

## Appreciating a Land of Purple: The Role of Social Media in the Cultural Appropriation of Food

The sight of it catches your eyes before you can use your other senses. You don't know if it's sweet, spicy, aromatic, or pungent, but what you do know is its vibrant purple color. You put into thought that purple isn't a color you see much of in dishes. But maybe you have seen it before in ice cream. You recall, could it be blueberry or grape-flavored? You decide to try out the dish you're presented with, and instead of the fruity tart flavor your tastebuds expected, you're hit with sweetness with a hint of nuttiness. You mentally scour through the types of nuts that you can remember, but none you know creates a purple hue. Maybe it's vanilla with purple food coloring? When you ask your friend what you're eating, you're surprised to hear it's something called *ube*. "Ube?" You ask, "What's that?" You're told it is a sweet yam, and you further inquire about the color itself. "The purple comes from the yam. Ube is a prevalent flavor in the Philippines. People prepare their toast, cupcakes, spring rolls, and drinks!" Your friend enthusiastically shares. The image of this sweet, purple food prepared in myriad ways intrigues you, as it's not something you commonly see on restaurant dessert menus. But unbeknownst to you until now, there is a whole culture where this sugary, nutty, purple vegetable is a staple in their cuisine. Alternatively, maybe you see yourself as the friend in this scenario. Growing up, you remember your Lola<sup>1</sup> making ube pandesal for breakfast. And at parties, where your Tita<sup>2</sup> baked an ube cake for your cousin's birthday. Or, when you look in the fridge and see the Magnolia Ube Ice Cream tub, hoping it is ice cream and not frozen leftovers.

*Ube*, meaning tuber in Tagalog, is a purple yam native to the Philippines. It has been in the Philippines for centuries, way before colonial rule, planted in the spring and harvested in the winter by indigenous Filipinos. Throughout history, Filipinos have created many sweet dishes

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<sup>1</sup> Grandmother.

<sup>2</sup> Aunt.

using this tuber. Most popularly, it is turned into halaya, or jam, by heating it and mixing it with coconut milk and sugar. The halaya is used as flavoring in many desserts like sapin-sapin and biko, rice cakes topped with roasted coconut eaten in the Philippines. Ube in its yam form can also be used in savory dishes such as ube sinigang, which mildens the taste of the sour soup. Ube's versatility in Filipino cuisine and deep roots in Filipino history cement its significance in Filipino culture.

In contrast to the thousands of years of history, ube outside of the Philippines has only stepped foot in the Western eyes in the recent decade. Many online articles credit this wave of popularity to the Manila Social Club's ube donut in New York, which blew up in 2015. *Forbes* writer Daphne Ewing-Chow describes in her article, "Ube— The Uber Ingredient of 2023," the pastry's appearance of a "gold-ube donut, adorned with icing made with Cristal champagne and filled with an ube mousse, champagne jelly, and covered with 24k gold at \$100 per donut." In this description, she highlights the main selling points of the donut: the gold, the champagne, and the ube. Interestingly, while ube was an uncommon flavor in Western donuts before the restaurant's creation, its uniqueness was not advertised as such to justify its price. Instead, the selling point focuses on the extravagance of the donut's 24k gold-encrusted exterior alongside the Cristal champagne that came with it. However, while Google says that the "French-inspired" Filipino restaurant is permanently closed, a quick look at their Instagram page, [@manilasocialclub](#), justifies the high price as it shows that they also used to sell regular ube donuts at \$3.50 per donut. The importance of this gold donut being accredited to ube's popularity in the West is a critical problem in its existence alone. When people think of Manila Social Club's ube donut as the original trendsetter, they are actually latching on to the display of its gold exterior rather than focusing on the ube itself. If you separate the gold from the ube

donut, ube automatically catches the eye with its bold purple color. However, as in images shown online, the restaurant's donut is covered by gold leaves, with no sliver of purple seen. Concealing the trademark color of ube not only hides any indication that it is ube flavored but also removes the indication that it is a Filipino dish. Without the vibrant purple of ube, it is hard to appropriately credit the ube wave to something that did not display its most recognizable trait. Such concerns about its initial popularity in the West show that although the globalization of ube has resulted in the spread of Filipino culture through social media, it comes at the risk of stripping down the Filipino identity of ube itself.

