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# Identity, Activism, and Rap in the Filipino American Diaspora

Scott Paul Gonzales Cooper

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University of San Francisco – Master of Arts in International Studies – May 2020

## ABSTRACT

For close to two decades, an established network of Filipino American rap artists have developed on the West Coast of the United States. These artists share musical narratives exploring their working-class immigrant experiences as well as the impact of colonization in the Philippines. Outside of music, these artists often engage in community organizing and activism, but few scholars have explored hip hop's effect within these spaces. Recently, a younger generation of Filipino American youth actively make use of hip hop in community organizations and activist groups. This paper will specifically examine how the identity of 1.5 and second generation Filipino youth were shaped by the use of rap in grassroots organizing and activism. They exhibit how rap provides a useful space in activism and is a culturally relevant method for analyzing lived realities. I argue that rap and community work help transform “Filipino-ness” into a sight of political identification. I also argue that this identification is rooted in anti-colonialism and social projects/community initiatives, which allows youth to bridge geographical and conceptual gaps between the diaspora and the “homeland.”

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**Activism, Identity and Rap In the Filipino American Diaspora**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS  
in  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by Scott Paul Gonzales Cooper  
May 01, 2020

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

APPROVED:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Capstone Adviser

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
MAIS Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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*If I discover that those songs the darkies sang and sing,  
were not just the innocent expressions of a primitive people,  
but extremely subtle, difficult, dangerous and tragic expressions  
of what it felt like to be in chains,  
then by one's presence, by the attempt to walk from here to there,  
you've begun to frighten the white world.*

— James Baldwin

*They are even afraid of our songs of love, my brother. . .*

— Carlos Bulosan

**Introduction**

What is today the most widely consumed musical genre in the world, hip hop has inspired and provided a creative outlet for urban youth around the globe. Rap music and the cultural movement of hip hop has its roots in decades of African American music tradition. What began as an expression of creativity and frustration amongst marginalized Black American, Puerto Rican and Afro-Caribbean communities in the Bronx, NY, has traversed the world. Filipino youth located in the San Francisco Bay Area have been no exception to the admiration and participation in what Professor S. Craig Watkins calls the “Hip Hop Nation.” With the art form into its fifth decade, some of the most popular cultural expressions practiced by generations of West Coast Filipino youth have been those considered forms of hip hop. From the mobile DJ crews of Daly City, to San Francisco City College bringing together the Renegade Rockers break dance team, to the renowned graffiti work of the late Mike “Dream” Francisco, Bay Area Filipino youth have imprinted greatly on hip hop culture. These contributions during the 1980s and 1990s predate the emergence of mainstream Filipino American rapper apl.de.ap of the Black

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Eyed Peas, and the growth of an underground community of Filipino American rap artists at the turn of the century.

In understanding rap music, as with other forms of hip hop, we cannot divorce the art from the identity and social context of those creating it. Rap music produced by Filipino youth in the diaspora is reflective of the long and complex history of U.S.-Philippine relations at the root of Filipino presence and geography in the United States. This history, as Christine Bacareza Balance puts it, is a “history of war, empire and neocolonialism.”<sup>1</sup> While notions of diaspora are complex, cultural anthropologist Deborah Reed-Danahay states that “there is an idea of groupness, a collective history, and shared memories in this concept.”<sup>2</sup> Milton Esman describes diaspora as “a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains sentimental or material links with its land of origin.”<sup>3</sup> This paper will analyze the Filipino American community as a diaspora, specifically looking within the San Francisco Bay Area.

In observing the identity of Filipino rap artists in the Bay Area, one common characteristic is their frequent embrace of activism and community organizing as expressed in their lyrics and personal lives. Amidst a history of U.S. colonization of the islands, Filipinos have migrated to the United States facing racism and the inequities of U.S. foreign and domestic policy. In response, a culture of activism and community organizing emerged and has become an important legacy of Filipinos in the United States. This legacy has centered both domestic movements, including labour struggles, community work, and educating and organizing around

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<sup>1</sup>Balance, Christine Bacareza. *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America*. Durham and London, United States.: Duke University Press, 2016.

<sup>2</sup>Reed-Danahay, Deborah. “‘Like a Foreigner in My Own Homeland’: Writing the Dilemmas of Return in the Vietnamese American Diaspora.” *Identities* 22, no. 5 (2014): 603–18.

<sup>3</sup>Juan, E. San. *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora: Lessons of Resistance and Critical Intervention*. España, Manila, Philippines: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2016.



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police harassment as well as transnational movements concerning itself with human rights back in the homeland and abroad.

There has been an observable overlap in the past two decades of these two identities, 1) Filipino American rap artists and 2) the work of community organizations and activist groups that exist in U.S. metropolitan areas. This paper centers the question of how rap music and its intersection with community work, and activism can positively shape the identity of 1.5 and second generation immigrant youth - whether one is Filipino or of another diasporic identity.

**Research Question & Methods**

This research project focuses on the influence of both rap and activism on identity. I ask how 1.5 and second generation diasporic youths' involvement in rap music and activism has influenced notions of being Filipino American.

This paper explores how rap and the emergence of Filipino American narratives in the art form have the potential to be utilized in community organizations and political activism. Ultimately, this paper seeks to explore how this intersection affects identity formation for youth in the San Francisco Bay Area, most noteworthy as an urban center with a prominent Filipino population. I argue that 1.5 and second generation Filipino youth shape “Filipino-ness” into a site of political identification, rooted in anti-colonialism and transformative projects. My findings exhibit how rap music provides a utility for youth to analyze their own lived realities, and gives them space within collective activism where they begin to form co-ethnic solidarity as well as connections between the diaspora and the homeland. I also explore the role that geographical location plays in allowing this process to occur and the ways that rap as it intersects with

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activism works to bridge a geographical and conceptual gap between the diaspora and the Philippines.

In order to examine the relationship between rap music and activism and how this relationship is influential in shaping Filipino American identity, I conducted a qualitative eight-week study of rap artists in the San Francisco Bay Area. The artists engaged in this study ranged from the ages of 19-35 and represented both 1.5 and second generation Filipino Americans (and one third generation outlier); all who have spent a significant portion of their upbringing in and around the Bay Area including the cities of San Francisco, Daly City, San Jose, and Pittsburg. The study looks at a variety of diverse artists who are all either directly involved or closely associated with community organizing and activism with the intent of obtaining a range of perspectives.

*Limitations*

My limitations in producing this research project revolves around the factors of time, availability and my own outsider identity. Regarding the time restrictions, I cannot claim that the amount of people interviewed is a full representation of contemporary Filipino American rap artists from the Bay Area or in different U.S. cities. Several artists had commitments outside of music including day jobs, school, and/or community work which constrained their availability and participation in this study. Therefore, I was unable to conduct interviews with the larger number of specific artists that I reached out to - often repeatedly.

My own identity as a recent transplant to the Bay Area may have influenced my own biases and the potential biases Bay Area Filipinos may have towards me. My identity as being mixed Filipino and Caucasian also may have influenced participants in what information they

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chose to share regarding race and identity or their willingness to share information all together.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my research is to better understand how the cultural production of rap music can impact immigrant youth as it relates to community organizing and activism. While living in the Bay Area and researching this community, it has become evident to me that for many Filipino youth, hip hop culture has been and continues to be significant in their lives. Although the focus of my study is on Filipinos in the San Francisco Bay Area, my findings may be applied to other metropolises and may be useful to understanding other postcolonial immigrant youth. Because my research looks at how geography has played a role in youths' exposure to and relation with identity, race, and rap music, similarities may be found amongst various other urban and racialized immigrant communities. Finally, while rap music is an artform with unique characteristics and relationship to race and urban resistance, my findings may be useful for studies around other cultural productions and their relationship to immigrant youth, such as spoken word or visual art.

What I wish to illuminate in my study is the role of rap music in community organizing/activism, and how this relationship has helped to inform the identity of immigrant youth. In doing so, this study will highlight the legacy and characteristics of Filipino American activism and its historical ties to forms of cultural work. I do not attempt to study Filipino rap artists based in the Philippines. However, my study will discuss U.S. and Philippine history, Filipino youth relations to the Philippines (through early memories, experiences in past trips,

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activism, and desire for future travel plans) and, explore how rap music and activism play a role in these relations.

**Presentation of Research Project**

In order to better develop my argument on the role of rap music and community work on identity the following section provides a brief context of colonial control of the Philippines, factors leading to immigration, Filipino/Filipino American activism, and the emergence of Filipino Americans in hip hop. Following this background is the literature review. The literature review will be categorized into three sections: Filipino American identity, Geography, and Filipino Activism & Hip Hop.

**Background For The Study**

*“I’m from the blood of savages they brought to world fairs  
chained up to a pole for Caucasians to point and stare scared  
the ones who could not drop from calibers the army had  
so they made higher calibers, the .45 mag”*

— “Butterfly Knife”

Bambu

*Colonization*

Recalling in her book the popular refrain, “three hundred and fifty years in a convent, and fifty years in Hollywood” Sarita See summarizes the Philippines' experience with colonial encounters.<sup>4</sup> Spanish rule of the islands began in 1561, opening up a process of using the Philippines as a strategic site for Spanish trade, resource extraction, and widespread religious

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<sup>4</sup>See, Sarita Echavez. *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

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conversion of the island's inhabitants to Catholicism.<sup>5</sup> Reflected in the Filipino Americans generations later was the resistance of their ancestors during this period of Spanish conquest. Filipinos in various parts of the country waged up to 200 bloody revolts against Spanish rule.<sup>6</sup> By 1896, the Katipunan, an anti-colonial organization formed by Andres Bonifacio, waged a revolution for national liberation and successfully established the first constitutional republic in Asia in 1898. Soon after, this state was destroyed with the Treaty of Paris when Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States. What followed was the brutal Philippine-American War of 1899-1902.<sup>7</sup>

At the foot of U.S. colonization of the Philippines was the deaths of 1.4 million Filipinos during the Philippine-American War which, including Moro resistance, extended until 1913 in southern regions of the country. Territorial possession of the Philippines lasted until 1946 when nominal independence was granted to the nation.<sup>8</sup> American annexation of the Philippines along with the Pacific Islands of Hawaii and Guam allowed the United States to expand in the region economically, militarily and gain a foothold in the China market.<sup>9</sup>

The prominent characteristic of U.S. colonization of the Philippines was not religious as in the Spanish case, but instead cultural, burdened by the Filipinos' need for benevolent assimilation. As literary academic E. San Juan Jr. states:

"..among other ideological apparatuses, the English language and sanitized literary texts, as well as the pedagogical agencies for propagating and teaching them, were mobilized to

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<sup>5</sup>Cruz, Prince Christian, "The Spanish Origins of Extractive Institutions in the Philippines." *Australian Economic History Review* 54, no. 1 (2014): 62–82.

<sup>6</sup>San Juan, *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora*, 71.

<sup>7</sup>San Juan, *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora*, 144.

<sup>8</sup>San Juan, *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora*, 97.

<sup>9</sup>San Juan, *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora*, 162.

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re-constitute the natives of the Philippine archipelago as subjects of the US nation-state”<sup>10</sup>

A free public mass education system using the English language along with counter revolutionary suppression was implemented in the Philippines as a tool for pacification and maintenance of the colonial state. At the same time, the United States ensured a large pool of workers who were fluent in the language of the colonial masters.<sup>11</sup> Scholars note how U.S. educational policy in the Philippines was generally patterned after those of educational strategies of the time meant to assimilate U.S. minorities.<sup>12</sup>

*Filipino Migration to the US*

*“You and I both children of Filipino immigrants*

*from the same island.*

*Our ancestors smilin’ cuz*

*we found one another in a strange land*

*strugglin’*

— “Life & Debt”

Geologic of the Blue Scholars

After the U.S. annexation of the Philippines in the early 1900s, while facing widespread poverty, unemployment, disease, internal displacement and agrarian unrest, many Filipinos began migrating as part of government sponsored programmes to southern parts of the Philippines, and then to mainland United States, Alaska and Hawaii.<sup>13</sup> The United States’

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<sup>10</sup>San Juan, *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora*, 72.

<sup>11</sup>Maca, Mark, “American Colonial Education Policy and Filipino Labour Migration to the US (1900–1935).” *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 37, no. 3 (March 2017): 310–28.

<sup>12</sup>Maca, “American Colonial Education Policy,” 318.

<sup>13</sup>Maca, “American Colonial Education Policy,” 313.

