoming more prominent, trilling in a blues lament, mirrored in the video by the tragic conclusion to the Filipino American family's narrative: a military vehicle arrives to the family's home not bearing the girl's father, but a grave-looking, uniformed stranger approaching stiffly and cradling a letter. Grasping her heart, the young mother, as a helpless, female victim, wails and collapses on the doorstep before the soldier can utter the news of her husband's death.

Sadly, Geo will have to "keep singin' this song." President Obama's pivot to Asia once again brings attention to military service in the Philippines, bringing back "home" American troops and sailors to America's twentieth century extension in the East. With the signing of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, the location of "home," which in the song represents a return to the American continent (perhaps Seattle) where young troops won't die in combat in Iraq or Afghanistan, can now ironically refer to a return to Geo's ancestral homeland, where, along with the Caribbean, the U.S. began its overseas imperial project. The EDCA is a reminder that for both Americans and Filipinos "home" is in U.S. empire, spanning from Manifest Destiny to the endless global war on terrorism. Geo's chants of "back home," therefore, is not only a cry to bring troops safely back to awaiting families, but it also signals a return to an imperial center that continues to commit local and global violence on vulnerable people, a violence recently made visible by the murder of Jennifer Laude by U.S. Marine Joseph Scott Pemberton in

[123] Tracy Lachica Buenavista and Jordan Beltran Gonzales, "DREAMs Deterred: Filipino Experiences and an Anti-Militarization Critique of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act," *Harvard Journal of Asian American Policy Review* (2010–2011), 21.

Olongapo City in 2014 and by the integral role of U.S. forces in the botched Oplan Exodus assault on a rebel Muslim group in Mamapasano, Mindanao in 2015.[124]

As "Back Home" visualizes, "Special Relations" occurring in America's overseas contact zones echoes among militarized people within the U.S. continent who are vulnerable to military recruitment and state violence. Geo articulates cultural currents that are never static but constantly migrating in global imperial currents. The creation, circulation, and sustaining of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular owe much to the mapping of these contact zones, which produce culture not simply by virtue of these zones' localness, but also due to their locations in a global network found in Subic Bay, Honolulu, Bremerton, and elsewhere.

Vernacularizing Motion, Movement, and Memory

> Motion, movement
> Architects, blue prints
> Showin', provin'
> Teachers, students
> Reachin' for truth in the self-revolution
> The roof is on fire, what's your solution?[125]
>
> -Blue Scholars, "Motion Movement"

In "Motion Movement," a song from the Blue Scholars first album *Blue Scholars* (2003), Geo alludes to both the motion and movement of hip hop performers and that of militarized Filipino American bodies.[126] The geography, politics, and poetics in a Filipino American hip hop vernacular reveal the various ways Filipino American culture is flows from U.S. empire.

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[124] Floyd Whaley, "Murder Charge Is Recommended for U.S. Marine in Death of Transgender Filipino," *The New York Times*, December 15, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/16/world/asia/murder-charge-is-recommended-for-us-marine-in-death-of-transgender-filipino.html. Last accessed on July, 14, 2015; Trefor Moss, "U.S. Role in Botched Philippines Raid Comes Under Scrutiny," *The Wall Street Journal*, http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-role-in-botched-philippines-raid-comes-under-scrutiny-1427435700. Last accessed on July 14, 2015.
[125] Blue Scholars, "Motion Movement," *Blue Scholars*, CD (Blue Scholars, 2003).
[126] Author's interview with Geologic, Irvine, California, May 23, 2014.

Out of the shadows of neocolonial "Special Relations," younger generations of Filipino Americans embody and express hip hop cultural discourses that contain the capacity to scrutinize imperialism. To use Geo's lyrics, while the "roof is on fire" during the U.S.'s ongoing imperial conquests made salient by Obama's pivot to Asia, Filipino American hip hop performers are "showin' and provin'" critical memory of the violence reverberating from McKinley and Roosevelt's original pivot. As the U.S. continues to arm its imperial contact zones for its goal of continued global military supremacy, these performers are in turn arming their fans with tools of cultural resistance where motion and movement can mean a call to political action: "Reachin' for truth in the self-revolution." Underpinning political critiques in "Proletariat Blues," "Back Home," and "Motion Movement" is the imprint of U.S. empire, which shapes the class positioning, geographies, and cultural politics emanating from Filipino American culture.

CHAPTER 2

"Civilize the Savage"[127]: Towards Islam, Filipino Origin, and the Golden Age

Prologue: Sovereign Clash

On January 25, 2015, Philippine police commandos and six "American nationals" conducted a botched raid dubbed "Oplan Exodus" in Mamasapano, a municipality in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao of the Philippines. The operation ended with the killings of at least forty-four commandos, four civilians, and eighteen rebels, including Zulkifli bin Hir, a bomb maker wanted on a $5 million U.S. bounty. The Mamasapano incident and a subsequent series of bloody encounters have displaced over 80,000 people and jeopardized a landmark 2014 cease-fire between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Philippine government seeking to end fifty years of regional hostility. According to bilateral defense treaties, U.S. military forces in the Philippines cannot engage in combat, except in self-defense. The U.S. Embassy denied that U.S. forces participated in the operation except in helping to retrieve the dead. This denial contradicted reports of U.S. forces' "substantial" involvement, which included the full-funding and training of the operation, sightings of U.S. drones in the area prior to and during the clash, the presence of a U.S. army helicopter after the incident, and the relinquishing of Zulkifli bin Hir's dismembered index finger to the F.B.I.[128]

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[127] Grand Puba, "360° (What Goes Around)," *Reel to Reel*, CD (Elektra, 1992).

[128] Walden Bello, "The U.S. Military Just Plunged Philippine Politics into Crisis," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, March 17, 2015, http://fpif.org/the-u-s-military-just-plunged-philippine-politics-into-crisis. Last accessed on July 21, 2015; Adam Hudson, "US Wages 'War on Terror' in the Philippines," *Truthout*, April 9, 2015, http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/30061-us-wages-war-on-terror-in-the-philippines. Last accessed on July 21, 2015; Marlon Ramos, "Police BOI report confirms US role in 'Oplan Exodus,'" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 13, 2015, http://globalnation.inquirer.net/119512/police-boi-report-confirms-us-role-in-oplan-exodus/#ixzz3VQXsDhgS. Last accessed on July 21, 2015; The Associated Press, "Philippine Military Says 23 Muslim Rebels Killed in Clashes," *New York Times*, March 11, 2015, http://nyti.ms/1FKzz4A. Last accessed on July 21, 2015; Craig Whitlock, "Manila: U.S. had key role in deadly counterterrorism raid in Philippines," *The Washington Post*, March 17, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-had-role-in-deadly-counterterrorism-raid-in-

The Mamasapano clash offers a grisly revelation of the U.S. military's re-garrisoning of the islands. Despite the removal of U.S. bases in the Philippines in 1992, the U.S. has steadily increased and sustained its military presence in its former colony.[129] The 1998 Visiting Forces Agreement, the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, and U.S. command in counter-terrorism missions in Muslim Mindanao indicate an invited curbing of Philippine sovereignty and the Republic's acquiescence to foreign occupation. The Mamasapano clash, then, represents the unresolved nature of sovereignty in the archipelago and the intricate and often violent negotiation of territory among competing power brokers. The Catholic-majority Republic of the Philippines, historically marginalized Moros in the country, and the militarized U.S. state have laid out the stakes of national self-determination in the region. These series of events, therefore, have put into relief the contested terms of national space in the Philippines. Much more, the historical and continuing presence of Muslims seems to channel several centuries of Philippine cultural unease, with colonial orchestration (Spanish and American) perpetually arranging who is and who is not welcomed in Philippine society.

With media attention channeled towards U.S. affairs in the Near and Middle East, the general public remains willfully ignorant of the bloody encounters perpetrated by U.S. forces in the Philippines. Through their spiritual, political, and artistic expressions, Filipino American hip hop artists, however, have been steadfast in narrating the intricate and unresolved status of Muslims in the Philippines—from the era of Spanish conquest to Muslims' current struggles for autonomy. These artists offer a reminder to their fans and observers of the lasting aftermath of

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philippines/2015/03/17/6ab42816-ccd6-11e4-8a46-b1dc9be5a8ff_story.html. Last accessed on July 21, 2015; Floyd Whaley, "Refugee Crisis in Philippines as Peace Deal Is at Risk," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2015, http://nyti.ms/1C1iRPo. Last accessed on July 21, 2015; Arlyn de la Cruz, "US drone watched Mamasapano debacle," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 8th, 2015, http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/671237/us-drone-watched-mamasapano-debacle. Last accessed on July 21, 2015.

[129] Staff and agencies in Manila, "Philippines reopens Subic Bay as military base to cover South China Sea," *The Guardian*, July 15, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/16/philippines-reopens-subic-bay-as-military-base-to-cover-south-china-sea. Last accessed on July 21, 2015.

Spanish and American colonial conquest—that the past is never really past, that American presence in the Philippines today rehearses a centuries'-long colonial strife.

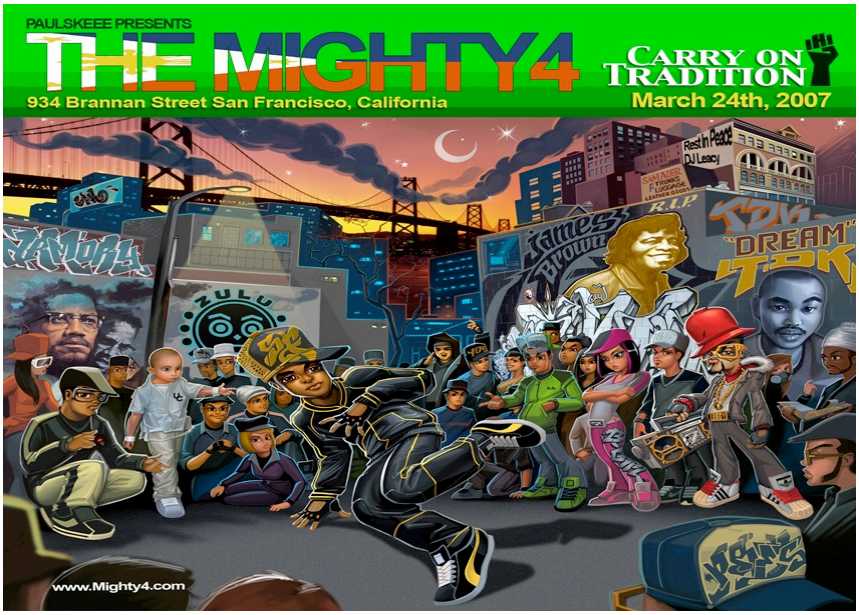

Figure 2.0. Mighty 4 flyer from 2007. Image from *Master Culture* blog.[130]

Filipino Emergent

If we ain't met yet
Let me introduce myself
They call me Kane
Father, husband, Muslim
What's in a name?[131]
-Odessa Kane, "The Pen and the Gun"

…the Philippines was indelibly marked by the DNA of colonialism… The country's very name encapsulates its colonial history. The Anglicized 'Philippines' or the Spanish 'Filipinas' is forever a reminder that this Southeast Asian archipelago was

[130] Paulskee, "MIGHTY4 15TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY: A R-EVOLUTION OF FLYER DESIGNS," *Master Culture*, September 30, 2013, www.themasterculture.com/?p=1869. Last accessed on July 21, 2015.
[131] Odessa Kane, "The Pen and the Gun," *Cuetes & Balisongs EP*, CD (Odessa Kane, 2012).

> so named in 1543 by Ruy López de Villalobos in honor of the sixteenth century Spanish crown prince who would in 1556 become King Filipe II.[132]
>
> -Luis Francia

In the 2007 flyer for The Mighty 4 hip hop competition held in San Francisco, California, a portrait of the late Filipino American graffiti artist Mike "Dream" Francisco is drawn next to the portrait of the late "Godfather of Soul" James Brown. The opposite end of the flyer shows Malcolm X. Malcolm's face is featured twice, looking up to the sky and peering down at the b-boy cipher happening in the center, where a circle of hip hop fans and dancers surround a single dancer. The flyer's artist, Pres One, a Filipino American from San Diego, inserts the emblem of the Universal Zulu Nation, a pioneering hip hop cultural organization started in the South Bronx, New York in 1973. Above the cipher, and above an image of the Golden Gate Bridge, Pres One depicts a crescent moon, a symbol of Islam. The Philippine flag is embedded in The Mighty 4 logo, which is positioned next to the words "carry on tradition" paired with a Black fist.[133] The Mighty 4 is an event started in 1998 by Paulskee, a Filipino American bboy from Union City, California. The array of signs featured in Pres One's 2007 flyer assembles a hip hop cultural imaginary invoked at events like those organized by Paulskee.

This chapter outlines hip hop culture's key role in facilitating Filipino Americans' encounter with Islam and Muslims. Pres One's flyer illustrates how a Filipino American hip hop vernacular is shaped by a hip hop imaginary and spiritual areas of racial belonging that give new meanings to Filipino bodies and history. In particular, Islam in a Filipino American hip hop vernacular equips performers with a set of politics and embodiments responding to centuries of

[132] Luis Francia, *A History of the Philippines: From Indios Bravos to Filipinos* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2013), 10.
[133] For more on Mighty 4 flyer artwork, see Paulskeee's blog, where he reflects on his flyer designs: Paulskee (2013).

colonial degradation in the archipelago, offering Filipino Americans more empowering and fulfilling modes of diasporic belonging. As postcolonial subjects with historically subordinate positionalities relative to Spain and the United States, Filipino Americans' longing for a different reality suggests an anticolonial reply to unacceptable subjugation. When Odessa Kane asks, "What's in a name?" the Muslim Filipino American/Chicano winner of the 2013 San Diego Music Award's best hip hop album references the significance of naming/re-naming in anticolonial practices.[134] Evidently, hip hop offers generous opportunities for fun and community-building while simultaneously inspiring anticolonialism. Hip hop's cultural lexicons and political embodiments, therefore, empower Filipino Americans to re-evaluate their very names and the very name "Filipino."

Ironically, however, Muslims in the Philippines historically represent the limits of a unified Philippine national identity. In fact, the storied mistreatment of Muslims in the Philippines suggests the failure of the modern Philippine nation-state, which under earlier Spanish and U.S. governance operated on the principle of pushing out or eliminating undesirable subjects.[135] At the tail end of Spanish colonial rule, the Catholic Tagalog-speaking elite, including Jose Rizal, privileged Christianized "Malays" as the authentic Filipino race and regarded Muslims as uncivilized.[136] The Philippine elite's preference for a Christianized Filipino culture reflected the linear Philippine national mythology of Europeanized progress, whereby Spanish and eventually White American contact inaugurated stages of Philippine modern

[134] Quan Vu, "Real Recognize Real: Odessa Kane on the SDMAs," *Sound San Diego on NBC San Diego*, December 11, 2013, http://www.nbcsandiego.com/blogs/sounddiego/Real-Recognize-Real-Odessa-Kane-on-the-SDMAs-231374981.html. Last accessed on July 21, 2015.
[135] Aguilar, Jr., Filomeno V., "'Ilustrado' Nationalism and the Racial Science of Migration Waves", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 64.3 (2005); Salman, Michael, *The Embarrassment of Slavery: Controversies over Bondage and Nationalism in the American Colonial Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
[136] Resil B. Mojares, "Claiming Malayness: Civilizational Discourse in Colonial Philippines," in *More Hispanic Than We Admit: Insights into Philippine Cultural History*, ed. Isaac Donoso, (Quezon City, Vibal Foundation, 2008).

development. Despite predating the arrival of Europeans, for Rizal and his peers, Muslims were deemed unfit for national representation.

For Filipino Americans such as Odessa Kane and Pres One, though, Muslims come to stand in for a more redeeming way of inhabiting history and the world. I argue that Filipino American hip hop performers' encounter with Islam and Muslims illustrates a longer anticolonial reauthoring of the terms of Filipino national and racial belonging that seeks a greater sense of dignity, sovereignty, and civilization. In this way, Filipino American hip hop performances are a sequel to the unfinished process of defining the "Filipino race," a project undertaken by Rizal and his contemporaries. However, unlike the *ilustrados* (the educated and nationalistic Filipino elite) of the late-nineteenth century who reinforced a form of European racial hierarchy by actively disavowing Muslims, Filipino American hip hop participants offer a critical counter-modernity that valorizes Muslims by utilizing hip hop's empowering racial and spiritual language.

To demonstrate the ways in which Filipino Americans recuperate and reclaim these abjected members of the archipelago, I observe Filipino American hip hop artists' both externally and internally-directed politics, while also appreciating the fluid flow and mutual constitutions between these political directions. In terms of their externally-directed politics, I focus on Filipino American hip hop performers' strident Third Worldist, anticolonial identification with Islam. The nexus of anticolonialism and Islam is particularly inspired by the racial solidarity projects led by African American Muslims, the Muslim International's global anticolonial struggle, and Muslim resistance against the U.S. and Philippine state. Next, in order to examine Filipino American hip hop artists' more internal explorations of Islam—their cosmological and spiritual considerations—I investigate the various usages of the term "Golden

Age." A nostalgic Golden Age represents a more desirable time and place, such as a precolonial Muslim Philippine past as well as an era in the late 1980s and mid-1990s when Islam and Black radical politics were flourishing in hip hop. Because of its flexible and resonant utility, the Golden Age is a useful metaphor to illustrate a Filipino American hip hop vernacular's convoluted pathway to a revered Muslim community, whereby performers mainly encounter Islam not via Muslim Filipinos but through American hip hop culture, which, paradoxically, often imagines Asia as the origin of Black Islam. Unlike their Filipino counterparts in the Philippines who "revert" to Islam because of their more proximate identification with Muslims in Southeast Asia, Filipino Americans' version of Islam is routed through blackness.

In very explicit ways, articulations of Islam in a Filipino American hip hop vernacular is largely indebted to a longer tradition of African American cultural vernacular, specifically insurgent Black spirituality promoted by African American Islam and the Black Arts Movement. Through hip hop culture, Filipino Americans take up representations of blackness to de-authorize the hegemonic codes of white life. Filipino Americans and African Americans' cultural pursuit of reclaiming spiritual dignity reveals these groups' shared "special fascination with history and its recovery by those who have been expelled from the official dramas of civilization[.]"[137]

"For the Last 500 Years Been in a War": The Muslim International and Anticolonial Struggle

> Get up, round up, Brain turn that sound up
> Pick up, raise up for all my folks shot in Gaza
> Lift the block up, lift the block up
> Raise up for Gaza
> Blocka, blocka, blocka[138]

[137] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 83.
[138] Kane (2012).

-Odessa Kane, "The Pen and the Gun"

Lick a shot for my people's up in Palestine
Especially up in Mindanao, fightin for they way of life.[139]

-Rocky Rivera, "The Rundown"

Bambu's opening song "Make Change" in his 2008 album *...exact change...* features an excerpt of a speech made by Malcolm X. Malcolm as hip hop's "prophet of rage" epitomizes the album's message of consciousness manifested into action: "Once you change your philosophy, you change your thought pattern. Once you change your thought pattern, you change your attitude. Once you change your attitude, it changes your behavior pattern. And then you go on and do some action."[140] In the album, Malcolm, who appears again in the song "Spare Change," represents a militant voice on the eve of the election of President Barack Obama. In resurrecting the spirit of the slain Black Muslim visionary of the mid twentieth century, Bambu calls for a more meaningful form of social activism rooted in Black radical protest, rather than found in the triumphant, multicultural liberalism sweeping the nation as the first Black president was swept into the White House. For Bambu, Malcolm—not Barack—becomes the spokesman for genuine social change. In evoking the metaphor of a knife stabbed into Black people's back, Malcolm's voice appears again on the opening track in Bambu's 2012 album *...one rifle per family...*, released at the dawn of President Obama's first term, proposing a provocative vision of national reconciliation. He suggests that progress can be achieved when the knife is first pulled out and we begin to "heal the wound that the blow made." He continues, "And they haven't even begun to pull the knife out, much less try to heal the wound. They won't even admit the knife is there."

[139] Rocky Rivera, "The Rundown," *Rocky Rivera*, CD (Beatrock Music, 2010).
[140] Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom beyond America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 111; Bambu, "Make Change," *...exact change...* CD (Bambu/Community Kitchen Recordings, 2008).

Even after four years of a Black president, Bambu suggests, the knife is still pierced inside the bodies of Black people, and perhaps in the bodies of other aggrieved groups. As a prophet himself forecasting the minimal impact made by the promises of a candidate Obama in 2008, Bambu has been consistent in promoting a change in listeners' "philosophy." Like many other Filipino American hip hop artists, he in his own way implores his peers to change their "thought patterns" so as to "go on and do some action."

Malcolm X's rebellious lyricism illustrates that alongside the protest found in Black radicalism has come the process of spiritual transformation among African Americans, with Islam as a cornerstone of Black affirmation and empowerment. The mid-twentieth century saw African Americans' defiant upending of their subordinate status in the United States, identifying with Black people and liberation struggles around the world, and, as Malcolm demonstrated in his global travels, connecting with a Muslim Third World.[141] Sohail Daulatzai writes,

> …Malcolm's role as iconic figure was a testament to the enduring political vision that he had crafted, for Black Islam in hip-hop culture reclaimed the interpretive authority over Black destiny in the United States and imagined a different community of belonging with very different possibilities for freedom, in which Black peoples would be seen not as national minorities but as global majorities.[142]

In *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom beyond America*, Daulatzai pioneers the task of situating Muslim emcees—such as Ice Cube, Gang Starr, Rakim, and Black Star—within a political context of Reaganism, the first war in Iraq, and the War on Terrorism. Hip hop, Daulatzai shows, connected to a global network of Muslims: "With the presence of Islam and Malcolm X, hip-hop culture became a powerful way to explore how its poetry, aesthetics, and political imagination not only forged a redemptive vision of Blackness in

[141] Daulatzai (2012).
[142] Ibid, 97.

the face of the remixed racism of the post-Civil Rights era, but also a radical alchemy of art and politics that shaped and contributed to the nuances and textures of the Muslim International."[143]

Hip hop has been crucial in mediating earlier Black freedom cultural strategies into the contemporary period. Melani McAlister describes the construction of a new Black culture during the mid-twentieth century that included a search for "not only Islam but also renewed interest in the signs and symbols of pre-Islamic and traditional African religions (such as the Yoruba religion) as well as the study of ancient Egypt."[144] African Americans' exploration for a spiritual belonging precedes the cultural and political milieu of the mid-20th century, with the rise of the Moorish Science Temple in what Richard Brent Turner calls "the first mass religious movement in the history of Islam in America" in the early 1900s.[145] With distinctly African American racial language, such as the Asiatic Black man discourse, the Moorish Science Temple and its successor the Nation of Islam wove together a fabric of a resistant Black worldview that continues to shape Black cultural ideology. African Americans' counter-spirituality and cultural projects of self-affirmation that turns to an abstracted and mythic "Asia" contributes to the counterdiscursive politics of what Bill V. Mullen terms "Afro-Orientalism," which, among a number of features, is grounded in "the attempt by black Americans, from the origins of the Republic, to link with larger radical and revolutionary projects originating outside the shores of the American empire[.]"[146]

African American cultural history also exhibits the ways in which counter-modernities often present convoluted imaginaries of spiritual home. Focusing on the practice of Islam among

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[143] Ibid, 110-111.
[144] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 104.
[145] Nathaniel Deutsch, "'The Asiatic Black Man': An African American Orientalism?" *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 4.3 (2001), 196.
[146] Bill V. Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xvi.

African Americans yields a counterintuitive historiography regarding African American Muslims' indexing of a genealogical, geographical, and spiritual home. Nathaniel Deutsch shows that in a 1970 Nation of Islam (NOI) publication, the influential African American Muslim organization suggested that blacks must relocate out of "uncivilized" places: "[I]gnorance and savagery here [in America] and there in Africa must be removed and replaced with the modern civilization of Islam."[147] Instead of Africa, "Asia" became the "root" of Black racial origin according NOI teaching. Preceding the NOI, the Moorish Science Temple of America, the "first mass religious movement in the history of Islam in America," and its mysterious leader Noble Drew Ali claimed even more grandiose racial origins for modern blacks in the United States, who he believed were descendants of ancient Moroccans.[148] Felicia M. Miyakawa writes that the leader's teachings professed a more geographically-spread Black origin: "According to Noble Drew Ali, the Moorish civilization at its height (around 1500 B.C.E.) extended from the area today known as Morocco to North, South, and Central America, encompassing even the mythical Atlantis."[149]

Islam became a transformative route of belonging outside of and against White imperial Christianity. Given that they can trace their Muslim heritage to some of the earliest of their ancestors who were forcibly brought to the Americas, African Americans claim Islam as their own, as "the Black man's religion."[150] African Americans became skeptical of Christianity, especially during a time of social upheaval in which the mantra of Christian brotherhood seemed to not work against violent, state-sanctioned white political revanchism.[151] More and more,

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[147] Deutsch (2001), 203.
[148] Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African-American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 450.
[149] Felicia Miyakawa, *Five Percenter Rap: God Hop's Music, Message, and Black Muslim Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 11.
[150] Turner (2003), 446-449; Daulatzai (2012), 102.
[151] Daulatzai (2012).

Christianity was linked to Eurocentrism and global power domination and Islam became associated with a dark, anti-colonial Third World. James Baldwin once wrote, "God, going north, and rising on the wings of power, had become white, and Allah, out of power, and on the dark side of Heaven, had become—for all practical purposes, anyway—Black."[152] The externalized political demands of what became Black Power in the late 1960s after Malcolm's death functioned together with the internal conversions of an empowered Black people.

Simultaneous to African Americans' political and spiritual reclamations of the mid-twentieth century existed the artistic imperative created in the Black Arts Movement. In this movement, cultural producers explored aesthetics of blackness and at the same time attempted to find a radical break from whiteness and the West. Much more, the movement attempted to foment political action.[153]

While the smoke from the social upheaval smoldered in New York, hip hop was incubating in the ruins. Branching from the Black Arts Movement, hip hop took cues from Black Power, inaugurating a generation of post-Civil Rights sensibilities and politics. In 1973, Afrika Bambaataa formed the Universal Zulu Nation, borrowing language from the Nation of Islam and conforming it to the tastes of African American and Puerto Rican youth in the Bronx, which included gang culture, partying, and having fun. Daulatzai writes, "To many, hip-hop came to be seen as the torchbearer for the Black Arts Movement…"[154] Throughout hip hop's four decade-old history, especially during the "Golden Age" roughly between 1986 and 1994 when hip hop "emerged as an aesthetic, lyrical, and also thematic force,"[155] African Americans continued their cosmological explorations seen in the hip hop's bourgeoning cultural canvas.

[152] McAlister (2001), 95.
[153] Daultazai (2012).
[154] Ibid, 112.
[155] Ibid.

Islam would again drive the political tenor of a post-Civil Rights generation, becoming what would be called hip hop's official religion.[156]

For the most part, Islam's legibility in hip hop has been invisible yet present, with a documented sharp decline of Muslim rap parlance beginning in the late 1990s.[157] Hip hop hardly announces itself as "Muslim music," perhaps partly because of strict interpretations of Islam consider music haraam, or forbidden.[158] Another possible reason for Islam's hidden presence in hip hop is the esoteric nature of Muslim parlance as an appealing aesthetic. Islam has historically formed the cultural foundation of hip hop, but it also shapes hip hop's sensibilities through its mystique and supposed un-knowability. The "sparks" of Muslim language in hip hop music, though, has been just enough for listeners to explore the faith on their own. Hip hop musician Usama Canon says, "That little spark was enough for me to take interest, and go study it."[159] On Islam's contradictorily foundational yet somehow obscure role in hip hop, Daulatzai writes, "But if you peel back the layers (or barely scratch beneath the surface), that initial look of surprise will soon turn to awe. Because not only is Islam part of hip-hop culture, it's central to its very foundation."[160]

As active participants in a Black cultural tradition inherited from Black struggle decades before, Filipino Americans in hip hop have also become participants in a political project of anticolonial solidarity. Filipino Americans' identification with the radical politics of the Muslim Internationalism, such as Bambu's invoking of Malcolm X, points to the particularities of a Filipino American postcolonial quest for cultural and historical redemption. These politics are

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[156] Soahil Daulatzai, *Return of the Mecca: The Art of Islam and Hip-Hop* (Razor Step Media LLC, 2014), 6.
[157] Adam K. Raymond, "Why Did Islam Disappear From Hip-Hop?" *Vocativ*, October 27, 2014, http://www.vocativ.com/culture/religion/islam-hip-hop/?page=all. Last accessed on July 21, 2015.
[158] Mustafa Davis (dir.), *Deen Tight*, online documentary film (Tabah Foundation, 2011), https://vimeo.com/27049587. Last accessed on July 21, 2015; Sohail Daulatzai (2014).
[159] Davis (2011).
[160] Daulatzai (2014), 6.

articulated in the larger cultural circulations of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular. Filipino American poet, educator, and political activist Freedom Self-Born Allah Siyam credits the influence on his cultural and political consciousness of the album *Blowout Comb* (1994) by the hip hop group Digable Planets, which is thoroughly inflected with rhetoric from the Black Muslim group the Five Percent Nation of Gods and Earths:

> For me, the timing of Digable Planets' 1994 release of the *Blowout Comb* album was impeccable. There is no other album that was comparable to the impact of *Blowout Comb* on my decolonization process. These thirteen tracks would be the soundscape that would accentuate my own journey from an *eighty-fiver* to one with knowledge of self through the lessons of the Five Percent and later anchoring my worldview in dialectical and historical materialism, the philosophical cornerstone of Marxism.[161]

Similarly, in the song "Olmec Mask," whose title references the African-like faces of ancient Mesoamerican sculptures, Odessa Kane seamlessly weaves his Muslim Internationalism together with revolutionary Marxism:[162]

> I've sensed evil since preschool…
> You got me fucked up
> I don't play that, fool.
> Plus I'm Muslim
> I chill with them Arabs, too.
> I'm on some worldwide
> You sniffin pearl white
> What you ain't learn right?
> Went the wrong way at the turnpike.
> I turn spite into love
> I turn right to show up
> To turn the club into a revolutionaries' gatherin.[163]

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[161] Freedom Allah Siyam, "Knowledge of Self: From Islam through Hip-Hop to Freedom," in *Empire of Funk: Hip Hop and Representation in Filipina/o America*, ed. Mark R. Villegas, Kuttin' Kandi, Roderick N. Labrador (San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2014), 48.
[162] Ivan Van Sertima, *They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America* (New York: Random House, 2003).
[163] Odessa Kane, "Olmec Mask (the intro)," online streaming, http://odessakane.bandcamp.com/track/olmec-mask-the-intro. Last accessed on July 21, 2015.

