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## Performing the Filipina “mail-order bride”: Queer neoliberalism, affective labor, and homonationalism

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The 2005 video/performance art piece, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*, by the Filipina American performance-art ensemble, the Mail Order Brides, examines the role of affective labor in constituting gay marriage as a form of US homonational belonging. In a contemporary context of capitalist globalization, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* critiques the subjugation of the third-world woman worker within a queer neoliberal logic, highlighting the inability of the mainstream US LGBT movement to address issues of race, migration, and labor. The Mail Order Brides enact forms of *feminist camp* and *ethnic drag* to denaturalize the affective labor that is embodied within the figure of the Filipina “mail-order bride.” In doing so, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* links an analysis of transnational Filipina labor with a critique of queer cultural politics in the US. In its critique of queer neoliberalism, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* builds on and contributes to queer of color social movements committed to racial and economic justice.

**Keywords:** Filipina labor; globalization; homonationalism; gay marriage; affective labor; Filipino American performance

One of the first appearances of the figure of the Filipina “mail-order bride” within gay popular culture occurred in the 1994 Australian film, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994). In the now-infamous ping-pong-ball scene, three Australian drag queens, Bernice, Felicia, and Mitzi, take the stage at a local pub in the Australian outback, to the confusion and disgust of the mainly heterosexual male clientele. Interrupting the drag queens’ performance, the Filipina bride character, Cynthia, bursts onto stage, to the delight of the straight male customers. Wearing a leopard-printed bustier, thigh-high boots, and garter belt, Cynthia performs a striptease for the audience. Her performance culminates with the unlikely act of popping ping-pong balls out of her vagina to the enthusiastic audience. Priscilla introduced the figure of the Filipina bride, one that is sexually available to the First World, to both mainstream global popular culture and an LGBT subculture. Although the queer Filipina American women’s organization Kilawin Kolektibo protested this film

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due to the portrayal of the Filipina bride character, Cynthia, few, if any, mainstream LGBT organizations in the US critiqued the politics of representation within the film.<sup>1</sup>

Filipino/a American activists, artists, and cultural producers have responded to the popular-cultural representations of Filipina “mail-order brides” in myriad ways – from protests and calls for “positive” images of Filipinas within popular culture, to kitschy appropriations of the term “mail-order bride.” Among the re-configurations of the figure of the “mail-order bride” is the 2005 video art piece, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* (henceforth AABNAB), by the Filipina American performance and video-art group the Mail Order Brides (henceforth M.O.B.). Inspired by a set of performances and art installations at various San Francisco Bay Area art and cultural institutions (Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Kearny Street Workshop, and the Manilatown Heritage Center), these videos are part of a larger performance and visual-art project of *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*. This essay focuses on the cultural politics of representing the figure of the Filipina “mail-order bride” within the testimonial-style video of *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*, examining how the Mail Order Brides intervene in a mainstream LGBT political discourse of same-sex marriage through their camp parody of the affective labor performed by Filipina bodies.<sup>2</sup> The Mail Order Brides use feminist camp and ethnic drag to reveal the invisibility, yet necessity, of Filipina labor within the logic of capitalist globalization.

M.O.B.’s parody of same-sex marriages in their video, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*, is a simultaneous critique of the marriage industry and the cultural politics of the mainstream LGBT movement for “marriage equality.” *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* presents an implicit critique of the invisibility of third-world women workers<sup>3</sup> labor within a US-based liberal queer agenda, particularly the affective labor provided by Filipino/as performing forms of feminized labor (whether female-assigned<sup>4</sup> or not). I bring together transnational feminist critiques of gendered labor with critiques of homonationalism to examine how affective labor is both a source of value for global capitalism, as well as a necessity for the constitution of gay marriage as a form of US national belonging. Despite the recent celebratory public discourse about the end of DOMA (the Defense of Marriage Act), gay marriage is not so much a “right” as it is as a means for white, middle-class LGBT couples to consolidate the material and discursive privilege that previously only white, middle-class married heterosexuals possessed. The neoliberal logics of homo- and heterosexual forms of marriage bolster the continued invisibility of the affective and domestic labor that third-world women workers provide within a global capitalist system. The Mail Order Brides’ focus on same-sex marriage and marriage for purposes of immigration makes evident how affective labor – such as the labor provided by their fictional “bridesmaid service” – is necessary for state-sanctioned forms of queer family.

Ultimately, I argue against the appeal to depoliticized domesticity as the basis for legitimate belonging to the nation-state, a foundation of the mainstream LGBT movement’s political goal of legalizing gay marriage. Moreover, I analyze the racism and sexism of homonationalism by focusing on the subordination of the third-world woman worker within a political economic context of queer neoliberalism. The Mail Order Brides denaturalize the affective and domestic labor performed by Filipina bodies through their appropriation of camp as a performative strategy. In their enactment of feminist camp, the Mail Order Brides shift from the gay, white male subject, to a feminist, queer of color subject.<sup>5</sup> The term “feminist camp” refers to the Mail Order Brides’ use of the hyperbolic aesthetic of camp to

foreground and critique the forms of gendered and racialized labor performed by third-world women. The Mail Order Brides queer the figure of the “mail-order bride” through their performance of ethnic drag. The Mail Order Brides’ exaggerated embodiment of Filipino/a ethnicity – their performance of ethnic drag – reveals the ethnic/racial performativity inherent to the enactment of domestic and affective labor. Through their use of feminist camp and ethnic drag as performative strategies, the Mail Order Brides make visible the role of affective labor in constituting the privileged subject of homonationalism.<sup>6</sup>

### **The figure of the Filipina “mail-order bride”**

*Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* is a response to the broader discourse of the Filipina “mail-order bride” within global popular culture, including film, television, and websites. Examples of the Filipina “mail-order bride” proliferate within popular culture, from the episode of the popular US television sitcom *Frasier*, in which Frasier’s father tells him that for “that amount of money, you could buy a Filipino/a wife” (Ackerman 1994), to the vast expanse of the Internet. A simple search for the word “Filipina” on an Internet search engine brings up dozens of Internet dating sites, offering every kind of Filipina bride imaginable. These examples demonstrate a dominant capitalist logic in which Filipina bodies are naturalized as sources of easily available sexual, domestic, and affective labor. The Philippine state plays a significant role in brokering a contemporary global labor diaspora of more than eight million Filipino/a migrant workers.<sup>7</sup> Although not all women, many of these Filipino/a workers perform gendered forms of labor, working as nurses, maids, nannies, eldercare providers, housewives, and sex workers.

*Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* is situated within, and intervenes in, a broader epistemic terrain in which transnational Filipina bodies are represented as easily available sources of sexual, domestic, and affective labor.<sup>8</sup> Although focused primarily on the figure of the Filipina “mail-order bride,” my analysis of AABNAB is situated within a constellation of representations of the transnational Filipina body that circulates within global popular culture, from the hyper-exploited Filipina overseas domestic laborer (maid, nanny, or eldercare provider) to the Filipina sex worker. Filipina women are especially visible within the ongoing feminist debates on the global sex trade and the “traffic in women,” as representations of Filipinas as sex workers and “entertainers” in Japan circulate within both popular and scholarly discourse.<sup>9</sup>

Filipina American artists Eliza Barrios, Jenifer Wofford, and Reanne Estrada formed the San Francisco Bay Area-based performance and visual-art ensemble the Mail Order Brides largely in response to such representations of Filipina women (Brenneman 1998). Responding primarily to US popular culture, the Mail Order Brides use humor to address the broader racialized and gendered discourses through which Filipina bodies are constituted and made visible under global capitalism. The Mail Order Brides create work in a variety of media, including installation art, photography, video art, karaoke videos, and performance. In their biography, M.O.B. describes their collective work:

For over a decade, Eliza “Neneng” Barrios, Reanne “Immaculata” Estrada and Jenifer “Baby” Wofford have worked collaboratively as Mail Order Brides/M.O.B., a trio of Filipina American artists engaged in an ongoing collaborative investigation of culture, race and gender.



Figure 1. The Mail Order Brides on the steps of San Francisco City Hall.  
Source: Photograph courtesy of the Mail Order Brides.

While traditionally, “real” mail order brides are thought of as ideal obedient domestics, it has not escaped this trio’s attention that, acronymically speaking, “Mail Order Brides” abbreviates down to a more sinister series of initials that inform the darker subtext of their connivings and conspirings.

They have taken matters into their own well-manicured hands, using their innate graciousness, good fashion sense, and interior decorating/decorum skills to gently pry open the eyes of the closed-minded. They have pursued this vision through a cornucopia of creative endeavors, including photographic psychodramas, parade performances, public service posters, karaoke music videos, museum makeovers, and educational workshops. Their recent successful business venture, *Always A Bridesmaid Never A Bride™*, has provided the world with long-needed services of three Professional Bridesmaids™ for weddings, commitment ceremonies and immigration-inspired marital arrangements.<sup>10</sup>

Calling attention to what they term the “women in distress” persona of Filipina women within popular culture, the Mail Order Brides critique hegemonic notions of Filipino/a American femininity and ethnic identity (Brenneman 1998). The Mail Order Brides satirize conventional artists’ statements, as well as notions of bourgeois femininity and the institution of marriage. Their brilliantly colored, exquisitely decorated vision of reality is visualized in the jewel-toned images of hyperbolized femininity that the Mail Order Brides

present in their photographs and videos. Their emphasis on “interior decorating/inner decorum” references the affective element of their work, as they bring the interior forward into the public space. M.O.B. suggests that “exterior” tropes of femininity (“well-manicured hands, innate graciousness, good fashion sense”) are intrinsically linked to “interior” elements of affective labor (nurturing, care giving). In doing so, the Mail Order Brides demonstrate how discourses of racialized and gendered labor under global capitalism rely on the performance of both interior *and* exterior tropes of affective labor.

Although the Mail Order Brides’ work draws on their training as visual artists, their intended sites of reception are varied, ranging from museums to the Lunar New Year parade in Oakland’s Chinatown. The Mail Order Brides use humor and parody to extend their work beyond the confines of a museum setting. As Wofford states: “Our photos are so ridiculously campy, and they exist on a level where it’s meant to be fun for everybody” (Brenneman 1998). The multiple genres represented within their work, including karaoke videos, infomercials, and public poster art, allows the Mail Order Brides to reach a broad audience, from everyday San Franciscans waiting for public transit to those who visit art galleries to experience their installation and video art. The screening of their work in Asian American community spaces in the San Francisco Bay Area, including Kearny Street Workshop, the Manilatown Heritage Center, and the Lunar New Year parade in Oakland’s Chinatown, reflects the Mail Order Brides’ participation in broader discourses of Asian American and Filipino/a American cultural production.<sup>11</sup> While I focus on M.O.B.’s figuration of the Filipina “mail order bride” – and third-world women workers more broadly – in relation to US homonationalism, the Mail Order Brides offer multiple conceptual entry points for varied audiences to engage with their work, from their critique of Filipino American cultural nationalism to their provocations on the politics of nationalist costumes.<sup>12</sup> Through these numerous sites of reception, the Mail Order Brides engage with multiple audiences and communities – Filipino/a Americans, queers, San Francisco public-transit passengers – to challenge the discursive construction of the Filipina laboring body within racialized and gendered discourses of global capitalism.

### *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*

The Mail Order Brides’ project, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*, includes performances, art installations, video infomercials, and glossy color brochures and postcards “advertising” their fictional bridesmaid services (AABNAB 2005). This essay focuses on a video testimonial, one of a series of four videos that constitutes the Mail Order Brides’ video series, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*. The video series promotes the services of this rent-a-bridesmaid service. From 2005 to 2010, the video series screened in multiple community and academic venues, mainly in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and Manila, Philippines.<sup>13</sup> *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* is structured as a faux infomercial, featuring testimonials by satisfied clients of the Mail Order Brides’ fictional bridesmaid service, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*.<sup>14</sup> The video features short vignettes of the group’s past successful weddings, highlighting same-sex weddings and weddings for

purposes of immigration. The video juxtaposes still images of the Mail Order Brides in their various bridesmaid costumes with video sequences, while voiceover “testimonials” from “satisfied customers” describe the various services that AABNAB offers. The Mail Order Brides’ use of the infomercial genre, and the testimonial form in particular, highlights the commodification of affective labor within the institution of marriage. M.O.B.’s parody of gay marriage as a business challenges the discursive production of the white gay consumer-citizen as the subject of homonormativity.<sup>15</sup> In particular, M.O.B.’s satire of “customer testimonials” foregrounds the constitution of the white homonationalist subject as a citizen-consumer of third-world women workers’ labor.

In their satire of the marriage industry, the Mail Order Brides play with the representation of Filipina women as innately hospitable and domestic, a discourse which positions Filipina women as naturalized sources of affective and domestic labor. In her description of the Mail Order Brides’ public-art series, “A Public Service Message about Your Private Life,” which featured images of Filipino American family life, Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns argues that “hospitality becomes understood as one of the categories under which Filipina subjects are evaluated and distributed globally” (Burns 2011, 213). Burns argues that the “Fipinina drag” performed by the Mail Order Brides reveals how notions of Filipina femininity are imbricated within racialized discourses of domesticity and hospitality. Thus, M.O.B.’s satirical bridesmaid service is both a reiteration and a critique of discourses of contemporary global capitalism, which render Filipina femininity as essentially linked to both affective and domestic labor (Burns 2011, 209). In *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*, however, M.O. B. shifts the scene from the heteronormative Filipino American family to the LGBT homonormative wedding.



Figure 2. “They put the *maid* into bridesmaid!”  
Source: Photo courtesy of the Mail Order Brides.

