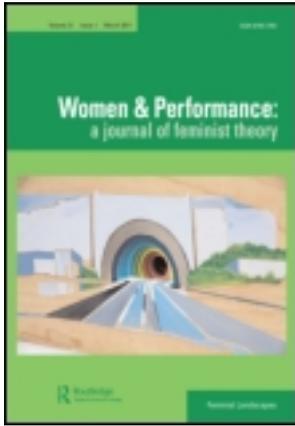


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Your *terno*'s draggin': Fashioning Filipino American performance

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In this essay, I explore the semiotics of the *terno*, the Philippine national dress, creatively interpreted by diasporic artists as a dense metaphor for the proper and improper Filipina. These artistic deployments of the *terno* lay bare unquestioned notions of Filipina femininity and nationalism to be fabrications of colonialism, militarization and globalization. The reconfigurations of the infamous “butterfly dress” by multimedia artist groups Barrionics and Mail Order Brides (M.O.B.) take center stage in my discussion. The genealogy of the *terno* I focus on in this article emphasizes alteration and transformation, to resist facile binaries of the nation as traditional and the diaspora as the site of modern and innovative modifications. My historicization of the *terno* underscores it as an emergent form in which to situate the uses of the *terno* in Filipino American performance projects within the history of the *terno* itself. Specifically, the essay focuses on the defamiliarization of feminine constructs that operate both in the nation and the diaspora, as well as to foreground the imbrications of colonial histories and our neocolonial present in the current global circulation of Filipina bodies. I highlight how these artists in the Filipino diaspora spectacularize the inchoateness of categories of gender, race and sexuality. Their performance works delink the dresser from the dress, the *terno* from the Filipina, the dress from the girl and the boy, the dress from the straight and from the queer, the dress from the diasporic and from the national. Within such figurations, the *terno* emerges as an overprivileged icon – of ideal womanhood and of the mother nation – whose iconicity is re-routed through bodies that do not belong.

Keywords: Filipino American performance; fashion and national costume; dressing

“We call it butterfly dress because after independence from the US in 1947, Filipino women could really fly.”

– Paola Isabella Rocha Tornito, Puerto Rican–Filipina “socialite”¹

“Dresses are props in racialized constructions of identities.”

– Laura Pérez, “Writing on the Social Body: Dresses and Body Ornamentation in Contemporary Chicana Art”

It is an evening of performances by and about Filipina American lives. In a one-act performance entitled *de blues*, performed at Bindlestiff Studio in San Francisco,

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California, a woman in her 30s comes onto the stage, half-clad in a *terno*, the distinguished national dress for women in the Philippines.² The dress drags on the floor, with its infamous “butterfly” sleeves, typically stiff, remaining limp on the woman’s shoulders. An argument ensues between the young woman and her mother. We soon learn that the occasion for the evening is the daughter’s *second* debut – a ritual designed to introduce to society young Filipinas who are of marriageable status. The “repeat” debutante no longer fits in her *terno*, much to her mother’s chagrin. The first cotillion did not yield a husband and thus the need for a second attempt. Her mother insists that her daughter dress herself in this national vesture, the only feasible attire for a ritual of passage announcing a young woman’s formal (re)entry into society. The mother’s determination to find a suitable escort for her daughter underscores the function of this coming-of-age ritual in upholding the strictures of hetero-normativity. In this struggle between mother and daughter, the *terno* becomes instead a visible marker of contestation. Even as the debutante’s body accedes to the performative stature of the dress, it remains stubbornly resistant, interrupting the prescribed script of the *terno*’s grandness.

In this performance, the physical comedy of actress Bernadette Sibayan Rosquites enlivens the contrast between the regal *terno* and the ageing debutante. Rosquites performs her character as falling out of the seams of the *terno*, constantly fidgeting and uncomfortable in the formal dress. While the mother pontificates on the importance of the occasion, the debutante rolls her eyes and tugs on her dress, and drolly responds: “The cotillion is one of the “‘three evils of the Pilipino culture’,” along with “‘Capitalism and Catholicism’.” The over-the-hill debutante is literally unable to fit into the *terno*, and figuratively unable to live up to what the *terno*, in this instantiation, symbolizes – a highly feminized, demure, marriageable, and upper-class Filipina. Through parody, *de blues* critiques the institution of the cotillion as a patriarchal ritual practice naturalized as a benign cultural tradition of becoming a woman. It puts on comedic display Filipino American racialization within gendered and classed structures, normalized through social practices such as the *debut*, and markers such as the *terno*.³

The appearance of the *terno* in this evening of performance works focusing on Filipina identity is, in many ways, inevitable. After all, this national costume is the vestimentary icon materializing the ideal Filipina. *de blues*’s depiction of a maturing debutante, ill fit to wear the regal garb, is an exemplary mobilization of the *terno* by contemporary artists in the Filipino diaspora. Read within the grain of its own historical and cultural notoriety, the *terno* here is reinforced as a powerful sign, foregrounding a contentious performance of gender and class stabilization through its figuration of the multiple genealogies undergirding its evocation. In this essay, I analyze how performance artists deploy the *terno* as a dense metaphor for the proper and improper Filipina. Centralizing the *terno* as a costume metaphor and as a literal “prop” of Filipinanness allows me to link performance to matters of materiality. To put it another way, these performances require an engagement with the material history of the *terno*, the process through which the *terno* came to assume its lauded place in the nation. Michel Foucault’s well-rehearsed notion of genealogy is useful here in its emphasis on variegated structures of emergence rather than on

fixed origins: “It opposes itself to the search for origins” (Foucault, 370). For Foucault, a turn to genealogy is “to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (376). Genealogy as a historical concept provides a framework that attends to the historically mediated relationship of the body with the dress. As in *de blues*, the wearer does not simply wear the dress, nor is the dress simply worn by the wearer. Thus, Laura Pérez, in describing uses of dress and body decoration in 1970s and the 1980s Chicana art, writes that dress “call[s] attention to both the body as social and to the social body that constitutes it as such, specifically through gendered and racialized histories of dress, labor, immigration . . .” (2002, 51). Multidisciplinary performance and visual arts such as *de blues*, *Barrionics does Barrioque* (2003) and *A Public Message Service about Your Private Life* “expose a body,” one enfolded in the *terno*, in multiple national contexts. The genealogies of the *terno* I construct here emphasize concepts of alteration and transformation, and resist facile binaries of the nation as traditional and intact and the diaspora as a space of “undoing” and modernity. Instead, I read the *terno* as an emergent popular form whose deployments provide spaces of immense possibility for performance artists in the Filipino diaspora.