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previous exclusion of Chinese and Japanese immigration had led to a need for “foreign” labour.<sup>14</sup>

From 1900 to 1934, classified as U.S. nationals and equipped with a colonial education, tens of thousands of Filipinos migrated to the United States as manual labourers in plantations and canneries, mess boys in the US Navy, nurses, and Pensionados participating in U.S. education programs.<sup>15</sup> Some scholars contest the classification of the Filipino as an “immigrant” to the United States prior to 1946 Filipino independence, instead calling them “subjugated natives of an annexed territory sold to the United States or colonial migrants.”<sup>16</sup>

While previous populations of Filipinos came to the U.S. during the period of U.S. colonization from 1898 to 1946, many Filipino youth on the West Coast of the U.S. who were early to embrace hip hop were born into families’ that arrived as part of a post-1965 immigration wave. This wave, which included university educated professionals, began with the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration and Naturalization Act. This act abolished the “national origins” quota, and prioritized family reunification leading to a drastic increase in the foreign-born population and labour force.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 1: Foreign Born Share of Labor Force**



<sup>14</sup>Harrison, Anthony Kwame. “Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production, and Identity Inscription within Filipino American Hip Hop Music.” *Perfect Beat*, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>15</sup>Maca, “American Colonial Education Policy,” 314.

<sup>16</sup>San Juan, *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora*, 102.

<sup>17</sup>San Juan, *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora*, 136.

(y-axis = % of total labour force)<sup>18</sup>

The U.S. legal and political frameworks established in the Philippine economy resulted in the country's orientation towards export and the adoption of strict structural adjustment programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.<sup>19</sup> Without any progressive national-populist regime as seen in some Latin American states after World War II, the Philippines fell victim to large scale unemployment and foreign debt.<sup>20</sup> By the second half of the 20th century, the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos (1972 to 1986) continued state operations in service of global capital, saw unemployment conditions perpetuate, and a labor export/remittance generating policy known as the Labor Export Program (LEP) promoted.<sup>21</sup> At the same time many who opposed Marcos and his implementation of Martial Law throughout the nation were forced into exile. These factors among others saw Filipino immigration to the United States drastically increase.<sup>22</sup>

The United States is currently home to the largest population of Filipinos working and living outside the Philippines with 4.1 million Filipinos in the U.S. More specifically, 1.5 million live in California, predominantly in San Diego, greater Los Angeles and San Francisco.<sup>23</sup> As a result of decades of Filipino migration, there are various generational distinctions amongst the diaspora including but not limited to:

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<sup>18</sup>US Census Bureau, "Section 12. Labor Force, Employment, and Earnings." The United States Census Bureau, February 9, 2018.

<sup>19</sup>San Juan, *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora*, 152.

<sup>20</sup>San Juan, *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora*, 5.

<sup>21</sup>Leano, Ryan. "Artist as Citizen: Transnational Cultural Work in the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines." *Filipino American Transnational Activism*, February 2019, 121–45.

<sup>22</sup>Viola, Michael Joseph, "W.E.B. Du Bois and Filipino/a American Exposure Programs to the Philippines: Race Class Analysis in an Epoch of 'Global Apartheid.'" *Race Ethnicity and Education* 19, no. 3 (2014): 500–523.

<sup>23</sup>Viola, "W.E.B. Du Bois and Filipino/a American Exposure Programs to the Philippines," 511.



**Table 1: Immigrant Generational Distinction**

First	Foreign born generation that migrated as adults
1.5	Generation who arrived as children
Second	U.S. born to Immigrant parent(s) <sup>24</sup>

The San Francisco Bay Area became a major site for generations of Filipinos arriving in the United States, beginning in the 1920s. Upon retirement, several Filipino navy servicemen who worked in the merchant marine along with Filipinos in the U.S. army, and “war brides” of Caucasian and Black soldiers in the Philippine-American War, began settling in San Francisco.<sup>25</sup> Many agricultural labourers shifted to urban service jobs, which led to Filipino workers from Hawaii and throughout California to relocate to San Francisco. California attorney general Ulysses S. Webb reflected on an early case of white flight during the 1920s, referring to San Francisco as a city ‘occupied’ with Filipino ‘colonies’.<sup>26</sup> Prominent San Francisco neighborhoods where Filipinos began to make homes and communities for themselves in the early to mid-twentieth century included the South of Market, Kearny Street adjacent to Chinatown, and the Fillmore.<sup>27</sup>

### *Filipino American Activism*

*Whether we rhyming or we marching in another rally  
from Seattle to the Bay down to Southern Cali  
isang mahal sa lahat ng mga Kabataan  
ngayon na lumalaban para sa ating bayan*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Reed-Danahay, “Like a Foreigner in My Own Homeland,” 607.

<sup>25</sup>*Filipinos in San Francisco* by Filipino American National Historical Society. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub., 2011.

<sup>26</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production.”

<sup>27</sup>*Filipinos in San Francisco*. 2011.

<sup>28</sup>Translated from Tagalog to English as “One love to all of the Kabataan, We are now fighting for our country.”

While largely unrecognized outside of academic and activist circles, the multigenerational Filipino community in the United States is no stranger to political organizing and activism. The scope of this section will not be able to provide an exhaustive list of activists, organizations, and their origins but will instead provide an overview of the major currents and themes relevant to present day Filipino Americans.

From labor organizers in Delano, California, Hawaiian plantations, and Alaskan canneries to students, intellectuals, and working-class people forming an Anti-Martial Law movement, Filipinos in the United States have an important tradition of resistance. Each generation of activists has worked towards achieving human dignity and self-respect for the Filipino migrant and their fellow workers, as well as for Filipinos in the homeland. In doing so, they have inspired future generations of organizers, activists, writers, and scholars-Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike.

One of the most recognized figures of this tradition is Carlos Bulosan. An author in the mediums of poetry and novel writing, Bulosan immigrated to the United States in 1930, at the age of 17. Bulosan would make up part of the “first wave” of Filipino laborers.<sup>29</sup> In addition to his work in agriculture and as a dishwasher along the West Coast, Bulosan tirelessly organized with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU).<sup>30</sup> Until the 1950s the ILWU attracted potentially the largest number of “left progressive” Filipino trade unionists of any

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<sup>29</sup>Baldoz, Rick, “‘Comrade Carlos Bulosan’: U.S. State Surveillance And the Cold War Suppression of Filipino Radicals.” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 11. no. 33 (August 18, 2014).

<sup>30</sup>Baldoz, “Comrade Carlos Bulosan.”

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existing union, and boasted predominantly Filipino leadership in two of its locals (Local 142 in Hawaii and Local 37 in Seattle).<sup>31</sup>

In addition to labor organizing, historians note Bulosan and other Filipino members of the ILWU's support for the Huk rebels during World War II in the newly independent Philippines. Historians even note Bulosan's desire to write a book and create a U.S. support committee for the anti-imperialist, peasant movement in order to promote their struggle among progressive American audiences.<sup>32</sup> Support for the Huk rebels exhibited a concern beyond domestic labor conditions and displayed a transnational character of Filipino leftists already taking hold during this period. While support proved difficult to develop beyond advocacy and rhetoric, Bulosan and fellow workers concerned with the affairs of their homeland set an example that would be emulated by the movements of following generations of Filipino Americans. Due to their organizing, anti-imperialist views, and proximity to the U.S. Communist Party, Bulosan and other Filipino laborers of the period were targeted by state surveillance and police violence.<sup>33</sup>

The thoughts and experiences of Bulosan are chronicled in his writings. Works like *America Is in the Heart* and *On Becoming Filipino* have gone on to ignite a sense of ethnic pride and collective memory amongst later generations of Filipino Americans. Sociologist Rick Baldoz explains the linkage of revolutionary actors, stating how “the political work carried out by Bulosan and other Filipino radicals during this period is important as it set the stage for a later phase of labor activism which eventually gave birth to the United Farm Workers Association (UFW) movement in the 1960s and 1970s.”<sup>34</sup> Philip Vera Cruz, an instrumental member

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<sup>31</sup>Toribio, Helen C. “We Are Revolution: A Reflective History of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP).” *Amerasia Journal*, no. 2 (1998): 155–78.

<sup>32</sup>Baldoz, “Comrade Carlos Bulosan.”

<sup>33</sup>Baldoz, “Comrade Carlos Bulosan.”

<sup>34</sup>Baldoz, “Comrade Carlos Bulosan.”

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alongside Larry Itliong in the Delano Grape strikes, explains how the ‘workers consciousness’ of the first half of the 20th century was key for him and his Filipino compatriots:

“We had been working in this country for over 40 years, and we were aware of prices and profits because we listened to market reports on the radio and then discussed these reports in Ilocano, our dialect. This 'worker's consciousness' helped us to be the most organized and united of all the different ethnic groups of farmworkers at that time.”<sup>35</sup>

In the early 1970s, Bulosan’s writings were also promoted by ethnic activists during the civil-rights struggles. The experiences of Bulosan’s generation were linked to contemporary issues such as the resistance to evictions of elderly Chinese and Filipinos from the International Hotel (I-Hotel) in San Francisco and the Anti-Martial Law movement beginning to grow around the country.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the legacy of Filipino labour organizers like Bulosan, Filipino American activists of the late 1960s and early 1970s were influenced by the politics of the Black Panther Party and the Mexican American organization, MEChA.<sup>37</sup> These organizations continued in a tradition established by the likes of W.E.B. DuBois and Malcolm X, which positioned people of color in the United States alongside the nations of the ‘Third World’ in a common fight against racism and colonization.<sup>38</sup> Named after the official newspaper of Andres Bonifacio's Katipunan, the *Kalayaan Newspaper* was published in 1971 by a group of American-born Filipinos and Filipino immigrants.<sup>39</sup> It was through this paper that many Filipino Americans began learning

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<sup>35</sup>Toribio, “We Are Revolution.”

<sup>36</sup>San Juan, *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora*, 97.

<sup>37</sup>Toribio, “We Are Revolution,” 160.

<sup>38</sup>Malloy, Sean Langdon. *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism during the Cold War*. Ithaca New York): Cornell University Press., 2017.

<sup>39</sup>Toribio, “We Are Revolution,” 161.

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about the National Democratic Movement in the Philippines. These activists would soon form United States based coalitions in support of the National Democratic Movement, opposing human rights violations observed under the Marcos dictatorship.

The National Democratic Movement has its roots in the Katipunan and the revolution against the Spanish of 1896. The movement identifies U.S. imperialism in the region as the main obstacle to national democracy.<sup>40</sup> Joma Maria Sison, founder of the Philippine based Kabataang Makabayan (Nationalist Youth) in 1964 explains:<sup>41</sup>

“With the continuing triumph of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines and the stability of its control, it is the chief task of the Filipino youth to resume and complete the unfinished revolution under the banner of national democracy, to expose and oppose the national and social iniquities caused by U.S. imperialism and its local reactionary allies.”<sup>42</sup>

With the declaration of Martial Law in September 1972 by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Filipino American leftist activism would see one of its most significant periods with the growth of an Anti-Martial Law movement, and in particular the creation of the *Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP)*. During the Martial Law period, constitutional liberties were suspended throughout all parts of the Philippines. In the midst of Cold War politics, Marcos declared Martial Law, citing the potential of a communist take-over.<sup>43</sup> This declaration and suspension of constitutional rights was justified by U.S. officials while

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<sup>40</sup>Leano, “Artist as Citizen” 63.

<sup>41</sup>Tigno, Jorge V. “A Time to Rise: Collective Memoirs of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP).” *Philippine Political Science Journal*, no. 3 (February 2018): 186–88.

<sup>42</sup>Sison, Jose Maria. *Struggle for National Democracy*. Vol. 3. Quezon City, Philippines: Lagda Publishing, 1995.

<sup>43</sup>Toribio. “We Are Revolution,” 163.

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continuing to provide financial support to the Marcos regime.<sup>44</sup> Growing Filipino American activism prior to 1972 shifted its focus towards opposing Martial Law.

