

**THE INSOLENT OF THE FILIPINAS:
MOTHERING NATIONALISM, GLOBALIZATION, AND LITERATURE**

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
Of the University of Minnesota
By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Roderick A. Ferguson, Adviser

December 2010

Acknowledgements.

The wisdom I've inherited from my adviser, Roderick Ferguson, well exceeds the academic. His restless commitment to reinventing the world—as thinker, teacher, mentor, administrator—has delivered a critical model that continues to impress upon me. Josephine Lee has read everything I sent her way, and her feedback has always been timely, persistent, and instructive. She combines kindness with brilliance effortlessly, demanding an intellectual rigor that has sustained my project. The first time I met Jigna Desai, we went for coffee at the Kitty Kat Club in Dinkytown. The pleasantries were soon replaced by a stunning flow of words as she described her research to me. Without yet knowing my project, I hoped she would work with me, and this project is all the better for it. Kevin Murphy's support has always been nearly palpable for me; his feedback has been abundant, gracious, and incredibly generative, and has greatly influenced the direction of this work.

The Department of American Studies at the University of Minnesota has been a warm and inviting place to develop young scholars. Colleen Hennen, Marie Milstein-Fiedler, Melanie Steinman, and Laura Domine are at its core. David Noble, too—I am thankful for his tremendous kindness and support. Kale Fajardo introduced me to Kidlat Tahimik's *Mababangong Bangungot*, a film I explore in my final chapter, which is indicative of the intellectual rapport we developed and which I hope to continue.

I can't say enough about the collegial and personal friendships I was fortunate to experience with other graduate students. The Asian American studies writing group that

Jo Lee organized was kind to include me as a telecommunicating penpal. Soojin Pate and Sonjia Hyon have been tremendous correspondents from New York to Minneapolis. I owe Jason Ruiz many thanks for guiding me through my early years. Chris Henninger has been a good friend since I met him studying Filipino in Madison, Wisconsin. Aaron Carico, Jill Doerfler, Michael David Franklin, Kim Park-Nelson, Trecia Pottinger, Thomas Sarmiento, and Heidi Stark also deserve my gratitude.

Across the US, I have been intellectually and socially nurtured and nourished by Jan Christian Bernabe. He's been incredibly important to my project and helps me envision a different kind of critique. In San Diego, I've had great intellectual exchange with Josen Diaz, Margaret Fajardo, Eugene Gambol, Amanda Solomon, and Thea Tagle, and undergraduates including Kathleen Baca, Kelly Chung, Joseph Ramirez, Angelica Tolentino, and Gracelynn West. Thanks to the UCSD Department of Ethnic Studies for inviting me to present at their colloquium.

Reaching nearly a decade back, I want to express my gratitude to my mentors at Brooklyn College-CUNY who encouraged me to consider graduate school: Ray Allen, Moustafa Bayoumi, George Cunningham, Jeanne Theoharis, and Salim Washington, along with the assists thrown in by Gail Smith and Robert Viscusi through the wonderful CUNY Pipeline Program.

Apart from my teaching appointments in San Diego and the CUNY Pipeline Program, in which I was a Diamond Fellow, I was supported by a Mellon Fellowship in Humanistic Studies, a Diversity of Views and Experiences Fellowship at the University of Minnesota, and Turpie-Bowron Fellowship and Mulford Q. Sibley Summer Research

Fellowship in American Studies, along with several conference travel grants from both American and Asian American studies. I was also fortunate to spend two summers in Madison, Wisconsin, studying at the Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute under the auspices of Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowships and Foreign Language Enhancement Program Scholarships through the Committee on Institutional Cooperation.

Above all, there are two who have inspired me most—whose inspiration is (in) their production. My mother, Rose Suarez, continues to amaze me; her life has always been more interesting than mine, and I quite envy the courage she takes in persistently re-inventing herself. It is a condition she may have inherited from her mother, and passed onto my sister—and she demands nothing less of me, too. She may never admit it, but Gina Opinaldo has been a fount of wisdom, passion, and sustenance throughout this journey. Ours is a deep love and profound respect, a gift from a future written in the texts whose readers are already everywhere. In and under their direction, she orients me.

For my mother

Abstract.

My dissertation, **THE INSOLENT OF THE FILIPINAS: MOTHERING NATIONALISM, GLOBALIZATION, AND LITERATURE**, reads diasporic Filipina/o literatures that destabilize the dominant representations which position Filipinas as “mothers” in and of the global economy and Philippine nationalism. The project is situated after the moment of US imperialism, as attempts to deliver a materially prosperous and psychologically uplifting national identity coincided with the rise of postfordist global economic strategies, the results of which were the brokering and exporting of Filipina/os overseas. As the nation struggled to assert itself under poor and corrupt leaders, as the social unrest of anti-imperialist organizing did not wane but transformed into anti-capitalist critiques, establishing a formal global visibility for Filipina/o workers became imperative to assuage political, economic, and cultural uncertainties. The turmoil would culminate in the 1974 Presidential Decree 442, which authorized and institutionalized overseas employment as a state-managed program.

The role diasporic Filipina/os play in the global economy—participating in older, traditional industries such as logging, manufacturing, and shipping, to newer service industries such as nursing, domestic help, and call centers—has been well-documented in recent scholarship, identifying the national service being performed. As numerous reports indicate, Filipina/os send more than ten billion dollars in remittances not just to families, but also to the nation. Such financing is so critical for the national economy that Philippine presidents have hailed them as both “national heroes” and “overseas investors.” This workforce is not only highly gendered insofar as it is predominantly

feminized, but it may be further specified as having a maternal character—literally but also, more broadly, symbolically. If nationalism and globalization work in tandem to inscribe Filipinas as a transnational, maternal underclass, what is the significance of texts that do not cohere with this inscription? My dissertation contends that in order to disrupt the authority of nationalism and globalization, which despite their differences collude to represent and employ Filipinas, one must destabilize those racialized, gendered, and sexualized representations. My dissertation thus seeks to bring to crisis the transparent and empiricist epistemologies that underwrite nationalism and globalization, outlining the ways that diasporic Filipina/o literatures critique these state-sanctioned ways of knowing and being.

My first chapter, “Mother, Navel, Nation: Disseminating the Dictionary of Philippine Heteronationalist Globalization,” lays out the theoretico-political scope of the project by reading Nick Joaquin’s short story, “The Woman Who Had Two Navels.” It is an appropriate text with which to begin, given both Joaquin’s role as a leading nationalist writer in the early phase of independence as well as given the dubious rumor that circulates in the story, spread by a young woman who, along with her mother, entices and repulses various male suitors. The story represents the postwar Philippines as a gendered landscape, newly independent and luring Filipino men who have left for other shores to return—only to offend and threaten them, driving them back overseas. While it explicitly negates the role of Filipina mothers, I draw on certain moments that reveal a more complex theorization of gender and sexuality for both nationalism and global capitalism. The contemporary neoliberal consensus collaborates with Philippine nationalism to

produce Filipina-as-mothers as ideal subjects according to particular racial, gender, and sexual categories.

This reading contributes to the genealogy of hetero-masculinist nationalism I trace within the chapter. As many scholars have analyzed and often reproduced, “revolution” has circulated as an “unfinished” discourse emerging from within anti-imperialist mobilizing in the Philippines. Not unlike both liberal and revolutionary nationalisms around the globe, the dominant character of such discourse has proven to be profoundly and constitutively heteropatriarchal. The mourning that is concomitant with the notion of an “unfinished” or “incomplete” “revolution” can thus be understood as a mourning of the failure of native masculinities to protect their families, women, and land. Building on postcolonial feminist critiques of nationalism as well as recent conceptualizations of the rhizomatic, biopolitical field of global empire, the chapter critiques nationalism not only for its unexamined heteropatriarchy, but also its potential obsolescence given the complicity of revolutionary and liberal Philippine nationalisms with global capital.

My second chapter, “Letting the Cat(achresis) Out of the Bag: Transnational Filipina Motherhood,” reads two texts that represent motherhood in two distinct ways. In Eleanor Coppola’s published diary of the filming of *Apocalypse Now*, the narrator aspires to overcome the inequality between her and her husband’s professional work by conceptualizing an ambitious marriage dependent on imperialist strategies and settings. Her writings probe the assertion of an empowered identity that, strikingly, only seeks that liberation in the Philippines; when returning to the national-domestic space, she appears content to return to her own national-domestic-maternal duties. Rizalina, the young

Filipina mother of Jessica Hagedorn's novel *Dream Jungle*, the second half of which fictionalizes the *Apocalypse Now* film production, distances herself from maternal, nationalist, and imperialist norms. In this way, she resists being recodified into a visible, legible, rational representation that reproduces either Coppola's imperialist feminism or an equally unexamined nationalist feminism. The terms of her liberation are not spelled out, but neither can one deny the happiness she claims; what can be specified is her obsession with a white tiger that is flown in for the film shoot. That cat, rather than a Filipina elder or Coppola's fictional counterpart, inspires Lina most of all. In doing so, Lina performs a catachresis on the production of racialized, gendered freedom.

My third chapter, "Carlos in Medford and Gabe in Meridan: Attempted Erasures of the Filipina Mother for Hetero/Homonational Masculinity," examines two novels, Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* and Brian Ascalon Roley's *American Son*, to consider how multiple efforts to represent freedom and agency draw from and reproduce imperialist and heteronormative authority. Even as Roley's novel stages an unannounced but noticeable homonationalism—which can be understood as a contemporary revision of the heteronationalism of Bulosan's novel—it is quickly rescinded back into a heteropatriarchal space. Neither narrator can liberate themselves on the grounds of masculinist identifications, whether heteronational or homonational. Whereas the masculine characters of both texts thus struggle in the attempt to speak for themselves, the mother in the second text recognizes the dilemmas representational strategies pose. Many characters try to speak for her, on her behalf, but she renders their attempts futile and does not aspire to represent herself. She rejects representations that interpret her as a

redemptive figure for either national heteronormativity or globalization. Such a move does not mean she accepts invisibility; to the contrary, her presence persistently disrupts the text and stymies its efforts at resolution.

The fourth and final chapter, “Learning to Listen: Nation, Film, and Children in Kidlat Tahimik’s *Mababangong Bangungot*,” reads the eponymous film, which demands critical audiences who listen as well as they watch. I argue that listening to a film is just as significant as watching it; in spite of what seems like a formalist argument, I examine in what ways such an approach intervenes in the production of Philippine history and Filipina/o bodies, especially as those bodies get translated for the interests of nationalism and globalization. In the film, an overprivileging of the visual aids and abets the film’s masculinist nationalism, which is promoted as a liberatory alternative to globalization and imperialism. In this chapter, the visual pathos of the Filipina mother—neglected, then remembered, by her son after warning him of the seductions of the west—fails to complicate her identity, employing her strictly for the purposes of nationalist mourning. But in the aural rendering of Filipina/o children, which works in sharp contrast to their visual rendering, it is possible to discern a critique of the film’s heteronormative nationalism. That is, by listening to the film, one can hear a moment of liberatory potential not in the service of heteronationalist global empire.

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Prologue.

1.

Some of the origins of this project cannot be discussed, especially within the current cultural-political climate. But there are many others that deserve mention here. One apocryphal tale has it that on the eve of my birth, my parents had arrived at two possible names: Archipelago, in homage to the chain of islands constituting the Philippines, or Harrod, in homage to the upscale department store in London where my father was traveling at the time. My nomenclature was thus worked out on the threshold of nationalism and global capital.

2.

Recently, I was looking through old files when I discovered a four-page essay I submitted as a high school senior. It was an analysis of Janie, the protagonist of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as a heroine. I examined how she resisted marriage in order to "dream." Strikingly, I did not assimilate her to the standards by which white, masculine heroes were measured: "Janie is not the typical hero one would envision: she is black, female, and modest. *But she is a subject*" (emphasis in original). My argument, drawing from critiques by Alice Walker and Mary Helen Washington, was that Janie resists claiming a voice in the same way that men do. Her heroism is alternative not simply due to her identity, but as a critique of the links between voice and authority, between presence and power. I was taking to task the metaphysics of

presence in the service of an incipient black feminist critique. Over the next decade or so, one could say that I have re-written and expanded that four-page essay, and refocused it on a different but related set of racialized, gendered, sexualized bodies—and all without being aware of it, since I’d forgotten about the essay.

3.

A more direct connection would be when, as an undergraduate at Brooklyn College-CUNY, I was tasked with doing an ethnography of my mother’s immigration. My professor hoped to use the “data” for his own research purposes—somehow, we students were doing his work, and earning grades for it—so I borrowed a tape recorder with a phone attachment from his office. Following Institutional Review Board rules, I had to obtain my mother’s consent before proceeding. Conscious of the recording, we were both careful not to discuss certain details that, paranoid of political authorities from Marcos to Bush, we worried would pose difficulties for us. There was no shortage of great anecdotes, though, such as the time when her citizenship application was “lost” after she directly insulted an immigration official who acted condescendingly towards her: “Just because you look ugly doesn’t mean you have to act ugly,” my mother told her. Note the lack of exclamation; she prided herself on being able to remain steely and composed while delivering invective. She had to petition California legislators including Barbara Boxer in order to remedy the situation.

For class, I was pressured to narrate the story in the conventional push/pull drama of immigration historiography: political repression, there; American dream, here. It was a

contrived effort, and not my best work. But the exercise encouraged me to think more about this problematic—her identity and history as a problematic; mine, too. The stories she tells me don't add up, and in recognizing this, I realized that the inconsistencies in her stories challenge the ironed-out histories of textbooks. The more I probe into how and why she moved, bringing me and my younger sister along, the less sense I can make of it all. It is not that she is lying; it is just that her plenitude of stories is irreducible to narrative and thus illegible to the very conditions within which they are produced.

To this point, what I am writing likely is common knowledge for those of us working in the humanities and social sciences: writing history reduces the open-ended set of experience to chronological and causal narrative—experience subjected to the ontic. The critical claims supporting this form of writing are almost as old as the push/pull narrative of immigration, and depending on your critical genealogy, even older. But the question I pose here, and which begins the critique advanced in this project, is what to do with these excesses—excesses that, I emphasize, are produced within as well as producing the very epistemologies that cannot comprehend them. One typical reaction is to argue that history needs to be expanded to include—to incorporate, in a very literal, bodily way—these excesses. History becomes an open-ended text on which to append the archives proliferating from all sorts of formerly unrecognized, marginalized spaces. It allows for a progressive telos of knowledge, keeping pace with the progressive telos of scientific, capitalist democracy—a global pax Americana. Another reaction is to argue that these excesses are inadmissible to the text of official history—that to include them within its visage would be to contaminate them (and especially the antagonistic position

they are meant to represent) with the poison of domination. The purity of authentic opposition must be maintained at all costs, as a means of resistance to authority and the staking out of liberated identities and cultures.

This project challenges these two positions, both of which prevail in much scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. Contrary to the second position, my mother's excesses cannot be understood outside of the conditions of their production: contamination is not an option. "Choice" is a fiction. Her identity and history were not produced externally to the texts of imperialism, nationalism, and globalization as *they* produced and mediated Philippine and global culture and history. The antecedent to the pronoun "they" is purposefully ambiguous—her identity and history are not only produced, but productive. Contrary to the first position, my mother's excesses cannot be simply added to the progressive telos of history. The text is fundamentally transformed by that which exceeds it, even if it produces, and is produced by, that excess. Our contamination, or complicity, is not tantamount to compromise. In the next chapter, I assemble a series of readings that elaborate on this argument, and expand on it in Chapter 2's discussion of catachresis.

A wellspring of research has emerged that situates women including my mother within processes of globalization; this category of women is gendered insofar as it is constituted by race, nation, and class. Following Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique, there is no preconstituted "woman" or "Third World woman" before or outside of a

particular epistemological and historical moment.¹ Correspondingly and importantly, following the work of Neferti Tadiar, there is no moment before or outside of the production of “Filipina.”² Obfuscating their productivity, translating it into passive objecthood, enables and facilitates their exploitation. (Only objects can be pushed or pulled.) These categories are mutually constitutive and overdetermined. The complexity of analyzing any given moment does not foreclose attempts to work on and within that moment, though. One can turn to Marx’s discussion of the proletariat as one such constructed, impermanent category. Mohanty details the mobilizing effort of organizations such as the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan. Tadiar writes at length about the production of a revolutionary imagination that cannot be reduced to heteronormative Philippine nationalism.

This project seems to me to reveal a bridge between the stories that proliferate from my mother and the work emerging from these postcolonial feminist critiques. The only *concrete, material(ist)* bridge that can connect the two is built and constructed from the imagination. Far from idealist abstraction, my use of “imagination” parallels others, such as Benedict Anderson, who writes about nationalism as the formation of an “imagined community.”³ It is not as if nationalism is artificial or false, but it is socially produced and thus imagined. Imaginative production is at once situated within a particular moment without being wholly determined by it; it is catachrestic by nature.

¹ See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003).

² See Neferti X. Tadiar, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009).

³ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

In particular, I examine novels and films that destabilize the enfiguration of the Filipina mother within nationalism and globalization. Since the Philippines gained official independence after World War II, and especially with the *national* rise of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos and the *global* emergence of a post-Fordist, service-oriented economy, overseas Filipina/o workers have become an integral part of the Philippine economy and the global labor force. Amid the political upheavals that have seemingly accompanied every presidential election since Marcos's reign ended in the 1980s, overseas employment has risen consistently, and an entire bureaucratic apparatus has been designed to "broker" what Robyn Magalit Rodriguez refers to as "migrant citizenship."⁴ As Vicente Rafael has noted, there is an important difference in the meanings attached to overseas transmigrants, who generally maintain Philippine citizenship and send remittances back to support nation and family, and *balikbayans* such as my mother, who migrate abroad more permanently (including those who ultimately retire in the Philippines) and have a more-ambiguous material relationship to the archipelago.⁵ Here, my project deviates slightly but significantly from my mother's biography.

Whereas past national heroes such as, most notably, José Rizal, are heralded for their willing sacrifice toward national independence and progress, the situation for these

⁴ Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010). Also see Anna Romina Guevarra, *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes: The Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Heroes* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2009).

⁵ See Vicente Rafael, "Your Grief is Our Gossip: Overseas Filipinos and Other Spectral Presences," *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), 204-228.

new national heroes—as named by several presidents—is quite a bit more complicated, despite attempts to represent overseas employment as “a voluntary act of self-sacrificing individuals living in a democratic society.”⁶ In the US, emergent work beginning with Rhacel Salazar Parreñas and continued by Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, Neferti Tadiar, and Kale Fajardo has advanced a strong and critical discourse that conceptualizes these complexities and extends analyses produced in the Philippines.⁷ This project seeks to contribute to this discourse by further unleashing the critical power of imaginative production to question the authority claimed by nationalism and globalization.

As the aforementioned critics note *mutatis mutandis*, the dominant trend has been to regard this workforce—primarily female, but with a significant male population that should not be overlooked—as proverbial cogs in the machine. Despite political differences, both advocates and critics of nationalism and globalization understand these workers to be essentially choice-less, mind-less bodies who are compelled by political, economic, and familial forces to work abroad. They do not produce or constitute social and economic relations, but are secondary effects of different ideological systems (capitalist, imperialist, nationalist, neocolonial, neoliberal, etc.). In sharp response to that constructed passivity, other representations tend to couch resistance through the

⁶ Rodriguez, 85.

⁷ See Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2001); Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and Globalization* (New York: New York UP, 2008); Tadiar, *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2004); Kale Bantigue Fajardo, “Transportation: Translating Filipino and Filipino American Tomboy Masculinities Through Global Migration and Seafaring,” *GLQ* 14:2-3 (2008), 403-424.

construction of volitional heroism; in the worst claims such as those coming from the state, heroic discourse is used to obfuscate exploitation. But both volitional and victimizing strategies understate the complex role of production that tethers Filipina/o workers without totalizing them. We are better off not taking on superlative identities such as heroes or victims that mask the complexities of production.

Specifically, I inquire into the production of Filipina motherhood that accompanies and constitutes the roles that have been fashioned by nationalism and globalization. Rather than assume motherhood to be a universal, ahistorical condition, I consider the ways in which it has become legible within what I call heteronationalist globalization. In the Philippines, anti-colonial, liberal, and radical nationalisms have organized around the mythical Inang Bayan, which roughly translates into Mother Country, who is to be protected against foreign colonization. Yet paradoxically, the Filipina mother has been brokered by these same nationalisms; I am discussing motherhood since it is precisely the domestic and maternal duties for which they are regarded as ideal subjects to be brokered between nation and capital. It is her domesticated role—as nurturer, caregiver, homemaker, teacher, nurse—thrust into the global labor force that allows her to be hailed as national heroes. In many ways, she is the fulcrum on which the liberal consensus straddling nationalism and globalization rests. But the meanings that produce her should not be taken for granted or assumed to be universal and ahistorical. By destabilizing these maternal meanings—by questioning their transparency—it allows one to question the ways in which Filipinas are employed and exploited, and enables alternative efforts to understand their excessive production.

4.

The title of this project is an interpolation of an an essay written by the nationalist hero José Rizal.⁸ His essay delivers a critique of the claim that “the Filipino” is “indolent,” but it does not refute the claim. Instead, it argues for what Spivak would call a metathesis—that indolence is an *effect* of Spanish colonialism, not a *cause* of the stagnant conditions of the colonial regime. The text compares Filipino culture in the late nineteenth century to historical accounts of indigenous cultures within the archipelago in the early decades of Spanish colonialism. Where Rizal observes a nationwide indolence among the populace, early texts suggest to him that prelapsarian cultures were industrious, productive, and fulfilled by their labor. He contends that his argument is strengthened by the fact that these accounts were written by Spanish explorers, disinterested if not outrightly opposed to the populations they were in the process of conquering. Ultimately, indolence must be historicized, as it is based on the implementation of a colonial order that alienated workers—especially since according to Rizal, the natives, or indios, were trained to emulate the colonial administrators and their own entitled indolence.

There are at least two ways of reading the argument. On one hand, it is a very commonplace if troublesome verdict rendered by an elite (“ilustrado”) cosmopolitan nationalist, confirming that the Filipino masses are indeed lazy and indolent, but to be excused given centuries of colonial aggression that transformed and subjugated indio cultures. On the other hand, reading against its grain, it is possible to understand the

⁸ José Rizal, “The Indolence of the Filipino.” <http://www.fullbooks.com/The-Indolence-of-the-Filipino.html>. Accessed September 3, 2010.

argument as theorizing a kind of resistance from within the very conditions of colonialism. That is to say, indolence is not only *not* in the indios's nature, it is an effect of colonialism that stymies and forestalls one of the objectives of colonialism, namely its productivity. In this way indolence can be read as a kind of *insolence*, not dependent on an essentially oppositional and authentic Filipino-ness, but on a rebellious, contemptuous, potentially strategic lethargy nurtured from within colonial conditions, spread by the colonizers to the colonized, the latter doing their best colonial mimic, but not quite.

While indolence could hardly be used—except as alibis for withholding wages, punishing employees, and finally deporting them—to describe the working habits of overseas Filipina workers, who are surveilled through a highly sophisticated system of clocks, timesheets, and supervisors national and abroad, it is useful to maintain a question of their insolence. Insolence is a quality of the traces of that which cannot be represented and narrativized for heteronationalist globalization. Even subject to harsh biopolitical management, there remains a persistent kernel of possibility which, if hardly noticed, is also impossible to altogether efface. Insolence may often be a quality associated with children, but in using it here, I am prefiguring the critique I advance in the final chapter and epilogue, in which Filipina/o children exceed the vessels of normative and imperialist cultures they are assumed naturally to be. Insolence may not be the language of revolution or organized mobilizing, but it nevertheless conjures up a certain contemptuous resistance that requires further inquiry.

The second noun (Filipinas) of this project's title transforms the singular, masculinized noun of Rizal's original (Filipino) into one that simultaneously pluralizes

and feminizes. Of course, the term can be used to identify a group according to race and gender, namely Filipinas. But “Filipinas” is also another way of referring to the Philippines, deriving from the Spanish translation. The ambivalence in the term, confusing women and nation, is an appropriate point of departure for a critical analysis, since Filipinas have often been invoked and, to use Laura Hyun Yi Kang’s term, enfigured, in the name of Philippine nationalism.⁹

More specifically, this project analyzes the plurality—not to be confused with totality—of ways in which Filipina mothers can be enfigured. One can begin with the term “Inang Bayan,” roughly translated as “mother-country,” which has been invoked for different nationalist agendas. Classic heteromasculinist colonialist tropes of virginal landscapes primed for the arrival of heroically penetrating male explorers (such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” John Smith’s writings on the settlement of Virginia, or H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*) have been transformed into anticolonialist narratives mourning feminized terrains raped and devastated by male colonizers, imperialists, and capitalists, calling in many instances for a redemptive native masculinity to fend off the outsiders, either by resisting them in favor of essentialized and nostalgic prelapsarian cultures or by asserting competence and fluency within a unified and universally heteromasculinist modernity. In the face of these narrow representations, I am rather more interested in the “textualization” of the Filipina mother—that is, how else she can be; the possibilities of producing her differently (namely by recognizing, without blandly heroizing, her productivity). Thus, I focus on creative, diasporic, Filipina/o texts

⁹ See Laura Hyun Yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).

that represent Filipina motherhood in ways that transform their meanings. These meanings are illegible to nationalism and globalization, making the latter unable to recognize the constitutive and productive role they play in their own lives, in ours, and in the world.

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This reading contributes to the genealogy of hetero-masculinist nationalism I trace within the chapter. As many scholars have analyzed and often reproduced, “revolution” has circulated as an “unfinished” discourse emerging from within anti-imperialist mobilizing in the Philippines. Not unlike both liberal and revolutionary nationalisms

around the globe, the dominant character of such discourse has proven to be profoundly and constitutively heteropatriarchal. The mourning that is concomitant with the notion of an “unfinished” or “incomplete” “revolution” can thus be understood as a mourning of the failure of native masculinities to protect their families, women, and land. Building on postcolonial feminist critiques of nationalism as well as recent conceptualizations of the rhizomatic, biopolitical field of global empire, the chapter critiques nationalism not only for its unexamined heteropatriarchy, but also its potential obsolescence given the complicity of revolutionary and liberal Philippine nationalisms with global capital.

My second chapter, “Letting the Cat(achresis) Out of the Bag: Transnational Filipina Motherhood,” reads two texts that represent motherhood in two distinct ways. In Eleanor Coppola’s published diary of the filming of *Apocalypse Now*, the narrator aspires to overcome the inequality between her and her husband’s professional work by conceptualizing an ambitious marriage dependent on imperialist strategies and settings. Her writings probe the assertion of an empowered identity that, strikingly, only seeks that liberation in the Philippines; when returning to the national-domestic space, she appears content to return to her own national-domestic-maternal duties. Rizalina, the young Filipina mother of Jessica Hagedorn’s novel *Dream Jungle*, the second half of which fictionalizes the *Apocalypse Now* film production, distances herself from maternal, nationalist, and imperialist norms. In this way, she resists being recodified into a visible, legible, rational representation that reproduces either Coppola’s imperialist feminism or an equally unexamined nationalist feminism. The terms of her liberation are not spelled out, but neither can one deny the happiness she claims; what can be specified is her

obsession with a white tiger that is flown in for the film shoot. That cat, rather than a Filipina elder or Coppola's fictional counterpart, inspires Lina most of all. In doing so, Lina performs a catachresis on the production of racialized, gendered freedom.

My third chapter, "Carlos in Medford and Gabe in Meridan: Attempted Erasures of the Filipina Mother for Hetero/Homonational Masculinity," examines two novels, Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* and Brian Ascalon Roley's *American Son*, to consider how multiple efforts to represent freedom and agency draw from and reproduce imperialist and heteronormative authority. Even as Roley's novel stages an unannounced but noticeable homonationalism—which can be understood as a contemporary revision of the heteronationalism of Bulosan's novel—it is quickly rescinded back into a heteropatriarchal space. Neither narrator can liberate themselves on the grounds of masculinist identifications, whether heteronational or homonational. Whereas the masculine characters of both texts thus struggle in the attempt to speak for themselves, the mother in the second text recognizes the dilemmas representational strategies pose. Many characters try to speak for her, on her behalf, but she renders their attempts futile and does not aspire to represent herself. She rejects representations that interpret her as a redemptive figure for either national heteronormativity or globalization. Such a move does not mean she accepts invisibility; to the contrary, her presence persistently disrupts the text and stymies its efforts at resolution.

The fourth and final chapter, "Learning to Listen: Nation, Film, and Children in Kidlat Tahimik's *Mababangong Bangungot*," reads the eponymous film, which demands critical audiences who listen as well as they watch. I argue that listening to a film is just

as significant as watching it; in spite of what seems like a formalist argument, I examine in what ways such an approach intervenes in the production of Philippine history and Filipina/o bodies, especially as those bodies get translated for the interests of nationalism and globalization. In the film, an overprivileging of the visual aids and abets the film's masculinist nationalism, which is promoted as a liberatory alternative to globalization and imperialism. In this chapter, the visual pathos of the Filipina mother—neglected, then remembered, by her son after warning him of the seductions of the west—fails to complicate her identity, employing her strictly for the purposes of nationalist mourning. But in the aural rendering of Filipina/o children, which works in sharp contrast to their visual rendering, it is possible to discern a critique of the film's heteronormative nationalism. That is, by listening to the film, one can hear a moment of liberatory potential not in the service of heteronationalist global empire.

Readers may find it intriguing that among the texts read in this study, only one—Kidlat Tahimik's *Perfumed Nightmare*—has a character that would qualify as an actual overseas worker. Even more perplexingly, that character is as a Filipino man. While the critics I mention above have explored the experiences, fictional and real, of overseas Filipina workers, my aims depart from theirs. My goal in part is, on one hand, to examine the particular position of overseas Filipina motherhood as a project situated within but not wholly determined by globalization and nationalism, and secondly, to extend the discussion of overseas workers beyond the explicitly sociological and empirical bodies of overseas Filipina workers. In a broad sense, what I am exploring is the conditions of possibility for “Filipinas” as they are maternally employed globally and for the nation.

The corporatized liberal consensus, which I discuss in this first chapter, stages this possibility through the disavowal of a genocidal imperative not confined to the imperialist past, nor confined to empirically determined identities.

In doing so, I am not erasing the specificity of the problematics of overseas Filipina workers; accordingly, neither do I mean to suggest verisimilitude among all “Filipinas”; far from it. I examine the textual “employment” of the Filipina mother—her racialized, classed, gendered, sexualized production within the particular epistemological moments fictionalized in these texts. More importantly, I seek to contribute to the destabilization of such projects—“to enter into texts so that the moments of bafflement can become useful,” as Spivak puts it.¹⁰ More schematically, Dylan Rodriguez writes that

it is useful and necessary to (a) strategically disrupt conceptions/narratives of the Filipino condition that cannot sufficiently account for the historical present of its genocidal American encounter, and (b) generate political and theoretical trajectories that position the putative Filipino in a state of irreconcilability with the US nation-state and its ongoing conditions of possibility.¹¹

Conceptualizing this allows us to recognize that “the Filipino condition may potentially enable an extended meditation on the symbiosis between genocide and the genealogies of social formation, state making, and civic institutionality that genocide both historically

¹⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Interview with *Radical Philosophy*,” *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 137.

¹¹ Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2009), 107.

facilitates and perpetually accompanies.”¹² Irreconcilability is an effect of the insolence of Filipinas—an insolence toward the genocide at the core of the biopolitical consensus.

5.

In Brian Gothong Tan’s video art project, *Imelda Goes to Singapore*, a Filipina maid is shown cleaning, putting away groceries, and serving a glass of water to her Singaporean employer.¹³ The video lasts for the duration of a song—it is a music video. The song that plays and which lends a performativity to the Filipina’s actions is “Dahil Sa Iyo,” perhaps the most popular song associated with twentieth-century Philippine culture, considered exemplary of the kundiman, a love song. While generally a beloved song, it acquired special significance when it became associated with the candidacy of Ferdinand Marcos. His wife, Imelda, a former beauty pageant contestant, traveled with him to different cities, towns, and barangays throughout the archipelago, singing the song to win the favor of the people, and to win their vote: “They looked at her while he spoke to them.”¹⁴ In such a setting, the lyrics take on a different meaning, transforming from a song of romantic love to national service. The title, for instance, which is roughly translated as “because of you,” is changed and charged with the idea that Marcos’s candidacy was what the people wanted and deserved, establishing an intimacy—romance, as it turns out, was not left behind, but nationalized—between candidate and public.

¹² Ibid., 149.

¹³ Brian Gothong Tan, *Imelda Goes to Singapore*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hb0vSow62zo>. Accessed September 3, 2010.

¹⁴ Vicente Rafael, “Patronage, Pornography, and Youth: Ideology and Spectatorship during the Early Marcos Years,” *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), 131.

In the video, there are other signs of Philippine nationalism accompanying the song, namely dance and dress associated with Philippine folk culture. The Filipina wears a *terno*, a fancy gown with a noticeably exaggerated high “butterfly” shoulder, and she briefly performs the *tinikling*, a folk dance routine choreographed over a pair of bamboo poles that, controlled by two people, clap together an accompanying rhythm.

Here, the ironies of Philippine nationalism are brought to the fore. It is not a real, exquisite dress she wears, but only two grocery plastic bags slung over her arms to mimic butterfly sleeves. The *tinikling* is performed not with two bamboo poles, but the metal arms of mops. She is, after all, an overseas domestic worker. The song, too, is resignified. As the Filipina sings the song, it becomes apparent that she is addressing the former first lady, who is confused with the Singaporean woman, as the national straddles the global. Alternatively, as suggested by the video’s title, the Filipina may be interpreted as repositioning Imelda Marcos as an overseas worker. It is Imelda who supplicates the Singaporean woman, pointing to the national supplication of the global. Both meanings *work*. As the lyrics are translated into English subtitles, they take on new meanings: “Because of you ... I am your slave.” The ideas that may or may not be appropriate for intense romance is plainly shocking as a political claim. In doing so, the video positions the overseas Filipina as a critic through whom the collusion between the national and the global can be 1) understood; 2) critiqued; and 3) destabilized via this productivity that exceeds the body-wage-labor system.

Chapter One.

Mother, Navel, Nation:

Disseminating the Dictionary of Philippine Heteronationalist Globalization

In what way can the Filipino diaspora serve as a paradigm for analyzing and critically unsettling the corporate globalization of labor and the reification of identities in the new millennium?

—E. San Juan, Jr.

[T]he Filipino condition resists political narrations which do not unsettle the representative terms or categories mandated by prevailing discursive grids in U.S. nation-state bureaucracies, academia, and cultural domains.

—Oscar Campomanes

Our everyday lives may be laced with tragedy, glazed with frustration and want, but they are also capable of fierce resistance to the dehumanization and trivialization that politico-cultural punditry and profit-driven media depend upon.

—Toni Morrison

Such language is new to you, no doubt. Is it possible that after having overwhelmed you with grief, I could force you to admire my courage?

—Roxana, *Persian Letters*

1.

Connie de Vidal, the eponymous Filipina of Nick Joaquin's story, "The Woman Who Had Two Navels," will remain a mystery for the text's duration. It begins when she visits a Filipino horse doctor in Hong Kong, hoping to convince him to perform surgery on her in order to fix the two navels she claims she has. (First question: Why a veterinarian? Is she an animal?) But once she leaves his office, except for a brief anecdote, she never returns, and just as importantly, the monstrous rumor is neither confirmed nor refuted. When her mother arrives at the veterinarian's office to discredit Connie's account, the story no longer really concerns her daughter's alleged aberrant body; instead, it transforms into a sustained meditation on the links between nationalism and gender. The story conceptualizes Philippine nationalism in a way that illustrates the ideals attached to the young nation, especially where gender and sexuality are concerned—primarily, the nation is to be won, defended, developed, and cultivated by a fraternal order.

The text inscribes the failures of Filipino masculinity and Philippine nationalism, as described in two conversations: first, between Connie's mother and the veterinarian, Pepe Monson; and second, between Monson and Paco Teixeira, a jazz musician and expatriate living in Hong Kong. Both conversations mourn the failure of the Philippine revolution against the US: having accomplished so much against Spain, having neared the promise of national independence, the subsequent subjection to the US more than disheartened the male characters whose fathers had fought alongside other revolutionaries. These failed forefathers left the Philippines, vowing not to return until it

had achieved independence. Now, though, a year or two after the US granted formal independence to the Philippines following World War II, it is too little, too late. Teixeira goes to the Philippines as part of a concert tour, only to be chased out by Connie's mother, who pesters him. Without men to lead them, women have effectively ruined society. The aging father of the veterinarian returns to Hong Kong shell-shocked, too, refusing to speak about his trip to the Philippines, dismayed to find their old house in disrepair. His trip had been scheduled as a precursor to Monson's, which was to have paved the way for the latter's marriage there—nuptials that would commemorate not just heterosexual coupling, but a return to an independent nation. To no avail. The marriage is postponed due to his father's decision to leave once more and return to Hong Kong.

The terms of this chain include family, marriage, home, nation, and patriarchy: “‘The house of our fathers is waiting for us to come home!’”¹ National belonging is linked to compulsory, legislated heterosexuality, and demands masculine presence to succeed. It hardly matters whether Connie has two navels, then. The circulation of this gendered, maternally aberrant myth serves only as an example of the unruly behavior of both Filipinas and the Philippines, both having been abandoned by the only hero this story can imagine, namely, Filipino men. Masculine anguish over the loss of the nation is the result of its agential role in this narrative; men have been deprived—by imperialists, by women—of their rightful and natural ability to lead the nation out of colonized darkness. If some women such as Connie's mother share in the anguish, it is not an anguish over their (women's) inability to lead, but the failure of men to do so: women

¹ Nick Joaquin, “The Woman Who Had Two Navels,” *Tropical Baroque: Four Manileño Theatricals* (U of Queensland P, 1983), 158.

can only destroy the nation, they cannot rebuild it. Connie's mother tells the veterinarian, "When I was a little girl people like your father were my conscience walking around in elegant clothes."²

In evacuating Connie so quickly from the text, the story misses out on some insights having to do precisely with its main concerns. As a woman whose deformity concerns the relationship between mother and child, reproduction and separation, Connie represents a culture distorted for lack of male parenting and tutelage. Her mother, the Señora de Vidal, is not so much an accomplice to these failures as she is a victim—first of male abandonment, then of a wild, irresponsible daughter. She might be a proxy for Inang Bayan, roughly translated as Mother Country, whose men left and whose children such as Connie are loose, immoral, and fittingly *conniving*. The text is obsessed not with its title character, who is only a symptom of national, gendered failure, but with the heteropatriarchy that returns belatedly to a forlorn, hapless, depraved nation.

The scapegoat of the story of racialized heteropatriarchy, Connie recalls Marx's well-known reading of the prostitute as a "*specific* expression of the *general* prostitution of the *labourer*."³ For Marx, capitalism's expansion of private property to the community is best exemplified in the figure of the prostitute, "in which a woman becomes a piece of *communal* and *common* property."⁴ It is not as if the prostitute defiles marriage; instead there is continuity between marriage and prostitution, the former being an "exclusive"

² Ibid., 160.

³ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Mulligan. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/> Accessed March 10, 2010.

⁴ Ibid.

form of private property that becomes the “universal private property” embodied in the latter. Selling her body (as commodity) to others and for them, the prostitute marks the capitalist alienation of the means of production from the worker. In crude terms, she works for others, rather than herself. But while, given the implicit critique of marriage, Marx is not protecting the husband-wife pair from the advances of a dangerous outsider, the metonymic relation he identifies between prostitution and capitalism alludes to the concrete roles that race, gender, and sexuality play in his critique of capital.

