

Forum Kritika: Reflections on Carlos Bulosan and
Becoming Filipino

THE MANONG'S "SONGS OF LOVE": GENDERED AND SEXUALIZED DIMENSIONS OF CARLOS BULOSAN'S LITERATURE AND LABOR ACTIVISM

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Abstract

This article takes the 2013 passage of California Assembly Bill 123, which mandates instruction on the Filipino contribution to the state's farm workers movement in public education curriculum, as an occasion to analyze the gendered and sexualized dimensions of Carlos Bulosan's literature and labor activism. The article considers the texts and contexts of *America is in the Heart* and Bulosan's short story "As Long as the Grass Shall Grow" to demonstrate how Bulosan's materialist, dialectical analysis also involves an incisive critique of the intersections of class, race, gender, and sexuality. As Bulosan narrates the proletariat struggles of the *manong* generation, he reveals how the Filipino immigrant's status as racialized labor is also gendered and sexualized therefore necessitating that one's labor activism be defined by an anti-patriarchal and anti-heteronormative stance. In this way, Bulosan presents us with a potentially expansive model of Filipino political consciousness, a model that is not restricted to a masculine revolutionary practice characterized by a laboring brotherhood. Furthermore, it is a revolutionary practice that by its very nature resists a toothless multicultural inclusion in state and national history and highlights the racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence of both US neocolonialism and domestic racism. Ultimately, this article insists that Bulosan calls for an intersectional liberatory praxis that is both anticolonial and anti-capitalist.

Keywords

anti-heteronormative, anti-patriarchal, *America is in the Heart*, Carlos Bulosan, CA Assembly Bill 123, gender, manong generation, sexuality

About the author

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They are afraid, my brother,
 They are afraid of our mighty fists, my brother,
 They are afraid of the magnificence of our works, my brother,
 They are even afraid of our songs of love, my brother.

Carlos Bulosan, "Song for Chris Mensalvas's Birthday"

On October 2, 2013, Governor Jerry Brown signed into law Assembly Bill 123, which requires California public school curriculum to include the contributions of Filipino immigrants to the farm labor movement in the state. Assemblyman Rob Bonta introduced the resolution into the California legislature and explains that he did so "to help include the important role of Filipino Americans in the history of the state[,] by recognizing those noteworthy historical Filipino American figures who never received appropriate recognition for their work with the farmworker labor movement" (*California Assembly Bill 123*). A Democrat from the 18th district representing primarily the East Bay of the San Francisco area and the first Filipino American elected to the California legislature, Bonta has highlighted how his own family's experience in the farmworkers movement was pivotal in teaching him the value of public service and community participation ("Teach California Students").

Bonta's personal testimony presents a particularly strategic use of the history of the Filipino contribution to the farmworker movement. The inclusion of the stories of labor activists such as Larry Itliong and Phillip Vera Cruz in public schools would not only educate the general public about Filipino American contributions to US society, but it would also serve as a model for the political consciousness of young Filipino Americans themselves leading to their participation in US civil society. One could imagine that the expanded curriculum that Bonta's bill would mandate in California classrooms would include a study of the life and writings of Carlos Bulosan. Bulosan's semi-autobiographical *America is in the Heart* has come to represent in the Asian American canon the quintessential Filipino American experience in the first half of the twentieth century. However, while Bulosan may be the voice of the "manong generation" and a model of labor activism that is the predecessor of Itliong and Vera Cruz's praxis, teaching about Bulosan in California classrooms that is only motivated by a multicultural sense of inclusion in local state and larger national history would actually act against the radical potential of Bulosan's and the *manong* generation's labor activism and cultural work.

While I open this paper with a consideration of AB 123, I also quote Bulosan's poem in honor of Chris Mensalvas. The poem's triangulation of the images of "fists," "works," and "love" invoke the three major modes of considering the material conditions, cultural productions, and individual as well as communal subjectivities of the *manong* generation. These three words indicate how this generation of Filipino immigrants has been discussed mostly in terms of their labor struggles, proletariat narratives, and the "womanless" nature of their community. In truth, Assemblyman Bonta's campaign may potentially further canonize this

characterization of the *manong* generation as heroic men raising their "fists," rallying against class oppression, and democratically contributing to America's multicultural history. This paper focuses instead on the *manong's* "songs of love," on the representations of gender and sexuality in Bulosan's writings in order to complicate how we understand and teach about the material and cultural legacies of the *manong* generation.

