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The Intersection of Culture and Activism in the Filipino Community in SoMa

A Capstone Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the College of Arts & Sciences

University of San Francisco

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN URBAN AFFAIRS

By

Erica Martynovych

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Abstract

My research analyzes the intersection between culture and activism, through oral histories with participants and organizers of SoMa Pilipinas, the Filipino cultural heritage district in the South of Market neighborhood of San Francisco. I analyzed the impact of the establishment of the Filipino cultural heritage district on the Filipino community in the South of Market neighborhood. I examined what motivates members of this community to be politically active by organizing and attending protests and rallies, speaking at Planning Commission hearings at City Hall, attending planning meetings for SoMa Pilipinas, building relationships across organizations and fields, and providing resources for community members.

Introduction

Since moving to San Francisco in the Summer of 2015, I had been searching for a sense

of place for Filipinas like myself. Eventually I became aware of the presence of a Filipino community harbored in the SoMa (South of Market) neighborhood. The largest Filipino population in the U.S. is in California.¹ SoMa has historically been a main location for new Filipino immigrants from the Philippines. The neighborhood still has a high Filipino population, and provides resources such as education, jobs, recreational activities for Filipinos.²

My curiosity about the Filipino community lead me to pursue an internship at the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN) in the summer of 2016. SOMCAN is a multigenerational community-based organization that works to offer economically disadvantaged people in SoMa support and education through leadership development and advocacy, as well as direct assistance with housing, employment, and referrals to community services.³ I connected with a network of Filipino organizers through my internship where I chose to focus on the SoMa Pilipinas Filipino Cultural Heritage District project. Suddenly, I was surrounded by an inspiring Filipino community. My internship duties, research, and community involvement brought my personal identity as a Filipino-American into focus.

As a first-generation immigrant born in the Philippines on a U.S. base, I felt a strong push toward learning about Filipino and Filipino-American culture each time I traveled to visit my family in the Philippines. Cultural identity encompasses more than shared language, values, religion, cuisine, social habits, and arts. The definition of cultural identity expands to include: “..displacement and alienation of self brought about by settling in a new country, so that being Filipino American, in this case, is about bridging the past and the present, the distant and the

¹ Migration Policy Institute, “The Filipino Diaspora in the United States,” *Migration Policy Institute*, July 2014, 1.

² SoMa Pilipinas, “San Francisco’s Filipino Cultural District,” 2016, <http://www.somapilipinas.org/>.

³ SOMCAN, “About Us,” *South of Market Community Action Network*, 2016, http://www.somcan.org/about_us

nearby”⁴ Moreover, to understand the formation of Filipino American culture and identity it is essential to explore the historical underpinnings that have shaped our lives.

Stuart Hall proposes two key elements of cultural identity, which are shared history and cultural codes, as well as the differences that shape what we are becoming.⁵ Historical identity does not change, but is experienced in new and ever changing ways as we move forward.⁶ Understanding and connecting with one’s native culture by relearning morals and ideals of their ancestors and of their people is referred to as imaginary reunification.⁷ Filipinos in the South of Market describe the neighborhood as a home away from home. They carry their culture from the Philippines to their new culture in San Francisco.

My initial research revealed that the history of the Filipino community is not sufficiently recorded in historical narratives or archives. I found that a majority of this history of Filipinos in the U.S. is found in the form of storytelling. Storytelling is used to discover what Hall refers to as ‘hidden histories’.⁸ Through my field research I used oral histories to investigate the intersections between culture and activism in SoMa Pilipinas. I sought examples of how the Filipino community self organizes to address issues and what within this organizing is culturally specific. I reached the above by observing activism, examining the role of storytelling and how these shape current Filipino community in SoMa.

The SoMa neighborhood has been a center of gravity for Filipinos for a long time because it is a place where Filipinos from all over the city and state go for housing, jobs,

⁴ Rick Bonus, *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity & the Cultural Politics of Space* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 83.

⁵ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 224-225.

⁶ Hall, 225.

⁷ Hall, 224.

⁸ Ibid.

resources, and community.⁹ The history of waves of Filipino migration to the U.S. are discussed, along with how the U.S. colonization of the Philippines affects Filipino-Americans. A brief history of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and the current issues occurring today surrounding the commodification of labor are highlighted. Though often overlooked, Filipinos have historically had an immense impact to San Francisco, California, and the United States as a whole. For example, the participation of Filipinos and Larry Itliong in the farm labor movement was overshadowed by the recognition of Cesar Chavez. Filipinos have been regularly denied their seat at the table in discussing American history and this is my attempt to amplify that narrative, in solidarity with other Filipino scholars.

The intersectionality of culture and activism is illustrated by the case of the establishment of SoMa Pilipinas as a Filipino cultural heritage district in the SoMa neighborhood in San Francisco. This is one way that Filipinos in San Francisco have claimed space to preserve their thriving culture. SoMa activism exemplifies what Bonus describes as resistance to “historical and institutional experiences of racialization and exclusion, as well as by a desire to claim a ‘space’ within the construct ‘American’ on their own terms”.¹⁰ SoMa activism holds the potential to shape, build and maintain a distinct cultural identity in the face of pressures to assimilate by preserving culture. This includes the history of political and cultural activism among Filipinos institution-building, history and archive making, art, food and small businesses. The above is within “..the contexts of U.S.-Philippine relationships of colonialism, neocolonialism, and labor recruitment; and in the interplay of economic, political, and social forces that define belonging and citizenship”.¹¹ The United States has held a belief that it should be a melting pot of various

⁹ MC Canlas, *SoMa Pilipinas Studies 2000 [In two Languages]* (San Francisco: Arkipelago Books Publishing, 2002), xi.

¹⁰ Bonus, 165.

¹¹ Bonus, 169.

cultures combining, creating a homogenous society. The work surrounding SoMa Pilipinas is maintaining Filipino American identity in the face of systemic pressure to abandon it.

A main issue discussed in *SoMa Pilipinas Studies 2000* is the Americanization of Filipinos as a population and how this has caused them to be mislabeled, misinterpreted, and culturally marginalized.¹² MC Canlas emphasizes this issue by stating, “Filipino history is a story of struggle against colonizers and the formation of one nation, *Inang Bayan*.”¹³ Uncovering this Filipino history adds to revealing how Filipino-American culture is determined and expressed.

This project contributes to the growing research about Filipinos in the United States. Studying the history of Filipinos immigrating to the U.S. and the challenges they face will contribute another perspective of the community. There is value that is created from people communicating their lived experiences. I am humanizing the information that I collected from literature on Filipino-American history and culture with personal stories and lived experiences from Filipino community members in SoMa. Future researchers interested in the initial phases of SoMa Pilipinas and the oral histories of this community will have access to the data I have documented concerning these specific moments in time. This also includes the history of SoMa Pilipinas, the core concepts behind it, and the opportunity that allowed for its formal establishment through the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

In the next section I delve into the details of my internship and how this connects to my research methods. Followed by this, in the Historical Review I go over the relationship between the United States and the Philippines, give the historical context of Filipino migration to the United States, and how this history shapes Filipino-American lives today. Then I look at Filipino activism in SoMa and explore Filipino culture through oral histories. This will lead to my

¹² Canlas, 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

analysis of the data I collected and with a description of the significance of my research. Finally, I will reflect on my research and give my conclusions and recommendations.

Internship/Research Methods

The legislation for SoMa Pilipinas which [Establishing SoMa Pilipinas - Filipino Cultural Heritage District in San Francisco] passed by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in April 2016, created working groups that were asked to organize a strategic plan in October 2016. The boundary streets of SoMa Pilipinas include Market Street to the northwest, San Francisco Bay to the northeast, Mission Channel to the southeast, and Division, 13th Street, and Highway 101 to the southwest. The working groups consist of the Historical Preservation, Arts and Culture,

Workers, Housing and Land Use, Business and Economic Development, Children, Youth, and Families, and Seniors and Tenants committees. I attended approximately 30 of these meetings from June 2016 to December 2016, along with about 30 other SoMa Pilipinas related events, hearings, and StoryCorps recordings.