After the home of the famous ube donut shut down, one would expect the purple wave to come to a halt eventually. However, the number of posts would argue the opposite when going through the #Ube hashtag on Instagram. In the tag, over 611,000 posts of real ube goodness, such as ube cheesecake, brownies, macarons, and the like, continue to increase by the day— all while proudly showing off its well-known color. On Instagram, the number of people taking pictures of their food and tagging it with the corresponding hashtag measures the food's popularity. Instagram especially latches on to food with eccentric features and spreads it on users' algorithms like wildfire. The more posts under the tag, the more popular it is. However, over time, the number of these posts loses traction once it is not the trendiest food on the market. As a result, food fads like the Japanese soufflé pancakes and the unicorn frappuccino from Starbucks come and go.

Interestingly, what makes ube unique to Instagram's algorithm is that it can be implemented in almost any food to give it a pop of purple. Chow brings up a quote from Hilton Hotels' food blog, *Stories by Hilton*, "4 Sweet Ube Recipes: Try the Popular Filipino Ingredient That's Sweetening Hilton Menus Around the World", stating, "As striking purple dishes

containing ube are taking social media by storm, an increasing number of chefs around the world are becoming inspired to experiment with ube in new dishes” (*Stories by Hilton*). Bringing ube outside of its traditional Filipino food and into non-Filipino dishes (like the brownies that first come up under the #Ube tag) has extrapolated its popularity in social media. The massive outreach ube has on Instagram’s food landscape has seemingly done the impossible: becoming the food trend instead of following them. This phenomenon means that ube’s uniquely eye-catching color invites rising food trends to take a step further and be ube-fied. While ube-fying food contrasts with the initial introduction of ube behind a gold facade, ube’s presence in the West eventually resulted in the tuber proudly taking back its signature Filipino identity and taking the forefront of any fusion dish.

In the aftermath of the purple explosion on social media, the demand for ube increased in the West. Chow lists several non-Filipino foods that have been ube-fied, such as ube pasta in Hawaii, ube burgers in Washington, and even ube mochi from Trader Joe’s. These examples show how ube has branched out of the confines of social media and into the real world. However, I still remember when ube felt like a treasured secret in the Filipino-American community, waiting to be loved by the rest of the world. When I was younger, there were many times when I brought ube mamon to school to eat as a snack for lunch. As I ungracefully tore apart the Red Ribbon<sup>3</sup> wrapper, the mini sponge cake in my hand piqued the interest of my non-Filipino friends. As a Filipino, I felt it was my duty to share my culture with those around me. So, sensing my friends’ curiosities, I would offer them a piece of my cake. However, after I had done so, they were almost always hesitant to accept it, as if intimidated by its dark purple color. To ease their hesitation, I would compare ube to the Philippines’ version of vanilla in the United States and then insist on sharing with them again (despite my secret reluctance to give

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<sup>3</sup> A Filipino bakery chain.

away my lunch). In associating an unfamiliar flavor with a flavor they know and love, I realized that back then, to share a part of my culture, I needed to divorce it from its native identity and give it a Western perspective. However, when I ask someone now if they know what ube is, their eyes light up, and they recall eating ube ice cream at SomiSomi, an American-based ice cream shop. Even though there is still a degree of separation between ube and its Filipino identity, I can appreciate people's efforts in familiarizing themselves with my culture independently. In a way, it was inevitable that social media's popularization of ube, following its demand in real life, would make ube more mainstream in the West. Remembering when ube was only accessible in Filipino grocers and restaurants, seeing ube in stores like Trader Joe's now feels like a reverse culture shock. In retrospect, ube's explosion in the West is critical in introducing ube to the general public and allowing Filipinos to access the well-beloved flavor easily.

