

# Defending a Place in the Nation: Gender, Class, and State Oppression in *Gil-ayab ti Daga* by Jose A. Bragado

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## ABSTRACT

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*Most theories of nation and state have excluded gender as an analytic category. This article will demonstrate how the nation and the state are gendered. It will examine how nation and gender are shaped by capitalist and patriarchal structures, two powerful ideologies that impact the state. Analyzing an Iluko novel which constructs in the context of urban squatting the nation as a social space, the article will detail how it is impacted by the state, by class and gender, and how people and identities as well as the social and political spaces they inhabit are classed and gendered. It will locate these classed and gendered identities and spaces in the class struggle for the nation as well as in the conflict that exists between the nation and state. The article therefore will illustrate how nation, state, class, and gender are inextricably bound up.*

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How do squatters face a capitalist who uses the state to evict them from the land they have occupied for years? How do they protect their claim to a land also claimed by a member of the ruling capitalist class who capitalizes on his hold of the state as well as of its repressive apparatuses such as the police and the legal courts? How is gender re(con)figured in this class struggle? How does gender re(con)figure this state and class oppression?

These are some of the questions that this article shall answer in discussing the Iluko novel *Gil-ayab ti Daga* (henceforth *Gil-ayab*)

by Jose A. Bragado.<sup>1</sup> This paper will consist of three parts. The first part will look into how gender (and gender oppression) may be explored within the state, considering that most theories of state do not consider gender at all. The second part will directly address the first three questions asked above and will attempt to explore the tactics and strategies available to urban squatters to protect their land. This part will explore how squatters build a viable “community” to counter the alliance of the state and the dominant class in oppressing them. The third part will examine how the struggle is gendered and how the novel attempts to construct both stereotypical and potentially alternative and disruptive masculinities and femininities. It will also look into how these gender representations are constructed in class, in other words, how they are classed or *classified*.

## STATE, CLASS, GENDER

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The relations of people within a state have been analyzed mainly through class stratification. The preponderance of class in theories of state and in theorizing social inequality have made it difficult for those engaged in the subject to utilize other concepts such as gender, ethnicity, or race. Class is a very important analytic tool in examining the position and status of people in any given place, but this should not preclude the use of other categories. Class cannot account for all the forms of, or multiple, oppression people face and suffer. It is in this context that the work of Sylvia Walby constitutes an important intervention. Her examination of how gender relations are shaped by and within the state fills a critical void in studies of social inequality. Before discussing Walby’s conceptualization of the state, I would like to preface my discussion first on her discussion of gender inequality since the way she relates state and gender depends upon how she looks at gender inequality.

An important aspect of Walby’s project is her problematization of the relationship between class and gender. She asks what the relationship is between class and gender and problematizes the usefulness of the concept of class in analyzing gender relations. She asserts that class “powerfully captures social inequality and...that it captures the material aspect of this.” However, she says that class “downplays the significance of non-economic aspects of women’s subordination, and that it comes with a set of baggage that is difficult

to drop about its relations to capitalist rather than patriarchal social relations” (*Theorizing Patriarchy* 13).

Explicit in Walby’s work is an attempt to clearly delineate between gender relations and oppression that obtain from patriarchal structures and those that obtain from capitalist structures. She asserts:

Should the concept of class be expanded to cover gender inequality across all these [household, violence, heterosexuality, paid work] areas? I think it should not be used to cover non-economic forms of inequality, since to do so would be to wrench the concept too far from its heritage. However, there are some major gendered economic cleavages to which it should be applied. So I would argue that housewives and husbands are classes, but that women and men are not. That is, certain aspects of patriarchal relations can be captured by the concept of class, but not all. Further, gender impacts upon class relations within capitalism. This means there are two class systems, one based around patriarchy, the other around capitalism. (*Theorizing Patriarchy* 13)

This distinction is central to Walby’s examination of gender inequality, and this distinction underpins her conceptualization of the state. For Walby, gender inequality is the “consequence of the interaction of autonomous systems of patriarchy and capitalism” (*Theorizing Patriarchy* 5). Walby’s dualist position is in response to accounts of gender inequality that see it as the consequence of patriarchy alone, or as the consequence of capitalist social relations alone, or the consequence of capitalist patriarchy (*Theorizing Patriarchy* 16-33).

There are others before Walby who have advanced such a position, but Walby finds problematic the way the bases of patriarchal and capitalist relations, as well as their spheres of influence have been identified. Walby advances a way of solving this bind that has plagued those who have tried to make dual accounts of gender relations. She suggests that:

[...] the search for an institutional basis of the separation is misplaced. Rather it is the distinctiveness of the social relations of patriarchy and capitalism, which is the crucial means of

separating them. Patriarchy is distinctive in being a system of interrelated structures through which men exploit women, while capitalism is a system in which capital expropriates wage labourers. It is the mode of exploitation which constitutes the central difference between the two systems. The distinctiveness of the patriarchal system is marked by the social relations which enable men to exploit women; in the racist system it is the social relations which enable one ethnic group to dominate another; in capitalism it is the social relations which enable capital to expropriate labour. These social relations exist at all levels of the social formation, whether this is characterized as economic, political and ideological, or as economy, civil society and the state or whatever. (*Theorizing Patriarchy* 46-7)

By insisting to distinguish the way patriarchy and capitalism construct gender relations, Walby asserts that patriarchy and capitalism should not be seen as synonymous. Though their processes and effects may have profound similarities, the two should not be confused or conflated; they should not cause what Walby calls a “conceptual slippage” particularly because there is an antagonism between patriarchy and capitalism especially with respect to the exploitation of women’s labor.

More importantly, the distinction is theoretically crucial to Walby’s conceptualization that the state “represents patriarchal as well as capitalist interests and furthers them in its actions” (*Theorizing Patriarchy* 57). Her conceptualization of the state as both patriarchal and capitalist rejects most theories of the state.

For Walby, political institutions, especially the state, structure the economy (*Gender Transformations* 13). If the state represents, and is the site of, patriarchal and capitalist interests and their struggles, then the economy is motored and determined by (the consequences of) these interests and struggles. Because both patriarchy and capitalism are structures that privilege men, the consequence, ultimately, is an economy that is gendered having been engendered by a polity that is itself gendered. Thus, the economy is an embodiment, a representation of unequal gender relations: “gender inequality leads to economic inefficiency; and that the gendered polity impacts on the economy. The divisions in society caused by gender lead to the intensification of other forms of inequality. It is not only that class

affects gender, but the nature of gender inequality exacerbates class and other forms of inequality” (*Gender Transformations* 13-4). Nonetheless, the state, “as an actor intervening in particular situations,” may introduce, as a result of pressure from groups (particularly women), changes that are putatively for the benefit of women. But because the state is constituted by the workings of patriarchal and capitalist interests, patriarchy and capitalism are able to “co-opt” these changes or reforms. For instance, women are no longer as dominated in the home (private patriarchy) as before because of their winning the vote, their access to education, etc. But their move from the private to the more public political space has been paralleled by the emergence of public patriarchy where women “are not barred from the public arenas, but are nonetheless subordinated within them” (*Theorizing Patriarchy* 178). Public patriarchy (cor)responds to the increasingly public role of women. In it, “[w]omen are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth, but have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited” (201).

Walby’s “theory” that the state is both patriarchal and capitalist opens up a possibility for simultaneously examining class and gender relations within the state. It is not only gender relations or inequality that may be examined in her theory. Social inequality based on class and gender may be examined at the same time. However, Walby makes it clear that class and gender are not impacted by the state in a homologous way. “Gender, ethnicity and class have different relationships to the ‘nation’, the state and to supra-national state-like institutions. This is because the determinants of gender, class and ethnicity are different. Hence the nation state has a different place in their construction” (*Gender Transformations* 193).

