Embodying What?: Displays of American Filipino In-between-ness

Desiree A. Quintero
Leeward Community College, University of Hawai'i
e-mail: desireeq@hawaii.edu

Abstract

In the United States, Filipinos are the second largest Asian group and the second largest immigrant group in the country. Given the history of anti-Filipino sentiment in the U.S. made evident in the Watsonville Riots, along with the passing of legislation such as the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 and anti-miscegenation laws, Americans of Filipino ancestry have had to contend with various levels of shame as "Filipino," derived from the legacies of colonialism and a history of racism. Simultaneously, the migration from the Philippine motherland and the subsequent language loss by later generations due to assimilation to American society has left Americans of Filipino ancestry feeling a sense of being "not Filipino enough." This has often left a sense of disconnectedness and longing for affirmation as both American and longing to be a "decolonised" Filipino. Navigating this in-between space, displays of identity and of Filipino-ness in America through performative displays and in performances as "Filipino" can be laced with pride and at times, imagination. Attempts to be "transnational" instead of "diasporic" have entered into the performances of "Filipino" that constantly seeks permission and affirmation of "culture bearers" in the Philippines, reiterating the unique positionality of Filipinos in America as being in a place that is both privileged yet marginal. However, particular performances honour the Filipino struggles as Americans and give visibility to their histories. This paper explores the work by New York's Slant Performance Group's song "Dime a Dance" and "Ullalim-Sugilanon" by The Autonomous Region and Kultura Kapwa in San Francisco and looks at how these works fulfil and embody empowered American Filipino narratives.

Keywords: American Filipino, decolonize, diaspora, Filipino-ness, in-between-ness

Introduction

I remember growing up and being asked the question: Where are you from? I would say my hometown, which would sometimes be met with puzzled looks. I knew what they were really asking: What was my ethnicity? The underlying sentiment being that although born and raised in the U.S., I am still looked at as a foreigner. Seeing Filipinos as perpetual foreigners is a type of micro-aggression that people still encounter with the unsaid intent behind such statements being, "Go back to where you came from." Other types of microaggressions encountered by Asian Americans in the U.S. include the sentiment that "all Asians look alike," dismissing differences

between Asian groupings, the perception that Asians cannot speak English and the exoticization of Filipino women coupled with the historical emasculation of Filipino men, all of which have contributed to the stigma of being Filipino in America. On the other hand, I also recall visiting the Philippines and being approached by people speaking in Tagalog. After responding in English, I would get a measured look from head to toe, "oh… Fil-Am." Loss of the mother tongue is common among second, third and later, generations of Filipinos in America as many elders see Philippine languages as a barrier to full assimilation as "American." It is also reflective of American colonial rule where English became a part of the education and political systems. In America, parents consciously stop speaking their native Philippine language to their children so that their children can grow up as American (translate "white American") as they can be. Growing up as not quite belonging as American and looked at as not fully "Filipino" by those in the motherland demonstrates the unique position that those of Filipino descent have in America.

Often Americans of Filipino ancestry are in a state of in-between-ness: not quite Filipino, as Filipinos in the Philippines will look at American of Filipino ancestry as Americanized due to the lack of Philippine language fluency and knowledge of traditions; and not quite American, as Filipinos in America historically and still face racism and discrimination as a minority group in the U.S. The seeming in-between-ness of Filipinos in America, where performative displays that assert their identities come out of a history of racism, distance from their motherland, and attempts at re-connecting with Filipino-ness is consciously constructed and sometimes imagined. This essay explores how displays of identity and performances as "Filipino" serve as a way for Filipino Americans to negotiate their in-between-ness, whether through attempts to "decolonise" that simultaneously imagines and/or fulfilling and embodying empowered American Filipino narratives. Out of this space of in-between-ness, markers that affirm identities become powerful tools of marking oneself as "Filipino" (Trimillos, 2020). Displays that are "Filipino" and performances of music and dance are tools for Filipino Americans to re-site (Min-ha, 2011) their "Filipino-ness" as a performative act. On the other hand, telling American Filipino stories gives a different kind of visibility that honours their experience, including their struggles, of being Filipino in America.