At the beginning of my internship at SOMCAN I volunteered as a note taker for organizers discussions on the SoMa Pilipinas strategic plan, which was designed to be developed by the Planning Department in collaboration with the community and submitted to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors. Within the walls of these meetings I began to discover what Filipino-American culture and politics looks and feels like: It is inclusive, high spirited, hard working, and there is almost always food.

The Bayanihan Community Center on Mission Street is a vital part of this Filipino center. Bayanihan is a word in Tagalog that means a voluntary activity or work characterized by people helping one another.¹⁴ The Bayanihan Community Center is a vital part of the Filipino community in SoMa and is currently in the process of collecting archival information related to Filipino history in San Francisco. The Historical Committee that meets at the Bayanihan Community Center is a large part of the SoMa Pilipinas cultural heritage district. A current project that they are working on is an archiving and oral history project. As an intern for SOMCAN, I collaborated with the Bayanihan Community Center to contribute to the SoMa Pilipinas. I completed fieldwork by conducting oral histories in the Filipino community in SoMa.

The first step was to begin a partnership in September 2016 with StoryCorps. StoryCorps, a national oral history project that began in 2003, aims to preserve and share humanity's stories

¹⁴ Canlas, 4.

in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world.¹⁵ I completed training at the San Francisco StoryCorps office to learn how to facilitate and use the recording equipment (StoryKit) to record stories at the Bayanihan Community Center. After each recorded conversation the participants were given a copy of their recording and the recordings are included in the SoMa Pilipinas archival project at the Bayanihan Community Center. The recordings are also stored at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

Throughout the process of conducting these 24 oral histories in SoMa Pilipinas, I observed common themes. Some of these themes include engagement in community actions, Filipino-American identity, and a sense of place in the SoMa. Community organizing in the Filipino community in SoMa takes many forms, such as attending protests and rallies, speaking at public hearings, attending working group and planning meetings for SoMa Pilipinas, building relationships across organizations and fields, and working at organizations that provide services and resources. I transcribed parts of these oral histories for this research project. The participants were multigenerational and are across many sectors, including workers, business owners, students, historians, artists, organizers, educators, leaders, city employees, and parents in SoMa.

I had little prior knowledge of the Filipino community in SoMa before my internship; however, spending extensive time within this community influenced and shaped my research interests. I knew that I was interested in the connection I could see between culture and activism, but through the recording process I gained interest in deeper aspects about Filipino history in San Francisco, identity formation, the relationship between the United States and the Philippines, and the effects of colonialism. In this project I explore how identifying with a community can influence one's motivation to be engaged with issues the community is facing.

¹⁵ StoryCorps, "About StoryCorps," *StoryCorps*, 2017, <https://storycorps.org/about/>.

My internship shaped the boundaries of my research which was largely ethnographic. A majority of the data for my research was obtained through participant-observation in the community. I connected to the Filipino community in SoMa through my internship and worked with SoMa Pilipinas and StoryCorps, attended SoMa Pilipinas planning meetings, held conversations outside of planned interviews, and attended community events. This original research builds on existing literature on the history of Filipino migration, SoMa and San Francisco more broadly, and on the formation of formal cultural districts in cities.

Historical Review

There is a long history of displacement in San Francisco. The Spanish arrived in what is now the Mission District in 1776. They forcefully displaced the Ohlone people who had lived in the region for at least 5,000 years. “By 1832, the Ohlone population had been reduced from a high of over 10,000 in 1770 to less than 2,000. The Spanish missionaries aimed to “civilize” the native people, which included murdering many native people along with imprisoning them for labor, and attempting to erase all of their culture and history. This concept is similar to Manifest Destiny, which began in North America, “Manifest Destiny embodied the belief that the white race was divinely ordained to spread westward to the Pacific shores, bringing government, economic prosperity and Christianity to the continent”¹⁶ Once all of the land in North America was conquered, the U.S. used Manifest Destiny to justify its conquest abroad to further lands including the Philippines.

The history of the colonization of the Philippines is significant because it reveals the

¹⁶ Abe Ignacio, Enrique de la Cruz, Jorge Emmanuel, and Helen Toribio, *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons* (Berkeley: Eastwind Books of Berkeley, 2004), 23.

foundation of their relationship with the U.S. In the Philippines Spanish rule lasted from 1565 until the declaration of independence from Spain on June 12th, 1898.¹⁷ Filipino revolutionary forces were in resistance against Spain beginning in 1896 and had taken power over most of the Philippines from Spain. There was only a small portion of Manila that was occupied by the United States in 1898.¹⁸ The Philippine Republic was established enacting a new constitution and president.¹⁹ This independence was short lived because in 1898 as a part of the Treaty of Paris, “The U.S. Congress ‘purchased’ the Philippines from Spain for \$20 million”.²⁰ The U.S. did not bring independence to the Philippines, instead the Philippine-American War from 1899-1902 resulted in the colonization of the Philippines by the U.S. During the Philippine-American War. Starvation, disease, and murder took the lives of about one-sixth of the 7 million Filipino citizens.²¹ This war involved more than 127,000 U.S. troops and in the first two years more than 4,200 were killed.²² The actions taken against the Philippines are described in *The Forbidden Book*, “The U.S. military responded to Filipino guerrilla warfare by burning villages and herding entire populations into concentration camps while destroying homes, crops, food stores, and animals to deprive guerrillas of support.”²³ This history shows that the United States was not a helpful liberator, and in fact, the Filipino people and their resources were violently exploited.

The U.S. occupation of the Philippines continued to displace communities as wealthy American men took over property dispossessing land, resulting in farmers feeling forced to leave

¹⁷ Ethan P. Hawkey, “Reviving the Reconquista in Southeast Asia: Moros and the Making of the Philippines, 1565-1662,” *Journal of World History* 25, no. 2&3 (2014): 289, accessed October 29, 2017, <http://0-eds.a.ebscohost.com.ignacio.usfca.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=6&sid=986095a1-2a5b-40ad-aa94-c995e09a26d2%40sessionmgr4008>

¹⁸ Ignacio, Cruz, Emmanuel, and Toribio, 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²² Ignacio, Cruz, Emmanuel, and Toribio, 97.

²³ *Ibid.*, 97.

the Philippines.²⁴ The Philippine-American War devastated the established public education system which included a multitude of higher learning institutions such as trade schools, arts academies, agricultural institutes, myriad colleges, and schools of commerce.²⁵ Pedagogy in the Philippines became framed by American culture. Thousands of American teachers from the U.S. went to the Philippines. This was a part of the extended logic/ideology of ‘Manifest Destiny’ when the U.S. began the process of teaching American culture as superior to Filipino culture. This organized colonization of Filipino people through public education included speaking English, being taught by American teachers, saying the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag, and singing The Star Spangled Banner.²⁶

The U.S. colonization of the Philippines thus had many far-reaching psychological and political effects on Filipinos. Psychologically, Filipinos were groomed to be “good colonial subjects.”²⁷ Scholars argue that Filipinos were coerced into believing the U.S. was there to help them. Politically, patriotism has historically been leveraged against critics of war, as was the case in the Philippine-American War. Those who questioned or criticized the war were looked down upon.²⁸

The term “collective amnesia” describes how the United States was able to use factual errors to erase the memory of the Philippine-American War from its history.²⁹ In *Strangers From a Different Shore* Ronald Takaki emphasizes the importance of Asian American immigrant history: “Their stories belong to our country’s history and need to be recorded in our history books, for they reflect the making of America as a nation of immigrants, as a place where men

²⁴ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1998), 60.

²⁵ Ignacio, Cruz, Emmanuel, and Toribio, 66.

²⁶ Takaki, 57.

²⁷ Ignacio, Cruz, Emmanuel, and Toribio, 155.

²⁸ Ignacio, Cruz, Emmanuel, and Toribio, 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

and women came to find a new beginning”³⁰ The erasure of the Philippine-American War through this amnesia reflects an inaccurate picture of the Filipino narrative. Americans, with no understanding of this colonial relationship and its impact on immigration, end up thinking of the U.S. outside of the constructs of its colonialism, which paints a different picture entirely.