While my analysis of class and gender relations within the state in *Gil-ayab* capitalizes on the possibilities offered by Walby’s work, I shall also use Poulantzas’ theory of the state since the novel constructs state and class relations that obtain from the functioning of state apparatuses. The perpetuation of existing social relations, or as McAll puts it, “the reproduction of capitalist relations of production, or the relationship between a class of capitalists and a class of workers in which the former appropriates the surplus value produced by the latter” (157) becomes possible through the functioning of the repressive and ideological apparatuses of the state. Poulantzas says that the dominant ideology is embodied in these state apparatuses

one of whose functions is “to elaborate, inculcate and reproduce that ideology—a function of considerable importance in the constitution and reproduction of social classes, class domination, and the social division of labour” (28). The important thing to bear in mind is to see how these relations are both enmeshed in gender and class, how these relations reveal the patriarchal and capitalist character of the state.

### IT IS ‘OURS’! IS IT ‘OURS’? DEFENDING ‘OUR’ PLACE

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Mr. Lopez, a rich businessman, arrives in Filipinas Street and claims the land. He orders the residents to leave the place and, with his private army, terrorizes the residents who for decades have “squatted” on “his” property. The residents, led by Bonifacio (or Boni), organize themselves into a community to form the Filipinas Street Homeowners Association. This homeowners association becomes the face and voice of the residents-squatters in the battle for Filipinas Street. Mr. Lopez, aided by the state and its apparatuses, defeats the residents-squatters who forged an alliance with criminals to thwart the aims of the capitalist. The novel ends with the people resigning to the “truth” that they are illegal occupants and that Filipinas Street rightfully belongs to Mr. Lopez.

From this summary, one can guess why the residents-squatters of Filipinas Street hinge their claim to the street on a notion of their position and space relative to it. They claim to own the land not only because they are within it but more importantly because they occupy it. In fact, many of the residents-squatters have occupied it for decades without anyone claiming it away from them. But the residents-squatters’ “within-ness” or “inside-ness” is precarious precisely because it is threatened by their “outside-ness” to it. Most of the residents know that the land they have occupied is not theirs. Only two families have titles to the lot where their houses are built yet, ironically, their titles point to their illegal occupation and possession of the land. Their titles are fake and could only point to their “externality.” In contrast, Mr. Lopez, the Filipino businessman who claims to be the real owner of Filipinas Street, claims the land not on the basis of a physical attachment to, or occupation of, it but on his possession of a land title such that even if he has always been “outside” of this place,

he has always been “within” it. More accurately, the place has always been “within” him as he claims that it has always been part of his vast wealth.

Filipinas Street as a place is not only physical space but also social space. In fact, its “physical-ness” becomes more visible because of its construction and representation as social space. It is a piece of land defined by class and gender struggles with the state contributing to the ‘classing’ and gendering of the struggle for Filipinas Street. The state (represented by the police/military, the barangay captain, and the courts) protects and ensures the interests of Mr. Lopez. The state’s “relative autonomy” is asserted, as the state’s ruling in favor of Mr. Lopez comes in the form of an “impartial judgment” from the high court. The class “war” is enmeshed in gender as the main representatives of this struggle are males. The representatives of the state are all males: the soldiers/ policemen; the barangay captain; and the judge/justice. Mr. Lopez who represents the ruling capitalist class is male. The leader of the residents of Filipinas Street is male. Yet within the project of defending Filipinas Street are gender representations and relations that are constructed along lines of class affiliations. In short, the residents of Filipinas Street, though all of them are squatters, are themselves class stratified.

### **Weapons of the Urban Weak: Building a Community**

The illegal occupation of land in many Third World cities has been described as “the most conspicuous political action of the urban masses” (Gilbert and Gugler 192). This exposes them to tremendous state violence although sometimes they are tolerated at first (Brillantes; Abad). What weapons are available to squatters when the state or when private (capitalist) interests or both can no longer tolerate them? What can slum dwellers do? Before I discuss the most available and perhaps the most powerful weapon squatters have, which is constituting themselves as a community, I would like to unpack first some conceptual baggage that weigh in the analysis I would like to make. When I use the phrase “weapons of the urban weak” (I will discuss its provenance below), I refer to an attitude or reaction of urban squatters to poverty and it is that “the reaction of the poor to poverty [is] rational and that families recognize the most sensible

ways of improving their living conditions” (Gilbert and Gugler 118 citing Abrams; Mangin; Turner). In short, the “rationality among the poor” position rejects the concept “culture of poverty” developed by Oscar Lewis (Gilbert and Gugler; Jocoano). Gilbert and Gugler say that “at its crudest, this view [culture of poverty] encouraged the idea that the poor are poor because they are poor. Poor children eat badly, receive a poor education, and receive from their families and cultural peers a training that encourages them to accept their poverty as inevitable” (118). The concept of culture of poverty “denote[s] a situation in which people are trapped in a social environment characterized by apathy, fatalism, lack of aspirations, exclusive concern with immediate gratifications and frequent endorsement of delinquent behavior” (Portes qtd. in Gilbert and Gugler 118). The culture of poverty view, though developed in the 1960s, has persisted and continues to inform the way the poor are seen and dealt with:

It persists, perhaps, because it is a highly convenient explanation to the wealthy; by implication poverty is the poor’s own fault. In this sense it serves as ‘a vehicle for interpreting the social reality in a form which serves the social interests of those in power’ (Perlman, 1976: 247). But, convenient though it may be, it has little basis in reality. The poor respond sensibly and rationally to the choices and opportunities open to them in their housing situation. And while the poor undoubtedly contribute at times to their own poverty, the basic causes of that poverty are beyond their control. The poor are not a separate sub-society but act much like everyone else. In Perlman’s (1976: 234) words: ‘In short, they have the aspirations of the bourgeoisie, the perseverance of pioneers, and the values of patriots. What they do not have is an opportunity to fulfill their aspirations.’ (Gilbert and Gugler 118)

Thus, to say that squatters have weapons to use against state and class oppression recognizes their conscious and always collective actions against a state and a ruling class that consign them to the most marginalized places in the (metro)polis; that frequently treat them as “*basura*” that can always be thrown away anywhere, anytime. In fact, squatters violently oppose the demolition of their shanties not only because they already claim the land upon which stand their shanties, but also because they have grown too familiar to government relocation/ housing programs. Relocation sites are very far from their



workplace; there is no provision for running water, for electricity; there are no nearby schools for children, etc. These are conditions squatters find unacceptable and unlivable. These urban poor/squatters/slum dwellers also recognize that their condition is largely due to government neglect that sustains uneven development, unequal distribution of wealth, and complicity with the landed elite and capitalists.

To be sure, not all of the residents-squatters of Filipinas Street may be considered urban poor. There are two families who are better off (they may be classified as lower-middle and middle-middle class) than the rest and these are the families where the two main female characters of the novel *Gil-ayab* belong. The two female characters are also not on equal standing primarily because, as I will argue later, the gender representations of these women characters are classed or *classified*. Nonetheless, I will look at the residents as squatters maintaining the class stratification that structures this squatter's community.

In the face of a problem that threatens to displace them from Filipinas Street, the residents build themselves into a community by forming the Filipinas Street Homeowners Association. Forged by an external threat, the residents see the need to unite so that they have a better chance to defeat Mr. Lopez. What formerly were residents and households that may have existed in the same place but nonetheless disparate, totally unconcerned about each other's business, suddenly had to exist as a community. This community, embodied in/by their organization reflects the very issue that threatens them as well as their constitution into a community only recently. And this community is their main weapon against Mr. Lopez. When I use "community" to refer to the residents-squatters of Filipinas Street, it is in a sense of a community that is both spatial and social. As Dylis Hill explains it:

Communities are purposive for their members. Communities exist through human communication; they are not merely territorial units but consist in the links that exist between people sharing common interests in a network of social relationships. People interact in the course of their everyday social and economic lives; therefore their experience of community is both spatial and social. (34)

The Filipinas Street community is further characterized by a sense of *communality* or communion due to the reason it was (or it had to be) built and forged. Knox provides the following discussion of *communality*:

*Communality*, or ‘communion,’ exists as a form of human association based on affective bonds. It is ‘community experience at the level of consciousness’ but it requires an intense mutual involvement that is difficult to sustain and so only appears under conditions of stress. (214)

The community of Filipinas Street is forged out of a common threat and thus a common struggle that is associated with industrial capitalism or the entry of capital into places (Rodman cited in Uguris 50). In fact, the appearance of Mr. Lopez coincides with the “appearance” of capital: he was claiming the land because he was going to build a factory. There is another sense that this community was forged in ‘common struggle and conflict’ (Rodman qtd. in Uguris 52) against the capital(ist) invasion of Mr. Lopez. The novel was written in 1985, and the author located Filipinas Street in a district in which the residents’ preferred mode of transport would be the Light Rail Transit (LRT). The LRT was at that time newly built, and the author intentionally juxtaposed these two urban conditions (squatting and modernization) not so much to comment on the contradictions of the two as to “celebrate” this concretization of industrial capital.