At the same time that they seek belonging outside the boundaries of the modern nation-state via Malcolm X's internationalism, Filipino American hip hop performers like Siyam and Kane articulate an aspiration for a Marxist-oriented revolutionary Philippine nation-state, thus upholding the primacy and urgency of a Philippine national project. In this aspiration, their expressions expand Filipinoness to include otherwise disavowed Muslims in the Philippines, thus collapsing (and perhaps confusing) Muslim Third Worldism, Muslim regionalism, and Philippine nationalism in syncretic radicalisms that would otherwise compete. For these artists, Muslims in the Philippines symbolize radical people who contribute to "a reconfiguration of the 'Filipino' category as part of struggles for national liberation in the Philippines."[164]

Siyam and Kane's introspective, spiritual examination and outward, radical manifestation of their Filipinoness finds a peculiar precedence in the anticolonialism of elite Filipino *ilustrados* of the late 1800s. Where Siyam and Kane's processes of anticolonial self-making are spiritually and politically reinvigorated by Islam, the *ilustrados*' practice of corralling and inventing Filipino racial—and national—belonging was premised on religious exclusion. As mentioned earlier, since the inception of the Philippines as a Spanish colony, Muslims in the Philippines have represented an archetypal other; *ilustrados* took cue and reproduced this "othering" in their nation-building project. Like their Spanish and *ilustrado* forebears, early U.S. Army administrators treated Muslims as savage and uncivilized. However, unlike their forebears, after a series of violent and genocidal project of "pacification" in the Moro Province, the U.S. adopted a policy of forced inclusion of Muslim territory into their colonial statecraft. Where Spain granted Muslim Mindanao generous autonomy throughout the Spanish colonial period and where *ilustrados* espoused an ideology of racial science that pushed Muslims and other non-Christian

[164] Roderick N. Labrador, "'The Rock, Rock On': Musical Autobiography as National Counter-Story, *Popular Music and Society*, 38:2 (2015), 256.

"wild tribes" outside of an aspirational Filipino modernity, U.S. colonizers regarded these groups as "special wards" of the state.[165] Deprived of a voice in Philippine national representation—whether through Spanish governance, *ilustrado* nationalism, or under U.S. Army rule—Muslims' "otherness" was attributed to their "uncivilized" nature.[166]

However, in the later phases of U.S. colonization, rather than overtly treating Muslims as subordinate wards, U.S. administrators and Filipino politicians attempted to somewhat integrate Muslims and even "Filipinize" them into the Philippine colonial body politic by offering token representation in the National Assembly.[167] By 1930, after a process of "civilian-izing" members of the Moro Province, the defiant region formally became a part of the Philippine Commonwealth.[168] Muslim political affiliation, particularly in regard to the Muslim political elite, would continue to sway between cooperating with Manila-based Filipinos and the Americans during the U.S. colonial period. On top of post-WWII government policies that promoted Catholic Filipino settlement in Mindanao, the 1967 Jabidah Massacre, in which the Philippine Army executed Muslim recruits, sparked the rise of existing militant Moro groups who are demanding separatism and more autonomy. Soon after, Muslim ethnic groups would consolidate under the identity of "Bangsa Moro," or Muslim nation.[169] At the same time, though, for the past few decades, continuing this strategy of cooperation, which secured the

[165] Aguilar (2005), 631; Salman (2001), 144.
[166] Salman (2001), 151-152.
[167] Patricio N. Abinales, *Making Mindanao: Cotabato and Davao in the Formation of the Philippine Nation-State* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), 30-40.
[168] Patricio N. Abinales, "An American Colonial State: Authority and Structure in Southern Mindanao," in *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999*, ed. Angel Velasco Shaw and Luis H. Francia (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 90.
[169] Birte Brecht-Drouart, "Muslim Women Leaders in the Philippines," in *Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia*, ed. Susanne Schröter (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2013), 208-209.

Muslim elites' social position, Muslim leaders in Mindanao are contented to receive millions in U.S. aid.[170]

Despite Muslim's fluid political affiliations, for radical Philippine-based nationalists during the 1970s, Muslim rebellion against foreign intervention "epitomized nationalism."[171] For these radicals, a recuperation of the Philippine nation via Muslims' anticolonial refusal mythologizes an anticolonial Philippine nationalist identity. If civilization for *ilustrados* and U.S. colonial administrators denoted the capacity for representation in modern national-building, then these Filipino nationalists' extolling of Muslims' overhauls the paired logics of civilization and modernity. The Philippine nation and the Filipino subject, then, are reiterated but resignified to fit nationalists' needs regardless of actual cases of Muslims' collaboration with U.S. administrators or Muslims' resistance to the Philippine state.[172] In Vicente Rafael's words, the Muslim-turned-Filipino "simultaneously acknowledge[s] and erase[s] the historicity of the term. [This] and other anachronistic usages of Filipino indicate the term's ironic origins, even as that irony is set aside."[173]

Filipino American hip hop artists, particularly those formally associated with Philippine left organizations, revitalize the Muslim-turned-Filipino discourse of their 1970s counterparts. The primal Philippine other becomes the model for an alternative national subjectivity, one that, to reissue James Baldwin's words, symbolizes a non-European other who arrives "out of power" to offer an alternative future. For some artists, Muslims in the Southern Philippines embody a heroic, masculine, and martial nationalism, even if Philippine society represents a complex and

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[170] Frederick L. Wernstedt and Paul D. Simkins, "Migrations and the Settlement of Mindanao," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 25.1 (1965), 83-103; Gil C. Cabacungan Jr., "WikiLeaks: US backed MILF: Washington favored MOA-AD, cables show," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 8, 2011, http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/54889/wikileaks-us-backed-milf. Last accessed on July 2, 2015.
[171] Abinales (2000), 46.
[172] Ibid, 45-68.
[173] Vicente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 8.

pluralized battleground of national, linguistic, religious, and regional memberships, with Muslims inhabiting a complex and fluctuating position between autonomy and state cooperation. Rather than identifying with a Filipino national project, Muslims in the Philippines have historically situated themselves with a Southeast Asian maritime network preceding Spanish arrival —a more localized and ancient *Muslim International*—constituted by a series of sultanates and datus governing regional trade.[174] The cultural legacy of this Southeast Asian worldview, with kinships exceeding and preceding the nation-state, continues to hold importance for Muslims in the region.[175] So, in a sense, when Filipina American emcee Rocky "licks a shot" for her people in Muslim Mindanao "fighting for they way of life" she is accurate: they just may be fighting for a *non*-Filipino way of life, quite frankly.

To be fair, some Filipino American hip hop artists may actually be in political alignment with Muslim autonomy or separatism in Mindanao, thus belying the Marxist-oriented, mass solidarity doctrine of the Philippine left. The vagueness or untroubled syncretism of their positions gives these artists poetic leeway in navigating and articulating the complex political landscape of the Philippines. Whatever the case—whether artists' expressions advocate for Muslim autonomy or Muslim-Filipino solidarity—the aggrieved but aggressive Muslim Filipino symbolizes a much-lauded anticolonial figure. The popular mythology of Lapu Lapu, who killed Magellan and is considered the "first Filipino national hero," perhaps best exemplifies the masculine and martial Muslim who rejects European religion and occupation. Rocky Rivera takes on a gangster, headhunting persona in her song "Married to the Hustle," recalling the

[174] Abinales (2000).
[175] Kamal Sadiq, *Paper Citizens: How Illegal Immigrants Acquire Citizenship in Developing Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

image of Lapu Lapu as nationalist-warrior: "We invented guerilla. A conquistador killa. Ask that [bleeped expletive] Magellan. Got his head in my village."[176]

Thanks in part to the discursive considerations of Moro anticolonialism, nowhere else in Filipino American culture is "Filipino" given deliberate and critical exploration than among hip hop artists. These artists critically evaluate the meaning of "Filipino"—in all of its contradictions—and contribute to its epistemology. "Filipino," in essence, stands as a categorical fiction used for various purposes, as demonstrated by Rizal's Malay Filipino universality or by Filipino nationalists in the 1970s. The unresolved contradictions and constant rewriting of "Filipino" opens rich opportunities for Filipino Americans to participate in their own self-authoring. As Filemino Aguilar states, "the 'Filipino race' is an ambiguous, unstable, and even empty signifier."[177] In an effort to emphasize the modern construction of "Filipino" as attached to the emergence of Philippine nationhood, Rafael reminds us, "Las islas Filipinas…existed for more than three centuries before there were any Filipinos."[178] He further elaborates, "A clear and undisputed fit between the Philippines and Filipinos is far from complete, and in fact, may never be realized."[179]

Interpellating bodies in the Philippines has always been anchored to the anticolonial meaning-making of national subjects. The practice of naming and renaming, then, is a significant and meaningful act for Filipino American hip hop performers who seek a postcolonial subjectivity, with Islam helping to generate the possibilities for an alternative cultural and political universe. As Freedom Self-Born Allah Siyam, who officially changed his name, astutely illustrates:

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[176] Rocky Rivera (formrerly EyeASage), "Married to the Hustle," *Married to the Hustle Mixtape* (EyeASage and Mama Clothing, 2008).
[177] Aguilar (2005), 630.
[178] Rafael (2000), 7.
[179] Ibid.

> I was given the name Arthur Gatcho Cupp at my physical birth. I took the name Freedom Self-Born Allah Siyam to represent my liberation or at the very least a lengthy process of unchaining the brain.
>
> *Freedom* because I had learned that no one is free while others are oppressed, and through my discipline as an educator I intended on mastering the science of pedagogy to free the dumb, deaf, and blind. *Self-Born Allah* to indicate what year I got Knowledge of Self and the year I discovered that Allah was closer to me than my jugular vein, as stated in the Quran's Surah 50:16, and Psalms 82:6, and John 10:34. And *Siyam*, for Siyam is a Tagalog and Ilocano word for the number nine, and traces its origins to the Arabic word referring the third pillar of Islam, the practice of abstaining from iniquities, particularly during the ninth month of the lunar calendar, the holy month of Ramadan.[180]

Embedded in his new name, Siyam elucidates a linkage of Filipino languages and Arabic, a linkage that signifies his "looking back" as he refashions his spiritual future. In his interview with Yasiin Bey, more famously known by his former stage name Mos Def, Daulatzai rightly recognizes the relationship between Muslim spiritual conversion and the act of renaming:

> The act of conversion that you're [Bey] talking about holds such powerful meaning. Malcolm talked about it and the importance of the name change and the embrace of the "X"—the unknown—and the refashioning of a new kind of self, particularly for Black people in the context of the United States.[181]

For Malcolm X (who, of course, later became El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz), Freedom Self-Born Allah Siyam, and Yasiin Bey, their names reflect a defiant and empowering inhabitation of the world. Just as "Filipino" remains a sensitive and purposeful designation among various constituents, hip hop artists and religious converts respect greatly the weight of a name: the "what" of a person is inexorably sutured to the "who." When Odessa Kane introduces himself in "The Pen and the Gun," he is introspective in posing the meaning of his name and identity: "They call me Kane. Father, husband, Muslim. What's in a name?" In the song, Kane keeps the question open-ended and doesn't seek a resolved answer, allowing the categories to float. Of

[180] Siyam (2014), 51-52.
[181] Daulatzai (2014), 32.

Frankie Quiñones's pseudonyms, Quan Vu of San Diego City Beat writes, "Originally, Quiñones created the name Odessa Kane by playing on the words *odyssey* and *cocaine,* presenting himself simply as "a cat exploring the dope." Now, with the help of his wife, he's transformed that into an acronym for "ODE to Strength, Solidarity and Action."[182] Vu describes Kane's music as cultural weapons of political protest, especially given that his EP is entitled *Cuetes & Balisongs*, or firearms and butterfly knives in Spanish and Tagalog. As a "cultural worker" devoting his craft to political protest and liberation of the Philippines from foreign occupation, the article notes, Kane was "organized" into leftist Philippine political activity by his wife, Ree Obaña. In the article, Kane states, "[W]e're still suffering as a result of foreign occupation in the Philippines."[183] For the emcee, identity and radical political action are paramount in his work. Similar to the works of his Filipino American peers, militant Muslim autonomy and Philippine national radicalism converge. For example, the cover image of *Cuetes & Balisongs* features a vintage photograph of "Bangsamoro freedom fighters" brandishing heavy weaponry. If Kane intends to represent these Bangsamoro fighters as waging war against the Philippine nation, then the visual messaging of his EP would be discordant with a Philippine nationalist political agenda.

[182] Quan Vu, "The wrath of Odessa Kane", *San Diego City Beat*, February 27, 2013, http://www.sdcitybeat.com/sandiego/article-11525-the-wrath-of-odessa-kane.html. Last accessed on July 21, 2015.
[183] Ibid.

Figure 2.1. Cover of Odessa Kane's *Cuetes & Balisongs* EP. From Odessa Kane's website.[184]

The "who" of Muslims in the Philippines, Kane reminds us, is not monolithic. In "The Pen and the Gun," Kane exposes the treachery of dynastic Muslim power brokers in Mindanao as he mourns for the thirty slain journalists massacred by a leading Muslim political clan during an election on November 23, 2009:[185]

> How I write
> Its like my hand is guided
> By the souls of journalists
> Killed in Maguindanao
> So write and unrestrained
> But well-reserved
> Just know when I speak on my pain
> Then it was well-deserved[186]

As "one of the deadliest single events for the press in memory" in the Philippines, in which a total of fifty-seven victims were slaughtered, Kane demonstrates that those inhabiting a Muslim identity can still replicate and uphold structures of feudalism and disrupt goals for democracy in the Philippines. Sharing Kane's sentiments, Bambu vividly re-narrates this brutal episode in his song "Massacre." Kane, as well as Bambu, understand that structural change is in the hands of poor people—the masses—regardless of religion.

The anticolonialism embodied by Muslims in the Philippines, and more specifically those who are locked out of political power, symbolizes a radical hope for Filipino American hip hop artists. Moro resistance to U.S. colonization, which by some accounts lasted until 1914—well

[184] "Cuetes & Balisongs," Odessa Kane, website, https://odessakane.bandcamp.com/album/cuetes-and-balisongs. Last accessed on August 1, 2015.
[185] Analyn Perez and TJ Dimacali, "The Ampatuan Massacre: a map and timeline," *GMA News Online*, November 25, 2009, http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/177821/news/specialreports/the-ampatuan-massacre-a-map-and-timeline. Last accessed on July 21, 2015.
[186] Kane (2012).

past the official "end" of the Philippine-American War in 1902—emboldens nationalistic Filipino Americans' charge of a "protracted war" against neocolonialism existing in the Philippines today.[187] Through the syncretic radicalisms of Filipino American hip hop artists, Moros become Muslim Filipinos, patriotic warriors engaged in ongoing anticolonial struggle against past and present U.S. occupation in the archipelago. On the cover of Bambu's 2012 album *...one rifle per family...*, Los Angeles-based Filipino American graphic artist Manila Ryce cogently visualizes the stakes involved in Moro struggle alongside the Philippine left. The picture centers a Moro family portrait, but with the gender roles inversed as the mother stands holding a gun and the father sits holding the child. Ryce further explains, "In highlighting the underrepresented Moro struggle for liberation, the definition of what it is to be Filipino is broadened beyond Manila-centered conceptions to include more than just the paternally racist perception of the "little brown brother" we too often embrace ourselves."[188]

Figure 2.2. Cover of Bambu's *...one rifle per family.* From Beatrock Music website.[189]

[187] Jim Zwick, "Mark Twain's Anti-Imperialist Writings in the 'American Century," in Shaw and Francia (2002), 39.
[188] Manila Ryce, "Art as Political Weapon," in Villegas, Kandi, and Labrador (2014), 219.
[189] Beatrock Music, website, http://beatrockmusic.com/store/bambu/. Last accessed on August 1, 2015.

Even in its inversion of gender relations, Ryce's album cover illustrates the power and militancy Moros encompass in a Filipino radical imagination that spans throughout a long history of Philippine anticolonialism "beyond Manila-centered conceptions." In "Lookin' Up" by Bambu and Prometheus Brown (together as the group The Bar), Bambu delivers a tragic opus to a colonized Philippine condition of which Moros interrupt. He opens his verse: "I'm from a place where the system's still feudal, and the masses still colonized." Countering this gloomy structural reality, Bambu recalls past Filipino heroics, alluding first to the Lapu Lapu mythology:

> It's the blood of the Visaya
> Where we never said 'sire'
> Where the Spanish fought hard
> But the fighter never tired
> To the South
> Where the Moros find it difficult to swallow
> When Treaty of Paris marries the North
> They don't follow[190]

In "Lookin' Up," Bambu provides a concise historical lesson of Muslims' precarious position at the dawn of U.S. colonial state-building in the Philippines. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898, the U.S. annexed the Philippines from Spain, including the Muslim South. However, under the Bates Agreement of 1899, the United States temporarily avoided war with Muslims. The Agreement promised a certain amount of autonomy in the region, including non-interference with Muslim traditions and local governance with some concessions, including the ability for enslaved people in Muslim society to purchase their freedom.[191] But soon enough, the U.S. unilaterally abrogated this agreement and began bloody military campaigns in the Moro

[190] The Bar, "Lookin' Up," *Prometheus Brown and Bambu Walk Into A Bar*, CD (Beatrock Music/In4mation, 2011).
[191] Abinales (2000), 47-52; James R. Arnold, *The Moro War: How America Battled a Muslim Insurgency in the Philippine Jungle, 1902-1913* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 8-9.

Province.[192] For Filipino American emcees, Muslim martial resistance, such as Lapu Lapu's Visayan insubmission and Moro intransigence, represents a deep history of courageous anti-imperial war in the Philippines.

To emphasize a Filipino condition structured by war and colonialism, a condition personified by the Moro, in "Talk Story," Geo chants in call-and-response manner, mimicking the litany-meditation of a Catholic novena: "For my children's well-being, I declare war. Hacienda Luisita, I declare war. For the last five hundred years, been in a war, to make sure we don't have to see five hundred more. I won't rest until my story's been told." Geo recites his lesson plan about war in the song "Wounded Eye," where his "wounded eye" recalls a condition of permanent brokenness and loss, yet, despite this injury, the seer retains a critical vision as a witness to the truth in trauma: "My wounded eye seen through the lies. Many soon to die. Who am I? A student. I study to survive." Geo recites the self-reflective motivations of a postcolonial subject whose very source of sustenance is knowledge of historical trauma—war—and the seeking for a better future. Later in the song, by slightly modifying his refrain, he signals to a collective Filipino fate in the face of a collective trauma: "Many brutalize. So *we* rise, and fight for the future we strive." Geo ties together a shared Filipino condition both in the Philippines and in the United States by keeping the location (time or place) of trauma ambiguous, acting as a space and time traveler (as Geo often does), a "survivor" with a "wounded eye" who witnessed multiple atrocities across generations and localities. Referencing the killing of up to one million Filipino civilians during the during the United States' invasion of the Philippines, he says, "They kicked in the door waving the four-five cal. One million died, I survive, I reside where the struggle and the hustle coincide. At this moment in time, a shift in the tide. Get the blindfold lifted from your eyes and see what we see and stop pretending it's alright, man." Geo's lyrics

[192] Zwick (2002), 39.

recall Dylan Rodriguez's thesis that the logics of "White supremacy and racist genocide…have irrevocably constituted the Filipino condition…"[193] Geo cannot "pretend it's alright" when American modern weaponry symbolized by the notorious Colt .45-caliber ("four-five cal.") helped perpetrate Filipino mass death and permanent war.

Countering the Filipino condition of colonial and genocidal injury, Geo imagines Moros as almost invincible Filipinos, whose bodies were able to withstand the onslaught of modern weaponry. The U.S. Army's use of the Colt .45-caliber is a recurring metaphor used by many Filipino American hip hop artists. The powerful weapon was issued for the U.S. Army for their campaign against Muslims who famously refused to die when shot by smaller bullets. As James R. Arnold writes,

> An officer who had served in the Indian Wars remarked, "Even the veteran Indian fighters…had to learn that a Moro *juramentado* ["running amuck" in a suicidal attack] was more dangerous than a renegade Apache and twice as hard to kill." Stories abounded about incidents such as the one in which a juramentado fought for five minutes, struggling and slashing the whole time, in spite of his fourteen bullet wounds, including three to the skull. Such incidents led to a reevaluation of the standard American handgun, the .38-caliber revolver.[194]

For Filipino nationalists, the need for the U.S. Army to upgrade has come to represent a warrior-like Filipino resiliency. Tellingly, in Seattle, the newsletter of the Filipino leftist group Anakbayan is named *45 Kaliber Proof.* The weapon is also a staple metaphor for many nationalist Filipino American hip hop artists. For example, in "Married to the Hustle," immediately after Rocky Rivera alludes to Magellan's beheading, she raps, "They invented a bullet, couldn't take us down." Furthermore, in Blue Scholars' "Commencement Day," a cautionary tale to students who graduate from school without knowledge of their history or social

[193] Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 1.
[194] Arnold (2011), 124-125.

conditions, Geo drops the name of Anakbayan's newsletter: "Ay yo we made it, .45-caliber proof. And your teachers don't believe that you can handle the truth." Here, the Colt .45 carries two possible meanings: "We" are bullet-proof Filipinos who defiantly "made it" despite the United States' technologically-upgraded genocide. Or, in another interpretation, "we" are "proof"—living evidence—of such an atrocity. Whatever the case, Filipinos—including Moros—"made it" through an episode of death and are present now to testify the "truth" of their survival. For Geo, the condition of Filipino death and survival is substantiated by Muslim pacification. The concept of the "modern" Filipino, then, is constituted by the death of savage Muslim bodies and the necessary upgrade of U.S. gratuitous violence.

Bambu's "So Many" continues to name Muslims as Filipinos in revolutionary struggle, but also comments on Philippine wars' resulting in the vastness of the Filipino diaspora. The song begins with a "white girl voice" repulsed by the overwhelming amount of Filipinos "here." Despite (white) abhorrence to a stifling Filipino presence, Bambu proudly includes himself in a larger community of Filipino belonging: "The whole Philippines, mi familia, so I fight, *we* fight. Had to come up with a bigger gun to kill us." The bigger gun used to "kill us"—the Colt .45-caliber revolver—points to an originary crisis that initiated a series of transformations to mi familia, such as the migration of Filipinos set in motion by a U.S. colonial infrastructure promoting warm body export of "so many."[195] For Bambu, U.S. genocide against "us" enables a legacy of Filipino struggle: "From a country where the revolution still fightin…I'm Filipino than a muthfucka." Bambu and Geo visualize an abundance of Filipino life—however repulsive to some—that at its origin was determined by a moment of death.

[195] Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

Return to the Golden Age: Gods, Devils, and Filipino Origin

> Each town indigenous
> Miles of villages
> They bow down to images of white Jesus
> White God and white Christ
> Til white supremacy starts stickin
> Like white rice.[196]
> -Bwan, "Brown"
>
> Brothers call me dog, they got the letters backwards.[197]
> -Geo, "No Rest for the Weary"

DJ Raichous, a Filipina American DJ from San Diego and a convert to Orthodox Islam, explains in the documentary film *Deen Tight* her parallel journey as a DJ who digs for records and a Filipina who "finds" her "original" religion: "The search for the record is the digging experience. And it's that whole journey that you went through to look for it, which is what is the essence of a digger. And parallel to that was my journey to Islam because I learned about digging for your heritage. And I also learned that the original religion in the Philippines was Islam." Raichous's reclamation of a supposedly more authentic spiritual affiliation in Islam animates the DJ's reevaluation of the terms of "Filipino" and the worthwhile journey of her "digging" for a more venerable Filipino genealogy. In *Deen Tight*, which documents Muslim hip hop artists' strategies for reconciling their faith and their love of music, Raichous states that she refrains from alcohol and smoking, often wears a hijab, and practices other tenets of Islam while also living a lifestyle as the controller of music for a dancing audience. According to strict practices of Islam, playing music and many kinds of dancing are considered haram (forbidden), yet Raichous and her mentor DJ Kidragon, who is also a Filipino American Muslim convert,

[196] Bwan (ft. Patience and Ruby Ibarra), "Brown," *Living Room*, CD (Beatrock Music, 2012).
[197] Blue Scholars, "No Rest for the Weary," *Blue Scholars*, CD (Blue Scholars, 2004).

fully embrace and enjoy the sounds and spaces of hip hop. Despite the seeming clash, Raichous and Kidragon exemplify the negotiation of Filipino Americans' self-narration, with hip hop operating as a key cultural resource to exploring a more preferred Filipino sense of history and spirituality.

Figure 2.3. DJ Kidragon and DJ Raichous in *Deen Tight*. Screenshot from film.

Raichous and Kidragon's conversion (or what is sometimes called "reversion") to Islam poses an internalized challenge to the cultural and spiritual supremacy of White imperial Christianity. This "looking back" is a defiant and self-affirming reorientation of one's soul, which, as elaborated earlier in this chapter, was a cultural strategy enacted by Black Americans throughout the twentieth century. Similar to Black Americans' embrace of a reimagined genealogy to the Tribe of Shabazz, Egypt, or Atlantis, Raichous's venerates a nostalgized pre-Hispanic Philippines. While it is quite well-understood that pre-Hispanic Philippines did host a strong Muslim presence as part of a larger Southeast Asian Muslim maritime network, Raichous's claim of Islam as the Philippines' "original" religion points to a postcolonial desire to connect with a Philippine civilization preceding several centuries of western cultural and material genocide. However, homogenizing Islam as the "original" religion casually disregards

the complex and multitudinous spiritual practices (not to mention different forms of Islam) abundant in pre-Hispanic Philippines.

Furthermore, in interpellating otherwise contested bodies in the Philippines as Filipino, Raichous, along with her nationalist Filipino American counterparts mentioned earlier, reinforce the disposition that "Filipino" can be delimited according to man-made geographical boundaries. The Philippines as a geography—be it colony or nation—has only become intelligible after Spanish and U.S. colonialism constructed its geographical borders. In many ways, the Philippines is a modern construction, with the Americans establishing its boundaries more formally than the Spanish.[198] Therefore, DJ Raichous's "originality" contradicts the genesis of "Filipino" contingent on its colonial context. As Vicente Rafael writes, "[T]he Filipino nation did not emerge as the return of a glorious past that had been repressed by an alien invasion. Instead, it was precisely the coming of outside forces that allowed for its genesis."[199] In their search for Filipino authenticity, Raichous, then, imaginatively disregards the constructed history of the Philippine nation. Much more, quite ironically, as detailed earlier, Jose Rizal and his *ilustrado* peers invented a Philippine nation that categorically excluded Muslims.

Raichous's parallel journey—digging for records as a hip hop DJ and digging for her Filipino heritage—proves instructive. Instead of a "looking back," I propose it is more useful to think of Filipino American hip hop artists' reclamation of Islam's supposed historical and spiritual authenticity as a "looking around," or, to use Theodore S. Gonzalves's term, a looking "laterally."[200] Or, to recite Raichous, their glancing towards Islam involves a parallelism, however romanticized. Filipino American hip hop performers' lateral or parallel "looking

[198] Abinales (2000).
[199] Vicente L. Rafael, "Parricides, Bastards, and Counterrevolution: Reflections on the Philippine Centennial," in Shaw and Francia (2002), 362.
[200] Theodore S. Gonzalves, *The Day the Dancers Stayed: Performing in the Filipino/American Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 10.

around" situates hip hop as a crucial cultural conduit to exploring postcolonial spiritual and cultural possibilities.

To help unpack Filipino American hip hop performers' intricate glances towards Islam, I evoke the concept of the Golden Age to refer to a temporal and spatial preference that provides a sense of nostalgia and redemption, like Raichous's admiration for a precolonial Muslim Philippines, Latinos' embrace of Muslim Andalusia, or African American Islam's turning to Asia as a spiritual origin. The Golden Age also recalls a moment in hip hop history between the late 1980s and mid 1990s when the genre supplied listeners with an abundance of racial empowerment and politically-radical knowledge.[201] In their cheerful retrospective song "1995," the Filipino American hip hop group the Native Guns, emcees Bambu and Kiwi mark 1995 as a formative moment for their Los Angeles-textured hip hop Golden Age. In the song, the duo list a litany of hip hop artists who influenced their styles and political consciousness. Starting his verse with a nod to Biggie Smalls's signature hit "Juicy" (also a retrospective song), Kiwi raps,

> It was all dream, I used to read URB Magazine
> When it was made of newsprint and it was still free.
> I would turn it to page three
> Table of contents
> Interview with KRS and Chuck D
> This was my window to the rap scene
> Besides that, honestly
> I didn't know a damn thing[202]

Excavating a Golden Age discourse clarifies the ways in which a Filipino American hip hop vernacular operates in a non-linear trajectory in its routing Filipino American self-narrations through African American counter-narratives. African Americans and Filipinos are diasporic people displaced by the mechanisms set forth by White imperial plunder, forcefully suspending

[201] Daulatzai (2012), 109.
[202] Native Guns, "1995," *Barrel Men*, CD (Native Guns, 2006).

their links to spiritual or civilizational home, thus placing their spiritual belonging in flux. As Richard Wright elucidates in his concept of being "split" as a black person "of the West":

> This double vision of mine stems from my being a product of Western civilization and from my racial identity, long and deeply conditioned, which is organically born of my being a product of that civilization. Being a negro living in a white Western Christian society, I've never been allowed to blend, in a natural and healthy manner, with the culture and civilization of the West…[203]

So to, then, have African Americans followed a non-linear path to spiritual belonging. Wright's contention that he cannot "blend, in a natural and healthy manner" to White civilization alludes to the host of spiritual, political, and artistic cultural strategies employed by African Americans to imagine themselves as members of a larger global and cosmic community, as inheritors of a more glorious Golden Age prior to or outside of White imperial plunder. As people of "double vision" being *of* Western civilization only because of their disavowal *from* it, African Americans have been actively pursuing counter-narratives that bring dignity and futurity to their bodies with a particular glance towards Islam and the "East," a gesture that will be further unpacked later in this section.

As with African Americans, Filipino American hip hop artists signify a counter-modernity that defies the cultural authority of White civilization, with Islam helping to reorder the status quo of global and cosmic power relations. Mos Def/Yasiin Bey refers to Muslim conversion as "reversion" given that Islam teaches the concept of *Fitrah*, or the "a state of oneness that Muslims believe all humans are born into." He explains, "[We] are coming back and reacquainting ourselves with ourselves. And so I think, in that essence, "revert" is a proper term. And it is also a conversion, a transformation. But it's not a departure from yourself. It's

[203] Mullen (2004), 43.

really a full integration of your highest self. And actually, even beyond the self, you know?"[204]

Like Bey, Filipinos in the Philippines have been undertaking a reversion process. Unlike Bey, for Filipinos in the Philippines, the roles of African American spiritual figures like Malcolm X and Islam in a hip hop cultural imaginary is their reversion process is less evident. These are also key differences between Philippine-based reversions to Islam and that of Filipino Americans. Called the "Balik Islam" movement in the Philippines, Filipinos from the archipelago who share a nation space with Muslims and become familiar with Islam as overseas contract workers in the Middle East "return" to what they see as the Philippines dominant religion prior to arrival of Spaniards. Vivienne S.M. Angeles elaborates,

> Balik means 'return', and 'Balik Islam' means 'return to Islam'. This notion of return stems first from the belief that Islam, which means submission, is the first religion of man and second, from the fact that Islam was already a dominant religion in the Philippines before the coming of the Spanish colonizers in 1521… The converts had been taught and are very well aware of this historical information. They understood therefore that being Balik Islam Muslims means taking part in this return to their original religion.[205]

Instead of Philippine precolonial religion, for Filipino Americans, hip hop culture typically directs their pathway to Islam. In this way, their reversion resonates with Mos Def/Yasiin Bey's spiritual journey, in which hip hop culture, and Black vernacular culture in general, inaugurates a self-transformation and a connection to a larger Muslim community. The "balik" or "return" for some Filipino Americans may eventually involve a spiritual "return" to Islam in the Philippines, as with Raichous, but for the most part, the "balik" for Filipino American reverts is a return informed by the uplift of Black spiritual redemption.

