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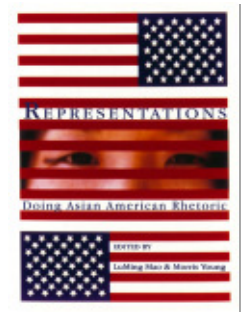
Published by Utah State University Press

Mao, LuMing & Young, Morris.

Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric.

Logan: Utah State University Press, 2008.

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4

LISTENING FOR LEGACIES

or, How I Began to Hear Dorothy Laigo Cordova, the Pinay behind the Podium Known as FANHS

Terese Guinsatao Monberg

Despite our ubiquitous presence throughout the diaspora, Filipinas remain contingently visible: as nameless, faceless overseas contract workers, sex workers, and mail-order brides scattered across the globe. We are seen as objects of a sexist, imperial ideology, yet we remain invisible as subjects and agents. Filipinas are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere.

Melinda L. de Jesús, *Pinay Power*

In reviewing the “legacies of erasure” that prevent Filipina and Filipina American women from being seen as subjects and agents, Melinda L. de Jesús reminds us that this erasure stems from other legacies, including long histories of imperialism, “further complicated by the patriarchal bias of both Asian American and Filipino American Studies” (2005a, 3).¹ But she further notes that Filipina women are also underrepresented in feminist studies—a field that includes feminist rhetorical studies, particularly feminist rhetorical history. How the historical legacies and rhetorical powers of Pinays² have gone unnoticed for so

1. Shirley Hune confirms that one reason Asian American women remain invisible is that race remains the dominant organizing category in Asian American studies and “the master narrative remains male-centered” (2003, 2). She also confirms that women’s studies in the United States has not yet fully recognized the complexity that difference(s) bring to gender studies.
2. The term *Pinay* has a complicated history, but is often used to refer to Filipina American women. The term, along with its masculine equivalent, *Pinoy*, is thought to have its origins in the 1900s, perhaps used to denote Filipina/os living in the United States (as opposed to being seen as visitors or temporary workers). Historians Emily Lawsin, Dawn Mabalon, Dorothy Laigo Cordova, and Fred Cordova have all written about the term and the evolution of its use. See, for example, Lawsin 1996. See also De Jesús’s footnote citing Dawn Mabalon in her introduction to *Pinay Power* (2005).

long—despite women rhetors like Gabriela Silang, Prosy Abarquez-Delacruz, Carol Ojeda-Kimbrough,³ Irene Natividad, Dorothy Laigo Cordova, and countless others—is the larger subject of this essay. It is not that Pinay rhetors have not existed, have not taken up the cause, or have not made a difference; rather, it is the lens through which we have been looking for “feminist” rhetorical activity and history that requires closer examination.

Feminist historiography has long been concerned with recuperating the rhetorical contributions of women. Recuperation efforts have required feminist rhetoricians to challenge traditional masculine notions of rhetoric, including dominant assumptions about what it means to participate in public spheres, to read texts through the lens of gender (Jarrett 1990), to count something as evidence (Mattingly 2002), and to interrogate the “dynamics of suppression by which women’s voices were silenced” (Campbell 2002, 45).⁴ In challenging these assumptions, however, we find that certain other assumptions remain dominant in the field. Assumptions meant to recuperate women’s voices intersect in complicated ways that still prevent many Asian/Asian American women from being heard. This dynamic can be seen, for example, in Hui Wu’s discussion of her research on Chinese post-Mao literary women. While these women’s texts directly engage issues of gender, Wu finds it difficult to justify these texts as “feminist rhetoric” using a western feminist theoretical framework defined by certain binary oppositions, including masculine/feminine, mind/body, “gender/sex, public/private, reasoning/caring, and equality/difference” (1990, 172). While many feminist rhetoricians have tried to recuperate the less valued term of the binary opposition and/or problematized the binary, as Wu demonstrates, these binaries still define the field, potentially hiding a number of non-western women and women of color from rhetoric’s view.

In her study of silence as an active strategy in Asian Pacific American women’s writing, Patti Duncan elaborates on the forms these binaries can take in U.S. feminist discussions:

Such discussions have tended to either overlook the involvement of Asian American women in the history of feminist movements, or they have

3. See Catherine Ceniza Choy’s important essay on Abarquez-Delacruz and Ojeda-Kimbrough (2005).

4. See Bizzell 2002.

attempted to interpret the lives, actions, and experiences of Asian and Asian American women (and other women of color) according to disturbing stereotypes and/or categories framed in oppositional paradigms: “developed” vs. “underdeveloped”; complex, real, material subjects vs. monolithic, homogeneous, objectified nonsubjects; independent and empowered vs. oppressed, victimized, and dependent; capable of expression and possessing a feminist vision and voice vs. silent, unknowing, and unable to understand or analyze one’s surroundings. (2004, 220)

Duncan reminds us that the consequence these paradigms have for Asian Pacific American women is often invisibility, not only in mainstream but also in feminist historical accounts. Thus, our methods for gathering and interpreting feminist rhetoric need further revision so we might see “Asian Pacific American women involved in movements for social change and justice in the United States, participating in activities that could easily be called ‘feminist’ in nature” (Duncan 2004, 221).