In his theory of the American leisure class, Thorstein Veblen strictly demarcates national costume from fashion, claiming that costume is “more static,” hence out-of-style. The history of the *terno* could not be a more fitting antithesis to Veblen’s declaration of national costume as “stable.” Veblen’s opinion of national dress as “stable costumes” extends to the people themselves: “. . . they belong in countries, localities and times where the population, or at least the class to which the costume in question belongs, is relatively homogenous, stable, and immobile” (2004, 281). The historical and symbolic formation of the *terno* defies Veblen’s clear distinction between fashion and national costume. Here, I trace the *terno*’s body politic within Filipino American performances to explore how its alterations and transformations establish it as a national object that is equally fluid in its form and unfixed in what it symbolizes.

The modifications and reconstructions of the *terno* in Filipino American performances are interjections into the larger discourse of US multicultural liberalism, the Philippine nation’s multiple colonial histories, and the circulation of Filipina bodies in contemporary globalization. In turn, these three foci also found the ideological ground on which Filipino American subject and community formation and Filipino American cultural works are subsumed. The works of the artists I discuss here embody the inchoateness of categories of gender, race and sexuality, denaturalizing the idea of a seamless relation between the national costumes and the bodies that wear them. Within such figurations, the *terno* emerges as an overprivileged icon – of ideal womanhood and of the mother nation – whose iconicity is re-routed through bodies that do not belong.

Nationalism is always already invoked in discussions of national costumes. This essay builds on scholarly works that approach the *terno*, its emergence, and its representations within a history of colonialism and a consideration of the body as site of regulation and resistance. Mina Roces’s writings on politics, dress and gender in the Philippines argue that the tension between Western Dress and Filipino dress

in twentieth-century Philippines “became not just semiotically charged but also politically potent” (2005a, 1). For M. Roces, “focusing on the politics of dress, and its gendered implications... show how the semiotics of dress was crucial to political strategy” (2). Her discussion of the Filipina suffragette movement in the early twentieth century highlights activist mobilization of the *terno*, whereby it both upholds “traditional womanhood” and advocates for modern rights. Anna Labrador moves the conversation towards a different rendition of history in her essay on celebrations of the centenary in Philippine visual arts. She observes “a correlation between images from historical paintings and the promotion of Philippine national costume” and “how contemporary artists found different ways of evoking them” in their own interpretations of “national identity and anti-colonial sentiments” (1999, 60–1). Labrador underscores (albeit briefly) the state policy that required government workers to wear *Filipiniana*, as part of the national Centennial celebration; she writes that this mandate “brought a process of negotiating a standard form of dress” (59). *Filipiniana*, as Labrador points out, is a contradictory term for all things Filipino as it emphasizes more the foreign influences undergirding on iconic costumes such as the *terno*. Alicia Arrízon traces this hybrid genealogy, beginning with the *terno*’s former name – *traje de mestiza*. Arrízon identifies the *terno* as emerging from a mestizo body, and proposes that “as it [the mestizo body] developed in fashion, the body [through the clothing] is linked with privilege, affirming the identity constructed by adopting the Hispanic legacy” (2006, 146).

Of particular interest here is an exploration of Filipina American engagement with the *terno* as a complicated extension of, and an integral part of, the political body of the Filipina. To ask, broadly put, what do these performances in the US Filipino/a diaspora reveal about the social and political practice of donning the *terno*? In attending to such questions from the diasporic stage, I reconsider the *terno*’s singular nationalist value, and in doing so, defamiliarize hegemonic feminine constructs that operate both in the nation and the diaspora. Within the work of M.O.B. and Barrionics, the semiotics of the *terno* unfold layers of complex signification, configuring notions of Filipina femininity and nationalism to be fabrications of colonialism, militarization, and global migration patterns.

My meditations on the *terno* extend, in some measure, contemporary analyses of vestimentary objects such as the turban or the veil. Controversies around the turban, the veil, and the burqa rest on the (false) liminality of both the object of clothing and the body that wears it. Such readings emphasize (and rightly so) the calculated spectacularization of religion and affect made visible within mobilizations of these objects. Jasbir Puar, for example, argues that the donning of the turban is a daily practice whose insistent ordinariness works against its controversial/exceptional status. By invoking the daily practice of donning the turban, of “selecting, tying, binding, pinning, folding, winding what might seem to be endless... amounts of cloth,” Puar emphasizes the repetitive nature of the ritual, while equally foregrounding the inexorable difference that each repetition brings (2007, 192).⁴ For Puar, “the turban is part of the body” such that the separation between the organic body and the inorganic object can no longer be sustained. My readings of the *terno* in these performance works depart somewhat from Puar’s collapse of the

separation between the object and the body. Instead, I begin with a well-worn observation: significance is produced through articulating a relationship between the body and the clothing. Indeed, in the case of the *terno*, it is precisely the staged distance between object and body that creates scripts of possibility for the wearers/performers. Collapsing the organic body and inorganic object works less effectively in the context of the Filipino body and the *terno*, as the stakes of the Filipino body in a *terno* (in the nation and the US diaspora) are significantly different from that of the Sikh body with a turban. That I locate the *terno* on the Filipino American body allows me to articulate its signification beyond a one-nation-bound performance of nationalism. Rather, my interest in the *terno* relies more on its dissemination as a (falsely) stable, ordinary icon of Filipino/Filipina American culture, and in understanding what is at stake for us to continue to do so. What do we learn from a shift in focus from the *terno*'s naturalization to the compacted colonial histories encrypted in the *terno* itself? In other words, how do the refashionings of the *terno* within Filipino American performance corrupt, extend and/or even consolidate sedimented languages of colonialism and globalization?

