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In conversation with Jan Padios

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of her review, Lagman asks “If American English and other practices of routinized work are not the aspects of labor that are engaging to Filipino workers, then what labor animates Filipino capacities, energies, and intellectual abilities?” To extend Lagman’s own analysis – and to gesture toward new research I’m doing on the Manila Carnival – we might also ask what *play* animates these capacities, energies, and abilities, as well. (For a great book that considers this question in the context of play, see Christopher Patterson’s *Open World Empire*.)

I’ll close this essay by observing that both Lagman and Marte-Wood are very generous with their compliments about the ethnographic work on which the book is based. It’s exciting to see, too, that Lagman is an English literature scholar who studies and engages ethnography. My thoughts on the method have transformed since then, in ways that inform my creative work, too. A sequel to *A Nation on the Line* might attend more to questions of knowledge and knowledge production, asking deeper questions about ethnography as a colonial form of knowledge and, perhaps, its connection to the twenty-first century knowledge economy which the Philippine nation-state has aspired to join. I have no idea where that thought is going but the personal growth I experienced writing this book made me not afraid unspool loose threads of thought in a public venue!

Four years out from the book’s publication, and with the help of my stellar students at Williams, I am more focused on what it means to decolonize ethnography. Is knowledge still the goal? If so, whose knowledge? If not, what then? I want to mention two modes of engagement around these questions. Again, the heavy lifting: ethnography for the purpose of collective struggle, where people are not objects of social science research but its very subjects, as in Valerie-Francisco’s work with transnational Filipinx migrants. And again, the fine-tuned foraging: ethnographic work as connected to what Allan Punzalan Isaac calls new ways of making sense of time, including labortime. Such approaches make me excited to see what our labors as Filipinx and Philippine Studies scholars will sift out and lift up from the language, technology, work, performance, and bodies that become us.

Jan M. Padios
Williams College

In conversation with Jan Padios, author of *A Nation on the Line: Call Centers as Postcolonial Predicaments in the Philippines*, recipient of the 2020 Association for Asian American Studies Book Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Social Sciences

The following conversation took place on January 25, 2022, covering a wide range of topics and issues. One strand of the conversation

revolved around Professor Padios's monograph, *A Nation on the Line: Call Centers as Postcolonial Predicaments in the Philippines* (2018). Another strand centered around the writing and publication process, and a third strand revolved around the author's foray into creative writing.

With respect to *A Nation on the Line*, we discussed the importance of shedding light on the everyday lives of Filipino call center agents and why it is important to interrogate the notion of the Philippines as the "call center capital of the world." As Professor Padios elaborates during our conversation, while the emergence of the Philippines as the "call center capital of the world" sounds like a positive development, it serves to obscure operations of global capitalism and U.S. empire. Moreover, we discussed what compelled Professor Padios to apply and train for a customer service job, as well as her deployment of a queer optics, examining what it means to approach call centers as queer sites. Specifically, Professor Padios detailed how concerns around HIV speak to anxiety about call centers as sites where deviant bodies put the nation at economic, cultural, and social risk.

In the second part of our conversation, we discussed what the writing and publication process was like for professor Padios, insights she learned that she could share with junior faculty and first-time authors. This included a consideration of strategies to deal with the stress and anxiety associated with making progress toward completion of a monograph for tenure. In the third part of our conversation, we talked about Professor Padios's foray into creative writing and what compelled her to pursue an M.F.A. Specifically, we considered the implications for scholarly accounts, ways to mesh creative writing with scholarly accounts and how the former speaks to the limits of the social sciences, as well as conventional scholarly accounts. We discussed the possibilities opened up by thinking of the boundaries between scholarly writing and creative writing as porous rather than discrete and exclusive.

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