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## THE VERNACULAR/LOCAL, THE NATIONAL, AND THE GLOBAL IN FILIPINO STUDIES

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### Abstract

Originally a concept paper for the Institute of Filipino Studies project in Oakland, California, this essay tracks a paradigmatic shift in area studies on the Philippines and ethnic studies of Filipinos/Filipino Americans toward what the writer calls “Filipino Studies.” Exceeding the national culture area assumptions of Philippine Studies and eschewing the assimilationist tendencies of long-standing notions of Filipino ethnicity, Campomanes bases this claim and project for a paradigmatic turn upon three critical planks: the diasporic dispersal of Filipinos in the age of globalization and late-modernity and how it problematizes unitary or organic concepts of Philippine nation, culture, and identity; the reformulation of Filipino nationalism to account for this global distension of the diverse constituencies that now appeal to a Filipino “national” identity and culture; and an historical etymology of the term “Filipino” to illustrate its power, over the term “Philippine,” to mark important junctures in the history of Filipino subject- and cultural formation and how these junctures might be read as instantiations of the vernacularizing act in Filipino formation. The vernacular or vernacularization, as used in this essay, is a term of mediation by which Filipinoness is evolved, contested, and opened up to new possibilities of reformulation; it is also used to underline the centrality of Filipino agency to the making and remaking of the nation to reflect not only diaspora but also its heteroglot/heterogenous composition.

### Keywords

globality, national identity, Philippine diaspora, Philippine Studies

### About the Author

Oscar V. Campomanes, on extended furlough from full-time teaching, is editor of the internationally-refereed journal *American Studies Asia* (DLSU Press) and currently sits, on a three year term, as Member-Elect of the National Council of the American Studies Association-USA (July 2002-June 2005). His work on US imperialism, Filipino American literature, and Philippine-American cultural relations has appeared in various critical anthologies and academic journals in the Philippines and the United States.

“Filipino Studies” is a term used in this essay to distinguish an emergent field from “Philippine Studies” — the current rubric for study of the Philippines as a national and culture area in international (especially American) academic networks and institutions. The shift from *Philippine* to *Filipino* studies is more than semantic; it is, in fact, paradigmatic, as I hope to suggest here. It is a position and a project that is premised upon the emergence of Filipinos as distinct constituencies and as articulate voices in the recomposition of American or global polities and socioeconomic orders within the last three decades; that is,

as Filipinos, in large numbers, now exceed the borders of the Philippines, as well as those of the United States and other countries where they migrate, work, settle, or create new identities, communities, and cultures.

The converging consensus of various scholars is that the fundamental reliance of the “area studies” and “ethnic studies” frameworks on the nation state and national culture as their demarcating model, unit, and purview for scholarly inquiry had become increasingly problematic and severely inadequate (see Appadurai; Rafael “Writing Outside” and Lowe). This assessment owes its main impetus to a general and dramatic phenomenon that has shaped up between the late 1960s and the 1990s: the onset of “globalization,” and large-scale population and culture transfers across national frontiers as people moved in the millions from and to different parts of the world and continue to do so at unprecedented rates. What now pose great challenges to our accustomed forms of producing academic and practical knowledges are, first, a new global political economy developing around “a footloose and country-free capitalism,” and second, the diasporic formations of population or culture groups responding to, or sometimes evading, its pressures by crossing national boundaries and thus challenging the modern idea of the nation and who count as its constituents (see Heller).

At the very moments, however, that modern nations and states are being reconfigured by these general developments, old and recalcitrant forms of nationalism and state power are consequently reasserting themselves. Old borders are being reconstructed and inter-ethnic strife is now being reanimated in various regions (either in the form of fratricidal conflict or heightened social tensions) from the Balkans and Western Europe to the United States, and from Rwanda and the Indian subcontinent to the former Soviet republics. But the same situations that breed this spectrum of prevalent and global problems are also generating relatively more hopeful symptoms like *multiculturalism*, *binationality*, *polyethnicity*, and *cultural hybridity* in the redefinition of certain national polities such as those of the United States and of Europe or in the formation of more mobile communities such as those of diasporic Filipinos and of “overseas” Indians and Chinese. In short, where national formation is rendered problematic by transnational population movements and massive capital or cultural flows across the globe, the enduring nationalist or colonialist concept of “assimilation” no longer suffices to serve as an aspiration and to account for the new forms of global interdependence, exclusionism, national belonging, and cultural community now taking shape in a variety of contexts and expressions.



## GLOBALITY AND THE “FILIPINO”

The global reach of modern nationalism and “historical capitalism” is certainly far from recent and has a much longer history than my contemporizing brief above suggests (Wallerstein; Hobsbawm *The Age; Nations*). With the Columbian age of “Exploration and Discovery,” the European Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, certain forms of powerful globality were already in genesis and at work. The contemporaneous colonialisms and eventual consolidation of modern world-systems by a few powerful European nation-states stimulated formative transfers and traffic in peoples, cultures, knowledges, and commodities in international encounters. These forms of globality, glossed by European ideologies of universalism and humanism, were forcefully set in place as the age of empires peaked, and then redivided the world, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Hobsbawm *The Age*). They installed Western Europe and the United States at the center or terminus of world history and reconstellated “others” and their now peripheral habitats as the renewed objects of territorial conquest and of a great movement of requisite colonial bureaucracies, missionaries, mythologies, and dominant knowledges (Kiernan; Said). But the scale and scope of recent globality, no doubt still powerfully inflected by the previously interpenetrating and now antithetical planetary compasses of nationalism and capitalism and mediated by the enduring legacies of expansive colonialism, strike many observers as singular, radical, and more far-reaching or fraught with still unimagined futures than modern precedents.

In the face of recent global migration and immigration patterns, many scholars and writers have announced the onset of a “postnational” and “post-modern” epoch in a world effectively collapsed to the most local levels by phenomenal 20th-century breakthroughs in information, communication, and transportation technologies, and by the effects or demands of late capital’s new regimes of denationalized or “flexible” accumulation and investments (see Harvey). The dissolution of modern and competing socialist and communist systems in a post-Cold War era (as evidenced in the breakdown of the Soviet state and its Eastern European satellites), and the massive disenchantment since the 1970s with the failure of “Third World” or anti-colonial movements to overhaul perduring colonial structures and to create independent and socially egalitarian nations, have contributed to the predominant view of capitalism’s “triumph” and self-renewal and, thus, to a prevailing sense of an epochal break from the national and the modern. Other scholars like Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm (*Nations*), however, have called attention to equivalent renewals of nationalisms and late (neo) colonialisms at the very same moments that these organizing and residual systems are supposed to have loosened their grip on

humankind. The “new immigrations” may have blurred the national question in peaking after (and partly due to) post-World War II decolonization, even as they were driven by “economic and cultural inequalities, wholesale labor recruitments, and legal arrangements set up on the basis of former Empires” but they have also posed it more acutely than ever in the very Western metropolises now tremendously stressed by the need “to account for the new composition of their collective make-up” (Brennan).

It is difficult to dispute the truth-claims of these contending but actually complementing positions; precisely, it is upon the sense of possibility and the worlds of analysis and critique which they open up that one can predicate the idea of “Filipino Studies.” Indeed, the Philippines, both historical and contemporary, and the peoples and cultures associated with them, were themselves substantially formed by global colonial conquests, capitalist modernity, migrations, and anti-colonial nationalisms, and thus constitute a set of productive nodes through which the economies, histories, politics, and cultures of globality might be investigated and creatively localized.

What is now known as the Philippines was first colonized by Spain for nearly four centuries (1565-1895) after the Columbian push for the ‘Indies’ and global Christianization in the 16th century, and then by the United States as a modern and secularizing power for a decisive forty years (1902-1941, including an ambiguous status as a US neocolony from 1946 to the early 1990s). The very naming of Philippines and abstractive ideas of the “Filipino,” both locally and historically, were themselves the direct legacies of these Western imperial spreads across world territories. In what follows, I suggest something of the ambience as well as the semantic and paradigmatic flux of the term *Filipino* during its emergence in the late 19th-century; by doing so, I hope to show how it remains richly indicative of important historical moments or transculturations in the formation of the Philippines and its colonially, and now transnationally, displaced peoples and cultures.

After this Malay archipelago was “discovered” by the Portuguese navigator and explorer Ferdinand Magellan for the Spanish Crown in 1521, the subsequent Ruy Lopez de Villabos expedition in 1542 claimed and named two central islands as *Filipinas* for then Prince (later to be King) Felipe II of the Hapsburgs. As more expeditionary and proselytizing expansion absorbed the other islands in due course, the enlarged domain was called *Las Islas Filipinas*, and then simply resignified as *Filipinas* toward the end of the Spanish colonial period. Following the 1896-98 Philippine Revolution against Spain which they vanquished, American colonists anglicized and popularized the Hispanic name as *Philippine Islands, USA.*, and after determining the extraterritorial colonial status of the archipelago within the union, modernized it as the *Philippines*, in close approximation of



the shifting nominative acts of their Spanish predecessors (see Scott, and also Anderson).

But the modern term *Filipino* itself has had a far more “checkered career” than *Filipinas* or *Philippines* and for this reason, among others, sketches the more dynamic nominative and symbolic grid for Filipino Studies. Late 19th-century Philippine expatriate Enlightenment intellectuals (*ilustrados*) like Jose Rizal are credited with nationalizing the term to identify the “natives” of the *Filipinas Libre* that they envisioned beyond the Spanish period, and with the growth of anti-colonial nationalism, began to “project the term anachronistically into past centuries” and ancestors (Scott Guerrero 1977 [1963]). It bears remembering, however, that Spanish colonial modernity by the 19th century first limited the term (*Espanoles filipinos*) to Spaniards born in the colony or *insulares* to distinguish them from the Iberian colonists or *peninsulares* who were instead contrastively privileged as *Espanoles europeos* by such chroniclers as Sinibaldo de Mas.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, all island inhabitants were customarily named *indios* throughout the Spanish period after Columbus’ “well-known error” of assuming he had reached the Indies or the Orient in encountering the Caribbean islands and their peoples (Scott 6-7).

Although Spanish (and then American) colonial ethnography and bureaucratic knowledge tried to fix it as a nominative or classifying concept, *Filipino* was to subsidize as well as mark both a range of elastic senses and a congeries of major currents or contending forces in Philippine (and now global) histories. Like any term of identity with delimiting and encompassing powers, it was to prove constitutionally unstable and subject to contending appropriations. Its potency in naming and differentiating Philippine formations, peoples, and cultures is evidenced in shifting forms of usage by various colonialist or nationalist users and in the array of contending meanings it has absorbed in modern history and continues to authorize in the present.

Although the term was not conventionalized in its first delimited sense until the 19th century as already noted, the early Spanish *conquista* was to provide the initial occasions for destabilizing *Filipino* and those eventually generated as its multiple and frequently conflicting valences. Examining Spanish colonial-archival sources across several centuries, the historian William Henry Scott determined that *Filipinos* (and its other variant, *Philipinos*, which American writers and colonial ethnographers were to popularize from 1898 onward) was also actually used to distinguish Philippine *indios* from the *indios* of the Americas, as instanced in *crónicas* and ethnographies by Chirino in 1604, de San Antonio in 1738, Antolin in 1789, and lately, de Mas in 1843. More curiously, Scott notes that the term was not infrequently used by some of these writers to refer to Philippine natives in the context of their pre-Hispanic lifeways and cultures or in terms of some imagined time *before* their

active and actual rechristening as *indios* in Spanish nominative practice (6-7). This practical sense of a descriptive and creative precedence of *Filipino* over *indio* in the evolving colonial lexicon and imagination guarantees both an incipient Spanish modern retroactivity to this term (that parallels later ‘anachronistic’ uses by ‘Filipinos’ like Rizal and his fellow *ilustrados*) and some emergent meanings that subsidize the theoretical claims for “Filipino Studies.”

### (INDIO/ILUSTRADO) FILIPINO AND THE VERNACULAR

The virtue of *Filipino* for the reorientations we desire for new studies, of course, is that it designates human subjects and “native” agents who could and can partly elude the totalizing reach, the “essentializing claims and regulatory compulsions” (Rafael) of colonial- and nation-state bureaucracies and dominant knowledges. Short of anthropomorphizing or metaphorizing it, *Filipinas* or *Philippines* only tends, primarily but not exclusively, to designate a physical and bounded (although frequently contested) territory and thereby an inert object of colonial conquest, nationalist desire, and expropriative templates (hence its relative representability in colonial and capitalist cartographs, for example, and its ideality in nationalist symbolic idioms). By contrast, the sweep of the colonial or capitalist machine as a program of conquest, as a technology of domination, and as a structure of expropriation “could never fully contain the lived experiences—the shrugs and silences, the resistance and refraction of its [human] subjects” (Dirks 29).<sup>2</sup> Thus, in engraving a frontispiece portrait of Philip V for Pedro Murillo Velarde’s 1743 *Cursus Juris Canonici*, the native artist Francisco Suarez could identify himself as *Indio filipino* and refunction the names differently from already shifting colonial usage; and in a radical inaugural act in 1887 that mythically signalled the emergence of anti-colonial Philippine nationalism and capped emboldening 19th-century native appropriations of a colonial identity term, Rizal would address the Madrid community of exiles thus: “Creoles, mestizos and Malays, we simply call ourselves Filipinos” (Scott 6-7).<sup>3</sup>

These historical exempla of *agency*, among many others, imply a critical principle that ought to be encouraged in envisioned Filipino Studies projects: the examination and accounting of the constitution of modern subjects and subjectivities (local, colonial, nationalist, or transnational) over against the obsessive and conventional objectivity or objectivation that structures precedent knowledges and received or enduring analytic protocols. Following Vicente Rafael, one may call this historical phenomenon (and critical approach) “vernacularization” or “localization.” As Rafael points out, vernacularization

and localization consist in “the particular ways by which the boundaries that differentiate the inside from the outside of native societies” and that are stressed by colonial conquest, capitalist modernity, and foreign influences “are historically drawn, expanded, contracted, or obscured” in and beyond *subjective* acts (*Contracting* 15-16). Native locality and the vernacular — as evidenced in their partial and changeable subjectivities — thus also circumscribe the dominance and partiality of colonial knowledges and Western intellectual production, and the inequities or hierarchies historically characterizing or structuring all colonial and neo/postcolonial power relations.<sup>4</sup>

To “localize” or “vernacularize” and to attend to forms of ‘native agency’ or a tactically conceptual sense of the “inside” then is to study the history and cultures of native society and Filipino alterities beyond and against the grain of colonial categories. This is not so much to unilaterally privilege the native or the local/vernacular in new studies but to recognize its intrication with the “outside” and global, and even with the national. It is also to struggle toward a far more dialogic picture of local reception and refractions of colonial and external institutions or impositions (including imperial and anti-colonial nationalisms and their competing claims upon “indigene”) as well as their reciprocal transformations. It is thus, finally, to help foster reciprocity in knowledge production and circulation between the West and the Rest, whose trajectory, until recently, has been monologic in favor and in the service of Euro-American globalisms (see Said, and Chakrabarty).<sup>5</sup>

Something of the terminological flux of *Filipino* itself, even in its 19th-century incarnations, would indicate conflicting and active appropriations in which the vernacular or local figures as both constitutive and constitutionally in excess of even anti-colonial nationalism. This is to say that the vernacular or local is resignifiable to encompass heterogeneous historical, cultural, and political formations of the indigene or ‘inside’ in dialogue with colonial or global power/knowledge and nationalist aspirations. The late 19th-century formation and emergence of *ilustrados* in relation to the rise of modern Philippine nationalisms, to post-Enlightenment discourses, and to Spain as the colonial motherland exemplify, in ways that remain little-explored, this research problematic or set of topical questions. To track their vernacularization of colonial terms/ categories like *Filipino* and of available Spanish liberalism is to get a sense of the promise of looking at “Filipino vernaculars” in new studies.

The *ilustrado* propagandists, nationalists, and 1896/98 revolutionary leaders are now severely criticized and hastily dismissed (in many cases, in unremitting and wholesale fashion) by modern Philippine historians and a few active revisionist American Filipinologists for their purportedly self-serving politics and class aspirations. But “it was

among the achievements of Rizal and the revolutionaries of his generation to imagine, gradually, a new historical person: the Filipino" (Anderson 107), and thus to institute, no matter how problematically, an alternative vernacular matrix around which various elite and mass movements could converge to attempt both an overhaul of the colonial social order and a widespread articulation of Filipino *national* identity over against class, social, and ethnoracial differences.

In the first phase of the *ilustrado* "Propaganda Movement," sometimes inadequately labelled the "Reform Movement," *Filipinization* actually meant *Hispanization*, and therefore did not intend the separation of the Philippines from Spain but its full political and cultural assimilation into the Spanish colonial body politic and its institutions. But this agenda was no less radical than the eventual call for Revolution and independence for its success (unlikely, in any case, given the obduracy of quasi-medieval political structures even in the peninsula) would have already in effect destroyed the "inequality" which was the very principle of Spanish colonial power and privilege. The radicalism of the *ilustrado* Propagandists lay in their deft reinterpretations or *vernacularization* of post-Enlightenment narratives of secular culture, progress, and modern rationality and thus their express attempts to adapt this altered continental thought or analysis to the peculiar conditions and needs of the colony and its inhabitants (Majul 1957). Directed against the "dark and superstitious" reign of the friars and religious orders over all arenas of Philippine society and politics, this Philippine enlightenment rested on notions of nonage and cultural education that envisioned and desired the formation of Filipinos as ethical subject-citizens who exercised freedom and universally recognized political and civil rights and enjoyed reciprocal recognition as their Spanish "betters." Precisely, the most subversive of the *ilustrado* demands, no matter how quixotic and patriarchal sounding from the perspective of the present, was the improvement or secularization of the colonial educational system to make the ideals of cultural hispanization (Filipinization) and Enlightenment available to the rest of the population as the basis for the formation of this new and imagined order even within (and precisely in spite of) the Spanish imperial context (de la Rosa 128). Even as relentless and anxious a critic of the *ilustrados* as the nationalist writer Renato Constantino concedes that the *ilustrados*, "limited as they were by their class position," appropriated colonial terms to certain powerful effects and in ways that eventually spelt the collapse of the theocratic and frailocratic architecture of Spanish rule: they prepared the philosophical grounds for subsequent Revolution and made it imaginable (11).

Like *Filipino*, however, the notion of the vernacular or local resists singular and essentializing reference as quite a few Philippine studies scholars and critics (especially

those laboring in vernacular studies and local-regional historiography in the Philippines) effectively show in a contending but relatively untheorized plurality of achieved and still-developing investigations.<sup>6</sup> In relation to the *ilustrado Filipino* case, I have merely cited an instantiation of the constitution of an emergent sense of *Filipino* through a particular set of vernacularizing acts. It might be hard to think of the vernacular as describing the self-fashioning of a privileged and problematic group like the *clase ilustrada*. But if we remember that, in spite of their cosmopolitanism, they still remained marginalized by “Mother Spain” and the European tradition to which they anxiously related, their own attempts to reinterpret the “global and universal” through Philippine conditions clearly constituted a *vernacularization* that did nothing less than herald an epochal change in 19th-century Philippine culture and politics.

At the most basic level for Filipinos everywhere, the vernacular or local itself, as critical concept, subdivides and multiplies with the fragmentation of the historical and present-day Philippines into well over eighty ethnolinguistic groups and an infinite number of speech communities disorganized otherwise by various and competing social modalities, including those formed by recent global migration patterns. That these formations manifest varying degrees of encounter with and absorption into global/colonialist/nationalist discourses and power structures is a commonplace whose implications for the established Philippine Studies and Filipino American studies formations are manifold and yet remain severely circumscribed within these fields’ “national borders” and area-studies/ethnic studies assumptions. Conceivably, the interplays of displaced local formations with flexible metropolitan contexts, if properly recognized as objects of inquiry in dialectical fashion, could provide the most productive orientations yet for emergent Filipino Studies.

