A Call for Healing: Transphobia, Homophobia, and Historical Trauma in Filipina/o/x American Activist Organizations

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I argue that for those who migrate to other countries for economic survival and political asylum, historical trauma wounds across geographical space. Using the work of David Eng and Nadine Naber on queer and feminist diasporas, I contend that homogeneous discourses of Filipino nationalism simplify and erase transphobia, homophobia, and heterosexism, giving rise to intergenerational conflict and the passing-on of trauma among activists in the United States. Focusing on Filipina/o/x American activist organizations, I center intergenerational conflict among leaders, highlighting transphobic and homophobic struggles that commonly arise in cisgender women majority spaces. I contextualize these struggles, linking them to traumas inherited through legacies of colonialism, feudalism, imperialism, hetero-patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy. I inquire: how does historical and personal trauma merge and shape activist relationships and conflict, and what are activists doing to disrupt and work through historical trauma? I advocate for a decolonizing approach for "acting out" and "working through" trauma and healing collectively. By exploring conflict in organizations shaped by dominant Filipino nationalist ideologies, I resist romantic notions of the diaspora. Revealing the ways that dominant Filipino nationalism perpetuates a simultaneous erasure of nonnormative histories and bodies and epistemological and interpersonal violence among activists, I reject homogeneous conceptions of nationalism and open up possibilities for decolonial organizing praxis.

In her discussion of the Lakota people, Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart defines historical trauma as the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over one's lifetime and across generations, following loss of lives, land, and vital aspects of culture (Brave Heart 1998). I argue that for those who migrate abroad for economic survival and political asylum, historical trauma also wounds across geographical space.

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Using the work of David Eng and Nadine Naber on queer and feminist diasporas, I contend that homogeneous discourses of Filipino nationalism simplify and erase transphobia, homophobia, and heterosexism, giving rise to intergenerational conflict and the passing-on of trauma among Filipina/o/x activists in the United States. Centering transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) activists is a political move, as transphobic struggles that commonly arise in cisgender women majority spaces are rarely discussed publicly.

I use the term "Filipina/o/x" with the understanding that, as Mike Atienza has argued, "Filipinx" alone is inaccessible and unused by many, including the trans and genderqueer Filipinos it seeks to represent. While the term Filipina/o/x may be unwieldy (and only useful in written form), my use of it is experimental, political, and purposeful. First, I use it to challenge a gender binary that assumes that people of Filipino descent identify as either Filipina or Filipino, and thus female or male respectively. Filipina/o/x aims to include those TGNC who identify as Filipinx or Pilipinx without forcing those who reject the "x" into a blanket "Filipinx/Pilipinx" identity. Second, I draw on Jessica Marie Johnson's 2015 article, "Thinking about the 'x,'" in which Johnson cites the power of the "x" in Latinx as invoking "an anti-racist intersectional paradigm that centers blackness and antiblackness within Latinidad."[1] That is, the "x" acknowledges the creative and lived digital communities of queer, TGNC Latinxs and Afrxlatinxs all around the world rather than a linguistic structure rooted in anti-black colonialism and slavery. Likewise, my use of the "x" recognizes the queer, TGNC Filipinxs who similarly use the "x" to express and describe their identity and politics online and elsewhere. As Johnson writes, the "x" may not be "the answer," especially given that "x" is not found in the Filipino alphabet and may not attend to the particularities that separate Filipinxs from Latinxs and Afrxlatinxs. However, I concur that "anytime we decide to choose structure (even linguistic structure) over real lives and bodies we are 1) expressing and describing a politics and 2) proving a point about the value and importance and precarity of those lives" (Johnson 2015). Recognizing the "x," for now, takes seriously the creative space-making interventions of some TGNC Filipinxs and Pilipinxs as recuperating pre-colonial and indigenous non-binary gender legacies, erased by both colonialism and hetero-patriarchal forms of Filipino nationalism.

My argument proceeds in six parts. I begin by outlining my methodological approach and offering a brief overview of the history of the Filipina/o/x American Left. Following this, I examine how conflict emerges with respect to Filipina/o/x activists' differing priorities in their US-based organizations. I contemplate the reasons that some activists hold tightly to their priorities based on previous experiences, such as "logics of emergency" that guide traditional diasporic activism, everyday assaults on TGNC activists, and intramovement sexism (Naber 2012). Subsequently, I contextualize conflicts as manifestations of historical trauma, inherited through legacies of colonization, feudalism, capitalism, imperialism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy. These legacies normalize the trauma of migration and erase a history in which women and nonbinary individuals held positions of authority. I conclude with ways that activists are "acting out" and working through trauma as they move toward

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

healing in their activist communities. Although some activists view movement work as their form of healing, they also engage in collective grieving processes that interrupt historical trauma, recovering indigenous sensibilities and practices.