Building on Wu’s and Duncan’s arguments, this essay outlines one methodological and interpretive approach for recovering and theorizing a Filipina/o American “feminist” notion of rhetoric, an approach that has been helpful in uncovering the rhetorical legacy of Dorothy Laigo Cordova, founder and executive director of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS). While Cordova is often hidden from traditional scholarly citations to FANHS, she is a central author of the spatial metaphors, methods, and pedagogical theories that structure the rhetorical activities of FANHS. This rhetorical space/structure is lost in traditional readings of FANHS texts and becomes available only through other methodological and interpretive approaches, including what Jacqueline Jones Royster, Malea Powell, Krista Ratcliffe, and Dorothy Cordova herself have each theorized as “listening.” My goal, then, is not just to recuperate the voice of a single Asian Pacific American woman, but to highlight how certain approaches may prevent an entire legacy of Asian Pacific American women rhetoricians from being heard.⁵ Listening as a methodology makes it possible to see and hear women who are

5. In a recent call for papers on the topic of feminist rhetoric, the editors explain that they “prefer theoretical or methodological topics to those that deal exclusively with the work of specific individuals.” Similarly, a recently published essay that reviews feminist rhetoric portrayed one scholar’s work (on rhetorical contributions by women of color) as not doing theory building or not explicitly reading through the lens of gender. This is one of the binaries—perhaps subtle, perhaps unintentional—that may prevent Asian Pacific American women from being heard by rhetoric.

presumed to be absent, but it also makes visible underlying assumptions in feminist historiography that reinforce those presumptions. In working toward a more culturally contingent model of feminist historiography, I argue that certain methods of listening—because they are attentive to interdependencies among rhetorical space, memory, and history—are central to the makings of an Asian Pacific American “feminist” rhetoric.⁶

LOSING SIGHT OF DOROTHY LAIGO CORDOVA

The term *listening* is a common theme among feminist scholars in the history of rhetoric. The commonsense definition of the term conjures up feminist rhetoricians struggling to hear the voices of women absent from “the” tradition. While early work in feminist historiography is not always seen as explicitly theorizing its meaning, listening has since been enacted and theorized as a method for recuperating women’s rhetorical contributions, for uncovering women’s intellectual genealogies, shifting interpretive paradigms, and hearing cultural difference. In recent scholarship, notions of listening have often been connected with Krista Ratcliffe’s important work on “rhetorical listening” (1999, 2005). Responding to several exigencies, Ratcliffe is most interested in how listening as a rhetorical strategy might facilitate cross-cultural dialogue. This important cross-cultural dialogue, however, somewhat depends on women of color being audibly or visibly present so that others might listen to their speeches/texts alongside speeches/texts or instances of whiteness. Because Ratcliffe’s model potentially reinforces distinctions between listening, theorizing, recovering voices, and creating texts, I turn instead to the ways listening has been enacted and theorized by, for example, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Malea Powell. In doing so, I implicitly argue that the making of an Asian Pacific American rhetoric benefits from the insights of other rhetorics of color, even as it requires its own culturally contingent context.

My argument begins with the premise that while most feminist historiographers in rhetoric use the term *listening*, most forms of listening have largely rested in seeing—seeing women at the podium, seeing women’s texts, seeing women’s words in print before they can be heard. But seeing is only one part of the dynamic equation when listening for/to women’s

6. I assume that most readers are familiar with some African American and black women’s reluctance to identify with the term *feminism*, preferring the term *framework* and values termed *womanist*. Similar reluctance exists among many Asian Pacific American women.

voices that have been institutionally marginalized in multiple, intersecting ways. To go beyond what is immediately visible and documented, then, requires what Jacqueline Jones Royster calls “a habit of critical questioning, of speculating in order to make visible unnoticed possibilities, to pose and articulate what we see now, what’s missing, and what we might see instead” (2000, 10). Royster repeatedly resists narratives of individual exceptionalism, redirecting attention to patterns and traditions of rhetorical leadership among African American women. While this tradition of leadership is often invisible in mainstream historical accounts, she listens for the “traces” that are visible in order to reveal the larger “stream” of women in that tradition. Perhaps, then, our primary reliance on sight is skewing our focus toward identifying historically significant documents at the expense of hearing other rhetorical activities. This skewed focus, in turn, may be keeping us from “seeing” the large numbers of women who have been present and contributing all along—in ways that challenge what we think of as rhetoric and as “feminist” rhetoric. In her discussion of black women’s roles in the black public sphere, Gwendolyn D. Pough reminds us: “We need to extend our interrogations and discussions in ways that validate not only the presence of women in the Black public sphere but women’s roles in *shaping* that sphere. Instead of commenting on the strength of male presence in the public discourse, we need to ask what Black women were doing *to enable that presence*. We will no doubt find women like [Houston] Baker’s mother writing speeches, raising funds, and *building institutions*” (2004, 37–38; emphasis mine).

Shaping public spheres, enabling the presence of others, and building institutions have not generally been recognized as rhetorical activities, particularly when texts providing evidence of these activities cannot be seen. To echo the words of Malea Powell, “this implied absence of [these] others” points more to “a space, an absence, in a particular conceptual understanding” of what rhetoric is and where we might find it (2002b, 398). Powell asks us to listen not only for these absences, but for the narratives these absences allow rhetoric to tell about itself as a discipline. In building a notion of rhetoric that “both listens and speaks” differently, Powell prompts us to imagine other “possible hearings and tellings” of rhetoric and its absences (2002a, 12; 2002b, 399).