## NOTES

- 1 A 1921 *diccionario* by the Spanish writer W .E. Retana still exclusively defined *Filipino/Filipina* as an “*adjetivo, dicese del hijo o de la hija de peninsulares nacido o nacida en Filipinas, y en general de todo el alli nacido que trae origen español por ambas lineas.*” The church historian Fr. Rolando de la Rosa observes that, effectively, “the same word-coining process which gave the term *Americanos* to *creoles* born in Latin America bestowed the name *Filipinos* to *creoles* born in the Philippines” (de la Rosa 125, 137).
- 2 Rafael attempts in a provocative essay to redefine—or metaphorize—the historical and postcontemporary “Philippines” as both “a sovereign nation in the global imaginary” and “a series of relations anchored to crisis and contingency.” While the territoriality of the Philippines might have been “a function of administrative exigencies on the part of both colonial and national state bureaucracies it has never been a stable entity” and its “reality” had not been and could not be contained by such historically “artificial boundaries.” (“Writing Outside” xvi-xvii).
- 3 Or, as Graciano Lopez Jaena (1856-1896) would exclaim in an 1889 toast to three exile ‘native’ artists who garnered top prizes for their categories at the Universal Exposition of Paris, “This time everyone born in those distant regions of Malaysia can be proud and say openly: I am a Filipino (*civis philipinus sum*).... The old opprobious stigma of their incapacity is now erased” (230).
- 4 The energy for this principle comes from the early and post-1970s theoretical gains on agency for historically minoritized and marginalized “subaltern” subjects as produced in Philippine vernacular critique and nationalist historiography; US Women’s Studies, Ethnic American Studies and new social historiography; and, recently South Asian Subaltern Studies scholarship. Although now considerably refined, notions of “subaltern agency” and their conditions of possibility in criticism and scholarship, in reading and exegetical practices, and as ontology, remain the object of debate or dispute especially in “poststructuralist and postcolonialist literary criticism” and the now popular field of “Cultural Studies.”
- 5 As Rafael observes, “Christianization of the subject populace” and “Hispanization of native cultures” as conventional categories for the study of the Spanish colonial Philippines unproblematically privilege colonial perspectives and colonial-language sources and creates some practical effects that “unwittingly [rehearse] the Spanish logic behind conversion and conquest.” External forces are seen as the primary motors of native history, and perspectives and sources available in the vernacular are shortcircuited and denied “a measure of veracity” accorded to the colonizer’s (*Contracting* 4-7).



- 6 Stimulated by the resurgence of Philippine cultural and political nationalism against continuing US neocolonial sway over the Philippines and Southeast Asia and in the context of multiple 'Third World' decolonization and national liberation movements in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, this renaissance of Philippine studies scholarship especially as undertaken by Filipino scholars and critics in literary and 'cultural' studies finds an uneven codification in the multivolume *Encyclopedia of Philippine Culture* published by the Cultural Center of the Philippines (1994). Ileta ("The Unfinished Revolution") is the best 'localizing' account of the highly precipitant context of the 1950s and 60s. The inaugural and pivotal work of the nationalist historians Teodoro Agoncillo and Renato Constantino and the critical historiography of Reynaldo Ileta (*Pasyon and Revolution*) enabled and marked important junctures in this immensely productive period of 'local' Philippine studies scholarship and critique.

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## LIFEWORLD-SYSTEMS ANALYSIS OF PEOPLE POWER 2 AND 3

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### Abstract

This paper is an application of the Habermasian distinction between the traditional “lifeworld” context of the plebeian public sphere, on the one hand, and the modern social systems of the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, to the political culture of Philippine society. The tragedy of the Estrada presidency is attributed to his failure to come to terms with the modern differentiated public sphere of the middle classes as mediated by the forces of Civil Society and the modern economic system of the Makati business class. His unorganized and inarticulate plebeian constituencies are basically marginalized from these modern social systems. Their marginalization, along with the emotional rhetoric and unorganized mass action initiated by their leaders, led to their violent attempt to seize Malacanang Palace in May 1, 2001.

### Keywords

civil society, EDSA Revolutions, Habermas, public sphere

### About the Author

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While packing his belongings to leave Malacanang Palace at the height of People Power 2 in January 2001, former President Joseph Estrada reportedly (Villanueva) asked the following question to Mayor Jose “Lito” L. Atienza, Jr. [of Manila]: “Where have I failed the people?”

That one can be surprised by Mr. Estrada’s naiveté in even raising such a question is indicative of an alternative interpretation of Philippine politics that resides in the attitude of the one who is not impressed by the seriousness of Mr. Estrada’s innocent query. This paper will show that such an alternative interpretation stems from the duality of Philippine social reality: the traditional feudal forms of life represented by Mr. Estrada, on the one hand, and the modern social mindset held by the Philippine middle classes, on the other hand.

## LIFEWORLDS AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS

We shall take as our initial model for analysis Alfred Schutz's theory of the lifeworld as "the unquestioned but always questionable background within which inquiry starts and within which it can be carried out" (57). The lifeworld is constituted by the taken-for-granted presuppositions that stabilize and predict the behavioral expectations of people in their social interactions. Like the Freudian notion of the unconscious, it lies "behind the back" of social actors as they go about in their daily interactions (Habermas *The Theory* 125). They remain unthematized unless they run into conflict with other social systems.

Lifeworlds, however, can be so pervasive to the extent that social systems are molded according to them. In the case of Mr. Estrada's paternalistic lifeworld, he labeled himself as "Ama ng Masa," the father of the poor, the ever-reliable provider of the family. He personally attended to his wards by giving them generous tips and spent precious official time to be and to share meals with them. He acted as if he lived the life of ordinary jeepney drivers and stevedores; he imagined himself as a worker, hanging a towel around his neck and sporting a sweatband with the seal of the President of the Republic on his wrist. He acted as if the lives of his wards depended on him. His clients likewise reciprocated as if their future aspirations depended on Mr. Estrada, their leader.

Mr. Estrada's traditional conception of the family as model of society, furthermore, is structurally embedded in Philippine social systems. As a matter of state policy, the Philippine Constitution considers the family "as a basic, autonomous social institution" (Art. II, Sec. 12). Even now, Philippine President Gloria Arroyo, Mr. Estrada's nemesis, attempted to package herself as "Ina ng Bayan" (mother of the nation) and "Ate Glo" (Older sister Glo). Our religious images are also replete with images of the Holy Family. Pope John Paul II, the Holy Father, had originally scheduled visiting the Philippines on the occasion of his proclamation of the year 2003 as the "Year of the Family."

A family centered-culture, however, is not a monopoly of Filipinos alone. It prevails among traditional cultures where social institutions such as the state and the economy are not yet differentiated from their tribal origins. Our politics are ruled by dynasties, beginning from our current President, who is the daughter of a former President, all the way down to the numerous political families that rule our provinces and even the Senate. Our economic system is likewise run by a few corporations dominated by a handful of families. This nepotism led Alfred McCoy to describe our form of governance as "An Anarchy of Families."

As a consequence of the dominance of the family as a model of social life, institutional power in traditional societies is distributed vertically rather than horizontally.

Subservience to authority is considered a social virtue while age and family connections, rather than talent and skill, serve as norms for social mobility. This could work well if the one in charge is benevolent, fair, and is running a small municipality like Mr. Estrada's town of San Juan. As town Mayor, Mr. Estrada is well remembered by his constituency. This personalistic approach, however, could prove disastrous when extended to the government of a whole country.

## TRADITIONAL VS. MODERN LIFEWORLDS

Those who toppled Mr. Estrada from the office of the presidency are heirs of the great revolutionary tradition of the middle classes at the turn of the 20th century. It was then that the so-called *Ilustrados*, children of Filipino middle-class families, were emancipated from the anonymous masses by virtue of their social participation in the processes of European modernization that eventually reached the shores of colonial countries like the Philippines.

Mr. Estrada, in fact, considered himself as the contemporary version of Andres Bonifacio [the revolutionary hero of the masses] without realizing that by identifying himself with the great Plebeian, there could also be Emilio Aguinaldo [Aguinaldo being the *ilustrado* President of the First Philippine Republic] lurking around to take power from his inept and inefficient leadership. It should be noted, however, that historians have unearthed evidence showing that Mr. Bonifacio himself was not part of the masses by virtue of his facility in the Spanish language and his obvious *mestizo* and middle-class features.

In *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*, O.D. Corpuz reminds us that:

People who begin or support modern revolutions are often men who are moved not by the passions and urges aroused by actual and physical suffering or pain or injustice, but by consciences and emotions stirred by the knowledge of pain or injustice. All this is due to the role of ideas and their dissemination in modern society. (190)

Although the Philippine middle classes had a checkered history of collaboration with foreign domination, their revolutionary potentials can be discerned if we take a closer look at our recent history, especially the role they played in the so-called first quarter storm of student activism in 1970, EDSA 1 in 1986, and EDSA 2 in 2001. This stems from their

capacity to distinguish the demands of social justice and equity, on the one hand, from the personal acts of benevolence and charity directed towards the less fortunate sectors of society, on the other hand.

The middle classes during the turn of the century and our contemporary middle-class agents of social change are bound by a shared cultural capital that enabled them to elevate their discourse to a higher degree of abstraction required by democratic principles of due process and fair play. The dictum of modern social relationships, as formulated by Kant, could very well govern the political agenda of modern social institutions: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant 52).

If we take into account the social functions of the so-called "civil society" – that core of Non-Government Organizations and People's Organizations that have been working to alleviate the conditions of the poor since the days of Martial Law – we will realize that they are mostly composed of the middle classes. In an essay entitled "Development Work is Middle Class Oriented as much as it is Poverty Oriented," Angelita Gregorio-Medel reports that "[m]ost of the founders, leaders and members of SDOs (Social Development Organizations) are graduates either of the state university or of respected, private educational institutions, most of which are run by religious groups" (66). A more recent study by Cynthia B. Bautista argued for "the middle classes as a natural constituency for democracy." She claims that "because of their higher level of education, they are less dependent on systems of patronage and also show greater appreciation of the rule of law and ethical standards" (ABS-CBN 188).

In pitting the *Insulares* and *Peninsulares* [terms appropriated from colonial history] against the masses, Mr. Estrada's rhetoric failed to take cognizance of the middle classes which eventually turned the tide against his feudal interpretation of society. In tandem with the Makati Business Club [an association of the top corporate executives in the country], civil society organizations had an easy time plucking Mr. Estrada from office. The people's militant march to Mendiola [a main thoroughfare leading to the official home of the President] to pressure his resignation from the Presidency on January 20, 2001, was a classic pincer attack by civil society groups and the business sector against Mr. Estrada's faltering grip on political power.



## CIVIL SOCIETY AS A DETERMINING VARIABLE IN DOING SOCIAL ANALYSIS

The category of “civil society” emerged as a significant component of social analysis as a result of the uncoupling of modern social systems, such as the state and the economy, from the everyday life of ordinary citizens. Instead of deciding on issues that confront societies on the basis of reasons that can be communicated through the language of everyday life, modern social systems mediate social conflicts by means of bureaucratic power and financial considerations: “Money speaks” and “Might is right” govern modern decision-making processes. The lifeworld is “instrumentalized,” as it were, by the norms established by the state and the economy.

At this point, Habermas’ distinction between lifeworlds and social systems becomes a critical framework for social analysis. According to Habermas, social systems are uncoupled from the lifeworld as a consequence of modernity. Social systems, although initially arising from the lifeworld, eventually colonize the lifeworld by making use of its steering mechanisms, such as power and money, to dominate the norms of the latter. Modern social systems are then characterized by at least three differentiated sub-systems: the economy, politics, and cultural institutions, with the latter emerging as an alternative arena for struggle among civil society and civic-oriented groups (see *The Structural*).

Such a triadic differentiation, however, produces new arenas for political action. It puts a limit, for example, to the traditional notion of the state as the central embodiment of power in society. Modern economic and civil societies have taken autonomous positions from the state as alternative centers of power and influence. Mrs. Arroyo, for example, was able to justify her resignation from Mr. Estrada’s cabinet at the height of revelations about the latter’s corrupt practices, on the basis of a faltering economy. The struggle of progressive mass movements were likewise galvanized against Mr. Estrada because of their opposition against several socio-cultural issues such as his attempt to give former President Ferdinand Marcos a hero’s burial, his orchestrated advertising boycott against the nation’s largest circulating broadsheet, and his all-out war against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the southern island of Mindanao (ABS 193).

Mr. Estrada’s arbitrary decisions ran counter to the basic presuppositions of a modern conception of an autonomous civil society (Arato and Cohen 348). When Mr. Estrada abused his position of power, he did not consider its effects on other social actors as his equal and he failed to anticipate beforehand the consequences of his political actions to other sectors of the social system such as the retired members of the military. He was trapped, as it were, within a feudal mindset. He failed to abide by the basic principle that

governs modernized discourses as enunciated in the following formulation of Habermas:

For an act to be valid, the consequences and side effects that its *general* observance can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the particular interests of *each* person affected must be such that *all* affected can accept them freely. (*Moral Consciousness* 120)

He failed to realize that his political position, no matter how powerful, was only one among the many other potential centers of power and influence within the context of a highly differentiated modern society.

Unlike traditional feudal societies where the state reigns supreme over all other social systems, a modern differentiated society has alternative centers that can shake the state from its dogmatic slumber. The economy, for example, with its web of global networks, must abide by professional codes of conduct that are more or less standardized initially by the monetary system but eventually homogenized by a corporate culture. Such homogenization, however, runs across state boundaries by virtue of the multinational character of business corporations. Nation-states have actually changed their laws and policies in order to suit market forces that channel the flow of goods and services within a globalized context.

Although civil society can be fractured by its variety of sectors such as party list organizations, workers, urban poor, and the church, academic and youth sectors, EDSA 2 showed that they can get their act together on behalf of a perceived common good. Fr. John Carroll aptly defined civil society as “an organized citizenry to assert itself in pushing for land reform, health, environmental protection and the solutions to other problems which weigh heavily on the lives of the people” (4). After EDSA 2, we may now add “good governance” as one of the most important aspirations of an organized citizenry.

## EDSA TRES

The violence that resulted from the so-called “EDSA Tres” in Malacanang Palace on May 1, 2001, was produced precisely by its lack of organization. Unlike the rallies sponsored by civil society organizations where marshals abound to police their ranks, EDSA Tres was precipitated by a mob that spontaneously gathered at EDSA as a reaction to the incarceration of their leader Estrada. Their commitment was not a product of deliberate processes of discourse and educational programs but by an emotional identification with a

folk hero who promised to emancipate them from their wretched situation.

A lesson to be gained from their uprising is to remind the bourgeois public that the plebeians exist, that they should be taken into account in the national agenda. Mr. Estrada at least paid attention to them even if his gestures were mere cinematic moments that covered up for his hedonistic lifestyle in mansions that supposedly housed alluring mistresses.

What differentiates the plebeian public sphere from its bourgeois counterpart is the illiterate and symbolic character of the former as opposed to the discursive literary form of the latter (Habermas *The Structural* xviii). Lacking in skills of articulation and argumentation, their legitimate demands for justice and equality were easily muted by clenched fists and bloody confrontations. Habermas also points out that this phenomenon is also prevalent in anarchist social movements in the European continent. We need not be surprised if they eventually become preyed upon by militaristic elements in our society whose habitual articulation of social issues springs from the threat of violence. They compensate for their lack of communicative competence with their grim and determined façade to achieve their avowed goals. It will not be surprising to find out that the constituencies of political figures that emerged from the military establishment will come from the camp of the inarticulate.

This dramatic contrast between the bourgeois and plebeian public spheres must remind us that the modern conception of civil society as formulated in its Hegelian form, was constituted as part and parcel of the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, the bourgeois economic class whose primary interests lie in the economic sphere. It is not surprising that civil society forces easily collaborated with economic social actors such as the Makati Business Club in their common effort to topple the Estrada Presidency.

Mr. Estrada's constituency lies outside the modern differentiated public spheres of the economy, civil society, and the state. He drew his political strength from the marginalized, the poor, and the powerless. He offered them an imagined possibility of participating in the social mainstream by personalizing the image of the benevolent Godfather of the underprivileged sectors of society. The latter's frustration from actually having access to the opportunities of social participation, however, led to the violent uprising on that fateful May Day of 2001.

Such amok pathology is reminiscent of Benedict Kierkvliet's description of Aling Lita in his poignant introduction to *Everyday Politics in the Philippines*:

Screams broke the evening stillness in San Ricardo. Neighbors emerging from their houses to investigate found Lita Zamora ranting in the middle of the graveled highway that passes through the village. She was a dim figure, lit only by faint glows from the houses lining the road. In her long skirt and with her hair bouncing about her shoulders as she gesticulated and stomped up and down, sending up small clouds of dust, she appeared to be more like a spirit than a 34-year old mother of four. “I’ll steal if I must support my family,” she screeched. “Ok, kill me, I am not afraid. Who are they anyway? Just brazen and shameless, that’s who. SHAMELESS!” She yelled as she threw up her arms. A few seconds of silence. From the shadows of trees and houses, perhaps seventy pairs of eyes followed her movements. No one spoke. Yet a consensus prevailed, conveyed perhaps by the relaxed but attentive posture of most, to let her vent her emotions. (1)

The immediate cause of Ms. Zamora’s protestations was the confiscation of her gambling tools (perhaps bingo or more significant dramatically, *jueteng*, a numbers game of chance) by her barangay leader who was merely doing his job in conformity to the demands of the duly constituted laws of the land (2). But *jueteng*, like the underworld economy, will always belong to the plebeian public sphere unless the less privileged sectors of society are eventually emancipated from their current state of marginalization, poverty, and powerlessness. New forms of gambling and other vices will emerge as forms of livelihood since these are the only means of economic sustenance that are readily available to the majority of our people. Crimes against society may also be viewed, from the perspective of the traditional lifeworld, as a form of protest against the impersonal and oppressive conduct of social actors that represent modern social systems. Ms. Zamora could not personally identify her enemy. But she personified the social system as being “shameless” — faceless, and indifferent from the sufferings of ordinary people, like herself, in their everyday lives.

### WHERE DID MR. ESTRADA GO WRONG?

Mr. Estrada won the Presidency in 1998 as a consequence of his pro-poor rhetoric. To this date, his plebeian followers claim that he is still the President of the Republic. After all, he won the Presidential election with a very wide margin from his closest rival. Had it not been for the middle classes and the elite who did not vote for him in the first place, Mr. Estrada claims that he could have fulfilled his electoral promises to the poor and

marginalized.

We live, however, in a modernizing age where political decisions, no matter how well intentioned, must be justified in terms of their public accountability before an educated public. The middle classes, with whom Mrs. Zamora's barangay leader identifies, live within a modernized social system and are merely playing their roles within that system. Traditional lifeworlds are usually not in harmony with modernity.

The lessons of EDSA 2 and EDSA Tres tell us that the key to democracy no longer depends on the heroism of our individual leaders but on the initiative of everyone who has been privileged to participate in our nation's modern political public sphere. Unlike the first EDSA uprising where individual leaders can be identified as heroes, EDSA 2 is a product of a concerted effort to modernize our political system. EDSA Tres serves as a reminder that there are many others who are being left behind by our march towards modernity. A collective future for our nation will require us to assist the many among us who are marginalized as mere spectators of the social mainstream. The middle classes, in their critical role as mediators between the elite and the poorest of the poor, are in a privileged position to help chart the future of our country. Without the mediation of the middle classes through the institutions of civil society, the tension between our traditional lifeworld and our modernizing social systems are bound to intensify in our daily lives. Our history of creative cultural adaptations, however, offers us hope that we shall eventually create new models of social arrangements that will support and facilitate our collective survival and social emancipation as a nation.