A Methodology of Queer Diasporas

How does historical trauma shape TGNC activist conflicts around gender and sexuality? What are activists doing to disrupt and work through historical trauma? I focus on interactions that occurred in Filipina/o[2] activist organizations in the US during the 2000s, centering conflict among cisgender women and TGNC activists. I do not do this because cisgender men are free of conflict, but rather because ciswomen and TGNC activists lead many organizations in the Filipina/o/x American Left. Since they are leaders, it is paramount that they take care of themselves and one another. I draw upon interviews I conducted between 2012 and 2016 with over sixty activists involved in US-based Filipino anti-imperialist organizing between 1972 and 2016. To maintain the anonymity of those involved, I do not name the organizations and use pseudonyms for the people I discuss, merging their characteristics to find patterns. Because I was a long-time member and volunteer in two organizations in the Filipina/o/x American Left, many activists were willing to speak with me about highly politicized topics. However, they asked to remain anonymous and emphasized that they did not speak on behalf of their organizations—several of which I was not a member of and had limited knowledge about their specificities.

By lifting up these activists' stories, I apply English-literature scholar David Eng's "methodology of queer diasporas." Eng argues that a methodology of queer diasporas "declines the normative impulse to recuperate lost origins, to recapture the mother or motherland, and to valorize dominant notions of social belonging and racial exclusion that the nation-state would seek to naturalize and legitimate through the inherited logics of kinship, blood, and identity" (Eng 2010, 13–14). Instead, it "highlights the breaks, discontinuities, and differences, rather than the origins, continuities, and commonalities, of diaspora" (14–15). Applying a methodology of queer diasporas, I explore conflicts between TGNC and cisgender members shaped by dominant Filipina/o nationalist ideologies. More specifically, I reveal the ways that dominant Filipino nationalism perpetuates a simultaneous erasure of nonnormative histories and bodies and epistemological and interpersonal violence among activists. A methodology of queer diasporas reveals the cracks within dominant Filipino nationalism and points out possibilities for decolonial organizing praxis.

My decision to write about conflict in the Filipina/o/x American Left was difficult. I do not wish to create a picture of it that detracts from its many accomplishments by making Filipina/o/xs appear exceptionally transphobic or conflict-ridden. Rather, I chose this case to discuss taboo transphobia and intergenerational conflict, which also occur in other social-justice organizations (and the rest of the world), albeit in distinct ways according to context. Out of concern for potentially "airing dirty laundry," I approach these conflicts with as much nuance and sensitivity as possible. It is

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

important to note that the characteristics of the activists discussed are not especially unique for this community. Thus, my study offers potential lessons for other Filipina/o/x and immigrant activist communities of color in the US.

The Origins of the Filipina/o/x American Left and its Anti-Imperialist Organizations

Preceded by decades of labor-union participation and civil-rights organizing, the contemporary Filipina/o/x American Left can be traced back to the political exile of anti-Marcos activists from the Philippines to the US from 1969 to 1986 during Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorship (Toribio 1998; Fujita-Rony 2003; Mabalo 2013; Cordova 2015). The first exiles converged (and clashed) with Filipina/o American activists, some who were children of farm and cannery-worker "Manongs" who came before them. Together, they formed the Kalayaan (Freedom) Collective (1971) and the revolutionary mass organization KDP (1973) (*Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino*). The KDP's goals were twofold. One goal was to support the National Democratic (ND) revolution in the Philippines, which was catalyzed by a powerful surge of militant youth and student protests during the First Quarter Storm of 1970 (Habal 2007, 66). In particular, KDP and its allied groups took on the task of exposing the US government's financial ties with Marcos, who had declared martial law in the Philippines in 1972. KDP's other goal was to build socialism in the US (Toribio 1998, 164). KDP led national anti-martial-law work and participated in local antiracist campaigns in major cities across the country, including the San Francisco fight against the Manongs' evictions from the International Hotel, which was important to the greater Asian American community (158). Although KDP disbanded in the late 1980s, some of its former members had already united with other US-based Filipina/os to continue supporting the ND Movement (NDM) in the Philippines in groups, such as Alliance for Philippine Concerns (APC) in the early 1980s, over the past four decades.

Today, ND and ND-supporting organizations comprise what some refer to as the Filipino Left in the US. Some of the organizations in the Filipina/o/x American Left are formal ND organizations. Others do not consider themselves ND organizations but support national democracy in the Philippines. According to *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (BAYAN), the NDM is a principled liberation movement that fights against imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism (BAYAN 2013). "National democracy" in the Philippines aims for the government to represent the interests of the Filipino majority, who the NDM argues should have political power in deciding matters affecting their livelihood.

Consisting of workers', women's, and youth organizations, the Filipina/o/x American Left is women, queer, and TGNC activist-led. The organizations oppose US occupation and militarization abroad while openly critiquing neoliberal economic policy and the expansion of transnational corporations that displace third-world people, primarily women, from their homes, funneling them into low-wage

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

work in countries in the Middle East, Europe, East and Southeast Asia, and North America (Lindio-McGovern 1999, 23–40). The groups view themselves as radical in the sense that they organize for systemic social change, building alliance with other groups to protest injustice in the US, the Philippines, Canada, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. Since the 1970s, Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideologies have guided the Fil-Am Left, like the original KDP and its Philippines-based ND predecessors.

