Mahalaya: Building Community in the Filipinx Diaspora through Solidarity Journalism

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Mahalaya: Building Community in the Filipinx Diaspora through Solidarity Journalism

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Master of Arts in Migration Studies

University of San Francisco

May 2022
MAHALAYA: BUILDING COMMUNITY IN THE FILIPINX DIASPORA THROUGH SOLIDARITY JOURNALISM

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER IN MIGRATION STUDIES

By Casey Ticsay

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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.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of Problem

Unethical approaches to storytelling in professional journalism continue to shape public discourse around the diverse experiences of Asians and Asian Americans. This paper analyzes the origins and impact of ethnic news media, specifically the rise of Filipino and Filipino American press in the United States, and the ways journalists of color continue to challenge traditional practices of professional journalism that perpetuate anti-Blackness and maintain white supremacy. Filipino and Filipino American newspapers in the early twentieth century were frequently led by Filipino immigrants, students, and journalists in the diaspora. The publications provide historical insight into the issues, debates, and conversations transpiring at the time and highlight the community’s ongoing response to the misrepresentations and invisibilization of their experiences in mainstream media. Ultimately, I emphasize the need for a critical understanding of the history and foundation of professional journalism. Using this project as an example, I propose a shift toward a thick solidarity approach to newsgathering and mediamaking in both professional and community journalism.

Purpose of the Project

Violence against Asians and Asian Americans, while not new in the nation’s history, became more visible in mainstream media and only increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. This violence took many forms: Donald Trump’s inflammatory rhetoric that fueled xenophobic and anti-Asian sentiments, verbal harassment and physical assaults on Asian American seniors, mass deportations of Southeast Asian refugees under the newly-elected Biden administration, the disproportionate number of COVID-related deaths among Filipino American healthcare workers.
professionals, and the Atlanta-area shootings in March 2021 that killed eight people, including six women of Asian descent.

As awareness about the impacts and pervasiveness of anti-Asian racism grew, so did Asian American activism and the movement to collectively build political power with other communities of color. Asian American organizers held nationwide marches, rallies, and vigils to support directly impacted people, memorialize victims, and condemn the racialized violence against Asian Americans. Students and educators advocated for ethnic studies courses and school curriculum that amplifies Asian American history. Immigrant rights coalitions mobilized to keep families together and bring an end to the mass incarceration, immigration detention, and deportation of Black and brown community members. Local organizations launched mutual aid programs to address food and housing insecurity in underserved communities and provide access to health and public safety resources and training. While politicians applauded the passage of the Covid-19 Hate Crimes Act, Asian American and Pacific Islander advocacy groups resisted, demanding more community-based solutions rather than symbolic measures that only maintain police and state violence.

However, Asian American activism has been “rendered conspicuously invisible” despite taking place over many decades (Rodriguez & Fujino, 2022, p. 3). Therefore, the goal of this project is to not only advocate for the rights, safety, and well-being of Filipinx through solidarity journalism but to continue to build and strengthen the Asian American social justice movement of previous generations.
Methodology

The frameworks I used to build this project include solidarity journalism, thick solidarity, and critical kapwa. A solidarity approach to journalism prioritizes accuracy over neutrality, centers the perspectives of sources with the most insight into an issue, and commits to ethical news reporting (Varma, 2021). Solidarity journalism includes five key aspects:

1. Making newsworthiness decisions based on assessing if a community’s dignity is being denigrated.
2. Centering the perspectives of sources who know the most about an issue or event rather than skewing coverage towards outside “experts” or officials.
3. Including the perspectives of all affected by an issue.
4. Setting a standard for truth based on people’s lived experiences.
5. Representing consensus across those affected (Varma, 2021)

Gina Baleria (2022) further builds on this journalistic approach. She calls on the need for community engagement, which involves building and maintaining relationships with people, organizations, and representatives, learning about the issues important to targeted readers and understanding the historical context and background of community relations. Community engagement becomes even more crucial when journalists approach communities that are not their own or may generally be marginalized or underserved.

I also draw from scholarship by Roseann Liu and Savannah Shange (2018) on thick solidarity, which in the case of this project, encourages journalists of color to reflect on their roles within the U.S. media landscape to achieve a deeper form of solidarity with one another. Maharaj “Raju” Desai (2016) provides a helpful framework for self-reflection called critical kapwa. Critical kapwa recognizes a shared identity and the ways interpersonal relationships
function and are maintained within this collective identity. It embodies a community with a deep connection and commitment to one another that they function as one. Using a thick solidarity approach to journalism that is grounded in critical kapwa and embraces community engagement shifts the traditional and uneven power dynamics between the journalist and the storyteller or community covered.

**Significance of the Project**

Desai (2016) describes the trauma and devastating effect that Spanish and U.S. colonialism has had on the lives and identities of Filipina/o Americans, such as the internalization of white supremacy, shame, colonial mentality, hetero-patriarchy, and the belief that America is a land of opportunity. Though rooted in the past, these colonial traumas “manifest themselves in the lives of Filipina/o Americans today who may or may not be able to recognize them as such” (p. 35). The need to create spaces where Filipinx youth can learn about their heritage, history, and interconnectedness with one another is significant. This project is critical kapwa, not as a mere concept or notion, but kapwa in action. As an open pedagogy, critical kapwa can help cultivate spaces needed to engage in collective liberation and activism and overcome the community’s colonial past and present trauma. I believe *Mahalaya* can serve as an additional opportunity, tool, and space for Filipinx across generations to engage in dialogue with one another and share their unique, diverse, and shared narratives.
Definition of Terms

How people of Philippine origin or descent in diasporic communities, particularly in the United States, identify has evolved over the years: Filipino, Filipina, Filipinx, Filipin@, Pinoy, Pinay, Pilipino, Pilipina, Pilipin@, Pin@y. Thus, terms about identity published in Mahalaya may be used interchangeably and will vary depending on the content and focus of an article or a speaker’s personal experience. Similarly, I may also use different terms throughout this academic essay, including “Filipino,” “Filipina/o,” “Filipino American,” and “Filipinx,” when discussing historical context or referring to specific individuals, organizations, or institutions.

My decision to define Mahalaya as a “Filipinx” publication and use various terms regarding identity throughout this project is intentional. “Filipinx,” a term commonly used in the United States as a gender-neutral alternative for “Filipino” or “Filipina,” has sparked global debates about language, identity, and colonialism. Proponents of “Filipinx” say the term acknowledges gender fluidity and is more inclusive to non-binary individuals. In contrast, views in opposition to “Filipinx” suggest it is a Western intervention that misrepresents the Tagalog language as gendered and alienates the lived experiences of those outside the American diaspora.

Since Mahalaya is a project founded in the United States, it speaks from the lens of people in the diaspora. Therefore, I use “Filipinx” to refer to the Filipinx American community at large. It is not my ambition nor this project’s purpose to define culture or impose a singular identity but to recognize and respect the diverse lived experiences and wide range of identities and gender expressions that community members of Philippine origin or descent hold in the United States.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Racialization of news in professional journalism

Donald Trump’s relentless attack on U.S. journalists as the “enemy of the people” can not be understated (Carlson, Robinson, & Lewis, 2020). His actions contributed to the growth of white nationalist media that “normalize racist stereotypes and endorse the creation of a white society” (Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes, 2018, p. 84). However, white nationalist forms of news in the United States are not unique to the Trump era, nor is professional journalism exempt from participating in the persistent racialization of news that defines and reproduces whiteness. Professional journalism in the United States has always been predominantly white. News produced primarily by white journalists that focus primarily on white communities and is “targeted at white audiences claims the label of professional journalism” (Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes, 2018, p. 78). However, with each new generation comes a reexamination of the role of journalism and writers.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2014) explain how a system of racial meanings, stereotypes, and racial ideology appears to be a permanent feature of American culture and media. Following the Reconstruction in the South, white publishers and editors used their newspapers to build, nurture, and protect a white supremacist and anti-Black society (Forde et al., 2021). Racist editorials, opinion pieces, and political cartoons published throughout history reveal how white journalists, publishers, and editors were indeed political actors who used their positions and publications to influence public opinion around immigration, build and sustain systems that criminalized Black people and spread misinformation about people they viewed as a threat (González & Torres, 2012).
For example, during the American colonial period in the Philippines, professional journalism often referred to Filipinos as America’s “Little Brown Brothers” and published commentary arguing that the Filipino people were “not yet ready for independence” and self-government. “The Filipino’s First Bath” is a political cartoon published on the cover of *Judge* magazine in 1899 that refers to Filipinos as “dirty” (Yuri Education Project, 2022). President William McKinley is shown giving a bath to a Filipino “baby” in a body of water labeled “Civilization” and with a brush labeled “Education.” Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, American officials and journalists also referred to Filipinos and Filipino immigrants in the United States as “savages,” “morally inferior,” and “stupid” (Flores, 2004).

Sharon Lee (2006) expands on the racial formation of Asian Americans and points to racist projects constructed by policymakers, educators, and journalists that simultaneously depict Asians as the *yellow peril foreigner* and the *model minority*. Newspapers were key players in dividing the U.S. labor force along racial lines. The overrepresentation of Asian Americans as the “model minority” is the work and agenda of white supremacy meant to “essentialize Asian Americans and pit them against other groups, primarily African Americans” (Lee, 2006). William Petersen’s *New York Times* article, “Success Story, Japanese American Style,” is one of the earliest depictions of the Model Minority Myth that served to chastise African Americans and other minorities for their activist work in the Civil Rights Movement (Lee, 2006). The “seamless continuum” of yellow peril and “model minority” representations in professional journalism, otherwise referred to as mainstream media, “overlooks persistent racial discrimination against Asians in the United States and the historical and structural reasons that account for Asian American socio-economic mobility” (Lee, 2006, p. 4).
Professional journalism rests on a pluralist model of democracy and continues to protect the status quo, essentialize culture, and trivialize diversity (Glasser et al., 2009). The failure of professional journalism on matters of race and ethnicity is systemic. It can be seen in how the U.S. government censored, silenced, and implemented laws preventing people of color from publishing, printing, distributing news, or owning licenses to broadcast (González & Torres, 2012). The racialization of communities of color in mainstream media, along with the racial exclusion of non-white journalists, gave rise to an opposition press in the United States, more commonly referred to as “ethnic” or “minority” media or “alternative” press. However, it is important to recognize that this distinction, created by white media, further racializes any being who challenges the status quo of professional journalism and threatens its white racial power.