Migration of Filipinos to the U.S.: Historical Context

After 333 years of Spanish colonial rule, American colonisation of the Philippine archipelago sparked different waves of migration of Filipinos to the U.S. since Filipinos were viewed as colonial subjects. In 1898, five years after the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and its monarch, Queen Lili'uokalani, in 1893 by American businessmen and U.S. marines, the U.S. annexed Hawai'i, the same year the U.S. was granted possession of the Philippines by the Spanish through the Treaty of Paris. Hawai'i, valued for its strategic location in the Pacific for both economic and military reasons, eventually became economically dependent on the U.S. after the establishment of sugar and pineapple plantations on the islands by white American businessmen. In 1906, the first 15 migrant labourers called *sakadas* travelled to the

U.S. territory of Hawai‘i to work the sugar plantations. For the next forty years until 1946, after WWII and when the U.S. granted independence to the Philippines, over 100,000 *sakadas* migrated to the U.S. to work the Hawai‘i plantations. Therefore, the economic control of the U.S. over the Hawaiian Islands, which was not yet a state, was directly related to the migration of Filipinos, beginning the history of Filipino communities in Hawai‘i. With the ease of migration of Filipinos to the U.S. as colonial subjects, migrant labourers started journeying to Alaska, Seattle, and California for opportunities, thus establishing communities on the west coast of the U.S.

In order to understand the struggles of many Filipino Americans and their supporters to make definitive the place of Filipinos in history and in American society, we have to understand the environment in which many Filipinos came to America. The migration of Filipino labourers to the U.S. helped establish Filipino communities. American colonial interests viewed the Philippines as strategic in its proximity to the Asian markets, valued for its mineral rich lands and as a source of cheap labour. However, America, coming out of a history of ousting its colonial rulers, had to justify its imperialism. This included various propaganda campaigns and calls for America to take up the "white man's burden" (1899) from Kipling's famous poem of civilising their "little brown brothers" through the suppression of Philippine armed resistance and the eventual colonisation of their lands.

American Imperialism and the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair

The rhetoric behind American imperialism, which believed in the racial superiority of white Americans over their "little brown brothers," was driven by a moral obligation to bring civilization to their colonised lands. To justify this, scientific racism looked at phenotype as evidence of the white racial superiority over people of colour. This led to a sort of categorisation of societies in the Philippines by anthropologists, from the most primitive to the most civilised. This was best illustrated in the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, where over 1,000 Filipinos of different ethnolinguistic groups from various parts of the archipelago were brought to live on the Philippine reservation to be part of live exhibitions. The Philippine Reservation was part of the American propaganda movement to justify their imperialism to colonise the Philippine archipelago in order to "save" and civilise Filipinos. The fair itself was a way for America to present itself internationally as a growing nation with power. The anthropological exhibits, also referred to human zoos, reflected the science of the time, the Darwin theory of evolution, where groups of people were placed within an evolutionary hierarchy. According to this racist hierarchy, Filipino ethnolinguistic groups were placed within an evolutionary scale: the most "primitive" of the Filipino groups displayed were the Igorots, highland people from the Cordillera Mountains in Northern Luzon; then the "Moros" or Muslim Filipinos from Western Mindanao; and then the most civilised were the Christianized Visayans.

The Filipino Reservation on the grounds of the St. Louis World's Fair and specifically the Igorot Village, was the most popular exhibit in the fair (The Asian American Education Project, n.d.). It was also the most exploitative for those who

lived in the village. The residents of the village were forced to butcher a dog and perform their gong music and dance every day, even though these events were traditionally performed primarily for special or ritual occasions back in their villages in the Philippine highlands. Dog eating and performances of their music and dance were meant to show the savagery of the Igorots as Filipinos to the Americans. Igorots were forced to butcher up to 20 dogs per week, which left a lasting stereotype of the Filipino dog eater that still exists to this day. The performativity of the "Filipino savage" advanced American imperialist agendas, shaped American perceptions of Filipinos while "setting the (contextual) stage" for Filipino migrants to arrive in the country two years later.