Filipinos were trained from a very young age to aspire to live in the United States and were convinced that their lives would improve after immigrating. One of the first major influxes of immigration from the Philippines was from 1906-1934.³¹ Takaki writes that they soon realized that they were not actually welcome. Filipino immigrants faced racial discrimination in the United States and were treated as strangers in this new place.³² They were confronted by this social inequity within many aspects of their lives, including at hotels, restaurants, and on the streets.³³

During this time, Manilatown was developed by the circumstances of these Filipino workers in San Francisco and became a permanent settlement home to field workers, merchant marines, family, and friends.³⁴ Most of the Filipino immigrants were single men who were needed for labor in the U.S. and some of the main places that Filipinos migrated to include Hawaii, Alaska, Seattle, and San Francisco. In San Francisco these single male Filipino workers developed a community. This led to a communal lifestyle and the creation of Manilatown north of Market Street near Washington and Kearny streets in San Francisco.³⁵

Although the Filipino community in San Francisco began to thrive, public policies systemically marginalized this population. Filipino immigrants were restricted by the Tydings-

³⁰ Takaki, 10.

³¹ Canlas, 23.

³² Takaki, 316.

³³ Ibid., 324.

³⁴ Manilatown Heritage Foundation, “About Us: History,” *Wordpress*, 2017, <https://manilatown.org/about-us/history/>.

³⁵ Canlas, 23.

McDuffie Act of 1934, which gave the Philippines the promise of future independence scheduled for July 4th, 1946, but also excluded Filipinos from the U.S. by classifying them as aliens.³⁶ In 1935 the Repatriation Act was passed to encourage Filipino immigrants to go back to the Philippines.³⁷ The labor of Filipino people was an exploitable and disposable resource.

In 1941 Japan occupied the Philippines while Filipino masses resisted. The U.S. recruited approximately eighty thousand Filipinos for the war effort. The U.S. took back control of the Philippines from Japan in 1945. Soon after, the right to military benefits was taken away from Filipino soldiers who fought for the U.S. in WWII through the Rescission Act in 1946. The US political domination of the Philippines through the guise of independence was declared on July 4th, 1946. This independence was given under strict circumstances that benefited the U.S. The Philippines was required to alter its constitution to implement the Bell Trade Act of 1946 in order to receive 620 million dollars from the U.S. in war damage compensation.³⁸ The conditions of this Act secured U.S. citizens' parity rights in the ownership of corporations and awarded them the same rights as Filipino citizens to utilize the Philippines natural and public resources for profit.³⁹ The Bell Trade Act also dictated that 23 military bases under U.S. extraterritorial jurisdiction would be in place for 99 years, including the massive Clark Air Base in Angeles.⁴⁰ The Philippines and its people are a resource that the U.S. would continue to exploit.

World War II and the post war era brought thousands of single male workers to San Francisco including Filipino immigrants. The second wave of Filipino immigration was the "Postwar Generation" between 1945-1965 which included women and children, World War II

³⁶ Takaki, 14.

³⁷ Ibid., 333.

³⁸ Ignacio, Cruz, Emmanuel, and Toribio, 156.

³⁹ Ignacio, Cruz, Emmanuel, and Toribio, 156.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 156.

families, professionals, and students.⁴¹ This wave of immigration was partially possible under an immigration act in 1965 that represented big change. The 1965 Immigration Act abolished national origins quotas and based entry to the U.S. on family reunification and occupational characteristics.⁴² This put family-based immigration in place, also known as chain migration. Chain migration is when family members are petitioned by their relatives to join them, reuniting families. Skills-based immigration was also a part of this law, preferring those who had professional characteristics needed in the U.S.⁴³ In a Filipino context, the 1965 Immigration Act meant that the single male Filipino workers were now able to petition their wives, children, and other family members to join them in the United States. According to Tom Gjeelten, the quota system was controversial, “The quotas set aside tens of thousands of visas each year for immigrants from Northern and Western Europe, while many countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East were allocated barely 100 slots each. It was a blatantly discriminatory system.”⁴⁴ Today, the immigration system is backed up and families are separated for years.⁴⁵

In the same year as the 1965 Immigration Act, Filipinos were contributing to the farm labor movement. The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) led by Filipino American farm worker and union organizer Larry Itliong merged with Cesar Chavez’s National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) to become the United Farm Workers (UFW).⁴⁶ While Cesar Chavez has gained recognition, this history of Filipino involvement in the 1965 Delano Grape

⁴¹ Canlas, 23.

⁴² Ibid., 23.

⁴³ Jennifer Ludden, “1965 Immigration Law Changed Face of America,” *Northwest Public Radio*, May 9, 2006. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5391395>.

⁴⁴ Tom Gjeelten, “In 1965, A Conservative Tried To Keep America White. His Plan Backfired,” *Northwest Public Radio*, October 3, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/2015/10/03/445339838/the-unintended-consequences-of-the-1965-immigration-act>.

⁴⁵ Ludden, “1965 Immigration Law Changed Face of America”

⁴⁶ Leslie Berestein Rojas, “The forgotten history of the Filipino laborers who worked with Cesar Chavez,” *89.3 KPCC Multi-American*, April 1, 2011, <http://www.scpr.org/blogs/multiamerican/2011/04/01/7203/the-asian-american-farm-worker-legacy/>

Strike and the part they played in the farm labor movement is not well known.⁴⁷ Dehumanizing workplace environments exploited Filipino immigrants, and for decades workers suffered from abusive labor practices.⁴⁸ Five years of striking and boycott of California table grapes before growers signed contracts with farmworkers promising better wages and improving standards for farm laborers conditions. In 2015, California legislation recognized Larry Itliong Day, and this history became a mandatory part of public school curriculum.⁴⁹ Sharing Filipino history will make these communities a stronger political force through the acknowledgment of our rich background. Having a firm foundational knowledge of how far Filipinos have come this far shows us how far we are capable of going if only we make our voices heard.

In 1968, the International Hotel (I-Hotel) was located at 838 Kearny Street in what used to be the neighborhood called “Manilatown” and the I-Hotel was the only remaining parcel. This Filipino neighborhood had been obliterated piece by piece through “urban renewal”. The crisis the community faced when the landlord wanted to evict all of the tenants is eloquently described by Estella Habal: “The presence and even the memory of these humble, yet strong and dignified, men and of the hotel they called home would soon be erased”. The hotel was home to many men from the first wave of immigration that occurred in 1906-1934 and these immigrants became known as the “Manong Generation”. The respectful term “Manong” refers to an elder male relative. The activism that took place at the I-Hotel became the epicenter of resistance in San Francisco from 1968 to 1977. It became a place of unity with cross-sectional activism. This included labor leaders, anti-war and anti-imperialist activists, organizers for district elections,

⁴⁷ Lisa Morehouse, “Grapes of Wrath: The Forgotten Filipinos Who Led A Farmworker Revolution,” *Northwest Public Radio*, September 19, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/09/16/440861458/grapes-of-wrath-the-forgotten-filipinos-who-led-a-farmworker-revolution>

⁴⁸ Estella Habal, “Filipino Americans in the Decade of the International Hotel,” in *Ten Years that Shook the City*, ed. Chris Carlsson (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2011), 130.

⁴⁹ Morehouse.

religious spokesmen and their congregations, advocates for gay rights, and Civil Rights activists all collaborating in resistance to a massive capitalist development that would engulf Manilatown, replacing a once thriving Filipino community with skyscrapers. They participated in a focused effort to preserve their sense of community and culture.⁵⁰ They fought to claim space for the community living in Manilatown and the cultures that were thriving there.

An interviewee Carlos Zialcita moved to the U.S. at age 10 in the late 1950s, he has a history as a jazz musician in San Francisco and is currently working on a book about Pinoy jazz in San Francisco. In the 1950's, the popularity of the automobile and needs of commuters brought major shifts in city planning that sacrificed the needs of people living in urban neighborhoods. Zialcita's memory of Manilatown includes witnessing it disappearing into one last building, the International Hotel. To prevent the loss of important cultural memories, he strongly supports the preservation of Filipino history in SoMa. As many members of SoMa Pilipinas have expressed, Zialcita states "The Bayanihan Community center is in my opinion the epicenter of the South of Market Filipino community".⁵¹

Filipino immigration increased rapidly after 1965 and many Filipinos moved to the South of Market and Daly City, which is the city located directly south of San Francisco.⁵² In 1967, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency enacted their vision, making room for progress by displacing thousands of SoMa community members through evictions and building demolitions⁵³ Plans for the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's Yerba Buena Center were introduced following popular models for development. The Yerba Buena Center plan was

⁵⁰ Habal, 126.