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## POPULAR AS POLITICAL CULTURE: THE FATHERLAND, NATIONALIST FILMS, AND MODERNITY IN SOUTH KOREA, TAIWAN, AND THE PHILIPPINES

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### Abstract

The experience of modernity results from the emergent social relations formed in liberalized market economies, which also posit as sites of newer forms of pain and suffering as especially experienced by those in the margins. As national economies undergo liberalization to survive in globalization, so are their political structures reshaped to become conducive to transnational capital. The essay discusses the relationship of the state and civil society in a postcolonial national setting, looking into their operations and parameters in the South Korean film *A Single Spark*. The analysis of the effects of the state and civil society in issues of citizenship and urban being is discussed in the Taiwanese film *Super Citizen Ko*. The transformation of the national into the transnational state and civil society is discussed in the Philippine film *Eskapo*.

### Keywords

*A Single Spark*, Asian films, *Eskapo*, *Super Citizen Ko*

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Popular culture figures in the recent transformation of nations, one that shifts from authoritarian to civil society. The image of the fatherland resonates as this liminal figure that marks the shift—advocating both dictatorial and popular rule. In this essay, I am interested to find out the following: How is the fatherland mobilized as the impetus for nationalism in film, and consequently, modernity in society? How is popular culture used for the political transformation of societies? How is the popular retransformed into the political culture in selected Asian nations?

Distance along Philippine national highways is measured by monuments. Every kilometer stretch of the national highway is indicated by yard-high landmarks, the designs of which are a microcosm of national politics. Former First Lady Imelda Marcos had theirs made resembling coconuts, with a hollow in the center originally conceived to hold coconut oil with which to light them. During President Corazon Aquino's term, these markers were replaced with yellow tombstone-like monuments. President Fidel Ramos, who succeeded her, opted for pebble-wash tombstone markers. The periodic revision of these distance markers is part of the larger project of transforming and reinventing the nation.

Marcos' Filipino design was part of then President Ferdinand Marcos' agenda of coming up with symbols to meet cosmopolitan ideals of the "New Society" (*Bagong Lipunan*), the official utopia of the nation. Aquino used the color yellow from the song "Tie a Yellow Ribbon," an anthem for her assassinated husband, oppositional leader Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino. This song also became the anthem of the middle-class protest movement that eventually toppled the Marcos dictatorship in 1986. The pervasive use of yellow was also meant to add color to her lackluster presidential performance. Ramos prized global competitiveness, and the design he preferred reflected a rejuvenated and functional subsystem that in turn suggested an equally hardworking presidency.

Why the eagerness to reinvent landmarks and highways? The meagerness, in number and scope, of Philippine highways has not dampened the official energies to transform them from simple paths of transport to imagined superhighways in the mobile exchange of people, goods, and capital. And because of uneven development aggravated by the archipelagic national space, all roads lead to the various centers of national and regional trade and commerce. Highways now mark the envisioned smooth flow and exchange of produce to the centers. The landmarking of highways measures proximity to these centers. The centers become both the emergent and residual sites of global capital as it accumulates and penetrates the national space.

However, the highway landmarks not only point to the centrality of economic and political centers but also to the originary national historical moment of a single monument. The monument of Jose Rizal, the official national hero, in the nation's premier park is point 0 in the highway system. Every other place is measured from this point. Thus, a landmark bearing the number 25, for example, means that it is 25 kilometers away from Rizal's monument in Manila, the country's capital. Just as all highway landmarks bear the spatial relational distance to this privileged national monument, so also do the landmarks and highway system bear the weight of the relations to the significance of the monument.

The significance of Rizal in the construction of the Philippine nation is not to be

understated. Historians and government officials have handcrafted a mythology of Rizal as purveyor of enlightened nationalist ideals—from his nationalist novels up to his martyrdom in death—that eventually pushed elite nationalist leaders to declare Philippine independence in 1898, and having done this, to make the country Asia's first republic. As the nation became the emblem of modernity, Rizal's figure has become the national symbol of Philippine modernity. After all, Rizal's significance has been an American colonial handiwork. Chosen to represent the ideals of enlightened colonialism, Rizal prevailed over other heroes of the revolution against Spain, the colonizer before the United States came in. His significance materialized when he was officially designated as the national hero by colonial administrators, and his meaning and materiality were mythologically disseminated.

Most towns in the country have at least one Rizal monument and one major street named after the national hero. Rizal was invoked for emulation by the US to prepare the local citizenry for its own national independence. Nationalist historians, however, antedate the modelling of the nation by already imagining the Philippines as a republic even prior to the coming of the US. Through a dialectical opposition and relation with another hero, the unofficial national hero, Andres Bonifacio—mythologized as a plebeian revolutionary—Rizal's position was already concretized. For lack of available archival materials, Bonifacio is spoken about with a tight relation to Rizal who had premonitions of greatness. Rizal had a propensity to save personal possessions, reflect on all things, and build an artillery of sources of his intellectual prowess.

For even in the post colonial era, Rizal is the locus and impetus for the formation and transformation of the nation. The anniversary of Rizal's death two years prior to the independence began the 1998 centennial celebrations. Rizal is the condensed originary national signifier of the Philippine nation. To speak of the nation and its experience with modernity, one has to go where the highway landmarks lead—to Rizal.

Indeed, for the celebration of the centennial of Philippine independence, there were at least three big-budgeted films in production. *Rizal in Dapitan* (Tikoy Aguiluz 1997) full ref for this movie – director, main actors, production company provides a model for these nationalist historical films. The film is highly pedagogical and centers on the male figure as originator and purveyor of larger nationalist struggles and ideals. However, to insert an anticlimactic note, the paper is not focused on the genre of nationalist historical films. My interest is rather on the convergence of issues of nationalism and modernity that bring about first, the resurgent overt preoccupation of the dominant institutions in nation-formation, and second, the counter-hegemonic practices in the travails of modernity that

the majority of the nation has yet to figure out.

Such travails of modernity result from emergent social relations formed in liberalized market economy, in which new forms of pain and suffering are generated for and experienced by those historically poised in the margins. I present a cognitive map of the effects brought about by historical processes that attempt to deal with past national traumas amidst present and sustained economic national flight. How does it feel to be a modern postcolonial citizen who is both traumatized by the past and gentrified by the present cultural and economic geography? In the construction of the nation's past, present, and future, the colonial and imperial historical moments are at play, together with the nation's own invented nationalism. How has the effect that allowed a tasting of the postmodern future provided a dialogue with recent economic woes and beings in some nations in the Asia Pacific?

My hypothesis is that the experience of modernity is interconnected with the experience of the nation. As the nation is never organically whole, so the experience with modernity is never complete. The nation that is imagined to experience growth and stability is at once interrogated by the uneven penetration of the experience with modernity. The further division and feminization of global labor are not only symptomatic of the modern penetration; the division and feminization are crucial in perpetuating the modern as the ideal for national economic, political and cultural transformations.

I use nationalist films to trace the trajectory of nation-formation in the light of more recent economic national developments that have transformed (at least, up to now) Asia Pacific nations with newly-acquired wealth. The nationalist films I choose to examine come at a time when the various nations in the Asia Pacific are experiencing sustained economic growth, and can now, therefore, engage with certain past national traumas using the grid of western liberal democracy and the nation's own invented nationalism. The historical distance provides both a safeguard and a means for subversive penetration into the present cultural geography that, with increasing gentrification, erases the trace of the possibilities of political social transformation.

By nationalist films, I am referring to those films that provide a historical reenactment of an originary moment, usually posed as a national trauma, in the construction of the nation's present being. There is a consensus in the significance of the particular national past as the "nation thing" (the essence and essential of nation)—as a hinge that both holds against and provides the impetus to greater national mobility. Like the authority figure in psychical socialization, the fatherland figure in nationalist films provides the libidinal drive that seeks to dominate the narrative of the postcolonial

nation—instantaneously mobilizing and immobilizing the national past in order for the nation to move onwards. For if the language for articulating the nation's past is through the present experience with liberal democracy, then the nation's own invented nationalism becomes the parole to articulate these historical processes from which a concept of the modern postcolonial nation emerges.

The films analyzed have common characteristics. They were made by directors who lived through their nation's traumatic experience as protesting citizens or in one case, as an offspring of the national administration's bureaucrat. The films add on to these directors' coming into canonical status in their nation's cinemas and industries. The films also were made at a timely moment when historical interrogation of the nation's traumatic past was possible. Public interest in knowing the truth about the past generated box-office and critical success for the films. Thus, the films become part of a retrospection of the nation's past trauma, allowing it to move on a guiltless trip through its gentrified present.

I begin the essay with a discussion of state and civil society in a postcolonial nation, looking into their workings and limits in the South Korean film *A Single Spark* (Park Kwang-su 1996). I proceed with an elaboration of the effects of the state and civil society in issues of citizenship, especially those living in the city, in the Taiwanese film *Super Citizen Ko* (Wan Jen 1995). I then look into the transformation of the national into a transnational state and civil society in the Philippine film *Eskapo* (Chito Roño 1995). While providing a relational perspective into the experience of modernity in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines, the essay also intends to present, in a general sense, a continuing narrative of modernity's transformation of the postcolonial nation. These films also need full referencing—as above.

## STATE, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND FATALITY IN A SINGLE SPARK

The 1980s were marked by the historical shift of political power from dictatorial rule to popular presidencies in the Asia-Pacific. Oppositional leaders have taken the reins of government. At the same time, the move to democratize the nation also comes at a time when the nation has already been economically liberalized and is reaping the rewards of economic liberalization; when it has already been well placed in the global economic network, whether as an enclave of global capital or as a terrain for the global division of labor; when there is no position to speak from outside the global economy. But the economic integration is not the only process by which capital survives and flourishes in developing nations.

For if capital is allowed to penetrate the national economy, the state—the coercive institution of the nation—has to rely more and more on consensus building, or as David McLellan says, to “represent [the state’s] own interests as those of society as a whole” (186). McLellan writes of Antonio Gramsci’s idea, “The concept of hegemony was thus the answer to the puzzle of capitalism’s ability to survive in the bourgeois democracies of the West” (186). The state is able to reinvent itself through civil society, which for Gramsci is the domain of the private that allows for a discussion of the everyday practices in which the nation-state is to be perceived. It now seems remote to think of newly-found wealth only among the cronies and compradors of the state. Economic liberalization has democratized the acquisition of wealth, trickling it down to individuals and sectors that generate and consolidate the middle class.

It has made real estate prices soar so high that landed farmers can now own capital. Political liberalization also comes into play in the transformation of the economy. States are only too eager to transform past atrocities into present workable “win-win” situations in the name of national peace and harmony. Commissions of truth and good government—fact-finding committees to look into the excesses of past dictatorships especially in cases of human rights violations and corruption—are formed by national governments wanting to deal with their traumatic past, an undoing of the states doing. The objective is not to try personalities but to present a collective truth about the past, both as national closure and birthing of eras.

But the project is never complete, as it is at once interrogated by the disjuncture of national crises of ending and beginning. As Gramsci stated, “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (276).<sup>1</sup> Yet the crisis has been naturalized in everyday life. Through civil society, the crisis is normalized as the nation’s state of being.

Hegemony is also manifested in the same morbidity that characterizes its working-project nature, never complete and always in the process of formation. The workings and limits of civil society are thus ambivalent—at once representing a break in the purely coercive state but also limited by the language through which such break can be articulated, and that is the discourse of the state’s own civil society. Homi Bhabha calls this doubling as “the nervous state,” allowing for a self-reflexive instance of articulating, for our purpose, both the temporal breakdown of the state and resurgence of civil society functions.

This doubling allows us to speak of *A Single Spark*, a film biography of the political awakening and self-immolation of labor union martyr Chon Tae-il. Park’s directorial focus



is to present the fetish of the state for surveillance and discipline, and how activists are able to circumvent the state operations. By the continuing existence of a network of activists and protest actions within the very network the state interrogates these people and actions, state power is never complete. However, the civil society that allows for the existence of emergent protest activism is only articulated through the language of state crisis.

So pervasive are state surveillance and discipline in sweatshop factories, as the film depicts, that self-immolation becomes an instant reprieve from civil society's indifference to the workers' plight. Chon's self-immolation becomes the "morbid symptom" in the crisis, a way to temporally break state hegemony in civil society. In doubling a crisis within a crisis, Chon provides a punctuation to the workings of the state. This punctuation, however, also points to its very limit, becoming the single last action of political dissent. Park reworks this life in the larger course of directing the formation of the recent civil society in South Korea that allowed, for example, for the election of a former political dissident, Kim Dae Jung, into the presidential office in 1998.

The film begins with documentary footage borrowed from the Korean People's Photographers Association on a more recent mass protest involving youths and students. This event is the result of the trajectory of Chon's awakening and martyrdom. The film is poised in the interregnum of a shift from past political oppression to present-day politics of civil society that allows for such films to be made and to take a critical stand. The state somehow manages to distance itself from its own history. Thus, while Chon's self-immolation presents the doubling in the filmic text, the film itself represents the doubling of the state, forecasting the interrogation of its nature and the limit of such an interrogation.

While allowing room for discussion of new dimensions of recent civil society, the film is readily available to sanction state hegemony. It is precisely in the very dissidence allowed within the language of the state that the film is able to articulate its protest. Such protest is twice removed—historically, the film deals with the nation's official past, and depicts state coercion; discursively, the film is made using the "alien" language of the state in which the past is articulated and that, in turn, has displaced the life of Chon. Moreover, the film becomes part of the continuum of recent civil society that allows for such a film to be produced and released in the present time.

While interrogating the state, the trajectory in which the film has poised Chon's story is made within the grid that has resulted in the recent civil society. The availability of his story only in the present is precisely allowed by the marginal existence of a civil society in the 1970s. His story opened up this civil society to what it is today. This recent civil society allows for the retelling of Chon's story because it fits within its own narrative of

developmental democracy.

Any move to articulate a counterhegemonic language, at the very least, invariably implicates the hegemonic language it seeks to subvert. As Michael Taussig states, “No writing is above the reality it realizes, and this is especially the case with the State, arbiter of reason in an unreasonable world” (65). Any critique of the state happens within a paradox: it has an ability to articulate an inside/outside position whereby to speak of one is to implicate the other; thereby, the workings of the state is exposed, but only to the extent that both the state and critique have come to their limits. In the succeeding section, I elaborate on this failure in terms of Chon’s self-immolation, and in terms of the labor conditions in which such action took place.

In the film, prior to Chon’s own self-immolation, he first lights up a black book containing the labor code. Chon’s symbolical gesture marks the failure of the state to implement its own laws on the safety and just compensation of its workers. His own immolation, depicted in slow motion, repetitive shots of black-and-white, and colored intercuts of fire engulfing his body, marks the double failure of the state. The state did not provide for adequate protection of its youth laborer-citizen; neither did the state oppress Chon enough for him to accept the conditions of the sweatshop.

However, as Chungmoo Choi has pointed out with the series of self-immolations in South Korea in 1991, “The symbolic power of the powerless thus cashes in on the vested social faith to seduce the masses into their romantic venture ... the line of criticism is directed at the romantic nature of the *minjung* movement and its failure to embrace a larger populace, a charge of exclusionism” (99).<sup>2</sup> Such sublime death and its cinematic depiction in *A Single Spark* allow for very little room to examine the politics in which the sublimity is to be contextualized as a political action. The analysis is similar to Gayatri Spivak’s own interrogation of the *sati*, or wife burning, after the death of the husband. The sublime death, though it defies some textual codification, does not do justice to the woman subject.

Benedict Anderson, however, puts the idea of fatality in another light, as vital to the project of imagining the nation. He states that “The idea of the ultimate sacrifice comes only with an idea of purity, through fatality” (144). This purity comes with the disinterestedness of individuals for the nation, a kind of pure primordial love that allows the nation to extol human sacrifice among its citizens. Anderson also places the “interplay between fatality, technology and capitalism” as the “essential thing” in the formation of the nation (42). Though Anderson uses the linguistic notion in relation to the territorialization of the nation, such a notion can also be used to establish the connection between self-immolation in the nationalist movement as a way of reconceiving a new form of imagined community.

Chon's self-immolation marks the fatality of the language of the state. When fire started to engulf his body, cameras begin flashing, capturing this moment of pure self-sacrifice. The body that commanded the attention of workers in the sweatshop district will attract a larger number of workers in tomorrow's newspapers. This identification with the burned body by unknown, nameless, and faceless workers throughout South Korea provides the network to imagine a contrary notion of nation, other than that espoused officially.

Such a fatality as technologized originally by the burning body and then reproduced by the media only seeks to mark the limits of media dissemination. Chon's earlier initiative to bring his case to the media yielded an initial positive feedback from the state's labor apparatus. It then became a matter of procedure within this state apparatus that such positive response was undertaken only to prolong the energies as well as anxieties over the poor labor conditions. Chon's death provides a knee-jerk response from the state though he is now marked for secular nationalist martyrdom. In a flashforward scene in the film, Chon's biography becomes standard reading for the new generation of workers in the area. The capital operations that instigated Chon's search for reprieve remain ever present.

Ironically, it is through the gentrification of the national economy that labor standards are upgraded by the state and businesses. After all, Nike's working conditions and pay in Indonesia, for example, will not do for South Koreans performing the same workload. It is a matter of keen transnational business sense that South Korean enterprises and state give to workers their due "South Korean" wages in order for greater products to be purchased from the same wages paid to them. With the greater role emphasized by capital in the interplay of the imagination of the nation, Chon's fatality and the technology in which this is disseminated gravely restricts the potential for subversion and liberation. Such a fatality simply punctuates the hegemonic language, unable to move the terms in which grammar and syntax of nation-formation, for example, are to be used for counter-hegemonic purposes.

The state still hovers as the large entity that prefigures the inscription of the nation and modernity in nationalist films. In the process of seeking redress for ill practices and conditions of the sweatshop where Chon works, labor officials connect these conditions with the patriotic mission of Korean workers. The state rationalizes the poor conditions and unjust practices in the sweatshop factory as part of the trajectory of the national project for economic development. With sustained growth of the Asian economies until the crisis of 1997, the standards operative in the 1970s working conditions are either minimized or transported to other less-developed transnational sites.

This does not mean that state and capitalist oppressions are eradicated; it means that these are displaced elsewhere or newer oppressive relations are established with recent movement of capital. By focusing on the life of the martyr Chon and connecting such sacrifice to recent protest actions by youth and students, *A Single Spark* missed out on other pertinent connections especially as these relate to newer social relations with the more recent movement of capital and the restructuring of labor.

Recent International Monetary Bank prescription for bail-out money to be flushed into South Korea's saddled economy required the liberalization of hiring and firing of workers. The production of critical texts should include the production of a range of contexts in which such texts can be read. Rather than maintain allegiance to the official trajectory of the recent civil society, nationalist films should equally elaborate on further broadening the connections between the past national trauma with present conditions of gentrification and newer exploitative relations with capital especially as it concerns a collaborative project of consciousness-raising.

The paradox of critique of the state speaks of a politics that engages in Bhabha's notion of doubling. What I want to briefly explore further is the direction in which emergent critiques of the state can be channeled, directions that provide for a quite self-reflexive, dialectical and perspectival approaches and, in turn raise, at the very least, ethical issues of empowerment. Because of the interchangeability of positions, Bhabha's doubling easily sidetracks the ethical issue of "for whom?" What is negated in the process is the very limits of exposing the state, marginalizing the issue of literal violence that comes with the epistemic violence inflicted on already traditionally-marginalized individuals and communities. How then to empower the margins?

The margins and social movements have survived even with or without the theoretical sophistication of the academe. Though the academe has enriched the various groups' experience, it has done so largely in terms of enriching the articulation of the experience. Choi states that "Resistance or struggle has real-life consequences beyond intellectual imagination. How we read what is not written needs to involve these practical considerations" (99). What then do these practical considerations entail? *A Single Spark's* unique contribution to a model of politicized commercial filmmaking is the creation of a counter public sphere that engages the participation of sympathetic various individuals to the production of the film. Kyung Hyun Kim has pointed out that "Through grassroots fundraising, more than 7,000 individuals helped to finance this project, raising about half the cost of film production" (17). Such participation calls into mind the political nature of filmmaking in "Third cinema," a collaborative nature of making-do with the given

resources to interrogate not only the issues of cinema but also the contextual issues that produce such a cinema.