Having access to ube is significant to Filipinos in America. It is almost impossible to imagine any Filipino event or restaurant without the staple dish from our culture. But most importantly, accessibility to ube grants us a way to connect to home. Finding home away from home was a sentiment carried by many during the pandemic, as the social barriers the pandemic put on everyone had prevented people from visiting family. However, the pre-existing distance separating them and their family by thousands of miles of water was significantly burdensome for Filipino-Americans. With long-planned goals of reunion put on hold, this amplified the disconnection of Filipinos to their homeland and culture. It was difficult for me during the pandemic as I was mainly alone at home while my mom worked as a live-in caregiver and my dad was stuck in the Philippines for my Lola's funeral. To deal with my unfortunate circumstances, I scrolled on TikTok, getting lost in the algorithm of cooking videos. Of course, I

was not alone in my coping habits, as many others turned to food for solace during those times. In Lindsay Jo et al.'s academic research, "Bread baking, food growing, and bicycle riding: practice memories and household consumption during the COVID-19 lockdowns in Melbourne", they suggest that baking during the pandemic "provided the opportunity to try new practices or rediscover practices remembered, recorded, and shared by others." Food is used to unlock cherished memories, and with most ube desserts being baked goods, I felt the reconnection between me and my culture when my mom and I decided to bake ube pandesal. From beginning to end, smelling the aromatic scent of the cheese-filled bread (as it is usually made with) made me feel like I was reunited with my dad and reliving my memories of baking pandesal with my Lola in the Philippines. I find these memories significant because I can be easily transported back to them with just the whiff of the strong ube scent from the pandesal she used to make. So, in baking the ube pandesal with my mom here in America, the process and the senses stimulated by ube helped me relive memories of my grandmother and reminisce about the time I spent in the Philippines. To best put it, it was like the scene from the 2007 *Pixar* film *Ratatouille*, where Ego takes a bite of the titular dish and is transported back to his childhood memories.

Rediscovering memories through food also brings up the topic of discovering food trends. Dalgona, a Korean candy made from sugar and baking soda, found its popularity outside of its homeland during the pandemic and on social media. While Koreans remember it as part of their childhood and culture, the rest of the world knows it as the life-or-death game, ppopgi, in the 2019 *Netflix* series *Squid Game*. Dalgona was followed by a flood of challenges on social media, where individuals copied the show's game and attempted to break the shape molded inside the candy. There was also a trend where people whipped coffee, sugar, and water to make

dalgona coffee. Christina Morales's *New York Times* article, "Why Is Everyone Talking About Dalgona Candy?" discusses the extensive history of dalgona, from its origins in postwar-stricken Korea and its decline in the early 2000s due to the emergence of the candy industry. Most people do not know about the bitter side of this sweet treat, as dalgona's reputation outside of its home is tied to a glamorized image and raving social media trends. Medina quotes sociologist and expert on race and racism in Hollywood, Nancy Wang Yuen, who says, "Dalgona candy is representative of fetishizing K-pop and K-dramas, and seeing one thing and saying, 'Wow, I've discovered Korean culture,' ... when in fact the candy, the cinema, the television series, all of these things, have been in existence" (Yuen). The sentiment that Yuen stresses, that despite its popularity, a historical and cultural association still comes with the candy and should not be forgotten, can also be argued in the case of ube. Both dalgona and ube found worldwide success ignited by social media during the pandemic. Yet, the simultaneous and similar fashion in which the two foods gained popularity are not the only things they have in common. Another thing that ube and dalgona share is its links to resilience during historical tragedies. Medina notes in her article that dalgona originated in postwar Korea due to Korean children who "had grown accustomed to the free chocolates given away by American soldiers" (Park)<sup>4</sup> looking for sweet alternatives. In the Philippines, ube was used as a source of nutrition in times of famine during Spanish colonialism. In those trying times, both foods offered a sweet solace to their people. The respective treats also profoundly resonate with Koreans and Filipinos during their childhood. Just like dalgona was sold outside elementary schools during the 1990s, in my childhood living in the Philippines, I remember the ice cream man selling ube ice cream outside my school. While both countries associate their sweet treat as a two-sided coin, with one

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<sup>4</sup> Medina quotes this from Albert Park, a history professor with expertise in Korean history in Claremont McKenna College.

face being times of hardship and the other being childhood nostalgia, those not a part of the respective cultures would not be aware otherwise. Instead, non-Koreans and non-Filipinos were introduced to ube and dalgona through the launching of the food's fascination as a social media spectacle. Although one cannot expect to immediately be knowledgeable of the history of another culture's food, it should be addressed that the sensationalism of food filters out the personal and cultural identity that it holds. The problem of filtering the food's identity leads back to Yuen's argument, where having a glamorized image of a cultural food causes people to "discover" something already significant to a culture.