For instance, Neferti Tadiar writes that the “indifference to the particularities of female prostitution which the metaphor of general prostitution requires is ... a sexual indifference. ... Inasmuch as this value as a ‘being-for-itself’ is realized in the labor which exceeds necessary or reproductive labor, labor qua labor is realized in its difference from its feminine condition as a ‘mere being for something else.’”⁵ Dignified labor is coded masculine, while under capitalism, men are symbolically transformed into wives, handmaidens, mistresses, and finally prostitutes under capitalism—into workers-for-others. All of this suggests that the worker is not an abstract figure, but is fundamentally gendered. The laborer is not just a laborer, and never was; epistemologies of gender and class are mutually constitutive. Roderick Ferguson suggests that in this way, not only is capitalism universalized, racialized heteropatriarchy is as well. The problem, for Marx, is capital’s universal defilement of *white* masculinity: “The universalization of heteropatriarchy produces the prostitute as the other of heteropatriarchal ideals, an other that is simultaneously the effect of racial, gender,

⁵ Neferti X. Tadiar *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2009), 34.

sexual, and class discourses, an other that names the social upheavals of capital as racialized disruptions.”⁶ (Where Marx’s analysis focused especially on British labor in the nineteenth century, across the Atlantic, an analogy may be drawn to abolitionist discourses which sought, for instance, to establish new states as free in order to protect the dignity of labor from its racialized defilement in slavery.) Not unlike the slave, the prostitute becomes a racialized other—again, not principally to the community of monogamous marriage, but to the white, male labor(er) that/who is dehumanized as it/he is entered into capitalism.⁷ Marx’s critique of capital *along these terms* draws him into an unwitting complicity with the liberal nationalists who also “sought to recover heteropatriarchal integrity from the ravages of industrialization.”⁸

But the relationship between Connie and Marx’s prostitute is not just one of analogy. As a Filipina, Connie does not just remind us of a prostitute, she is one. (In other work, Tadiar also argues for understanding the Filipina as a slave, and not metaphorically so.⁹) Tadiar writes that “Filipinas compose a significant part of the female global labor force whose socially gendered skills and subsistence work give it the flexibility and cheap reproductive cost exploited and demanded by capital.”¹⁰ Or, more precisely, within a worldview that is “misogynist, homophobic, and racist,” “pussy is not only what the

⁶ Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003), 10.

⁷ It is important to note that though mutually constitutive, the universalizations of capital and racialized heteropatriarchy are discontinuous since, as Ferguson notes, capital is “based on a[n amoral] logic of reproduction that fundamentally overrides and often violates heteropatriarchy’s logic.” *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹ See *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2004).

¹⁰ *Things Fall Away*, 30.

Philippines *has*, it is what the Philippines *is*.”¹¹ The slippage from Filipinas as gendered bodies to nation remains appropriate for this narrative.

This gendered, nationalist crisis plagues but also structures the Philippines’s role in the global economy. Tadiar argues that as an “anti-colonial nation,” the Philippines “is itself born of crisis, defined by crisis, and, to the extent that it is successful in maintaining itself, perpetuating and perpetuated by crisis.”¹² If Ferguson highlights the affinities between Marxist radicals and liberal nationals, Tadiar also suggests a continuity between mainstream Philippine nationalists such as Marcos and radical nationalists such as Renato Constantino. Both understand Philippine culture as having been “rendered impotent by its multiple personality, its lack of identity and sovereignty, ... its incomplete separation from and lingering dependence on the United States and its servile mentality and hysterical obsession with what Americans thought.”¹³ Insofar as Filipinas are prostitutes working for imperialist, neoliberal others, different reformist and radical discourses read them as defiled and depraved—but who, on the other hand, will also be exploited by the nation’s reformers and radicals since the “feminine body is conceived as a property of the collective,” such as in the case of contemporary overseas workers.¹⁴

From the perspective of globalization, an uncanny parallel to Joaquin’s story emerges in Wong Kar-Wai’s second film, *Days of Being Wild*. Wong’s position as an avant-garde filmmaker amid the recent global emergence of Hong Kong’s economy and culture compels a reading of the film as an allegory of Hong Kong. Set in the early

¹¹ Ibid., 25.

¹² Ibid., 26.

¹³ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

1960s, the film focuses on York, a young man who has a series of non-committal relationships with women. His wandering, peripatetic sensibility—he compares himself to a bird with no legs, that can only land once, when it dies—is linked to his unstable and often combative rapport with his adoptive mother. It is as if the ambiguity of and distance from his origins produces these growing pains and portends an equally uncertain future. But his decision to seek out his biological mother—to discover his origins—leads to his death. The film's last scene shows an entirely new character who seems to be York's foil—unlike York's lack of direction and reckless behavior, this man dresses in a suit, seemingly ready to work: economic ambition, rather than a search for origins, can resolve cultural ambivalence. The narrative allegorizes Hong Kong's status in the late 1990s, as it transferred from British to Chinese control, all the while maintaining relative independence politically and economically (and successfully so).

More relevant for my discussion is that York's biological mother is a Filipina actress. Despondent, he goes to the Philippines to see her; he arrives at a stately, gated mansion, but is told she is away. She does not want to see him. He spends a few days in Binondo, the Chinese district in Manila, which is depicted as a slum; a Filipina prostitute steals money from him while he is drunk and asleep in the street. A solitary man—whom he once knew in Hong Kong, but does not admit to recognizing—takes him in. The friend tells another prostitute to leave, and the two men share a bottle of wine in the cramped room. In a brief shot, York moves from the center of the camera, revealing his friend lying on his back, on the bed. It is a short, passing moment of queer desire in the midst of York's identity crisis. Finally on what seems like the next day, after trying to obtain an

illegal passport without paying for it, York instigates a gang fight and flees Binondo by train. But a crony shoots him, leaving him to die in his seat.

Taken together—the illegal activity, violence, queer desire, prostitution—the Philippines is represented as an amoral space linked to the Chinese settlement resulting from early global commerce. As in Joaquin’s story, the Philippines is a landscape where men such as York are absent—in his case, sold/adopted abroad—and women such as his mother have led the nation into a depraved state. The depravity emerges specifically in Binondo, an urban district marked by Chinese settlement and its transnational, commercial bodies, where sexual and other mores have been relaxed in favor of amoral capital gain. As an unwilling and incompetent parent, York’s biological mother can be compared to the Señora de Vidal. But whereas the short story ponders the failures of masculinity, the film does not even consider the whereabouts of York’s father. Both Joaquin’s story and Wong’s film represent a nation that has been abandoned by men, left to spoil in the care of negligent mothers whose children have deformed bodies and are sold abroad, or else escape there.

In the film, York’s adoptive mother was herself once a prostitute; in a flashback, she narrates relief in walking out of the hospital with the infant York in her arms, knowing she would be compensated fifty US dollars each month for raising him. Within the text of Philippine history, the mother/wife is no longer distinct from the prostitute; there is no difference between exclusive and communal—even transnational—private property. The affairs of the home are the affairs of the nation, and the affairs of the nation are the affairs of the global economy. York’s biological mother, who does not live in

Binondo but nevertheless represents a depraved Filipinas, may be understood as yet another prostitute—serving Wong’s film, representing the nation for a global film audience. Both nationalist texts such as the short story and global ones such as the film employ Filipinas as prostitutes, and both are only specific examples of the general national-global employment of Filipinas.

In the rest of this chapter, I lay out the theoretical and political scope of this project. The racialized, gendered, and sexualized representations that structure the employment of Filipinas for the shared objectives of Philippine nationalism and global capital have been well-documented by critics such as Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, and Anna Romina Guevarra.¹⁵ The wealth of empirical and sociological data that informs critiques of the global-national consensus structuring Filipina overseas employment has its own limits, which can be ascertained through a discussion of the textuality that goes into the making of ideal subjects of global-national labor. In particular, productions of nationalism in the Philippines by a diverse set of constituents help stabilize and naturalize heteromasculinist authority. The response among advocates, activists, organizers, and sociologists to this stabilizing of meaning has often been to stabilize a different set of meaning—especially relying on empirical data

¹⁵ Anna Romina Guevarra, *Marketing Dreams, Manufacturing Heroes: The Transnational Labor Brokering of Filipino Heroes* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2009). Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2001); *The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and Globalization* (New York: New York UP, 2008). Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010).

that solidifies a critique contending that, in short, Filipinas are suffering at the hands of both nationalists and global capital.

Such narratives contribute much to challenging the neoliberal consensus but at the risk of effacing the textuality of the real. The problem here is not philosophical so much as it is ethico-political: textuality helps destabilize the empirical “truth” of neoliberalist freedom and choice. Following Neferti Tadiar, my project builds on and departs from sociological analyses and attempts to read for the underside of the process—a process I specify as bearing particularly maternal characteristics. That is, I engage with the figure of the Filipina mother as she has been employed within contemporary globalization—aided as it has been by Philippine nationalisms, liberal and revolutionary. While Nick Joaquin does not qualify as a “revolutionary,” his story’s mourning of the failed, masculinist revolution suggests a critical overlap between revolutionary and liberal postcolonial nationalisms. But by reading the text and pursuing its effort to produce global heteronationalism, this essay produces a critique of it, from within its terms, revealing not only maternal Filipinas’s productivity in global labor, but an underside that interrupts the consensual celebration of multicultural global heteromascu­linist nationalism.

2.

On July 4, 1946, the US officially recognized an independent Republic of the Philippines, ending almost half a century of US colonial administration. The date is worth reflecting on as it is situated at a critical juncture connecting, but also distinguishing,

between “past” and “future”: 1) Marking and inheriting the date marking Independence Day in the US, it reinforces the “little brown brother” narrative, which contends that US imperialism was a sacrificial, altruistic, and “benevolent,” rather than exploitative, mission; 2) It also marks, following World War II and the emergence of global policing strategies, what critics have variously called “late capitalism,” “postmodernity,” and “neoliberalism.” The moment of national liberation is simultaneously the moment of global capitalism; the direct administration of colonial governance is transferred into the indirect and thus more insidious, public-relations-friendly narratives of “development” and “human rights,” except in certain “extreme,” “post-9/11,” cases: “The full realization of the world market is necessarily the end of imperialism.”¹⁶

The strategic repetition of independence dates attempts to efface a critical difference between US and Philippine independence: the former was earned through violent revolution, the latter bestowed by the imperial sovereign. This distinction brings to mind Fanon’s contention that violence is a “cleansing force” that “frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect,” revolution needing to be won rather than benevolently granted.¹⁷ The psychologizing operation of Fanon’s decolonization also reminds one of Roland Barthes: “no father to kill, no family to hate, no milieu to reject: great Oedipal frustration!”¹⁸ What frustrations sustain a Philippine nation paternalistically *allowed to*

¹⁶ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001), 333.

¹⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 94.

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 45.

become independent? In what ways is this *national* frustration gendered and particularly masculinist?

It is not as if revolutionary mobilizing is absent from Philippine history. In a way, the revolution happens over and over again: in March 1521, when Ferdinand Magellan arrived on the island of Mactan, before there was “the Philippines”; when Antonio Pigafetta first began documenting, and imagining, what happened on that circumnavigation in ways that only further obscured knowledge; when Lapu-Lapu murdered Magellan a few weeks later; when during three centuries of Spanish rule, it remained difficult for the natives to understand the colonial structures of authority, given severe failures of translation¹⁹; in 1872, when the Gomburza priests were executed for contributing to calls for reform; when the indios appropriated Christian theology into local idioms²⁰; when José Rizal published novels, poetry, and essays critical of Spanish rule²¹; more so, when Rizal was executed by the Spanish: according to eyewitness accounts²², Rizal petitioned to face the firing squad, to die honorably—a request denied, leading Rizal to stand in such a way, legs crossed, so that upon the bullet’s impact he would fall, twisting around to face his executors; in 1892, when inspired by Rizal, Andres

¹⁹ Vicente Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993); *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005).

²⁰ Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila UP, 1997); *Filipinos and Their Revolution: Event, Discourse, and Historiography* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila UP, 1999).

²¹ Rizal’s best-known writings are the novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, but he also wrote many essays and poems.

²² See *The Trial of Rizal: W.E. Retana’s Transcription of the Official Spanish Documents*, ed. Horacio de la Costa, S.J. (Manila: Ateneo de Manila UP, 1998).

Bonifacio formed the Kataas-taasang, Kagalang-galangang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan, launching a sustained insurgency against Spain by August of 1896; when Emilio Aguinaldo declared independence on June 12, 1898²³; and so many other events leading into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.²⁴

Despite the success of revolutionary mobilizing against Spain, the Philippines would be prevented from achieving and celebrating independence. In 1898, the Spanish-American War—fought in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines—ended with the Treaty of Paris. Among the terms of the agreement was that Spain effectively sold the Philippines to the US for twenty million dollars. Whatever gains the revolutionaries—a divided lot by this time, with Bonifacio’s assassination and the emergence of Aguinaldo—made against Spain were negated by the arrival of a new imperial power. The insurrection would lead to a Philippine-American War that would last officially for three years and extend unofficially well into the twentieth century.

But the revolution does not end there; Reynaldo Ileto suggests that revolution is an “unfinished *discourse*” that recycles itself throughout the twentieth century.²⁵ The genealogy Ileto traces is striking. He writes that by 1961, “unfinished revolution” was a “catchword shared by the conservative president [Diosdado Macapagal] and radical intellectuals alike.”²⁶ Within mainstream discourse, the emergence of a postwar historiography claiming Bonifacio, rather than Rizal, as the national hero spurred greater

²³ The official independence day holiday was changed to June 12 from July 4 in 1962.

²⁴ One should note here the separate political genealogy of indigenous claims for independence, from both western powers and the Philippine government.

²⁵ Emphasis added. Reynaldo Ileto, “The ‘Unfinished Revolution’ in Philippine Political Discourse,” *Southeast Asian Studies* 31:1 (June 1993), 62-82.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

circulation of revolutionary discourse. Early in Ferdinand Marcos's presidency, he did not draw on these discourses, but as Martial Law was implemented to suppress insurgent movements in 1972, his "discourse had, consciously or not, become reconstituted in relation to a revolutionary discourse which threatened his regime."²⁷ Soon, Marcos (who began claiming he was part of a "revolution from the center"), radical intellectuals, and political activists were all relying on the notion of an unfinished revolution for their diverse and antagonistic agendas.²⁸ In the past decade, more than a century after the Philippine-American War began, revolutionary discourse became part of the movement to impeach President Joseph Estrada and continues to echo in public spaces in the midst of the recent Charter Change controversies.²⁹ Vicente Rafael, among others, has questioned the extent to which recent mobilizations can be considered revolutionary, for good reasons.³⁰

If revolution is unfinished, if every action is only a sign of a revolution to come, a revolution perpetually in the future, then disappointment—at the very least—sets in. If

²⁷ Ibid., 70.

²⁸ Ferdinand Marcos, *Revolution from the Center: How the Philippines is Using Martial Law to Build a New Society* (Hong Kong: Raya, 1978). His version, of course, was much less "revolutionary" in its aims, and the Philippine history he commissioned re-oriented the focus toward Rizal and a revolution led by elites.

²⁹ Recently, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo attempted to amend the constitution in such a way that would allow for a unicameral form of government; critics feared it was an attempt to consolidate her power before her presidency—now the second longest presidency after Marcos—expired. The recent election delivered Benigno Aquino III to the presidency, but it remains unclear to what extent power is changing hands. As many critics have suggested—beginning with Jose Maria Sison—presidential corruption extends well beyond the Marcos dynasty; opponents of Marcos, that is, use the alibi of opposition to Marcos as pretexts for their own insidious corruption.

³⁰ Vicente Rafael, "The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Philippines," *Public Culture* 15:3 (2003), 399-425.

every revolution is only the precursor to the next one, it must be the case that these so-called revolutions fail. Failure, not revolution, recurs; to admit it as discourse is, in some respect, the very recognition of failure. Discursivity signals the failure of transparency, immediacy, realization. (“Succeeding” or “failing” may not matter: We in the US, too, are constantly reminded of our own revolution, as if losing sight of it would make us forget our exceptional status, re-entering us into history, actively disavowing that the discourse itself marks our historicity.) These recurring failures are the descendants of the first one; it is the failure of that revolution against Spain, co-opted by the US, that looms over the twentieth century, setting the precedent according to which all future actions will be compared and, more to the point, analogized. In short, a revolution-in-perpetuity must be accompanied by failure ad infinitum and, consequently, very nearly a permanent (though constantly shifting) state of mourning, which is commemorated by different kinds of texts, ranging from Nick Joaquin’s work to diasporic texts such as *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream 1899-1999*.³¹ The achievements of such texts is undeniable, but neither can one deny their shared and prolonged investments in a revolutionary nationalist mourning.

Critiques of nationalism arrive from numerous sources.³² In what ways is mourning particularly nationalist? (Without entering into psychoanalytic debates for the

³¹ *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999*, eds. Luis H. Francia and Angel Shaw (New York: New York UP, 2002).

³² For general theories of nationalism, see: Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” In *Becoming National: A Reader*, eds. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 41-55; Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (New York: NYUP, 1997); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*

time being, it may be that the individual is the hidden term in this syllogism: if mourning has been theorized as part of individual subject-formation, that supposedly autonomous, rational subject is not only not autonomous and irrational, but is also a nationalist fantasy or abstraction. At the very least, the historicity of the rational, agential subject is contemporaneous with the historicity of the nation.) To be sure, revolutionary activities in the Philippines cannot be reduced solely to nationalist agendas, which would do no justice to the efforts of individuals such as José Maria Sison, who has led and continues to advise the Communist Party of the Philippines, has been branded a terrorist by both the Philippines and the US, and is currently exiled in the Netherlands. But if revolutionary discourse in the Philippines takes on multiple forms, a plurality that must be recognized, it is nevertheless worth considering how the “underside”³³ of revolution—failure and the

(New York: Verso, 2006); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992); Hardt and Negri. For postcolonial critiques of nationalism, see: Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993); Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Edward Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990). For women of color critiques of nationalism, see Zillah Eisenstein, “The Combahee River Collective Statement,” in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table, 1983); bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Cambridge: South End, 1999); *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, eds. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, Minoo Moallem (Durham: Duke UP, 1999); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003); Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005). For Asian American critiques of nationalism, see Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996); Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003).

³³ See Iletto, “Rizal and the Underside of Philippine History,” *Filipinos and Their Revolution*.

mourning of failure—takes on a specifically national form.³⁴ Hence José Rizal and Andres Bonifacio are heralded as national heroes, and especially, national martyrs, giving up their lives in dramatic fashion fighting for the nation. If nationalism constructs an imagined community, mourning signals the loss of the nation form.

For my purposes, such mourning needs to be understood as enabled by two conditions. On one hand, it is essentially gendered. Insofar as the revolutionary nationalist is predestined to be a *male* hero—in the Philippines, exhibited not just in Rizal and Bonifacio, but also in the characters of Joaquin’s story—failure is in particular a failure of masculinity. Colonialism itself has been produced as a white, masculinized conquering of feminized, virgin territory, and within that logic, anticolonialism produces itself as the masculine defenders of the motherland.³⁵ The stakes of the nation are coterminous with the emergence of Filipino masculinity; it may be that revolutionary nationalist mourning is only an alibi for mourning the loss of masculinity. On the other hand, the dominant masculinist perspective that imagines the need for a dialectical and revolutionary passing over into national liberation may be fighting a war that has long ended, like Hiroo Onoda, the Japanese soldier still fighting World War II in Philippine jungles well into the 1970s.

At this point, I can only suggest what deserves its own project: that dialectical “revolution,” as an event imagining two antagonists, no longer corresponds to the non-

³⁴ In the last chapter, I return to the question of mourning and nationalism through Giorgio Agamben’s discussion of the state of exception as a kind of mourning. See *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005).

³⁵ Critics such as Jasbir Puar remind us that this is not only a gendered narrative, but a heterosexualized one. See Jasbir Puar, “The Sexuality of Terrorism,” *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 37-78.

dialectical, biopolitical form of power that marks contemporary global conditions. Within what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call “empire” or “postmodern sovereignty,” modes of resistance need to be reconceptualized—and they have been reimagined especially within various women of color feminisms, not surprisingly outside the scope of masculinist politics. “The end of the outside is the end of liberal politics,” Hardt and Negri write, but it is also the end of revolutionary politics when it is fashioned dialectically.³⁶ In Jacques Derrida’s reading of *Capital*, for instance, he finds a critique of the very revolutionary forces that communist movements, inspired by Marx, depend on, and which especially cannot effectively respond to contemporary modes of production: “No, no more revolutionary memory, down with the monument, bring down the curtain on the shadow theater and funerary eloquence, destroy the mausoleum for popular crowds, shatter the death masks beneath the glass caskets. All of that is the revolution of the past.”³⁷ If contemporary, biopolitical technologies foreclose the possibility of revolution, then the revolution never could have been televised.

Philippine nationalism remains a problematic within contemporary critiques, as intellectuals seek to redeem a different kind of nationalism—one that cannot be reduced to the western bourgeois standard, one which remains a vital resource in the fight against neoliberalism. Caroline Hau, for instance, argues that the unfinished aspect is an effect of the literariness of revolution: “The nationalist project is always unfinished because

³⁶ Hardt and Negri, 189.

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, “In the Name of the Revolution, the Double Barricade,” *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge Classics, 1994), 142.

literature and politics can only generate more writing and action.”³⁸ Her brilliant analyses of the marginalized “excesses” of Philippine nationalism impel her to call for a renewed and revised nationalism. Charlie Samuya Veric agrees with Hau, contending that “the nation beckons to the people of the decolonized and decolonizing as the single decisive place wherein they can reclaim their sense of becoming. To deny them that nationhood is to deny their possibility.”³⁹ While it is certainly true that nationalism, as an imagined constituency, can be re-imagined, apologists need to better explain why they imagine it to be the *only* “possibility,” why a “sense of becoming” cannot take place at any other level than the national, especially in the face of so many moments, conceptual and empirical, of the violence of nationalism. The energy and spirit of resistance taking place in the streets against various authorities may indeed deserve a better terminology than either nationalism or revolution.⁴⁰

Neferti Tadiar has analyzed the gendered levels of Philippine revolutionary nationalism and conceptualizes a Benjaminian “divine sorrow” that “opens up an emergent political ontology and economy of human life and death and of nature that departs from the ontological foundations of the hegemonic cultural-political logics of both state power and revolution.”⁴¹ While she retains the term “revolution,” she redirects

³⁸ Caroline Hau, *Necessary Fictions: Philippine Literature and the Nation, 1946-1980* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila UP, 2000), 7.

³⁹ Charlie Samuya Veric, “On the Potential of Failure,” *American Quarterly* 58:1 (2006), 262.

⁴⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes about “planetary” as an alternative to both nationalism and globalization. Where globalization may be a renewed universalism, planetary re-situates our specificity. See *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005).

⁴¹ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 368.

it in a way that does not reproduce nationalist or dialectical forms of dominant intellectual, cultural, and political production, but instead builds on the “affective labor ... of a surplus people.”⁴² Alongside the recognition of the longstanding dilemmas produced by masculinized, nationalist mourning is what Dylan Rodriguez provocatively conceptualizes as a transnational genocidal raciality that conditions the production of both Filipina/os and Filipina/o Americans—a willed complicity with US imperialism-cum-multiculturalism.⁴³ Instead of critically engaging with the “racial analytics” of US imperialism in the Philippines, which would serve to undermine and disrupt US liberal multiculturalism, bourgeois Filipina/o nationalists alongside Filipina/o American “common sense” seek inclusion. The forgetting of genocide informs Philippine nationalist and diasporic attempts that do not question the imperatives of US imperialism, but replicate them in claiming national sovereignty and overseas migration.⁴⁴ As with formal US imperialism in the Philippines, genocide has been transformed into tutelage—another instance of nationalist-globalist collusion.⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid., 374.

⁴³ Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide, and the Filipino Condition* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2009).

⁴⁴ His astute reading of the native community of Aetas—whose response to the threat of and rescue from volcanic activity confounds Philippine officials—exemplifies the continuing failures to establish a national identity and agenda. There appears to be much more work needed to understand the relationship between groups such as the Aetas and national leadership. See pp. 190-217.

⁴⁵ While Rodriguez’s focus is on the liberal, rather than revolutionary, variants of nationalism, one may understand Marcos’s attempt to stage a “revolution from the center” as the convergence and (con)fusion of different nationalisms.

3.

That anticolonial, revolutionary nationalism may be obsolete has not forestalled its recurrence, especially as it has been appropriated by figures such as Ferdinand Marcos. More needs to be said about his “centered revolution,” although in doing so, I should emphasize that his dictatorship should not be regarded as exceptional in its exploitative measures. The end of that reign did not usher in a liberatory political climate, but perhaps only allowed for a more-refined form of exploitation under the guise of an anti-Marcos/anti-authoritarian platform. In 1974, Marcos signed Presidential Decree 442, which institutionalized overseas employment. The mandate not only served as a reaction to radical, leftist, and student mobilizing that Marcos could only interpret as the result of labor shortage, it also sought to take advantage of the emergence of a global service-oriented economy that focused primarily on women of color. An entire bureaucratic apparatus—today composed of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration—was organized to manage the recruitment, training, preparation, and sending of workers, and especially their remitting of earnings. The most important part of the process was that workers supporting their family would send a portion of their earnings home, flooding the Philippine economy with money earned overseas. In 1983, nearing the end of his reign, Marcos signed Executive Order 857, which required remittances to be sent via Philippine banks; although the legislation did not last, it is an example of the economic logic structuring overseas employment.

To date, more than one tenth of the population works overseas, set up by

recruiting agencies based out of Hong Kong, London, etc., collaborating with the Philippine government. These workers—primarily a female population⁴⁶—earn close to twenty billion dollars in income, much of which is remitted home to support their families.⁴⁷ But as these families use these remittances to pay for the costs of living, the remittances support the national economy, as well, which has led more than one Philippine president to hail these workers as national heroes. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez writes that the “state’s promise of jobs to its citizens and, perhaps more importantly, the remittances migrants’ send home, have helped the Philippines avert a major social catastrophe.”⁴⁸ Along with Anna Romina Guevarra, her analysis of the Philippines as a “broker” of overseas laborers shows that Philippine leaders have worked hard to align themselves with global capitalism, at the expense of the workers whose welfare they claim to protect and serve.

Structuring the official documents, agencies, and statistics is the representation of this growing population of workers. Where Joaquin’s and Wong’s texts, both set in the early years of Philippine independence, cannot imagine anything but a failed masculine heroism, cannot imagine the Filipina—as mother, as prostitute—as anything but a helpless object of these failures, the discourse of Philippine nationalism shifts with Marcos. Namely, new national heroes emerged who, according to Marcos but also future Philippine presidents, would help restore national pride, who would lift up the nation

⁴⁶ Kale Bantigue Fajardo’s work on male overseas workers helps counter any unwitting attempts—including, possibly, mine—to link numerical majorities with symbolic privilege. See “Transportation: Translating Filipino and Filipino American Tomboy Masculinities Through Global Migration and Seafaring,” *GLQ* 14:2-3 (2008), 403-424.

⁴⁷ See http://www.poea.gov.ph/stats/2008_stats.pdf (Accessed January 6, 2010).

⁴⁸ Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, 142.

from the ashes of colonialism and despotism, who would discover the true national form that has been forestalled for more than a century now. The new national heroes—and they number in the millions by now, an entire population forced into heroism—will reinvigorate nationalism simply by working. The nation will not so much as overthrow capitalist and imperialist regimes as find a workable niche in them, discover the way to economic development and political stability. The revolution, if it can be called that, will still come from, and be managed by, the center—and it is a center that constitutes just one node in the network of global empire.

In this way, the supposedly essential antagonism between nationalism and globalization, generally driven by the notion that the movement of global commerce, industry, culture, and migration threatens the social, economic, and political stabilities created and managed by the nation, is imprecise with regard to the Philippines—and, certainly, in other cases as well.⁴⁹ Instead, Philippine nationalism works in tandem with globalization, a process that inscribes Filipinas according to racialized, gendered, and sexualized representations. Filipinas, then, are regarded as, on one hand, the ideal subject of global labor, an identity that depends on categories of race, gender, and sexuality, and on the other hand, the ideal subject of Philippine nationalism, which exploits the very same categories. Their heroism is a sign not only of things-to-come (fingers crossed, national liberation via national-global multicultural-genocidal prosperity), but things-that-did-not-come (failed revolutionary nationalist masculinity).

⁴⁹ See Grewal, *Transnational America*; Puar; M. Jacqui Alexander, “Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas,” *Feminist Review* (1994) 48, 5–23.

Despite announcing then obfuscating Connie's abnormal body, Joaquin's story cannot help but address the relationship between culture and politics, intersecting this crisis with the crisis of Philippine nationalism. Connie's mother insists that the chain of masculinized, nationalist authority—a chain binding women to men's thinking—has to do with language:

“They were a reference, a dictionary that I always had open before me. I could never doubt how a word like ‘virtue’ for instance was spelled. I might spell it with a ‘b’ because I wanted to, or without the ‘e’ because I thought it was superfluous—but if I did I knew very well what I was doing and that it was wrong. I had no excuse. But young people now, like my poor Connie ... Where's the dictionary they're to believe in?”⁵⁰

Masculinized nationalism is a vocabulary spelled out in a dictionary—a system of language producing a national community according to definable values such as virtue and morality. The problem, she emphasizes, is that since the failures of masculinized nationalism, no such “dictionaries” exist to guide the youth. It is not as if the now-feminized nation lacks a vocabulary, but its language is inchoate and directionless. The postcolonial woman is irrational. The task for the newly independent nation is thus made clear: “‘The house of our fathers is waiting for us to come home!’” Come home, (male) Filipinos, and save us (women) from ourselves. Teixeira returns to Manila and sees a “sleeping woman outlined against the sky—and it changed the indifference with which he had come to his father's country into a stirring of clan-emotion—a glow, almost, of

⁵⁰ Joaquin, 158 ff.

homecoming.”⁵¹ The metaphors of the dictionary and of language more generally are significant insofar as they are not only metaphors of Philippine nationalism, but insights on its very production.

On one hand, a dictionary is a closed, self-referential system: each word can be defined by grouping together other listed words to form meanings; each of the words in these definitions can also be defined by other groupings of other listed words to form other meanings; and so on. This system authorizes correct usage and grammar, establishing structures of communication, representing the very material normativities of culture. It presumes to be comprehensive and coherent, according to the terms it sets up—a refined, self-referential, tautological system. But seemingly seamless systems have vulnerabilities: every year, dictionaries include new entries in the effort to keep up with new words, meanings, and ideas—in the effort to keep up with the culture whose rules of communication they supposedly establish. Wavering between the prescriptive-normative and descriptive, the belatedness of this system removes it from the center of authority. It is the unintelligible that must be kept pace with, and above all, must be accounted for, if only to reterritorialize it. Despite the ubiquity of dictionaries online, which seems to indicate their popularity, a dictionary depends more on consulting culture—it needs to, to remain viable (and profitable)—than an individual depends on dictionaries. Hence the eruption of englishes and pidgins.

When it comes to the nationalist/globalist production of overseas Filipina/o workers, language has figured importantly. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez writes that

⁵¹ Ibid., 174.

in the 1970s and 1980s, migrant workers were identified in routine government documents and bureaucratic parlance as “OCWs,” or overseas contract workers. Later, after major migration policy reforms were introduced in 1995 “OCW” was replaced with “OFW,” or overseas Filipino workers, emphasizing workers’ nationality or citizenship as Filipinos as opposed to the nature of their work. Not long after Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo took office after President Joseph Estrada’s impeachment, she introduced the term “OFI,” or Overseas Filipino Investors in her state of the nation address in which she encouraged migrants to invest their overseas earnings on developmental projects in their communities or in entrepreneurial ventures.⁵²

“OFI,” that is, effaces the specificity of their labor in exchange for terms that mark their national, financial, as well as global position. Given the scrupulous attention to naming, it may be worth asking if the failure to attend to the gendering of that position is not so much a failure as a way to retain the masculinity that is part of the discourse of nationalist heroics. It is not only labor identity that has been manipulated in the transformation of this nomenclature.

This workforce is not only highly gendered insofar as it is predominantly feminized, but it may be further specified as having a maternal character—literally but also, more broadly, symbolically. (Or more precisely, recalling Derrida and Bhabha, in its

⁵² Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, 88.

dissemination.⁵³) In this project, I engage with different kinds of Filipina motherhood that must be understood as different kinds of labor. As my discussion of Joaquin's story suggests, the mother plays an integral role in both national and global narratives. If for Marx the prostitute is the universalization of domestic gender roles, the mother is already a kind of prostitute, a racialized other *within the space of the domestic, of the nation*, whose racial otherness figures her gender and sexual subordination/service to the family and nation. She does not intrude upon the home; she is a biopolitical figure from within. Motherhood overdetermines the Filipina; simultaneously, she: is asked to raise children for the nation's future; is transformed into an heroic figure who will work overseas to support family and nation; is then blamed for deserting the family, leading to dysfunction; and is responsible for supporting the people for whom she works in nursing and domestic help. In what ways is motherhood itself employed for nationalism and globalization? More importantly, in what ways do the Filipina mothers in the texts I read signify an excess that cannot be accounted for within the logic of the normativities of nationalism and globalization?

In other words, what is left out of the dictionary of Philippine nationalism? What cannot be made intelligible to the closed system of the global-national neoliberal consensus? This is to ask if Filipinas-as-mothers are—if they must be—ideal subjects of Philippine nationalism and globalization. Is this the only, and preferred, way to understand them? Do the particular representations that serve as the conditions of

⁵³ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983), and Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

possibility for—which authorize, justify, legitimize, and also empirically critique—their exploitation valid, coherent, and most importantly, *just*? What is the significance of texts that do not cohere with the bureaucratic and biopolitical protocols of nationalism and globalization? Very simply, it is to ask, what more can be said about Filipina mothers? By asking what “more,” this project should not be understood as additive in scope. To reconceptualize the role of Filipinas-as-mothers is not to broaden the scope of history, as if its expanse can deliver anything more than corporatized liberal multiculturalism. Instead, “more” has to do with what Neferti Tadiar refers to as the excessive meanings that “fall away” from nationalist and global representations of Filipinas.⁵⁴

On one hand, Tadiar traces the ways in which Filipina labor is yoked to the twin processes of globalization and nationalism. Describing their labor as new forms of slavery and prostitution, she documents the racialized, gendered, and sexualized narratives that work to situate Filipinas as servants of the fantasy-production of globalization. But her analyses never end there—in other words, her work never behaves as if oppression or heroism constituted the entirety of Filipinas’s experiences; as she writes, the “standpoint of labor is not an authentic life perspective but a *theoretical-political* perspective from the social position of the marginalized within the dominant mode of production.”⁵⁵ There are other standpoints to learn from. Understanding the national crisis of Philippine culture in this way allows one to see it only as a “feeble attempt to quell” the transformative potential for Filipinas to be understood as “producers

⁵⁴ See Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 52-3.

of the world.”⁵⁶ Tadiar’s readings of different texts, fiction and nonfiction, discover efforts that prevent the category of Filipina (or babae) from being overdetermined by globalization and nationalism.

In similarly provocative terms, Celine Parreñas Shimizu rereads filmic depictions of Asian American women, from mainstream films to pornography, in order to establish what “more” can be said about them. While certain feminist and ethnic studies critiques identify the racialized, gendered, and sexualized problems in filmic representations, which facilitate the material subjugation of Asian American women, Shimizu contends that there is an excess of meaning that should not be ignored in establishing politicized discourses. She suggests that recognizing the heterogeneity of meanings actually has political significance: “Productive perversity involves identifying with ‘bad’ images, or working to establish a different identity along with established sexual images so as to expand racial agendas beyond the need to establish normalcy and standardization.”⁵⁷ Her readings do not reify racialized, gendered hierarchies; by discussing desire and beauty, by thinking about their role as producers of desire and beauty, she divorces visual signifiers from the passive, victimized roles they are intended to signify.

As these “excessive” critiques suggest, it is possible and necessary to conceive of a politics that is not heteropatriarchally wedded to organized, nationalist representations that also work in the service of nationalism and global capital. Focused on the links between representation and politics, this project contends that in order to disrupt the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 52

⁵⁷ Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2007), 121.

authority of nationalism and globalization, which despite their differences collude to represent Filipinas for their respective agendas, one must destabilize those racialized, gendered, and sexualized representations. In working to destabilize normative systems by identifying and exploiting their textual vulnerabilities, I produce a critique of Philippine nationalism and global capital insofar as they rely on and seek to reproduce racialized heteronormativities. It is on the Filipina mother's working shoulders, weary joints, and (textual) surplus value that the burden of Philippine nationalism and global capital depends. If so much work in postcolonial, feminist, and transnational studies has shown that this language, this dictionary of Filipinas's oppression, is unacceptable, its lack of transparent coherence must be emphasized and alternative readings must be obtained and employed.

4.

Early on in *Disagreement*, Jacques Rancière reminds readers of a tale from Herodotus, in which Scythian slaves, who are customarily blinded in order to maintain their subservience, are abandoned by their masters—busy fighting in Asia—for an entire generation. The slaves's progeny grow up with their eyes, able to see, and in doing so realize their equality with their Scythian masters; they prepare for a war meant to restore their social and political equality. But vision does not guarantee liberty, and the revolt fails: when the warriors return, they restore inequality not by taking up their weapons, but by setting them down. The logic goes that *with* weapons, they are on *equal* footing with the slaves's children: social relations are negotiable, contestible. By presenting

themselves without weapons, they re-establish their superiority: there is nothing to negotiate, nothing to contest. In other words, superiority is not discursive, but presumed, natural.

Another brief anecdote, from Book VI of Plato's *Republic*, helps Rancière conceptualize the political. He refers to a dialogue between Socrates and Adeimantus, concerning the noise of the "large and powerful animal"—the people, the demos—and the need for a "science" that understands "what vocal effects make the great animal growl and those that make it nice and gentle."⁵⁸ For Rancière, "Just as the demos usurps entitlement to community, democracy is the regime—the way of life—in which the voice ... usurps the privileges of the logos, which allows the just to be recognized and organizes this realization in terms of community proportion."⁵⁹ A political community—here, democracy—needs a voice that is organized, coherent, and recognizable by the dominant order if it is to make any progress; neither disorderly revolts nor animalistic grunts, ineffective as they are in the two tales, count as effective political strategies.

In this way, politics must be understood as an *organized interruption*. Rancière argues that traditional examples of politics—for example, bureaucratic administration, electoral democracy, or consensus politics—are better regarded as policing. In contrast, politics must have a disruptive—but also sustainable—force. Working through three paradigms he names archipolitics, parapolitics, and metapolitics, each of which structures the links between philosophy and politics differently, his critique emerges finally to

⁵⁸ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999), 22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

rebuke the contemporary embrace of a post-democratic and post-historical consensus among liberal nations. The post-democratic consensus has misinterpreted the recent demise of communism as validating the supremacy not just of capitalism, but (US-styled) republican democracy as well, thus signalling the end of both history and politics, ushering in an era of consensus. The post-democratic consensus confirms that the “absolute identification of politics with the management of capital is no longer the shameful hidden secret behind the ‘forms’ of democracy; it is the openly declared truth by which our governments acquire legitimacy.”⁶⁰

Rancière argues that a politics based on consensus is fundamentally flawed insofar as it depends on a transparent relationship between political and sociological communities; that is, it assumes that a political constituency demanding certain rights is understood as exactly identical to those suffering for lack of those rights. Consensus can only exist if it is accepted that each individual perfectly and transparently understands her or his social position and embraces the rights that come with those positions. This legitimacy is obtained not only by guaranteeing rights to political-sociological communities, but by ensuring that threats to the consensus are not granted a voice: “What indeed is consensus if not the presupposition of inclusion of all parties and their problems that prohibits the political subjectification of a part of those who have no part, of a count of the uncounted?”⁶¹ There is a tautology at work here, so that inclusivity is guaranteed only to those who have been given a voice. This genealogy of exclusion is similar to the one Inderpal Grewal and Jasbir Puar identify, in which a transnational same-sex-tolerant

⁶⁰ Ibid., 113.