This counter public sphere moves forward earlier attempts of directors from the Third World to produce political films. What comes to my mind is Filipino director Lino Brocka whose political films provide a counter-register of images and issues to those disseminated by the Marcoses and Aquino. Though he did not engage in direct grassroots organizing in filmmaking, his films were directly poised against official hegemony. What can be learned from Brocka is a more timely response, quite historically-poised films that undermine the very contexts in which the films are produced, including entanglement with censorship, judiciary, and the military.

From Park's film, what can be productively added is a kind of grassroots organizing that broadens the participation to political filmmaking. The more than 7,000 names acknowledged in the final titles provide both material and symbolic meaning to *A Single Spark*. Such filmic tactics from Brocka and Park produce a model for engaging in a political kind of filmmaking at a time when the overtly political is being interrogated to give way to the micropolitics of cultural identities and everyday life.

## CITIZENSHIP AND THE CITY IN SUPER CITIZEN KO

*Super Citizen Ko* tells the story of an aging Ko's investigation of a colleague's fate. Ko has been forced to tell on the colleague to the police to escape further torture during the Kuomintang's "White Terror" campaign in the 1950s. The film shows the shifts in Ko's *national* identity—from being a soldier of the imperial army when Taiwan was colonized by Japan, to an intellectual imprisoned for allegations of working for Taiwanese independence during Chang Kai Shek's era, to an aging citizen in present Taiwan. Ko's quest is undertaken at a time when Taiwan is undergoing a national election, choosing between pro-unification and pro-independence political parties, where issues are openly raised, issues which could have caused someone's life fifty years ago. Ko is lost in the politics, time and space of modern Taiwan.

Ko's search for a colleague's fate is an analog of his own search for national identity; it is a search that marks the pain and limits of national identity formation. He is lost in the newness of politics, time and space of Taiwan, after having been imprisoned for sixteen years and choosing to isolate himself for eighteen more. When he can no longer bear the haunting of an imagined memory of his friend's execution, Ko begins his search. This search is predicated not to succeed other than to resolve symbolically individual national

identity, as when Ko lights up candles in the isolated graves of victims of Taiwan's forgotten period in the film's ending.

For how can the search anchored on Taiwan's forgotten history be made to materialize in the 1990s, when such national memory has already been invoked in the everyday politics? How can a repressed memory be dealt with when it has now been surfaced? How can one begin to talk about a traumatic past in an age when the past has been symbolically and materially obliterated, when the signifiers of the past trauma have already been transformed into nodes of the post-Fordist service sector? In the film, the building of the Bureau of Public Security that supervised surveillance, torture, and summary execution in the 1950s now houses the Lion Forest Department Store; the military Tribunal office is now a five-star hotel; the execution site is now called Youth Park. Like Ko's citizenship, the city is a signifier without a signified.

Citizenship is posed as an arbitrary construction of hegemony and individual agency. Because of various historical shifts in Taiwan, institutions are continuously being introduced and new social practices continuously being redefined and enforced. Modern Taiwanese politics have been set and dominated by mainlanders. Individuals are not as quick to reinvent themselves. How individuals invoke their relationship to the shifting identities of the state is foregrounded in the issue of citizenship.

Individuals who immediately grapple with their relational identities—becoming full-fledged citizens like Ko—are the first to be troubled by succeeding impositions of new orders and identity requirements. When he is determined to make his own claim to identity, to become a Taiwanese citizen, it is already too late because the rigidity of past identity claims has now become liberal electoral issues. The nation now votes on the kind of national identity it wants to perform every four years.

Civil society has now taken root in Taiwan after decades of authoritarian rule that has overseen the national economic growth. Unlike the recent past in *A Single Spark* that fits in the continuum of the maturity of civil society, recent civil society in *Super Citizen Ko* comes as a blast of the present, devoid of any historical blocks. The existence of civil society comes to Ko as an alienation, forging distance to any material subject formation. All his accumulated signifieds cease to have any signification in the modern period. He is a floating absent signifier.

He becomes the latest fashion victim, the retrenched worker who has failed to reskill him or herself with the latest of machine or service sector technology, the latest political fallguy. When an open civil society somehow manages to surface in the state, Ko's



accumulated identities become unaccustomed to present-day dispensation of power. Since Ko's generation represents pre-boom Taiwan, this open civil society becomes a by-product of sustained economic growth. This realization further isolates Ko and the history he represents—where have all his generation's pain and suffering led to?

*Super Citizen Ko* becomes part of the spectacle involved in the resolution of the February 28, 1947 incident that marked native Taiwanese resentment of Kuomintang rule. It also unleashed a backlash on the Taiwanese as an estimated 8,000 people were killed in the rectification campaign. As Ping-hui Liao states, "While the 8,000 certainly included not only members of the Taiwanese elite, large numbers of local intellectuals were killed or imprisoned, which put an end to civil society that was beginning to take shape" (287). What was at stake then—civil society—becomes more and more a natural aspect of the postwar and now, the postindustrial state. The recent civil society is not god-sent; it is also enplaced in national and transnational survival.

How can the modern state mobilize its people and the global community for continued economic growth, at a time when its nationality is continuously being besieged by mainland China's desire for a return of the prodigal son, a-la Hong Kong? So highly maintained is the overseeing of the national economy that Taiwan is one of the few countries in the Asia Pacific that has escaped the crisis affecting the region. Its sustained economic boom becomes its primary political weapon to thwart any move to reunify with China. Thus, the originary island and Japanese coloniality are invoked in national identity formation to expunge a purely mainland China identity.

The unraveling of the national trauma of the February 28, 1947 incident becomes a national spectacle, with a zealous production of incident information artefacts: The Historical Research Commission of Taiwan Province (1991) then started work on an official history of the Incident, which was published in November 1991. Even earlier, however, especially after 1986, many articles and books about the uprising had begun to appear. Drawing on oral history and historiography similar to the subaltern studies in India, writers used interviews to compile biographies of the victims and to describe and analyze the Incident within its historical context. And a major event in this process was the summer 1989 production of *The City of Sadness*, a film directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien here's another movie that needs full ref. that won an award at the Venice Film Festival because of its political subject matter (see Sassen 206).

*Super Citizen Ko* also produces an effect which, as Liao mentions, is part of "a tendency [...] to see "martyrs" as precursors of the Taiwan Independent Movement or as victims of political persecution" (287). This martyrdom is interestingly poised in the

*depiction* of Ko's alienation from the urban space. In one scene, Ko blankly stares at people marching for various political parties in an upcoming national election. The ground level alienation is further intensified by an overview detachment to the new transformations of the city.

In the scene where Ko goes to a Taipei tower, the breathtaking view of modern city buildings and open greenery is given a warped perspective by his dystopic voice-over narration of how the city, as analog of national politics, has been gentrified. Ko's own trauma of the past—intercut of black-and-white footage of his colleague's execution—further isolates the modern city. What the city does to Ko is to present the new signifying field in which transformations of identity are to be filtered. In the process, Ko realizes his loss; he becomes a signifier unable to adapt to newer hegemonic signifying practices.

Ko is not citified, as more recent national governments would have encouraged it. His body does not bear the marks of a highly cosmopolitan and modernized city. His dated fashion, detachment from his daughter's modern family life, alienation from cityscapes, and displacement in national politics and civil society become symptoms of a loss of subjectivity. He is melancholic not from longing for an originary national identity, but from a sense of family coherence as he imagines the family of his early years in black-and-white footage. The break up of the family was predicted by the state, upon his incarceration for a crime against this state.

Taken by surprise by his decision to divorce her, his wife decides to end her life. His daughter grows up alone, persecuted by teachers for having a traitor of a father. With recent amenities of technologizing family coherence in modern Taiwan, the family readily becomes the symptom of national growth and unity. Having lost his family—Ko's primordial source of identity—to the state, he is unable to fully deal with newer shifts in state and civil society.

The city becomes emblematic of the tensions arising from loss and the inability to deal with this loss. The city is indifferent to multiple identities, even as its civil society advocates a plurality of tolerable politics. Claims towards identity in the highly modernized city become extremely limited. From Ko's own quest for claims of national identity, the problem, as posed by the city, is that the national has given way to the transnational claims of Taiwanese and Taiwanese-ness. The city becomes unsympathetic to national claims, as its present politics only seeks to reaffirm the intransitivity of national claims. Taiwanese identity is to be sorted transnationally, as Ko's ocular view of the city suggests. For the city becomes the quicksand of history—new structures that arise become devoid of historicity and historical block claims. As Saskia Sassen stated, "The

denationalizing of urban space and the formation of new claims centered in transnational actors and involving contestation, raise the question—whose city is it?” (206) For urban planners, the city is a model of economic efficiency and modern living. For those who “walk the city” to use Michel de Certeau’s contrary image, the city is experienced in its rawness and how people make do with urban reality (91-110). But Ko’s own experience with the city negates both models for the city has moved beyond being purveyor of everyday existence. Even the perception of the everyday is mediated through popular ideal images, from ghetto basketball to liberal democracy. Ko looks at the city as highly urbanized and liberalized. It is precisely these characteristics of the city that alienate Ko. The modes of surveillance and discipline such as the blackout city or curfew siren that used to haunt the city have been transformed by highly segregated lines of economic and political transformation. Pain is not just a mental state; it is the material state of the city. Where then to stake Ko’s claim on the city?

To stake specific claims on the city amidst globalization follows through what Nicholas Garnham proposes, the “universal rationality as a cultural principle” (251). Garnham sees no other option but to take a universalist position<sup>3</sup> in the debates of globalization, one that attempts to “democratize the globe and the role of an increasingly globalized media system.” Thus he claims that “while globalization calls for the development of a parallel concept of global citizenship and representative global political structures, at this time the only effective political structures we have are nation-states, and our actual citizenship identities are national” (259). Garnham’s idea seeks to liberalize the modern public sphere, but does very little to question the very tenets in which liberal democracy may obliquely fit in various nation-states.

How can a new discursive strategy that purports to be as global as the most recent economic drive of capital be applied when the very implementation of capital has not been evenly developed and globalized? In *Super Citizen Ko*, the city becomes the organizing geography for Ko’s search. As the city has lost its historicity and the nation has trivialized its past, what the film implies is the transnational movement of national identity formation. Sassen places due consideration on marginal identities, like immigrants, making claims of citizenship on a denationalized city.

However, in the film, while civil society has allowed for, at least, two political positions, Ko’s own historical background leaves little room for accommodation. Ko not only shows the limits of recent civil society but also the very politics that have institutionalized this civil society. In this new city and civil society, Ko cannot make claims to citizenship as his being is so anchored on Taiwan’s past, a history nominalized

in modern politics. Modern politics have allowed such views to proliferate yet do not really invest power on the state—whether to become independent or to return to mainland China—to negotiate such terms.

Taiwan, like Ko, becomes a signifier without a signified. But unlike Ko, Taiwan's in-between identity is poised as a postmodern postindustrial dominant organizer of Taiwanese reality. Ko has already lost touch both with the organicity of the past and simulacrum of the present. *Super Citizen Ko* is a pessimistic look at citizenship within the national space. Such a national identity, as the film suggests, can only be genuinely generated transnationally.

The point that the film makes is a critique of recent Taiwanese civil society, one that has failed to substantiate Ko's being. This point, I think, posits the continued strength of the state to organize and define Taiwanese modernity and nation. The state may have liberalized, but only in relation to absorbing alternative politics and history that support its own survival as a quasi-nation internally, and a transnation externally. Ko's own obsession with what really happened only presents the futility of unearthing historical truths. Like Ko's own quest and discovery, such truths have long been buried in isolated grave sites, and all one can do is to memorialize the memory.

Citizens, as Ko embodies, are signifiers looking for a signified. Even when the signifying field has been set up by the state and civil society, bodies would always be looking for alternative claims. Thus, Ko's citizenship is one of becoming a supercitizen, as the film's title suggests—searching for a non-existent yet basic signified in identity formation. His citizenship, like most Taiwanese's, is neither poised nationally or transnationally. Citizenship then becomes a floating essential signifier, transforming as divergent needs and claims call upon it. However, citizenship does not bear the promise of delivery nor return, should one be unsatisfied with it. Citizenship is relational.

Like Ko's nostalgic view of family organicity, citizenship depends on the company one imagines to keep. Such a utopic view, however, is imbricated by the trauma one individual or nation, even if it attempts to deal fully with it, will never wholly resolve. Yet for Ko, the meaning or the lack of meaning of citizenship can only be resolved in the quest, in the struggle to come up with a workable truth of being and nation. Unlike *A Single Spark's* overtly political mode of filmmaking, *Super Citizen Ko* presents a new wave return to the political. The visuality presented in the film, especially as to how Ko relates to the city, mimics the camera. The film foregrounds and critiques the media for the institutionalization of dominant claims that alienate historical block claims such as Ko's.

## PRIVATIZED AND TRANSNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY IN ESKAPO

In *Super Citizen Ko*, the transnational link was suggested to be the purveyor of present-day civil society and identity formation. In *Eskapo*, another wonderful film to check full ref! however, the connection is more embarrassingly overt, using nationalism in the service of big business and traditional oligarchs. The film narrates the heroic escape from Marcos' maximum security prison by two members of affluent Filipino families—Genny Lopez, scion to a political dynasty and business empire that include the monopolistic franchise of an electric company, the nation's largest television and media conglomerate, and a former owner of a leading newspaper; and Sergio Osmeña, III, also scion to a political and business dynasty but in the southern Philippine city of Cebu. Upon declaration of martial law in 1972, they are imprisoned for allegedly plotting to overthrow Marcos. The film explains that they were used by Marcos as hostage to quell political and economic opposition. When all else fail after five years in prison, they decide to escape from the military camp and fly out of the country by a private plane.

Funded by Lopez's own film company, *Eskapo* presents a nationalist project that is tied up with business and traditional political interests. Disenfranchised during the Marcos dictatorship but re-enfranchised during Aquino's takeover of the presidency twenty-five years later, the rich have never seen better times. Most families saw the return of their properties and businesses, including political power, having already earned profit and mileage. The film tackles a trauma shared by the nation—the Marcos dictatorship—that provides the impetus for greater endeavor in business and politics among the traditional rich.

In the film's ending intertitles, updates on the careers and pursuits of Lopez and Osmeña are presented—the political activities they engaged in during their exile in the US, the return of sequestered businesses to them, and the further enlargement of business and political interests. So unabashed is the film in acclaiming the two personalities that it even utilized the country's two leading dramatic actors to portray the characters. The film legitimizes big business and traditional politics, especially as to how these were repressed, liberated, and transformed.

What I find interesting in the film is the transnational links being posed, especially as to how the US is figured in the whole project of bringing in recent civil society. For if in *Super Citizen Ko*, the transnational link is nameless, in *Eskapo*, it is the continuation of the benevolent link between the US and the Philippines that discusses notions of civil society and citizenship. US coloniality is invoked through a massive continuation of the hegemonic narrative that binds the US and the Philippines. Articulated in the highly disseminated

language of William McKinley's benevolent assimilation, US domination of Philippine politics has continued to evoke conflicting and dialoging nationalist responses.<sup>4</sup> For the mass movements, it was no less than a quest for a genuinely independent Philippines. For the traditional politicians, such a nation can evolve through links with nations more experienced in the task of self-governance and economic prosperity. Because of the enlightened colonial project, the US to this day remains as the single most important purveyor of economic, political, and popular culture in the country.

What McKinley stated in the halls of the White House on the night he decided on the colonization of the Philippines reverberates in the way the film depicts the US. In the film, the US is the safe haven for families disenfranchised during the Marcos dictatorship. The fathers of both Lopez and Osmeña have chosen to become political refugees in the US to flee from Marcos. What is implied is that the US is an embodiment of the ideals of the liberal state and a working civil society. It is a model for the clans' own vision of a workable political system, one that tolerates dissent and acknowledges populism.

For the film itself, like the fact that *A Single Spark* was allowed public exhibition, is a testament to truth-claims about the medium, freedom of speech, rationality, and other libertarian ideals. The showing of the film marks the opening of a civil society that not only tolerates past dissent, but more importantly represents current maneuvers to sustain this civil society. What is also being invoked is the authorship of recent civil society by the traditional rich who thus have legitimate moral and judicial truth-claims.

What is not said about the two prominent people's escape to the US is the unavailability of such an option for most of the people repressed under the Marcos dictatorship. Their escape involved the hiring of a private plane. Most oppositionists that sought refuge in the US were already part of the elite politics in the Philippines that were disenfranchised during the Marcos dictatorship. In addition, the 1960 immigration pattern has allowed only for the migration of highly-skilled professionals. As the greater number of people who comprised the oppositional mass movement met neither criteria, the site of struggle was mostly undertaken within the national space. The national space became the privileged domain of nationalist struggle. Consequently, in order for exiled oppositionists to maintain their political and economic clout, there ensued a reverse migration when international pressure on Marcos' human rights violations was beginning to swell.

What is squirmishly uncomfortable about the set-up is the way nationalist films have been invoked in the service of big business and traditional politics. In the refashioning of nationalism for the maintenance of hegemony, big business and traditional politics have set the agenda in redefining the terrain of engagement. Traditional politics have helped usher



laws banning child labor, the inclusion of marital rape as a crime, stringent protection of the environment, and other politically-correct state measures. In the same light, traditional politics have also aggressively rubberstamped laws maintaining on-going capitalist principles of liberalization, privatization, and globalization. On the one hand, forest parks are declared national monuments free from illegal logging. On the other hand and in the same vein, the Omnibus Investment Code that guarantees preferential treatment to big transnational capitalists is ratified and the Mining Act allows the speculative exploitation of all land resources. Whereas in the past, propaganda films of the state disseminated official viewpoints and representational images, the task, like most governmental functions, has been taken upon by big businesses. More than any other time in the history of Philippine business, corporations now keeping a keen interest on social issues and alternative practices as part of good business sense. Atlas Consolidated Mining Corporation is involved with a shoemaking project for Abaca, a sitio within the mine's parameters; Central Azucarera Don Pedro has given loans to housewives and dependants of employees to start up an industrial rags project; Negros Navigation has set up *Bangko Sang Barangay* (The Poor Man's Bank); San Miguel Agribusiness Division and Pilipinas Kao have opened cooperative projects; Phelps Dodge and Ramcar are involved in various livelihood projects (see Luz and Montelibano).

The state function is being privatized in tension-field ways. Like Michel Foucault's notion of power, state power—i.e., political power—is made prolific rather than amassed by institutions. State power is being delegated to businesses. On the one hand, political power is filtered through the active participation of business. In the 1998 Philippine national elections, for example, business loyalty to presidential candidates had already been made clear early on by contending business interests. On the other hand, while the nation-state is being continuously interrogated and redefined by multinational corporations, it has also moved into directions that befit an enlightened liberal community.

The military is modernized; the police professionalized; more infrastructures are being built through business participation through build-own-transfer contract deals that allow business to establish and to own priority infrastructures for at least twenty-five years before these are turned over to the government. In addition, water and power distribution has already been privatized. Specialized hospitals and the prison system are also on their way towards privatization. What is perceived to be a better, more efficient delivery of basic services is now placed in the hands of business by government perennially riddled with a bloated and corrupt bureaucracy. In short, business is setting a major bulk of the agenda of nation-building and consequently, on national identity formation.

Civil society is being privatized in ways that is circuited towards transnational objectives. Transnational objectives of good government have been set by traditional politicians and big businesses to mimic the US model. This is where the US shows its tenacity in maintaining its colonial and imperial legacy. While Japanese popular culture has started to infiltrate the national cultural domain, the model of political and economic governance has always been the US. The link is subtly generated in the film *Eskapo*. For once, as the film shows, human rights is a democratic issue.

Even, or because, Lopez and Osmeña have also suffered human rights violations under an authoritarian regime, their claim to political power is as legitimate as that of the marginal figures who were tortured or who have died under the dictatorship. Marcos' legacy becomes a democratic leveling mechanism to perpetuate claims of victimization and political power. This power is being vigorously redefined in two ways. Osmeña continues to pursue traditional politics while the Lopez clan strives for greater political reach through good business sense. Osmeña's political power, like that of traditional politics, has already been made to serve business interests.