A committee known as The National Coalition for the Restoration of Civil Liberties in the Philippines (NCRCLP) was formed shortly after Martial Law was declared, by both immigrant and second generation Filipino progressives in San Francisco. Following the formation of the NCRCLP on July 1973 was the establishment of the *Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP)* near San Francisco.<sup>45</sup> Beyond opposition to Marcos, the KDP positioned themselves within the movement for national democracy in the Philippines and socialism in the United States, strongly opposing U.S. military, political, and economic domination on the islands.<sup>46</sup> KDP founders sought to combat the “exploitation and racist oppression of U.S. monopoly-capitalism” in America and in the Philippines and exhibited explicit support for the Philippine Communist Party and New People's Army.<sup>47</sup>

In spite of having liberal or centrist ideologies, other Filipino organizations were sought out by the KDP in order to form a broad coalition of Philippine and American born Filipinos who were against the Marcos dictatorship. Maintaining its strongest chapters throughout the 1970s in California, Hawaii, New York, Washington D.C., and Washington state, the KDP focused on mass actions and lobbying the U.S. Congress to cut military aid to the Marcos government.<sup>48</sup> The assassination of two KDP members Gene Viernes and Silme Domingo in Seattle in 1981 and the 1983 assassination of Marcos’s central political rival Benigno Aquino Jr.

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<sup>44</sup>Zarsadiaz, James, “Raising Hell in the Heartland: Filipino Chicago and the Anti-Martial Law Movement, 1972-1986.” *American Studies*, no. 56.1 (2017): 141–62.

<sup>45</sup>Tigno, “A Time to Rise,” xiv.

<sup>46</sup>Toribio, “We Are Revolution,” 163.

<sup>47</sup>Zarsadiaz, “Raising Hell in the Heartland,” 157.

<sup>48</sup>Zarsadiaz, “Raising Hell in the Heartland,” 148.

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in Manila led to an expansion of domestic and international outrage against the Marcos regime. The internationally praised “People Power Movement” ushered in the end of Martial Law and ousting of Marcos in 1986.<sup>49</sup>

A final important element of Filipino American activism is BAYAN. Originating in the Philippines, BAYAN, short for *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (New Patriotic Alliance), is a broad based alliance of progressive organizations that are part of the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines. The National Democratic Movement came to the forefront in a series of massive protests in 1970, known as “The First Quarter Storm” which ultimately led President Marcos to declare martial law in 1972.<sup>50</sup> During Martial Law, popular support for the movement continued to grow. After the assassination of Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino in 1983, BAYAN was formed in 1985. BAYAN brought together a broad coalition of groups part of the National Democratic Movement and received support from thousands of Filipino compatriots in the U.S.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the overthrow of the Marcos regime in 1986 BAYAN continues mass mobilization and organization in line with the National Democratic Movement.<sup>52</sup> BAYAN USA was formed in 2005 and today comprises 26 progressive organizations such as Anakbayan, Migrante and the League of Filipino Students. These groups advocate for human rights in the Philippines and directly answer to and support BAYAN Philippines. BAYAN USA, also sends their Filipino American members on ‘exposure trips’ hosted by partner organizations in the

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<sup>49</sup>Zarsadiaz, “Raising Hell in the Heartland,” 153.

<sup>50</sup>Leano, “Artist as Citizen” 125.

<sup>51</sup>Leano, “Artist as Citizen.”

<sup>52</sup>Leano, “Artist as Citizen.”

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Philippines.<sup>53</sup> These ‘exposure trips’ are designed to educate their participants on the social, economic and political conditions in the “homeland,” while exposing them to the degree of organization and mobilization around the National Democratic Movement in the Philippines.<sup>54</sup>

This section has explored the movements of Filipinos like Bulosan, Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz in the Delano Grape strikes and the UFWA, and the thousands who fought to oppose the United States backed Marcos regime. These movements serve to inspire today's generation of Filipino Americans towards progressive and radical projects locally and transnationally.

*Filipino Americans in Hip Hop Music*

*“And I still don't know when my accent changed  
from a native dialect to a hip hop slang  
its a hood thing baby you just wouldn't understand”*

— “Bad News”  
Rocky Rivera

Filipino Americans have historically occupied a space in hip hop music as DJs. During the 1980s and 1990s, figures including DJ Qbert and Mix Master Mic along with groups of Filipino youth, dominating local DJ scenes in cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, represented the prominent contributions of Filipinos Americans in the DJ art form.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>“USA – Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (New Patriotic Alliance).” BAYAN. Accessed April 25, 2020. <https://bayanusa.org/>.

<sup>54</sup>Harrison, Anthony Kwame, ““Change That Wouldn’t Fill a Homeless Man’s Cup up.”” In *The Hip Hop Obama Reader*, 133–48, 2015.

<sup>55</sup>Tiongson, Antonio T, *Filipinos Represent. DJs, Racial Authenticity, and the Hip-Hop Nation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.



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While earlier decades in hip hop witnessed this genesis of Filipinos' participation in DJing, the start of the 21st century saw the emergence of a distinct class of Filipino American rappers. Historically the least racially integrated form of hip hop, in comparison to the fields of DJing, breakdancing, and graffiti, the presence of the Filipino rapper or MC allowed Filipino American youth to witness a more visible presence in hip hop culture.<sup>56</sup> Scholars discuss this initial lack of visibility stating that “while drawn to hip-hop, Filipino American youth have had no co-ethnic role models to emulate.”<sup>57</sup> Filipino youth have instead turned to distinct African American cultural roles. Jack De Jesus a.k.a. Kiwi a prominent voice amongst early Filipino American rappers recalls how in high school “trying to come up as an emcee, there was no acting like a Filipino if you wanted to rap... because you're putting your persona out there.”<sup>58</sup> In addition to less visibility of the DJ role, rap also offered the ability to share written narratives and perspectives. Artists like Bambu and Kiwi of the Native Guns, apl.de.ap of the Black Eyed Peas, and MC Geo of the Blue Scholars were early adopters of the role of the MC. Scholars such as Anthony Kwame Harrison note a particular political vitality in the music of Filipino rappers coming out of the early 21st century, with lyrics that, according to Harrison, both express and construct the identity of these urban youth.<sup>59</sup>

Geographically located along the West Coast of the United States, from Seattle to San Diego, other rap artists, Rocky Rivera, and Power Struggle helped to create an initial class of Filipino rap artists. With the formation of the Los Angeles based Beatrock Music record label in 2009, progressive Filipino rappers have continued to find a home for their brand of politically

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<sup>56</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production.”

<sup>57</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production,” 33.

<sup>58</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production,” 33.

<sup>59</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production,” 31.

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charged hip hop.<sup>60</sup> Anthony Kwame Harrison states how this scene was founded on a “critique of the historical and contemporary implications of U.S. imperialism for people of color and the working class.”<sup>61</sup> These artists have shared narratives of urban metropolis life, immigration, and identity, which not only illuminate, but also position their work around a tradition of Filipino/American activism. The young artists interviewed in this paper share similar characteristics as well as associations with this scene of underground Filipino American rappers, many of whom are based in the Bay Area.

**Literature Review**

The scholarly work reviewed for this research is organized in the following sections: Arts impact on Filipino American identity, Diaspora/Geography, and Filipino Activism & Hip Hop.

*Arts Impact on Filipino American Identity*

This paper will be in conversation with existing scholarship on Filipino American identity and the arts. Existing research on this topic covers a broad range of artistic mediums, some of which discussed by Professor Sarita See are in the fields of visual arts, including filmmaking, painting, installation, and performance art. In her book *Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance*, See looks geographically at the major Filipino American communities of the Bay Area and New York City. She argues that the work of Filipino American

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<sup>60</sup>Harrison, “Change That Wouldn’t Fill a Homeless Man’s Cup up,” 147.

<sup>61</sup>Harrison, “Change That Wouldn’t Fill a Homeless Man’s Cup up,” 135.

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artist “cohorts” in these metropolises serves to counter the invisibility surrounding Philippine-American history of racial subjugation and colonization, or “imperial forgetting.”<sup>62</sup>

See states that colonization is a process that works to erase the colonized subjects’ identity, and that, ironically, it is at this moment of erasure that identity for these Filipino artists becomes a decolonizing practice. Many of the artists See discusses in her book engage in highly performative art work, which she argues produces a culture of physical presence where performing is a main site for “collective belonging.”<sup>63</sup>

Another scholar focused on the role of the arts in shaping Filipino identity which this paper will be engaging with is the work of Antonio T. Tiongson Jr. In his book *Filipinos Represent: DJs Racial Authenticity and the Hip Hop Nation*, Tiongson, like See, is focused on a cohort of Filipino American artists and specifically analyzes the early 2010s DJ community in the Bay Area. Tiongson argues that, for artists within the Filipino diaspora, cultural identity is a dynamic process, one not simply rooted in the “homeland.” He argues that instead of authenticity centered on cultural practice and imaginaries from the homeland, DJs and their claim to authenticity both as Filipinos and as hip hop artists reveal the contextual nature of identity and the ways in which “Filipino-ness” change over time. For young second generation Filipinos in the Bay Area, the cultural production of DJing in a sense expands the frame of their identity as Filipinos.

In expanding and engaging with Tiongson’s work, I want to first build upon this notion of the expanding cultural identity that is not simply rooted in the cultural production and values of the homeland. I will engage with the ways in which Filipino rappers use their music as a form of

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<sup>62</sup>See, *The Decolonized Eye*, xxvi.

<sup>63</sup>See, *The Decolonized Eye*, xxvii.

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cultural work, activism, and organizing in the Bay Area to engage the concept of geography rooted in struggles of the “homeland.” I build upon their argument of authenticity in the hip hop nation by exploring the ways in which Filipino American rappers engage with the larger multi-racial communities in which they were raised, and how they reconcile their own identity as Filipinos within hip hop, specifically in the role of the rapper.

In his research, Tiongson also explores how for some Filipino DJs their own place in the art form is seen in a color blind or deracialized manner. Tiongson speaks to the tendency of his interviewees to “[shy] away from overt identity claims (particularly along the lines of race) and instead resorting to claims of liberal pluralism.”<sup>64</sup> Drawing from these findings my paper strives to illuminate the ways in which racial identity and authenticity is brought to the forefront particularly by Filipino rappers in or around a community of activism and community organizing. My participants have tended to confront racial identity and to some extent reject this sense of “liberal pluralism” which Tiongson discusses. This paper aims to contribute to the argument about the ways in which upbringing in multi-racial neighborhoods, along with ongoing activism and resistance to neoliberalism in these neighborhoods have contributed to community solidarity, especially around race, for Bay Area Filipino rappers.

Building off of See’s knowledge and recognition of artistic groups, or cohorts, this paper will look at the relationships, collaborations and proximity between Filipino American rappers in the Bay Area as taking similar form to Filipino artistic communities in the Bay Area and New York. These affiliations, I will argue, are part of a tradition of collective artistic production, and in the case of Filipino rap artists in the Bay Area, this tradition is expanded upon with artists

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<sup>64</sup>Tiongson, *Filipinos Represent*, 61.

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sharing a mutual value and participation in community organizing and activism. See's argument also rests on the absence and invisibility of Filipino American history, art and cultural productions. It is this absence that shapes artists' insistence on the body as a "vehicle" to combat this lack of visibility. In this paper I contribute to the existing scholarship by outlining that through embracing the highly visible and physical role of the emcee Filipino rap artists extended this same desire to combat the invisibility and "imperial forgetting."<sup>65</sup>

*Diaspora/Geography*

Critical to identity amongst diasporic Filipino youth is the geography inscribed in their and their families' lives. Geographical location has played a major role in the socialization of Filipino youth, who find themselves growing up in the post-Civil Rights Movement/Era, urban, and multi-racial landscapes far removed from that of their parents "Third World" upbringing. In the 1980s and 1990s, as hip hop culture began to be wholeheartedly embraced by many young Filipinos in the United States, diaspora studies as a field emerged.

Filipinos in the diaspora have come to see hip hop as a relevant cultural practice in part due to the geography in which they inhabit. Anthony Kwame Harrison's "Post-colonial consciousness, knowledge production, and identity inscription within Filipino American hip hop music" points to the distinct Filipino American rap music movement that has emerged in the past decade along the West Coast of the United States.<sup>66</sup> Harrison cites Manuel Castells' work in *The Power of Identity*, arguing that identity is constructed in distinct ways and in relation to dominant structures of power. Two of these identity formations include:

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<sup>65</sup>See, *The Decolonized Eye*, 35.

<sup>66</sup>Harrison, "Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production," 30.