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[204] Daulatzai (2014), 32-33.

[205] Vivienne S.M. Angeles, "From Catholic to Muslim: Changing Perceptions of Gender Roles in a Balik-Islam Movement in the Philippines," in Schröter (2013), 184.

The hip hop duo the Digital Martyrs, composed of brothers Scotty and Darnell, are reverts to Orthodox Islam who locate themselves in Islam's expansive spiritual and cultural world. The Oakland-based artists, whose wives also converted to Islam, are part of a transnational network of Muslims, including Filipino spiritual advisors in the Philippines and Sacramento while anchoring themselves within a community of African American Muslims in the East Bay Area of Northern California, many who happen to be hip hop artists and often make appearances in the Digital Martyrs's music. Like many Filipino American hip hop performers, the brothers' musical experience interlocks seamlessly with an African American tradition that addresses Filipino American concerns. In this case, African American Islam influences in hip hop music inspire their music, which in turn the brothers' hope will give greater representation for Filipino Americans in the hip hop scene. The name "Digital Martyrs," Darnell mentions, refers to Filipino American artists who become "martyrs" for hip hop because they contribute so much to the culture, but are usually left unknown and invisible. The Digital Martyrs, therefore, seek to act as catalysts of greater Filipino American representation while promoting Islam in their lyrics and art.[206]

[206] Author's interview with the Digital Martyrs, Los Angeles, California, August 31, 2012.

Figure 2.4. Digital Martyrs *Ballad of the Bullet* poster. From Jeff Miciano's Coroflot artistic website.[207]

Santa Ana, California-based Filipino American graphic artist Jeffrey Miciano, who is also exploring Islam, designed their logo for their album *The Ballad of the Bullet*, a title that evokes Malcolm X's famous speech "The Ballot or the Bullet." The spired and arched architecture of the building suggest traditional Muslim architecture, which in the context of Philippine colonial history can offer an architectural substitute to the Spanish Catholic churches that dominate the architectural terrain of the Philippines. Commenting on the absence of monumental architecture that could testify to classical pre-Hispanic "civilization" in the Philippines, Rafael notes, "the first monumental architecture in the Philippines was the Catholic church…"[208] The edifice on *The Ballad of the Bullet* album, then, stands in to reclaim a Philippine civilization from Spanish spiritual hegemony. The moon logo at the top, designed by Darnell, mimics the iconic Muslim crescent (as seen in the Mighty 4 flyer), but is stylized to resemble the Philippine flag's eight-point sun. Embedded in the moon is the written in Arabic the Muslim shahada, "There is no god

[207] Jeff Miciano, "Digital Martyrs 'Ballad Of The Bullet' Poster," http://www.coroflot.com/jeffreymiciano/Digital-MartyrsBallad-Of-The-Bullet-Poster. Last accessed on August 1, 2015.

[208] Rafael (2002), 362.

but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God." In their lyrics, visual art, and motivation as artists, the Digital Martyrs meld together the values of a Muslim International community and Filipino American representational politics.

The spiritual revivals of Raichous, Kidragon, and the Digital Martyrs trouble the long arc of Philippine national identity. Early cultural production in Spanish colonial Philippines testifies to the narrative of the necessity of Muslim death in order to promote Catholic Philippine life. Spanish theatrical *comedia* in the Philippines, which has shaped the aesthetics and ideology of Philippine film, were built around themes of conflict between Christians and Muslims.[209] In another example, Manila as colonial Philippines' spiritual and commercial center was established as a Catholic stronghold, with Santiago Matamoros (Saint James the Moor-slayer) as the city's patron saint, his valiant slaughtering of Moors immortalized in stone above Fort Santiago in Intramuros.[210] Santiago Matamoros as a symbol of Christian reconquest of the Al-Andulus (Muslim Iberian Peninsula) represents an ideological battle for the spiritual reputation of Spain. As outlined in the prior section, *ilustrados* deemed Muslims as essentially not Filipino. The *indios* who the *ilustrados* decided to be endowed with modern capacity were, not surprisingly, of those linguistic groups who were culturally Hispanicized, such as Tagalogs or Ilocanos.[211] U.S. authorities during early U.S. colonial occupation of the Philippines designated Muslims in the archipelago as wards of the state and later as collaborators of convenience.[212] Today, exemplified by the Oplan Exodus fiasco, the contentious relationship effectively continues between the U.S. military-abetted Philippine state and the marginalized predominantly Muslim

[209] Nick DeOcampo, "Hispanic Influences on Tagalog Cinema: The Battle for Hegemony on the Native Screen," in Donoso (2008), 356; Doreen G. Fernández, *Palabas: Essays on Philippine Theater History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996).
[210] Carlos Celdran's "Walk This Way" tour of Intramuros, Manila, Philippines, July 23, 2012.
[211] Aguilar (2005).
[212] Salman (2001), 52.

regions. Raichous, the Digital Martyrs, and Micianos's modes of Muslim reclamation of the Philippines subvert this deep-seated anti-Muslim sentiment in the islands. These artists help symbolize a revival of a Golden Age of Islam in the Philippines, and concomitantly in Spain. For them, the Muslim villains vanquished underneath the hooves of Santiago Matamoros's horse are no longer the evil Philippine and Spanish other.

Filipino Americans' strategic identification for something more "golden" than their present and past Filipino historiography cites a more primal antagonism fomented by the consolidation of fifteenth century European identity through the conquest of the dark other. Daulatzai poignantly notes, "For it was through the Muslim that the modern concept of race and its structuring of national identity was born. As Europe and the idea of 'the West' began to cohere around concepts of whiteness and Christianity, race and religion deeply informed each other…"[213] It makes sense, then, that Filipino American hip hop artists resituating their relationship to the Philippine nation coincides with a community of Latin Americans and Latinos who are also reconfiguring their position in the world and re-authoring the terms of a Hispanic imperial legacy. The mythical "Golden Age" of Islam that thrived prior to and without the dominance of the "West" as celebrated in pre-Hispanic Philippines is reiterated in discourses that extol the period of Muslim rule in Spain. Al-Andalus, which existed as a political entity between the eighth and fifteenth century, has become a symbol of a more desirable past for some Latin Americans and Latinos in the United States.[214] Cuban nationalist José Martí's declaration "Let us be Moors!" in 1893 is just one of a series of calls for Latin Americans to revere and revalue their Spanish Moorish past.[215] Hisham Aidi states, "Moorish Spain was a place where Islam was in and of the West, and inhabited a Golden Age before the rise of the genocidal, imperial

[213] Daulatzai (2012), xviii.
[214] Jean-Benoit Nadeau and Julie Barlow, *The Story of Spanish* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2014).
[215] Hisham D. Aidi, "Let Us Be Moors: Islam, Race, and 'Connected Histories'", *Souls*, 7.1 (2005), 36-37.

West[.]"[216] Latino reverts' (including Latino hip hop practitioners') spiritual anchoring to Al-Andalus defies the historical authority of Spain and the West.[217] The trope of the Golden Age is thus a meaningful signifier for formerly colonized Spanish subjects, where a spiritual home is rooted to a non-Hispanic past.

In addition to its impact among Latin Americans and Latinos, a revised Iberian genealogy has significance in the re-telling of Philippine colonial mythology. Notably, Isaac Donoso Jiménez opens the possibility of Muslim Iberian migration to the Philippine archipelago after their expulsion from the peninsula in 1609. He writes, "In the end it is probable that the first European who reached the Philippine archipelago was not an Iberian Christian, but an Iberian Muslim."[218] Hence, in order to legitimize their colonization, the "discovery" of the existence of Muslims in the archipelago for Spanish conquerors shifted the war with the "enemy" from the Mediterranean to Southeast Asia by linking Muslims in the Philippines to those in Iberia.[219] It seems, then, that along with bodies, war migrated from Europe to the archipelago. Thus, a consideration of Al-Andalus not only provides a re-imagining of a more "golden" Iberian past, it also probes questions regarding an epistemology of Philippine settlement and the beginnings of Spanish antagonism against Muslims in the archipelago.

Whatever the case, Raichous, the Digital Martyrs, and Miciano imagine an alternative possibility of a Philippine past, which concomitantly reconsiders the imperial role of Europe in the subjugation of Hispanicized colonial subjects. Although hip hop remains a dominant mode of exploring a more desirable Golden Age of Filipino belonging, a romanticized Philippine

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[216] Ibid, 49.
[217] Tim Padgett, *WLRN*, "Why So Many Latinos Are Becoming Muslims," October 9, 2013, http://wlrn.org/post/why-so-many-latinos-are-becoming-muslims. Last accessed on July 22, 2015; Hishaam Aidi, "Jihadis in the Hood:Race, Urban Islam and the War on Terror," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 32.224 (2002).
[218] Isaac Donoso Jimenez, "Al-Andalus and Asia: Ibero-Asian Relations Before Magellan," in Donoso (2008), 30.
[219] Jimenez (2008), 29.

Muslim past appears in other cultural forms. In the extravagant Pilipino Culture Nights (PCN) along the West Coast and their variants throughout the nation, Muslim-designated Philippine dances—often grouped in what is called the "Moro suite"—are usually the choice dances among Filipino American college and high school performers. Barbara Gaerlan argues that this preference for the Moro-themed dances stems from students' desire to embody the myth of Moros as regal, proud, civilized, and unconquered by the Spanish.[220] She notes that for these dancers, the "Moro suite" represents a "kind of 'Golden Age' of Philippine independence on which Filipinos everywhere can look back with pride."[221] Muslim disavowal has always been crucial in forming students' identification to the Philippine colony and nation. Ironically, as has been emphasized in this chapter, Muslim Filipinos are repositioned as *the* authentic Filipinos. Sarita See comments that Filipinos internalize the colonial idiom "Filipinos 'have no culture.'"[222] Islam as metonym for culture, then, supplants the "impurity" of colonial heterogeneity found in the vague designation "Filipino culture."

Overall, from Spain, Latin America, and the Philippines, Islam represents a more desirable inhabitation of history and the world that was permanently shaped by the primal antagonism fomented by White European racializing of the dark Muslim other. This unsettling of imperial Europeans' temporal and geographical determination of colonized people's culture is in many ways indebted to African Americans' much longer tradition of spiritual and cultural redemption through Islam. For African American Muslims, the Golden Age trope also venerates a more glorious culture than what is dealt by Europeans, but is more capacious in its geographical imagination than in the Iberian and Philippine contexts. For example, as already

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[220] Barbara Gaerlan, "In the Court of the Sultan: Orientalism, Nationalism, and Modernity in Philippine and Filipino American Dance," *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 2.3 (1999).
[221] Gaerlan (1999), 254.
[222] Sarita Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xxxiv.

mentioned, Noble Drew Ali's mythology of Moorish civilization "extended from the area today known as Morocco to North, South, and Central America, encompassing even the mythical Atlantis."[223]

In expanding their spiritual home beyond Africa and embracing a global geography that connects with the Muslim Third World, "Asia" occupied an increasingly central valence within claims to Black civilization.[224] During the early-twentieth century, the biologically inferiorizing term "negro" lost credence in African American self-identification. Richard Brent Turner notes the founder of the NOI's disowning of "negro" in exchange for Black's "original" identity: "[W.D. Fard] preached that the word 'negro' was a misnomer for the people of the Black African diaspora; this name was created by the white race to separate African Americans from their original Asiatic roots."[225] Helping create a racial-spiritual combination of "Asiatic-blackness," Fard preached that African Americans were "lost members" of the "original Black nation of Asia, the Tribe of Shabazz."[226] Similarly, the boxer Muhammad Ali once stated on a radio show: "I am not a Negro… I am Muhammad Ali… And I am an Asiatic Black man."[227]

The trope of the Asiatic Black pervades in hip hop music. Miyakawa documents the impact of the Five Percent Nation of Gods and Earths on hip hop. Some scholars trace the Five Percent Nation's cosmology to the Moorish Science Temple of America and the Nation of Islam, the latter of which the Five Percent Nation founder Clarence 13X was a follower.[228] The hip hop soundscape, especially during the Golden Age of the late-1980s and early 1990s, was textured by the lessons of the Five Percent, which practices an esoteric numerology and teaches that Black

[223] Miyakawa (2005), 11.
[224] Daulatzai (2012); Deutsch (2001).
[225] Turner (2003), 456.
[226] Deutsch (2001), 197.
[227] Ibid, 194.
[228] Miyakawa (2005), 9, 15.

men are the embodiment of God. Miyakawa indicates how rap became an essential medium to spread Five Percenter knowledge, especially given the simultaneous rise of hip hop and the Five Percent Nation in New York City during the 1970s: "The pairing of rap and the Five Percent Nation was perhaps inevitable."[229] Furthermore, of the Nation of Islam's influence on the Asiatic Black trope, Daulatzai writes,

> ...[T]he NOI [Nation of Islam] redefined and expanded Black identity beyond the United States and in relation to the Third World, using terms such as the *Asiatic*, *Asian black nation*, *Afro-Asiatic Black Man*, and the *Asiatic Black Man*, all of which echoed [early NOI leader] Elijah Muhammad's claim in his seminal text that "we are descendants of the Asiatic black nation…the rich Nile Valley of Egypt and the present seat of the Holy City, Mecca, Arabia." As a result, the Nation of Islam "provided an alternative to—and in some sense a fundamental critique of—the nation-state.[230]

As Miyakawa alludes, Asia in Black Islam was popularized by Golden Age-era hip hop artists such as Big Daddy Kane, Gang Starr, Brand Nubian, the Wu-Tang Clan, and Rakim who referred to themselves as "original Asiatic Black men."[231] "[T]his is Asia, where where I came," raps Rakim in his song "Casualties of War," which criticizes Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf. Golden Age hip hop artists, it seems, help promote Golden Age mythologies.

Given the widespread usage of the Asiatic Black trope beginning in the early-twentieth century and continuing with hip hop music today, the role of Asian *people* becomes curious in the racial-spiritual world of Black diasporic Islam. During World War II, the former leader of the NOI, Elijah Muhammad, advocated the side of the Japanese imperial army, stating, "The Asiatic race is made up of all dark-skinned people, including the Japanese and the Asiatic Black man. Therefore, members of the Asiatic race must stick together. The Japanese will win the war

[229] Ibid, 21, 35-37.
[230] Daulatzai (2012), 102-103.
[231] Daulatzai (2012), 131.

because the white man cannot successfully oppose the Asiatics."[232] As has been demonstrated, Black identification with Asia intertwines with claims to civilization with a rising imperial Japan operating as an embodiment of Asian power that rivaled white global hegemony. Recalling Bill V. Mullen's Afro-Orientalist discourse of racial solidarity, African Americans' political and spiritual re-mapping of Asia thus often privileged an Orientalized and re-masculinized vision of an abstracted and mysterious Asia, of which more powerful Asian hegemonies inhabit the Asiatic paradigm.[233] Asians, representing an "Oriental decadence" threatening the West mentally and corporeally, provided a more desirable embodiment for a rivaling Black sense of being, whose ascribed primitiveness only offered physical peril.[234]

For Filipinos, membership within a threatening Asiatic civilization has always been scrupulous, especially given the archipelago's long and intimate history with the West. Under Spanish and U.S. governance, Filipinos have rarely been categorized as embodying "Oriental decadence" but were rather marked as a deficient race in need of White salvation and tutelage. However, in the beginning of the twentieth century after large-scale Chinese and Japanese migrations to the United States, Filipinos were deemed members of a "third Asiatic invasion." During this period, they became associated with, even if only tangentially, to the racial markings of Asiatic, Oriental, and Mongolian, especially when it came to the their legal and extralegal rights and limitations as U.S. nationals in the context of labor and sexual competition with aggrieved White men.[235] Even during this period, Filipinos' racial mixture and ambiguity tended to relegate them in special racial categories including Malay, Brown, and a combination of

[232] Deutsch (2001), 194.
[233] Mullen (2004); Turner (2003).
[234] Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and The Social Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 58-61.
[235] Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Migration and Empire in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

Negro and Mongolian, all of which posed legal ramifications for citizenship, naturalization, and rights to sexual access.[236]

Hence, given Filipinos' proximate racial distance from "Asiatic civilization" in a broad sense, the cognitive convolution becomes entangled as the "Asiatic" in Islam meets the "Filipino." Filipino American hip hop performers arrive at Islam via Black Muslim counter-narrative, which in turn exalts Asia—specifically Arabia and the Near/Middle East—as the origin of Black civilization. Some versions of Filipino Americanized Islam, then, requires a compartmentalized disregard for the Orientalism of Black Islam with which Filipino Americans may not identify: the original Asiatic Black man did not emerge out of Southeast Asia. At the same time, Filipino Americanized Islam, with its foundation in hip hop, is indebted to Black spiritual redemption. For some Filipino American Muslims, this intricate cultural pathway may lead to a cultural solidarity with Philippine Islam and a veneration of a precolonial Golden Age in the Philippines. "Asiatic civilization" for Filipino Americanized Islam in this case *is* located in Southeast Asia.

As Elijah Muhammad held an expansive and flexible view of who is to be considered "Asiatic" in his racial pairing of the Japanese and the Asiatic Black man, some Filipino American hip hop artists issue syncretic interpretations of Black Islam's spiritual and political subjects. The group MastaPlann playfully re-signifies Elijah Muhammad's Asiatic Black discourse by assuming True Asiatic Tribe personae.[237] MastaPlann is composed of Filipino Americans from California who acquired fame in the Philippines' after migrating there in 1992.

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[236] Ibid, 70-112.

[237] True Asiatic Tribe is a larger group of Filipino hip hop artists of different crafts of which MastaPlann are core leaders. Documentation on this group exists in their YouTube videos and on Facebook. For more, see "MastaPlann: True Asiatic Legends," *Laking Hip Hop Music*, January 19, 2011, http://lakinghiphopmusic.blogspot.com/2011/01/mastaplanntrue-asiatic-legends.html. Last accessed on July 22, 2015.

As Golden Age-influenced artists, they identified with Five Percent hip hop, especially the "God" Rakim Allah whose famous lyrics in the rap anthem "Paid in Full" begin with "Thinkin of a masta plan." As Filipino Americans, MastaPlann re-circulate the tropes of the "Asiatic" both to reaffirm Asiatic's vernacular validity and also to elaborate on its invented currency. As such, the Filipino "Asiatic" moves beyond Filipino racial categorization as Asian by fusing with NOI and Five Percent racial worldviews. The True Asiatic Tribe illustrates the circuitous identificatory practices of a larger "tribe" in the Filipino diaspora. As supposedly "truer Asiatic" people, Filipino Americans arrive at the intersection of the vectors that make up a history of U.S. racial anxiety: the "East" and blackness.

As well as being "Asiatic," an "original" person can register a multiple set of possibilities. For example, in recounting his journey of political and spiritual consciousness, Siyam explains his study of "original people" in the consciousness-raising group "360 Nation":

> I loved these folks from the jump, for they were humble and thoughtful people, dedicated to improving their spiritual lives through the study of original cultures and pre-colonial spiritual traditions. Through brother G-Hod Amen in the Central District, I learned a lot about Kemet, what black Africa's Egypt once was called, and was introduced to a number of influential writers of black history and or spiritual traditions of black people… We also studied Santeria, Voudoun and their African roots in Ifa...
>
> In 360 we studied and shared what we learned through thoughtful observation and diligent study. We built, we meditated, we improved our ways and actions. We studied pre-colonial Africa, pre-colonial North and South America, and I tried to get my hands on anything about pre-Spanish Philippines…[238]

Here, Siyam demonstrates the ways in which "original" can include a range of colonized people, such as those of the Philippines.

"Original," then, in the contexts of both Elijah Muhammad and Siyam's epistemological claims, as well as for Raichous's Muslim reversion, symbolizes a buried but re-discovered sense

[238] Siyam (2014), 48-49.

of being. Correspondingly, for Geo, the "knowledge of self" pedagogical principle of the NOI, Universal Zulu Nation, and the Five Percent Nation reverberates soundly. Reiterating the words of Nation of Islam founder W.D. Fard, Geo writes, "Filipinos are also [of] a 'lost-found' nation—robbed of our nationhood and livelihood by the same people who robbed the Africans and the rest of the world…With no knowledge of who we are and how we came to become an oppressed, nationless diaspora, we have no hope of fighting imperialism."[239] In his twinned call to knowledge of self and anti-imperial political action, Geo designates the Philippines as a nation-yet-realized, thus re-adopting an Afro-Orientalist "lost-found" nation in Arabia/Near/Middle East to the Philippines—perhaps more poetically than spiritually. In "No Rest for the Weary" Geo's rhymes excavate—and write—a Filipino "knowledge of self":

> Igniting the cipher sessions I'm deciphering life,
> Blending both theory into practice.
> I write vernacular and actual fact
> God, no posturing.[240]

Geo suggests that intertwined with divine reflection is a project of knowing. "Actual fact" in Five Percent vernacular stresses that God and knowledge is not mysterious but can be found and claimed "right here" on earth. "Actual fact" informs Geo's critical pedagogy of Filipinos' "true" history amidst the lies of the colonizer.

Geo, who is not a Muslim-revert but takes artistic liberties in his poetic identifications, crafts much of his lyricism utilizing the rhetoric of the Five Percent. In Five Percent "actual fact" philosophy, Black men are referred to as Gods and women as Earths. In poetically embodying God in his lyrics, Geo inscribes onto his Filipino body the African American inversion of a savage status to a masculine, divine embodiment. In the song "Opening Salvo,"

[239] Author's electronic correspondence with Geo, February 22, 2007.
[240] Blue Scholars (2004).

Geo evokes this God-savage inversion, accompanying his re-divinity with a critique of colonialism: "Right now I want to thank God for being me. My soul won't rest until the colony is free." And in "No Rest for the Weary" he says, "But this song ain't a psalm waiting for God to answer. Brothers call me dog, they got the letters backwards. I'm back with a plan of attack to repossess my name, face, and history." Continuing in "Opening Salvo," Geo articulates the link between his artistic motivation and the liberation of the Philippines:

> 1896 revolution incomplete
> Silence is defeat, my solution is to speak
> Resurrect the legacy of martyrs I beseech
> Time to choose a side: It's the mighty verse the meek
> My big brother Free brought the word from the East.
> We're the bullet in the middle of the belly of the beast.[241]

In the verse above, Geo alludes to the group Sentinario ng Bayan and its project of politicizing Filipino Americans in the mid-1990s through the remembrance of the 1896 Philippine Revolution against Spain. Extending the revolution to a contemporary moment in the Filipino diaspora, he references Freedom Self-Born Allah Siyam, who traveled to the Philippines (the "East") and returned with the message that Filipino Americans must be militant elements ("bullets") in the center of the United States empire (the "beast"). In evoking the Philippines as the "East," Geo craftily borrows from Black Islam's reconfiguration of Asia—the "East"—as spiritual home.

For Siyam and Geo, the NOI and the Five Percent Nation provide essential resources for signifying a Filipino anticolonial political imaginary. Starting off as a poets in the isangmahal arts kollective, whose motto proclaimed "subverting cultural genocide," Geo and Siyam sharpened their craft within a Filipino American space that provoked heterodox and experimental imaginings of Filipino identity. Reminiscent of the renegade aesthetics associated with the Black

[241] Blue Scholars, "Opening Salvo," *The Long March EP*, CD (Massline, 2007).

Arts Movement of the late 1960s, isangmahal and a number of other Filipino American poetic spaces nurtured during the late 1990s such as the Balagtasan Collective and L.A. Enkanto in Los Angeles and 8th Wonder in the San Francisco Bay Area would form cultural and political foundations for many Filipino American hip hop artists.[242]

Figure 2.5. Isangmahal flyers designed by Jaime Ardena. Courtesy of Paul Felix.

Seattle's Filipino American poetry scene would breed one of the city's most recognized emcees in Geo. The *Blue Scholars* album—a sonic document composed of anti-war Bush-era anger, hip hop Golden Age boom-bap nostalgia, indigenous Filipino soul meditation, Third World rage, and Seattle street soliloquy—has anchored Geo's poetics throughout his career. *Blue Scholars*, compared to Geo's subsequent albums, articulates a more internal and urgent reflection of spiritual orientation. Whether his esoteric references to alternative cosmologies are

[242] Author's interviews with Jojo Gaon, Bobby Gaon, Paul Felix, and Freedom Allah Siyam, Seattle, Washington, March 22-23, 2012; isangmahal, *Pito*, documentary DVD; isangmahal arts kollective, *a live cd recording featuring omo alagba & all one tribe,* CD (isangmahal arts kollective, 2004).

legible to a wider (and whiter) audience may not be known, but perhaps its mystery—the unknowability of his words—contributes to listeners' intrigue. Grounded in a strident critique of the intersections of Christianity and white colonialism, Geo, like many other popular Filipino American emcees such as Bambu, Kiwi, Rocky Rivera, and Bwan, envision a position in the universe that goes against the white racial values often found in the imagery of Christianity. For example, "Burnt Offering" gives a soothingly melodic and introspective indictment of the unjust power relationships present in his family's Catholic religion:

> I need a brand new prayer to read
> Seems the old ones grew tons of mold cuz they're narrow as hell
> Sometimes they be thinking that this heavens for sale
> Worse than that, they still think God is a male[243]

As he tends to do, Geo paints a bricolage vision of the universe, drawing from a variety of resources such as Filipino indigeneity, third world feminism, African American Islam, and hip hop. While defying the orthodoxy of Christianity, "Burnt Offering" allows further exploration and possibilities for the divine, such as the radical idea that God is a woman. He continues,

> But moms used to hang up pictures of white Jesus
> Fist clutching rosary beads, over the years
> I began to question this Father Almighty
> Made in his image but don't look nothing like me
> But we be the children of the most high
> Ghosts of the colonized lost in the time
> Redesign, redefine what it meant to be divine
> Knowing that she meant for me to rhyme

Not settling for a stringent or dogmatic "brand new prayer to read" in their exploration of their place in the universe, Filipino American hip hop performers expand the possibilities of the imaginings of the Filipino soul. Where their spiritual connection to a pre-Hispanic sense of cosmic worth has been obscured, thus leaving Filipino culture and colonization forever linked,

[243] Blue Scholars, "Burnt Offering," *Blue Scholars*, CD (Blue Scholars, 2004).

Filipino American hip hop performers are contributing alternative visions of spiritual belonging in their creation of Filipino American culture, constantly redefining "what is meant to be divine."

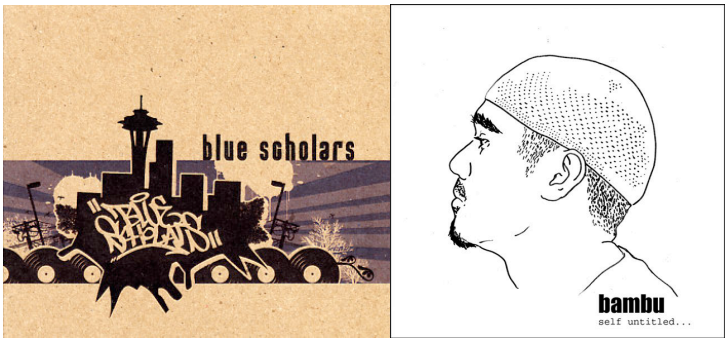

Figure 2.6. Blue Scholars' first album, self-titled (2004) and Bambu's first album *self untitled...*(2002).[244]

Filipino Americans' formation of artistic spaces such as Isangmahal and their immersion in hip hop culture demonstrates how Filipino Americans' are direct beneficiaries of the Black Arts Movement and inheritors of a longer lineage of African American spiritual and political consciousness. Echoing the poetics of the Black Arts Movement, hip hop's poetic canon brings into relief earthly and divine values assigned to racialized people. The poles designating "savage" versus "civilized" and "devil" versus "god" that reverberate in hip hop's poetics, especially abundant in Five Percent rap where white people are occasionally described as "the devil" and Black men are uplifted as "gods," illustrate the stakes involved in an imagined cosmic encounter. Much like Islam has represented for African Americans a self-affirming counter-civilization that rivals the claims of White modernity, Islam serves as a resource for many Filipino American emcees in their critique of the historical violence associated with white colonial religion. Hip hop has become a nexus between Islam and Filipino American racial revaluing. In the anti-colonial and Five Percenter-tinged song "No Rest for the Weary," Geo

[244] Blue Scholars, *Blue Scholars*, CD (Blue Scholars, 2004); Bambu, *Bambu*, CD (Bambu, 2003).

condemns the hypocrisy he finds in the civilizing mission of white colonizers in the Philippines and perhaps beyond: "They claim civilized with they animal ways."

Evoking itinerant spiritual poetics, Filipino American hip hop performers' internal meditations that "redefine what is meant to be divine" follow a larger tradition of African American counter-modernities that form the ideological and aesthetic infrastructure of hip hop culture. In "No Rest for the Weary," Geo enunciates the migratory pattern of an itinerant Filipino American spiritual vernacular: "From the East, my brotha, we came. The lessons might change, but the essence of the message is the same." As Asia has offered a more expansive spiritual and geographic home to a redemptive African American universe, hip hop has provided the resources with which Filipino Americans use to negotiate and strategize their sense of belonging as diasporic, dark children of empire.

Racial Consciousness in a White Wilderness

In "Talk Story," Geo makes clear the antagonists responsible for his colonized and displaced position:

> Who got the guns and the gold?
> Who left us out in the cold?
> White wilderness I travel while in search of my own
> That's why I'm flippin a poem like it was written in stone
> It's for the children seekin answers to the question of home[245]

The knowledge of self-directive he espouses by flippin a poem is motivated by the erasure of home perpetrated by plunderers with the guns and the gold. In the white wilderness of the imperial metropole, Geo searches for his "own" sense of belonging. Earlier on, at the brink of Philippine nationhood in the late nineteenth century, Jose Rizal and his *ilustrado* contemporaries

[245] Blue Scholars, "Talk Story," (2007).

attempted to answer the question of home and their "own." Desiring membership in civilization by using European modernity's racial logic, the *ilustrados* claimed a venerable non-colonized Filipino origin and embodiment. A century later Filipino Americans have been re-imagining their natal membership as children in empire. However, unlike their *ilustrado* counterparts, they are embracing alternative modernities that perform a critique of a world ordering that mark them as uncivilized in the first place.

Filipino Americans' invoking a boundless blackness de-authorizes white arbitration of Filipino life. With the technology to erase bodies, culture, and nationality, U.S. colonizers wielding big guns continued the subjugation of indigenous people in the Philippines. In light of this death and violence, Filipino Americans, together with African Americans who also travel the white wilderness, continue a legacy of embracing a language that while providing "proof" of racial power also validates their lives in history and the universe. In expanding the geography of the nation and the cosmos, redeeming their savage bodies as civilized and divine, and recuperating disavowed Muslims as agentive subjects of their Filipino embodiment, Filipino American hip hop artists are re-narrating a Filipino positionality, refusing the determinations of White modernity, and offering a more empowering future.