⁶¹ Ibid., 116.

multiculturalism consolidates and celebrates diversity but mainly in order to resist those who are represented as terrorist, Muslim, Arabic, and/or Middle Eastern.⁶²

Within Rancière's alternative conceptualization, politics is established neither administratively nor consensually. It is not obtained by consensually reclaiming and administratively protecting "natural"—inalienable or divine—"rights" that have been corrupted. In fact, politics is not at all concerned with naming (originary) rights, but with naming a "wrong" that interrupts domination. Secondly, this wrong can only be named, and claimed, through the formation of a political community, a formation that is *not* coterminous with sociological or empirical experience. Anyone, that is, can participate in a political community, even if she is not directly affected by the wrongs being named. In this way, "the poor," "workers," or "women" are not really groups in a cohesive, sociocultural sense; they are only *negatively* identified as those who are not in power, names given to the position of the excluded.

All of this builds on and extends Marx's comments on the formation of the proletarian class, a political community that would be disbanded once it had achieved its aims. The neoliberal consensus depends on exclusion, and it is this exclusion, and only this exclusion, that is shared among members of a group of being called political. The members of political groups have no essentially mutual interests, values, or traditions other than *not having*, and fourthly, they make claims based on this exclusion: "In politics, subjects do not have consistent bodies; they are fluctuating performers who have their moments, places, occurrences, and the peculiar role of inventing *arguments* and

⁶² See Grewal; Puar.

demonstrations”⁶³; the construction of a “people” is “not definable in terms of ethnic properties, one that does not identify with a sociologically determinable part of a population or with the sum of the groups that go to make up this population.”⁶⁴ Political arguments are not founded on originary rights *or originary cultural values and beliefs*, but on exclusion.

“Workers” or “women” are identities that apparently hold no mystery. Anyone can tell *who* is meant. But political subjectification forces them out of such obviousness by questioning the relationship between a *who* and a *what* in the apparent redundancy of the positing of an existence. ... The familiar police logic that decides that militant proletarians *are not* workers but *déclassés*, and that militant feminists are strangers to their sex, is, all in all, justified. Any subjectification is a disidentification, removal from the naturalness of a place, the opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted, where a connection is made between having a part and having no part.⁶⁵

In this way, politics is a disruption insofar as it is *textual*. It is not a process that mediates or, more auspiciously, resolves the difference between unequal sociological/ empirical groups; politics *is* the constitutive difference between, for instance, rich and poor, and

⁶³ Rancière, 89. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 36. As some critics in Asian American studies have argued, (Asian American) identity should be based on politics, not the other way around. Lisa Lowe, for instance, emphasizes the heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity that can sustain Asian America in way that nevertheless makes “common struggle possible—a politics whose vision is not the origin but the destination.” See *Immigrant Acts*, 153.

also between poor (as unwealthy) and poor (as political constituent). Politics is the naming, and textualizing, of inequality; Rancière reminds us that there is “no division between a rational order of argument from a poetic, if not irrational, order of commentary and metaphor.”⁶⁶ Politics and poetics, community and commentary, are nearly synonymous; that is, the textual production of community is necessarily the organizing of a politics. He decries the “autonomization” of aesthetics as a discipline separate from politics.⁶⁷ As such, politics is “caught in the circuit of a literariness that undoes the relationships between the order of words and the order of bodies that determine the place of each.”⁶⁸ Politics is socioculturally constructed; it does not precede culture, and it does not use representation to advance its agenda—it is not as if representations can be moved aside in order to directly access the political. The text is the politics.

But this conceptualization of politics is awkward in some respects. On one hand, politics is a destabilizing force that disrupts the prevailing dominant order; on the other hand, it depends heavily on order and organization, lest it fails as the Scythian slaves did. In this way, the literary and textual somewhat regresses into functional representation, as it relies on coherence to succeed in effecting change. It is a conservative disruption; the political communities he envisions are constructed in order to “usurp entitlement and privilege,” a phrasing that seems only to desire some of the advantages awarded to the dominating, rather than to overthrow the system. Following this logic, when not organized in this (representational) manner, politics fails: hence the failure of the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 37.

Scythian slaves; without science, the irrational, unintelligible animal will remain so. (Recall: the postcolonial woman is irrational.) If a sustainable politics is achieved via recognition by the dominating, powerful, and wealthy, how much pandering will be required? How would disruption and pandering work together? Is “usurping privilege” the best way to describe, and desire, political disruption? Does it not sound like an attempt *not* to conceptualize justice, but instead to acquire the privilege of the masters? Is the objective to become a master in the powerful eyes of—as recognized and legitimated by—the masters? Is there nothing more to be said of slave revolts and animalistic grunts than to mourn their lack of civility?⁶⁹

I should clarify that these failures (of slaves and animals) *do not parallel* the failure of Philippine revolutions; it is better to understand these failures as antagonistic to each other, providing insight on Rancière’s formulations. The failures of Philippine nationalism challenge his politics—despite its organized resistance, and its rather explicit attempts to mimic and usurp the hegemonic, Philippine nationalism *failed*. Given this failure, it is critical to not fail to attend to the textual openings provided by the seemingly inchoate, incoherent, and unintelligible. What seems unintelligible may have more to do with *our* consensually-ordered, biopolitically maintained epistemological and ontological

⁶⁹ This conceptualization may be informed by Rancière’s reaction to the May 1968 student protests in Paris, which distanced him from his mentor, Louis Althusser, and which he discusses briefly toward the end of the text. Notwithstanding that impact, it is at least equally the case that Rancière is responding to the emergence of postmodern critiques. Though he argues for the representational basis of politics, he is quick to repudiate Jean Baudrillard’s description of simulacra, which Rancière narrates as reducing the social to a succession of images directed by media technologies. A concept of simulacra does not “oppose the real” and “liberate appearances,” leading to “egalitarian contingency” (104, 105); it only abets consensus-driven discourses that rely on the marriage of science and media to more effectively manage, and exploit, society.

limits than with the alleged sources of unintelligibility (the prostitute, slave, animal, Filipina). None of these are necessarily failures, after all.

As Jacques Derrida argued in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the distinction between animal and human has long structured—and plagued—Western philosophy. In his reading of Kant, Derrida suggests, “As an individual, the human would, like the wild beast, also be ready to go to war against its neighbors in order to affirm its unconditional freedom. There is therefore neither socialization, political constitution, nor politics itself without the principle of domestication of the wild animal. . . . Politics supposes livestock.”⁷⁰ Deconstructing the binary logic firmly separating animal from human, disorder from order, and ineffective politics from effective politics is instructive not only for my reading of Rancière, but also is helpful in further developing an understanding of the links between politics and representation. It suggests that reading is an act of complicity: deconstructive reading inhabits the logic of a text, pointing to the ways in which a text produces meaning. But close, complicit reading does not strengthen or further justify the intended, explicit meaning of a text; instead, reading in this way enables one to underscore the limits of meaning-making, producing uncertainty about the “explicit,” “transparent,” and “intended,” noticing that which is marginalized for its excess (here, the slippage between human and animal, and the constituting of politics based on the taming of the latter), and thus enables the destabilization of meaning.

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham UP, 2008), 96.

In other words, reading seeks the *différance* of a text which allows it to present itself as coherent and logical.⁷¹ It is not that animals have been excluded from possessing human reason, will, and social organization; the very naming of human reason, will, and social organization depends squarely on the exclusion of animals. The traces of the excessive and marginalized (in this case, the animal) are *not* excluded, but *constitutive*, the very conditions the possibility of political identity. A close and complicit reading not only challenges the authority of identity's presence, but destabilizes the logic of the argument, the very system that establishes a binary distinction between animal and human.⁷² The task of *différance* is thus twofold: on one hand, it points to those excesses that "have been deferred by (conscious or unconscious) calculation"⁷³; on the other hand, it must be understood as having a "relation to an impossible presence, as expenditure without reserve, as the irreparable loss of presence, the irreversible usage of energy, that is, as the death instinct, and as the entirely other relationship that apparently interrupts every economy."⁷⁴ Here is another way of thinking about the open-endedness of meaning and of the textual as it delivers an open-endedness of the political, so that slaves and

⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, "Différance," *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984), 1-28.

⁷² A point that must be emphasized in passing is that when Derrida writes that, as most translations have it, there is nothing outside the text, it would be misleading to think he reduces material reality to language. If there is no outside, there also cannot be an inside to the text, thus calling into question the inside/outside binary separating the text from the real, language from the material.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

animals are not banished for their unintelligibility. As Spivak reminds us, we must “learn to learn from the subaltern.”⁷⁵

Seeking to conceive of a politics that does not stabilize organized, nationalist representations working in the service of nationalism and global capital, it is not enough to recover the previously effaced narratives of Filipinas—my point is not to tell Connie de Vidal’s story, to fill in the details of her alleged navel. There are at least two dangers of projects focusing on sociological and empirical analyses. Firstly, following Rancière, they may only confirm and reinforce the logic linking identity and presence—to take one example, the emergence of popular multiculturalism may be used to argue that race or sexuality is no longer a problem for the US, that the presence and visibility accorded to different minority groups is proof we have achieved a socially just, non-racist society. Secondly and accordingly, such analyses are susceptible to being part of the problem, as in the corporatization of multiculturalism. In other words, sociological and empirical analyses often imply that the problem is that there is information about minority groups missing from our historical knowledge, and that delivering visibility is tantamount to ensuring equality or, worse, justice. In the polemical, and accurate, words of E. San Juan, Jr., there are too many “brown Americanists who continue to blabber about the ‘forgotten Filipino’ in the hope of being awarded a share of the obsolescent welfare-state pie.”⁷⁶

Instead, *différance* is

⁷⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005), 50.

⁷⁶ E. San Juan, Jr., “Trajectories of the Filipino Diaspora,” *From Globalization to National Liberation: Essays of Three Decades*, Quezon City: U of the Philippines P, 2008), 196.

strategic and adventurous. Strategic because no transcendent truth present outside the field of writing can govern theologically the totality of the field. Adventurous because this strategy is not a simple strategy in the sense that strategy orients tactics according to a final goal, a telos or theme of domination, a mastery and ultimate reappropriation of the development of the field. Finally, strategy without finality, what might be called blind tactics.⁷⁷

This strategy works not only to identify certain pragmatic goals, but also against itself insofar as it does not name a “final goal,” not only not afraid to keep questions open, but understanding those open questions as so many opportunities for destabilizing presence—what Spivak calls a “practical politics of the open end.”⁷⁸ Such an approach enhances an understanding of representational strategies that fix Filipina mothers purely for practical—in other words, efficacious—terms, as they are understood strictly in terms of their exchange value. The “open end” reminds us that their productive value is not limited to representational exchange value. There is an openness, a surplus, an excess, that demands attention.

5.

It is intriguing that in Spivak’s formulation, the words “practical” and “open” seem to disagree with each other; at least by standard definitions, it would seem that to keep the “end” “open” works against what might be considered practical exigencies. It is

⁷⁷ Derrida, “Différance,” 7.

⁷⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Practical Politics of the Open End,” *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 95-112.

precisely this disjuncture or crisis that makes her critical contributions significant to my project. She does not attempt to create a clean, uncontaminated, exterior position, whether feminist, Marxist, deconstruction, or postcolonial, but instead argues for the need to bring crisis to multiple critical narratives, a crisis which arrives when these narratives are made to engage with each other.⁷⁹ That is, contradiction and complicity are critical resources, rather than the foreclosure of critique. She has written about events such as colonialism, rape, and human rights discourse as “enabling violations,” whose horrors cannot be erased, but from which one might be enabled nevertheless.⁸⁰ Outright rejection is ineffective given our complicity.

In one interview, she draws on an analogy of bodily health, suggesting that on one hand, one must do the routine, mundane things such as brushing one’s teeth, feeding oneself, etc., in order to keep alive; on the other hand, at times major surgical operations are necessary.⁸¹ These constitute the combined effort of a “practical politics” and an “open end.” Both have goals of promoting health and life, albeit by drastically different means. The same might be said about deconstruction. If (the metaphysics of) presence depends less on exclusion than a deferred constitution, one is compelled to react according to its terms but also to destabilize its structure. Maintenance but also surgery, sociology but also a radical critique of sociology: the search for a major surgical procedure is imperative, and it is this second movement that concerns me in this project.

⁷⁹ Spivak, “Negotiating the Structures of Violence,” *The Post-colonial Critic*, 138-151.

⁸⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Bonding in Difference: Interview with Alfred Arteaga,” *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, eds. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1995), 19.

⁸¹ Spivak, “Practical Politics,” 105.

The goal, following Spivak, is not to replace the former with the latter, but to bring both to “productive crisis ... neither is privileged.”⁸²

The notion of crisis is especially valuable for this project, which seeks to produce its own crises. In calling for crisis, Spivak admits to a certain theoretical infidelity, given that her goals are not to confirm one theory—be it Marxism, deconstruction, or feminism—as superior to the others. In other words, even as she is compelled by theory, she is not any one’s apologist. It matters little to name the theoretical incompatibilities that structure the rapport among Marxism, deconstruction, and feminism. The strangeness of these bedfellows does not limit production, either. Instead, bringing their ideas to crisis is its own production—interventions that are epistemologically impossible if theoretical fidelity were the goal. This is also not to accuse Spivak of treating theory as a happy, consensual, tolerant interdisciplinary field. It is precisely in their *incongruities* that questions of the social—the social as that which exceeds any epistemology—and the political can be asked.

If according to Hardt and Negri, the “outside is what gave the crisis its coherence,” Spivak’s intervention enable us to think about a politics that does not depend on a revolutionary, nationalist, or dialectical “outside” that is pure and uncontaminated, but a crisis that cannot be resolved into consensus or coherence.⁸³ One of the epigraphs to this chapter is worth revisiting: as Oscar Campomanes writes, the “Filipino condition resists political narrations which do not unsettle the representative terms or categories mandated by prevailing discursive grids in U.S. nation-state bureaucracies, academia, and

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.

cultural domains.”⁸⁴ To address the Philippines forces a crisis upon who we think we are (ontology) and what we think is happening (epistemology). While the consequences of this crisis have yet to be fully articulated, it is incumbent upon us not to run away from that future, as if the present is a safe refuge for any one on the planet.

There is an ethical charge here that accompanies—and must accompany—the question of a textual politics. Recalling Rancière, the danger of investing in (self-) presence as transparent truth—in sociological knowledge as political imperative—has received sharp critique from different kinds of projects associated with poststructuralism. But if poststructuralism questions the ability for (psychic, social, cultural) structures to direct their effects and thus their significance—in short, to create a foundation for meaning—opponents have suggested such theories are ultimately depoliticizing, unable to conceptualize agency, identity, and sociality. As Judith Butler puts it, such critics claim that “the absence of [coherent, meaningful, immediate] narrative will spell a certain threat, a threat to life, and will pose the risk, if not the certainty, of a certain kind of death, the death of a subject who cannot, who can never, fully recuperate the conditions of its own emergence.”⁸⁵

Butler responds by addressing the textual and political import of the poststructural. The destabilization of meaning is not at all an apolitical gesture, but importantly contributes to negotiations of power, and she pursues this specifically through a discussion of what might be understood as an intersubjective ethics, or “an

⁸⁴ Oscar Campomanes, “The New Empire’s Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipina/o-American Postcolonialities,” *Critical Mass* 2:2 (Spring 1995), 148.

⁸⁵ Judith Butler, “Giving an Account of Oneself,” *Diacritics* (Winter 2001), 35.

ethics based on our shared, and invariable, partial blindness about ourselves.”⁸⁶ Her comments advance a critique of a subject-based politics, a politics grounded on recognition, identity, and meaning. As she suggests,

[w]e sometimes move too quickly to summarize another’s life, and think that the ethical posture is, and must be, the one that judges, that can show not only that it can and will make judgments, but that it can justify the judgments that it makes. And though I am certainly not arguing that we ought never to make judgments—they are necessary for political and personal life alike: I make them, and I will—I think that it would be important, in rethinking the terms of the culture of ethics, to remember that not all ethical relations are reducible to acts of judgment.⁸⁷

A politics guided by ethical considerations is not wholly dependent on making judgments, and making judgments may actually foreclose politics. She does not let go of judgment and meaning, but neither does she understand them to be the only means for political intervention. In other words, one must keep questions open:

By not pursuing satisfaction, and by letting the question remain open, even enduring, we let the Other live, since *life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we may try to give of it*. If letting the Other live is part of a new definition of recognition, then this version of recognition would be one that is based less on knowledge than on an apprehension of its limits.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 28. Emphasis added.

Importantly, Butler's insights on the opacity of truth point away from the real and toward the fictional and the textual:

Fictional narration requires no referent to work as narrative, and we might say that the irrecoverability of the referent, its foreclosure to us, is the very condition of possibility for an account of myself, if that account is to take narrative form. It does not destroy narrative but produces it precisely in a fictional direction.⁸⁹

The link between the textual and the political has perhaps the most purchase where the nation is concerned; specifically, according to Homi Bhabha, it employs a "double movement" as pedagogical and performative. The nation, that is, relies on a discursive "authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*."⁹⁰

These abstract values disavow the normative discourses founded along race, gender, and sexuality which shape these supposedly universal values. As Partha Chatterjee reminds us, we must historicize the production of these values in order to avoid the universal claims necessary for the concept of an abstract national tradition.⁹¹ Similar to the problems—but also possibilities—posed by the production of a heterogeneous Asian America, to imagine a unified Philippines is implausible, and such an admission *need not foreclose a politics*.⁹² According to Bhabha, the second aspect of the nation is its

⁸⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 145.

⁹¹ The kind of transformative politics I am interested in here produces history as a dissemination of narrative, and finds this surplus politically useful, not a postmodern loss of meaning. See Chuh's discussion of Chatterjee's work. See Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise*, 128.

⁹² The debates about producing an Asian American identity and community have greatly influenced this project. See Lowe; Chuh; David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001); David Palumbo-Liu,

performative process. Citizens-in-training, national-subjects-in-information, are made accountable to the pedagogical “aura”⁹³ of nationalism, but to participate in national culture, they must perform—and conform—to the nation, such that the national *tradition* is not dead, but alive and well, “as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process.”⁹⁴ National homogeneity is contingent on a dialectical anticolonial nationalism, but this performativity must be reimagined and transformed to conceptualize the Philippines as heterogeneous.

Such a reimagination does not in itself constitute a radical politics; in many ways, it only describes the very workings of global capital. But global capital and postmodern sovereignty do not exhaust the values ascribed to Filipina mothers, the Philippines, and the performativity of heterogeneity. The double movement, Bhabha notes, produces disidentificatory ambivalence and hybridity; as an abstract pedagogy for creating new national subjects, it fails to account for the “discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous

Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1999); Viet Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002); Laura Hyun Yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).

⁹³ Walter Benjamin famously describes the “auratic” as the “uniqueness of a work of art” which reifies it in an authentic time and space. Against this aura of modern art, he writes, industrial technologies close the gap between art and audience, artist and viewer: “Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. . . . At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer.” To think about the “aura” of nationalist rhetoric, as we have seen, is to invest solely in the pedagogy of an historical tradition of the nation to which we have no access, whereas Bhabha, similar to Benjamin, highlights how the performative process, in the need to make that national past contemporary, ambivalently negotiates the national aura. The performing subject is akin to the reader-turned-writer. See “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 232.

⁹⁴ Bhabha, 145.

histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference.”⁹⁵ Linking this analysis to what Raymond Williams has written about “structures of feeling,” Bhabha suggests that the differential discourses obscured by nationalist pedagogy emerge in the performative process and thus trace “residual” and “emergent” resistant knowledges and practices. Unlike the abstract formula of nationalist pedagogy, the performative “tracks the displacements and realignments that are the effects of cultural antagonisms and articulations, subverting the rationale of the hegemonic moment and relocating alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiation.”⁹⁶ It is via this ethically inspired excessive textual politics that the Filipina mother’s productivity can be marked in difference to the narrow representation of her consensually determined labor value, and through which a resistance to that narrow global heteronationalist representation may be discerned.

6.

At its most ambitious, the goal of destabilizing the epistemological links between Filipinas, nationalism, and globalization seeks a further destabilization: of the corporate, neoliberal multicultural consensus that manages globalization. In such a consensus that capitalizes on women of color workers such as Filipinas, and does so while celebrating our supposedly post-historical, post-political, post-national globality, it may be worth revising Foucault’s revision: global capital is the continuation of politics, and thus war, by other means (of production). Such a formulation would demand a critical, rather than

⁹⁵ Ibid., 148.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 178.

celebratory, return to questions of power and difference. Global capital not only does not produce a smooth, undifferentiated space; it actually capitalizes, in the most (economically and culturally) literal sense, on difference—differences not only having to do with GDPs, currency rates, military arsenals, and communications technologies, but on bodies sociopolitically constructed according to race, gender, sexuality, and class. These differences may be most visible or identifiable at the level of the nation-state, anchored especially by juridical, historical, and moral claims, but they are hardly exhausted by (inter)national strategies. Nations such as the Philippines and the US, that is, maintain and manage racial, gender, sexual, and class differences in the service of both local and global concerns. As I have suggested in this chapter, it is thus better to understand nations not as obsolete, outdated, and ultimately powerless in the face of multiple globalizations, but as reinvented (and perhaps even reinvigorated). (It is worth asking, where postcoloniality is the context, if *reinvented* is appropriate, since for much of the global south, decolonization and the advent of late capitalism were not only contemporaneous, but as I argued earlier, also mutually constitutive.)

It would seem that my discussion of Rancière contradicts the genealogy of postmodern sovereignty that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri provide in *Empire*, whose biopolitical focus I derive much from. Hardt and Negri argue that a certain multitudinal ontology emerged to mark the emergence of modernity. For Hardt and Negri, this ontology was secular and rational, but most importantly, immanent, rather than analogical. It is the distinction between understanding oneself in a Hegelian relation to others or an Other (such as god—to be “in His image,” for example), which is mediated

and dialectical, and understanding oneself as *immediate* and self-defining, that enables the challenge to feudal subservience whether to lord, king, or priest. Modernity for them has a progressive, even radical, origin, only to be usurped by a new form of sovereignty. The new form of sovereignty could not take a purely transcendental form—that is, it could no longer simply assert its will over its subjects, but nonetheless re-established its authority through the very immanent forms that functioned toward liberation. One may consider recent attempts to police and profit on the Internet as a recent example of how authority is belated to the scene: individuals and groups discover new forms of identity, community, and expression by exploiting the new technology (developed for military purposes, originally), only to be re-anchored to an ordered, profitable, disciplining social. Sovereignty is thus a reaction to, and derivative of, liberation.

In contrast, Rancière's narrative of politics consists in the naming of wrong. Rancière's move allows him to claim that politics is not about re-establishing natural or innate (or god-given) rights that have been abused or taken away. Politics is not about establishing origins; that is, origins do not authenticate freedom, which would seem to oppose the originary claims that Hardt and Negri make about the liberatory multitude. Genealogical differences aside—leave them to the critics to find these competing texts fully incompatible based on these details, to resolve the crisis whose openings are more valuable to me; I am more interested in how these texts enable a rigorous discussion on, engagement with, and intervention into contemporary forms of exploitation—Hardt and Negri and Rancière are each seeking to transform the consensual governmentality that for

the former inscribes but does not circumscribe the multitude and for the latter confuses administrative, bureaucratic debate with political engagement.

There is a more substantive difference, though, in how each conceptualizes sovereignty. For Hardt and Negri, postmodern sovereignty is inclusive, since it does not rely on the modern binary of inside/outside—akin to my discussion of complicity. Instead, biopower encompasses the totality, without totalizing it. We are all caught within the web or network of power, since we are all transmitting it through our social relations—since the social, political, and economic are interconnected, perhaps interproductive. Rancière, on the other hand, suggests that the contemporary consensus nevertheless deals in inclusive/exclusive terms. It is precisely the exclusion of othered positions that constitutes any attempt to make political claims. Without trying to neatly resolve these competing narratives, I do not find them wholly incompatible. Hardt and Negri move too quickly in asserting the erasure of boundedness, of place, of position, and of our imagined relations—of nationalism. While the biopolitical helps us understand the fluidity of power, this chapter has suggested that nationalism remains relevant in this era—it is not simply a handmaiden to global empire, and neither is it riding on its coattails. The Philippine government is actively contributing to global capital. Hence the significance of Rancière's claims about the maintenance of exclusion—an important one, too, since it enables the naming and textualization of the political. The somewhat

perplexing problematic of inclusion *and* exclusion are perhaps the disavowed, “enfolded borders” of US imperialism in which Allan Isaac situates Filipina/o America.⁹⁷

Lee Edelman offers the first of what I consider to be two very provocative discussions about our consensual, biopolitical globality.⁹⁸ Edelman focuses on the “reproductive futurism” that subtends consensual politics, arguing that the various angles and positions of any issue—taxes, gay marriage, war, immigration, etc.—organize around the figure of the Child, a figure that is universalized even as it is implicitly and often explicitly white and middle-class. The Child, as symbol of progress and future, is always positioned within a racialized, classed heteronormativity. The neoliberal consensus employs this Child—“political” fights are always about which side believes it can protect and provide for this Child better, whether by: allowing it to grow up in a diverse society; protecting the hard-earned wealth of legally sanctioned work; empowering it with values of freedom and tolerance; empowering it with values of autonomy and competitiveness; ensuring it respects laws of nature and/or god; and so and so forth.

Rather than attempt to improve upon this neoliberal global-national hetero-consensus, Edelman attempts to articulate a “queer oppositionality that would oppose itself to the structural determinants of politics as such, which is also to say, that would oppose itself to the logic of opposition.”⁹⁹ Edelman’s work points to the fundamental link between representation and politics, which helps contest the dubious and artificial

⁹⁷ Allan Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006).

⁹⁸ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

attempts to reify the divide between theory and practice: “queer insists that politics is always a politics of the signifier ... to shore up a reality always unmoored by signification and lacking any guarantee.”¹⁰⁰ “Queer,” here, signifies not only the relationship between politics and representation, but the need to produce this critique as also antagonistic to the heteronormative, since “heterosexuality [is] the assurance of meaning itself.”¹⁰¹ Figuring in the work of queer of color and queer diasporic critique, it is equally important to engage with question of race, racialization, and racism when trying to produce queer critique.¹⁰² In doing so, one approaches a critique of the consensus politics that stabilize the position of Filipina mothers in the global economy, who work on behalf of that Child, whose idealized maternal skills are preferred precisely for that neoliberal Child, whose future liberals, conservatives, radicals, corporations, and nationalists fight to lead.

Another provocative concept is, as described earlier in my discussion of Dylan Rodriguez’s work, genocidal common sense.¹⁰³ Drawing from Antonio Gramsci’s discussion about “common sense,” Rodriguez writes compellingly and polemically about a “Filipino American common sense” that is not marked by *passive* ignorance about the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 127.

¹⁰² Among the outpouring of critiques that have responded to Edelman’s polemic, José Esteban Muñoz and others have argued that such a refusal of politics only reproduces an idealized and abstracted position that privileges a white, gay, male position. The call to think about race is important. But rather than using race to return to a “politics of the future,” it is worth pondering if, instead, Edelman’s argument challenges racial politics similarly, so that the goal cannot (and should not) be inclusion in a liberal multiculturalist capitalism that trades under the name of democracy. I’m not accusing Muñoz of seeking such a goal, but seeking to employ Edelman’s argument within mine own. See “Cruising the Toilet: LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity,” *GLQ* 13:2-3 (2007), 353-367.

¹⁰³ See Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse*.

role of white supremacy and genocide in the history of Filipina/o raciality, but a willful and strategic consent with the continued prerogatives of white supremacy in its current neoliberal multicultural form. For Rodriguez, this common sense refers to an ideological consistency promoting a normative Filipina/o American identity and community that disavows US imperialism in favor of upward economic mobility and apolitical cultural pride and visibility. In doing so, it advocates for the genocidal imperatives of US nationalism and imperialism, a genealogy that transformed the Philippines throughout the course of the twentieth century, a continuity between US imperialism, Philippine nationalism, and global capitalism. This common sense helps stabilize the overseas employment of Filipina mothers.

Most of the critics I have discussed in this chapter are significant insofar as they seek not only to name, identify, and detail the workings of contemporary, consensual power, but for addressing and conceptualizing the underside to this consensus. For Hardt and Negri, the multitude is originary; for Spivak, the crisis of knowledge and practice delivers an enabling violence; for Edelman, resistance lies in the possibilities of queer critique; for Shimizu, one must reveal the excesses of racialized hypersexuality; for Tadiar, the excesses of capital disrupt its authority; for Dylan Rodriguez, the analytics of raciality, thus far disavowed, can generate critique. Among these, Rodriguez is the most explicit in addressing the question of agency and allows me to refine my conceptualization of it in this project. The other critics generally avoid the question of agency, at least explicitly, and this likely has to do with the strong critique of agency after psychoanalysis and poststructuralism. It is often a moot point these days, and for many

good reasons. But to a certain degree, Rodriguez's conceptualization of common sense depends precisely on the intentionality of those participating in and reproducing the disavowal of genocidal raciality. For him, it is not that Filipina/o Americans and Filipina/o nationalists fail to address questions of power—they are not passive receptacles of knowledge or ignorant objects of multiculturalism—they are *actively, intentionally, willfully* forgetting, in order to gain the benefits of liberal multiculturalism. Doing so helps rebuke narratives of victimhood that render Filipina/os as lacking agency in the production of global neoliberal multiculturalism. Filipina/os are not guided by false consciousness, not puppets of US imperialism, but active contributors and producers within global capital.

But my discussion of complicity extends beyond intent. It is uncertain whether the focus on intention is necessary, especially since it, alongside the critique of agency, has been called into question. Given Foucauldian narratives of power as a network or system, Deleuzian narratives of power and desire (deterritorialization and reterritorialization), culpability is hard to discern. For instance, it is not as if George Bush has really been *the* source of any power; he is better understood as a conduit for the transmitting of imperialist heteronormative aims whose source cannot easily be traced. (In other words, replacing him with a shrewd, eloquent politician—Barack Obama?—may fall well short of real transformation. Without denying the affective jubilation following Obama's electoral victory, Slavoj Žižek warns that he may “turn out to be a ‘Bush with a human face,’” much like every Philippine president since Marcos has functioned as Marcos-

without-the-visceral, widespread brutality, but no less corrupt.¹⁰⁴) Recognizing the reach of the biopolitical and thus our shared, if uneven, complicity is crucial; in other words, “[o]ur work cannot succeed if we always have a scapegoat.”¹⁰⁵ This refusal to blame any one person or group is both a blessing and a curse. It is a curse since there is no one to blame, which also means that we are all to blame—we are all conduits of power.

This is the very core of biopoliticality, no? It is not as if each of us has equal access to that dissemination of power (Bush and Obama are surely at the top), but to varying degrees, it courses through each of our veins or Foucauldian capillaries. What makes this a blessing is that instead of blaming the king or dictator or president for oppressing us passive victims, we can exercise a certain amount of “agency” in redirecting that power to radical possibilities: the immanence of Hardt and Negri’s multitude. This narrative of power, that is, allows us to conceive of our agency, to affirm, question, or reject power. But this agency is not tantamount to intention; it is not a familiar, conscious agency.¹⁰⁶ Radical possibility may not take the form of willed action—nor should we want it to, since such a theorization returns us to a coherent, autonomous, rational individual, the very western identity that has waged neoliberal genocide around the world. Radical agency may take forms not yet recognizable, legible,

¹⁰⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (New York: Verso, 2009), 107. For another critique of Barack Obama, see Roderick Ferguson, “An American Studies Meant for Interruption,” *American Quarterly* 62:2 (June 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Spivak, “History,” *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999), 309.

¹⁰⁶ Judith Butler writes that the “force of repetition in language may be the paradoxical condition by which a certain agency—not linked to a fiction of the ego as master of circumstance—is derived from the *impossibility* of choice.” Emphases added to first part. See *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 124.

or intelligible within the epistemologies currently available to us.

7.

In August 2009, nearing the end of her presidency, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo signed into law the “Magna Carta of Women,” which establishes further protection and empowerment of Filipinas’ rights.¹⁰⁷ For instance, it seeks to achieve perfect numerical equality according to gender in the police force, legal services, and the “third [local] tier” of government—all so that they may better contribute to the “political, economic, social and cultural development of the nation.” In some parts, it is a very robust and potentially transformative text: echoing the language of much postcolonial feminism, it affirms that “women are active agents of development and not just passive recipients of development assistance,” even seeking to interrogate “the validity of the gender roles ... ascribed to women and men.” Even more intriguing is its redefining of “gender mainstreaming,” which has a genealogy within human rights and feminist discourses, as a

strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

This provision would seem to recognize the essential role that gender constructions plays in the production of nation and economy. Indeed, some of its wording has been

¹⁰⁷ The full text of the Magna Carta of Women may be viewed at http://www.congress.gov.ph/download/billtext_14/hbt04273.pdf. Accessed May 25, 2010.

questioned by religious authorities who fear the effects of women's independence on the family.

But the two texts it cites as predecessors—CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) and the Magna Carta—are instructive of the bill's workings. CEDAW was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and, while containing provisions that have thus far scared the US from ratifying it, also must be situated within the moment of global capitalism, when flexible industries, export processing zones, and maquiladoras—primarily employing women of color—have been made possible by other international bodies such as the IMF, World Bank, and NAFTA. In the face of this exploitation, CEDAW comes across as legal niceties that seeks to bureaucratically administer women under the auspices of global capital, and it has been examined as such by feminist critics.¹⁰⁸ One may ask to what extent CEDAW is not just a passive bystander in the face of globally feminized labor, but a complicit actor in the global production and management of women's labor.

As for the Magna Carta, the 1215 document is regarded by most historians as the beginning of the resistance to monarchical authority—the emergence of legislated democratic reform that would lead to the modern epoch. But it may well be that the document is less a liberatory weapon in the fight against feudal sovereignty than the transition to a modern form of sovereignty—a sovereignty that seeks to manage

¹⁰⁸ See Penelope Andrews, "Women's Human Rights and the Conversation Across Cultures," *Albany Law Review* 67 (2003), 609-617; Anne Bayefsky, "CEDAW: Threat to, or Enhancement of, Human Rights," *American Society of International Law Proceedings* 94 (2000), 197-199; Kate Nash, "Human Rights for Women: An Argument for 'Deconstructive Equality,'" *Economy and Society* 31 (2002), 414-433.

individual, society, nation, and economy via the biopolitical.¹⁰⁹ The Magna Carta protected subjects only insofar as the throne itself, faced with the threat of revolt, would be protected; the king accedes to society's demands only to save his ass—sovereignty reinvented. The same might be said for CEDAW and, in the Philippines, the Magna Carta of Women: as Filipina labor is ever-intensively exported, it is worth questioning just what is being protected in such documents. “[W]hat interests me is that the protection of woman (today, the “third-world woman”) becomes a signifier for the establishment of a *good* society (now a good planet) which must, at such inaugurative moments, transgress mere legality, or equity of legal policy.”¹¹⁰ Even a cursory survey of recent Philippine history—with two female presidents, no less—would further strengthen such skepticism. The state of exception, which I discuss in the conclusion, that underwrites the global employment of Filipina mothers as a means to rescue the nation in a perpetual state of emergency—what happens not when the revolution never finishes, but when we refuse to let go of that fanciful and destructive heteronationalist fantasy—confirms our suspicions.

Connie de Vidal and her two navels, when read not merely as symptoms of the failure of Philippine nationalism, deliver other possibilities not circumscribed or even policeable by genocidal, imperialist, and heteronationalist global capitalism. Her resistance, I should emphasize, is neither libidinal nor individualist, not in the form of abstracted, universal desire, and neither is it conditioned by her self-conscious agency. It

¹⁰⁹ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001). Surprising, then, that in the third installment of their trilogy, Hardt and Negri describe multitudinal resistance as a “new Magna Carta.” See *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

¹¹⁰ Spivak, “History,” 288.

is (on) her body as a material text. Even if Joaquin's story never resolves the alleged deformity/monstrosity/disability, it must not be ignored; critical readers are compelled are compelled to employ it subversively, to *make something (excessive)* of it. A belly button surplus, and thus a maternal (re)productive excess. It is precisely in her bodily aberration that a resistance to global heteronationalism is born; no wonder the story's attempts to disengage from Connie. The second navel signifies the wound of another "origin," another site of (re)production, which is not coterminous with masculinized nationalism and its alliance with heteronormative globalization, an "origin" that is not an origin, for which there is no dictionary entry. It is only in this way that the supposed complicity between Connie and her mother—Teixeira finally dismisses them as equally irrational and conspiring to drive men mad—can be understood. Neither Connie nor her mother are dupes and victims of failed masculinity; neither are they transparent heroes of resistance. But Connie, with her two navels, is mother to something else, some formation, some meaning that cannot be articulated in a story about Philippine nationalism, even if it also cannot be fully evacuated. Ultimately, neither Joaquin, nor Connie's mother, nor Paco and Pepe can evacuate Connie from the story. Her resistance is (not) (il)legible.

Given Connie's maternal disidentification with Filipina/os who can only mourn the failure of masculinist nationalism, her mothering insists on keeping questions open and alive, producing crises of knowledge, history, and power, and if unable to represent justice, she might nevertheless point in its direction—veering off the path of heteronationalist globalization, a persistent, insolent, and catachrestic detour within empire. Kandice Chuh asserts that justice emerges "as an orientation, as a commitment to

an indefatigable and illimitable interrogation of myriad relations of power.”¹¹¹ Among our tasks as critics, educators, and activists is “to learn to learn from the subaltern,” a challenge that has not yet been realized, hence the opacity of resistance. It is thus fitting that Connie only points the way, rather than providing a transparent articulation of the space of justice and freedom. We must follow her, even as we remain vigilant of the biopolitical, pursuing us from behind, belatedly catching us on our heels. As Neferti Tadiar writes, “those very acts of freedom might at a later moment result in the installation of a new regime of subjection.”¹¹² Such concerns produce the crises that textualize the Filipina in her global-national employment.

¹¹¹ Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise*, 150.

¹¹² Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*, 212.

Chapter Two.

Letting the Cat(achresis) Out of the Bag: Transnational Filipina Motherhood

For are we not searching for resemblance? And when we try to determine *the dominant* metaphor of a group which interests us because of its capacity to gather things together, then what else should we expect but the metaphor of domination augmented by that power of dissimulation which allows it to escape domination in its turn, what else but God or the Sun?

–Derrida

It is the disenfranchised who teaches us most often by saying: I do not recognize myself in the object of your benevolence. I do not recognize my share in your naming. Although the vocabulary is not that of high theory, she tells us that if we *care* to hear (without identifying our onto/epistemological subjectivity with *her* anxiety for the subjectship of ethics and the agency of the political) that she is not the literal referent for our frenzied naming of woman in the scramble for legitimacy in the house of theory. She reminds us that the name of ‘woman,’ however political, is, like any other name, a catachresis.

–Spivak

Nevertheless.

–Rizalina, *Dream Jungle*

1.

It is usually the case that when one of your leading male actors, already with a reputation for being surly and uncooperative, arrives overweight, and the other one has a heart attack on the set, things cannot get any worse. For Francis Ford Coppola on the set of *Apocalypse Now*, though, the particulars of Marlon Brando's and Martin Sheen's respective struggles were only part of a much larger chaos literally surrounding the late-seventies film production. Relying on the Philippine military for use of their aircraft, Coppola and the production were delayed whenever the military needed the jets to suppress rebel activity nearby. Surely, negotiating with the Marcos regime had both its benefits and drawbacks. Ferdinand Marcos's second, and last, term expired in 1972, but rather than step down, Marcos imposed martial law. He cited outstanding political turmoil, which he blamed on alleged communist plots—who while politically active and visible were also only part of an even broader, more-widespread challenge consisting of various, not entirely unified labor and student groups—as alibis for imposing curfews, controlling the media, and militarizing the nation. It would last for nearly a decade. Coppola's ego would have to contend with an ego even more audacious.