Dressmaking/nation-making: butterfly dress and the Filipina woman

The *terno* was declared by legendary Filipino designer Joe Salazar (who made Imelda Marcos infamous for her butterfly dresses) to be *the* “marker of Filipina identity.” It is known by other names: *traje de mestiza*, butterfly dress, Maria Clara. At times, it is also referred to as *baro't saya*, the name of its origins. Names and varying references to the *terno* reflect its changing look. This Filipino dress was once a four-part suit (*terno* is Filipino for “suit”), which included the *camisa* (blouse with sleeves), the *saya* (skirt), the *pañuelo* (a cloth worn over the *camisa*), and the *tapis* (worn over the skirt). Through the years and a series of innovations, it has emerged as a one-piece dress, sometimes with detachable “butterfly” sleeves. One of the most intriguing and identifiable features of the *terno* is its “butterfly sleeves.” A unique variation on the long tulip-shape sleeves of the nineteenth century, the “butterfly sleeve” is a metamorphosis that emerged in the 1920s from Pacita Longos’s complex designs. The “starched tulle [*babaharin*]” is used to create the “butterfly sleeve” shape, which is “pleated at the shoulder line to create the impression of a butterfly on tiptoe for a flight” (A. Roces 1978, 2539). Deposed first lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos made popular the present-day starched “sculptured look” of the *terno*'s butterfly sleeves; hence, it is also known as “Imelda sleeves” (Cruz 1982, 11). Its detachable arm easily transforms the *terno* into a fitted evening gown.

Discussions on the modifications of the *terno* are most often preoccupied with modernity and modernization, consistent with oft-cited fashion theorist Gilles Lipovetsky's (1994) observation of fashion as coextensive with modernity. The genealogy of the *terno*, on the other hand, is more an amalgamation of indigenous and colonial garb and its modifications over time are influenced by various cultural trends and mores. For example, Ramon Valera's one-piece *terno* creation in 1939 initially scandalized *terno* wearers, as this design seemed to destabilize an established idiom of Filipina womanhood and propriety. During an earlier period, explains

distinguished and internationally known high-couture designer Pito Moreno, the “incarnation” of the *pamuelo* “the period’s [nineteenth-century] concession to modesty – the *camisa* being low necked, and made of the flimsiest fabrics, the *piña* and *jusi*.” The *tapis* appears to have a similar function: “the addition of the *tapis* as overskirt was to keep the lower torso from showing through the sheerness of the skirt material.”⁵ In another account the *pamuelo*’s use as a head covering, worn most often in churches, reinforces this clothing and modesty; or in this case, piety:

Contrary to the observations of foreigners during the last century, the veil was not an intrinsic part of the native dress. It was worn only to church, but since our female ancestors were a pious lot, they were often seen with their heads covered. The church-going *colegiala* of the 18th century wore a thick *baro’t saya* with long narrow sleeves, a shroud-like veil and an *estampita* (saint’s picture) hanging from her neck to deliver her from evil. By the 1750’s, the *colegiala*’s mother was wearing a large cape-like *pañuelo* and a wide floor-length *saya*. (Pito Moreno, excerpted from *Philippine Costume* [1995, www.filipinoheritage.com/costumes])

Most significantly, the project of colonialism provided the condition for the evolution of *terno* designs as a means to police the production of gender through propriety. Colonial regimes regulated women’s subjectivity through dress codes that controlled bodily movement. Codes of dressing and movement – pious, modest, delicate (like a butterfly), graceful – have been naturalized as a characteristic of ideal Filipina womanhood. What is now presumed to be a sign of nationalism is thus ironically more a corrupt effect of colonialism.

Although the *terno* is an amalgamation of styles from various influences, as described by Moreno and Cruz, its very name is derived from Spanish. The *terno* naturalizes the Spanish colonial cultural residue as the authentic site of “Filipinanness.” This particular embracing of Spanish culture was a salient form of political protest against Americanization in the early decades of the Philippine Commonwealth. National artist Nick Joaquin is described as one of the leaders of this movement. In his famous plays such as *The Portrait of an Artist as a Filipino* and *Tatarin*, Joaquin strategically depicts the Spanish *mestizo* landed class as redeemable and the true inheritors of the Philippine nation. In the context of protesting Americans and *sajonista* (*sajon* is the Spanish term for Anglo-Saxon), Arrizon’s point about “adopting Hispanic legacy” noted earlier is seen in a different light. This act of Hispanic affiliation erases and dis-identifies with laboring bodies of the servant class as it resists American occupation and influence.