The organizations combine education, advocacy, leadership development, cultural arts, campaigns, and service, educating the public and one another about Filipina/o/x people's histories of migration and resistance. They mobilize for immigration reform and advocate for undocumented people who have been unjustly detained or deported. They refer members to health services and provide case management. Moreover, they provide "know your rights" trainings, host open schools for survivors on how to address domestic violence, organize legal clinics, and provide free consultation for workers. The organizations have also supported families whose loved ones have committed suicide because of exploitative labor conditions. Through these methods, they address violence against women, militarization, trafficking, and systemic racism, among other issues.

The Filipina/o/x American Left has made concrete gains in the lives of Filipina/o/xs. For example, one organization recovered over $20,000 in unpaid wages for one of its members, and through another group's labor program, forty workers retrieved over $500,000 in stolen wages. One group helped two of its members obtain visas under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), holding their abusive husbands and boyfriends accountable. Almost all have raised funds for typhoon relief. Indeed, the Filipina/o/x American Left has been a vital source of support for countless Filipina/o/x workers, women, and immigrants in the US.

Clashed Priorities: Logics of Emergency

TGNC activists recounted stories of transphobia, homophobia, and heterosexism hidden within what Nadine Naber calls "logics of emergency" that dominate nationalist organizing. These logics prioritize bodily harm, death, and killing over other losses of human dignity that don't always appear in moments of crisis (Naber 2012, 200–201).

Neutron, a queer TGNC migrant activist from the Philippines, remembered an experience when an elder cis-straight woman in her organization questioned whether Neutron was "a real lesbian" because she had once had a relationship with a man.[3] At the time, Neutron was quiet and confused, as her organization did not conduct analyses about gender and sexuality despite the majority of its leaders being TGNC. Years later, she understood the comment as homophobic and representative of a typical dynamic in the Philippines in which it is disrespectful to talk back to elders. Neutron believed that her silence led the elder to more quickly dismiss American-born LGBTQ comrades' concerns as being bourgeois, "American," and frivolous to working-class revolution.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> I think in that time my quietness and lack of understanding of my reality as a transnational queer person enabled her to dismiss … [LGBTQ matters] such as DOMA, California's Prop 8 … [They] could have … enabled our queer cadres and members to be documented and not be forced to be in a hetero-relationship. There were a lot of things we could have done for our people.

This dismissal is familiar to Jan, who is also TGNC but US-born. Jan recalled instances in which an elder leader named Aurelia would dismiss their input ("LGBT whatever, XYZ whatever") and characterize LGBTQ organizing as a distraction from the "real" work of the organization. According to Jan, Aurelia dismissed their efforts to integrate LGBTQ issues into the organizational agenda ("this isn't of relevance right now"), citing the urgency of war in the Philippines as her primary concern.[4] While addressing LGBTQ issues was not a specific goal of this organization, building a culture of kindness and care was a priority to Jan. Thus, Jan felt that LGBTQ issues should be part of this mission.

> There's always gonna be a war in the Philippines, people! That's why we're here … at least [those in other Filipina/o/x organizations] seem to be caring about the basic identity politics of their members … [W]hether that's deeply embedded in the analysis … [a]t least you're affirmed.

For Aurelia, who is older than Jan and was an activist in the Philippines during martial law, war is a marker for trauma. With over 3,000 extrajudicial killings, 35,000 people tortured, and 70,000 people incarcerated, the Marcos dictatorship likely informs her perspective (McCoy 1999). Under the banner of land reform and working-class revolution, tens of thousands of activists took significant risks during this time. Like other activists who publicly opposed Marcos, Aurelia could not return to the Philippines during Marcos's reign because returning would have meant her probable death. I surmise that the trauma of being unable to return to one's homeland for over a decade had grave emotional costs, despite the social capital her experience gave her within a movement that privileges those who organized in the Philippines under martial law. With land reform still unresolved today, it is unsurprising she would consider LGBTQ issues insignificant.

Neutron suggests an additional reason that Aurelia might be prioritizing war:

> For a transnational person, time stops. It creates a feeling, understanding, and belief that whatever they left behind didn't change. And they sometimes refer to those feelings and try to justify what is happening now through a vision tunnel. We are in a more privileged position [in the US]. Therefore LGBT issues are [considered] less important than the war in the Philippines.

Even though Neutron disagrees with such logic, she too struggles with what she calls "a mix of Catholic guilt and savior mentality" as someone who left the Philippines to live in the US for economic survival.

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Just as Jan does not know what it means to be a migrant living in the US, the elder activists—both cis-straight—do not know how it is to live simultaneously as racial, gender, and sexual minorities. Living multiply marginalized as queer, TGNC, working-class people of color has dire material costs. These include increased risk of homelessness, police harassment, job discrimination, incarceration, sexual assault, murder, and other forms of violence (Tuba 2011). According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, eighty percent of anti-LGBT murders in 2014 were committed against people of color, and transgender people of color survivors of hate violence were 6.2 times more likely to experience police violence and 1.6 times more likely to experience any physical violence (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs 2015). Studies also show that the stress of poverty, which is raced, gendered, and sexualized, can lead to life-threatening disease, including hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes (McEwen 2000, 110–11).