The rise of ethnic media and “alternative press”

*America’s pioneer publications by journalists of color*

Through archival research of colonial newspapers, Juan González and Joseph Torres (2012) demonstrate how racial divisions and racial segregation have shaped the U.S. media system and how Americans receive information. According to their research, people of color published more than one hundred newspapers in the United States before the Civil War. Founded in 1827, the *Freedom’s Journal* was the first Black-owned newspaper in the country. *Cherokee Phoenix*, the first Native American newspaper established in 1828, was published weekly in English and Cherokee. While not the first Hispanic newspaper in the United States, *El Habanero* was the most influential and is credited alongside the *Freedom’s Journal* and *Cherokee Phoenix* as one of America’s pioneer publications by people of color. The three publications, forged in direct opposition to racism and colonial conquest, gave voice to “the moral and political struggle of a people who had long been denied their rights” (p. 65).
Early editors of color resisted sensationalized news coverage, opposed a commercially driven and centralized media system, and “persistently pleaded for the news media to adopt a more responsible social role in relation to the public” (p. 66). Despite a common purpose and the white population’s ignorance of this new press, disagreements between editors and journalists within the same ethnic group as well as racial and ethnic bias among one group toward another were present and remained a challenge to this day.

Filipino and Filipino American press in the United States

Scholar Jean Vengua (2010) provides an in-depth analysis of the Filipino and Filipino American press in the United States during the early 20th century. She studies eight Filipino periodicals in the western United States to better understand the literary production and history of Filipino writing in the United States and how these periodicals reinforced the formation of Filipino communities. Publications included the Three Stars, Philippines Mail, Filipino Pioneer, Philippine Advocate, Philippine Examiner, and Philippine Journal.

Community newspapers were central to Filipino and Filipino American life in the United States. Many early newspapers published stories in English, Tagalog, Cebuano, and Ilocano and had editors and contributors deeply involved in community organizations and labor organizing (Mabalon, 2013). With a unique mission, style, and geographical reach, each publication reflected the issues and activism of the Asian and Asian American community during the time. Not all publications agreed with one another; debates around Philippine-U.S. relations and Philippine independence varied, along with the newspaper’s focus and tone (Ishizuka, 2018).

Aside from Vengua’s research, scholarship on Asian American journalism and the contributions to the field made by Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Southwest Asian journalists remains inadequate (González & Torres, 2012).
A shift towards thick solidarity in journalism

And these are times that demand of the writer to declare his positive stand – his supreme sacrifice – on the question of war or peace, life or death. The writer who sides with and gives his voice to democracy and progress is a real writer, because he writes to protect man and restore his dignity. He writes so that this will be a world of mutual cooperation, mutual protection, mutual love; so that darkness, ignorance, brutality, exploitation of man by another, and deceit will be purged from the face of the earth. Carlos Bulosan, 1995

The fallacy of journalistic objectivity

According to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2021), journalism’s first obligation is to the truth, and loyalty is to citizens. They view journalistic truth as a goal and process over time that requires more than mere accuracy but concentrates on context and verification. As noble as “seeking truth” in professional journalism may appear, “how a journalist goes about fulfilling that goal must change dramatically” (p. 67). Failure to do so has significant implications, such as in the case of immigrants in the United States. In his book Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen, journalist and filmmaker Jose Antonio Vargas (2018) describes mainstream media’s coverage of immigration as “lackluster at best and irresponsible at worst, promoting and sustaining stereotypes while spreading misinformation” (p. 129).

Practices of neutrality and objective reporting that emerged in the twentieth century emphasize a “two-sided version of balance” that separates facts from opinion, attributes opinions to sources, and prefers description over-interpretation (Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes, 2018). In essence, to achieve journalistic “objectivity,” journalists sacrifice people’s humanity (Vargas, 2018, p. 127). The Black press in the United States has long critiqued traditional notions of objectivity (Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes, 2018). Situating news as a voice for equality and social justice, they challenge the power of white media and racism:

“In this context, the Black Lives Matter movement and the reemergent Black press are powerful because they serve as valuable interventions that disrupt narratives produced by
both white professional media and white nationalist media. The history of racial
capitalism and the Black press, however, teach us that white supremacy is quite adept at
coopting social movements that make material demands for justice” (Alamo-Pastrana &
Hoynes, 2018, p. 88).

Viewing objectivity as the foundation of professional journalism has only concealed the
field’s proximity to whiteness and resulted in the continued marginalization of journalists of
color. As Kathy Roberts Forde and Sid Bedingfield (2021) explain, journalism is neither a
neutral institution nor a neutral cultural product. Moreover, journalists are not neutral actors even
when they attempt to practice or strive for objectivity and impartiality in their work.

**Defining solidarity**

Solidarity journalism provides a much-needed framework for newsrooms and journalists.
However, what is solidarity? “Is solidarity a feeling of compassion and recognition of injustice?
Does it require action?” (Nikunen, 2019, p. 15). Drawing on social theory, political economy,
and cultural studies, Kaarina Nikunen (2019) explores how journalists and media have the power
to evoke and obstruct meaningful social and political solidarity. She views solidarity as a “shared
sense of responsibility and alliance that is formed horizontally rather than vertically” (p. 15).
Central to the concept of solidarity, Nikunen says, is the capability to imagine alternative visions
of the future.

Anita Varma (2020) defines solidarity as a “commitment to social justice that translates
into action” and serves as an alternative to empathy for it “shifts focus from the relatable
individual to the contours of systemic factors” that impact entire communities (p. 2). Evoking
empathy through “pity narratives” rather than enacting solidarity has consequences. As Andre
Dao and Sienna Merope (2018) explain, pity narratives “dehumanize narrators, portraying them
as two-dimensional victims rather than as complex, multifaceted human beings” (p. 61).
Prioritizing victim narratives can lead to empathy fatigue in which readers can no longer connect
Solidarity journalism is not a new phenomenon, nor are its practices challenging to adopt. Journalists of color, specifically the Black press in the early nineteenth century, challenged the white racial narrative in American news and still do so today. For example, Black editors “repeatedly linked their own community’s fight for racial equality to the desire for national freedom among non-white peoples in other parts of the world” (González & Torres, 2012, p. 179). This included news coverage in Black publications that denounced the occupation of the Philippines and the U.S. government’s rejection of Emilio Aguinaldo’s declaration of Filipino independence.

**Solidarity journalism in ethnic media**

Solidarity journalism has limitations and can result in a surface-level approach to allyship or notions of shared suffering that “creates a false equivalence between different experiences of racialized violence” (Liu & Shange, 2018). Diane C. Fujino and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (2022) explain how allyship, as opposed to solidarity, is how many folks in the Asian American community situate their politics in relation to the Black struggle today.

A solidarity approach to reporting in professional journalism may look different than a solidarity approach to reporting in ethnic media or community journalism. According to Claire Jean Kim (2022) and her research on racial triangulation, Asian Americans are not white but, above all, not Black. Keeping in mind the role of white supremacy and anti-Blackness in both the Asian American community and overall U.S. mediascape, I call for an approach grounded in what Liu and Shange (2018) refer to as *thick solidarity*. Thick solidarity, the scholars say, is
based on a “radical belief in the inherent value of each other’s lives despite never being able to fully understand or fully share in the experience of those lives” (p. 2).

Asian Americans must recognize how (mis)representations of the community in U.S. media still influence how their experiences are portrayed today. At the same time, it is also necessary for Asian American journalists and publications to reflect on their approaches to journalism, for some news coverage may fall into *people-of-color-blindness* — a refusal to acknowledge the systemic privileges and oppression that exist among different people of color (Liu & Shange, 2018).

**Summary**

Analyzing news coverage among ethnic media demonstrates how journalists of color resisted norms in professional journalism and organized against the problematic portrayals of their communities. Questioning how professional journalism (mis)informs audiences and upholds anti-Blackness and white supremacy in its content, along with its impact on ethnic media, particularly the Asian American press, can help journalists and readers critically understand and identify systems of oppression.
Chapter Three: The Project and its Development

Description of the Project

Mahalaya, meaning love and freedom, is a Filipinx community newspaper based in San Francisco, California. Powered by a staff of dedicated volunteers, this free monthly publication centers Filipinx voices and experiences in and beyond the Bay Area through solidarity journalism. A vital component of this project is its focus on immigrant rights and narratives. In addition to having a News, Arts and Culture, Opinion, and Poetry section, Mahalaya features an ongoing Immigration section that shares community actions, stories, and resources. Editors work directly with contributors, whether or not they have a journalism background.

Development of the Project

Phase One: The logistics behind establishing a community newspaper

I divided the development of the project into four distinct phases. The first phase focused on the logistics of building a community newspaper from the ground up. Throughout the fall semester of 2021, I researched and analyzed eight neighborhood newspapers belonging to the San Francisco Neighborhood Newspaper Association to determine common elements and themes. I compiled a list of questions that I had during this process:

1. What is the cost of printing a monthly newspaper?
2. What printing company should I use? How many copies should I print?
3. Frequency of the paper. Daily, biweekly, monthly, or quarterly?
4. Size and dimensions of the newspaper? Type of paper used?
5. Where, when, and how will the newspaper be distributed?
6. Will this be a multilingual publication? If so, how many translators are needed? How will this impact the number of stories and pages, layout, and design of the paper?