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- 1) Resilient Identities - which take hold among people who feel “devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination.”
- 2) Project Identities - the construction of new identities that seek to reposition social actors and transform the overall social structure.<sup>67</sup>

He states that these forms of identity exist in opposition to “legitimizing identities” which “serve to rationalize and extend the power of dominant institutions and discourses.”<sup>68</sup> Filipino hip hop artists' identities are most commonly formed in multi-racial, working class communities, and it is this urban positioning that contributes to a “post-colonial consciousness” among Filipino rappers in line with both project and resilient identities. Victor Hugo Viesca explains how several of the Filipino youth who have become prominent voices within the West Coast hip hop movement claim working-class backgrounds.<sup>69</sup> Kiwi, for instance, grew up in Los Angeles’ Koreatown, a community largely composed of low-wage immigrant workers.<sup>70</sup>

Christine Balance’s book *Tropical Renditions: Making Musical Scenes in Filipino America* explores geography through the geopolitical distance between the Philippines and America and the geographical pathways of musical production that make up what is Filipino in America. Balance argues that the translocal and alternative spaces of community or “musical scenes” in various cities such as San Francisco, Manila, and New York help to promote “shared cultural history of musical personalities, iconic or memorable events, essential recordings and

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<sup>67</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production,” 30.

<sup>68</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production,” 32.

<sup>69</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production,” 34.

<sup>70</sup>Viesca, Victor Hugo, “Native Guns and Stray Bullets: Cultural Activism and Filipino American Rap Music in Post-Riot Los Angeles.” *Amerasia Journal* 38, no. 1 (2012): 112–42.

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key venues” which “[unsettle] dominant discourses of race, performance, and U.S. popular music.”<sup>71</sup>

Drawing from Harrison, this paper builds off of his argument on both urban location and resilient and project identity. Along with urban location, Harrison also discusses the factors of historical racialization, Filipinos' foothold in hip hop's other forms, and the rise of Filipino Studies in colleges and universities that have helped to create the resilient and project identities among Filipino youth. I would like to assert that Harrison, within his analysis of urban location, overlooks the importance of local community organizations. Regarding resilient and project identities, I add to his argument by asserting that rap music as a form of cultural work in community and activist organization provides a process in which project identities can be both realized and enacted by youth.

*Filipino Activism & Hip Hop*

Scholarship on Filipino activism and its intersections with hip hop cultural production is relatively recent and continually evolving as more artists of diverse identities and backgrounds rise to prominence. The work of Anthony Kwame Harrison will again be analyzed in this section through his writings in “Change That Wouldn't Fill a Homeless Man's Cup: Filipino American Political Hip Hop and Community Organizing in the Age of Obama.” Here, Harrison centers narratives of San Francisco based Filipino American underground hip hop group Power Struggle, arguing that within the underground Filipino American hip hop community, there has been a shift from a primary focus on the music industry to a focus on activism and community work. He

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<sup>71</sup>Balance, *Tropical Renditions*, 6.

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argues that this shift is reflective of the Obama presidency, during which many activists voiced the limitations of electoral politics. Harrison asserts that Filipino Americans can use hip hop as an avenue towards community work; however, this presents a somewhat mutually exclusive view of music and political organizing amongst Filipino artists. Harrison tends to focus on the ways in which they run parallel opposed to how they intersect.

Michael Joseph Viola's paper, "W.E.B. Du Bois and Filipino/a American exposure programs to the Philippines: race class analysis in an epoch of 'global apartheid'" dives into this intersection absent in Harrison's work, as well as the transnational potential for hip hop and activism. Viola centers the 2009 documentary *Sounds of a New Hope* featuring Filipino rapper Kiwi's exposure trip to the Philippines. Exploring W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of the "guiding hundredth," Viola presents the case study of Kiwi's educational hip hop exposure trip to the Philippines, arguing that this trip highlights a qualitative and interdisciplinary account of the lived conditions of those facing racial oppression in a global economy. He states that this particular brand of cultural work can be useful to the field of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Revolutionary Critical Pedagogy (RCP). Viola links the work of Du Bois, particularly his notion of a "guiding hundredth," to the Filipino/a American like Kiwi who makes use of a "culturally relevant educational practice... as a site for global counter storytelling and transnational organizing against the racist logic and structure embedded in global capitalism."<sup>72</sup>

Author Victor Hugo Viesca explores the now disbanded Filipino American Hip Hop group Native Guns, of which Kiwi was a member, and their links to progressive cultural and political activism, which he argues was born out of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. His 2012 article

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<sup>72</sup>Viola, "W.E.B. Du Bois and Filipino/a American Exposure Programs to the Philippines", 501.



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“Native Guns Cultural Activism and Filipino American Rap Music in Post-Riot Los Angeles,” provides important background on two of the most influential early Filipino American rappers who have since continued to grow their musical work, critical acclaim, and involvement in activism. Viesca argues that the critical sensibility and activist orientation expressed in their work was “significantly shaped by the Los Angeles uprising and by the multi-racial cultural activism that arose in the city in its aftermath.”<sup>73</sup>

While Viesca cites the major event of the 1992 Los Angeles riots as being instrumental in the identity prescription and activism which arose, my research sheds light on the urban landscape of San Francisco as a site of similar activism and community organization. Because my research does not have a sole climactic event such as the LA riots, participants' growth towards “critical sensibilities” tend to be shaped in varied and more gradual ways, yet still constructed in multi-racial, neoliberal cityscapes.

This paper will build on Viola's main case study of Kiwi and his experiences with hip hop transnationally, and with the experiences of more recent Filipino American rappers' transnational links to the Philippines during exposure programs. I explore similar “methods of critical literacy and counter storytelling” used in both local Bay Area and transnational contexts. In building off Viola's argument, this paper looks at the ways in which counter storytelling and organizing has been used locally and globally through the work and inspirations of young 1.5 and second generation Filipino American mcees. This paper focuses on identity formation within the transnational and community organizing process, particularly exploring the idea of what it

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<sup>73</sup>Viesca, “Native Guns and Stray Bullets,” 114.

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means for diasporic youth to be Filipino, as opposed to these phenomena impact on the academic field of Critical Race Theory and Critical Pedagogy.

In drawing from Harrison’s work, this paper suggests that rather than hip hop being used as a means towards involvement in community work, in a sense requiring a transition, hip hop and community work for young diasporic Filipinos instead frequently coexist and enhance one another. While Harrison argues that young people’s consciousness is often developed by hip hop and that community work can stand alongside this, he does not explore the effect or instances of the two factors operating in the same space. This is explored by Viola in a transnational sense; however, the local geography of the Bay Area in which Harrison focuses is a prime setting in which this coexistence continues to occur. In building off Viola’s arguments I look at the interactions between hip hop and transnational organizing by contributing new case studies to his argument that hip hop can be used as a culturally relevant educational tool against “the racist logic and structure embedded in global capitalism.”<sup>74</sup> While Viola focuses on the implications of this on the fields of critical race theory, my paper will instead look at this phenomenon as it affects notions of “Filipino-ness” for diasporic youth.

**Research Methods**

Exposure to hip hop music and specifically Filipino American rap narratives inspired me to explore my own cultural and political identity as a Filipino American, both academically and artistically. As for many Filipinos and other demographics of youth raised in diasporic settings, the history, and culture of our ancestors is often taught to us sparsely. If an effort to teach is

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<sup>74</sup>Viola, “W.E.B. Du Bois and Filipino/a American Exposure Programs to the Philippines.”

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made, what tends to remain elusive is an education exploring activism, resistance, and anti-colonialism. I seek to discover how hip hop music can be a tool in engaging in activism and community organizing for those involved in the art. In order to achieve this, my goals for this research project are 1) to understand how and why diasporic Filipinos engage with hip hop music and 2) to determine how diasporic Filipino engagement in both community activism and hip hop shapes “Filipino-ness” into a sight of political identification, rooted in anti-colonialism and transformative projects.

Through interviews, I conducted a qualitative study in the San Francisco Bay Area. Those I interviewed can be broken down into two groups, 1.5 generation immigrants and second generation Filipino Americans. With various identifiers such as age at the time of the interview, how old they were when they first moved to the U.S., and the location they predominantly were raised, reside and make music from. One of my interviewees is an outlier in the data being third generation, however due to the important insight into the Filipino hip hop community in San Francisco and the participants own activism, they were included.

To describe my research methodology, I want to first illustrate the varying settings in which I conducted my research. I will then provide detail on my data collection procedures for the interviews. Finally, I explain the limitations faced while conducting the research.

*Research Setting*

I lived in the San Francisco Bay Area for one and a half years as a student in the International Studies graduate program at the University of San Francisco. I began conducting this research project in my last 8 weeks of the semester from October 15th to December 18th,

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2019. Before beginning my research, I interned for the non-profit organization South Of Market Action Committee (SOMCAN) during the months of June and July. In addition to this during my first year in San Francisco I spent several months volunteering with a National Democratic organization called the “League of Filipino Students” (LFS) based in San Francisco State University. In both organizations I was able to build connections amongst community organizers and youth in the area. Living in the Bay Area during my research also provided me with relatively easy geographical access to the various neighborhoods in which my interviewees lived, as well as little to no major cultural or language barriers.

The South of Market (SoMa) and Excelsior neighborhoods were among the areas in which I had to travel to for interviews. Both neighborhoods have been important areas for working class Filipinos in San Francisco, which is most evident by the presence of The Bayanihan Center in SoMa, and the Filipino Community Center in the Excelsior. Both of these centers are dedicated to providing a safe space where Filipino families’ can access services, receive support, and build community.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, these neighborhoods have, since the early 2000s, witnessed what is known as the “Dot-com bubble” and growing issues regarding affordable housing. This makes San Francisco an interesting setting for my research. As my findings will show, there are varying reactions from young San Francisco locals and long time residents regarding public space, race, and how their own identity has been and continues to be shaped by these contexts.

*San Francisco Bay Area Based Artists*

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<sup>75</sup>“Filipino Community Center.” Filipino Community Center. Accessed April 25, 2020. <https://www.filipinocc.org/>.

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The artists I interviewed represented a variety of Bay Area cities and within those cities various neighborhoods. Even within this breakdown, certain participants spent significant periods between not just one but two neighborhoods and for this reason will be counted multiple times in the breakdown. The majority of my interviewees were from the city of San Francisco. The neighborhoods represented were SoMa (four), Excelsior (two), Fillmore (one), and Bernal Heights (one). Other cities represented include Daly City (one), Pittsburg (one) and San Jose (one). All of the above data regarding the participants has been broken down in the following table.

**Table 2: Lists of Artists and Various Identifiers**

Artist	Age	Generation	Age moved to US	Location
E.P.	20	1.5	7	SF (SoMa)
Bettina F.	22	1.5	4	San Jose, SF
JT	30	1.5	14	SF (Excelsior)
Rudy K.	25	1.5	5	Daly City
Amihan	22	Second	N/A	SF (Excelsior, SoMa)
Pat	27	Second	N/A	Pittsburg (CA), Daly City
Ro3lay	30	Second	N/A	SF (Fillmore, SoMa)
Mavy-E	22	Second	N/A	SF (SoMa)
Santi	22	Third*	N/A	SF (Bernal Heights)

Of the nine interviewed artists, I had no prior interactions with five of them before conducting the interview. The other four I had become acquainted with through my networks at either SOMCAN or LFS. SOMCAN is a nonprofit organization in the South of Market district that since 2000 has been engaged in “uplifting the voices of immigrant, people-of-color, and low-income communities, so that they will be heard in local policy-making decisions and so civic offices are accountable to their needs.”<sup>76</sup> Through my involvement in SOMCAN I was familiarized with the organizations “Youth Organizing Home and Neighborhood Action program” known as Yohana. Yohana is a youth program with part of its focus on “arts-based outreach, including writing, visual art, and music with the use of SOMCAN's recording booth.”<sup>77</sup> I was made aware and able to be put in contact with various rappers who at one point had been involved in Yohana.

The League of Filipino Students is a grassroots activist group under Anakbayan USA. Composed of youth and students, from the ages of 18-35, LFS focuses towards deepening the understanding of the concrete connections between Filipinos in the United States and in the Homeland.<sup>78</sup> Anakbayan USA serves as an international wing of Anakbayan Philippines, which is a member of the larger BAYAN Organization pushing for national democracy in the Philippines. Through my membership in this organization I networked with artists connected with the organization specifically at the Filipino Community Center in the Excelsior where LFS would hold certain events.

### *Participants in Community Organizing and Activism*

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<sup>76</sup>“About.” SOMCAN. Accessed April 25, 2020. <https://www.somcan.org/about>.

<sup>77</sup>“What We Do.” SOMCAN. Accessed April 25, 2020. <https://www.somcan.org/about>.

<sup>78</sup>BAYAN. Accessed April 25, 2020. <https://bayanusa.org/>.