CHAPTER 3

Nation in the Universe: The Cosmic Vision of Afro-Filipino Futurism

I pledge allegiance and have to brag about the
united weights in America. And to this republic for
which we dance, the Zulu Nation, in the yard, is the
invincible, with ability to touch this for yall.[246]
-Tony Touch, "Toca's Intro"

It's for the kids who parents' workin overtime
And for the Filipino kids who gone travel time.[247]
-Prometheus Brown, "Barkada"

Alienated Races

Figure 3.0. Larry Legaspi designed the cosmic costumes for funk bands such as LaBelle and also the rock band Kiss. Screenshot from *Finding the Funk*.

In the VH1 documentary *Finding the Funk* (2013), director Nelson George acknowledges the contributions of Larry Legaspi who popularized the space-age costumes worn by African American funk artists: "The thing about funk is it embraced freakiness, outsiderness… So you have a gay Filipino man, unheralded in a sense, but is essentially a part of creating the look of

[246] Tony Touch, "Toca's Intro," *The Piece Maker*, CD (Rhino/Ada, 2000).
[247] The Bar, "Barkada," *Barkada*, CD (Beatrock Music, 2014).

funk in the 70s."[248] The universe of funk music and style exemplifies a continuation of a longer lineage of Black aesthetics and philosophy in Islam and jazz that has always explored alternative and counter-routes of Black origin and destiny. The legacies of jazz and funk musicians Sun Ra, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Earth, Wind, and Fire, and Parliament Funkadelic travels in the universe of more contemporary Black musical forms, such as techno, R&B, and hip hop. The designs of Legaspi anticipated the "freakiness" and "outsiderness" espoused by African American hip hop artists less than a decade later. Funk's costuming, fashion, record sleeve art, drum patterns, and musical samplings would continue in the diverse expressions of Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force, Queen Latifa, X-Klan, Public Enemy, The Digable Planets, Outkast, Kool Keith, Janelle Monáe, Flying Lotus, Ras G, and countless other hip hop artists.[249] Beginning in the 1990s, young Filipino Americans would become prominent participants to these "freaky" and "outsider" aesthetics in what would be called Afrofuturism.

This chapter demonstrates Filipino American hip hop performance's indebtedness to the aesthetics and politics of a Black American cultural imagination. Many Filipino American hip hop performers have been inspired by Afrofuturist aesthetics and, like Legaspi, are contributors to Afrofuturism as a genre. In *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (2013), Ytasha L. Womack describes the genre as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation," which in some cases "offers a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques."[250] Mark Dery in his 1994 essay "Black

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[248] Nelson George (dir.), *Finding the Funk*, online documentary (Finding the Funk Productions, 2013), http://www.vh1.com/shows/vh1_rock_docs/finding-the-funk-full-episode/1721346/playlist/#id=1721346. Last accessed on July 31, 2015; "Designer turns fantasies into fashion," *Gadsden Times*, May 13, 1979, http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1891&dat=19790513&id=ynMpAAAAIBAJ&sjid=N9YEAAAAIBAJ&pg=2020,2342389. Last accessed on July 22, 2015.

[249] Rose Eveleth, "The Subversive Science Fiction of Hip-Hop," *Motherboard*, July 7, 2015, http://motherboard.vice.com/read/the-subversive-science-fiction-of-hip-hop. Last accessed on July 22, 2015.

[250] Ytasha L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), 9.

to the Future" first used the term Afrofuturism, ushering in "the serious study of cyberculture and gave a name to the technoculture trends in black America."[251] Since the 1990s, Afrofuturism is celebrated as a beloved cultural domain for "Black geeks" drawn to science fiction, outer space, and alternative historiographies of Black people expressed in literature, film, music, and other forms of popular culture. For Black geeks and Black cultural producers, these fantastical worlds open important avenues to examine historical traumas, critique current social conditions, and imagine solutions for a more just tomorrow. In "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism," Kodwo Eshun notes, "Ongoing disputes over reparation indicate that these traumas continue to shape the contemporary era. It is never a matter of forgetting what it took so long to remember. Rather, the vigilance that is necessary to indict imperial modernity must be extended into the field of the future."[252] Alienation echoing from the past into the future is a recurring theme in Afrofuturism that aims to "indict imperial modernity." Specifically, the alien stands in for very real social positions that can be traced back to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Eshun credits W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness for providing an early model for understanding the trope of alienation: "Afrofuturism uses extraterrestriality as a hyperbolic trope to explore the historical terms, the everyday implications of forcibly imposed dislocation, and the constitution of Black Atlantic subjectivities: from slave to negro to coloured to evolué to black to African to African American."[253]

Inspired by Afrofuturism, I use the term Afro-Filipino Futurism as a lens to help understand similar (but not equal) alternative worlds traversed by Filipino American hip hop performers. Afro-Filipino Futurism seeks to give proper respects to Black imaginative culture while illuminating a Filipino historical condition shaped by Filipinos' exclusion or suspension

[251] Ibid, 17.
[252] Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism," *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3.2 (2003), 288.
[253] Ibid, 298-299.

from modernity. In short, Filipino American hip hop artists help narrate key contributions of Black imaginaries instrumental in excavating Filipino subalternity and speculating a Filipino futurity. By proposing worlds beyond this world, Afro-Filipino Futurism "indicts imperial modernity": the status quo of four centuries of Spanish and American subordination of native Filipino bodies. This proposal thus opens the opportunity to consider an Afro-Filipino resonant historical location in empire and, in turn, shared strategies of anticolonial practices.

I argue that the outlandish, alien, and creative community-formations of Filipino American hip hop cultural performances respond not only to the civic politics of U.S. racial exclusion but to the absence of a durable mythology of a venerable pre-colonial Filipino civilization. These performances, as such, propose alternative genealogies, modernities, and futurities that help outline a process of ongoing Filipino cultural decolonization. These responses contrast the visionary but problematic mythologies of elite Filipino intellectual culture of the late-nineteenth century. Inspired by European racial taxonomies, Hispanicized Filipino ilustrados embraced Europeanized versions of Filipino civilization for racial self-validation, expelling non-Christianized and darker-skinned Filipino ethnic groups from an aspired Philippine nation. Afro-Filipino Futurism, on the other hand, seeks unorthodox routes of identification by detouring away from conventional (and certainly colonial) categories of humanity. Afro-Filipino Futurism alludes to a sense of cosmic justice, or the reparation of cosmic injuries, which, as examined in my chapter on Filipino American exploration of Islam, is embedded within hip hop's larger decolonial cultural goals. If the march of U.S. imperialism into the Pacific and the Caribbean represented a "cosmic tendency" according U.S. Secretary of State John Hay in 1904, then in order to imagine a better future, Filipinos are actively revising

this cosmic status quo.[254] Infantilized for centuries by the Spanish and then categorized as savage and primitive during early years of American colonial administration, as summarized in my introduction, the Filipino body is persistently marked as devoid of history, culture, and a place in modernity. The historical fact of colonialism in the Philippines may have forged a geography of subordination and domination in las islas Filipinas for four centuries, foreclosing Indios' claim to civilization or nation and decimating a pre-colonial sacred orientation, but since the end of the twentieth century, Filipino American hip hop performers are articulating alternative claims to belonging by situating themselves as members of a global and intergalactic universe who exceed the strictures of imperial geographies.

Outside of hip hop culture, Afro-Filipino Futurism can be considered a distant kin to genres of Philippine and Filipino American speculative fiction and science fiction in the visual arts and performance. "Filipino Futurism," though, is not a popular descriptor for the latter genres.[255] Rather, Oliver Wang coined the term "Filipino-futurism" to describe Filipino American DJs' fascination with "spaceships, eight-armed extraterrestrials, and other figments of science fiction" serving as an "alternative discourse that compensates for the absence of race."[256] Specifically referring to the San Francisco-based crew the Invisibl Skratch Piklz (ISP), Elizabeth H. Pisares nuances Wang's proposition by pointing to the Filipino American cultural infrastructure available for these DJs amidst "racial isolation and hierarchy" and ISP's acknowledgments of their Filipino heritage. Harboring a social condition of racial invisibility

[254] Benito M. Vergara, *Displaying Filipinos: Photography and Colonialism in Early 20th-Century Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1995), 20.
[255] Special thanks to Leo Esclamado, Anna Alves, Thea Quiray, Barbara Jane Reyes, and Charles Tan for your electronic correspondences in helping me think through these concepts. For more on Philippine speculative fiction, see *Philippine Speculative Fiction Sampler*, website, http://philippinespeculativefiction.com/index.html. Last accessed on July 22, 20150.
[256] Elizabeth H. Pisares, "Do You Mis(recognize) Me: Filipina Americans in Popular Music and the Problem of Invisibility," in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, ed. Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr., Edgardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 194.

and misrecognition among Filipino Americans generally, as Pisares shows, these DJs function as imaginative bricoleurs in patching together a creative language of racial belonging. She writes that Filipino Americans "must become as agile with the existing racial discourses as their DJs are with recordings from different musical genres to create a language for themselves."[257] So, instead of simply treated as an "absence of race," the fantastical worlds created by artists like ISP should be appreciated for their versatile capacity to signify race.

As this chapter shows, Filipino American leadership in the Universal Zulu Nation, the freaky sonics of ISP, and the extraterrestrial communion of Filipina American emcee Hopie exemplify the ways in which Afro-Filipino Futurism reconstitutes race as a key cultural politic. Afro-Filipino Futurism, like Afrofuturism, mobilizes an abundance of Black aesthetics.[258] Operating within hip hop's anticolonial universe, I show Afro-Filipino Futurism's indebtedness to a longer lineage of Black vernacular expression. My analysis, therefore, addresses Antonio T. Tiongson Jr.'s criticism of Filipino Americans' proclivity to "dissociate hip-hop with blackness."[259] Tiongson's study on the deracialization of hip hop among Filipino American DJs, including that of the Piklz and other Filipino American DJs from the San Francisco Bay Area, provides an important intervention in understanding the problems of liberal racial discourses in the post-civil rights era. His criticism of some hip hop performers' reiteration of colorblindness rightly illustrates that one's participation in hip hop does not mean a valuing of hip hop's blackness or of Black people. He writes, "Deracialization of hip-hop, which I argue is

[257] Ibid, 194.
[258] Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Womack (2013). Special thanks to Graham Eng-Wilmot for his valuable consultation.
[259] Antonio T. Tiongson Jr., *Filipinos Represent: DJs, Racial Authenticity, and the Hip-hop Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), xiii.

symptomatic of contemporary racial discourse and, in particular, the inability to think about race in a critically sustained way in the contemporary moment."[260]

My analysis appreciates a fuller vantage of Filipino American hip hop performance and refuses to allow artist interviews, on which greatly Tiongson relies, that tend to privilege discussions on meritocracy over racial identity to overdetermine the varied meanings and politics of their wider expressions.[261] As Christine Balance reminds us, the actual performance of artists, which create "social realities and worlds" beyond racial recognition, should be given due attention and discussion.[262] Relaying Balance's performative readings, DJ Qbert of ISP retains prescient understandings of his own "staged" performances. Qbert often designs his interviews to be overtly facetious and even sarcastic, though nonetheless illuminating. For example, in an interview with Roderick N. Labrador, Qbert compares his role as a DJ to theater:

> Well, it's theater... If you want to be a character that is a Filipina/o character, that's fine. But make it the best you can be. If you want to be a clown up there, if you want to be a gay rapper, do whatever you want. If you want to be the naked rapper, that's fine but there needs to be some skills. It's all theater. People don't see it as that they're up there as an actor. We're up there performing a character. But if you're an actor, you need some skills, too. You can be whoever you want to be. It's your stage.[263]

For Qbert, being Filipino, naked, or gay are theatrical—they are flattened as equal categories of identity performed on stage. His remarks, then, succinctly underscore both his defiant evasion of identity and his awareness of performance as a practice.

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[260] Ibid.
[261] For examples of DJ Qbert's quirky and sarcastic interviews, see DJ Qbert and Roderick N. Labrador, "We're Up There Performing a Character," in *Empire of Funk: Hip Hop and Representation in Filipina/o America*, ed. Mark R. Villegas, Kuttin' Kandi, and Roderick N. Labrador (San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2014), 10; Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 89-90.
[262] Christine Balance, *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 72.
[263] Qbert and Labrador (2014), 10.

Reading the alien and cosmic themes of Filipino American hip hop performances as part of an Afro-Filipino Futuristic practice positions these performances within hip hop's Afrofuturistic imaginary. The "other forms of affiliation" (to reuse Balance's words) made by these artists include an affiliation with hip hop's expansive Black universe. This lens makes evident a necessary corrective to Tiongson's interpretation of African American cultural orientation. Filipino American DJ's self-narration, Tiongson contends, "are generally oriented toward the future and outer space in contrast to that of African Americans."[264] My analysis reconsiders such a "contrast." An Afro-Filipino Futurist optic is attentive to the more dynamic and capacious orientations of Black vernacular culture, which, without a doubt, actuates "the future and outer space" as vital imaginaries.

Interplanetary Rock from the Boogie Down

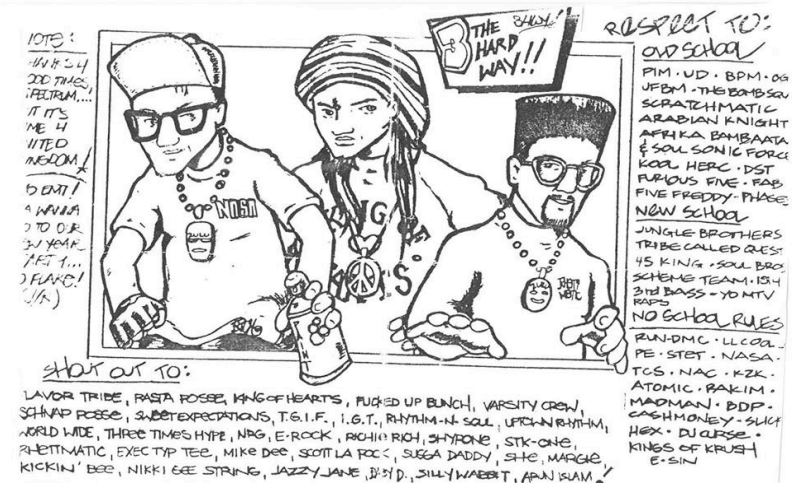

Figure 3.1. United Kingdom DJ crew party flyer featuring Rich 1, Eric Sanford, and DJ Rhettmatic with acknowledgments of predominantly New York-based and Universal Zulu Nation artists. Image courtesy of Mark Pulido.

[264] Tiongson (2013), 59.

In a party flyer from the early 1990s, the artist DJ Rhettmatic of the world-renown turntablist group The Beat Junkies portrays three Cerritos-based Filipino American hip hop luminaries—graffiti artist Rich 1, graphic artist Eric Sanford, and DJ Rhettmatic—in an Afro-humanist style reminiscent of De La Soul or A Tribe Called Quest. While Sanford sports a peace sign pendant, Rich 1 and Rhett display their Universal Zulu Nation (UZN) emblems. Surrounding the trio are shout-outs to a compilation of popular hip hop acts who share a pro-Black, Afro-humanist message. As West Coast youth, the trio's tight identification with the mainly New York-based hip hop artists exemplifies the dominance of New York-based hip hop at the time (particularly a UZN Bronx River hip hop origin mythology), a dominance that many diehard hip hop enthusiasts would embrace even after the mainstream rise of West Coast rap in the early-1990s and Southern rap in the late-1990s. This flyer demonstrates how the cultural iconography of the UZN's brand of hip hop survives throughout the decades and has become a mainstay around the world. In a FuseTV interview, DJ Qbert points out the New York-style artwork on his crew's record sleeve: "Because of all that East Coast influence, we were trying to be like East Coast on the West Coast. So all the people were claiming 'West Coast,' we were claiming 'East Coast.'"[265] The UZN has functioned as cultural glue to prioritize hip hop's Bronx-origin myth, New York-centricity across several UZN chapters around the world.

As Rhettmatic's flyer shows, Filipino Americans have long been invested in taking up the UZN's cultural mission to preserve and expand what is deemed as authentic hip hop. For many Filipino Americans, the UZN has served as a cultural community to redeem one's dignity and to seek a sense of belonging. From across the continent, the UZN's New York-centric hip hop

[265] "DJ Qbert Shows Off His Incredibly Diverse Record Collection," *FuseTV*, March 5, 2014, website, http://www.fuse.tv/2014/03/qbert-crate-diggers?campaign=ytb-cd-030514-end#ooid=FzYm12azqEjYYV9qLaPCSHiQnPVdEC8V. Last accessed on July 23, 2015.

universe has reverberated for many Filipino American hip hop heads. Given the UZN's cultural weight, I contextualize Filipino American involvement in the organization.

Eric Sanford's introduction to the UZN provides an instructive example of Filipino Americans' early encounter with the organization. As a young bboy (breakdancer) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Sanford performed in downtown Los Angeles hip hop clubs. Dancing with a particular bboy style in the face of bboy culture's decline (and even ridicule) in Los Angeles, his talent attracted the attention of Zulu Gremlin, a member of the UZN and the Rock Steady Crew (RSC). Sanford was recruited into RSC, a legendary New York-originated bboy organization that was expanding membership across the United States at the time. He soon joined the UZN, a decision his fellow Cerritos-based Filipino American friends Rhettmatic and DJ Curse had already made. As Sanford says, "We were drawn to the Zulu Nation because the birth of Hip Hop and the Zulu Nation go hand in hand. You don't have one without the other. The coast was irrelevant because true Zulus don't seek division. And we recognized and appreciated the principles Zulu Nation stood for."[266]

Even in the Philippines, hip hop performers will credit the UZN for appearing early on in the archipelago to export their brand of hip hop. In an interview, legendary bboy Jmasta from Manila reiterates the UZN's mantra of peace and unity while trying to solidify UZN's authority as containing *the* original hip hop history: "We are one nation, take care of our planet, we are all brothers and sisters in this. Visit www.zulunation.com. Read the history."[267]

Founded in 1973, the UZN organized the artistic energies of ghetto youth in the Bronx, New York and has named itself the "first family of Hip Hop Culture," representing as the

[266] Electronic correspondence with Eric Sanford, February 27, 2015; Author's interview with Sanford, Artesia, CA, July 25, 2015.
[267] Bea Lesaca, "Rooted TV Episode 1: Jmasta (Battlekrew)," *Boogie Down Manila*, March 10, 2014, blog, http://funkynastycrazyclassy.wordpress.com/2014/03/10/rooted-tv-episode-1-jmasta-battlekrew/. Last accessed on July 23, 2015.

originator, protector, and messenger of authentic hip hop culture.[268] The UZN formed as an extension of the Black Arts Movement imperative of social uplift, intertwining themes of African American radical imagination arising during the mid-twentieth century. Energized by a newly defiant African American spiritual movement, an assemblage of counter-spiritual elements influenced UZN worldviews. Islam, Ancient Egyptian (Kemetic) symbols, biblical citations, UFO-ology, and cyborg technology adorn the esoteric and seemingly-improvised resources that circulate in UZN imagery.[269] This temporally-fused aesthetic illustrates fictional writer Ishmael Reed's concept of "synchronicity," or "putting disparate elements into the same time, making them run in the same time, together."[270] Renowned Los Angeles beat producer Ras G. describes this eclecticism in his music as "ancient timelessness."[271]

Afrika Bambaataa, the mysterious founder of the UZN, personifies the organization's bricolaged "ancient timelessness."[272] Jeff Chang writes, "[Bambaataa] began imposing his own order on the chaos of representations" surrounding the young UZN founder in the late 1960s.[273] A highly-aestheticized iconography surrounds Bambaataa. For example, on the cover of the All Tribes Chapter (San Francisco) informational pamphlet, with the ambience of the celestial universe around him, Bambaataa pumps his fist forward (notably, not upward in a Black Power gesture) and wears a medallion in the shape of the continent of Africa, a "Zulu" button, and an ancient Egyptian ankh medallion. The music video to his famous "Planet Rock" (1982) with the Soul Sonic Force features a swirl of George Clinton futurism, a combination of Mad Max,

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[268] "What is The Universal Zulu Nation???????" *Universal Zulu Nation*, website, http://www.zulunation.com/about-zulunation/. Last accessed on July 23, 2015.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Alondra Nelson, "Introduction: Future Texts," *Social Text*, 71, 20.2 (2002), 8.
[271] Ras G. public conversation with Nicole Mitchell, Black Urban Music Conference, University of California, Irvine, Feb. 28, 2015.
[272] Robin Sylvan, "Rap Music, Hip-Hop Culture and 'the Future Religion of the World,'" *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*, ed. Monica R Miller and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2014), 418.
[273] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 93.

Egyptian high priest, Native American, and pimpage chic together with a heavy dose of bboy toughness and teenage party energy. Emerging out of the psychedelic soul and cosmic funk of Sly and the Family Stone, Parliament-Funkadelic, and other 1970s Black musical acts, Bambaataa embodied a new era of post-radical cool. Jeff Chang writes,

> So many of the archetypes of the hip-hop generation seem to rise from the body of facts and myths that represent Bambaataa Aasim's life—godfather, yes, but also original gangster, post-civil rights peacemaker, Black riot rocker, breakbeat archaeologist, interplanetary mystic, conspiracy theorist, Afrofuturist, hip-hop activist, twenty-first-century griot.[274]

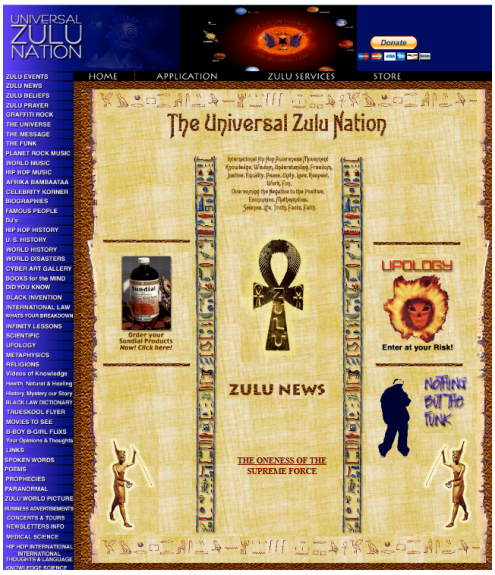

Figure 3.2. Universal Zulu Nation website (circa 2013). Screenshot of website.

Tellingly, Bambaataa's imagery and philosophies are grounded in strident anticolonial politics. Bambaataa derived the name "Zulu Nation" from his fascination with Michael Caine's 1964 film *Zulu*, which recounts British colonial defense against fierce Zulu resistance in 1879.[275] Bambaataa remembers the impact of the movie: "To see these Black people fight for their freedom and their land just stuck in my mind. I said when I get older I'm gonna have me a group

[274] Ibid, 92.
[275] Ibid, 93.

called the Zulu Nation."[276] According to the UZN Infinity Lesson #2, the original Bambaataa became bulletproof against British forces in South Africa. Part of a set of principles to the UZN "way of life," this lesson narrates the earlier Bambaataa beseeching his people to "abandon the signs and objects of European culture—except for their guns…"[277] In addition to Zulu anticolonialism, Bambaataa inherits mid-twentieth century new Black cultural politics that reclaims ancient Egypt as evidence of the flourishing of a precolonial Black African civilization.[278] Much more, Bambaataa's Kemeticism follows the political imagination of jazz, soul, and funk artists, which sees the science and cosmology of ancient Egypt as providing a portal to a post-Earth community.[279]

Without a doubt, Bambaataa's UZN is securely wedded to the anticolonial politics of Black consciousness. Unlike the performances of racial evasion DJ Qbert and the Invisibl Skratch Piklz, who are also UZN members, Bambaataa's cosmic vision is one of self-reclamation by exploring one's "true" identity. However, similar to Qbert and ISP, as a "universal" cultural organization, racial legibility—for example, memorializing blackness as an identifiable category—is often aesthetically abstracted. Seemingly contradictory flows between self-reclamation and "universal" abstraction, UZN's prerogative of "self-transformation," influenced by the Nation of Islam, evidences the organization's valuing of the sacredness of redeemed Black lives. The UZN takes up a cultural politics of cosmic justice, reaching from the pyramids to the stars above. The "universal" in the Universal Zulu Nation, then, is not the "universal" of the French Enlightenment that erases identity, power, and history but a

[276] Ibid, 94.
[277] Ibid, 91.
[278] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 104.
[279] John Coney (dir.), *Space is the Place*, DVD (Plexifilm, 2003).

"universal" abundant with *space*—as in the universe and outer space. Of hip hop's transnational success, partly due to UZN's outreach and education efforts beginning before mainstream rap's crossover, Bambaataa believes the culture should achieve the next step of literally reaching outside the planet Earth. Harkening to the theories of early jazz musician Sun Ra, the hip hop pioneer seeks to connect with other planets via music: "But now our big vision is as we become galactic humans, that we start taking hip hop when we start traveling to other planets."[280] An excerpt from "The Green Book" of the UZN's Infinity Lessons, reinforces Bambaataa's interplanetary ambitions:

> We, the Universal Zulu Nation are an organization and a universal nation, for all people on this planet so called Earth, as well for alien life form of people in the universe, whether you're from Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Pluto, Earth, etc. We the Zulu's are not foolish people to believe that we are the only life in the universe and that the creator, (Allah, Jehovah, Jah, Yahweh, God or whichever name you wish to call the Almighty One) is only limited to producing LIFE only on the planet so called Earth.[281]

Clearly, Bambaataa's philosophy of "life" deauthorizes the earthly "person" as an exceptional category of life. In turn, this philosophy problematizes human racial categories by extending "universal" value in the intelligence of interplanetary beings. The excerpt continues, "We as Zulu's who are from many different races, colors, and creeds should not be afraid to hear different views coming from humans or aliens from other planets."[282] Anchored in ancient Egypt and South African anticolonialism and enriched by the prospects of post-Earth community, racial difference for Bambaataa is a paradox: there is no difference among people

[280] "Afrika Bambaataa interview on Hip Hop, street gangs and the 5th element of Hip-Hop," August 5, 2006, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=563eLRk3lts. Last accessed on July 23, 2015.
[281] Thanks to Gabe Delacruz for his consultation. King Mark Luv and Malika Saphire (curators), *Book #1: The Green Book, Universal Zulu Nation Infinity Lessons Archive, 1973-2000, for the masses* (Publisher and date unknown).
[282] Ibid, 7.

because we are all galactic beings, but we are galactic beings according to the political and aesthetic terms of Afrofuturistic Black redemption.

But before hip hop is transmitted to other planets, it must first reach earthly saturation. As "Planet Rock" presciently prophesied, the UZN's mission of peace, unity, and having fun would soon reach around the world with UZN chapters in the Philippines, Japan, France, and Germany. Vague on political goals and maintaining an esoteric recruitment process, the UZN has attracted an array of mostly male members, including talented DJs and dancers, Afrocentric purists seeming to arrive from Kemet by way of spaceship, and pop stars, the latter underscored by the recent scandal surrounding the induction of mainstream hip hop celebrity Lil Wayne into the organization.[283] In the early 1990s, the UZN would eventually reach an already thriving Filipino American hip hop cultural infrastructure. Filipino American practitioners, as with African American practitioners, were drawn to the UZN's reclamation of the street, dance floor, and their own bodies for the purpose of pleasure, competition, and expression. They also absorbed the UZN's pedagogical imperative to learn about obscured histories and civilizations. Largely thanks to the active fostering of West Coast breaking and DJ crews by the New York-based Rock Steady Crew in the early 1990s and the educational efforts by existing West Coast UZN chapters, Filipino Americans from San Diego to Seattle became cultural vanguards of the UZN's empowering and fun-centered brand of hip hop and also become international ambassadors for the organization, traveling to teach hip hop classes around the world.[284] Filipino Americans are active members in many UZN chapters; some join by completing an initiation

[283] Latifah Muhammad, "Report: Lil Wayne Joins the Zulu Nation, Is Weezy the newest member of hip hop's oldest organization?" *BET*, November 28, 2014, http://www.bet.com/news/music/2014/11/28/report-lil-wayne-joins-the-zulu-nation.html. Last accessed on July 23, 2015.

[284] Rob Nasty, "Building Hip Hop from the Bay to the World," in *Empire of Funk: Hip Hop and Representation in Filipina/o America*, ed. Mark R. Villegas, Kuttin' Kandi, and Roderick N. Labrador (San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2014); Mikey Disko and Rob Nasty publicize widely their dance classes hosted in various cities around the world. Their Facebook accounts contain an archive of all of their travels.

process consisting of mastering "lessons" and others are inducted into the group by virtue of their exceptional contributions to hip hop culture. As demonstrated by Qbert and ISP, in the San Francisco Bay Area, Filipino Americans are key leaders and artistic visionaries in several UZN chapters and have become woven into the region's rich and historic African American music and dance community.

I attended the annual "Meeting of the Minds" UZN conference hosted by the All Tribes San Francisco chapter in 2014. The packed event in the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts featured some of the Bay Area's most influential hip hop artists, radio personalities, and community organizers. As UZN members entered the space, they greeted each other with the special Zulu handshake/embrace. The mostly African American and Latino—and gender mixed—audience and panelists were joined by an observable Filipino American presence. Even the official food vendor was a Filipino American guy. Richard "Patience" Olayvar, a Filipino American emcee from San Francisco's Mission District, was the host and helped introduce guests who spoke on the topics of gentrification in the Mission, police brutality, the current state of the hip hop music industry, and hip hop's involvement in political movements. Rudy Corpuz, founder of the anti-gang nonprofit organization United Playaz, spoke on stage with local middle school youth about being born into gang life in the South of Market District, the importance of seeking peace, and staying away from drugs.[285] Corpuz wore a baseball cap adorned with the Philippine three stars and sun and rocked a Philippine flag UZN-type emblem around his neck. After appearing as a guest on a panel, Gabriel "Ahki Zulu Delrokz" Delacruz, former UZN All Tribes president and a local DJ, concluded the conference by asking the audience to join him in the "Isang Baksak" (one fall) clap, a ritual of solidarity performed by early Filipino and Mexican

[285] Joshua Sabatini, "Staving off displacement: SF fund helps anti-violence youth organization buy building," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 30, 2014, http://www.sfexaminer.com/sanfrancisco/staving-off-displacement-sf-fund-helps-anti-violence-youth-organization-buy-building/Content?oid=2915563. Last accessed on July 23, 2015.

farmworkers in California and currently rehearsed by Filipino American college students to honor these farmworkers' role in the labor struggle.

Figure 3.3. Universal Zulu Nation All Tribes SF Chapter flyer for "Meeting of the Minds" event on December 6th, 2014. From Facebook page of Gabriel De La Cruz.

Figure 3.4. Author's photographs from "Meeting of the Minds" event.

