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Earth Kitt’s “Waray Waray”

The Filipina in Black Feminist Performance Imaginary

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Earth Kitt’s repertoire of international sounds includes a Filipino translation of a popular Visayan folk song “Waray Waray.” She sings a version of this iconic regional tune that is a mix of Tagalog with Visayan words. Eartha Kitt is known to have recorded music in at least ten languages, with “Waray Waray” standing in for the Philippines. Kitt performed the song in wide-ranging venues including Manila’s Araneta Coliseum in 1963, and it is included in her repertoire of world music. In a 2006 performance in New York City, Kitt shares an anecdote about performing for Imelda Marcos, where Marcos’s male entourage eventually sang along, (albeit) “out of tune!” (Holden) The song became a staple in Kitt’s global selection, replete with her playful, sultry, feisty, and theatrical vocal performance. “Waray Waray” celebrates the strength of women from/of Eastern Visayas. The lyrics tell of Waray women’s unflinching courage and resilience. This song is identified with a region of Central Philippines, acting as a foil to Kitt’s artistic persona as one who embraced and explored female power and sexuality. It is unknown when Kitt first encountered this song and when she first sang it. Here, I am less interested in tracing Kitt’s discovery of the song than in exploring what made it possible for Kitt to perform in the Philippines in 1963, and for “Waray Waray” to become such a part of Kitt’s recordings of music around the world. More specifically, I am interested in the far-reaching and potentially radical consequences of her border-crossing performance.

To articulate these consequences, this chapter tracks the “multidirectional cultural flows” in the geography of US cultures of empire as embodied in Kitt’s performance of “Waray Waray” (Delgadillo). Kitt’s rendition
of “Waray Waray” raises complex questions about the entanglements of race, empire, and the politics of sound/vocal mimicry. I take my inspiration from Theresa Delgadillo’s analysis of Eartha Kitt’s version of the song “Angélicos Negros,” wherein Delgadillo links the concepts of African diaspora, mestizaje, and borderlands. In this essay, I am interested in the world-making (and world undoing) possibilities for the African American performing body in Kitt’s rendition of this song. More specifically, what does this song do to our understanding of Eartha Kitt’s black feminist performance? And what does Kitt’s black feminist performance offer to our understanding of “Waray Waray”—a song that has had multiple significations in the representational history of Waray women and Filipinas? What I hope to explore are the alliances that make possible a performance such as Eartha Kitt singing “Waray Waray,” for the consequences it bears and the consequences out of which it emerges. By consequences, I gesture to the material and imaginative conditions of possibility that are created by and from Kitt’s rendition of the song. Neferti Tadiar’s formulation of “other Philippine Consequences” is useful here as she underscores the dynamic role the Philippines performs within a larger global economy. In her formative book, Tadiar considers the consequences of the Philippines to the world, specifically to the production/performance of a Free World Fantasy. In confronting the subservience of the Philippines to the United States, as “the intractable object of U.S. (as well as the Philippine) desire,” Tadiar also argues for the burden and possibilities the Philippines has on the world.

Eartha Kitt’s rendition of “Waray Waray” in the early 1960s signifies a period of transition between US-Philippine imperial relations. Eartha Kitt visited and performed in the Philippines when the country was just over a decade into its status as an independent nation. This was a new era for the United States and the Philippines as each traversed a new terrain. Rather than one of imperial administrator and its territorial acquisition, the United States and the Philippines were learning to negotiate their relationship as two self-governing states. This chapter acknowledges the crucial and shifting roles of cultural exchanges and of artists in international relations, specifically toward the normalization of US-Philippine relations. What meaning might we make in listening to Eartha Kitt’s singing of “Waray Waray” in the context of the United States and the Philippines forging new bonds between two sovereign countries?