Ube and dalgona's success story in the West comes at a fragile cost. While some people can see it as a cultural gem finally receiving its well-deserved roses, one must consider how the hyperfocus on its image rather than culture can do more harm than good, especially in the age of social media. In dalgona's case, the trend of playing ppopgi and making dalgona coffee seems like a thing of the past now as it was linked to the wave of the *Squid Game* hype and a simple pastime for people during the pandemic. Now that people can finally go outside, binging the TV show is not as much the rave as it was during the pandemic. As a result, making dalgona and playing ppopgi isn't the trend anymore. However, for Koreans, just because the hype has died down online does not eradicate dalgona's Korean history, nor does it erase the fact that making dalgona is still a livelihood for some. The way ube's popularity is different from dalgona's lies in the composition of both foods. Dalgona's candy composition is limited to its candy form and the coffee trend. Outside of that, not many dalgona recipes have emerged past the pandemic hype. Yet because ube can be used as a flavoring in its yam and halaya form, it is malleable in following any food trends while once again becoming the trend. Ube's resilience to food trends



benefits it in that it is not regarded as a thing of the past but something that can be discussed in the present and future.

However, the problem of implicating cultural foods into social media trends opens up a more considerable discussion on how easy it is for said foods to be disregarded once they are deemed “unpopular.” For dalgona, the longevity of its popularity was linked to the pandemic. Once it was over, so was the hype. Yet, to broaden the scope of the definition of “unpopular,” popularity is not limited to the timeline of something’s longevity. Popularity is also linked to how consumable something is to a large audience. For something to become “popular,” the meaning comes with the indication that something is well-loved by the masses. When someone becomes famous, they are either well-loved or hated by many. The longevity of their popularity is also linked to the fact that they will be talked about more if they are well-loved. In contrast, if they are hated, there is only a limited amount of time before the general public moves on from their persona and onto a new person. Yet when a food is deemed popular, it must not look “ugly,” smell “bad,” or have too much of an “unconventional” taste. Anything else will immediately disqualify it from being discussed in a positive light on a bigger stage.

Take balut, a popular Filipino street food in the Philippines. Balut is everything opposite of ube—salty, mute in colors, and most importantly, a fertilized egg embryo. Both ube and balut are widely eaten in the Philippines, but while only one has a place in numerous “most disgusting foods in the world” lists, the other can be found in a myriad of foods like gold-encrusted donuts. If Filipinos see nothing wrong with both cuisines, why is one more heavily scrutinized? In the *CNN* article “All Hail Ube, the Culinary Gem We Took for granted,” writer Anna Bueno says, “For all its newfound fame, ube — in its raw form — is ugly. It looks like poop at its worst, and resembles a shapeless, hardened piece of rock at its best” (Bueno). As

some might argue, what makes balut more polarizing is how it looks like a living baby chicken. Although the embryo in the egg is not alive, an entire country still considers balut a delicacy. The discussion here is how cultural foods are only deemed “acceptable” once filtered through a Western standard. This standard of the Western palette relies on the familiarity of the food’s appearance. This filtering is exemplified with the ube donut, where ube’s popularity in the West is credited to the extravagant display of the donut rather than the simple ube donut sold alongside in the restaurant. Notably, the ube wave beginning with a donut rather than a traditional Filipino cuisine like sapin-sapin also speaks to how the closer a food appears to a Western look, the more people are willing to try it out. Only then can cultural food be worthy of praise and success even to have a possibility of global popularity, thus transcending the limits of a trend.