Dorothy Laigo Cordova’s case demonstrates how Filipina American “feminist” rhetoric(s) are particularly vulnerable to invisibility if we rely on methods dominated by seeing and collecting texts. These methods might uncover writing by Cordova in FANHS newsletters, announcements, an

essay published in *Making Waves*, or a manuscript in progress on the history of Filipina women in the United States, but these visible texts might not illuminate her central role in shaping FANHS as a rhetorical space—or the rhetorical legacies that have informed that shaping. Cordova, a second-generation Filipina American, the eldest of nine children, was born in 1932 and raised in Seattle, Washington. Cordova and her husband, Fred Cordova, have been lifetime partners in Filipina/o American activism. The Cordovas cofounded the legendary Filipino Youth Activities, Incorporated, of Seattle in 1957; throughout the 1960s and 1970s they were active in the civil rights and Asian American movements. Dorothy is both founder and has always been executive director of FANHS; Fred is founding president emeritus of FANHS and founder of the National Pinoy Archives (NPA) associated with FANHS. Both are affiliate assistant professors in American ethnic studies at the University of Washington, and both were granted honorary doctorates by Seattle University in 1988. They have received lifetime achievement awards from numerous organizations, including the Association for Asian American Studies and *Filipinas Magazine*. But while Dorothy Cordova's achievements have been recognized, her rhetorical imaginings and capacities have not.

For more than twenty years prior to her founding of FANHS, Cordova had been writing and securing numerous grants to fund large-scale social research projects on Asian American communities, using her research findings to testify before Congress and to develop advocacy programs for these communities. Her founding of FANHS in 1982 was built on this foundation of community-based research and activism; and FANHS has since grown, with twenty-seven chapters currently active nationwide. Cordova's vision of FANHS as a rhetorical space and what this space offers Filipina/o Americans would be largely invisible to a methodology that privileges our use of sight to navigate traditional maps and catalogs of knowledge. We might *see*, for example, her husband, Fred Cordova, as the principal voice of FANHS. His book, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans* (1983)—made possible by oral histories and documents collected through the Demonstration Project for Asian Americans (DPAA) directed by Dorothy Laigo Cordova—is a foundational text in Filipina/o American historiography.⁷ Fred Cordova has also published numerous

7. While Fred Cordova makes a concerted effort to credit Dorothy Laigo Cordova in his book—listing her as editor, listing the contributions of her staff, having her write the introduction, crediting her again in his prologue—academic convention requires that when the book is cited, Fred Cordova is cited as the author.

essays that we could locate in the FANHS journal, the foreword to one of the first anthologies of Filipina/o American studies (1997), and op-ed pieces in Philippine newspapers in the Seattle area. While most Filipina/o American scholars and community members familiar with FANHS recognize Dorothy Laigo Cordova as an equally key figure behind the organization, her rhetorical influence and contributions remain hidden from view, especially invisible to feminist historiographers of rhetoric who tend to privilege sight as the primary method for identifying sites of feminist rhetoric.⁸

In 1999, I had the privilege of meeting both Cordovas when two Chicago-based FANHS members and I traveled to Seattle to visit the national office and archives. Before my visit, I had performed some preliminary analyses of FANHS texts in preparation for my interviews. I noticed that in several of Fred Cordova's essays, he refers to FANHS as "a podium." When I asked Fred Cordova about this metaphor, however, he told me: "That's Dorothy's [term]" (1999). He further explained that, when it came to FANHS, he was more of the speaker and writer, while Dorothy Laigo Cordova was more of the thinker. When I asked Dorothy Laigo Cordova about this during our interview, she replied: "Yes. Probably. That's probably right. I'm more the behind the scenes person. I like to get an idea, and then I start typing it out and I'll plan it. And then I'll want to see it happen. To me, that's important. It's the execution, the carrying out, and bringing it [to] people, that's really important to me" (1999, 19).

Bringing people to the podium and having them take something away from it is what motivates Dorothy Laigo Cordova. While these rhetorical activities may not always result in (what we traditionally see as) a published document, especially of her explicit authorship—there is an important shaping of a public sphere happening here. To see this Pinay behind the podium known as FANHS, however, required different forms of data gathering and interpretation, since I was not familiar

8. Recent texts have begun to include references to Dorothy Cordova's work with FANHS. See, for example, Dorothy Fujita Rony, *American Workers, Colonial Power: Philippine Seattle and the Transpacific West, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Barbara Posadas, *The Filipino Americans*, New American Series (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999); Peter Jamero, "The Filipino American Young Turks of Seattle: A Unique Experience in the American Sociopolitical Mainstream," in *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity*, edited by Maria P. P. Root (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 299-315; and Nomura 2003,

with FANHS or the work of the Cordovas before I began this project.⁹ And it was only through an oral history interview that I began to hear Cordova's spatial/rhetorical imaginings of FANHS as a podium, as a place where Filipina/o Americans can create new historical texts, narratives, and landscapes.

ORAL HISTORY AS A SITE FOR LISTENING

While oral history methodologies are a common preference among academic and community-based researchers in Asian Pacific American studies, feminist historiographers have not traditionally turned to oral history as a method for uncovering historical texts of significance. This may stem from disciplinary debates surrounding authorial intention and rhetorical agency, or disciplinary assumptions about what counts as history, as rhetoric, as public participation, as feminist practice, and as evidence. But our reluctance to turn toward oral history may also stem from implicit assumptions that history lives only in the past, in archival documents, and not in memories and communities. In considering the significance "feminist theories from the Third World" might have for rhetoric, Wu argues that "historical studies of rhetorical women should not be limited to the study of the deceased; living women should also be included as historical subjects as long as the study contributes to history building" (2002, 90–91). While uncovering historical texts is an important endeavor, it is just as important to document the rhetorical practices, institutions, social movements, and theories that women like Cordova have contributed. And these contributions, or traces of these contributions, may be glimpsed only through photographs or oral history interviews—if we act while these women can still share their histories. As a method and a discipline, oral history has often defined itself by its ability to give voice to populations whose perspectives and everyday experiences have been historically overlooked by histories focused on "great" men (and women). Oral histories also give us a view into the arena of lived experience where subjects actively make rhetorical choices, where categories are created, refused, and negotiated—if we are willing to really listen.