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Of the artists interviewed, many were currently or at one point involved in activism or in a local community organization. While in some cases the artists had no particular affiliations with any organization, they tended to be overtly “political” in their music or were associated through informal networks with members of an organization. The following table breaks down the various affiliations which artists revealed to me and discussed during our interviews.

**Table 3: List of Artists and Organization Affiliations**

Organization	Artists
Filipino Community Center/ KBT (youth program)	Pat, Santi, Amihan, JT
SOMCAN (Yohana)	EP, Mavy-E
Anakbayan/LFS	Santi, JT, Amihan
West Bay Center	Mavy-E, Bettina
ALAY	JT
Kabataan Alliance	Pat
N/A	Ro3lay, Rudy K.

*Limitation*

This research project’s limitations include: time and my identity as a transplant to the Bay Area. Both of these factors potentially influenced the outcome of my research as they impacted the amount of data I collected. In spite of living in the Bay Area for over a year prior to engaging in this research, my period of research only lasted approximately eight weeks. I cannot claim that in this time of my exposure to the organizing and rap culture of the Bay Area was sufficient to fully understand the local experience. Because my research is focused primarily on artists who are in some way associated with community organizations and activism this study may overlook

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the perspectives and voices of Filipino Americans who are not a part of these networks. While my research does attempt to venture out as seen in the section *Participants in Community Organizing and Activism*, the majority of emcees that took part in this study belonged to similar networks and thus may represent only a specific outlook of the Bay Area Filipino Americans involved in hip hop. Having more time to conduct research would have allowed me the opportunity to build a larger array of emcees who may have grown up in the same neighborhoods as my participants but were not within the activist/organizer circles.

**Data Collection Procedures**

*Interviews*

Extensive interviews aiming, for at least one hour in length, were conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of various themes in these 1.5 and second generation diasporic youths' lives. The interview questions remained consistent however specific questions may have been asked to artists regarding the organizations they were a part of and tangential questions were also explored. The first theme of the interviews explored their upbringing, their history or families' history with migration, and growing up as young Filipinos in their neighborhoods. Questioning then moved onto music and how they became exposed to hip hop and their musical journey. The interviews proceeded to inquire about their involvement in the community, activism and the ways in which they have seen hip hop utilized in these spaces. Finally, interviews focused on the theme of their identity as Filipinos/Filipino Americans, their relationship to the Philippines and how their music and organizing has influenced this. Questions were designed to be open ended, inspiring lengthy responses. For instance, the artists were asked "What does it



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mean to you to be Filipino?” or “How does your music allow you to explore your Filipino identity?” Follow up probing questions were asked to gain further context.

*Lyrics*

Where relevant specific lyrics of an artist interviewed have also been presented in the data. These lyrics will not be treated as sources for literary analysis but instead are reflected alongside the interview answers in order to strengthen the points that they are making. For example, one particular piece of music where lyrics will be shared from is a group hip hop album recorded at the Filipino Community Center (FCC) by several members of a former Filipino youth organization called ALAY in 2007/2008. This album was shared to me by one of my interviewees and remains only physically and on the computers at the FCC.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This section will break down the immigration experiences and early life of the 1.5 and second generation diasporic youth, their early exposure to hip hop, the ways in which rap proves useful in community organizing and/or activism, and finally how this intersection of hip hop and activism have shaped identity among these youth. My research supports three main factors articulated by Harrison for the frequent involvement of Filipino youth in both rap music and community organizing/activism:

- 1) Social location within urban working class communities,
- 2) a long history of Filipino migration to these communities and,
- 3) the highly expressive and consciousness raising tradition of rap music.

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My findings explore the intersection of activism and rap by the Filipino diaspora in both local and transnational spaces. Through this intersection I argue that youth shape Filipino identity into a sight of political identification, rooted in anti-colonialism and transformative projects. My findings exhibit that the consumption and creation of rap music provides youth with a culturally relevant art form to analyze their own lived realities, and gives them a space within collective activism where they can begin to form solidarity co-ethnically as well as between the diaspora and the homeland.

*Migration / Early Life & Geographic Location*

1.5 Generation: Migration

Of the nine artists interviewed four arrived in the United States as children ranging from the ages of four to fourteen. This group, “the 1.5 generation” expressed mixed views on their migrating as children to the United States. One of four expressed excitement in coming to the United States. Half, due to their age, did not express much emotions or early memories of life before arriving in the United States. While one of the four migrated due to traumatic circumstances and experienced family dislocation, they did not explain their feelings towards migrating.

All four who immigrated cited upward mobility and economic security as reasons related to their families' migration. Historic U.S. and Philippine relations were also discussed by interviewees as attributing factors to their migration. Once in the United States, three of the four expressed facing some form of cultural challenges amongst the racially diverse working class communities where they were raised. The early life and migration experiences shared by

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interviewees established important context in understanding the progression of these youths' into engaging in the cultural practice of rap music and grass roots organizing/activism. It will be these early life experiences that shape the conditions for resilient identities to be further developed in the years ahead.

In regards to upward mobility, JT for example, at the age of 14, saw his family's "middle class status" while in the Philippines, become precarious due to the passing of his father. This led to his migration from Quezon City, Philippines, to South Central Los Angeles and finally to the Excelsior district in San Francisco.

JT:

"So because of that [father's passing] my family was pretty insecure with like our finances and what not so we had to sell our house and fortunately our grandparents were [U.S.] citizens through the military. I'm not exactly sure what it was like for them, but because of them we were petitioned to become [U.S.] citizens."

Here JT provides an example of how U.S.- Philippine relations and the history of American military recruitment in the colony led to his grandparents' U.S. military ties. This factor played an important role in allowing for his eventual migration and his family's pursuit of financial security.

Rudy K. sights the historic presence of Filipinos in the Bay Area for his migration, stating the family ties and a "support system" that his family had in the Bay Area, specifically in cities like Daly City, Concord, and South City led his family to migrate from an "underdeveloped barrio" area in Pangasinan, Philippines to Daly City.

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1.5 Generation: Early Life in the U.S.

Upon arriving in America half of those interviewed in this category expressed challenges regarding the English language. EP for instance recalled difficulty in finding a “sense of community” in the beginning of his life in American because of a language barrier and lack of extended family in the area. He recalls however that by attending Bessie Carmichael, a public elementary and middle school in SoMa with a Filipino bi-lingual program, his alienation and culture shock began to ease.

EP:

“When I went to school at Bessie, I got put into the English class and I didn’t know a lick of it but then they put me in the bi-lingual classes and once the teacher started speaking in Tagalog or like a mix of Tagalog and English and the students were all doing the same it gave me a lot of confidence.”

The Bessie Carmichael school, the only SF public school in the South of Market, and its bi-lingual program was established due to decades of Filipino migration to the working class neighborhood. For EP finding a place here was important in shifting his initial alienation in American society towards acceptance and greater self-esteem. The other half interviewed in this group expressed their ability to speak English prior to migrating as an advantage in settling in the U.S. This ability was due to their education in the Philippines as well as learning English by being fans of American cultural productions such as the NBA, Hip Hop music, and American pro-wrestling. Their English centered education is reflective of the U.S. colonial period and

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Philippine national policies that support development strategies that export Filipino's throughout the globe.<sup>79</sup>

1.5 Generation: Settling in Racially Diverse and/or Working Class Neighborhoods

Three out of the four interviewed recall growing up in racially diverse neighborhoods such as SoMa and South San Jose. Living in these neighborhoods presented a variety of challenges impacting their identity. Bettina states how despite the racial diversity in South San Jose and the prominent Filipino community in other parts of the city she “grew up feeling different.” This difference however was not only predicated on her “non-white” identity but was also based on a difference amongst other non-white minorities in the area. She states that many of her friends growing up would speak Spanish around her further complicating her settling in the United States.

A contrasting perspective comes from Rudy K. who upon moving to Daly City did not experience much diversity. Here he recalls growing up around a large Filipino community with many of his Catholic school classmates either 1.5 or second generation Filipinos. Because of this Rudy recalls how in his community his earlier years “weren't much of a struggle.” While Rudy explains experiencing a difference between him and the second generation Filipino Americans, he states that due to his young age and his ability to absorb the culture around him “like a sponge” this difference was not much of a problem. It was not until high school that Rudy recalls being faced with more racial diversity and experiencing a slight degree of “culture shock.”

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<sup>79</sup>Viola, “W.E.B. Du Bois and Filipino/a American Exposure Programs to the Philippines,” 511.

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EP explains how the SoMa, like Daly City, was home to a vibrant Filipino community however unlike Rudy he expressed frustration with his own community explaining to me that,

EP:

“Filipinos aren't the only folks in the South of Market there's also like Black folks and Latinx folks and a lot of Filipinos have this colonial mindset of being anti-Black and all of that stuff and sometimes it can feel like we seclude ourselves too much compared to other communities you feel me?”

This frustration, expressed by EP, stems from the diversity of his neighborhood and suggests in spite of his Filipino communities strength, his own desires to be racially inclusive and build intercultural connections. Pointing out the idea of a “colonial mindset” EP calls attention to the ways he has seen diasporic Filipinos reproduce white supremacist logic, stemming from their own history of colonization. EPs desire for racial solidarity from his own Filipino community will go on to shape his identity, organizing efforts, and music.

Different tensions between himself and his diverse working class community were also felt by JT. Prior to his resettlement in the Excelsior in San Francisco at age 16 JT spent his first two years in the U.S. in South Central Los Angeles. Here he lived in a Motel Six with his twenty four year old brother, sister in law and baby niece and nephew. At this time JT’s mother stayed behind in the Philippines and JT recalls how he felt without any sense of a Filipino community, a significant contrast to the early lives of EP and Rudy in the SoMa and Daly City. JT recalls how in his majority “Black and Latino” high school he felt like “someone, who no one knew [his] people, couldn't even point out my home [the Philippines] out on the map right? And so it was

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hard being a nobody.” At the same time JT also recalls “waking up” to the realities of America beyond the TV, seeing “the poverty, intergenerational violence and trauma” people were experiencing and perpetuating around him. It was this sense of isolation and alienation in an already traumatic environment, and the strained family relations as a result of the passing of his father, that would lead JT, at the age of “fourteen and a half,” to attempt suicide. This incident led to his move to the Excelsior district in San Francisco with his aunt and uncle, where his mother would soon join.

While growing up in SoMa EP explained a similar realization to that experienced by JT, regarding the violent nature of his environment. He recalls that when arriving in the community he was “sheltered” until the fourth grade. After this time, he recalls how he began to see “everything that was going on in the South of Market from gentrification to police brutality and crime.” Recalling how “just seeing all of that [it] gets people mad.” Listening to EP he points to both a critique of the systems of power witnessed in his neighborhood as well as his desire for solidarity amongst Filipinos and other racial groups in the area.

The diversity within Filipino immigrant neighborhoods has been reflected upon by Helen C. Toribio in explaining the character of KDP activists of the early 1970s. Toribio in part attributes the political identity of Filipino youth of the time to this diversity. She describes how KDP activists typically grew up in both urban and rural predominantly non-white neighborhoods. She states how Filipino youth social circles “were composed of Blacks, Latinos, other Asians, and Pacific Islanders besides Filipinos.” Going on to explain how “in the political ferment of the

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late sixties and early seventies, they were inclined to participate in those struggles having a “Third World” character prior to joining the KDP.”<sup>80</sup>

This “Third World” character of both the KDP and Black and Latino struggles in the 1970s is reflected by EP and others in their continued political development. Collective memories of a homeland and the racial diversity of their neighborhoods will remain important factors for the 1.5 generation in both music and activism. Early life experiences including racial diversity and its relationship with interviewees’ Filipino identity will continue to be explored within the second generation group.

Second Generation: Early Life in the U.S.

For second generation Filipino Americans language barriers did not exist as they did for half of the 1.5 generation immigrants. Being born and raised in the United States their identity formation was shaped without early memories of a “home land” culture. Similarly, to the 1.5 generation group, for three of the four second generation Filipino youth the idea that their families’ had immigrated to achieve upward mobility and economic security, was a significant factor in their upbringings. Three out of the four youth described class dynamics and issues of poverty and/or violence shaping their early identity.

Pat explains how his parents were both college educated in the Philippines although when they migrated to the U.S., despite their education, they were employed working at Burger King. While Pat does not explain further, it can be inferred that even this level of employment (working class service industry) in the United States, was seen as an improvement or perhaps a

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<sup>80</sup>Toribio, “We Are Revolution,” 157.