Reading *America is in the Heart* and Bulosan's short story "As Long as the Grass Shall Grow," I demonstrate how Bulosan's materialist, dialectical analysis also involves an incisive critique of the intersections of class, race, gender, and sexuality. As Bulosan narrates the proletariat struggles of the *manong* generation, he reveals how the Filipino immigrant's status as racialized labor is also gendered and sexualized, therefore necessitating that one's labor activism be defined by an anti-patriarchal and anti-heteronormative stance. In this way, I argue that Bulosan presents us with a potentially expansive model of Filipino political consciousness, a model that is not restricted to a masculine revolutionary practice characterized by a laboring brotherhood. Furthermore, it is a revolutionary practice that by its very nature resists a toothless multicultural inclusion in state and national history and highlights the racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence of both US neocolonialism and domestic racism. I insist that Bulosan calls for an intersectional liberatory praxis that is both anticolonial and anticapitalist.

Moreover, it is through his narrative form that he demonstrates this multivalent critique of material forces in order to imagine a radical coalition that crosses racialized, gendered, and sexualized lines. In particular, Bulosan suggests this radical coalition in the moments of interracial intimacy and working-class solidarity that occur between his *manong* characters and "white" women. While anti-Filipino riots during Bulosan's times were sparked by the specter of miscegenation between Filipino laborers and the white women they came into contact with, Bulosan uses moments of interracial intimacy in his texts to reject the heteronormative prescriptions of white females as passive objects of desire and brown males as hypermasculine primitive forces of desire. Bulosan uses these moments not only to demonstrate the complexity of the Filipino subject in the face of dehumanizing capitalist, racialized, gendered and sexualized hierarchies, but also to highlight the mutually constitutive qualities of these hierarchies.

Ultimately, I consciously offer an anti-heteronormative reading of Bulosan's prose (in its long and short forms) in order to connect the *manong* generation and the official recognition of Philippine "independence" with our current moment characterized by massive outflows of Filipina immigrant labor fueling a globalized neoliberal economy. Bulosan's literature and labor activism force us to consider the complex entanglement of racial, proletariat, gendered, and sexual marginalization that not only drove the granting of Philippine independence and the emergence of contemporary Filipino America, but still deeply affects the experiences and life conditions of Filipinas and Filipinos in diaspora now. Any curriculum

focused on Bulosan's labor activism thus must be attentive to its gendered and sexualized dimensions and trace the possibilities it poses for both transforming the conditions of US heteropatriarchal domestic racism and forwarding the project of comprehensive Philippine national democracy.

The Manong Generation and Sexualized Raciality

Bulosan's observation, "They are even afraid of our songs of love," powerfully alludes to representations of Filipino immigrants particularly during the onset of the Great Depression as over-sexed colonials competing with white working classmen for both jobs and (white) women. Such perceptions of entwined economic and sexual competition revolved around the interracial intimacy made possible by Filipino patronage of taxi dance halls, where the immigrant men prohibited by anti-miscegenation acts and de facto segregation could otherwise seek the company ("for a dime a dance") of lower class white and Mexican women. Such fear of interracial mixing ignited not only media vitriol but also actual anti-Filipino extrajudicial violence such as in Watsonville, CA in 1930, when a three-day riot resulted in the destruction of the Filipino labor camp and the murder of one of its inhabitants. Scholars such as Kandice Chuh, Susan Koshy, and Linda Espana-Maram have importantly considered this preoccupation with the sexuality of the early wave of Filipino immigration and how it reveals the contradictions of the self-proclaimed American mission of benevolent assimilation in the islands or "white love," to use Vicente Rafael's phrase.

The most dramatic articulation of "white love" – of the necessity of intervening in the Philippine anti-colonial struggle against Spanish rule in order to benevolently guide Filipinos towards civilization – can be seen in President William McKinley's remarks to a delegation of Methodist ministers in 1899 at the close of the Spanish American War. In his remarks, McKinley describes how he prayed to the Lord for guidance as to "what to do with them" and ultimately realized: "there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died" (McKinley 22). It is clear from McKinley's speech that Americans by virtue of their exceptional democratic history and Anglo-Saxon racial background are able (even manifestly destined) to enter the space of the islands to uplift Filipino society. More than that, they must do so in the spirit of Christ-like love for their fellow man.