The exhibition of Igorots at the St. Louis World's Fair and their obvious exploitation at the fair by organisers was an extremely dehumanising process that attempted to support the idea of white superiority over all races. Pensionados, Filipino scholars who were studying at American universities at the time, opposed the depiction of all Filipinos as uncivilised, where "aboriginal savages" were a class in itself and Christianised Filipinos were "the real Filipinos, who politically and socially represent the Philippines Islands" (R. Acosta, quoted in The Pensionados and the Image of the Filipino 'Primitive,' n.d.). Some of the languaging equated Igorots and their culture as the "lowest grade of Filipino culture" by Filipinos themselves. This messaging is demonstrative of colonial mentality, mimicking and reiterating the racial hierarchy emphasised by Americans. This also reveals an amount of shame around cultural practices, such as wearing a loincloth that Igorots traditionally wear and playing gongs and dancing.

Homi Bhabha's (1984) notion of mimicry explains how the members of a colonised society imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonisers. If we take this idea of the mimicry of colonised peoples of their colonial oppressors, the categorisations of "Filipinos" that were prevalent in American propaganda are also seen in Filipino cultural performances even today. The sort of hierarchy of placing Filipinos on an evolutionary timeline is echoed in the chronology in an evening of Philippine folk dance packaged as "Suites," where indigenous music and dance (which also includes Igorot) would be performed first (Igorot or Mountain Suite), followed by traditions from Muslim groups in the southern Philippines (Muslim Suite), followed by Spanish-influenced dances (Maria Clara Suite) and ending with dances from the country-side (Rural Suite). These formulaic "Suites" were popularised by Bayanihan National Folk Dance Company and are still perpetuated in performances in the diaspora. However, Bhaba's mimicry also reveals that the colonised are not fully their colonisers, leaving space to subvert and resist hegemonic cultural, social and political systems. It is this space where many Americans of Filipino ancestry have started to question and actively dismantle Filipino place and representation in American society, at times leading towards atavistic longing for "pre-colonial" traditions.

Filipino Migration: Anti-Filipino and Anti-Miscegenation

With the first *sakadas*—Filipino migrant labourers who landed in Hawaii in 1906 to work the plantations—subsequent migrations of Filipino labourers continued, thus making Hawaii a source of labour for California's agri-business. In the 1920s, there was an unprecedented amount of Filipino migration to the US, increasing 900%, the majority of which lived in California. From 1923 to 1929, 4,000 Filipino labourers entered the U.S. each year, with the majority migrating to Stockton and Los Angeles as fruit and lettuce pickers. By 1930 there were about 45,000 Filipinos in the U.S., the majority of whom were farm labourers, with only 1 in 14 being female (Arguelles, 2017). Filipinos represented 42% of all non-European labour working on California farms being paid low wages. The "third wave" of Asian migration or "Filipino invasion" instilled fear that Filipinos would create serious social and economic problems and take jobs from white Americans. This is also the time of the Great Depression in the US, starting in 1929. As a result, numerous anti-Filipino sentiments, violence, and riots occurred from 1929 to1930, fuelled by racial stereotyping of Filipinos as prone to crime, instead of looking at the reality of these Filipinos who lived in depressed economic situations, had low social status, and faced general inequality. As stated by Judge D.W. Rohrback of Monterey of the Filipino, "The worst part of his being here is his mixing with young white girls from thirteen to seventeen. He gives them silk underwear and makes them pregnant and crowds whites out of jobs in the bargain" (White Mobs Attack Filipino Farmworkers in Watsonville, California, n.d.). This reflects the perception that Filipino men were sexually promiscuous and deviants.

Filipinos in California were the third group of Asians to migrate, after the Chinese and Japanese. Filipinos tended to be young men, with minimal education, and filled the low-paying manual labour jobs. In 1934, the Tydings McDuffie Act was passed, which changed the status of Filipinos from nationals as colonial subjects to "aliens," which meant there was a quota of 50 Filipino immigrants per year. The Tydings McDuffie Act that specifically targeted Filipinos was the first anti-Filipino legislation to pass in the U.S. Prior to 1946, Filipinos who had already migrated to the U.S. were not allowed to be naturalised as US citizens and therefore unable to own land. When the Philippines became an independent nation in 1946, the Luce-Celler Bill was passed, which allowed for the naturalisation of Filipinos who immigrated to the US prior to March 1934.