There is also mental illness. Anne Cheng argues that long histories of racial trauma for Asian Americans can lead to a specific type of "racial melancholia," compared to other groups, because of their model-minority status, which effectively renders invisible the systematic racial oppression of Asian Americans (Cheng 2000). Studies also indicate that Filipina/o/xs have a higher prevalence of depression compared to that of the general American population and that rates of suicidal ideation double for Filipina/o/x American youth (Tompar-Tiu and Sustento-Seneriches 1995; Wolf 1997, 476). Poor and working-class LGBTQ people of color especially are subject to the psychic violence of racism and homophobia, leading many to illness and early death. Logics of emergency thus create the false opposition between individual health and structural oppression.

This information suggests that when Marxists challenge TGNC activists for so-called "identity politics," they misunderstand that the mobilization around identities centers embodied experiences of *oppression* rather than the identity itself (Allen 2012, 23–26). One cannot understand the particularities of the poor, working class, and migrants without recognizing how experiences of class are always gendered, raced, and sexualized, as well as marginalized, for those with nonnormative lives, including many queer and trans people of color (Kelley 1997, 109). Sharper attention to the intersectional dimensions of class would strengthen the Filipina/o/x American Left's analysis of capitalism, migration, and imperialism.

After years of organizing in the US, Cynthia, a cis-straight Filipina immigrant anti-martial-law veteran in her 60s, reflected, "In order to sustain a movement to support national democracy in the Philippines, you [as a US-based organizer] must address the primary needs of your members [in the US] first" (Anonymous 1 2015). Her experience conflicts with the Philippine Left's nationalist politics, which has historically forced US-based activists to choose "there" over "here." This requirement overly simplifies the fragmentation of identities that inevitably results from living and organizing within the Filipina/o/x diaspora. Applying a "queer diasporic" approach, Jan, Neutron, and Cynthia do not choose one place over the other. Rather, they argue that solidarity is strengthened when activists address members' immediate needs.

Intra-Movement Sexism and Recycled Patriarchy

Another cause for conflict is what I call "recycled patriarchy." Charity, also TGNC, explained how in their all-women's space, cis-straight women members took their frustrations out on them because they present masculinity, thereby scapegoating *them* for patriarchy they experienced in mixed-gender spaces. Charity argued that because they were assigned female at birth, they have learned to hold in anger like other women of color who have been historically devalued and considered threatening to white people and cismen. Having to "hold it" is an example of the emotional labor that women of color and TGNC organizers are pressured to undergo for the stability of the movement. Arlie Hochschild refers to emotional labor as the avoidance of distressing sensations in order to help other people remain at ease.

> All of a sudden, *all* the stuff you couldn't point out to your cis-male brothers … you can give it all to me. Why? Because I'm female assigned at birth and I've learned, like you, how to hold it. That's what women of color do, you hold it … you can scream at me because I give off some levels, depending on the conversation, masculine privilege, depending on where I am and where I pass. (Hochschild 1983, ix)

Charity's gender performance blurred lines between woman and man, threatening the presumed safety of those who did not feel comfortable in the company of those they viewed as cismen. Such blame ignores the difficulties that TGNCs (particularly those who do not pass as cisgender) experience in a transphobic society that is rooted in patriarchal, normative expectations that affect ciswomen's and trans bodies alike.[5]

Gayatri Spivak devised the term *strategic essentialism* to refer to the ways that marginalized social groups temporarily forge a sense of collective identity despite differences in order to achieve political goals (Spivak 1988). Applying strategic essentialism by uniting around the identity of "woman," several elder leaders in Charity's organization helped to co-found their organization. Intent on ameliorating this gender inequity, the founders of these groups built an organization in the Filipina/o/x diaspora that centered the needs of women from an anti-imperialist perspective. At a time when America had little consciousness of transgender issues, an organization that recognized the specific needs of Filipina women and asserted separatism from men was both groundbreaking and revolutionary.

Thus, it was not only against a dictator and capitalist imperialist system that these women's organizations fought relentlessly. They also contested male-dominated leadership and sexism prevalent in the Left. Even though there was a plethora of women leaders in KDP in the 1970s, sexism existed within it and in the ND groupings like APC that followed, according to some members (Habal 2007, 109; Rosca 2000, 85). For example, even though sixty to seventy percent of the Filipino American population in the late 1980s were women and seventy percent of Fil-Am Left organizations were comprised of female members, the leadership was still ninety-nine percent male and the organizations conducted little work on women's issues (Rosca 2000, 84–85). This observation echoes that of other revolutionary nationalist movements of that

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

time period and beyond, including the antiwar movement, Black Power Movement, and Chicano Movement (Brown 1992; Blackwell 2011; Wu 2013). Across movements, women were told that separate women's organizations were unnecessary and divisive (see Combahee River Collective 1983; Ordona 2000; Rosca 2000; Blackwell 2011).

These women's organizations made urgent strides in educating the public about violence against Filipina women. The elder women who founded and later shaped the growth of their organizations were successful in helping scores of women find empowerment and justice. However, often the resolution of one contradiction yields the creation of the next. Charity's experience suggests that the trauma of patriarchy recycled itself within their organization a decade after it was formed. Still, at a time when there was little societal concern for trans issues, and domestic violence, rape, labor and sex trafficking, and reproductive injustice remained salient issues, it is understandable that an organization with majority ciswomen would have little regard for a trans-masculine person in their organization.