Class formation further constitutes Filipina womanhood and shapes emerging versions of the *terno*. Alfredo Roces, a leading historian of *Filipiniana* costumes, writes: the *terno*

should be distinguished from such other Filipino dresses as the informal *balintawak* and the *patadyong*. Lacking the *terno*’s svelte sophistication, these rural costumes are worn mainly by barefoot dancers of the *tinikling* and by carabao-riding maidens in the landscapes of Amorsolo. The *terno*, on the other hand, goes with the stately grace of the *rigodon de honor*, *flores de mayo* processions, coronation nights and the Malacañang Palace. (1978, 2536)

A. Roces makes the distinction between the various Filipina clothing, placing a higher sartorial and social value on the *terno*, to be worn in places such as the

Malacañang Palace and at special occasions. The kinds of women who would wear *terno* and those who would wear *other* native garbs is once again explained here through movement, in particular, dances. Changes in the design of the *terno* itself are at times made to differentiate between the upper- and lower-class Filipina women. Whereas Pito Moreno, in the quotation earlier, explains the function of the *tapis* in the language of propriety, another *terno* historian describes the *tapis* as “a garment worn by servants.” The discarding of the *tapis* is attributed to its identification with women of a lower class, making it unnecessary and inappropriate attire for upper class Filipinas. Indeed, if the *tapis* is a garment only useful to servants, it is precisely irrelevant to those who would most likely be wearing the *terno* and to where it would be worn (Philippine Terno, 2005).⁶

The *terno*'s place in politics may have been sealed during the Marcos regime, but it played a relatively key role in democracy debates of the newly forming republic during the early twentieth century, specifically in women's participation within the nation-building project. As noted earlier, Mina Roces's writings on the politics of dressing highlight specific historical and political moments in which the *terno* was woven into the social and national fabric. As it were, the *terno* took central stage in one of women's struggles to enact the most popular form of democracy – voting. During the American colonial period, Filipina suffragists donned the *terno* while advocating for equality in the workplace and political arena. Roces argues that the “*panuelo* activists”⁷ fought for the rights of women and deployed the *terno* as a political tactic by appealing to the nostalgia of “traditional Filipina womanhood” (M. Roces 2005b, 5). During this period, as the Philippine nation was negotiating its entry into modernity, the figure of the “traditional Filipina” carried the burden of nostalgia. Filipina suffragists' understanding and manipulation of the semiotics of the *terno*, at a critical historical moment, moved forward the rights of Filipinas.

In the 1970s, the Marcoses actively re-envisioned Philippine history through their own lives (Rafael 2000), and made good use of the *terno* in these nation-remaking efforts. The then-Philippine president/dictator Ferdinand Marcos and first lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos popularized the *terno* and the *barong tagalog*. The *terno*, for a particular generation, is almost synonymous with the deposed president's wife. Dressing played a role in what the Marcoses declared as the “New Society,” where the *terno* and the *barong tagalog* was instrumental in fashioning the image of the modern Filipino and democratic Philippines. First lady Imelda notoriously wore the *terno* on all occasions and locations, hence she gained a nickname that sutures the *terno* sleeves and her sense of power – “steel butterfly.”⁸ Many have interpreted the Marcos's sartorial choices as part of a strategic self-fashioning of themselves as pro-nationalists. Like the suffragists at the turn of the century, the former first lady manipulates the cultural capital of the *terno* as a “bearer of tradition,” but for entirely different ends. M. Roces argues that Imelda's employment of the *terno* as a “construction of the feminine as ‘bearer of tradition’ was essential to her dual agenda of legitimizing her husband's authoritarian regime and her own access to power via her husband.” Imelda's attempts align her with the cultural capital of the *terno* as a pro-nationalist symbol, even as the *terno* is consequently rejected by the masses. As M. Roces writes: “by the 1980s, the *terno* was metonymy for Imelda Marcos

rather than metaphor for the nation” (2005b, 12). Mrs Marcos tirelessly wore the Philippine national dress, as an expression of Filipino pride. At the time of her trial for racketeering charges in 1988, her image in a lavishly colored *terno* worn in New York winter made a worldwide impact. *Times Magazine* reporters wrote: “She swept into U.S. district court in nothing less bewitching than a floor-length turquoise gown, a silk-and-chiffon *terno* that is traditional Philippine wear” (Lacayo and Sachs 1988).

Early in the new millenium, the *terno* remains a continuing source of inspiration for Philippine couture. The year 2003 was declared the “year of the *terno*” for the Philippine couture industry (Mauricio, 2004). Fashion shows, such as the “Timeless *Terno*,” and design competitions zealously promoted the “return and modernization” of the national dress. A series of efforts galvanized the *terno* as a metaphor of the Philippine nation, and workers such as the *bordadoras* are synonymously constructed as the weavers of cultural/national identity. Luli Arroyo, daughter of president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001–2010), and Bea Zobel Jr, arts patroness, top presidential aide, and a member of wealthy and powerful the Ayala clan, spearheaded this revival effort. They also launched “*Ternos* for Twenty-one Competition: Taking the *Terno* to the New Century,” a competition for fashion designers with the idea of a “modern interpretation of the *terno*.”⁹ Their *terno* revival project is a collaborative venture involving the Metropolitan Museum of the Philippines. Within such elitist collaborations, we see what Benedict Anderson has famously branded as “cacique democracy” in its manifestation within matters of culture.

The recovery of the *terno*, as articulated in these popular cultural projects, hinges on its modernization, in design and in function, and on a renewed commitment to the makers of this national dress. The project leaders are moved to action through their recognition of the potentialities of labor involved in the making of the *terno*. This lengthy quotation from Bea Zobel Jr is an affective appeal, one that seeks to ignite passion for the national dress and its return back into fashion. The plea is partly organized around craftsmanship and the labor economy generated by the garment’s production:

The *terno* was a form of art that produced livelihood and jobs for whole communities: from the *bordadoras* to the seamstresses to the weavers of the fabric. More important, the *terno* was one of the carriers of our history and identity. I felt more and more that many Filipinos were losing touch with our roots and our sense of self was constantly being undermined.

