

## FORUM KRITIKA

### DECOLONIZING KNOWLEDGES: ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, CARLOS BULOSAN, AND INSURGENT FILIPINO DIASPORIC IMAGINATION

**Jeffrey Arellano Cabusao**  
**Bryant University**  
*[jcabusao@bryant.edu](mailto:jcabusao@bryant.edu)*  
*[jeff.cabusao@gmail.com](mailto:jeff.cabusao@gmail.com)*

#### Abstract

The current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have compelled interdisciplinary scholars to seek new methods of engaging US Empire. This essay will attempt to outline an emerging critique-al strand of Filipino Cultural Studies that challenges the limitations of the “cultural turn” through its connection to the larger goal of creating movements for social justice. Over the past few years, new forms of Filipino American scholarship have advanced a unique tradition of class analysis developed by earlier generations of Filipino cultural workers and activists. In addition to this new development, Filipino American cultural workers have created politically conscious art through their participation in social justice movements. I argue that this new form of Filipino Cultural Studies – one that is not strictly ensconced in the academy – might provide useful and timely suggestions for alternative and transformative ways of knowing and being.

#### Keywords

Filipino American public intellectuals, social activism

#### About the author

Jeffrey Arellano Cabusao is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at Bryant University. He received his BA in English and Cross-Cultural Ethnic Studies from Oberlin College, his MA in Asian American Studies from UCLA, and his PhD in English from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. During the 2006-2007 academic year, he was a Mellon Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in the Department of English at Kalamazoo College. His teaching and research focus on US Ethnic Studies (specifically comparative approaches to Asian American and African American Studies), Cultural Studies (literary and cultural theory, critical pedagogies), and Women’s Studies (feminist movement and social change). He’s particularly interested in the relationship between interdisciplinary formations, cultural production, and social justice movements in the United States. Current research projects explore how the work of Filipino American author and activist Carlos Bulosan and the emerging field of Filipino American Studies might offer new ways of developing racial literacy in a “post-racial” United States.

During my undergraduate years at Oberlin College in the 1990s, I found myself involved in passionate discussions with classmates about the function of intellectuals in society. At that time we were involved in a national student movement to establish Asian American and US Ethnic Studies programs in colleges and universities east of California. This involved the occupation of buildings

and the formation of teach-ins and hunger strikes. Our student organizing on the Oberlin campus provided hard-won opportunities to invite renowned intellectuals, academics, and activists to our campus for discussion: Ronald Takaki, Cornel West, Angela Davis, Delia Aguilar, Yuri Kochiyama, E. San Juan, Jr., Ward Churchill, Elaine Brown, Bhairavi Desai, Edward Said, Evelyn Hu-DeHart, Urvashi Vaid, Karin Aguilar-San Juan, and bell hooks (*On Strike!*; Kochiyama appendix 18; Cabusao “The Social Responsibility”). Within and outside of the classroom, we engaged a variety of writers who provided different approaches to examining the function of race in US society from Toni Morrison to Carlos Bulosan. Some of us engaged the writings of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha in search of theoretical tools to help us make sense of the world. A running joke among student activists who were assigned Homi Bhabha was: “Yeah, Homi Bhabha is his name. But is Homi *really* your homey?” This kind of response to Bhabha’s writing was symptomatic of a noticeable gap—within some forms of postcolonial scholarship—between theoretical articulations of “speechless” subalterns and the harsh material realities of US racialized Others coming to terms with the Winter of Civil Rights in an age of neoliberal globalization: corporate attack on worker’s rights, the intensification of racialized poverty across the nation, and a rollback on Affirmative Action programs (Omatsu; Drucker; Duggan; Wolff).

Now as a teacher, I’ve become very aware of the contradictions of knowledge production within the contemporary academy. Oftentimes an institution’s commitment to socially engaged and innovative intellectual production (especially in the humanities) is at odds with its commitment to its financial well being, especially at this time of severe financial crisis with nearly twenty percent unemployed in the United States (“A Superpower in Decline”; O’Hara; Chapman and Kelderman). A variety of institutions are now in the process of eliminating their liberal arts programs or redefining liberal arts to include some form of professional training as a way to attract more students who are interested in programs that will eventually pay off with a job after graduation (McSpadden). What this process of redefinition means is that liberal arts are to be restructured within the context of job training. Although I understand the circumstances (the extreme pressure placed on young people who must grapple with the increasing costs of a college education), I can’t help but feel alarmed at the ways in which students are increasingly positioned as consumers instead of producers of knowledge. Faculty members themselves become commodified and the knowledges they produce reified. Today, graduate education in the humanities is also in the process of rethinking and “re-branding” itself for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (“Graduate Humanities Education”).

The combination of a deep financial crisis, the destruction and privatization of public education, the emergence of a consumer model of higher education in the age of neoliberal globalization, and the absence of sustained mass movements for social change has created the

context for what US cultural critic Lewis Gordon calls the “market colonization of intellectuals.” What Gordon means is that academics are trained – pressured – to “align the university with the sociology and norms of the market.” The privatization of the academy and the subsequent rise of a managerial academic class have created the conditions within which academics produce their work. What Gordon means when he says that “[m]arket potentiality governs [what academics] produce” is that the view of what’s possible—specifically the possibility of connecting academic inquiry with sustained public intellectual engagement—has become severely limited. According to Gordon, one consequence of the market colonization of the humanities is the privileging of form over content or the “appearance of education through textual familiarity” (technique or “textual marketability”) over “research that challenges texts, produces new kinds, and may even transcend textual virtuosity” (innovative knowledge production). Another consequence is the silencing of a rich tradition of intellectual dissent that has informed the development of various interdisciplinary fields such as African American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Women’s Studies, Lesbian and Gay Studies, and Cultural Studies. Gordon cites several examples of engaged public intellectuals that might offer useful alternative narratives for developing a socially engaged humanities: W.E.B. DuBois, Anna Julia Cooper, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Gordon’s critique, in many ways, builds upon the sentiments of French intellectual historian Francois Cusset who stated a few years ago in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that “one of the saddest things about the immediate post-9/11 climate in the United States’ public space” was the fact that intellectuals, theorists and “campus radicals didn’t have much to say about George W. Bush, Iraq, terror, national pride, and global democracy, apart from a distant feeling of horror and disarray.” At this year’s annual conference of the American Historical Association, a panel discussion was organized to address the silence of historians on the global “war on terror.” Peter Schmidt at the *Chronicle* highlighted history professor Carolyn Eisenberg’s comments at the event: “a great number of historians are profoundly at odds with the thrust of the ‘war on terror’ but their opposition ‘has scarcely registered in the public debate – it is barely a peep.”