In deconstructing the appearance of cultural food to make it more palatable to a Western audience, deconstruction also disregards the historical background that it comes with. As exemplified with dalgona, where a bitter background surrounds the sweet candy, the article “The Authentic Balut: History, Culture, and Economy of a Philippine Food Icon” by Maria Carinnes P. Alejandria et al. informs how Filipinos had taken a liking to eat balut due to “extreme hunger and lack of proper food during World War II.” Filipinos’ liking to balut results from dealing with what was available during war and poverty. As balut was easily accessible to them, it eventually became a staple delicacy in the Philippines. However, the hostile reaction to balut from non-Filipinos neglects this historical background and instead focuses on the fact that balut is a baby chicken. In focusing on appearance rather than historical context, forcing foods through a Western lens to pass approval completely disregards why the food is being eaten in

the first place. To non-Filipinos, balut is a dish that deserves a spot on the “most disgusting foods in the world” lists, but to Filipinos, balut is a reminder of survival in the face of adversity.

Coming from the same country that has persisted through Spanish, Japanese, and American occupation, ube is no exception to this history. While worldwide, ube is known for its sweetness and color, that alone is not what makes ube so crucial to the Philippines. Ube’s ubiquitous presence in the complicated history of the Philippines has followed alongside colonization and wars. The value from ube gave Filipinos essential nutrients, such as “fiber, protein, calcium, iron, vitamin C and vitamin A” (Chow), which were needed to sustain them during trying times. Historically, it has helped Filipinos survive through droughts due to how easily it can be planted in varying types of soils and climates (Bueno). In FEATR’s documentary, “Is Ube Being Stolen From the Philippines?” vice president Celencio Maligsa of the Bohol Ubi<sup>5</sup> [sic] Growers Association discusses ube’s role in Filipino culture. Maligsa describes ube as their “savior” during a food crisis when rice was hard to get. In the East, where rice is a staple crop across many countries, it is dire to find a replacement when harvesting is difficult. He also brings up how ube had to be carefully handled. If someone dropped the tuber, they would have to kiss it or go to church to erase the karma from dropping the sacred ube (Maligsa). Although ube can easily bruise and rot, the superstition associated with kissing the tuber to remove a curse is linked to Filipino’s reliance on ube as their lifeline. It was crucial to handle ube carefully because if you did not, it would rot, and you would not be able to get your nutrition. Like balut, the love for ube stems from Filipinos having to scrape the resources they have at hand and strive for survival. Consequently, the fight for survival pushed Filipinos to

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<sup>5</sup> Ube is particularly significant in Bohol due to the province being the main producers of ube. The spelling of ubi in Bohol is an acronym of the Unique Boholano Identity.

incorporate ube into other accessible crops like rice to expand their needed nutrition into new cultural dishes, like biko, that can be found today.

However, forgetting that food can have such a significant cultural background is not something only people outside said culture can experience. One of my favorite places for my ube fix is Cafe 86 in Artesia. When you walk in, its humble appearance, the fragrant smell of sugar, and the display of ube treats invite you to open your wallet and fill your stomach as much as possible. What I usually buy from there is their Ube Monster Shake, a sweet purple milkshake topped with Oreo bits to satisfy my sweet tooth. Sometimes, I indulge in their halo-halo, a traditional Filipino dessert with sweet beans at the bottom and ube ice cream topped with Frosted Flakes and leche flan. When I take a bite of their halo-halo, I am transported to childhood memories in the Philippines, where my cousins and I would make our versions of halo-halo at home with shaved ice. Although I see good memories in halo-halo, others see it as representing something bigger. Cafe 86 owner Ginger Lim-Dimapasok says in her interview with the Filipino new-station *ABS-CBN*, “Halo-halo is more than a dessert. It's a map of Filipino history in a glass. Taiwanese boba, Indian jackfruit, Filipino ube, and, let's not forget the colonizers -- Spanish flan and American cereal. A sweet treat that represents a not-so-sweet past.” Most Filipinos associate halo-halo as a “Filipino” staple. Nevertheless, as Dimapasok puts it, we tend to forget that our Filipino identity is also linked with strands of other cultures. From our languages, names, religion, and even the “traditional” Filipino barong<sup>6</sup>, all of these have been assimilated as part of the Filipino identity because of its roots in colonialism. Regarding halo-halo, the only thing that remains unequivocally Filipino is the tuber. Ube being native to the Philippines is one of the few things that can be argued has been entirely untouched