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necessary step towards upward mobility and financial security for his family. This type of employment in fact has been common among Filipino migrants coming to the U.S., as part of the “post-1965 contingent” who have faced underemployment in regards to their educational attainments.<sup>81</sup>

Similarly Ro3lay born in the South of Market, and quickly moving to the Fillmore District, explains how his mother migrated to the U.S. in the mid 1980s. A period that he calls “the brain drain era” referring to the period of exodus of highly skilled and mid-level professionals from the start of the 1970s under the Marcos administration.<sup>82</sup> Amihan states that her mother also migrated to the United States around this time explicitly stating that it was during the “Marcos regime.”

Second Generation: Racially Diverse Neighborhoods & Filipino Cultural Connections

Both Ro3lay and Pat describe growing up as some of the few Filipinos in their respective neighborhoods of the Fillmore and Pittsburg. “I grew up around a lot of Latino folks... like growing up I didn't know I was Filipino until the third grade” says Pat recalling how the few Filipino classmates he had eventually made him aware of his ethnicity.

Ro3lay growing up in the Fillmore recalls “living in an African [American] neighborhood in Fillmore, it was the hood you know.” He recalls the world of his neighborhood as being drastically different to that of his “Filipino household” where his mother and he would speak Tagalog, and where he would “eat with his hands.” Here Ro3lay explains growing up negotiating between cultural spaces and his own outward performance. From a young age in the Fillmore he

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<sup>81</sup>Harrison. “Post-Colonial Consciousness, Knowledge Production.”

<sup>82</sup>Alburo, Florian A. “Remittances, Trade and the Philippine Economy.” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*2, no. 3 (1993): 269–83.

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starts to shape a multifaceted and transnational Filipino identity claiming both his “immigrant” and “native to San Francisco” identity. This would later be evident in his music, with his debut album entitled “Native Immigrant” exploring this theme his lyrics state:

“It's the native, the immigrant, intertwined in one,  
holding on to my roots proud of where I came from,  
repping two homes from the islands to the sco,  
repping two homes.”

- Native Immigrant by Ro3lay

Mavy-E and Amihan both grew up attending the Bessie Charmichael elementary and middle school in the SoMa. However, unlike EP from the 1.5 generation group, Mavy-E and Amihan having been born in the United States did not come to the school with a cultural or language barrier. Both describe a positive community growing up surrounded by Filipinos of both second and 1.5 generation. Many of their classmates were similar to Mavy and Amihan and had familiar migration stories. Amihan states that as a second generation Filipino American she had a disconnect to Filipino culture but the *Galing Bata* after school program at Bessie Charmichael was her way of learning some basic Tagalog and connecting to the culture. This is in contrast to EP who explains that after migrating from the Philippines to SoMa, despite the large Filipino community and his attendance of Bessie Charmichael for his first few years of elementary school, he eventually lost his ability to speak Tagalog, in effect reshaping a part of his cultural identity. The loss of Tagalog may be attributed to the fact that EP only spent his first few years at Bessie Charmichael before transferring to a “mostly white” middle and high school.

For Amihan outside of her schooling at Bessie Charmichael her early childhood was partially shaped by her parents involvement in the legacy of Filipino American activism and organizing within her community. Growing up, Amihan recalls her parents' involvement, as both co-founders of the Filipino Community Center (FCC) in the Excelsior, her father working at SOMCAN, and her mother being the first chairperson of the U.S. chapter of Gabriella, a women's organization part BAYAN.<sup>83</sup> This early exposure to organizing and activism in Amihan's life would go on to inform her own future involvement in activism.

Amihan:

“My mom, she works for the city but [it] was always working on legislation to help like marginalized communities here in SF and she was the first chairperson of Gabriella[U.S.A.]... When all the different women's orgs became Gabriella she became the chairperson and I remember going to the, I don't know if it was called the congress? But you know when they kina just did everything in L.A., and like I was a little kid and I didn't understand what was happening.”

Pat, Ro3lay and Mavy-E all explain the nature of their neighborhoods as a struggle with issues of violence and/or poverty, and similar to JT of the 1.5 group, saw the realities of an “American life” contrary to the idealized image often associated with the immigrant “American dream.” Pat explains how a pivotal moment in his upbringing was his attempt to join a gang in middle school.

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<sup>83</sup>“USA – Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (New Patriotic Alliance).” BAYAN. Accessed April 25, 2020. <https://bayanusa.org/>.

Pat:

“A lot of my homies were joining gangs, and I was like ‘oh shit I want to join a gang too’ cause all my friends were joining gangs. One of my uncles was actually part of one of the Filipino gangs in Pittsburg when he immigrated from the Philippines to the U.S., and he found out that I was trying to join a gang and he got hella mad.”

It was this event that led Pat’s uncle, who had been formerly incarcerated on a five year felony gun charge, to seriously intervene in Pat’s life. Through important conversations and the mentorship of his uncle and grandmother he was set on a path towards embracing his roots as a Filipino and questioning the reasons why as a Filipino he was in the United States faced with these conditions. Pat recalls conversations and questions of “Why was he here? Why did his family leave the Philippines? How come he couldn’t speak the language? And why did he relate with other young people who were “*willin’ out*?” It was this experience as a child of working class immigrants who, as he puts it, were struggling to “make it in America,” along with his own violent environment that would sow the early seeds of community organizing in him.

Ro3lay describes violence growing up in Fillmore. For example, he recounts incidents during his childhood such as having his scooter stolen while riding to the bus stop, “people checking how much money he had” and getting bullied. As one of the few Asians in his neighborhood he recalls how he would be “hanging out with the African[American] dudes, just causing a ruckus, and I’d always get checked like ‘Man who’s this Asian cat? like he ain’t down with the set’ or whatever type of thing.” Ro3lay explains how growing up these confrontations came as part of the territory and he slowly became privy to “hood etiquette,” shaping his own

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identity around the conditions of his community. These incidents led Ro3lay to negotiate between his traditional Filipino home life and his identity in his community. Through this negotiation he came to understand that due to factors such as age, gender and migration experience he was faced with a separate situation than that of his first generation immigrant mother and had to learn from these experiences on his own. “That's the only time where I felt like, ok I have to take it upon myself, that wasn't something that my mother could have taught me. You know, she didn't experience that she didn't know nothing about that.”

While Mavy-E described his SoMa upbringing as a positive environment with a Filipino community, he also frequently describes his neighborhood with the words “low income” and “poverty.” Mavy describes a situation in which at the age of eighteen, due to unexplained issues with the building where he lived, he and his family were evicted from their home. Facing potential houselessness, the non profit organization SOMCAN stepped in and allowed the family to live in their office for two days. This is reflective of the tight knit Filipino community that exists in SoMa, as a result of Filipinos' long time presence in this working class neighborhood. It was this incident and inspiration from his mentor, a Filipino employee of SOMCAN (which will be further discussed in the following section) that led Mavy-E towards pursuing a passion for rap music.

It will be these life experiences for the 1.5 and second generation youth that will begin to inform their views on class, race and their own identity as Filipinos. Particularly, a history of Filipino migration to multi-racial neighborhoods, and working class communities have been vital in shaping sensibilities of Filipino youth in the hip hop community pushing them towards both activism and music. Negotiating between “Filipino-ness” and neighborhood life in the case of

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Ro3lay, and experiences of a loss of cultural identity as discussed by EP, Rudy and JT are common for diasporic youth and point to feelings of devalue and stigmatization. Similar types of experiences of Filipino diaspora have been written about by Tiongson and Harrison.

For Pat these feelings almost materialized in him joining a gang. However a push to investigate and form deeper connections with an identity tied to his ‘motherland’ would steer him away from gang life. The intervention of hip hop for these youth will be explored in the next section. What Harrison describes as “project identities” or the “construction of new identities that seek to reposition social actors and transform the overall social structure” will particularly be analyzed while looking at early exposure to hip hop and community organizing.<sup>84</sup>

**Exposure to Hip Hop & Filipino American Narratives**

All nine of the total artists interviewed across both the 1.5 and second groups and the one third generation member became exposed and involved in hip hop through their schools and neighborhoods. Four of the nine artists became involved in making rap music through the influences of community organizations at a young age speaking to an important existing connection between both rap and community organization. Ro3lay and Amihan were exposed early to poetry and music as both grew up with a musician/poet as a parent. Several of the artists including EP, Amihan, Ro3lay, Bettina, Santi and JT, began writing poetry and spoken word before moving to rapping. A common theme between artists was the need to express frustrations and stress through the rap and poetry art forms. Much of this frustration stems from the social landscapes of their neighborhoods, cultural barriers, and specific events from their upbringing

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<sup>84</sup>Harrison, Anthony Harrison, “Post-colonial consciousness, knowledge production, and identity inscription within Filipino American hip hop music” Equinox Publishing, 2012, United States.

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ties to their identity as Filipino immigrants in America. Five of the nine interviewed artists discussed established Filipino American rappers as being major influences to them.

Hip Hop Through Community Organization

One youth who became involved in making rap music through the influences of community organizations was Mavy-E. When facing the eviction from his home Mavy recalls “times when [he] couldn't sleep” and how because of this he was advised by his mentor to try writing “it” in a song. In this case his mentor, a member of the community organization SOMCAN, directly influenced him to channel the issues he was facing into creating his first song in SOMCAN’s own recording booth. Mavy recalls how enjoyable and stress relieving this process was and he continued making music from that time forward. EP, also a resident of SoMa, seems to sum up Mavy’s and others road to rap music and their use of it as an outlet with his own observations. EP sees the economic situation of their neighborhood as closely related to his own exposure to hip hop.

EP:

“Like South of Market isn't some upper middle class neighborhood you feel me? It's lower class. But you hear a lot of music outside whether it's folks playing it from their speakers or their cars or what not, and you know hip hop has always been an outlet to people from lower class communities and a way to express themselves.”

This exposure to hip hop would be integral in EP’s path to Yohana and his involvement in community organizing. EP recalls his desire to start recording some of the songs he had begun

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creating. A neighborhood friend introduced EP to one of the Yohana mentors knowing that SOMCAN had their own recording booth. The topics in EP's music at the time spoke about SoMa and his experiences growing up in the community since the age of seven. Although EP admits to me that some of his lyrics were "problematic" at the time, his mentor enjoyed his work and encouraged him to join Yohana. By "problematic" EP alludes to a lack of awareness and/or ignorance expressed in his lyrics, a fault he strived to improve through involvement in the organization. EP states how he sees Yohana like a family and that it "was just like a great base for me as a person to know what's right and what's wrong just like even help me push myself to seek better knowledge on stuff like social justice."

Hip Hop and Processing Stress and Violent Environments

For Rudy frustrations leading him to create music stem from both economic and cultural factors. Despite his parents divorce at an early age, due to financial reasons, they continue to live together. Rudy recalls the "toxic" environment that was often created because of this dynamic. Rudy also explains how because of the fact that his level of Tagalog never progressed past a five year olds (the age he left the Philippines) his conversations with his parents remained basic and without the ability to create a deeper connection. Feelings of depression and isolation eventually led Rudy, who began listening to rap in high school, to begin making his own music as a means to voice and make sense of his frustrations.

Similar feelings related to mental health were cited by JT who explains how his pursuit of rap and spoken word stemmed "from a need to just process what I was experiencing and it came from a need for creating a voice for what I needed for myself." In the case of each of these artists



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we find a common theme wherein the artform of rap presented unique characteristics for them to explore issues associated with their diasporic identity. The need for cultural art forms to process immigrant experiences was mirrored by Carlos Bulosan almost a century prior. Harrison explains how Bulosan who had never previously written while in the Philippines “began exploring and experimenting with writing as a way of processing, documenting and dealing with the class oppression and racism he encountered.”<sup>85</sup>

For Pat his uncle's intervention leading him away from gang life would prelude him slowly growing his interest in music. This intervention threw Pat on a quest of “consciousness raising,” researching Filipino history which would later be translated into his music. For Pat this process of consciousness raising would address what Harrison identifies as a cultural paradox many second generation immigrant youth face of having symbolic loyalty to the Philippines but having little access to knowledge about it.<sup>86</sup> Pat recalls the influence of the rap group Native Guns formed by Filipino American rappers Kiwi, and Bambu who had released their first album in 2006.

Pat:

“I would always be on wikipedia for hella hours reading on different Filipino histories and teaching myself about Rizal and Bonifacio and the Katipunan. Eventually it got to the point of the Anti-Martial Law activists and then kind of seeing how that ties together and putting that into my music... Along the way right before highschool I found out about the Native Guns, and I was like oh shoot this is what I've been looking for all my life.”

