

The Struggle Over Race, Class, Nationality & Gender: Social Dynamics and United Front Politics in Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*

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ABSTRACT

Deploying a historical-materialist perspective, this essay analyzes the intersection of various thematic strands in the text of Bulosan's masterpiece, *America is in the Heart*. The result is that novel is not just an immigrant narrative of success, but an acute dramatic rendering of the class-racial struggle of Filipinos for national self-determination translated into the united-front politics of the Depression and the years before World War II. This unorthodox interpretation challenges the hegemonic appraisal of the novel that sanitizes its radical politics.

INTRODUCTION

When *America Is in the Heart* (*AIH*) appeared in 1946, the Philippines was about to receive formal independence from the United States after four harrowing years of Japanese barbarism. Filipinos thanked the troops of General Douglas MacArthur for their "Liberation." Bulosan's book was praised less for its avowed progressive sentiments than for its affirmation of the sacrifices made in Bataan and Corregidor, sacrifices memorialized for their promise of complete national redemption. Bulosan tried to capture the pathos of a long-expected moment of rendezvous among waylaid brothers and lost compatriots. Victory against Japan seemed to wipe out the trauma of the U.S. bloody pacification of the islands from 1899 to 1913, an experience alluded to in Bulosan's farewell to his brother Leon, a veteran of the European carnage that occurred thousands of miles away from Binalonan, Pangasinan, where Bulosan was born on November 2, 1911.

Two years after his birth, the Filipino-American War ended on June 11, 1913 when General Pershing's troops slaughtered 10,000 Moros in the Bud Bagsak massacre (Tan). Add this toll to about a million natives killed earlier, we arrive at the initial fruit of President McKinley's "Benevolent

Assimilation” policy justifying the new empire’s possession. Soon the newly established school system and William Howard Taft’s “Filipinization” program produced an entrenched bureaucratic caste with close ties to the feudal landlords and compradors that colluded with the new rulers up to the Commonwealth period (1935-1946). When this oligarchy accepted the onerous conditions of independence in July 1946, Stanley Karnow wryly remarked that “they submitted voluntarily to their own exploitation,” wishing to become “a favored and exemplary party within a *Pax Americana*” (330).

Bulosan’s advent into the world was thus counterpointed with such paradoxes and intractable ironies. His initiation was self-contradictory, his psyche charged with aberrant impulses and dispositions. It reflected the quandaries of the times. Jaime Veneracion remarks that “while the Americans supposedly introduced land reform, the effect was the intensification of the tenancy problem” (63). Throughout U.S. ascendancy, fierce antagonisms convulsed the pacified countryside. One charismatic folk-hero, Felipe Salvador, was hanged for leading a massive peasant rebellion against landlords and their U.S. patrons. Between his birth and departure for the U.S. in 1930, Bulosan might have agonized over the desperate revolts of impoverished farmers in the Colorums of Luzon and elsewhere (Constantino; Sturtevant). In Part I, Chapter 8, he describes the 1931 Tayug uprising which he didn’t personally witness. It was led by Pedro Calosa, a veteran of union activism in Hawaii who was jailed for instigating multiethnic strikes and summarily deported back to the colony in 1927.

Transversal Border-Crossings

How did Filipinos suddenly appear in Hawaii? After three decades of imperial tutelage, the Philippines was transformed into a classic dependency providing raw materials and cheap labor. From 1907 to 1926, more than 100,000 Filipinos were recruited by the Hawaiian sugar plantations. Driven by poverty, feudal abuses, and bureaucratic repression, Filipinos plotted their journey to the metropole to pursue “the dream of success” broadcast so seductively in the mass-circulated textbooks and mass media that mesmerized Bulosan and his generation. Neither citizens nor aliens, they moved around as “wards” or “nationals.” Neither

immigrants nor foreigners, they were denied citizenship, wandering from rural countryside to city ghettos and back. As Carey McWilliams observed, "they were neither fish nor fowl" (x). They explored an enigmatic *terra incognita* filled with perverse fantasies and tragicomic comeuppances. These derelict expatriates shared W.E. B. DuBois syndrome of "double consciousness" (11), a condition of permanent crisis born in the years of transition from feudal bondage to capitalist alienation. It was a hazardous passage that may explain the ironic turnabouts and precarious balancing acts encountered here, a plight analogous to the misfortunes of the peasantry in Europe when the enclosures of the commons engendered banditry, anarchic mayhem, reprisals, together with the fabled gallery of rogues, tricksters, vagabonds, and rambunctious fugitives.