Our handicrafts were in the hands only of the elderly and our different national costumes were being abandoned. Few women were wearing the *terno*. I was soon screaming for help. Someone had to listen. We could not let the *terno* disappear with our other national costumes. If some people could spend a lot on imported clothes, we certainly could spend on *ternos*. (http://www.inq7.net/lif/2004/apr/26/lif_8-2.htm) (Zobel, 2004)

Labor consciousness is layered on nationalist language; the recovery of the *terno* thus embodies a work of art and an art of work. Scholarly discourse on fashion and clothing can be catalogued under several categories: historical studies of clothing, postmodern studies that speak to gender-bending or the epistemology of fashion, dress as a battle ground for nationalist struggles, policing or regulating of gender and sexual

identities, globalization and dress, and materialist critiques of labor practices in the clothing industry. In the quotation above, Zobel conflates nostalgia with tradition, labor-practice consciousness, and national/ethnic identity. Zobel's interventions on the material histories of the *terno* are key reminders of the continued success of commodity fetishism. Now more than ever, with the rise of ethno-chic and aggressive appropriation of ethnic and traditional wear into everyday *moda*, there is a sense of globality promoted through consumerism, while the laborers remain invisible.¹⁰

This brief history of the *terno* that stitches dress, politics and gender now segues into interpretations of Filipina cultural constructs by diasporic feminist performances. The invocation of the history of the *terno* and the politics of dressing in the Philippines (although both topics are only partially laid out here) are critically connected to diasporic alterations. Both diasporic and national modifications of the *terno* negotiate an uneven relationship to the *terno*'s symbolic and materialization of ideal Filipinanness, oscillating between reproduction and alteration. I now turn to the works of Filipino American artists as they participate in this variegated narrative of the *terno*.

Alter(n)ations: Queer diasporic refashionings of Filipinanness

The works of multi- and interdisciplinary artists Barrionics and M.O.B. tailor the *terno* to comment on Filipinanness as constructed in the liberal multicultural context of the US and within the history of the Philippines as multiply colonized. Through their use of drag as performance style, M.O.B. and Barrionics defamiliarize Filipina femininity while also denaturalizing ethnic identity markers, using creative methods such as contrast, juxtaposition, collage and other methods that orchestrate the performers' bodies, costumes, staging and props. The *terno* is reconstructed, appearing as a single butterfly sleeve, not necessarily worn by a woman, and contrasted more stridently with mod/punk-style haircuts, bouffant wigs, and bright nail polish. While these performance projects engage with identity politics rooted in the discourse of US multiculturalism, they equally disrupt images of Filipinas overdetermined by varying historical legacies, specifically the construct of Filipina femininity within the global circulation of Filipina bodies, and the cultural capital of "ethno-chic." And as such, each performance labors, more specifically, as a critique of the normalization of Filipina bodies as "servants of globalization" (Parreñas 2001), as well as hold suspect valorized discourses of hybridity and transculturation as simply artistic processes that emerge in a fast-shrinking world.

Both M.O.B. and Barrionics are particularly attentive to the entanglements of sexuality and performance through the modality of drag. In a preface to the *Journal of Homosexuality*'s issue entitled "The Drag Queen Anthology," Judith Lorber writes:

Drag's core elements are *performance* and *parody*. Drag exaggerates gendered dress and mannerisms with enough little incongruities to show the "otherness" of the drag artist. In the exaggeration lies the parody. . . . What is the joke in drag? Not that someone can pass convincingly as a member of the opposite gender – transgenders and permanent cross-dressers do not want to be unmasked. The joke in drag is to set up 'femininity' or

'masculinity' as pure performance, as *exaggerated* gender display – and then to cut them down as pretense after all. (2004, xxv)

Lorber's emphasis on drag as performance is useful in my discussion of the works by M.O.B. and Barrionics. Both M.O.B. and Barrionics use exaggeration and incongruity as performance devices that comment on Filipinanness, femininity and globalization. The *terno* and other *Filipiniana* costumes are juxtaposed against bodies, other material objects, as well as against scenes that echo familiarity. However, I am reluctant to fully surrender to Lorber's easy linkage between parody and drag. M.O.B. and Barrionics, for example, perform drag to enact their affection



“Barrionics does Barrioque”. Johanna Poethig, Anne Perez, and Rico Reyes. Image courtesy of Barrionics.

for the Philippine nation and display their pride as Filipinos. Drag as discussed by Lorber focuses on its deployment as a critique of gender and sexuality but rarely extends that critique to questions of geopolitics and race. M.O.B. and Barrionics, on the other hand, perform drag as a critique of empire and globalization. Following Martin Manalansan's (2003) critical interpretation of the gay Filipino transmigrants' appropriation of Santacruzán, a highly theatrical parade/procession/pageant Filipino celebration in the month of May, as a critique of gender, sexuality and empire, I want to directly articulate drag, in my readings of M.O.B. and Barrionics, as a performative and analytical tool that foregrounds the limits of US multiculturalism and empire.

Barrionics does Barrioque was an exhibit held in 2003 at the Togonon Gallery in San Francisco, CA; it included paintings, mixed media, video, and performance from its three members: Johanna Poethig, Rico Reyes and Anne Perez. The *terno* makes its appearance in this exhibit in the form of a single butterfly sleeve worn by Urduja (Poethig) and Fanta Siya (Reyes). Fanta Siya is also partly clad in a *baro't saya*, an "older version" of the *terno*. Also in a *baro't saya*, with an accompanying *panuelo*, is the seated Perez. Costume designs, by Reyes, and the other props in this image are crafted with materials that create an "ethnic aura." Accouterments include mats made of hemp-like materials. The sheer *panuelo* (also called *alampay*) could be made of *jusi* (raw silk) or *piña* fabric, traditionally used to make the Philippine national costumes of the *terno* and the *barong tagalog*. The careful staging of the Mac power book on the wooden end table next to a rattan recliner, the collage of suggestively-ethnic clothing, camouflage patterned cloths, mats, shell necklace, and the wires that connect the human bodies to electronic technology suggest more than anachronism. The artists of Barrionics deploy juxtaposition to perform the contrast and intersection of "ethnic," invoked as pre-industrial and natural, with technology, physicalized in the wires attached to the artists' bodies. Together, scraps become *objet trouvé* and make up a portrait of Filipinos in the global era.