7. Will the newspaper have an online presence (ex: social media, website, video, podcasts), and to what degree?

8. What potential partnerships in the community can be established? Which organizations do I plan to reach out to, and why?

9. How many volunteers and staff members are needed for a monthly newspaper?

10. What equipment or software (ex: cameras, computers, Adobe Creative Suite) is needed to assist with the development of the project? Who is the intended audience or readership?

11. Positionality of the newspaper. What issues, events, and experiences will the paper cover, and from what lens?

To address these questions and better understand how to operate and maintain a print newspaper, I contacted an editor of a local Latinx newspaper in San Francisco and attended various webinars featuring journalists from across California. From the information and notes I gathered during this phase, I could determine what elements, partnerships, and approaches would work best for my focus.

**Phase Two: Frameworks and scholarly articles**

I dedicated phase two to reading scholarly articles and researching frameworks related to journalism, solidarity, and the Filipinx community. While there is a lack of scholarship on this particular focus, research published in direct response to the issues Asian Americans faced throughout the pandemic and the role media and journalists played during this period began to surface. Fortunately, I came across the work of Dr. Anita Varma on solidarity journalism. Reading her articles led me to additional scholarship on alternative approaches to producing and
sharing news in journalism and the media industry. I also analyzed Filipino and Filipino American newspapers, most based in Seattle, Hawaii, and California, from the 1930s through the early 2000s. I learned how Filipinx in different communities across the country utilized journalism to reflect on and respond to the events, politics, and movements of their time.

More specifically, I sought to understand what solidarity journalism could look like in the context of the Filipinx community and what would be most effective and meaningful to highlight in a print newspaper. While Filipinx activism is not as visible in coverage conducted by major media outlets, it has always been present and continues to evolve with each new generation. By the end of this phase, I decided that one of the main goals of this project would be to highlight how Filipinx organized in the past and contribute to social justice movements today.

**Phase Three: Community engagement**

An essential task of phase three was to develop a project pitch to share with potential writers and volunteers. Gaining trust and building relationships with organizations and volunteers takes time, so it was important that I conveyed my message clearly and effectively. After finalizing my project pitch, I contacted a freelance graphic designer to create an informational flier about the project, which incorporated article excerpts from former community newspapers and personal family photos. I posted the flier on January 27, 2022, on the Master’s in Migration Studies’ Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook pages with the caption:

“Calling all writers, photographers, and designers! Cohort 5 student Casey Ticsay is developing a Filipinx community newspaper for her capstone project. Click the link in our bio if you’d like to learn more and contribute to the pilot issue that comes out in May 2022!” (M.A. in Migration Studies at USF, 2022)
The link referenced in the caption led people to a Google Form titled, “Filipinx Newspaper – Interest Form.” The form included the following questions:

1. Full name
2. Preferred gender pronoun
3. Email
4. Phone
5. What city are you based in?
6. What is your preferred method of contact? Text, phone call, email?
7. Affiliations (ex. SOMCAN, Kasamahan, Pin@y Educational Partnerships, Asian Prisoner Support Committee, etc.)
8. What role(s) interest you? Please check all that apply.
   a. Writer, photographer, graphic designer, layout designer (Adobe InDesign), copy editing, advertising, translator, “I’m open to anything.”
9. What topics interest you? Please check all that apply.
   a. Housing, education, immigration, arts and culture, opinion, poetry, “other.”
10. Have an article, poem, or story idea you’d like to submit?
11. Additional comments

It was exciting to see how the project announcement was received, particularly on Instagram. According to data compiled by Instagram Insights, 157 actions were taken from the post, including 151 visits to the MIMS Instagram profile and six website taps. The post reached over 486 accounts, was shared 54 times, saved 16 times, and liked by 87 people. This Filipino American Life, a podcast exploring the nuanced experiences of Filipinos in the United States, shared the flier on their Instagram account, which has over 19.3 thousand followers; the post
gained 144 likes overall. I was also invited to speak about the project at two migration-related webinars and one informal meeting with faculty and staff from a university in San Diego.

Thirty-four people completed the interest form. I emailed each person individually with follow-up information and a link to schedule a one-on-one meeting via Zoom. To streamline the process, I created a free Calendly account. Calendly is an online appointment scheduling software where I can list my availability preferences. Once guests select the day and time that works with their schedules, Calendly automatically sends a confirmation email with a Zoom link and meeting details. I conducted over 30 virtual meetings and one in-person meeting between February and March of 2022 with writers, photographers, poets, graphic designers, and copy editors from cities across the country, including Brooklyn, Culver City, Fairfield, Fountain Valley, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Lubbock, Oakland, Ontario, Portland, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, Sunnyvale, and Washington D.C.

What began as a project that focused on issues and narratives of Filipinx in the San Francisco Bay Area quickly evolved into a publication that centers the stories and experiences of Filipinx nationally. Getting the opportunity to meet with different professionals from the Filipinx community was an unforgettable experience. I had the privilege to learn about their work, upbringing, and visions for the project. We brainstormed story ideas and themes, confirmed roles, and set deadlines that worked with the project timeline and their availability. I offered optional check-in meetings with writers to answer questions about their story assignments or provide feedback on their first and second drafts. I edited drafts alongside a volunteer copy editor, scheduled photographers to stories, and collaborated with an illustrator. Designing a logo that incorporated elements related to migration and the Philippines took nearly two months.
I spent the remainder of phase three and April 2022 compiling a list of names of former and current Filipino and Filipino American newspapers, magazines, and blogs from the United States and the Philippines. I skimmed through books, poems, and articles, searching for potential names related to the mission and founding principles of the project, until I happened upon the word Mahalaya in a blog post.

**Phase Four: Production and distribution of Mahalaya**

The fourth phase of development took place in May 2022. The initial launch date of Mahalaya was scheduled for the third week of May, but due to scheduling conflicts had to be pushed to June. I contacted one of my former journalism professors, who provided a list of printing companies and explained the process of ordering and distributing copies. With the help of another volunteer, we requested price quotes, secured a printing company, and confirmed a delivery date for the pilot issue.

Once contributors emailed me their drafts, illustrations, and photos, I uploaded the assets to a Google drive folder for two volunteer designers to access. The designers had about two weeks to work on the layout design. They developed ten different versions following a series of edits, additions, and changes. Another volunteer submitted the final design of the pilot issue to the printing company on May 31, 2022. Within two days, the printers delivered 5,000 printed copies to my doorstep. I paid for the copies via check using my own income.

I also bought the domain name mahalayasf.org and created social media accounts for Mahalaya a few weeks prior to the official launch of the first issue. Given time restrictions, I knew I did not have the capacity to create a website until summer. As a workaround, I uploaded a copy of the pilot issue to a digital publishing platform called Issuu and scheduled social media posts of each article for the entire month of June using the social media marketing and
management platform Hootsuite. Readers can complete a Google form online to request free print copies or have the option to pick up copies at select businesses, community centers, and bookstores in San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, and Daly City. I also mailed copies to a few writers featured in the pilot issue who volunteered to distribute copies throughout their cities, including Stockton, Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Sacramento.

The Project

The inaugural issue of Mahalaya came out on June 2, 2022. The 16-page, all-color issue was printed on 17 x 11 recycled paper. It featured three news articles, two immigration-related stories, two opinion pieces, four arts and culture articles, three poems, four complimentary advertisements, 24 photographs, and two illustrations.
Maria Legarda, a Filipina community and faith leader, looked back at the Central California Women’s Facility, a place she had called home for 14 years. At last, she could reunite with her family and begin a new chapter of her life. But what was meant to be a celebration became the beginning of a different fight and journey.

“I was very grateful for my second chance. It’s finally over. I am coming home to my family. But then I looked down and saw my wrists with cuffs shackled to my feet,” Legarda said.

She never made it home. Instead, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials escorted Legarda into a van, immediately transferred her to San Bernardino County Adelanto Detention Facility, and detained her for 11 months.

The practice, otherwise known as “ICE transfers,” is a collaboration between ICE and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) that systematically places people with an immigration “hold” and previous conviction into prolonged detention and deportation proceedings. The CDCR voluntarily notifies ICE of a person’s release date and helps facilitate an arrest at the prison, disregarding their personal transformation, time served, or ties to the community.

“The right to live is for every human being. So who gets to dictate that? No matter the status, no matter the color, every person living and breathing has the right to live a safe life with the people they love,” Legarda said.

Legarda immigrated from the Philippines to the United States at 20 years old. She was on her own and had just graduated from college. A survivor of sexual assault, she faced many hardships that led to addiction and a sentence of 15 years to life. While serving her time, Legarda transformed her life and was granted early release for her rehabilitation efforts and mentorship to other women.

She became the first female intern at Asian Prisoner Support Committee (APSC) and the first person to intern in its Roots to Reentry program (R2R), assisting formerly incarcerated individuals along their reentry journeys. Legarda continues to fight for her right to remain in the United States with her loved ones.

“I’m grateful for having my family stand by my side,” Legarda said. “The beauty of going through this turmoil, this limbo, while it puts a strain on my family, is that we encourage each other. There is nothing that we as a family cannot overcome.”

Faith is an integral part of the movement to end ICE transfers and keep families together. Organizations such as the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity (IM4HI) and its newest collective, Kasama Ng Kalayaan, provide spaces for healing to community members directly impacted by policies and practices that make up the U.S. carceral and immigration systems.