When I think of hard-hitting public intellectuals who have critiqued the US war on Iraq, it’s difficult for me to think of many coming from the contemporary academy. I think of investigative journalists like Naomi Klein, Chris Hedges, Amy Goodman, or progressive sportswriter David Zirin. There are, of course, those of an earlier generation like Noam Chomsky, Angela Davis, Terry Eagleton, and the late Howard Zinn. Promising developments exist among a few younger academics, which must be nurtured and sustained. Asian Americanist Vijay Prashad and political scientist Melissa Harris Lacewell in the United States and feminist philosopher Nina Power in the United Kingdom are examples of those who have combined innovative knowledge production with their engagement with traditions of intellectual dissent.

With regard to Filipino American public intellectuals, I'm hard-pressed to think of a handful. There are, of course, E. San Juan, Jr. and Delia Aguilar who continue to write, lecture, and mentor young people. But who are the public intellectuals among younger Filipinos? There is the conservative commentator Michelle Malkin. If we count Malkin, how about Manny Pacquiao? Or Oprah's favorite Filipina singer Charice Pempengco? I'm being a bit facetious here. To be sure, progressive minded Filipino intellectuals exist within the academy. My point is that we must be critical of the larger context within which a new generation of Asian Americanists and Filipino academics is conditioned to produce knowledge – a context that prevents progressive minded academics from developing and nurturing a collective approach to innovative intellectual and creative production that draws on traditions of intellectual dissent.

### REFLECTIONS ON CARLOS BULOSAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES: INSTITUTIONALIZATION WITHIN THE ACADEMIC INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

One of our most prominent Filipino public intellectuals is Carlos Bulosan (1911-1956), a prolific writer of essays, poems, and fiction and a major figure of American, Asian American, and Philippine literary canons.<sup>1</sup> In this section, I'd like to explore a connection between the market colonization of Carlos Bulosan in the academy and the market colonization—or institutionalization of—Asian American Studies. Carlos Bulosan provides a point of departure into a brief examination of different methodologies of reading Filipino agency and subjectivity in Asian American Studies. I'll end by offering a few suggestions for engaging Bulosan as a model for producing decolonized intellectual work.

Through World War II, Bulosan worked on some of his most widely recognized works: *Laughter of My Father* (1944), a satirical indictment of Philippine class society, and *America is in the Heart* (1946), his classic “ethno-biographical” testament to the resourcefulness and militancy of the Philippine peasantry and Filipino workers. Bulosan occupied a prominent position on the US Cultural Left as well as in the popular imagination of the American public.<sup>2</sup> Though blacklisted in the United States and by CIA-supported Philippine President Magsaysay, Bulosan reaffirmed his political and artistic vision during the Cold War period. In 1949, he defended the rights of Filipino labor organizers charged for membership in the Communist Party, USA.<sup>3</sup> In 1952, Bulosan edited *the International Longshoreman's and Warehousemen's Union, Local 37 Yearbook* (Seattle), which includes a passionate call to release imprisoned Philippine-based poet/labor union leader Amado V. Hernandez. Around 1955, inspired by Luis Taruc's *Born of the People* (1953), Bulosan wrote *The Cry and the Dedication*, which dramatizes the anti-imperialist Huk peasant insurgency in the Philippines. It was posthumously published and edited by E. San Juan, Jr. in 1977 and 1995.<sup>4</sup>

Given Bulosan's rich history of involvement in working class struggles, I'm very concerned about the ways in which Bulosan has been read and remembered in the academy. Here I think of two literary anthologies that I've looked at for my courses in literature and Asian American Studies: Paul Lauter's *Heath Anthology of American Literature* (contemporary period from 1945 to the present) and Jessica Hagedorn's updated *Charlie Chan is Dead 2: At Home in the World*. In Lauter's 2010 edition, two chapters from part two of *America is in the Heart* are included. Bulosan is remembered primarily as an immigrant who, although subjected to multiple forms of racist violence, continues in his determination to make something of himself in America (the Asian American model minority in the making). While Lauter's selection introduces readers to the Filipino migrant experience in the United States (students are exposed to an inventory of racial and class inequalities from the perspective of the protagonist), Hagedorn's selected piece titled "Homecoming" commemorates Bulosan primarily as an exile yearning for home. The protagonist of "Homecoming" returns to the Philippines scarred and broken after years of brutal racist violence in the United States as a migrant worker.

Whether it's the postwar American literary canon or the post 9/11 Asian American literary canon, the figure of Bulosan as dissenting public intellectual is silenced either through the obscuring of the history of the US colonization of the Philippines (the conditions of possibility for the migration of Filipino workers and for the racialized exploitation of Filipinos in the United States) or the ahistorical framing and juxtaposing of Bulosan with contemporary Asian American writing that envisions empowerment through consumption and sexual desire/pleasure. I do, however, applaud Lauter and Hagedorn for including Bulosan in their anthologies. Their challenge of including Bulosan opens a space to consider larger challenges that confront all of us within American, Asian American, and Filipino/Philippine Studies: 1) the project of confronting and critiquing a history of US Empire (the Philippines was a colony of the United States beginning in 1899 and continues as a US neocolony); and 2) the project of exploring a history of Filipino intellectual dissent, progressive working class struggle, and sustained collective struggle for Philippine national sovereignty.

### INTERROGATING THE CULTURALIZATION OF RESISTANCE

When I was assigned Hagedorn's anthology *Charlie Chan is Dead* (first edition) in an undergraduate Asian American literature course in the early 1990s, I was elated. I felt empowered because it spoke to my own experiences of marginalization as an Asian American/Filipino American college student who desired new ways of reading US literature and society. What's stunning about Hagedorn's collection is its representation of an extremely rich diversity of voices

(differences) within the Asian American literary community. While the collection was useful for my own process of identity formation and intellectual development, I soon yearned for other notions of empowerment (especially as the sounds of a youthful anti-globalization movement entered our classrooms)—an empowerment beyond affirmation of my multiple intersecting identities (race, class, gender, sexuality).