These migrant labourers, known as *manongs* (Ilocano for "older brother"), is a term of endearment and respect for an older male. After a long day of working in the fields, mostly in California, Filipino migrant workers would retire to taxi dance halls, where mostly white women worked as dance partners for hire. Filipinos and other immigrant workers dressed up and bought their tickets for 10 cents each, and like a taxi ride, a manong could dance with a girl of his choosing. At this time anti-miscegenation laws were in place that prevented marriage between the "races." Since many of these Filipino labourers were young, unmarried, and unable to bring family from the Philippines over, they sought some form of companionship, even if it was temporary and paid for. These manongs laboured in the fields for up to ten hours a day at only a few cents an hour. However, they were transformed into handsome well-

dressed young men, sporting sharp suits, and were known for their incredible dancing. The manongs at taxi dance halls contradicted the image of the poor, dirty labourer, which was resented by their white blue-collar counterparts. This atmosphere laid the foundation for anti-Filipino violence that spread along the coast of California.

The first anti-Filipino incident occurred in 1926 between Filipino and white farm labourers in Stockton. Social tensions with white labourers, press and media that were laden with racial stereotypes, as well as various politicians putting forward anti-Filipino legislation to curb migration, created anti-Filipino sentiments that escalated in the riots starting in 1929, first in Exeter in San Joaquin Valley. Anti-Filipino sentiment was spreading, and in December 1929 Judge Rohrback proposed a resolution that stated that Filipinos were a health and social menace in California to curb the migration of Filipino farm labourers. Rohrback further made statements against Filipino farm labour and the social relationships between the races, condemning taxi dance halls (Rose, 2021). On January 11, 1930, a new taxi dance hall catering to Filipinos opened in Palm Beach, not far from Watsonville. The anti-Filipino sentiment on the political and social levels culminated in the Watsonville riots of 1930. On January 19, 1930, a mob of 500 local blue-collared white men marched to the Palm Beach dance hall, searching for, and attacking Filipino farm workers. On January 22, a young Filipino named Fermin Tobera, was killed when a mob shot into the dwellings of Filipino farmworkers' homes. The violence spread to other areas of California, creating more havoc and fear among Filipinos. To add to the anti-Filipino sentiment, in 1933 California passed a law that prohibited the marriage between Filipinos and white women (White mobs attack Filipino farmworkers in Watsonville, California, n.d.).

This history of representation of Filipinos from the 1904 World's Fair to the anti-Filipino violence and laws that are directly linked to U.S. colonial rule over the Philippines have left lasting legacies on Filipinos in America and the need by many to counter images of Filipinos prevalent in U.S. history. The representation of "Filipino" reveals how Filipino/Filipino American identity can be rooted in historical events and how Americans of Filipino ancestry can create work to dismantle these negative stereotypes that were also perpetuated by other Filipinos themselves. It is also evident that the historical events that shaped the experience of Filipinos in the U.S. veered in quite a different trajectory than that of Filipinos in the motherland, positing differing cultural experiences and drives towards empowerment as "Filipino" in the U.S. Bayan as cultural imaginary (Peterson, 2016) indicative in performances that display "Filipino-ness" as a reiteration of national belonging to the Philippines as "Filipino" becoming differently meaninged in the diaspora, particularly in the U.S. where experiences are both American and as Filipino.