However, Filipino immigrants once in the space of the metropole are seen as potentially atavistic threats to American racial purity and modernity. While men like McKinley are called upon to embrace and better their Filipino brother, Filipino immigrants are barred from actual physical and affective contact with members of white American society. "White love" (or benevolent assimilation) must be unidirectional – the Filipino must receive progress benevolently brought

by American rule but must not be allowed to spread racial contamination and cultural degeneracy once in the US. In many ways then, Bulosan's "songs of love" may reference Filipino attempts to gain access to "white" women, an access that indicates a refusal to exist at the margins of US society and embodies (vexed) attempts to claim national participation and belonging.

However, while this consideration of the *manong's* "songs of love" is important, I wish to complicate this perception of the womanless nature of the *manong* generation in order to challenge universalizing assumptions of Filipino immigrant (heterosexual) desire for inclusion in the US nation and to force more complex analyses of the granting of Philippine independence and processes of Filipino racialization in both the archipelago and the US. The obsession with Filipino interracial desire embodied by anti-Filipino riots and nativist political campaigns reveals how the history of the Filipino in America is a history of sexuality (to use Kandice Chuh's Foucauldian turn of phrase). Filipino racialization both in local and diasporic contexts is inextricable from processes of sexualization that rely on a farcical primitivism and dehumanizing constructions of indigeneity.

By thinking through how invocations of Filipino sexuality shaped and animated the passage of the Philippine Independence Act (or the 1934 Tydings McDuffie Act), we see how the advent of Philippine independence must be reckoned with not as a moment of liberation and the constitution of a post (rather than neo) colonial Philippine nation-state but rather as a moment animated by hypersexualized constructions of Filipino raciality in the US. As such, it forces a consideration of how race, gender and sexuality become dense transfer points of imperial power (to borrow from Foucault). Racialized, gendered and sexualized modes of representation within Filipino American cultural productions both indict these larger social forces and are deployed by writers like Bulosan to reimagine Filipino American subjectivity and community in ways that resist normativizing prescriptions of national, diasporic and postcolonial politics. To explore these alternate visions, we must start by considering how from the very beginning of US involvement in the archipelago, the process of Filipino racialization involved an invocation of a sexualized primitivism that posited the heteronormative nuclear bourgeois family as the proper intimate formation of social relations.

Vicente Rafael has incisively demonstrated how a type of colonial family romance operated in the justification of benevolent assimilation and US occupation of the islands. We can see this colonial family romance at work in the image from *Judge* magazine chosen to be the cover of *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons*. It depicts President William McKinley as the great white father bathing a primitivized (read Africanized) screaming Filipino infant in the pools of "civilization." The cartoon visually demonstrates the powerful linkages between assumptions of racial, civilizational, gendered, sexualized, and national superiority. Filipino racial difference is represented through the markers of savage underdevelopment (the spear, loincloth, dark skin) indicating the Filipino to be the

complete other of the epitome of masculine modern development, i.e., the dutiful (heteronormative) father. This mechanism of colonial subordination made possible through the juxtaposition of racialized primitivism against white heteronormativity follows the figure of the Filipino forty years later as increased waves of immigrants enter the continental US.

In 1931, at the height of immigration from the islands, C.M. Goethe, a leading eugenicist from California and the founder of what would later become the California State University of Sacramento, published an essay in the journal *Current History* that called for the immediate exclusion of Filipinos. Goethe's evaluation of Filipino undesirability took on highly sexualized connotations:

Filipino immigrants are mostly men; 93 percent of the islanders admitted to California in 1920-29 were males. These men are jungle folk, and their primitive moral code accentuates the race problem even more than the economic difficulty....