Kimmita manen [Boni] iti tangatang. Luma[b]bagan dagiti ulep iti laud. Nababan ti init. Dandanidan agawid. Idi kumita iti tuktok dagiti balbalay, nakitana ti ulo ti estasion ti LRT iti Buendia. Ladawan dayta ti agrangrang-ay a pagilian. [*Gil-ayab* 24, December 9, 1985, p. 21]

[Again Boni looked up the sky. The clouds in the west are turning red. The sun is already low. They will soon be going home. When he looked at the rooftops, he saw the top of the LRT station at Buendia. That is a sign of a nation growing richer.]

The community of Filipinas Street consists of residents-squatters who come from the ‘underclass’ (that “surplus population’ in a capitalist society made up of the unemployed, the unemployable, and a ‘lumpenproletariat’ of criminals, prostitutes and vagrants” [Hill

73]); the working class; and the lower- and middle-middle class. The composition of the forged community determines not only the leadership of this community but more importantly the strategies/tactics it employed to counter the collusion of the state and the ruling capitalist class. In discussing the forms of resistance the residents of Filipinas Street used to face Mr. Lopez and his goons, I will be using a modified version of James Scott's concept of "weapons of the weak" made by James Ockey in his study of the forms and methods of resistance slum communities in Bangkok used to resist eviction. Ockey calls these "weapons of the urban weak" and explains thus:

James Scott developed the concept of the "weapons of the weak" to focus attention on the types of resistance that can be found in the countryside on an everyday basis (Scott 1985, 1986, 1989). Weapons of the weak are aimed at resisting oppression through methods like dissimulation, false compliance, foot-dragging, and sabotage. They are low-risk strategies of resisting the unjust demands of those in power. If there is an urban equivalent of the everyday forms of peasant resistance outlined in Scott, it will be found among the urban weak, in slum and squatter communities.

(1)

Ockey modifies Scott by bringing into the concept the possibility that everyday resistance may lead to some form of confrontation, an aspect that has already been explored by Andrew Turton whom Ockey cites: "a middle-ground in-between everyday and exceptional forms of resistance, a middle-ground, a terrain of struggle, on which practices may possibly serve to link the other two terms" (2). He says, "this middle ground is entered when everyday resistance is no longer sufficient to protect the *de facto* gains made. In this middle ground between passive resistance and open rebellion are eviction proceedings and resistance to them, both processes that go beyond the everyday actions and discourse that constitutes Scott's analysis" (2). He identifies as everyday resistance the following: organizing a watch (to protect the community from arson); adopting a siege mentality; maintaining solidarity; gaining support outside the community; vigorous gathering of information; and remaining visible (5, 11-13). The middle-ground tactics include petitioning government officials; attempting to have the issue reconsidered by parliament, the Cabinet, or other bodies; calling for public debates and hearings; and the most provocative, demonstrating (13).

Many of the ways resorted to by the residents of Filipinas Street fall within the classification of Ockey. However, there are aspects of the resistance of the Filipinas Street community that cannot be explained by Ockey's "weapons of the urban weak" specifically the many instances when the residents had to transform misery into opportunities for winning the sympathy and support of the outside communities. It is in this context that De Certeau's discussion of strategies and tactics becomes conceptually useful for my project. Beverly Skeggs explains De Certeau's discussion of the difference between strategies and tactics:

Strategies...have institutional positioning and are able to conceal their connections with power; tactics have no institutional location and cannot capitalize on the advantages of such positioning. Rather, tactics constantly manipulate events to turn them into opportunities; tactical options have more to do with constraints than possibilities. They are determined by the absence of power just as strategy is organized by the postulation of power. (10)

De Certeau's distinction is very useful because just as the residents of Filipinas Street were (re-)acting (to) on the moves of Mr. Lopez, Mr. Lopez was resorting to both manipulative and violent/coercive means of "getting back his land." However, the residents are not just reacting to whatever Mr. Lopez did, for their resistance would have been reduced to being reactive. The community, through its officers (its president, Boni, and its secretary, Minda), was also able to do things, which, although still actually in response to the threat of Mr. Lopez, were not "reactive" responses to the various ways Mr. Lopez used to evict the residents. These include, for instance, their registering their homeowners association with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

To fully discuss the resistance made by the community of Filipinas Street against Mr. Lopez, and hence the variety of ways they employed to deal with a formidable foe, I propose to examine the struggle for Filipinas Street within the context of the alliances set up by both sides. To talk about the tactics (or whenever appropriate, strategies) used by the community of Filipinas Street is to implicate the forces and strategies employed by the enemy they are ranged against. By looking into the alliances both sides were able to build, we can better appreciate the forces at work in the struggle for Filipinas

Street. On the one hand, we can examine the “inclusivity” that the community resorted to. On the other hand, we can examine how Mr. Lopez who represents the dominant/ruling capitalist class is protected by the state through its various apparatuses.

### **The Community and the ‘Underworld’ versus Mr. Lopez and the State**

When Bonifacio Aglibut (Boni) proposed to the residents of Filipinas Street that they form their Filipinas Street Homeowners Association, that was the only time the residents realized that they needed to become a community. The Filipinas Street Homeowners Association was quickly perceived as the residents’ way of becoming a community, which was the only option available to them to face Mr. Lopez. They knew that as individuals they stood no chance but as a “body communal” united in/by a common problem and struggle, they can fight Mr. Lopez. A lieutenant who eventually was designated adviser of the association sums up the association’s unifying role:

Daytoyen ti pangrugian ti panagsisinninged tayo. No mabuangay ti gunglo, patiek a mawarwar amin a problema iti Filipinas Street [*Gil-ayab* 2, July 8, 1985, p. 20]

[This is now the beginning of our solidarity. If the association is formed, I believe that all problems in Filipinas Street will be solved.]

However, this homeowners association was expected at least initially and only by a few (only two residents expressed such a view one of whom is the lieutenant) to build a community, which would eradicate the presence of criminals in the place. Consequently, the community was already expected to operate on an exclusionary practice because it was already defining who can and who cannot be part of the community:

Ammoyo, nasapsapa koma a binuangaytayo daytoy nga asosasion. Mabalin a daytoy ti makalapped ‘ti panagadu ti kriminal nga aglemlemeng iti lugartayo. Kitaenyo, kunkunada a hideout dagiti underworld character ti Filipinas Street. [*Gil-ayab* 2, p. 20]

[You know, we should have formed our association much earlier. This could prevent the increase in the number of criminals who are hiding in our place. See, they say that Filipinas Street is a hideout of underworld characters.]

Thus, an “internal” problem threatens the community from the very outset. For just as the “legitimate” residents are trying to assert their ownership of the land, and thus their inside-ness, they are, by postulating the community as a mechanism to rid itself of criminals, constructing an outside space for those who, like them, have found Filipinas Street as their only place. The criminals, those who are considered as most outside of both the state and the law (but who are most subject to the state and the law) were never explicitly considered and labeled as outsiders before the coming of Mr. Lopez and before the founding of the homeowners association, and thus of the community. The community then becomes the structure that makes possible the “legitimate,” explicit and public assertion of the outside-ness of the criminals who have made themselves “inside” Filipinas Street. Within this community, the criminals, like in the state, are *personae non gratae*.

For Filipinas Street to be truly a community, it must embrace these underworld characters. In turn, these criminals must prove their solidarity with the community. What integrates the two is the alliance forged between them in protecting Filipinas Street from Mr. Lopez whose ally is the state, the enemy of the criminals. Nothing captures the possibility of this alliance, and this alliance itself, than the fact that the president of the Filipinas Street Homeowners Association, Boni, and the most prominent underworld character of Filipinas Street, Lando, live together. The two are in fact the best of friends who look after each other more than brothers do.