Early in the UZN's creation, Bambaataa crafted the intentional interplay between aesthetics and transformative pedagogy. The UZN espouses the saying "knowledge of self," a

mantra issued earlier by the Nation of Islam's Elijah Mohammed.[286] In his "MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS OF THE WORLD," on the UZN website Bambaataa declares,

> You must seek knowledge: Knowledge is to know and is the foundation of all things in existence. Knowledge is infinite. Knowledge is to know thyself and to know others. Knowledge is to know your surroundings, environment, the nature of life and death, animals, the solar system, the universe, the past, present, and the future. Knowledge is to know The Supreme One.[287]

As already mentioned, Bambaataa inherited the legacies of Black Power, funk music, and African American Islam. "Knowledge of self" for the organization, therefore, is strongly linked to a larger legacy of Afrocentric spiritual redemption. As Chang notes, "Rather than rebelling against an unjust society by accomplishing externalized movements against systems and institutions, seeking one's own truth, 'having a true reckoning with one's god within,' and 'overstanding' injustice in the world has always been the UZN's method of 'politics.'[288] Paulskee, former UZN Tri-City Funk Chapter president in the Bay Area, testifies to the organization's impact on his own exploration of his Filipino American cultural background and his decision to proudly wear traditional Filipino attire at hip hop jams: "The whole belief of the Zulu Nation is to find yourself. I would see Bam [Bambaataa] all the time. He'd be rockin' dashikis and a lot of African attire… I realized why he was doing that."[289] Within the UZN's pedagogical discourse, alongside the mix of South African and Bronx River hip hop history, and Nation of Islam-derived guidelines on appropriate hygiene and meat and dairy consumption are

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[286] Joseph D. Eure and James G. Spady, *Nation Conscious Rap: The Hip Hop Vision* (New York: PC International Press, 1991), 329.
[287] Afrika Bambaataa, "Message to the Youth and Young Adults of the World," website, http://www.zulunation.com/the-message/. Last accessed on July 23, 2015.
[288] Chang (2005), 106.
[289] Mark Villegas (dir.), *Hip Hop Mestizaje: Racialization, Resonance, and Filipino American Knowledge of Self*, online documentary, (Mark Villegas, 2007), https://vimeo.com/6394176. Last accessed on July 23, 2015.

included indigenous, Latino, and Filipino historiographies.[290] At least in some San Francisco Bay Area UZN chapters, the Infinity Lessons new members must review include an assortment of articles on Philippine revolutionary and nationalist heroes, U.S. colonization of the Philippines, precolonial Philippine history, and the contributions of Filipino Americans in hip hop. Sharon "Sha Boogie" Mendoza, a UZN member of the Rock 5 Zulus chapter, notes that in her chapter all prospective members, regardless of ethnicity, must learn Philippine and Filipino American-related lessons.[291]

Somehow confounding binaries and essentialism, Filipino Americans negotiate Bambaataa's bricolaged Afrocentric, post-Earth universe while exploring their own Filipinoness. I don't view this negotiation as a tension or a contradiction. Applying the UZN as a cultural resource, Filipino Americans are applying strategies of belonging that imagines another world—a new "universal nation"—where they can manifest their dignity. The hip hop cosmos mutually interweaves a Filipino racial "overstanding." The UZN's pedagogical imperative is a critical catalyst to mobilizing cultural codes of Filipino American racialization. Absent of a Filipino subjectivity not molded by European and white American domination, through Afro-Filipino Futuristic expressions, Filipino Americans are inscribing their own visions of nationality and belonging by reissuing Black poetics. For Filipinos who are "robbed of our nationhood," to use the words of Filipino American emcee Geo, the UZN and hip hop in general become cultural proxies for a colonized Philippines.[292]

Yet, in his book on deracialization in Filipino American DJ culture, Tiongson interrogates the problems of hip hop's nationalist discourses. Tiongson asks, "Why the deployment of 'nation,' given the highly problematic status of nationalist discourses and

[290] *The Green Book*; Chang (2005), 105-106.
[291] Author's electronic correspondence with Sharon Mendoza, February 5-6, 2015.
[292] Author's electronic correspondence with Geo, February 22, 2007.

logic?"[293] Specifically critiquing Filipino American DJs, he writes, "While Filipino youth involvement in DJing has served to expand the grounds from which to consider the bounds of Filipinoness, it has also served to perpetuate narrow notions of nationalist discourse and logic."[294] More concerned with the exclusionary mechanisms of nation in terms of gender and sexuality, Tiongson begrudges the perpetuated discourse of the "hip hop nation," especially as hip hop emerges out of the politics of the post-civil rights era in which liberalist, pluralist politics evacuate differences in racial power.

While Tiongson is astute in his critique, the "nation" according to the poetics of Bambaataa and other hip hop cultural agents are much more capacious, contradictorily defying traditional limitations of nation while also reifying some of nation's discourse.[295] Even if the term "nation" is appropriated by Bambaataa and his Black nationalist forebears (such as the Nation of Islam or Amiri Baraka's album *It's Nation Time*), hip hop's supposed "universality" and border-crossing defiance disrupts the defining features of the modern nation.[296] Instead of an instrument of military competition, resource accumulation, and geographic delimitation, the nation for Bambaataa and many hip hop disciples has been redefined as a new *outer*space of belonging. The cosmic abstraction and anticolonial/precolonial stakes of the UZN's "universal" nation should be appreciated for its expansive politics rooted in a redemptive Black universe.

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[293] Tiongson (2013), 99.
[294] Ibid, 101.
[295] For more on the politics of nation and diaspora, see H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, and Alastair Pennycook, *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2009); James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Paul Gilroy, Small Acts: *Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1994); Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[296] Amiri Baraka, *It's Nation Time: African Visionary Music*, LP (Black Forum, 1972).

Figure 3.5. Delrokz displays his UZN beads and DJ Qbert collectible. Screenshot from "Reel Hood Heroes" video.

For some Filipino Americans, the temporally and geographically defiant version of hip hop's funky nation—or rather, funky universe—becomes empowering. In the "Reel Hood Heroes" interview with Delrokz, the then-UZN All Tribes president holds up a book entitled *Philippine History and Government throughout the Years*. "Knowledge is infinite and you gotta go out there and get it for yourself. School only teaches you so much," he proclaims.[297] Delrokz's incitement to learn about history not taught in schools not only gestures to the erasure of Filipino history in textbooks, but also suggests the recuperative projects that attempt to address the irretrievability of a Filipino national subjectivity. In the next scene of the interview, Delrokz shows off a DJ Qbert collectible toy and pays homage to Qbert and the Skratch Piklz for putting "Filipinos on the map as far as DJs and really representing Daly City." As intimated earlier, Daly City and San Francisco in general is home to one of the largest concentrations of Filipino Americans in the U.S. and has come to be representative of a West Coast, Filipino American hip hop origin myth given the city's boasting of world-renown Filipino American DJs and dancers. Delrokz's interview illustrates the overlapping of a supposedly attainable Filipino national history and the creation of Filipino subjectivity through Filipino American

[297] "2012 Reel Hood Hero: Gabriel Dela Cruz aka The Mighty Delrokz," Jul 24, 2012, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk7wHQFhUsM. Last accessed on July 23, 2015.

representation in hip hop. The knowledge of self aspiration in this scene alludes to the "routing" of Filipinos on the "map" of hip hop and Daly City as much as it is a "rooting" to the "natal" of a Philippine nation.[298] Discussing the pedagogical mandate of the UZN, Delrokz reiterates his transcendental quest for "truth": "I want to know every side of the story, so I can know my own truth, what I believe to be true." For Delrokz, the relative absence of a Filipino historical narrative motivates knowledge of self while prompting opportunities for collaboration and community-building through hip hop.

The UZN has operated as a "school" for Filipino Americans seeking "true" knowledge, thus helping fulfill a desire to make visible a Filipino historiography. As Delrokz shows, a search for Filipino knowledge of self is given resources that flow in the hip hop universe of Afrocentric abstraction. But, as the next section demonstrates, Filipino legibility is not the only route of an anticolonial practice for Filipino American hip hop performers. Alien, extraterrestriality, and interplanetary motifs can also operate as spaces of belonging for these artists.

Alien Intelligence

The song "Crosshairs" begins with the sizzle of a teleportation beam, a zap of a laser ray, and pings from a satellite, all kept in time by the clap of a snare drum. "Crosshairs," from Filipino American emcee Bambu's album *Sun of a Gun* (2013), evokes the ways DJ Qbert, the song's producer, seems to constantly speak to extraterrestrial life forms with his music. On top of Qbert's deep tumbling of bass drums, Bambu levels a witty and adversarial critique of American surveillance, U.S. gun culture, and the hypocrisies of overseas war policies. At the end of his first verse, Bambu summons the DJ, "Q, talk," to which Qbert "breaks it down" by

[298] For more on roots versus routes, see Paul Gilroy (1993), 19.

conducting a clinic of turntable wizardry with his virtuoso cuts of the vocal sample "I could break it down."[299] As Bambu's urgent messages transmit to politicized listeners, the quirky beeps, rumbles, and scratches in "Crosshairs" exemplify a trademark "Q talk" that seems to transmit to outer space. While Bambu sends clear and confrontational vocal vibrations, Qbert's electronic vibrations are cryptic and strange.

Characterizing Afro-Filipino Futurism, Qbert's abstract and avant-garde approach to music finds affinities with—and provides indisputable contributions to—a larger hip hop artistic universe that utilizes science fiction aesthetics and motifs. Of Qbert and his turntablist crew the Invisibl Skratch Piklz, Christine Balance writes, "These new phonographers insist listening ears travel through the inner spaces of music with out-of-this-world sounds created by encounters between humans and machines. This is the stuff of science fiction, as well as the postcolonial and postmodern, where and when shifting temporalities create spaces to re-imagine the future."[300] Relaying the notion of Filipino American cyborg connectivity, Kodwo Eshun quotes DJ Mix Master Mike of ISP: "We think as instruments."[301] If Filipino American DJs are sentient cyborg musical instruments, then their desire to communicate must involve a superhuman level of cognizance that cannot be described as merely human and surely exceeds the so-called primitive. Terming "skratchadelia" as the chaotic yet rhythmic sounds of turntablism, Eshun gestures to the extraterrestrial communicative noises blaring from the DJ's instruments: "Skratchadelia encrypts its tones, demanding alien listeners tuned into the open secret hidden in static, receivers who can hear a new world in its garbled frequencies."[302] D-Styles, another member of ISP, likens their cerebral turntablist sounds to bebop, which defied the

[299] Bambu, "Crosshairs," *Son of a Gun*, CD (Beatrock Music, 2013).
[300] Balance (2016), 74-75.
[301] Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1999), 43.
[302] Ibid, 21.

more easily digestible and dance-able jazz music: "Some music we make is just listening music, very similar to the jazz movement in the 1940s when bebop moved away from the traditional jazz dance band."[303] D-Styles's cataloging of ISP's sounds within the longer archive of creative Black music, of which Bambaataa and other influential hip hop artists are also keen to recognizing, indicates ISP's sophisticated aesthetic awareness.

ISP's eccentric skratchadelia were most prominent in the late 1990s and early 2000s in the form of mixtapes, DJ battles, and radio skits. In the 2001 documentary *Scratch*, "Scratching to me is another kind of intelligence," professes Mix Master Mike. In another scene, similar to Bambaataa's interplanetary vision, Qbert reflects on his musical communion with aliens: "Since earth is kind of like a primitive planet, what about the more advanced civilizations? How does their music sound? So I would imagine whatever they're doing, and I guess that's how I come up with my ideas." Also in 2001, the South By Southwest film festival audience award-winning animated film *Wave Twisters* based on the music of DJ Qbert's album of the same name relishes in the artist's psychedelic communications.[304] "In *Wave Twisters*," Balance writes, "as with ISP's musical recordings, the adolescent (nerd-boy culture) and the avant-garde (sound and film technologies) comfortably co-exist."[305] The sonically and visually collaged and frenetic Star Wars parody utilizes "nerd-boy" comic book superhero/supervillain tropes popular in hip hop visuals exemplified in the record art of the Soul Sonic Force in the 1980s and continuing with more current artists such as the Wu Tang Clan, Outkast, and MF Doom. The glorious absurdities, however, are obvious as the film's dancing, blue-skinned protagonist "Julio Azul," the "Dental Commander," wears a head mirror and green medical scrubs, conducts bloody

[303] Balance (2016), 65.
[304] "SXSW Film Winners: Winners of the SXSW 2001 Film Festival," *The Austin Chronicle*, March 16, 2001, website, http://www.austinchronicle.com/screens/2001-03-16/sxsw-film-winners/. Last accessed on July 24, 2015.
[305] Balance (2016), 77.

surgery on robots and alien beings, and travels outer space to overcome the diabolic schemes of Lord Ook the crime boss voodoo doll baddy and his henchman The Red Worm, who lives inside the belly button of a luchador-masked baby. With UZN-like zeal, the Dental Commander and his crew must preserve the "Lost Arts," aka the hip hop cultural elements, from erasure by dispatching turntable scratches as deadly weapons. Conceivably, the dentist hero could represent a sarcastic jab at the stereotypical medical career aspirations of bourgeois Filipino Americans; the "Dental Commander" is heroic not because he happens to be a good dentist, but because he is an intergalactic traveling, cybertechnology-savvy, and skilled b-boy/turntablist/alien fighter. If Qbert's sonic imagination attempts to encounter the frequency waves of "more advanced civilizations," *Wave Twisters* conjures a whimsical and crafty extraterrestrial narrative that bewilders markers of race and humanness, yet, importantly, upholds gender and sexuality roles—in true "nerd-boy" fashion—with Dental Commander's climactic saving of helpless and scantily-clad token female crewmember, graffiti artist Honey Drips, from imminent death on a giant spinning laser turntable.

The racial ambiguity in *Wave Twisters* reflects Qbert's persistent evasion of the possible roles of Filipinoness in his artistic experiences. As mentioned earlier, Qbert's take on racial identity in his music decidedly prioritizes skills and art without focusing too much on being Filipino. Balance examines ISP's motifs of science fiction and abstraction as a form of political practice in what she calls "labors of alienation."[306] On top of ISP's flair for bizarre otherworldliness and abstraction, their defiant interview responses that disengage race, ethnicity, and other identities from their performances (i.e. Qbert uniformly categorizing Filipino, gay, and naked) is often seen as a dangerous act of racial evasion and transcendence, so argued by

[306] Ibid, 57.

Antonio Tiongson.[307] Yet, even if ISP members problematically evade racial legibility, the group's "labors of alienation" bear "performative power" in defying racial visibility, a defiance that is in itself a political practice offering listeners "the possibility to imagine other forms of affiliation."[308] Balance outlines the limits of visibility discourse, which seeks to address Filipinos' perceptual absence in order to seek legitimate representation, and its origins in U.S. colonial usage of photography to assert a "principle of compulsory visibility": "I hear ISP and DJ QBert's improper responses, in the setting of the interview, as their own laborious acts of alienation, ones that work through the mode and moods of disaffection and, therefore, form part of a longer history of Filipino insubordination."[309] ISP's performances in both interviews and creative productions, according to Balance, offer an alternative, counter-intuitive politics of representation.

Balance's listening methodology is "aware of diverse archives but unafraid of juggling between disparate historical moments in order to experiment with and explore the contours of particular themes and possibilities."[310] She highlights the parallels between ISP's theme of alienation and Asian and Asian Americans' historical legal and cultural exclusion due to their characterizations as "hordes of unfeeling automatons and inscrutable foreigners."[311] But, unlike other Asian groups, as imperial subjects during the first half of the twentieth century, Filipinos in the United States have more often oscillated in their social and legal statuses "between uncivilized natives or little brown brothers and U.S. nationals or military allies."[312] These oscillating historical moments reverberate in ISP's music, and, for Balance, through a more

[307] Ibid, 68-69; Tiongson (2013).
[308] Balance (2016), 73.
[309] Ibid, 70-71, 80.
[310] Ibid, 79.
[311] Ibid, 66.
[312] Ibid, 67.

careful and "disobedient listening" of ISP's "weirdest sounds," "we can and should take seriously the political and aesthetic alliances made possible by the identity category of alien, as a recuperative of previous histories and a signaling towards other forms of extraterrestrial intelligence."[313]

Building off of Balance's serious consideration of ISP's "political and aesthetic alliances," I maintain that members of ISP are indeed building these linkages through a longer history of Black politics and aesthetics as well as with a larger hip hop community. Further, I contend, Filipino Americans' alienation does not only originate from their invisibility or outsider/insider social and civic statuses relative to the United States; their alienation is also informed by Filipinos' broader exclusion from (or at least suspect inclusion in) civilization and modernity; the freakish and quirky extraterrestrial soundscapes and imagery compensates for a Filipino American sense of embodiment when the category "Filipino" remains indeterminate within and beyond U.S. minoritarian civic politics. As with Black decolonial cultural practices, ISP's Afro-Filipino Futurism yields the knowledge of a centuries-long cultural project that envisions colonized bodies flourishing outside the authority of the racist imperial state and its built hierarchies. ISP's "weirdest sounds" are communications signaling for an intimate connectivity with a more expansive and liberating universe.

Afro-Filipino Futurism represents an intersection of Afrofuturism and Filipino American hip hop vernacular, with the language of alien intelligence and "advanced civilization" sharing a desire to connect with a world beyond this world. As discussed earlier, Afrofuturism employs tropes of the alien and alienation to address Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness and the trauma of dislocation and enslavement. Eshun writes, "[T]he idea of slavery as an alien

[313] Ibid, 68.

abduction which means that we've all been living in an alien-nation since the 18th century."[314] With their fictional tale of mutant descendants of overboarded Africans in the Atlantic, The Detroit electro group Drexciya epitomizes an Afrofuturistic penchant for alien mythologizing. Eshun describes Drexciyans as "'water breathing, aquatically mutated descendants,' webbed mutants of the Black Atlantic, amphibians adapted for the ocean's abyssal plains, a phylum disconnected from the aliens who adapted to land." Drexciya's electronic sound replays "the alien abduction of slavery" and the supposed migration of these advanced beings onto the U.S. continent. "They have been here all along and they are you. You are the alien you are looking for."[315] Of Afrofuturists propensity to use alien themes, Ytasha Womack states, "The alien motif reveals dissonance while also providing a prism through which to view the power of the imagination, aspiration, and creativity channeled in resisting dehumanization efforts."[316]

But for Filipino Americans, critical references to blackness and alienation as illustrated by Drexciya and other Afrofuturistic cultural productions meet an obvious cognitive impasse; for Filipino Americans, aliens and alienation tend to inhabit a different valence. Double-consciousness is obviously not located in the original trauma of the Atlantic slave trade, but can allude to the fracturing and curtailing of Filipino diasporic nationhood and the estrangement from a more sacred precolonial world. Since the dockings of Spanish ships in Samar and the American Navy in Manila Bay, Filipino alienation from modernity is at once geographic, civic, and civilizational. The desire to connect with more "advanced civilizations" exemplifies a yearning to exist outside present human hierarchies and representations. In a 1998 *URB* magazine interview, for example, ISP members theorize alien contact with their hometown of

[314] Eshun (1999), 192.
[315] Ibid, 84.
[316] Womack (2013), 37.

San Francisco.[317] Balance writes, "The conversation [in the interview] quickly devolves into theories of aliens designing The City as their 'trading base' and the pyramid-shaped Transamerica building as their telephone [aka 'alien's AT&T']."[318] As alluded to earlier, ancient Egypt and its pyramids hold great symbolic importance for the UZN, jazz, and funk. It is possible that these DJs have glanced countless times at the pyramids on the record covers of Earth, Wind, and Fire, Herbie Hancock, or Hieroglyphics, thus making a cognitive connection between popular Kemetic iconography with that of their beloved skyline. ISP's revisualizing the iconic Transamerica building as a conduit for alien communication, then, resounds with Black music and hip hop's already-rich mythologies of extraterrestrial-honing Egyptian pyramids. However, instead of Bambaataa's ancient Egypt, a structure symbolizing San Francisco's financial district becomes a "sacred" site, a more immediate point of alternative recognition for members of ISP. Where Bambaataa and other modern-day Kemetics seek to reclaim ancient Egyptian monuments for Black Africans and their extraterrestrial kindred, ISP members' transformation of their city to an alien conduit signifies their desire to develop otherworldly community absent of a re-veneration of a previously disparaged or invisibilized colonized historiography. ISP's San Francisco becomes a modern metropole version of Kemet, a site to invite contact with more "advanced civilizations."

Hopie is another notable Filipina/o American hip hop artist who consults hip hop's otherworldly aesthetics. She is perhaps currently the most prolific Filipina/o American hip hop artist who channels these extraterrestrial affinities, inheriting the Afro-Filipino Futuristic sensibilities of her more-veteran San Francisco-based peers Qbert and ISP. In her music videos "Space Case" and "Solar Systems," Hopie suggests that her emcee skills are honed due to an

[317] James Tai, Dave Tompkins, and Brian "B+" Cross, "Science Friction," *URB*, February 1998. Special thanks to Sean Slusser for digital copy of article.
[318] Balance (2016), 60.

elevated form of consciousness. As a Filipina American emcee from a male-dominated hip hop scene in San Francisco, her lyrics are textured with battle-rap braggadocio that confronts men's low-expectations of her skills.[319] Hopie's rapping ability excels not only due to her being a strong Pinay, but because she is also a special conduit of cosmic intelligence. She is, in essence, advanced; she is superhuman.

"Space Case" is a non-linear (or synchronistic, to use Ishmael Reed's term) unfolding of Hopie's series of abductions.[320] After being taken by alien beings, the emcee is abducted a second time by agents dressed in hazmat outfits on a mission to erase the memory of Hopie's alien encounter a la the series *Men in Black*. The video begins with Hopie having just woken up from a bizarre "dream." Things don't seem normal as she gazes at the San Francisco skyline from the rooftop of her apartment. She glimpses a UFO in the sky. Upon entering her apartment, objects float about her due to her newly acquired power of telekinesis. After spotting a mark on her hand, the prior evening's outing with her girlfriends flash into her mind, with one of her friends drawing a caricature of an alien on Hopie's palm, as if to mark the emcee as the one to be abducted. A beam of light transports Hopie to a spaceship after she wanders away from her group. On the spaceship, Hopie sits on a satellite-shaped throne, having morphed into a futuristic alien-like character. She boasts about her emcee skills to an audience of claymation aliens and mini flying saucers wobbling around her. "Wait a second I'm secondary to none," the queen raps before her new fans. The battle rap content, which composes the entirety of her song, seems adjacent to the sci-fi psychedelics of the song's beat and imagery.

[319] Hopie, "Writing Wrongs," in Villegas, Kandi, and Labrador (2014).
[320] Hopie, "Space Case," August 23, 2011, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzD22MF4NJ0. Last accessed on July 24, 2015.

Figure 3.6. Hopie's music video "Space Case." Screenshots from video.

After the first chorus, Del the Funky Homosapien recites a guest verse. Del, who is a member of the well-respected and ancient Egyptian-loving Oakland hip hop crew the Hieroglyphics, is a real-life artistic mentor to Hopie.[321] Like Hopie, the space ship teleports the legendary Oakland emcee and the aliens also enthrone him and treat him to an audience. As soon as Hopie is teleported back to earth, agents swoop down to abduct her. The agents surround Hopie with microphones. Like the aliens, several agents catch a groove and begin dancing to her lyrics. The agents' abduction, however, is more intrusive and clinical: Hopie wears a medical gown and sits on an examining table. The agents' curiosity is anthropological, reminiscent of the scientific examination of Filipino "specimens" at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.[322] The "object" of exhibition, though, is boldly "speaking back," marveling the agents with her lyrical virtuosity. Also, Hopie's superhuman characteristics contrast the White gaze placing subhumanness upon the bodies of colonized and abducted Filipinos at the World's Fair. When the agents scan Hopie's memory, flashes of the evening's festivities appear on the monitor; a pleasurable, women-centered space that juxtaposes the anonymous, sterile, and menacing inspection room where the agents have detained her. The words "Aliens detected" gleams on the monitor and the agents inject a needle into Hopie's neck. The event is "terminated." After being

[321] Hopie (2014), 163.
[322] Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1987).

released by the agents, Hopie, wandering the forest, is invited to listen to music by her beatmaker Six Fingers, summoning UFOs to reappear in the sky.

To the agents, the emcee's communing with her girls and aliens is dangerous. Hopie is a witness and participant to a forbidden event. However, the agents' termination of her memory seems incomplete; with her telekinetic powers and UFO visits, permanent residue of the evening remains. "Space Case" gestures to the U.S. program of benevolent assimilation that successfully sought to "erase" through an elaborate system of colonial tutelage the knowledge of U.S. war and occupation in the Philippines. The termination of Hopie's memory, as well, recalls the termination of Philippine state sovereignty at the moment of U.S. "abduction" of the Philippines and literal abduction of indigenous people from the Philippines for anthropological study and exhibition. "Space Case" reimagines an alternative outcome of colonial erasure, one in which a contraband counter-memory filled with communing and otherworldly expression persist in waking life despite the conspiratorial machinations of repressive and obliterating agents.

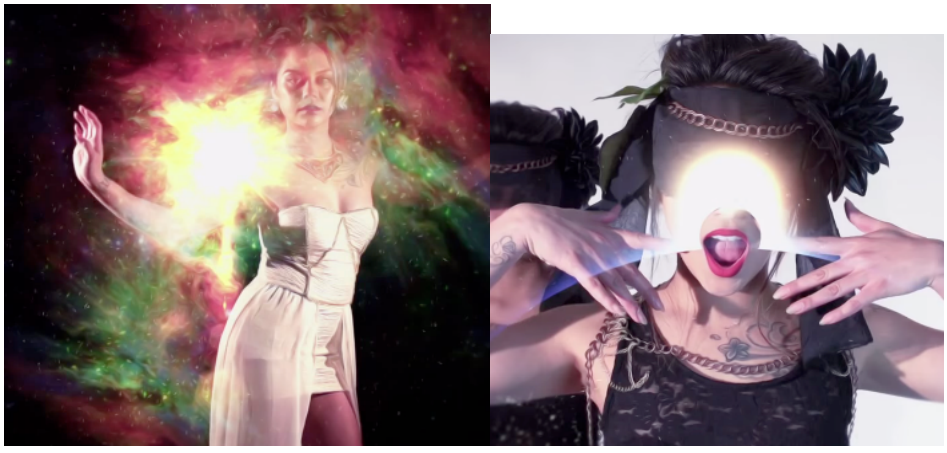

Figure 3.7. Hopie's music video "Solar Systems." Screenshots from video.

The music video "Solar Systems" continues Hopie's theme of otherworldliness.[323] This time, the emcee is a deity possessing cosmic intelligence that radiates from within her mind or from her "third eye." Contrasting the boyhood comic book fantasies of Qbert's *Wave Twisters*, "Solar Systems," like the party scenes in "Space Case," values woman-centered spaces and pleasures, complete with graceful and haunting dances by an all-woman cast. The pleasure of inhabiting the expressions of their own female bodies points to Hopie's politics of feminine empowerment. Hopie personifies "hope," the driving metaphor throughout the song's lyrics and visual presentation. She suspends binary morality and implies that hope sustains our survival despite its (her) flaws, disappointments, and contradictions. Her first verse begins,

> Call me a goddess, a devil
> I'm modern and I'm modest
> I'm evil but I'm honest
> At whatever you been sayin'
> I been that
> Even a couple times or more
> I've been war and I've been peace
> And I bit a piece of a man's heart before
> And broken hearts too fell apart too
> Been smart when I done some dumb shit
> Went dumb and deaf and blind side
> Lost vision in my mind's eye
> Envisioned shit that fell through
> Built castles that have held jewels
> But heaven gave them hell too
> I feel you when I tell you

She implies that the universe has intentions beyond human understanding, so hope is what we grasp in the chaos of a larger, sublime, cosmic system. Hope is both visionary and blind. Surrounded by the stars, Hopie represents an advanced knowledge beyond traditional senses. In some parts of the video, she dons a veil over her eyes to embody her human persona who stays

[323] Hopie, "Solar Systems," October 15, 2014, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSfsp2PnVGs. Last accessed on July 24, 2015.

naïve to the solar system's order. Even her dancers perform graceful movements with their sight veiled, demonstrating a kinetic brilliance despite the absence of sight.

At the same time Hopie connects with an infinite universe (or is perhaps a goddess who helps orchestrate the universe), she decides to adjoin "Solar Systems" to her ethnic roots by punctuating the rhythmic climax of the song (the tempo is enhanced) with lyrics in the Filipino language. She raps,

> Lahat sa loob ang ating bala (the bullets are in us)
> Sa mga kanta ako ay nakatira (I live with music)
> Tayo talaga totoong hope (We are true hope)
> And hope is the message
> I'm sharing with yall

Hurling her Filipino language or "roots" into the cosmos, Hopie suggests that her Filipinoness has much more expansive frontiers than the multicultural compartmentalization of her ethnicity. For her, being Filipino accentuates her borderless universe. Instead of a defiant evasiveness of her race and ethnicity assumed by her ISP counterparts, "Solar Systems" shows how Hopie exudes her Filipinoness comfortably without "memorializing" it. Bambaataa-esque in its delivery, the video assembles Hopie's "roots" onto an intergalactic scale. Perhaps her desired audience is fluent in Filipino, and her message of hope is one she seeks to impart to Filipinos who have yet to manifest their own infinite and hopeful potential.

Postcolonial Space

The culture and genealogy of Filipino America is always strongly fused to a violent moment of U.S. war and occupation in the Philippines. "[The Filipinos] are merely in a state of Christian pupilage. They are imitative. They are glad to be educated, glad to study some languages other than their own, glad to follow European and American ideals[,]" wrote former

Philippine Governor-General William Howard Taft in 1905.[324] A century later, Filipino Americans are revising the defining terms of European and White American superiority by restoring their bodies as civilized, intelligent, and even superhuman. They are mobilizing selfhoods that embrace fantastical and more fulfilling mythologies inspired by Black cultural redemption, a practice of what I call Afro-Filipino Futurism. Delrokz's truth-seeking, Mix Master Mike's turntable intelligence, Qbert's transmissions to advanced civilizations, and Hopie's alien communion indicate an ongoing project of Filipino epistemology, a project that began more than a century ago with nation-aspiring Filipino ilustrados. As historically "savage" subjects with a vexed claim to a place in the modern world, for some Filipino Americans the search for truth, dignity, and civilizational connectivity is explored throughout a vast, funky universe.

Filipino Americans' creative worlds and affinities offer instructive gateways to understanding Filipinos' historical encounter with very real ships carrying "aliens" from Europe and America. In turn, as colonial subjects, indigenous Filipinos would become the aliens of Spanish and U.S. empire. As migrants and racialized minorities, Filipinos live as "outsiders" in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and elsewhere in the U.S. metropole. The "outsiderness" of funk fashion designer Larry Legaspi remains a social status and sometimes embraced positionality echoing throughout the cultural imagination of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular. Filipino American hip hop performance, I have asserted, is shaped by and tethered to a history of unreconciled trauma, which brilliantly emanates from performers' funky expressions. To borrow

[324] Vicente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2000), 34-35.

from Hopie: "Instead of letting it destroy me, I let it create me."[325] And, much more, Hopie and her fellow artists are actively creating new and vibrant cultural possibilities.

[325] Hopie (2014), 164.

CHAPTER 4

Postcolonial Bodies, Modern Postures: The Queered Positioning of Filipino American Hip Hop Dance Culture

Modern Legacy

Figure 4.0. Kaba Modern Legacy flyer. From Kaba Modern Facebook Page.

The Irvine Barclay Theatre at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) teemed with high school and college-aged students sporting fashionable, bright-colored hats, athletic clothes, and wild hair. It was hard to distinguish between those who were dancers dressed for the stage and those who were the spectators dressed to impress. Parents, many of whom were former Kaba Modern dancers, herded young children to their seats in the opulent auditorium filled with a racially diverse (but predominantly Filipino American) crowd. The Kaba Modern dedication show "Legacy: Celebrating 20 Years of Kaba Modern Family and Innovative Artistry" in August of 2012 honored the group's two decade reign and, given the creative labor of the night's performers and the enthusiasm of the multigenerational audience, projected its continued local and international relevance. The program featured performances by Kaba Kids, traditional dancers of the Pilipino-American Culture Night (formerly Pilipino Culture Night), various

professional dance companies, and a grand assemblage of former Kaba Modern choreographers in the "KM 20 Directors' Tribute." True to its title, KM 20 gathered under one roof an extended and tight-knit family of artists and artists-in-the-making.