⁵¹ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Carlos Zialcita and Jibril Alvarez. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 12, 2016.

⁵² Habal, 132.

⁵³ Page & Turnbull, Inc., "South of Market Area: San Francisco, California" (Historic Context Statement, San Francisco, 2009), 5 & 68.

approved in April 1966 by the Board of Supervisors.⁵⁴ At the time, development in cities across the U.S. were being designed in ways that reflected suburbs and claimed to remove urban blight.

⁵⁵ The project impacted an estimated 4,000 people and 700 businesses. Areas that had once housed large populations of low income people including Filipino Americans were destined to be transformed into centers of entertainment and commerce.⁵⁶

Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment (TOOR) was created in 1969 to fight against the displacement caused by the SFRA Yerba Buena development. TOOR successfully fought for replacement housing for the former residents of the land that Yerba Buena was built on. Following this, many more groups organized to fight against redevelopment all over San Francisco.⁵⁷ Correspondingly, during the late 1960's, a resurgent nationalist movement grew as Filipinos born in the Philippines collaborated with Filipinos born in the U.S. to organize in opposition to racism. As U.S. born Filipinos were searching for their identities, Philippine-born Filipinos were seeking support in their nationalist ethnic organizing.⁵⁸ This played out locally in San Francisco as organizers strove for economic and social equity for Filipinos living in the U.S.

Nancy Foner describes transnationalism as the processes that immigrants go through, as they remain connected with their home countries, while also becoming involved in their new countries.⁵⁹ Foner further explores transnationalism by comparing immigration at the turn of the century with contemporary immigration in New York City: “In a transnationalism perspective,

⁵⁴ Chester W. Hartman and Sarah Carnochan, *City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (California: University of California Press, 2002), 49.

⁵⁵ Page & Turnbull, Inc., Historic Context Statement, 67.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁷ Page & Turnbull, Inc., Historic Context Statement, 69.

⁵⁸ Habal, 134.

⁵⁹ Nancy Foner, “What’s New About Transnationalism?: New York Immigrants Today and at the Turn of the Century,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 3 (1997): 355.

contemporary immigrants are seen as maintaining familial, economic, political, and cultural ties across international borders, in effect making the home and host societies a single arena of social action”.⁶⁰ These ties that immigrants have to their home countries include relatives left behind, ties of sentiment, along with involvement in the politics of the home countries. Foner points out that the lack of economic security and acceptance in the United States could have played into the reasoning behind immigrants allegiance to their home societies.⁶¹

The Philippines suffers from extreme income inequality. James Tyner states, “The causes of rural poverty are many, but in general result from a history of land displacement, exploitative land-tenancy and sharecropping systems, and civil strife”.⁶² Workers are a national commodity used to purchase economic progress for the Philippines since the 1970s.⁶³ Filipinas disproportionately carry the burden of this exploitation of people with over two million Filipina overseas contract laborers across the globe including approximately 50,000 mail-order brides delivered to the United States.⁶⁴ Neferti Xina M. Tadiar cuts to the heart of the issue: “They are things and signs whose meanings and devaluation are the product of a long history of ‘special relations’ between the United States and the Philippines”.⁶⁵ The identity of Filipinas is certain to be sculpted by the forces of capitalism that are maintained by long standing structures of oppression that reduce individuals to an object of commerce. The effects included within the phenomenon of globalization continue to have very local consequences on the Overseas Filipino

⁶⁰ Ibid., 355.

⁶¹ Ibid., 357.

⁶² James A. Tyner, *The Philippines: Mobilities, Identities, Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 2.

⁶³ Neferti Xina M. Tadiar, “Filipinas ‘Living in a Time of War’,” in *Pinay Power: Theorizing the Filipina/American Experience*, ed. Melinda L. de Jesus (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 374.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 376.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 376.

workers, their families, and their communities. The global presence of Filipinos has been encouraged by the Philippine government since the 1970s.⁶⁶

Historically, transnational immigrants have taken advantage of economic opportunities in both countries by saving money earned in the U.S. and using it in their homeland. Remittances are a large part of Filipino migration and often they have a commitment to their home country and their extended family. Walden Bello states, “With remittances now totaling some \$20 billion a year, the Philippines places fourth as a recipient of remittances, after China, India, and Mexico”.⁶⁷ When discussing transnationalism, the return rates of immigrants had previously been an issue because Americans feared that immigrants were coming to the U.S. just for money. The conditions of the home country also had an influence on whether immigrants had interest in permanently settling in NYC or returning. Foner explains that remittances are not frowned upon as they were in the past, “Anti-immigrant sentiment is still with us, and immigrant loyalties are still often questioned, but rates of return are not, as in the past, a key part of immigration debates”.⁶⁸ However, when looking at public attitudes toward current immigration, it is significant to consider race because most immigrants are now people of color. The idea of the “melting pot” was a part of the Americanization movement, which believed that immigrants should abandon their own customs and languages in order to assimilate to the culture in the U.S.⁶⁹ This idea is being left behind in part because of “...ties to the home society complement commitments in the US, rather than necessarily detracting from them”.⁷⁰ Social scientists are researching what is now referred to as the transnational social field emphasizing the need to look

⁶⁶ Tyner, 35.

⁶⁷ Walden Bello, “Globalization and the New Slave Trade,” *The Manila Review*, January 2013, <http://themanilareview.com/issues/view/globalization-and-the-new-slave-trade>.

⁶⁸ Foner, 368.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 368.

at the complexity of immigrants' experiences as they hold deep connections to more than one culture.⁷¹

Researchers Erina Alejo and Rani Marcos examine transnational issues affecting Filipinos and Filipino-Americans. In my interview with Alejo and Marcos, they described their involvement with the San Francisco Filipino Mental Health Initiative and Red Envelope Giving Circle which fund the Sarimanok project. The project utilizes creative arts to explore cultural effects in the lives of queer Filipinos in the Bay Area. Alejo and Marcos discussed the creation of an established space for community members to explore intersectionality (ex: queer Filipino/a), fighting cultural erasure, intergenerational relationships, and personal psychological health. Marcos stated, "I feel that the theme within this talk is around relationships. In the centuries and centuries of burying history and indigenous knowledge, we really have to rely on each other for that information. We really need to hold closer to be able to move our liberation process." Alejo agreed that recording people's stories is an important way to fight cultural erasure.⁷² They emphasized how sharing stories unveils the complexity of the Filipino American experience and contributes to the cultivation of a more abundant cultural identity.

James Holston and Arjun Appadurai look at transnational citizenship and argue that cities are viewed as strategic arenas for the development of citizenship.⁷³ This leads to immigrants not having political power in their host societies.⁷⁴ The rights that people are given depend on their membership to the nation-state and the struggle of belonging to the national society are

⁷¹ Ibid., 368.

⁷² Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Rani Marcos and Erina Alejo. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 18, 2016.

⁷³ James Holston and Arjun Appadurai, "Cities and Citizenship," *Public Culture* 8, (1996): 188.

⁷⁴ Bello, "Globalization and the New Slave Trade"

expressed in social movements of the urban poor fighting for their rights to the city.⁷⁵ There is a need to expand the scope of understanding of entitlement and people have rights to a minimum standard of living regardless of their absolute rights as citizens.⁷⁶ Technological changes also altered the nature of transnational connections, “...increasing the density, multiplicity, and importance of transnational interconnections.”⁷⁷ Overall, Holston and Appadurai assert that there is a need to understand the social and historical context around specific problems in order to move forward with the citizenship and civil rights of people in cities.⁷⁸ I believe these solutions should also include access to urban resources and for the Filipino community in SoMa, this access has to be fought for.

South of Market Filipino Activism

In this section I explore what motivates the Filipino community in SoMa to be politically active. I view the act of contributing to the community as a form of activism. The Filipino culture in San Francisco is coming together to create organizations that provide needed resources, strengthen their community, and educate and empower youth. I interviewed members of the Filipino community in SoMa and I use their voices throughout my analysis below. The storytelling in SoMa shows us the social memory of the history of this community. Dolores Hayden refers to social memory relying on storytelling and place memory being the connection

⁷⁵ Holston and Appadurai, 196.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 197.

