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# CARE AS COLLECTIVE REVOLUTION: FILIPINO WOMEN'S ACTIVIST HISTORIES AND CONTEMPORARY SOLIDARITIES IN GUÅHAN

*Josephine Ong*

## Introduction

In a June 2021 speech, Philippine Consul General Patrick Hilado declared that the month of June would become Philippine Independence month in the U.S. territory of Guam.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the Consulate's work with the Chamorro governor Lou Leon Guerrero, Hilado connects twentieth century Filipino revolutionaries' sacrifices to twenty-first century Filipino "frontline workers" that serve as nurses, restaurant workers, and hotel staff in Guam. At the same time, Hilado grounds his understanding of Filipino "heroism and valor" within Filipino workers that live "all over the world." In the process, Hilado ties multiple temporalities—as in the "past" of the 1898 Philippine Revolution to the present Filipino labor struggles—to the different spaces that Filipinos have migrated to. Considering COVID-19's global impacts on Filipino health workers, Hilado also underscores that these commemorations are conducted in a "safe, simple yet still meaningful way." However, his definition of security emphasizes Filipino frontline workers' necessary "sacrifices for freedom," rather than their long-term health and wellbeing within a site of U.S. military occupation.<sup>2</sup>

I open my paper with Hilado's statement to consider the various temporal and spatial impacts of Philippine independence from Spanish and colonial rule. As the Filipino critical theorist Oscar Campomanes argues in his 1995 article "The New Empire's Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens," contemporary erasure of American colonization of the Philippines maintains its historical practice of global colonial

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1. Isaiah Aguon, "June declared Philippine Independence Month," *KUAM News*, June 4, 2021, <https://www.kuam.com/story/44030708/june-declared-philippine-independence-month>.

2. I will discuss how U. S. military occupation produces intertwined conditions of precarity for Chamorros and Filipinos in my *Oceanic Indigenous Feminisms* paper. Here, I will utilize Noelani Goodyear-Ka'opua (2018) and Tiara R. Naputi (2018)'s Oceanic feminist critiques of militarized violence to theorize how U. S. military occupation works in Guam.

expansion.<sup>3</sup> Following Campomanes' reminder to remember the political importance of Filipino resistance,<sup>4</sup> I wonder what role do Philippine Independence commemorations play in complicating U. S. colonization of the Philippines? How do their public performances relate to Chamorros, the Indigenous peoples of Guam, and the U. S. empire's other racialized subjects?

### **Filipina Revolutionaries' Historical Acts of Care**

To begin to answer these questions, I will now turn to nineteenth and twentieth century Spanish and U. S. penal codes and reports, articles from the nineteenth century newspaper *La Independencia*, and the memoir of the Filipino woman revolutionary Gregoria de Jesus. These reports, newspapers, and memoirs reveal that turn-of-the-twentieth century Filipino revolutionary women like Melchora Aquino and Segunda Puentes Santiago had resisted the Spanish by spying on their officials, editing and writing for revolutionary newspapers like the *La Independencia*, providing food and financial backing for the revolutionary government, and taking care of wounded Filipino soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

While contemporary Filipino nationalist histories and commemorations do not always remember Filipina revolutionaries' acts of care, they nevertheless threatened the Spanish colonial government in the late nineteenth century. In 1896, two Filipino women, Melchora Aquino and Segunda Puentes Santiago, were deported to the nearby island of Guam. The two women were deported because of their ties to the Katipunan, a Filipino revolutionary society that advocated for the Philippines' independence from Spain. Consequently, the women were exiled to Guam, and remained even when the United States annexed both the Philippines and Guam in 1898.<sup>6</sup> Five years later, another 32 Filipino revolutionaries were exiled to Guam—this time by the U.S. military.<sup>7</sup> One of the newly exiled revolutionaries was Apolinario Mabini, the former Prime Minister of the Philippine revolutionary government.

In 1903, Mabini had lobbied U. S. military officials to successfully repatriate Aquino and Puentes Santiago back to the Philippines.<sup>8</sup> About fifty years later, the Philippines regained its independence from the United States.<sup>9</sup> Since then, Filipino community organizations have regularly memorialized Filipino revolutionaries like Mabini that fought for independence.

Aquino and Puentes Santiago were also occasionally recognized in earlier Philippine independence commemorations. For example, in the 1982 Philippine Independence Commemorations, memories of Filipino revolutionaries' support focused on "dramatiz[ing] the full liberation of the Filipino and serve as a paradigm of our national unity."<sup>10</sup> Ten years later, Guam's Philippine Consulate cited Filipino women's "unique service" and Aquino's "material assistance to the Katipunan" in

a 1990 “Philippine Independence Anniversary Supplement.”<sup>11</sup> These late twentieth century narratives suggest Hilado’s 2021 narrative of Filipino women’s sacrifices for the Philippine nation–state follow a decades-long pattern that the Consulate—and thus the Philippine nation state—continuously ritualizes and remembers in Guåhan. In turn, the historical and contemporary revolutionary potential of Filipina care work distorts into service for the Philippine nation–state and its transactions with U.S. empire.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, these narratives also seem to invalidate Chamorros advocacy against the U.S. military’s systematic dispossession of Chamorros, expansive acts of destruction, and environmental pollution.<sup>13</sup> Chamorro activism, based on inafa’maolek as a form of “mutual respect and care,” is never fully mentioned by these Filipino politicians and economic elites, who commodify Filipina acts of care into service for the nation. Through Philippine nationalist commemorations like Hilado’s 2021 address, Filipina care work has been turned away from Chamorros and towards collaborations with the U. S. empire. What, then, would it look like to center Chamorro-Filipino intimacies and acts of care for one another?

Unlike the Philippine Consulate and its allies, solidarity organizations like Filipinos for Guåhan have combined written advocacy for Guam’s decolonization with other community initiatives, such as donating sustainably grown produce to the Chamorro-led mutual aid collective Para Todus Hit. Considering the potential similarities between nineteenth and twenty-first century Filipino women’s activism in the Philippines and Guam, interrogating their historical connections and differences may have important implications for Chamorro-Filipino collective resistance against U. S. militarization of Guåhan today.

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11. Flocerpida F. Mabgbitang and Myrna G. Lallana, “Women on revolution honor roll,” *Pacific Daily News* (Agana Heights, Guam), June 12, 1990.

12. Mabgbitang and Lallana, 192. <[Change “Ibid.” to author’s last name.]

13. Tiara Na’puti and Michael L. Bevacqua, “Militarization and Resistance from Guåhan: Protecting and Defending Págat,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2015): 848.