Legal authorities in California declare that since the Philippines are a ceded territory, the people take on whatever civil and political status the United States chooses to give them. Immediate exclusion is tragically necessary to protect our American seed stock . . . Primitive island folk such as the Filipinos do not hesitate to have nine children, while parents of white stock find educating three a problem of finance . . . Thus, after an emergency stopgap in the nature of a quota against Filipinos, we may find we may have to decide between the rights of our future generations and the danger that lurks in granting the Filipinos the status of American citizenship. (F. Perez and L. Perez 8)

In Goethe's evaluation, the "race problem" is of more critical import than the economic issue of labor competition. However, Goethe locates racial difference in a sexualized primitivism that inhibits Filipinos from adapting to modern US society; he links this primitivism with an uncontrollable sexual impulse to reproduce regardless of economic concerns that therefore violates proper bourgeois familial formations. For Goethe, immediate measures in the same vein as the Chinese Exclusion Act must be proclaimed against the new wave of brown hordes that seemingly threaten the very fabric of US racial and political society. The national status of the Filipino, however, makes exclusion impossible so that official US recognition of Philippine independence is offered as the solution to the problem of Filipino immigration.

This focus on Filipino immigrant sexuality thus reveals how the granting of Philippine independence was not accomplished because the islands had suddenly reached the telos of benevolent assimilation. Moreover, neither full citizen nor foreign alien, it is this presence of the Filipino national in America that indexes the economic and political subordination of the Philippine nation that persists despite

and is perpetuated through the proclamation of official sovereignty. These Filipino laboring bodies reveal the capitalist conditions underlying democratic tutelage: the entry into the Spanish American War in order to access overseas markets (or the "backdoor to China") as well as to secure cheap racialized labor necessary for the development of US industry. These conditions of capital ensured a specific classed and gendered laboring subject: namely, young single men necessary to fill the role of stoop labor mainly in Hawaiian plantations and the fields of the west coast.

Eventually, as the needs of US capital contracted with the onset of the Depression, the islands became represented as an unnecessary burden and Filipino immigrants in the US as lascivious threats to white women and therefore the nation. These immigrants were thus disciplined and objectified by a perception of their sexuality as rapaciously primitive, as "one jump from the jungle." The shift in the gendered and sexualized representation of Filipinos from dark, primitivized infants to potential rapists frequenting licentious taxi dance halls operates on the same continuum of discursive power that conscripts marginalized subjects into the project of US nation and capital. Filipino immigrant sexuality is thus a dense metonym for racial, national and evolutionary difference that drove the granting of Philippine independence.

Throughout Bulosan's works, however, he subverts both the assumption of the heteronormative family as the foundation of modernity and the rigid gendered and sexualized binaries that are expressed and upheld through such an assumption. I argue that he offers alternate familial structures as sites of survival and modes of critique of colonial processes of racialization, gendering and sexualization. In the poem I opened this paper with, for example, Bulosan ends each line with the refrain "my brother." This echoes how Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* (and arguably the whole body of his oeuvre) responds to dominant representations of sexualized Filipino primitivism in two ways: first, by highlighting the innocent and platonic nature of the relationships in the text between Filipino men and white women; and secondly (and simultaneously) by emphasizing the sense of kinship experienced by the narrator and his fellow laborers (whether Filipino male or white female) as they organize themselves into a vision of a revolutionary America.

Bulosan's Radical Kinships of Class and Sexuality

Chapters 28 and 29 of *America Is in the Heart* (AIH) dramatically demonstrate the gendered and sexualized dimensions of Bulosan's literature and labor activism through its focus on the narrator's relationship with a woman named Marian. While her name alludes to the Christian ideal of perpetual virginity and motherhood, it is highly suggested throughout the text that Marian is a prostitute, and it is explicitly stated that she dies from syphilis. Furthermore, she tells the narrator Carlos when they initially meet, "For a long time now I've wanted to care for someone. And you are the one" (212). She goes on to spend her last few weeks working to earn

money for the narrator's education; Marian's character and her relationship to Carlos are thus complex and seemingly paradoxical. She is a white woman who literally prostitutes herself to her death to earn enough money to send Carlos to be educated. I argue that Bulosan uses their relationship to challenge dominant representations of the lascivious Filipino laborer and the white whore, suggesting the sense of coalition as well as radical non-heteronormative affiliation that can emerge between marginalized persons of US society.