Another point generated is the working subject that is able to reclaim and enlarge the meager resources which are nonetheless his/hers. The final intertitles show the professional work ethics of the scions to claim what is rightfully theirs. The working subject is poised as the model for preserving civil society. By continuously working to generate surplus, the individual achieves power of a liberal kind. Political power as imbibed in the working subject is generated as an economic by-product. By generating economic surplus, political power is also generated to liberate other less-privileged working bodies. Power is democratized through political gentrification. Civil society gradually becomes a pursuit of big business for it yields a power mimicking state power.

Business undertakes the financing of the dissemination of laissez faire and human rights as prevailing social interests in *Eskapo*. Being a media mogul, Lopez doubles as both break and continuity in the democratic tradition of media to provide a public sphere for articulating dissent and consent. His story of victimization and rescue appearing on film seemingly poses the possibility of media constituting and transforming the public sphere. However, his authoring of the film biography—both as film subject and producer—not only represents a narcissistic relation to oneself but also to one's claims.

*Eskapo's* public service becomes self-service. Lopez, who knows the trauma of losing the media to the hands of the dictatorship, indirectly stresses class interest as purveyor of public interest. Nothing is neutral, not even those that seem to provide sympathy to trauma management. What the film becomes is a pedagogical tool for the management

of the public sphere, clearly demarcating the models and interests of civil society that produces this sphere.

## NATION AND MODERNITY IN THE PRESENCE OF FATHERLAND

Nationalist films in Asia Pacific cinema embody both the ideal way of dealing with a past national trauma—what contexts are to be used to generate meaning over the trauma—and the operations of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic realities—how the past is made usable for present contending interests. More importantly, nationalist films, precisely because these deal with social trauma, interrogate the absence and rise of recent civil society. The figure of the fatherland, the masculine allegorical authority of the narrativization of the nation, provides the map to read the past trauma and present predicament.

The fatherland, however, is to be distinguished from the motherland: the motherland provides the spiritual inspiration in the formation of the nation and national identity; the fatherland provides the material mapping of the formation and elaboration of the nation (see Partha Chatterjee's gendered distinction of nation-formation; see also my discussion about the mother-nation, Tolentino). The social mapping of the nation is invoked through the discourse of civil society and the state. The fatherland embodies the organization of civil society, marking its absence, birth, and recent maturity through the enlistment of effects on the male individual figure, some micro-collectivity, and the nation.

The elaboration of the national experience in South Korean, Taiwanese, and Philippine cinemas also expounds on the nation's experience with modernity. On the one hand, the nation is continuously being interrogated and defined by contending and dialoging forces nationally and transnationally, producing therefore oblique relations of power and national formation. This disjuncture in being and power almost always materializes through the experience of pain and suffering. On the other hand, since the formation of nation and national identity and modernity prevail under the most trying circumstances, the nation is already spoken for in the experience of modernity, and vice-versa. One can therefore speculate that the nation is an enlightenment construct that interfaces with the more universal experience of modernity. The local experience of nation-formation is the parole in the language of modernity.

Thus there exists a relational mode in which nation-formation and modernity implicate each other in Asia Pacific cinema. Such self-reflexivity can also be seen in the meta-filmic quality of nationalist films. Because it documents a nation's past and present,

nationalist films elaborate on the film's own relationship both with filmmaking and media, and society. Each film analyzed presents contending views about film and the media, both how one uses and is used by film and the media to visualize and audiolize the nation's past and present. While the film narrative provides certain trajectories of nation-formation and the experience with modernity, the self-reflexive meta-film provides commentaries on the very relationship of the film to its media.

There is another counter that was being disseminated to mark the countdown towards the actual centennial day of the proclamation of independence. The originary counter that marked the declining number of days towards the centennial of Philippine independence is located in Freedom Park fronting Malacañang Palace, home to the presidency. There was so much media hype during its "100-day" launch that traffic in Metro Manila's highways, because of the massive infrastructure build-up, was further rerouted to accommodate the expected, largely required attendance, of school children.

Such a counter is technologically less calibrated than the digital clock displayed in Tiananmen Square that counted up to the seconds the remaining time left before Hong Kong was turned over to China. The official centennial counter, however, was being disseminated to various national and local offices. It was basically a day calendar whose pages one could pull off, one could work back from one hundred to one. The original and mass-disseminated counters represent the maneuvering of time and hence, history to meet present hegemonic needs for the most intense project of nation-formation. Time is made into a trajectory of itself, devoid of other factors in the ascendancy of hegemonic truth-claims to national history.

It becomes a signifier with a sole signified, and thus constricts the parameters of allowable play of meanings. Time is reversed instead of projected forward. The centennial of Philippine independence now owes authorship to the power behind this reversal of history. Though it may be considered trivial, the reversal of history remains vital to the authoring of the most recent and intense project of nation-formation. It sets up the authority in the management of history, the centennial celebration, nation, national identity and citizenship, and more importantly, the succeeding hundred years of national transformation. In other words, the national future is already marked by a reversal to the originary past. It is precisely because the gesture is symbolic that it yields to contending signifying practices—good and bad nationalisms, hegemony and counter-hegemony, nationhood and colonialism, nationalism and imperialism, localism and globalism.

This discussion of nationalist films in the experience of nation-formation and modernity allows the critique of such emplacement of the public sphere in civil society.

If the terms for engagement are already being set forth by the state and its hegemony, then one of two things can be undertaken by those in which such hegemony is being emplaced—a critique of the state becomes necessary to illuminate both the workings and limits of civil society, and the new ways of both challenging this civil society and moving towards the institutionalization of a counter-public sphere within the state-owned civil society.

## NOTES

- 1 Gramsci also clarifies the notion of hegemony in a footnote, “The ‘normal’ exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of opinion—newspapers and associations—which, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied” (80).
- 2 The Minjung movement, according to Choi, “began in the wake of the popular April 19 Revolution in 1960 and developed into an anticolonial national unification movement by the end of the 1980s. Its proponents considered it an extension of Korea’s long tradition of popular nationalist movements, from the 1894 Tonghak Peasant War and the 1919 March First Independence Movement to the April 19 Revolution, which toppled the US-sponsored Syngman Rhee regime (1948-1960)” (90).
- 3 Garnham cites three reasons for making a universalist claim on the debate on globalization: “First one can conceive of the problem of a national or local culture being threatened by a globalising process only from a universalist position.... Second, the very phenomenon under discussion, globalization, is a universal phenomenon based on a universal symbol of value, the system of money. Third, a debate is only possible if the participants share some common set of values within which they can say meaningfully that they understand each other’s positions and either agree or disagree and why. And finally, and perhaps most important, because the participants in the global cultural market itself show every sign of happily accepting at least that minimum universals on which any shared cultural space depends” (258-9).
- 4 In President William McKinley’s remarks to a Methodist delegation, he narrates how he decided on the US colonization of the Philippines: “I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed [to] Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way—I don’t know how it was, but it came: 1) That we would not give them (Filipinos) back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable; 2) that we would not turn them over to France and Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable; 3) that we would not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain’s was; and 4) that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we would by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died” (qtd. in Schirmer and Roskamm Shalom 22-3).



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## FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: CONSIDERING CONTEXT AND THE TEACHER AS THEORIST

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### Abstract

Language pedagogy has drawn on various disciplines to inform it, one of which is Second Language Acquisition (SLA). However, while considerable developments in SLA have generated more confidence in it, there are still those among SLA researchers who have been reticent in applying results of their research to language pedagogy. Perhaps the problematic relationship between theory and practice and between specialists and teachers need not in principle be oppositional, if we have a greater understanding of the complex nature of the language classroom, as Prabhu has suggested in "The Dynamics of the Language Lesson" (TESOL 1992). In this paper, I expound on two central themes earlier explored by Prabhu, namely the interplay between pedagogic and non-pedagogic dimensions that influences much of what happens in the classroom and the theorizing role teachers have to play if any change aimed at productive learning is to be realized, discussing these issues particularly in relation to SLA studies on interaction to promote L2 learning. In the process, I discuss the implications of the aforementioned points for language teaching, with reference to my teaching context.

### Keywords

English language teaching, language pedagogy, Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

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## INTRODUCTION

Let me begin with an anecdote. A few years ago, I suggested to my freshman class of about twenty students who were taking up a preparatory course in English that we arrange their seats in a semi-circle. I thought it would set the tone for a more informal and inclusive class discussion. To have twenty students in the classroom is a rarity even in a supposedly elite university like the Ateneo de Manila University and I thought of taking advantage of the situation to actualize in some way (even if, perhaps, superficially) a teaching philosophy to which I have always subscribed. And so it came to pass.

During the mid-term evaluation of the course though, a handful of my students expressed preference for the traditional classroom setup where they are seated in rows. When I asked why, they said that the semi-circle seating arrangement made them feel more distant from me given the physical space it left in the middle of the classroom.

In hindsight, I realized that maybe I was not pacing and using that spacious center aisle to bridge that physical distance between us during English class. Maybe too, although they did not articulate it, it must have been threatening for a number of my sixteen to seventeen year-old students who were on their first semester in college and did not know me, much less any of their classmates, to actually have to face not only me, their teacher (which might not have been so bad considering how as teachers we are naturally interested in, or at least are good at appearing interested in what our students have to say), but to have to literally deal face-to-face with the rest of the strangers in the classroom. In the seating arrangement I proposed, little room was left for saving face, so to speak, and that actually goes against the grain of the Filipino character.

Why do I share this anecdote? I mention it because I think it illustrates a point that we teachers have to be more cognizant of: that the particularity of our teaching context does challenge some assumptions and practices (in this case, a practice as simple as students' seating arrangement) that are supposed to positively impact our practice (in this case, to help create an atmosphere more conducive to learning). And so we cannot escape in the act of theorizing the context in which we operate.

Specifically as language teachers, we continually seek ways to develop a more effective language pedagogy so we can help learners develop their language skills. That is a goal I think we all share, though by no means the only one.

Language pedagogy as we all know has drawn on various disciplines to inform it, one of which is Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The study of SLA is hardly forty years old and yet, admittedly, a great deal of research has been done in this field, focusing mainly on the process of language learning and the factors which affect the language learner's language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman). Indeed, it has been noted by Larsen-Freeman and Ellis (*The Study*) that considerable developments in SLA research have been made, and thus, there is now greater confidence in SLA research.

Among SLA researchers, however, there are those who have been reticent in applying results of their research to language pedagogy, as Ellis later noted ("SLA"). These do not feel that there ought to be any relationship between the two. Tarone, et al. (qtd. in Lightbown) enumerated limitations to the classroom applications of SLA, among which are the restricted linguistic scope of the studies, the lack of data on cognitive process

and learning strategies, the limited information about the role of individual variables, insufficient information about the role of social and environmental variables, and the limited number of replicate studies. Hatch (qtd. in Ellis *The Study*) is similarly cautious about applying SLA research to language pedagogy: “[O]ur field must be known for the incredible leap in logic we make in applying our research findings to classroom teaching” (687).

The relationship between SLA and teaching has always been open to challenge for various reasons. Nunan, for instance, takes issue with the lack of SLA research in actual classrooms; and Bolitho (qtd. in Ellis *Studies*) is critical of the inaccessible presentation of SLA ideas to language pedagogy practitioners.

It seems to me that the relevance of theory to practice and the problematic, though in principle not oppositional relationship between specialists and teachers, is a matter worth revisiting.

For my purpose, I wish to begin by recalling some points raised by N. S. Prabhu in his discussion of the complex nature of the language classroom in his 1992 *TESOL* article “The Dynamics of the Language Lesson.” Particularly in relation to SLA studies on interactions that can promote L2 learning, I expound on his article’s two central themes: 1) the interplay between pedagogic and nonpedagogic dimensions influences much of what happens in the classroom; and 2) given that the classroom culture is based on stability, any change aimed at productive learning can only be effective to the extent that teachers are actively engaged in their own conceptual exploration. I contend though, for Prabhu stops short of saying this, that what the theorizing teachers need to do should not preclude a critical consideration of the wider milieu – that is, the socio-political context of the classroom. Indeed I take ‘theorizing’ to mean problematizing the broader context of our teaching situation as well. Finally, I discuss some implications of critical engagement on practice with reference to my own teaching context.

## THE DYNAMICS OF THE LANGUAGE LESSON: A SUMMARY

In exploring the complexity of the language lesson, Prabhu identifies four aspects of the lesson event that interact with each other in actual classroom practice: as a unit in a planned curricular sequence, a teaching method in operation, a patterned social activity, and a social encounter.

The first two aspects view the lesson as a pedagogic event, a perspective adopted by specialists on the language lesson, and one which teachers (and in rare cases, learners) may

share (228). Hence, seen as a teaching unit, a language lesson is to be understood in relation to other lessons that have been designed to supposedly match the learner's developmental stage. Seen as a teaching method, the language lesson is to be understood with reference to a theory of learning.

The next two aspects, on the other hand, view the classroom as an arena where social and personal factors meet, a perspective that is shared by teachers and learners but rarely considered by specialists. As a routinized social event, it provides its participants with a sense of security and stability arising from their shared expectations, thereby making possible the classroom lesson as a recurrent event. As a social encounter, it lends itself to human interactions that greatly influence both curriculum and method (227-30).

By highlighting the nonpedagogic dimensions, Prabhu cautions against prescribing any teaching method or curriculum for classroom use since it can be unsettling and therefore likely to be discarded in favor of the protective routines already established in the classroom. And where specialist inputs are adopted, eventually replacing old routines, he argues that they could very well provide little more than the satisfaction arising from the performance of such routines, devoid of any conceptual substance (235-6).

If that is so, how then can we accomplish pedagogically effective changes in classroom procedures? Prabhu makes a case for the following: first, that teachers be theorists, embarking on an intellectual exploration, engaging their own theories in the classroom, testing, refining, or rejecting them in light of their classroom experience; and second, that specialists take teachers' theories seriously and interact with teachers as fellow theorists (224). In particular, Prabhu suggests that it may be more worthwhile for specialists to explore ways of enabling teachers to function as theorists than to provide them with new methods to replace old routines.

## CULTURE AND LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

As any teacher knows only too well, pedagogical plans, despite careful planning, do not always work out as originally envisioned. They are tempered, as Holliday reminds us, by the beliefs, attitudes, and expectations embedded in the classroom culture, and the tacit understandings about what source of behavior is acceptable.

As if the classroom context is not complex enough, we need to contend with forces outside the classroom. No classroom culture is after all isolated. As Holliday has argued, the attitudes and expectations people bring in are influenced by the social forces within and outside the educational institution (9).

That this should be the case ought to make teachers reconsider directly applying recommendations from the SLA field to classroom teaching, and caution specialists against urging teachers to carry out their recommendations.

Certainly, SLA research has contributed to our understanding of the language learning process, and this augurs well for language teachers committed to effective pedagogy. Descriptive studies of interlanguage development, for example, can help us better understand patterns of acquisition of a linguistic form so we can design instructional activities to promote its acquisition.

But the language classroom is not such an 'innocent' environment, and alas, the language classroom landscape painted by SLA research does not come close to the realities of the classroom. Scant attention has been paid to the classroom as a social context; instead, SLA has encouraged the view of the classroom as an experimental laboratory where the teacher ensures that the learner is exposed to optimal linguistic input that may be shown to correlate with desirable outcomes (Breen 137) rather than as an arena of complex human interactions (Prabhu "The Dynamics" 230).

Long (9), for instance, advances the psycholinguistic rationale and pedagogic advantages of task-group interactions, and lists among the pedagogic benefits of group work the opportunity to practice a wider speech repertoire and the affective climate it can provide to shy or linguistically insecure students especially.

However, it is I think a fair comment to make that the intimacy of a group work setting can be unsettling for some students who come from the same language background. I have had a number of students whose attitudes toward speaking English can be viewed as ambivalent. Although they are aware of the value society places on the English language and the access to socio-economic advantages it offers to those who are proficient in it, among classmates with whom they share a common first language, Filipino, to speak English can mean to risk ridicule because English is considered an elitist language, the 'they' code (see Gumperz). For adolescent learners in particular, a sense of belonging may be more valuable than becoming proficient in a second language.

Hence, even where two-way tasks are designed to produce more negotiation work according to Long, there is no guarantee that negotiation is going to be done in the target language, an important issue to second language teachers.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the teacher who sees the monitoring of students' language use important if only to help counter factors that might impinge on their decision to speak in the target language, can only do so much when managing a class of 50 students or more, arguably the norm rather than the exception in most public schools in Metro Manila.



So despite the perceived advantages of task-group interactions over teacher-fronted activities, those who are linguistically insecure but eager to learn may not particularly relish the sense of autonomy task-group interactions provide and consequently resist opportunities to speak English in such a set-up. Instead, they may welcome the 'obtrusive' presence of a teacher in teacher-fronted activities if only to legitimize, so to speak, their attempt to speak in English, no matter how haltingly, and to override peer pressure. The teacher, whose authority role in the classroom has been defined by shared expectations, becomes a safeguard against the hazards of speaking in English in this type of classroom setting.

For as experience bears out, there are students who do intimidate the less confident, or who do not have the patience to give others opportunities to self-correct nor the energy to make clarification requests and confirmation checks in a group work setting. And given an educational system that places a premium on grades, there will always be students who would take it upon themselves to accomplish much of the task at hand, believing they can do a much better job than others in their group who, anyway, would allow them to do just that if it would mean a favorable assessment of their group output.

I point this out not to undermine SLA research (or ESL research in general) but merely to underscore the need for context-sensitive pedagogy. While the potential value task-group interaction is worth exploring,<sup>2</sup> we should not lose sight of the fact that the complexity of classroom realities do impact the feasibility of applying pedagogic activities such as those that Long prescribes. Clarke (17) in fact suggests that teachers contend with other constraints not mentioned in Prabhu's characterization of the classroom, some of which are time, physical space, and availability of resources. The sanitized version, as it were, of the classroom situation presented in much of the SLA work is remote from the classroom of which teachers have intimate knowledge.

In the face of the complex realities of the classroom the language teachers confront every day, it might indeed be useful, as Prabhu suggests ("The Dynamics" 233), to examine how the teacher's own management of forces at play in the classroom might become pedagogically more constructive.

## THE TEACHER AS THEORIST

Prescribing procedures to reconcile conflicts arising from the varied demands pedagogic and nonpedagogic dimensions make on teachers and learners is not the answer. The classroom as a social genre varies across societies and cultures, after all. Nevertheless,

although the stability of a classroom culture affords teachers and learners a sense of security, no culture is rooted in absolutes (Murphy, qtd. in Holliday 26). Change is indeed possible but calls for an understanding of the culture and a willingness to work with it.

To begin to understand the classroom culture, teachers need to operate as theorists, drawing on their ongoing experience as they construct their own theory of practice. They have to continually test, develop, and modify their theories in light of their own context. Simply put, teachers have “to theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize” (Kumaravadivelu 545) if classroom activities are to be more than protective routines and if any change to be introduced is sustained and not performed perfunctorily, as Prabhu has consistently argued.

Furthermore, a commitment to any innovation and to better language pedagogy can only be strengthened if teachers feel a sense of ownership. This sense of ownership can begin with what has been referred to as engaging one’s *sense of plausibility* (Prabhu “There is no”).

It is quite telling of the limitations and even biases of research that teachers’ pedagogic notions have hardly been investigated when it is these beliefs, whether they are articulated or not, that ultimately guide much of what they do in the classroom. Teachers, after all, are not “conveyor belts delivering teaching practices” mechanically (Larsen-Freeman “On the Need” 26). It seems to me that in maintaining that hard information about the activity one is performing is more useful than intuitions and personal theories about the activity, a number of researchers undermine teachers’ capacity for thoughtful evaluation of pedagogical practices. It is an impoverished view that ignores teachers’ own engagement with their practices on the basis of their own knowledge, even if largely tacit.