Yet the seventies is also notable for the intense nation-building push spurred by Marcos—a continuity between presidency and martial law. Vicente Rafael has shown how early in the presidency the Marcoses constructed a nationalist historiography driven by patronage, utilizing fanfare and pageantry to win popular appeal.¹ Even as Ferdinand and his wife Imelda robbed the nation's coffers, they undertook projects to superficially

¹ Vicente Rafael, "Patronage, Pornography, and Youth: Ideology and Spectatorship during the Early Marcos Years," *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), 122-161.

“advance” the nation’s development. Development projects functioned as visible evidence of their successful leadership, but much of this development relied on foreign financing. Building waterfront museums, promoting overseas tourism and corporate investment, and encouraging overseas work, the path to national prosperity and stability was paved with the turf of global investment. The importance of public relations, from winning public favor to securing global financing, cannot be overstated. The filming of *Apocalypse Now* can be regarded as one such initiative. Others included hosting the Miss Universe pageant in 1974 and staging the “Thrilla in Manila” boxing match in 1975, both of which were broadcast to television audiences globally.

Also included in this public relations racket was the highly controversial publicity surrounding the Tasaday, a rural community in the Mindanao region. Early in the decade, their “discovery” received worldwide attention after claims circulated that they were a primitive tribe which had never before had contact with modern societies. That attention surpassed anthropology, spilling over into celebrity and renown: Charles Lindbergh visited, and the Tasaday also became a symbol for environmentalist and human rights groups, as deforestation threatened them. After several years, reports emerged suggesting it was an elaborate, publicity-driven hoax: the Tasaday were a rural group, to be sure, but of whom many surrounding, “contemporary” communities were well-aware. The controversy continues today, with experts on multiple sides.² Either way, events such as beauty contests, heavyweight boxing championships, the discovery of a lost tribe, and the filming of a Hollywood project delivered attention to the nation while providing distractions from the severe abuses Marcos exercised as a despot.

² For a comprehensive analysis of the controversy, see Robin Hemley, *Invented Eden: The Elusive, Disputed History of the Tasaday* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2007).

In this way, the crisis taking place on the film set is only part of a much broader text, whose expanse exceeds even the decade. The film cites its critical force as deriving from the texts of colonial violence—among others, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and the Vietnam war. The Philippines is perhaps appropriately decentered, as the film asks to overlook the clothing, flags, and other markers that reveal the Philippine setting, and the archipelago only functions to deliver the authenticity of Vietnam from a safer, cheaper distance. (Indeed, Coppola originally intended to film in Vietnam *while* the war continued, but could not secure insurance for the project.) All the while, it disavows its complicity as an Orientalist film production exploiting the Philippines for its supposedly Vietnam-like landscape, climate, people, and cost-effectiveness (presuming an Orientalist viewing audience). Within the logic of the collaboration between nationalism and globalization that conditions the production of *Apocalypse Now*, though, this moment bears all the markings of a celebratory moment: an emergent postcolonial nation using its resources to attract publicity and financing—and essentially starring in one of the biggest Hollywood films ever, no less. The Philippine jungle is a dream come true for filmmakers, anthropologists, and nationalists alike—the dreams of a global neoliberal multicultural corporate consensus that can even applaud itself for the self-critical posturing of the arguably anti-war, anti-imperialist sentiment in the film.

Both the Tasaday and *Apocalypse Now* are fictionally reimagined in Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dream Jungle*. With Hagedorn’s penchant for tongue-in-cheek humor, the Tasaday are renamed the Taobo—potentially a mistranslation of a Tagalog response to who they are: “Tao, po” (“People, sir/ma’am”), hinting at their falsified, mistranslated

creation.³ The organization invested in protecting them is the Philippine Indigenous Minority Peoples Foundation, shortened into the acronym PIMPF. *Apocalypse Now* is renamed *Napalm Sunset*. The novel is bifurcated historically, according to these events: the first half is set in the early seventies and focuses on the Taobo's discovery, while the second half focuses on the film production at the end of the decade. Nevertheless (notably, a word-concept that is perhaps the most significant to the text; more on this later), there are direct and indirect connections between the two events. Rizalina Cayabyab, for instance, works as a servant in the household of Zamora Lopez de Legazpi, the man overseeing PIMPF, but runs away and re-emerges as Lina, a catering employee on the film set who cares for her infant and enters into a sexual relationship with one of the white actors.

By the end of the novel, she is in the US, living in the apartment of the actor, working, and having left her infant in the care of an older woman in the Philippines. It is what her dreams told her to do. But what exactly is the status of those dreams? Where are they coming from, what are they telling her, and how does she respond to them? Are they

³ Mistranslation has continuously plagued the encounter between natives and foreigners. When Antonio Pigafetta arrived with the Magellan-Elcano expedition in the spring of 1521, he recorded lists of vocabulary. As Theodore Cachey has shown, it was rife with errors, among them “ebarasai,” which Pigafetta recorded as “when they sneeze, they say...” as if it the western custom of wishing someone health after the sneeze was universal. It wasn't, it was a response to the plague. Pigafetta did not seem to realize this. Cachey notes that “ebarasai” more likely simply means “to sneeze.” There was no need to treat sneezing as anything other than an involuntary reflex, since the plague did not reach Southeast Asia. It's worth noting in passing that we have also “mistranslated” the circumnavigation itself, insofar as Magellan, who receives all the credit for it, did not actually complete the journey. He was slain by Lapu-Lapu, a chieftain in the present-day Cebu region of the Philippines. See Antonio Pigafetta, *First Voyage Around the World: An Account of Magellan's Expedition*, ed. Theodore Cachey (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2007), 175. Also see Vicente Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993).

coterminous with other jungle dreams? It is possible to argue that her dreams are specifically aligned with the western feminism that is exhibited by Janet Pierce, the wife of Tony the director? (Janet is the fictional counterpart of Francis Ford Coppola, whose wife, Eleanor, joins him on the set with their children, while she records her experiences there both in journal and filmic form; her diary, *Notes*, would be published the same years as the film's release, and her footage would be edited into a documentary of the production.) Does Janet's/Ellie's tension between domestic, familial identity and career ambitions inform Lina's actions? More to the point, in what ways do Lina's actions perform a *catachresis* of Janet's/Ellie's problematic desires?

In "White Mythology," Jacques Derrida questions the relationship between metaphor and philosophy, suggesting that the pursuit of knowledge cannot take place without the use of metaphorical—that is, indirect, mediating—language. Philosophy does not rely on metaphor to better explain (or as more often argued, obstruct) the truths it discovers, as if there can be non-metaphorical philosophical discourse. "Are not all metaphors strictly speaking, concepts, and is there any *sense* in opposing them?"⁴ Taking metaphors as primary—not relegating them as secondary to true meaning, but fundamentally producing meaning—one notices the catachresis that metaphor performs on the concepts and ideas for which it is only employed to elucidate. That which is supposed *only* to supplement is constitutive. (Can the same be said of overseas Filipinas, whose supplementing of global capital can be re-interpreted as foundational?) Catachresis means that the use of metaphor "does not go outside the language, does not create new signs, does not enrich the code; yet it transforms its functioning: it produces, with the

⁴ Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," trans. F.C.T. Moore, *New Literary History*, 6:1 (1974), 66.

same material, new rules of exchange, new meanings.”⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak develops these concerns in thinking specifically about postcoloniality. “[T]he *supposedly* authoritative [narratives] of the production of which was written elsewhere, in the social formations of Western Europe... are being reclaimed, indeed claimed, as concept-metaphors for which no historically adequate referent may be advanced from postcolonial space, yet that does not make the claims less important. A concept-metaphor without an adequate referent is a catachresis.”⁶ There is a possibility opened up within the postcolonial moment that is not simply derivative, parasitic, and imitative of the west, but which is productive and transformative of the concepts themselves. When mimicry fails, as it must, “failure” marks alternative possibilities.

This alternative productivity demands a distinction between nationalism and postcoloniality, such that the two are not coterminous, and more so, may be antagonistic. In other words, there may be emergent alternatives within the postcolonial that are compromised and suppressed by anticolonial nationalism. In the previous chapter, I suggested that some critics seek a kind of catachresis within nationalist discourse, such that Philippine nationalism need not be responsible to all the abuses of nationalism coming from western sites; I disagreed with that position, given the rather disturbing aspects of Philippine nationalisms, philosophically and empirically. But that disagreement does not deny the possibility for catachrestic appropriation. In my assessment, though, nationalism has been a false catachresis since it hardly wrests meaning away from its normative authority: it only wants to have access to that authority.

⁵ Ibid., 59.

⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Marginality in the Teaching Machine,” *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 60.

But other catachreses can indeed provide alternatives. Within the neoliberal consensus of global capitalism and various nationalisms—“a coma despots call peace,” Toni Morrison writes—there are alternatives that can be discovered precisely by understanding the fundamentally surplus productivity of bodies laboring for and under global capital.⁷ Recognizing this catachrestic excess can help destabilize the empiricist and sociological representations of Filipinas, refuting narratives that suggest their lives are wholly exhausted and explainable by racialized, gendered, national, and economic logics—logics that depend precisely on the disavowal of postcolonial catachreses.

This chapter looks into multiple catachreses that emerge from Philippine history and that are consolidated but also transformed once more (but without finality) in *Dream Jungle*. My argument leads toward a reading of Lina’s catachresis that departs from the alleged (neo-)liberatory potential of the consensual politics of nationalism, globalization, and feminism. Where the novel’s (fictionalized) inclusion of excerpts from Janet Pierce’s diary allude to this problematic, my argument compels me also to read Eleanor Coppola’s diary, where questions of who she is and who she wants to be are spelled out much more explicitly than her fictional counterpart. In her quest to claim a role in the public sphere and measure herself against her overachieving husband, Ellie articulates her freedom within the terms of imperialism. It is only in the Philippines, after all, that these ambitions emerge for her.

Lina, though, refuses to make her liberation contingent on such an equation. Yet neither does she invest in a nationalist feminism organized according to a kind of “native” performance; not only does she not invest in it, she actively resists it. Thus, it is

⁷ Toni Morrison, “Peril,” in *Burn This Book*, ed. Morrison (New York: Harper, 2009), 1.

worth asking whether the dreams of the text's main character, Rizalina Cayabyab, aligns herself with the consensual dreams that constitute the jungle even as they emerge from it, and to consider more seriously the substance of her position so that it is not reduced to dominant political strategies, and so that the significance of such catachrestic maneuvering within the scope of Philippine culture and history is grasped.

2.

In assembling an array of texts that includes excerpts from Antonio Pigafetta's diary entries of the Magellan-Elcano circumnavigation that passed through the Philippines and President William McKinley's oft-cited diary entry seeking divine inspiration to establish colonial governance of the Philippines, *Dream Jungle* weaves through Philippine history not with reckless abandon, but catachrestically.⁸ After a brief passage from Pigafetta's diary describing the "newly discovered" natives in present-day Cebu, the next chapter correspondingly describes Zamora Lopez de Legazpi's first encounter with the "newly discovered" Taobo. The juxtaposition creates a signifying inheritance that works doubly. On one hand, it suggests that Legazpi will not only discover, but conquer, the Taobo, a text that also bears on the north's longstanding militarization of the Muslim-dominant region of Mindanao. But on the other hand, it also

⁸ Here is McKinley in 1903, once more: "When I next realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps I confess I did not know what to do with them. . . And one night late it came to me this way. . . 1) That we could not give them back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable; 2) that we could not turn them over to France and Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable; 3) that we not leave them to themselves—they are unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's wars; and 4) that 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 forwhom Christ also died."

suggests a certain falsification in Magellan's alleged discovery: both discoveries are possibly false. The issue here is not about claiming empirical evidence of prior contact between natives and foreigners, but about the possessive and self-aggrandizing claims that accompany discovery, which is a concept, rather than a truth. In this way—the first text working on the second, and vice versa—catachrestic transformation is not reducible to temporality or progress. If such categories are deemed necessary, the “present” can work on the “past” just as well as the “past” can work on the “present.”

As mentioned, the first part concentrates on activities in the Legazpi estate in the early 1970s, located in Manila, as its owner administers to the lost tribe living in the southernmost part of the archipelago. The second part focuses on the late 1970s film production, most of which takes place not far from where the Taobo live, now militarized. The second half does return, now and then, to the questions raised by the Taobo discovery, and the epilogue focuses on Legazpi's funeral and concludes with his ghost looking in on his daughter and ex-wife in New York, curious about his legacy and whether his controversial achievements will be remembered. Beyond the useful but vague notion that both events dream up a jungle—that the jungle functions as a palimpsest that can be exploited for multiple projects overlapping imperialism, science, capitalism, nationalism, cultural production, and politics—what is perhaps most significant is what it suggests about the martial law nationalism of the 1970s. The signifying chain links Legazpi's discovery to Spanish colonialism, and then links Marcos's global capitalized nationalism to Legazpi's discovery. The authority Marcos exercised bore the characteristics of imperialism—the conquering of the Taobo recasts the conquering of the Philippines not only by foreign imperialists, but by a much more recent domestic variant.

Above all, though, Lina herself enfigures the most important catachresis of the text. It is signified in her very name: she prefers to be identified as Lina rather than her birthname, Rizalina, which takes on the aura of the nationalist hero José Rizal. In this way, the negotiation of her identity does not derive from any essentially non-Western, autochthonous knowledge, a rebuke of anticolonial and cultural nationalisms; she also stands in contrast to the masculinist interpretation of such nationalisms. She was born in Mindanao in one of the southernmost lands of the archipelago and in proximity to the Taobo, and she survives a typhoon that destroys the ship she, her father, and her two brothers were aboard, headed north for Manila, where her mother worked as a servant in Legazpi's mansion. The typhoon kills everyone except for her. She despised her father and brothers for numerous reasons, especially her dismay that her brothers did nothing to stop their father's sexual abuse of her, so this space-clearing gesture, a kind of *deus ex machina* that arrives at the novel's beginning, not only does not bother her too much, it also marks her as special, since she is the only survivor.

She exhibits an intellectual curiosity, sneaking into Legazpi's library to read from Pigafetta's diary. Lina's growth is marked also by a threatening sexuality that cannot be separated from her intellectual development. More precisely, the threat of sexual violence on her body results in the production of knowledge. This link contests any interpretations of Lina as a victim of patriarchy and misogyny. It is not as if she escapes abuse—her father molests her, Zamora nearly molests her, and she is nearly raped by two other men. Yet in each case, there is something enabled, namely, the possibility of resistance. When her father molests her, for instance, "I stared at the torn calendar on the wall, wondered when he would stop. Questions rang in my head. *What is time? Who invented the*

*calendar? What is God?*⁹ At first, it seems to suggest that sexual violence is marked by its temporality, since she looks to a calendar to consider the nature of time. But the sexual act raises philosophical questions that, while seemingly universal, have significance for thinking through the conquest of the Philippines. Lina blurs the borders separating the material from the philosophical. Her inquiries raise questions pertinent to colonial discourse—concerns about temporality and historicity, its ordering on the calendrical grid, as well as the role of religion in conquest, sexually and otherwise.

It would be wrong to accuse the novel of not dramatizing the moment more traumatically since, on one hand, *Dream Jungle* thwarts realism at every turn, even without conjuring entirely magical or fantastical images. (Through Legazpi's eyes, the jungle is described in romanticized language—"God's trees, so ancient and huge they obscured sky and sun"—only to turn against that rhetoric: "Such clichés he felt, such reverence and awe."¹⁰) On the other hand, what is not traumatic if not the colonial encounter? While one should be careful not to repeat the conflation of "virginal landscapes" with sexual domination that has been part of masculinist colonial as well as anticolonial discourses, Lina is keen to draw upon the obscured links between the private world of familial, incestuous relations with the public world of conquest, giving her a certain sensitivity to the biopolitical.¹¹

In one particularly threatening scene, Legazpi lectures her at length about the Spanish artist Goya, which only seems like a put-on to be alone with her. But when he

⁹ Jessica Hagedorn, *Dream Jungle* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹ Neferti Tadiar's scholarship, to which this project is deeply indebted, takes similar, self-conscious risks in claiming neocolonial labor as both prostitution and slavery, literally and not metaphorically.

finishes, he reminds her that “I’ve lived up to my promise, haven’t I? Didn’t touch you, didn’t hurt you. You can stop trembling now. The lesson is over.”¹² What is this lesson? That he is not just an evil man, that there is a redemptive humanity behind his show of force? That he can always lord his authority over her, that the threat will always be there, even if it does not manifest? It is ambiguous, but it is significant that education—about art, as a “lesson”—takes place in a threatening moment, at the scene of potential sexual violence. Sex, even in the most potentially destructive moments, enables epistemological negotiations with power, identity, and history. Before she runs away from her mother and Legazpi, Lina visits him in his office, without letting him know of her plans, and touches his face intimately. “Hot tears trickled down over her fist. Did he love her the way Chito did? This longing she felt, this aching, inexplicable confusion whenever Mister Zamora was near—was it love?”¹³ It is Lina who acts first in this scene, on the verge of leaving the mansion, as she ponders love. Within these fearsome moments, Lina recasts them and is able to produce a surplus meaning that enables her alternative maturity to take form.

But what is the substance of this alternative? Of what does it consist? Given Lina’s disdain for and resistance to both her mother’s persistent maternal policing and Legazpi’s paternalist and nationalist civilizing mission, one possible source of inspiration for her may reside in the character of Janet Pierce, wife of the director. An extended detour through first her diary and then that of Eleanor Coppola, Pierce’s real-life counterpart, allows us to understand Lina’s position with regard to this potential feminist resistance. Though the novel does not depict any interaction between Janet and Lina, the former may serve, at least for readers, as a model of women’s liberation for the latter.

¹² Ibid., 49.

¹³ Ibid., 117.

Pierce does not only write in her diary, she also records footage for a documentary of the film production. Her actions require a proactive and even aggressive pursuit of what others see as, quite simply, a woman getting in the way. When she proposes the project to Tony, she interprets his response as “What the hell, Jan. If it makes you happy,” and the crew sees it no different: “Janet was being indulged—her documentary nothing more than a glorified home movie.”¹⁴ She cynically refers to “‘my’ documentary,”¹⁵ questioning to what extent it is hers, and to what extent it is not simply a “home movie.” Her ambition to overcome this sexism and enter the professional ranks is consonant with the second-wave feminism of the postwar US and Europe that empowered women to further interrogate the private/public binaries consigning them to the domestic sphere.

But as third-wave feminist critiques of the second-wave have shown, “women’s liberation” often depended on racialized and even imperialist notions, and Janet’s diary resonates here, too. (Other work, such as Laura Wexler’s, suggests that nineteenth-century white middle-class women photographers’s production of “domesticity” already exhibited racist and imperialist ambitions.¹⁶) It is thus necessary to question in what ways Janet’s freedom arrives in the Philippines. As Tony’s wife, she occupies a position subordinate to him, yet as a white American, she remains superordinate to Filipina/os. Her position is constituted not only by marginalization, then, but by an authority that is racialized, heterosexist, and imperialist. But *Dream Jungle* only introduces the imperialist feminism Janet’s diary embodies. Turning to Eleanor Coppola’s diary, echoes of which

¹⁴ Ibid., 187.

¹⁵ Ibid., 279.

¹⁶ See Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of US Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000).

structure Janet's recollections, one gains better insight into the particular contours of this production of heterosexist imperialism.

3.

Published as *Notes*, Eleanor Coppola's diary details her experience as part of the production of *Apocalypse Now*. While the diary would seem to be just a footnote in the film's production, it provides revealing insights into the very terms by which Ellie understood both her work in the Philippines and her husband's, and the significance of that shared, but separated work, bringing fuller detail to the inspiration for Janet. Specifically, Ellie articulates her ambitions through a teleology grounded in race, gender, and sexuality, which forms the core of an implicit argument attempting to make sense of and even justify the imperialist production of *Apocalypse Now*. In this way, the identity she idealizes and imagines for herself must be understood as produced within and responding to not only her marriage and the ambitious film production, but also the Philippine setting. The diary argues for the establishment of an idealized heterosexual marriage by a white couple doing the "most pertinent artwork." White femininity finds itself behind the lens of a camera and a Philippine setting, both of which eventually force her into their frames. The Coppolas's racialized authority is established via the realization of their dreamy, Philippine-based heteronormativity. It succeeds insofar as Ellie produces an ambitious narrative of marriage that depends on the Philippine setting in ways she does not recognize, and it is this intersection between the authority the Coppolas exercise outwardly and inwardly (to each other) that can be called a kind of heterosexist imperialism.

The transformations wrought by the setting and camera are unexpected, since both are regarded as mere formalities and vehicles for the creative genius of both Francis and Ellie. The Philippines is a formality insofar as it provides certain opportunities without bearing any apparent significance itself; it is also a formality since it provides the formal elements necessary for depicting the war in Southeast Asia. As Ellie explains in the introduction, “the Philippines was chosen as the location because of the similarity of the terrain to Vietnam, the fact that the Philippine Government was willing to rent its American-made helicopters and military equipment to the production and that building and labor costs were generally low.”¹⁷ Notice that she begins with a passive construction (“was chosen”) but not as if there were any doubt about who made the decision and why—the reasons for the choice occupy the rest of the sentence. What it does suggest is an unwillingness to acknowledge this accountability. It also means grammatically that the Philippines, the direct object, slips into the space reserved for the subject. The Philippines becomes a subject at the moment of its subjection, an ambivalence which the passive voice underscores. Indeed, this ambivalence will mark the role of the Philippines for the rest of the text. The three reasons Ellie mentions—verisimilitude, government compliance/complicity and cost-effectiveness—attempt to stabilize this indeterminacy, producing and also refuting its accountability.

This attention to the grammar of US imperialism is crucial in order to destabilize its own account. Alongside other texts, the diary implicates itself within imperialist discourses that have treated the Philippines as marginal to the main action, slipping from a discourse of imperial desire to something else, such as military strategy in Asia—but in

¹⁷ Eleanor Coppola, *Notes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 17.

this case, a combination of white feminism, idealized romance, and cutting-edge art. The same could be said for the film production, which attempts to portray the Philippines as other-than-itself, parading exclusively as the not-unrelated narrative of US imperialism in Southeast Asia via the best-known literature on the conquest of Africa. The Philippines is imagined only as a “stepping-stone,”¹⁸ a waystation between the US and its objectives, whether those objectives are Manifest Destiny, Cold War containment, the Vietnam War, *Apocalypse Now*, or the more recent “war on terror.”¹⁹

Since the Philippines does not matter, it is that much easier to disavow the consequences, another way of thinking about what both Amy Kaplan and Oscar Campomanes have called the “amnesia” of US empire.²⁰ Kaplan’s introductory essay to *The Cultures of US Imperialism* argues that US exceptionalism depends precisely on excising the unsavory narratives of conquest from the historical record; she builds her argument for a critical American studies not by distancing American studies from US exceptionalist nationalism, but by reading the work of Northrup Frye, regarded as a founder of American studies, as reproducing this narrative of amnesia. It ends with a brief

¹⁸ For instance, a number of fin de siècle cartoons printed in US and British newsmagazines represent the Philippines and other colonial possessions as “stepping-stones,” not least of which was the March 21, 1900 issues of *Judge*, which featured Emil Flohri’s cartoon whose caption read, “And, after all, the Philippines are only the stepping-stone to China.” See *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons*, eds. Abe Ignacio, Enrique de la Cruz, Jorge Emmanuel, and Helen Toribio (San Francisco: T’Boli Publishing and Distribution, 2004), 54.

¹⁹ Neferti Tadiar ironizes and describes the contemporary status of the Philippines as a prostitute not only in its exporting of a feminized workforce, but also due to its own political and economic affairs. See *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2004).

²⁰ Oscar Campomanes, “The New Empire’s Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipino-American Postcolonialities,” *Critical Mass* 2:2 (1995), 145-200. Also see Amy Kaplan, “Left Alone with America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture.” In *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*, eds. Kaplan and Donald Pease (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1993), 3-21.

consideration of Coppola's diary as also exemplary of this amnesia. Campomanes orients this critique toward the annexation of the Philippines, suggesting that Filipina/os are not so much excluded from the US nation as they are "forgotten." Late-nineteenth-century US imperialism is regarded either as an aberration to the traditions of US democracy or as a different, specifically benevolent, kind of imperial governance, as might be suggested by the ship of teachers aboard the *USS Thomas* who arrived even as the Philippine-American War continued, unofficially, into the early twentieth century.

Ellie (the narrator, distinct from Eleanor, the author) spends much time agonizing not over these responsibilities, but balancing her documentary aspirations with her maternal duties. She has almost no previous filmmaking experience and wonders "if [Francis] is just trying to keep me busy or if he wants to avoid the addition of a professional team on an already overloaded production. Maybe both."²¹ From the start of the production, her role is questionable and, left unanswered, persistently ambivalent and potentially worthless. It is not as if she has nothing to do, since she is watching over their three children (Gio, Roman, and Sofia) for what would amount to more than a year of filming. This double (or triple) duty as mother (and wife) and filmmaker, creates a crisis for her; she worries about which should take priority: "I am the mother of these children, the wife of the director of this multimillion-dollar production, and I hadn't given a thought to my family this morning. ... Riding along in the car I began going through my wife/mother versus artist argument in my head for about the five hundredth time."²² She attempts to rationalize her position, claiming that "[b]oth sides have this perfectly

²¹ Coppola, 24.

²² Coppola, 115.

reasonable position; neither gives in.”²³ The relationship between the two positions requires their distinct division, so that “wife/mother” is distanced from “artist.” The “versus” in the sentence goes beyond distinction, though, suggesting an explicitly antagonistic, competitive relationship. What they are vying for is her identity. She presumes that there is nothing in the identity of a “wife/mother” that can be understood as artistic and creative. Finally, she seems to dissolve any possibility of actively making a decision in this matter. Instead, the two positions will compete for her identity.

Yet in some ways the competition is already determined, as Ellie hints at how this discourse is gendered, not insofar as an artist must necessarily identify with the masculine, but in terms of which gender can better manage or negotiate the competition. For Francis, for instance, his “life and his art were all mixed together. Why am I always struggling to get them to blend?”²⁴ What she hints at but fails to elaborate on, however, are the binary terms of dominant productions of gender, which enables her to understand her husband’s smooth combining of “life” and “art” in ways that perhaps must remain separate for her. It is a more complex operation than simply linking masculinity with the public sphere, whether art, business, politics, etc. The specific privilege lies in the masculine role’s *natural ability* to combine “life” and “art.” Masculinity is afforded a position that need not see competition between the two positions structuring Ellie’s crisis. What I am suggesting is that the crisis extends well beyond Francis and Ellie as individuals: their identities are biopolitically constructed according to these gendered norms.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 115-116.

It is a crisis that gets both articulated and temporarily resolved amid the film production in the Philippines. When she thinks back to the production once they have returned to the US, she notes that “[t]here is part of me that *wants* to work. There I was those nine months in the Philippines, working every day on the documentary. It was stimulating and full of insights for me, ... the first time in our married life that my work part and my marriage part were integrated.”²⁵ In the Philippines, that is, she comes to terms with her dilemma, although these terms have been revised. She implies that the artist (more generally, worker) is neither an identity competing with the wife/mother nor one that is separable from her identity, but that these are different “parts” that can be “integrated.” It is a pregnant moment (fittingly, nine months) for her, delivering not another child but an emboldened identity that marries wedlock with labor. She goes so far as to claim that it was a singular moment, one that had apparently never materialized in the marriage.

But this narrative is abstracted from and forgets one of its conditions of possibility: its setting in the Philippines, former colony of the US yet still entangled with it, especially as the US formally backed the Marcos regime, even during its installation of martial law. What Ellie obscures, then, is an imperialist discourse that aids and abets the film production which, she mentions, is only possible thanks to certain arrangements arising from US-Philippine relations. Without these narratives, she can only describe the uncanny difference she feels back in the US. For instance, when she has to return to San Francisco ahead of the others to prepare for the holidays, she is

²⁵ Ibid., 174.

mad that I was back with this mountain of household responsibilities. ... And I was the wife sent home to get the house in order for a family Christmas. I was mad and confused, irritated, stumbling over this big house in my life once again.²⁶

She identifies herself not as Francis' wife, but as "the" wife, the definitive article dissolving her particularity into a generic narrative—"the" wife is preparing "the" house, as if she does not participate in it except to fulfill her duty not to her family, but to "the family," in service of "the" imperialist nation. Disavowing imperialism allows her to universalize her gendered position and oppression, and vice versa, as the abstracted universalization of "the" woman enables the forgetting of empire. Finally, her grammar breaks down as she is "confused, irritated, stumbling over"—and here is a brief return to an intimate, particular narrative—"this big house in *my* life." Arriving at the end of this passage, it feels forced, as if she must claim a personal investment in it in order to be recognized as a citizen, at once victim of and complicit with the nation.

Most startling, perhaps, is the paradox she articulates. While the San Francisco setting is familiar, language troubles her: "I felt like I was in a familiar place but didn't speak the language."²⁷ (Here, one recalls the problematic of language, vocabularies, and dictionaries that plagued Connie de Vidal's mother in the first chapter.) Even in anticipation of the Christmas holiday which is among the most cherished in the US for bringing families together, the language of being a wife/mother proves inadequate for Ellie. What is the catalyst for this aphasia, and what language could have replaced it? The language she learns abroad is neither Tagalog nor Filipino, to be certain; to cover some of the other texts which matter for the film production, it is also not Vietnamese, Khmer, or

²⁶ Ibid., 169.

²⁷ Ibid.

Congolese. Unbeknownst to her, it is the language of heterosexist imperialism, with which she had been complicit yet to which as a wife/mother she also had been oblivious, and which structures her filmmaking work. Imperialism is marked in the diary by its absence, by a language Ellie cannot (not) speak. Campomanes argues that US exceptionalist nationalism depends precisely on both empire and its “forgetting”—here, of language itself. For Ellie, the imperialist role allows her to blend gender roles, to blend family and work duties, in the Philippines. Within US borders, her gender role is most *pronounced*, whereas abroad her feminine difference is positioned in a way that it can incorporate her maternal duties. Like Francis, Ellie learns to integrate “life” and “art,” and her feminized difference is integrated and incorporated into imperialist discourse. At “home,” she is reminded that a woman is not a man. Unable to speak that language, she has literally lost her (wife/mother) tongue.

If this antagonism seems insurmountable, though, Ellie works to defuse any tension that one might expect would emerge from such conditions. Dramatizing their reconciliation in rather ambitious and self-aggrandizing terms, she describes the turmoil they were in before beginning film production in the Philippines. She identifies a void in their lives insofar as they did not occupy the “terrific center of exciting art,” a disappointment that drove Francis to destroy the Oscars he had received for previous work. It is a sadness overcome in the Philippines:

Well, just this morning, I realized that this is *it!* Right here in Pagsanjan, of all places. I couldn't see it because it isn't some North Beach café or picturesque studio in Paris or a New York City loft. It's right here. Here we both are, right

here where we dreamed of being. I started to laugh. ... When I think about it, I really believe that this film is about the most pertinent artwork going on today.²⁸ She is shocked that their “dream” materializes in the Philippines, “of all places.” Dreams, apparently, are not supposed to come true in the Philippines, even for them (though in another entry, she compares the fantastic landscape to Disneyland). Nevertheless, the dream materializes, and it is a superlative moment. Her narrative includes a specific description of how Francis fits into this dream. As it turns out, more superlatives are in order:

Francis is writing, only he is not in a romantic-looking garret, he is bent over his electric typewriter right here, sweating in Pagsanjan, so he doesn’t see it. Francis is actually the conceptual artist, the ultimate conceptual artist I have been wanting to know. The most right-on artist in 1976. This is that moment we’ve dreamed of being present at. We’re swatting mosquitoes, and eating mangos, it doesn’t look like it’s supposed to, but I’ll bet this is that point in time somebody will label as *it*.

I am still laughing.²⁹

If she does not claim to dislike the surroundings, between mosquitoes and mangoes, at least it does not look as “it’s supposed to.” Pagsanjan shatters her image of what the production of artwork should look like and where it should take place. Pagsanjan intrudes on her dream, even as the dream manifests there. Ellie laughs defiantly, convincing herself that indeed, it is, and they are, the center of avant-garde art. Not only does the Philippines enable a grander role for her, it allows for such audacious claims.

²⁸ Ibid., 120.

²⁹ Ibid.

Notably, even within the very emergence of this newfound confidence, doubt enters as she underscores the risk that her claims may be ultimately errant. Thus she must “bet” on an abstract figure (who, it is noteworthy, is neither racialized nor gendered), a “somebody,” in the future, who will be able to confirm her claims. It also demands a closer inspection of the awkward usage of pronouns in the passage. Ellie rejoices at the culmination of marital and artistic production that is realized in the Philippines, but the participation remains stratified despite her best attempts to discover equivalence. Francis remains in the superior position—it is he who works on his typewriter and is the “ultimate conceptual artist.” Ellie tries to include herself in that work—“right here where *we* dreamed of being”—but her inclusion is mostly one of observation and perseverance. The dream they share positions Francis in its center, resigning her to “swatting mosquitoes” and generally doing work as wife/mother and even artist which is valued much less than her husband’s.

After this extended and ambitious narrative of the realization of a dream that brings together both Francis’s “right-on” artistry and Ellie’s opportunity to be both artist and wife/mother, she resorts to a tiresome, magnetic cliché, articulated quite simply as “opposites attract”:

The more I see it, the more I marvel at how opposite we are. I spent a lot of years resisting the differences, being angry, making myself right and him wrong. The more I see him as he is, my total opposite, and enjoy with amazement how we are attracted to our polar opposites, the more I love him.³⁰

³⁰ Ibid., 125.

One can only be disappointed that her grandiloquence ends in cliché. More importantly, gender difference becomes heteronormalized insofar as its gendered stratification results in a (re)productive “love,” in an inverse relation: the more different Francis is from Ellie—the closer they get to being “total[ly] opposite”—the greater is the love they share. The difference that depends on the structure of binary gender roles is sublated into an idealized heterosexist—and imperialist—love. Ellie’s narrative does not just repeat the kind of idealization of marriage as the uniting of private and public spheres, woman’s work and man’s work, respectively. After all, she does not come to this recognition until she is enlisted in making her own film, which allows for the linking of “life” and “art.” (Her film, though, remains secondary, only existing in order to document her husband’s.) It is precisely in the Philippines where she has these epiphanies, a specificity refused in favor of an abstract setting for the manifestation—and manifesto—of an abstracted heterosexist love. The forgetting of empire is intimately constitutive of feminist heteronormativity.

4.

The meanings Ellie associates with the filmic camera enable her to further conceptualize their experience in the Philippines, and thus elaborate upon imperialist heteronormativity. Consistently, she narrates events and perceptions by leaning, perhaps a bit too much, on analogies to the filmic camera. For instance, shortly after arriving there, she notes that “[p]art of me is waiting for the reels to change and get back to a familiar scene in San Francisco or Napa.”³¹ (The irony, as we have just seen, is how the

³¹ Ibid., 22.

familiar will come to seem foreign for her.) Describing her surroundings, it is not enough to reach stereotypical conclusions about the Philippine landscape, which she does repeatedly: The Philippines is how “Tahiti looked two hundred years ago. There were *almost* no signs of the Western world.”³² She continues, “It looked like something out of a movie.” Looking around, she identifies herself as the audience of the hypothetical “movie,” outside of the camera’s purview, an invisible observer who might as well not be there and who imagines herself as precisely absent from that (recorded) (imperialist) scene—unless by “almost” she refers not only to some of the objects (plastics, sandals) she notices in the landscape, but to herself as well. She will repeat this structure of distancing herself from the action and scenery as much as possible, until she no longer can. Her ignorance is not only sanctioned, it is seemingly willed and apologized. Later in the diary, when they are back in the US, she is explicit about how the camera metaphor helps her look “at my life from a distance, almost as if I were outside my body.”³³

In a way, Ellie’s camera analogies possess a biopolitical element in their functioning. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes “heterosexual monogamy” as having a centrifugal force, such that it maintains an invisible, unmarked, and naturalized center, all the while dependent on as well as contrasted with a marginalized set of all other sexualized categories which receives full scrutiny precisely as markedly abnormal.³⁴ That force keeps difference tethered to but excluded from the center. This structure of power relations accompanies his narrative of the emergence of modern disciplinarity, which transferred from external and vertical

³² Ibid., 65. Emphasis added.

³³ Ibid., 213.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 38 ff.

authority (that, for instance, legislated marital rules) to increasingly internalized, horizontal networks of self-regulation (for instance, the cultural production of heteronormativity). Modern subjectivities are constituted within these normative paradigms, such that discipline is self-imposed, rather than waiting for the orders of a monarch, despot, or president. While Foucault's governmentality still depends on bureaucratic institutions—science, medicine, prison, school, etc.—that authorize these social relations, Hardt and Negri's work on the biopolitical within globalization suggests that power is even more horizontal and that regulation is wholly immanent (as discussed in the first chapter).³⁵ Ellie's own privileging of "heterosexual monogamy," while receiving much attention and scrutiny, is reinforced by this distancing, centrifugal, and biopolitical effect.

Conceptualizing her film work, Ellie understands her task in making a documentary as fully opposed—notice, another profound difference between her and Francis—to fiction. "The whole idea in documentary filmmaking is to *watch* what is happening and catch some moments on film as they pass by. Fiction filmmaking [what her husband is doing] is about *making* things happen, shooting them over and over until they happen the way you want. The process is reversed."³⁶ Francis seems to agree: "We were sitting on the front porch talking about filmmaking being like a metaphor for living. ... Francis said, 'I am willing to sacrifice my best scene to make the film better ... anything ... I can always put it back. That's the difference with life, you can't put it

³⁵ See my first chapter and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001).

³⁶ Coppola, 226. Emphasis added.

back.”³⁷ In both accounts, fiction is assigned an agency (“making things happen”) that documenting reality, as well as living in it, do not have, which seems to parallel the gendered distinctions separating wife/mother from husband. If fiction indeed has the power to “make things happen,” a proposition I wish to retain (but transform, catachrestically) it will be imperative to disturb its presumed masculinity. I am not suggesting that masculinity needs to make stronger claims on defining reality, but that the possibilities afforded by fictional, creative production need to be divorced from the masculinity to which Ellie assumes it belongs; the consequences of such a transformation return us to the destabilizing of empirical and sociological representations as outlined in the first chapter, and begin to return us to Lina’s negotiations.

By claiming the role of documentary filmmaker, Ellie remains unable to recognize herself in the lens. The distance she claims here, which she likens to an out-of-body experience, is a space of comfort; as merely an observer (of creative filmmaking and of empire), her racialization is a disembodied, feminized whiteness hiding behind the camera. She does not realize that in yoking her wife/mother and artistic roles, she has slipped into a kind of masculine discourse that also slips her into the camera’s frame. Reflecting on the dilemma after filming has concluded and during a long period of editing and production, Ellie finally notices that even as the documentarist, she is not outside the camera lens: “I was watching from the point of view of the observer, not realizing that I was on that journey, too. Now I am at a place, I don’t know quite how I got here. It feels strange and foreign.”³⁸ Despite devoting much space to describing the Philippines as precisely “strange and foreign,” she draws no connections between the

³⁷ Ibid., 248.

³⁸ Ibid., 212.

landscape and her interiority, keeping in place the imposed gap (sanctioned ignorance) between setting and self.

But once she discovers herself in front of the camera, she makes a startling comment which all of a sudden leaps from the abstract to, it would seem, “history”: “I can’t go back to the way it was. Neither can Francis, neither can Willard [a character in the film], neither can the United States.”³⁹ The realization enables her to recognize the roles that fact and fiction play in the production of meaning—but only to recognize both, not to blur the boundaries separating them. The camera analogy overwhelms her attempt to make sense of both the development and unraveling of their multiple projects, yoking together not just the two films, but their marriage, their Willard- and Kurtz-derived/inspired journeys, her historical outlook, and US imperialism.