In the chapter preceding Carlos and Marian's meeting, he has just narrowly escaped death at the hands of white union breakers. While the narrator and his compatriots are planning a lettuce strike in San Jose, five white men attack their headquarters and take them to the woods to torture and lynch them. The violence of the scene is overtly sexualized and racialized as the men are punished for refusing to accept passively their status as racialized cogs in American agricultural industry:

Then I saw them pouring the tar on José's body. One of them lit a match and burned the delicate hair between his legs.

"Jesus, he's a well-hung son-of-a-bitch!"

"Yeah!"

"No wonder whores stick to them!"

"This other monkey ain't so hot!" [...]

Another man, the one called Jake, tied me to a tree. Then he started beating me with his fists. Why were these men so brutal, so sadistic? [...] The man called Lester grabbed my testicles with his left hand and smashed them with his right first. (208)

Jake and Lester's fixation on the genitalia of their victims and their observation, "whores stick to them," dramatically indicate the consequences of the hypersexual representation of Filipino raciality. The perceived persistence of Filipino men to attract and access white women signals a refusal to accept conditions of de facto segregation; interracial relationships between Filipinos and white women fundamentally violate the unidirectional nature as well as racial and patriarchal hierarchies of white love. The "monkey's" place is as a savage benefitting from benevolent assimilation, not attempting inclusion in US society through interracial intimacy or by demanding equal treatment as a worker through unionization. In this scene, the symbolic assertion of proper white masculine authority is accomplished through the attempt to physically destroy José's and the narrator's testes. This violent act of emasculation thus demonstrates how Bulosan's and his generation's anti-capitalist resistance cannot be studied and taught about solely along racial and class lines, but must be recognized as entangled with issues of sexuality and gender.

Carlos eventually manages to flee from his torturers and seeks refuge in a house in the "Oriental section" of town, where he encounters a woman named Marian (209). The narrator's relationship with Marian further demonstrates the complexity

of Bulosan's gendered and sexualized representations. Marian discovers Carlos in her little room and seeing his distressed state, hurries to give him aid. Carlos responds, "I almost cried. What was the matter with this land? Just a moment ago I was being beaten by white men. But here was another white person, a woman, giving me food and a place to rest" (209-210). Barely asking any questions about Carlos, Marian unbelievably decides to leave her home and run away with him to Los Angeles. On their drive, they learn more about each other. Carlos shares his narrative of immigration, exploitation and violence, while Marian never completed her education and was abused by her ex-lover. Despite her instant and almost complete devotion to Carlos, Bulosan is careful to represent Marian and the narrator's relationship as one of utter platonic devotion. Bulosan writes, "She was sweet and near. But I could not touch her. Even when she was close to me, even when all her thoughts were leaning toward me and her heart was in my heart" (213).

Bulosan strategically pairs the scene of white supremacist torture with one of care at the hands of a white woman. One scene reveals the violence of sexualized racialization of the Filipino while the other proves the interiority of the Filipino subject that is disavowed by such representation. In chapter 28, the white men seek to reduce Carlos and his companion to their bodies in order to destroy the Filipino immigrants' attempts to unionize and demand equal treatment. Though it is implied that Marian is a prostitute – she is out all night and after a few weeks magically comes back with enough money to send Carlos to school – the narrator is entirely naïve of this possibility. He cannot conceive of her in those terms. This strategic rendering of Bulosan works to prove hyperbolically Carlos's humanity. He disregards Marian's body and shows absolutely no capacity for interracial desire, only perceiving her beautiful heart and soul. Their relationship is premised on the mutual recognition of the other's intrinsic goodness despite their narrowly punctuated positions in society: one as racialized labor and the other as a fallen woman.

Once in Los Angeles, Carlos and Marian go to a Hollywood club for a "capitalist dinner" and dancing. However, Marian faints in the restaurant and is rushed to the hospital where her health quickly fails. As she lies dying, she calls Carlos to her and tells him, "Promise me not to hate. But love – love everything good and clean. There is something in you that radiates an inner light and it affects others. Promise me to let it grow" (217). Marian's speech can be read as directly referencing the violence of chapter 28. Marian exhorts Carlos to maintain his inner goodness, his sense of humanity, despite the violence of racialization and marginalization in America. Her relationship with Carlos not only proves the depth of an interiority that emanates creativity and love but also moves the reader to sympathize with the plight of Filipino immigrants. In this way, Bulosan re-scripts the relationship between a white prostitute and a brown man into one not of lust and monetary exchange but rather into a sentimental narrative of love and sacrifice. Such a narrative purposefully de-centers the possibility of a lustful relationship between