In this zone of contingencies, Bulosan found himself struggling to survive with his cohort upon arrival in the midst of the Great Depression (1929-33). They became easy victims of labor contractors, agribusiness operatives, gamblers, racist vigilantes, and state security agents (prohibiting their marriage with whites) from Hawaii and California to Alaska. Naïve and vulnerable, they nurtured a sophisticated culture of resistance. Bulosan's friendship with militant organizer Chris Mensalvas plunged him in the campaigns of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), such as the 1933 strike of 4,000 Filipinos in Stockton and Salinas, California (San Juan, "Filipinos"). As editor of *The New Tide* in 1934, Bulosan became acquainted with Richard Wright, William Saroyan, John Fante, Louis Adamic, and Sanora Babb. When he was confined at the Los Angeles General Hospital in 1936-38, it was Sanora Babb and her sister Dorothy who shrewdly apprenticed him to a writer's vocation. They helped him discover through books "all my world of intellectual possibilities—and a grand dream of bettering society for the working man," as he confessed (San Juan, *Balikbayan* 161). While convalescing, he composed fiction satirizing feudal savagery and patriarchal despotism, later gathered in *The Laughter of My Father* (1944, hereafter *Laughter*). He also wrote poems rehearsing the themes of AIH collected in *Chorus for America* (1942), *Letter from America* (1942), *The Voice of Bataan* (1943), and in his impassioned ode, "If You Want To Know What We Are" (*On Becoming* 166-68).

U.S. colonialism dissolved traditional affinities and salvaged pastoral folkways. Bulosan's adolescent years drew energy from the

survival craft of a poor peasant clan in which the fathers and uncles had to reckon with maternal wisdom and bureaucratic humbuggery. In his numerous letters, fiction and essays, Bulosan pays homage to the cunning spirit of his father trying to outwit landlords, merchant-usurers, and petty officials to eke out a bare subsistence. In reconstructing his past, Bulosan revitalized the rich insurgent culture of the dispossessed among whom he grew up. He learned the ethos of a rapidly changing society, its strategy of compromises and tactics of ambivalent temporizing. In response to the philistine putdown of his vignettes as a mode of commercializing exotic mores, Bulosan urged us to attend more to their subtle immanent critique: "My politico-economic ideas are embedded in all my writings....Laughter is not humor; it is satire; it is indictment against an economic system that stifled the growth of the primitive, making him decadent overnight without passing through the various stages of growth and decay" (Feria 273). Other stories by Bulosan (in *The Philippines Is in the Heart*) exuded "hidden bitterness" couched in dark humor, his antidote to an imputed trademark optimism. They retold folktales attacking the predatory impostures of the oligarchy and the iniquitous property/power relations afflicting the majority.

One might conclude that Bulosan's return to the homeland began with the ritual of his departure. His apprenticeship as an organic intellectual of the emergent diaspora began with the effort to understand the trials of his family to overcome feudal-colonial privations. Although *Laughter* and *AIH* demonstrated his creative potential, unlike his contemporary Jose Garcia Villa, Bulosan was never genuinely accepted by the Establishment literati. He remained suspect, a subversive pariah from the "boondocks." His radicalization began with an act of "popular memory" triggered by the circumstances of uprooting and rabid ostracism. Even before the imperialist crisis subsided, Bulosan had already plotted his project of remapping the U.S. cultural-political landscape with his claim in an autobiographical manifesto: "I want to interpret the soul of the Filipinos in this country. What really compelled me to write was to try to understand this country, to find a place in it not only for myself but for my people" ("Autobiography" 267).

Mapping the Terrain of Friends and Foes

Originally acclaimed as a poignant testimonial of ethnic success, *AIH's* epilogue gestures toward a popular-front strategy against global fascism. Written during the war, Bulosan's quasi-autobiography functions as a geopolitical annal of those years of struggle against white-supremacist violence. It serves as a critique of the paradigm of immigrant success still celebrated by self-serving opinion-makers. Obliquely parodying the *Bildungsroman* model, *AIH* presents a massive documentation of the various patterns of racism, exploitation, and spiritual injury suffered by Filipinos from the Depression to the end of World War II. Drifting in a limbo of indeterminacy, the untutored subaltern with libertarian affections and perceptions, Bulosan (refunctioning the author's name to signify the novelistic persona) survived years of ignominy and unquiet desperation. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, he summed up his group's ordeals: "Yes, I feel like a criminal running away from a crime I did not commit. And the crime is that I am a Filipino in America" (*On Becoming* 173).