All along I have been talking about Francis’s conflicts, mirroring the conflicts of Willard. The contradictions of the peace-loving U.S.A. making a bloody war. I’ve been standing back, as if looking through a wide-angle lens, seeing the big picture. Now I have found myself with a close-up lens. It brings into focus *my* contradictions. I am laughing and crying my heart out.⁴⁰

From wide-angle to close-up, she realizes that contradictions not only plague Francis, Willard, and the US, but herself as well. Previously laughing at how picture-perfect the film production was for their marriage, the laughter here differs significantly. By recognizing herself in the frame, reality and history are denaturalized for the documentarist:

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 229-230.

How I thought I was the innocent bystander, just recording some snapshots about the making of Apocalypse, as if it didn't pertain to me. I had a belief system that took the world literally. I chose to only see the rational, the literal, and deny the illusion. ... I am emerging from my tunnel vision. I am in a clearing where I can see more, see the literal and the illusion both at the same time.⁴¹

The documentary is exposed as fiction, illusion, and creation. But Ellie can effect no radical epistemological break. While she admits to previously having “den[ied] the illusion,” her (second) epiphany—which only restores and recenters the self, a new and improved “I”—limits itself to admitting the presence of illusion. Even as she refers to such characters as “Willard,” “Francis,” “the US” and herself interchangeably (the Philippines remains unthinkable here)—which suggests that the “literal and the illusion” are *indistinguishable* from each other and *mutually constitutive*—she maintains a division between them, accepting only that she can recognize “both at the same time.” (Just as her ambitions seek only to find an [imperialist] equality for women compared to men, not a more-radical conceptualization of femininity as a strategic disruption of masculinity.)

What should be made of these opposed pairs, literal and illusion, brought together? Surely they will have to be distanced from the harmony of opposites attracting, of the magnetic love binding Francis and Ellie, which formed the basis of her “tunnel vision,” allowing her to idealize the heterosexist imperialism of their project as a stable, even predictable, narrative. Instead, the combining of literal and illusion may lead beyond this tunnel vision. Following the implicit “logic” of Ellie’s diary—one whose radicality she does not notice—dissolving the distinction between reality and illusion leads to a

⁴¹ Ibid.

critique of the heterosexist imperialism the text has assembled. Now, watching herself in front of the camera, as well as within the plot of Francis's film, she believes "that big, two-headed stone temple at Kurtz Compound represented marriage. The basic structure of beliefs that my life was based on. It exploded. I wept and ached and tried to put back the stones, hold up the walls and patch it together as it crumbled. Finally I gave up."⁴² A sentence fragment is followed by two short words. The grammar of heterosexist imperialism is exhausted with logic and meaning; the Philippines, having slipped into the subject via the passive voice, is the agent of this catachresis in Ellie's life.

This destabilization has certain consequences for the text of heterosexist imperialism as it emerges in the diary and in the Philippines. Ellie writes, "So many nonreasonable things have happened to me since I have been in the Philippines, I no longer try to make them all fit a reasonable, linear context. I see things, notice them, the way you do in dreams. Here, the waking world and the dream world have many things in common. The line between the two is not abrupt and definitive."⁴³ Might "nonreasonable" lead to "unreasonable"? That is to ask, how is the latent critique emerging from within the very articulation of heterosexist imperialism not only unintelligible to logic and reason, but fully unreasonable and antagonistic to its imperative? How does this unacknowledged yet undeniable catachresis lose its referent? Waking and dreaming, the literal and the illusion, converge to thwart its meaningful structures; the documentary filmmaker needs illusions in order to stage reality. Here is her conclusion, which is only a beginning for Lina: "Perhaps making movies [in other

⁴² Ibid., 247.

⁴³ Ibid., 132.

words, creative production] is a step toward being able to move backward and forward and in and out of linear time.”⁴⁴

5.

Reading catachresis in this postcolonial text means recognizing the ways in which Lina, as a young, impressionable Filipina, does not simply—blindly, unthinkingly—reproduce forms of power, whether nationalist, imperialist, or feminist. In the language of biopolitical analysis, she is not an empty vehicle for a smooth, continuous transmission of power. Within the global network of normativities and the (complicitous) resistances built into the network, the “individual” is not a unified subject, but a site of potential deterritorializations and reterritorializations, a momentary and shifting confluence and mediation that necessarily transforms what it then transmits, even if that transmittal bears strong resemblance to received conventions. In this way, postcolonial biopolitical catachresis suggests that the categories that inform the production of identity are processeed and potentially transformed. Thus, Lina’s resistance must be read not as external to the powers that seek to influence her, whether toward exploitation or liberation; neither should it be read as mechanical reproduction. Instead, her productions and negotiations of power serve as the conditions of possibility for her resistance.

Lina may be understood as escaping and surviving three times in the novel—firstly, she survives the capsized ship; secondly, she runs away from the Legazpi estate, which concludes the first half of the novel; finally, at the end of the text, she is no longer in the Philippines, but in the US. In what ways are her resistances related to the dilemmas

⁴⁴ Ibid.

that Janet Pierce and Ellie Coppola experience? Is Lina's struggle for liberation grounded in the same terms that structure their liberatory imaginings, primarily the staging of heterosexist imperialism in order to resolve gender inequality, all the while ignoring the more-radical opportunities afforded by Ellie's diary entries? Does her moving to the US signal an affirmation of Ellie's feminist yearnings?

When Lina reappears in the second half of the text, she is introduced as Jinx, an exotic nightclub dancer in a gritty part of Manila, to Vincent Moody, one of the white American actors in town preparing for Tony Pierce's film. Beginning an affair with him, she quits the nightclub and joins the film production, working on the catering staff; the film, being shot in Mindanao, the place of her youth, reunites her with figures from her past. Working during the day and living with Moody, she leaves her child, Yeye, in the care of Aling Belen, an older woman who is critical of the film's incursion into the area. Early in the novel, she watched a young Lina and cured her of sickness using native remedies. Aling Belen represents a wise matriarch who looks upon the foreigners with scorn and disdain. In this way, she is not unlike Ulang, a matriarchal figure of the Taobo community, and Lina's mother. These women serve as Lina's role models, strong women who defy imperialist masculinity in the service of implicitly protecting the nation, as their maternal roles are supposed to fulfill.

One day, Fritz Magbantay, the mayor of the town near where the film is being shot, sees Lina taking a walk on her own, and he and his chauffeur trap her. In this isolated area, she is the potential victim of rape—as she was with her father and Legazpi. But Aling Belen appears and the mayor's advances are thwarted—though in her old age she can do nothing about it, he knows better than to challenge the matriarch. All of this,

though, is less significant than what happens next. At a nearby cemetery, Aling Belen advises Lina to ““get away from here. I’ll take care of Yeye, but I can’t help you anymore.””⁴⁵ As they continue to walk, she asks Lina, ““Why were you in that man’s car?” ‘I don’t know,’ Lina said. After a pause Lina continued, ‘I keep dreaming about a tiger. What does my dream mean, Aling Belen?’ ‘I don’t know,’ Aling Belen said, chewing.””⁴⁶ The old woman has nothing to say about it, leaving Lina without an answer. Those three words, “I don’t know,” mark a significant inability to provide native insight for the young woman; she will have to figure it out on her own.

Thus, among the multiple figures of feminine resistance available to Lina, ranging from her mother to Janet to Aling Belen, Lina will choose none of the above. She opts for the tiger instead, which exists in her dreams but also in reality. One of the most sensational events of the films—both *Apocalypse Now* and *Napalm Sunset*—is the arrival of a tiger whose name in the novel is “Shiva, after the Hindu god of destruction.”⁴⁷ It appears in one scene, as two GIs disappear into the jungle. The tiger draws the attention of everyone—“like the Vietnam war movie, [it] made life seem less slow, petty, and provincial”—and Pierce orders the set closed except for the crew as well as a few invited guests. Lina implores Moody to get permission for her to be there. He assumes she has the same curiosity as everyone else, but there are more significant reasons she does not disclose. Her observation is not limited to sheer excitement:

Lina stared at the tiger, riveted. She was looking for a sign. Anything at all, to explain all those dreams. To point her in the right direction. Shiva was a god—

⁴⁵ Ibid., 260.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 261.

⁴⁷ Hagedorn, 263.

Vincent had said so. Gods knew the way, could help her make a decision. To stay or to go? To leave Yeye behind or take her along? The tiger gazed back at Lina, languid, indifferent. His work was done. ... The tiger blinked its amazing eyes and roared. As if to say, Yes, yes. It's about time! Will you feed me? Lina felt a great joy.⁴⁸

What is a thrill and a threat for others is a solution for Lina. The solution that Shiva provides encourages Lina to go to the US, without Yeye, which Aling Belen had already suggested but which was insufficient for Lina—hence the need for Shiva to confirm it. Lina does not just accept and obey the matriarch. Instead, it is indeterminate from whence the solution emerges: it was Aling Belen's suggestion, yes, but it was also Shiva's, and the latter's that actually empowers Lina to act. The solution to the dilemma this young woman faces is not a nativist interpretation without equivocation, especially given Aling Belen's inability to decipher Lina's dreams. It comes from Lina's own engagement with the terms of her mother, Aling Belen, Janet Pierce, Hollywood film culture, US empire, and the tiger itself.

The tiger continues to haunt Lina—she scrawls a stick-figure version of it on her palms and refuses to show it to Moody, claiming her power to control its meaning for her. She seduces Moody, and during sex he declares his love for her. “But she could not hear him, lost as she was in her nightmare of tigers dreams.”⁴⁹ The seeming fulfillment of heteropatriarchal imperialism, as marked by his white, masculine wealth that seeks access to and possession of exoticized and eroticized femininity, is revised, catachrestically, into

⁴⁸ Ibid., 270.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 272.

a description that reveals her productivity. Sex enables her to further explore the significance of the tiger.

Tigers danced on the walls and ceiling, on the bed of tangled sheets on which she and Moody thrashed and moaned. Pagodas of tigers, floating islands of tigers. Pouncing, roaming, prowling. Out of a sea of tigers rose her tiger-faced mother, father, and twin brothers. Rose a glaring Zamora Lopez de Legazpi. As hard as she tried to distract herself, Lina was unable to shake her mind free of its multiplying visions. Tigers in trees, trees of tigers. Tigers within tigers.⁵⁰

Moody's authority is wholly absent, and his proclamations of love ignored. Instead, she see tigers who transform her memories of her family and past.⁵¹ The proliferating tigers signify a proliferation of meaning and give her the epistemological means to make sense of her situation and guide her through its negotiation. Soon after, she leaves the Philippines and leaves Yeye in the care of Aling Belen.

How should this final act of the text be understood? It is possible to read this departure as a combining of multiple feminisms—primarily, Aling Belen's nativist version, which advises Lina to leave the difficulty of the Philippines for better opportunities abroad, and Janet's/Ellie's, which develops a gendered liberation based on imperialist superiority? Though the two positions are not coterminous and may even be understood as antagonistic, Lina's decision may appear to be informed by both. Another

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Earlier in the text, Legazpi lectured Lina on a painting by Goya, *The Great He-Goat*, in which an anthropomorphized goat sits on one side of a bonfire and charismatically holds the attention of several older women—a dark scene evoking Dionysian danger. One younger girl, Legazpi points out, is unswayed by the goat, and he likens himself to the goat and, implicitly, Lina to the girl. It is thus fitting that Legazpi returns to her in this vision of tigers. These mythic animals play a critical role in the production of both Legazpi's and Lina's identities.

possible interpretive temptation is to claim that Lina abandons both child and nation—that she gives up any literal and symbolic positions as a maternal resource for the Philippines. Worse yet, she abandons it all to live in the cushy accommodations of a Hollywood actor, having moved into Moody’s place in Santa Monica.

Both interpretations are untenable and unfaithful to the text. In the last glimpse readers have of Lina before the novel’s end, she meets Sonny Limahan, formerly one of Legazpi’s bodyguards, at an art gallery in Los Angeles. She stands before a painting, reminiscent of the work of Manuel Ocampo, “of a gaunt Jesus carrying a massive wooden cross. Near Christ were a crowing rooster and a pile of skulls. Four corners of the canvas were decorated, as if in afterthought, by sloppily rendered swastikas.”⁵² After she tells him the artist is Filipino, he scoffs at the painting. But the scene helps us understand Lina’s generally illegible maternity. Limahan represents the last vestiges of the intensely repressive global heteronationalism of the Marcos regime in the 1970s, of which Legazpi’s Taobo discovery (again, fictionalizing the Tasaday discovery by Manuel Elizalde) played a feature role. His attempt to reclaim Lina as the bearer of future generations—aside from the other servants in Legazpi’s estate, she is the only young Filipina woman in the text—just after Legazpi has died seems to mark a final nationalist effort, one last attempt to recruit Lina into nationalist motherhood.

He warns her that her mother is sick and wants to see her. Lina interrupts him, insisting she must go. ““You came to tell me [Legazpi] was dead. That my *nanay* is sick. Nevertheless—’ She gathered her things. ‘I must go now.’”⁵³ He pleads with her to stay longer, but to no avail. He asks if she has what she needs; she tells him she is working.

⁵² Ibid., 309.

⁵³ Ibid., 311.

“She was mysterious about the job; she refused to tell him exactly where she lived. ‘I stay near the beach,’ was all she said. ‘I am happy now. I want to stay happy.’”⁵⁴ That is all she permits Sonny to know, before she leaves him, without looking back. Lina refuses his pleas and proclaims her happiness.

This outcome does not mean she has abandoned anything whatsoever, or that her happiness is dependent on leaving the Philippines to toil in the ruins of martial law while she basks in the afterglow of Hollywood. Instead, while Limahan’s waning nationalism finds the painting “ugly” and “profane,” Lina studies it. She does not simply celebrate the art for its Filipino origins, but neither does she dismiss it. She stands critically in front of it, weighing its significance, seeking its insights—which is in sharp contrast not only to Limahan, but Ellie, whose marital and professional ideals fail to recognize the role the Philippines plays in that narrative which, once recognized, actually destabilizes those aspirations. That is, at every effort made to write the Philippines out of the story—to deliberately forget about empire in favor of the culmination of white feminism, marriage, and art; to reject its art, as Limahan does, in order to forget the failings of nationalism—the archipelago, like Lina, disidentifies with its marginalization.

As a Filipina mother, Lina aspires to neither heterosexist imperialism nor nationalism. Her maternity cannot be reduced to the domestic or passive, and her feminism cannot be reduced to the western and individualized. Unlike Ellie, the illusions of fiction can transform, deserving not only an *equivalence* to “reality,” but even a destabilizing of the claims made by the real, such that mythic tigers imported for imperialist Hollywood productions can deny the heteropatriarchal imperialism of a

⁵⁴ Ibid., 312.

sexualized encounter—and, in a manner that is not purely negating, the tigers can also inspire difficult decisions. In this way, Lina does not abandon Yeye or the Philippines—or perhaps, she only does if readers cannot distance ourselves from the norms that structure understandings of motherhood, gender, and imperialism.

Lina destabilizes those expectations, but it is up to readers to make that productive—and “happy”—subversion legible. That legibility rests on “nevertheless,” which Lina claims is her favorite word and which appears in numerous scenes. In its simplest terms, it suggests that things are worth a second look, another approach, a re-evaluation and a revaluation. “Nevertheless” reminds us of the importance of postcolonial catachresis. It should inspire readers to return to scenes of violence—racist, sexist, anti-queer, capitalist, genocidal, imperialist, nationalist, etc.—and discover their lack of transparency and immediacy, not in order to engage in intellectual games of postmodern interpretation, but to engage with the disseminated productivity of biopower. These violations must be made to enable the possibility for alternative modes of resistance.

It is only fitting that Lina loves the word “nevertheless,” which as catachresis signifies possibility—a possibility that does not legitimize (neo-)liberation through libidinal or capitalist means, but a possibility that recognizes complicity, responsibility, and desire. It is in this way that it would be mistaken to think of her as having run away from her problems, as if in leaving behind nation and child she has abandoned the conditions of her own identity. “Nevertheless” advises readers not to judge Lina but to endure, and to imagine the possibility that she has left nothing behind whatsoever. “Nevertheless” modifies the terms of narrative, a formality of language whose importance—the transformation it effects—might be overlooked by those looking

forward to the apocalypse and those dreaming of the jungle. Lina transforms and is transformed by the Hollywood film production for which she works as part of the catering staff, relying on none of the options offered to her for her salvation, but rather forces a crisis upon them. The white Bengal tiger that is flown in by the megalomaniacal US director provides an answer to her probing questions about identity, culture, and history that other figures cannot.

Just as Lina's tiger obsession and Hagedorn's novel blur and disrupt the borders of fiction and reality in ways that Ellie Coppola can produce but not recognize, and certainly not act upon, the consequences for this reading of Lina far exceed literary interpretation. The production of a global workforce of Filipinas, employable and exploitable for their racialized, gendered maternal identities, must be understood as a set of stabilized representations relying on the fictions of sociology and empiricism. They may be resisted within progressive (neo-)liberal discourses that seek to ameliorate the conditions of these workers, but such projects as may be found in the global network of NGOs make liberation contingent on assimilation and administration. They seek, on one hand, to provide programs to assist workers in their job placement, education, financial handling, family planning, etc.; on the other hand, they seek to make global capitalism more accountable to itself, to render transparent the injustice on which surplus value is extracted. In both sets of activities, transformative possibilities are exchanged for pragmatic compromise with a system that is regarded either as sacrosanct or undefeatable. Both sets of activities are the terms of assimilation and administration to that system, not of liberation. They reaffirm the system by subscribing to teleological and

continuous narratives of development that are profoundly racist, imperialist, and misogynist.

The response, as taught to us by Lina, is not wholesale rejection—once more, the illusion of extricating oneself from networks of power is impossible given the biopolitical constitution of global empire. Working within its terms is not tantamount to accepting those terms, and it is also not tantamount to resignation. Instead, it is possible to destabilize these regimes of knowledge and power from within, through the very production of surplus values that are not the surpluses of capital. The two are antithetical. While the latter structures exploitation in very discrete, even quantifiable terms, the former resists that will-to-knowledge and by definition cannot be accounted for—at least not within dominant logics (imperialist, nationalist, capitalist, heteronormative). It is this potential that Lina discovers in her obsessions, for which there is no accessible logic or language (again, within dominant paradigms). “Nevertheless” appears multiple times in the text, that is, but not to fulfill the structure of language—it does not lead directly to another clause, as it should grammatically. Its catachrestic power transforms the very structure of language in ways that suit Lina’s needs, rather than to uphold the king’s imperial english. Revealing her exact and specific resistance is less important and would only serve our voyeurism; it is enough that at novel’s end, she is “happy.” That is why she only admits to the absent presence of resistance by her favorite word, which suggests there is more to the story than what has been announced, reported on, debated about, and studied by filmmakers, nationalists, and feminists; each and every time it is articulated in the text, nothing visible or logical follows it: “Nevertheless.”

Chapter Three.

Carlos in Medford and Gabe in Meridan:

Attempted Erasures of the Filipina Mother for Hetero/Homonational Masculinity

1.

Though perhaps not quite as powerful as “nevertheless,” a single word performs a risky, if unintended, maneuver in Brian Ascalon Roley’s *American Son*. When the Oldsmobile that the Filipino American teenager Gabe steals from his brother breaks down near the Oregon border, he has it towed to the nearest city, which according to the waitress at the diner, and any maps of the area, should refer to Medford, a midsized metropolis. But the car is towed across the state border into “Meridan,” not Medford. It seems to be an error shared by author, editor, and publisher; especially given the novel’s otherwise gritty realism, the substitution of an imaginary city for a real one is unlikely. But the presumed error exceeds its status as such, opening up a series of questions that enables a critique of a Filipino American homonationalism which buttresses the genocidal imperatives of US neoliberalism. Gabe will arrive in Meridan in the company of a white tow truck driver who develops a rapport with Gabe that wavers between the paternal—a father figure in place of Gabe’s white father, who is absent from the family—and the homoerotic.

It is also not by coincidence that Medford is a small but critical stopover for Carlos, the protagonist and narrator of Carlos Bulosan’s well-read *America Is in the Heart*. Allos travels first from a rural province in the Philippines to the city, and then to the west coast of the US, where he becomes a migrant worker, relocating according to the

seasons, before suffering physical illness and launching a writerly career. Renamed Carlos in the US, he dedicates himself to fighting against the ills plaguing migrant workers. His contributions insert race and imperialism into the question of labor politics, even as he embraces an alternative vision of the US as a racially harmonious global leader. Yet his racial critique of migrant labor is advanced in heteromasculinist ways, as he not only seeks to change laws preventing interracial marriage on the grounds that it would deliver equality to Filipino men—an equality grounded in having legal access to white women—but he also polices his desire for white women given the threat of vigilante (extra-legal) violence.

Treating publishing error and intertextual coincidence as strengths despite their unintentional and arbitrary conditions, this chapter measures the distance between Medford and Meridan, between the real and the imagined. What results from asking whether Gabe's detour to an imagined Meridan is a necessary one within the terms of the text, especially insofar as it may be read as a homonational response to Bulosan's heteronationalism—that is, an expanded, revised Filipino Americanism inclusive of multiple sexualities? For this project, critically reading the difference between Bulosan's Medford and Roley's Meridan takes us a long way toward reimagining the epistemological and political frameworks that underwrite the study of Filipina mothers. In particular, I argue that alongside the global biopolitical employment of Filipina mothers (according to the terms of heteropatriarchy that I articulated in the first chapter), one may discern in these two texts an interplay between the heteropatriarchal and the homonational. In the relationship between Stone and Gabe, same-sex desire is both a

threat to their homosocial rapport but also a source that renders them complicit in the nationalist effacing of Gabe's mother.

Much scholarship has focused on the heteropatriarchal and heteronormative politics of US nationalism and imperialism; US national identity, history, culture, economics, and politics have been constituted by hegemonic masculinities and compulsory heterosexuality. Race and class are part of the equation as well. The emergence, naturalization, and institutionalization of the bourgeois white nuclear family has served the interests of republican democracy, US imperialism, and industrial capitalism. This narrative of exceptionalist normativity is widening, however. In response to the social movements that threatened the US and the world in the sixties, the attenuation of entitlement programs and the renewed fervor of free market ideologies took hold alongside an emergent “political correctness” that reduced and tamed social movements into corporatized sensitivity training. In other words, cultural awareness may have “expanded,” but that expansion must also be understood as a narrowing and policing of diversity into political correctness—the goal is to be tolerant and non-offensive, not to ask difficult questions about difference and history. Intensified biopolitical exploitation within the uneven management of globalization through NAFTA, NGOs, etc., was partially covered over by a mediatized embrace of diversity structuring the bland mainstream cultural politics of the last two decades. To make matters worse, inclusion of the minoritized continues to take the form of assimilation into the normative, such that “sympathetic” discourses of racial and ethnic minorities—whether in popular films and sitcoms, on Capitol Hill, or within academic research—reinforce how politically non-threatening, free market-embracing, and family-oriented “model” minorities are.

Within the language of contemporary cultural theory, the biopolitical production and management of US diversity must be understood as a Deleuzian reterritorializing of the deterritorializing imperatives of decolonization, civil rights, black nationalist, feminist, and student movements.¹ (To be sure, the terms of these deterritorializations often contain other unexamined normativities—hence the masculinism of anticolonial nationalism, which required its own deterritorialization in the form of the various women of color mobilizations.) More recently, as Inderpal Grewal has shown, multiculturalism has served not just to broadly construct tokenized niche markets devoid of historicity, but also to celebrate a superficial diversity in order to deflect the global and nearly consensual extermination of Arabs and Muslims (who are [con]fused into a unitary, undifferentiated, essentialized other).² The racialization of Arabs and Muslims is by no means new, but has been reinvigorated within the particular moment of the war on terror.

Arabs and Muslims are not only confused into a single other, they are totalized into what Jasbir Puar calls a “terrorist assemblage.”³ Grewal suggests that the terrorist is racialized as an other against which other minorities are embraced—multiculturalism employed in order to deflect accusations of racism. The war on terror must be reinforced as a secular, liberatory, freedom-loving movement against the violent and fundamentalist intolerance of religious terrorists. Puar argues that such a racialization is at once a gendering and sexualizing of the terrorist. According to official and popular texts Puar analyzes, in contrast to a purportedly woman-friendly, if not putatively feminist, US

¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989).

² Inderpal Grewal, “Transnational America: Race and Gender After 9/11,” *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 196-220.

³ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 37-78.

liberal society, the Middle Eastern terrorist is a male whose psycho-sexual issues coupled with archaic beliefs promote traditional values that generally repress women. Ironically, the veil is a blindingly transparent symbol of male domination. The US thus produces a “sexual exceptionalism” that, concurrent and overlapping with multiculturalism, celebrates the tolerant nation—and really, global community—of a post-historical, post-political neoliberal consensus, which requires a sanctioned ignorance, if not willful forgetting, of the persistent exploitation of minorities, both groups who are included within the biopolitical consensus and those who are not.

Such a politics of diversity, as US sexual exceptionalism, may be understood as “homonationalist” insofar as it superficially embraces US same-sex visibility as a straw man permitting the representation of the terrorist as not just misogynistic, but homophobic and anti-gay. Many gay rights discourses are complicit with such propaganda, answering the patriotic call to fight homophobia, Puar notes, even as the recourse to anti-same-sex politics is always present in the US, as highlighted in recent debates about gay marriage.⁴ Homonationalism is overdetermined by white and middle-class privilege, too, so that once more, same-sex relations are tolerated insofar as they uphold other norms, sexually (nuclear, monogamous ideals) and otherwise: homonationalism “may support forms of heteronormativity and the class, racial, and citizenship privileges” of US nationalism.⁵ One is reminded of Derrida’s caution: “[E]ach time that ethnocentrism is precipitately and ostentatiously reversed, some effort silently hides behind all spectacular effects to consolidate an inside and to draw from it some

⁴ Not surprisingly, two of the most visible sides of the debate stress how important normative, middle-class, nationalist normativities are, further reinforcing marriage as a legal, institutional category.

⁵ Puar, 9.

domestic benefit,” where domesticity is now global, a nearly all-inclusive “inside.”⁶ Thus, in sharp contrast—not just contrast, but the constitutive trace of the imagined binary—the terrorist is regarded as someone whose perverse, non-normative sexuality remains intolerable, undomesticated, and savage. The “monster-terrorist-fag” is devalued and deranged for its economic, cultural, familial non-(re)productive, self-annihilating/suicidal behavior.

This critique of homonationalism paves the detour from Medford to Meridan. In the first part of this chapter, I build on compelling analyses by Martin Ponce and Rachel Lee to reappraise Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* by linking its transnational narrative, which attempts to bring together aesthetics and politics through the narrator’s literary career, to its repeated tendency to represent women as a threat to the promise of a fraternal solidarity. The narrator’s ambitions, that is, ultimately seek only to reinforce the disciplinary authority that rules over bodies, nations, and empires. While it is possible to read for the excesses of discipline, the narrator neither avers nor avows it. The second part of this chapter points to the inability for such heteronormative disciplining tactics to circumscribe desire through a reading of *American Son*. While half a century separates the narrators of each novel, each expresses the pressures of living up to the various disciplinary gazes that order their experience. Yet if Carlos cannot imagine otherwise, Gabe’s briefly homonational sojourn draws out those excesses, without naively assuming it has escaped discipline altogether.

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), 80; qtd. in Spivak, “History,” *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999), 281.

Through this reading, I suggest that homonationalism is employed not only toward external threats such as the Islamic terrorist. It is also employed as a means to deny the Filipina *mother* a speaking position. If the domestic has gone global, then someone is needed to pick up after empire, but not to question it. The homonationalism that structures the relationship between Gabe and Stone is momentary, as it is rescinded by an attendant heteropatriarchy that polices their mutual desires. (Puar suggests that homonationalisms “are partial, fragmentary, uneven formations, implicated in the pendular momentum of inclusion and exclusion, some dissipating as quickly as they appear.”⁷) While homonationalism and heteropatriarchy fight, unevenly, for the souls of Gabe and Stone, they are complicit in eviscerating Gabe’s mother from the national scene of belonging and desire after her reproductive contributions are completed. She can neither belong nor desire, but only serve, and masculine liberation will, one way or another, depend on the exclusion of the Filipina mother.

Ultimately, the critique advanced here is best established not by either of the two protagonists, who are too invested in the disciplining of bodies according to different racial, gender, and sexual norms, but by Gabe’s mother. Her absent, nameless presence in the text represents both the need to mark her presence as well as the unwillingness to stabilize that presence by speaking for herself. Having been refused a speaking position does not generate in her an identity based on that refusal—she does not simply desire to have what she cannot have (which as I have suggested in previous chapters is a fallacy of anti-colonial nationalism). In this way, she proffers an alternative to the logic announcing that “bad,” “poor,” or “negative” representations need to be answered with “good,”

⁷ Ibid., 10.

“positive” ones. While the narratives of Carlos, Gabe, as well as Stone depend in particular on realism to stage normative racialized masculinity, Gabe’s mother figures as nothing less than the representation of that which has no proper, normative, good representation. As the trace of the global neoliberal order, Filipina mothers are produced by—and produce themselves—biopolitical networks. In a risky move, Gabe’s mother refuses the logic of representation on the grounds that it is too intimately linked to the exercise of racial and sexual authority, and to the practices of imperialism and hetero/homonationalism. But that refusal does not signal erasure, displacement, or disavowal, these being precisely the terms of visible racialized masculinity in both of these texts. Her efforts are neither futile nor hapless. Instead, her absent presence produces an illegible excess. She does not respond to hetero/homonational exclusions by seeking or claiming a speaking position, but questions the privilege of the speaking position and underscores the vulnerabilities it cannot contain. Despite repeated efforts, she can neither be erased nor represented for the global fraternal order.

2.

America Is in the Heart opens with the return of the narrator’s brother, Leon, from World War I. Soon after Leon’s wedding to a poor woman, the two participate in a “primitive custom” meant to determine if she were “virginal.”⁸ The narrator, Allos, criticizes it as a

cruel custom, because the women could no longer marry when they were returned to their parents, and would be looked upon with abhorrence and would be

⁸ Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1973), 6.

ostracized. But it was a fast-dying custom, in line with other backward customs in the Philippines, yielding to the new ways of the younger generation that were shaping out sharply from the growing industrialism.⁹

For Leon's unnamed new bride, the custom did not die fast enough, though, and the lack of smoke signals coming from the hut implied that she was not a virgin, giving way to a public beating, at the hands of both men and women, leading to the newlyweds's banishment from the village. Allos thus latches onto "industrialism" as a way to overcome women's oppression in a "backward," traditional society, thereby disclosing, without fully elaborating upon, a link between the economic and the cultural. Positioning the Philippines as a primitive land not only poses US modernity as the better, more-civilized culture, it obscures the presence of another Western nation, Spain, under whose colonial administration the Philippines languished for nearly three centuries.¹⁰ It is this hope for an idealized and specifically western modernity that will sustain the narrator throughout the text, even despite the harsh racism he faces once he migrates to the US. If, as Martin Joseph Ponce and others have suggested, the text ends ambivalently with regard to the US—on one hand, welcoming its influence and promise; on the other hand, vividly describing its racism—this ambivalence is present from the beginning, especially as the young narrator accrues experiences of economic hardship that can be traced not

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰ Not unlike Allos, though much more explicitly, US colonial administrators distanced themselves from their colonial predecessors by representing Spain's failure to modernize the Philippines. In this way, Allos may be understood as repeating colonial discourse, despite his otherwise internationalist claims. This paradox carries through to the text's conclusion.

just to the rural economy, but a pre-emergent global industrialism under the auspices of US imperialism.¹¹

In this early portion of the novel, Ponce conceptualizes this ambivalence as a “transnational address” that interconnects “lyrically rendered pastoral representations of the homeland widely used by Philippine writers at the time, and class-based social analysis derived from interwar proletarian literatures and theories.”¹² Thus, the first scene describes a pastoral scene for Leon’s homecoming while inserting stinging critiques of global capitalism, such as when the family struggles to pay their debts given the new economic structures impacting local agriculture. This writing strategy exceeds memoir into the political, amounting to a space-clearing gesture that positions Bulosan in the center of a Filipino literary culture writing from the US. Ponce notes that Leon’s homecoming is actually a retelling of Manuel Arguilla’s short story, “How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife,” and its revised inclusion is suggestive of Bulosan’s project to revise the lyrical, pastoral writing of Filipino literature. Within this space-clearing move, Ponce suggests that the death of two characters representing the lyrical and

¹¹ The conclusion of the novel has drawn much attention from critics as an apologia for US multiculturalist capitalism and nationalism. I would submit, however, that the conclusion is a more-complex text than has thus far been alleged, though in this essay I only briefly touch upon its complexity. For some recent interpretations, see Martin Joseph Ponce, “On Becoming Socially Articulate: Transnational Bulosan” *Journal of Asian American Studies* (February 2005): 49-80; Rachel Lee, “Fraternal Devotions: Carlos Bulosan and the Sexual Politics of America,” *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), 17-43; Kandice Chuh, “Against Uniform Subjectivity: Remembering ‘Filipino America,’” *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 31-57; Augusto Fauni Espiritu, “Suffering and Passion: Carlos Bulosan,” *Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and Filipino American Intellectuals* (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2005); Allan Punzalan Isaac, “Reconstituting American Subjects: Proximate Masculinities,” *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006).

¹² Ponce, 55.

political, respectively, is consonant with and appropriate for Allos's efforts to combine, rather than keep distinct, the literary and political.

While this ambivalence between the aesthetic/lyrical/pastoral and the political appears in the first chapter, it becomes a pronounced problem in the narrator's life in the US. The problem Carlos (a name he accepts once arriving to the US) must confront is the inability to link the aesthetic and the political—that is, to resolve the ambivalence. As the supposed hero of the novel, he will prove unsuccessful in this regard. The problem manifests in how both publishing houses and other migrant laborers respond to his aspirations to leave the ranks of migrant labor and become a politically committed writer. Perhaps the first hint that this space-clearing, heroic effort will fail is the conditions for its very emergence, which is Carlos's chronic illness that keeps him bedridden for much of the narrative. It is as if the aesthetic can only emerge from the breaking down of the material body—and not just any body, but a racialized, gendered body, but a Filipino male body. The writerly body is one that cannot do physical work, which leads to another question: if the migrant laborer is a racialized, gendered body, and if the Filipino male body is produced and circumscribed within US imperialism by its ability to do physical work, does Carlos's inability to do physical work deracinate his body? Does it render the nonfunctioning body meaningless and devalued within the terms of US imperialism? While his illness is pitied, it is not interrogated for its potential origins and meanings in these particular conditions.

Despite his illness, he makes an effort to stay involved in the labor movement, in a way that would unite his belletristic pursuits with social justice:

I discovered that one writer led to another: that they were all moved by the same social force. While Federico Garcia Lorca was writing passionately about the folklore of the peasants in Granada, Nicolas Guillén was chanting verses of social equality for the Negro people in Puerto Rico. While André Malraux was dramatizing the heroism of the Chinese Communists, a Filipino, Manuel E. Arguilla, was writing of the peasantry on the island of Luzon.¹³

By referring to different writers working in different political situations, the transnational aspect of the link between the aesthetic and the political is reinforced and distinctly masculinized. This global community of male authors provides a model for Carlos in his pursuit of what Ponce calls a transnational “doubled address” (doubled for its interconnecting the aesthetic and the political). Other laborers, though, interpret Carlos’s writing habits as a move away from their struggle, finding no common cause that can unite the two kinds of labor. For instance, seeking to address issues that affect specifically Filipino masculinity— “Why can’t we marry women of the Caucasian race? And why are we not allowed to marry in the state?”—he proposes to launch a “separate Filipino unit” of the Communist party. Two organizers attempt to stop him, arguing that it is a “divisionist tactic” that is a “complete disobedience of the Party’s rules.”¹⁴ They accuse him of “talk[ing] like an intellectual.” He tells them that he has “washed dishes for a living” and that “I have never made any pretensions to intellectualism” and imagines them conspiring to exclude him based on a “working class arrogance” that refused to see a “common ground” between the aesthetic and the political.¹⁵

¹³ Bulosan, 246.

¹⁴ Ibid., 269.

¹⁵ Ibid., 270, 293.

The penultimate chapter signifies the ultimate failure of Carlos's project. He succeeds in publishing a book of poetry and seeks his brother Amado, who also works as a migrant laborer, to show it to him. He finds him "drinking beer with two girls," the book hidden under his coat to protect it from the rain.

Then one of the girls, thinking perhaps that I had a bottle of whisky under my coat, pulled at my arm. When she saw that it was only a book, her joyous anticipation vanished.

"It's a damned book," she said.

"Yes, it's my book," I said.

"Ha-ha!" she laughed. "Poetry!" She began tearing out the pages and throwing them at my face.

"Don't do that, please!" I said, rising to take the book away from her.

It was like tearing my heart apart. Amado suddenly grabbed the book from her and gave it to me. Then he got up and started beating her with his fists, cursing her.¹⁶

"It was like tearing my heart apart"—the very heart in which Carlos's America is contained. The attempt to establish a link between the aesthetic and the political is forestalled here, as his creative efforts are belittled and he is humiliated in a public setting where migrant laborers spend their leisure time. Presumed to be a bottle of liquor, the thing hiding under his coat is revealed to be worthless intellectualism—it is poetry, after all, not even a political pamphlet—that warrants destruction. That it occurs in front of his

¹⁶ Ibid., 321.

brother gestures toward Carlos's transnational desires, as Amado signifies both labor culture in the US and family in the Philippines.

The failure, though, is not due to the abstract ambivalence between the aesthetic and the political alone. It is not insignificant that the agent of the undoing of the link is a woman. After all, the book could have been torn to shreds by a male Communist leader, or by Amado himself. Instead, the blame is displaced from those critical antagonists, who are reduced to witnesses of the event, to a woman who suffers violent blows from Amado after destroying his brother's book, a woman who has no name or background, which are irrelevant, and is only referred to "as one of the girls." Amado, who was not actively supportive of Carlos's literary pursuits, nevertheless defends his brother against this "goddamned whore."¹⁷ In spite of whatever class and/or racial affinities that bring together these men and women, she is declaimed for interrupting an emergent fraternal solidarity—a *solidarity that didn't exist until her arrival*. In this way, it is not that woman interrupts a pre-existing fraternity; she is constitutive of the fraternal order that temporarily resolves the ambivalence between aesthetic and political, between Carlos the writer and migrant labor.

Since the solidarity that emerges in this scene remains uncertain—is Amado defending Carlos as a brother, Filipino, male laborer?—it is necessary to consider in what specific ways women work to disrupt, even as they constitute, the uniting of the aesthetic and the political according to the terms of a transnational fraternal order. Rachel Lee argues that women in the novel "appear the Other of labor—the abject identity against

¹⁷ Ibid.

which male labor defines itself.”¹⁸ Her reading of gender and sexuality in the novel contends that sexualized women are repeatedly accused of interrupting the possibility of fraternal community, both nationally and transnationally. The ideals Carlos imagines about the US not only are concerned with modern concepts of liberal democracy and freedom, but also effect a desire for a homosocial fraternity that depends precisely on the exclusion of (sexualized) women. Lee begins with the same opening scene Ponce discusses, highlighting how Leon is reunited with his father and brother after fighting in World War I. This momentary fulfillment is immediately disrupted by Leon’s fiance, leading not only to the couple’s banishment from the community but the specific dissolution of the fraternal family. This is only the first instance of a recurring motif that structures the text, and in other instances both Allos and another brother are compelled to “[flee] home in order to avoid forced [marriages].”¹⁹ Evicted from their homeland as a consequence of women in pursuit, they are resigned to re-establish home elsewhere. Lee writes that the novel “begins framing America as the site to which brothers flee and wherein a lost brotherhood might be recovered.”²⁰ Yet there, too, “women are depicted as the cause of brotherly dissension”—even when the text shows men competing for the attention of women and thus potentially undermines “brotherly collectives,” the blame falls upon women. This becomes literal when other women even “use sexual intimacy to infiltrate labor fraternities and promote their internal fragmentation.”²¹

An early dialogue between men stages the privileging of a modern masculinity and fraternal order. Allos meets another brother, Macario, who has been away at school

¹⁸ Lee, 27.