In 2008, as the programming director of the Festival of Philippine Arts and Culture (FPAC) in Los Angeles, I organized a hip hop dance battle called "Show and Prove." Kaba Modern, PAC Modern, and other college and high school-based teams from around Southern California participated, arguably perhaps the biggest audience of the festival. Next year, FPAC (which again featured Kaba Modern and PAC Modern) invited Supreme Soul, a predominantly Filipino American crew that, like Kaba Modern, made it to the later rounds of the wildly-popular MTV reality competition America's Best Dance Crew (ABDC). Sheroes, which auditioned for ABDC and whose members, including Filipina dancers, eventually succeeded in the show as dancers representing different crews, also performed that year. In a way, for a time, FPAC became like an ABDC reunion. My experience with the festival brought me in direct contact with a bevy of heavy-hitters in the Southern California Filipino American hip hop dance circuit. Like the KM 20 anniversary show at UCI and the many other dance competitions I've attended, FPAC exemplified a space where Filipino American hip hop dancers and their multiracial peers gathered to "show and prove" their embodied ingenuity and fashion sense while building a community (and quite frankly, an industry) of dancers. They did all this, of course, while inhabiting an explicitly Filipino American cultural space.

In observing the cultural discourses about and by Filipino American hip hop dancers, this chapter scrutinizes this group's various claims to being "modern" in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality. I argue that understanding their performances as a continuation of an intimate engagement with American dance culture—instead of an inauguration into it—re-

narrates the terms of Filipino American modern belonging. Their performances in hip hop dance are integral to the cultural circulations of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular, exposing the friction between a subaltern counter-discourse and mainstream representational legibility. Therefore, I show that the signaling of "modern" among dance practitioners achieves a set of complicated and syncretic discursive goals that at once aims to assert an "arrival" of these dancers as acceptable members of a liberal multicultural society while also alluding to a much longer Filipino colonial "arrival" to modernity.

I unpack Filipino American hip hop dancers' discursive maneuvers in their uses of "modern" by mobilizing two critical agendas: First, I examine politics of racial representation in the mainstreaming of Filipino American hip hop dance culture on ABDC. Second, in tracing the colonial legacies that shape Filipino American community-building and feelings belonging, I attempt to restore Filipino American hip hop dance cultures' vernacular history, which I describe as queer. In regards to the former agenda, I maintain that the mainstreaming of Filipino American hip hop dance culture into a narrative of Asian American modern "arrival" renders obscure Filipino American bodies and cultural contributions in the larger hip hop dance scene. In regards to the latter agenda, I respond to the commodification and cultural valorization of the more legible Asian American hip hop dancer by advancing a more illuminating historical vantage of "modern" that recuperates Filipino American hip hop dancers' queer cultural strategies and counter-memories. Overall, both the mainstream and vernacular qualities of Filipino American hip hop dance culture enacts an episteme—a memory-rich repertoire—that exemplifies Filipino Americans' multifaceted "modern" encounters with U.S. culture.

Queer is useful in describing Filipino American hip hop dancers' cultural strategies and counter-memories because, for one, many influential Filipino American hip hop dancers

(especially men) are either out or are closeted queer people. Queer is also useful in describing flexible modes of belonging that exceed orderly categories of race, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and affiliation. Filipino American hip hop dancers' association with complex layers of racial identification, tradition, sexuality, and family is inspired by what Fiona I.B. Ngô calls "queer modernities."[326] The politics expressed in dancers' queer modernities offer a poignant response to the "proper" resistant politics sanctioned by some critics of Filipino American hip hop performance, as described in this project's introduction. In short, rather than promoting a legible politics rooted in the radicalism of mid-twentieth century U.S. movements for racial and gender justice, these performers offer unruly, messy, and popular counter-strategies to resist power. In this way, by embodying the defiant pleasures and agency garnered in the production and consumption of popular culture, the queer politics emanating from these performers point to redemptive forms of postmodern feminism, as described by Angela McRobbie in her study on girls' and popular culture.[327]

Appearing on hit shows like ABDC, in anniversary celebrations like KM 20, at Filipino events like FPAC or Pilipino Culture Night (PCN), or in virtual worlds like YouTube, Filipino Americans inhabit protean roles for multiple audiences who gaze upon their racialized and sexualized bodies. As trendsetters and cultural/industry leaders, Filipino American hip hop dancers represent broader American cultural idealizations rooted in and routed through their dancing bodies. With their fluency in American dance gestures and leadership roles in hip hop dance, Filipino American youth at the turn of the new millennium demonstrate their embodied

[326] Fiona I.B. Ngô, *Imperial Blues: Geographies of Race and Sex in Jazz Age New York* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 76.
[327] Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

knowledge of American culture; they give evidence of a cultural genealogy informed by American Benevolent Assimilation's duty to teach the savage to become civilized.

I begin this chapter by tracing a cursory outline of the fundamental contributions of Filipino Americans to hip hop dance culture in general. As choreographers, dancers, and organizational leaders, Filipino Americans started off performing in local dance crews and have since been at the front of large-scale hip hop dance institutions. As practitioners in a Filipino American hip hop vernacular, Filipino American dancers' influence in the dance scene points to the cultural mobility of this vernacular. Next, I investigate the historical background of modern dance, especially the U.S. colonial moment during the advent of the genre and, as a result of the racial crisis wrought by U.S. colonialism, the racial politics involved in the exhibiting of Filipino and African American bodies in early twentieth century theaters and dance floors. This historical background sets up the cultural particularities of Filipino American hip hop dance performance—a vernacular culture inheriting the material conditions of colonialism. In the next section, I show such particularities are obscured as Asian American hip hop dancers ascend as commercial and global celebrities. The modern "arrival" of Asian Americans in hip hop dance, evident in fans' internet discourse, has invisibilized the longer history of Filipino American hip hop dance vernacular. One of the vernacular casualties of Asian American multicultural "arrival" in hip hop are the transgressive queer forms of belonging and embodiments, which I discuss in the next two sections. In their syncretic counter-memories that unsettle binaries of "tradition" and "modern," alternative forms of community connectivity, and effeminate embodiments, Filipino American hip hop dancers re-author ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and hip hop culture. Finally, I conclude with an anecdote of my experience observing hip hop dance

culture in the Philippines, a scene that alludes to the transnational migration of culture in imperial networks.

It started with the crew

For young Filipino Americans, especially those with collegiate backgrounds on the West Coast, Kaba Modern has served as a cultural vanguard of dance artistry. The crew gets its name from its institutional association to the larger Kababayan at UCI Filipino American student organization, where it first began performing at PCN. Yet, even if the group has been extremely influential, it cannot claim a historical monopoly in the Filipino American dance crew circuit. Before the advent of Kaba Modern in 1992, beginning in the late 1980s, short-lived but influential Filipino American dance groups such as Ladyz First, Protégé, TRIBE, Funki Junction, and Johnny's Quest in Cerritos set the foundation for collegiate crews, emerging out of local high schools and parishes where Filipino American youth gathered.[328] Today, PAC (Pilipino American Coalition) Modern at California State University, Long Beach, SP (Samahang Pilipino) Modern, and Team Millennia in Fullerton, California command a notable presence in the Southern California hip hop dance circuit. In Northern California, Filipino American hip hop dance crews also emerged in the early 1990s, such as the preeminent hip hop crew the Knuckle Neck Tribe.[329]

The West Coast, although supremely influential, is not the only region that has fostered a vibrant Filipino American choreographed dance culture. Many Filipino Americans, regardless of

[328] Interestingly, a few members of these early crews would go on to become Kaba Modern leaders and hip hop cultural innovators in general. See Cheryl Cambay, "Filipino American Dance Culture in Suburbia: The Story of Funki Junction" and Arnel Calvario, "Soul in the Whole: The Success and Challenges of Representation from Kaba Modern and Beyond," in *Empire of Funk: Hip Hop and Representation in Filipina/o America*, ed. Mark R. Villegas, Kuttin' Kandi, Roderick N. Labrador (San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2014).
[329] Ryan Anthony Leano, "The Rhythm of a Nation: The Filipin@ American Movement in Hiphop Dance," unpublished master's thesis (San Francisco State University, 2005); Alan Mar David, "The Funk Behind Bay Street Dance," unpublished master's thesis (San Francisco State University, 2012).

their geographical region who came of age in the 1980s to today, understand the significance of the hip hop dance crew in their local communities. In small cliques and in armies, Filipino American hip hop dance crews have been ubiquitous sights in many cities with a critical presence of young Filipino Americans. As a former hip hop dancer and an active participant in faith and activist-based Filipino American organizations that took me to national conferences, I played the role of dancer and witness to these various scenes. From New Jersey, Seattle, to Florida, I recognize the prominence of hip hop dance crews for young Filipino American youth, for both the "good" Catholic kids and the "angry" activistas. I remember one moment in college when the choreographer for my dance crew, the Filipino Student Association at the University of Florida, snickered while we sat in my living room and watched a VHS tape of a Catholic dance crew from another city. The moment went quickly from an attitude of skepticism to impression as the Catholic kids expertly blended hip hop with Filipino traditional dance, "code-switching" between so-called traditional and modern forms much like my crew. It was abundantly clear, I thought, that those church-going dancers must also be a part of their respective Filipino American college organization.

Before there were large dance competitions, TV shows, and Youtube channels there was the dance crew. Crews were important forms of social organizing for young Filipino Americans, however ephemeral they were. Paralleling the Filipino American mobile DJ scene in the San Francisco Bay Area carefully documented by Oliver Wang, hip hop dance crews not only emerged out of a Filipino American community, the crews became integral components to shaping the Filipino American community at large.[330] Young Filipino Americans in high school clubs, community-based groups, and church organizations have spent endless hours practicing,

[330] Oliver Wang, *Legions of Boom: Filipino American Mobile DJ Crews in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

coordinating, and perfecting their dance moves in garages, living rooms, basketball courts, and church halls. Recalling her days practicing with her crew for church talent shows, Filipino associations, high school PCN, garage/house parties, and debuts (eighteenth birthday celebrations), early Kaba Modern member Cheryl Cambay describes the humble rehearsal settings before the MTV glitz and the rise of the hip hop dance studio industry:

> I remember rehearsals well—we'd end up at someone's house and practice in the garages, front yard or the street. At one of the girls' houses—without the mirrors like you see in dance studios—the way we viewed our progress was literally to video tape rehearsals on a camera that was propped up on a tripod and view the footage and make adjustments, corrections, blocking as needed. When we rehearsed at Emil's house, I remember his mother had a glass-mirrored wall that we used to rehearse in front of and it was small so you couldn't see the whole group in the reflection! Oh the joy of practices at our parents' houses after school! And whenever we needed to rehearse or perform at a gig we literally had to call each other at home (no cell phones or email) or page each other to make sure we scheduled rehearsals and made ourselves available for the gigs we were asked to perform at. We also went shopping for performance outfits, which consisted throughout the years of overalls, paisley shirts, timberland boots, embroidered hats, parachute pants—what we considered cool and hip at the time![331]

Figure 4.1. Filipino American dance crew in Cerritos, 1988. Courtesy of Jennifer Chandler.

[331] Cambay (2014), 20.

Graduating from cramped living room rehearsals, Filipino American hip hop dance crews in colleges across the nation have since cemented their reputations as the most rigorous and competitive dance organizations on campus.[332] These college crews regularly attract into their folds non-Filipino dancers who want to learn new, creative ways of movement. As I will discuss below, the controversy surrounding the appearance of only non-Filipino representatives of Kaba Modern on MTV's ABDC points to the racial diversity in Filipino American-led crews. The motivations for non-Filipinos to join vary. Oftentimes, students who major in dance would join Filipino American hip hop dance crews in order to capitalize on the free training and the team's respected status. This was certainly the case for my dance crew at the University of Florida. For students on some campuses, having been a member of a Filipino American hip hop dance crew even provides a pathway to careers in performance.[333]

Even though there have been community infrastructures that have provided suitable conditions for the success of dance crews—for example, a network of Filipino American high school and college organizations, non-profit community groups that recruit and train young dancers, and church associations—I suggest that there are explanations for the emergence of Filipino American hip hop dance crews stemming from an assemblage of historical and cultural phenomena. For example, demographically, a critical mass of Filipino Americans came-of-age and built collegiate and community infrastructures alongside the cultural rise of hip hop in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[334] The tendency to author a Filipino American ethnic identity via a coded (Black) Americanness plays a significant role here, as it has for many American youth

[332] David (2012), 44, 56-57.
[333] Kathryn Bold, "Majoring in Kaba Modern: Hip-hop crews com of age on campus" and Kathryn Bold, "The King of Tut: Alumnus Mike Song has everyone—and his mother—dancing 'Gangnam Style,'" in *UC Irvine Magazine*, 1.3 (Spring 2013).
[334] For Filipino American collegiate culture and demographics, see Theodore S. Gonzalves, *The Day the Dancers Stayed: Performing in the Filipino/American Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); for rise of hip hop culture, see Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005).

regardless of ethnic background. However, the macro quality of the phenomenon—in its geographic spread, historical longevity, and the sheer number of practitioners—makes Filipino American hip hop dance crews a particular Filipino occurrence, as shown at the FPAC dance battles. Again, the "Filipinoness" of some hip hop dance scenes resembles the mobile DJ scene in the Bay Area, if only in regards to their large Filipino presences and the key contributions of Filipino leaders. Of the mobile scene, Wang states, "It was as if the scene's ethnic composition was so ordinary as to be unworthy of note or reflection, even though it could not be sheer coincidence that so many Filipino American teenagers formed into mobile crews *with one another*."[335] Like in the mobile scene, young Filipino Americans across the country were both building enduring organizations like Kaba Modern and more ephemeral affiliations, such as assembling impromptu dance crews among friends to perform at events like debuts or graduation parties.

The bourgeoning of a Filipino American dance community has grown to the extent that a number of their choreographers have broadened their skills to "non-Filipino American" spaces. Led by Filipino American choreographers, Boogiezone, Culture Shock, and Team Millennia Dance Studio are centered in Southern California and some have international branches.[336] Boogiezone, founded by Elm Pizarro in 2003, is a pioneering online social network of dancers whose successful global presence helped inaugurate Boogiezone Utopia dance studios in Southern California and Japan.[337] Arnel Calvario, founder of Kaba Modern, serves as the Board President of Culture Shock Los Angeles and Culture Shock International. Various chapters of Culture Shock are led by a whole host of talented Filipino Americans whose own stories and

[335] Wang (2015), 19.
[336] "Happiness is Now Tour," website, http://happinessisnow.org/happyman/. Last accessed on July 27, 2015.
[337] Michelle Woo, "Kaba Modern Created a Dance Dance Revolution," *OC Weekly*, January 12, 2012, http://www.ocweekly.com/2012-01-19/culture/kaba-modern-irvine/. Last accessed on July 27, 2015.

contributions cannot be given proper justice to in my project. Team Millennia's founder Danny V. Batimana has choreographed the routines of several NBA cheerleader teams and has directed and managed several crews that appeared on ABDC. Batimana directs his non-profit organization Happiness is NOW Inc., which uses dance to promote youth wellness. The list of Filipino American leadership in hip hop dance communities across the country for the past two decades can go on. But, it is without a doubt that the aforementioned choreographers and their respective organizations have been key contributors to the foundation of choreographed hip hop dance culture on a global scale.

Within the broader Asian American community, Filipino Americans have been instrumental in fostering a nationally recognized Asian American hip hop dance scene.[338] Before Asian Americans made regular appearances on reality TV hip hop dance competitions beginning in the late 2000s, Filipino Americans led the way in organizing large-scale hip hop dance competitions across Southern California. Anna Sarao, a Filipina American who was the artistic director of Culture Shock San Diego, organized Bustagroove in 2000, which later became the mega competition Body Rock in 2005.[339] Of the dominance of Filipino Americans in the Southern California hip hop dance scene, and alluding to how Filipino Americans blend with an Asian American scene, Sarao says in a 2005 interview:

> Since I've been in Culture Shock, I would say its members were 80% Filipino descent. There's a couple Blacks, a couple whites, one Mexican. But you know, it's so funny, a lot of the dance crews are mostly Filipino! I never really thought about why there are so many Filipinos in dance crews. I don't think that networking strategies are just catered to Filipinos, but for some reason, we still are the majority. And I've been looking for so long, because I coordinate this competition called Bustagroove, but I haven't found any crew that isn't mostly

[338] Elizabeth Lee, "Asian Americans Break Stereotypes Through Urban Dance," *Voice of America*, June 24, 2013, http://www.voanews.com/content/asian-american-break-sterotypes-through-urban-dance/1687837.html. Last accessed on July 27, 2015.
[339] "Interview with Anna Sarao (Body Rock Dance Competition)," *OneCypher: Street Dance Website*, http://www.onecypher.com/2004/09/28/interview-with-anna-sarao/. Last accessed on July 27, 2015.

> Filipino or Asian. There just aren't any like all Blacks, or all Mexican, dance crews.[340]

The annual Vibe dance competition—"THE premier West Coast hip hop dance competition"—hosted by the Asian American fraternity Lambda Theta Delta (LTD) at UCI, is credited for being the first hip hop dance competition in Southern California and for popularizing hip hop dance among Asian Americans.[341] Initiated as a fundraiser for LTD, Joseph Lising, roommate of Arnel Calvario at the time and a member of Kaba Modern and Kababayan at UCI, first organized Vibe in 1995.[342] Completing its 18th year in 2013, Vibe has been an important Asian American hip hop dance institution, providing a space where young people can project and produce a type of Asian American social acceptability to combat commonly held and well-documented stereotypes that relegate Asians as awkward, nerdy, and passive.[343]

The commercial success and cultural blossoming of hip hop dance scenes have thrived in large part thanks to the creative and organizational labor of Filipino Americans already active in the cultural spaces of a Filipino American hip hop vernacular. Yet, their labor and bodies seem to be illegible or obscured. As subjects of the afterlife of Spanish and American imperialism, Filipino Americans are haunted by an unresolvable postcolonial positionality, which renders mobile the status of "Filipino." In hip hop dance, the status of "Filipino" has held political stakes in regards to Filipinos' visibility in the scene and Filipino American dancers' own narrations of their bodies on stage and in community.

Modern dance and colonialism

[340] Leano (2005), 41-42.
[341] Vibe Dance Competition, Facebook Page, https://www.facebook.com/VIBEDanceComp/info; Vibe Dance Competition, website, http://vibedancecomp.com/. Last accessed on July 27, 2015; Woo (2012).
[342] Calvario (2014).
[343] Lee (2013).

Successfully venturing their talents beyond Filipino community-formation in capitalizing on a larger market of dance enthusiasts in Vibe, ABDC, Culture Shock, Body Rock, and so on, Filipino American dancers' discursive and embodied negotiations of "Filipino" illustrate the ways in which hip hop vernacular culture among Filipino Americans develops out colonialism's structural and imagined inheritances. These dancers provide what Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns calls in her analysis of early twentieth century Filipino taxi hall patrons an "archival embodiment," which "gestures to the corpus of Filipino American history and records, choreographed by and onto the Filipino body."[344] Archival embodiment inspires my investigation of the knowledge imbued by Filipino American hip hop dancers who seek voice and representation in the shadow of U.S. imperialism and in the ferment of U.S. liberal multiculturalism. Aptly constructing themselves as explicitly modern (i.e. Kaba Modern), these dancers choreograph both a pursuit of civic recognition in the U.S. and earlier colonial episodes in the disciplining of the Filipino subject. These dancers' forms of modernity provide a language to make intelligible an otherwise inarticulable position of Filipino postcoloniality in the United States. In this sense, then, for these Filipino American hip hop dancers, claiming "modern" is a posture; it is an inhabitation, an expression, a presentation. These strategies ultimately speak to the unrelenting presence of colonialism in their racial and ethnic imagination.

Filipino American hip hop dancers' modern posture both resonates with and diverges from the aesthetic and cultural priorities of the conventionally understandings of modern dance. A versatile genre, modern dance is traditionally regarded as originating in the late 1890s and is deemed on par with jazz as a being "truly American" art. Arriving at the time of mechanization and swift urbanization, modern dance often sees itself as liberating the body's movements.

[344] Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 54.

Pioneered by White American women dancers, it is considered a rebellious response to corporeal restrictions placed upon women, championing individual forms of freedom in light of the disciplined formalism of traditional ballet.[345] Filipino American hip hop dancers, as important cultural contributors to hip hop's postmodern attributes—its popular practices "from below"—blur the boundaries between modern and postmodern, a familiar compulsion reflected in modern dance. As Jack Anderson shows, "'Modern dance' can imply something merely transient. Nevertheless, the term has stuck. And attempts by some recent critics to devise a separate category for a type of dance that has developed from it have resulted in nothing more than a new and even more awkward term: 'postmodern dance.'"[346] Anderson's reluctance to separate modern and postmodern dance affords Filipino American hip hop dancers a linguistic link bridging the postmodern kinesthetics of hip hop and the ambitions of staged American dance. For groups like Kaba Modern, hip hop's postmodernism and dancers' simultaneous modern postures presents no obvious "awkwardness."

Much more than provoking the transient qualities of modern dance, Filipino American hip hop dance culture enacts the invisibilized racial genealogies in the formation of modern dance. The dancing Filipino body, whether during the early twentieth century as documented by Burns or more currently on the stages of MTV, dramatizes a U.S. colonial preoccupation with a White universality through the simultaneous abjection and incorporation of dark, racialized bodies, a preoccupation I suggest is restaged in the traditions of modern dance. The idealization of the modern White body necessitated the subordination of the non-White other, including Filipino colonial subjects who were treated as anthropological specimens by the White public at the moment of U.S. overseas expansion. For example, in *Babylon Girls: Black Women*

[345] Jack Anderson, *Art without Borders: The World of Modern Dance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997); Don McDonagh, *The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance* (Atlanta: A Cappella Books, 1990).
[346] Anderson (1997), 5.

Performers and the Shaping of the Modern (Duke University Press, 2008), Jayna Brown illustrates the racial exchange occurring in the formation of the "modern." "[P]erforming race had everything to do with articulating the modern world," she writes.[347] Brown considers the process of fragmentation and dislocation in the mechanized modern age and the responses represented in the dancing body: "Dance was the lexicon reflecting the dialectic process of modern transformation: the modern body continually reinventing itself, in and against its environment, at the same time as the environment made its claims upon the body." In this fragmented condition, "black expressive forms, miscoded as signatures for a timed and timeless past and separated from actual black subjects, were used as the source by which the modern (white) body could re-member itself."[348] Brown shows modernity was not limited to White universalist responses to mechanization and urban alienation and their search for "newness." Modernity emanated from Black performers mobile, sexual, and multivalent bodies that were defiant of national boundaries.

Similarly, in *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), Susan Manning also outlines the racial exchange occurring at the time: "Negro dance and modern dance were mutually constitutive categories, and their interdependent representations of blackness and whiteness shifted in tandem over time."[349] Both Brown and Manning recognize the ways in which modern sensibilities and modern dance owe much to blackness and Black people, an indebtedness revisited among Filipino American hip hop dancers. Reading Brown's text as a guidepost to contemporary Filipino American hip hop dance scenes traces Filipino American culture to earlier episodes of shared Filipino and African

[347] Jayna Brown, *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1.
[348] Ibid, 16-17.
[349] Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xiv.

American racial formation. With acts named *A Filipino Misfit*, formerly called *A Darktown Frolic*, among other orientalized and race-conscious acts, the cultural vocabulary of early twentieth century African American performers' spoke to the geopolitical expansiveness of imperialism at the same moment the U.S. was attempting to "pacify" and discipline Filipinos. Filipinos, along with other colonized and orientalized bodies, configured in Black performers' racial vocabularies. Light-skinned Black performers especially participated in "passing" for various racialized subjects on stage.[350] Chorus shows like *The Creole Show* that became a hit in 1890 and similar shows following in its wake "demonstrated that the city and colony (territories occupied by European and U.S. national and business interests) were intertwined spectacles."[351] Brown turns to the Black women's

> practices of racial delineation, alternately Cubana, Filipina, Chinese, Egyptian, as their acts mediated between and revealed the artifice of "modern" and "primitive" ideas of the feminine. These acts both celebrated and called into question the boundaries between colony and metropole and drew parallels between geographies of imperial annexation and the sexualized, racialized zoning of city spaces, the lines of which were being drawn at the same time.[352]

For Brown, the intertwining and coterminous facets of otherwise seemingly disparate geographies and bodies come into relief on the stages where these women performed, even as the women themselves were complicit to orientalizing and othering narratives. Likewise, in further scandalizing the compression of these heterogeneous boundaries, light-skinned African American chorus women on stage brought to life "the titillating 'problem' of miscegenation," their presence offering a "physical spoof on the serious business of color codification in the United States…"[353] As embodied archives, the multivalent embodiments of Black women

[350] See also Ngô (2014).
[351] Brown (2008), 93.
[352] Ibid, 95.
[353] Ibid, 219.

performers, then, issue a "critique of modernity" in that they "create forms of consciousness and resistance against a plethora of strategies that have barred them from inclusion in both dominant and resistant collective political-cultural bodies." Brown unpacks a convoluted set of exchanges by which blackness becomes mobile and multidirectional for early Black performers.

Like Brown, Burns recalls the processes African American and Filipino racial co-constitution in theater. In an effort to highlight the significance of the Filipino body in the U.S. popular imagination, she lists a bevy of White American productions that "made visible (and desirable) the culture of U.S. empire"[354]:

> During the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, the Philippines and the Filipina/o body appeared in numerous musical productions at a rate that has yet to be matched. Such plays included George Ade's *Sultan of Sulu* (1902), Charles Blaney's *Across the Pacific* (1900), Earl Carroll's *The Wireless Bell* (1910), J.A. Fraser's *Dewey, the Hero of Manila* (1897), Guy Bolton/Jerome Kern's *90 in the Shade* (1915), Clyde Fitch's *Her Own Way* (1903), *Manila Bound* (adopted from *Un Voyage en Chine*, 1900, author unknown), and *The Manila Beauty: An Opera* (1901, author unknown).[355]

African Americans' "brownface performance" of Filipinos occurring during this time "accentuates the radical malleability of the black performing body…[and] provided an avenue for black performers to transgress constrictions imposed by the white-black binary of the U.S. racial hierarchy."[356] Specifically, in the African American production *The Shoo-Fly Regiment* (1907), which stood out "as one of the earliest all-black productions to shift away from stereotypical characters depicted in minstrel shows," Burns argues that the political solidarity offered by Black performers' "racial drag" also serviced a problematic "patriotic narrative" in which the Philippines became "a site of racial uplift for African Americans *through* the practice

[354] Burns (2012), 35.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ibid, 23.

and imagination of Orientalism."[357] Ultimately, Brown and Burns illustrate that turn-of-the-century U.S. expansionism provided the structural and cultural conditions for the exploration of Black performative subjectivity via the colonized Filipino body.

Where Brown redeems the central role of Black women performers in the shaping of modern culture, the historical account of Filipino and Filipino American dance culture redirects modern dance to the colonial influence of White women. Americanized Filipino dance culture, which emerged simultaneously to early twentieth century African American dance, was ironically indebted to White American women, who, as we learn from Brown, were "trained" by Black American women who, without given much historical credit, helped author White female modernity.[358] Gleaning from early twentieth century photographs that show White women teaching indigenous Filipinos popular American dance numbers, Burns examines "the pivotal role white women and performance played in the American civilizing mission."[359] The routing of Black vernacular dance through the tutelage of colonizing, liberal White American women poses an irony, as Burns demonstrates, in that the very fear of White America and its attached laws calling for Filipino exclusionary and anti-miscegenation were grounded in the taboo of Filipino men's "splendid dancing" with White women. The "exceptionality" of their skills, Burns shows, is always linked to the exceptionality of U.S. empire.

As representatives of the afterlife of the very colonized subjects of African American brownface performance who were supposedly "civilized" by White women, Filipino American hip hop dancers re-embody their African American dance predecessors' protean corporeality. Filipino American hip hop dancers signify the multiplicity of the politics of their racialized and gendered performances: as non-Black people, they engage Black expressive forms while

[357] Ibid, 39-41.
[358] Brown (2008), 169.
[359] Burns (2012), 50.

recalling the "splendid dancing" of Filipino bodies that threatened early twentieth century whiteness. Said another way: Filipino Americans perform blackness as hip hop dancers, but they are also performing Filipinoness as diasporic, Americanized postcolonials. In this instance, as has also been suggested throughout this dissertation, Filipinoness is revealed as "impure" and mobile, traveling across a multitude of racial circuits of which blackness configures prominently.

The racial intersections of the early twentieth century further reemerge in the ways that Filipino American hip hop dancers labor as unheralded teachers to the more visible and commodifiable Asian American hip hop dancer. It seems that dance cultures in both beginnings of the twentieth and twenty-first century enact an erasure when it asserts its legibility either as art or as commercial product. Similar to early African American dancers who have made an unmistaken yet largely ignored imprint on modern dance and other forms of modern embodiments, Filipino American hip hop dancers, whose vernacular culture thrived decades before the celebrated "arrival" of Asian American hip hop dancers on a global scale, continue to be unnoticed for their specific yet immense cultural contributions to hip hop dance writ large; the visibility of Filipino American hip hop dance vernacular culture seems to be inversely proportionate to the commercial rise of the Asian American hip hop dance scene.

Invisible intermediaries to street dance

Since the premiere of MTV's America's Best Dance Crew in 2008, Filipino Americans and Asian Americans in general have had a noticeable presence in reality dance TV competitions. Their faces and bodies graced the stages on shows such as So You Think You Can Dance and Step It Up and Dance, creating a niche entertainment career for these performers who

now host their own live shows and continue to appear on TV shows, including the 2015 winners' "reunion" season of ABDC.

Season one of ABDC set the stage for the cultural and commercial success of hip hop choreographed dance. The season also dramatized the politics of Filipino Americans' racial membership as fans celebrated and debated the contributions and talents of Asian American and Filipino American dancers. I maintain that the drama of season one, perhaps the show's most iconic season in its four year run, contributes to the epistemology of Filipino American postcolonial invisibility, whereby Asian Americans' liberal multicultural debut in hip hop dance culture necessitates the subsuming and/or obscuring of the presence of Filipino Americans in the formation of that culture. In particular, for example, I show that ABDC fans' exhortations of "Asian pride" elide the decades of Filipino American hip hop dancers' creative labor.

The popularity of Asian Americans in hip hop dance reached a fever-pitch after the success of Kaba Modern and the Jabbawockeez crews on ABDC's premiere season. After studying the big hip hop dance competitions over the years—Vibe, Body Rock, Fusion, and Prelude—the producers of the U.S. Aerobics Championships consulted leaders in the dance community including Filipino American dance leaders Arnel Calvario, Anna Sarao, and Elm Pizarro on how to establish a television show akin to American Idol but based on the hip hop dance scene. Soon Hip Hop International was created, which achieved its goal in creating the show ABDC.[360] Arnel Calvario relinquished his role as a consultant to ABDC in order to manage the Kaba Modern team that competed on the show. Out of twelve crews, Kaba Modern made it to the top three, and the Jabbawockeez became the champions of the show's first season. Asian American (particularly Filipino American)-dominant dance crews continued to make appearances on the show (as well as in similar dance shows on other channels), such as Team

[360] Woo (2012); Calvario (2014).