I am struck by Barrionics's sustained attentiveness to the variegated aesthetic histories that structure the group's artistic labors. For example, baroque, in art history, describes the lush and highly ornamental style of mid-sixteenth- to eighteenth-century European art. Barrionics acknowledge early cross-cultural intersections of this European art form with Asian art. As they write in their artist statement, their interest is to explore "the aesthetics, passions and politics of baroque traditions and transculturalizations." The wires attached to the artists are material metaphor for transcultural exchange. Their mission statement highlights the practice of cultural exchange during the Baroque period. In doing so they are able to play with notions of "borrowing," camouflage, and hybridity as deriving from a long-tradition of transculturation dating back to the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Yet, Barrionics' interpretation of transcultural exchange, and the resulting hybrid aesthetic at play, must be understood alongside its development within a history of domination. They perform hybridization with objects and on bodies that circle back and forth to the historical and contemporary realities of US imperialism in the Philippines. Thus Filipino costumes and camouflage cloths are stitched together. "Barrionics does Barrioque" is a performative image that conjoins material and



“Urduja”. Johanna Poethig. Image courtesy of Barrionics.

symbolic histories: the weaving of Filipino cultural hybridity (*baro't saya*, the fictive symbols of the mats and shells), Spanish colonialism (*terno*), US imperialism through military occupation of the Philippines (military fatigues), and globalization (Mac computer, wires). It is an image of scraps or the excesses of globalization and an evocative performative portrait of Filipinos and globalization.

Barrionics in-your-face *barrio* pride is akin to another aesthetic movement that fuses postmodern collage and violent colonial histories, *rasquache*. Amalia Mesa-Bains describes the Chicano art aesthetic of *rasquachismo* in the following terms:

In its broadest sense, it is a combination of resistant and resilient attitudes devised to allow the Chicano to survive and persevere with a sense of dignity. The capacity to hold

life together with bits of string, old coffee cans, and broken mirrors in a dazzling gesture of aesthetic bravado is at the heart of *rasquachismo*. (2003, 298)¹¹

I invoke *rasquachismo* because of the centrality of Barrionics' *barrio* pride. The very name Barrionics toys with racialized notions of place that are pre-industrial or invoke the tropics while appended with the futuristic technological "ionics." Both archetypal and stereotypical notions of *barrio* folks – naïve, gullible and *baduy* (out of fashion) – are present to resist the broad-reach of the cosmopolitan glamour of the global. They re-appropriate the *barrio*, highlighting its sensibility in multiple political and aesthetic contexts. Here it is resituated in urban sites and invokes a communal way of living lost in the individualist, anonymous, and hardness of the city. The politics of collectivity is most evident in Barrionics's work of art in public spaces, both as a collective and as individual artists. Each artist in Barrionics has been involved in community neighborhood beautification and heritage projects in San Francisco, Stockton and other cities.¹²

Barrionics does Barrioque's exaggerated fabrications of village-gone-techno also satirizes the commodified notion of "ethnic." Objects such as straw mats are used to suggest some exotic cultural item, as mere approximations of something "ethnic." Styles, patterns and materials from ethnic and traditional cultural wear globally have been rich sources of inspiration (or appropriation) for various fashion sites including high couture, avante-garde designs, and popular fashion. Use of mats and other objects that are not necessarily an item of clothing or item to be "worn" becomes a satire of avant-garde fashion's fetish for breaking conventions of what can be worn, what is clothing, what is cloth. As Dorinne Kondo argues in her book *About Face* (1997), the innovation of avant-garde convention often builds on and/or relies on racist notions already at the seams of avant-garde and/or popular fashion industry. Barrionics works the malleability of the *terno*, appropriating it as part of its *barrio* aesthetic. While in the Philippines, this regal dress is associated with a higher social class, Barrionics stitches the butterfly sleeve to the *baro't saya*, the *panuelo*, and bamboo mats to shift its significance within the context of multicultural US and to juxtapose it alongside contemporary Western dress codes. More importantly Barrionics reworks the emergent form of the *terno* to comment on art, hybridity and the link between colonialism and circuits of exchange.

While Barrionics comments on US multiculturalism, globalization and empire by piecing together recognizable scraps of ethnicity and technology, M.O.B. sets its portrait of the Filipina in diasporic domesticity and hospitality in *A Public Service Message about Your Private Life* (M.O.B. 1998). In one of the poster installations, "Have you eaten?", each bride is outfitted in a *terno* variation, accessorized with big hairdos, fancy shoes, and brightly painted nails. The scene is set in a dining room, with a table lavishly adorned with picture-like-quality foods and giant paper flowers. Catholic religious icons, such as a statue of Santo Niño and a laminated image of the Virgin Mary, are looming in the background. In this image, each performer is positioned at the table holding a dish. They are directly looking at the camera and are overtly posing for the photograph. The poster includes the frame of the window indicating that the position of the camera and the photographer as outside of the "room" where this feast is about to happen. The window frame literalizes M.O.B.'s

project of “looking into” Filipina subjectivity. Their hospitable gaze beyond the window frame makes the viewer aware that the “looking in” is welcomed, and that those being looked at are also looking.