¹⁹ Ibid., 23.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 27.

for several years, for the first time.²² The first words Macario has for his younger brother concern his long, unruly hair, which their father explains is needed for “protection” against insects and exposure to the sun. Such reasons allude to Allos’s life in the province, working in the fields. This non-modern, un-American lifestyle generates this response from Macario:

“I will make a gentleman out of him. . . . Wouldn’t you like to be a gentleman, Allos?”

I could not say anything. I walked silently between them: my brother on the left, my father on the right. They were like two strong walls protecting me from the attack of an unseen enemy (moving into my life to give me the warm assurance of their proximity, and guiding me into the future that was waiting with all its ferocity).²³

Who or what is this “enemy,” and why is it “unseen”? The analogy is awkward, two edifices whose proximity provides warmth even as they obscure the enemy—like blind, masculinized (and militarized) patriotism. These walls erected around Allos move with him, synchronous, into the future. What is the substance of its “ferocity”? The passage functions like a thesis for the text, but like the other thesis of yoking aesthetics to politics, this fraternal order will fail at the hands of (sexualized) women.

It is noteworthy that Allos’s mother is not included in the erection of masculine protection for the young Allos. The novel’s displacing of women from the scene of an ideal community extends to include not only Lee’s sexualized women, but maternal

²² Allos notes how Macario greets their father with a handshake, rather than a kiss, since Macario is “being educated in the American way” (20).

²³ Bulosan, 21.

women as well. Lee points out that while Allos sympathizes with his mother for selling beans at the market, indicating their poverty, he rejects her presumed acceptance of a subordinate role. Neither does he recognize her efforts to “emul[ate] the bourgeoisie through her petty mercantilism”; instead, “the merit of woman lies in her maternity.”²⁴ One could say that maternal women, too, become sexualized insofar as their bodies are useful only for reproducing men, after which they are discarded and displaced from the national and transnational landscape.

The presence of women thus disrupts the very attempt to produce a unity between the aesthetic and the political. The “transnational doubled address” that Carlos tries to write into existence, whose audience is a homosocial fraternity, is fractured by women. It is now possible to return to the penultimate chapter of the text and recognize the significance of the unnamed woman who tears Carlos’s book of poetry apart. Neither his brother nor any other male laborer could enact such a terroristic maneuver, since Carlos’s idealism depended on the hope for a (trans)national social justice founded on fraternity. While critics point to the last chapter as the staging of a resilient idealism, a kind of American dream detached from the racial violence Carlos experiences throughout the text, the idealism is in place even earlier, and with no less of the nostalgia that, as Lee points out, looks both backward and forward to the gendered utopia of fraternity, disrupted in the present precisely by the presence of women.

The short chapter that follows and concludes the text is a paradoxical, if poignant, attempt to imagine an America that leaves two experiences behind: racist, imperialist culture, and the failure to overcome that culture by establishing a transnational fraternity

²⁴ Lee, 29.

between the aesthetic and the political. That failure is ultimately only the sign of a greater failure—of Carlos’s version of the American dream. The gap that cannot be closed is the one separating the material from the immaterial, separating experience from ideal. Carlos bids farewell to the “Filipino pea pickers” he sees from his bus seat in Portland. The sound of bells ringing reminds him of a church in the Philippines. When he looks “out of the window again to look at the broad land I had dreamed so much about,” the last chance to recognize the chasm between dreams and realities is obscured by a surreal image—a rare instance in a text so invested in realism—of “the American earth ... like a huge heart unfolding warmly to receive me. I felt it spreading through my being, warming me with its glowing reality. It came to me that no man—no one at all—could destroy my faith in America again.”²⁵

According to the terms of his fraternal ideals, no man would dare interfere with Carlos’s “faith.” But women have done just that. His inability to specify the category of “woman” that all along has been his primary target to expel from society parallels the text’s rare and concluding surreal image. Page after page, the text invests in realism, detailing the brutal conditions of US imperialism and capitalism, until this last chapter, where in order for Carlos to preserve his ideals, he is compelled to imagine the landscape swallowing itself up and the narrator as well. If dream and experience cannot align, the text makes a final effort to hide experience in the interior space of a heart, a secret materiality that bears the name “woman,” which he refuses to announce despite having done almost nothing but announce it as the sign of failure throughout the text. This refusal is a desperate and futile attempt to preserve the dream. This desire for America

²⁵ Bulosan, 326.

has a transnational level to it, as he notes that it “grew out of the sacrifices and loneliness of my friends, of my brothers in America and my family in the Philippines—something that grew out of our desire to know America, and to become part of her great tradition, and to contribute something toward her final fulfillment.”²⁶ Lee is keen to point to the pronoun “her” used to signify the nation, which “conceals the narrator’s ‘ever’-lasting attendance to an all-male collective.”²⁷

If by its end the text does not accomplish what it set out to do—that is, if the presence of women cannot be disavowed, if the very characters in Carlos’s story disallow it—there is one other scene that suspends his investment in one kind of American dream for not very long, but long enough to point otherwise, to imagine otherwise, than the rest of the text. Mourning the death of one of his friends (not insignificantly, a white woman whose death from complications associated with syphilis possibly refers to her sex work) Carlos decides to leave California and buys a one-way bus ticket to Seattle. On the bus, he meets two white women, Rosaline and Lily. Having married sailors in San Diego, both women are romantically unavailable. On the bus ride, the three sing “popular tunes” as if on a school field trip: innocent, clean fun. Crossing the California border into Oregon, Carlos describes it as “a familiar land. How many times had I passed through it? The air was clean. The trees were tall and straight. I could see little streams in the deep canyons below.”²⁸ Even within this idyllic landscape, however, the threat of violence lurks: “Now we were nearing the place where I had been humiliated by two highway patrolmen.”²⁹ Nevertheless, Rosaline and Lily invite him to postpone his trip to Seattle and join them in

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 327.

²⁷ Lee, 41.

²⁸ Bulosan, 220.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Medford, Oregon, where their families live. Carlos agrees but insists on staying at a hotel, it seems, as a way of avoiding any misinterpretation of their friendships. After dinner, they go skinny-dipping in a nearby lake. The night, as he puts it, “was like an arrested dream: so calm it was almost unreal.”³⁰

Critics have argued that the novel repeatedly idealizes his relationships with white women in order to uphold an American dream uncontaminated by sexual desire. Kandice Chuh writes that his “idolatry of white women does not translate into a desire for miscegenation per se, but for the conditions that would make it unremarkable for Allos to be seen in the company of a white woman.”³¹ Viet Thanh Nguyen goes so far as to proclaim Carlos’s achievement to be nothing short of “enac[ting] a discourse of revolutionary morality, one that is both politically conscious and sexually chaste.”³² But whereas Nguyen’s account suggests an ethical position in Carlos’s masculinity, it is better understood within Chuh’s analysis of a strategic politics. In particular, the Medford scene challenges the argument that Carlos idealizes the US through the effacing of sexual desire, that his morality has anything to do with chastity. It reads, instead, as a strategy to avoid racial violence inflicted on his body. He writes that “Lily suddenly pushed me vigorously and swam away, turning back to see if I would follow her. I dived and swam swiftly under the water. I caught her and for a moment was tempted to hold her tightly; but I merely splashed water into her face and swam away.”³³ When they leave, he feels a “great loneliness.” The “temptation” is there, but self-policed. Medford marks only a

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Chuh, 40.

³² Viet Thanh Nguyen, “Wounded Bodies and the Cold War: Freedom, Materialism, and Revolution in Asian American Literature, 1946-1957,” *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 69.

³³ Ibid., 221.

brief stopover for Carlos, one of the many that the peripatetic narrator makes on the west coast. The sexual desire it represents suggests that Carlos is not as idealistic as critics argue, but instead must discipline sexual desire given the risk of racial violence. His idealization is less an ethical stance than a discursive strategy, an alternative masculinity wary of the sexual violence associated with the Filipinized male body. This revised reading can and perhaps should be extended to account even for the numerous passages where idealism and exceptionalism seem transparent—for instance, the sentimental and wistful lament about the US that ends the novel.

In contrast to the persistent attempts to establish a transnational fraternal order dependent on the exclusion of women, the scene briefly glimpses a different landscape that imagines a space for women. Undoubtedly, it is a heterosexist narrative—women only can participate as the objects of Filipino male sexual desire. Yet it suggests that the “all-male collective” is managed by anti-miscegenation and racism, an admission that the fraternal order which is constantly disrupted by women is not native or traditional, but part of the western, modern, industrial script—a challenge to the all-too-easy conflation of women’s rights and western industrialism articulated in the opening scene. In this reading, Carlos’s heteronationalism is discontinuous and antagonistic to US imperialism and racism; even as Carlos here potentially disidentifies, however briefly, with the fraternal utopia, such a disidentification is founded on a heterosexism that must not be disavowed. Filipino masculinity retains its claim as the site of injury; insofar as it cannot sexually access white women’s bodies, it is not part of the national body politic. Thus, the miscegenated heteronationalism Carlos seeks does not actually disrupt the fraternal order,

it only seeks to diversify who can possess women's bodies, so that the inclusion of women in no way delivers gendered equality or justice.

If the transnational fraternity that dominates the text and the miscegenated heteronationalism that appears in this scene are both denied by the presence of women who destroy the narrator's poetry and swim away from him, Brian Roley's *American Son* explores to what extent same-sex desire may be the site of national belonging. In other words, I ask whether homonationalism can deliver liberation for Filipino masculinity, and what effects Gabe's homonational encounter—which is itself subject to a racialized heteropatriarchy—has on women, and in particular on Gabe's Filipina mother. The detour through a homonational Meridan, rather than a heteronational Medford, will somehow end up in the same space of global heteronational empire. It will be the detour that Gabe's mother takes that more critically arrives at alternative destinations.

3.

Consonant with the argument I developed in the first chapter, if there is a critical demand for more work on Filipina/os—supported by the claim that histories have been forgotten, bodies have been made invisible, and thus academic work needs to counter these imperialist erasures—I argue that emergent narratives must not embrace visibility naively and wholeheartedly: visibility brings no guarantees of liberation, and may be incorporated into dangerous narratives of liberal multiculturalism, heteronormative nationalism, and capitalist exploitation. Filipina/o (American) cultural critique must grasp the threshold between visibility and invisibility, must understand that both may work to manage bodies according to racial, gender, and sexual categories. My goal in this chapter

and in the larger project is to point to the instabilities in literary and cultural representations in order to disturb the transparent wills-to-knowledge relied upon by imperialism, globalization, and nationalism, as well as critical alternative efforts that unwittingly reinforce their antagonists.

In an important essay, Oscar Campomanes claims that the invisibility of Filipina/os is necessary to the imperial amnesia subtending US exceptionalism.³⁴ Why else would the second largest Asian immigrant group, statistically, have such little presence in popular culture as well as historiography? But while some critics might read the essay as a call to confront invisibility directly with visibility through historical, sociological, and anthropological narratives—as if guaranteeing liberation via documentation—a careful reading suggests that Campomanes recognizes that visibility does not offer guaranteed solutions, and that to invest in visibility might only reinforce the terms of imperialism: “How do these exceptionalist emplotments of U.S. imperial nationality constrain and implicate present-day Filipino American politics of recognition and identities?”³⁵ If a politics based on visibility is “fatally entwined” with imperialist amnesia, he argues that “remembrance is precarious but possibly productive: it calls up an unimaginable becoming (the Filipino *American*) and an unimagined community that represents the unrepresentable and critically recognizes the perils of forgetfulness.”³⁶ The “possibly productive” is juxtaposed with a “precariousness” that should not be lost in favor of a simplistic belief that visibility and recognition will serve as solutions.

³⁴ Oscar Campomanes, “The New Empire’s Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipina/o-American Postcolonialities,” *Critical Mass* 2:2 (Spring 1995), 145-200.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 165-6; emphasis in original.

When he calls for “U.S. Filipino studies” to “teas[e] out the inchoate narratives signified by this matter of categories or ‘proper names,’” it is critical not to ignore the “inchoate” out of which knowledge is produced.³⁷ Campomanes is clear on this point, suggesting that “the Filipino condition resists political narrations which do not unsettle the representative terms or categories mandated by prevailing discursive grids in U.S. nation-state bureaucracies, academia, and cultural domains.”³⁸ In a manner of speaking, to be Filipina/o is to necessarily resist conventional political narratives—identity politics, liberal multiculturalism, heteronormative nationalism, etc., and this point may be understood as the dissemination of the category “Filipina/o.” It is a politically charged naming that resists what Dylan Rodriguez calls the “genocidal common sense” of mainstream efforts to claim visibility in the US body politic, as I discussed in the first chapter.

The need is thus to see how U.S. Filipino nominative politics speak to the several U.S. fields which Filipino Americans and their forms actually traverse and criss-cross without earning the requisite currencies. ... This curious condition of simultaneous polymorphousness and liminality crystallizes the larger argument: Filipinos and their “subaltern” (because actively repressed and only emergent) formations are precisely and significantly unaccommodated by such fields for the multiple complications that they present to prevailing narrative patterns and representational protocols in U.S.-based discourses.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., 152.

³⁸ Ibid., 148.

³⁹ Ibid., 151.

It is this *excess* that the production of knowledge—no matter who or what institution is doing the producing—cannot account for, which “falls away.” Writing about the ineffable that often escapes scholastic inquiries, R. Radhakrishnan writes that

the thing to note is that the most effective way intellectuals can express their affirmation of life and their solicitude for existence is in terms of their critical disaffection with their own disciplinary practices. The positive plenitude or presence of life has to be valorized as the not said or the not sayable within intellectuals’ own disciplinary parameters.⁴⁰

In this way, it is possible to understand the need to destabilize representation as a politicized, as well as critical, intervention.

Fifty years after the publishing of *America Is in the Heart*, Gabe, the narrator of Brian Ascalon Roley’s novel *American Son*, travels along the west coast, in search of identity and freedom. Though his trip originates in Los Angeles, he “travels along the eastern part of the state,” the beginning of a zigzagging journey that cannot be easily, if at all, traced on a map.⁴¹ Nevertheless, when Gabe’s car breaks down in a rural town and must be towed over the California border, the roadtrip recalls some of Carlos’s travels, and in particular the bus ride that involves a stopover in Medford, Oregon. The parallel ends abruptly, though, when it turns out that, as introduced earlier, Gabe’s stopover is not Medford, but Meridan—a city that does not exist on any official documents, whether maps, histories, city charters, census data, etc.

⁴⁰ R. Radhakrishnan, “Theory, Democracy, and the Public Intellectual,” *PMLA* 125:3 (2010), 790.

⁴¹ Brian Ascalon Roley, *American Son* (New York: Norton, 2001), 62. The text mentions both Navarro and Mammoth, towns so far apart—and across the state—that it would be highly improbable for any north-south trip to pass through both.

Why the difference? Is it an intentional move by the author, creating a parallel universe that deviates for an unstated reason? Such a reading is possible, especially since the subtitle given to this, the second section of the text, is “Somewhere in Another California, July 1993.”⁴² Though the section only occupies roughly one-quarter of the text, it is noteworthy that it is the only section that shares its title, “American Son,” with the title of the entire text. At first glance, the “another” in the subtitle refers to the rural landscape whose exotic difference is difficult for the Los Angeles-based Gabe to take: it unsettles him, not only for its quietude, but also for its whiteness. But it could also refer to an otherness of a more fundamental order, one that would explain the difference between Medford and Meridan. For a text that is so committed to realism, though, this surreal parallel universe requires an imaginative leap.

On the other hand, could it be a simple mistake shared by the writer, editor, and publisher? At a diner before the car breaks down, Gabe talks about *not* intending to go to “Medford”; a towing agency recommends towing the car to “Medford.” But when the Oldsmobile is towed over the border, it arrives in Meridan. The city’s name is mentioned only once in the entire text, in contrast to the several references to Medford that appear; when Gabe thinks back to the roadtrip in the third and final section, he only refers to it as Oregon. Rather than fret about the possible reasons for the discrepancy, it is worth considering whether this alleged error can be put in the service of critique—in a manner of speaking, is it possible and productive to measure the distance between Medford and Meridan? Can this aporetic opening make way for a very certain destabilization of the

⁴² Ibid., 59.

hetero/homonationalisms of the two texts? Can it take up Campomanes's radical call to redefine Filipina/o America?

4.

Gabe runs away from his family in Los Angeles. With his white father, a military veteran, absent from the family, his older brother Tomas assumes the role of patriarch, culturally and economically, as he "helps pay the mortgage."⁴³ Tomas is hyperviolently racialized and masculinized, translating his ambiguous half-white, half-Filipino appearance into a stereotype of an urban Chicano, dressing "like a Mexican gangster" and sporting tattoos that are "mostly gang, Spanish, and old-lady Catholic."⁴⁴ He bullies his Filipina mother and brother and sells "attack dogs to rich people and celebrities" seeking both to protect their valuables and image.⁴⁵ There are material benefits to be gained from this manipulation of identity: Tomas's wealthy clients like seeing the signs of racialized hypermasculinity that they associate with the "poor end of Santa Monica," believing it means the dogs are really dangerous.⁴⁶ The dogs, too, are caught within these signifying practices, as Tomas, who buys the dogs from others, pretends that they

have pedigrees that go back to Germany, and that they descend from dogs the Nazis used. He likes to tell [potential clients] Nazi scientists did experiments in dog breeding just as they did in genetics and rocketry. He tells them this is a

⁴³ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 21.

Teutonic art that goes back to the Prussian war states. ... [T]he clients seems to like the explanation.⁴⁷

The alibi works for most customers, except for one rich, white man who can tell the difference. At his gated home, Tomas and Gabe are caught off-guard by the woman of color who lets them in; they assume she is the maid, not the wife and co-customer, and are irritated by her meddling. This confusion foreshadows Gabe's behavior in Meridan.

Despite or considering Tomas's hypermasculine posturing, there is a gender ambivalence that can be understood as organizing the family. In this way, though their mother pleads with Tomas to look white "if he wants to be something he is not," racial and gender normativity are not presented as options, hypermasculinity being just one non-normative formation.⁴⁸ Provocatively, the main character in this nexus of racial and gender ambivalence is Buster, one of the attack dogs; the slippage from human to animal is not irrelevant, either. Buster, who already bears the weight of a kind of racial identity crisis—German or not?—is, as Gabe points out, "a bitch, but [Tomas] named her the masculine Buster because he had always wanted to name a dog Buster."⁴⁹ In many ways, this animal, whose identity straddles multiple racial and gender identities, is the only thing keeping the family together. Tomas "refuses to sell her" even for premium prices. Buster sleeps on their mother's bed and "[s]ometimes our mother has a hand on Buster's neck as if she were her husband."⁵⁰ The ambiguity in pronouns is instructive of the kinds of confusions and slippages structuring the family.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 26.

Though Gabe is a pushover, a “mama’s boy,” he is perhaps the most normative member of the family, bearing neither signs of racial otherness—such as his mother’s thick accent, Tomas’s Chicano performance, or Buster’s racial and gender ambivalence.⁵¹ It is not surprising, then, when he tires of Tomas’s bullying and seeks revenge and an escape. Given Buster’s role in the rather non-normative family, it is equally not surprising that Gabe’s revenge takes the form of kidnapping and selling Buster before stealing Tomas’s car to run away from the non-normative urban space of their home.

Far from that urban landscape, the lack of familiarity and comfort deliver considerable unease to the teen. He is suspicious of the mostly white population and tries to fit in as much as possible. This strategy depends primarily on trying to ensure that, paraphrasing Gabe, he looks, speaks, and acts white. For the most part, though, he slinks away from society, choosing to interact with as few people as possible. The real test comes when the car breaks down and he is forced to solicit help. Stone, the white tow truck driver, agrees to tow the car to the nearest city, over state lines in Oregon. Sharing the cab of a truck with Stone for an extended duration, Gabe works hard to give off the impression of whiteness. But it is his insecurities about his acting performance that dominate the text. Throughout the roadtrip, he is dumbfounded that Stone has not caught on, repeating several times that Stone “must be blind.”⁵²

Decrying the Los Angeles metro area, Gabe mimics Stone out of fear. The teen nods in agreement that, as Stone says, “Venice is a shithole,” due to the “fucking Mexicans” and adds, “But it isn’t near as bad as San Pedro. . . . Cambodians, Vietnamese,

⁵¹ Ibid., 27.

⁵² Ibid., 84, 90, 98.

Laotians.”⁵³ While Gabe affirms him, the teen wonders how long it will take for Stone to notice that he is also not fully, not quite white. For a moment, it appears that Stone does just that, pleading that “I hope it didn’t bother you what I said about them Asians being quiet.”⁵⁴ The conversation reaches absurdity when Stone clarifies that his apology is directed toward the generalization and stereotyping of “quiet people,” not Asians: “I didn’t mean to make any judgments about quiet people, per se.”⁵⁵ Asians remain available for such generalizations, apparently. Doing his part to abet Stone’s blindness, Gabe describes life in Los Angeles as filled with racial terror, drawing from observations of his own brother to provide detail:

The Mexicans come up and it’s like they’re still roaming all the barrios killing each other down in Mexico. They have their neighborhoods they mark up with graffiti. Like pissing dogs. The new ones have macho mustaches and slick their hair back like they’re some kind of Spanish Casanovas, but they’re like these short Indian-looking guys. The Cambodians are the worst. It’s like their war isn’t over yet.⁵⁶

Los Angeles is represented as an urban landscape terrorized by people of color. If James Kyung-Jin Lee argues that multiculturalism produces a scene of “urban triage” in US metropolises, urban representations find no relief in the countryside.⁵⁷

The bond between Gabe and Stone is built partly on their shared distance from Los Angeles; Stone claims Gabe does not seem like “the LA type.”⁵⁸ Gabe’s rant against

⁵³ Ibid., 83 ff.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁷ See James Kyung-Jin Lee, *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism*, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004.

different ethnic groups transforms him from a passive if agreeable listener to an engaged and active participant. The bigger transformation comes from Stone, though: “Suddenly he looks upon me with fatherly concern.”⁵⁹ The moment of Gabe proclaiming his investments in racialized normativity is met, at first glance, with a paternal comfort. It appears that a significant rapport is established in this moment, marking Stone as a surrogate for the white father missing from Gabe’s life. On the next page, the parent-child relationship is further cemented when Stone reveals that his daughter was killed, implying they were both victims of gunfire in Los Angeles. The twist in this mutually surrogate relationship is that Gabe fills in for a white woman.

That twist, though, is not the most intriguing one that emerges in this new relationship, founded on racial normativity. The language Gabe uses to describe the revelation of the murder of Stone’s daughter is erotic, representing a desire not for Stone’s daughter, but for Stone. The emergence of Gabe’s racial/gender/sexual disciplining is immediately also the emergence of that which cannot be fully restrained, namely same-sex desire.

Suddenly he looks upon me with fatherly concern. An overwhelming warmth spreads within me like an intake of hot sour breath. Blushing, I turn away.

He leans forward and fingers open his top shirt button, barely able to restrain himself. A gold chain connects to a pendant which rests against a nest of chest hair. He pulls it out.

Here, take a look at this, he says, handing it to me.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

The warm sweaty metal feels heavy in my fingers. It takes a moment of fumbling for the latch to snap open. There's a picture of a pretty blond girl inside.

He seems to be nervously studying me as if to see what I think of her.

Who's this? I finally say.

She was my daughter.

...

He unbuttons his shirt further, then peels back the damp fabric to reveal more of his chest. Matted chest hair clings to the shirt wool, then pops back. It seems weird that he would do this, and I look down.

Look here, he says.

There is a quarter-sized red scar on his chest, and suddenly he takes my hand in his sweaty palm and leads my finger to it. I have to force myself not to jerk away, this is so surprising. His black chest hair feels thick against my fingertip, the skin warm. A pulse beats, though I do not know whether it is his or mine.⁶⁰

By the end of this passage, the difference between their bodies diminishes as Gabe is forced to touch Stone. It is not necessarily skin color that they share, but pulse, which reverberates with Carlos's metaphorized American heart. This intimacy begins to make Gabe uncomfortable.⁶¹

There are two other scenes in which the paternal, the erotic, and the racial converge, adding to the discourse as well as their intimacy. First, the two stop for lunch at a diner. Stone is familiar with the workers and customers there, and he will later admit

⁶⁰ Ibid., 87.

⁶¹ It should be emphasized that the novel is a narration of Gabe's experience; Stone's thoughts remain obscure. The lack of quotation marks separating itself from the narration and differentiating between who is speaking stresses the interiority of this narrative.

that he is a part-owner of the restaurant. Gabe continues trying to conceal his identity, especially in light of Stone's insights on the locals, and no one questions him about his background, although the teen surmises that one old man who makes a racist comment about Mexicans feels "embarrassed" by Gabe's presence. As they are leaving, Stone tells him to wait outside, where he is confronted by two Mexican restaurant workers who interrogate him about his car, which they correctly associate with urban Chicano life. It is not the only subtlety they perceive, as they tease him about his relationship to Stone:

Is the big guy your friend?

I shrug.

He's just towing my truck.

They trade glances. So he's not your friend? the big one says.

I just met him.

Because you seemed really friendly.⁶²

At one point, they ask him if Stone knows he is Mexican, to which Gabe replies, "I ain't no Mexican."⁶³ Stone returns just in time to defuse the situation, ordering them back into the kitchen. He then goes to comfort Gabe:

Sorry about that.

I wave with my hand to indicate that it is nothing, nada. It is an awkward ghost of a gesture I have seen Tomas use adroitly many times. Immediately I am sorry I used it, but he does not seem to notice it is not an Anglo movement.

He half smiles upon me, father-like, then pats my shoulder. Damned spics, he says almost gently.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid., 100.

⁶³ Ibid., 101.

Stone now more fully reminds Gabe of his father. The teen is comforted by Stone's "father-like" protection, which slides into the erotic as he notices a resemblance in eye color:

I relax and notice more about him. His shirt is damp and dark at his breasts and underarms and also now along his sides. Each time we emerge into a clearing and sunlight peeks below the window's top edge, it catches his face, which glistens with sweat. Lit like that, his eyes appear amber and warm even when he squints. My father's were light like that.⁶⁵

Such rapport, confused between the paternal and homoerotic, may be understood within the discussion of homonationalism that appears early in this chapter. If we understand the paternal to be intimately linked to the national—the Founding Fathers, the Father of our Country, the Flags of our Fathers, etc.—then it is quite appropriate that as a form of homonational rapport, their relationship would lose sense of any fine distinctions between the two, between discipline and desire. Gabe is thus able to find a father-figure, lover, and national belonging—all of which were out of reach in Santa Monica. It is a homoerotic, rather than homosocial and heteropatriarchal, relation that intersects with the national/patriarchal, but as Jasbir Puar and others have suggested, homonationalism (and homopatriarchy) precisely allows for the inclusion of multiple sexualities as long as they register with other normativities, such as patriotism.

Before arriving in Meridan, Gabe and Stone pull over to rest at a meadow, where they lounge on folding chairs and drink beers. Earlier in the trip, Stone offered Gabe soda; it is as if he has matured on the roadtrip, learning how to be a man. But Stone

⁶⁴ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 104.

“senses that I do not like the taste of the beer and laughs, and lets me grab another root beer.”⁶⁶ Stone’s eyes remind Gabe of his father’s, and here the comfort reminds Gabe of when Tomas and I were little and my father would bring us to the highway that runs along LAX to sit on his Corvette hood and watch the underbellies of landing planes. . . . That was before Tomas had found any Mexican friends, and we had run down the highway looking for rocks to take to the beach and skip over the water.⁶⁷

Gabe is reminded of a past that was not only homosocial, but untainted by racial difference, when both he and Tomas played white. Here in Meridan, without Tomas or his mother, Gabe and Stone realize a markedly white, fraternal utopia. It strongly echoes Carlos’s memory of the father and brother who ushered him into the future, a memory that likewise did not acknowledge any mother. The signal difference of the homoerotic—the potential for a substantive homoerotic desire to threaten the scene of the heteronational—is thwarted by its emergence as a homonationalism that connects the explicitly paternal and nationalist with the *implicitly* homoerotic. So long as it is unannounced, same-sex desire can belong. Gabe succeeds where Carlos doesn’t, but the terms of his liberation remain wedded to normative and national prerogatives.

That homonational liberation, however, is fleeting. As it turns out, Gabe is not the only one who has lied in this relationship. Upon arriving in Meridan, they struggle to find an open repair station for the car—it is the Fourth of July weekend. Gabe grows anxious. Strikingly, Stone tells the nervous teen, “Don’t look so pale,” as if aware of the ways Gabe manipulates his identity. Stone questions him about where to drop him off, and he

⁶⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

has no adequate answer. It seems the tow-truck driver is only going through the motions with this procedure, as he comes up with an offer that, Gabe notes, makes it seem like he “probably planned to bring me here all along.”⁶⁸ “Here” is a motel, and what unfolds is the threat that the erotic promise of their discourse and behavior on the roadtrip might be fulfilled with a discreet, illegal, non-normative sexual encounter—something not containable within the persistent normativity of the homonational.

Gabe notices that the clerk who waits on them does not ask him for payment. He calls out but the man points to Stone: “*He* paid, son.”⁶⁹ All throughout the roadtrip, Gabe was uncomfortable with Stone for not letting him pay for anything. He finally confronts the tow truck driver, attention which Stone tries to deflect, especially because it attracts the clerk’s attention. The clerk intervenes: “You folks father and son? the man says to me, stepping forward. He’s my nephew, Stone says. The man regards him *suspiciously*, but I nod and he watches us as we push open the glass door.”⁷⁰ This time, Stone is unable to comfort Gabe, trying “to pat my shoulder, but only manages an awkward slap, and I do not respond”; frustrated and perhaps wondering what Gabe thinks of him, he admonishes the teen: “Come on, buddy, don’t look at me like that. What the hell do you think this is about?”⁷¹

As much as the question is a last stab at authority, policing Gabe not only back into the homonational, but all the way back into the heteronational—the slippage is easy, as Puar suggests—it is also the revelation of a secret made public not only for the hotel clerk, but also for the unannounced and unintended readers of *American Son*, the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 109.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 111.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

revelation of the limits of discipline, of authority, of intentions.⁷² That is, the reconstitution of heteropatriarchy is also the scene of its disruption—not unlike the torn poetry book and the midnight swim. Where Carlos swims away from the secret temptation of the Lily-white body, policing his own racialized body, Gabe and Stone confront the secret of a mutual desire. To ask “what the hell this is about” is, for Stone as much as it is for us critical readers, to admit complicity, if only for a moment. Earlier, Stone could only “barely restrain himself”; but this restraint gives way to the disclosure of the imperial intimacies linking not just Gabe to Stone, but the Philippines to the US. As easy as it is for the non-normative and possibly queer to be reined in to the heteronational, the reverse is also true, a rhizomatic series of deterritorializations and reterritorializations structuring and also de-structuring social relations, such as the one between Gabe and Stone.

5.

Gabe’s Meridan and Carlos’s Medford have as much in common as in difference. On one hand, Medford marked the site of restrained desire: Carlos policed his desire not due to an idealized American dream narrative, but due to the violence that threatened his racialized, gendered body. This is in contrast to the ways in which Gabe’s roadtrip with Stone reveals the excesses of sexual desire that *cannot* be totally policed by disciplinary operations. On the other hand, both Carlos and Gabe pursue an American dream devoid of racialized conflict and full of homosocial-cum-homonational community, ultimately

⁷² The lack of quotation marks not only does not distinguish between dialogue and narrative, setting up the text as constituted solely by Gabe’s interior monologue; since readers are privy to this monologue, it also marks the complicity of readers.

guaranteed by racialized heteropatriarchy. After all, the more radical threat of a queer sexuality, in contrast to homonationalism, is likened to both pedophilia and incest, disrupting the rapport between men. Not unlike Carlos, the teen learns to police his body according to normative identifications. In this way, Meridan actually bears a resemblance to Medford. It is thus not too surprising that the arrival of women—namely, Gabe’s mother and aunt, to pick him up in Meridan—works in tandem with the threat of queerness to stifle Gabe’s ultimately heteronormative aspirations.

Recall that in *America Is in the Heart*, women are subject to exclusion and scapegoating. Repeatedly, their arrival signals the disruption of fraternal solidarity. This scapegoating and exclusion of women extends to include not only sexualized women, but maternal figures such as Carlos’s mother. As I suggested in the first part of this chapter, these were the conditions not only for a fraternal society, but also for a transnational discourse linking the aesthetic to the political. The project failed, insofar as the text ends with little resolved, and with yet another woman literally destroying the book of poetry Carlos has published and wants to show his brother. Women, that is, do not accept the terms of Carlos’s American dream, and return to disrupt its realization. Their presence, though, is fleeting.

In sharp contrast to this transitory quality but in league with its disruptive capabilities is Gabe’s mother, who is nameless for most of the novel, since nearly the entire text is Gabe’s narration, and he refers to her only as his mother. Suspicious that Gabe is underage, Stone surreptitiously contacts Gabe’s mother and arranges for her to meet them in Meridan. Though Gabe and Stone have already damaged their rapport, it is her arrival that confirms the damage. She arrives with her sister-in-law, Jessica, a white

woman who remains a presence in their lives despite her brother's estrangement. Gabe and Stone walk up to the diner, and Gabe sees them through the window and points them out. Stone assumes she is Gabe's mother, confirming the success of Gabe's racial performance. It leads the truck driver to ask who the brown woman seated at the table is—an opportunity for Gabe to correct Stone's assumption, and to reveal what had escaped Stone's visibility. Given that his attempt to run away has failed, it is a chance to confront, rather than deny, the racial and gender non-normativity that marks his family, on the road to making peace with them.

“That's our maid,” Gabe replies.⁷³ He restores his dream of normativity and solidarity with Stone through class and racial hierarchies: Gabe remains the good white son who comes from a good middle-class home with a beautiful white mother and an obedient non-white maid. The Filipina mother remains the supplement to the family—expendable and yet indispensable. She is at once not part of the white family and the anchor that stabilizes the white family through her maternal sensibilities. All that is missing is a good white father, for which Stone remains a viable substitute. But the temporary rapport will not last. Aunt Jessica is distant with Gabe, while his mother, the alleged maid, coddles him. At one point, she accidentally “knocks over a glass of water. An awkward moment elapses as she senses [Stone's] impulse to reach over and upright it. Then—no doubt remembering that she is a maid—he sits back down.”⁷⁴ When she sits next to him, “his body instinctively turns away from her as his attention focuses on me and Aunt Jessica, the proper family members.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 122.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Finally, the secret is revealed, and Stone interrogates Gabe. The fallout does not end there, though. Back in their motel room, Gabe's mother questions him:

What did you tell him about me? she suddenly says.

Tell who?

The tow truck man.

I pause. Nothing.

She shakes her head, disappointedly.

I don't know what you're talking about, I add.

Yes you do, Gabe. Her fingers cup each other, trying to keep still in her lap.

I guess he just assumed, I say, glancing aside.

No, Gabe. I don't think so.

...

Did you tell him I was your maid? she says.

I am silent. She studies my face, and the motel curtains catch the headlights of some car in the parking lot.

Of course not.

...

I tell her it is a lie and he was never near my aunt and did not say anything. I add that if she does not want to believe me, then I am sorry she found me. Mom sits very quietly. The more quiet she is, the quicker my words come, and they spill upon me like vomit, my jeans, my face, the walls, the floor. It is dark, this room, and I am talking and thinking and believing that maybe she believes me.

Then the words stop coming.⁷⁶

As if the direct transmission of their dialogue is too much of an indictment of Gabe's guilt, creating too much complicity between readers who know of Gabe's deeds and the mother who is being lied to, the dialogue transforms into a secondhand description of the dialogue. The detour away from direct speech is a rare moment in this section of the novel, which is dominated by dialogue. Though his exact words are concealed, the manner in which the words are described illustrates the abject role this American son occupies. Whereas Carlos's America(n dream) is confined, protected, and hidden from the material violence and inequality that dominates the landscape—in the heart, as precisely evoked in the text's title—Gabe is an American son, the abject expelled from the maternal body. This is evoked in Gabe's words, as the sexual connotations of “coming” combine with the disgust of vomit as multiple instances of abjection. This very abject quality constitutes Gabe's identity, as the differences between “talking” and “thinking” and “belief” are obliterated—all in the hope not that he may repair his relationship with his mother, only that she buys into his lie.⁷⁷ All the narrating that was supposed to lead to Gabe's liberation—all of the revelation of identity, the reclamation of national belonging, and the rapport with Stone—lead here. It is only at this point, at the recognition of the limits of a politics of representation, that Gabe's “words stop coming.”

If there is anything to be learned from this novel, it is how looks can be deceiving, and how women enable no resolution, but invite problems. This claim must not be interpreted as an essentialization of Woman across race, nation, and class into a singular

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷⁷ Once more, it should be noted that the lack of quotation marks in the text makes readers complicit in this abject condition; we, too, cannot perceive any difference between talking, thinking, and belief in the text.

force of disruption. I am making no such attempt to represent women; this reading emerges precisely from Bulosan's and Roley's novels. What I mean is that it is the very construction of hetero/homonational Filipino masculinity that essentializes Woman in its disruptive form. But rather than reject these texts outright, let us see if it is possible to read how they destabilize themselves—how their essentializing of Woman, and in particular of Filipina mother, as a terrorist from within the domestic space, not only repeatedly disrupts fraternal order, but enables a glimpse toward an alternative set of knowledge and practice, and ultimately of being. While the content of that alternative cannot be made fully transparent, it clearly marks itself as that which recognizes difference, challenging essentialisms of masculine exclusion but also feminine inclusion.

What happens to Gabe in the last half of the text is unremarkable except for its failed liberation. Tomas forces Gabe to participate in violent activities as payback. They break into houses in search of jewelry to steal. They assault classmates and others. If the text remains spare in its dialogue, it indulges in the havoc they wreak. But to be seduced by the graphic, sensational acts of violence that occupy much of the last half of the text is to succumb to a realism tied to the racialized masculinity Gabe and Tomas (and also Carlos) share. Whereas *America Is in the Heart* attempts to critique that violently racialized masculinity in the hopes of securing an idealized fraternal community, *American Son* acts as if that ideal is achieved precisely through violence, especially insofar as this new subjectivity for Gabe comes after—both within the time of the story and the space of the text—the roadtrip with Stone. That is to say, if Stone and Gabe fail to achieve a certain heteropatriarchal rapport, if Gabe fails to take on Stone as surrogate family, the text concludes with a solidarity, however forced, between Tomas and Gabe,

which is the antithesis to all that did and did not transpire in Meridan. Realist aesthetics accompany the staging of this masculinity.

While being forced to work as Tomas's underling, Gabe tries to repair his relationship with his mother; as he says, "[I]t is she, not my brother, who is mostly on my mind these days."⁷⁸ But she appears in sharp contrast to the realist display of Filipino American masculinity. While much of the second half of the text depicts the unsavory adventures of Gabe and Tomas with detail, she looms over the text, without actually drawing much attention to herself. This absent presence is made possible due to the continuation of Gabe's interior monologue, which implicitly seeks to overcome the guilt borne from what happened in the Meridan diner as well as the lies compounded with it. If the text invests in realism to anchor its racialized masculinity, it could be said that Gabe's mother is represented without being spoken for. She does not invest in representation as a liberatory narrative in the way that Gabe's narration does (and in doing so, fails). In a way, she is able to make her presence felt despite having little to say to anyone, especially to readers.