9. While I am a mixed-blood Pinay, I grew up in the Midwest and was trained not in Asian American studies but in rhetoric and composition. Unpacking the many reasons I was not familiar with FANHS or the Cordovas before this project confirms the perceived invisibility of Asian Pacific American rhetoric(s) and writing(s) and the need to pursue the ongoing struggle of decolonization and resistance.

To understand why oral histories hold special importance in the making of a Filipina/o “feminist” rhetorical history, I turn to Royster’s discussion of how the essay, as one generic form used by the African American women she studied, was central in theorizing the ways these women used literacy for sociopolitical action. Generic features of the essay, as identified by Royster, resonate with the ways oral historians describe generic features of oral history narratives. For example, of the essay, Royster writes: “[The essay] is self-authorized; it privileges the first-person ‘I’ perspective; it is grounded in experience; it shows a mind at work; it is exploratory; it recognizes a listening audience and expects response; it invites skepticism; it is situated in a particular time, place, and writer; it permits the writer’s knowledge, experience, and insight to emerge; it is protean in form” (2000, 232).¹⁰

Like the essay, an oral history narrative privileges the first-person perspective; it is situated in relationship to particular times, places, people, social movements, and historical events while allowing the narrator’s “knowledge, experience, and insight to emerge.” An oral history narrative can show us “a mind at work,” telling us, in the words of Alessandro Portelli, “not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (1991, 50). Oral history narratives, then, reveal a speaking subject actively negotiating, shaping, and building spaces, institutions, and histories of rhetoric.

Generic features of the oral history narrative point to several reasons for the use of oral history methods among Filipina/o American community-based and academic researchers. Perhaps the most evident reason for turning to oral histories is that our history has been absent from the documents traditionally seen as worthy of preserving, archiving, reading, and analyzing. An equally evident reason is that these narratives place the speaking subject at the center of the narrative, as “I,” as an active agent (rather than a passive recipient) of knowledge and history. But these reasons alone cannot tell us why Filipina/o American researchers might prefer this genre to others (like, for example, the essay); this requires listening to how the features of a genre or discourse are taken up, used, and performed (Powell 2002b; Royster 2000). Royster, for example, not only identifies features of the essay, she also listens closely to African American women’s *performance* of the essay and highlights the

10. These features of the essay resonate with how oral historians describe oral history interviews (see, for example, Anderson and Jack 1998).

importance of the essayist tradition among African American women. In doing so, Royster reminds us that rhetorical activities only become “meaningful within systems of belief,” and these systems of belief may indicate why a group might employ rhetorical *preferences* in working toward their sociopolitical purposes (43; emphasis mine).

To understand the larger sociopolitical purposes that may lead Filipina/o American scholars like myself to prefer oral history narratives, then, means understanding our strong tradition of orality, and how oral modes were put to *different uses*—especially in the face of colonization—in order to carry history, cultural memory, and tradition.¹¹ S. Lily Mendoza offers one example of how this preference shapes the making of rhetorical histories. In her study of the indigenization movement among Filipina/o and Filipina/o American scholars, she privileges this rhetorical preference as an important part of her data collection. She writes: “Given the strong tradition of orality in both the Filipina/o and Filipina/o American community, I took pains to trace the latest trends in theorizing not only in published texts but also in informal conversations and settings among Filipina/o and Filipina/o American academics. Included in these informal discursive encounters are face-to-face engagements in such contexts *as kapihan* (coffeeshop gatherings), *balitaktakan* (informal chats and discussions), mediated e-mail conversations, or the more structured context of conference meetings” (2002, 37).

In an endnote, Mendoza points to a larger implication of this Filipina/o tradition of orality when she notes that “some of the most influential theorists, particularly in Philippine academe, are not necessarily the most published and vice versa” (2002, 41).¹² Thus, oral histories may be particularly important to the making of a Filipina/o American rhetoric because they create spaces for dialogue, for informal discursive encounters on formal topics deemed important by community members—and these encounters have potential to enact a sense of community that is valued by members. So while an oral history narrative places the speaking subject, as “I,” at the center of the narrative, like

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11. I use the term *carry* in the ways that Malea Powell uses the term in her recent work on American Indian material rhetoric(s) (2002b).
 12. This is not to say that Filipina/o and Filipina/o scholars do not write prolifically. I am not arguing for an essentialist or functionalist notion of oral culture. The idea of preference points to our need to take into account the complex reasons preferences take shape and how they are taken up, many times in ways that subvert the genre’s perceived standard uses, to accomplish specific sociopolitical goals.

the essay, it is a genre that “recognizes a listening audience and expects response” (Royster 2000, 232). Thus, the processes and products of oral history can be used (and have been used) to facilitate and mobilize dialogues not just between interviewer and interviewee but also among real and imagined members of a larger listening audience. These dialogues are one example of the ways oral histories can be put to use; they are one vehicle through which our history, culture, intellectual and rhetorical traditions, strategies for resistance and survival are shared, performed, and carried forward (Powell 2002b). Oral history, then, not only documents but also carries/shares a form of social memory not often documented in traditional texts and tellings of history, including feminist rhetorical history.