The Mail Order Brides' staging of *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* occurs in San Francisco, California, immediately after the mayor at the time, Gavin Newsom, declared gay marriage legal.<sup>16</sup> The image that the Mail Order Brides include in their print advertisement for *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* features a queer couple, a light-skinned, feminine-presenting woman and a darker-skinned, masculine-presenting, female-assigned person (Figures 1 and 3). As a hub for queer culture and a destination for queer tourism, as well as the home of well-established Asian American and recent Asian migrant communities, San Francisco is a global city in which issues of neoliberal citizenship, racialized migrant labor, and queer cultural politics coalesce. The video begins with a close-up image of a satisfied customer extolling the virtues of AABNAB, describing their "utmost professionalism . . . forsaking themselves and only thinking about the bride." Here the gendered affective labor of emotional sacrifice – putting others' needs before one's own – is highlighted as a service that the Mail Order Brides offer to gay couples. A still image of the Mail Order Brides in similar formal gowns, each in a bright, primary, color is followed by a still image of San Francisco City Hall. In a voiceover, a satisfied gay male client with a faux Southern accent describes how he and his partner made use of AABNAB's services:

The announcement came while my honey and I were working out at the gym. It was like a bolt out of the blue – they were marrying gays at City Hall! But we didn't know how long it was gonna last. So we rushed down and we realized that we didn't have any witnesses, we didn't have any wedding party. Thank goodness for Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride! They sure did come through for us. Boy, that teary-eyed hysteria, it was perfect! I tell you, it made our wedding photos. And their confetti cleanup, . . . those girls must come from a long line of domestic workers . . . They put the "maid" into "bridesmaid!" (*Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*, emphasis mine).

During this voiceover is a still image of the Mail Order Brides kneeling on the steps of San Francisco City Hall. They are wearing identical pink dresses, elaborate make-up, and matching gauzy white aprons (Figure 2). In their hands, they carry a feather duster, a broom, and a dust-pan, with which they are cleaning up fallen rose petals from a wedding ceremony. The still images of the Mail Order Brides in whiteface make-up, jewel-toned *terno* gowns and identical candy-pink pantsuits are interspersed with several still and video images of same-sex couples (both male and female) on the steps of San Francisco City Hall. The dialogue and images articulate the capitalist logic which renders Filipino bodies as the naturalized embodiment of domestic labor for a neoliberal global economy; as one of their clients testifies of AABNAB's services: "They put the 'maid' in 'bridesmaid!'" In particular, this dialogue foregrounds the gay citizen-consumer as the beneficiary of gendered and racialized labor. Through this satire of customer testimonials, the Mail Order Brides undermine the assumed verisimilitude of the testimonial as a mode of performance. M.O.B.'s camp performance of the testimonial form challenges the "reality" of global capitalism – that Filipino/a workers necessarily embody devalued domestic and affective labor ("They put the *maid* into bridesmaid! They must come from a long line of domestic helpers!"). Through their satire of the testimonial form, the Mail Order Brides denaturalize the affective labor required of the Filipino/a laboring body.

The Mail Order Brides use ethnic drag to suggest that racial/ethnic and gender performativity is an essential component of labor within capitalist globalization.<sup>17</sup> The next still



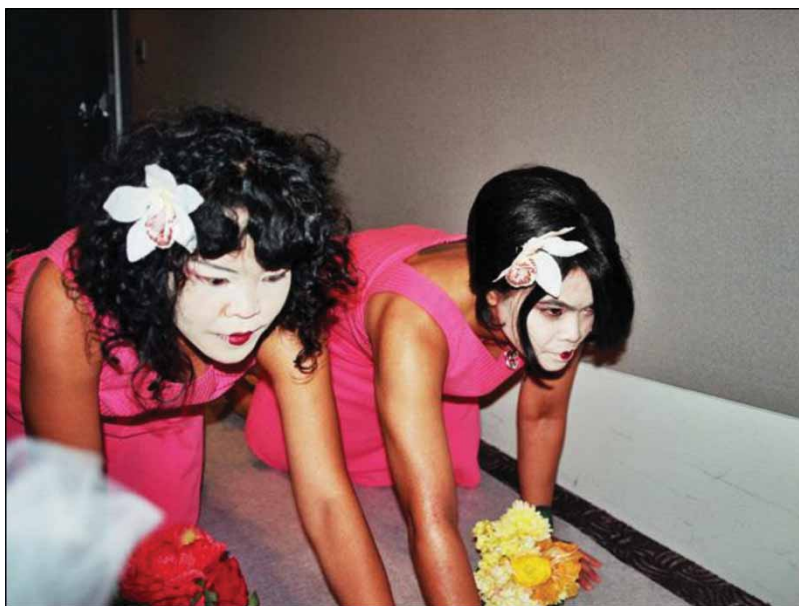


Figure 3. The Mail Order Brides' trademarked "Aisle Service™".  
Source: Photo courtesy of the Mail Order Brides.

image in the video shows the Mail Order Brides lined up in a row wearing whiteface that contrasts with their drawn-in, heart-shaped dark lips. Their vacant facial expressions and identical pink dresses with elaborate lacy white collars emphasize the doll-like effect of their countenance. The stark contrast of their white make-up with their brown skin makes evident the performance of race essential to the figuring of Filipina bodies as naturalized sources of domestic, affective, and sexual labor. The Mail Order Brides implicitly critique the logic of exchangeability – visualized through their identical pink outfits – which characterizes third-world women as replaceable sources of devalued labor. In a voice-over, one of the Mail Order Brides explains her decision to serve as a professional bridesmaid: "I remember when we first heard our calling. . . Every couple is special; every couple needs a different kind of support." The Mail Order Brides' satirical description of their vocational "calling" as professional bridesmaids makes evident the discursive construction of Filipino/a workers as "caring" and "warm," which serves to naturalize the affective and domestic labor that they provide. In the background of the voice-over testimonials, saccharine electronic music plays, much like the musical accompaniment of a karaoke video (another genre that M.O.B. employs in their art). The next set of images implies the availability of the professional bridesmaids for sexual labor, in addition to affective and domestic labor. In a faux Southern accent, a client describes his recent wedding: "My cousin Francis came to town not knowing no one. He's real awkward with the ladies and such. . . and Neneng, she made him feel right at home." This voice-over is accompanied by still images of Neneng seducing the groom's cousin, much to his surprise

and delight. This scene invokes the figure of the Filipina sex worker, particularly the role of Filipinas as “overseas entertainers” in Japan. As such, Neneng suggests both the sexual availability of Filipina entertainers, as well as the affective ability to make Francis feel “right at home.” The Mail Order Brides’ invocation of the Filipina sex worker, made up in white face, calls to mind the figure of the geisha.<sup>18</sup> Within the Western popular imagination, the figure of the geisha is the penultimate Orientalized embodiment of affective and sexual labor; her role is not solely to satiate the sexual desires of heterosexual men, but to make them feel comfortable and sexually attractive. The Orientalist representation of the geisha/sex worker/bridesmaid within AABNAB suggests the necessity of ethnic drag, a specifically ethnic/racialized performance of gendered affective and sexual labor intrinsic to the work that Filipina women do for a global economy. M.O.B.’s invocation of the figure of the geisha also references the history, and ongoing present, of Filipinas as sources of sexual labor for a global economy – from the forced servitude of Filipina comfort women during World War II, to the “rest and recreation” of US servicemen at US military bases in the Philippines, to the global sex trade – suggesting that contemporary forms of Filipino/a labor are always already imbricated in multiple histories of colonialism and neocolonialism.<sup>19</sup>