Students, faith and directly impacted leaders, community advocates, and family members engage in various actions to urge the release of individuals from detention and incarceration and accompany them as they reenter society. Their efforts include community zoom discussions, support letters, prayer vigils, educational outreach, freedom campaigns, legal strategies, and fundraising for reentry programs and support.

“There’s a lack of resources for people coming out of immigration detention and incarceration. Very few resources from the government and state go towards reentry, so everything becomes reliant on the community. We’re creating these systems of care to fill that gap and provide the support and resources they need,” said Gala King, a second-generation Filipina and the Regional Program Director of Northern California for IM4HI.

King launched Kasama ng Kalayaan in 2020 alongside other community leaders, including Legarda and Rose Lynn Abesamis-Bell, a Filipina faith leader. The collective aims to deepen cultural and faith traditions and organize for the liberation and healing of Filipinx affected by the immigration-to-school-to-prison-to-deportation pipeline.

The collective’s reach extends across borders and oceans. One of its members is Jon Sales Jr., a reentry coordinator from Stockton, California. He was incarcerated at the age of 18 and served 20 years in prison. During this time, he received an education and transformed his life. Despite being granted parole, Sales Jr. was transferred directly to ICE custody and detained for an additional three years. In 2018, he was deported to the Philippines, leaving behind his wife, family, and community. Today, Sales Jr. continues fighting for his freedom and right to return to the place he calls home: the United States.
The Filipino Community Center continues the mission of the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns (NAFCON) Bayanihan Response to COVID-19 by delivering free groceries to households in San Francisco’s Excelsior District. The program is a partnership between the FCC and Bayanihan Equity Center and currently serves 59 households, equating to 126 individuals overall.

“This campaign encapsulates a lot of the community’s needs based on health, education, food insecurity, income insecurity, workers’ rights,” said Food Program Coordinator Jaya Duhaylongsod. “We want to continue to see how we can unite together and really capture the spirit of Bayanihan to help the community because this is just that. There are so many different ways folks can come together, assess the needs, and take action.”

NAFCON launched the national health and wellness campaign in March 2020 in response to the urgent and long-term needs of impacted Filipino communities throughout the United States and the Philippines.

“We try to be as culturally competent as possible and provide foods that Filipinos would like to eat, including rice and spam,” said Marybeth Salem, an FCC staff member and NAFCON coordinator. “Many Filipinos prefer our program because we deliver the groceries directly to them.”

The food delivery program represents something more than bags of groceries provided to Filipinos in the area. Salem says it’s a way to give back and reconnect with the community, which has become a fruitful experience for her and other volunteers.

The Bayanihan spirit of communal unity and cooperation is a concept that became more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tobi Santelices, who volunteers for the FCC and serves as a communications lead for the food delivery program, reflects on this spirit, which has persisted and only grown more profound in the Filipino community over the past two years.

“Having the FCC be based in the Excelsior has been really helpful because we can develop deep relationships, understand the conditions of what’s happening in the neighborhood, and not only provide free food but also connect clients to different services,” Santelices said.

Although support has remained steady, continued efforts may be placed on hold until the FCC secures a grant to fund the delivery program. Despite the lack of financial support and the program’s pending termination in June 2022, the Bayanihan spirit and hope for the community still remain.

“There’s definitely a need to provide resources for all those communities in the Excelsior,” Salem said. “Even though we haven’t secured funding, we want to advocate for it since we know [food insecurity] is a huge problem that Filipinos will continue to face, especially under a pandemic.”

BY FELICIA HYDE
News podcast. “I hope we continue to keep achieving and setting that bar, raising it and breaking that ceiling.”

The Philippines women’s national football team — nicknamed the Malilditas — defeated Chinese Taipei during the quarter-finals of the 2022 AFC Women’s Asian Cup in Pune, India, by a final score of 4-3 in penalty kicks, with Sarina’s kick clinching the game.

Qualifying for the World Cup as a player, team, and nation still feels like a dream, Sarina says. That dream — which will be realized next year as the Philippines take part in the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup in Australia and New Zealand — has been a lifetime in the making.

Showing a natural prowess for sports at a young age, Sarina dabbled in the usual youth activities of gymnastics, basketball, and softball. But it wasn’t until the age of six that Sarina took up soccer at the suggestion of a friend and the guidance of her father, who spent hours upon hours with her at practices.

“It wasn’t like, ‘You’re going to be a professional soccer player.’ It was just trying to figure out what our kids love to do,” Sherry said. Sherry, though, remained focused. And saw the look on her daughter’s face.

“She’s always wanted to do something great,” she said. “By golly, she got it.”

From the limit of the penalty box, Sarina revved forward and struck hard, soaring the soccer ball beyond the rival goalkeeper’s reach and into the left face.

And saw the look on her daughter’s face.

“I just had this deep love for the sport that I couldn’t really explain, and I wanted to explore that love for the sport,” Sarina said.

The team’s historic achievement is not only one of athletic perseverance but also of diaspora. The presence of foreign-born players who embark upon the athletic pilgrimage to their ancestral homelands to represent their national teams has become a soccer trend in recent years. Only four of the 23 athletes currently on the Philippines women’s national team were born in the Philippines.

Sarina was only 21 years old when she was named to the Philippines women’s national team in 2018. Coincidentally, that’s the same age her maternal grandfather was when he decided to emigrate to the United States.

Romaaldo Mendoza Calpo, originally from Alcala, Pangasinan, relocated to San Leandro, California, with his wife and three children. Sherry, their youngest daughter, was three years old at the time. Eventually, Sherry set roots in Milpitas, where Sarina and her younger brother were raised.

Achieving soccer history hasn’t come without costs. The grind of playing Division I collegiate soccer for four consecutive years took its physical toll, and the challenges women face in professional sports — especially equal pay in soccer — have been well documented. So when the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly brought the world to a halt in 2020, Sarina found herself at a crossroads.

“As a Kultivate Labs project, Kapwa Gardens provides a healing space for community members impacted by the mental, physical, and economic effects of COVID-19. Over 350 volunteers in 2020 transformed Kapwa Gardens from a mere parking lot at 967 Mission Street to a vibrant, technicolored urban garden in the heart of the SOMA Filipino Cultural Heritage District.”

In December 2021, the nonprofit launched “Kapwa Gardens 2.0,” a crowdfunding campaign that would go towards renovations of the outdoor venue.

“The fundraising goal for Kapwa Gardens 2.0 allows us to upgrade the Balay Bus, as well as provide a tent awning over the stage area,” said Project Lead Desti Danganan.

Adding tenting will shield noise, provide privacy for events, and enable better facilitation of special occasions. Danganan says that the upgrades will also include functional workspaces for staff, an A/V tech booth and green room to support live performances, and a calming space that promotes creative rejuvenation.

Kapwa Gardens surpassed its $30,000 fundraising goal and has already begun renovating the Balay Bus. Originally modeled on the popular UNDSCVRD Market & Festival, Kapwa Gardens has hosted over 150 small business entrepreneurs, countless artists, and musicians in the last year. Socially-distanced events vary from live performances and vendor markets to health services such as fitness classes and free walk-up COVID testing.

CAMO Studios, a SoMa-based landscape design studio, previously worked on the Kultivate Labs UNDSCVRD court in 2019. When the pandemic hit, organizers and designers from CAMO Studios re-imagined the location as a COVID-conscious space. The concept of a healing garden emerged from this partnership, one grounded in “kapwa,” which means “recognition of shared identity with others” in Tagalog.

Kapwa Gardens continues to evolve in its purpose.

“The pandemic is the biggest crisis our generation has collectively faced. When history looks back, they’ll write about how Filipinos stood their ground and made beauty out of nothing,” said General Manager Marissa Macayan.
SOMA Pilipinas: A Look Into the Past and Future

BY JEANTELLE LABERINTO, RAQUEL REDONDIEZ, DAVID WOO

Editor’s Note: This is an excerpt published in SOMA Pilipinas’ Cultural Heritage, Housing, and Economic Sustainability (CHHES) Strategies Report (2021).

SOMA Pilipinas, San Francisco’s Filipino Cultural Heritage District located in the South of Market, is home to a network of community-serving organizations, cultural institutions, multi-generational residents, workers, artists, and activists that represent the rich cultural history and perseverance of the Filipino community. SOMA Pilipinas’ formal recognition in 2016 is a result of decades of organizing and community advocacy and the resilience and collective power of the Filipino community in the face of political struggle, dispossession, and disinvestment.

The South of Market (SOMA) has historically been an industrial and working class neighborhood. Though SOMA Pilipinas was formally recognized in 2016, the Filipino community’s presence in San Francisco spans over a century. With the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, the SOMA quickly became one of the main gateways for Filipino immigrants moving to the U.S.

Policies including urban redevelopment and the expansion of San Francisco’s Downtown and Financial District after WWII began to displace Filipino residents and erase long-standing Filipino neighborhoods, most notably the destruction of Manilatown, San Francisco’s first Filipino enclave. Though the fall of the International Hotel in 1977 marked the end of Manilatown, it sparked the beginning of San Francisco’s contemporary housing movement, serving as a formative experience for many Filipinos who would become involved in future struggles against displacement.

In the 1990s, the dot-com boom brought new challenges to the SOMA. The rise of evictions through the Ellis Act, illegal conversions of industrial property to office use, and displacement of residents and businesses to make way for market-rate development made it imperative for the community to organize.

Given the erasure of Manilatown just decades prior, the community understood the urgency to protect their neighborhood and cultural assets. They fought to rebuild Bessie Carmichael and preserve the FEC, the first elementary school in the nation to offer Filipino bilingual education. They created Victoria Manalo Draves Park, named after a Filipino-American Olympian and SOMA resident, and protected anchor businesses and institutions like Arkipelago Bookstore and Bindlestiff Studio, the first Filipino bookstore and the only Filipino-American arts theater in the United States, respectively.