The alliance determined to a large extent the two courses of action the community took. Provisionally, I shall call them the ‘legal’ and ‘extralegal’ (or illegal) courses of action. I frame my discussion of the residents’ tactics (or strategies) within this division.

Boni is convinced that the best way to deal with Mr. Lopez is to act within the bounds of the law. However, even if he is opposed to using criminal acts to put an end to their problem, he is prepared to use them, if only as a desperate last resort. With a sense of inevitability,

the Filipinas Street community is bound to deal with Mr. Lopez's forces with its own forces. Mr. Lopez, prior to his visit to Filipinas Street with business partners had already enlisted the help of a judge named Liput (Traitor).

Against the community's adherence to the rule of law, Mr. Lopez "takes the law into his hands" and unilaterally orders the residents to dismantle their houses and to leave. Using his "private army of goons" to enforce his order, Mr. Lopez threatens the community with force and violence. Yet the community in its first "face off" with Mr. Lopez's armed men chooses to face them with a phalanx of students-activists who had joined the residents to help them protect Filipinas Street even if Lando obtained the commitment of twenty other criminals who could engage Mr. Lopez's men in a shootout. At this stage of the struggle, they are not the principal fighters of the community. They acted as reinforcement to the students who blocked the demolition team from entering the area. In fact, in the first attempt of Mr. Lopez's men to demolish the houses in Filipinas Street, it may be said that the students were the only ones needed to stop the demolition. Frustrated, Mr. Lopez's minions retreat with the threat that the residents will be hailed in court.

Although they succeeded in stopping the demolition team, the residents know that they now face even greater risks as Mr. Lopez would now resort to harsher means. The residents begin to take a siege mentality and are always on the lookout for fire. However, Mr. Lopez does not terrorize the whole community right away. He begins with Boni, bribing him into resigning as president of the homeowners association and making him convince the others to just leave Filipinas Street. (Mr. Lopez thinks that the residents of Filipinas Street are not easily intimidated because they had a president who is willing to risk his life for the community. If he could buy Boni, then it would be easier for him to drive the residents away.)

While working on Boni, Mr. Lopez "deploys" the law through the court to evict the residents from Filipinas Street. The court promptly issues an order giving the residents 15 days to vacate Filipinas Street. Lando believes that money had passed hands.

The community, in keeping with Boni's "legal" mode of fighting Mr. Lopez, hires a lawyer to try to get the judge to reconsider his

order. But the residents know that they must resort to other means in order to get the judge to reverse his ruling:

“Intayo agrali iti sango ti pangukoman. Pikarentayo ti hues.”  
[*Gil-ayab* 14, p. 20]

[“Let us stage a rally in front of the court. Let us goad the court.”]

Demonstrations, according to Ockey, are the most provocative of middle ground weapons of the urban weak (13). Though demonstrations are frequently effective for oppressed people to articulate their oppression and to draw public attention to their oppression, the way demonstrations are used by the Filipinas Street community is ‘tactical.’ This is because much of what demonstrations are supposed to accomplish or obtain for the residents depends on the opportunities that may arise from these demonstrations. Boni and Lando in fact imagine possible scenarios that can help them attract public attention to their struggle. That Boni and Lando are conjuring potential scenarios and unintended outcomes they could capitalize on and transform into opportunities demonstrates their lack of (access to) institutional power, such that violence, the extreme result of which is death, would be good for the cause—a welcome event and development in their struggle. Even their lawyer tells them to hold rallies and demonstrations in front of the court to get the judge to change his mind. Demonstrations, however, are not always readily available to the community. Even this “weapon” is sometimes denied them. The police always tried to stop them especially when the residents did not have a permit to hold a demonstration. The residents face all sorts of constraints even in merely demonstrating: would the police have allowed them to hold a demonstration in front of a court if the residents asked for permission? Worse, they get attacked by the men of Mr. Lopez and the police take the side of Mr. Lopez and accuse the residents of lawlessness.

From this time on, the confrontations between the community and the forces of Mr. Lopez become more direct and violent. And the modes of resistance employed by the community become more confrontational and violent, too. The “underworld” residents also increasingly take a more central role and position in the community’s defense of Filipinas Street. This is clearly evident in their response to



the most serious attack by the men of Mr. Lopez on Filipinas Street. The goons burn the house of Boni and Lando. After the incident, the “underworld” residents, upon the initiative and instigation of Lando, keep vigil to protect the community. They kill three of Mr. Lopez’s men when the latter came back to see if the whole “squatter’s area” had been eaten by fire. Violence for violence, the criminals led by Lando drive the vehicle of Mr. Lopez’s men to an isolated place and burn it together with the bodies of those they killed. Still, Boni would not allow Lando to kill Mr. Lopez. Not just yet, he says, since they still have a petition being heard in court.

But the judge never heard the “case” as he gave a ruling in favor of Mr. Lopez without even first listening to the side of the community and examining the pieces of evidence that they were prepared to show. The judge ruled that Mr. Lopez’s land title is authentic and that the community’s land titles are fake even though he has not seen the titles held by the residents of Filipinas Street.

Even with the judge’s ruling against them, Boni, as leader of the community, sticks to his two tactics (still within his preferred “legal” resistance). First, in the face of the near exhaustion of their recourse to a legal, fair, and just resolution to their problem, the people strengthen their solidarity since it was becoming clear to them that justice has been bought by Mr. Lopez. This solidarity is demonstrated in several rallies and demonstrations joined by most residents of the community. Nonetheless, the community files a motion for reconsideration before the same court that ruled in favor of Mr. Lopez. Also, they ask an appellate court to issue a restraining order. This is the second tactic: going through the legal process. Even with a newfound solidarity and a willingness among most of the residents to shed blood to protect Filipinas Street, many of them are discouraged by the obvious miscarriage of justice. The circulation of money among Mr. Lopez, the judge, and even the lawyer of the community has only led to the concentration of “justice” on Mr. Lopez.

The misery of the residents does not end with the judge and their lawyer getting bribed. Their request for a restraining order on the ruling evicting them had not even been looked into by the appellate court until the last hour. Thus, they had to prepare again for another demolition. This time, because the eviction order came from a judge, the state’s police and soldiers come to assist the private army of Mr.

Lopez. In fact, the police and soldiers mouth the “official” line that the residents are merely squatting and that their land titles are fake. They therefore had to be evicted and by force this time. When the residents showed that they were prepared for a physical and violent struggle, one of the men of Mr. Lopez shot at the crowd, killing two children and an old woman (who had a heart attack because of the shooting).

What the community did with the death of the three residents reveals further the ‘tactical’ rather than ‘strategic’ characteristic of the community’s resistance to and struggle against Mr. Lopez. The community agreed to have the wake for the three victims of capitalist and state violence in front of the court that ruled in favor of Mr. Lopez. Capitalizing on the grief and misery of the situation, the community hoped to transform the judge’s indifference and apathy into sympathy. Prohibited by both police and the security guards of the court, the community doggedly persisted in drawing the attention of the judge to the injustice he had just helped to deliver. But it was not the judge that the community succeeded in winning but the court’s security guard.

True, the community may have won the public, but they simply lost to the workings of the law. When the appellate court finally found time to look into the community’s case, the justice assigned to it asked Boni to submit land titles to prove their ownership of the land. But the community could only submit two land titles, which turned out to be fake. Moreover, the area covered by the titles totaled only 150 square meters whereas Mr. Lopez’s authentic land title covered ten hectares. The appellate court upheld the ownership of Mr. Lopez of the contested land. The court, relying on the authenticity of the land titles, did not consider the fact that many of the residents had lived there for thirty years and therefore could not just be evicted without consideration for this fact. The issue here is reduced to matters that revolve around authenticity of land titles and not on the issue of squatting itself. Squatters over time may earn the right to purchase from the government the land they have occupied for such a long period of time.<sup>2</sup> While the court looked into available pieces of evidence and had them verified and authenticated by the concerned agency (Bureau of Land Registration), it did not question the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of the land by Mr. Lopez. If, as the justice ruled, the two land titles presented by the community

were made during a period when fake titles proliferated, then it is just as possible that Mr. Lopez's ownership of the land is questionable or dubious.