Oral history guides emphasize listening as one of the key skills an oral historian can cultivate. The researcher must actively listen and engage the research participant in a dialogue by asking for further connections, clarifications, and elaborations during the interview process. But conducting oral history interviews with the Cordovas was only the first step in my listening process.¹³ I then transcribed the interviews myself—listening, pausing, typing, rewinding, listening again. Certain passages stayed with me; I heard her voice as I read other FANHS texts, transcribed other interviews, analyzed data, and recalled other conversations we had outside of the formal interviews. I listened to my own voice as I typed my dissertation, conference papers, essays for publication, striving to resist easy generalizations and categories that academic work often fosters. As I have listened, recursively across multiple performances of FANHS’s rhetoric, one segment from my interview with Dorothy Laigo Cordova has stayed with me throughout this project. In response to my question about her use of the term *podium* to describe FANHS, she shared her vision of FANHS as a rhetorical space this way:

Yeah. I’ve always used that [term]. And I saw that. Especially, when you have people who are just community researchers, or students, who would never be invited to speak anywhere. We gave them the podium to share their information. And to me, I was just delighted. I mean, they were coming up with things that nobody else was coming out with. They came out of that. And so they were / what they did often times is they followed / they followed their heart, or they followed something that they knew and they just wanted to

13. It is important to note that my interview with Fred Cordova was just as significant in revealing Dorothy Laigo Cordova’s role in shaping FANHS.

find out more information about it. You know, I like to compare Filipino American history or even all kinds of history: it's like a great big beach that's not sandy. It's like the beaches we have in the Northwest are full of stone. And so, when you ask people to give you history, some of them will just tell you about a beach that's all white sand. And others will say, well, there's a beach with a whole bunch of rocks. What I want people in FANHS to do is to say, there's a beach with rocks, but under every rock, there's a different story. And to go down. And possibly even / for them to even dig down / and find what's further down. That, to me, is community research. (1999, 9; slashes indicate a pause in narration)

Cordova's description of the podium is both simple and deeply complex. It seems natural for community-based researchers and students to share their information at a podium, similar to the ways researchers share information at academic conferences. But unlike academic researchers, these community-based researchers, students, and "just plain folk" (as FANHS often calls them) wouldn't normally have a formal place to share their information. The fact that most of these researchers and students are Filipina/o Americans who are writing and speaking about Filipina/o American history complicates this desire for a place to share. Unlike other (though certainly not all) Asian Pacific American groups, multiple layers of colonization make the topic of history—for both Filipina/os and Filipina/o Americans—a continual process of excavation: we must listen to the story under every rock. To speak about Filipina/o American history, in the United States in particular, is to interrogate cultural amnesia surrounding U.S. imperialism in the Philippines and to deconstruct ideals of linear progress and individualism that permeate most popular narratives and images in U.S. history (including the history of rhetoric). Thus, oral history is not a simple solution for making new forms of rhetoric "visible." For if a "text" or rhetorical space is meaningful only within a larger system of beliefs, then we also need to rethink the interpretive paradigms we use when listening for/to, in this case, a Filipina/o American "feminist" rhetoric.

EXCAVATING SITES FOR FILIPINA/O FEMINIST RHETORIC

The role listening can play in research, as defined and enacted by researchers like Royster, Pough, Wu, Duncan, and Powell, for example, means rethinking interpretive frameworks, listening for patterns within an emerging tradition, and looking to other disciplines in a larger effort

to understand the context in which words can mean. For as Royster argues, “a community’s material conditions greatly define the range of what this group does with the written word and, to a significant degree, even how they do it” (2000, 5). For example, while Cordova’s vision of FANHS as a podium, as a place for recovering and sharing undocumented histories and voices, resonates with the social movements of historically underrepresented groups, it’s also important to note that themes of place, of home, are central to Asian American writing. As Rocío G. Davis argues, “the artistic appropriation of place ranks among the central concerns for Asian American writing” (2001, 47). This sense of place, what she calls a “simultaneous geography of space and imagination,” differs from the sense of place we might get from the discipline of cultural geography—a discipline that Nedra Reynolds (2004) has characterized as “a seeing discipline.” For Asian American writers, Davis elaborates, these imagined places are “not just [articulated] in geographic, economic, or planning terms, but also in terms of feeling and emotion” (2001, 48). One must listen for them, hear them, feel them, not just see them.

In Filipina/o and Filipina/o American writing, themes of place are often expressed spatially in terms of landscapes. As one Filipina writer, Marianne Villanueva, explains it: “the idea of landscape has always been a central one in my writing, perhaps because I no longer live in the country of my birth. What is this landscape that I write about? It is not only a place that exists in real time. It is something more personal and inward, a landscape of memory. . . . It is what . . . Andre Aciman calls ‘the geographical frame to a psychological mess’” (2003, 12). This spatial sense of place shows that, for Filipina/os and Filipina/o Americans, places are deep, sedimented spaces marked with history. Renato Rosaldo’s study of Ilongot headhunters (1980), for example, shows how Ilongots’ conceptions of history are embedded in stories tied deeply to places—history is marked by recursive movements through space rather than movements through linear time. For Cordova, the recursive movements through space that rewrite the historical landscape are imagined as community-based researchers moving across the beach, listening to the story under every rock, rather than grouping rocks solely by time or waves of immigration—categories readily available in mainstream and some academic discourses.