During this time, the South of Market also became home to hundreds of Filipino WWII veterans. The Veterans Equity Center opened its doors to the public in 1999, providing housing application assistance, counseling, legal referral services, and case management. San Francisco became the headquarters for the fight for full equity for Filipino WWII Veterans who were not recognized for their services due to the Rescission Act of 1946.

The current gentrification and displacement crisis is historically linked to the pattern of market-driven growth that has shaped planning and development in San Francisco. The first and second technology booms have brought in enormous amounts of capital to the city. This process of wealth generation, like that of the past, has been to the direct benefit of some at the expense of others.

300 banners celebrating the Filipino community were installed throughout San Francisco’s South of Market neighborhood in 2021. Photo: Nix Guirre

See SOMA PILIPINAS, page 14

Philippine Studies at CCSF Fall 2022 Courses are Open

PHST 20: The Filipino Family | CRN: 71175
Remote/Online Synchronous Meetings on Thursdays 11:10am - 12:25pm
Instructor: Dr. Villaraza

NEW CLASS!

PHST 50: Filipino LGBTQ+ Identities and Culture | CRN: 72339
Remote/Online Synchronous Meetings on Wednesdays 4:10pm - 7:15pm
Instructor: Dr. Desai

HIST 37: Philippine History | CRN: 71236
Remote/Online Synchronous Meeting on Thursdays: 9:10am - 10:25am
Instructor: Dr. Villaraza

PHST 10: Independent Study in Philippine Studies | CRN: 71174
Individual meetings arranged
*students must have had taken courses in Philippine Studies, Pilipino, or other courses with content related to the Filipinx experience
Instructor: Dr. Villaraza

REGISTER AT: HTTPS://CUTT.LY/0G7B5B8
Through Our Lens: Undocumented Filmmakers Reflect on Their Art Journeys

BY LORILLEE PARAS

Editor’s Note: This is the first part of “Through Our Lens,” a series of short stories about undocumented filmmakers and media-makers in the entertainment industry. Storytellers in the Through Our Lens series discuss identity, the power of art, and the need for equitable opportunities for undocumented immigrants.

Hangelic Rivera

Hangelic (she/her/hers) is a cinephile, writer, and a growing storyteller. Hangelic was born in Quezon City, Philippines, and lived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, for eight years before migrating to the United States in 2001. She recently graduated from Sacramento State with a film and ethnic studies background, intending to become a published film critic. Her work culminates in analyzing films and pairing them with historical stories about communities of color and underrepresented perspectives.

“The making of movies. The stories you tell and what you see in film, we can always connect to someone about it. There’s always something relatable that you can find. It’s almost like food in a way,” she said.

Hangelic believes that her experiences being undocumented are hardly told in the mainstream and that Asian and Asian American experiences are not generally validated.

“Where are human resources for people who are not in studios or not part of the union? Who is watching their back in terms of legality? How are these people protected? They’re not, and that’s the biggest thing,” Hangelic said. “People in the industry should be more aware of these things and give access to people like freelancers, to human resources, undocumented or not.”

Wil Prada

Sounds of a beeping call emanate through my laptop screen. Wil (he/him) answers our Zoom call with a grin on his face.

“I’m a filmmaker, Peruvian, director of photography, gaffer. I’m also undocumented and an Indigenous Latino. I haven’t heard that word much, but that’s how I’ve been feeling lately,” he said.

Wil seeks to heal the disconnect between his family’s origins and the realities of growing up in the big city of Lima, Peru, by embodying his Quechua roots and the power of his dark skin and Indigenous features. His earliest memory of creating art was for a poetry assignment in elementary school.

“I had experienced a low magnitude earthquake, nothing too strong. It was a common thing for us to experience in Peru. There was a civil war happening, and sometimes bombs would go off. I don’t know if it was a quake or a bomb, but I wrote a poem describing the feeling of it. I remember drawing cables from electric posts shaking and women screaming. My teacher said that I captured the essence of the earthquake, and that was really encouraging. That might be one of the earliest memories of me creating art,” Wil said.

In 2012, Wil became involved in youth organizing at a time when undocumented youth were using their agency to tell their own stories. A fellow organizer taught him camera fundamentals and editing. Wil utilized these skills by filming an event in collaboration with Dream Team Los Angeles, where immigrant youth and their families were provided access to lawyers, funds, and pathways to apply for legal help.

“I was part of the media team that supported creating and accessing media ourselves. I wanted to be intentional about what kind of messages we put out there through the press. We couldn’t rely on the press to tell our stories. We believe that we got to tell our own stories. We asked people questions, we had laughs. It was a good day of celebration, and people were happy to finally have some kind of legal ability to work and not feel like they were just in complete limbo. So there were a lot of good vibes,” Wil said.

Armando Ibañez

Inspired by blockbuster movies and Mexican cinema, Armando (he/his/him) found his calling for writing at seven years old. But the moment that inspired him to share his own story happened much later.

“When I saw a movement of undocumented queer protesters, it was the movement of the Dreamers in 2010-2011. I was like, ‘Who are they?’ I went to the protest rallies, and I started becoming friends with many of them and realized that many in the movement identified as queer, trans, bi, and gender non-binary. That’s when I felt like I belonged here for the first time. I belonged somewhere. That is when I embraced my identity as a queer, undocumented immigrant,” Armando said.

Armando’s self-discovery journey empowered him to come out to his family and friends and be unapologetically vulnerable about who he is on social media.

“I was dealing with depression because sometimes the responses are not too positive,” he said.

During this time, Armando discovered a YouTube series called “The Misadventures of an Awkward Black Girl” by Issa Rae.

“I felt it brought me back to life. I felt so inspired. I think I can do that. I can tell my story. I can tell everything that’s inside me,” he said.

In 2016, Armando wrote and created an episodic YouTube series called “Undocumented Tales,” which centers on the journey of a Mexican and queer server who happens to be undocumented living in Los Angeles. “Undocumented Tales” has been screened across universities.
Filipinx Activism and the Fight to Keep Families Together

“In the Philippines when I was five years old and came back at 41. Even though I’m Filipino, coming back was a culture shock because I’ve been gone. These are my people, but damn, I feel like an outcast because I didn’t speak the language,” Sales Jr. said.

Sales Jr. serves as a crucial line of communication between the Philippines and the Bay Area and is a vocal advocate in the movement to end immigration detention and deportation. He connects with other Filipinos via Facebook, where they can stay connected, ask questions, share concerns, and support one another as they rebuild their lives in the Philippines. More than anything, Sales Jr. emphasizes the need to establish policies and reentry programs, similar to APSC, that support individuals like him in the Philippines.

“The key element here is to be reunited with your family, regardless of where you’re coming from — jail, prison, or whatever the case may be. To me, it’s all about family,” Sales Jr. said. “I want to help those in that same position and do whatever I can to make sure that whatever avenues they have to take will help them succeed.”

Currently on the Senate Floor in the California state 2022 legislative session is AB 937, the VISION Act. Authored by Assembly member Wendy Carrillo, the VISION Act would protect refugee and immigrant community members — who are already deemed eligible for release from local jails and state prisons — from being funneled to immigration detention. APSC and IM4HI are actively advocating for the passage of the VISION Act to stop ICE transfers of community members.

“Have we many folks that are system impacted who are very traumatized by the system and by the violence that’s happened to them,” San Diego said. “Being able to face those fears head-on every single day and speak about them — from personal experience, I think that’s really powerful. There’s a lot of healing and wisdom that can be passed on.”

San Diego’s father was in and out of jail, and his mother struggled with drug use. Despite his family’s hardships, he found healing through education. After completing high school, San Diego enrolled in ethnic studies classes at Chabot College and learned about the history of his people and different diasporas in the United States. He transferred to the University of California Berkeley and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in History and a minor in Race and the Law in 2018. San Diego’s advocacy work with APSC, Filipino Advocates for Justice, and Kasama ng Kalayaan focuses on educating and empowering youth.

“Whatever your role is, it’s very meaningful. I think it’s empowering our kids to know that they have a voice and hopefully our community to know that we need to take care of ourselves and each other,” Abesamis-Bell said.

King stresses the importance of understanding how the systems of immigration and incarceration work together and are designed to separate people and communities.

“We know this work [to dismantle systems of oppression] can’t be done by one movement or community alone,” King said. “Solidarity between communities is so important and necessary for true liberation.”
Say It Once, Say It Twice. We Will Not Put Up With ICE.

BY NIKKI CHAN
Empowering Marginalized Asian Communities

Immigrant and refugee communities face double punishment – incarceration and ICE detention. A new state bill could help change that.

Put yourself in these shoes. You just completed your 15 years of incarceration. You are getting ready to be reunited with your family, friends, and loved ones who have been waiting for you to come home. You received multiple degrees and certifications while away. Not only were you able to process and work through your rehabilitation, but you also learned how to both love and forgive yourself. Freedom is just outside those cell doors.

But instead of your loved ones waiting for you outside with open arms, federal immigration agents are there to pick you up and detain and arrest you. You are not going home.

This is the reality that thousands of refugee and immigrant community members face when released from local jails and state prisons on a day they thought would be their homecoming. Currently, local jails and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) voluntarily funnel refugee and immigrant community members — who have already been deemed eligible for release — to immigrant detention centers, also referred to as an “ICE transfer.” Transferring a person from one jail cell to another is an unjust process that continues to re-traumatize and re-incarcerate community members.

For the last year, organizations, policy advocates, and some elected officials have been pushing for the passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 937, otherwise known as the Voids Inequality and Seeking Inclusion for Our Immigrant Neighbors (VISION) Act. The VISION Act would protect refugees and immigrants from ICE transfers and ensure they are treated equally by prohibiting agencies and courts from using immigration status as a factor to determine eligibility for rehabilitative programs, such as those centered on diversion and mental health.