Through its parody of the commodification of affective labor in the service of same-sex marriage, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* presents an implicit critique of queer neoliberalism. Speaking “in character” in my interview with her, Mail Order Bride Reanne Estrada discusses the LGBT clientele of *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*. “Inclusion is our business strategy. ... As a business you want to make sure you have a lot of customers. It’s a way to bring our services to individuals who have been shut out of this ritual.”<sup>20</sup> Estrada’s emphasis on the ritual of marriage as a means of inclusion into a broader consumer-citizenship exemplifies the logic of homonormativity.<sup>21</sup> The Mail Order Brides’ parody of the consumer nature of gay inclusion into the national family is also an implicit critique of the racialization of this process. A particularly striking image is one of a white, newly married lesbian couple embracing on the steps of City Hall, wrapped in a gigantic American flag. The image visualizes the affective connection between the institution of marriage and US nationalism. Here ideologies of US national belonging are intertwined with the ideology of “marriage equality,” reifying the imbrication of whiteness with marriage and belonging to the US nation. The implicit visual narrative of this image connects notions of US liberal democracy and freedom to the rights-based claim of “marriage equality,” suggesting that the US (and San Francisco in particular) is a site of freedom for queers.<sup>22</sup> However, despite the celebratory discourse surrounding the US Supreme Court’s recent ruling of the Defense of Marriage Act as unconstitutional, the benefits granted to same-sex married couples are largely limited to documented, white, middle-class, property-owning, monogamous couples.

Within these queer neoliberal discourses, the Mail Order Brides’ enactment of feminist camp foregrounds the invisibility of third-world woman workers. As a genre that has historically been associated with white gay male culture, camp has been critiqued for its “blatantly misogynistic images of female excess” (Robertson 1993, 57). In contrast, the Mail Order Brides enact a form of feminist camp to critique the discursive embodiment of Filipina workers as sources of affective labor. Building on theorists Pamela Robertson’s and Jose Muñoz’s discussions of feminist and queer of color interventions in camp as a

performance strategy, the Mail Order Brides' use of feminist camp calls attention to the performance of ethnicized gender and gendered ethnicity required of Filipinas as providers of affective labor. The Mail Order Brides' enactment of feminist camp critiques both the racialized homonationalism of mainstream US LGBT politics and the position of third-world women workers within a broader international division of labor. The Mail Order Brides reveal how racialized and gendered labor itself is a form of ethnic drag. Their performance of gendered Filipino/a ethnicity is visually signified by their wearing of *terno* gowns and their use of whiteface.<sup>23</sup> M.O.B.'s performance of corporeal and sartorial markers of ethnic and racial difference exposes the nature of affective labor within capitalist globalization, which requires ethnic/racialized subjects to perform banal forms of ethnic/racial difference. The Mail Order Brides' performative embodiment as "eternal bridesmaids" visualizes forms of corporeal and affective labor – cleaning up after the wedding party, kneeling to roll out the aisle for their "trademarked aisle service," shedding tears during the ceremony – that position the transnational Filipina body as essentially outside of racialized homonationalist subjectivity. While the domestic and affective labor of the transnational Filipina body is necessary for the constitution of the white, middle-class homonationalist subject (AABNAB's ideal "customer"), the Mail Order Brides are never able to access this form of national respectability themselves. As their title suggests, the transnational Filipina body is "always a bridesmaid, never a bride." As figures whose racialized corporeal labor (domestic, affective, sexual) is rendered outside of the norm of bourgeois respectability and marriage, their bodies are instead circumscribed by global capitalist discourses which figure transnational Filipina bodies as sex workers, "trafficked" women, "gold-diggers," or maids.<sup>24</sup> In Pamela Robertson's words, the Mail Order Bride "plays at what she is already perceived to be" (Robertson 1999, 274).

The Mail Order Brides' use of feminist camp and ethnic drag to denaturalize the labor of Filipina bodies illuminates the crucial absence, within scholarly and popular critiques of homonationalism, of analyses of racialized and gendered labor and migration within queer cultural politics. While other theorists have addressed the intersections of queer identities and global capitalism, few critics of homonationalism have explicitly addressed its relationship to racialized transnational labor. The scarcity of political-economic discussions of labor within critiques of homonationalism leaves under-theorized the vital connection between queer cultural politics and social movements focused on migration and racial and economic justice. *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* addresses this gap in both scholarly and popular critiques of queer neoliberalism and racialized homonationalism by explicitly foregrounding the ways in which transnational labor is both gendered and racialized in relation to queer politics. Through their parody of gay marriage, the Mail Order Brides problematize the invisible role of third-world affective and domestic labor in the constitution of gay marriage as a site of freedom and national belonging. The Mail Order Brides' use of a feminist camp aesthetic, evident in their ostentatious, brightly colored costumes and exaggerated make-up, makes clear the artifice of their hyperbolized performances of ethnicity and gender. AABNAB's intertextual advertising of "trademarked" services reveals the consumer nature of the video as a "marketing" tool, pointing to both the homonormativity of mainstream US LGBT cultural politics (in which citizenship is consolidated through consumerism), as well as the commodification of Filipina bodily labor more broadly. Interspersed with still images of the Mail

Order Brides are the intertextual phrases, “We always go the extra mile, down the aisle™” and “Our Signature W.M.D.s™” (Wedding Maid Duties). The Mail Order Brides’ “trademarked” services include Sycophancy™, Sentimental Toasts™, Flattery™, Fawning™, Tears of Emotion™, Best Friends Forever™, Deluxe Applause™, Confetti Cleanup™, Bouquet Skirmish™, and Aisle Service™, and as well as short video sequences of the Mail Order Brides performing each of these forms of affective labor. The video also presents images of the Mail Order Brides performing physical labor, from their Confetti Cleanup™ to their Aisle Service™ (in which they roll out the aisle for the wedding participants) (Figure 4). In these images, the Mail Order Brides are literally on their knees, embodying the physical and affective labor necessary to uphold marriage as a neoliberal social institution. The ability of the nuclear family to serve as an independent, self-sufficient economic unit, financially independent of the state, relies on the subordinated labor of Third World women and women of color. As such, women of color in the US and Third World women globally bear the burden of the gendered effects of neoliberal globalization, as structural adjustment policies and anti-immigrant policies in the US severely limit access to social services, education, and healthcare.<sup>25</sup> The Mail Order Brides’ identical pink suits and dresses suggest a logic of exchangeability, within which the laboring bodies of third-world women are reduced to indistinguishable, replaceable sources of labor. Through their performance of the figure



Figure 4. The Mail Order Brides’ advertisement in Central Coast Bride.  
 Source: Photograph courtesy of the Mail Order Brides.

of the third-world woman worker, the Mail Order Brides present a crucial intervention in the critique of racialized homonationalism, one that focuses on the relationship of queer cultural politics to labor.