Hagedorn's approach to categorizing Asian American literature organized around the notion of "differences within" resonates with the theoretical assumptions of a key essay titled "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, and Multiplicity: Asian American Differences" (1991) by Asian American cultural theorist Lisa Lowe.<sup>5</sup> This pioneering essay in the field of Asian American Studies (one of the first in the 1990s to concretize a cultural materialist analysis of Asian American cultural production) "emphasizes the gender, class, and cultural differences within the Asian American community." Lowe challenges the essentialism of US racism that obscures the differences within the broad Asian American community and seeks to develop an understanding of how Asian American differences could be used to create new forms of pan-Asian ethnic solidarity in a post-Civil Rights era.<sup>6</sup>

A central concept for Lowe is material hybridity, which is an attempt to connect an analysis of culture with an analysis of capitalism. Material hybridity is the convergence of two processes. The "material" part of material hybridity highlights unequal social relations of power within capitalism. The "hybridity" part highlights strategies of "living, inventing, and reproducing different cultural alternatives." One example that Lowe uses to illustrate the idea of material hybridity is the "racial and linguistic mixings in the Philippines and among Filipinos in the United States," which function as the "material trace of the history of Spanish colonialism, US colonization, and US neocolonialism" (428). Lowe affirms the cultural (racial and linguistic) diversity (hybridity) within Philippine society and among Filipino Americans as that which "marks the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination." An affirmation, however, of cultural hybridity (difference) as a mode of survival (form of agency) within Philippine society and among Filipino Americans without an engagement with the history of subaltern struggles within the Philippines for national sovereignty inadvertently gives more power to colonialism in shaping Filipino identity and culture than it deserves. If Bulosan as dissenting public intellectual is forgotten under the sign of intersectionality/empowerment in Hagedorn's anthology, the Filipino people's struggle for national sovereignty (as an alternative form of existence) is silenced (and deferred) under the sign of difference/cultural hybridity in Lowe's project.

According to feminist theorist Teresa Ebert, Lowe's material hybridity can be read as a form of discursive materialism "grafted onto deconstruction" (see also Mojab). What this means is that, given the theoretical underpinnings of "material hybridity" and deconstruction, the very system of

capitalism itself is reduced to a closed text within which a critique of its contradictions is produced. An immanent critique (a critique produced from within the closed confines of a text) can only destabilize and disrupt the dominant ideologies that give shape and form to a text; however, it can not create an alternative beyond the text.

The assumptions of Lowe's "material hybridity" are advanced in another key text in Asian American Studies by Yen Le Espiritu titled *Home Bound* (2003), a sociological study on the various ways in which Filipino Americans attempt to claim a home within a country that continues to sustain neocolonial relations with the Philippines. In her study, she challenges the dominant mode of knowledge production within immigration studies. This is one that is individualist and places the "immigration problem" onto immigrants themselves (6-7). In an attempt to produce a systemic critique of global capitalism, Espiritu develops the idea of a "critical transnational perspective." According to Espiritu, a "critical transnational perspective" focuses on "the global structures of inequality" that shape "Asian immigration and Asian American lives in the United States" (5). On one hand, Espiritu is concerned with the materiality of global capitalism and imperialism; on the other, she posits "immigration [as] a cultural system ... that naturalizes unequal patterns of mobility and uneven integration into the nation" (208).

What's at issue here is that the "global structures of inequality" are themselves reduced to a closed cultural text within which everyday forms of survival of Filipino Americans in San Diego, California (creating communities, homes, and complex transnational identities within an inhospitable, racist environment) are read to deconstruct, destabilize, and denaturalize global capitalism and imperialism as totalizing forces on the lives of people of color.

By living their lives across borders, Filipino immigrants, in effect, are challenging the nation-state's attempt to localize them; that is, to mold them into acceptable and "normal" subjects. As such, Filipino transnational activities must be understood in part as an act of resistance. (Espiritu 212)

In her admirable desire to resist positioning Filipinos as complete victims and to grant them some form of agency, Espiritu reads global capitalism through the lens of "scattered hegemonies," a network of power that is also culturalized—"modes of representation are themselves forms of power rather than mere reflections of power" (201). To be sure, hegemony is never totalizing; however, if power is diffuse and culturalized (discursive materialism), then resistance emerges along similar lines (destabilization from within): it's dispersed, scattershot, individualist, and within every existing interstices. In other words, everyday acts of getting by (survival) within global capitalism are read and affirmed as resistance.

Despite the culturally deterministic moments in her analysis, I appreciate Espiritu's effort to bring attention to the Filipino community in San Diego. One of the extremely useful aspects of Espiritu's text is its reminding us of the global context within which US racism functions. For example, the racialization of Filipinos is a process that is intertwined with the US colonial occupation of the Philippines. Also, I'd like to acknowledge Espiritu's opening a space to examine new forms of subject making among Filipino American youth and students in California.

In her final chapter, she interviews three young Filipino American women who, in the late 1990s, were radicalized by the Philippine Integration/Exposure Program "hosted by the Los Angeles-based League of Filipino Students" (218). Espiritu sheds light on the new forms of identity that these young women were able to create once exposed to the concrete conditions and various forms of activism in the Philippines: "the young women were most inspired and awed by the level of activism and political consciousness exhibited by the people and organizations in the Philippines" (220). Many young people who participate in the Integrate/Exposure Program hosted by the League of Filipino Students are able to work closely with social justice organizations in the Philippines committed to national sovereignty.

The information that Espiritu gathers about these women's experiences in the Philippine Integration/Exposure Program is extremely rich: working with indigenous organizations, urban workers, peasant farmers. What occurs, however, in her analysis is a privileging of the process of identity formation—specifically the formation of transnational identity—as a form of resistance within global capitalism. What's highlighted is the women's ability, upon returning to the United States from the Integrate/Exposure Program in the Philippines, to affirm their racialized and gendered identities ("to claim a 'sense of ownership' over one's Pinay identity") and to reconceptualize their sense of belonging to the United States and to the Philippines, both of which eventually lead all three to become committed to US-based social struggles for change. These developments are positioned as "new ways of living, seeing, and fighting ... the tools of home making," while the question of Philippine self determination (as a key to imagining an alternative beyond the text, imagining home making beyond capitalism) is marginalized and deferred. To be fair, Espiritu provides detailed information about the vibrant connection between the Integrate/Exposure Program and the mass movement for Philippine national sovereignty. Unfortunately, this information is found in her endnotes to the chapter and not fully integrated into her analysis of how these young women are creating new forms of Pinay subjectivities (245-46). The US neocolonial subjugation and violent containment of the movement for Philippine sovereignty, which has intensified in our post 9/11 era, cannot be disconnected from Filipino Americans' yearning for identity, home, and belonging.