⁷⁷ Foner, 362.

⁷⁸ Holston and Appadurai, 195.

to the built and natural environments within the cultural landscape.⁷⁹ Oral histories provide a way of recording public history that is defined by the people that are a part of the history and a community can be empowered when they are involved in the recording of their own history.⁸⁰ Storytelling is the sharing of memories and Hayden states, “Identity is intimately tied to memory: both our personal memories (where we have come from and where we have dwelt) and the collective or social memories interconnected with the histories of our families, neighbors, fellow workers, and ethnic communities”.⁸¹ To understand Filipino identity and culture in SoMa I used oral histories from this community. The interviewees that I name have all made significant contributions to the Filipino community and continue to be active within SoMa Pilipinas.

In my research I interviewed David Ilumin, who is 62 years old and has been advocating for youth services in SoMa and San Francisco since the 1970s. He describes the Filipino population exploding in the 1970s, including professionals, families, youth, and teenagers. According to Ilumin, service agencies in San Francisco were not prepared for this boom in the Filipino population and the Filipino American community had to organize to help themselves. David found the youth community in need of support and worked with the United Filipino Youth Organization (UFYO). Some of the issues that the youth faced were violence, police brutality, dropout rates, along with misunderstandings and miscommunications. There was a city grant that helped provide direct services to the Filipino youth in San Francisco.⁸² Luis Syquia said that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, “We were all kind of searching for our identity, looking to find our own voice in this multiethnic place called America”. He emphasized the importance of

⁷⁹ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 46.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 49.

⁸¹ Ibid., 9.

⁸² Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Steve Arevalo, David Ilumin, and Luis Syquia. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 17, 2016.

Filipinos being able to express themselves in a positive way.⁸³ This is significant because it gave young people the ability to see and experience themselves not as the ‘Other’ and instead as empowered Filipino-Americans with a voice.⁸⁴

Multi-generational activism continues to this day and it is alive and well in this community. Young activists were searching for a sense of belonging through their own histories and where they came from. This, along with the established elderly manongs formed a bond between generations.⁸⁵ A respect for elders and labor grew, “As a result of this bonding between young and old, the Filipino youth identity movement developed working-class values at its core”.⁸⁶

In the late 1990s, the emerging tech industry began locating more of its offices in the South of Market neighborhood. During this time the internet became popular for commercial purposes; this period is known as the dot-com boom that was at its height in 1997 and lasted until about 2001. Before this, in the 1970s and 80s warehouses were turned into alternative affordable living spaces in San Francisco that were created by artists which are now referred to as “live-work” lofts.⁸⁷ Developers took advantage of live-work lofts, they figured out that if they classified tech workers as artists then they could sell housing in industrial areas that were zoned for business. The construction of live-work lofts allowed new residents to move into SoMa.⁸⁸ The population of SoMa grew by about 80% in the 1990s while the city of San Francisco had an

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Hall, 225.

⁸⁵ Habal, 129.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 130.

⁸⁷ Jackie Barshak, “Live/Work Spaces for Artists: A Historical Perspective,” *FoundSF*, 2013, http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Live/Work_Spaces_for_Artists:_A_Historical_Perspective

⁸⁸ Page & Turnbull, Inc., Historic Context Statement, 74.

11% population growth during the same time and SoMas population was about 13,500 according to the 2000 Census.⁸⁹

With the massive influx of new residents to SoMa, the existing communities including the Filipino community were being displaced. The Filipino community in SoMa is constantly fighting for the ability to stay in San Francisco and a major part of this is the fight for affordable housing. There is a long history of Filipino residents, activism, and community and this continues on by fighting for investing in the community. Various community members expressed the feeling that the city failed to grasp the urgency and need for services in the Filipino community and they had to take it upon themselves to provide the services that they needed. The resilience of the Filipino community in SoMa is described by David Iumin, “We have to fight for everything we have now and what we’re going to eventually need in the future”.⁹⁰ More recently, the Filipino community in SoMa has been actively claiming space culturally and physically through organizing that supports each other. While there continues to be growth in San Francisco and SoMa specifically, the Filipino community is making sure that their contributions are recognized and that they are staying in their neighborhood. In *Space and Place* Yi-Fu Tuan describes the neighborhood as a concept and claims that emotions are what create the experience of place in a neighborhood.⁹¹ The Filipino community has cultural history connected to this space and continue to work together to keep it. According to Tuan, the emotional connection to a place such as a neighborhood gets stronger when the place is under

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁰ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Steve Arevalo, David Iumin, and Luis Syquia. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 17, 2016.

⁹¹ Yi Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 171.

threat.⁹² Gentrification has been threatening SoMa since the 1990s and the Filipino community has been united in fighting to save their sense of place since then.

Organizing to fight for resources for the Filipino community in SoMa gives them more political power. Angelica Cabande is the Organizational Director of the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN) and Raquel Redondiez has been living in SoMa since 1996 and began her work at Local 2 union organizing Filipino workers and is the current SoMa Pilipinas Project Manager. They have both been active in SoMa since the 1990s. In the late 1990s small Filipino businesses were being displaced. Cabande describes the establishment of SOMCAN, “The South of Market Community Action Network was established in 2000 to educate and organize residents and the community around displacement issues and to build the communities capacity and advocacy efforts to make sure we’re no longer going to be displaced, but also figuring out ways on how to deal with developments in the area”. She spoke about how SOMCAN works to empower the community by organizing on top of providing services. The work is organized around the idea that the people who are affected should be the ones advocating for themselves by building their capacity to fight for what they care about. The work that is being done today at SOMCAN has roots in the organizing in the 1990s, Redondiez states, “Since then the Filipino community in San Francisco has become more of a political force and of course now you have SoMa Pilipinas which is the Filipino historic district but it was really years and decades in the making in terms of being recognized as a community”.⁹³

Claire Amable is a Filipina activist in SoMa and Tenderloin who is incredibly involved in her community. Through an interview with her I gathered information about SOMCAN and some of the current projects that they are working on, which include pedestrian safety, the Youth

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Angelica Cabande and Raquel Redondiez. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 19, 2016.

and Family Special Use District, Central SoMa plan, affordable housing policy and preserving buildings. The work that SOMCAN does is separated into a direct service category and an organizing category. Included in the direct services provided is: United Families (services for low income families), Workforce Program (helping people find jobs), Tenants Rights Program (assistance fighting against evictions and for tenants rights), and Healthy Initiative Promoting Healthy Youth (HIPHY). Within the organizing category is: Workers rights (educating workers to teach others about their rights), Kapit Bahay (educating tenants to teach others about their rights in their neighborhoods), and YOHANA (Youth Organizing Home and Neighborhood Action). These programs are important because they are teaching community members how to organize themselves and fight for the resources they need.

YOHANA provides space for the youth to learn about leadership through public speaking, running campaigns, and being involved at City Hall. Youth care about what is going on in their neighborhood and through YOHANA, they are able to build community and help teach others how to be leaders. This includes educating the youth about Filipino history, gentrification, and how to advocate for themselves and youth related issues. This advocacy is done by looking at current policies and legislation and speaking during public comments at hearings at City Hall.⁹⁴ Alexa Drapiza and Maverick Ruiz are both a part of YOHANA which they describe as a place to figure out what they want in the community and how to help the community. They strongly support the youth's voice in order to provide their perspective on the issues they face. Maverick expresses his thankfulness for having adults look at him and the other youth like they're the future and something they want to take care of.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Claire Amable. Personal Interview. San Francisco. 2017.

⁹⁵ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Alexa Drapiza and Maverick Ruiz. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 13, 2016.