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<sup>85</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness.”

<sup>86</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness” 35.

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Both Kiwi and Bambu, members of the Native Guns, grew up in working class Los Angeles neighborhoods and were involved in gangs as youth in the 1990s. Harrison sights an interview with Kiwi in which he explains how being in a gang “was the thing to do if you were an adolescent Filipino male back then. I don’t think any of us at the time had a sense of ourselves as Filipinos. Being in a gang gave us that sense of belonging to something.”<sup>87</sup> Both Bambu and Kiwi experienced an eventual shift from gang life into music and activism reflecting how “having the voice to author politically expressive musical narratives can... provide discursive frames through which aligned subjects make sense of particular events and come to know themselves.”<sup>88</sup>

It is evident that for Pat, finding these artists and the narratives present in their work played a substantial role in his research of Filipino history offering him a means to make sense of his own set of closely related experiences. This is supported by Santi, whose mother was born in the U.S. making him a third generation Filipino American. Santi explains how he was able to connect to Filipino American rappers such as Bambu, Power Struggle, Kiwi, Ruby Ibarra and the Blue Scholars. Growing up in Bernal Heights, a community with few Filipinos, he was drawn to these artists as they fed a “knowledge of self” when talking about “our people's history.” Furthermore these artists would inspire and earn a deep respect from Santi due to their own work in their communities, “participating and being a part of the struggle.” Here Santi refers to the different community involvements of these Filipino American rappers such as Nomi from Power Struggles advocacy for workers rights with the FCC and Migrante and Kiwis involvement in BAYAN USA.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness” 35.

<sup>88</sup>Harrison, “Post-Colonial Consciousness” 33.

<sup>89</sup>Viesca, “Native Guns and Stray Bullets,” 114.

For Bettina, Santi and Amihan hip hop culture may have been presented to them around less traumatic circumstances. Bettina describes how in her South San Jose neighborhood hip hop had a constant presence in the physical spaces of her neighborhood. Every day after school she described how B-Boy crews would assemble on the block near her house recalling “ethnic diversity” and “unity” amongst this environment. “I felt so much peace like you know just hearing the break beats, hearing hip hop playing in the back I just felt so much peace in all of that” recalls Bettina. Bettina alludes to how hip hop became a positive and communal element in her diverse neighborhood shaping a love for hip hop in her early years.

For Amihan early exposure to hip hop came through growing up with her father who was a musician in a band called *Diskarte Namin* which in Tagalog translates to Our Strategy. She recalls how the band would incorporate traditional Filipino instruments like the *kulintang* and would also feature an MC who would rap. Much like her family’s decision to school her outside of their Excelsior Neighborhood, at Bessie Charmichael in the SoMa, strong Filipino cultural ties are also exhibited musically in her upbringing with her father's fusion of Filipino tradition and Hip Hop.

Through the interviews we can see that within the artists initial exposure to hip hop they had already begun to see the potential for the art to be used as a means to explore, and potentially transform, their own struggles associated with their own diasporic 1.5/second generation Filipino identity. Hip Hop acts as a present factor in these youths' early lives serving to expose class dynamics and push artists towards seeing their own Filipino identity within a class and racial solidarity. This initial exposure to hip hop helps establish the context for youths’ involvement in

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community organizing. As explored in the next section, interviewees will begin to align their own cultural production of rap music, into activism and community spaces and in doing so further developing these initial notions of identity.

**Identity Formation in Rap and Activism**

Of the nine artists seven have directly been involved in an activist or community organizing group. For these interviewees hip hop and rap music have been important factors in creating a space for themselves within community organizations and activist groups. Three main factors within the intersection of organizing and rap music are:

- 1) Providing a culturally relevant tool to teach and share;
- 2) building productive community spaces through music; and
- 3) creating groups of affiliated artists also tied to activism/organizing.

This phenomenon is seen in both domestic community spaces and in transnational spaces as experienced in the “exposure trips” to the Philippines participated in by the interviewees. On a domestic level these three factors within the intersection of rap and community work, help to raise political consciousness and position Filipino youth within racial and working class solidarities. On a local and transnational level Filipinos begin to position the Philippines as a political identity engaged with a long history of decolonization and resistance. Through activism and hip hop Filipino youth do not see the struggles of the diaspora as dislocated from these histories but rather as within the same continuum. This following section explores the intersections on a community level before exploring the ways that this has then been applied in a transnational context.

### Grass Roots Activism and Hip Hop on the Local Community Level

Both Mavy-E and EP have been a part of the youth group Yohana at SOMCAN in the South of Market. During his involvement with Yohana, EP participated in various campaigns such as a pedestrian safety campaign to improve street lights in South of Market, a neighborhood with relatively high crime levels. Yohana also put on several “open mic” events to showcase the talent in the neighborhood which EP would take great pride in helping organize. These open mics were held at the Bindlestiff theater in the SOMA, a performing arts theater that since the late 1990s has played a substantial role in the development of Filipino American performing arts.<sup>90</sup> Continuing in an artistic legacy built at Bindlestiff the “Ignite Open Mic” events organized by Yohana allowed EP to build connections with other youth both inside and outside of the community, as well as have his first performance as a rapper. Taking part in these campaigns and open mic events were significant for EP in shaping his identity around creative artistic expression, and inter-ethnic community solidarity shaped by his desire to serve those most vulnerable in society.

Other interviewees including Mavy E and Bettina recalled attending and performing at the Yohana open mics as well, contributing to a group affiliation amongst themselves and other Filipino artists. In addition, as a member of Yohana, EP and other youth were led on a trip to Delano California to learn about the United Farmworkers and the history of Filipino labor leaders like Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz, tying the legacy of the Farm workers to present day Filipino American political consciousness. EP recalls how this experience “opened his eyes”

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<sup>90</sup>Balance. *Tropical Renditions*, 138.

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to parts of his own identity as this was the very first time in America he remembers learning about a specific history of Filipinos in the United States as opposed to in the Philippines.

According to EP his music and relationship with organizing continue to grow and be informed by one another. In keeping with the boastful or prideful trends in rap music EP strives to make music that is celebratory of his community and organizing culture.

EP:

“As I'm getting older and I've gotten used to organizing I'm trying to find a way to like take my [rap]influences who are all like really confident and really expressive and they flex a lot of stuff but you know it's mostly like some capitalistic shit like gold and all of that stuff. I'm like how can I turn it to where I could flex about my own shit and flex about like me organizing and all of that stuff, because as I grow older at the end of the day I want everything to be for the people.”

Here EP is alluding to the connections between his own cultural production of rap music and his pride and identity around community organizing. EP seems to view both aspects of his life as a part of the same end goal. A goal of serving his community. EP does not refer to his community as simply the Filipino community but rather a racially diverse working class community existing in the SOMA. Amihan a childhood friend of Mavy-E, shares how for Mavy “it wasn't separate... he was developing his music and at the same time developing his understanding of community issues through SOMCAN.”

Also based in the South of Market is an organization called West Bay. Mavy-E and Bettina both have continued to work with this organization that began in 1977 and serves as a

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multi-purpose Filipino center with the goal of serving youth in the South of Market.<sup>91</sup> West Bay, runs an afterschool program where Bettina worked as the high school coordinator for mainly Filipino high school youth and Mavy-E works as a middle school coordinator. Bettina recalls that on her first day she started a “rap cypher”<sup>92</sup> recognizing that some youth already had talent and were already rapping. This process was reflective of her own identity formation within hip hop culture. She explains her feelings of acceptance in the art form as someone with a racialized and immigrant identity.

Bettina:

“Hip hop was like, the reason why I felt confident in myself period as like an immigrant coming in here you know. As like someone who didn't look white you know what I mean? Like ya it was like my home like I felt like I was going home, cause like I didn't really feel that way. I always felt like an outsider always did, and when I was in hip hop I felt relieved, I was like I'm home.”

A similar youth group to Yohana existed in the Excelsior district called Kabataan (KBT) that operates out of the Filipino Community Center (FCC). Amihan, a member of KBT while in high school, recalls how several of her mentors in this organization, were all involved in hip hop. KBT consisted of weekly workshops, both pertaining to cultural education about the Philippines and learning about political issues that affect Filipino youth, and youth more generally. Amihan recalls how hip hop was often used as a culturally relevant tool and had an important role in this education process.

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<sup>91</sup>Jastillana, Marco. “West Bay Pilipino Multi-Service Center.” SOMA PILIPINAS. SOMA PILIPINAS, July 13, 2018. <https://www.somapilipinas.org/community-1/2018/7/13/west-bay-pilipino-multi-service-center>.

<sup>92</sup>Collectively rapping in an improvised freestyle a.k.a “freestyle cypher.” Viola. “W.E.B. Du Bois and Filipino/a American Exposure Programs to the Philippines.”

Amihan:

“It was interesting because the ways they would also connect to us and teach us certain things was through hip hop....Even just listening to like Rocky Rivera and analyzing her songs or listening to local artist talk about these things and like learning from them or like expanding on what they're talking about and that was like the connection like to youth doing it through hip hop.”

JT found a similar value in hip hop as Amihan and the important intersection between rap and activism that shapes his identity. JT describes how in high school, community organizers and educators from the Filipino Community Center began to take interest in him, encouraging him to pursue his poetry and teaching him about grassroots organizing. At the time JT also recalls having frequent military recruiters visit his school and his disdain for their “aggressive” and “toxic” attitudes. His connections with the FCC eventually led to JT taking part in “mobilizations” against the Iraq War, the major political event of the period. Eventually JT became a part of a youth and student organization in the Excelsior called ALAY. ALAY or, Active Leadership to Advance Youth, used hip hop as a tool in the educational process for the community members involved. A hip hop workshop, similar to those described by Amihan, was held by prominent local Filipino hip hop artists, including Pele, Nomi from Power Struggle, and Kiwi from the Native Guns. JT explains the inspiration and education received from the mentorship of these artists recalling how they allowed him to see what was possible through music.

JT:



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“They had a hip hop workshop that was led by prominent local Filipino hip hop artists at the time... we created songs and talked about our experiences and our perspective on issues. They got like twenty young rappers together to make a hip hop mixtape with like hella posse cuts like three or four people per song. That was really informative for me, at the time, I was the youngest in the group... [it] kind of helped me develop my writing and actually consider taking writing seriously.”

JT recalls the kinship formed by this hip hop/activist community recalling how Pele, who today works in the Philippines with indigenous schools, even let JT stay in his home for half a school year in order for him to “focus on school and kind of focus away from, you know, family challenges.” An example of the lyrics and themes explored through the music that would come out of this hip hop workshop are as follows:

“The smell of *sampaguita* sun beaming down on my face,  
without this craze embrace the image where my lineage trace,  
a couple thousand miles away from you never felt far,  
spit the bars speaking knowledge with the sun and the stars,  
I hold the blood line of soldiers she gave birth too,  
absorb the love unconditional the things you been through.”

-“Filipino Kulture”

A similar process of implementing hip hop as a means to educate in an organizational setting was practiced by Mavy-E with the West Bay youth he works with. He explains how he

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has led the youth in engaging in “music analysis.” For example with the Black Eyed Peas song “Where is the Love” he asked the youth to apply this song to the present day. Engaging the youth in music analysis provided a culturally relevant educational process. He also explains that during the summer they had organized hip hop classes including, breakdancing, beat making and writing lyrics. Mavy acknowledges that during the school year the main focus in his mentorship is around homework completion and other class related activities and therefore hip hop is incorporated into a larger education system only when possible.

Pat became a mentor at KBT the youth program at the Filipino Community Center in the Excelsior during his time at San Francisco State University. Continuing his work with the youth program today, Pat discusses challenges in relating with some of the youth who have less interest in hip hop instead preferring other popular music such as Korean Pop (K-Pop). Despite Pat's love for rap music, and the art forms' impact on his involvement with organizing, he explains how there are many ways to relate to youth, and what is of primary importance is being a mentor to help youth succeed in their daily lives. For Pat it is not a coincidence that many of his peers involved in hip hop also organize and work with youth in the community.

Pat:

“A lot of folks who are involved in hip hop usually what that means is that they are alongside young people... I think a lot of it is realizing the importance of having our heritage and stories told from our own perspective... The young people we work with listen to us and we also are able to learn from them and kind of meld our experiences together and craft a story that encapsulates the experiences of Filipinos here in the *Yay Area*.”