Millenia, the Massive Monkees, Supreme Soul, and Super Cr3w, the latter who won first place in the second season of ABDC. The regularity of Asian Americans on ABDC had prompted the suspicion of many that the show was intentionally limiting the number of Asian American dancers on the show. Calvario writes, "I have heard of casting directors turning away dance crews comprised of Asian-Americans in efforts to diversify the faces of their show and optimize ratings."[361] It seems that Asian American representation in hip hop dance had become so saturated that it stoked fears of Asian domination.

On episode seven, entitled "Evolution of Street Dance," the remaining crews were presented with the challenge of devising a dance set for what ABDC host Mario Lopez called "the most iconic styles in past 20 years of street dancing." Serving as lesson of the recent history of popular dance, the episode prompted teams to exhibit a linear history of dance styles, starting with funk and ending with crumping. The episode was also the final standoff between crowd favorites Kaba Modern and the Jabbawockeez in what Lopez declared as the "most intense head to head clash on this stage." The Jabbawockeez, the all-men, mostly Asian American crew known for their "foundational" hip hop dance techniques, hit the stage first in the head-to-head battle. In a backstage interview, Jabbawockeez member Ben Chung acknowledged that their goal was to "tell the timeline of hip hop." Dressed in apocalyptic bboy attire, they take to the stage in sinister-looking, expressionless, blood red masks, ski goggles, snow hats, and brown vests. They breezed through the "timeline of hip hop," showing particular precision in flips, swipes, and footwork in their bboy set to the bboy canon Jimmy Castor Bunch's "It's Just Begun."[362] The crew topped off their routine with Rynan Paguio's toe-touching three-minute head spin. The Jabbawockeez's set exemplified the crew's faithfulness to fundamental bboy

[361] Calvario (2014).
[362] Joseph G. Schloss, *Foundation: B-boys, B-girls and Hip-Hop Culture in New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 (2009), 21.

moves, which define the members' repertoire before appearing on the show, while also exhibiting a flair for crowd-pleasing acrobatics.

Could Kaba Modern compete with the intimidating "masked men?" "The judges have said that Kaba Modern is the future of dance. So let's see how they took on the styles of the past," Lopez stated before the video montage glimpsed at the evenly mixed-gender group's preparation for the week's challenge. Kaba Modern took to the stage dressed in a comfortable matching Adidas athletic gear. After the voice sample inspired by Jimmy Castor Bunch's song "Troglodyte (Cave Man)" bellowed—"Right about now, we're gonna go back into time"—Kaba Modern waved their Kangol caps and began to do their locking styles to Lipps INC's "Funkytown." Next, they donned black wide-brimmed hats in their nod to Run DMC, then red and blue beanies for the bboy set. The ladies lose their pants to expose knee-high socks and very short red shorts for the Salt-N-Peppa "Push-It" routine. Unzipping their jackets to brandish their Kaba Modern-branded black hooded sweatshirts, they ended with a moderately aggressive crumping set. At the routine's climax, they crossed their arms with their hoods up and backs to the audience. ABDC judge Little Mama commended the group: "The walk-through…the evolution, was crazy." Likewise, judge Shane Sparks applauded, "Ya'll bring back memories for me. I know a lot of old school brothers that are watching this show are like, 'Dang! They doin' all our dances!'" The third judge, former NSYNC member JC Chasez, remarked to the Kaba Modern ladies, "You're like the last girls here, man. And you represented girls so well."

Despite the accolades given to Kaba Modern, the Jabbawockeez would win the episode's face-off and, eventually, take the crown for ABDC's debut season. Episode seven's lesson of popular dance styles highlights an attempt to ground the show as a legitimate and informed forum for popular Black dance (sprinkled with some White boy band NSYNC moves). Truly

multiracial in its composition, for seven seasons, ABDC attempted to give representation to various competitors' colors, geographical regions, genders, and sexualities. Episode seven of season one, though, gave perhaps the most epic Asian American crew showdown never to be seen again on ABDC, cementing Asian Americans' competence in flexing Black popular dance so much that Sparks, a reputed African American hip hop dance choreographer, can exclaim for "a lot of old school brothers" that "They doin' all our dances!" Ultimately, though, MTV's objective of deracination through a commodified and choreographed multiculturalism amplified and even calcified racial difference. Despite the colorblind utopia exhibited on the show, to restate Jayna Brown, "performing race had everything to do with articulating the modern world."

Calvario's leadership in fostering hip hop dance both as a local, Filipino American expression and as a entertainment product on MTV encapsulates Filipino Americans' multilayered roles in the development of the scene. In both their absence and presence on ABDC, Filipino Americans bridged a localized cultural dance vernacular to a virtual, global, and thoroughly commercialized arena. The lights on more humble stages of the past two decades were outshined by the digitized and dazzling glitz of telecommunications and globalized exchange represented by MTV. Magnifying the stakes of their craft, ABDC competitors became hypermobile, flocking to regional metropolises like New York, Houston, and Chicago with hopes of winning an audition and, perhaps, freezing life plans for a few months to live in Hollywood and prove to the world that they are America's best. The pleasure of labor in building local dance communities is greatly indebted to the craft and vision of Filipino Americans. Yet, ABDC, as the supposed "debut" of choreographed hip hop to the world, arrested Filipino representation in modern hip hop dance culture while making hypervisible a "modern" Asian American hip hop constituency seen fully capable to compete with the best.

For many Filipino Americans, the Jabbawockeez's win made a lot of sense as the mostly Filipino American members came out of the competitive West Coast bboy community.[363] In short, the Jabbawockeez members, Filipino American or not, were party to the dance spaces in which a Filipino American hip hop vernacular circulated. Kaba Modern's loss on ABDC but overall winning of the hearts of the audience held a more mixed reaction from Filipino Americans. Their applauded endurance in the first season was riddled with controversy. Gleaning from internet discourse, many Filipino American netizens begrudged the fact that Kaba Modern, as a historically Filipino American group that holds strong ties to PCN and Kababayan, had no Filipino Americans on the MTV show. Where many Filipino Americans intuitively recognize that they have been highly involved in hip hop dance—from bboying to choreographed dance—their absence on the show signified yet another blow to their woeful condition of seemingly perpetual mainstream invisibility.[364] Expressing concern about the disconnect between the Kaba Modern name and its non-Filipino representatives on MTV, a Kaba Modern fan posted on the www.8asians.com messageboard, which holds a rich archive of ABDC fan reactions:

> As much I am a fan of kaba modern.. I feel there is a sense of disappointment personally as a Filipino because there is not even at least just ONE filipino member. Kaba Modern was based on a filipino tradition and I feel like yes I am glad that we opened the doors to other cultures to participate in a great dance troupe... BUT why is it they couldn't atleast have the decency to allow a filipino member to be apart or the show..If not the people who are watching might not know where their name came from. and I feel that is it important to let the people of America know how it all really started.. and it's simple. it start with filipinos. so why can't we get the recognition that we should be getting?[365]

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[363] Angela J. Bass, *B-girling in a B-boy's World*, online video, 2010, https://vimeo.com/11516937. Last accessed on July 28, 2015.
[364] Elizabeth H. Pisares, "Do You Mis(recognize) Me: Filipina Americans in Popular Music and the Problem of Invisibility," in *Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse*, ed. Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr., Edgardo V. Gutierrez, and Ricardo V. Gutierrez (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).
[365] Ernie, "Kaba Modern on America's Best Dance Crew," *8 Asians*, January 29, 2008, blog post, http://www.8asians.com/2008/01/29/kaba-modern-on-americas-best-dance-crew/. Last accessed on July 28, 2015. All references to www.8asians.com refer to this citation.

Via Kaba Modern on ABDC, Filipino Americans may not have gotten the recognition that some feel they deserved. What the six non-Filipino members of the MTV Kaba Modern crew signifies is a manifestation of a Filipino American hip hop dance vernacular that bleeds and weaves into a larger Asian American dance scene. Non-Filipinos excelling on a world stage as a crew managed by Calvario and branded with a Filipino namesake, recalibrates the developmental linearity of episode seven's clean and simplified "Evolution of Street Dance." Central but unacknowledged in the story of street dance—and built into the conception of ABDC—is the creative labor of Filipino Americans who for years have defied the neat linearity of dance in their multiple and simultaneous absorbing of styles. The MTV Kaba Modern team, as the "future of dance," signaled the "we made it moment" for Asian Americans who were tired of being seen as outside of street dance. Little Mama's "future" comment was prescient indeed, as Asian American-majority dance teams exploded across the nation in subsequent years, concomitant to the overlooking of the core contributions of Filipino American dancers who directly or indirectly made the MTV Kaba Modern team possible.

For Asian Americans, being accepted as legitimate participants in American culture has always proved vexing. Until recently, especially with the global dominance of Korean pop culture, Asians have continually been placed outside of being hip and cool (for the purpose of this project, I use these terms interchangeably) in an American setting.[366] Of hip's insider/outsider dynamics, John Leland writes, "Hip begins… as a subversive intelligence that outsiders developed under the eye of insiders." To be Asian and "hip" to American culture—in this case Black American culture—implies that they are "in the know" despite being chronically castigated as "perpetual foreigners" to the United States. Further, the white imaginary continues

[366] Euny Hong, *The Birth of Korean Cool: How One Nation Is Conquering the World Through Pop Culture* (New York: Picador, 2014).

to stereotype Asians as nerdy, having superior mental and spiritual capabilities but lacking corporeal power, and, for Asian men, being sexually effete.[367] Laying out the racially dichotomous nature of hip, Leland continues, "[H]ip tells a story of black and white America, and the dance of conflict and curiosity that binds it."[368] According to Leland's ruminations, hip is constituted by White Americans' realizations of alternative whiteness through their appropriation of blackness, where white rebelliousness can come to exemplify a "signature American style."[369]

Asian American coolness reveals ideological crevices presented by a black/white cultural binary reiterated by Leland. As racialized minorities in American society, Asian Americans exert a complex set of racial power. For one, they have been accused of inhabiting many traits of whiteness, including class and property conceits and dominance in educational advancement. As such, a constellation of social and economic privileges that creates the dubious honor of "Asian American whiteness" certainly casts suspicion on Asian American cool culture as some African Americans question whether Asian Americans are on their side, or are more like whites.[370] But Asian Americans are also racialized minorities who have been historically targeted by state and state-sanctioned exclusion precisely because of their "unassimilability" to the "white race."[371] They continue to be marked as "other" in the American racial scheme and quite conspicuously outside the decided attributes of American culture, thus situating their civic belonging as never racially unmarked (i.e. white). To be regarded as cool and hip, though, ultimately harkens the

[367] Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and The Social Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 58-61; Oliver Wang, "Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity, and the Asian American MC," in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, ed. Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
[368] John Leland, *Hip: The History* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 6.
[369] Ibid, 13.
[370] Anthony Kwame Harrison *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
[371] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

masculine codes in African American vernacular culture linked to strategies of control, dignity, and awareness in the face of everyday crisis and racism.[372] To be a "cool" Asian American in hip hop, however, may connote a variety of gender expressions, experiences, aesthetics, and embodiments according to context. But, in hip hop especially, being "cool" necessitates a glancing towards the historical trajectory of anti-blackness that help form the aesthetics and politics in Black music and dance, cultural forms constituting Leland's identification of a "signature American style."

Asian Americans' mainstream arrival to a "signature American style" in hip hop involves a series of erasures. Blackness, in the case of the ABDC episode, is both celebrated yet somehow "evolved" to include Asian faces as the "future" of hip hop dance. Here, Asian Americans enter a field of power in hip hop in which the historical status of blackness become vulnerable as non-Blacks "arrive" in hip hop. The most notorious incident of Asian Americans' assertion of power over Black bodies and culture through hip hop occurred through the very real (not figurative) practice of blackface performance 2013. New members of the Asian American fraternity Lambda Theta Delta (LTD) at UCI (the same fraternity that has organized the Vibe dance competition) posted a Youtube video of themselves lip-synching to Justin Timberlake's song "Suit and Tie." In the video one of the young men, in his role as the African American rapper Jay-Z, wore blackface paint. As the story goes, the video was intended to advertise an upcoming event and "did not intend racism," as noted in the Youtube video's description by the members. The video was soon taken down, but an outraged public calling the video racist and anti-black had already reposted the video for the world to see. Given backlash aired on local and national news, LTD, which advertises itself as UCI's first and largest Asian American interest

[372] Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1993).

fraternity, suspended its activities for the academic year and put in jeopardy the Asian American-cherished Vibe hip hop dance competition.[373]

The class mobility, racial privilege, and male heterosexuality epitomized by Asian American fraternity culture as depicted in the LTD video displaces the cultural work of Filipino American students at UCI who are key contributors to hip hop dance. In a two minute video, the anti-black and heterosexually male-centric message erased several decades of the hip hop dance community's indebtedness to Filipino Americans who helped build a now international hip hop dance scene. The incident provides a stark example of the historical power of non-Blacks to abuse—however intentionally and in whatever degree of admiration—the dignity of Black people through minstrelsy.[374] The LTD members who received the brunt of the fallout were the fraternity's president and the young man in blackface, both of whom were Filipino American. As the public spokesman for the organization, the president represented the face of the Asian American fraternity, and in effect, Asian American Greek culture in general. The blackface performer, whose name was displayed in captions in the original video, symbolized the willful ignorance usually attached to campus Greek life (think of the image of the stereotypical "frat boy") and the cultural power of Asian American students at UCI, who, in 2011, were half of the undergraduate body, while African American students stood at two percent.[375] During a protest led by African American students after the release of the video, protestors called out Asian American students' penchant for choreographed hip hop dance.[376] For the Filipino American

[373] Lisa Brenner Katz, "UCI Asian-American fraternity imposes self-suspension over blackface video," *89.3 KPCC*, May 3, 2013, http://www.scpr.org/blogs/news/2013/05/03/13530/uci-asian-american-fraternity-imposes-self-suspens/. Last accessed on July 28, 2015.
[374] Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
[375] Student data enrollment, website, http://www.oir.uci.edu/enrollment.html. Last accessed on July 28, 2015.
[376] John Murillo III, "Op Ed: Defying Antiblackness at UC Irvine—and Everywhere," *The Feminist Wire*, April 28, 2013, http://thefeministwire.com/2013/04/op-ed-defying-antiblackness-at-uc-irvine-and-everywhere/. Last accessed

LTD members, their particular ethnicity and any supposed historical relationship to blackness and hip hop became moot. As members of a pan-Asian American fraternity that touts a mission of Asian American-oriented community service, Filipino American members effectively "became" Asian American, along with its attendant racial privileges. Coupled with the Greek system's association with upper-middle-class social power, members of LTD and other Asian American Greek organizations at UCI can be seen as attempting to achieve Asian American racial autonomy and distinction in the name of multiculturalism and middle-class assimilation.

Returning to the racial politics of ABDC, the material erasure of Filipino bodies in Kaba Modern parallels the subjugation of blackness in Asian Americans' cultural aspirations in hip hop. According to accounts well-known among Kababayan and Kaba Modern members at the time, before the six ABDC members were chosen to appear on the show, two Filipino American coordinators were included in the original line-up. However, these two coordinators were also committed to preparing the larger Kaba Modern group for the Vibe competition and ultimately could not join the show.[377] So, with the strong embrace of the MTV Kaba Modern team as generically Asian American, to some dancers and observers Kaba Modern virtually became a non-Filipino team.

Taking it a step further, some observers seized the fact of Filipino-absence to tout the multiracial nature of Kaba Modern. Another user on www.8asians.com, who claims to be a current dancer of the larger Kaba Modern group, writes,

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on July 28, 2015. For criticism of Asian American participation in hip hop, see Kenyon Farrow, "We Real Cool? On Hip-Hop, Asian-Americans, Black Folks, and Appropriation," *Kenyonfarrow.com*, June 2, 2005, website, http://kenyonfarrow.com/2005/06/02/we-real-coolon-hip-hop-asian-americans-black-folks-and-appropriation/. Last accessed on July 28, 2015.

[377] See comments section here, Mark Villegas, "Asian Pride on MTV! But, Where Did the Filipino Go?" *Hip Hop Lives: Traditions of Filipino Performance*, February 2, 2008, blog, http://filamfunk.blogspot.com/2008/02/asian-pride-on-mtv-but-where-did.html. Last accessed on July 28, 2015.

> our team is in fact CRAZY DIVERSE...we have pretty much every asian race, black, white and indian on the team...please realize that just because we began from our filipino culture club that we are not limited to just a certain type of people...as dancers OUR MAIN GOAL is to inspire through our passion and break the boundaries of narrow mindedness...we have been so successful throughout the years because of this very reason: we learn from eachother and are constantly growing and absorbing backgrounds from cultures in not only dance but life as well!

What the user suggests is that a preoccupation with Filipino representation signals "narrow mindedness." A Youtube user commenting on a short-lived Kaba Modern ABDC clip also defends the idea that Kaba Modern's racial and ethnic heterogeneity contributes to the group's overall success states,

> truth is only about half of our team is filipino...the other half is a combination of people from many other ethnicities...our choreographers are of many races as well. it is this diversity and respect for all people that allows us to innovate and display our love for dance =D[378]

According to the two commenters above, Filipino-centricity denotes ethnic parochialism, which inhibits the development of their craft. Instead, as implied, a liberal multicultural mantra of "respect for all people" propels the organization. Yet, even if both the larger Kaba Modern family and the six member ABDC group are extremely diverse, clearly the organization is composed predominantly of Asian Americans (reflecting UCI's student demographics). So, apparently, Kaba Modern is multicultural in that its members are of different Asian ethnic backgrounds. Equating the Tagalog term "kababayan" (countryman) to accommodate all Asians, another user on the same Youtube video comments,

> I'm filipino and it doesnt matter if there is no pinoy on the crew I'm still proud of them as asian and they carry the name kaba modern as the group. KABA mean

[378] http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ZBrBZogp36g. This video has since been removed due to copyright infringement.

> kababayan right, group of asian country we can call them our kababayan because we are from asia[379]

Similar to this user, many Filipino Americans claimed a sense of ethnic and racial legibility through the mainstream valorization of non-Filipino Asian Americans.

The penchant for de-prioritizing Filipino American membership in the larger Kaba Modern organization over the years became a "solution" for larger Asian American cultural gain. The chronic nature of Filipino American "invisibility" in the American imaginary is well-discussed and theorized.[380] However, the concerns over Filipino American non-representation on ABDC also points to the invisibility of Filipinos within the Asian category. With Kaba Modern's continued climb in ABDC season one, ahistorical exhortations of "Asian pride" quickly flooded internet chat rooms and Youtube comment sections. One user on www.8asians.com proclaims, "Yo KaBa ModErN Is sOMe TiGHt AZN BReAkerS! I hOPE TheY MAkE IT aLL thE WaY BABy! AZIAN PRIDE!!!!!!!!!!" As if "AZN" recognition comes only when Filipino American gatekeepers "accept" non-Filipinos into their fold, one user on the same website comments,

> Kaba Modern is one of the BEST "California AZN Collegiate" hip hop crews around. They're so notorious and they've accepted non-filipino's into their crew...just like all the other Chinese and Japanese crews do at other schools. If you wanna dance with the best, then you join the best! ^_^

Another, who appears to be Filipino (judging from his comment that his "peeps" are not on the show), dismisses the controversy surrounding the lack of Filipinos on the crew and instead praises "us asians" for competing at a high level:

> who cares if theres any filipinos in kaba modern. they dont have my peeps in there but they are still representing for the azians. kaba modern isnt the best asian crew

[379] Ibid.
[380] Pisares (2006).

> compared to others but i hope they win so the world could see how us asians do it. one day im gonna go to UCI too and become one of them(but better) and i hope i meet YURI TANG!! =)

The Asian pride discourse is especially evident in the fandom surrounding Korean American dancer Yuri Tag, who became the starlet of the ABDC Kaba Modern team and came to exemplify the narratives of an Asian American cultural triumph story.[381] Fans' sexualization of and fascination with Tag is reminiscent of Rachael Miyung Joo's thesis on the "arrival" of the Korean female body in the Korean public sphere as athletes and fans, signifying "modern" Korean nation able to compete in a globalized economy.[382] Tag's fandom points to an Asian American cultural desire for an Asian female who is sexy, hip, educated, and talented: a "modern" Asian American woman. Her teary-eyed biographical vignette on the first episode of ABDC, which operated as the primary focus of Kaba Modern's introduction to the world, featured her parents who finally gave their approval of her choice of career as a dancer. The image of immigrant parental-support may be an important story for some Asian American viewers. Whereas Asian American members of the Jabbawockeez were certainly sexualized and celebrated for their Asian masculinity, the particular debut of the parentally supported, modern Asian American woman indicates the achievement of an Asian American embodiment that includes an Asian femininity able to compete kinesthetically with other racialized (especially Black) bodies.

[381] "Yuri Tag of Kaba Modern," *Kineda*, March 7, 2008, blog, http://www.kineda.com/yuri-tag-of-kaba-modern/#.UdjOXj5ATvZ. Last accessed on July 28, 2015.
[382] Rachael Miyung Joo, *Transnational Sport: Gender, Media, and Global Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

Figure 4.2. Yuri Tag points to her parents in the audience at ABDC's live audition. Screenshot from ABDC episode 1.

For sure, Tag's appeal gave a younger community of dance fans a cause to celebrate Asian Americans' capableness in hip hop dance. Yet, I maintain that fans' exhortations of "Asian pride" are ahistorical because they do not channel the more than a decade old Filipino American choreographed dance scene, the more than two decade old broader Filipino American hip hop dance scene, nor the non-Filipino Asian Americans that later joined these overlapping communities. In short, "Asian pride" does not harken to the local, community-based vernacular Filipino American hip hop dance movement. Of course, ABDC and Youtube opened up the world to younger generations of hip hop dance enthusiasts, bringing in a much larger audience to an already existing Asian American dance community in Southern California. Hence, these prideful dance enthusiasts were simply too naïve to the historical depth of the dance scene.

In addition to ABDC enthusiasts' youngness, fans' naiveté is further compounded by Filipinos' historical defiance of racial categorization. The mainstream success of non-Filipino Asian Americans in the hip hop dance world has opened debate about the contested claim of Filipino Americans' membership in a broader Asian American community. Their different racial memberships follow the interests of various political stakes. Asian pride will incorporate the history of Filipino Americans in hip hop as a testament to Asian American dominance in the scene. Here, non-Filipino Asian Americans and Filipino Americans alike can point to the longer arc of Kaba Modern's reign as evidence of Asian Americans' legitimate place in hip hop dance.

In this case, as demonstrated by the previously cited messageboard user, "the best" started off with Filipinos but has now become bona fide "AZN" territory. Regardless of any distancing other Asian Americans had from Filipinos, Filipino Americans are welcomed into the fold as long as it conveniences Asian America writ large. In another scenario, observers will distinguish Filipinos as Pacific Islander. In a crudely filmed Youtube interview, Yuri Tag is asked whether she thinks Filipinos are Asian or Pacific Islander. Amidst whispers of "Asian" from the person next her, she answers somewhat innocuously (as if she is uncomfortably put on the spot): "Actually, preferably, I'd have to pick Pacific Islander because they are always running the show and they have really good food and Kaba Modern…" At that moment she pulls a Pinay dancer towards her and says, "Look, she's Pacific Islander and I like her a lot."[383] The language of differentiation ("they are always running the show") does not in any way place Filipinos into the category of Pacific Islander, but Tag's impromptu response to somehow justify Filipinos' racial distance from "Asian" (as if she really believes non-Filipino Asians don't have good food) exhibits an effort on Tag's behalf to communicate Filipinos' distinct roles/status in Kaba Modern relative to other Asian American dancers. Although this role/status is not clear, Tag's response marks an anxiety some people have—whether Filipino or not—in conflating Filipinos as Asian. Among internet users, Filipino Americans' preferred identification with "Pacific Islander" became a hot point of contention. A rather vocal user on www.8asians.com sardonically states,

> THE IRONY OUT OF ALL THIS ARE THE FILIPINO-AMERICANS WHO DON'T WANT TO BE LABELED AS "ASIANS" RATHER "PACIFIC ISLANDERS". FOR ALL THE PEOPLE WHO SAYING 'ASIAN PRIDE' NOT TO MENTION THE ASIANS WHO ARE REPRESENTING A FILIPINO GROUP, THIS MUST REALLY PISS OFF THE FIL-AMS WHO DON'T LIKE TO BE KNOWN AS "ASIAN".
> ROFL! SO FUNNY!

[383] "Kaba Modern - Filipinos are PACIFIC ISLANDERS! Filipinos are NOT Asian!" November 29, 2011, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INiVQnwq1eo. Last accessed on July 28, 2015.

This user, who later goes on to give a long-winded, pedantic lesson on why Filipinos are indeed Asian and calls those "Fil-Ams" who identify as Pacific Islander "uneducated," further demonstrates Filipinos' disputed racial territory. The user's point is well-taken in supposing some Filipino Americans' chagrin to being interpellated as Asian. However erudite the user may be in enumerating the political identification Filipinos in the Philippines has with Asia, especially as the Philippines was an original founder of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the user, who admits to being Filipino and not Filipino American, scoffs at the possibility of Filipino American cultural incommensurability within the category "Asian." Whatever the case, the mainstreaming of Asian Americans in hip hop dance has put front and center the contested territory of Asian America, where Filipino Americans are simultaneously accepted and disavowed, and where Filipino Americans themselves find Asian America as a contradictory space of shared community and dissonant coalition. Here, Filipino Americans demonstrate the holes in the unifying claims of Asian American panethnicity.[384]

Amidst the controversy of Filipino-absence in Kaba Modern, the Jabbawockeez's win gave limited satisfaction for the calls of Filipino American recognition in hip hop dance, even if the crew did not give overt or subtle references to their ethnicity. Due to the Jabbawockeez's notoriety from the show, the masked champions now host a lucrative theatrical show in Las Vegas. Half of the crew's members were known by astute observers to be Filipino, with Rynan Paguio leading as an already popular Southern California Filipino American breaker. Without any overt references to Filipino ethnicity, the enigmatic, all-male performers competed without the burden to demonstrate their connection to Filipino ethnicity, something Kaba Modern had to shoulder because of their namesake. The Jabbawockeez's win reflects the triumph more of a

[384] See this Fung Brothers episode for an instructive example, "Pacific Islander or Asian: ARE FILIPINOS ASIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER? - Level: Asian - Fung Bros," February 24, 2014, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lEmsdHw6trM. Last accessed on July 28, 2015.

Filipino American *male* breaker tradition that reaches back to the early 1980s. For Filipino American fans, the Jabbawockeez gave spotlight to the "real hip hop" that Filipino American males had been performing for years, a hip hop scene that has thrived outside of a college setting.[385] Although they were often placed alongside Kaba Modern's "Asian pride" success story, the maleness and hip hop "realness" of their embodiments solicited a varied gaze: only two other non-Filipino Asian Americans filled the roster (if we can judge their ethnicities from their last names), with one African American dancer rounding out the six-member team. I contend that Kaba Modern's ethnic and gender diversity and its being composed of *all* Asian American dancers who are university-educated provides much more of an asset to a circulating "Asian pride" discourse, particularly for Asian Americans who identify with safe, middleclass, model minority aspirations where the proletarian idea of *street* dance can be whimsically transported into the elite university. The Jabbawockeez's "street" (blacker?) style did attract many Asian American fans, but for the reasons above, I suggest Kaba Modern garnered more "Asian pride" appeal.[386]

Figure 4.3. The ABDC Kaba Modern group on UCI campus as the scene of their introductory vignette. Screenshot from ABDC episode 1.

[385] For more on the Jabbawockeez's discussion of the garage as the space of dance socialization, see "The History of The Jabbawockeez: The Garage and A Boombox," May 18, 2012, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zISskHpvo9c&list=PLC8AA61F61D6292FB. Last accessed on October 21, 2013.

[386] For more on the origins of the Jabbawockeez, see "The History of The Jabbawockeez: Forming the Group," May 31, 2012, YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJOVeRiXsMA&list=PLC8AA61F61D6292FB. Last accessed on October 21, 2013.

With the Jabbawockeez, Filipino Americans were on the American stage but without having to *be* Filipino: their faces were in fact covered with masks at least during their dance performances. Not until season two of ABDC were Filipino Americans somehow given shine when Kristine Bueta of Team Millennia shouted out "Filipino!" and had a conversation with one of the judges about traditional Filipino dancing. ABDC host Mario Lopez then hollered, "Pinay in the house!" The culmination of Filipino representation arrived when a member of Super Cr3w (again, an all male crew) waved a Philippine flag when they were announced as champions of season two. These brief eruptions of Filipino legibility on the show produced what Kaba Modern and the Jabbawockeez could not do: give symbolic credit to Filipino American dancers who helped build the hip hop dance scene.

Figure 4.4. Team Millenia dancer Kristine Bueta and Super Cr3w display Filipino symbols. Screenshots from ABDC season 2 episode 1 and episode 10.

At least in hip hop dance, the modern and cool Asian American body has been constituted by ongoing Filipino American cultural negotiations and strategies. Borrowing a term from my chapter on the circulation of hip hop culture among Filipino Americans and the role of militarized geographies, choreographed dance has functioned as a "contact zone" for Asian Americans into a Filipino American hip hop vernacular. Resonating with U.S. empire's spaces

of colonial interaction, this particular "contact zone" involves a complex field of power relationships and identity formations. As such, Filipino Americans' articulations of their own historical, cultural, and racial affinities in these zones include but also exceed Asian American cultural politics. In their excess, whether they are regarded as Filipino, Asian American, Pacific Islander, or something else, Filipino Americans have worked as invisible intermediaries for Asian Americans' success in the mainstream realm of hip hop dance.

Being modern signals varying forms of encounters for Filipino Americans and Asian Americans: the former harkens to racial domination arriving at the shores of Asia and the latter involves the knocking on the door of American culture. Where Asian American becomes a legitimate racial category equivalent to the many racial categories in the patchwork of a liberal multicultural American society, Filipino America follows the determinations of American empire: it disappears.

Staging tradition and queer counter-memory

As suggested in the prior section, the decades-old and locally-rooted vernacular culture of Filipino American hip hop dance remains one of the casualties of the mainstream, multicultural triumph of Asian American hip hop dance culture. In recuperating Filipino American hip hop dance vernacular, I seek to recognize its important emergence out of the processes of Filipino American community building and belonging. In this section, I examine the productive friction occurring in Filipino American hip hop dancers' negotiations of "modern" and "traditional" as they relate to the representations of their bodies on stage and in community with each other. Here, dancers' mixed narrations of their participation in Pilipino Culture Night (offers what are regarded as traditional forms of dance) and Kaba Modern exemplify a non-linear and

uncategorizable queer counter-memory of Filipino racial performances and belonging. I argue that experiencing modernity via the encounter of the U.S.'s civilizational mission in the Philippines produces queer forms of affiliation for Filipino Americans whereby ethnicity and family become flexible signifiers of belonging. As noted earlier, queer also references unconventional sexual subjectivities, which, as I discuss later, Filipino American hip hop practitioners present through their performances.