Indeed, most centrally, I wish to foreground a materialist analysis of this performative act. In other words, I want to attend to material and historical conditions to make meaning of Kitt’s “Waray Waray,” with a particular concern toward US cultures of imperialism, US-Philippine relations, and black feminist performance. Yet my meditations on such issues hinge equally on my early capitulation with the way Kitt inhabits this song. In the recording on which I base my exploration, she is barely able to pronounce some of the words. Unlike her French and Spanish song recordings, noted for her good accent and proximity to native speakers, Kitt cannot be complimented for her Filipino/Tagalog accent. Listening to Kitt sing this song prompts me to engage the politics of vocal/sound mimicry. Her performance of this song inspires a discussion of the politics of vocal/sound mimicry beyond the discourse of becoming (to sound like is to become) and being like (to sound like is to be like), and of exploitation and appropriation. I resist a reading of Kitt’s mistakes documented in the audio-recorded live show as incompetence and yet another evidence of American imperial amnesia. Rather the potentiality in her performance is its more disruptive refusal of binary interpretations of Filipinas. The politics of vocal/sound mimicry in Kitt’s performance inspires what possibilities lie in dissonance and in approximation rather than in precision. Her rendering of “Waray Waray” provides insight into mimicry as a performance methodology that is not about mastering the other to exhibit one’s virtuosity but about exploring the possibility of black feminist performance beyond the black body. The radicality of Kitt’s performance is precisely on her not getting it right.
sequence in black feminist performance after World War II. For the Philippines, Eartha Kitt’s rendition of “Waray Waray” queries the newly independent nation’s strategies for managing regional difference against the image of a unified modern nation. More specifically, this song is an instantiation of the smoothing of regional differences as staged on to the shifting terrain of Filipina womanhood. How the Filipina question is constitutive to the national discourse of Filipino identity can be tracked in this regional song’s reach to national status and its subsumption in national popular/folk music.

African American Performers in the World

The international performance of African American artists such as Nat King Cole, Duke Ellington, Dizzie Gillespie, and Louie Armstrong attests to the circulation of American culture during the Cold War period. In arguing for the importance of African American culture during the Cold War, Penny Von Eschen emphasizes the contradiction of the image of the United States embodied in and by African American performers on international stage. US officials supported and facilitated international tours for jazz artists such as Ellington, Gillespie, and Armstrong to redirect the image of US racism, “depending on the blackness of [the] musicians to legitimize America’s global agendas” (4). Kitt may not have been officially part of this group of artists sponsored by the US government to represent the United States internationally, but her career came to its fruition at this time. State support of African American artists as representatives of American culture in the global scene facilitated Kitt’s access to an international audience and performance venues, and to gaining success outside of the United States.7 Kitt’s career prior to her trip to the Philippines and recording of “Waray Waray” was a route mapped on to a larger stage of world entertainment and world politics, specifically of black nationalist politics, of racial segregation, and of US efforts to return to normalcy post-World War II. In the years following World War II, African Americans, like the rest of the American people, were subjected to a rhetoric of normalization. The US State promoted notions of cooperation and common goals to be crucial to postwar prosperity.8

Katherine Dunham’s dance company, where she performed as a dancer, musician, and a vocalist. Her training prior to gaining scholarship at the Katherine Dunham Dance School at the age of sixteen included piano, choir singing, and theater acting.9 Katherine Dunham, as is well-recorded, pioneered what is now known as the genre of Afro-Caribbean dance.10 Thus, in Dunham’s company, Kitt was not only introduced to ballet and modern dance techniques but also to Afro-Caribbean rituals, dance, and music. In a recorded interview, Kitt fondly attributes all she knows about dance to Dunham and to the streets of Spanish Harlem (“I was the best rumba dancer in town!”). In the 1940s, as a company member of the Dunham Dance Company, Kitt performed in Mexico, South America, and throughout Europe. She danced, played the drums, sang in the chorus, and was a vocalist. She was a principal dancer in the highly acclaimed Bal Negre (1946), described as “A Native Music and Dance Revue in Three Acts and Six Scenes.” Bal Negre is an epic line up of African diasporic dance that included elements of Haitian corn-sorting ritual, rhumba, son, Brazilian choro, ragtime, foxtrot, turkey trot, Waltz, the Charleston, Snake hips, the Black Bottom. It was also during her years in the Dunham Dance Company when signature pieces such as Shango (1945), a staged interpretation of a Vodun ritual, were performed. Kitt was one of the three in Rhumba Trio, a number that premiered at the Mexico’s Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes. In 1948, Kitt appeared with the dance company in Casbah, a movie filmed in Hollywood, California. Working with Dunham during these years of segregation, Kitt witnessed Dunham confront racial discrimination that they and their audience experienced in US cities and throughout Europe and Latin America.11