What's at stake in my critique here is the ability to understand the world that we inhabit so



that we can change and transform it – not just destabilize it from within with forms of discursive materialism. What’s interesting to me is that the young Filipino American women who returned to the Philippines attempted to do what Bulosan did in his writings, which is to connect the struggles of oppressed people in the United States with subaltern struggles in the Philippines. This particular form of global cognitive mapping may help us come to grips with the contours of the contemporary Filipino diaspora.

The Philippines has a population of over 90 million attempting to survive within a society that’s literally falling apart due to US military and economic intervention, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and various Structural Adjustment Programs (San Juan *On the Presence of Filipinos*; Aguilar “Class Considerations”). Over nine million Filipinos are scattered around the world as Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs). Approximately 70% are women. Each day an average of four Overseas Contract Workers, branded as “supermaids,” return in coffins to an increasingly militarized Philippines that has witnessed, over the years, the return of US troops under the Visiting Forces Agreement and the intensification of the global “war on terrorism” (San Juan *On the Presence of Filipinos*; Aguilar “Class Considerations,” “Imperialism”; *Modern Heroes*).<sup>7</sup> Massive abuses (from imprisonment to death) of progressive human rights activists from various sectors of Philippine society (youth and students, teachers, lawyers, clergy, indigenous communities, workers and peasants) occurred daily under the Arroyo administration (Macapagal). Since 2001 in the Philippines, over 1000 lives have been claimed by extrajudicial violence (KARAPATAN; People’s IOM).<sup>8</sup> The situation has not improved under the new Aquino administration (Roxas).

On other side of the diaspora, we find that Filipino Americans live a contradictory existence as one of the largest Asian Pacific American groups; yet, their history, culture, and identities are rendered almost invisible. (Several semesters ago, one of my most intellectually curious students asked to meet with me. In the email message, I was asked two questions: What are your office hours? How do you identify in terms of race?) Filipino Americans, as ethnically indeterminate Others, are invisible on one hand, yet targeted by the state on the other: approximately 85,000 Filipinos have been racially profiled and targeted for deportation under the USA Patriot Act (San Juan *On the Presence of Filipinos*). In a corporatized, consumer culture, Filipino Americans have struggled to create a link between the formation of identity (politics of representation within the United States) and the formation of a genuinely independent Philippines (politics of redistribution within a global context).

## FROM TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION TO GLOBAL FORMS OF RESISTANCE

I’d like to highlight a significant development among young Filipino American academics

and intellectuals, which opens a space for us to reflect upon ways of transforming academic scholarship into forms of intellectual dissent—of challenging the market colonization of the field by acknowledging the significance of collective forms of resistance. The Critical Filipina & Filipino Studies Collective (CFFSC), “a group of scholars and activists seeking to interrogate and challenge the legacies of Empire (US and Spanish Imperialisms) for past and present communities both in the Philippines and in the Filipino diaspora,” was formed in California in response to the global “war on terror,” specifically its consequences on the everyday lives of Filipinos in the United States and in the Philippines.<sup>9</sup> Members of the CFFSC have been involved in various campaigns to support Filipino immigrants targeted for deportation, Filipino American activists blacklisted by the US and Philippine governments, and campaigns to expose massive human rights abuses by the Philippine government.<sup>10</sup>

The CFFSC’s critical analysis of the global “war on terror” challenges us to reflect upon how the legacy of US Empire gives shape to contemporary forms of domestic and international racism. Their work in the early and mid-2000s resonates with the ways in which scholars, artists, and intellectuals in other fields such as Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Critical Theory were challenging, at that time, the market colonization of intellectual production by questioning existing theoretical paradigms. African American feminist writer bell hooks and Chicana feminist artist Amalia Mesa-Bains in *Homegrown: Engaged Cultural Criticism* (2006) argue that the reality of post 9/11 forms of racism within the United States and its connection with the US occupation of Iraq “call into question all of our academic theories about postcoloniality” (132). Mesa-Bains states, “we’re not ‘over’ colonialism. Just think about the undocumented workers who died on 9/11; their names were never added to any lists, and their families were never given any reparation” (hooks and Mesa-Bains 132). Literary theorist Terry Eagleton in *After Theory* (2003) questions how the institutionalization and professionalization of “theory” have led to the erasure of class analysis and the rise of forms of historical amnesia regarding the contributions of mass movements for social change in the Global North and South. In “Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?” (2004), theorist Fredric Jameson pushes against the idea that we’ve reached the “end” of theory and argues for the necessity of developing theories that illuminate the process of creating collective forms of subjectivity.

In summer 2004, Robyn Rodriguez and Nerissa Balce, two members of the CFFSC, published an essay titled “American Insecurity and Radical Filipino Community Politics” in the *Peace Review*. This was one of the first essays produced by a younger generation of Filipino American scholars that pushed against the historical amnesia that informed dominant approaches (discursive materialism) in Asian American cultural studies by acknowledging the significance of collective forms of resistance and subject making. In addition to examining the everyday lived

experiences of Filipino Americans in a post 9/11 landscape (from Filipino airport screeners to the case of conscientious objector Stephen Funk), they highlight the ways in which Filipino American activists are able to connect the US occupation of Iraq with the long history of US-Philippines colonial and neocolonial relations.