The members of YOHANA participate in their community and during my internship with SOMCAN I went with a group of them to various Privately-Owned Public Open Spaces (POPOS) downtown. POPOS are provided by private developments and are supposed to provide publicly accessible open space for downtown workers, residents and visitors. But, this is not the case for many of these POPOS. Some of these spaces are inaccessible. Requiring an ID to enter a public open space is wrong and is not welcoming to everyone. Public space has been privatized, allowing only those who can afford it to occupy the space. In *Everyday Urbanism*, Margaret Crawford describes how public space is being reshaped in cities in the following quotation:

Residents with new histories, cultures, and demands appear in the city and disrupt the given categories of social life and urban space. Expressed through the specific needs of everyday life, their urban experiences increasingly become the focus of their struggle to redefine the conditions belonging to society. Once mobilized, social identities become political demands, spaces and sites for political transformation, with the potential to reshape cities⁹⁶

As the population shifts the space changes to meet the new needs, but this tends to leave the existing community left behind. During the outing with YOHANA members I took pictures and video of their reactions and experiences at various POPOS and SOMCAN turned this into a short video clip that was shown at a planning commission hearing when the Central SoMa plan was being presented on August 11th, 2016. The youth were shocked that they didn't know about these spaces that are technically open to them, but at the same time they were not satisfied or comfortable in many of them. At the planning commission hearing, the lead architect told me that they were no longer planning on building anymore POPOS on rooftops and that any new

⁹⁶ Margaret Crawford, *Everyday Urbanism*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan 2005), 35.

ones built within the Central SoMa boundary would be ground level and that they wanted to make sure that they were truly public and accessible to everyone. It will be interesting to see if this is true and what these spaces end up looking like.

SOMCAN collaborates with other organizations, such as Migrante Tenderloin/SoMa, Gabriela San Francisco, and SoMa Pilipinas. SOMCAN recently organized an event titled “Immigration in Trump’s America” with Migrante Tenderloin/SoMa in February, 2017. This community discussion brought together groups of diverse people to discuss Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids, applying for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, and more about immigration. There was a panel that consisted of representatives from Migrante, Asian Law Caucus, DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), the Palestinian Youth Movement, and the Filipino Community Center. Events like this are important because diverse groups all face similar issues and collaborative events can foster intersectional support which makes everyone stronger. This strength shows through political power that influences the resources available to community members.

The main short term goal is for the community to continue being able to educate themselves about different issues that affect their livelihoods. This includes workers and tenants rights, along with advocacy at City Hall related to current policy and legislation that supports services such as affordable housing, education, immigration rights, and more. The long term goal is to make sure that Filipinos are still present in SoMa, this means that they have places to live, work, go to school, and exist as a Filipino community.⁹⁷

Filipino American Development Foundation (FADF) is an organization located in the Bayanihan Community Center in SoMa and is an example of how Filipino Americans have

⁹⁷ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Claire Amable. Personal Interview. San Francisco. 2017.

fought to claim space in San Francisco. In the 1990s there was a lot of organizing against the impending gentrification associated with the first dot com boom. Bernadette Sy is the Executive Director of FADF and Teresa Yanga is the Director of Housing Research at San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing. They explained the history of the FADF and the Bayanihan Community Center. Teresa Yanga was the project manager of FADF. Dr. Mario Borja, Bernadette Sy's father owned the Delta Hotel building since 1976. He wanted to operate a non-profit in the building while providing respectable affordable housing. There was a fire at the Delta Hotel in 1997 and through the recovery of the building, FADF was formed. The first priority was the Filipino WWII veterans and everyone was passionate about the injustices these veterans were facing. The injustices included the lack of military benefits and affordable housing for the Filipino veterans. The passion behind fighting for the veterans was that it was truly a fight for the broader good of the community. The reintroduction of district elections in 2000 allowed people to advocate for money in a specific neighborhood. Through this process, the Veterans Equity Center (VEC) received a grant to gain capacity and plan. The labor to design and construct VEC was all volunteered time and everyone had their role with various specialities.

⁹⁸Two of the major people who were involved in the organizing for Filipino veterans are Luisa Antonio and Lourdes Tancinco who are founders of the Veterans Equity Center (VEC) which is a nonprofit that began in 1998 as the Veterans Equity Center Task Force in order to provide services for Filipino World War II veterans. In 1999 the VEC opened in the Bayanihan Community Center on 6th and Mission Street in SoMa. Luisa explained that VEC was a must needed organization and the community came together to support veterans, this included assistance with housing, legal issues, counseling, health care, clothing, and more. She expressed

⁹⁸ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Bernadette Sy and Teresa Yanga. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 8, 2016.

that the Bayanihan culture is maintained in this vibrant community of people helping each other.⁹⁹

Canon Kip is a vital part of the community because it allows community members to age within their neighborhood and amplifies their traditions as part of their care. The Canon Kip Senior Center is located between Howard Street and Mission Street at 705 Natoma Street. Cecilia Bubsan was hired at Canon Kip as an interpreter in 1983 and is very passionate about what Canon Kip provides for seniors, “I love Canon Kip and I will die for Canon Kip and I have donated some things to Canon Kip... I walk 5 blocks everyday one way and 5 blocks going back, that is my therapy”. She explained that Canon Kip was majority Filipino seniors and that other people enjoyed the Filipino celebrations. The services provided include financial assistance, food, housing, and case management. Bubsan has also spoken at City Hall at a San Francisco Supervisors hearing advocating for Clipper cards for seniors. Her hopes for the future is that there will be affordable housing for seniors, “I hope Canon Kip will grow and we are thankful with all the staff members, they are all kind, and I hope we will grow so fast that we will need another big, big building”.¹⁰⁰

There is clearly strong motivation to push for intergenerational resources and these resources in SoMa were developed on the backs of community organizers. One of my interviewees Leah Mercado, has worked in SoMa since the 1980s at the Canon Kip Senior Center and the recreation and park department. She served as a liaison between the Filipino community and the city of San Francisco. Her responsiveness to the families showed initiative towards meeting the needs of the community. The SoMa Recreation Center opened in 1990 and

⁹⁹ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Luisa Antonio and Lourdes Tancinco. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 7, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Cecilia Bubsan and MC Canlas. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 13, 2016.

provided after school and summer programs. Part of the youth education included workshops and programs related to high school dropout rates, sex education, and support for success. She was also involved with organizing for SoMa Childcare. Judith Baker was a teacher at SoMa Childcare as well as the Executive Director for 41 years and is now on the SoMa Childcare board of directors. SoMa childcare (SOMACC) was seen as a family center, the seniors were very active in their community and with the childcare program. This program was made up of 90% Filipino families and was funded by federal money at the beginning, but the community had to organize to fight for city funding for continued services.¹⁰¹

Claudine del Rosario is the director and manager for the SoMa Stabilization Fund and Kris Ongoco is the vice chair. The SoMa Stabilization Fund is a way that the city plays a role in preventing displacement by building capacity of organizations. Kris Ongoco explains that the SoMa Stabilization Fund is trying to ensure that Filipinos stay in SoMa. They both see SoMa Pilipinas as a claim of space and voice for the Filipino community. Claudine del Rosario is a professor at the University of San Francisco with a focus on Philippine history and exploring Filipino and American identity. She explains that these discussions always start with indigenous by reclaiming and rediscovering history. She encourages Filipinos to represent their Filipino-ness proudly.¹⁰²

Cristina Sprague is a nurse who started working at the SoMa health center in 1990, she describes feeling at home working there. About 30-35% of the clients were Filipinos. She describes the rush of immigrants from Pampanga in the early 1990s due to the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo. Because of the high migration rate of Filipinos to SoMa it was important to have

¹⁰¹ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Leah Mercado and Judith Baker. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 12, 2016.