The 2000s has yielded increasing awareness of gender as a spectrum and even more so by 2016. TGNC people have made it clear that they are not exempt from gender-based violence, including the examples mentioned in the previous paragraph, and in some cases are shown to be more vulnerable to it. Further, they assert that their needs should not be placed against those not TGNC. Given contemporary understandings of gender, the conflicts among these activists raise questions, such as: How might intentionally gender-exclusive spaces be inadvertently oppressive to those who do not fall within a gender binary? How can we think about gender in revolutionary ways (Gumbs 2016)? How can seasoned activists be open to the ideas of newer activists whose experience of marginalization is radically different from theirs?

Charity suggests that activists might resist ideas from younger members because of "founder's syndrome." Founder's syndrome is commonly defined as the phenomenon in which a founder of an organization maintains disproportionate power and influence over its future, leading to problems for both the organizations and those involved in it. Charity explained that the most transphobic and homophobic people were among the founders of their organization. Although it is possible that ego and control are related to their elder comrades' reactiveness, contextualizing it within their decades-long conflict and abuse of power by cismen in the movement, survival of martial law, exile in the US, and their commitment to the tenets of the ND Movement, suggests that their behaviors need a more complicated explanation. In fact, it is logical that elder activists would hold tightly onto an organization they helped build for the justice of (cis) Filipinas, before the terms cis and trans were in mainstream use, in the face of hostile opposition from their own comrades.

Historical Trauma: Buried Histories of Gender-Crossing

I have argued that activists' differing experiences of trauma affected their interactions with one another, but it may not be obvious how their conflict is linked to legacies

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of colonialism. Various scholars have described gender-crossing as a cultural feature of precolonial communities of the Philippines (Scott 1994, 84–85; Garcia 1996, 151; Brewer 1999). Although Elizabeth Uy Eviota dismisses claims that there was no sexism in the pre-colonial Philippines, most scholars agree that there was "a complementary—rather than a rigid and hierarchical—division of roles between men, women, gender-crossers, and others" before the Spanish arrived (Eviota 1992, 34–35; Garcia 2008, 166–67). One example of such gender-crossers are the *babaylan*, known by different names in the Philippines including *bailan, catooran, mamumuhat, diwatero, catalonan, babalian, alopogan, and dorarakit*.[6] Grace Nono describes them as serving many functions, including as "priestesses/ritualists, healers/therapists, chanters/reciters of oral traditions, dancers, philosophers, [and] transmitters of culture" before Spanish colonization (Nono 2013, 24). Although most were women, some were men, and others were what we might call today "gender queer" (35).[7] I argue that their authority in the pre-colonial Philippines contrasts with longstanding postcolonial gender and sexual binaries that hold men, the masculine, and heterosexuality supreme.

For the majority of the Philippines, however, the status of women and nonbinary people progressively deteriorated with the passing of centuries under colonization. Carolyn Brewer documents the resistance of the babaylan and her regional equivalents in the early seventeenth century who incited their people to resist Spanish colonizers and preserve their cultural identities (Brewer 2004, 93, 95).[8] In response, the Spanish "elaborated strategies and acted toward her elimination … launching an inquisition style of locating and eliminating [her] influence over the townspeople" (Mangahas 2006, 36–39). The Spanish massacred the babaylan, who were forced to surrender or go underground in order to survive. Although babaylan and their regional equivalents continue to exist today in small numbers, their societal power has greatly diminished (39). Furthermore, colonialism created the conditions for prostitution, as large numbers of Spanish men, unaccompanied by women, arrived in the islands (Eviota 1992, 37). Catholicism condemned same-sex desire, and traditional gender-crossing became increasingly difficult to maintain given Spanish norms of machismo (Garcia 2008, 167).

During the American period, gender-crossing continued despite stigma. Filipina/os' ideas of sexuality and gender, increasingly influenced by ideas derived from the US' and Europe's bourgeoning field of sexology, shifted further (Garcia 2008, 167). New perspectives deepened the perception of homosexuality as perversion, conflated gender and sexuality, and imposed a "homo/hetero" distinction onto sexuality (165). J. Neil Garcia argues that the proliferation of such gender and sexual ideologies occurred in multiple forms during the American colonial period vis-à-vis:

> entrenchment of American cultural hegemony through the co-optation of the traditional mestizo creolized elite, the expansion of the newly empowered middle class, the secularization of public education, the promulgation and regulation of Western (specifically, American) notions of gender and sexuality by means of academic instruction in English, and the Americanization of all aspects of government and the mass media. (Garcia 2008, 167)

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In short, after over 500 years of Spanish and American influence, gender-crossing and transvestism in the Philippines became ignored at best and pathologized at worst. As Neutron has observed, stigmatization happens predominantly in the elite educated class, as working-class and poor communities often ignore one's deviant sexuality and gender as long as they can work and gain income for their families.