### **Affective labor, surplus value, and the gendering of Filipino/a bodies**

The Mail Order Brides critique the role of commodified Filipina affective labor in upholding the social institution of the family under global capitalism, as well as the specific role of affective labor in constituting neoliberal homonationalist subjectivity through gay marriage. Affective labor is a form of “immaterial labor,” which according to Michael Hardt, is labor that produces immaterial goods, such as service, knowledge, or communication.<sup>26</sup> Hardt argues that within a contemporary global capitalist economy that is geared towards the circulation and exchange of information and services, rather than durable goods, affective labor is the most value-producing form of labor for global capital (Hardt 1999, 90). The affective and domestic labor of transnational Filipinas, who clean the houses, care for the children, and satisfy the husbands of middle- and upper-class families in the Global North, reflects the neoliberal logic which places the responsibility of economic survival on the nuclear family, relieving the state of its duty to ameliorate the disastrous effects of budget cuts and structural-adjustment policies. Filipinas, like other poor women of color from the Global South, bear the brunt of the gendered effects of globalization. The performance of labor by the Mail Order Brides suggests the biopolitical function of affective labor in producing and differentiating racialized and gendered subjectivities within global capitalism.<sup>27</sup> The affective labor of Filipina bodies serves a bio-political function both through the production of value (in Hardt’s theorization of the term) for nuclear families in the Global North, and by differentiating which bodies have access to racialized homonationalist subjectivity. That is, their performance of affective labor in the service of the heteronormative family is precisely that which forecloses Filipina women from participating in homonationalist structures of feeling. This foreclosure from racialized homonormativity is made evident in the Mail Order Brides’ motto, “Always a bridesmaid, never a bride.” As racialized and gendered providers of affective labor, Filipinas and other women of the Global South are rendered outside of the racialized frameworks of national belonging inherent within the institution of gay marriage. In a global capitalist system that relies on affective labor to produce forms of sociality and collectivity, Filipina wives, nannies, and maids are a crucial source of value. The forms of affective labor required to produce feelings of community, as well as social institutions such as the family, can be understood as a form of biopower.<sup>28</sup> These feelings of community and family, achieved through affective labor, are the forms of surplus value/biopower that Filipinos/as provide for a global economy. Through their parody of the inherent commercial value of the affective labor necessary to create the hetero- and homo-normative family through marriage – signified by their “trademarking” of their various services – the Mail Order Brides make evident the forms of biopower provided by Filipina bodies for the functioning of global capital.

The Mail Order Brides emphasize the surplus value created by Filipina labor through their “marketing” of forms of affective labor in the service of gay marriage – “Sycophancy™, Sentimental Toasts™, Flattery™, Fawning™, and Tears of Emotion™.” The devaluing of affective labor, such as caregiving and nurturing, within a wage-labor

economy, positions Filipina wives, maids, and nannies as a cheap source of surplus value for the Global North. This surplus value is accrued precisely because of the devaluation of Filipinas' racialized and gendered bodies, seen solely as a source of unskilled and flexible labor. While Filipinas are discursively constructed as subjects/workers under contemporary global capitalism, they are simultaneously constituted as endless sources of surplus value, as "bodies without subjectivity."<sup>29</sup> It is precisely through the performance of affective labor that surplus value is extracted from Filipina laboring bodies. Indeed, the performance of nurturing and caregiving by Filipinas, whether as wives, eldercare providers, or nannies, is the surplus value or biopower upon which the social institutions such as the nuclear family or the community rely. This extraction of surplus value through affective labor – the labor required to build forms of sociality – happens specifically through the racializing and gendering of third-world women workers' bodies. The "coercive mimeticism" required of Filipino/a workers within a global capitalist logic – performances of racialized gender and gendered race – is that which renders their labor invisible, while facilitating the extraction of surplus value from their affective labor.<sup>30</sup>

The Mail Order Brides make this labor visible through their enactment of feminist camp, a hyperbolized performance of Filipina labor which creates a critical distance from the normalized gendered labor of the private sphere – the site in which Filipina women provide affective, domestic, and sexual labor within an economic context of transnational labor migration. The Mail Order Brides' excessive, humorous style of camp highlights their feminist analysis of gendered labor. This critical distance, created by M.O.B.'s enactment of feminist camp, illuminates the extraction of surplus value through Filipino/a affective labor. By naming and visualizing the labor that Filipina bodies provide, the Mail Order Brides bring into the public domain the private realm of gendered and racialized labor. The infomercial-like, testimonial style of the video, and the presentation of "trade-marked" services, creates a performative scenario that denaturalizes the labor of Filipina bodies.

*Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* destabilizes the conflation of domestic and caregiving work with female-bodied workers. Martin Manalansan challenges the association of affective labor with the bodies of cisgendered<sup>31</sup> women in his discussion of the heteronormativity of scholarship on gender and migration (Manalansan 2008, 4). Manalansan critiques feminist scholarship on migration that collapses gendered transnational labor within the essentialized category of women. Like Manalansan, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* unsettles notions of affective labor that assume a gendering based on normative conceptions of care, love, and other emotions, based on a "[gender] essentialism [that] revolves around the crucial assertion that women are domestic, that they are essentially caring and loving" (Manalansan 2008, 4). Echoing Manalansan's concerns, the Mail Order Brides suggest an analysis of gendered labor migration and affective labor that is not centered on the biological bodies of cisgendered women or the dominant framework of heterosexuality.<sup>32</sup> The gendering of Filipino/a labor is not limited to the "feminine" qualities of affective labor. As Kale Bantigue Fajardo has shown, Filipino men are also discursively gendered according to masculinist narratives of being good providers and "breadwinners," particularly by the Philippine state.<sup>33</sup> By hyperbolizing the attachment of essentialized Filipina femininity to affective and domestic labor, the Mail Order Brides queer the figure of the "mail-order bride." Reanne Estrada describes the Mail Order Brides' art as "queer" in

that it involves an “abnegation of the idea of a fixed identity.”<sup>34</sup> As such, Estrada’s use of the term “queer” refers less to sexual orientation and more to the unfixing of essentialized relationships between ethnically marked femininity, racialized labor, and female-assigned bodies.

The *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* video “infomercials” and print brochures present an implicit critique of a broader neoliberal capitalist logic, in which racialized and gendered “cultural traits” are essentialized as a sign of national difference, naturalizing the performance of affective labor by Filipina bodies. The Mail Order Brides’ “trade-marking” of their affective, domestic, and sexual labor is also a parody of the Philippine state’s marketing of Filipino/a laborers to a global market. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez and Anna Romina Guevarra discuss the role of the neoliberal Philippine state, as well as private agencies, in creating a “cultural logic of labor migration” (Guevarra 2010, 4). Both Rodriguez and Guevarra analyze Philippine state discourse, which lauds the affective qualities that distinguish Filipino/as as exemplary workers in a context of global labor migration. Rodriguez cites an anecdote from a Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (the state agency that both manages and promotes overseas Filipino/a labor) official, in regards to the Filipino/a medical workers: “The Philippines is still top. Filipinas have a warmth and care that people like” (Rodriguez 2010, 61). Guevarra points to the racializing and essentializing of “cultural traits” attributed to Filipino/a workers by the Philippine state in her analysis of a brochure circulated at a pre-departure seminar for Filipino/a migrant workers, titled “Filipino/a Workers: Moving the World Today.” The brochure describes the “added bonus qualities” of Filipino/a workers, including “hospitality,” “charm and cheerful efficiency,” “an innovative spirit,” and “a strong desire to heal” (Guevarra 2010, 66). These essentialized qualities, or at least the performance of these qualities, is integral to the “racialized (and gendered) work hierarchies upon which the global division of labor, and hence capitalism’s profits, depends” (Rodriguez 2010, 63). The Mail Order Brides’ parody of the commodification of affective labor is a simultaneous critique of the wedding industry – and gay marriage in particular – as well as the role of the Philippine state in discursively constructing gendered migrant labor as “products for export.”