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<sup>6</sup> Also known as barong tagalog, or “Tagalog outfit,” this formal long-sleeved shirt is worn by men. It is regarded as the national costume of the Philippines. The barong has undergone many iterations in style throughout Filipino history, notably taking influence from Spanish colonial fashion.

by colonization. Although it can be implemented in cross-cultural dishes such as pandesal, the tuber is indigenous. Acknowledging its indigenous identity is critical in the aftermath of ube's globalization, as the flavor's popularity should be properly credited to the country it comes from.

However, because ube's most extraordinary feats, besides its flavor, are its resilience against food trends, droughts, and colonization, this does not mean its newfound popularity resulted in profound changes in the ube industry back home. Filipino brand Good Shepherd announced back in 2019 that it would switch to using white yams in its products (Chow). The FEATR documentary and Bueno's article both point out how there has been a recent increase in false advertising regarding "real" ube products. In the documentary, FEATR founder Erwan Heussaff goes to a market to buy different halaya brands for a taste test. The shopkeeper advises not to buy a particular brand of ube because "it is not real ube," despite it being branded otherwise. Bueno recounts an experience she had in a market, saying, "an ube pastillas product I recently bought from an organic mart, for example, lists buffalo milk as its main ingredient, with "natural ube flavoring" listed at the very end" (Bueno). Both Heussaff and Bueno highlight the inconsistency of false ube products compared to the actual product, calling the halaya "gelatinous" when it is not supposed to be (Heussaff) and the ube flavor in the pastillas lacking (Bueno). Strangely, for a country where ube is a staple part of the culture, the trend of fake ube products is rising, juxtaposing with its rising demand worldwide.

In a time where ube recipes on social media are skyrocketing, attention to ube must focus not only on its pretty appearance but also its conflicts. According to Cynthia G. Kiswa, director of Benguet State University, ube output went from 30,000 metric tons to 14,000 metric tons between 2006 and 2021 (qtd. in Heussaff). Ube's decreasing outputs result from a

multitude of factors, one of which is climate change. Epi Fabonan III's *One News* article, "Why Purple Ube Is Affected By Climate Change," cites that the main reason for Good Shepherd's business decision is because of how the heating climate has stunted ube harvesting. Because ube relies on the shade the trees provide to grow in big harvests, the lack of shade has done otherwise, resulting in insufficient ube production (Fabonan III). Additionally, farming land has decreased over the years, affecting all agricultural production in the Philippines. In the research "The Rice Crisis in the Philippines," by Jomar H. Mendoza, farmers sell their land to earn money from wealthy businessmen who intend to turn it into malls. They also sell it to support their kids and look for better opportunities in the city. However, for the farmers that still grow ube, like the Aeta<sup>7</sup> ube farmer Aiza Lansang, harvesting ube is a strenuous occupation with little reward, with ube being sold for one dollar for two pounds. With the lack of ready farming areas available for farmers, and farmers walking away from their occupation, the space for ube to grow is becoming more limited despite its growing demands. Most of these problems can be attributed to the lack of government support. While government support in the Philippines is an extensive issue overall in the country, there is little attention given to the agricultural sector in the Philippines. Heussaff brings up how the Philippines was seen as "the center of rice production" yet was exceeded in exports by other countries once they learned from Filipinos how to plant it efficiently. He also notes how another staple of Filipino cuisine, calamansi<sup>8</sup>, is going down the same route, and questions ube possibly following after. Food historian Ige Ramos voices these concerns towards the government, saying that the government should be more aware of ube's geographical indicators and use them to command a higher price on ube. Heussaff says Ramos' concerns can be protected by a Product of Destination Origin (PDO)

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<sup>7</sup> The Aeta people are an indigenous group of Filipinos living in the Luzon region of the Philippines.