While reading, we are confronted with scenes of abuse, insult, and ruthless murder of these "wards" rendered with naturalistic candor. Their successive dilemmas are spliced with snapshots of escape and recovery—a haunting montage mixing history, confessional diary, and quotidian reports from the frontlines. Except for Part I, the remaining three parts of this book—a polyphonic orchestration of fractals from lived experiences—chart the passage of the youthful sensibility through a landscape of cruel privations and melodramatic entanglements. Performing as both protagonist and witness of events, Bulosan's itinerary of self-discovery begins with his victimization by corrupt contractors on his arrival in Seattle. This is followed by a series of ordeals after which he, Pollyana-like, concludes by vindicating his faith in "America"—"America" is no longer the arena of painful bloodletting but a magical space "sprung from all our hopes and aspirations."

Readers are stunned by the stark disjunction between the brutal reality and the compensatory frame of the interpretation. How do we reconcile this discrepancy between actuality and thought, between fact (the chaotic wasteland) and the honorific label "America" erotically identified with equality and freedom? Is this simply a sly maneuver to syncope

deluded narrator with subversive author? Is this Bulosan's subterfuge of multiplying perspectives in order to demystify the neurosis of his life while investing hope and trust in a future chimerical utopia?

One way of approaching this incommensurability, this impasse of discrepant readings, has become routine. We can reject the commonsensical thesis that this work belongs to that species of personal reminiscence designed to promote easy assimilation into the proverbial "melting pot." Alternatively, one can propose that *AIH* invents a new literary genre which operates as the negation of the mythical quest for Americanization—the whitening of dark-skinned indigenes. One can also urge a probing of rhetorical nuances, such as the address to the "American earth" which is deliberately cast in the subjunctive mood, tied to an unfolding process whose horizon is overshadowed by the disasters of Pearl Harbor, Bataan and Corregidor; this procedure culminates in the last chapters which recapitulate the anger, moral panic, and dissidence saturating the lives of Filipinos in the "New World."

Hermeneutic Interlude

The mainstream approach to Bulosan's work is charitable but disingenuous. Whatever the pressures of the Cold War and marketing imperatives, to judge Bulosan's chronicle of the Filipino struggle to give dignity to their damaged lives as an advertisement for ethnocentric "nationalism" seems unwarranted, if not invidious. It is surely meant to erase all evidence of its profoundly radical, communalist motivation. Perhaps the formalist way to correct this mistake is to identify the trope of personification, the wish-fulfilling imaginary underlying the fictive structure. Who is "America"? The anguished protagonist answers: Eileen Odell "was undeniably the America I had wanted to find in those frantic days of fear and flight, in those acute hours of hunger and loneliness. This America was human, good, and real." If Eileen functions as a placeholder or synecdoche for all those who demonstrated compassion for strangers like Filipino migrant-workers, then the abstract referent "America" cannot be conflated with this specific locus signified here. Overall, the redeeming figure is a maternal character with manifold personifications (explored later), insinuated in the author's solicitous, imploring stance. She represents the singular desire called "America" invoked by the novel's title.

Viewed from another angle, the idiomatic tenor of the title designates an inward process of acquiring self-awareness. It may be construed as a mode of self-reflexibility, a mode of psychic parthenogenesis. Note the symbolic resonance of such descriptions as he felt "love growing inside him," leading to "a new heroism: a feeling of growing with a huge life." By metonymic semiosis, the trope of containment intimates pregnancy and deliverance, a symbiosis of outside and inside forces. Although victimized, Bulosan feels remolded into "a new man." Of crucial importance is the equation of "heart" with "one island, the Philippines," expanding the image. Bulosan deploys Robinson Crusoe's individualistic predicament as antithetical comment. Literally and figuratively, the "heart" becomes a polysemous vehicle that signifies inclusion and exclusion. It functions as a device to reconcile warring drives, tendencies, dispositions. Its figural use serves to characterize the text as belonging to the allegorical type of fiction where time and space ("chronotope," in Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation) are configured in such a way as to realize the vision of an embattled community germinating within the confines of an anomic, disintegrated metropolis.