### **Towards a transformative queer politics**

Discussions of race are largely elided within mainstream LGBT political discourse in the US, perpetuating the fallacy that race and sexuality are inherently distinct axes of difference.<sup>35</sup> In this queer neoliberal discourse, racial and sexual civil rights are positioned as parallel but separate discourses.<sup>36</sup> *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* challenges the “colorblindness” of a queer neoliberal discourse that implicitly excludes queers of color and queer immigrants, while centering the normative white, gay, middle-class subject. AABNAB’s foregrounding of marriage for purposes of immigration highlights the invisible position of undocumented, racialized queer immigrants within a mainstream discourse of “marriage equality,” revealing that gay marriage is not so equal after all.<sup>37</sup> The name of the piece, *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*, suggests how marriage as a form of inclusion into the nation-state – a form of national respectability/ middle-class heteronormativity – is possible only for the white homonationalist subject.

While many queer theorists have critiqued the homonormativity of the “marriage equality” movement, few critics have addressed the relationship of homonationalism to racialized and gendered labor.<sup>38</sup> Keeping in mind Lisa Duggan’s original theorization of the queer consumer-citizen, a key component of a neoliberal queer culture, my analysis of the Mail Order Brides extends Duggan’s analytical framework to encompass not only the consumer nature of homonormative politics, but the relationship of homonationalism to racialized and gendered labor as well.<sup>39</sup> Echoing mainstream anti-immigration discourses – which seek to withhold rights to citizenship from undocumented migrants, while simultaneously relying on their labor – the mainstream LGBT movement’s failure to address issues of immigration is indicative of its broader rhetoric of “colorblindness.”

*Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* elucidates how homonationalism, exemplified by gay marriage, is integral to an implicitly racialized national affect.<sup>40</sup> *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride*’s juxtaposition of an image of white lesbians wrapped in a gigantic American flag, with voiceover testimonials of gay men extolling the Mail Order Brides’ exquisite attention to detail and “customer service,” reveals the forms of immaterial labor required for this performance of national affect. Echoing Berlant and Warner’s argument that “[n]ational heterosexuality is the mechanism by which a core national culture can be imagined as a sanitized space of *sentimental feeling* and immaculate behavior, *a space of pure citizenship*,” *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* demonstrates how the performance of homonational belonging is necessarily affective (Berlant and Warner 2000, 313 emphasis mine).<sup>41</sup> As such, the Mail Order Brides critique the conflation of citizenship with whiteness within performances of homonationalist affect.<sup>42</sup> In particular, the creation of a (white) homonationalist structure of feeling is similar to the “public comfort” of heteronormativity, in which only particular (white, middle-class) queer bodies are allowed to occupy the “space of pure citizenship.”<sup>43</sup> By denaturalizing the “public comfort” of gay marriage, the Mail Order Brides makes clear how a homonationalist structure of feeling, centered on the white homo-nuclear family, both relies on, yet fails to recognize, the labor of queer people of color and queer migrants.

Introducing a crucial intervention into the homonationalist project of “marriage equality,” *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* underscores issues of migration and racialized, gendered labor within queer politics. As such, their work resonates with a queer vernacular counter-discourse that resists two key tenets of neoliberal logic: the conflation of consumerism with citizenship and the prioritization of rights claims over a more equitable societal structure.<sup>44</sup> As artists, the Mail Order Brides’ work builds upon queer of color political movements that integrate an analysis of queer politics with issues of racism, migration, neoliberalism, imperialism, and incarceration and policing. The Mail Order Brides’ parody of gay marriage echoes the many existing critiques within this anti-homonationalist, radical queer political culture that conceptualizes “economic issues,” such as labor or welfare rights for people of color and migrants, as inherent to social-justice struggles to improve the lives of queer people.<sup>45</sup> More specifically, the Mail Order Brides introduce an analysis of gendered and racialized labor into both popular and scholarly critiques of homonationalism.<sup>46</sup> AABNAB accomplishes this through its critique of the forms of affective labor that Filipinas perform in the service of maintaining the heteronormative families in the global North, an analysis which links feminist critiques of the exploitation of third-world women’s labor with queer of color critiques of racialized homonationalism. While many



queer of color scholars argue that a queer political agenda must focus on social transformation and a critique of the status quo, not an attempt to assimilate into the dominant structures of nationalism, incarceration, neoliberalism, and imperialism, the politics of racialized and gendered labor in relation to queer politics are often overlooked.<sup>47</sup>

Through their embodiment of the figure of the Filipina “mail-order bride,” M.O.B. suggests a broader optic of analysis for queer politics, one that emphasizes the subordination of racialized and gendered third-world labor within the logic of queer neoliberalism. The Mail Order Brides use the performative strategies of feminist camp and ethnic drag to contest the US mainstream LGBT movement’s elision of racialized and gendered migration and labor. Rather than focusing on assimilation as consumer-citizens into the hegemonic nation-state, a transformative queer political culture would resist the discursive and material effects of neoliberalism and capitalist globalization. Building on both scholarly and activist critiques of queer neoliberalism and racialized homonationalism, this essay ultimately argues for a transformative queer political agenda attentive to the international and domestic repercussions of the US-led War on Terror, including increased militarization, higher rates of incarceration, and surveillance and violence toward migrants and people of color, as well as the dire consequences of the crisis of contemporary capitalism: the lack of employment, housing, and healthcare for queers of color and queer migrants. A transformative approach to queer politics would foreground issues of racial and economic justice – founded in a critique of capitalism – within queer social movements. *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* signals a shift in the terrain of queer cultural politics, from a politics of homonationalist assimilation to radical transformation.

### Notes on contributor

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### Notes

1. Lipat (2008).
2. By affective labor, I draw on both Arlie Hochschild’s theory of emotional labor, as well as Michael Hardt’s theory of affective labor as immaterial labor. Michael Hardt highlights the centrality of what he terms “immaterial labor,” and affective labor in particular, to a contemporary global capitalist system. See Hardt (1999), Hochschild (1983), and Kathi Weeks’ (2007) excellent review of both strands of literature. However, Hardt’s theorization fails to address the role of gendered affective labor in consolidating racialized national identities in the postcolonial context. See Yuval-Davis (1991) and Yuval-David and Anthias (1992) for a now-classic