Rodriguez and Balce document creative forms of anti-war protest and progressive Filipino community formations that enabled Filipino Americans to bridge their experiences of racial profiling with the political repression in the Philippines—from a vibrant “People’s Choir” that performed songs/chants of global solidarity at multiple anti-war rallies in San Francisco to the development of Filipinos for Global Justice Not War Coalition, a broad network of Filipino “campus and community-based youth organizations, human rights organizations [supporting the rights of the people of the Philippines], immigrant worker organizations, and scholars’ groups” (137). They argue that these progressive Filipino community formations build upon a legacy of struggle from an earlier generation of Filipino labor organizers in the United States that forged connections with movements in the Philippines. Rodriguez and Balce state,

By the second half of the 1930s, as Filipino laborers were organizing farm workers strikes in California and across the United States, Filipino peasant farmers in Central Luzon organized chapters of the National Society of Peasants in the Philippines (Katipunang Pambansa ng mga Magsasaka sa Pilipinas), which staged farmers’ strikes, pickets, rallies, and even armed uprisings in the Philippine countryside. (139)

Rodriguez and Balce interpret these forms of global cognitive mapping of two generations of Filipinos—the Manong generation of the 1930s and post 9/11 Filipino American activists—as transnational Filipino radicalism. Unlike Espiritu’s “critical transnational perspective” that brackets the question of Philippine sovereignty in her theorization of Filipino American identity, Rodriguez and Balce see grassroots struggles for racial and economic justice in the United States and the struggle for Philippine national sovereignty as inextricably interconnected and central to the process of “becoming Filipino”—of creating forms of collective Filipino subjectivity.<sup>11</sup>

Dylan Rodriguez, another member of the CFFSC, published an essay titled “The Significance of 15 March 2005: On the Bagong Diwa Prison Massacre” in *Left Curve* (2005) that examines the case of twenty two Filipino Muslim prisoners who, as a response to their rebellion against inhuman treatment within the prison system, were murdered by the Philippine National Police “[a]ided by US-trained Philippine paramilitary and SWAT-style units” (20). Advancing the notion of transnational Filipino radicalism in Robyn Rodriguez and Nerissa Balce’s essay, Dylan Rodriguez urges diasporic Filipinos to develop a “kinship of captivity” that will enable them to become

critical of the ways in which the US prison industrial complex, in its global expansion as part of the “war on terror” (Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo), has reemerged in new forms in the Philippines, a US neocolony, under the Arroyo administration. This transnational Filipino radicalism (Rodriguez’s “kinship of captivity”) can also be discerned in the popular culture of Filipino Americans. For example, Blue Scholars, a hip hop duo at the forefront of the underground Filipino American hip hop scene, have situated the everyday lived experiences of working class Filipino Americans within the context of the anti-war organizing efforts of Filipino American youth and students across the country. In the song “Back Home” (2007), they give voice to the experiences of Filipino and other working class communities that have sent their children to Iraq. Michael Viola’s excellent essay “Filipino American Hip Hop and Class Consciousness: Renewing the Spirit of Carlos Bulosan” explores the ways in which other Filipino American hip hop artists such as Kiwi and Bambu not only advance this notion of transnational Filipino radicalism but also engage the specificity of Carlos Bulosan’s unique tradition of Filipino intellectual dissent.<sup>12</sup>

### TRANSFORMATIVE KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION: LIBERATING BULOSAN AND SUSTAINING AN INSURGENT FILIPINO DIASPORIC IMAGINATION

The formation of the CFFSC is a significant development among Filipino American academics for its commitment to examining the formation of collective Filipino subjectivity as a process of struggle for Filipino self determination in the Philippines and throughout the diaspora. The CFFSC’s interrogation of US Empire, specifically US-Philippines neocolonial relations, opens a space for reassessing Carlos Bulosan’s work and life in ways that might be useful in challenging the market colonization of intellectual production that has become the hallmark of the contemporary academy. Here I’d like to highlight three dimensions of Bulosan’s literary vision for further exploration in our work as teachers, scholars, and activists.

#### 1) *Bulosan’s “Filipino subject-in-revolt”: on race, class, and empire*

If the figures of the assimilating immigrant or the homesick exile are privileged by Paul Lauter and Jessica Hagedorn’s anthologies, it’s the figure of the Filipino as subject-in-revolt that’s central to Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart*. E. San Juan, Jr. defines the Filipino as subject-in-revolt in the following passage from his essay “In Search of Filipino Writing: Reclaiming Whose ‘America?’”:

Called “little brown brothers,” barbaric “yellow bellies,” “scarcely more than savages,” and other derogatory epithets, Filipinos as subjects-in-revolt have refused

to conform to the totalizing logic of white supremacy and the knowledge of “the Filipino” constructed by Orientalizing methods of American scholarship. Intractable and recalcitrant, Filipinos in the process of being subjugated have confounded US disciplinary regimes of knowledge production and surveillance. They have challenged the asymmetrical cartography of metropolis and colony, core and periphery, in the official world system. Interpellated within the boundaries of empire, Filipinos continue to bear the marks of three centuries of anticolonial insurgency. (443-44)

Bulosan’s text resists a major convention of naturalism (where the protagonist is a mere victim of social forces) by bearing witness to the formation of a worker-peasant subjectivity critical of the unequal colonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines. In parts one and two of *America is in the Heart*, Allos is thrust into a “world of brutality and despair” and is in a “constant flight from fear” in the Philippines and later in the United States. As the text unfolds, Allos is able to break out of this despair and “flight from fear” by developing a systemic understanding of the social forces that have shaped and distorted his life. Later in the narrative (parts three and four), Allos immerses himself in the US labor movement and creates friendships with radical Filipino labor organizers who “bear the marks of ... anticolonial insurgency” (who sustain memories of peasant revolts in the Philippines) and with progressive white labor organizers who understand that the process of abolishing their possessive investment in whiteness is essential to forging working class solidarity across racial boundaries. Allos’ participation in the multiethnic US labor movement gives new meaning to the struggles of the Philippine peasantry during his childhood (part one of the narrative).

Part one of the text can be read as Allos’ (and Bulosan’s) homecoming, a return to the Philippines to recover a tradition of peasant revolt and insurgency, which also functions as a prelude to Bulosan’s later novel *The Cry and the Dedication*. The entire narrative can be read as Bulosan’s imaginative theorization of collective Filipino subjectivity that is only possible by grasping the interconnectedness of complex class struggles in the Philippines and the United States. As the narrative unfolds, the narrator learns through ideological and material struggle to fuse his multiple identities—Allos/Carlos/Carl as subject-in-revolt—that evoke different moments in time in the Philippines and the United States. Bulosan’s radical internationalist—or global—perspective was influenced by some of the most militant Filipino American labor organizers who integrated radical traditions of subaltern struggles from the Philippines into the multiethnic labor movement: Pedro Calosa (who led the 1931 Tayug peasant revolt in the Philippines), Pablo Manlapit, Danny Roxas, Chris Mensalvas, Ernesto Mangaoang, Ponce Torres, Casimiro Bueno Absolor, and Joe Prudencio.