Kitt came to know the world outside of the United States through her work and travels with the Dunham company. In her autobiography, Alone with Me, Kitt laments her ignorance of global politics and her desire to know what is going on in the world. Her desire for a heightened political literacy thus may have influenced her decision to stay in Europe to pursue a solo career. It was on the international stage that Kitt came into her own as a performer, gaining the attention of internationally renowned artists such as Orson Welles in the late 1940s. More offers came— theater performances, as a headliner in nightclub acts, music recordings. She found herself performing in European countries including England,
France, Russia, and Turkey. Along with these performances came opportunities to record in different languages including songs in Turkish, in French, and in Spanish.

It is well known that Kitt recorded music in ten languages, and she sang in more. Such linguistic dexterity and cultivated polyglot skills, along with her training in different dance traditions, earned Kitt the (often dubious) honor of versatility as a performer. But more specifically, her celebrated malleability underscored her racialization as a light-skinned black woman. Being cast in roles such as the Catwoman in the Batman television series (from 1966–68) is routinely read as evidence of Kitt’s abilities to transcend the color line of American race relations. Instead of simply ceding to such readings of light-skinned black women as politically suspect figures, Kitt’s racial malleability could equally be read as a unique and disruptive worldliness attributed to and embraced by and within African Americans’ claims to world citizenship after World War II. While such an identification might be perceived as a desire to transcend race and blackness, these claims are also directed at the limitations of American citizenship. The turn to, or identification with, global belonging is among a number of political and social strategies against the continuing assault of black people and American provincialism (not exclusive of one another). Thus a claim to worldliness at this time is an act that simultaneously rejects US isolationism and is also an indictment of American racism that continues to treat and perceive black citizenry as nonequals. Black feminist radical scholar/activist Angela Davis, for example, has long insisted that the struggles of African Americans must necessarily be linked to a broader critique of empire and citizenship. With such worldviews, if you will, Kitt’s worldliness cannot simply be flattened into an individual classed cosmopolitanism that sought to transcend racism by imagining a color-blind version of the world.

Catwoman Sings “Waray Waray”

For many Filipinos, this infamous folk song has and continues to showcase the so-called strength of Waray women. Or rather, the Filipino imaginary, in its nationalist fervent to manage strong regional identifications, has mobilized this song to caricature Waray women as matam (thuggish), as masiga (tough), and as maturay (feisty or grumpy). The tune, now considered a Filipino classic, was composed by Juan Silos Jr. with lyrics by National Artist honoree Levi Celerio. The transcription below is a translation of the song as sung by Kitt:

Waray women will not flee, even in the face of death. She will fight even the toughest of goons, come what may. Waray Waray she is called. In a fight, she will not back down Even if you are a thug.

(Eartha Kitt translates the gist of the song: Tagalog [which she pronounced as “Togalog”]. Women of Waray Waray have muscles of steel, and we can fight any battle. But our kisses are as sweet as wine.)

We are nature’s muse. We are always giving But Waray women are different We do not fear anyone

[By this point Kitt is addressing the audience, the musicians and/or the back up singers.]

We are nature’s muse. We are always giving But Waray women are different We do not fear anyone Waray women Are tough, wherever they are They put up a fight No matter who provokes them

Waray Waray (men back up singers sing this part) Waray women will never flee Waray Waray (men back up singers sing this part) Waray women will fight til death
Waray Waray (men back up singers sing this part)
Waray Waray come what may
Waray Waray [till hell freezes over]

We are nature's muse.
We are always giving.
But Waray women are different
We do not fear anyone
Waray women
Are tough, wherever they are
They put up a fight
No matter who provokes them.

Kitt could not have been praised for her ability to sing in Tagalog, as she has been praised for her accents in her Spanish and French songs. Unlike her rendition of “Angelitos Negros,” the recorded live version of Kitt singing “Waray Waray” is full of mistakes (mispronunciations, wrong word emphasis, made up words). She even mispronounces the language of the Philippines, calling it “Togalog.” She plays with and off of what I hear as mistakes, creatively pushing them off as scat singing as if the words are nonsense syllables. Hers is not a seamless occupation of the song through the perfect accent (or not having an accent). Rather, Kitt infuses her idiosyncratic performance persona with or into this song not to demonstrate her chameleon like voice, but to signify the potentialities of performance as it inhabits an (othered) geopolitics and racialization. Kitt’s inability or refusal to linguistic verisimilitude redirects her listeners away from the (somewhat stagnant) discourse of authenticity that often charges the politics of sound/vocal mimicry.