It is precisely in not raising these questions that even a court, which is presented as an impartial arbiter, acts on behalf of powerful groups. The involvement of the police, the soldiers, and the courts in the legitimization and protection of the claims of Mr. Lopez shows how the state, through its apparatuses, has been appropriated for the maintenance and protection of the interests of the dominant class. Boni and Lando who went to the appellate court to inquire about the justice's ruling (the justice was not even there; the ruling was discussed with them by the secretary which again points to how judges and justices are not really available for "small" people like the residents of Filipinas Street) express how the court has betrayed the community:

Namnamaenda a mangsalaknib kadakuada a marigrigat ti ketdi  
hugado ti nanggibus iti amin a darepdepda a maaddaanda iti  
daga wenno panangtagikuada iti nagtakderan dagiti balayda.  
[*Gil-ayab* 38, March 17, 1986, p. 20]

[That which they had hoped to protect them who are poor, it was the judge who ended all their dreams of owning land or their acquisition of the land where their houses stood.]

That it was Boni and Lando (recall their status in the community) who went to inquire about the ruling is significant to the change in the mode of resistance the community used. When the community pinned their hopes on a just legal resolution to their problem, Boni and Minda were the main organizers and movers. Minda, being a college activist-student, had a network with student organizations that were willing to join them in their community's fight. Their 'legal' fight was complemented by demonstrations, which were more 'tactical' than 'strategic' in motivation. Their demonstrations reveal their lack of 'inside' access to justice so much so that they need to resort to demonstrations to appeal to the "*awa*" of the judge. In contrast, because he had the money and the power, Mr. Lopez worked his way very insidiously. His access to the judge had to be kept secret because such access is illegal and illegitimate. In fact, the novel does not mention that Mr. Lopez had really bribed the judge except for the insinuations and suspicions of members of the

Filipinas Street community. The judge Mr. Lopez mentioned he had already talked with (Judge Liput) is not the judge who ruled on the case (Judge Joson), but Judge Liput perhaps, just perhaps, could have been the link between Mr. Lopez and Judge Joson. However, it should not be missed that Mr. Lopez has tremendous access to state power such that a court that is presented as having ruled on the case without any influence from anybody remains questionable precisely because it based its ruling on evidence that may have been obtained dishonestly or through the circulation and exploitation of Mr. Lopez's vast wealth, power, and influence.

Thus when Boni went to the appellate court, he asked Lando and not Minda to accompany him. The community's use of 'extralegal' means to a resolution of their problem is signaled. At this point, the struggle is becoming both tactical and strategic employing modes of resistance that range from the "every day" to the "middle ground" to "open confrontation." When Lando attempted to kill Mr. Lopez, he was not acting on the express/explicit "instructions" or "requests" or "wishes" of the community. He acted on his own, even keeping his decision unknown to Boni. But when Lando was killed by the men of Mr. Lopez, who himself was fatally wounded, the community wished he succeeded in killing Mr. Lopez. When the residents learned that Lando attempted to kill Mr. Lopez to get rid of their community's enemy, they appropriately showed their gratitude for his sacrifice by attending his funeral. Other criminal-friends of Lando said that if the community so desired, they could finish off Mr. Lopez.

The community, which had initially wanted to drive away these criminals, come to depend on the capacity of these criminals (in other words, on their criminality) to commit acts which otherwise they themselves cannot do if only to protect Filipinas Street. The residents needed each other because if these "underworld" residents succeeded, then at least no one would pursue "their" land, "their" place as vigorously as Mr. Lopez. Despite their exclusion from power, however (or precisely because of their exclusion), the residents discovered, and forged, their community with those who were even more under the oppression of, and subjection to, the state—the criminals. Their alliance, which constituted the Filipinas Street community, enabled them in crucial stages of their struggle against the alliance of Mr. Lopez and the state to engage in 'strategic' resistance. Denied by the

state their power as a people, they asserted back such power precisely by resorting to the only kind of power available to them and to a sense of justice that they believed was now their only hope. They welcomed the 'criminal' acts of their fellow community members, those a few had initially wanted *displaced*; after all, the state is committing criminal acts (through the courts, the police, and the military) against citizens it considers too negligible .

## STATE AND CLASS RELATIONS: CLASSED CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER

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As I already mentioned, the residents of Filipinas Street are not homogeneous; not all belong to the lower class. I suspect that the inclusion of the two middle class families as squatters in Filipinas Street is not so much to indicate that the problem of squatting affects not only the poor (Ockey 10) or to suggest a re-conceptualization of the exploiting class/exploited class (dominant/ dominated) dichotomy into "classes which are at one and the same time both exploiting and exploited" (Roxborough 90). I argue that the presence of the two middle class families (for a definition of "middle class," see Roxborough 78) is primarily used to construct gender (female) representations that obtain from specific class positions. In this section, I explore how, in the struggle for Filipinas Street, state and class relations and antagonisms impact gender, and how the particular construction and representation of the femaleness/femininity (i.e., gender) of the two woman characters of the novel are implicated in class. This in effect argues that the way Filipinas Street, as place is constructed is imbricated in or tied to constructions of class, gender and state power (Uguris; Knox).

### Gender and State-Class Relations/Antagonisms

In discussing how state-class relations (state + Mr. Lopez) and antagonisms (state + Mr. Lopez versus squatters) impact gender, I refer specifically to the construction of Boni's masculinity in leading the Filipinas Street community against Mr. Lopez. Marginally, this also includes the construction of the masculinity of the men of Mr. Lopez as well as how the women are constructed within the struggle. Let me state at the outset that a great part of Boni's resolve to fight for

Filipinas Street is his fear of being called a coward. He must be strong; he must, with courage, face the risks that attend his position not only to thwart the aims of Mr. Lopez but equally (or more) important, so that his fellow residents would not doubt his masculinity. In fact, Boni was elected president of the Filipinas Street Homeowners Association precisely because he is said to embody the most important quality of a president who must lead his community united against the businessman. The virtue of the president must be that he “is not afraid to fight for the rights of the small and the oppressed.” Boni fears that if he succumbed to the intimidation being done by the men of Mr. Lopez, the people would think him a coward (“*takrot*”) and not so much as having betrayed them but as having reneged on a social contract or shirked responsibility.

There are two reasons why Boni is so preoccupied with being always seen as brave. The first has to do with his duty as president of the association. The second has to do with impressing the woman he likes. The struggle for Filipinas Street between the residents and Mr. Lopez produces in Boni a consuming desire to prove himself: both as president and as a man. But the struggle also constructs another aspect of Boni’s masculinity: his taking a principled legal and peaceful resolution to their problem. This concern for the law and the protection of life is diametrically opposed to the ruthless and lawless, brutal and violent masculinity of the men of Mr. Lopez. This masculinity is enabled primarily by the excessive power that Mr. Lopez possesses as well as the excessive power generated by the collusion of the state and Mr. Lopez, the representation of the dominant, capitalist class. The following argument between Boni and two of Mr. Lopez’s men which occurred during the first time the residents were ordered to leave Filipinas Street shows the oppositional construction of the masculinity of Boni and Mr. Lopez’s men:

“Brad, saan koma a kasta ti aramidenyo,” kinunana. “Adda titulo dagiti lotemi ken ammomi a kukua ti gobierno dagiti dadduma a lote ditoy. Kasano a kukua ni Mr. Lopez ti Filipinas Street?”

“Ne, asinoka nga aginlalaing nga agdamdamag?” insungbat ti lalaki. “Kayatmo ta burakek ta rupam? Amangan no dimo ammo ni Mr. Lopez?”

.....

Nangemkem ni Boni. Minulenglenganna manen ti agdukdukol iti siket ti lalaki.... Dina maako nga ikasta lattan ti padana a lalaki.

“Saanak a mamutbuteng, brad, ken ad-adda pay a saanak a mabuteng basta kalintegak la ketdi,” kinuna ni Boni. “Ibagam kenni Mr. Lopez nga agkitakamto idia kortel!” [*Gil-ayab* 4, July 22, 1985, p. 20]

[“Brad, please do not do this,” he said. “We have titles to our lots and we know that the government owns some of the lots here. How can Mr. Lopez own Filipinas Street?”