2) Bulosan's "Filipino subject-in-revolt": on gender and class in the Global South

In his skillful introduction to a collection of Bulosan's short stories, essays, and letters titled *On Becoming Filipino* (1995), E. San Juan, Jr. provides insightful comments on the short story "Passage into Life," which illuminate Bulosan's method of dramatizing the processes by which the Filipino subject achieves class consciousness (19). "Passage into Life" is a series of vignettes in which the young protagonist of poor peasant origins, also named Allos, comes to terms with various class conflicts of Philippine society.<sup>13</sup> One dimension of Bulosan's imaginative theorization of the Filipino subject-in-revolt that has gained attention by other scholars in recent years is a class analysis of women's oppression and exploitation in the Philippines (Alquizola and Hirabayashi; Higashida). I'd like to build upon San Juan's comments by shifting our focus to gender and class in order to consider the contributions of "Passing into Life" to the formation of "Third World" feminism.<sup>14</sup>

"Passage into Life" dramatizes the interconnectedness of gender and class in Philippine society. In one vignette, Allos' sister Marcia sits by her window every day until midnight waiting for a husband. He notices how this process has dehumanized Marcia by reducing her to her exchange-value on the marriage market: "Her eyes were lifeless when she looked at [Allos]" (55). When he asks his mother why it's difficult for Marcia to find a husband, she responds, "Because we are poor, son ... Nobody wants to marry a poor girl" (55). Upon acknowledging this reality, Allos is compelled to question the world: he "rushed out of the house wondering why there were poor people." Allos' observations and his mother's response situate the specificity of Marcia's experience within a larger context—it is through gender (as a social relation) that Marcia experiences class oppression and exploitation in Philippine society.

Bulosan's examination of women's oppression in Philippine society anticipates the feminist movement and the creation of women's organizations such as MAKIBAKA in the late 1960s/early 1970s, which advanced the national sovereignty movement. In the 1980s, Filipina feminist scholar and activist Delia Aguilar began the groundbreaking task of concretizing an historical materialist critique of women's oppression and exploitation within Philippine society. In dialogue with fellow activists and cultural workers in the Philippines, Aguilar encouraged a dialectical approach to analyzing the economic exploitation and ideological oppression of women. She highlights the contributions of Marxist Feminists in the following:

[Marxist Feminists] argue that the oppression of women and the sexual division of labor are entrenched in capitalist relations of production and must be analyzed in this light, stressing that Marxism must take into account women's domestic labor, their

role as poorly paid workers in the labor force, and the familial ideology that heightens their oppression. (“Four Interventions” in San Juan’s *Filipina Insurgency* 172)

Merely transforming the economic base is not enough. Sustaining the two ends of this dialectic—gendered exploitative social relations of production and patriarchal ideology—is crucial for understanding women’s oppression and exploitation. This kind of analysis is necessary not only for the full participation of women in the Philippine movement for national sovereignty but also for the total and complete emancipation of women.

In vignette ten of “Passage into Life,” we learn that there is “one thing that drove Allos to thinking, and it was watching his mother work all day and half of the night” (53). The vignette provides a lengthy and detailed inventory of the non-wage domestic labor that his mother must perform on a daily basis. She awakens at five in the morning to prepare breakfast. She cleans the house and begins to wash the laundry at the river—all before noon. She then prepares lunch and returns to the river to continue the wash. By evening, she prepares dinner and cleans up afterwards. When all family members are asleep, she irons the day’s laundry by lamplight. By midnight, she retires only to awaken at five to repeat the labor intensive cycle. When Allos discovers that his mother has seriously injured her knee while carrying a large basket of vegetables to the market, he approaches a crisis in his worldview. His mother’s cries of excruciating pain compel Allos to question the existence and purpose of God and humanity. Allos becomes cognizant of the ways in which his mother’s productive and reproductive labor provide the necessary sustenance for the entire family.<sup>15</sup> Traumatized by the thought of losing his mother, Allos begins to distance himself from the oppressive ideologies of two patriarchal ideological state apparatuses—the church and the family.

In another vignette, in a desperate attempt to save his father’s life, Allos runs to his wealthy cousin’s house for assistance. Without speaking a word, the cousin throws a dime at Allos and speeds off with his wife in their expensive car. As his father dies, Allos “pick[s] up the small silver dime,” which symbolizes the exchange value of his father’s life, and “look[s] at it for a long time” (57). The death of his father is followed by two vignettes in which Allos encounters a stranger who tells him that death is not the end: “No one is really an orphan as long as there is another man living. As long as there is one man living and working and thinking on earth.” The stranger escorts Allos to the top of a mountain where he encounters “an impenetrable darkness ... a silence that had no voice... and [he] knew at last that there was a life without end.” This moment of distancing crystallizes the narrative’s process of denaturalizing the oppressive and exploitative ideologies of Philippine class society, which Allos questions throughout. In other words, Allos, now critically distanced from patriarchal and religious ideologies, is able to see that the collective human struggle

for new forms of social organization and new forms of subjectivity will sustain the memory of his father. This struggle will enable Allos to recover the true meaning (use value) of his father's life in relation to the lives of other members of his family who have suffered under the conditions of a semi-feudal society. Toward the end of the short story, Allos emerges with a new form of consciousness:

Now Allos knew: there in the known world he must go to seek a new life, seek it among the living until he would have enough time to pause and ponder on the mystery of the dead. (58-59)<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the disintegration of the patriarchal family system, it is Allos' unique sensitivity toward women's oppression (which is central to his developing class consciousness in the narrative) that enables him to grasp the international scope of the stranger's call for solidarity—to venture beyond familial and national boundaries in order to seek others with whom he may struggle so that those very inhuman conditions that took the life of his father and destroyed the lives of his mother and sister might be radically transformed.