It is clear that homophobia, transphobia, and patriarchy have harmed all of these activists. But more profoundly, what is most devastating is the continued erasure of Filipina/o/x gender-crossing, colonization of sexuality, and heteropatriarchy, conferred and exacerbated by colonialism and internalized by Filipina/o/xs themselves.[9] Compounding such erasure are the ways that the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), an inspiration to some Filipina/o/x activists, has reinscribed heterosexism in its practices (Abinales 2004, 98–100). Marxist-Leninist groups of the twentieth century, including the CPP, have historically viewed homosexuality as an offshoot of bourgeois thinking and Western imperialism (Anonymous 5 2012; Machado 2014). Although an amended 1998 CPP document now forbids discrimination with respect to gender and sexuality, it is difficult to undo internalized homophobia and heterosexism previously cemented in ideology (Abinales 2004, 98–100). This may be particularly true for those whose politics were greatly influenced by the Party as young people in the late 1960s and 1970s, decades before the amendment was introduced.[10]

For guidance, we might look to examples of indigenous people of the Cordillera region who successfully resisted Spanish conquest, avoiding Christianization and its patriarchal culture (Roces 2012, 89). Some scholars argue that Ifugao men and women, for instance, have maintained a system of shared agricultural labor. Men are central to cooking and child rearing, and parents share child care with their extended communities (Mondiguing 2000, 18; Santiago 2000). Although the Ifugao's traditional forms of livelihood are increasingly at odds with globalization's "industrialization, tourism, intensified mining activities, the creation of export processing zones, and the increase of monoculture agricultural products," there is power in knowing that egalitarian models exist, which challenges activists to imagine other revolutionary arrangements (Roces 2012, 98).

Knowing how Spanish colonization, US imperialism, and modern forms of globalization and advanced capitalism have affected gender-crossers throughout Philippine history might lend additional legitimacy for those resistant to LGBTQ issues within anti-imperialist nationalist and often masculinist and heteronormative movements. Such knowledges reject the recapitulation of US exceptionalism and gay liberalism into anti-imperialist struggles. It must be remembered that the US, too, has failed Jan, Neutron, and Charity through its historical exclusion and state-sanctioned violence against TGNC people. All three utilize Eng's "queer diasporic" approach by neither renouncing Philippine sovereignty nor subscribing to American exceptionalism in their activism.

Let us further contextualize Jan's, Neutron's, and Charity's experiences within the social, political, and economic systems in which they live. Raised in the US by immigrant mothers, Jan and Charity—like other American-born Filipina/o/xs—fight assimilation, loss of language and culture, physical separation from their homeland, and

the emotions that accompany such navigation. Neutron, the daughter of a nursing aide, arrived in the US at age seventeen and had been in and out of community colleges while working in temporary, low-wage jobs. As a neo-colony of the US, the Philippines has become largely dependent on cash crops and its own unprocessed raw materials for survival, with little national income gained within its small-scale traditional manufacturing and agricultural sectors (Eviota 1992, 63–64). Four hundred years of Spanish colonialism and feudalism and 100 years of Americanization, hand-in-hand with the penetration of transnational capital facilitated by members of the local ruling class, have locked the Philippines into a dependent and ongoing asymmetrical relationship among multinational corporations, international banks, and multilateral institutions (63–64). In the 1970s, Aurelia, Cynthia, and others joined a movement to challenge the Philippines' root problems and deteriorating economy, while Neutron and the mothers of Jan and Charity moved to the US to escape poverty. In the US, Charity's mother continued her career as a nurse, but Jan's mother became a domestic worker, experiencing overwork, exposure to chemicals, and low wages, contradicting the American Dream. Thirty years later, Jan, Charity, and Neutron joined this same movement for Philippine self-determination, recognizing that Philippine conditions of poverty, exacerbated by US government and corporate involvement, led Neutron and their mothers to move overseas in the first place.

"Acting Out" and Working Through Historical Trauma

It is within this historical, political, and economic contextualization that the origins of many of the activists' collective traumas become clearer. Drawing on Brave Heart's concept of historical trauma, I argue that all of the activists I have described experienced cumulative wounding within their lifetimes and from generations before them (Brave Heart 1998). Their historical trauma obviously differs from that described by Brave Heart about the Lakota people, and instead can be traced to impacts specific to Filipina/o/x history: martial law, migration and exile, sexism, capitalism, racism, transphobia, homophobia, feudalism, imperialism, and colonialism. It is this historical trauma that I argue has shaped conflict among the activists, uniting them while also pitting them against one another.

Facing trauma requires activists to collectively ask: What historical trauma have we inherited as a people? How does historical and personal trauma merge and affect our relationships with one another, impeding our social-change work? How do we acknowledge traumatic paths without being defeated by them?

Reversing cultural amnesia about the genocide that accompanies centuries of colonization by learning about present-day Filipina/o/x indigenous communities and precolonial history might offer visions for what decolonized organizations and relationships could look like in the future. Information about the babaylan in the precolonial Philippines also reveals the possibility of moving gender-fluid and trans people to their rightful place of honor and power among cismen and ciswomen within the Filipina/o/x American Left. Confronting historical trauma and embracing history is powerful because it

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

outlines the layers of trauma and abuse that Filipina/o/xs, particularly women and gender and sexual minorities, have borne for centuries. It also connects the past to the present and elders and ancestors to youth, prioritizing the Filipino core value of *kapwa*, or the extension of the "shared self" to "the Other" (De Guia 2005, 28).