“Ne, who are you to ask as though you knew anything?” the man answered. “Do you want your face smashed? Maybe you do not know Mr. Lopez?”

.....  
Boni clenched his jaw in anger. He stared again at what was sticking out of the man’s waist. He could not be treated like that by another man.

“I am not trying to scare you, brad, and all the more that I cannot be scared off especially if it is my right [that is already involved],” Boni said. “Tell Mr. Lopez that we will see each other in court.”]

While it is true that in this incident, Boni faced their community’s foes because he is president, it is also equally true that he did so because Luz, the woman he loves, was witnessing what was going on.

While the presidency exerts tremendous pressure on Boni to constantly assert and prove himself (meaning his masculinity), Boni sees his presidency as a vehicle for him to realize his longing for the respect of the residents and as providing him access to the women in the place. It is precisely because of what the presidency has opened for Boni that he cannot be a coward, accept that he is a coward, or show cowardice.

As the threat to his life was becoming more serious, “cowardice” as a non-option gets redefined in the sense that although Boni

maintains the same motivations for always being courageous and brave (“*natured*,” “*saan a takrot*”), the situations in which he finds himself also dictate that he keep fighting Mr. Lopez for the sake of their community. If he resigned as president, for this is what Mr. Lopez wanted him to do, people would think that he has been bought. Even if this is so, cowardice, as far as Boni is concerned, is intimately linked with being a real man, which in turn is intimately linked with being a leader.

Conversely, courage and leadership (which to Boni are a function of being a real man) have to do with facing problems so much so that for Boni to resign is unthinkable. A more extreme form of courage and leadership as meaning the ability to face problems and threats is to think that even hiding (if only to protect Boni’s life) is cowardice.

That Boni thought that his leadership would be seriously undermined if his masculinity is put in question (by showing any trace of weakness or cowardice) is a logical consequence of the masculinization of the struggle for Filipinas Street. However, this masculinization of the struggle is not something that just produced the effect on Boni particularly with his concern for his image. To be sure, Boni accepts this patriarchal appropriation of the struggle for Filipinas Street (the representation of the struggle as constituted primarily by the struggle between or among male power) for his own ‘masculine’ benefit.

The masculinization of the struggle produces two oppositional representations of women. First, there is the prostitute who was offered/given to Boni when he was brought to Mr. Lopez’s Cavite resort. The woman, constructed primarily as a sexual object, was intended to seduce Boni to get him to resign as president of the Filipinas Street Homeowners Association. Second, there is Minda, who in the context of the community’s struggle against Mr. Lopez is constructed as an activist, yet in relation to Boni, she is, just like the prostitute, a sexual object. I discuss this more fully in the following section.



## **Class Positions and Constructions of Gender**

It is not only the struggle for Filipinas Street that is constitutive of Boni's masculinity. His class location constructs his masculinity as much. But it is not only Boni whose particular gendering is 'classed.' More crucial in examining how class informs the construction or production of gender (representations) is how the gender representations of women, especially Luz and Minda, the two women characters who occupy a central position in Boni's life, are constructed through their class location. While this is going to be the focus of this section, I will bring into the discussion how, besides being represented as woman through their class, the women characters are treated as women; that is, how they are treated because they are women. I will focus on Boni (and Lando) first and then on Minda and Luz.

### ***Class and Domestic(ated) Men***

Boni, a construction worker, and Lando, a *kargador* at the pier, are men whose bodies have been hardened by their heavy work. Yet their poverty has compelled them to adopt a lifestyle of 'domestication.' Thus, while Boni feels that his manliness would be seriously diminished if people thought he was a coward, he does not find washing clothes, cooking, and washing the dishes as well as going to the market after work threatening to his masculinity. In fact, Boni and Lando's ability to do these household work is not an issue for the two (unlike cowardice), and the two go about their respective domestic work without thinking it as 'unnatural.' The two never complain why they are doing what they are doing and are not worried about what others might think and say. Finally, they have a very positive attitude to their 'domestication.' Their 'domestication' makes them even more 'manly,' a quality that should make Boni even more acceptable to women.

Overall, the classed representation of the masculinity of Boni and Lando is positive in at least two ways. First, it is positive in that their 'domestication' is not perceived by the two as diminishing their being men. In fact, they view it as a necessary fact or part of life (and this is due mainly to their class/economic position). Not only does this 'domestication' make them more attractive to the women (it is a plus that these two men know how, and are willing, to do household

work), it also helps Boni and Lando manage their household and their relationship. Consequently, their relationship attains a certain degree of homo-sociality, which is insinuated both by Boni and Lando through the jokes that they exchange. Second, the representation of Boni and Lando is positive in that they offer an alternative masculinity. Two very tough men hardened by the difficulties of their lives (Lando in fact had been imprisoned several times) are imaged as competent in household work (and are unashamed of it).

While Boni and Lando's masculinity is positively constructed in relation to their class, the classed construction of Luz and Minda's femaleness is negative and stereotypical. The way Luz and Minda are constructed also negates the positive classed construction of Boni and Lando's masculinity. This is because while their attitude towards domestic (household) work is positive, the way they look at women, especially Luz and Minda, reduces women to sex objects. Ultimately, the construction and deployment of Minda and Luz point to the "link between the way genders are defined in the local culture, and the goals articulated by a slum culture" (Thorbeck 204).

### ***Class(ifi)ed Women***

Some feminist scholars such as Bettie, Gagnier, and Skeggs have criticized the disappearance of class in feminist and cultural studies, particularly in how class determines the construction of women's identities and subjectivities. In this section, I show that the representations of the femininity of Luz and Minda are constructed by and through their class positions. Both Luz and Minda come from middle class families. Luz's family, however, is more well-to-do, and for purposes of class differentiating them, I will look at Luz as middle-middle class and Minda as lower-middle class. This distinction is not very strict, but it is useful in explaining how their representations as women are *class(ifi)ed*. Most of the descriptions that we have of Luz and Minda come from Boni and Lando, and these descriptions reveal how class informs the construction and production of Luz and Minda.

Because Luz comes from a more well-to-do family, her qualities are "more refined" than Minda's. She is modest, quiet, prayerful whereas Minda is crass, vulgar, "liberated," and aggressive. Their

reaction to Boni's kidnapping reveals this counterposing of their femininities, and Boni does not hide his preference:

“Ania ti kunkuna da Luz ken Minda?”

“Makapungtot ni Minda. Kasta unay ti panangilunodna kadagiti lallaki nga immay nangala kenka. Ammona lattan a pasurot ida ni Mr. Lopez. Makasangsangit met ni Luz. Kasta unay ti panangikararagna a didaka patayen.”

Naamiris ni Boni ti paggiatian dagiti dua a babbalasang. Lunod ken ni Minda ket kararag met ken ni Luz. No isu ti mapaturay, kaykayatna ni Luz. Ngem napigsa ti sex appeal ni Minda. Prangka pay daytoy. Aramidenna latta ti kayatna. Kas iti daydi panangagekna kenkuana. Idinto ta naemma ni Luz. Natanang nga aggargaraw. [*Gil-ayab* 9, p. 46]

[“What did Luz and Minda say?”

“Minda was very angry. How she cursed the men who came to get you. She was certain they were the minions of Mr. Lopez. Luz was on the verge of tears. How she prayed that they will not kill you.”

Boni realized the difference between the two women. Cursing to Minda and prayer to Luz. If he were to be followed, he prefers Luz. But Minda has a strong sex appeal. And she's frank, too. She does what she wants. Like when she kissed him. Luz on the other hand is modest. She acts and behaves properly.]

Luz is the preferred woman for Boni not only because her femininity is constructed on her 'better class' (thus her privileged femininity) but also simply because she comes from a better class. Boni says that if he married, it would be to a woman who is a professional, one who has a stable job so that both of them will earn for the family.