<sup>8</sup> A type of lime that is native to the Philippines.

status, which can help bring more attention to ube to support the farmers and keep the tradition and culture of ube alive. The stress of protecting the ube industry and ube farmers is imperative in preserving what is ubiquitously Filipino in identity. Without these precautions, it can lead to significant economic losses and a loss of traces of pre-colonial Filipino culture. Especially when ube is gaining traction outside of its native home at an exponential level due to social media, these threats are becoming imminent the more ube's virality is left unchecked.

Despite all the problems in ube production, they are easy to gloss over if you are detached from the process, especially by thousands of miles. As found in the study by J. M. Valiente-Neighbours, "Mobility, Embodiment, and Scales: Filipino Immigrant Perspectives on Local Food," Filipino immigrants have varying meanings of what "local food" is. One of these definitions outlined in the study is that Filipino immigrants define "local food" as Filipino food. Despite a clear difference in distance, the importance of Filipino immigrants deeming what "local food" is to them being food from home contributes to this ube craze in America. For Filipinos in America, when we take a bite of that ube cake from Red Ribbon, we are given a faint taste of what we had an abundance of at home. Even though ube here in America will still come from the Philippines, ube does not entirely bring the culture of everything else from the Philippines. To find traces of home, we try to latch on to what we can, and we do this by creating different ube-flavored food.

Nevertheless, in the Philippines, a role reversal occurs, where due to the proximity to ube, there is not much of an ube craze. "They always set aside the ube because local lang siya," says Michelle Concepcion-Reyes, co-owner of Michelle's Homemade Putong Ube, in Bueno's article. She says that because of how locally accessible ube is, Filipinos find no appeal to the dish. Whereas Filipinos living abroad see ube as an extension of their memories of home, there

is no regard for that in the Philippines, as they already live within their homeland. Instead, the appeal to ube for some Filipinos lies not in its flavor but in the appearance of the ube dish being made. Reyes brings up how she has to use fancy packaging to make it “sosyal,” or something that looks upper-class. She also jokes about how it is unfortunate that ube had to be hyped up by people in the U.S. and that “maybe we should put some gold in our ube.” Still, Reyes’ comment reflects the reality regarding ube in the Philippines. Ube is not portrayed as a new spectacle or a trendy food on Instagram because ube in the Philippines is *just* ube. The familiarity associated with the tuber in the Philippines contrasts with the West’s fascination with it. In the Philippines, ube cannot be rediscovered and claimed as a new and exotic taste, unlike in the West, where ube is a relatively new presence. However, this benefits the Philippines as it deepens the relationship with ube on a level no other countries can replicate. In being closely related to the tuber, ube is appreciated in the Philippines not for its phenomenal presence on social media but because of the history and culture intertwined alongside it.

Considering the circumstances surrounding ube, the stress of keeping ube’s Filipino identity alive is crucial. While Filipino-Americans and non-Filipinos contribute to a rising demand for this “trendy” flavor, divorcing the Filipino identity of ube through a Western lens clashes with the Philippines’ need to preserve this unequivocally Filipino ingredient. Ube’s globalization brings into question the extent to which appreciation can turn into appropriation. Ube is more than just a quick ticket to a viral Instagram post for many Filipinos worldwide. Ube is also a way to reconnect to home and family, to relive meaningful memories, and is a livelihood for some. In a larger sense, ube is also a representative of everything that is uniquely Filipino. Just as it appears from harvest to plate, ube carries both the ugly and pretty sides of Filipino history and culture. Spreading the love for ube is Filipinos’ way of giving a part of



themselves rather than assimilating into others' cultures, as has happened throughout history. In the age of social media, where content is constantly being consumed without a second thought, there is a dire need to step back, slow down, and consider why the thing you consume is widespread and how you can ensure you are respectfully indulging the information. So, in the craze of ube mochi, ube burgers, and golden ube donuts, when you take a bite of whatever new ube-fied dish is served to you, it is essential to remember that at the end of the day, what you are eating is, first and foremost, Filipino.

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