Kitt’s “Waray Waray” vocalizes Filipinas beyond the siga, taray, and sexually repressed probinsyana. She performs a playful sensuality that invites her listeners in, without the promise of a release into the languages of nationalism or universality. Writer Ambeth Ocampo was compelled to comment on this sensuality that comes through in the recording: “Listening to Kitt and reading the transcription, I can’t make out what she is saying but she makes everything sound so sexy and funny at the same time, adding yet another footnote to Philippine cultural and popular history” (Philippine Inquirer Opinion). Prior to one of the longer instrumental breaks in the song, Kitt directs the lover-fighter Waray character that she embodies and vocalizes toward the audience and the musicians. Though not entirely clear in the recording, a back-and-forth exchange between her and the musicians ensues. She brings her sexy persona to this song, a persona that has been stylized as her Catwoman purr. A critical look/listen at performance of “Waray Waray” demystifies Kitt’s particular black feminist performance, one that has become synonymous with exotic, animalistic sexuality. For many, as is well documented, Eartha Kitt’s playful and rousing embrace of her sexuality refuses sedimented mythologies of black women’s aberrant sexuality, situated in histories of slavery and segregation. In Kitt’s “Waray Waray,” we encounter this playful sensuality more as a creative methodology, mobilized to interpret representations of Filipina gender formation in popular culture. The Philippine consequence in Kitt’s “Waray Waray” extends black feminist performance’s iconic sexuality beyond black women, refracting it onto a differently yet still racialized Third-World female body.

In listening to Kitt’s “Waray Waray,” what emerges as insightful (though perhaps not intentional) is another dimension of the Waray woman that breaks out of the dichotomy of the siga on the outside yet demure on the inside. This binary characterization of the Waray woman has been immortalized in the popular performances of the late television and film star Nida Blanca (and later passed on and reproduced in her duet performance with on-screen daughter Maricel Soriano). In Nida Blanca’s depiction of the Waray woman, the emphasis is on toughness. The Waray woman’s rough exterior hides a gentle, caring, and demure woman who is also ready to give her sweet love to the man who can see through her. To fully appreciate Kitt’s “Waray Waray,” a discussion of the song’s story and its place in the Filipino imaginary must now follow.

Babae ba iyan?: “Waray Waray” and the Filipina Question

This widely known song has made in/famous the reputation of Waray women as possessing a rough shell and holding on tight to a precisely vulnerable inside. A Waray woman is always of humble background, a probinsyana (woman from a rural province) who lacks the refined
manner of her antithesis—the sosyal higher class, urban-bred woman. The song insists that a Waray woman defends herself from any fight; yet her true characteristic lies in her potential to love and be loved by a man. In the mid-1950s, the song gained wider circulation through the film, *Waray-Waray* (1954), starring Nida Blanca with Nestor de Villa. The two starred as young lovers in many movies that proved to be box-office hits. Those years are considered the golden years of Philippine filmmaking, and Blanca's portrayal became a defining image for the Waray woman. The Waray woman is defined by the intersection of her gender, class, and geographic identity (*probinysyana*). Her foil, of course, is the opposite—a man, upper class, an urban sophisticate. He is cosmopolitan in contrast to her domesticated insularity. He is refined, gentlemanly, schooled, and he possesses knowledge of the world while she is crass and tomboyish, and she gains her knowledge from the streets, the palengke (public market), and her fellow service workers. His sophistication ages him as older; her crudity infantilizes her. Such a developmental character approach sets up her transformation at the end of the story. Along the way, there is some gesture toward the merits of her rawness, a condescending gesture toward the value of her local ways that he finds most endearing and might even teach him a thing or two about the world. These transformations, of course, are not of equal value; the entire narrative rests on her make over.

