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Queer Filipina/x/o Americans (FAs) may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), pansexual, nonbinary, intersex, or none of the above. More broadly, the identity term *queer* refers to FAs who identify differently than the norm of heterosexuality and cisgenderism. However, while some FAs might identify with various aspects of the acronym LGBT, they may not necessarily identify as *queer*, even if they are categorized as such. Terms that refer to non-heteronormative and non-cisgender identity among FAs, such as *bakla* and *tomboy*, have spread from the Philippines through its diaspora. U.S.-based terms such as *Pin@y* and *Filipinx*, which, although not specific to queer or trans FAs, present a more gender-inclusive term of racial and ethnic identity. The emergence and controversy regarding the gender-inclusive term *Filipinx* in the first two decades of the 21st century is the broader thematic focus of this entry. Drawing on *Latinx*, another U.S.-based term of ethnic and racial identity, *Filipinx* has become widely used within both popular and scholarly writing among FAs. However, there has been a heated debate on social media between FAs and Filipinas/x/os in the Philippines regarding use of the “x.” In the midst of this debate, queer FA studies scholars have explored the productive challenges that *Filipinx*—and its related antecedent, *Latinx*—present to discussions of FA identity and the Filipina/x/o diaspora.

## The Politics of Naming

Queer FA identity has largely been one of multiplicity and fluidity. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the term *queer* was reappropriated by U.S. LGBT activists, from a derogatory term to a term of self-identification. Terms that originated in the Philippines and spread to the United States, such as *bakla* and *tomboy*, are also used by FAs. *Bakla* refers to a feminine-presenting individual (assigned male at birth) who is assumed to be sexually attracted to masculine cisgender men. *Tomboy* refers to a masculine-presenting individual (assigned female at birth) who is assumed to be sexually attracted to feminine cisgender women. Both *bakla* and *tomboy* are terms associated with working-class communities, while *gay* and *lesbian* are associated with the middle and upper classes. Queer FA studies scholar Martin Manalansan juxtaposes the term *bakla* with *gay* to critique the notion of a *global gay identity*. Manalansan argues that a gay identity is not universal; instead non-heteronormative and non-cisgender identities and practices develop in local contexts which may or may not travel across national borders. The United States and Global North-based narratives of LGBT visibility, *coming out of the closet*, and *pride* that characterized 1960s and 1970s gay and lesbian liberationist politics in the Global North more broadly cannot be assumed within local sites in the Global South. Indeed, some have argued that the use of the terms *gay* and *lesbian* in the Philippines has been imposed from the West, associated with a higher class status than the working-class-identified terms of *bakla* or *tomboy*. The terms *gay* and *lesbian* are often associated with access to transnational travel or a Western higher education. Queer FA studies scholar Kale Fajardo has argued that the shifting meaning of the term *tomboy*—which can refer to

gender identity as well as sexual orientation—is influenced not only by class and race but by one’s positioning within a transnational Filipina/x/o diaspora. The politics of naming are significant, as they index changing debates over the ability of notions of gender and sexuality to travel across national borders. Here the relationship between U.S. Filipina/x/os and those in the Philippines is a key one, as FA identities are shaped in relation to the idea of the Philippines as the nation of origin. Although *home* is not always the Philippines, the Philippine nation remains a point of reference for a global Filipina/x/o diaspora, which continues to expand due to the reliance of the Philippine nation on remittances from migrant workers abroad.

### ***The Debate Over the “X”***

The use of gendered terms of self-identification is a key locus of debate within and across diasporic Filipina/x/o communities. While earlier terms such as *Pinay* and *Pinoy* have been taken up widely in the Philippines, more recent attempts at popularizing more gender-inclusive terms have provoked more dissent. As mainstream U.S. society has become more cognizant of nonbinary and transgender identities, more gender-inclusive terms have emerged among queer and trans FAs, such as the term *Pin@y*, adopted in the late 1990s by FAs. *Pin@y* drew on terms such as *Latin@* or *Chican@* that replaced the more heteronormatively gendered terms *Latino* or *Latina*. *Queer Pin@y* conferences were held at various campuses of the University of California system from 1999 to 2011, demonstrating the popularity of this term among queer FAs in California. The emergence of the term *Latinx* as a more gender-inclusive term during the 2000s inspired the use of *Filipinx* (or *Pilipinx*) among FAs. Like the heated discussions about the term *Latinx* within communities of Latin American descent in the United States, *Filipinx* has catalyzed intense debate between Filipina/x/os in the United States and Canada and those in the Philippines. “I am Filipinx,” a virtual roundtable discussion organized by the LGBT student organization Babaylan at the University of the Philippines at Diliman occurred via Facebook Live on September 11, 2020. The roundtable discussion included queer, trans, and nonbinary scholars and activists from across the Filipina/x/o diaspora: Andoy Evangelista, Jaya Jacobo, Kale Fajardo, Sampa Tumaliuan Westerlaken, Kaya Candaza, Joseph Ruanto-Ramirez, and Rod Singh. In the roundtable discussion, Kale Fajardo commented that the term *Filipinx* became more widely used after the mass shooting at a Latinx party at Pulse (an LGBT nightclub in Orlando, FL) in 2016. Fajardo noted that the adoption of *Filipinx* by queer and trans FAs is a form of political solidarity with Latinx LGBT communities in response to the Pulse massacre. Further discussion among the roundtable participants emphasized that *Filipinx* invokes a shared history of Spanish colonization and racialization in the United States, comparable to *Latinx*. Contrary to some popular narratives, *Filipinx* did not originate within academic discourse but developed organically among FA youth through social media. While several Filipina/x/o studies scholars in the United States have taken up the term *Filipinx* in academic publications at the time of this writing, it remains a hotly contested term. Unlike the