### 3) Bulosan's "Filipino subject-in-revolt": on culture and public intellectual work

It is within the context of forging international solidarity between workers in the United States and workers and peasants in the Philippines that Bulosan developed into a Filipino subject-in-revolt. While his imaginative writings (novels, short stories, and poems) dramatize the collective Filipino experience in the United States and in the Philippines, his essays and letters offer insight into his ability to theorize cultural production and the function of the public intellectual. Essays such as the "The Growth of Philippine Culture" and "Filipino Writers in a Changing World" lay out Bulosan's approach to producing and engaging literature and culture as part of the national struggle for Philippine independence. For Bulosan, literature is a realm within which women and men attempt to make sense of the contradictions of class society. In his essay "The Writer as Worker," Bulosan explains the function of the writer (or intellectual) in society. His theorization of the function of writers as public intellectuals is framed within a larger understanding of the dynamic relationship between cultural production and social transformation.

Culture [is] a social product ... Since any social system is forced to change to another by concrete economic forces, its art changes ... also to be recharged, reshaped, and revitalized by the new conditions. Thus, if the writer has any significance, [he] should



write about the world in which he lives: interpret his time and envision the future through his knowledge of historical reality... My making as a writer and poet is not mysterious, neither was I gifted by an unknown power. It was hard work and hard living. Suffering, loneliness, pain, hunger, hate, joy, happiness, pity, compassion—all these factors make me a writer. Plus, of course, my tenderness, my affection toward everything that lives. Plus, again, my participation in the people's fight for peace and democracy ... I don't care what some writers in the Philippines think of me. That is their privilege. But I care about what they write, for or against war, for or against life. (*On Becoming Filipino* 144)

*Sound of Falling Light: Letters in Exile*, edited by Dolores Feria and published in the Philippines in 1960, is another rich resource for students, teachers, and scholars interested in exploring the formation of Bulosan's political consciousness and radical literary imagination. In his correspondence with close friends, Bulosan shares his thoughts on various writers and artists such as John Steinbeck, Richard Wright, Muriel Rukeyser, Hart Crane, and Paul Robeson as well as his thoughts on the process of using Philippine history and folklore in his own writings. While many of the letters shed light on Bulosan's view of cultural production ("I hope [*America is in the Heart*] will help arouse the consciousness of other Filipino writers toward social realities"), others provide insight into his view of society. Here is an excerpt from his letter to Dorothy Babb in March 1953:

Human life could truly be paradise, in many respects, if the money spent for destruction were used for the elimination of disease, schools propagating tolerance, factories for necessary consumer goods, and research centers, clinics, hospitals, maternity wards, etc. In fact, we should have a Department of Peace in the cabinet, instead of a Department of War. Hate, greed, selfishness—these are not human nature. These are weapons of destruction evolved by generations of experimenters in the service of ruling groups ... These destructive elements have finally become so subtle, so intricate, so deeply rooted in men's minds in our time, the era of international finance, that many people sincerely, though ignorantly believe them to be the guiding forces of nature. (*Sound of Falling Light* 264)

Bulosan's call for a Department of Peace and his critique of the commodification of everyday life (the naturalization of "hate, greed, selfishness") remain fresh and relevant close to fifty years after its publication in Feria's edited collection.

Bulosan continues to be relevant not only because of our current conditions—the market

colonization of intellectuals, the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a decade of human rights abuses in the Philippines under the global “war on terror” —but also because young Filipino American intellectuals, academics, artists, and activists are yearning for new ways to create collective forms of Filipino subjectivities-in-revolt that are inextricably interconnected with the struggle for Philippine national sovereignty. When we grasp the significance of Bulosan as a dissenting intellectual, we’ll be able to look at his work as a useful model for decolonizing intellectual production. The efforts of a new generation of insurgent Filipino intellectuals and artists to reclaim Bulosan as engaged artist and public intellectual remind us that, borrowing from African American philosopher and activist Angela Davis, empowerment will remain powerless if structures and relations of power are not radically transformed.

NOTES

- 1 “Carlos Bulosan was born almost a decade after brutal US colonization of the Southeast Asian archipelago (Spanish American War 1898; Filipino American War 1899–1902). Uprooted from the Philippine countryside, Bulosan joined thousands of Filipino migrant workers on US plantations (100,000 in Hawaii and 30,000 in California) and in fish canneries along the West Coast during the Depression era. Arriving in 1930, Bulosan forged an alternative education, as an organic intellectual, through his involvement in the labor movement. Bulosan “died in poverty and obscurity” in 1956 (see Amy Ling and King-Kok Cheung in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*). Bulosan participated in the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America, and developed a lasting friendship with Filipino labor organizer Chris Mensalvas. In 1934, he edited the worker’s magazine *The New Tide*, which connected him to Sonora Babb, Richard Wright, William Carlos Williams, and others. Hospitalized in Los Angeles for serious health issues (including tuberculosis) from 1936 to 1938, Bulosan received encouragement from his brother Aurelio, friend Dorothy Babb, and *Poetry* editor Harriet Monroe to nurture his craft. He enthusiastically studied a wide variety of authors including Gorky, Neruda, Tolstoy, Rizal, Bonifacio, and various Marxists literary critics. According to friend Dolores Feria, Bulosan sharpened his political analysis with issues of *New Masses*, *The New Republic*, and *Nation*” (Cabusao “Carlos Bulosan”).
- 2 “[Bulosan] was listed in *Who’s Who*, and commissioned by President Roosevelt in 1943 to write ‘Freedom from Want,’ which was displayed at the San Francisco Federal Building and published in the *Saturday Evening Post* with a Norman Rockwell illustration” (Cabusao “Carlos Bulosan”).
- 3 Leading Filipino figures of the Local 7, FTA-CIO: Ernesto Mangaoang, Chris Mensalvas, Ponce Torres, Casimiro Bueno Absolor, and Joe Prudencio.
- 4 “Scholars and activists continue to reclaim Bulosan’s imagination, which fuses US proletarian literary aesthetics and Third World subaltern resistance. In the late 1980s, revered Philippine-based playwright Bienvenido Lumbera created an opera in Filipino, the national language, based on *America is in the Heart*. During the 1990s, Bulosan was a prominent subject of dissertations (Timothy Libretti) and landmark publications in American Studies (Michael Denning) and US Ethnic/Cultural Studies (E. San Juan, Jr.)” (Cabusao “Carlos Bulosan”).
- 5 This essay is significant in that it is one of the first major theoretical pieces emerging from Asian American Studies in the 1990s that, in a sense, Asian Americanized a key concept in British Cultural Studies—Raymond Williams’ notion of cultural materialism.
- 6 Heterogeneity is used to “indicate the existence of differences and differential relationships [class, gender, national origins] within a bounded category.” Hybridity refers to “the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations;” thus, we can read Asian American cultural production/practices as exhibiting the “marks of the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination.” And, finally, multiplicity designates “the ways in which subjects located within social relations are determined by several

different axes of power, are multiply determined by the contradictions of capitalism, patriarchy, and race relations, with particular contradictions surfacing in relation to the material conditions of a specific historical moment." Using the concepts of "heterogeneity," "hybridity," and "multiplicity," Lowe also challenges the limitations of the Asian American Movement of the late 1960s/early 1970s, its tendency to privilege masculinist cultural nationalist discourses, without abandoning its legacy of struggle.