The script of opposites becoming ultimately compatible, through taming of the woman and transforming her into a gentle lady, is not an unfamiliar one. It is also quite familiar that such a script flirts with the feminization of the gentleman and the masculinization of the provincial woman. At some point in the 1954 film, the Waray woman's gender is put to question: “Babae ba iyan?” (“Is that a woman?”). Here, the recognizable *Pygmaion* script is deftly grafted onto the Filipino national narrative. These scripts of conversion become a place to work through the “national question”—What is a Filipino? What is a Filipina? As the Philippines, in the early 1950s, moved away from its former colonial status and into an independent state, such questions appeared in the collective imaginary. Both the song sung by the popular songstress Sylvia de la Torre and the film *Waray-Waray* feminized the national question, thereby illustrating gender as central to the question of national identity. While the expression of anxiety over what is a Filipino takes on the form of the woman question in this film, linking them, it behooves us not to collapse the national question with the question of gender. Gender cannot simply be a metaphor for the development of the nation. Mina Roces has argued for the parallel journeys of the national and women questions, with many points of intersection, even as Filipino feminists have cautioned against the subordination of Filipinas's equality to the project of nation-building. Denise Cruz, in her study on "transpacific Filipinas," details the complexities of Filipina intellectuals' struggle with the question of the nation and women's role during this period of normalization between the United States and the Philippines, post-World War II and into the US Cold War period. Cruz argues for "the recognition the transpacific Filipinas'[ role in shaping a global code of morality, ethics, and responsibility, one that is quite similar to the sentimentalized processes of U.S. cold war expansion" (26). Yet, whereas Cruz asserts how Filipina intellectuals such as María Paz Mendoza-Guázón and Trinidad Tarrosa Subido mobilized the site of the transnational to infuse their participation in "shaping the global code of morality, ethics and responsibility," the figure of the Waray insists on the place of folk and regional femininities in the future vision of this new nation. Emplacing the Waray woman within the national question and the woman question comes at a crucial time when the Philippine nation must prove itself as a new, coherent modern identity to the world.

The figure of the Waray woman also comes up against the prevailing ideal image of the Filipina at this time—María Clara. Roces argues that the icon María Clara has over time as the ideal notion of what a Filipina is from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century (43). María Clara is the mortal version of *Virgen Maria*, the ultimate symbol of the sacrificial mother. María Clara is a name taken from the character in the writings of Philippine national hero Dr. Jose Rizal; his novels epitomized and sealed this ideal virgin mother in the Philippine popular memory. Against the passive and self-effacing María Clara, the Waray woman is vocal and confrontational. María Clara is "beautiful, virginal, convent-school educated, upper-class heroine, a shy, obedient daughter" (41). She endures her suffering silently; the Waray woman does not accept anything quietly. Against the demure María Clara, the Waray woman seemingly widens the possibility of Filipina embodiment. The María Clara ideal held tightly the standard for being Filipina; the Waray woman offers an alternative,
hairied, she’s got the figure of an 18-year-old. Dressed in three-inch heels and a body-hugging pantsuit with a leopard spotted top, she walks with the supreme confidence of a ramp model, totally oblivious to the stares of those around her. (Lagorta)

Ramsey’s “Waray Waray” is often described as an imitation of Eartha Kitt’s, even though Ramsey was already a performer by the time Kitt came to the Philippines. Kitt’s stamp on “Waray Waray” is also read onto Corrales. Ambeth Ocampo, as he recalls Kitt’s Philippine connection upon Kitt’s death in 2008, asks, “Sa kanya pala kinopya ni Pilila ang paglilayad liyad niya?” (Was it from her [Kitt] that Pilipita copied her body bending singing posture? Who copied who? Who is the original?) The natives are copying the foreigner who copied their song. This discussion of mimicry productively illustrates Tadiar’s notion of Philippine consequences that structures the principal theoretical arc of this chapter. The kinesthetic and sonic contact between Kitt and the Filipina performers bore traces in the ways they brought meaning to “Waray Waray.”

Among the best known of Waray women is the former first lady Imelda Marcos. As the country’s most powerful woman, her performance of the Waray navigated the necessary regional character in Filipino politics while advancing a national agenda. She even participated in the debates about the song becoming a stereotype and caricature of Waray women. During the Marcos’ reign, Imelda saw herself as bringing beauty to the Filipino people. She worked her appeal as a Waray woman, appearing to have come from and still of the humble origins. The Waray woman, as personified by Imelda, thus became charming and beautiful, though still rooted in her honest probinsya roots. Rather than squelching the pull of regionalism so strongly imbedded in Filipino identification practices, Imelda Marcos (and by extension the Marcos government) mobilized her charms to disarm the threat of strong regional affiliations against a unified nation.