Cordova’s rhetorical imagining of the podium resonates with other writers of Filipina/o descent in their desire for a sense of place, location,

history, memory, a site for relocating and rewriting cultural and historical consciousness. In rewriting this landscape, community members can reposition themselves in relationship to American culture and in relationship to the multiple cultures and languages through which they move. By essentially authoring a podium, a public space where other Filipina/o American writers can write and speak about Filipina/o American history, Cordova creates both a place and a movement through space—one Filipina/o American rhetorical tradition of many. But while Cordova's text resonates with other forms of Asian American and Filipina/o American cultural expression, what is it about this spatial text that merits its characterization as a feminist space? While oral history methods might now allow Cordova to become visible as a woman rhetor, mainstream feminist standards may keep her only contingently visible as a *feminist* rhetorician. As Wu argues, our analysis of women's rhetorical contributions must "begin with an awareness of the contingency and cultural specificity of analytical categories," including what it means to be a "feminist" in a given context (2005, 175). To look at how "feminism" might take form, then, in a Filipina/American context requires an attention to "struggles with racism, sexism, imperialism, and homophobia and struggles for decolonization, consciousness, and liberation" (de Jesús 2005a, 5). For these reasons, as de Jesús notes, Filipina and Filipina American "feminists" may prefer the term *peminism*. She writes:

Peminism describes Filipina American consciousness, theory, and culture, with the p signifying specifically Pinay or Pilipina, terms used in referring to ourselves as American-born Filipinas. . . . Peminism thereby signifies the assertion of a specifically Filipina American subjectivity, one that radically repudiates white feminist hegemony as it incorporates the Filipino American oppositional politics inscribed by choosing the term Pilipino over Filipino. . . . peminism is an inextricable part of our decolonization as a people: far from being a slighting of Filipino American men or Filipino American culture in general, attention to Pinay voices and perspectives demonstrates our commitment to all Filipinos. (5; emphasis in the original)¹⁴

14. As Fred Cordova has highlighted in his common phrase "to 'P' or not to 'P,'" there is an ongoing debate (with historical roots) about whether to call ourselves *Filipinos* or *Pilipinos*. As de Jesús explains in an endnote, the term Pilipina/o is a "political and regional choice of self-naming grounded in the third world student movements of the 1960s" that helped establish the first Asian American studies programs in the United States. De Jesús explains that although the term is grounded in "specifically a California-based, working-class-identity politics," it more generally signifies an

Throughout de Jesús' collection, *Pinay Power: Peminist Critical Theory*, peminist scholars refute feminist frameworks that have neglected the complex experiences of Filipina American women. Perla Peredes Daly, for example, argues that "all forms of resistance by Filipinas against exploitation fall under the category of Filipina feminism" (2005, 233). Being Filipina and Filipina American women, by definition, says Linda M. Pierce, "means having a relationship to decolonization: whether active or passive, engaged, conflicted, opposed, or in denial, the relationship is automatic (and sometimes uninvited) by living in [the United States]" (2005, 33). So how Pinays use their relationship to decolonization may be one determining factor in how we might define a Pinay peminism. Within this framework, Cordova's metaphorical text is the making of a Pinay peminist rhetorical space that makes it possible for Filipina/o Americans to reclaim their histories and rework more dominant narratives of American and Asian American history and identity.

HEARING THE PEMINIST RHETORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF DOROTHY LAIGO CORDOVA

Given the history of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines and the forms of academic knowledge production that support those imperialist ideologies, Cordova's vision of research—how it should be conducted and disseminated, what purposes it should ultimately hold—demonstrates this Pinay's active resistance to colonization. Thus, listening to Cordova's community-based model of the podium within the larger context of U.S. imperialism, we might better understand why Dorothy Laigo Cordova positions community members (as researchers, as research subjects, as subjects of knowledge) at the center of the dialogue. The social distance that academics often see as necessary to produce "objective" academic knowledge has proved to be not only colonizing, but also taking knowledge from community members and producing this knowledge in forms often irrelevant to the needs of those community members. When I asked Dorothy what it meant—from her perspective, as founder and executive director of FANHS—to be a community-based

active resistance to the effects of multiple layers of colonization and the recuperation of "what is perceived to be the native *p* sound" over the colonizers' *f* sound (2005, 14). The *f* sound was introduced when King Philip II of Spain named the Philippines for himself, but the sound was further reinforced under U.S. colonization. This history of colonization and the importance of self-naming as a process of decolonization have also played out in debates over establishing and naming a national language in the Philippines.

research organization and how that might compare to a traditional academic model, she replied: “The academic one is very selfish. It’s for them. I’ve worked with academics. See, in social research, I was a community person. Everybody else was the academician. I’m the one who connected with the community. We used to have fights. I’d say, ‘You guys are sitting up in your ivory tower and you’re looking down at these people.’ One guy, the director, referred to the war brides as ‘entities.’ They weren’t human beings, they were entities that they were documenting” (1999, 8).

Viewing the dominant academic model through the lens of Pinay feminism, community activism and advocacy, Dorothy Cordova sees academic researchers as disconnected from the community. She sees academics as sitting in their “ivory tower,” looking down on Filipina/o Americans as “entities,” sources of historical evidence to be mined for academic research purposes and goals. We might see how dominant academic notions of objectivity further justify (and reproduce) this social distance between the academy and the community.¹⁵ When academics accept and perpetuate their social distance from Filipina/o American communities, they risk reproducing the colonizing ideologies found in early U.S. research on Filipina/os.¹⁶ Community members are seen as research objects to be categorized rather than as human beings who might be affected by the methods and outcomes of academic knowledge production. Only certain details of their lives may be relevant to an academic researcher, and when little other research exists on Filipina/

15. While I agree that an assumed binary between “the academy” and “the community” is problematic, especially in Asian American studies, I also want to recognize how the academy—as an institution—privileges certain kinds of knowledge making and provides certain kinds of incentives and disincentives for knowledge-making activities. For example, Malea Powell writes about how “the ‘rules’ of scholarly discourse” both require and perpetuate a deeply rooted sociological distance: “Scholars are set forth on the fringes of ‘the unknown’ in order to stake out and define a piece of ‘unoccupied’ scholarly territory that, through our skill at explicating and analyzing, will become our own scholarly homestead, our area of concentration. We are trained to identify our object of study in terms of its boundaries, its difference from other objects of study, and then to do everything within our power to bring that object into the realm of other ‘known’ objects” (1999, 3). Powell draws a piercing analogy between claiming a scholarly territory and claiming a colonial territory. Because distance from our objects of study is what often lends us our legitimacy and authority as academic experts, we risk imposing colonizing ideologies on the people we study. The ways these forces manifest themselves can be both disciplinary specific and institutionally specific.