Marian and the narrator in order to re-present both her and Carlos as kindred suffering souls. Despite and to spite the dominant narratives of miscegenous relationships that seek to reduce Carlos and Marian to the status of their bodies in order to maintain the boundaries between nations, classes, genders and races, Bulosan emphasizes the mutual recognition of the caliber of their hearts and souls, this shared "inner light." Carlos's "inner light" is so strong that it inspires Marian to devote herself to him in order to continue educating his mind.

While Bulosan's representations of interracial relationships in the second half of *AIH* is clearly meant to debunk the reduction of the Filipino to primitive bodily desires through this sentimental emphasis on interiority, it also potentially poses an idealized vision of white women. Feminist scholars like Susan Koshy and Rachel Lee, for example, have taken Bulosan to task for idealizing women in his text so that he seems to place them beyond the realm of material action. For example, Lee has stated: ". . . all-male societies in Bulosan's text emerge as precursors to labor activism, which presupposes that women do not labor. The fact that women toil as prostitutes and entertainment workers does not appear an issue over which they can bond with the properly laboring subjects of the novel, the Filipino migrant workers" (27). Therefore, while Marian's relationship with the narrator conveys his affective complexity, it still remains that Marian leaves the material world (literally) and seems to have no place in making real Bulosan's revolutionary vision. I want to end though by considering how in the short story "As Long as the Grass Shall Grow" Bulosan not only contests dominant representations of Filipino sexuality but also expands the conception of brotherhood, challenging this potentially masculinist tenor of his revolutionary vision of the America that is in the heart. I argue that in "As Long as the Grass Shall Grow," Bulosan does not restrict material action to a masculine role but rather depicts a radical kinship between marginalized women and men that is defined by both affect and action.

In "As Long as the Grass Shall Grow," the unnamed narrator, a young Filipino pea-picker, forms a relationship with a local schoolteacher named Helen O'Reilly, who offers to teach him to read. The image of the white lady schoolteacher cannot help but call to mind the institution of public, English-only education in the Philippines as part of the military system of pacification following the Spanish American War and during the Philippine American War. Renato Constantino has powerfully discussed how even before the U.S. had secured control of the islands, General Arthur MacArthur had requisitioned textbooks and teachers in an ideological battle for Filipino minds, and a literal shipload of male and female instructors responded. Miss O'Reilly seems to operate in Bulosan's short story as the benevolent schoolteacher intent on ameliorating the illiterate condition of the Filipino workers, and yet her decision to take on such a cause is met with censure by local officials and violence by a nameless gang of men who beat the narrator when he attempts to go to her for his reading lesson. In the story of Miss O'Reilly then the multiple primitivized representations of Filipinos collide: the infantilized

savage in need of the white love of masculine discipline and feminine tutelage as well as the oversexed Filipino immigrant in America who uncontrollably desires the white woman's body.

Throughout his story, Bulosan emphasizes his narrator's innocence and interiority, pushing back against the reduction of Filipino subjectivity to bodily impulse and libidinal desire. When Miss O'Reilly asks him if he wants to learn to read, the narrator says yes but is cautious: "I looked at my companions from the corners of my eyes because they would ridicule me if they knew that I wanted some education. I never saw any reading material at our bunkhouse except the semi-nude pictures of women in movie magazines" (78-79). Bulosan's narrator however is not a simple exception to the prurient illiteracy of his fellow Filipinos. As the story progresses, the narrator comes to realize that the disinterest his companions show is not because of their inherent lack of intellectual depth or desire for learning; rather, the narrator recognizes how "the American doors [shutting] against [them]" limit the possibilities of life for the Filipino immigrant in the US to serving as racialized, cheap labor (80).