By deploying imaginative ruses, Bulosan grapples with the bifurcating trajectory of his passage through the American maelstrom. The utopian theme of imagining a community within the fold of an atomized society counterpoints the somewhat morbid realism punctuating the text. It lends plausibility to the didactic sections where the assured authorial voice seems to compensate for the disoriented protagonist and the episodic plot. The climax of Bulosan's scheme of educating his compatriots about the unifying thread of their fragmented lives transpires in his extolling the "simplicity of their hearts, nourished in the conviction that 'America' is still our unfinished dream." Purged of his narcissistic malaise, he confesses: "I was rediscovering myself in their lives." He thus rejects the social-Darwinist postulate of the wolf embedded in every person, replacing it with the Moses/mother motif of empathy and conviviality.

Forking Arguments, Discordant Flows

We soon observe how the narrator's ego merges with the spirit of an enlarged "family" whose members are bound by a transcendent purpose, a universal principle: the fight against fascist terrorism. This moment anticipates what Bulosan would later call "the revolution" where ordinary

workers would “play our own role in the turbulent drama of history... the one and only common thread that bound us together, white and black and brown, in America.” In Chapter 25, we find the narrator harping on the metaphor of the old world dying while a new world is struggling to be born, intuited from the belief that “America is in the hearts of men that died for freedom....a prophecy of a new society.” Framed by Bulosan’s cathartic discovery of his writing ability linked to his vision of “the war between labor and capital,” the apostrophe to the multiracial army of workers as “America” is better cognized as part of Bulosan’s project of re-articulating the discourse of popular rights in a socialist direction. But the invocation of a divided “America”—a unity of opposites—presages a recursive aporia, a troubling paradox, an irksome undecidability. Note that the theme of solidarity was broached first in Bulosan’s desire “to know [the hoboes in the freight trains] and to be a part of their life.” Eventually, the call for partisanship animates the dialectical structure of feeling, the ethico-political disposition concerning the Spanish Civil War, the key historical contradiction here that inflects the binarisms of city/countryside, metropole and colony, consciousness and the public sphere.

So far the categorizing principle of popular-front-democracy-against-fascism occupies the foreground of Bulosan’s historiography. Here Japanese aggression evokes the earlier U.S. pacification of the islands, the primal event of conquest and deracination. The dissolution of the old order signaled by the war’s outbreak seems to resolve the tension between trivializing idealism and empirical mimesis. It offers the opportunity for a fantasized resolution, one that will mediate between the notion of “America” as a classless society and its institutionalized racist exclusivism. A poetic mechanism of compensatory fulfillment is rendered here when the truth of colonial subjugation becomes the repressed traumatic object returning to the surface of quotidian existence. Bulosan himself points out that as exiles “socially strangled in America,” instrumentalized and commodified, Filipinos find it easier “to integrate ourselves in a universal ideal,” with organic intellectuals serving as the tribune of the “wretched of the earth” (Fanon), enslaved and disenfranchised peoples mobilizing around the planet.

We discern the crucial turn of Bulosan’s life at the exact middle of the book (Chapter 23). Struggling to communicate to his fugitive brother,

he reconstructs his past and gains release from the prison of silence to “tell the world what they’ve done to me.” The victim thus recovers poise and mutates into an agency fusing theory and practice. This discovery of the capacity for inspired speech-acts occurs after he rebels two chapters earlier: “I had struck at the white world, at last; and I felt free.” Finally, when he meets the lawyer Pascual, Bulosan assumes his role as witness/spokesperson for the grassroots movement. Now he conceives literary art as the symbolic theater of his death and rebirth, and his role within it as a transformative agent, a productive “transindividual” (Goldmann) empowering the rise of a community of equals.

Discourse of Detours and Disjunctures

What becomes symptomatic at this juncture is a shift in rhetoric and style. The memoir’s realistic stance and its affinities with picaresque naturalism (marked by the intrusions of petty crimes, rough diction, squalid surroundings) are disrupted by lyricized nostalgic recalls of an idyllic homeland. By this time, the generic norms of traditional autobiography, using the typical coding for verisimilitude and linear plotting, have already been qualified by a lively comic rhythm of reiteration and recovery. Characters appear and disappear with uncanny gusto. Incidents swerve and replicate themselves while the nuances of dialogue are reprogrammed in a carnivalesque circulation of energies. Polyphonic voices fill the void of Filipino lives until the crisis of hegemonic representation arrives, with emotion-laden scenarios displaced by reflexive meditation at the end.