earlier gender-inclusive terms *Pin@y* and *Filipin@*, the term *Filipinx* has evoked fierce opposition from both social media users and scholars in the Philippines. The opposition from Philippine-based scholars likely reflects the broader tension between Filipina/x/o studies and Philippine studies, which partially stems from the disparate intellectual and political trajectories of area studies and U.S. Ethnic Studies/Asian American studies.

Much of the debate over the term *Filipinx* has occurred on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, with those based in the Philippines often contesting the use of this term, arguing that the national language of the Philippines, Filipino, is already gender neutral. In contrast, many queer, trans, and nonbinary FAs and Filipina/x/os in other parts of the Global North (such as Canada or Western Europe) have claimed the term *Filipinx* in order to avoid a binary, cis-centric understanding of gender. It is necessary to note the distinction between *gender-neutral* terms—such as the pronoun *siya* in Filipino, which does not indicate a particular gender—and a *gender-inclusive* term such as *Filipinx*. While *siya* does not indicate a particular gender, it does *not* contest or destabilize a binary understanding of gender. *Filipinx*, like *Latinx*, presents an inherent challenge to a binary understanding of gender as only male or female. Philippines-based critics of *Filipinx* have denounced this term on social media, at times characterizing FAs who advocate for the use of *Filipinx* as culturally inauthentic and ignorant. These familiar tropes about FA *balikbayans* in the Philippines are not new. Citing the privilege of FAs, some Philippines-based social media users have argued that the term *Filipinx* is imposed on them by FAs. In contrast, queer Filipina/x/o and FA scholars and activists Barrett, Hanna, and Palomar argue that respecting the term *Filipinx* is crucial to addressing the systemic material violence that queer, trans, and nonbinary Filipina/x/os experience on a daily basis in the Philippines and its diaspora.

It is necessary to note that *Filipinx* developed in the specific racial context of the contemporary United States. Since the Black Lives Matter (BLM) uprisings and the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the visibility of national conversations on race and anti-Blackness has increased exponentially. The BLM movement was founded by three queer Black women; as a movement, BLM has highlighted violence against queer and trans Black people. In addition, the virulent anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric of former President Donald Trump and his White nationalist supporters inform the geopolitical context for understanding *Filipinx* as a term of gender and racial/ethnic self-identification and solidarity in the contemporary United States. The term *Filipinx*, inspired by and in conversation with *Latinx*, must be situated within this struggle against the White supremacy of the U.S. nation-state. In contrast, Philippines-based critics of *Filipinx* are responding less to U.S. racial politics and the rise of White nationalism, and more to the position of the Philippine nation as subordinate to both U.S. imperialism and the inherent exploitation of contemporary capitalist globalization.

## Theoretical Possibilities of the “X”

Some FA queer studies scholars have argued for a less binary analysis of *Filipinx*, suggesting that the term opens up theoretical possibilities for thinking through the relationship of those in the Filipina/x/o diaspora to the Philippine nation. FA studies scholar Thomas Sarmiento argues that *Filipinx* introduces a *queer diasporic* theoretical framework that destabilizes the referent of the Philippine nation as home. Rather than respond to claims of inauthenticity or cultural ignorance, a queer diasporic use of *Filipinx* foregrounds the unfixed relationship of diasporic subjects to the notion of *home*. Similarly, advocates for the term *Latinx* have argued that this term conveys the experience of the borderlands between the nation of origin, and the U.S. Filipina/x/o and Latin American studies scholar Sony Coráñez Bolton suggests that the debate surrounding *Latinx*—particularly criticisms of Latinx and Chicana feminist theory—presents productive challenges to the use of *Filipinx* within Filipina/x/o studies. Latinx and Chicana queer and feminist theory, such as the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, has been critiqued for its failure to address settler colonialism or acknowledge the need for indigenous sovereignty. Sony Coráñez Bolton suggests that an increased focus on indigeneity and settler colonialism could benefit Filipina/x/o studies (and FA cultural politics) as well. *Filipinx* offers an invitation to question the simultaneous exclusion of indigenous peoples from the Philippine nation and the fetishizing of indigeneity within FA culture. In addition, *Filipinx* opens the door to a more rigorous analysis of the relationship of FAs to U.S. settler colonialism. As the debate on *Filipinx* carries on, queer FAs continue to articulate their identities and experiences as part of a queer diaspora, which is simultaneously separate from and connected to the Philippine nation.

**See also** [Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora](#); [Heterosexism](#); [LGBTQ Rights Movement, Filipino American](#); [Queer Studies](#); [Sexual Orientation Identity Development](#); [Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Filipinx Americans](#)

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