While Bulosan debunks the image of the oversexed Filipino, he also destabilizes assumptions of masculinity, highlights the performativity of gender, and suggests an expansive understanding of brotherhood. When Miss O'Reilly appears at the workers' bunkhouse to begin the narrator's lessons, Bulosan describes her thus: "She had put on a pair of corduroy pants and an unpresed blue shirt. It was my first time to see a woman dressed like a man. I stole glances at her every time she turned her face away" (79). Later, after more of Bulosan's compatriots join Miss O'Reilly's reading lessons, they discuss how best to express their appreciation:

Miss O'Reilly was a good teacher. We started giving her peas and flowers that we picked on the hillside when we were working. Once we thought of buying her a dress, but one of the older men said that was improper. So we put the money in a large envelope and gave it to her when she came one evening. She did not want to accept it, but we said that it was a token of our gratitude. She took it then and when she came again she showed us a gabardine suit that she had bought with it. (80)

Strictures of gendered and interracial propriety are both challenged here in this small exchange between Miss O'Reilly and Bulosan's characters. While the workers attempt to understand Miss O'Reilly's differing performance of femininity – her choice of masculine attire particularly – Bulosan also subtly criticizes the racializing assumptions that would make the workers' purchase of the dress into a sexually transgressive act. I do not read this moment as depicting the space of American society as somehow less patriarchal simply because the Filipino immigrants find it unusual to imagine a woman in man's clothing. Rather, Bulosan is incisively indicting

a racist and heteropatriarchal society that prescribes confining performances of gender and sexuality for both (white) women and (brown) men.

American society is no less patriarchal and restrictive for Miss O'Reilly simply because she can wear pants. As a single woman, she is vulnerable to many misogynist embodiments of social authority, from the unnamed local organization who questions her visits to the labor camp to the school board that prohibits her from using the local schoolhouse to teach the workers to her landlord who then forbids her from receiving the men in her room. While Bulosan's narrator and Miss O'Reilly are in no way marginalized in society in equivalent ways, Bulosan's depiction of her does suggest solidarity between those who refuse to confirm to either a subordinate white femininity or a hypersexualized Filipino raciality. In this way, normative assumptions of masculinity and femininity are challenged, making it difficult to limit Bulosan's idea of a revolutionary brotherhood to a stable framework of gender difference. Ultimately, he offers different performances of gender that do not uphold the violently racist masculinity that would subordinate both Miss O'Reilly and the narrator. He counters the dangerous interracial desire for the white woman's body that animated debates over Philippine independence with representations of mutual desire for a world where brown lust for the white body is not assumed and alternate expressions of gender are possible.

Beyond Inclusion and Towards Radical Re-Visioning

In closing, I return to CA Assembly Bill 123, the passage of which would mandate the teaching of the histories and narratives of Bulosan's generation of Filipino immigrants and farm laborers. A grassroots coalition of community-based organizations and educators from all levels have rallied around Assemblyman Bonta's call to mandate the inclusion of the Filipino contribution to the farmworkers movement into the state's public education curriculum. As I have endeavored to show, however, the history of the Filipino contribution to the nation is not a simple linear narrative of immigration, assimilation, the fight for civil liberties, and then ultimately inclusion in the national body. US imperialism and the needs of American capital established the circuits that Filipino immigrants followed across the Pacific into Hawaiian plantations and California fields. Once here the contradictions of benevolent assimilation ensured that Filipinos were racialized as threatening hypersexual primitives devaluing wages and menacing white American communities.

It was this construction of sexualized Filipino raciality that fueled recognition of Philippine sovereignty. The act that finally granted Philippine independence is thus simultaneously the same act that barred further Filipino immigration into the US as it rendered Filipinos as foreign aliens, revoking their national status. The Tydings McDuffie Act thus cannot be read as the telos of the project of national democracy for the Philippines. Rather, it formalized the neocolonial relationship

between the Philippines and US and indexes the sexualized racialization of Filipino communities in America. The poetry and prose of Carlos Bulosan reveal not just the racialized and proletariat struggles that defined the beginning of Filipino American communities, but also its gendered and sexualized dimensions. His poetry, prose and praxis fundamentally resist easy narratives of multicultural inclusion, indicating instead the foundational material and discursive violence at the heart of Filipino America's formation and the recognition of the "sovereign" Philippine nation. His texts show us that while we should honor the "mighty fists" and "great works" of the *manong* generation, we must also explore and teach about their "songs of love" that express a liberatory desire for anti-capitalist and decolonizing political practices operating from the intersections of racial, classed, gendered, and sexualized differences.

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