M.O.B.’s *A Public Service Message about Your Private Life* consists of a poster series with seemingly familiar scenes in Filipino households, performed for the camera. Three artists make up M.O.B.: Eliza Barrios, Reanne Estrada and Jennifer Wofford. In 1998, *A Public Service Message about Your Private Life* was on display in kiosks on Market Street in San Francisco, as part of the SF Art Commission’s Art in Transit Program.¹³ The description of this public exhibit reads:

Inspired by the similarity between the Market Street kiosks and Filipino nipa huts, this artist team of three Filipinas... created a vibrantly colored poster series of domestic scenes, placing “homes” in the midst of the hustle and bustle of the commercial core of San Francisco. The series is a reminder that people from a wide range of cultures move to San Francisco to set up house. (<http://www.sfartscommission.org/pubartcollection/uncategorized/2008/08/31/kiosk-poster-series/12/>)

Each poster image is accompanied with a caption, questions such as “Are you entertaining?” (two young girls watching someone in a maid uniform singing with a karaoke machine in a living room); “How much longer?” (a young woman looking longingly out the window); and “Why don’t you settle down?” (an elderly couple sternly talking to a young woman who is looking away from them). *A Public Service Message about Your Private Life* shares *Barrionics does Barrioque’s* concerns about the inhospitable nature of city life. The posters are indeed “vibrantly colored,” conveying warmth and intimacy. Yet, there is more to these beyond public advertisements of “inviting” domestic scenes; they are not merely earnest invitations that “place home” in the urban center. M.O.B. treads the line between parodying such public service announcements meant to remind the city of its diverse occupants, and portraying Filipino American domestic scenes to affirm the city’s “wide range of cultures.”

Through their use of “props” of Filipina-ness such as the *terno*, M.O.B. puts on the character of a Filipina, along with fancy-styled, big-hair wigs, brightly painted nails, high-heeled open-toed shoes. Juxtaposed next to other images in the series that do not include the artists wearing wigs, there is a strong contrast highlighting M.O.B.’s performance of Filipina drag. While big bouffant-styled wigs appear continuous with the *terno* to recall 1950s/1960s scenes of tightly knit, nuclear family units, M.O.B. artists’ “natural,” contemporary urban hairstyles – short hair, blonde/brown highlights, asymmetrical bob – evoke discontinuity with the national dress. Reanne Estrada, one of the Brides, explains: “We take on various characteristics of Filipino culture. Apart from the obvious ‘drag’ clothes that we put on – because we are basically American – when we’re doing that sort of stuff it’s a very conscious thing to put on the dress and be like, OK, we’re playing at being Filipino” (Brenneman 2002, 78). M.O.B. relies on a fixed vestimentary code of the *terno* – the symbol of Filipinanness, and deploys it as a costume to perform Filipina drag. Estrada’s statement here articulates diasporic identity crisis vis-à-vis the nation, what is now a much-rehearsed terrain of US identity politics in the era of liberal multiculturalism. M.O.B. engages with the tension the diasporic Filipina body as it

negotiates its emergence within transnational context. The artists of M.O.B. came up with their name “in response to the common Western misconception that Filipinas make ideal (read: submissive and obedient) brides, a myth born out of unfortunate economic reality that makes women and their labor the leading export of the Philippines” (interview with Brenneman 2002).¹⁴ In this public service announcement poster series, M.O.B. confronts the significations of the global circulation of Filipina bodies, subverting reified notions of Filipina domesticity.

Scenes in this series, “vividly colored and beautifully executed,” range from a feast in a Filipino household to a mah-jong game among *kumadres* (group of women friends). Some of the subjects of these posters toy with images that traditionally appear in Filipino calendars, particularly ones which insist on Filipino cultural values such as prioritizing family duty.¹⁵ Distributed in the form of calendars and product advertisements, these images circulate widely, simultaneously endorsing and naturalizing heterosexual and patriarchal family values through the production of the Filipina body as domestic. Often the *terno* is cast as the vestimentary icon in these portraits, where it takes a central role in the production of a national and cultural ideology that normalizes heterosexuality and affirms patriarchal family values. In *A Public Service Message about Your Private Life*, M.O.B. takes these familiar familial scenes of domesticity, understood to be Filipina femininity, and unfolds the dominant ideology embodied in these images. M.O.B.’s posters place the *terno* in the private domestic setting of a Filipino household, though it is a home that is constituted by the global that Barrionics portrays. Hospitality, as routinely linked to Filipina femininity, is overwhelmingly performed in “Have you eaten?” M.O.B. plays with the question “Have you eaten?,” as they pose graciously offering an abundance of food as a typical welcome that one receives in a Filipino household. The power of M.O.B.’s works is that it hovers at the edge of playfulness and dementia. While we can simply read this scene as Filipina hospitality portrayed in camp, a comedic recognition of Filipino identity that transcends displacement and is retained in the diaspora, we cannot help but also read the implications of the image of the “Filipina as hospitable” in the context of the millions of Filipinas on whose bodies the Philippine economy is being built and sustained. Neferti Tadiar writes that in the “making of women into Filipinas [...] in its [“Filipina”] idealized and therefore commodifiable form [...] it consists of practices of caring for others, or extending oneself to others, of serving and accommodating others” (7). And thus M.O.B.’s performative visual posters art signify the complex of hospitality as performed by the Filipina body; hospitality becomes understood as one of the categories under which Filipina subjects are evaluated and distributed globally.

In contrast to the public image of Filipina hospitality in “Have you Eaten?” the portrait of Filipinas in “Do you play?” offers a different view. “Do you play?” shows several *kumadres* playing mah-jong. The “glammed up” house makers in “Have you eaten?” are pictured on their “day off” in “Do you play?” The women are sitting around the table, mah-jong tiles on one hand and a cigarette and a can of drink on the other. They have shed their *ternos* and are dressed in loose, flowery and colorful *daster*, house dress typically worn in the house. Their hair is undone and they wear ordinary house *tsinelas* (house slippers). When women are in their *dasters*, they have

no intentions of leaving the house and nor being seen in public. They have settled into their mah-jong game. In the room, there is a figure of Buddha with children and a laminated photo of Jesus Christ Sacred Heart. A little girl joins the game, and a man in the back part of the room, looking towards where the women are playing. “Do you play?” shows the women relaxing in their domesticity, performing an activity for themselves. M.O.B.’s display of the *terno* and the *daster* in different domestic scenarios reveals the relational production of the *terno*’s iconicity.