When activists recognize how historical and personal traumas influence their organizations, they may be more likely to prioritize healing for themselves and one another because leaders want people to stay in the movement. But organizational sustainability cannot be the sole reason to prioritize healing. Centering organizational sustainability privileges people's output rather than people themselves. A decolonial process, however, nurtures Filipina/o/x indigeneity, which cherishes all living things.

Some activists worry that there is no time to spare for "healing" in their activism. However, some activists argue that activism *is* healing (Crimp 1989; Cvetkovich 2003). For those who survived the US AIDS epidemic and whose militancy played a crucial role in their own emotional and physical survival, "mourning *becomes* militancy" (Crimp 1989, 9). Further arguing this point, many anti-martial-law activists, over forty years later, offer public testimony at events that commemorate the declaration of martial law about their experiences as former political prisoners. These actions keep alive the memory of those who were murdered, and for them, it is a fundamental part of their healing process. Public acts of militant mourning can also ensure future survival. For example, mourning through militancy undergirds the #neveragain campaign, which aims to remember Marcos's human-rights atrocities so that current and future presidents never repeat them (Pimentel 2015). Through militant mourning, "the dead stay with us, [keeping] the historical record open" (Cvetkovich 2003, 238). It suggests that even if one could overcome their trauma, they might not want to do so.

Still, I concur with Crimp and others that militancy cannot heal all wounds. One US-based anti-martial-law activist in Aurelia's generation told me that she has not had a chance to heal from the death of two of her comrades because her organization never offered time for members to grieve. Although they spent years campaigning for justice for the murders, no one ever told her the location of their graves, and she was afraid to ask (Anonymous 6 2015). Her story suggests that militancy is not always sufficient for healing and that grieving is necessary for some activists. Instead of pushing to "get over" trauma, it might be useful to ask what it means for activists to actually *grieve* and do it collectively (Cheng 2000, 7).

Collective grieving is radical because grieving is often considered a private act in the West. Indigenous communities, however, engage in collective grieving and healing rituals, which acknowledge the pains of both living and dead. They involve the family, various community members, and sometimes entire villages. For example, in Cagayan Valley, according to Sr. Rosario Battung, the close relative of a sick person used to stand by a window at night and sing the Mangurug, an indigenous Ibanag cultural song. The whole village, upon hearing the song, would join and sing the Mangurug to pray for the neighbor's healing (Nono 2013, 205).

Supporting grief collectively requires education, communication, patience, compassion, and sometimes space. Some Filipina/o/x American Left organizations have built

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

spaces for this crucial step in the healing process. Releasing emotional pain can take many forms, including deep breathing, crying, yelling, dancing, trembling, and sweating. Bearing in mind the value of releasing pain, two organizations train members to use somatic centering to position themselves when something triggers them; they also offer members free yoga classes. Another organization helped a member plan a memorial service and raised money to send her back to the Philippines when her father died. That activist communities in the Filipina/o/x American Left are creating spaces for releasing pain is a huge milestone. In previous decades, activists would ignore their pain or have to go outside of their organizations for support. Furthermore, activists in the 1970s Filipina/o American Left were subjected to hypercritical "criticism-self-criticism" sessions where they were "guilt-tripped" by their comrades for taking time away from organizing to spend time with their families. In one extreme case, a former leading member of the 1970s Filipina/o American Left was placed under "house arrest" and all her actions were suspected of being grounded in "petit bourgeois individualism" (Anonymous 4 2015).

The conflicts described illustrate that activism itself can be traumatic due to its disappointments and emotional intensities. Acknowledging the importance of intra-organizational healing, one Filipina/o/x American Left organization has created protocols for airing "deep feelings" and built spaces for holding members accountable to one another without the police or state being involved (Anonymous 7 2012). Although implementing such protocols is challenging, the mindfulness around them is a vital intervention for shifting the burden from the individual in need of healing to the rest of their collective.

Intra-movement communication and education are not always easy. They take time, risk, and courage. But they are also crucial for interrupting histories of trauma built upon the erasure of individual and collective pain. How often does resentment and pain accumulate because of assumptions fueled by lack of communication? How do we stay tender with others when we too are hurting?

Intra-movement communication sometimes requires "meeting people where they're at," which Sharon Doetsch-Kidder calls "loving criticism." In her research on the role of spirituality in social-justice activism, Doetsch-Kidder describes loving criticism as "a combination of opening to life, acceptance of things as they are, and letting go of concepts" (Doetsch-Kidder 2012, 25–26). A woman organizer recounted how women challenge men in their group with "tough love." They say, "Remember when [narrator's name] said that you were wack? You're doing it again." She emphasized the importance of learning history and understanding the root causes of the sexism of many Filipino and Fil-Am men: "Sexism will happen because of the [Catholic] church and internalized [oppression] . . . maybe you learned it from a problematic *lola* [grandmother]. There's an understanding that folks are in a different place" (Anonymous 7 2012).