Decoloniality as Resistance to Assimilation

The discrimination the Filipino diaspora faced and still experience in America has placed them in a unique position in between a dominant American culture (which itself is not a monolith, dependent on place, e.g., Hawai'i, West Coast, East Coast, Mid-West, etc.) and Filipino cultures depending upon the family and community that

surrounds them. Growing up in a predominantly Filipino community in California is different from growing up in Hawaii, or even perhaps the Southern United States. The shame of one's Filipino-ness is intimately connected to colonial mentality, one of colonialism's legacies: where one has internalised their inferiority while upholding western, often American culture, as superior, thus rejecting anything Filipino. This is exemplified in the deprecating term "coconut" referring to people as brown on the outside, and white on the inside. Colonial mentality manifests in different ways, from the use of skin whitening products where dark skin is undesirable and *pangit* (or ugly), to intra-ethnic or intra-group discrimination such as the bullying instigated by Filipino Americans of Filipino immigrants who are perceived to be not fully assimilated into American society being called FOBs (fresh off the boat) and deriding their accents. Colonial mentality thus operates within Filipino communities and becomes a tool of assimilation, further distancing Filipino Americans from their ethnic identity, and simultaneously producing low self-esteem and shame. Studies on internalized oppression and its connections to mental health (David, 2008; Decena, 2014; Collado, 2022) have made findings that Filipino Americans, and specifically females, or Filipinas, have the highest rates of suicide ideation than any other minority group in America, directly connecting colonial mentality with shame and perhaps the distancing from what marks one as Filipino such as cultural practices and language.

The shame of Filipino culture and attempts by Filipinos to assimilate to the dominant American culture has resulted in native language loss of 1.5 generation (1.5G) Filipinos and later generations. It is common for immigrant parents to consciously not speak to their children in their native language as it is seen as a barrier to their American education; children also do not want to speak a Philippine mother tongue because it is seen as foreign and not "American" (Espiritu & Wolf, 2001; Guevarra, 2016; Osalbo, 2011).

However, efforts by Americans of Filipino ancestry to re-establish a connection with a Filipino heritage through cultural traditions perceived as "Filipino" has led to looking towards a re-centering of their Filipino-ness, marking oneself as Filipino (Trimillos, 2022). The drive towards the ideas of decolonisation, "the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches," is a way for Filipino Americans to define and shape what comprises "Filipino"—therefore what they claim ownership over as "Filipino" despite one's Filipino ancestry that might be non-indigenous. "Decolonisation involves valuing and revitalising Indigenous knowledge and approaches and weeding out settler biases or assumptions that have impacted Indigenous ways of being" (Decolonisation and Indigenization, n.d.). For Filipinos in America, this is manifested in the search for language, traditions, the "ancestral" and "culture bearers" that can fill that void of believed cultural and personal loss. The imagined "pre-colonial" "indigeneity" becomes a source of empowerment and retrieval from centuries of perceived loss through colonisation and subsequent shame coming from colonial mentality. For Filipino Americans, decoloniality is resistance to assimilation and a history of discrimination through an assertion of "Filipino" in America.

Re-siting of Filipino-ness Through Performance

> I suggest the "kulintang movement" is part of an ongoing process of decolonisation both in the Philippines and in the diaspora. (Trimillos, 2020, p. xvi)

> What is imagined by Filipino Americans is an "ancient" and pre-colonial heritage in crafting a vision of something distinct from and in opposition to cultural legacies of colonisation and not fixed to any religiosity. This vision provides balm to a felt marginalisation and rootlessness in Euro-American society, and empowers individuals to move forward with a sense of one's own history and connectivity to an ancestral homeland. (Quintero, 2011, p. 114)

Finding connections with Filipino performing arts traditions is a way to claim "Filipino" identity within American culture. Using indigenous performance traditions such as *kulintang* music and dance, Filipino Americans through performances of Filipino cultural traditions, particularly dance and music, engage in the process of "re-siting" Filipino-ness (Minh-ha, 2011). They are actively reconstructing, reassessing, and reconsidering what it means to be Filipino in America by redrawing the metaphoric boundaries of Filipino-ness, from the motherland to America. Given the sense of loss of culture, language in America, seeking out displays of "pre-colonial" "Filipino," the quest for authenticity shifts the gaze towards indigenous Philippine groups. The draw towards kulintang performing arts, found in western Mindanao amongst Islamized ethnolinguistic groups, is multi-layered: it comes from ethnolinguistic groups that have historically resisted Spanish colonisation; they are non-Hispanized cultural traditions; and it is perceived to be "ancient" and "pre-colonial" (Quintero, 2011). The act of performing kulintang music and dance from the southern Philippines that comes from ethnolinguistic groups such as the Maguindanao, Maranao and Sama, among Filipino Americans serves as a tangible expression of this re-siting the boundaries of Filipino identity. This form of "re-siting," the act as performative "Filipino" through performances, renegotiates what has become popular and normative displays through Maria Clara dances and the *tinikling* bamboo dance, and connection to traditional practices perceived to be older than Spanish contact in the archipelago. The popularity of kulintang music and dance are empowering as they satisfy atavistic agendas that yearn for something "authentically ancient Filipino."