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Local and Transnational: Expanding Views on “Filipino-ness”

Involvement in hip hop and activism has led to exploration and expanding notions for those interviewed regarding their own identity as Filipinos. One important project that has allowed youth to explore their own identity as Filipino Americans, are opportunities to travel to the Philippines on what are known as “exposure trips.” Filipino Americans have been able to use the expressive means of hip hop to enhance and analyze their own experiences during these trips to the Philippines. This process has provided youth with first hand experience of the neocolonial conditions of the country and a “Third World” polity, specifically allowing them to integrate with the National Democratic Movement in the Philippines.

In a local context, hip hop and its intersection with activism have pushed youth towards seeing themselves aligned with other racialized youth in America, and in doing so as part of a larger geography mapped by colonization, migration and activism. In line with Harrison's explanation of “project identities” both exposure trips and local activism have helped to give rise to a “global Filipino” identity linking the diaspora to histories of colonialism, present day struggles in the Philippines, and a collective vision for transforming social systems. Of the nine artists interviewed four have been able to attend exposure trips. This section will explore both the local and transnational contexts.

Local Context

For Pat reflective of his diverse minority community in Pittsburg, hip hop began to form an identity around solidarity and collective notions of marginalization with other racialized communities in the United States and nationalities around the world.

Pat:

“...I think what hip hop always provided for me was that it exposed [that], because I listened to all types of hip hop... I listened to a lot of different artists from the early and mid 2000s that even openly criticized a lot of the things that happened following 9/11. The attack on the Iraqi people, the attacks on Palestinian people, the overall anti-immigrant sentiment that started to foment because of the so-called War on Terror that started then but is still going on today. But this was communicated by different hip hop artists who said ‘nah fuck that shit, we’re a people who’ve had things stolen from us, even had our identities, our tongues and our cultures stolen from us but through the development of this culture[hip hop] we try to reclaim.”

This period of time after 9/11, that Pat is referring to, according to Harrison, created a national context for the emergence of a Filipino voice that took aim at the excesses of American global capitalism and military reach.<sup>93</sup>

Mavy-E explains similar ties to other racial communities through his appreciation for hip hop stating how “rap has made me a better person.” He discusses how listening to 2Pac as one of his first rap influences allowed him to relate, and see his own identity as a Filipino in relation with other marginalized groups. Mavy states how he began “politically thinking about what he[2pac] was going through” and how the poverty and gentrification he witnessed in SoMa was

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<sup>93</sup>Harrison “‘Change That Wouldn’t Fill a Homeless Man’s Cup up.’” 147

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reflective of this. Both Mavy and Pat began to see their identities as Filipinos as wrapped up with the identity and the struggles of other marginalized groups through the narratives presented to them in rap music. This realization was expressed by Pat to be key in his eventual involvement in organizing and activism.

Transnational Context

JT's involvement in poetry was essential in leading to his engagement with ALAY, and his engagement with anti-war rallies against the Iraq War. Through ALAY, and under the leadership of prominent Filipino American rappers, JT was able to return, for only the second time since his migration to the U.S., back to his motherland. JT, as a representative of ALAY was part of a 2014 relief mission and “exposure trip” for Typhoon Haiyan led by the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns (NAFCON). It was on this trip that JT fully became aware of the vision of the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines.

JT:

“Being able to go [to the Philippines] to see where our fundraising went showed me that kind of my vision to help create lasting change was being practiced and exercised by alliances like NAFCON and the National Democratic Movement, and so that motivated me to continue being part of it hopefully for life, that's where my mind and my heart is like this is what I want to dedicate my life too.”

This transnational view of his own 1.5 generation immigrant identity through the activist work of the National Democratic Movement, is present within the narratives of his music.

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Michael Viola discusses the role of hip hop in “nurturing critical consciousness and radical identity formations in transforming social relations of race, class and gender.”<sup>94</sup> For JT authenticity is what is most important and in expressing what is authentic to him through the cultural production of rap music he hopes it may lead to others having an authentic interest in this movement.

Amihan explains how her music is used to share her own voice within activism. Even before attending her first exposure trip Amihan explains how music gave her an important “artistic and creative space in organizing to talk about the issues.” Amihan attended an exposure trip in 2018 to the Philippines with her mother. Having just turned twenty the trip would be her first time going to the Philippines. She would take part on a documentation trip with filmmakers who were members of the National Alliance of Filipino Concerns (NAFCON). On this trip Amihan and her mother were able to integrate with members of the Aeta indigenous peoples who were under threat of being displaced by building developments for the Southeast Asian games to be held in the Philippines.

During the trip she saw poetry and spoken word used by youth in the educational discussions or ED’s. “So we’d go around to the *sitios*<sup>95</sup> and talk about certain issues and that night of the birthday party like all the youth that had formed a mini ED... the youth did like some spoken word and rap type pieces about what they just learned.” Amihan would later use her own music to share, and analyze the experiences she had on her exposure trip.

Amihan:

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<sup>94</sup>Viola. “W.E.B. Du Bois and Filipino/a American Exposure Programs to the Philippines.”

<sup>95</sup>Small usually rural towns making up a barangay (administrative areas within a city).

“I wrote a song about the expo trip which I shared at our report back for it. It was interesting because I started writing the song before I even knew I was going to the Philippines [so] the first part was kind of like reflecting and like longing to go there, and then the second part I wrote after the trip... It was like ok, the first part is like this is what I know about the issues and the second part is like these are the actual experiences I had with the peasants and workers and indigenous people over there.”

The “report back” where Amihan would share her song, is a process where participants of exposure trips share their experiences with their communities and networks back in the U.S. Report backs may take formal or informal approaches ranging from discussions in homes to events with labor unions or at universities. Participants are often encouraged to use “creative cultural mediums and pedagogical practices such as mixed media, documentaries and music, when sharing their experiences while abroad.”<sup>96</sup>

For Santi, rap and poetry also played a role during his exposure trip to the Philippines as a member of Anakbayan San Francisco. Whilst integrating with youth activists at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Santi recalls sharing his own raps during group dialogs. Viola explains how during exposure trips “classes, mutual dialog, community workshops and formal and informal discussions are facilitated to immerse participants in the everyday conditions of the Philippines.”<sup>97</sup> One example of this recalled by Santi were the “room to room” discussions led by youth activists at the University discussing the work being done “to combat the exploitation, displacement and poverty.” Santi recalls activists encouraging him to share his work.

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<sup>96</sup>Viola, “W.E.B. Du Bois and Filipino/a American Exposure Programs to the Philippines,” 513.

<sup>97</sup>Viola, “W.E.B. Du Bois and Filipino/a American Exposure Programs to the Philippines,” 512.

Santi:

“I was able to share... in the beginning of the room to rooms and that was just so cool because like this was stuff that I wrote in the United States with the Philippines in my heart and on my mind and communicated through my words. Being able to share it in the Philippines with young people was so dope because they were really receptive to it and that's what's so cool about hip hop it's something that really speaks to people especially young people.”

Pat would travel to the Philippines on an exposure trip at the same time as JT, six months after Typhoon Haiyan in 2014. While Pat attended this trip as a member of the collegiate organization Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE), as opposed to an activist or community based organization, he worked closely with other organizations outside of academic institutions whilst in the Philippines. As an exposure trip and just his second time in the country, Pat recalls it being drastically different than his previous visit. Pat explains his thoughts while integrating with local communities.

Pat:

“I had a lot of questions. Like why do they have nothing? Why do they have to live in a way that they do? And after learning through the different organizations about the overlying systemic things that keep the Filipino people in adverse poverty and then to go and integrate into communities in the countryside it was like ‘woah, people are really out here struggling.’ But I think beyond that it was the way they were fighting and how they would organize themselves to make sure that no one goes hungry or if they were going hungry the ways they could figure out how to survive and fight another day.”



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Pat goes on to explain how this trip helped form his understanding of a global social order responsible for much of the suffering he witnessed.

Pat:

“I mean definitely the injustices of the world are very much connected to the different kinds of policies that our government here enacts... you know they try to cover it up. like ‘Oh, all these types of funding to dispose of governments all serves our interest in parts of the world.’ So for me I was like ‘Oh America ain’t nothing but a big ass bully’... It was enraging really. I was like ‘why do things have to be this way?’ They don't have to be this way. And I think with all these problems we have going on, all these struggles it's also good to keep in mind we fight as much as we can but we still try to find the joy in between.”

For Santi his experience during his exposure trip helped him to realize that “this is the homeland this is the heartland, I'm like an offshoot of this place I am part of the Philippine diaspora in this way.” Santi views his art as an important part of his own organizing, especially in processing, analyzing and using his platform to share important stories linking the diaspora and the homeland.

Santi:

“I think that really instilled a sense of urgency to share and share creatively through music through hip hop through poetry and through organizing and tapping into that vein of how real and urgent the situation is for Filipinos in the Philippines and Filipinos overseas, and how those are very connected and related in very direct ways.”

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This connection is a sentiment shared by Pat who explains how he still holds onto the memories of his exposure trip to “remind him what he is *rooted* in” helping to locate his own identity amongst a collective history and a vision part of the National Democratic Movement. Amihan explains a similar perspective describing a verse she wrote for a collaborative song with other Filipino American rappers. She shows how her experiences in the Philippines helped to link the geographies of the homeland and diaspora. She explains her lyrics were about being:

“Born and raised here in SF, second generation and then kind of going into the gentrification of the city and then... how the organizing here and the movement here is like a continuation of the revolution in the Philippines, you know it's not separate. I don't know how to explain but... it's not separated, it's like a continuation.”

Filipino American youth have been able to use the art form of rap music as a tool to enhance, analyze and share their experiences integrating with different sectors of Philippine society including students, workers, and indigenous people within a larger movement for social change. In doing so they have helped in forging transnational links between themselves and the homeland. On a local level artists involvement in hip hop has been used as a culturally relevant tool within community organizations especially around the mentorship of youth. Both locally and internationally artists are able to locate “Filipino-ness” alongside other racialized youth in the United States, and as part of a larger geography mapped by colonization, migration and activism.

**Conclusion**

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Over 70 years after Carlos Bulosan presented his own generations' struggles and explored identity in his book *America is in the Heart*, Filipinos in American continue to grapple with their identity as part of the Filipino diaspora. Hip hop culture created by Black American, Puerto Rican and Afro-Caribbean communities in the Bronx, NY, has become a critical site in which Filipino American youth creatively analyze and share their own experiences and histories. One arena where the cultural artform of rap has found productive uses is the field of activism and community organizing.

This paper has explored a legacy of progressive Filipino migrants during the U.S. colonial period, and subsequent generations of Filipino Americans who have organized movements around both local and transnational projects. The San Francisco Bay Area, a central location in the historic and ongoing dispersal of Filipinos from their country, is an important site for Filipinos in both hip hop and activism. Here through an intersection of rap and activism 1.5 and second generation Filipino youth shape “Filipino-ness” into a sight of political identification, rooted in anti-colonialism and transformative projects. This paper has explored the migration experiences, early life, and the ways in which youth have become involved in both hip hop and community organizing/activism. My findings have exhibited how rap music provides a utility for youth in analyzing their own lived realities, and has given them space within collective activism where they begin to form co-ethnic solidarity as well as connections between the diaspora and the homeland. These connections to the Philippines become most evident around the exposure trips Filipino youth participate in and work to bridge a geographical and conceptual gap between the diaspora and the Philippines.

The purpose of this research paper was to understand how post-colonial immigrants work to build a sense of identity in the communities which they have formed in the diaspora. As exemplified in the “Literature Review” different mediums of art have helped provide a meaningful site where Filipinos make sense of their own complex existence in America. The ways in which the arts help form connections between the diaspora and homeland is a particularly noteworthy area for further research to be pursued. While my research focused on Filipino Americans, within the Philippines similar artists invested in their social and political contexts exist. Evidence of this can be seen in groups like the Concerned Artists of the Philippines formed by progressive artists during the Philippine Martial Law period. Even more recently CNN Philippines profiled a collective known as Sandata. Sandata is made up of both Filipino researchers and rappers who recently toured cities in the U.S. presenting data as well as hip hop performances about President Rodrigo Duterte's War on Drugs. Studies may delve into the ways in which these artists from the homeland are in conversation with Filipino Americans or in conversation a wider international community concerned with human rights and social change. Most interestingly research analyzing what values, if any, the art and those creating it have in forming transnational communities and in shaping identity around larger social movements should be pursued.

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