Putting an ethic of compassion into practice is markedly challenging given the everyday assaults of heteropatriarchy in the lives of LGBTQ people. Thus, building antisexist and antihomophobic spaces requires holding one another accountable in sensitive and loving ways. Some organizations in the Filipina/o/x American Left,

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

including the organizations mentioned, are doing this now, more than ten years after the aforementioned conflicts. For example, one organization offers specific homophobia, heterosexism, and sexism workshops to the greater community. Some queer organizers vocalized what they view as responsibility for educating cis-straight members. They do not feel pressured to "hold it"; rather, there is an understanding for them to speak up. At the same time, cis and straight members are expected to be open to learning and to take responsibility for educating themselves without over-burdening TGNC comrades, particularly those who are multiply marginalized.

Through these mechanisms, the Filipina/o/x American Left is evolving. While not perfect, Aurelia and the elders in Charity's organization have since become allies of the LGBTQ community, publicly advocating against LGBTQ rights violations. It is important to draw out this point, emphasizing that the conflict described is historically specific. According to one activist, this shift is the result of a decades-long struggle in which LGBT comrades in the Philippines contested the formalized analysis that LGBT identities were a construct of the petit bourgeoisie. As a result, the CPP formally recognized LGBT members for the first time in 1998.[11] I observe that Filipina/o diasporic activists, some of whom were influenced by the CPP, have started to follow suit since then.

Rebecca Klatch's research about feminist consciousness development in US activist spheres may also prove helpful for understanding how this shift occurred and why the change took time. She refers to a process called "framing" as necessary for consciousness development. Framing entails the creation of a larger context and available language within which people can place their individual experiences, collectively expressing and understanding grievances (Klatch 2001, 795–97). This process takes time. Applying the concept of framing, the intergenerational conflict I discussed between cis-straight elders and TGNC activists makes sense. Elder and younger activists formed and framed their political consciousness in different historical moments of LGBTQ acceptance within the Filipina/o/x American Left. Over time, with broader societal consciousness around LGBTQ issues fought for by TGNC people, cis-straight activists have increasingly sought to act as allies.

Although activists may learn the tools for better understanding one another and their collective and personal traumas, overcoming racial grief and trauma is likely impossible, given Cheng's discussion of racial melancholia and the multiple ways that personal and state-sanctioned violence is initiated in the Philippines and in the US (Cheng 2000). Here, Cvetkovich's analysis is helpful:

> I refuse the sharp distinction between mourning and melancholy that leads Dominick LaCapra, for example, to differentiate between "working through," the successful resolution of trauma, and "acting out," the repetition of trauma that does not lead to transformation. Not only does the distinction often seem tautological—good responses to trauma are cases of working through; bad ones are instances of acting out—but … activism's modes of acting out, especially its performative and expressive functions, are a crucial resource for responding to trauma. (Cvetkovich 2003, 164)

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cvetkovich argues that blurring "working through" and "acting out" trauma (for example, militant mourning) opens doors for ambivalence and the acknowledgment of grief, both of which are part of the healing process. Honoring this process rejects healing progress-narratives in which mourning linearly comes to an end.

Healing trauma is ongoing. By partaking in intergenerational and decolonizing dialogue and education, Filipina/o/x activists chip away at centuries-old violence embedded in their relationships with one another. Doing so allows them to organize against the root causes of their trauma with greater clarity and unity while remaining tender toward themselves and one another.

Notes

I would like to thank the reviewers and editors for their encouragement and constructive feedback. I also thank Kim Baglieri, Ana Liza Caballes, Olivia Canlas, Grace Chang, Leah Obias, Joana Palomar, and Gina Velasco for reading drafts and offering valuable insights and suggestions. Lastly, and most importantly, I humbly thank the activists whom I interviewed for their contributions to social change and for their trust and openness in discussing these issues.

1. Much gratitude to Savannah Shange for sharing Jessica Marie Johnson's 2015 article with me and others.

2. I deliberately move between the terms Filipina/o and Filipina/o/x depending on context. In general, I do not use the x when referring to people in the past, attending to what Halberstam refers to as "perverse presentism." Perverse presentism avoids contemporary labels when describing people in the past, understanding that identities from the current perspective may have held different past meanings. See Halberstam 1998, 50.

3. All names are pseudonyms.

4. "Passing" in this context refers to a trans or gender-nonconforming person being read by others as someone whose gender matches the sex assigned to them at birth, on the basis of appearance, mannerism, and voice; see Stryker 2007 and Snorton 2009 for more about the politics of passing

5. According to Grace Nono, these figures hold distinct qualities specific to the places from which they originate, but all are similarly connected to the spirit world (Nono 2013).

6. More research must be done on how gender was aggregated during precolonial times.

7. Brewer cites Lopez, "Annual Letter of 1609–1610," trans. Repetti (Society of Jesus in the Philippines, 1607–1609), 439.

8. See Mendoza 2015 on how US imperialism in the Philippines shaped and was shaped by racialized notions of sexuality.

9. See section 13 of a 1998 revision of the law renamed *Mga Gabay at Tuntunin sa Pag-aasawa sa Loob ng Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (Abinales 2004).

10. See Amendment 6 of 1998 revision of *Gabay* (Abinales 2004).

https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12342 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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Statement on Human Subjects

This research with human subjects was approved by the Office of Research at the University of California, Santa Barbara, 6-13-0464 on June 27, 2013, and 8-16-0310 on April 15, 2016.