Indeed, the text shows how futile are the attempts made by others to speak for her. Aunt Jessica, for instance upbraids Gabe for his behavior toward his mother. She builds her case based on what she assumes:

Your mother had hopes when she came to this country. In America you can become successful. You can rise above. You can get education. That's what she was taught by those nuns the American Catholics sent over. ... But it's too late for her, Gabe. ... You and Tomas are everything to her. You think she has dreams of

⁷⁸ Ibid., 163.

her own? What, to open up a shoemaking business? To become a millionaire? To remarry of something, go dancing, live it up, have a good time? Like some young, happy-go-lucky single mother? Come on. You know what she's like. She came to this country in the first place, Gabe, even back then, because she had dreams that her kids could have a better life than that caste-driven slum you come from.⁷⁹

Rather than faithfully representing the situation, Jessica's diatribe reveals investments in sync with US imperialism and generalized push/pull immigration narratives.⁸⁰ Women-qua-Woman is no longer. In a more mundane instance, Gabe accuses the clerks at the makeup counter of ignoring his mother, who stands there, Gabe assumes, too meek to say anything. He has seen this happen in the past but now, in his guilt, he wants to help her. After arguing with Gabe, one clerk asks his mother if she wants assistance, to which she responds, "Oh no, thank you. ... I'm just looking."⁸¹ The clerk snaps at Gabe, "You got no business speaking for *strangers* and making unwarranted accusations."⁸²

It appears that what has happened in the past is not useful in wholly accounting for the present, and this small change in her behavior marks Gabe as a "stranger" to his own mother. These slight shifts in her behavior act as a critique of those who would try to speak for her, whether Jessica, Gabe, or Tomas, who does his own share of speaking for the Filipina mother. Gabe notices other tiny changes. She offers to treat them to frozen yogurt before dinner, which in the past would have been forbidden because it would have ruined their appetites; she even gets it herself, whereas "[n]ormally she would give me

⁷⁹ Ibid., 166 ff.

⁸⁰ Fittingly, she tries enroll Gabe enroll in a school named Westward.

⁸¹ Ibid., 183.

⁸² Ibid., 184.

the money and I would buy us the ice cream.”⁸³ At a family party, she “is angry, not merely trying to *look* angry the way she usually does.”⁸⁴ At the trendy Promenade in Santa Monica, where she usually “instinctively clutches [Gabe’s] arm ... [around] people who she thought might look down on her accent,” ... “she immediately lets go of me.”⁸⁵

Gabe’s attempt to speak for her is only an extension of the kind of solutions he envisions for his liberation—namely, the ability to speak. In contrast, his mother is less concerned with such strategies. Her critical response is not directed only at Gabe and to lesser degrees Tomas, Jessica, and others—but Carlos as well. Carlos’s space-clearing gesture, like Gabe’s running-away, must be understood as an attempt at representation: not just of himself, and not of another individual, but of an entire transnational community of (working and writing) men. Gabe’s mother responds to both of these failed masculinities not by speaking for herself or announcing her own truths. It is as if she recognizes the reductive quality of identity politics, of both Medford and Meridan. This does not mean she accepts the terms as articulated by Carlos or Gabe—for both, the desire to erase women from the (trans)nation. Instead, she asserts her presence over the text, haunting Gabe and others; but this presence is felt as a kind of sheer fact, and does not consist of any spoken truths. It does not need to provide (sociological, empirical) proof of being, agency, identity, or resistance.

⁸³ Ibid., 186.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 195. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 179.

Ultimately, it is with her as a stranger to Gabe that the text ends—this will not be resolved into a stronger family unit, at least not in the normative sense.⁸⁶ Two passages are most significant; here is the first:

I also try not to think about the way she looked the day after Oregon. Mostly that day she ignored me. But one time I looked up from my book and caught her looking at me, though immediately she turned away. I only saw her for a second.

Even though she looked away so quickly I did not have enough time to tell whether she seemed hurt or angry, still I could not get her face out of my mind.

The way she appeared at that moment—it haunts me—and I go over it in my head, trying to figure out what she was feeling. At times she looks mad but at others she seems hurt, and I cannot tell which look is my memory and which is my imagination.⁸⁷

The passage returns Gabe to the scene where the arrival of his mother served to disrupt the potential father-son/lover/nation rapport with Stone; the failure of that rapport was followed by his lie about his mother, which nevertheless signalled a kind of truth—that Gabe and his mother are strangers at best, blood relations be damned. Though he cannot erase her presence, though he *could not get her face out of my mind*, he cannot discern what she is thinking or feeling, depriving him of the possibility of knowing her and of speaking for him. He senses that his imagination plays a significant role in interpreting her—that even in her presence, he is representing her. It is her appearance, nothing more

⁸⁶ In fact, the text ends twice; an Epilogue was published after the novel, in an anthology of literature about Filipino children. What happens in that addendum does not substantively alter the argument made here. See Brian Ascalon Roley, “*American Son Epilogue*,” in *Growing up Filipino: Stories for Young Adults*, ed. Cecilia Manguerra Brainard (Santa Monica: Philippine American Literary House, 2003), 104-114.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

and nothing less, that haunts him. Not only is he unable to parse out her feelings, the ambiguity conjures in Gabe epistemological and ontological confusion—a confusion about what is real and about who he is. Her absent presence engenders this rupture of the realism that the text invests in, the one that stages racialized masculinity.

The second passage reads: “[Mom’s] expression stays in my mind. It is hard to figure out. Something about it bothers me, and as I think about it her face has already become a memory, and then it occurs to me—I know it is strange to think this—that what I had seen was a look of longing.”⁸⁸ The sentiment of the first passage is echoed here, but transformed significantly. She is represented as not totally unreadable, unrepresentable, here. What Gabe perceives in her is desire—a look of (be)longing that is neither hetero- nor homonational. Whatever the substance of her desire, it does not confuse national or global belonging with desire. Perhaps he cannot know it because it has not been written, spoken, thought, or represented, which does not mean that she is wrong or illiterate or that she has gone mad or that the Filipina mother remains a mystery. It only means that she is a stranger to the commonsensical, consensual strategies—aesthetic-political, hetero-homonational, realist—that guide her Filipino American sons.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 189.

Chapter Four.

Learning to Listen:

Nation, Film, and Children in Kidlat Tahimik's *Mababangong Bangungot*

One day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good. What is found after the law is not a more proper and original use value that precedes the law, but a new use that is born only after it. This liberation is the task of study, or of play. And this studious play is the passage that allows us to arrive at that justice that one of Benjamin's posthumous fragments defines as a state of the world in which the world appears as a good that absolutely cannot be appropriated or made juridical.

—Giorgio Agamben

1.

During the filming of his 1979 epic *Apocalypse Now*, Francis Ford Coppola had the opportunity to view a film by a local filmmaker, Kidlat Tahimik (né Eric de Guia). Coppola appreciated *Mababangong Bangungot*, which has been widely translated as *Perfumed Nightmare*, so much that he later handled international distribution of it through his American Zoetrope studio. In particular, he loved the film's "non-Hollywood strengths," claiming that its "crazy dreams mirror to us the contradictions of the American Dream."¹ In that brief statement, there is no question who "us" is. "Non-

¹ Frank Cimat, "Perfumed All These Years," *Inquirer.net*, October 17, 2007 http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/regions/view_article.php?article_id=94883 (accessed July 31, 2008).

Hollywood” establishes the Philippine production as the antithesis of not only Hollywood, but by extension, the US.² But note that he does not use this dichotomy to assert US superiority. By praising the film’s strengths, he was likely referring to its spare, austere look, contributing as it did to the Third Cinema movement, which should not be confused with “Third World cinema”—though it is possible Coppola does just this.³ Understood in this manner, the difference between filmic cultures, and nations, is not only aesthetic for Coppola, but also historical. This Philippine film, that is, is not part of US history, is not responding to it, which is why it can “mirror” contradictions in the US. The mirror here has a distancing effect, foreclosing the possibility that metonymy best describes the relationship between the US and the Philippines, in which case the latter would not “mirror” so much as be an extension of or be regarded as equally impacted and constituted by US “contradictions.” No doubt it is this sanctioned ignorance that empowered him to make a film confronting US imperialism in Vietnam using as a setting a former and “forgotten” US colony.⁴ The metonyms abound: the Philippines is not just

² This statement is not meant to conflate Hollywood with the US, of course, but rather follows the argument that despite Hollywood’s global reach, as the writers of *Global Hollywood 2* suggest, it nevertheless fuels US nationalist discourses, first of all by assuming US audiences. See Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurrin, Richard Maxwell, Ting Wang, *Global Hollywood 2* (London: British Film Institute, 2005).

³ Broadly speaking, the former term encompasses a kind of politicized aesthetics, where the latter may be only geographically descriptive. See Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, “Towards a Third Cinema,” <http://www.documentaryisneverneutral.com/words/camasgun.html> (accessed June 14, 2010).

⁴ Oscar Campomanes, “The New Empire’s Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipina/o-American Postcolonialities,” *Critical Mass 2:2* (Spring 1995): 145-200.

the “first Vietnam,” a metaphoric claim that would support the mirror hypothesis, it is a metonym for Vietnam in Coppola’s film.⁵

In the second chapter, I suggested that the narrator of Eleanor Coppola’s diary touched on the ironies of her position as well as her husband’s in ways that he could not recognize. Though she invested in an imperialist feminism that arrogated an ambitious role for herself within the film production, it was challenged by the excesses that could not be effaced. Both her moonlighting work as a documentary filmmaker and her role as a wife and mother are tested by her reflections on and in the Philippine setting. It is not unlike the numerous claims of neurasthenia made by colonial administrators half a century earlier—nervous and mental breakdowns allegedly resulting from the inhospitable tropical heat and unsympathetic natives.⁶ Both the diary and the documentary, released several years later, shows Francis Ford Coppola’s tempers and madness, only unwittingly remarking on the complexities of this production, in which case the “non-Hollywood” setting would figure to be a psychological weakness for him, rather than a strength.

As non-Hollywood as Tahimik’s film may be, there is nevertheless an apocalyptic present in it, bringing it closer to Coppola’s mega-blockbuster film than one might expect. But it is a present that is absent, or at least not self-consciously rationalized, taking place as it does in a vivid and surreal nightmare—indeed, it may be considered a

⁵ Luzviminda Francisco, “The First Vietnam: the U.S.-Philippine War of 1899,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 5 (1973): 2-16. Judging by her published diary, Eleanor Coppola, wife of the acclaimed director, fared only slightly better in understanding the ironies of the situation. See my discussion of her diary in chapter 2, and see her *Notes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980).

⁶ See Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006).

perversion of the “American Dream” Coppola mentions. The perversion of the nightmare, as apocalypse, signals the end-times of the dream. Rather than prematurely celebrating its anti-imperialist gestures, though, this chapter questions the substance of its critique. There are two authors of the sweet-scented nightmare, both of whom collaborate on the film’s apocalypse: On one hand, the source of the nightmare is a capitalist, imperialist author(ity) located in the colonial metropolises and wreaking havoc on both its own citizens and those in its former colonies, in particular the Philippines. (The US is another absent presence in the film, not being an actual setting, but whose palpable force is felt in the dialogue and imagery.) The chickens have come home to roost, as the film shows how Europe, as well as the Philippines, has been ravaged by industrial capitalism. The dialogue and sequence of images suggest that the primary victims are working-class women, in contradistinction to the male narrator. By situating the male narrator and protagonist as hero, the film draws from and reproduces anticapitalist and anticolonialist discourses that seek to protect women from the ravages of modernity, as well as from the clichéd analogy of colonialism-as-rape; often, these narratives seek ultimately to return to nostalgic, prelapsarian pasts, which the narrator romanticizes. More importantly, his authority is racialized via gender and class, insofar as his racialized masculinity bears the responsibility for rescuing both white and Filipina working-class women.

On the other hand, the source of the nightmare is the filmic camera itself. As I argue, the film’s ethnographic realism can and must be linked to its capitalist and colonialist narratives, and both filmic device and meaning are disrupted by the surreal anger of the male protagonist and the melodramatic pity and sorrow of the women he is called on to protect. This surreal turn is effected in particular through the filmic

techniques that Tahimik employs. Judging by this visual diegesis, one has no option but to accept the heteropatriarchal rescue of the working classes and the colonized—both feminized—across the globe. A surreal, masculinized resistance provides the opposition to the realism of ethnography, capitalism, and colonialism. The nightmare is thus doubled, as surreal Filipino masculinity responds to global industrial and imperialist capitalism by seeking escape from it while protecting those who are vulnerable but cannot escape. It is the combined effort of these two sources that brings forth the powerful nightmarish critique of global empire.

In this way, the filmic camera holds viewers hostage to its politics—but only if we act as if film is defined solely by its visual frame, which it is not. How, then, are viewers to read the invisible specter that looms over film—namely, sound—whose vibrations expand into the far reaches of the space in which the film is viewed? How can we avoid undermining its presence, an undermining which occurs mostly given that sound is not visible, a tautology that reinforces itself, invisibility spiraling into nothingness? Is it possible that herein lies a resistance, a politics, that is an alternative not just to overprivileging the visual, but also to heteropatriarchal heroism and its concomitant representations of women and children? Is it possible that this ghost-like presence is a threat far greater than the apocalyptic nightmare itself, to the extent that sound functions as a critique of both realist capitalism-imperialism and surreal masculinized opposition, the nightmare's two authors?

To clarify, I am suggesting that the authors who wield authority in the film—a cycle of authority that consigns women to passivity, whether under colonial rule or anticolonial protection—consists not just of a (false) dichotomy of imperialist and anti-

imperialist, but another one of ethnographic realism and surrealism. Both dichotomies are false insofar as the latter terms in each do not provide for a dialectical liberation. Recall my discussion of the waning of dialectical revolutionary nationalism in the first chapter, and the critical problems with producing oppositionality that consistently only reproduces the terms of imperialism. If Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has conceptualized colonialism as “white men saving brown women from brown men,” anti-colonial nationalism inverts the logic so that brown men are saving brown women from white men. In both cases, “brown women” are constructed as the fulcrum around which opposed masculinities pivot for leverage. In the film, such themes reinscribe a hierarchy that is at once primarily gendered and visualized. As suggested in the first chapter, these discourses parallel and even help constitute the emergence of biopolitics that, in the words of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, is marked by decolonization, decentralization, and disciplinarity.⁷

By arguing that we listen to film, my aim is not to produce another narrative that arrives at meanings and conclusions about *Mababangong Bangungot* better than those that already have been written, by figures as grand as E. San Juan, Jr., and Fredric Jameson.⁸ Listening should not be treated as a new, dialectically generated paradigm that will be more accurate or authentic than visual readings. Instead, the value of listening is in the opportunity it presents to bring film studies, and its overprivileging of the visual, to crisis. As Jean-Luc Nancy suggests, “To be listening is always to be on the edge of

⁷ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000).

⁸ E. San Juan, Jr., “Cinema of the ‘Naïve’ Subaltern in Search of an Audience,” in *Geopolitics of the Visible: Essays on Philippine Film Cultures*, ed. Rolando B. Tolentino (Manila: Ateneo de Manila UP, 2000), 264-276; Fredric Jameson, “‘Art Naïf’ and the Admixture of Worlds,” *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995), 186-213.

meaning.”⁹ Sound, he reminds readers, is constituted only through a relation between different surfaces, reverberations that deprive a focus on origins, including any origins that would attempt to suture the “self.” Nancy considers the physical aspects of sound as vibrations that resonate throughout space, not confined to local sites, not confined to their intended audiences—ultimately an “infinite referral,” “indifferent to identity and to difference,” as well as to the distinction between self and other.¹⁰ The subject who listens is neither a “phenomenological subject” nor a “philosophical subject,” “and finally, perhaps, he is not a subject at all, except as the place of resonance, of its infinite tension and rebound, the amplitude of sonorous deployment, and the slightness of its simultaneous redeployment.”¹¹ It is this resonant “subjectlessness” that must be heard loud and clear.

I am also suggesting that bringing film studies to crisis, as a political gesture that bears on the study of Filipina mothers, has much to do with the kind of crises Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak invites upon deconstruction, feminism, and Marxism, which I discussed in my first chapter.¹² Questioned about the discontinuities between her commitments, Spivak does not aspire to create an expansive multi- or interdisciplinary approach that successfully intersects these three fields. Instead, she attempts to produce moments of crisis within disciplinary productions of knowledge, in order precisely to intervene not just critically, but politically as well. Thus, as will become clear, this

⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham UP, 2007), 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ff.

¹² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Practical Politics of the Open End,” *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990): 95-112.

chapter should be considered as much an attempt to intervene in the production of knowledge about Filipina mothers as it is an attempt to intervene in film studies.

Ultimately, the best critique that emerges from *Mababangong Bangungot* comes neither from the main character nor his mother. His mother becomes a figure of pity, both for her son and the audience. She epitomizes the longstanding gendered notion of colonialism that holds foreign, white men accountable for plundering land and women alike. Accordingly, her son—whose father was killed by a white soldier a long time ago—takes on the role of redeemer and defender of mother and nation. In many ways, his role even exceeds that, given his heroic efforts to rescue a white woman overseas. But while the main story reinforces this thesis of anticolonial heteronationalism, there emerges an alternative argument that never fully coalesces into coherence, but nevertheless proffers 1) that alternatives can and must be revealed, or read, within the text of Philippine global heteronationalism, and 2) that these alternatives may not be fully understood—digested, absorbed—within epistemologies and ontologies devoted to empiricism and sociology. As the filmic lens and visual diegesis implicate themselves within such imperialist productions of knowledge, it becomes imperative to discover alternatives, which come through the performance of children's identities not reducible to the norms of global capital and nationalism. These children, whose mothers are nowhere to be found—overseas, perhaps, or somewhere reinventing their production—deliver something other than the familiar. They are the dispossessed children nourished by an aberrant umbilical cord, marked only by a second navel—an alternative formation.

2.

Mababangong Bangungot marks Kidlat Tahimik's entry into filmmaking. As Eric de Guia, he attended the prestigious Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, earning an MBA before working as a researcher for a Paris-based international economic development organization. These experiences, along with his having grown up near US military bases in the Philippines, became part of the inspiration for his re-emergence as filmmaker, lending to the biographical quality of his oeuvre. After *Mababangong Bangungot*, Tahimik directed *Turumba* in 1981, which continues his critique of global industrialism. *Turumba* focuses on a specific Philippine village, whose artisanal creations attract foreign investors and are transformed into an exploitative global cottage industry. Both films worked with small budgets and should be considered part of the Third Cinema movement, operating against and critical of the polished, expansive, and expensive productions associated with Hollywood. As an alternative movement, it achieved some degree of cultural visibility; *Mababangong Bangungot*, for instance, garnered much international attention, winning the International Critics Award at the 1977 Berlin Film Festival.

Set in the mid-1970s, *Mababangong Bangungot* opens with Tahimik narrating his fascination with space travel while going about his work as a jeepney driver in Balian, a village in Laguna, a mostly rural province not far from Manila. Jeepneys are former U.S. military jeeps converted into cheap public transportation following official sovereignty. They were crucial for the Philippines to enter into industrial modernity, and Tahimik comments, with a tinge of romanticism, that they "are vehicles of war which we made into vehicles of life." As will be shown, all of this figures importantly in the film's

critique. The eye-catching, visible appeal of the jeepney—its bright colors and local and religious paraphernalia—inspires a US delegate, visiting the rural province for a conference on “international inflation,” to invite both Tahimik and his jeepney to work for him in Paris, with promises of also going to the US. He is hired primarily to refill the chewing-gum dispensers owned by the delegate. This offer fulfills Tahimik’s dream—to go to the west; he tells the American, “I can be an astronaut there; here, I am only a jeepney driver.” He is enamored in particular with science, technology, and space travel, wishing to trade in his jeepney for a rocket.

But his arrival in Paris transforms him: he witnesses the effects of industrial modernity on the local cultures of the old European metropolises. In Paris, a supermarket the size of a department store replaces the streetside grocers he befriended. Elsewhere, Germans bemoan the last handmade *Zwiebelturm*, an onion-shaped church tower common in parts of Germany, giving way to industrial technology. Dismayed at how Western technology uproots its own communities, Tahimik’s dream becomes a nightmare. The emergence of a critique of techno-corporate capitalism challenges his idealization of (rocket) science and conjures up the advice he received from friends and family before he left. The film ends with a surreal montage of images that show Tahimik summoning winds native to the Laguna province in order to blow away the rockets, mega-groceries, and chewing-gum machines of his experiences in Europe and return to the Philippines.

Aside from the protagonist, three women in need of the narrator’s masculinized heroics help establish the gendered politics of the film. There is, first of all, his mother, who mourns the death of her husband at the hands of newly-minted U.S. colonial

authorities as the Spanish-American War transformed into the Philippine-American War. If it seems unlikely that a young man living in the 1970s could have a father who was murdered at the turn of the nineteenth century, it is worth noting in passing how the suspension of rigid historicism allows for the teasing out of links between colonialism in the Philippines and industrialism in Europe. The narrator's mother warns him of his love for western science, reminding him that his father, too, loved the "white man's mind." Images of Tahimik expressing amazement at escalators and motion-sensor sliding glass doors are interrupted by images of her sweeping the hut in which she lives, evincing the contrast between metropole and post-colony, a contrast later upended.

Secondly, there is the elderly Parisian streetside grocer who befriends the narrator, chatting him up about his mother. She commends him for carrying a keepsake made by his mother—a wooden horse meant to sit in front of the bus he drives, leading him out of harm's way. This rapport establishes a link between his mother and this woman, and it is cemented when the narrator returns to Paris after a brief trip to Berlin. He discovers that she is no longer selling vegetables, fruit, and dairy products on the street: the opening of a supermarket nearby has made it impossible for her to compete. The empathy generated by the scene echoes the solemn mood in scenes recalling his mother, as if he not only feels both of their pain, but bears the responsibility to make things right for both.

Thirdly, there is the young German woman he meets on a street in Berlin, where a crowd gathers to witness the erecting of a Zwiebelturm, a traditional onion-shaped church tower. The locals are critical of it, divulging that it is the first tower constructed not by human hands, but by machines and factories—not unlike the mega-grocery making the

streetside vendor obsolete. The narrator meets a charming, blonde woman about to give birth. A little bit later, she goes into labor, and he offers to drive her to the hospital in his bus. But they cannot make it to the hospital, and off-camera, Tahimik actually helps to deliver the child. If miscegenation has been frowned upon given the global circulation of Filipina/o bodies (giving, for instance, Carlos Bulosan anxieties about his national belonging) Tahimik can nevertheless aid in the reproduction of white bodies, a reproduction in contradistinction to the church tower—made by bodies, delivered by hands, not machines, not even hospitals. The newborn thus must be critically distinguished from the mass-produced Zwiebelturm, a kind of global multicultural resistance (given Tahimik's role) to the threat of rampant industrialized technology via a return to hand-delivered childbirth. She names the baby after him, an honor befitting a male hero. As I will suggest, this child cannot be counted among the dispossessed and radically potent; its resistance to industrialism remains problematic, given the multicultural heteropatriarchal conditions of its emergence.

Above all, the most important character in the film might not be a person at all, but a machine. Its significance has to do not only with its history, but its visibility—one could say, the history of its visibility. In order to explain what I mean, I need to take a somewhat lengthy but absolutely necessary detour through a discussion of the jeepney. Its fetishized, de-historicized abstraction precisely as a visual object—both by characters in the film and by critics viewing it—has very much to do with the articulation of the film's nightmare, and the production of masculinist nationalist heroics. In other words, the jeepney's visuality assists and enables Tahimik's heroism.

3.

Jeepneys are former US military jeeps which, following official independence in the Philippines after WWII, were retrofitted into vehicles for public transportation, playing a critical role in the urbanization that accompanied industrialization and imperialism. Inscribed on their bodies is the attempt to rewrite their narratives and to erase the imperialist militarization that conditioned their emergence. The first few generations of jeepneys converted military jeeps for public transport; these days, their bright colors and local and religious paraphernalia make it difficult to recall their previous function. If their conditions of possibility have changed, if the surplus of leftover jeeps has been exhausted and jeepneys are manufactured brand-new with slight adjustments, why the persistence of the form? It is not as if capital has not been channeled toward other forms of public transportation: buses, trains, and taxis, each of which also transport Metro Manila.¹³ The retrofitting and reconceptualization of the jeepney must thus be understood as imagined; unable to fully erase its participation in imperial authority, the persistence of its form establishes links not only between past and present, but between imperialism and industrialism, and between life and death. All of this is not only imagined, though, but also visualized: the myriad ways it has functioned to discipline the population—first as a form of militarized imperialism, then as a form of modern urban development—is intimately linked to its visibility, from drab monochromes and camouflage to bright and vivid colors. The visual attempt to forget its past is precisely a reminder of what cannot be forgotten.

¹³ For a related discussion on the construction of “flyover” highways in Manila, see Neferti Tadiar, “Manila’s New Metropolitan Form,” in *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures*, ed. Vicente Rafael (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995), 285-313.

In the film, the opening shots show a jeepney crossing, from the right of the frame to the left, a small, stone bridge that seems to arc over a river. Foliage, as well as the camera's frame, obscures what is on either side of the bridge. A man dressed like a police officer leans out of the vehicle and directs traffic with a baton. Then the jeepney reverses, backing its way across the bridge. As the scene unfolds, Tahimik's voice speaks in Tagalog. Not more than five seconds passes, though, before another voice, also of Tahimik but in English, translates the monologue: "This is the bridge to our village. It is the only way into Balian. (Pause.) And it is the only way out. Our bridge is three meters



Figure 1. The delegate's long legs dangle out of the jeepney Tahimik drives. Source: www.lesblank.com.

wide by ten meters long. It is our bridge of life.” As the translation begins, the initial monologue ends, as if there were no need to continue. The translation silences the original. But the origin returns: it is no end at all, only an extended pause. As the English-speaking Tahimik begins after its own brief pause, the Tagalog-speaking Tahimik speaks again, seemingly translating the last sentence (back?) into Tagalog.

The return of the origin, as a reversal of translation, already throws into doubt the search for sources, origins, and causes. Does this abet the attempt to forget from where the jeepney emerged? Or might it help in understanding the multiple positions the jeepney has occupied in its genealogy? The film begins with a translation of a translation of a translation. There are multiple ironies in what gets translated into Tagalog after the pause. The first comes via a discrepancy between the image and the spoken word: the jeepney, that is, reverses back into Balian which, it would seem, is not the “way out.” Second and perhaps more significantly, the “bridge of life” comes with conditions, which is suggested by the officer who directs traffic. The monologue will continue with Tahimik contending that the bridge, built by the Spanish who destroyed the one his grandfather built, was expanded for US military vehicles. The conditions of “life,” then, are linked to US imperialism, policing, militarization. If most of the film seems to address an international audience—with its reliance on translating into English, with its ethnographic gaze—this may not be the case at least here, since in describing the “way out,” Tahimik speaks first in English, then in Tagalog. He just may be speaking to the people of Balian; the least that could be said is that the film imagines more than one audience.

That he speaks to fellow villagers need not be commended, though, given that Tahimik's advice to them only echoes or more precisely translates the officer's authority. The "way out" of Balian, after all, is exactly what he seeks for most of the film: "In America I can be an astronaut. Here I am only a jeepney driver," he says. Though the monologue's implicit irony begins a critique of desiring and idealizing what the west offers, the first part of the film shows Tahimik fascinated with the west. He listens on his transistor radio to the Voice of America. He cuts out a photo of a white woman in a swimsuit from a calendar of beauty pageant contestants and places it in a photo frame next to the Virgin Mary. He acts as president of the Werner von Braun fan club of Balian, in honor of the rocket scientist.

As a jeepney driver, the people and objects Tahimik transports are a diverse array that prohibit any efforts to paint over its multiple uses. Riding alone with the delegate, they are stopped and joined by a crowd of peasants and their livestock; the delegate is humorously forced to move to the trailer the jeepney pulls. Tahimik picks up a woman and her statue, and a block of ice, somewhat of a technological marvel given the hot and humid climate. The jeepney thus functions both as a sign and as a literal conveyance for modernity. It is not at all surprising, given his desires, that Tahimik makes his living as a jeepney driver. In some ways, the jeepney is the closest thing to a spaceship that Tahimik can get. This fascination with US technology suggests that his opening comments about jeepneys and bridges is part of this idealization of all things western.

It should be noted, though, that to claim Tahimik as a character obsessed with the west does not mean the west can be avoided; the film demonstrates an awareness of the necessity of complicity, of what Allan Isaac calls the "enfolded borders" that constitute

US imperial nationalism.¹⁴ Tahimik describes jeepneys as “vehicles of war which we made into vehicles of life.” “Life,” as the opening scene reminds viewers, is not mutually exclusive to imperialism, policing and militarization. Later, when I ask about the stakes of looking away from the jeepney, it would be mistaken to understand my critique as denying the jeepney, as if (its) visuality were totally contaminated by imperialist readings and thus lacking any politics of resistance. As I suggested above and will explain further on, listening to the film is *part of* the experience of watching it. Thus, it is appropriate to ask who “we” is in Tahimik’s comment: just who is doing this making? Though it seems to refer to Filipina/os, granting them a role in building up the nation from the ashes of militarized colonialism, there is no way to firmly separate “we” from the US. (Recall Coppola’s efforts to do so.) The effort to power up a different kind of jeepney effectively stalls in its articulation: “life” is not mutually exclusive to “war.” Briefly, it is also worth noting how the passage from war into life may indeed parallel the passage into biopolitical forms of power, insofar as the use of explicit force as embodied by military machinery is transformed into the machinery of industry and production, all the while implicitly sustaining a connection to power. “Life” cannot be equated to freedom, but must be regarded as another form of power, in which self-discipline and self-regulation have replaced external coercion.

The jeepney is more than a means of employment for Tahimik, and more than a sign for his love of western technology—although to be sure, it is all of these things, too. Here, an early episode, repeated in near succession three times, broadens the scope of his affinity. In the first repetition, a wide shot shows Tahimik walking to the middle of the

¹⁴ Allan Punzalan Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006).

bridge. He stops there and faces the camera, which zooms in on his person: “I first tried to cross the bridge alone when I was three years old. (Pause.) I am Kidlat Tahimik. I choose my vehicle and I can cross this bridge.” He proceeds ahead (leftward), and in his hand he pulls a string that is attached to a toy jeepney that looks small enough to hold in one’s hands. In each scene, the volume of his Tagalog is steadily decreased in favor of an English translation. Briefly, there are shots of a parade or pageant in the town, complete with a loud marching band. Then the second repetition. He stops on the bridge and says, “Again I tried to cross the bridge by myself when I was four years old. (Pause.) I am Kidlat Tahimik. I choose my vehicle and I can cross any bridge.” The jeepney he pulls across is a little bigger, but still a toy. A small child could fit in it. After more shots of the marching band and more corporal-looking groups—scouts? soldiers?—the third repetition appears: “Today I am still trying to make that final crossing to freedom. . . . I am Kidlat Tahimik. I choose my vehicle and I can cross all bridges.” This time he struggles to pull across a full-sized jeepney.

The series represents ideas of development and progress via the route of modernization, and modernization is here both ontological and material. Each jeepney that appears is bigger than the previous one, and this is complemented by the script, which transforms from crossing “*this* bridge” to “*any* bridge” to “*all* bridges.” Presumably, getting older and finding bigger vehicles to cross bigger bridges will lead to “that final crossing to freedom.” But not all of the monologue conveys a sense of change. In each repetition, Tahimik only speaks of making an effort to perform these feats: “tried,” “tried,” “still trying.” One is reminded of Sisyphus, as if there is a certain futility to the enterprise, but instead of boulders there are jeepneys to continually pull. (Is this

another instance of the “unfinished” and everlasting revolution-to-come?) Here, the freedom marked by “choosing vehicles” seems rather like something one is consigned to, condemned to, and conscripted to accept, given the futility.

Is it not remarkable, too, that Tahimik pulls the jeepney rather than driving it to freedom? Of what use is a vehicle that one must tow—can the jeepney even be considered a vehicle if it does not make travel any easier? Who or what is the passenger, and who or what is the driver? The distance between what he says about the opportunities afforded by the jeepney and the image of him struggling, in the last repetition, to pull it across, hints at the forthcoming critique of technology, of “freedom,” of “life.” Read in this manner, Tahimik—not a driver of jeepneys but their steward—justifies but also ironizes his relationship to the jeepney, signalling a need to not forget imperialism amid the postcolonial rush to restore “life” through modernization. This ironic, pulled version of “life” will remain if no one will examine its terms and posit alternatives. The film and its jeepney suggest this desire for biopoliticized “life” will remain so long as these terms do not change, so long as alternatives are not produced. Having realized this, it will be up to his masculine heroics to rescue the Philippines.

4.

For Fredric Jameson, *Mababangong Bangungot* produces a critique that swerves past the dichotomy of capitalist modernization and cultural nationalism, neither of which he finds acceptable. This “third term” arrives in the Sarao jeepney factory that appears in

the film, a hybridized moment he calls “the moment of industrial production within an otherwise agricultural context.”¹⁵ More specifically, the Sarao factory

blasts apart the sterile opposition between the old and the new, the traditional and the Western, ... a space of human labor which does not know the structural oppression of the assembly line or Taylorization, which is permanently provisional, thereby liberating its subjects from the tyrannies of form and of the pre-programmed. ... [It] marks the place of a properly Third-World way with production which is ... a kind of Brechtian delight with the bad new things that anybody can hammer together for their pleasure and utility if they have a mind to.¹⁶

Jameson concludes *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* by asserting that “Kidlat’s film is then itself just such another jeepney, an omnibus and omnipurpose object that ferries its way back and forth between First and Third Worlds with dignified hilarity.”¹⁷ He imagines that “Third-World” sites (Sarao) and texts (*Mababangong Bangungot*) are “the last surviving social space[s] from which alternatives to corporate capitalist daily life and social relations are to be sought” and thus may indeed provide the conditions for a cultural critique which, if cognitively mapped, would reveal the “admixture” of political, ideological, and economic levels.¹⁸

For Felicidad Lim, E. San Juan, Jr., and Roland Tolentino, these comments are “deeply and dangerously flawed,” nothing short of a utopian idealization of a site of labor that, in spite of what Jameson contends, is fully implicated in the movement of global

¹⁵ Jameson, 209.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

capital.¹⁹ These critics accuse him of romanticizing the “Third-World” as not yet totally implicated in global capitalism. Tolentino ventures a hypothesis about what leads to Jameson’s blindspot: “[Jameson] is limited by his lack of a ‘native informant’ position.”²⁰ Apparently, this is why Jameson passes over the historical specificity of Sarao, among a number of images in the film which challenge his Third-World/third term thesis. Contrary to Jameson’s generalizing speculations, Tolentino opts to “generate” a “localized reading,” which he understands to be “based on [his] subject position.”²¹

I would offer, however, that Jameson’s analysis does not suffer for lack of a “native informant” position, but from not listening to the film. To argue for the transformative power of “localized readings,” and thus for the necessity of a concept of translation, is, contrary to what Tolentino thinks, not a solicitation and privileging of the “native informant.” Aside from Tolentino’s example being a poor one—Jameson, as I am arguing, simply did poor research, mostly because he did not read (especially, listen to) the text, passing over not so much the historical reality of Sarao but its representation as a gendered labor space—to privilege the perspective of the native informant not only ignores the variegated critiques of representation coming from so many sectors of cultural

¹⁹ Felicidad Lim, “Perfumed Nightmare and the Perils of Jameson’s ‘New Political Culture,’” *Philippine Critical Forum* 1:1 (1995): 27. Felicidad Lim, “Perfumed Nightmare and the Perils of Jameson’s ‘New Political Culture,’” *Philippine Critical Forum* 1, no. 1 (1995): 27. Thinking through Aijaz Ahmad’s famous critique of Jameson, Lim suggests that “in the third world, the inroads of capital must have already consolidated distinctions between public and private” (26). For her, Jameson’s commentary is “so poorly grounded in any actual understanding of the material conditions obtaining in a Sarao jeepney factory that the reaction which such a statement would engender if communicated to the actual workers at Sarao factories is impossible for me to conceive” (35).

²⁰ Roland Tolentino, “Kidlat Tahimik in the Rhetoric of First World Critical Theory,” *National/Transnational: Subject Formation and Media in and on the Philippines* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila UP, 2001): 110.

²¹ Ibid.

studies broadly conceived, it also bypasses related questions of (essentialist) identity. Who qualifies for such an identity? Does Tolentino's status as an intellectual, for instance, challenge his position, as a native informant? Who gets to say where to draw the lines around identity formations, and where not to draw them? Though E. San Juan, Jr., does not explicitly disagree with Tolentino, he argues that "traces or indicators escape the hegemonic intellectual unfamiliar with the historical specificity of US racialized ideological, economic, and political domination of the Philippines," which differs significantly from what a native informant provides, and comes closer to my contention that Jameson did not do his best research with regard to Sarao.²² Similarly, Lim frames her argument in terms of the limited access to Third World texts for Western critics, claiming that "Jameson's theorizing on oppositional Filipino filmmaking is debilitated by this state of affairs."²³

To be sure, Jameson is critical of the film's anthropological visuality—which spans the entire film, not just those scenes set in the Philippines—arguing that it must "be prevented from degenerating into that travelogue" that is linked to the project of cultural nationalism.²⁴ It might be understood as not only producing racial and class others—showing natives in their local habitats, not just rural Filipinos but working-class French and Germans, too—it also produces gendered others, focusing on women in each setting. But in privileging a factory that reassembles and retrofits imperial military vehicles into colorful, exotic vehicles designed for the congestion of modern traffic and travel, Jameson seems to fall into the same ethnographic trap, enamored with the visual flourish

²² San Juan, Jr., 268.

²³ Lim, 33.

²⁴ Jameson, 203.

of the vehicle just as the film generates realist sympathies for the poor women, both constituents awaiting a male hero, and thus unwittingly reinforcing patriarchal resistance through his investment in the abstracted visual spectacle of the jeepney. In this way, the jeepney's visibility, which catches the eye of the delegate in the film and the critic watching it, is closely linked to the film's gender politics.

If there is something in the film that might be considered a "third term" that critiques the spectacles of modernity and cultural nationalism, one would do well to turn away from the jeepney, which seems to act as a kind of spectacle for the West, whether for global tourists, Euro-American delegates, or theorists of postmodern culture. In a way, I am asking how we might theorize the jeepney as inscribed within both narratives of modernity and nationalism without reducing it to precisely such empirico-historical determinations. There is a way in which one might not look at the jeepney or the film at all, without ceasing to grant them both critical readings. If that seems like an impossible task, then one might at least suspend the reliance on the visual as the authoritative mode of production where film is concerned. Film criticism and theory have not yet learned to distrust the visual diegesis, have yet to absorb critiques advanced by Michel Chion, Mary Ann Doane, and John Mowitt.²⁵ But there is no film without sound, whether prerecorded or in-house orchestra. Judging by orchestras and soundtracks, the term "silent film" is an erroneous term and besides, as Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us, silence must be "understood not as a privation but as an arrangement of resonance ... an intensive spacing of a

²⁵ See Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia UP, 1999); Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space," in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), 162-176; John Mowitt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Anti-Disciplinary Object* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1992).

rebound that does not end in any return to self without immediately relaunching, as an echo, a call to that same self.”²⁶

Michel Chion conceptualizes the “acousmètre” as a character in film who/that uses disappearance for power. The acousmètre is a

voice [that] has not yet been visualized—that is, when we cannot yet connect it to a face—we get a special being, a kind of talking and acting shadow to which we attach the name *acousmètre*, ... the *complete acousmètre*, the one who is not-yet-seen, but who remains liable to appear in the visual field at any moment.²⁷

The source of the acousmètre’s power is in its lack of presence:

Thus, in order to take possession of the spectator and the images and even the characters, the voice has to avoid that which designates it as a tangible object.