The 'intra-class' difference between Luz and Minda also impacts upon the degree of their involvement in the struggle for Filipinas Street. Activism is not part of the 'middle class femininity' of Luz. In contrast, because Minda is from a lower (middle) class, she

is represented as an activist (although her being a student is also a contributing factor). Her representation as an activist, which obtains from her class location, is shown to be the reason for Minda's 'liberated' attitude towards sex, which in the novel, can be attributed again to her class position. This constitutes another difference between Minda and Luz.

Clearly, the classed representations of Luz and Minda rely on, and are founded upon, stereotypical notions and representations of class values. It is precisely in the author's use of these stereotypes that make problematic and contradictory the representation of Minda. This is because against Mr. Lopez, she is a radical woman. Her activism in the context of their struggle to protect Filipinas Street is to a large extent made inconsistent by her subservient devotion to Boni to the point that her happiness as a woman is totally dependent on her being with him, in serving him. In this case, her activism tends to be the result or the outcome of her desire for Boni and not so much for a desire to protect their community. Minda seems to have used their struggle not only to fight for Filipinas Street but as an opportunity to get close to Boni. Her motivations were constituted by her activism as much as by her desire/love for Boni. These, however, should not preclude a proper appreciation of Minda's role in the community's fight for Filipinas Street.

Minda's active participation in the residents' fight for Filipinas Street owes to her being the secretary of the homeowners association (she defeated Luz for the post). Although her position in the association is certainly a stereotype, she re-defined her role as secretary by outperforming the other officials, from the vice president down.

In the community's fight for Filipinas Street, Boni welcomes Minda's activism but finds it a negative aspect as far as her relationship with him as woman/lover is concerned:

[Lando speaking] "Ammom, maitured daydiay ti pumatay. Kitaem laengen no idauluanna dagit padana nga estudiante. Talaga a para riri."

Saan a nagtagari ni Boni. Pudno ti kinuna ni Lando. Napintas ni Minda. Ngem no agari ti kinaaktibistana, mapukaw ti kinalamuyot daytoy iti rupana. [*Gil-ayab* 21, November 18, 1995, p. 41]

[“You know, she’s capable of killing. Just look at how she leads her fellow students. She’s really meant for crisis/trouble.”

Boni did not say anything. What Lando said was true. Minda is beautiful. But when her activism takes over, the softness disappears from her face.]

What is even more negatively portrayed as part of Minda’s activism is her sexual assertiveness. Although there is nothing wrong with a woman being demonstrative and vocal about her feelings for a man, the “sexual liberation” of Minda is not intended to represent a “radical” female subjectivity consistent with her social activism but rather a femininity (or female sexuality) that is perceived to destroy Boni. Her sexual liberatedness is not a welcome aspect of her activism. Her representation as a loud-mouthed woman is equated with her being noisy, an inability on her part to control her emotion and let her rationality prevail.<sup>4</sup> This “noisy-ness” spills over into her inability to restrain herself from publicly displaying her affection for Boni. Minda “goes out of control” when she spreads that she and Boni are already going steady when, as far as Boni is concerned, there is no relationship yet between them. Thus, Minda’s activism is merely used as an excuse for the author’s construction of Minda’s sexual assertiveness/aggressiveness. The novel *identifies* Minda’s activism with her sexual behavior. The intention, of course, is not only to make a comparison that privileges Luz, but also to construct a woman who is distractive/destructive because of her sexuality. The particular construction of her sexuality vis-à-vis her activism makes her an ambivalent character. As an activist she helps Boni and the whole community fight for Filipinas Street, and the community recognizes her. But when this activism is contaminated or polluted by her sexuality, many residents find it destructive to their struggle. The residents perceive this contamination of their communal struggle by the sexuality of Minda as the cause of Boni being remiss in his duties and the community’s defeat in court. It is this contamination that is going to destroy Boni as leader of the Filipinas Street community.

The relationship between Boni and Minda, however, did not in any way negatively affect the performance of their duties. On the contrary, because they can work together really well, they were able to do and finish things more quickly and more efficiently. Moreover, Minda’s motivation to work is very high because she wants to help

Boni. What is really at issue here is that Minda is to blame for Boni's lapses. The ease with which Boni's supposed neglect of his duties as a leader is attributed not only to his relationship with Minda, but to Minda herself. This suggests a gender ideological slippage in which women become more of a distraction—they dislocate men from their focus, from their real duties and responsibilities. And when things really go wrong, women are to blame. In the author's construction of Minda, there is a traceable "Eve complex." The fall of Adam is blamed on Eve; the fall of Boni is blamed on Minda.

Boni had seen this coming. He knew that as president of the homeowners association, he should not have any sexual relationship with Minda because she is his secretary. But Boni was not able to resist Minda. Boni said several times that it was not his fault, but Minda's, because she tempted him. This attitude of Boni leads us to the sexual objectification of Luz and Minda. In spite of their oppositional construction, the two are treated both by Boni (and Lando) as sexual objects. Frequently, Boni's descriptions of the two women focus on specific parts of their body, such as their lips, breasts, buttocks, and legs, and rarely on their totality/wholeness (even only physically). This 'a(na)tomized' representation (focus on the body but only on specific parts) of Luz and Minda reveal, specifically for Minda, how they are really appreciated by others. For Minda, this is particularly unfair because as a leader of the Filipinas Street community's resistance, she did a lot and often out of her own initiative. For the novel, as well as the author, however, her real function is to be the sex/love object of Boni. This sexual objectification of Minda (and Luz) also points to the patriarchal ideology that informs their classed construction.

My discussion here will focus on the patriarchal appropriation of the activism of Minda. As far as Luz is concerned, an idea of her sexual objectification may be deduced from the descriptions of Minda. The patriarchal attitude towards Minda may be classified into two: one, her sexual objectification; and two, her domestication. These two are related inasmuch as Minda's sexual objectification constitutes her domestication.

But the sexual objectification of Minda does not only depend on her body but on her reputation as a sexually aggressive woman. In

the following passage, note that Minda's image as a sexual object is juxtaposed with an image of her as easy-to-get and insatiable:

“Nakasarakkan, lakay, iti dimo pagrigatan,” kinunana [Lando].

“Ngem awan met sapulem. Napungga, kasadsadiwaanna, ken talaga a mapnekka. Kunana pay: isa pa nga!” [*Gil-ayab* 9, p. 21]

[“There, lakay, you have stumbled upon someone you don't have to work hard for,” Lando said. “But you can't ask for anything more. Beautiful. She is in her prime, and you'll really be satisfied. She'll even say: on(c)e more!”]

These descriptions that ‘colonize’ Minda as a sexed body make her appropriation into domesticity easy. Since she, or her body, is supposed to be for the consumption of Boni, then her other role within patriarchy (that as a wife) is primarily to look after Boni's house and to bear children, things that like her sexual function are supposed to please and serve Boni.

It would be incorrect to say that Minda's desire to be Boni's wife is inconsistent with her activism (one can be a wife and still be an activist). However, Minda's awareness of their class oppression is not complemented by a consciousness of her oppression as a woman under patriarchy. She does not question her sexual objectification and the derisive remarks made about her. Neither does she question the expectation that she is supposed to cook and wash, etc. for her husband. On the contrary, she finds these as entirely acceptable and natural; she enters this discourse with full consent and willingness. This reinforces my earlier point that Minda's liberal attitude towards sex is not really to question, disrupt, and unsettle the socially sanctioned sexual behavior of a woman (that which Luz embodies) as much as to *classify* this kind of female sexual behavior. Minda's activism (which is also *classified*) provides a convenient mechanism for her to use this sexual behavior to get what she wants, Boni. Ultimately, Minda used her sexual aggressiveness (which the community disapproved of) to remove Luz, a rival, out of the picture and have Boni. In other words, she used a socially unacceptable behavior to enter a female role that is socially acceptable—domesticity.

It is in Minda's domesticity that another contradiction in her construction surfaces. Minda denounces their class oppression but attacks a family living in Filipinas Street on the basis of class, and declares she could not possibly live in a house as squalid and wretched as the house of the family she criticizes:

“Kunam la no asino nga adda kabaelanna. Mamirmirautda met laeng. Ay sus, diak la ketdi agbiag no kasdiay ti pagnaedak.”

“Kasanon no kasdiay ti maited kenka ti maasawam?” insintir ni Boni.