In order to appreciate the multifaceted discourses of "modern" associated with Filipino American hip hop dancers, including their queer responses to the modern/traditional binary, it is important to understand their dance crews' emergence out of PCN. As a powerful cultural authority of Filipino ethnic authenticity, PCN demonstrates the cultural stakes involved in the processes of Filipino American postcolonial subjectivity that blend orientalized and parochial visions of Filipino tradition into hip hop dance. In its blending, PCN points to both the Philippine cultural regime's postcolonial resolve of inhabiting principles of sovereignty (modernity) and hip hop dance's supposed promise of unchaining subjects from the stiffness of ethnic "tradition."

As Theodore Gonzalves and Dylan Rodriguez show, PCNs have typically endorsed a type of liberal multiculturalism that became popularized during the 1980s and onward.[387] As racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, PCN has served as an outlet for many Filipino American youth to make a spectacle of their imagined difference, where their staged Filipinoness pines for an authentic Filipino past and their aestheticized ethnicity deflects from material inequalities and social injustices perpetrated among different groups. Since the 1930s, in an attempt to construct a national identity based on the heterogeneity of the archipelago, Philippine

[387] Gonzalves (2010); Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

state initiatives utilized tools of dance and performance such as the Bayanihan Dance Company to project to the world Philippine national unity despite its ethnic diversity and internal strife.[388] Bayanihan provided a durable and reproducible template for PCNs by staging various dance "suites" that showcased the range of regions and races of the Philippines. At the end of the 20th century, U.S. multiculturalism would mirror the Philippines's version of multiculturalism, and these paired national discourses would shape the stated motivations and formal elements of PCNs.

At a time when the number of Filipino American graduates from the University of California quadrupled between 1982 and 1992, PCNs served as a main venue for students to recognize themselves as Filipino.[389] PCNs have since filled an ethnic void for second generation Filipino Americans who only had a symbolic connection to the Philippines.[390] As such, PCN organizers have worked as ordained recuperators of "lost" culture by formalizing and making rigid the ritualization of PCN. Gonzalves states, "In a patrimonial sense, the organizers are the inevitable inheritors and stewards of enduring, if beleaguered, cultural practices. To forestall the 'loss,' the custodians renew that patrimony every year, reminding themselves of tradition's vitality."[391] The "culture" of PCN for many Filipino American students suffices for Filipino culture writ-large.[392] Participation in PCN to authenticate their Filipinoness has for many Filipino American students sanctified the PCN as an orthodox rite of passage to Filipino ethnic realization. Gonzalves continues, "Like the other invented traditions that have dubious roots in

[388] Gonzalves (2010), 63-88.
[389] Ibid, 114.
[390] Espiritu (2003).
[391] Ibid, 113.
[392] Credit to Xavier Hernandez for this concept.

an 'authentic past,' the Pilipino Culture Night has become a static and seemingly unchanging and unchangeable artifact."[393]

The irony of embodying an "authentic past" on the stage of modern theater that echoes the state-driven project of Philippine modernity is further seen in PCN students' acceding to the problematic representations of their bodies. In pursuit of their "lost culture," many PCN dancers reproduce discourses of Orientalism as shown in their privileging of the Moro (Muslim) dance suite. "[T]he modern theatricality of the Bayanihan genre," explains Barbara Gaerlan,

> …gave [students] a venue for expressing Filipino culture in the United States of which they could be proud. They seemed unaware that, in addition to theatricality, the Bayanihan included another "modern" feature, Orientalism, highlighted in their presentation of the "Muslim" as exotic, autocratic, slave holding and patriarchal.[394]

The tenets of Filipinoness, however, would reach beyond the fabricated authenticity showcased in PCN traditional suites in order to accommodate a more American-based cultural form with which young Filipino Americans aligned themselves: hip hop dance. The paradoxical accommodation of rigid Filipino tradition with hip hop's modernity characterizes the constant reinventing of Filipino cultural identity. Called the "modern suite" in PCN, the hip hop dance suite affirms Jack Anderson's attempt to describe the vision of modern dance: "Modern dancers have tended to use 'modern' as a synonym for 'new' or 'creative,' and they have prized experimentation."[395] The newness of the modern suite threatened PCN traditionalists. According to early organizers of PCN, there was resistance to hip hop's incorporation into the event, especially in the early days when concerns included "losing" Filipino cultural authenticity

[393] Gonzalves (2010), 116.
[394] Barbara Gaerlan, "In the Court of the Sultan: Orientalism, Nationalism, and Modernity in Philippine and Filipino American Dance," *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 2.3 (1999), 256.
[395] Anderson (1997), 4.

within the folklore of PCN to the ruin of hip hop's "modernity."[396] Despite early resistance, hip hop dance's eventual union into PCN's standard repertoire quickly became default, due in large part to the modern dance suites' ability to draw sizeable, screaming audiences.[397] This union offers a critique of PCN's ethnic absolutism by demonstrating diaspora's capacity to highlight the constant reconfiguring of culture.[398]

Hip hop dance's legitimization into PCN signals the flexibility of Filipino diasporic identity and the ease with which performers are willing to re-form the staged and formalized tenets of a supposed Philippine nationality. For PCN dancers who unflinchingly wed traditional and modern suites, their multiple manifestations of "modern" draws on the ironic simultaneity of their Filipino auto-orientalism and the betrayal of such orientalism through American-based hip hop. As the modern dance suite became staple in Filipino American youth performance, what was labeled "modern" became a Filipino American "tradition." The perceived binary between modern and traditional becomes muddied, troubling the rules governing Filipino ethnic authenticity and inviting unruly counter-memories to the rules that govern the differences between traditional and modern.

For the most part, PCN fulfills multiculturalism's promise to equally include various national, ethnic, and racial groups within the U.S. national body by paradoxically flattening differences.[399] PCN during the late 1980s and early 1990s, therefore, functioned conservatively amidst the racial rage erupting especially in Los Angeles. Kaba Modern's appearance in the spring quarter of 1992, around the same time as the build-up and aftermath of the LA riots,

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[396] For more on unsettling notions of modernity, see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 4.
[397] See enthusiastic crowd reactions during Kaba Modern performances at PCN in *Kaba Modern: The First 20 Years*, DVD (Red 5 Studios, 2012); Woo (2012).
[398] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[399] Lowe (1996).

parallels the multiculturalism of PCN, where Filipino American ethnicity on stage is "updated" from the "backwardness" of traditional PCN suites to the modern, American-based embodiment of "cool." Such an embodiment, however indebted to Black dance, excused itself from Black racial protest.[400] In this way, the staged difference of PCN and Kaba Modern are more alike in their political posture of exhibiting the Filipino body as self-determining, acceptable, and modern.

Mirroring and emerging out of the parochial ethnic traditionalism of PCNs, Filipino American hip hop dance crews' resounding and resolute discourse of "family" signifies the syncretizing of traditional values of ethnic kinship and lateral or queer forms of community. In as much as KM 20's honoring of "Kaba Modern Family" represents a celebration of an intimate dance community, it represents a revised version of PCN's practice of ritualistic ethnic kinship. I propose that tight membership in a dance family works as a metaphor for a postcolonial strategy of ethnic belonging. Where PCN helps realize an imagined Filipino ethnic identity through a rigid system of performances, Kaba Modern embraces unifying practices to foster a more amorphous and flexible feeling of belonging.

Kaba Modern promotes family as a mode of communal identity so much that dancers credit the their crew's strong familial bond to Kaba Modern's exceptional talent. For example, in the Spring 2013 edition of the *UC Irvine Magazine*, Kaba Modern's 2011 artistic director states, "The thing that sets us apart is that we're a big family. We know how to work together[.]"[401] Likewise, in the Kaba Modern 20 year anniversary documentary, the centrality of family resonates throughout, with various current and former dancers testifying to the importance of family. Arnel Calvario, still an active leader and in the organization, says in the

[400] Electronic correspondence with former PCN director, Edgar Dormitorio, June 24, 2013.
[401] Bold (2013).

documentary: “Kaba Modern first and foremost is a family. So you have to be part of a family, contribute to the family, and just grow within the family.”

Interestingly, while highlighting the tightness in community-formation among dancers over a twenty-year span, the documentary DVD sold at the KM20 event, *Kaba Modern: The First 20 Years*, elides references to Filipino or any other ethnicity. Clues to interviewees’ ethnic backgrounds can only be suggested by their captioned last names. But then again, many Filipinos have Chinese and Spanish last names, evacuating evidence that could determine if the interviewee comes from a “purely” Chinese or Latino background with no connection to a Filipino ancestry. The silence in the documentary’s treatment of ethnicity can be symptomatic of a larger effort to downplay Kaba Modern’s Filipino American roots stemming not only from the group’s relationship to PCN and Kababayan, but also from the crew’s pioneering role in a Filipino American-dominated Southern California hip hop dance scene. Simply put, it makes more sense to de-ethnicize Kaba Modern in order to promote its idea of family. Given this, the family rhetoric pervading Kaba Modern’s community mythology can be called post-Filipino. Even if their very bodies speak to the complexities of Filipino historical formation, many Filipino American-dominant hip hop dance crews attempt to transcend Filipino corporeality. Regardless if the group comes out of PCN, continues to perform at PCN, and its dancers are dues-paying members of Kababayan, the family will somehow be constrained, alienating non-Filipinos, if Filipinoness is afforded too much attention.

Even if there is a pervasive de-emphasizing of Filipinoness in Kaba Modern’s public persona, the traces of distinct Filipino American traits are hard to shake. Kaba Modern parallels PCN’s patrimonial culture of passing on “tradition” (which will be discussed later) revealing a “culture of Kaba Modern” that scaffolds the idea of family. In the documentary, Leej Razalan, a

dancer from 1997-2000, states, "There's this continuation of the same essence that the forefathers placed as a foundation for the rest of the generations to come." Similarly, Alex Nguyen, dancer from 2002-2006, mentions, "The traditions that had been passed on from generation to generation, I think that's probably the most important thing." One such tradition, as shown in the film, involves bringing one's toothbrush to dance practice in order to stay and feel fresh. Another Kaba Modern ritual is the "soul in the hole" rallying cry in which dancers link hands in a circle and commit positive energy to the group.[402] In true PCN fashion, Kaba Modern stresses a generational unity through the repetition of cemented practices.

Welcoming of dancers of varying sexual identities in more recent years, the emphasis on family in Kaba Modern not only offers dancers of all genders and sexual-orientations a space of belonging, but it also imparts a particularly queer space of community formation. I read Kaba Modern's idea of family as queer in the crew's gendered formations and in Filipino Americans' sense of expansive communal membership that de-prioritizes Filipinoness. The complex ways in which Filipino American hip hop dancers imagine their alternative family of belongings borrows from Fiona I.B. Ngô's analysis of Black artists' "queer modernities" produced through empire. Like subjects of Ngô's exploration, in their queered community formations, Filipino American hip hop dancers exhibit a "crisis of referentiality that occurs when bodies that are meant to signify certain relationships within national discourse take on multiple and unstable meanings brought about by the changes—often produced through empire—in geographical and ideological borders."[403]

Through their defiance of tradition and modern, cemented rituals, narrations of family, and irreverence to conventional rules of ethnicity, these dancers foster queer counter-memories

[402] Calvario (2014).
[403] Ngô (2014), 76.

emerging out of empire's "crisis of referentiality." In the Kaba Modern documentary, Arnel Calvario, who is openly gay, expresses the meaningfulness of his dance crew: "It's a place you can call home. Not just physically, but just a state of mind. Somewhere down the road, you feel connected. You feel related to, it's that kind of thing." Here, Calvario sums up succinctly the "state of mind" put forth by young Filipino American hip hop dancers who, since the late 1980s, have been forming new modes of connectivity. The queer modernities created in PCN and dance crew culture enable unique and often liberating community bonds.

The alternative families Filipino American hip hop dancers conjure to "feel connected" are symptomatic of the cognitive expansiveness met in Filipino American postcoloniality that imagines its boundaries of belonging beyond Filipino ethnicity or nationality. Multiracial and queer families become relatable proxies for "Filipino," even if the origin of their dance crews is indebted to PCN and their social spaces are largely that with other Filipinos.

Fem Modern

As Filipino American-dominant crews like Kaba Modern create alternative modes of connectivity, which I described as queer in the prior section, dancers of these crews are also presenting gender expressions that counter the hypermasculine styles typically associated with hip hop culture. Exhibiting more diversity in gender and sexuality than in other elements of hip hop, the hip hop dance scene in general unsettles the long-held notion that hip hop can only be led by heterosexual males and can only be expressed in a hypermasculine manner. The demographics of the scene, including its queer male fandom, help to reimagine hip hop's gender and sexual identity. Choreographed hip hop dance, affectionately (and sometimes derogatorily) called "choreo," offers a more egalitarian alternative in hip hop dance, in which bboy culture

espouses predominantly male practitioners and heterosexual masculinity.[404] Staging the drama between bboy culture and choreo rehearses the trope of tradition versus modern in Kaba Modern's incorporation into PCN. Like Kaba Modern dancers' syncretizing of their notions of "ethnic" Filipino dances with hip hop, bboy culture must negotiate its values of "tradition" given the rise of choreo.

Bboying, also called breaking or breakdancing, with its acrobatics, machismo gestures, and overwhelmingly male constituency has been designated as representing "real" hip hop culture compared to choreo's supposedly simplified synchronized movements (I will further address this debate later). In light of bboy culture's tendency to define hip hop's cultural boundaries, I redeem choreo's place in hip hop while at the same time foregrounding choreo's ability to flex different styles, including breaking. In effect, choreo's ability to transgress style and celebrate both masculine and feminine movements contributes to the varied dimensions of hip hop: choreo queers hip hop's cultural expectations. Choreo is regarded as part of a family of dances under street dance, "an umbrella term for dances that have been created by people usually from low-economic backgrounds outside of traditional studio or professional setting. It refers to dancing in the streets due to lack of access to other more formal venues."[405] Choreo is the synchronized movements of several performers on stage as popularized by music videos (such as those featuring Michael and Janet Jackson) and by the Fly Girls dance segments on the TV show *In Living Color*. Early leaders of Kaba Modern, like Cheryl Cambay who was mentioned earlier, were fans of this dance genre and became vanguards in teaching choreo skills to younger Filipino American women and men. By featuring the talent of women and gay men, choreo's

[404] Sara LaBoskey, "Getting off: Portrayals of Masculinity in Hip Hop Dance in Film," *Dance Research Journal*, 33.2 (2001), 112- 120.
[405] David (2012), 6-7.

capacity to queer hip hop offers the possibility to renegotiate hip hop's sexual embodiments.[406] The rise in Kaba Modern's global and certainly national stardom thanks in large part to the coinciding of the premiere of ABDC and the boom in social media cyber culture demonstrates choreo's firm footing in the world of hip hop writ large.

The rise of choreo within the larger cultural imaginary of hip hop, however, has inevitably met resistance from those who seek to preserve the gender and sexual codes of a more "true" hip hop. In his ethnography on bboy culture in New York, Joseph G. Schloss recounts dancers' strict upholding of a "core b-boy philosophy", or a "foundation":

> *Foundation* is a term used by b-boys and b-girls to refer to an almost mystical set of notions about b-boying that is passed from teacher to student. In addition to the actual physical movements, it includes the history of the movements and the form in general, strategies for how to improvise, philosophy about dance in general, musical associations, and a variety of other subjects. The idea that a core b-boy philosophy should be so important that it requires a special term says a great about the dance and why it is so significant in the lives of its practitioners.[407]

Schloss neglects to examine the gender and sexual codes in his study, but I contend that this bboy "foundation" has been structured by preferences for masculine and male heteronormative bodies and embodiments. In an almost PCN manner, as Schloss evidences in his study, bboy culture perpetuates an ethos of "authenticity" that must be passed down. This ethos, importantly, excludes (and even demeans) femininity.

Attached to bboy culture's upholding of "foundation," it seems, is the abhorrence of any deviance from this ethos. Bboy culture's aversion to choreo, for example, can be witnessed in internet discourse. During ABDC's reign, a fear of choreo became evident in the chatter on hip hop forums on the internet and commentary on YouTube videos featuring various choreo

[406] The centrality of women in hip hop dance can be seen in Calvin Leung (dir.), *Furious Beauty: A Hip-Hop Family*, DVD (Cinema Libre Studio, Plixyl Studios INC, 2013).
[407] Schloss (2009), 12.

performances. Whereas the more improvised and masculine form of bboy dance is often sanctified as "real" hip hop, in many hip hop circles, choreo is frequently sidelined as inauthentic hip hop and seen as requiring "less skill" because of the genre's rehearsed nature. For example, on the popular www.Bboyworld.com, users debated the merits of choreo dancers and whether they should be considered "inside" or "outside" of hip hop culture. Not discounting choreo's artistic value, but rather choreo dancers' knowledge of hip hop, one user states, "im not BASHING the dance im talking about how upsetting it is that 'hip hop dancers' are NOT educated on what hip hop is."[408] Continuing the nebulous prioritization of "hip hop knowledge" as a prerequisite to hip hop membership, another user writes, "I don't hate on the choreo dancers that know their shit and are respectful, but there are a lot of posers who don't know shit. It's mostly people who are new to dancing... they watch you got served or bring it on [mainstream hip hop dance movies] and want to learn some moves."[409] These attitudes beg the question: how much and what kind of "knowledge" makes one deserving of respect in hip hop culture?

Hip hop enthusiasts' resistance to choreo may be symptomatic of a larger fear of women and gay men in hip hop. For many, choreo hip hop dancers are "posers" who have no business claiming to "be" hip hop. Where the masculinized "genius" of bboys' supposed improvisation is championed as the epitome of hip hop's cultural essence, choreo dancers are seen as "passive" and feminine bodies: they are simply taking orders from a choreographer rather than showcasing their individual wit. Despite the notoriety and success of "traditional" bboy crews on ABDC, such as the Jabbawockeez, the Massive Monkees, Super Cr3w, Quest Crew, and Supreme

[408] "Thread: Fed up with 'Hip Hop Choreo Dancers," *Bboyworld*, website comments section, www.bboyworld.com/forum/showthread.php?91615-Fed-up-with-quot-Hip-Hop-quot-Choreo-Dancers/page3. Last accessed on July 29, 2015.
[409] Ibid.

Soul—all of whom performed choreo for the show—it seems that many "foundation" purists still hold on to some sort of unsullied hip hop past. But, even in hip hop, change is inevitable.

Since the mainstreaming of choreo, to the chagrin of bboy culture purists, the expectations of street dance have shifted to elevate choreo and, consequently, much more feminine gender expressions. Gaining wide attention in social media, choreo and queer forms of movement is currently dominating street dance fandom. For example, in September of 2014, a video of two male Kaba Modern dancers, Jeffrey Caluag and Dimitri Mendez, rehearsing at California State University, Fullerton's campus "went viral" on the internet, making rounds on several blogs and pop culture sites. The duo's masterfully feminine dance ("fem-dance") interpretation of Nicki Manaj's "Anaconda," a song that itself re-interpret's Sir-Mix-A-Lot's early rap hit "Baby Got Back," left netizens in a fan frenzy.[410] The duo's routine, one pop culture website writer commented, "has more intense hip movements and attitude than the rapper's herself… Minaj has a history of giving her fans a moment in the spotlight, so hopefully she'll see this fierce 'Anaconda' routine and call these boys to the stage… Mind. Blown." As champions of numerous international hip hop dance battles before and after their MTV appearance, Kaba Modern dancers are veterans of cyber world publicity. The "Anaconda" routine, though, put into the greater celebrity, gossip, and pop culture universe an endorsed and celebrated queerness not meant to scandalize, as Manaj's unsubtly pornographic "Anaconda" music video provokes, but to revel in such vivacious sexuality.

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[410] Emily Arata, "These Guys Dancing To 'Anaconda' Could Give Nicki Minaj A Run For Her Money," *Elite Daily*, September 9, 2014, http://elitedaily.com/music/guys-dancing-anaconda-nicki-minaj-video/746911/. Last accessed on July 29, 2015; Tanya Chen, "These Two Guys Dancing To Nicki Minaj's 'Anaconda' Will Give You So Much Life," *BuzzFeed*, September 8, 2014, http://www.buzzfeed.com/tanyachen/two-guys-choreography-to-nicki-minajs-anaconda#.bpQp68zwZ. Last accessed on July 29, 2015; Brandi Fowler, "Move Over Ellen DeGeneres: These Two Guys Dancing to Nicki Minaj's 'Anaconda' Came to Win," *Cambio*, September 10, 2015, http://www.cambio.com/2014/09/10/move-over-ellen-degeneres-these-two-guys-dancing-to-nicki-minaj/. Last accessed on July 29, 2015.

Figure 4.5. Kaba Modern dancers Jeffrey Caluag and Dimitri Mendez rehearse their version of "Anaconda." Screenshot from viral video.

A celebrated male queerness and femininity of Kaba Modern was not always a staple in the crew's repertoire. Like any other cultural community, hip hop dancers' attitudes generally reflect the greater cultural climate from which it came. The Filipino American hip hop dance scene has not been any different, either perpetuating sexual roles or foregrounding radical changes in their rigid assignments. Whatever the case, Filipino Americans' creative labor in hip hop dance foregrounds the political terrain of sexual expression in hip hop.

Similar to hip hop dance repertoire in general, including the crews I belonged to and observed over the years, Kaba Modern used to delineate male and female roles to their respective gender-assigned movements. Kimmy Maniquis, a choreographer for Kaba Modern in the early 1990s, reflects on the roleplaying of male and female dancers in Kaba Modern and the gendered movements of hip hop dance. During her time as a choreographer, she explaines, Kaba Modern's dancers were segregated neatly to fit the "appropriate" gender for either masculine or feminine dance genres: "I think it's very interesting that back in the day, we portrayed a very heterosexual front on stage: the traditional 'nasty' part that was like a guy/girl dance, and maybe

one guy doing the more 'feminine' pieces like the other traditional 'jazz' part."[411] Indicating changes in cultural expectations regarding the "proper" roles of men and women in dance, and perhaps generational changes in the broader acceptance of queer people, the gendered roles played by these dancers have become less regimented. Maniquis continues,

> What was striking when I judged the last Kaba auditions a few years back was how much that has transformed. There were entirely male groups that could perform what is perceived as "feminine" styles of dance and it being integrated within the team's performances seamlessly. In other words, it wasn't like "that's the gay piece, and this is the rest of the routine." Similarly, women are performing pieces that I would think would be performed by men back in the day. Women are b-girling, tutting, popping, doing all the stuff that the guys are doing and doing it well. I think we were very gendered in our performances back then, and that clearly isn't the case now.[412]

The "Anaconda" duo and Maniquis testify to the cultural shifts in hip hop dance. Being more diverse in its gender composition, the choreo scene challenges the assumption that hip hop as a larger culture strictly adheres to "foundational" codes of masculinity with heterosexual males heralded as its main cultural agents. The embracing of feminine movements (for example, waacking) in much of choreographed hip hop dance repertoire exemplifies this scene's gender flexibility. One can even argue that some hip hop "party" dances, such as seen in the Dougie and the Nae Nae, contain feminine movements largely popularized by Black heterosexual men, particularly sports celebrities.[413] Embracing a broader spectrum of hip hop dance (and Black

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[411] Electronic correspondence with Kimmy Maniquis, May 1, 2013.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Although a whole host of college and professional sports players have "gone viral" in their performances of said dances, NBA player John Wall seems to be one of the most publicized. See Dan Steinberg, "Colin Cowherd cares about John Wall once doing the Dougie more than anyone else in the world cares about anything," *The Washington Post*, April 21, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/dc-sports-bog/wp/2015/04/21/colin-cowherd-cares-about-john-wall-once-doing-the-dougie-more-than-anyone-else-in-the-world-cares-about-anything/. Last accessed on July 29, 2015; Jason McIntyre, "John Wall Doing the Nae Nae with Paul George Was Better Than the Dunk Contest," *USA Today Sports*, February 17, 2014, http://thebiglead.com/2014/02/17/john-wall-doing-the-nae-nae-with-paul-george-was-better-than-the-dunk-contest/. Last accessed July 29, 2015.

vernacular dance in general) can disrupt the gender traditionalism and parochialism of purist bboy culture.

More and more, the queering of gender roles has become a sign of dancers' virtuosity. This flexing of skill holds particularly true for male dancers who can play feminine roles. In his interviews with gay male hip hop dancers, Joseph Ramirez shows the prestige attached to males (gay or straight) who can master feminine gestures. Describing the experience of Teri (one of his interviewees) as performing a gay male role, Ramirez writes of the "authority" queer male performance has in choreographed hip hop dance:

> Teri self-identifies as a fem-dancer, a genre of dance found in choreographed hip hop that is gendered to be (hyper)feminine and dramatic. Fem-dances incorporate moves that are hypersexual and draws from dance moves from famous hip hop and pop singers. Teri explains that these types of dances are usually reserved for gay-identified males and females (regardless of sexual orientation), but is received differently by audience members if a known heterosexual-identified male performs it. For heterosexual males, this form of performances excites the audiences and, according to Teri, boosts the respect of the dancers for their versatility. Yet, it is also known by dancers that such performances are done with the approval of female dancers and queer male dancers. This power dynamic between heterosexual males and queer males is unique to choreographed hip hop dance scene. Queer males have a sense of authority and power of the performance of femininity, which is ironically accepted by female dancers as well.[414]

The "approval" of straight male dancers' fem-dance skills by female and queer male dancers runs against the normative "approval" of hip hop skills prized in more heterosexually male-dominated genres of hip hop culture. This example of gender variance opens possibilities to push the boundaries of hip hop's conventional gender dynamics.

The "authority" and "power" of "fem-dance" skills performed by straight and queer male dancers expand the expected gender roles of its members. As discussed earlier, choreo dance scenes cultivate "queer modernities" in which queer members build trust and family, a queer

[414] Joseph Ramirez, "Booty Pop Madness: The Negotiation of Space for Gay Pilipino American Males and Choreographed Hip Hop," in Villegas, Kandi, and Labrador (2014), 167.

form of affiliation discussed earlier. The choreo dance crew provides safe and resistant "family" with which to "gaze back" at the world. The relationship between the transgression of gender boundaries and the increase in numerical and authoritative representation of gay male dancers is symbiotic: the flexibility of form in choreographed hip hop dance has attracted more queer dancers, which in turn transforms the dances' form, or vice-versa. Ramirez writes of the choreographed hip hop dance scene as legitimizing queer Filipino American males' embattled gender and sexual identity: "For Pilipino American males, this negotiation of familial bonds allows them to find a form of imagined acceptance from a family unit that is unique to queer youths trying to find validation for their gender and sexual identity."[415] Ramirez compares the more stringent rules of gender and sexuality in "traditional pillars of hip hop" to the openness of differences in choreographed hip hop. Ramirez claims that choreographed hip hop has been for gay males, "a venue to not only express their sexuality, but also find community and camaraderie where they will not be judged because of their sexuality."[416] Similarly, in the Kaba Modern documentary, openly gay former Kaba Modern dancer Miguel Zarate, who competed on the TV show Step It Up and Dance, notes the crew's notable capacity to embrace his queerness: "Kaba Modern literally gave me the first forum to completely be myself. It was the one place where I didn't have to censor myself."[417]

In broadening the scope of hip hop's form—in diversifying its gender composition and its inclusion of feminized movement—many adherents of hip hop culture would benefit from dismantling their own parochialisms of hip hop authenticity. For one, the idea that bboys do not need to rehearse could and should be demystified. Rather than celebrating a supposed improvisation, breaking could be seen as a different kind of rehearsing that can inspire inventive

[415] Ibid, 166-167.
[416] Ibid, 165.
[417] *Kaba Modern: The First 20 Years* (2012).

and "spontaneous" movements. Also, bboy battles around the world regularly include "routines" by which members of a crew synchronize movements to tell stories through dance. As part of the arsenal in battles between opposing crews, these routines are essentially short choreo dance sets. Recognizing the blurred lines between choreo and bboying dance can help to reimagine the terms of membership in a "hip hop community," where feminine and queer bodies not only perform as dancers in this community, but also shape the expectations of what hip hop expressions *should* look like.

Modern Memory

In 2009, I visited Metro Manila, Philippines for the first time as an adult to explore the hip hop scene. I brought my digital camcorder just in case I met some interesting characters. Connected mainly through the social networking site MySpace, I arranged meetings with hip hop dancers, emcees, producers, and DJs and was pleasantly surprised about the tremendous ambition, heart, and underdog spirit of the artists in a nation that is constantly berated for only producing second-rate, copy-cat work. As one of my interviewees Chrizo, a hip hop beatmaker, confessed, "What I really love about having Fil Ams over, humbly speaking, I really love surprising them. Showing 'em up, like they would never expect."[418] On one of my many outings to meet artists, my hosts brought me to a giant collegiate hip hop dance battle. The event was bewildering to me. I was corrected in thinking that collegiate hip hop dance battles were only thriving in the United States. The tournament of crews sweated it out in the pulsating and oppressively humid dance club, giving it their all to win. Chrizo was right; I would have never expected this. Not until I traveled to the Philippines was I able to appreciate the transnational

[418] Mark Villegas, *Lyrical Empire: Hip Hop in Metro Manila*, online documentary (Mark Villegas, 2010), https://vimeo.com/15007683. Last accessed on July 29, 2015.

exchange of the Filipino and Filipino American culture. Like their Filipino American counterparts in popular crews like Kaba Modern and the Jabbawockeez, Filipino dancers from the fabled crew the Philippine All Stars were winning championships, sometimes back-to-back in worldwide competitions. The crew even performed an unaired, live-audience exhibition routine on the set of ABDC in 2008 after winning the World Hip Hop Dance Championship.[419] It began to make sense that a few of the lauded hip hop dancers in the Philippines, I learned, actually grew up in the United States.

My exploration of hip hop in the Philippines alludes to the "imperial subjecthoods" performed in what Jayna Brown calls the "global reach of plantation economies and the transnational migratory patterns of exploited labor."[420] To me, Kaba Modern, the Jabbawockeez, and countless other Filipino American hip hop dance crews are not simply modern manifestations of continental American culture; they are "archival embodiments" to the coterminous networks in U.S. empire. Brown's examination of Black performers' "global reach" offers a lens with which to imagine postcolonial subjects' narrations of their identifications and belongings. As experts in kinetic illusion, Filipino American hip hop dancers reveal a form of "knowledge" in their expressive gestures. Performing history through repertoire, their bodies are conscious, their postures are articulate. They prove that the body can be intelligent and "thinking" in its movement of limbs and twists of torsos as conjured by choreographers and in the repeated practice so that movements are rehearsed in dancers' dreams.[421] Revealing vernacular culture's material inheritances, their moves become a

[419] "Philippine Allstars - Philippines (HHI 2008 Champions) on ABDC Stage!!" Jul 8, 2013, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-bAUy4FzLM. Last accessed on August 6, 2015.
[420] Brown (2008), 102.
[421] For more on embodied intelligence, see Jacqueline Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 7.

permanent imprint in memory and the body enacts history. The Filipino American hip hop dancer, in her or his fluency of the dance repertoire, expertly "remembers" the past.

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