In Part III, a decisive break occurs. This destroys the model of the successful immigrant and its iconic aura. On this edge of the narrative looms impending failure. Bulosan’s fantasized “conspiracy” of making “a better America” is suspended by the collapse of the body and its grim endurance. History materializes in the return of the “child” as invalid, the agony of wandering now displaced by the stasis of physical breakdown. Epitomized here is the vitality of the comic genre—the cycle of death and rebirth in “monumental” time—which manifests itself in the body of the expatriate who “died many deaths” between exile and imagined return. Bulosan has dared to transcribe a hazardous reconnaissance of the American heartland. In the process, he celebrates several deaths, one of which is the suicide of Estevan whose story about his hometown precipitates a spiritual

conversion: “I began to rediscover my native land, and the cultural roots there that had nourished me, and I felt a great urge to identify myself with the social awakening of my people.” Recalling previous disappointments, those deaths impregnate the psyche and resurrects the repressed subliminal forces in the language of incongruous, disjunctive confrontations.

In-depth semiotic inquiry would pursue the trope of prophetic homecoming informing the structure of the dream (in Chapter 40) which functions as a synecdoche for what is repressed. Misrecognized as “the Filipino communist” strike leader, the narrator flees from the police. Falling asleep on a bus, the fugitive dreams of his return to his hometown and rejoices at seeing his mother and the whole family eating together. Jolted by “tears of remembrance” at this reunion, he asks himself how the “tragedy” of his childhood had returned in his sleep “because I had forgotten it.” What had been erased from consciousness is his youth in the occupied homeland, a section of profound ethico-political significance, foregrounding the resourcefulness, strength, courage, and intransigence of the peasantry and plebeian masses. By subtle stylistic modalities, Bulosan’s narrative heightens a recursive tempo that seeks to register the power of the peasantry’s (now migrant-workers’) collective agency

In retrospect, Bulosan’s illness—his confinement at the Los Angeles Hospital where the notion of a community larger than the male-bonding of Filipino bachelors proves regenerative—becomes not a gratuitous interruption but a pivotal event. It halts the spatial discontinuity, the labyrinthine route of his adventure. It ushers the protagonist into a recognition of his new vocation, not so much as the fabulist of *Laughter* as the archivalist of popular memory. The myriad recognition scenes interspersed throughout function as the healing refrain that repudiates the vexatious fatality limiting his hopes. This potential for reconciliation informs his covenant with the “associated producers” of the ravished homeland, peasants and farmworkers as bearers of an emancipated future.

Tracking the Labor of the Negative

From a broader historical standpoint, *AIH* may be appraised as the first example of a new genre in the archive, a popular-front allegory attuned

to the frightful landscape of the Depression and total World War (Denning). This form articulates the problems of class, race, nation, and gender in an elaborate, overdetermined configuration painstakingly unraveled in a sequence of surprising but familiar incidents. But what I think constitutes *AIH*'s originality is its rendering of what Julia Kristeva calls "woman's time." This is the subtext or "political unconscious" (Jameson) constituting the unorthodox singularity of this memoir. Comedy and the symbolic dynamics of the unconscious interact with the realist code of story-telling to generate this new artifice.

Examining the ambiguous role of women in Bulosan's "pilgrimage" in inhospitable territory, we discover representatives of its Otherness, its antithetical mirror-image. One recalls how Bulosan praised the exuberant resourcefulness of his mother, that "dynamic little peasant woman": "[T]o know my mother's name was to know the password into the secrets of the soul, into childhood and pleasant memories,...a guiding star, a talisman, a charm that lights us to manhood and decency" (*America* 123). Her genial figure is sublimated in the feisty samaritanic women interrogating patriarchal authority. She is reincarnated in his loyal female companions — emblems of the hidden "Other," the oppositional mask of an indifferent if not hostile America. Can we consider *AIH* a protofeminist text interweaving the nomadic and sedentary lines of action, of flight and confrontation?