Conclusion

Eartha Kitt’s encounter with the Philippines at her 1961 concert was brief yet memorable, as noted in a few responses in different forms. Her concert in the Philippines inspired a poem and may have even inspired
a defining performance gesture—Pilita’s liyad (back-arching signature move)—associated with an internationally acclaimed artist. A short film titled The Women of Waray Waray explores US-Philippine imperial relations through a character modeled after both Eartha Kitt and Imelda Marcos. The recording of Kitt’s “Waray Waray” continues to inspire citation because, for the Philippines, a country that needs to continuously articulate to itself and the rest of the world its consequence, this border-crossing performance seems a rarity.

I have labored here to consider the consequences of Kitt’s border-crossing black feminist performance, the ones it emerged out of and ones that it produced. Kitt richly renders this regional song whose consequences are of national proportions. Kitt’s enactment of “Waray Waray,” as I have analyzed here, bring insights to vocal and sound mimicry as creative labor. More specifically, Kitt’s approach to this performing “Waray Waray” challenges prevailing measures by which imitative acts are valued. There is much to be made of the imprecision and mistakes immortalized in the recording of Kitt’s “Waray Waray.” Her imperfect mimicry is less an act of complete transformation into the object of mimetic act. Not sounding like, in this instance, opens up a larger world of possibilities for black feminist performance.

Notes

1. Included in the album Eartha Kitt In Person: At the Plaza Live. Live performance recorded in 1966. Album released October 26, 1994, GNP Crescendo Record Co., Inc.

2. Filipino as the Philippine national language was made official by the Corazon Aquino administration through the 1987 Article XIV, Section 6. Tagalog became the undeclared national language because the majority of the ruling officials spoke this language. In addition, the location of the country’s central government is in a Tagalog-speaking region. Filipino, the national language, negotiates the linguistic dominance of Tagalog through the incorporation of native tongues including Pampango, Bicol, Cebuano, Ilocano, as well as other languages spoken in the Philippines such as English and Spanish. For more information on the emergence of Filipino as the Philippine national language, see Pam M. Belves, “Development of Filipino, the National Language of the Philippines,” National Commission for Culture and the Arts website, http://www.ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/articles-on-c-a/a/article.php?img=381-202. See also Josephine Barrios, “Why Filipino and not Filipino?”

3. Araneta Coliseum is one of the largest covered coliseums in Asia, and it opened in 1959. It holds entertainment events, including concerts, sports events, and beauty-pageant competitions. The coliseum hosted Nat King Cole in 1961. Other US artists who have held their concerts there include Carlos Santana, the Black Eyed Peas, and The Pussycat Dolls.

4. My use of normalization to describe this period of US-Philippine relations means to invoke what is referred to as the American period of normalization following World War II and the Cold War. Within the continuing US-Philippine imperial relations, the early 1960s are years following the post-war Republic and its transitional years shifting away from direct US colonial administration. What I call normalization here is how the United States and the Philippines negotiated their new relation as two sovereign nations.

5. Scholarship on the politics of voice mimicry and racialization have been dominated by a focus on yellowface, a performance practice likened to blackface that is an Orientalist appropriation of what is understood as Asian embodiment. Critiques of yellowface have provided language for cultural appropriation, consumption of racialized bodies by white bodies, and how colonialism, imperialism, indentured labor, and other systems of subordination have produced the conditions that facilitated racist depictions.