16. See, for example, Renato Rosaldo’s discussion of early ethnographic studies of Ilongots in the Philippines (1980).

os and Filipina/o Americans, these details may come to (mis)represent “the” history of the community.

As Dorothy Cordova is a community researcher, her work has been partly motivated by distorted representations of the community perpetuated by academic experts, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. In her early years as a community researcher, she was often confronted with academic misconceptions about Filipina women: that they were absent from the United States until 1945. Knowing they were “totally wrong,” she began collecting histories on Filipina women and traced their presence in the United States to as early as 1860. In 1985, her work culminated in a series of traveling photo exhibits as part of a project entitled “Filipino Women in America: 1860–1985.” Her methods for collecting history, through oral history and journal writing, have received critical acclaim in Filipina/o and Asian American studies, most recently resulting in an article by Gail M. Nomura (2003) on how Cordova uses journal writing to recover women’s history.

In Cordova’s work, if we listen, we can hear how her notion of the researcher moving recursively through space, across the beach, connected to the landscape, listening to the story under every rock, informs how she approaches her research on Filipina and Filipina American women. If we listen, we can hear her rhetorical/spatial imaginings textualized in a book chapter she published in *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women*. Her essay incorporates multiple voices—through citations of oral histories—and deconstructs assumptions about Filipina American women who came to the United States before World War II. She writes: “Though the largest group of Filipino immigrants during this period [the early 1920s and 1930s] was comprised of young single men, a very small minority were married; and a few of the more fortunate ones brought other families with them to the new land. In addition to the few women who accompanied their spouses, other women arrived to seek educational opportunities, employment, and cultural and social freedom” (1989, 42).

In this excerpt, Cordova refutes assumptions constructed through historical narratives framed by time (and primarily by male academic historians): that all the women who came to the United States before World War II were wives, mothers, and daughters of Filipino male laborers; many were, in fact. But they were also, as she told me, “more than that.” In her essay, Cordova introduces us to women who demonstrated

other forms of agency, women who were students and professionals, women who fled poverty and unwanted marriages.

Cordova also sees women across waves of immigration as connected to one another. She emphasizes both diversity and unity among women within the community: “The women came as war brides, students, plantation workers, teachers, housekeepers, seamstresses, wives, kitchen helpers, labor camp cooks, entertainers, and nurses. Some were small business entrepreneurs who ran pool halls, restaurants, grocery stores, beauty parlors, and gambling concessions” (1989, 49).

Cordova’s approach to oral history is to document the way women (and men) have “led different lives at different times,” rather than focusing narrowly on how one research participant can contribute to a narrow research project on, for example, war brides. War brides, in Cordova’s model, have lives and histories that cannot be solely defined by their relationship to their husbands. In emphasizing the connections among women across immigration waves, Cordova also stresses the important role women have played in their communities: “As guardians of Filipino culture in America, the women played an important role. They sought to preserve language, traditions such as folk dance and music, and a sense of family and community” (1989, 49).

By connecting women from one immigration wave to women in other immigration waves, Cordova illustrates both the traces and the larger stream of Filipina American women. These “traces of a stream,” as Royster argues, show how these women’s “activities might connect . . . multidimensionally, to the practices of others both before and after them in the making of various traditions” (2000, 8).

This connection to women who came before her and women who have come after her can be seen throughout Cordova’s work. During my interviews with both Dorothy and Fred Cordova, they each acknowledged their strong mothers, and the role these women played in creating strong traditions of history, identity, and storytelling in their lives and their communities. Dorothy Cordova has taken up this community preservation and advocacy role herself countless times, the most relevant for my purposes here being her shaping of the rhetorical and public space known as FANHS. She also brought together researchers who helped form the research foundation of FANHS. Research projects that served as the foundation of FANHS in its founding—research on the Manilamen who settled in New Orleans as early as the eighteenth century, the Indios Luzones who landed in Morro Bay in the sixteenth

century, the oral histories of Filipina/os who (im)migrated to the United States in the early twentieth century—were research projects primarily conducted by women: Marina Espina, Eloisa Gomez Borah, and Dorothy Laigo Cordova (and her research staff made up primarily of women). Cordova has also served as a mentor for young Filipina American women. At the Eighth Biennial FANHS Conference, she awarded two young Pinays the “Young Pioneer Award” for their groundbreaking community-based efforts in promoting Filipina/o American history.

Cordova continually places herself and other women in the community within a larger legacy of community leadership among women (and men). She sees herself as part of a larger whole rather than as an exceptional individual. This deep belief, which questions dominant U.S. values of exceptionalism and individualism, may be rooted in the Filipina/o indigenous concepts of *loób* and *labás*—which add another level of complexity to Cordova’s landscape metaphor of the beach. Filipina decolonization scholar Leny Mendoza Strobel explains:

Filipino psychology and philosophy studies assert that Filipinos have a holistic worldview that is derived from the sense of the self as a whole. We perceive ourselves as holistic from an interior dimension operating under harmony (*loób*). We perceive ourselves as people who will, people who think, people who act as a whole. Many Filipino languages are nonlinear and vertical; there is not separation of subject and object and there are usually no gender distinctions. Filipinos use poetic speech, which is rooted in a spiritual consciousness that is affective and nondiscursive and where objective and subjective reality, the world and the soul, coexist separately. The core concept of *loób* has dual dimensions—*loób* (interiority) and *labás* (exteriority); these dimensions are deployed as accommodative tools under colonization. (2005, 27)