By now we are inclined to consider *AIH* a complex ideological construct meant to resolve real-life contradictions by imaginary fiat, even by a counterfeit resolution. To challenge this, we can deploy an interpretive scheme revolving around women's time, zeroing in on the image of the mother and other signifiers of need and desire. This move would structure the reader's horizon of expectation since what, in truth, this schizoid recollection wants to forget but somehow cannot, is a lacuna whose lingering traces serve as the stigmata of Filipino *insurrectos*: the genocidal U.S. conquest, with over a million natives killed and a whole civilization ruined. The aftermath preserved feudal-landlord power which suppressed the Colorum and Sakdal uprisings and drove Bulosan and his generation into permanent exile (Francisco; Guerrero; Taruc). In effect, what Bulosan attempts to salvage are the damaged lives of working men and women whose commodified identities have been calculated and dispersed into the predatory flux of "America" where Filipino bachelors found themselves

symbolically, if not literally, castrated—a lifeworld libidinally subsumed in the cutthroat *laissez-faire* market and the mystique of commodity-fetishism now trenchantly sanctified in the dogmas of neoliberal globalization.

Architectonics of Belonging

World War II was almost over when Bulosan's memoir was completed. McArthur's shibboleth, "I Shall Return," had fired up Filipino hopes, motivating Bulosan's inventory and assessment of the total experience of his generation. In this context, the intent of *AIH* can be construed as the reinscription of the inaugural moment of loss (U.S. colonization refracted by the Japanese occupation) in the dominant culture by a text that violates conventional expectations. Counterhegemonic reminiscence foregrounds the earth, the tillers' cooperative sharing, and maternal desire as the ground of meaning and identity. We witness in the end the festive, self-conscious urgent tone of the narrator as he attempts a final reconciliation of the warring forces in his life. His striving for coherence and intelligibility is simultaneously an endeavor to universalize the import and significance of his experience. The final episodes intimate "a return to the source" (Cabral), the time of expropriation and uprooting, inducing a need to retrieve a submerged tradition of indigenous resistance based on principles of solidarity, the concrete universal of this artistic performance.

Whatever the inherited prejudices of readers, Bulosan seeks to provoke with an inquiry about one's role in the ongoing drama of social transformation: "Our world was this one, but a new one was being born. We belonged to the old world of confusion; but in this other world—new, bright, promising—we would be unable to meet its demands" (*America* 324). He calls for the renewal of the social energies that lie dormant in the interstices of the text, particularly the oppositional and the utopian impulses stifled by acquisitive individualism. For this purpose, we need a pedagogical method to transcode the unity of opposites here into humankind's *agon* of exposing duplicities, reaffirming the value of scientific inquiry, and discriminating what is reactionary and what is progressive, in the heterogeneous micropolitics of daily life.

Mindful of the uncouth realism mediating existential reality, we can appreciate *AIH's* modernist temper in privileging autonomy,

imaginative transcendence, and secular humanism. Has the postmodernist taste for pastiche and cynical deconstructivism rendered this book inutile? Conceived as an *agent-provocateur*, *AIH* allegorizes the radical transformation of the old system of colonial bondage and culture of silence into one of egalitarian freedom by way of a critical appropriation of diverse embodied ideas entangled in historic contingencies. This process of decolonization enacted by the witness/testifier of *AIH* is ultimately geared to fashioning a responsible transindividual subject, not a hustling entrepreneur—a task accomplished via reciprocal transactions, ecumenical dialogue, and mutual exchanges among the participants (San Juan, *Carlos Bulosan*).

At this point I would argue that the evolution of Bulosan's sensibility transcended the imperatives of nativism, the nostalgic cult of a mythical past, or a yearning for a tolerant cosmopolis. No doubt Bulosan's "conscientization" (Freire) transgressed nation-state boundaries and upheld proletarian internationalism, as evidenced in poems expressing his commitment to the radical ideals of the Spanish Republic. Bulosan's engagement with the contentious popular-front strategy afforded him a philosophical worldview which gave direction to his group's nomadic existence. When the Pacific War broke out, Bulosan rediscovered the beleaguered islands as the fountainhead of his prophetic, truth-telling advocacy. This served as the germinal site for the paradigm of "national liberation" in *AIH*, as well as in *The Cry and the Dedication* (hereafter *The Cry*), a novel inspired by Bulosan's friendship with the left-wing activist Amado V. Hernandez, with whom he collaborated in publicizing Luis Taruc's autobiography, *Born of the People*.