- feminist analysis of the co-constitutive relationship of ethnicity, gender, and nationalism. See also Jacqui Alexander's (1994) germinal essay on the relationship between black female sexual labor and the postcolonial nationalist state.
3. I use the term "third-world woman worker," coined by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, to describe the racialization and gendering of devalued labor within a global capitalist political economy. My use of the term "third-world woman worker" allows for a critique of queer neoliberalism that emphasizes the possibilities for transnational solidarity and coalitional politics among those who have been the most exploited by a racialized and gendered international division of labor. In addition, I draw on the rich body of scholarship about third-world women's racialized and gendered labor produced by transnational and women of color feminists; see Mohanty (1995), Tadiar (2004), Parreñas (2001), and Lowe (1996).
  4. I use the term "male-assigned" and "female-assigned" to reference the disjuncture between the gender one is assigned at birth and one's self-determined gender identity and expression.
  5. José Esteban Muñoz (1999, 120) describes the discourse of camp as one dominated by "middle-to upper-class white gay male sensibilities."
  6. I build on Jasbir Puar's (2007) introduction of the term homonationalism to describe the ways in which normative queer subjects, primarily white, middle-class gay men, conform to social norms in order to become legitimate members of the national body.
  7. See Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (2009). As of 2011, the population of the Philippines was approximately 94 million. For an excellent discussion of the role of the Philippine state in the brokering of Filipino migrant laborers, see Rodriguez (2010). See also Anna Guevarra's (2010) study of the cultural logic of labor brokering in the Philippines.
  8. From the widespread representation of Filipinas on Internet dating websites to mid-1990s films such as *The Adventures of Priscilla*, *Queen of the Desert*, to actor Alec Baldwin's controversial quip in 2009 (on the television show *Late Night with David Letterman*) that he would enlarge his family by "looking for a Filipino mail-order bride," it is clear that the Filipina "mail-order bride" is an omnipresent figure within popular culture in the US and across the Global North. For a discussion of the representation of Filipina bodies on the Internet, see Gonzalez and Rodriguez (2003). For a discussion of the figure of the transnational Filipina body, see Tolentino (1999).
  9. See Rhacel Parreñas's (2010a; 2010b) ethnographic scholarship on Filipina entertainers in Japan.
  10. *Mail Order Brides* (2008).
  11. Kearny Street Workshop (2010) (<http://kearnystreet.wordpress.com>) is a historically Asian American community arts space in San Francisco, California. The Manilatown Heritage Center (2010) (<http://www.manilatown.org>) is a Filipino American community center, also in San Francisco. Oakland's Chinatown is a commercial and residential district that is the hub of Chinese American and Asian American communities in Oakland. Although not the focus of this essay, it is important to note the Mail Order Brides' work presents an implicit challenge to the heteronormativity and masculinism of Filipino American and Asian American cultural nationalisms. Their engagement with Filipino American cultural politics reflects their location within the San Francisco Bay Area, one of the largest, most well-established Filipino American communities outside of the Philippines; see Espiritu (2003).
  12. Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns presents an insightful analysis of the Mail Order Brides' invocation of the *terno*, the Filipina nationalist dress, identified by its signature butterfly-shaped sleeves. Burns (2011) analyzes the Mail Order Brides in relation to the emergence of the *terno* as a nationalist symbol for upper-class Filipina femininity.
  13. *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* screened in the following venues: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA (2005); Barbershop Chinatown, Los Angeles, CA (2005); Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA (2006); California State University Monterey Bay, CA (2006); The Living Room art space, Manila, Philippines (2006); Future Prospects art space, Manila, Philippines (2006); University of California at Los Angeles (2006); University of California at Berkeley (2006, 2007, 2008); University of San Francisco (2007, 2008, 2009); Kearny Street

- Workshop, San Francisco, CA (2007); San Pacho Arts Festival, San Pancho, Mexico (2007); Chela Project, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2007); Manilatown Heritage Center, San Francisco, CA (2008); California College of the Arts, Oakland, CA (2008); Zeum Museum, San Francisco, CA (2008); Queer Conference, University of California at Santa Cruz (2010).
14. Although the project *Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride* encompasses work within multiple media (video, performance, photography, installation art), my analysis is primarily focused on the “testimonial” video, one of a series of four videos that the Mail Order Brides created in this artistic collaboration.
  15. Lisa Duggan’s introduction of the term “homonormativity” to describe the consumer nature of an assimilationist LGBT cultural politics introduced a critique of queer neoliberal politics. Duggan (2002) describes how a homonormative political agenda does “not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.” The creation of the white gay male consumer as the ideal queer subject within the US popular imagination has been critiqued by queer studies scholars Rosemary Hennessey (2000) and Jacqui Alexander (1998).
  16. In 2004, San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom directed the San Francisco city clerk to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples; see Allday (2008).
  17. Rey Chow (2002) uses the term “coercive mimeticism,” to describe the ways in which ethnic subjects are discursively constructed in relation to labor. Ethnic subjects (and I would argue racialized subjects as well) are required to perform the stereotypes attributed to them within a dominant racial formation.
  18. The Mail Order Brides’ use of whiteface must be contextualized within the racial formation of the US. As several scholars have noted, the longstanding relationship of the Philippines to US imperialism and the centuries-long colonization by Spain have resulted in a persistent colorism within the Philippines, in which whiteness is valued as a sign of beauty and social and economic upward mobility; see Rondilla and Spickard (2007), Pierce (2005), and Hunter (2007).
  19. See Gonzalez and Rodriguez’ (2003) discussion of the history of Filipina sexual labor, particularly the relationship of military prostitution to the contemporary global sex trade.
  20. Estrada (2009).
  21. Duggan (2002).
  22. See Jin Haritaworn’s (2008) discussion of gay assimilation and the discursive production of the West as a site of freedom for queers.
  23. Although a comprehensive discussion of the practice of whiteface is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting the Mail Order Brides’ use of whiteface directly references their emphasis on racial/ethnic performativity. Drawing on multiple cultural references, from the figure of the geisha, to Japanese Kabuki theater, to American blackface and minstrelsy, the Mail Order Brides invoke cross-racial and cross-gender performance traditions. Indeed, their wearing of the traditional Filipino male formal attire, the transparent Barong shirt, reveals the play of both gender and racial performativity in their work. Further, their use of whiteface inverts the dominant paradigm of performing the racial Other, signified by practices such as the wearing of blackface by white performers.
  24. The characterization of Filipina brides ranges from the devious, sexually excessive figure of Cynthia in the Australian film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) to the multiple media images of abused and murdered Filipina “mail-order brides”; see Tolentino (1999).
  25. See Grace Chang’s (2000) excellent discussion of the relationship between anti-immigrant rhetoric in the US and neoliberal policies of structural adjustment.
  26. Hardt (1999).
  27. Citing the affective labor of the transgender medical-tourism industry (in which many Americans and Europeans travel to Thailand to undergo sexual reassignment surgery), Aren Aizura (2011) discusses how affective labor serves to differentiate racialized and gendered bodies within a framework of global capitalism.