The depictions of Islamized cultures of the Philippines depend on the group, an artist's purposes, and level of commitment to research and accuracy. Going back to the motherland to seek out knowledge and traditions from indigenous groups is now a common phenomenon practised among Filipino Americans. A project called "Tribal Tour" through the group KulArts and so-called cultural "immersions" by arts groups such as Parangal, both based in California, seek to connect Filipino Americans with "culture bearers" of particular indigenous peoples in the Philippines. A shift occurs perhaps from being "diasporic," leaving the motherland, to longing to be transnational, where going back and forth to the Philippines means being able to sustain a connection to the motherland and people. This puts Filipino Americans in a unique place where transnationalism becomes a privileged place with monetary support needed and the possession of a blue U.S. passport. Simultaneously, the need

to constantly return to the Philippines driven by the sense of loss and need comes from a place of marginality within the U.S.

One of the ways in which this in-between-ness is manifested is in the use and performance in native textiles. As Filipino Americans don "cultural" indigenous attire, they do not replicate that indigeneity that endows the textile donned and created by indigenous hands. Instead, meanings of "indigeneity" for Filipino Americans are utilised in the in-between space of privilege and marginality, re-purposing the textile to be symbolic of their supposed cultural pre-coloniality. Filipino Americans re-site traditional textiles, transporting them from their Filipino origins and placing them into new contexts within American performances. This shift towards reconnecting with the Philippines reflects a reflexive response in the ongoing process of identity formation and affirmation as Filipino within the backdrop of American society. Some Filipino Americans move beyond symbolic representations, shifting away from a generalised nationalised costume and instead focus on a more nuanced understanding of indigenous Philippine groups through their distinctive kulintang and textile traditions. While the influence of Bayanihan National Folk Dance Company remains palpable and is frequently referenced by Filipino American groups, there is a noticeable shift as Filipino Americans engage in dialogues with specific indigenous ethnolinguistic groups, challenge and redefine the boundaries of Philippine music and dance as it is practised in America. The pursuit of "inspired" dances from ethnolinguistic groups signals an attempt to grasp, however superficial or deep, the ethos of indigenous ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines. For Filipino Americans, the act of costuming as "indigenous" and playing kulintang music and dance becomes a means to re-site Filipino-ness, challenging and expanding the boundaries of what constitutes Filipino identity. This process of re-siting draws new borders of meaning and engaging in a continuous dialogue with an imagined "pre-colonial ancestor," American audiences, Filipinos in America, and those within the Philippine nation-state.

Re-siting Filipinos in America: American Filipino Narratives and Belonging

The combinative identity of "Filipino American" as one's identification is first with one's "motherland" and the secondary identity of American culture. This suggests that one should be familiar with and more rooted to "Filipino." However, fore fronting the rootedness Filipinos have in American history, through labour movements (Sugar Strikes in Hawai'i, the Delano Grape Strike) and the economy (labour for sugar and pineapple plantations, canneries in Alaska, grape and lettuce pickers on farms in the west coast), Filipino American history is American history. The moniker *American Filipino* understands that Filipinos have been enculturated in American society, born and raised, and that their "American-ness" also rightfully places them as part of the tapestry of American history and contemporary life. It flips the framework of the perpetual foreigner and questions perhaps what one's culture is and where it is: in America one is Filipino, in the Philippines one is American. One embodies both as an American Filipino.