Vectors of Intervention

At the start of the Cold War, Bulosan was already a blacklisted writer. The recent discovery of his FBI files seems anticlimactic if not a fortuitous expose of "dirty linen" (Alquizola and Hirabayashi). Bulosan's intimacy with the astute Babb sisters active in the Hollywood milieu of fellow-travelling intellectuals, was public knowledge. As a journalist with the International Longshoreman's and Warehouseman's Union (ILWU), Local 37, Bulosan was regarded as a dangerous subversive, threatened with deportation. But how could the government deport a writer commissioned by President Franklin Roosevelt to celebrate one of the "four freedoms"

with an art-work exhibited at the Federal Building in San Francisco in 1943?

By the end of the McCarthy witch-hunt in 1954, Bulosan enjoyed a modest if surreptitious prestige. The best-selling *Laughter* had been translated into over a dozen languages, while *AIH* had been favorably reviewed and the author cited in *Who's Who in America*, *Current Biography*, etc. Meanwhile, he was drafting *The Cry*, his saga of Huk guerrillas reconstructing their nation's history as they sought to establish linkage with U.S.-based sympathizers (on the Huk uprising, see San Juan, "American Witness"; Taruc). Allegorizing the improvised self-fashioning of the Filipino subject, *The Cry* may be read as a performative argument seeking to concretize the right of self-determination. What impelled him to write? "The answer is—my grand dream of equality among men and freedom for all.... Above all and ultimately, to translate the desires and aspirations of the whole Filipino people in the Philippines and abroad in terms relevant to contemporary history. Yes, I have taken unto myself this sole responsibility" (*On Becoming* 216). Bulosan died on September 11, 1956, three years after the Korean War ended, within earshot of the portentous rumblings from IndoChina.

In retrospect, the tensions of the Cold War offered an occasion for Bulosan to analyze and redefine the self-contradictory predicament that bedevilled the lives of his contemporaries. In grappling with life-and-death contingencies, he reinvented the intertextual conjuncture of class, gender, race, and ethnicity that articulated the epochal conflict between capitalism and the various socialist experiments since the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. A decade after Bulosan's death, Filipino farm-workers led by his younger comrades began the 1965 strike that led to the founding of the United Farmworkers of America, the fruit of pioneering efforts of the CIO, ILWU, and civic organizations whose leaders were hounded by the FBI and its ideological apparatus. It vindicated the aspiration of these disinherited Asians/Pacific Islanders for justice and respect. Filipinos joined coalitions with African Americans, Chicanos, Native Americans and others in the instructive Civil Rights rebellions, all drawing their energies from a centuries-old memory of resistance—an epic of heroic "soul-making." Its genealogy was already prefigured in Bulosan's reflexive aide-memoire, "How My Stories Were Written," in which an old village story-teller in his

hometown is finally revealed as his ancestral progenitor, the fountainhead of all the "wisdom of the heart" (San Juan, *Imagination* 138-43).

Amid the disruptive controversy over immigration today, over three million Filipinos in the U.S., not counting those "undocumented," are preponderant stakeholders in the tortuous re-shaping of civil society. Bulosan endeavored to substantiate their presence in this chronicle of the subaltern's quest for recognition and equality. Before he died, Bulosan reaffirmed his conviction in the virtue of collective praxis as emblematic of humanity's vast potential in making history: "Writing was not sufficient...I drew inspiration from my active participation in the workers' movement. The most decisive move that the writer could make was to take his stand with the workers" ("Writer" 31). As long as the Philippines remains a neocolonial backwater, and the Filipino diaspora languishes in obsessive consumerism, Bulosan's works will remain serviceable as speculative tools for diagnosing its "Unhappy Consciousness" (Hegel) and its ethos of *ressentiment*, compromise, and disobedience. What Mark Twain called "the Philippine temptation" (32) when the U.S. suppressed its armed inhabitants—the scandalous spectacle of the American republic subjugating millions who refused to be enslaved—yielded a joyful ambidextrous response, to which Bulosan's life-work bears witness. This arena of struggle over the aesthetic worth and moral gravity of his achievement may prove decisive in extrapolating the vicissitudes and prospects of popular-democratic changes everywhere in this new millennium.

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