In the context of Strobel’s concepts of *loób* and *labás*, we can see how Cordova’s spatial notion of the podium positions any given Filipina/o American community member or researcher both as a speaker at the podium and as a rock on the beach (*loób*, *labás*). There is no separation between subject and object of knowledge. Any given rock is more than a one-dimensional source of historical evidence; each rock is a holistic being with multiple dimensions of interiority and exteriority. In conversations and during FANHS conference presentations, Cordova has often criticized the patriarchal and academic linear bias of Asian American and Filipina/o American studies—one example being how they have approached and portrayed Filipina war brides: not as “human beings,”

she says, but as “entities to be documented.” In her own work, she counters this approach by promoting research that further promotes Filipina/o cultural values for women and men as articulated by Strobel: by seeing Filipina/o American community members, and listening to them, as holistic beings. The podium assumes a model of subjectivity that is multidimensional. The life story under every rock, in other words, reveals (and contributes to) not just one academic agenda but deeper knowledge of the community and its histories.

The rhetorical space known as FANHS is a place where collaborative forms of rhetoric, including texts, emerge from community members. Ideally, these “texts” are then carried further into the community, added to, built upon. For Cordova, a single-authored text does not necessarily benefit the community in the same way that many collaborative living texts might. Cordova’s rhetorical imagining and theoretical understanding resonates with one articulated by Malea Powell; that is: “that human beings learn to produce texts through both theory and practice, *by listening and by doing*; that ‘successful’ texts are collaborative and meant for the community, not for the self; and that through continued textual production the community (and the knowledge of its members) survives and gives thanks for its survival” (2004, 44; emphasis mine).

Cordova’s vision of FANHS articulates the kinds of listening required for working against the histories of colonization that haunt Filipina/o American history. To hear Cordova, however, also required that I listen for ways to honor her vision, not just as a practice, but also as a form of *feminist theorizing* that may not be valued under mainstream feminist standards. This form of listening includes listening for what Malea Powell calls “ghost stories.” Powell elaborates: “For me, ghost stories are *both* the stories of material colonization and the webs and wisps of narrative that are woven around, under, beneath, behind, inside, *and* against the dominant narratives of ‘scholarly discourse.’ I think a lot about what ghost stories can teach us, how in telling them I might *both* honor the knowledge that isn’t honored in universities *and* do so in a way that interweaves these stories with more recognizable academic ‘theorizing’ as well” (2002a, 12; emphasis in the original).

Listening for ghost stories, then, includes working against a dominant feminist framework that fails to hear Cordova and risks perpetuating colonizing narratives of our rhetorical history: seeing her work as history but not as rhetorical history; seeing her work as rhetorical practice but not as rhetorical theory; seeing her work through modes of listening

but not as theorizing listening; seeing her work as decolonizing but not as feminist.

LISTENING FOR/AS THE MAKINGS OF ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN RHETORIC(S)

The work of Dorothy Laigo Cordova, at least as I have discussed it here, demonstrates the kinds of listening required to uncover larger legacies of Asian Pacific American women's rhetorical agency, theory, and history. While Cordova is the central author of the spatial metaphors, methods, and pedagogical theories that structure the rhetorical activities of FANHS, her rhetorical capacities might remain hidden because of a preference for sight and visible textual evidence and, as Wu (2005) suggests, by a preference for feminist frameworks that are not always culturally contingent. The making of a Filipina/o American peminist rhetoric, then, may be similar to LuMing Mao's description of the making of a Chinese American rhetoric; it "lies in reflective moments, and it finds its makings through emergent alignments and unsettled associations" (2005, 460). In many ways, the making of a Filipina/o American peminist rhetoric carries the legacy of unsettled and uneasy associations with feminist, Asian American, and Filipina/o American rhetorics. In other ways, it emerges in alliance with, for example, the makings of an Asian Pacific American rhetoric, for it requires that we listen for/to: unrecognized rhetorical capacities and imaginings, new sites for these capacities and imaginings, resonance with other rhetorics of/from color, other disciplines and knowledge-making communities that might illuminate the deeper contexts in which rhetoric(s) make meaning, and dominant assumptions that may be encouraging us to ignore (or reduce the significance of) these capacities and imaginings.

Listening is both a method for uncovering and for *making* an Asian Pacific American rhetoric, which must by necessity "explore other modes of retrieving and spatializing [rhetorical] history" (Lowe 1996, 101). Themes of space, history, and memory are central to the articulation of an Asian Pacific American rhetoric, just as they were for the very emergence of the naming of "Asian America" in the 1960s and 1970s. The rhetorical spaces where Asian Pacific American rhetorics are used/performed and contested, made and remade over time—like FANHS—are sedimented spaces that require deep excavation (125). This deep excavation for some Asian Pacific American rhetorics, like Filipina/o American rhetorics, will depend heavily on alternative forms of institutional or

public memory, and different methods for re/constructing that collective memory. Perhaps this is not unlike other rhetorics of/from color; however, the contexts and ways in which these collective memories are formed, shared, and carried—if also excavated—might provide important specificities. Listening for emergent rhetorical structures and imaginings, like Cordova's notion of the podium, helps us to map our understandings of how Asian Pacific Americans use rhetoric to craft collective and political identities that perform some larger use. Listening, as I have theorized and enacted it in this essay, becomes an important part of an Asian Pacific American rhetoric—an emergent, diverse, often transcultural and transnational tradition—which is always in the process of becoming.

Thank you for listening.

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