Indeed, language teaching has been misrepresented as a client activity and language teachers, as mere consumers of the findings of research, thereby undervaluing the nature of teaching as a domain of theory and research in its own right (Widdowson “Discourse” 47). However, it is the teachers who deal with surprises that arise from their routines, who are faced with moment-to-moment decision making in the classroom encounter and are responsible for creating learning conditions. And so, it is they who must necessarily determine what it is they will be able to use in their own classrooms.

When teachers, for example, are inconsistent in correcting learners’ errors, it may well be, as Larsen-Freeman (“On the Need” 267) suggests, that a teacher willfully rejects correcting errors for it might threaten the social climate. After all, part of our job is to address not just the language and cognitive needs of students but their affective needs as well. When teachers apply research findings with caution as Hatch (qtd. in Widdowson

*Aspects*) counsels, or not at all as Widdowson suggests (*Aspects* 26), it well may be that the teacher's own experience has taught him or her that to do otherwise is to ignore the students' experiences and belief systems.

That said, we need to go beyond critically examining both present and prescribed classroom practices and seeking alternatives to them. For how can we fully understand our practice if we abstract it from its larger context? In my view, our role as educators demands that we problematize L2 education itself, recognizing that it is intimately tied to a broader social, economic, and political environment.

A number of studies done on the socio-political context of ESL actually demonstrate the political dimension of educational practices, how they reinforce implicitly or explicitly a particular social order. Let us take the area of curriculum. In his analysis of competencies listed in the Refugee Processing Center curricula, Tollefson found that these competencies "attempt to inculcate attitudes and values that will make refugees passive citizens who comply rather than complain, accept rather than resist, and apologize rather than disagree" (657). Similarly, in her study of adult ESL literacy, Auerbach (417) found that students are socialized "for a limited range of working-class roles", and are often taught explicitly "those behaviors required in menial jobs" (418).

We need to understand the greater forces outside the classroom because they influence the decisions we (that means teachers and students) make and have wide implications for the kind of society we want (whether or not we choose to articulate our vision of society). Thus, we need to ask questions ranging from: *Do our English curricula help our students make more sense of their current conditions? Do they equip them with the skills to assert their rights?* to questions like: *When a play gets banned from a university campus, whose interests (or sensibilities, for that matter) are actually protected? And why? When powerful stakeholders are more generous in funding sports development rather than faculty development, what value system is actually perpetuated? And why?*

In other words, we should concern ourselves with examining the extent to which outside forces are either benefiting or harming both teachers and students. Otherwise, we might as well surrender our minds and perhaps even our dignity to the powers-that-be.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROFESSION

Teacher education is going to be crucial in enabling teachers to develop the confidence and the skills to function as theorists then. The contributions of several TESOL specialists to the field of teacher education are noteworthy. For example, Nunan (qtd. in

Clarke) talks of the teacher as an action-researcher. Richards and Lockhart advocate a reflective approach to teaching in the second language classroom that takes into account the roles and beliefs of teachers and learners and teacher decision making. These approaches to teaching affirm the central role of teachers in examining their own assumptions about learning and 'dialoguing' with their own teaching context. For if research is to truly have something more useful to say to language educators who are immersed in the real world, it will need to confer on teachers the privileged status they deserve.

Admittedly, the very affirmation of the teacher's role in making pedagogic decisions calls for the institutionalization of supporting structures that would make the classroom conducive to thoughtful practice. For schools with limited resources, that may be a tall order but not necessarily impossible. An obvious starting point is the examination of existing policies (e.g. budget allocation, hiring policies, code of behavior) and how they either expand or limit teachers' and student's choices.

Finally, although there is a growing body of ESL literature on critical pedagogy, it will serve us well to explore more fully how relations of power both inside and outside the ESL classroom impact interaction and learning.

## CONCLUSION

ESL research can provide insights into language teaching, but innovation in the classroom can never be a matter of direct implementation of the findings of research. The acquisition of a second language, after all, is more than a psycholinguistic enterprise, and attention must be paid to the sociocultural context in which the learning of the language is supposed to take place. There is then no single recipe that can solve pedagogical problems across all classroom situations, considering the often overwhelming phenomena of classroom dynamics that teachers have to work with.

Although it has been proposed that theorists and classroom teachers need to genuinely collaborate with each other (Larsen-Freeman "On the Need;" Prabhu "The Dynamics;" and also Clarke), teachers would always do well to engage their own theories in the classroom so they can continue to grow professionally. Teaching that is a kind of intellectual exploration can do much in transforming classroom routine events into learning events for students and teachers themselves.

In the end, however, because we are educators, we ought to be held not only "technically accountable but educationally [and] morally answerable as well" (Schwab qtd. in Carr 5). Hence, to theorize practice is to theorize our teaching situation as part of a broader socio-political context. The extent to which we are able to do this is a measure of our commitment to a more equitable society.

## NOTES

- 1 Despite little information available regarding the desirability of using L1 in the L2 classroom, L1 may be useful in explaining unknown words or grammar rules (Ellis *Second Language*).
- 2 Although there is some support for the claim that interactional modifications (e.g. clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, etc.) assist comprehension, there appears no clear empirical basis for the claim that interactional modifications promote acquisition (Ellis "Researching").

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## AGAINST EMPIRE AND TOWARD A POLITICS AND PRAXIS OF HOPE: REFLECTIONS ON E. SAN JUAN, JR.'S *RACISM AND CULTURAL STUDIES*

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### Abstract

E. San Juan Jr.'s *Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference* (Duke UP, 2002) offers a fresh and timely critique of the ways in which racism and the ideology of white supremacy function in the creation of the US nation-state and the current intensification of US imperialism. *Racism and Cultural Studies* provides an impressive inventory—and unique synthesis—of a variety of historical materialist methods to cultural studies that enable us to challenge the insidious ways in which US imperial hegemony is ideologically and materially produced and maintained.

This review highlights how E. San Juan, Jr. creates alternative “methodologies of the oppressed” (a politics and praxis of hope), which recognize the agency of people of color/Third World peoples to envision and collectively organize for radical transformative social change.

### Keywords

ideology, multiculturalism, US imperialism

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... needless deaths, suffering, humiliation, and violation of human rights can be attributed to racism ... Racists are worldwide, planting their seed of racial superiority and national chauvinism. The real danger is when racists wield their evil with economic and political power to enforce policies that destabilize others, neutralize others, curtail the self-development and self-determination of others. We must not let the roots of racism spread for it is contagious. We must all work in concert with each other to stop the continuous creation of this dreadful disease—this scourge that has cursed this world. Much of this happens right here in our own backyard.... “Our backyard” is USA—quite a large territory, but this is where the concentration of work must be.

—Yuri Kochiyama, Asian-American activist

On February 15, 2003, eleven million people around the world passionately and critically denounced the US “war against terrorism,” and proclaimed it to be a racist war. We emphatically argued that the a war on Iraq will destroy the lives of millions of innocent Third World peoples as well as the lives of the US multiracial working class, many of whom will be sent to the front lines to sacrifice their lives. Despite massive global opposition to war, during the third week of March, the Bush administration began dropping bombs on the people of Iraq in the name of “regime change.” Three months after “Day X” (the start of the war) and thirteen years after the imposition of harsh sanctions, it is now clear to the whole world that the Iraqi people have been denied the right to determine their own future—to develop their own forms of resistance against Saddam Hussein and to fight for a country free from US imperialist domination (see Chomsky). The US attacks on the rights of Third World peoples to self-determination and national sovereignty—Iraq, Palestine, Cuba, the Philippines, etc.—must be situated alongside on-going assaults on the civil liberties of immigrants and communities of color within the United States, for example the new Patriot 2 Act and other Homeland Security measures.

Everyday, we Filipino Americans learn of new cases of civil liberties abuses within the “belly of the beast” and countless gruesome human rights violations in the Philippines. For some time now, Filipino American youth and students across the nation have been organizing community and university based educational forums and rallies to raise awareness about the interconnectedness between the racial profiling and deportation of hundreds of Filipino/Filipino Americans and the repression of the mass movement for Philippine national liberation.

The Philippines, a US neocolony, captured the world’s attention as the second front in the “war against terrorism” after Afghanistan. In 1898 the Philippines (from which E. San Juan, Jr. hails) was violently colonized by the United States; it shares this history with Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam, and Hawai’i. The Abu Sayaaaf bandit group is used to justify the domination of the Philippines by the presence of thousands of US troops. Last summer (2002), Colin Powell, considered to be G.W. Bush’s “house slave” by prominent Afro-Caribbean American performer Harry Belafonte, declared the major progressive insurgency groups, the peasant-based New People’s Army and the Communist Party of the Philippines, part of the coalition called the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, as terrorist groups.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in his *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois wrote, with extraordinarily keen foresight, that the “problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men

in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (16). By centering racism in our critique of US imperialism in the twenty-first century, are we in danger of blatant reductionism? Filmmaker Michael Moore doesn't seem to think so. In the popular *Bowling for Columbine*, Moore attempts to make sense of the senseless massacre at Columbine high school (Colorado) several years ago. Deftly using the technique of collage, Moore situates the question of gun control within the larger context of the historical development of the US nation-state, which includes a long series of bloody US imperialist conquests of Third World countries. In a candid interview, when asked why the United States is the most violent industrialized country in the world, Charleston Heston, the celebrity face of the NRA, pathetically mumbles something about the "ethnic conflict" in this country. Heston not only betrays his racist desire to protect, by bearing arms, his investment in whiteness (and all the psychological and material privileges that come with that subject position), but also touches upon the central nerve of the US imperial imaginary—that of white supremacy and the racist subjugation and exploitation of millions of working and poor bodies of color around the globe. In this milieu of intensified global crisis and emergency, Cultural Studies must broaden its scope to include the hinterlands of Empire and engage with the many worldwide who, because they are deeply concerned with peace, genuine democracy, and social justice, are taking a firm stand to challenge the brutality of US imperial hegemony.

E. San Juan, Jr., one of our most important and prolific Filipino cultural theorists and a major critic of Establishment postcolonial discipline, offers a crucial intervention for our times. In his previous book, *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (1998), San Juan argues that the progressive insurgent forces of the Philippine National Democratic mass movement play a vital part of the "postcolonial" subaltern resistance, but have been muted and silenced by post-colonial studies. San Juan's latest book, *Racism and Cultural Studies* (2002) expands this critique in fresh and innovative ways that speak directly to our current collective desire for liberation and freedom for all.

Boldly pushing against the historical limitations of fashionable theoretical trends of the academy, San Juan urgently asks us to reclaim the various rich and dynamic Marxist traditions (both Western and Third World Marxisms) of theorizing the connection between culture/knowledge production and the struggle for radical social transformation (the twin tasks of ideological and material struggle). In *Racism and Cultural Studies*, San Juan offers a rigorous historical materialist method for regrounding the dominant "new times=new politics" model of contemporary Cultural Studies. This alternative methodology allows us to shift from reified notions of difference to a dialectical regrounding in which difference is conceived as, in the words of feminist Teresa Ebert, "difference within a material system

of exploitation” (see her *Ludic Feminism* for an excellent critique of post-al difference). This shifting of grounds enables San Juan to bring to the fore the importance of analyzing the complex ways in which difference—race, gender, sexuality—is historically produced and reproduced within class society. A leitmotif of this book is the advancement of Marx’s challenge to idealism. It is not enough to interpret the world. We must collectively and creatively struggle for a radically transformed society in which difference will no longer be produced by a racialized and gendered division of labor (exploitative social relations of production). Instead, genuine differences will emerge: so that each can live “according to his/her needs and abilities.”

One of the main goals of San Juan’s *Racism and Cultural Studies* is to confront the insidious ways in which racism is gendered, sexualized, and “naturalized” through US nationalism. This is an advancement of the central argument of San Juan’s earlier, groundbreaking *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations* (1992), now a classic in US Ethnic Studies. There, he argues that one of the major achievements of the organizing efforts and the intellectual/cultural production of people of color and their allies during the late 1960s/early 1970s is a deeper and more sophisticated historical materialist analysis of the following: 1.) the US nation-state as a “racial-socioeconomic formation,” and 2.) racism as “an international political force” (45). Instead of falling prey to an orthodox Marxist rendering of race as epiphenomenal, race and class are theorized as dialectically intertwined via the concept of internal colonialism (see the early writing of Robert Blauner, 1972). The underlying assumption of this “Third World” political worldview is that “racially categorized groups [within the US nation-state] like Blacks, Chicanos, Native Americans, and Asians are both exploited as workers and oppressed as colonized peoples” (Blauner 11). Using this analytic framework of internal colonialism, people of color within the United States aligned themselves in solidarity with the national liberation movements of the Third World. Asian American activist-teacher Glenn Omatsu recalls that the Asian American movement, which emerged from grassroots organizing, developed an international theoretical perspective. The movement linked, in theory and in praxis, various lessons gained from struggles both within the internal US colonies as well as within the Third World. Asian American activists were drawn to “Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Che Guevara, Kim Il-sung, W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, Paulo Freire, the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, the women’s liberation movement, and many other resistance struggles” (31).

Drawing upon his earlier 1992 work and the accomplishments of past insurgent struggles of Third World peoples in the belly of the beast, San Juan posits the thesis of the

United States as a racial polity as the cardinal premise of his *Racism and Cultural Studies* (25). The philosopher Charles Mills proposed this thesis in *The Racial Contract* (1997); however, scholars of US Ethnic Studies have not engaged it. San Juan elaborates the idea of a US racial polity and offers us sharper theoretical tools at a time when our intellectual landscape is almost completely saturated by contemporary “ludic” globalization theories (Hardt and Negri come to mind) that valorize civil society (abstracted from the state) in ways that culturalize hegemony and ultimately displace collective working class and subaltern agency. San Juan, in his examination of US nationalism, emphasizes the civil society/state dialectic in the production and reproduction of US imperial hegemony.

San Juan returns us to the basics of understanding the centrality of racism within US society, while simultaneously offering an inventory and an advancement of dialectical methodological approaches that we can use to critique how the US racial polity came to be, so that we can radically transform it. San Juan resituates racism within the larger framework of US and global capitalism. Racism, particularly its justifying ideology of white supremacy, is the organizing principle of the division of labor and unequal distribution of resources and wealth within US society. And, now, given the immense asymmetrical power relations between the global North and South, one can no longer ignore how racism organizes global capitalism (the international racialized and gendered division of labor) and sustains US imperialist aggression around the globe.

Just as Engels, in his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), reminded his readers of the late nineteenth century that the difference between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is one that is historically created by capitalism in order to maximize profits, San Juan reminds us of how contemporary global capitalism produces and utilizes “difference” (racialized and gendered) to reproduce itself as a system of exploitation. San Juan acknowledges that we do, however, live in “new times,” but this “new-ness” must be properly contextualized: “New post-Cold War realignments compel us to return to a historical-materialist analysis of political economy and its overdeterminations in order to grasp the new racial politics of transnationality and multiculturalism” (*Racism* 82). Richard Appelbaum’s meditation on capitalism and “difference” can help us contextualize our “new times.” He argues that capitalism “has always reinforced class divisions with divisions based on race, ethnicity, gender, and other forms of ascription” (299). San Juan refers to recent scholarship that illustrate Appelbaum’s claim. Edna Bonacich critiques how multiculturalism, as an ideology, ultimately justifies the exploitation of the surplus labor of immigrant women of color in the Los Angeles garment district. Glenn Omatsu examines the role of racism in a “one-sided class war” against the US multiracial working class. Racism divides people of



color, for example Korean Americans and African Americans in Los Angeles, in order to bolster the “fierce class war waged by the US corporate elite against both the US working masses and their international rivals (Japan, Germany)” (42). Transnational corporations, under the control of the US corporate elite, are able to move across borders to exploit the surplus labor of Asian and Latina women in the internal colonies of the United States as well as in the “free-trade zones” of the global South. It is time that those on the US Left who believe in international proletarianism must reckon with the fact that eight million Filipina domestic workers, or overseas “contract workers” (OCWs), are exploited all around the globe—the Middle East, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, various European countries (Omatsu 42). On an average, four OCWs return daily to the Philippines in coffins (Aguilar). To be sure, many Third World peoples do not have time for ludic games that posit transnational corporations (TNCs) as “free floating signifiers,” a post-al reading that renders TNCs completely unaccountable to any one nation-state. What is needed is an unflinching critique of the US nation-state and its ideology of white supremacy/racism. US imperialism, then, must be at the center of our analysis if we are truly committed to the struggle for social justice.

San Juan unequivocally argues that the problem of the 21<sup>st</sup> century continues to be the color-line, and that we must advance the race-class dialectic, developed by past insurgent subaltern struggles, for our contemporary times. This project includes not only grasping the historical trajectory of the US nation-state as a racial order, but also seriously critiquing the purpose and function of US nationalism in late global capitalism. In other words, given the re-composition of global capitalism within our post-Cold War moment, we must give priority to interrogating the race/nation dialectic upon which the US nation-state operates. The way to understand this particular dialectic is twofold. First, we must understand how the US nation-state developed as a racial formation within the context of global capitalism (in relation to other nation-states, the formation of a core and periphery, etc.). The US nation-state continues to rely upon its racialized genocidal history, which is situated “around the axis of white supremacy,” in order to legitimate its imperial hegemony around the globe. Second, we must then understand how US nationalism -- “the self-identification of peoples based on the perceived commonality of symbols, beliefs, traditions, and so on” —functions as the very ideology that produces and reproduces racialized class exploitation within and without the boundaries of the US nation-state. This process of disentangling US nationalism and the US nation-state as separate, yet interconnected historical constructs, is extremely useful for our efforts in fusing both ends of the civil society/state dialectic against the current of ludic post-al logic. The overarching

emancipatory vision of RCS is one that anticipates the collective counterhegemonic struggles that must, and will, emerge from the US internal colonies. San Juan expresses this crucial task for the US Left in the following passage:

What is imperative for the oppressed working masses, especially the internally colonized people of color in the United States, is a radical critique of US nationalism as the enabling ideology of racialized class domination (Giroux 1995; San Juan 1999b). White supremacist practices inform the functional core of this ideology. Given the historical specificity of US capitalism, class struggle cannot be theorized adequately outside the conjunctures of the racial formation in which it acquires valency. (*Racism* 33)

The struggle for Black reparations is just one of the many movements for social justice that are currently developing within the US internal colonies. Prominent African American activist-academic Manning Marable argues in the on-line site *ZNet Commentary* that the demand for Black reparations exposes how racism has deeply penetrated both US civil society and the state: “the unequal distribution of economic resources, land, and access to opportunities for social development... was sanctioned by the federal government.” The demand for Black reparations forces white society to confront the violent history of the United States, and how that history (genocide, slavery, colonization) is replicated, by the state and its various ideological and repressive apparatuses, in the daily lives of people of color. Without a doubt, the fight for Black reparations is a necessary first step toward the abolition of “whiteness” and white supremacy within US society (see Roediger). San Juan emphatically argues for the need for a radical structural transformation of our racist class society: “without a thoroughgoing overhaul of the social division of labor and legally sanctioned property relations sedimented in state and civil society, any claim to achieving genuine equality will remain a hypocritical formality” (27). Mobilizing for this kind of structural transformation also requires a flexible, yet historically concrete analysis of ideology, culture, and the development of collective human agency. This is where Cultural Studies can intervene.

Cultural Studies must engage current movements for social justice, both here and abroad, if it is committed to social transformation. Only social movements (Black reparations, anti-war mobilization, multiethnic labor struggles, working-class and peasant based Third World national liberation movements, international Palestinian support movement, etc.) have the power to break open a space for intellectuals to unlock the

liberatory potential of cultural studies. The history of Cultural Studies, from working-class British Cultural Studies to US Ethnic, Women's, and Lesbian/Gay Studies, proves this point. By aligning itself with, and committing itself to building, mass movements for radical social transformation, cultural studies will be able to challenge how it has been institutionalized by the corporatized academy and eventually claim its historic responsibility. Marx reminds us that it is within the site of culture that oppressed and exploited women and men begin to challenge their dehumanizing conditions. It is that space where they struggle to make sense of the racialized and gendered contradictions of class society. Gramsci's theories of hegemony and counterhegemony are extremely useful as we attempt to critique the ideology of US nationalism. At this historical moment, only a multiethnic united front mass movement against the US drive to war with Iraq can liberate the repressed radical traditions of struggle within the field of Cultural Studies, ranging from Raymond Williams and Jean-Paul Sartre to radical US "Third World" cultural workers of color such as Carlos Bulosan and Audre Lorde. The emerging anti-war movement will be able to envision a radical alternative to global capitalism only if people of color/Third World peoples play a central role, and only if white progressives challenge, with every fiber in their bodies, their investment in whiteness/white supremacy, which undergirds the US nationalism of this impending imperialist war.