Scholars such as Bill Mullen, Vijay Prashad, Claire Jean Kim, Josephine Lee, and Shannon Steen and Heike Raphael-Hernandez propose a shift away from white-black, white-Asian binaries that underpin discussion of yellowface through a formulation that Steen and Raphael-Hernandez offer in their formulation “Afro-Asian” and Mullens in his “Afro Orientalism.” Mullens, Prashad, and Fred Ho in particular richly represent masculinist AfroAsian coalition traced in figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Bruce Lee, and Malcolm X, as well as in artistic practices like hip hop and jazz and in their invocation of the promise of anti-imperialist coalition between African and Asian states seen in the Bandung Conference of 1955. This essay benefits from the growing critical work on AfroAsian relations as it acknowledges the rare feminist critique in this existing body of scholarship. Thus, this chapter aligns with the work of scholars/artists/feminist/queer activists C. A. Griffith and H. L. T. Quan in their focus on feminist anti-imperialist politics of Angela Davis and Yuri Kochiyama. For a unique creative yet critical approach to Black Asian relations, see Karen Yamashita’s novel I Hotel.

6. I wish to acknowledge the work of two scholars that helped me arrive at these ideas. First, there is Daphne Brooks’s discussion of Sandra Bernhard’s performance of the failure of white women’s embodiment of black women. Second is Laura Klang’s critique of “stereotype critiques” that dominated representational analysis in Asian American Studies in the 1990s. Both works push away from valuing what is a correct representation and provide a much more layered insight to the complexity of mimicry as a representational practice.

7. Just two years prior to Kitt’s concert at the Araneta Coliseum, Nat King Cole held his concert there. He sang and later recorded a Filipino classic love song, “Dahil Sa Iyo” (Because of You).

8. Ably Kinchy’s essay on African Americans and the atomic age provides an interesting perspective on how black communities in the United States were incorporated.
into the project of post-World War II normalization via nuclear technology. He writes, “The atomic bomb revealed new possibilities for African Americans to pursue full inclusion in the postwar national project. In contrast to radical critics of nuclear weapons, some black leaders saw opportunities for the advancement of civil rights in the industries and ideologies of the atomic age” (30). Kinchy also situates this pro-nuclear point of view emerging within following era of attacks on anticomunist and radical politics (“African Americans in the Atomic Age”).

9. Kitt spent some years in New York’s High School for the Performing Arts. There she focused her studies in theater but did not have dance training.

10. Dunham is also a cultural anthropologist whose research on Afro-Caribbean culture included rituals is considered groundbreaking. Dunham put in conversation Afro-Caribbean dance with modern dance, influencing Dance Studies.

11. Katherine Dunham’s much-cited vocal resistance to the racism she and her company experienced include a performance in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1944 where Dunham addressed the audience after the show to say that her company would not return until people with her skin color are allowed to sit next to people with the audience’s skin color. Another racial discrimination the Dunham company dealt with was when they worked on a film in Hollywood. She was instructed to replace her darker-skinned company members with lighter-skinned ones. Other incidents of racism included difficulty in finding housing in Europe and Latin America. Consistent in the citation of these incidents is the grace and authority with which Dunham addressed discriminatory acts and challenged them. (http://kweez.how.gov/tribal/health/dunham/dunham-timeline.html#stormyweather; http://fora.tv/2006/06/26/Katherine_Dunham_on_Overcoming_1940s_Racism#fullprogram. See also Clark and Johnson, Kaisol.

12. For a deeply insightful essay on black women's sexuality and slavery, see Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe.

13. This excerpt is posted on Youtube by Edric Eltasio, January 1, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHzIm3U0jJq. The show is Maricel Live! Maricel Soriano’s Variety Show which aired in 1986 in the IBC network which was turned over to ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation after the EDSA Revolution.

14. Writer Carmen Guerrero Nakpil once pronounced in 1964 that “the idealization of Maria Clara was the greatest tragedy experienced by the Filipino woman in the last hundred years” (cited in Roces 41).

15. Blanca and Soriano were part of an iconic television family comedy, one of the longest-running sitcoms (from 1973 to the 1990s), along with Dolphy Quizon and Rolly Quizon. Blanca played the mother of the working-class Puruntong family and Soriano played the daughter.

16. Films that depict the 1980s version of Waray Waray include Galinggaw, the Bote series, and others.

17. Eartha Kitt's petite frame is immortalized in the healthy-living genre book Rejuvenate! It's Never too Late.

18. As an alternative to “Waray Waray,” which has become a caricature of the women from Eastern Visayas, Imelda Marcos offered “ada ada” (there is something). She proposed this alternative term of endearment with the intent to maintain the gesture toward a special quality of women from this region. Others retorted that ada ada gestures to something worse—“something askew.”

Works Cited