The relationship between local jails, CDCR, and ICE has become a game of Monopoly for them — they get rich while others stay in jail. According to a report by Centro Legal de la Raza’s “Golden State Annex: Impacted Communities and Immigration Enforcement Trends,” 80% of incarcerated immigrants in some California ICE detention centers were unjustly placed there because of inhumane ICE transfers from jails and CDCR. ICE Out of California, a statewide coalition leading advocacy around the VISION Act, reported that between 2018 and 2019, nearly 4,000 people were transferred from local jails to ICE alone. In that one year, the local jail transfers cost an estimated $7 million; this doesn’t include the costs of CDCR transfers.

Passing the VISION Act would ensure that our community will no longer face this harmful double punishment. The VISION Act further extends protections for formerly incarcerated refugees and immigrants in the community and can bring them straight home upon their release.

Now imagine this, you are back in your childhood home with your family. You smell your favorite food cooking in the kitchen. You hear kids laughing in the yard. You are safe, and you are loved. A homecoming is celebrated.

All people are sacred across bars and borders

VISION Act (AB 937)

Jon Sales Jr. was incarcerated at the age of 18 and spent decades in prison. After transforming his life and being granted parole, Jon was directly transferred to ICE detention, detained for three years, and deported to the Philippines.

Pass the #VISIONAct to #StopICETransfers!

Take Action: bit.ly/FaithVISION-Toolkit

Illustration: Salesh Prasad
Not everyone is a parent, but everyone has been parented. The soil from which we grow and the earth that our roots are connected to all have a profound impact on the quality of the flowers and the fruit. When I use the term parent, I am addressing biological, non-birthing, step, adoptive, and surrogate parents; aunts and uncles, ates and kuyas, lolas and lolos, committed teachers, coaches, and community folks. Anyone who centers the betterment of children in their life’s purpose.

It is important to be inclusive of these roles because we have a collective responsibility to raise the revolution. Childhood is precious. Parenting is a revolutionary act. It is our divine assignment to examine this role whether you are a birthing parent or a non-birthing parent.

I envision this cozy space of words and ideas to operate as a little garden patch of sorts. Enriching the soil, deepening the roots, honoring the thorns, flowers, and fruits in order to prepare for an abundant harvest. So abundant that the seeds have no other choice than to thrive.

So, gardeners, I invite you to come along during this season and see what we can grow together. Let’s begin. First, we will examine our soil.

Were you transplanted? Are you a settler in new soil? Where is your motherland? How about your parents, their parents, your ancestors, and your lineage. Are your roots deep in this land, or are you laying new roots?

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What were their conditions like when they were laying down the roots to your family tree? Were they fertile? Perhaps the conditions were not ideal for growth. Maybe the land needed to be cleared of dead plants and basura before planting. Or maybe that was considered a luxury at the time and you, my dear gardener, are a rose that grew from concrete.

When looking at the conditions we grew up in — the family dynamics, generational traumas, capacity for generational healing, and our deep desire to act as filters in deciding what we want to pass on and what we must disrupt — I will leave you with a passage from E.J.R. David’s Foreword for the book “Coming Full Circle: The Process of Decolonization Among Post-1965 Filipino Americans” (second edition) by Leny Mendoza Strobel:

“I learned that colonial mentality was passed on to me by my parents and their generation, and, in turn, it was passed on to them by the generations that came before. And I, as a colonized descendant of colonized ancestors, was destined to pass it on to my children and, subsequently, to future generations. Just like many others before me, I realized that, without intervention, I was on track to serve as a vehicle for the intergenerational transfer of colonial mentality.”

Let’s grow together. I’m rooting for you.
How Randy Ribay is Changing the Publishing Industry, One YA Novel at a Time

BY JAENA RAE CABRERA

Patron Saints of Nothing” hit the young adult (YA) literary world by storm in 2019, and author Randy Ribay (pronounced “ree-BYE”) has been riding high ever since.

The book is a compelling coming-of-age story about grief, guilt, and the risks a Filipino American teenager takes to reveal the truth about his cousin’s murder in the Philippines. It was selected as a 2019 Freeman Book Award winner and finalist for the National Book Award, Los Angeles Times Book Prize, Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Young Adult Novel, International Thriller Writers Young Adult Award, Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award, CILIP Carnegie Medal, and 17 state book awards for children’s and YA literature.

Ribay says that for “Patron Saints of Nothing,” he asked himself, “What role do I have as a Filipino American in talking about injustices occurring in the Philippines?”

Born in Manila, Ribay and his family moved to the United States and eventually settled in Michigan, just outside Detroit. He remembers a sporadic Filipinx presence in his childhood, visiting the houses of random Filipinx families and fielding microaggressions in the predominantly white community.

“Nobody could place me ethnically. I didn’t want us to have accents and felt that we needed to speak English to succeed economically,” he said.

Ribay went on to earn his Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the University of Colorado at Boulder and his Master’s degree in Language and Literacy from Harvard Graduate School of Education. He has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area with his family for the last six years and currently teaches high school English.

Based in the Bay Area, Ribay says that he’s surrounded by a robust Filipinx population for the first time in his life. From buying Filipino food at local grocery stores to hearing people speak Tagalog and other languages of the Philippines, living in the Bay Area has impacted Ribay and his writing.

“I’ve always been influenced by where I live. It impacts how I think about things. In terms of how I write, [my characters] are often Filipino characters who are the only ones in the community. That’s starting to shift now that I live in a place with a stronger Filipinx American community. It’s making me think about history more and different perspectives of living around people,” he said.

Ribay is doing his part to change the industry. He plans to release several short stories in different YA anthologies in the next few years. Coming fall 2022 is “Grimoire of Grave Fates,” a YA fantasy mystery set at a magic school where one of the professors has been murdered. In this anthology, each author tells a piece of the story, focusing on the biracial or multiracial experiences of individual characters. “House Party” is a YA anthology of senior year stories to be released in 2023, in which a cast of diverse authors each writes about a different character’s experience. Ribay is also working on an audio-only short story with Audible and a “super-secret” project with details that he has yet to share.

“Sometimes it doesn’t seem busy because other authors publish every year. I feel super slow sometimes,” Ribay said, “but I will defer to having a full-time job.”

Ribay is also the author of two other YA novels: “An Infinite Number of Parallel Universes” and “After the Shot Drops.” But entering the publishing industry wasn’t easy for Ribay. With no connections or family members who were practicing artists, he says he felt clueless and ran into barriers that writers of color often encounter in publishing.

He shares that he received feedback like, “Hey, your writing is good, but I can’t connect to your characters.” The lack of understanding and connection, he says, demonstrates biases in the publishing industry that have real ramifications and perpetuates a dominant group in YA literature — the white upper-middle class.

“These biases add up, so the industry will always reproduce itself. If we want it to produce meaningful change, to diversify the stories that are out there, there’s no way to work on that besides diversifying who’s working behind the scenes,” Ribay said.

Ribay is doing his part to change the industry. He plans to release several short stories in different YA anthologies in the next few years. Coming fall 2022 is “Grimoire of Grave Fates,” a YA fantasy mystery set at a magic school where one of the professors has been murdered. In this anthology, each author tells a piece of the story, focusing on the biracial or multiracial experiences of individual characters. “House Party” is a YA anthology of senior year stories to be released in 2023, in which a cast of diverse authors each writes about a different character’s experience. Ribay is also working on an audio-only short story with Audible and a “super-secret” project with details that he has yet to share.

“Sometimes it doesn’t seem busy because other authors publish every year. I feel super slow sometimes,” Ribay said, “but I will defer to having a full-time job and raising a 19-month-old child.”
Rambunctious Rebels: Histories of Authentic Expression in Filipinx Tattoo Cultures

BY BERNARD JAMES REMOLLINO

What is a Filipino tattoo? In August 2020, I reached out to Filipino American tattoo artist Tito Gavina over Instagram, hoping he could work around an unfinished tattoo of my grandmother on my upper back. I asked if he might be able to tattoo a scene that would honor the intent of the existing piece: unbroken connections with my ancestors.

Gavina tattooed my entire back from shoulders to buttocks over the course of thirty hours between September 2020 and February 2022. He framed my grandmother’s portrait with a rooster, a skull, and a densely packed river of color. But a six-month backpacking trip in 2017 inspired Gavina to channel his creative energies toward a different compositional style: elements of traditional Japanese tattoos with scenes from precolonial Philippine mythology. He bought a one-way ticket to Thailand, packed his bags, and began a journey across Southeast Asia alongside his partner.

“Traveling helps open your mind and gives you a different perspective of how you see the world. I was able to dive deep into different cultures, learn more about them and understand the connections between a lot of Filipino things and other parts of Asia,” Gavina said.

Gavina’s designs utilize the meticulously black-shaded clouds and waves of the Japanese style contrasted by vibrant red, green, and gold inks coloring Filipino headhunters, jewel-laden death masks, and the Bakunawa, a moon-eating water dragon of precolonial Cebuano mythology, it deviates from the recognized definitions of traditional Filipino tattooing. They are not traditional. This does not necessarily mean that they are not Filipino tattoos.

Traditional Filipino tattoos use diverse tribal designs, which were widespread for millennia before the Spanish and U.S. colonial occupations of what is now considered the Philippines. Simplified representations of dogs, scorpions, and people accompany extensive geometric patterns. Oil and soot compose the black ink that is tapped into skin using thorn needles.