Far from advocating a return to economically deterministic, vulgar Marxism, San Juan's *Racism and Cultural Studies* provides a breathtaking inventory and synthesis of various figures from both Western and Third World Marxist traditions—running the gamut from Antonio Gramsci to Frantz Fanon—that provide examples of how to dialectically challenge current post-al ludic temptations of abstracting civil society from the state, culturalizing hegemony, divorcing nation from class, and conflating the nationalism of oppressed neocolonial nation-states with the nationalism of oppressor nation-states. Each chapter within *Racism and Cultural Studies* expands upon the critique of the US nation-state as a racial polity. San Juan addresses an extraordinarily broad range of critical topics within Cultural Studies such as the following: sexuality and US nationalism within late global capitalism, Asian American literary studies, critiques of ethnicity paradigms, postmodern and postcolonial literary and cultural criticism, the interchange between Western and Third World Marxisms (San Juan provides an important reading of Raymond Williams and Frantz Fanon).

The extended afterword, which focuses on the current Philippine mass movement for genuine national sovereignty in relation to the Filipino Diaspora, illustrates the dialectical method of global cognitive mapping proposed throughout the book. Here, San

Juan unleashes a powerful critique of the use of post-al theories of transnationalism within contemporary studies of Filipina/o experiences. San Juan critiques Nicole Constable's *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina Workers* (366-8). He argues that the anti-foundationalist analytical framework of Constable's study, whether unintentionally or not, ultimately flattens the unequal relations of power between the United States and the Philippines (the latter being a neocolony of the former). In other words, political economy and history are sacrificed for micro-politics. The agency of the Filipina domestic worker, then, is located purely in the politics of consumption (asking for more catsup and napkins at McDonald's, an example from Constable's work). The politics of production—and the process by which exploitative social relations of production can be transformed—are completely erased. Filipina subalterns have always spoken, but, unfortunately, theories of transnationalism only muffle their voices of struggle and disregard their potential for collective transformation. The dialectical interaction between organized forms of resistance within the Diaspora and the progressive mass movement for genuine national sovereignty in the Philippines will ensure the development of collective Filipina/o agency (San Juan, *Racism* 380-1).

An interdisciplinary tour de force, *Racism and Cultural Studies* offers timely critiques and suggestions for advancing a unique “methodology of the oppressed” that may, for the moment, seem submerged or repressed in the industrialized global North, but is, as I write, being tested and refined in the overexploited global South where the wretched of the earth have been proclaiming through protracted organized mass struggle (based on a worker-peasant alliance) that “another world is possible.” In the “Third World,” subalterns have uttered this expression long before it became the clarion call of the young and courageous anti-globalization movement in the North. I urge all of us to engage San Juan's *Racism and Cultural Studies*—to learn from his lessons in dialectical analysis and his suggestions for creating strategies for cognitive mapping, to listen to his impassioned appeal to activists, insurgent intellectuals (both organic and academic), and all democratic minded people to critique the central roles that racism and US nationalism play in the process by which global capitalism wrecks havoc on the daily lives of millions all over the world. After a careful reading of this book, one will appreciate its ability to articulate in new and imaginative ways a politics of hope in these perilous times—its ability to provide an intervention that can, to quote Raymond Williams, “make hope practical, rather than despair convincing” (qtd in San Juan, *Racial* 313).

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## LITERARY SECTION

### ANG PAANYAYA NI BUSH KAY GLORIA

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#### About the Author

Bienvenido Lumbera is Professor Emeritus of the College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines, Diliman. He is also on the Board of Advisers of the Institute of Creative Writing at UP Diliman. His books of poems are *Likhang Dila*, *Likhang Diwa* (Anvil, 1993) and *Balaybay* (Talingdao, 2002). He was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature and Creative Communication Arts in 1993. The poem "Ang Paanyaya ni Bush kay Gloria" was read out in anti-US war on Iraq rallies in the Philippines.

#### About the Translator

Charlie Samuya Veric is a poet, critic, essayist, and translator. He teaches writing and literature with the Department of English, Ateneo de Manila University. His works have been published in learned and international journals.

Halina sa Iraq,  
Tayo ay magpasiklab  
Ng gerang uutas  
Sa mga teroristang de-balbas  
Na, aba, ay nangahas mangahas  
Lumaban sa banal na dahas  
Ng Amerikang may dakilang misyong iligtas  
Ang mundo sa tiyak na pagkapahamak.

Halina, ikaw ay itatakas  
Sa mga problema mong di malutas-lutas -  
Ekonomiyang butas-butas,  
Politikang waldas-waldas,



Lumulobong utang panlabas,  
Lipunang winasak-wasak  
Ng kriminal, kurakot at kulimbat,  
Bayan mong walang hinaharap

Halina, masdan ang iyong bukas -  
Dagdag na pautang, pinaglumaang armas  
Ipamamanang lahat-lahat,  
Tiyak na ang pagkautas  
Ng NPA, MILF, Abu Sayyaf.  
Bayan mong di makausad-usad  
Hihilahin tungo sa pag-unlad,  
IMF-World Bank ang hahawak  
Sa yaman ng mina mo't gubat,  
Sa biyaya ng bukid mo't dagat.

Halina sa Baghdad,  
Kay ganda, ang siyudad, nagliliyab!  
Sa lahat ng dako ng estadong malawak  
Dumadagsa ang aking hukbo ng sindak  
Sinusuyod ang bundok at gubat,  
Kapatagan at dagat.  
Mga pangil ng apoy nginangatngat  
Ang langit na lumiliyab!  
Hayun, ang lupai'y nagbibitak-bitak  
Mga gusali'y nadudurog, bumabagsak,  
At sa lahat ng dako bangkay ay nagkalat,  
Bata matanda babae lalaki tibo badaf  
Terorista silang lahat!  
At sa disyerto ng Iraq,  
Ang sarap!  
Langis na dumaranak,  
Itim na gintong naglalandas,  
Tubo na sa Wall Street kumakatutak.  
Halina sa Iraq!

## BUSH'S INVITATION TO GLORIA

*Bienvenido Lumbera*

*Translated by Charlie Samuya Veric*

Come to Iraq,  
Let's make war a spectacle  
That will finish  
Bearded terrorists  
That, oh, dare  
Oppose the benevolent violence  
Of America's great destiny to save  
The world from absolute perdition.

Come, you will be released  
From your insoluble problems--  
Destitute economy,  
Profligate politics,  
Swelling foreign debts,  
Society damaged  
By the criminal, the corrupt and cheat,  
Your miserable country.

Come, look at your future—  
More debts, hand-me-down weapons  
My generosity all,  
Sure to butcher  
The NPA, MILF, Abu Sayyaf.  
Your idle country  
Will be propelled to development,  
The IMF-World Bank will handle  
The minerals and forests  
The boon of your mountains and seas.

Come to Baghdad,  
How beautiful, the city, burning!  
In all corners of the vast state  
My armies of terror charge  
Sweeping heights and woods,  
Plains and seas.  
The fanged conflagration  
Devouring the bright sky!  
There, the earth cannot hold,  
Houses tremble, fall,  
And the dead litter the landscape,  
Young old women men dykes faggots  
They're all terrorists!  
And in Iraq's desert,  
How sweet!  
Oil that springs,  
Dark gold that trails,  
Profit that inundates Wall Street.  
Come to Iraq!

## LITERARY SECTION

### DAISY BOMB

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#### About the Author

Mila D. Aguilar, a.k.a. Clarita Roja of the revolutionary underground movement, currently teaches at the English Department of the University of the Philippines in Diliman. She is, among other things, preparing her seventh book, and second most complete collection, of poems, *Chronicle of a Life Foretold: 101 Poems* (1995-2003). Her last book of poems was *Journey: An Autobiography in Verse* (1964-1995), published by the UP Press.

I only heard this; I have no way  
of verifying its authenticity.

In Baghdad during the Gulf War,  
they say, within a meters-thick

bomb shelter the size of a mammoth hall,  
women, children, the old and infirm

were gathered for protection  
from deadly American weapons.

In their midst landed a daisy cutter,  
which had bored through the thick concrete

willy-nilly, without effort, with little compunction.  
Daisy-as in my mother's lazy daisy,

which effortlessly serves those  
who wish to eat, sup and sap, devour-

landed, but just lay there.  
The community laughed, thinking

the fearful thing was a dud.  
They did not know what happened after.

Having heard the gentile laughter,  
Daisy proceeded to turn round again,

releasing her deadly venom as she did,  
with great force plastering

the women, children, old and infirm  
on the walls of the shelter.

The fossils are still there, they say,  
monuments to great American might.

I only heard this, mind, and have  
no way of verifying its authenticity.

I can only pray  
it won't happen in my own land.

*-Valentine's Day, 2003*

## LITERARY SECTION

### YANKEE DOODLE GOES TO WAR

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#### About the Author

Joi Barrios is Associate Professor at the University of the Philippines. She was Visiting Assistant Professor at University of California Irvine, University of California Los Angeles, and Osaka University of Foreign Studies. She has a PhD in Philippine Literature from UP. Dr. Barrios has published two volumes of poetry, *Ang Pagiging Babae ay Pamumuhay sa Panahon ng Digma* (*To Be a Woman is to Live at a Time of War*) and *Minatamis at Iba Pang Tula ng Pag-ibig* (*Sweetened Fruit and Other Love Poems*), 1998; a play collection, *Bailaya*; and a collection of romance novels and essays, *Ang Aking Prince Charming at Iba Pang Nobela ng Pag-ibig* (*My Prince Charming and other Romance Novels*). She has co-edited literary anthologies and published her essays in academic journals. She is a member of the Congress of Teachers for Nationalism and Democracy (CONTEND), literary manager of Ma-yi Theatre Company, and board member of the New York-based Philippine Forum. Nerissa Balce notes that the poem "Yankee Doodle Goes to War" was read by the poet in several literary events in California and New York. It was also read during the first anniversary of the September 11 tragedies on KPFA radio.

Pilipina ako.  
I am a Filipina woman.  
At sa bayan ko ngayon  
And in my country  
Tatlong libong Amerikanong sundalo  
ang naroon.  
There are three thousand American soldiers.  
Ito ang awit ko,  
Awit ng pagkutya, hinagpis, at pagtawag.  
This is my song.  
My song of satire, my lament,  
My call to action.  
  
Yankee doodle came to town  
Riding on a pony  
Killed and maimed and tortured us  
And called it a...democracy.



Yankee doodle keep it up,  
Yankee doodle dandy,  
Burn the village and the town,  
And with your gun be handy.

Amerika, Amerika,  
America, America.  
Kay dali mong lumimot, Amerika.  
How easily you forget, America.  
Ipinagpapalit ang dugo makapangyari lamang.  
You traded lives for power.  
Pagkat ano ang halaga ng buhay ng mahirap?  
What is the value of life  
In a poor country?  
Ang halaga ng buhay ng taong may kulay?  
The value of life  
Of a person of color?  
Bawat Pilipino'y may pilat  
We are forever scarred,  
Pilat ng bayang sinakop ng dahas.  
Filipinos marked  
By the violence of your war.  
Yankee doodle comes again  
Riding on a fighter  
Brings his war to my country  
And calls it a ... democracy.

Amerika, Amerika.  
America, America.  
Patungo ka na naman sa digma, Amerika.  
Off to war again, America.

\* \* \*

Ipinagpapalit ang dugo para sa langis .  
Trading blood for oil.  
Ang bayan ko'y hindi palaruan  
My country is not a playground  
Ng iyong mga tanke't sundalo.  
For your tanks and soldiers.  
Ang bayan ay di lamang lupa,  
O bundok o dagat,  
A nation is not just land,  
Mountains, sea.  
Ikamamatay namin ang iyong mga punglo,  
We die with your bullets,  
Ikawawasak namin ang iyong mga bomba.  
We perish with your bombs.  
Kami'y mahirap lang,  
We live in poverty,  
Kami'y taong may kulay,  
We are people of color,  
Ngunit inaawit namin ang dangal  
Ang laya, ang kapayapaan.  
Yet we sing of dignity,  
Sovereignty, and peace.  
Layas, Amerika,  
Leave, America,  
Sa aking bayan ay lumayas.  
Leave my country, leave.

## NEW SCHOLARS FORUM

### THE INADEQUACY OF THE WORD: A DIALOGIC READING OF SUSAN LARA'S "ENCOUNTER"

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#### Abstract

The Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin calls the capacity of language to incorporate two speeches or intentions within a single utterance its double-voicedness. This dialogism or double-voicedness lends texture to Susan Lara's short story, "Encounter," which narrates the failure of a romantic relationship. The girl, having realized that she was inadequate and lost in the brief absence of her fiancé, decided to transform her ordinary self to the more interesting character of the art dilettante to the displeasure of her fiancé. He puzzles out this change but nevertheless, takes after her pursuits with alacrity and proves himself to be the better art critic—and to her chagrin, an accidental sleuth as well. Reading the story in light of Bakhtin's understanding of dialogism is to examine how the language of the main character and the narrator contains a built-in critique of the represented language—an authoritative discourse, which becomes, in this context, an object of irony and parody.

#### Keywords

Bakhtin, heteroglossia, irony, paradox, textuality

#### About the Author

Mayel Panganiban is finishing her MA in Literary and Cultural Studies at the Ateneo de Manila University and teaches English at Miriam College.

The economy and simplicity characterizing Susan Lara's fiction belies the writer's skill in rendering impressions of human life that are perceptive and revelatory. The ten compact stories, "Letting Go and Other Stories," deal with the vicissitudes of ordinary life, among them the deformed nature of human relationships, the disorderly impulses of desire, and the daunting confrontation with mortality. However, Lara redeems these painful experiences of conflict through epiphanies that bristle everywhere in her stories. Through these penetrating slices of life that yield insights about the most commonplace, Lara animates the paradox that in the mundane lies concealed the most trying, the most illuminating of experiences that impel her characters and perhaps, her readers to self-

discovery. Among the characters transformed by these revelations in her stories are Lazaro, the grumpy, hell-is-other-people professor in "Old and Unborn;" the pathologically needy mother in "Claudia;" the reluctant hack-writer in "The Edge of Innocence;" and Henry, the gallant, altruistic fiancé in "Encounter."

Lara's fiction which evokes the irregular rhythm of life despite its sparse qualities, is largely attributed to the precise language. Her diction is charged with the minutest of details and significance. Such attributes affirm that nothing is lost on the consciousness of the writer. "Encounter," the treated story in this paper, embodies these tendencies.

On a formalist level, "Encounter" configures the collapse of a romantic relationship along the patterns of a detective story. Henry, the earnest engineer, returns from fieldwork to discover that his uncomplicated Mona had morphed overnight into a glib artistic critic. Baffled by this unexpected change in his fiancée but determined to preserve the relationship nevertheless, Henry, who professes pleasure in the simple and the ordinary, forces himself to follow her lead. In trying to understand the new Mona, Henry turns sleuth and the story tosses in clues here and there to suggest that Mona's transformation is less than genuine. Reluctant and frustrated in his initial stab at literary canons like Kafka, Henry nevertheless gains a secure grasp of these authors' discourses, and to his and Mona's embarrassment emerges as the authentic critic. Eventually, Henry unmasks Mona for what she really is – a woman insecure enough of herself to assume a false identity.

Following the commonplace notion of narrative as mimetic, the story moves toward closure through the medium of Henry's character. As center of consciousness and hence source of meaning, Henry exemplifies the classic realist theory of character as consistent, unified, and coherent, whose infinite capacity for understanding and knowledge enables him to recognize the 'world' in himself and consequently, resolve any conflict that disrupts the unity of the text.

Yet this way of reading is reductive and shortsighted as it fails to explore and account for the manner in which the peculiar use of language in the story draws attention to its textuality. Textuality, a concept that refers to the material conditions of the object, implies that literature is constructed from words rather than a source of timeless truths about a world 'out there,' which is static and unchanging (Jones 641). This approach rejects the notion that literature mirrors life as if language were a transparent medium, unmediated by historical conventions and individual intentions. More importantly, textuality surfaces and imputes significance to the contradictions of the text. It likewise challenges the concept of character as a source of truth since it too is constructed in language.

This paper, therefore, attempts to show a more textured reading of the story, "Encounter." It will employ Mikhail Bakhtin's framework of novelistic image and dialogism in understanding the characters and the layers of their utterances. The theory posits that language, especially in novelistic prose, is a discourse made up of various utterances by individuals conditioned by social and historical contexts.

Bakhtin, a major voice in the discourse theory of literature, bases the study of language and literary texts on the utterances of embodied subjects situated historically in contending socio-ideological spheres. He argues that language operates on heteroglossia, a stratification layered by individual speeches, value judgments, and specific worldviews among others (see 291), as it emerges from a reality that is ever changing, open-ended, and contradictory. The resulting interplay among these spoken discourses in turn establishes language as exponentially dialogic: each word is charged with the energies of other "alien" words, and utterances are responses to ones previously spoken, which in turn, anticipates other responses (291).

Bakhtin's discussion of the dialogic, which characterizes novelistic prose, has paved the way for meaning to be understood in such texts, as polysemic, contested, open-ended – subjected to an inherent heteroglossia.

Dialogism for Bakhtin manifests, among other things, the inherent capacity of language to register its plurality, its heteroglossia, thus allowing for the representing language and the one re-presented to engage in conversation, in a dialogue (314). Bakhtin attributes this capacity of any single utterance to speak a double voice to the operations of the novelistic image, which is the image of a culturally specific speech, style, or genre re-presented or refracted by language, as if these were enclosed under "intonational quotation marks" (44). Unlike monologic genres such as the lyric poem and the epic, the novel or novelistic prose allows a multiplicity of discourses, which is a given in any moment of daily life, to converse among themselves. To examine then the discourse in the novel as perennially dynamic, exposed to the open-endedness of contemporary reality, is to entertain an understanding of the genre's atmosphere as a dialogized heteroglossia, occasioned by the presence of various social speech utterances, which reveals the ideology of the speakers (333). Language thus becomes "overpopulated with the intentions of others," – the author's and the discourse spoken or represented by the characters. This interanimation of languages creates in the novel a "stylization," a mimicking, which is comic, parodic, or ironic in effect, that usually results in a reduction in the seriousness of the re-presented speech. In any novelistic prose that allows the dynamism of language to operate, this diversity of speech types represents respective ideologies which interact with

each other.

This view of language as heteroglot and dialogic invites a re-reading of certain conditions and elements in the story, which a purely formalist aesthetics would declare as fixed representations of life. Henry's character, particularly his speeches in the story, is such an instance. The story at first glance seems to privilege the protagonist's perspective and judgment. The capable, genuine-thinker, and "plastic" male is juxtaposed with the vacuous, dilettante, and two-dimensional fiancée. But further inspection of language exposes this reading to be reductive as it disregards the dialogic qualities of speeches in the story.

The diction and tropes used by the author in establishing Henry's character, thoughts, actions, and direct speeches, embody a stylization which discloses an unfolding dialogism. Alongside the seemingly unitary development of Henry's character are invisible but palpable intonational quotation marks placed by the author which call into question the protagonist's claim to an authoritative voice in the story. This dialogism associated with the character reflects how language has the capacity to represent authorial intention, refract this intention, and become reified as objects (dead, period-bound speeches), which is deployed by novelistic prose in order to establish the intentional theme of the author. Furthermore, Bakhtin explains that the novel rarely contains speeches that directly represent authorial discourse because the novelist usually uses refraction - a mode that channels authorial language via another's speech or reification. Reification is the process in which a speech becomes objectified and used as mere artifact in the text (432).