28. Hardt (1999) argues “affective labor is itself . . . the constitution of communities and collective subjectivities.” This affective labor in the service of producing the social is what Michael Hardt, drawing on Foucault, terms “biopower.” Unlike Foucault, however, Hardt argues that biopower is not solely exercised by the state. Hardt describes a “biopower from below,” defining biopower as “the creation of life; it is the production of collective subjectivities, sociality, and society itself.”
29. In her essay “Domestic Bodies,” Neferti Tadiar (2004, 104) discusses the racializing discourses through which corporeal difference is made legible on Filipina bodies within a context of global capitalism. Here racial and gender difference are the basis for determining which bodies are considered human. Tadiar describes Filipina domestic helpers as “bodies without subjectivity; that is, corporeal objects at the mercy and for the pleasure of those who buy them from the recruitment agency.” For Tadiar, the corporeality of the Filipina body is objectified as a commodity, while the subjectivity of these women is foreclosed. In the case of Filipina domestic helpers, it is their very corporeality that is sold. Tadiar argues: “Domestic helpers are paid not for a specific skill but *rather for their gendered bodies* – for their embodiment of a variety of functions and services which they are expected to provide at the beck and call of their employers” (104, emphasis mine).
30. See Chow (2002).
31. I use the term “cisgendered women” to refer to non-transgendered women, or women whose gender identity corresponds with the gender assigned at birth.
32. Both Martin Manalansan (2008) and Alan Punzalan Isaac (2009) analyze how the performance of affective labor by Filipina transgendered women and Filipino gay men in the Israeli documentary film, *Paper Dolls*, disrupts the heteronormative paradigm of gendered labor migration.
33. Fajardo (2011, 77–96).
34. Estrada (2009).
35. The editor of the Washington, D.C. LGBT weekly newspaper *The Washington Blade*, Kevin Naff, critiqued a statement issued by the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce, signed by 29 national LGBT organizations, condemning the killing of African American teenager, Trayvon Martin, by George Zimmerman. Nash argued that these LGBT organizations “jumped onto the bandwagon” of race. See <http://thetaskforceblog.org/2012/04/02/national-lgbt-rights-groups-issue-joint-open-letter-on-the-killing-of-trayvon-martin-it-is-a-national-call-to-action>. In contrast, Jeff Krehely, Vice President of LGBT Progress, and Aisha Moodie-Mills, advisor of LGBT Progress’ FIRE Initiative for racial equality, argued against Nash’s statement that “the spotlight on Trayvon somehow casts a shadow on LGBT victims of hate crimes.” Krehely and Moodie-Mills (2012) go on to critique the assumption that victims of LGBT hate crimes are white, citing research that most victims of LGBT hate crimes are people of color. <http://thinkprogress.org/lgbt/2012/04/10/461681/gay-newspaper-editorial-on-trayvon-martins-death-ignores-reality-of-racial-oppression/?mobile=nc>.
36. Despite the perception of race as separate from sexuality, LGBT rights are nonetheless invoked using the language of racial civil rights. Following the passage of Proposition 8 in November 2008, which banned same-sex marriage in the state of California, the US mass media compared LGBT rights with the civil rights of African Americans. In 2008, the mainstream LGBT magazine *The Advocate* (2008) posed the following question on its cover, “Is gay the new black?”
37. While this essay focuses on the ways in which the mainstream “marriage equality” discourse constitutes an implicitly white homonationalist subject, it is necessary to note that many queer migrants of color participate in marriage (both heterosexual and same-sex marriage) for the purpose of obtaining legal residency or citizenship. I am not arguing that queer migrants of color are completely excluded from the dominant institution of marriage. Instead, I argue that the broader political discourse of “marriage equality” relies on racialized notions of (white) queer citizenship that exclude queer migrants of color, while making invisible the racialized and gendered labor necessary to uphold the social institution of the hetero- and homonormative nuclear family.

38. The notable exception is, of course, Jasbir Puar's (2007) discussion of the emergence of the homonationalist subject.
39. Duggan (2002).
40. Although beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth mentioning that homonormativity does not require the referent of heteronormativity to function. Thus, homonormativity is less a mirror of heteronormativity, but instead functions independently as a hegemonic normalizing discourse. Thank you to Aren Z. Aizura for bringing this to my attention.
41. Within contemporary US queer politics, homonormativity has replaced heteronormativity as the familial model of belonging to the nation. Scholars such as Judith Butler (2002) have critiqued how LGBT political organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign reify marriage as the only legitimate (and state-sanctioned) form of queer belonging. See also Bailey, Kandaswamy, and Richardson (2008).
42. José Esteban Muñoz's discussion of the performance of racial and ethnic affect has been crucial to the development of my argument. Muñoz critiques the popular view of Latino/a affect as excessive. In contrast, Muñoz (2002) describes how the performance of Latino/a affect, or "feeling brown," demonstrates the affective lack or impoverishment of whiteness. Muñoz argues that this white normative affect, what he terms "national affect," is implicitly associated with citizenship in the US
43. Sara Ahmed (2004) argues: "Heteronormativity functions as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape."
44. Thank you to Chandan Reddy for suggesting the term "queer vernacular" to describe the various queer counter-discourses to homonationalism.
45. For example, during the week of National Coming Out Day (11 October 2009), the group Queer Kids of Queer Parents Against Gay Marriage published an online manifesto titled "Resist the Gay Marriage Agenda!" As adults raised within queer families, bloggers Katie Miles and Jane Kaufman argue against the neoliberal logic of gay-marriage activists, arguing: "It's that sneaky thing about late liberal capitalism: its promise of formal rights over real restructuring, of citizenship for those who can participate in the state's economic plan over economic justice for all." Another example of this anti-assimilationist queer political culture is the group, Queers Against Assimilation (QAA). On 11 October 2009, the day of the National Equality March on Washington, QAA threw black and pink-glitter paint grenades at the Human Rights Commission headquarters building and issued a manifesto critiquing the political agenda of the HRC. Calling their attack on the HRC "glamdalism," Queers Against Assimilation criticized the HRC fundraising gala held the night before, at which President Obama spoke. QAA described HRC as "a few wealthy elites who are in bed with corporate sponsors who proliferate militarism, heteronormativity, and capitalist exploitation." See LezGetReal (2009) The actions and statements of Queers Against Assimilation, Queer Kids of Queer Parents Against Gay Marriage, and other queer cultural critics suggest that queer opposition to homonormativity and homonationalism is multifaceted, drawing on critiques of racism, militarism, incarceration, police violence, neoliberalism, and anti-immigrant discrimination. See Queer Kids of Queer Parents Against Gay Marriage (2009)
46. Following Jasbir Puar's introduction of the term, "homonationalism," critiques of the imbrication of racialized nationalism and imperialism within queer politics have multiplied. Puar's analysis of homonationalism belongs to a larger body of queer of color and queer diaspora/queer studies scholarship, including Eng (2010), Manalansan (2003), Gopinath (2005), Muñoz (1999), and Ferguson (2004).
47. In contrast, queer of color political organizations such as SUSPECT, FIERCE, Queers for Economic Justice, Audre Lorde Project, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and SUSPECT integrate economic- and racial-justice issues into their political campaigns. For example, Queers for Economic Justice's welfare-rights campaign, Welfare Warriors, "organizes low-income LGBT people on public assistance to fight for a more humane, just and inclusive welfare system." See Queers for Economic Justice. <http://q4ej.org/>. Welfare-rights campaigns inherently address the politics of racialized and gendered labor, particularly domestic and affective labor, in

relation to the neoliberal state. See also: SUSPECT, <http://nohomonationalism.blogspot.com/>; Audre Lorde Project, <http://alp.org/>; FIERCE, <http://www.fiercencyc.org/>; Sylvia Rivera Law Project, <http://srlp.org/>. While taking note of queer studies scholars' critiques of the tendency to position a priori queer of color subjects and queer of color political organizing as inherently transgressive, it is also necessary to imagine and create queer political cultures that envision issues such as welfare rights, the policing and incarceration of trans and gender nonconforming people, US imperialism, migration, and racialized/gendered labor as fundamentally intertwined with justice for queer and trans people of color. See Puar's (2007, 23–24) critique of intersectionality and the positioning of the queer of color subject as inherently transgressive.

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