Fore fronting American Filipino narratives in performance acts as a way to

tether them to place, land, and a nation called America creating a different sense of belonging rooted in American history and honouring American Filipino experiences. Performances that are specifically American Filipino assert a unique, yet rooted, American identity that perhaps does not reference the rhetoric of assimilation as it claims the in-between space as a place of power and possible empowerment. Referencing both American and Filipino culture in performances gives visibility to their history and belonging in America. Two examples are New York's Slant Performance Group's song "Dime a Dance" and San Francisco's The Autonomous Region and Kultura Kapwa's "Ullalim-Sugilanon." These two performances use the American musical traditions of blues and jazz in order to tell American Filipino stories.

The Slant Performance Group (also known as Slant) is a three-man Asian American group founded by Rick Ebihara, Wayland Quintero and Perry Yung in New York City. Slant is known for their theatrical satire tackling issues around racial and sexual stereotypes, often using humour in their repertoire. The song "Dime a Dance" combines harmonica, guitar, and vocals to tell the story of Timoteo, a Filipino farm worker in Watsonville, California. A labourer earning just a dollar a day working in the fields, Timoteo spends his money at the taxi dance hall paying a dime a dance (10 cents a dance) to be with his "MaryAnn" (a white woman). The song talks about Timoteo, dance halls, and references Watsonville (where the song is set), alluding to the riots in 1930 where mobs of white men targeted Filipino farm labourers, while also referencing the anti-miscegenation laws that made it illegal for Filipino men to marry white women in California.

Dime a dance
With his best dress pants
His dark skin against her white
Dime a dance
A strange romance
But it's all so strong
While they play their song
Why does something so wrong
Feel so right

I arrived in California in 1923
Just like all the others looking for opportunity
Law said I had to leave my sweetheart in Manila
Well the only chance for romance here is dance hall vanilla

Dime a dance
Dime a dance
She said she'd marry you if she had a chance
But here in Watsonville that ain't gonna be
You and her ain't making no babies

-Slant Performance Group, "Dime a Dance"

The song is set within a larger theatrical piece with scene vignettes that centre around Asian American issues. Singing about the exploitation of Filipino workers (earning one dollar a day), the racism they encountered and laws that targeted them, Slant's "Dime a Dance" gives visibility to what many migrant labourers encountered in the first half of the 1900s in the United States. The lyrics, "The only chance for romance here is dance hall vanilla" that continues on to "She said she'd marry you if she had the chance… You and her ain't making no babies," sadly and humorously reveals what the reality was for many of the manongs. Many of them lived into their later years single and unmarried and have been called "the lost generation" because these men did not have families and children of their own. "Dime a dance" also contextualises this American Filipino experience within a larger Asian American narrative.

The Autonomous Region is a jazz ensemble in San Francisco that performs jazz standards and new compositions with kulintang instruments, while Kultura Kapwa is a non-jazz ensemble that presents music, dances and attire from the southern Philippines. Collaboratively working together, they presented "Ulliam-Sugilanon" an American epic poem which premiered in 2021. The performance piece combined rhythms and instrumentation from the southern Philippines, the northern Philippine Cordillera region and jazz with storytelling, narrating one's family's "American Filipino experience in San Francisco from 1904 through 1942. Crafted according to the poetic structure of the Philippine Kalinga Epic Poem "di Ullalim," the poem is accompanied by original jazz compositions inspired by Kalinga rhythmic motifs and melodies" ("Ulliam-Sugilanon," 2021). The piece incorporates jazz, *gangsa* (handheld flat gongs), kulintang and other traditional instruments, keeping the "essence" of traditional music while simultaneously making it "American Filipino" through storytelling using verse, song, and dance. Caroline Cabading, the lead vocalist, sings a combination of Kalinga and English, weaving in and out of jazz and Kalinga rhythms, a sort of manifestation of the American Filipino experience of referencing here—the history of American Filipinos in the U.S.—and there—the musical traditions from the Philippines. Through this music is manifested American Filipino in-between-ness. "Ulliam-Sugilanon" is an American, a Filipino and an immigrant story that demonstrates a culmination of identities that asserts itself as belonging within history as an American story. Although the piece focuses on the journey of one family, it situates their story within what would become San Francisco's first Filipino community: "Bamboo community, steady and strong, all together is how we belong" (Ulliam-Sugilanon, 2021).