Filipino Americans in the 1990s concentrated efforts to reclaim and revive precolonial Filipino tattooing. This coincided with widespread interest in neo-traditional Filipino motifs — which fused generalized Pacific Islander black geometric patterns — alongside a demand for tattoos with a precolonial Filipino script called “Baybayin.” Filipino cultural experts and contemporary Filipino tribes based in the United States represent one perspective concerning how best to honor ancestral Filipino traditions: strict adherence to accuracy in reproducing the form, structure, and nuance of these precocolonial practices.

Quintano’s new immigrant positionality energizes his work, which regularly incorporates modern images and phrases reflecting his Filipinx clientele’s experiences. His designs evoke nostalgic connections to the Philippines — jeepneys and traysikels, parols and bahay kubos, nurses and Filipino revolutionaries — accented
Bernard James Remollino’s back tattoos pay homage to his ancestors. Between 2020-2022, Tito Gavina added elements to Remollino’s piece, including a rooster, skull, and river. Photo: Ekevara Kitpowsong

Jeff Quintano poses with his self-published workbook, Baybayin: A Primer on Reading and Writing Baybayin, on May 12, 2022. The workbook includes Quintano’s tattoo designs. Photo: Ekevara Kitpowsong


(Left to right) Bernard James Remollino, Jeff Quintano, and Tito Gavina in San Francisco Chinatown on May 12 2022. Photo: Ekevara Kitpowsong
Creating Sustainability Across an Archipelago of Gardens

BY NIK EVASCO

Dakota Hafalia-Yackel always knew he wanted to work in agriculture and the environment. With this vision, he founded Carabao Farms, a personal project guided by wisdom from his family and ancestors that seeks to return Filipinx land cultivation, food preparation, and identity to the diaspora in San Francisco.

“There are so many ways you can connect people to food, to culture, and that’s where I find joy. I treat it as my art form,” he said.

Carabao Farms is not a large tract of land in the conventional sense but a network that represents community, one grounded in traditional agricultural systems and ancestral practices in the Philippines. Hafalia-Yackel works across an archipelago of yards, home gardens, and plots of land, assessing soil and growing conditions to create sustainable farming spaces across the Bay Area, particularly within Filipinx neighborhoods.

“Learning more about place and identity is where I came into this. What is identity? What is American identity? Not what they taught you in school, but looking at identity from an immigrant agricultural perspective,” Hafalia-Yackel said. “I looked at the connections about how Black and brown people come to the U.S. through that agricultural exploitation.”

For Filipinos, this agricultural exploitation can be traced back to Spanish colonization, which enforced restrictive farming policies and methods in the Philippines. The introduction of the encomienda system restructured land use and had lasting effects on communities dependent on agriculture as their primary means of livelihood.

Exploitation took many forms in what is now known as the United States, from the enslavement of Africans to the continued occupation of Indigenous peoples to the enactment of the Bracero Program, which subjected farmworkers to low wages and substandard working and living conditions.

Food is much more than mere products on a grocery store shelf. Food tells a story of history and power and offers a means of making connections and building relationships among different communities and cultures. It’s this very source of connection that Hafalia-Yackel emphasizes while working with youth groups in diverse neighborhoods like the Excelsior.

“I’ve had Filipino students who say, ‘my Lola makes this, this, and this. I know it so well!’ and then Latinx students who are like, ‘Nah, this is our crop,’” Hafalia-Yackel said.

Chayote, also known as chayote or sayote, is a staple in Filipinx and Latinx cuisines. Grown widely in Mexico and Central America, this nutrient-rich fruit was introduced to the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period. Today, it’s used in a variety of dishes, including ginseng sayote.

“Food is about the people coming in, trading, moving, and that beautiful movement of migration. It is Filipino culture. It turns something that used to feel shameful into something that feels good,” Hafalia-Yackel said.

Growing food to reproduce and maintain traditional recipes is a significant part of Carabao Farms, but one that extends beyond cooking perspectives and techniques. The project values food, its relationship with the land, and its role in sharing knowledge across generations.

“There is a connection when you get to the table — the kitchen really and ask what dishes we know and what that means to us. Where did we get those stories?” Hafalia-Yackel said.

He reflected on his childhood and the many stories his maternal grandmother, Ceralina Hafalia, would share about life in Ilocos Sur, Philippines. She told him about the animals that would walk about the farm she grew up on in Santa Lucia and the crabs and monkeys she played with as a child. But it was the story about a water buffalo that Hafalia-Yackel remembers most and is the inspiration behind the Carabao Farms name.

“Her big story is that the carabao she was feeding and would work with as a young child, its horn hit her right under the eye. That mark on her cheek is still with her at 98 years old,” Hafalia-Yackel said.

The carabao holds special significance to Filipino farmers like Ceralina. They are valuable contributors to Philippine agriculture, providing meat and dairy products, hide, and a heavy build well suited for hard labor in the fields.

“She always talks about how important the carabao was on the farm and that tillage and pre-industrial agriculture. That’s always resonated with me as a name and why I bring it with my own land management,” Hafalia-Yackel said.

“My grandma is the champion of our family and the reason why I do what I do.”

(Top) Dakota Hafalia-Yackel poses with his grandmother Ceralina Hafalia. (Bottom) Dakota Hafalia-Yackel tends to chickens in his backyard on April 23, 2022. Photos: Jeanina Casusi
Bay Area pastry chef Mariah Taloa is bringing Samoan and Filipino flavors and representation to Stockton and Tracy, CA, through her made-to-order online bakery, Taloa’s Bakery.

Taloa’s Bakery boasts a variety of baked goodies, including their colorful Filimoa cookies – a take on the Girl Scout Samoa cookie. Filimoas are baked to perfection, coated in purple ube and melted white Ghirardelli chocolate, and sprinkled with crispy coconut flakes. These wonderful delights are made fresh to order.

The unofficial slogan of Taloa’s Bakery, she says, is “Bringing you the best of both islands,” a nod to her Samoan-Filipino roots. An example of this fusion is the bakery’s ube pani popo, a sweet Samoan roll filled with Filipino purple yam. The pastry chef confesses she was not a fan of purple yam until her brother suggested the idea to fill a Pani Popo with Ube.

Growing up in Daly City, Taloa is proud to be from a town with a large Filipino population. Yet, she distinctly remembers the lack of a Samoan community.

“It’s interesting because a lot of people don’t know what Samoan cuisine is. When it came to Polynesians, there was no one. We were roped under [Asian American and Pacific Islander],” Taloa said. “My mission with Taloa’s Bakery is to bring awareness to Polynesian food.”

A child of working-class immigrant parents, Taloa cites her family as one of her biggest baking inspirations. She remembers her 10-year-old self baking dinner rolls in her childhood kitchen. But her earliest memory of being dazzled by the art of baking was at the age of five when her grandfather would bake “mountains” of puto, a Filipino steamed rice cake, using a make-shift steamer consisting of cupcake tins and liners.

“I remember my eyes growing so big looking at the table of puto at family parties, looking at it like gold,” Taloa recalled fondly.

Taloa knew she wanted to study Culinary Arts at an early age. While her peers focused on getting into the top universities and colleges, Taloa believed her talents were better suited for more hands-on subjects.

“With culinary school, it’s about attention to detail, your work ethic, and how fast you gotta bang out the product,” Taloa said.

According to Taloa, line cooks and pastry chefs in the early 2010s were paid $8 to $12 at most. This financial stress compelled her to pursue a career in the corporate world. Despite this change, Taloa credits the event planning experience she learned as the reason behind the success of her nonprofit organization Kommunity Hub.

Co-founded by Taloa and Leilani Alfonso, Kommunity Hub provides workshops, educational tools, and event opportunities to small and local food businesses in Pacific Islander, Oceania, and Filipino communities throughout the Tri-Valley area.

“Taloa’s Bakery sponsors Kommunity Hub — not just the events but incubator programs and helping local businesses get on their feet,” Taloa said.

Her advice to the next generation is never to forget their dreams and to always align themselves with people, situations, and paths that speak to them.

“I’ve never felt more fulfilled in my life,” she said.
The second tech boom has been much longer-lasting than the first. Beginning in 2001, the tech industry in San Francisco was centered. The dot-com boom during Urban Renewal, the city has steadily lost low-income and working-class residents and had a net-out-migration of Black and Latino residents from 2006-2015 as wealthier residents came into the city. The struggle for official recognition and the formal establishment of SOMA Pilipinas is part of this longer fight for economic and racial justice, visibility, recognition, and cultural preservation. These realities have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic that is disproportionately impacting communities already suffering from gentrification and displacement. At the height of the pandemic, the SOMA neighborhood experienced a high burden of COVID-19 cases compared to the rest of the city. COVID-19, however, only exacerbated existing inequities, including housing instability, low wages, food insecurity, health insecurity, lack of childcare, and more.

SOMA Pilipinas is a community in action and a cultural movement that resists the profit-driven transformation of the SOMA, and is advancing a model of self-determination and community development that puts the needs, experiences, and realities of low-income Filipino seniors, families, and workers at the center. Today, SOMA Pilipinas, alongside the community, is actively advocating for strategies to not only preserve their home and cultural heritage, but also address the myriad of issues impacting the community, many of which are articulated in SOMA Pilipinas’ Cultural Heritage, Housing, and Economic Sustainability Strategies report submitted to the City in 2021.
community spaces, and notable film festivals, such as Outfest and the Los Angeles Web Series Festival, which awarded Armando for outstanding lead actor. In producing the series, Armando prioritized hiring crew members that embodied his community, including undocumented immigrants, DACA recipient filmmakers, and LGBTQ+ community members.

"Laughing, loving, falling in love, dancing — I never see undocumented, queer people on screen being humans. I only see them suffering, only see them crying," Armando said. "One of my goals is to tell the different stories about humans who happen to be undocumented and queer. What inspires me is to show their humanity, our humanity, our resiliency, our queer. What inspires me is to tell the different stories about humans that are only seen suffering, only seen..."