“Apay, ibalaynak ti kasdiay?” insungbat ni Minda.

“Pakpakawan. Diak la mangas-asawan.” [*Gil-ayab* 34, February 17, 1986, p. 20]

[“As if he is someone capable of anything. They are so destitute. *Ay sus*, I would not survive if I lived in such a house.”

“What if your husband can only give you something like that?” Boni teased.

“Why, you will make me live in something like that?” Minda answered. “*Pakpakawan*. I'd rather not marry.”]

It appears that there is a separate construction of Minda's femininity and subjectivity within capitalism (the struggle for their land against a capitalist conversion into a factory) and her femininity and subjectivity within patriarchy. For how does one explain these inconsistencies and contradictions? How can Minda fight the community's oppression by Mr. Lopez, denounce his capitalist activities, invoke class oppression on one hand and condemn a family more oppressed than she on the other? How does one explain the community's attitude towards Minda? As an activist, Minda is recognized by the community, but when she becomes Boni's girlfriend, she is perceived as a destructive force (because the relationship is seen in the context of the community's struggle). How does one explain Boni's attitude towards Minda's activism? In their struggle against Mr. Lopez, he welcomes it yet at the same time thinks that it makes her “unwomanly” (“mapukaw ti kinalamuyot daytoy iti rupana”).



How does one reconcile Minda's activism and sexual assertiveness (which in the novel are a function of her class and their struggle) with her willingness to perform domestic work for Boni who is not her husband yet? How does one reconcile these two images of Minda who says she is willing to go to war against the men of Mr. Lopez while serving food to the men who were helping Boni rebuild his house?

To explain these contradictions and inconsistencies that attend Minda's femininity, activism, sexual assertiveness, domestication, class "hypocrisy," in other words, her subjectivity, without meaning to resolve them in a unified identity, we need to be aware of her location within two separate systems or structures of power: capitalism and patriarchy.

Capitalism and patriarchy impact on Minda differently. On the one hand, in the community's fight for Filipinas Street against the collusion of the state and the dominant capitalist class (embodied by Mr. Lopez), she is constructed as an activist woman who is willing to go to war if only to defend their Filipinas Street. On the other hand, patriarchy dictates and expects her to be a woman who reflects and embodies this patriarchal ideology. This distinction in her construction as a woman within these two systems of power can account for the multiple inconsistent behavior and pronouncements of Minda. This explains how she can both be an active leader of the community's struggle for Filipinas Street while at the same time a very subservient woman performing domestic duties for Boni.

Certainly, her role in the struggle for Filipinas Street against the forces of the state and Mr. Lopez was also determined by patriarchal ideology. Her election as the secretary of the homeowners association points to this. As a woman, she was given a post that has traditionally been for women. Yet she was able to move beyond the traditional duties of a secretary so much so that Boni depended on her to organize students for their demonstrations.

Within patriarchy, Minda's activism is a liability. As a woman primarily constructed as a sexual object, her activist orientation (compounded by her liberated sexual behavior) diminishes her worth as a prospective wife. Within patriarchy, too, there is an attempt to discredit Minda's activism by presenting her as someone who, within

the same community oppressed by the dominant class, distinguishes herself from others. There is an attempt to make activism and social agency as the sole preserve of men. Note that Minda is the only named woman involved in the demonstrations. By presenting her as engaged in the class oppression of her poorer fellow residents, the novel argues that only men like Boni and Lando can credibly act for the community. This has been signaled by the novel's representation of Minda as a distraction to Boni, as a destructive force to his leadership. Conversely, the novel argues that Minda's place is (in) the house, and so Boni must make sure that she knows how to take care of one. The homosociality not only of the relationship between Boni and Lando but also, more importantly, of the values the novel upholds ensures and entrenches the fraternal bond between men "in which women [are] relegated to the realm of domesticity" (Hunt 297). The homosocial union between Boni and Lando represented no less than by their cohabitation, which determined the community's battle plan against Mr. Lopez, is a patriarchal strategy of rejecting "any intrusion of the feminine into the public" (Hunt 297).

If Filipinas Street is the nation, then the people's struggle for it against Mr. Lopez and the state is a national struggle for political and social justice. It is the people's assertion of their fundamental right to the nation that is being usurped and monopolized by Mr. Lopez. If Filipinas Street is the nation and the struggle for it a struggle against class and state oppression and against state-class appropriation of the nation, then Minda is an agent in this national project. She is an active social and political actor in this national undertaking. Her agency, however, is determined, limited, by her patriarchal construction. Thus, while Minda occupies a more public space and a more socio-political role in the(ir) struggle to prevent the dominant class' capitalist "colonization" of the nation, patriarchy commands her to occupy a private and domestic space, to find her happiness beside Boni. In Minda's active participation in defending (their place in) the nation against the state and the dominant class, it turns out that what she is defending is not only the nation but also the patriarchal ideology that tells her to stay at home. The battle for Filipinas Street is not only the defense of the people's rightful place in the nation. It is not only about preventing the dominant class and the state from grabbing the national land. It is equally about defending the patriarchal ideology that denies the likes of Minda full and active participation in the national community. While the struggle for Filipinas Street/the

nation is mainly a class struggle, within the Filipinas Street community/the nation is an insidious gender struggle that privileges men. It is an insidious struggle that even uses women to win it. While the Filipinas Street community/the nation accepts their defeat, the patriarchal ideology that structures the relationship between men and women in the community (and, therefore, in the nation) is not displaced with their displacement from Filipinas Street.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> *Gil-ayab ti Daga* (literally *Land's Flame*), serialized from 1985 to 1986 in the Ilokano weekly magazine *Bannawag* (Dawn) is one of the first novels in Iluko to explicitly discourse about the nation. *Gil-ayab*, in a sense, may be said to mark a shift in the consciousness of Iluko novels. While Iluko literature particularly since 1970 has predominantly been socially conscious, *Gil-ayab* signals a shift from a merely 'societal' to the broader 'national' consciousness. A number of novels (for example *Saksi ti Kaunggan* by Juan S.P. Hidalgo, Jr; *Angkel Sam* by Reynaldo A. Duque; *Alsa Masa 1763* by Bernardino C. Alzate; *Bin-i dagiti Kimat* by Cles B. Rambaud; *Congressman Pitong 1* and *Congressman Pitong 2* by Jose A. Bragado) would be serialized in *Bannawag* in rapid succession after *Gil-ayab*.

Jose A. Bragado is a prolific writer, having written more than a dozen novels for the *Bannawag* where he served as literary and associate editor. He is the present president of the GUMIL Filipinas (Gunglo dagiti Mannurat nga Ilokano) an association of Ilokano writers with chapters in the Middle East, Hawaii, California, Guam, Greece, and Italy.

<sup>2</sup> An absurd (though I would say completely plausible) way of looking at Lando's role in Boni's life is that he is the third of Boni's "lovers." In Iluko literature, the nation is frequently represented as a woman named Luzviminda. The two women, Luz and Minda, obviously constitute two parts. Now Boni is a Bisaya (coming from the Visayas) and should constitute the remaining part. Lando is the other chain that links "Luzviminda" to Boni. Thus we have two women and a man used to "suggest" the nation and who are all 'romantically' involved with Boni, the leader of the Filipinas Street community.

<sup>3</sup> The novel was serialized from 1985-1986, and although the law that most explicitly protects squatters from eviction, the Lina Law (so called because the principal author is Jose Lina), was passed by the Congress in the early '90s, there has been 'legal' protection for squatters in the '70s. For instance, the United Nation's Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights promulgated in 1974 recognizes the housing rights of citizens of member-states. In fact, the United Nation's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights wrote in 1993 to the Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs asking for a

response to charges that the Philippine government has consistently violated the housing rights of thousands of its citizens (Seabrook 201).

<sup>4</sup>To be sure, the behavior of Minda, especially her verbal attacks on the demolition team, the police, soldiers, the judge, and Mr. Lopez is also intended to portray her as a loud-mouthed (*bungangera*) and crass woman primarily to contrast her with Luz. I argue, however, that it is entirely a proper behavior of a woman/person whose house and land are threatened by a capitalist. In addition, Minda's verbal attacks reveal her courage and strength as a woman/person.

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