¹⁰² Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Claudine del Rosario and Kris Ongoco. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 12, 2016.

health services accessible in the neighborhood. Sprague explains that the health clinic is culturally sensitive and feels like a home. MC Canlas is the Social Heritage Specialist at FADF (Filipino American Development Foundation), he migrated from the Philippines to California in 1984. Once he discovered how closely related the Filipino community was to SoMa he decided to get involved. In 1990 he was employed in the Filipino early intervention project with West Bay Pilipino Multi Service Center as the fiscal agent.¹⁰³ West Bay is in SoMa and is a 501(c)3 California public benefit corporation, formed in 1968 from a combination of six community service agencies that served the Filipino community.¹⁰⁴ The first project that Canlas worked on was a health fair which included a needs assessment for Filipinos. This was done with the department of public health and involved focus groups and workshops.¹⁰⁵

The Filipino Education Center is a bilingual program at Bessie Carmichael school. This school has been threatened to be shut down multiple times, most recently in the early 2000's, an interviewee Augustus Tagaro described this threat as the loss of identity.¹⁰⁶ Charm Consolacion and Sharlyne Sarinas both work at this school and discussed the significance of language access to a person's identity.¹⁰⁷ Growing up, Tagalog was spoken at home and this was a large factor in me understanding that I was from the Philippines. Although I never learned Tagalog, I have always felt comfortable around people speaking this Filipino language. Consolacion and Sarinas describe students coming back to volunteer at the school because it is their a home away from

¹⁰³ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with MC Canlas and Cristina Sprague. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 12, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ West Bay, "Our History," *West Bay Pilipino Multi Service Center*, 2017, http://westbaycenter.org/home/?page_id=2018.

¹⁰⁵ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with MC Canlas and Cristina Sprague. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 12, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Robert Marquez and Augustus Tagaro. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 17, 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Charm Consolacion and Sharlyne Sarinas. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 7, 2016.

home.¹⁰⁸ Alexa Drapiza and Maverick Ruiz shared that at Bessie Carmichael Filipino American students and newer Filipino immigrants are able to learn from each other and that this collaboration is helpful in building community regardless of differences.¹⁰⁹ Claudine del Rosario emphasized the importance of Bessie Carmichael school being bilingual and reinforced the importance of documenting the history of the community fighting to keep this vital bilingual program in existence.¹¹⁰ Having a school where young immigrants can speak their own language empowers them to learn in a way that an English only school wouldn't because they are able to feel comfortable in a safe space.

Sandra Panopio and Terrance Valen were involved in certifying Filipino as an official language in 2014 in San Francisco. Terrance Valen stresses how Filipinos have been a part of the social fabric of San Francisco and that people are more comfortable in their own languages. Sandra Panopio is the official Language Specialist for the office of Civic Engagement in Immigrant Affairs with the city and county of San Francisco. Language access is a large part of providing culturally competent services. Valen states, "Less familiarity with the language will of course create obstacles for their ability to get justice for themselves and assert their rights". They consider the question of who this city is for and how language access is a way of fighting for the Filipino community in the city.¹¹¹ Filipino being certified as an official language adds weight and validity to the work at the Filipino Education Center. Language perpetuates culture by giving people a way to relate to their families and communities while also instilling pride in their culture.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Alexa Drapiza and Maverick Ruiz. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 13, 2016.

¹¹⁰ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Kris Ongoco and Claudine del Rosario. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 12, 2016.

¹¹¹ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Sandra Panopio and Terrance Valen. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 19, 2016.

Significance and Data Analysis

In this section I will describe the various Filipino cultural events that I attended throughout the last year. From my observations through my internship at SOMCAN, attending SoMa Pilipinas planning meetings, Planning Commission hearings, and events, I see activism as a part of what it means to be a part of the Filipino community in SoMa. My observations have shown that being a part of organizing efforts in your community can give you a stronger sense of place and self. I use the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN) and their organizing projects as well as SoMa Pilipinas as my main examples for how a sense of community is created for Filipino-Americans through organizing. I am exploring how colonialism affects identity as well as how Filipino-Americans are currently resisting assimilation and appropriation. Finding a balance of what to keep from their Filipino culture and what to take on from their American culture is prevalent in many Filipino-American's lives.

Currently the Filipino community in SoMa is very active. I have attended events such as the International Hotel - Manilatown Center commemoration event, Open Mic Nights put together by YOHANA (Youth Organizing Home and Neighborhood Action), and fundraiser events in 2016. SOMCAN has been holding fundraisers to raise money for legal fees to challenge the Hearst/Forest City mega-development, 5M. The four-acre piece of land that the project is planned for is located on 5th and Mission is owned by the Hearst Corporation. The developer of this project, Forest City is supported by the Planning Department and the mayor. Promised community benefits have caused a division in the community but SOMCAN and others believe that the development will cause displacement, gentrification, and evictions in this low-income area.¹¹² The sense of community that is formed through organizing against the

¹¹² Tim Redmond, "The supersizing of Soma," *48Hills*, September 2, 2015, <https://48hills.org/2015/09/02/the-supersizing-of-soma/>

displacement of their people is part of Filipino American identity in SoMa. The events mentioned above were centered around the concept of supporting each other. Through participant observation I noticed the high level of support by how many community members showed up and how many of the same people show up to the various events.

In multiple recordings community members referred to themselves and others as cultural workers. One interviewee, Luis Syquia explained that this meant that there were many fronts and a lot of ways to contribute.¹¹³ With various ways to contribute, people are able to plug themselves in where they are useful and help each other grow. The political organizing that the Filipino community in SoMa are a part of is incredibly intergenerational, always including all different age groups. Many of the organizations aim to serve youth, families, adults, and seniors. Barrio Fiesta held at the Rec Center and described as being an intergenerational celebration with food for everyone. There is a push to pass down the legacy of organizing and Filipino culture to children. Augustus and Robert discussed the importance of learning from the past to then hold onto the culture. They emphasize the notion that everything precious in the Filipino community has always been under threat and continues to be.¹¹⁴ This push back to preserve the resources needed is something that is prevalent throughout most of the recordings I completed.

Alexa Drapiza is the Youth Organizer at SOMCAN and was raised in SoMa, she describes it as her community and her family. She has been involved in SoMa through attending Bessie Carmichael school, West Bay after school program, United Playaz, and SOMCAN. Maverick Ruiz interned with SOMCAN in the summer of 2016 focused on workers rights. He grew up in SoMa and has a sense of pride in his neighborhood. Similar to Alexa Drapiza, he has

¹¹³ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Steve Arevalo, David Ilumin, and Luis Syquia. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 17, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Robert Marquez and Augustus Tagaro. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 17, 2016.

been involved with Bessie Carmichael school, West Bay, SOMCAN, and United Playaz. United Playaz is an organization in SoMa that has the goal of keeping the youth off of the streets while preventing violence and promoting youth leadership in all San Francisco neighborhoods. Ruiz discussed how hard working Filipinos are and that, “We do what we gotta do because we think it’s right”. In this statement he is referring to all of the community organizing that happens in SoMa. Ruiz’s hopes for the future are as follows, “...what I really want to see in the community is people working together, open arms, everyone welcoming pretty much”.

The intersection of mental health and culture is significant to Filipino Americans and discussing it shows the psychological impact of colonization. Joyce Diloy and Bernadette Navarro Simem discussed their involvement with the Filipino Mental Health Initiative. They are Filipino immigrants working to change the mental health system, advocate for Filipinos, and help the community. This initiative started in San Mateo in 2006 and was established in San Francisco in 2012. Diloy discusses the effects of immigration on one's mental health: “Culture is a factor that can help lower the risk of drug use and gang memberships. It really does help and so in my own way I would like to be able to help”.¹¹⁵ A scholar who researched this connection between culture and mental health, E.J.R. David discusses the psychological impact of colonialism, using the term ‘colonial mentality’. This refers to internalized oppression which has been shown through Filipino Americans who hold consistent thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors to assimilate towards American characteristics.¹¹⁶ According to David, in Filipino culture the core value is ‘Kapwa’, “It is the recognition that one shares an identity, or a shared inner self, with others and that one is not and should not be separated from others”¹¹⁷ This adds to the

¹¹⁵ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Joyce Diloy and Bernadette Navarro Simem. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 15, 2016.