Where many Filipino Americans continue to search and yearn for the "pre-colonial ancestor" by using indigenous Philippine traditions in and from the motherland as a way of decolonising and seeking to empower their marginality, works that incorporate various Filipino and American histories and traditions create space in America as Filipino and as American. The Slant Performance Group's song "Dime a Dance" and "Ullalim-Sugilanon" by The Autonomous Region and Kultura Kapwa in San Francisco fulfil and embody American Filipino narratives by giving visibility to their histories and struggles in the U.S. These works speak of "place" and belongingness as both American and Filipino, empowering the in-between-ness of American Filipinos.

References

Arguelles, D. (2017). Remembering the Manongs and story of the Filipino farm worker movement. *National Parks Conservation Association*. Retrieved from https://www.npca.org/articles/1555-remembering-the-manongs-and-story-of-the-filipino-farm-worker-movement

Bhabha, H. (1984). Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse. *October, 28*, 125-133.

Collado, R. M. (2022). Colonial mentality-Filipino: A documentary for the Filipino community [Doctoral dissertation]. Alliant International University.

David, E. J. R. (2008). A colonial mentality model of depression for Filipino Americans. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *14*(2), 118–127. https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.14.2.118

Decena, A. M. (2014). Identity, colonial mentality, and decolonising the mind: Exploring narratives and examining mental health implications for Filipino Americans [Master's thesis]. Smith College.

Decolonisation and Indigenization. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfrontlineworkers/chapter/decolonisation-and-indigenization

Espiritu, Y. L., & Wolf, D. L. (2001). The paradox of assimilation: Children of Filipino immigrants in San Diego. In R. G. Rumbaut & A. Portes (Eds.), *Ethnicities: Children of immigrants in America* (pp. 157–186). Russell Sage Foundation.

Guevarra, E. C. (2016). For some Filipino-Americans, language barriers leave culture lost in translation. *KQED*. Retrieved from https://www.kqed.org/news/10746111/for-some-filipino-americans-language-barriers-leave-culture-lost-in-translation

Minh-ha, T. (2011). *Elsewhere, within here*. Routledge.

Osalbo, J. G. (2011). Filipino American identity development and its relation to heritage language loss [Doctoral dissertation]. California State University, Sacramento.

Peterson, W. (2016). *Places for happiness: Community, self, and performance in the Philippines*. University of Hawaii Press.

Quintero, W. (2011). Kulintang zone: Gong chime playing, dancing, and costumed Filipino Americans. *Tirai Panggung, 11*, 96-117.

Rose, S. (2021, March 31). The Anti-Filipino Watsonville riots of 1930. Retrieved from https://blurredbylines.com/articles/watsonville-riots-anti-filipino-immigration-1930-california/

The Pensionados and the Image of the Filipino 'Primitive.' (n.d.). *The Philippines and the University of Michigan, 1870-1935*. Retrieved from https://philippines.michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/s/exhibit/page/pensionados-and-the-image-of-the-filipino-primitive

The Slant Performance Group. *Dime a dance*. [Performance].

Trimillos, R. D. (2020). Music & dance: Performing Filipino/a/x identities. In E. Lipat-Chesler & M. Talusan (Eds.), *Our culture resounds, our future reveals: A legacy of Filipino American performing arts in California*. UCLA Department of Ethnomusicology. Retrieved from https://californiarevealed.org/do/90bb34e0-8d99-4205-b19c-22d3a92c7ef3

White mobs attack Filipino farmworkers in Watsonville, California. (n.d.). *A History of Racial Injustice*. Retrieved from https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/jan/19

Biography

Desiree A. Quintero is currently a lecturer in Filipino Studies at Leeward Community College, University of Hawai‘i on O‘ahu. She works with student populations and communities that seek representation and visibility in their education. Her research focus has been on Sulu dance practices, their transmission and pedagogy in Sabah and southern Philippines, extending to other areas including Manila and the U.S. She earned her PhD in Ethnochoreology at the University of Malaya and subsequently conducted research as an Asian Cultural Council fellow.