Otherwise the spectator would become conscious of the identification process by perceiving its contours, its identity.²⁸

Visibility is thus tantamount to vulnerability, which is what happens when Chion’s speaker-from-beyond is revealed (what he refers to as de-acousmatization). Chion reverses the claims made by some critics for whom visibility affords power.²⁹ It is not as if sound denies visibility: they are not mutually exclusive—sensuous experience is diversified. It is just that visuality occupies a certain analytical and cultural privilege over against these other senses, and fittingly, this privilege comes with blind spots.

²⁶ Nancy, 21.

²⁷ Chion, 21. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁹ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16:3 (1975): 6-18; Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997).

What listening may achieve that visibility, which sustains the presence/absence binary, through its own binary of visibility/invisibility, does not is the pushing of presence to its limit. Sound is both presence and absence. It is everywhere and nowhere on the filmic screen. The sensuous crisis effected by sound establishes the minor debate among film critics about the term “voice-off.” Mary Ann Doane writes that

“voice-off” refers to instances in which we hear the voice of a character who is not visible within the frame. Yet the film establishes, by means of previous shots or other contextual determinants, the character’s ‘presence’ in the space of the scene, in the diegesis.³⁰

Yet as she points out, Christian Metz disagrees with this retrenched privileging of the visible, since “voice-off” refers to “the visibility (or lack of visibility) of the source of the sound. Metz argues that sound is never ‘off.’”³¹ Pushing this further, I contend that sound not only does not participate in the debates about visibility and invisibility, it troubles the very terms of the debate.

This crisis, as may already be apparent, straddles sites local to film as well as broader questions having to do with our sensuous engagement with an increasingly mediatized world—specifically, in the direction of the relationship between the visual and aural, or among and within the sensuous. It recalls us to Roland Barthes’ “The Grain of the Voice”—but an earlier essay of his also bears relevance. Here is the earlier essay’s provocative thesis, in the form of a question: “In a word, haven’t you ever happened to

³⁰ Doane, 165.

³¹ Ibid., 166.

*read while looking up from your book?*³² Rather than aspire for an interpretation of “the work’s philological, autobiographical, or psychological details,”³³ he pays careful attention to his role as reader of the text. What Barthes may be approaching is intertextuality, a term taken up by many critics, but most famously by Julia Kristeva, for whom, crudely speaking, intertextuality is a way of understanding all texts to be quotations of each other.³⁴ These are not quotations in the sense of intentional cross-references, but unintentional and unconscious, whereby strands of ideas are borrowed, shared, reproduced—in a word, disseminated.³⁵ While Barthes and Kristeva differ in their theorizations, both share a concern with displacing the power of the author, and theorize around the “(inter)text” to do so.

Despite the powerful claims of Barthes’s essay, it retains a narrow understanding of the text by focusing on visuality alone; what is being disavowed, as John Mowitt points out, is the text’s “intratextuality,” which he identifies as the supplement of intertextuality. Intratextuality “underscores the presence of conflicting disciplinary histories and agendas within the frontier space of any text,”³⁶ and Mowitt’s provocative reading of *Alexander Nevsky*’s musical score, in relation to the film’s visual diegesis, offers a consideration of the text’s “anti-disciplinarity.” If the reader trained in Barthes, herself suspicious of disciplinarity, were to rewrite his narrative as an intratextual reading, she would not produce one of the visual alone, moving from reading the book to

³² Roland Barthes, “Writing Reading,” in *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 29. Emphasis in original.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980).

³⁵ See Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983).

³⁶ Mowitt, 175.

looking up, and presumably back down again, as if visuality were the only sensuous experience contributing to her reading. Instead, she could attempt to notice the sounds she hears while reading, and consider how these produce her readerly subject position, whether they are the sounds of a housecat purring, or the sirens from a passing firetruck. (The jeepney in *Mababangong Bangungot*, though, only aids a visually disciplinary heroism; its distractive force is too bright and colorful, in the otherwise dreary film, to inspire anything other than an appreciation for its visuality.)

In “The Grain of the Voice,” Barthes distinguishes between “pheno-songs” and “geno-songs,” a distinction he borrows from Kristeva. In her work, whereas the phenotext serves primarily a communicative function, the genotext is “language’s underlying foundation” and marks not only its symbolic, communicative function, but its signifiatory potential.³⁷ The genotext, like the aural, is signification that is not overdetermined by its context. In Barthes’s rendering, the pheno-song deals with that which is “in the service of communication, representation, expression,” while the geno-song instead deals with the “diction of the language”:

[I]t forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression; it is that apex (or that depth) of production where the melody really works at the language—not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sound-signifiers, of its letters—where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work.³⁸

³⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 87.

³⁸ Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice,” in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 182-183.

To approach the sound of a film as a geno-song thus provides a route that circumvents the troublesome logic of representation, always already the tortured ground of identity politics. We must think not of absence and presence, then, but of the fact of absence and presence—not only of the content or context of a text, but its sensuousness; not what appears or does not appear in a film, but the film as a “frontier space” of aural-visual signification.

Reading film in a way that does not privilege only the visual is not only a formal problem, but has to do with the kinds of social questions that critics, philosophers, and activists ask. Two of the best-known examples of the operation by which individuals are “hailed” or “interpellated,” for instance, are not just about producing social identities, but are described in both visual and aural terms: Louis Althusser’s police officer, who yells, “Hey, you there,” catches the individual’s attention through *speech*, and Frantz Fanon’s little white girl, who shouts, “Look, a Negro!” to convey the racial difference between white and black in a colonial setting. Though sound comes after sight in both instances, its role is far from auxiliary and instead is essential to the production of sociality. As Jean-Luc Nancy asks, in what ways are identities constituted through sound? Though he claims the maternal womb as the origin of aural individuation, such operations continue even post-partum, even when visibility would seem to have more authority.

5.

Such a critique has not only been advanced by an emergent “structure of feeling” among film scholars, but is one of the lessons to be learned from the film, whose narrator becomes disillusioned by visibility and presence. *Mababangong Bangungot* admits to the

limits of visual representation by the aural presence that intervenes, but which can only be recognized if one is not too distracted, as Jameson was, with the jeepney. Sound is not treated as an effect of what takes place in the visual diegesis; it is not taken for granted as a second-order, parasitic level of representation. Instead, its invisible presence forces a disruption of the representational strategies afforded by the visual. It is a lesson the narrator learns from his mother, who challenges his desires by describing in detail the circumstances of his father's death. Not unlike Tahimik, his father was a "happy taxi driver" who always sang. One day, he is given a rifle by an American soldier, and encouraged to use it against the Spanish—"It is your bridge to freedom, your vehicle to freedom," Tahimik's mother says, quoting the soldier. According to his mother, her husband "stopped singing," participated in the overthrow of the Spanish, and then resumed singing even while the Americans were negotiating the purchase of the Philippines from Spain in the 1898 Treaty of Paris. Finally, he was prevented from entering Manila by an American sentry, which led to a confrontation where he was murdered. "It was his last song," she says.

His mother's cautionary remarks suggest a relation between song and life. It is not specified what kinds of songs her husband sings, only that he sings. It is not about singing good or bad songs, positive or negative ones. Her comments imply that song, and more generally sound, is critical to life; and, given the visual diegesis that takes place during her recollections, it is both the production as well as reception of sound that matters, the singing as well as the listening. In this regard, her argument is not unlike Jean-Luc Nancy's, which is aided by the visual diegesis. As she retells the story, the screen shifts to what appears as a parodic re-enactment of the silent film genre, with its rote facial

expressions and, at least in the case of Chaplin, happy-go-lucky ambience. It moves between color and grayscale. Tahimik's father is shown as a young man driving a horse-carriage. The parodic quality of the scene is further emphasized by the horses he whips, which are not real, but painted bright red and wooden—somewhat like a carousel horse, but also somewhat like a jeepney. Importantly, not only do we see him singing, *we viewers hear it*—and when he sings his last song, the music ceases.

Even if we grant that there are limits to this analysis, that it has yet to think through its consequences for those who “cannot hear” (in all of the phrase's semantic richness), we cannot take this aural narrative for granted. After all, since his mother explains to Tahimik that his father sang songs, the film's audience need not hear the singing, and perhaps shouldn't, given the re-staging of the silent film. Hearing the song hails us as not just viewers, but listeners of his song, a song even the narrator himself can only imagine. In this way we are permitted to see, and hear, more than the narrator. We can understand how this kind of dramatic irony coheres with the film's critical disdain for presence. If Tahimik is initially dissatisfied with life in the village, longing for the West, and then even more disgusted with his firsthand experience of the metropole and its advanced corporate technology, then presence is necessarily problematic. The wooden horses also suggest the limits of visual representations of reality, as does the soundtrack that is not supposed to be there in the silent film of his father, but is. Sound becomes useful to juxtapose with presence since it lacks visibility or rather, does not participate in the economy of visual representation, visibility/invisibility. Most significantly, what results from reading (both watching and listening to) Tahimik's film is an aural critique

of both U.S. imperialism in the Philippines and the postcolonial hero whose response to imperialism is patriarchal nationalism.



Figure 2. Tahimik's father, also a driver of sorts. Source: www.lesblank.com.

Rather than presume a transparent and subordinate relationship between visual and aural, as is often the case in film criticism, the film admits to the limits of visual representation by the aural presence that intervenes in scenes such as the one I have just described. Sound is not treated as an effect of what takes place in the visual diegesis; it is not taken for granted as a second-order, parasitic level of representation. Instead, its invisible presence forces a disruption of the representational strategies afforded by the

visual. An aural critique of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines thus results from *reading* (both watching and listening to) Tahimik's film.

In order to bring our filmic investments to crisis, which simultaneously brings to crisis the narrative of heteropatriarchal nationalism as resistance, I suggest that there is one especially significant moment in the film, early on, where listening disrupts visible truths, or visibility's will-to-knowledge. In one of many scenes that begin amusingly only to turn more dramatic, Tahimik addresses the Werner von Braun Fan Club of Balian, Laguna, in the Philippines. Aside from the adult Tahimik, the president of the club, it appears from the camera's panning that all the other members are children. Tahimik congratulates them for accepting women (or girls) into the club, which receives much applause. (One could pause here briefly to think about the consequences of this inclusion: is it an inclusion that intervenes in patriarchal organizing strategies, or a benign form of multiculturalism for which women's inclusion serves only to reinforce masculine order?) Tahimik goes on to read aloud a letter from the Voice of America, the international broadcast service of the U.S., which he listens to incessantly on his transistor radio. The letter is sent by the Voice of America, addressing a question about America's moonlanding, perhaps the crowning achievement of the race to space—the competition among nations, primarily the Soviet Union and the U.S., to possess the most advanced technology. Sent to Balian, the letter is inscribed within the history of U.S. colonialism in the Philippines.

The letter is in response to a question he sent them, asking what the first astronaut to ever walk on the moon said when he set foot on the lunar surface, the fortieth anniversary of which was recently celebrated in the US. Though he reads it to a group of

children at a public square, the imagery quickly changes to a remote setting, in a forest, where only a few children appear. Each frame is static and anthropological, as the camera barely moves. The children stand still, faces averted from the camera. Their organic relationship to nature is strengthened by the shot of the ridge and blue sky—all around them, there is nature, and thus they, too, are a part of nature. The viewer does not recognize humanity, not from the birds-eye angle of the camera. The oppressive power of technology Tahimik recognizes in Europe is already at work in this early scene, especially as it induces compliance from viewers. One could say that imperialism enters the text at the moment the child is regarded, by viewers, as part of nature.

Tahimik exhibits difficulty in reading the letter aloud; what is amusing is not his difficulty in pronouncing these words, but the distinctive “monkey” that stands out amid his stutter. In the diagram which appears below, I have tried to approximate the dialogue in relation to the visual frame:

Aural (Tahimik’s voice)

Visual

(flute in background at all times)

Boy, leaning against tree, faces camera.
He wears a white hat and white T-shirt.
He looks to the side of the camera.
We see him only from the chest up.

“The answer to your question – The first words said by American astronauts on the moon:”

Sideview of same boy plus another boy, leaning against the tree, standing still.

“That’s one small step for man, one gee-

*-ant leap for man-kee ...
monkey...
man...*

Nature shot—at the bottom of the screen, the ridge of a green hill, but roughly 80% of the frame is clear blue sky.

*keend...
mankeend...
One geeant leap for mankeend.”*

Child’s feet balanced on thin wooden logs, through which a small stream runs.

(flute)

Birds-eye view of child walking on logs; an older child stands nearby.

While the background flute music accompanies the *National Geographic* or Discovery Channel feel of the imagery, the letter read aloud does not. Here we reach the pivotal use of sound in this sequence. In the middle of the sequence, the only scene without Filipina/o children present is almost exclusively filled with clear-blue sky. Only a green mountain ridge appears across the bottom. It is within these few frames that the narrator stutters over “one giant leap for mankind,” uttering “monkey” in place of “mankind.” “Monkey” emerges in a failed repetition of “mankind,” such that the linguistic failure signifies the failure of colonialism to faithfully reproduce Western concepts of “universal mankind,” due to the West’s equally adamant insistence on a concept of racial difference. More so, what is precisely unspeakable for Tahimik is the “i/I” of “mankind.” He cannot pronounce the “I”; it comes out as “ee.” The individual cannot emerge from nature, but rather civilized society. It is also fitting to recognize that “monkey” is a racial slur that has been directed at Filipina/os in colonial as well as anticolonial propaganda during the Spanish American War, and later during the colonial period.

In this split-second, the aural disturbs the visual anthropology from its otherwise seamless narrative; it is how the film inscribes complicity with the anthropological while also provoking critique. When the narrator cannot pronounce “mankind,” and is consigned to instead articulate, *in quite clear English*, the racist and colonialist label applied to Filipina/os, the camera shows the sky, as if the term—whether the written “mankind” or the enounced “monkey”—cannot apply to the children. If they do not fit into a Western conception of “mankind,” they are neither its other, the savage or uncivilized. Neither men nor monkeys, their disappearance from the gaze of colonialist anthropology suggests they simply exceed representation, the soundwaves of “monkey”

dispersing into the forest but also beyond it, into space, the very frontier once prized by Tahimik, now only the destination for sonorous deployments and redeployments.



Figure 3. “... Monkey ...” Source: www.lesblank.com.

These are the kind of children of whom Lee Edelman might be proud.³⁹ In other words, these are not children who can be employed toward global heteronormative futures. In this way, these children must be understood as fully the antithesis of the child Tahimik delivers in Germany. Recall that he comes to the rescue of a pregnant German woman and helps to deliver her child, who then becomes his namesake, a scene that is

³⁹ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004). Also see my first chapter, where I briefly discuss the impact of Edelman’s work on this project.

supposedly a kind of artisanal resistance against the machinery of modernity's grocery stores and *Zwiebelturms*, thanks to the handiwork of the Filipino male hero. The child who bears his name inherits that tradition—a tradition expanded to include racialized bodies, all but forgetting the imperial past and uneven present, which also upholds certain standards of masculine leadership. In sharp contrast, the children he addresses are not included within a progressive, masculinized narrative that forgets imperialism, and neither are they consigned to the racist terms of that imperialism. It is not that they signify nothing, but the terms of their signification are not be legible to a viewer who seeks only to reinforce global(ist) normativities.

Listening perhaps signals a call for more work to be done on the sensuousness and sensuality of the biopolitical. While visual metaphors of the panopticon have inspired scholars to look at visualizing and surveilling technologies of modernity, especially in the visual arts, the distance it relies on—Coppola's "mirror," too, is visual—cannot grasp the intimacy and immediacy of biopower. Visuality may itself be a straw man or straw jeepney distracting us from biopolitical experience. Techniques of social management and profit-extraction are nearly invisible except in cases deemed extreme (the war on terror, for instance). The global neoliberal consensus persuades us we are making free choices both as consumers and producers, and the persuasion succeeds since there are few evident signs of coercion. Overseas Filipinas, within the rationale of corporatized multiculturalism, are now included within the community of self-conscious agents making rational decisions. See them vote officials in office who regulate overseas employment. See some of them make decisions better than others and be rewarded for it. There is nothing obscene or profane here; I know it when I see it.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's problematizing of subaltern speech is instructive not only for its interrogation of celebratory radical philosophy, having presumed it has done away with the western subject, once and for all.⁴⁰ We may add Jameson, for his reading of *Mababangong Bangungot*, to Foucault and Deleuze, who are her examples. In the film, it is not as if Tahimik's mother has spoken, though her lips are moving and sound is coming from them. Her enfiguration is as a mouthpiece for the narrator's heteropatriarchal aspirations. That is her nearly ritualized sacrifice; it is Tahimik, the filmmaker whose background is as global as it is "Filipino," who employs her in the service of the narrative I have explored here. Though she may not be as bright and colorful as the jeepney—indeed, her appearance is quite sullen and tragic—she, too, works as decoy and distraction. Both her sadness and wisdom inspire sympathy and pity, as well as relief that her son is coming home to save her.

Critically listening to the dialogue and speech in the film reveal these to be projections of biopolitical desire circulating between filmmaker and audience. Nothing about the narrator's mother has been revealed. The children in the scene I examined, too, do not reveal themselves to us. It is only Tahimik's voice, narrating the Voice of America's letter—revealing his heteropatriarchal ambitions to be the mouthpiece of empire.⁴¹ But by disappearing from the frame at the precise moment of the naming of imperial desire, of the naming of Filipina/os as monkeys—in that absent presence—the

⁴⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "History," *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999), 198-311. This chapter contains a revision of her well-known essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

⁴¹ It should be clear that my argument is not a return to the privilege of the voice that has structured the metaphysics of presence in western philosophy. Sound does not allow us to transparently access meaning, and is thus not a dialectical improvement over visibility. Instead, the intersection of sound and vision produces disciplinary, sensuous, and interpretive crisis.

children show us that we are still only speaking to ourselves about ourselves. Like Ellie, we critics are thrust into the scene, though not into the camera's frame—instead, through the speakers. The speakers continue to amplify our voices—the selfsame voices, only louder and more insistent, as they disseminate into the acoustics of global capital space. But the amplification is as much a sign of vulnerability as it is a display of technological innovation—the vulnerability that the words themselves have reached the limits of comprehension, that their internal logic is being revealed as fundamentally catachrestic, if not aporetic, that what we are telling ourselves no longer makes sense to us, and is certainly not what others are hearing.

Epilogue.

Pidgin-Holed: Mothering Diasporic, Catachrestic Literature

We *are* our final vocabulary,
and how we use it.
There is no secret contingency.
There's only the rearrangement, the redescription
Of little and mortal things.
There's only this single body, this tiny garment
Gathering the past against itself,
making it otherwise.

—Charles Wright

And dishwasher gives back no images

—Waring Cuney

But memories and recollections won't give me total access
to the unwritten interior life of these people. Only the act of
the imagination can help me.¹

—Toni Morrison

1.

Ferdinand Marcos's regime has often been described as a dictatorship, given the imposition of martial law for a decade beginning in 1973. But Giorgio Agamben's conceptualization of a "state of exception"—in which he argues that Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, and Stalin are not dictators judging by a Roman genealogy of what constitutes a "dictatorship," but are better understood as figures advancing so many states of exception—applies to Marcos, too. Agamben writes that the state of exception "is not a

¹ As the anecdote in my introduction suggested, this project is greatly indebted to a wide range of black feminist critiques. Limiting its explicit contributions to anecdotes and epigraphs in no way does justice to the extent of those contributions, but signals the need for closer critical affiliations in future work, and in the work of, and toward, alternative futures.

dictatorship ... but a space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations—and above all the very distinction between public and private—are deactivated.”² Where Roman dictators were appointed and vested with dictatorial responsibilities, the state of exception (in ancient Rome, the *iustitium*) “results not from being invested with a dictatorial *imperium*, but from the suspension of laws that restricted their action.”³

The state of exception is not contained within the juridical order, even as it is protected by it, empowering an authority that rules by whatever means necessary to preserve order. The state is in an “exceptional” position requiring measures whose exigencies cannot be stymied by bureaucratic administration. Writing about the US, Agamben cites Lincoln’s use of martial law to mobilize the armed forces and declare the Emancipation Proclamation; Roosevelt’s betraying the institution of checks and balances to “cope with the Great Depression” and enter the US into World War Two; and more recently, the undeclared war on terror as examples of the state of exception.⁴ Readers of Naomi Klein’s work on “disaster capitalism”—the use of exceptional moments like war, depression, 9/11, etc., to implement economic and political policies as emergency measures that would otherwise have been criticized, but are approved or unquestioned given the panic and turmoil, and then remain in place long after the crisis—will hear echoes of Agamben’s writings.⁵

² Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005), 50.

³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-22.

⁵ See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2008).

Within the state of exception that marked the declaration of martial law in the Philippines in 1973, Marcos advocated the formalized recruitment, training, and exporting of laborers across the world—only one of the policies that mark the neoliberalization of the Philippines. But returning to some of the questions asked at the beginning of this project, if mourning is linked to nationalism, then the state of exception in no way rests solely upon the shoulders of the Marcos regime. Indeed, it may be possible for critics to argue that the state of exception was ushered in at the moment of national liberation—a liberation that was never won, but granted. The masculinist aura looming over Philippine nationalism never asserted its independence successfully, only able to wait for it to be given by the imperial sovereign. Hence nationalism has perpetually been marked by this failure, evident in the mourning of Nick Joaquin’s work and in the attempts to declare a “revolution from the center” in Marcos’s writings. The twin, mutually constitutive crises of masculinity and nationalism sustain the “unfinished discourse” of revolution, and instantiate the state of exception.

The state of exception is gendered insofar as it marks this crisis of nationalist masculinity. Agamben suggests that mourning anchors the relationship between the law and the state of exception—mourning, he points out, is often the very occasion for emergency measures, the justification for acting indifferently to “normal” procedure.⁶ The mourning that is the persistent underside of revolutionary nationalism in the Philippines is precisely the setting for an extralegal state of exception whereby the nation would seek to assert restore its masculinity in the global arena, whatever the cost. Marcos’s martial law—as well as the policies of those who followed under the banner of

⁶ See Agamben’s fifth chapter, “Feast, Mourning, Anomie,” 65-73.

anti-Marcos discourse—is the logical result of such motivations, including the production of an overseas workforce that has colonial and early postcolonial roots.⁷

The production of the Filipina mother as an ideal subject of global heteronationalism needs to be understood as an exceptionalist politics. Filipina mothers have been normalized and naturalized according to these particularly extreme conditions, within the particularly extreme *language* that stabilizes such global management. Not surprisingly, Agamben finds strong analogies between the articulation of a state of exception and language: “In this sense, the floating signifier . . . corresponds to the state of exception, in which the norm is in force without being applied.”⁸ We could go one step further and dissolve the implied distance of analogy and correspondence, suggesting that language *constitutes* the state of exception, and vice versa. As R. Radhakrishnan illuminatingly asks, “Are we in a world where some need representation or in a world where representation is the highest form of political enslavement?”⁹ It is precisely the dominant representations of Filipina mothers as well as the faith in sociological and empiricist approaches that enable what Neferti Tadiar refers to as their literal and representational enslavement.¹⁰

In this dissertation, my aim has been to draw out the excessive, disidentificatory fruit of social labor that cannot be circumscribed, even if it has been inscribed within, the conditions and representations of global capitalism and imperialism. It can be witnessed,

⁷ See, for instance, Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹ R. Radhakrishnan, “Theory, Democracy, and the Public Intellectual,” *PMLA* 125:3 (2010), 790.

¹⁰ See Neferti Tadiar, *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2004).

if not grasped, in Lina's "happiness"; felt, if not known, in the longing of Gabe's mother; and heard, if not seen, in the children of *Mababangong Bangungot*. It can also be heard in the cacophony of Filipina/o children's voices and their pidgin languages that constitute R. Zamora Linmark's *Rolling the R's*—a fitting conclusion for a project such as this.¹¹ Largely composed of prose fiction, it is a text that might be called a novel, but bears none of the conventional features: it has no main character, no main plot accompanied by subplots, and no explicit causal development leading to resolution. Despite concerning children, it does not qualify as an authentically modern, national bildungsroman; David Eng refers to it as a "wonderfully deranged and transformative bildungsroman" that takes a "detour through queerness and diaspora."¹² Insofar as the novel form as has accompanied and contributed to the spread of nationalism, *Rolling the R's* is not only a challenge to Philippine nationalist heteronormativity, but multiple, global heteronationalisms. Its innovations are thus not limited to the formal or aesthetic, but are primarily material and political.

In this text, the failed, unfinished revolution of the Philippines is not ignored, but neither does it preoccupy the community of fifth-graders living in Hawai'i. This does not have to do with their being outside of the nation proper, especially since the children of *Mababangong Bangungot*, who are basically contemporaneous with these children, may be included within these stories. The children of Tahimik's nightmare are not so much natives in their native setting (an anthropological fiction) as diasporas of the diaspora, in league with the diasporic natives of Kalihi. By understanding the fifth-graders in this

¹¹ R. Zamora Linmark, *Rolling the R's* (San Francisco: Kaya, 1997).

¹² David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001), 228.

way, a global and diasporic critique of US imperialism, linking the subjugation of Hawai'i's local populations with those in the Philippines, can emerge. The children's obsession with and appropriation of dominant and popular cultural productions—Donna Summer, “Happy Days,” “Charlie’s Angels”—that occurs over and over in the text enables the production of diasporic Filipina/o (dis)identifications that interrogate the history and politics not just of the Philippines, but also Hawai'i; its critiques are not nation-based, but instead address global formations. Not only does “‘Filipino America’ [prompt] us to consider the possibilities of employing a transnational imaginary as a conceptual frame,”¹³ Hawai'i becomes a place that “resists a one-directional compulsion to mainland/mainstream norms of race, nation, and gender.”¹⁴ In this way, the children's enthusiasm for popular culture does not signify an assimilative embrace of the US; instead, television shows and radio hits help the youth explore racial and sexual disidentifications which enrich, bore, and traumatize them.¹⁵

The text begins with an aberrant and disidentifying subject. In an early vignette, two of the children (Edgar and an unnamed narrator) engage in a conversation with Exotica, who is described as a “woman trapped in a foreigner's body,” about her sexual

¹³ Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 59.

¹⁴ Crystal Parikh, “Blue Hawaii: Asian Hawaiian Cultural Production and Racial Melancholia,” in *Journal of Asian American Studies* (October 2002), 199-216.

¹⁵ “Any subjectification is a disidentification, removal from the naturalness of a place, the opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted, where a connection is made between having a part and having no part.” Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999), 36. Also see José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

transformation.¹⁶ A “man from the waist down,” Exotica tells them she is ““just waiting for D-Day to come when the doctors can cut it off so I can finally straighten out my act.””¹⁷ The youth pepper her with questions addressing the visibility and history of her transition. One asks her if ““the men you go out with ever know what you really are?””¹⁸ Her response and behavior are instructive: ““I try to be discreet about it,” Exotica says, spilling the contents of her makeup bag onto the vanity. ‘It’s such a bother—I have to spend hours and hours just wrapping it up and tucking it tight between my legs.’”¹⁹ That is, as she empties her makeup bag of the very items that enable her femininity, she discloses the ordeal of hiding that which signifies a male identity. Her action forces a crisis on reality—where the question asks about what she “really” is, the juxtaposition of her action, which interrupts her comment as it is narrated on the page, sets the stage for a rereading of her comment. In effect, Exotica does not answer the question, she changes its terms. The penis she hides no longer signifies what she “really” is but, like the makeup now exposed on the vanity, it is a performative object, a phallus.²⁰

What remains intriguing about Exotica’s story is the effects it might have on the children to whom she narrates. Can Exotica be a mother, within this performative moment? Toward the end of the chapter, Edgar asks her to evaluate the aesthetic and signficatory power of his lips, which she affirms, allowing him to take “pride in his

¹⁶ Linmark, 12.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See Jacques Lacan, “The Meaning of the Phallus,” in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1985), 74-85.

newly discovered asset.”²¹ This generous reading of Edgar’s lips prompts the other one to ask, ““What about my lips?””²² One could guess that this unidentified character and narrator of this chapter is Edgar’s friend Vicente, who appears in various sexualized episodes throughout the narrative but unlike Edgar, is timid and uncertain about his sexuality. His uncertainty is confirmed here when “I look at Exotica’s eyes, spellbound and watery. I know she’s discovered the secret I’m trying to hide.”²³ But let us take a chance here to not assume we can identify Vicente as the narrator. Let us accept the “I” who narrates as unspecified—a performative, rather than constative, pronoun. This “I,” then, is something of a public, anonymous “I,” that can be claimed by anyone—you, too. The text makes the reader into a confidant, and the secret, while unspecified and unspoken, conceals the possibilities at work in the claiming. Indeed, since Exotica keeps the secret in confidence, one cannot even be certain of its content.

What if the secret is that *our* mother has two navels? What if *our* secret is Connie’s whereabouts? Lina’s motivations? What if it cannot be captured by the birds-eye view of an imperialist camera? What if *our* mother is a stranger to us?

This production of diasporic sexualities calls into question the national longing for sexual normativity that foregrounds Philippine global heteronationalism. If this is the case, there is a way in which the disidentification of the diaspora—insofar as it is estranged from the “homeland,” insofar as it does not belong—might help reveal the fundamental queerness of the nation, its multiple, irreducible origins, its plural navels. It is not as if those who have gone abroad for all kinds of reasons have abandoned the

²¹ Linmark, 14.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 15.

nation whatsoever; that may be far too simplistic a narrative. Consider how the nation is invoked in “The Battle Poem of the Republic,” a poem narrated by Florante, the intellectual of the group. The first stanza tells us that

Last week, Mrs. Takemoto made us
write a poem in standard English
for the Annual State Poetry
Contest, Division III.²⁴

Enjambment creates a signifying performative: the teacher of the class constructs and instructs the class, but not just to “write a poem in standard English”; given the line break, her orders are unspecific and general. “Made us” also suggests the ways in which identities are created within different systems. The second line is also a performative that gives a command, and the rest of the stanza reinforces the state’s bureaucratic role in organizing the competition. It is a role that calls for elaboration. Between stanzas in this first section of the poem, Mrs. Takemoto’s voice supplements it with key phrases. The first one that appears cites the monetary prize for the competition: “... *if chosen, \$100.00* ...” These interjections help us understand how nationalism, colonialism, and capitalism—along with education—constitute the event.

Above all, literature is employed in the service of the nation. The poetry contest is a demand for form, not content; the very notion of a poetry contest emphasizes the formal appearance of poetry—namely, it is the quality of the formal difference from prose on which students will be judged. Thus, students are challenged to reproduce an abstracted written form as an imperative of (and to be rewarded by) the neocolonial nation-state. In

²⁴ Ibid., 55.

this way, the economic text is inscribed within the aesthetic-cultural; the next stanza confirms this:

Our eyes went bonkers. Our faces
wore hundred-dollar smiles. Even
Katrina-Trina Cruz's packed-on
makeup and Judy-Ann Katsura's
scotch-taped eyelids were peeled
off by the crisp Ben Franklin.²⁵

Whereas in "LIPS" makeup helps recover the performativity of diasporic history, here the students' makeup and "scotch-taped eyelids" is "peeled/ off" by money. Yet this should not be understood within an orthodox Marxism where the cultural superstructure only reveals an essentially economic mode of production; rather, the "peeling/ off" signifies that performativity is not limited to makeup alone, but also to money; the students "wear" "crisp Ben Franklins." Even as the contest interpellates the students as economic competitors, each "with an I-spit-on-your-poem attitude," along with a nativist posturing that identifies the poet as "Florante off the Boat," the last line of the third stanza enacts a performative irony: "win first prize. No way, Jose."²⁶ The command articulated in the first half of the line is thwarted by the second half's declaration.

Yet if the contest, as a writing exercise, suggests the identifications students are pressured to make within a normative pedagogy, the poems they write—which Florante summarizes in the third section of Florante's poem—recognize the disidentifications that are produced given their variegated, diverse backgrounds. In effect, the formal exercise

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 56.

of writing poems transforms into a site where different stories reveal the lives of the students, all of which cannot be consolidated and interpreted for abstract and pedagogic capitalist-heteronationalism. The imperative to learn an abstract form delivers *unforgettable* content; for instance,

Rowell Cortez, the only Filipino who had enough courage to admit he ate black dogs, wrote ‘bout his first time at a cockfight in Waipahu.

...
Katherine Katrina-Trina Cruz wrote ‘bout her third time with her babe, star quarterback Erwin Castillo.

...
Judy-Ann Katsura wrote ‘bout being grateful that she’s Japanese and not Okinawan like Jared.

...
Stephen Bean [the lone haole] wrote ‘bout the military importance in Hawai‘i.²⁷

These narratives disturb the normativizing efforts of school—to speak proper English, to quit “rolling your r’s.” The practice of writing poems, while attempting to shape and ultimately change the dialects that mark the students’ various backgrounds in the lower strata of Kalihi—in other words, to erase history by erasing difference—provides the space to tell stories that belie the dominant narratives undergirding education and national citizenship. In very similar ways to how the children make popular culture a repository for potential queerness, where they can play out the roles of Joanie and Chachi on “Happy Days” or Jill Munroe on “Charlie’s Angels” without adhering to the racial,

²⁷ Linmark, 57.

gender, and sexual norms that circulate in these shows, the students disidentify with learning English—they insist on rolling the r’s of an alternative vocabulary.²⁸

The stakes of the poem, which ends with a description of Florante’s own drafts, work in a manner similar to Exotica’s conversation, and both must be distinguished from the narrow, essentialist, nationalist, and heteronormative meanings of Joaquin’s story. As with Exotica, the students produce stories that cannot be reduced to the failure of the Philippine revolution, telling stories from the margins—of sexuality, immigration, and ethnic politics. Rather than a failed or inadequate vocabulary, theirs is excessive. The last part of Florante’s poem, which details his own drafts, reinforces the refusal to settle on any single story. His drafts do not pursue a single theme or topic which is revised several times; each draft is not a technical or formalistic revision of an earlier version, but a surplus of multiple topics. As with Exotica, Florante is not interested in “revised versions” of Philippine history. In their stead, different poems emerge whose diffusion suggests a critically reflexive way of conceptualizing a diasporic and transnational history:

I wrote ‘bout

Hungry bees eating space, black dogs losing it first time

America raiding scotch-taped Kalihi while Pedros drowned in Franco’s
German-spit second time

Dim in the Philippines, PI Joes missing in Fort De Russy’s dead-end pock-
ets third time

Immigrants coming to Kalihi, dodging the American sham battle fourth
time

²⁸ In this way, of course, history is not approached as a linear form, but a dissemination of narrative; “rolling the r’s” convincingly shows how language becomes a contentious site for the construction of identity, history, and nation.

Smiles that break evil bones after school, touch-dance brawling in front of
Kress fifth time

Uninviting priests with dog-tattooed arms, grinding fighting cocks, and
preaching last words sixth time

(And I wrote 'bout a pig cap pen bleeding a hundred-dollar poem.)²⁹

The laundry list is neither in poetic nor prose form; these fragments suggest another form that challenges the formal rapport between novel and nation, between nation and diaspora, and between literature and education. The poem acts as a dictionary whose ordering and assemblage are antithetical to the kind hoped for by the Señora de Vidal, an “infinite referral” reminding one of Borges, Flaubert, and Shōnagon.

2.

The title of Kidlat Tahimik’s film delivers some compelling conclusions for this dissertation. *Mababangong Bangungot* has been widely translated as *Perfumed Nightmare*. Nightmare should be considered a subset of dreaming, which can be interpreted as, on one hand, the cognitive experience of dreaming, and on the other hand, the kind of dreaming that is associated with wish-fulfillment. But more intriguingly, one archaic meaning of nightmare is, quoting from the *OED*, “a female spirit or monster supposed to settle on and produce a feeling of suffocation in a sleeping person or animal.” Gender is signified in the term, as is asphyxiation, this latter cohering with E. San Juan, Jr.’s alternative translation of the title as *Fragrant Asphyxiations*. If the one producing the effect is a female monster, luring victims with a certain scent, we may

²⁹ Ibid., 58.

better understand the film's investments in masculine heroics. Tahimik's antagonist is not only capitalism and colonialism; the film's investment in masculinity implies its nemesis.

Not unlike the title's uncanny translations, it is worth pondering that filmmaker Eric de Guia's pseudonym, Kidlat Tahimik, translates into what Felicidad Lim calls "Lightning-Quiet," an incongruity with profound implications. Is lightning not of a visual order, accompanied by an aural thunder? Why, then, is it not "Thunder-Quiet," or "Thunderously Quiet"? Even so, that would not make much sense. Neither lightning nor thunder evoke sentiments that would be associated with quietude. In this way, the moniker points to a fundamental incommensurability in the attempt to turn the sensuous into representation. Neither listening nor seeing will ever suffice, and to transform them into a consistent and coherent language is its own ordeal.

Despite the fragility of creating meaning, here is one possible interpretation of the name: To attain the speed of light, one must first attain the speed of sound. It is thus impossible for lightning to be quiet; or if so, the silence is only an intensive spacing, and one that is belated, but which eventually arrives as thunder. But a quietude that can attain such speed, that is as fast as lightning, not only breaks the sound barrier, it breaks the barriers to sound, and more broadly, the sensuous, that foreclose critical readings of Filipina mothers and their wayward children. While lightning never ceases to frighten, startle, and otherwise excite us, it is often thunder that is all the more terrifying. Lightning cracks the skies for a second, then disappears—the flash of an instant crisis almost immediately withdrawn and forgotten about, so long as it remains distant. But thunder rumbles through the land, a boom echoing and reverberating down to our very bones. They are not finally distinguishable, of course, as one signals the other. But if a

masculinist global heteronationalism, as lightning dominating our visions and cameras, is advanced as the response to imperialism, it is the ominous, jarring sonic thunder that is the radical, two-naveled monster in our midst, luring us to listen. Will we heed her call?

The call of the radical monster in our midst returns us to the aberrant body of Connie de Vidal and the circulation of a rumor intended to sensationalize the role of Filipinas in unraveling the hopes of Philippine nationalism—but which is transformed into a critique of the gendered terms of that revolutionary and shamelessly global capitalist narrative. What is glimpsed here among all of these texts—among Connie, Lina, Gabe’s mother, diasporic children, and poetry—is the possibility of an alternative mode of (re)production that is formed within the very protocols of global capital and Philippine heteronationalism. Connie—Lina and Gabe’s mother, too—establishes no continuous diasporic maternal identity in the service of what I have referred to as globalized heteronationalism. They are also neither victims nor heroes, despite the overwhelming temptation and tendency in empirical and sociological analyses to make such claims.

Writing about black culture and history, Toni Morrison reminds us that “[o]ur everyday lives may be laced with tragedy, glazed with frustration and want, but they are also capable of fierce resistance to the dehumanization and trivialization that politico-cultural punditry and profit-driven media depend upon.”³⁰ The exact terms of this surplus production can barely be glimpsed or heard within current epistemologies and ontologies. Their resistance cannot be *spelled out* within our limited dictionaries, vocabularies, and

³⁰ Toni Morrison, “The Future of Time: Literature and Diminished Expectations,” *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction*, ed. Carolyn Denard (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2008), 176.

cameras. Yet as certain as they are structurally illegible (by design), they remain, undeniably, as so many absent presences. Far from having reached the consensual telos of the post-political, post-historical, and post-theoretical, far from having realized a transparently immediate present filled with the euphoria of multicultural globalization, the present remains absent—beyond our grasp for as long as we are committed to repeating, wittingly and unwittingly, the workings of global, heteronational empire. The “post-” that is appended to so many of our concepts disavows the *pre*-emergent within, but it is a “pre-” that exceeds the logic of our temporality and epistemology, a pre-emergent that signals the *nevertheless* that destabilizes all that may be known of, ordered in, and managed over Filipina mothers.

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