Paolo Rein
Paolo Rein (he/him) grew up surrounded by music and enjoyed singing karaoke with his family; this experience fomented his self-expression. He considers filmmaking a form of spirituality. "It makes me feel free. When I’m in those creative spaces where I’m writing, film directing — or even with music — my intentions are to provide some form of a gift," Paolo said. Paolo’s projects are reflections of his own lived experiences of being undocumented. There were moments, he says, when he felt discriminated against for having dark skin and curly hair. He found support from Latinx and Black peers in his high school, who told him to embrace who he is.

"I think as an undocumented [Asian Pacific Islander], it’s too taboo to speak about undocumented experiences. I felt that I was never accepted in the Filipino community or Asian community because of my status or the way I looked," Paolo said. "It makes it so sad because it can be damaging to any other individual who might have other experiences as an undocumented API and not find that support." Paolo aims to tell stories reclaiming vulnerability as a strength rather than a struggle. His short film, "Karnanta," which empowers the challenges of what connection and love mean to oneself through reaffirmation, is told through the eyes of a 1st generation Filipina student learning how to navigate her emotions in her own way. "I’d like to see more studios collaborating and hiring undocumented artists, undocumented electricians, programmers, or caterers. I feel like film is one of the few things that encompasses everything. So why limit it to just artists? Why not be open to opportunities for undocumented people?" he said.

Set Hernandez Rongjilo
"How do I identify?" Set laughs. "I identify with so many facets to my identity. I am a Taurus. I was born in the Year of the Monkey in 1992. I am an undocumented immigrant originally from the Philippines. I am queer. Gay. I identify as non-binary. All the works!"

Set (they/them/she/her) discovered their path as a storyteller when they came across a film called “Lost and Found” by Tam Tran, a Vietnamese filmmaker born in Germany and raised in the United States. "Tam was one of the first undocumented filmmakers that really spoke to my experience as an Asian undocumented person. So Southeast Asian more specifically," Set said.

Set reflects on their experience as a queer person who grew up in the 1990s, a time, they say, when being queer wasn’t entirely accepted in the Philippines. "The lack of seeing myself on screen or anywhere, in general, prevented me from realizing that it’s okay to be me. This desire to communicate the human experience through my lens is really the impetus for why I wanted to be a filmmaker," Set said.

Nicole Solla-Sison
"Did you hear that? That was thunder." Nicole (she/her) smiles as the roar of thunder echoes through the Zoom call. A week before her seventh birthday, she migrated to Los Angeles, Tongva Land, and later on lived and attended school for six years in the Bay Area, the ancestral homeland of the Ramaytshu Ohlone people. "I identify as an individual living in America who is a migrant. I come from a mixed-identity background with Spanish, German, Filipino, and Indigenous Filipino ancestry. I also consider myself American and undocumented," Nicole said.

Nicole envisioned becoming a marine biologist and environmentalist as a child, but U.S. citizenship was required. "I was really heartbroken because I was far from being a U.S. citizen, and I couldn’t provide proof that I was a U.S. citizen. So I dove into something that I found very comforting, and that was art," she said.

Presently, Nicole wears several chosen hats as a creative director, producer, designer, educator, and artist. "I found [art] very liberating because if you are a designer, photographer, or a videographer, no one was ever going to ask you what your status was; no one is ever asking you straight off the bat, prove yourself in the form of documentation."

Lived experiences in Nicole’s childhood created not just a spark to express herself through photography and design but to willingly choose it as an extension of who she continues to be. "Art was my way of coping and surviving in a capitalist mode of providing a living for myself and my family," she said.

POETRY

Nga Nga
BY ALISON MALLARI ROOZEBOOM

The jackfruit, big as a child hanging from the tree, proud spines they picked it for me cleaved it in two and set it out bare on the table.

Ants wound their way through the flesh, unbothered we pried out pieces, sunlit gems fingers, hands, arms up to our elbows, sticky its smell hanging in the thick monsoon-season air.

And it didn’t matter that at the market they could not understand my foreign mouth fumbling over the word for betel nut nga nga to offer at an altar for my ancestors, Maybe the jackfruit seeds will do.

Growing up in a traditionally Filipino and immigrant family, the pressure to achieve perfection was everything, and being gay wasn’t any part of it.

Regardless, I knew it was time to tell my parents who I truly was — I needed to come out. I packed a bag, zipping everything I loved, my thoughts necessary inside it. My friend waited outside it. My friend waited in the unconditional love of God. I was left only with my faith and the church," "You still love God, right? You just need faith and the church," my parents told me when I said I liked boys. Disappointment.

That’s what they felt when I told them my sexuality. My parents spared me of the pressure to achieve perfection in my religion, I learned the importance of being compassionate in spite of those who feel hate for people like me — gay and Catholic. Remembering the night I came out, I felt my call to serve, to be compassionate, and to truly live the phrase, "They’re all Christians by our love, by our love." My parent’s condition of still loving God blossoms onto me where ang “bakla” loves the church, but more importantly — himself. Being gay and Catholic is my version of perfection.

I’m not just devout, I’m not just bakla, I’m so much more. I’ve had to weave both worlds together, and they’ve resulted in one answer: me.

I Thought You Knew
BY LORILLEE PARAS

The sun shows us how knowledge is passed on, Images of shadows that are bounced upon, The ground we crawl, walk and even run on.

The sun glimmers against beings of growth, beings of loss and beings of storytellers. We are all born with knowledge from the sun.

You can’t see it, you can’t feel it, you definitely can’t smell it, but you use it. The knowledge the sun gifts us all becomes complicated because we make it so. The sun gives us what we can handle.

When the sun sets, illusions face us. It is up to us on how to keep that knowledge bright and burning.

It is an illusion because yet when it’s night, the sun is always there. It is what we know. What we know. It is never about what we will never know. That is the knowledge in disguise. It is for you to know, no one else. Only yourself.
Celebrating 50 Years of Arts & Activism at KSW

BY JAENA RAE CABRERA

Kearny Street Workshop, the oldest Asian Pacific American multidisciplinary arts organization in the United States, is holding a 50th Anniversary Gala on June 11 to commemorate half a century of Asian Pacific American arts and activism. The gala is billed as a night with live entertainment, performances, and food at the San Francisco Mint.

The theme, “To Imagine is to Exist,” originally came from KSW’s podcast, hosted by Michelle Lin and Dara Katrina Del Rosario. During a podcast presentation, the audience misheard the original title, “To Imagine is to Resist,” and Lin and Del Rosario thought it better suited the organization.

“It’s not always just resist, resist, and resist and fight back. We also have a lot of joy and love, and we’re enacting alternative modes of caring for each other and imagining worlds that we want to build together,” Lin said.

Founded in 1972, KSW provides an artspace for Asian American and Pacific Islander artists, curators, and culture makers. It was initially housed on the ground floor of the International Hotel in what was formerly San Francisco’s Manilatown. During the 1980s, KSW established the Asian American Jazz Festival and published one of the first Filipino American literary anthologies. Today, the organization hosts programs and workshops in the visual, performing, and literary arts. This includes Aperture, a three-week festival that focuses on emerging Asian Pacific American artists.

“One of the things about KSW is that it’s never been about one individual artist. It’s been about the community. We’ve had people who’ve performed with us in the early parts of their careers,” said artistic director Jason Bayani.

According to Robynn Takayama, vice president of the KSW board, the challenge is to continue making people who may otherwise feel othered within the Asian American community feel included.

“[KSW] is really conscious about reaching out to immigrants and queer and trans people, and having programs with Pacific Islanders, Southeast Asians, and folks who are not just East Asian, Chinese, Japanese, or Korean,” Takayama said.

One of their recent projects and initial foray into virtual storytelling is “Pilipinx Virtual Histories.” A collaboration between KSW and Balay Kreative, “Pilipinx Virtual Histories,” explores the cultural impact of the Pilipinx and Asian American arts activism community in San Francisco.

“This is a space where people can have opportunities that may not be as readily available in mainstream spaces,” Bayani said. “What’s great is that you have all types of people come through. It’s not just about the folks who made it big. People go through all different types of journeys with their art.”

Takayama remembers KSW’s 45th anniversary. The celebration featured rapper Ruby Ibarra and author Jessica Hagedorn, who references KSW in her 1997 novel “The Gangster of Love.” Bernice Yeung, an award-winning Aperture artist, interviewed Hagedorn on stage.

“It was great to have those two generations in conversation,” Takayama said. “Ruby really looked up to Jessica, and so to have those two in the same room was incredible.”

Takayama guarantees that kind of intergenerational connection and talent are things attendees can look forward to at the 50th Anniversary Gala.
Chapter Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

Journalists of color have long resisted the standard practices of objective reporting and misrepresentations of their communities, often found in professional news media. Despite efforts to diversify newsrooms, the foundations of professional journalism remain the same, resulting in the perpetuation of anti-Blackness and white supremacy in media through stereotypical depictions or victim narratives. The publications mentioned in this paper, many of which inspired the creation of Mahalaya, are more than historical archives to refer to from time to time. Ethnic media, including Filipino and Filipino American press in the United States, represent an alternative practice of journalism that strives for meaningful solidarity and transformative justice. It is essential to acknowledge the extensive history and nature of Filipinx activism and make it visible across different media platforms for it can nurture and foster new generations of organizers.

Building a Filipinx community newspaper within a Migration Studies program and thick solidarity framework provided me the space to critically analyze and reflect on the U.S. mediascape and the impacts of professional journalism. The rise of alternative press, ethnic media, and community journalism today reveals the ongoing failure of professional journalism to confront the racial dynamics of the field and its role in reaffirming white racial power. Community journalism and community engagement are the solutions, and we must invest in and support the work of the ethnic press and alternative media.
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