¹¹⁶ E.J.R. David, *Brown Skin, White Minds* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2013), 77.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 109.

argument that when a Filipino does not know about their own culture or are separated from it, their mental health can suffer and they may seek a sense of belonging in other ways that can have negative consequences. In San Francisco, Diloy sees the need of resources for mental health first hand working in outpatient services which includes wellness promotion, anti-stigma, first aid classes, training caregivers, watching mental health movies that have positive messages about mental health, and busting myths through education. Bernadette Navarro Simem fights for Filipinos by advocating for mental health services working at the policy making level and sees mental health as a social political movement. She states, “I always believe that at any moment I could be in their shoes, and I need to remember what that is like and so having to change the mental health system is actually the goal of my agency. Not to just help one client, but we are using actually the client to change how the system works”.¹¹⁸

Juvy Barbonio worked as a social worker in the Philippines for 20 years before she migrated to the U.S. In San Francisco she worked at Canon Kip senior center as a case manager for about 7 years and currently works as the United Families Coordinator at SOMCAN. She emphasized her appreciation for the amount of resources for her clients in San Francisco compared to the Philippines. Barbonio stated, “Living in SoMa is like I am in the Philippines, the difference is it’s colder here.. I consider SoMa my home away from home”. Juvy also shares her appreciation for the way that people will call her when they cook food to share it with her and explains that this is a part of Filipino culture.¹¹⁹

TJ Basa got involved in the Filipino community in SoMa through Bindlestiff Studio. This is a community-based performing arts venue that is dedicated to Filipino American and Filipino

¹¹⁸ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Joyce Diloy and Bernadette Navarro Simem. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 15, 2016.

¹¹⁹ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with TJ Basa and Juvy Barbonio. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 19, 2016.

artists. She then worked as an Arts Program Manager at the Kearny Street Workshop (KSW), which is the oldest Asian-American arts organization in the country and began in the I-Hotel in Manilatown. Basa now works as the Fund Development Coordinator at SOMCAN. She expressed her respect for SOMCAN and the ways that they develop leaders from the community and helps the community in their daily lives. She helped revitalize the Barrio Fiesta that is an intergenerational celebration with food for everyone held at the SoMa Recreation Center. More recently she has been a part of Migrante - SoMa/Tenderloin working for human rights internationally.

Marie Romero migrated in the mid-1970s as a high school student to the United States during Martial Law in the Philippines. During this time the President of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos placed the Philippines under Martial Law. Many Filipinos who had the means migrated to the U.S. to get away from potential danger. After initially moving to New Orleans Romero and her family decided to settle in San Francisco, she describes this, “It seems like I’m with my people... all the sudden there are so many Filipinos everywhere I go”. She saw a need for more Filipino books in San Francisco and started Sulu Arts and Books with her husband. This eventually turned into a solo project under the name Arkipelago Books in 1994. This bookstore is one of the only specialty Filipino bookstores in the U.S. and is located in the Bayanihan Community Center instilling Filipino culture in San Francisco.¹²⁰

I asked participants about their expectations and hopes for the future of SoMa Pilipinas. Lisa Juachon hopes that the sense of community in SoMa Pilipinas remains along with affordable housing and businesses. Her vision is, “In 20 years I hope that we have a bigger community and a really thriving economic base, so that means we’ll have three more Arkipelago

¹²⁰ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Marie Romero and Beatriz Datangel. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 13, 2016.

books, we'll have five more Filipino restaurants in SoMa, and that the families and communities here multiply".¹²¹ Glen Andang states, "One of the main motivations for SoMa Pilipinas is to acknowledge the existence and contributions of Filipinas in SoMa hopes that I have is that the sense of community that we have here, that we have developed and built with other people and what we've learned from other people that have been part of the community. I just hope that this kind of remains, I know it's kind of vague to say but there's just something about this place, this community that is really really unique".¹²² Juby Barbonio said "My hope for the future is for the government in San Francisco to provide more affordable housing for the families, especially new immigrant families"¹²³ Cabande, the Organizational director at SOMCAN describes SoMa Pilipinas as something that is comprehensive of different sectors and ages including workers, youth, and seniors. The hope for the future is that the area is a place where Filipinos can learn about their history and be empowered by the energy that the community has.¹²⁴

Analytical Reflection

I am in the process of discovering my own identity as a Filipino-American and learning about my roots and culture. Awareness of Filipino-American history matters because it is a large part of identity formation. Knowing your roots can influence the way you live your life. I had never claimed myself as Filipino-American until I became involved with the Filipino community in SoMa. Before moving to San Francisco in 2015, my only exposure to Filipino culture was my mom's cooking, a few stores, and my visits back to the Philippines. Once I began my internship

¹²¹ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Glen Andang and Lisa Juachon. StoryCorps. San Francisco, October 3, 2016.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with TJ Basa and Juvy Barbonio. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 19, 2016.

¹²⁴ Ericka Martynovych. Interview with Angelica Cabande and Raquel Redondiez. StoryCorps. San Francisco, December 19, 2016.

with SOMCAN, I was surrounded by Filipino-Americans and knew that I had found something special within this place with these people. Exploring my personal roots allows me to better understand myself and enhance my ability to critically analyze why certain things are important to me. By gaining a further understanding of the history of the relationship between the Philippines and the United States I have insight on how colonization affects Filipino-Americans including myself. After my time as an intern at SOMCAN, working with SoMa Pilipinas, and my continued involvement I formed my own identity as a Filipino-American. Once I found a sense of belonging in this community it motivated me to be more active by attending more events that are geared towards supporting Filipinos in SoMa. Recording the participants' stories encouraged me to participate in the community because it enhanced my sense of personal and communal agency in situations such as fighting for local policies. Storytelling links people to their cultural identity and the sharing of these stories creates networks that connect dots between people that can lead to social change. This social change takes many forms including lobbying for the provision of resources, housing, and jobs. The Filipino community in SoMa was aware that SoMa Pilipinas shared the StoryCorps recordings with the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) and the Filipino community and that seemed to motivate them to participate in the recordings.

A part of my process of self knowledge is constructed by considering the timeline of my life compared with historical events. I was born in 1991 in Angeles in the Philippines on Clark Air Base, which was a United States Air Force base at the time. My mother had lived her whole life in the Philippines until she met my father who was stationed at the base. One month after I was born Mt. Pinatubo erupted, my mother, age 20 and I had to evacuate to the United States immediately, and my father, age 30 had to stay behind to assist with cleaning up after the

disaster. My mother and I stayed with my father's family in Seattle, Washington for months before he was able to join us. From beginning to end, my mother's immigrant story has instances of her dealing with assimilation along with transnationalism. About 25 years later, my mother is very comfortable and happy with her life in the U.S. and she is thankful to have the life she now has. She was able to grow stronger as a person throughout her struggles of assimilating into a new place and culture, while keeping her ties to her home country. Our immigration story is directly related to historical events connected to the relationship between the Philippines and the U.S.

Conclusions & Recommendations

By challenging the stories and information we are given about Filipino history, we are able to truly analyze the world around us, while cultivating new histories that reflect the Filipino-American experience with greater authenticity. The intersection between culture and activism in the Filipino community in SoMa is significant. Moments in history have fueled activism in the Filipino community and this activism has taken place in a cultural context. Inspection of the micropolitics in SoMa illuminates the relationship between power and decision making in the city. This is an important point of analysis because gaining political power influences what resources are available to the Filipino community. Along with observations from field research, my research shows that Filipino identity is place-based in SoMa Pilipinas. Participating in the

organizing of this cultural heritage district and the struggles over land use affected people's identities.

I believe that by remembering and sharing the history of Filipino people, these communities become stronger political forces. The creation of the SoMa Pilipinas cultural district is empowering the Filipino community and gives a stronger voice to Filipinos, addresses the community's needs, and enhances agency in meeting the challenges they face in SoMa. SoMa Pilipinas is a place of culture and it is a part of claiming and preserving this space and this contributes to cultural empowerment.

The history of the contribution of Filipinos to the United States, California, and San Francisco is often overlooked and I bring to light the significance of Filipinos in SoMa. My capstone research project contributes to the growing information about Filipinos in the United States by sharing common themes and stories of Filipino-American culture, identity formation, and claiming space in the South of Market neighborhood in San Francisco. Filipino identity is place-based in SoMa Pilipinas and I am analyzing how participating in the organizing of this cultural heritage district and the struggles over land use affect people's political identities and cultural empowerment. It also informs people outside of the community about the cultural heritage district SoMa Pilipinas, Filipino culture, and the contributions of Filipinos in San Francisco.

For Filipinos in San Francisco, the South of Market neighborhood has been and continues to be an important place. Historically this area has been home to Filipino workers since the 1920s. SoMa Pilipinas is a place of culture and having a presence that acknowledges the existence and contributions of Filipinas in SoMa must be preserved. I am contributing to the recording of Filipino history by studying this particular place and time.

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