<sup>7</sup> In her 2002 essay "Imperialism, Female Diaspora, and Feminism," Aguilar states: "Fully 10% of the population of 82 million is overseas; 70% of OCWs are women, large numbers serving as domestic workers for families in 162 countries. These women have been lauded by Presidents Aquino and Ramos as 'the country's new heroines,' and by Ramos as 'the Philippines' contribution to other countries' development. Without the remittances these workers send home, \$7 billion in 2000, the government would not have managed its debt-service payments to financial lending agencies. It is a widely acknowledged fact in the Philippines that the survival of the economy has been made possible by the remittances of OCWs, which represent the largest source of foreign exchange."

<sup>8</sup> The militarization of the Philippines is connected to other forms of violence, especially against women. Consider the 2005 Subic Rape case in which a young Filipina (Nicole) in her early twenties "was gang-raped by four US military servicemen; one of the soldiers was found guilty in a trial ... December [2006], only to be whisked away from a local prison by the US Embassy in the middle of the night" (Aguilar "Class Considerations").

<sup>9</sup> "Critical Filipino/Filipina Studies Collective (CFFSC), a group of scholars and activists seeking to interrogate and challenge the legacies of Empire (US and Spanish Imperialisms) for past and present communities both in the Philippines and in the Filipino diaspora" <<http://cffsc.focusnow.org/>>; <[http://www.barnard.edu/wmstud/bio\\_tadiar.html](http://www.barnard.edu/wmstud/bio_tadiar.html)> <<http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/sociology/living.html>>.

Vision and goals of the CFFSC: "Since Marcos, many scholars, politicians, and commentators argue that the Philippines has become more democratic in its government and that social equality has been decreasing. In contrast, the Critical Filipina and Filipino Studies Collective (CFFSC) is compelled to present evidence that the US, its political and economic allies, and global capitalist interests dominate in new ... ways the Philippine government, society, and economy than ever before.

"As result, this neocolonial domination and the further weakening of the Filipino state have produced conditions forcing Filipino workers and their families to leave the country and search for jobs and security. As Filipinos sought work and security elsewhere since the 1970s, they have created and transformed Filipino communities in Europe, Africa, North America, the Middle East, and other places in Asia and the Pacific. These diasporic communities nonetheless have faced racism, further social and economic hardships, and other forms of systemic oppressions.

"Today the Filipino struggle against the global and national elites remains ever more committed and vigilant, challenging social, economic, and global injustices. Its quests for social equality and economic justice continues."

<sup>10</sup> See Critical Filipina & Filipino Studies Collective's "U.S. Government Post 9/11 Actions Threaten

Filipino Immigrant Rights,” which is a pamphlet that includes overview of impact of US Patriot Act on the Filipino community in the United States as well as information for support and assistance from the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns/NAFCON and the National Lawyers Guild. See also Rodriguez and Balce: “In one major campaign, the CFSC [Critical Filipina/o Studies Collective] introduced an anti-war resolution at the 2003 Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) Annual Meeting in San Francisco, which was successfully passed” (138).

<sup>11</sup> Rodriguez and Balce: “Filipino radicalism in America has been transnational in its organization and consciousness, as Filipinos have worked in solidarity with radical movements of the Philippines and have articulated their critiques of American domestic policy as linked to the project of U.S. imperialism” (139).

<sup>12</sup> See other hip hop artists such as Suheir Hammad (Palestinian American) and Lupe Fiasco (African American) who are using the genre of hip hop to critique the global war on terrorism. Hammad’s “Refugees” powerfully connects the Hurricane Katrina disaster (displacement of African Americans) with the displacement of Palestinians. See also Lupe Fiasco’s “American Terrorist,” which situates the notion of “internal colonialism” within the contemporary context of US racism under Homeland Security.

<sup>13</sup> Published in San Juan’s *On Becoming Filipino: Selected Writings of Carlos Bulosan*. This short story is from the personal collection of Dolores Feria.

<sup>14</sup> In the introduction to *On Becoming Filipino*, E. San Juan, Jr. provides some excellent comments on “Passage into Life.” It is my hope to advance San Juan’s reading by focusing on how this short story generates a “Third World” materialist feminist critique.

<sup>15</sup> Delia Aguilar reminds us that “we need to look at what Marxist economist Lourdes Beneria refers to as women’s ‘reproductive work,’ that is to say, the sum total of the work performed in the home setting in which gender division of labor is often distinctly elaborated. What does the woman do in the home? She not only produces children but also reproduces the social relations and the existential basis of daily life; and produces and reproduces the working capacity of the wage earner (increasingly, the category of wage earner includes herself). Household work involves meeting the needs of the wage worker in tangible (e.g., feeding and clothing him) and in less tangible ways (servicing the husband’s emotional needs, managing psychological tensions, creating a ‘good family environment,’ etc.). The woman is responsible for socializing the children congruent with society’s requirements, her own enactment of what the culture defines as ‘feminine’ and her husband’s playing his ‘masculine’ role serving as models for them to imitate. In doing so, she also reproduces the social relations necessary to maintain the hierarchical, gender-based structures of our semi-colonial and semi-feudal society” (“Four Interventions” in San Juan *Filipina Insurgency* 180).

<sup>16</sup> See also page 19 of the Introduction, San Juan. The urgency underlying the protagonist’s desire to forge local and international forms of solidarity (“there in the known world he must go to seek a new life”) stems from the ways in which the narrative unrelentingly dramatizes (through multiple vignettes) the (gendered) processes by which poor peasants are exploited as well as complicit in their own oppression (hegemony through consent). The narrative simultaneously opens a space to theorize how the peasantry is able to negotiate their collective agency (hegemony is never totalizing).

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