In many ways, this essay too has proffered a reading of the creative deployments of the *terno* as a site of playful materiality and possibility. I have turned to this material icon and national metaphor precisely because of its overdetermined and yet curiously underexamined presence in the Filipino diasporic cultural imagination. To approach these diasporic translations of the *terno* is to at once acknowledge and complicate the *terno*’s historical prominence as an icon of nation and gender. From its recuperation by Filipina nationalist feminists, to its staged manipulations by the Marcos regime, the *terno* has been a source of differentiated historical capital. The challenge here has been to engage with diasporic renditions of the *terno* that mine its historical capital for scenes of transgressive pleasure and profit. Such performances stage embodied performative practices that circle back and forth between historical and contemporary histories of US imperialism in and out the Philippines.

My focus on the *terno* as a site of “historical” performance equally calls on specific modalities of time and place, heightening what may otherwise be relegated as mundane practice. By shedding the *terno* for the *daster*, M.O.B., for example, confronts the routinized circulation of Filipina bodies, subverting reified notions of Filipina domesticity. Barrionics and M.O.B.’s use of the *terno* stridently imagines its symbolic function in the global circulation of Filipina bodies. Their works make central the labor of the Filipino performing body in making visible the production of a material icon. Yet these productions do not merely advocate for a facile recognition of the *terno*’s material contexts within circuits of transnational labor. Rather they urge us to consider these material contexts as equal sites of performance and contestation.

The (false) ordinariness of the *terno* as vestimentary object gives way instead to scenes of historical and performative disarray. Indeed, as seen in the multiple recastings of the *terno*, it is precisely the staged distance between *object* and body that creates scripts of possibility for the wearers/performers. Within such articulations, the *terno* is more a strategic marker of profound undoing, delinking the dress from the dressee, the *terno* from the Filipina, the dress from the girl and the boy, the dress from the straight and the queer. Read less as a stable object of vestimentary desire, the *terno* emerges instead as an embedded sign whose materiality speaks the entanglements of labor, history and performance. “Your *terno*’s draggin’” becomes, as it were, an evocative performance of Filipinos and globalization.

Notes on contributor

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performing body's interlocking genealogies as it conjoins colonial histories of the Philippines with US race relations and discourses of globalization.

Notes

1. Statement made at the opening of a designer clothing store Pucci in New York City, September 11, 2004.
2. Bindlestiff Studio, located in San Francisco's South of Market district, has been home to Filipino American performances for over a decade. Self-proclaimed as an "epicenter of Filipino American performance," Bindlestiff Studio presents and produces music, theater, performance art and film, as well as provides artistic workshops. See Bindlestiff Studio 2003 www.bindlestiff.org.
3. For a filmic interpretation of the significance of *debuts* among Filipino Americans, see Gene Cajayon's *The Debut*.
4. Here Puar references Judith Butler's well-known "repetition with a difference," in her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1997).
5. http://www.filipinoheritage.com/costumes/findesiecle/maria_clara.htm. Originally from Pito Moreno's *Philippine Costume* (1995).
6. Certain *terno* garments and the manner in which they are worn may also be distinct according to specific regional dressing practice. In Alfredo Roces's "The Ins and Outs of the *Terno*," a caption under one of the photographs reads: "The wearer of this well-matched *baro't saya* (circa 1912) is probably a Busyng, as indicated by the absence of a *tapis*" (1978, 2537).
7. Originally cited in Roces (2005a, 5). Mary Grace Tirana gave this appellation in her essay, "*Pañuelo* Activism" published in *Women's Role in Philippine History*.
8. Others also note this nickname as "iron butterfly."
9. Another "modernizing" project I want to mention here is the "Miss Asia Pacific Terno Competition: The Maria Clara Quest." This event was part of the 7th Hair Olympics Competition, held at Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City, Philippines, in 2003. The sponsoring organization for this competition is the Asia Pacific Hairdressers and Cosmetologists Association. Part of the "modernizing" project is the global appeal of this national dress.
10. Kristin Hoganson's (2003) essay, "The Fashionable World: Imagined Communities of Dress," was helpful in formulating this observation. In this essay, Hoganson interrogates US bourgeois women and their participation in the transnational trade network as fashion consumers in the early twentieth century.
11. I wish to thank Felicity Schaeffer-Grabiell for this suggestion.
12. An example of this commitment to public art projects is Johanna Phoetig's collaborative public art project "BEACON" 2007 in Gleason Park in Stockton, California. Poethig and Brian Laczko of Oakland designed the twin pillars, which feature glass-covered portals that enclose historic photos of the character and original inhabitants of the Little Manila community and the Stockton area. The metal flames are based on traditional Filipino "sari manok" motifs. The gateway completes the park element of the larger redevelopment project for the neighborhood, which will also include a new elementary school and new housing units just south of the Crosstown Freeway.
13. This set of works was also exhibited, along with other pieces, at Oakland's Lizabeth Oliviera Gallery (now located in Los Angeles) in January 2001. M.O.B. has exhibited their works at the DeYoung Museum, the Triton Museum, and galleries in Manila, Philippines.
14. See Rachel Parreñas's *Servants of Globalization* (2001) and Miriam Ching Yoon Louie's (2001) *Sweatshop Warriors* for a book-length study of Filipina women's participation in transnational global labor.

15. I wish to acknowledge Terry Acebo Davis, a scholar and visual artist, who delivered a lecture on Filipino/Filipina American art at a gathering of the National Federation of Filipino American Association in San José, California, in June 2002. In this lecture, she argues that Filipino and Filipina American art is distributed through the popular reproduction of these works in calendars.

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