The operation of dialogism is illustrated in Henry's character, either through description or dialogue. In the following discussion, dialogism engenders a questioning of the ideological belief-systems reflected by each use of language.

The third paragraph in the opening of the story describes Henry's state upon awakening as a "*communion* (my emphasis) with the ceiling." The narrator likewise uses a lofty word to describe an earlier action: "Henry opened his eyes and *librated* (my emphasis) for a while between oblivion and consciousness" (97). Later on in the story, Henry is gradually presented as a character that thinks too much, but he dismisses this attribute, preferring the practical and the mundane. The precise diction used by the narrator and Henry's thoughts taken together as a single image, represent an ironic re-reading of his role in the story. This is an instance of what Bakhtin identifies as a refraction of authorial intention, where the author's discourse enters into the speech of another (303) – in this case, the narrator. What results is a jarring, contradictory image of Henry, which destabilizes his authority in the story. For someone who supposedly shuns the sublime or the

philosophical, Henry's indirect speeches are surprisingly eloquent as can be gleaned from the italicized words and their variants in the story. Moreover, his prodigious mastery of literary discourse in the story now becomes suspect. Analyzing the interplay between these two sets of representations directs our attention to the uneven construction, intentionally so, of Henry's character.

Equally illuminating are the manner in which Henry articulates the voice of the critic and how the speech of the narrator represents Henry's self-education via specific diction. In light of the interplay of languages established in the story, it is significant that Henry's appreciation of literary theory was occasioned by his reading of Hemingway, Freud, and Jung – authors known for their masculine discourses that tend towards phallogocentrism. Phallogocentrism is a coinage that fuses phallogocentrism (male-centered discourse) and logocentrism (the privileging of the spoken word as a direct access to truth). It describes how patriarchal assumptions insinuate themselves in existing languages and how masculine biases are naturalized as cultural and linguistic conventions (Childers and Hentzi 225). In the story, these are presented as objectified, dead speeches that refract authorial intention. More importantly, the narrator's and sometimes Henry's speech through a single word, simile/metaphor, or expression appropriates, mimics, and parodies these phallogocentric discourses, by turning it into a novelistic image.

Henry's facility with Hemingway expressed in the speech: "Who said the study of literature did not lend itself to systematization, he asked *rhetorically*," (102) is an instance of parodization. Hemingway is known for his frequent use of elevated rhetoric as a device in his fiction, and in attaching and applying the device to Henry's speech the word and the discourse it represents are relativized, reduced in its seriousness. Moreover, the lack of distance between the narrator's introduction of Hemingway in this part of the story and Henry's speedy application of the term in his own processing of the author, suggest that his scholarship is specious, put on, and is perhaps, mere mimicry. The same effect happens to Hemingway's rhetoric. It likewise suffers in representation, a desultory object of study, something that can be effortlessly applied.

A similar parodization occurs in the narrator's description of Henry's easy read of 'After the Storm', a work of fiction by Hemingway. In the speech, Henry's experience of reading the work and interpreting its symbols is likened to "a child hunting for rare shells" (102) – a simile appropriated from the text itself. Such an easy appropriation dismisses the necessary rigor in unlocking the symbols in the text. A comic effect is likewise produced when the narrator's speech characterizes Henry's reading as "breezing gaily" through the work. Again, such use of expression, which is borrowed from the trope of the work itself,



undermines the perceived complexity and seriousness of the work.

The rest of Henry's discovery and delight over his ease in interpreting symbols unfolds in the same manner. The last instance of this ease in interpreting symbols is in his reading of the snake as a symbol in Freudian psychology. Encouraged by Mona's approval, Henry, whose mind suddenly opens to psychoanalytic criticism, *gobbles* many other literary works (103). "Gobble," representing the snake as a Freudian symbol, is applied to Henry's sudden interest in psychoanalytic criticism, producing a comic, parodizing effect. This stylization of the figure of the snake is extended when Henry's relationship with Mona is described to have "taken the quality of intravenous feeding." The same parodizing effect is read here.

Consolidating the variety of Henry's language, one gleans a side of his character-as a specious, critical thinker. In Bakhtin's theory, the speaking person in novelistic prose always carries with him an ideology which his language represents (332). Novelistic prose is thus unique because in it, language transforms itself into an image under the condition of heteroglossia (336). As a speaking human being in the story, Henry's language represents inflated masculine discourse, obsessed with omnipotence and omnipresence. This is immediately perceived at the beginning of the story. Although Mona is the more conspicuous fraud, whose language, after her transformation, represents a dead one (memorized quotations from literary texts and the like), it is Henry, whose aspiration to authority is undermined. This is brought about by the dialogism of the language.

Mona's language, prior to her 'transformation,' is consolidated in the language of the needy, clingy, and domesticated fiancée:

Just after you left I had so much time in my hands. I never realized before how much time we had spent together. It was a dreadful feeling: not knowing where you're going when you're at the bus stop and buses going everywhere whiz past you. (99)

This utterance, the content of the letter Mona sent to Henry in his absence, is significant for two reasons: First, it represents Mona's former role as a meek and passive female, and as such, enters into dialogue in anticipating a response from Henry in his role as the ever-concerned, altruistic, conscientious lover. Second, the simple diction of this speech also establishes Mona's desolation in the story, in contrast to Henry's assured, confident, and lofty speeches, utterances, which embody his character.

More than any other device, it is really language in the story which is capable

of surfacing the rich texture, the interplay of meanings in the story. Through its hybrid construction and double-voicedness, language unravels the attempts of masculine discourse to assume an authoritative voice in the story. This is used to refract the author's intentions of unmasking, ridiculing masculine/patriarchal discourse for what it is in the story – an inadequate attempt at containing reality. Thus, Henry is not more authentic than Mona in his search for meaning in literature. As the previous analysis shows, his criticism is just as crude. His is the more insidious hypocrisy compared to Mona's.

But the effect of dialogism inherent in the text does not stop short at a parodization of masculine discourse. In refracting and reifying the languages in the story, the intention of the author, it seems, is to expose the inadequacy of authoritative words in capturing reality. By implication, unitary languages can never really exhaust reality in its complexity and open-endedness. Thus in the end of the story, Henry cannot but remain silent: "Henry wished then he could say something kind to her, *but the words did not come* (my emphasis)" (108).

This last speech (the narrator's) is important because it contrasts with the earlier exchanges between Henry and Mona, most of which are bandied around quotations from authoritative literary texts. In the end, unitary language, like the discourse of the philosopher-critic, is ill-equipped to embody necessary human gestures like dialogue. Unitary language becomes detrimental if it does not come into contact with the present, in its plurality of languages. Bakhtin refers to it as the authoritative word. It is the prior discourse, located in a distanced zone; it is the word of the fathers (342). The inability of the couple to communicate in the story is symptomatic of this privileging of the authoritative word. Silence or non-speech ends the story because the authoritative word censures all authentic dialogue.

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## NEW SCHOLARS FORUM

### REPRESENTATIONS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS IN SIMEON DUMDUM'S *THE GIFT OF SLEEP*

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#### Abstract

The Unconscious is perhaps the most important psychological concept that has come to have a bearing on not only literary theory but also in literary works themselves. It is interesting, therefore, to examine how the concept of the 'unknowable' has come to be represented in particular works of literature. This paper examines how the Unconscious has been represented in Simeon Dumdum's poetry collection, *The Gift of Sleep*. Through a close textual analysis of the poems, this paper illustrates how Dumdum's textual representations of the unconscious have come to be in concordance with and in deviation from those established by Freud and Lacan, with special emphasis on the topographic representations of the Unconscious, the Freudian idea of the dream-work, and the concept of the unconscious as Other.

#### Keywords

poetry, psychoanalysis

#### About the Author

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When Freud "discovered" the unconscious in his seminal work "A Note on the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis," not only was the field of psychiatry going to be forever changed, but also the way in which the rest of the world would come to understand and interpret the workings of the human mind. It would also ultimately change how we would talk about that which was not only unknown, but unknowable, for the unconscious was precisely that—it was the unknowable part of the mind that revealed itself only through slips of the tongue, neurotic symptoms, and dreams. And in as much as this was an abstract concept, it was therefore "condemned" to be described not only in journals of psychiatry but also in everyday speech in the most indirect ways through analogies, metaphors, and figures of speech.

It is interesting, therefore, to examine how the concept of the unconscious has come to be represented in works of literature, whether manifestly in the form of poetry collections and novels written expressly around psychological concepts, or in less obvious ways in the form of works whose psychological concerns are more subtly integrated into the text.

### SIMEON DUMDUM, JR. AND *THE GIFT OF SLEEP*

Simeon Dumdum, Jr., a contemporary Filipino poet, whose work has been published in three poetry collections, is well-known as a poet of witty humor and satire. His most anthologized poem, for example, is "Third World Opera," a poem of political satire where a town mayor, in the blissful ignorance of thinking himself a legitimate "patron of the arts," applauds the kick that he gets from one of the lead actors on the false premise that it is "art." Dumdum is also well-acknowledged as a poet with a keen sense for the ironic in the most ordinary of Filipino circumstances as found in other anthologized poems like "Some Die of Light" and "To My Mother."

As a result, even if some of his poems like "Axioms" and "When is a poem already a poem" lend themselves to interpretations that regard these poems as philosophical expositions on the nature of consciousness, his poetry collections have hardly been read in the context of psychology and the unconscious, or as commentaries on the nature of the imagination. This, even as from across the three poetry collections of *Selected Poems*, *Third World Opera*, and *The Gift of Sleep*, a persistent preoccupation with the states of dream and wakefulness and the natures of knowledge is evident.

Whereas other Filipino poets like Alejandro Abadilla and Pedro Ricarte have been recognized and their works evaluated on the basis of their takes on the Self, Consciousness, and other psychological concepts, no such studies have been made on the poems of Dumdum. It is, therefore the aim of this paper to provide what this author feels is a much-needed "psychoanalytic" perspective in the reading of his poems by illustrating through a close textual analysis of the poems found in *The Gift of Sleep*<sup>1</sup> the ways in which the Unconscious, a fundamental concept of psychology, has been represented.

This paper in no way seeks to give a definitive interpretation of these poems, or to come out with a reductive understanding of the work of Dumdum. Instead, it aims to provide an enriching understanding of the poems specifically and the textual and cultural representations of the Unconscious in general. It also seeks to examine to what degree Dumdum's representations of the unconscious match with "established" western representations, and to what extent they deviate from them, if ever they do.

## THE TOPOLOGICAL AND HYDRAULIC MODELS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

In her essay on the unconscious, published in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, Professor Francoise Meltzer describes two ways in which the unconscious has been represented: the topographic model and the hydraulic model.

In the topographic model, the unconscious is described using “spatial notions of place and layers in the mind” (qtd. in Letricchia and McLaughlin 147). In this model, we have descriptions of the unconscious as the “uncharted terrains,” “unknown regions,” and “dark places” of the mind. It is a *place* of memory and a *repository* of dreams. It is also popularly described as an antechamber leading to the sitting room of consciousness where desires are seen as attempting to bypass the guarded sentry of the repression barrier and enter the sitting room.

In the hydraulic model, the unconscious is described in terms of “energy” and “tension.” The unconscious is seen as a “throbbing energy center” in which tension “builds up” and seeks “release.” This “psychic tension” is released in the form of puns, slips of the tongue, and neurotic or psychotic symptoms. It is also in this model where we find the important concept of *repression*, as it is the force against which these “psychic tensions” in the form of secret desires and hidden wishes push to overcome.

## “BIRTHPLACE”

These two models of the unconscious are probably the most popular, so it is no surprise that they may be found evident in many of the poems in *The Gift of Sleep*. One such poem is “Birthplace”:

This is the land  
I told you about  
    (That’s the river  
    we shall have to roll  
5 our trousers and wade  
    Tweet sings that sunbird  
    In the yellow grass)  
    over which I have the right  
    of first refusal.

(Dumdum 6)

Here, what seems to be an overt description of a hometown ultimately turns into a meditation on memory and the place of memory. Right at the start of the poem, the reader is led to believe that this birthplace is not so much an actual place concretely returnable to but a “conceptual” place defined not by where it actually is but what has been said about it. It is significant only in relation to what is uttered about it. How it is represented is all that there is—“This is the land / I told you about.”

This is important to take note of because in lines that follow, it is exactly that which we get—a description of the place, off-hand and almost enigmatic. The use of the parenthesis gives this description the connotations of an aside, a hushed remark. It is information given “in addition to.” In other words, it is either given indirectly (meaning, beside the point), or it is actually unsaid—a mere gesture, like a pointing at.

The last two lines of the poem reveal reason for this return. It is the land “over which I [the persona] have the right / of first refusal.” This is a statement that clearly doesn’t make sense. What exactly has been refused? And what are the other refusals of which this is the first one? And why is the persona returning to this place that he has purportedly already refused?

So far, what we get from the poem is that there is a persona who is showing us the place of his birth. He has presumably talked to us about this place and so he points to things he has already told us about: the river, the tweet of the birds, and the fact that this is the place of first refusal. And this is all that we get; for the poem is, in fact, syntactically merely a sentence.

However, once we read the poem in the context of the topographic and “hydraulic” models of the unconscious, a number of ambiguous elements become clearer. As we have already mentioned, one of the ways the unconscious is represented is as a *place* containing that which is “unknowable” and “unknown.” It is a place, therefore, that can be talked about in terms of something other than itself. And it is defined exactly by those terms of description. Once we accept the possibility that this “birthplace” can be seen in a similar way, then the poem begins to make a little more sense to us. This is the place that is significant only to the extent that it is made manifest in terms other than itself. It is also not just any place but the *birth* place, that from which we originate. And to the extent that the unconscious is such a place of *childhood memories*, then perhaps this birthplace *is* the unconscious.

Lines 3-7, therefore, as they are set in parentheses, take on the semblance of a slip of the tongue, an unintentional remark, an expression of the unconscious—an outburst, a blurt. And this first right of refusal can ultimately be understood as the first instance of



psychological repression. This is the place of first denial.

Already at this point, it is clear that Dumdum appropriates both models of the unconscious—the unconscious both as place, and as repository of psychic tension necessitating the conscious act of repression.

### THE DREAM-WORK

Now that we have ascertained the nature of the description of the birthplace as a “verbal slip of the tongue,” let us examine the description itself which we are to take now, in this context, as the manifestation of the unconscious itself, and which goes:

“(That’s the river  
we shall have to roll  
our trousers and wade  
Tweet sings that sunbird  
In the yellow grass)”

It is a scene that matches expected representations of any Filipino hometown. And yet it can also be seen as an imaginative if not fantastic rendering of it. One wonders if there is really such a bird as a sunbird and if the “yellow” grass is a depiction of the dried grass of summer or if it really *is* yellow.

This fantastic aspect of the image illustrates one of the most fundamental ways in which the unconscious expresses itself— what has been called in psychoanalytic theory as the dream-work. For Freud, any dream was composed of a manifest content (the images seen in a dream) and a latent content (dream-thought). And any dream was to be understood as a form of picture-puzzle or a rebus whose images were to be treated not as mere images in themselves but as symbols of more abstract concepts. This “distortion” of the latent content was seen to happen either through a process of condensation or a process of displacement. In condensation, a sole idea represents several associative chains at whose center it is located. While in displacement, units with high psychical values are transferred to units of lower “charge.” The river, the bird, and the grass, are, therefore, meant to be read as potential symbols for “something else,” as “more than themselves,” perhaps of unresolved situations, or as unexpressed desires that need to be repressed.

Another aspect of the dream-work is the transformation of the rhetoric of the dream-message into the “grammar-less” image of the manifest content. According to Freud, for

example, causalities, may be depicted as two images or dreams which go one after the other, and logical connections may be represented through simultaneity. One way of interpreting the images in the poem is by saying that the tweet of the bird may actually be a response to the wading in the river, or the wading may be the direct response to such a tweet.

The dream-work through the processes of displacement and condensation are all ways in which unacceptable desires and wishes escape the censorships imposed by repression. One such common method and “image” of the unconscious desire and wish is through the use of the images of animals. In fact, images of the natural world as whole are rife sources of such displacements.

### “NIGHT DEER”

In this context, it would therefore be interesting to do a textual analysis on another poem by Dumdum, “Night Deer”:

It was deer dark when I opened the door,  
I mean in the blackness I could make out  
The free form of a fawn, a nose  
Would be there small and cold, would cloud  
5 My face, and if I stretched my hand I'd hold  
A funny little jaw, how dark the round  
Night, and it would kneel if it was stroked  
And I would pat it, and about  
This deer, of course, I'd been feeling the road,  
10 Touch and its tale, and darkness you could count  
How many deer –  
And then I would not close  
The door so they could come and right around,  
Darkness and its animals, so you would know.

(Dumdum 14)

In the poem, the night, in as much as it connotes the unknown, the unfamiliar, and, therefore, the dangerous, is made known and “knowable” through the image of a deer – “It was deer dark when I opened the door.”

The first line of the poem is interesting in that (1) deer is used as a metaphor for the night, and that (2) this is actually based on a play of words on the phrase “*dear dark*.” The unknown, intimidating night is made harmless (in the form of the deer), and intimate (in that it is “*dear*”), which is explained and explicated within the poem itself in the succeeding lines: “*I mean in the blackness I could make out / The free form of a fawn...*” [italics mine]. In the context of dream-work, this explication actually represents the *de*-coding of the dream-puzzle or riddle itself. The “*dear dark*” (as it is a metaphor and as such a complete product of the dream-work) in as much as it becomes explainable ultimately comes under the control of the “*I*.” In fact, the night-deer becomes subservient to the persona’s will-- “and it would kneel if it was stroked / And I would pat it.”

Another interesting part of the poem that can be read as an instance of dream-work occurs when the persona, having tamed this “*night*,” strokes this “*animal*” and instead of finding a *tail*, finds instead a *tale*! The image of the tail is a common symbol in both literature and common rhetoric for the “*base*” instincts, the uncivilized part of nature; in other words, that which is not consistent with man’s essence as a rational being. To have a *tail* transform to *tale*, therefore, means more than a “*taming*” of the unknown; it is really a full appropriation of the strange and inhuman into the human. To tell a tale, in this context therefore, is really to integrate something “*other*” into the schema of narrative and human consciousness. And the unconscious is made known, not only to individual consciousness but ultimately to the collective consciousness. It becomes knowledge capable of being talked about, and therefore shareable—“*Darkness and its animals so you would know*” [italics mine].

Using the concepts of the dream-work, therefore, we are able to explore a whole layer of Dumdum’s poetry as it alludes to and makes use of established representations of the unconscious. Another example of this is the way Dumdum depicts the encounter of the persona with the unknowable (read as the encounter of consciousness with the unconscious, and in the case of “*Night Deer*,” the meeting of the persona with the “*deer dark*”)—which is through the opening of a door-- “*It was deer dark when I opened the door*” (line 1) and “*And then I would not close / The door so they could come and right around*” (lines 12, 13).

This depiction of the encounter is, if we are to remember, actually in direct concordance with the topographical representations of the unconscious. Specifically, we mean the representations of the unconscious as the anteroom barred by the “*door*” of repression from being connected to the room of consciousness. Dumdum’s use of the image of *opening the door* can, therefore, be re-read in this context as ultimately the meeting

of the consciousness with unconscious desires, and the fact of keeping this door open as correlative to acknowledging such unconscious desires.

### “CAMPING OUT”

This depiction of the encounter with the unconscious is also seen in another of Dumdum’s poems entitled, “Camping Out”:

Night catches me  
on a triangle edged with grass.  
I need three walls  
to protect me:

The first,  
to keep out the wild boar  
beset by fireflies;

The second,  
to ward off the one-eyed insect  
that bores into my poems;

The third,  
to hold back the wild boar  
and the one-eyed insect  
in case they move  
to the third side.

I will have no roof.  
He who has a roof  
has a star for an enemy.

(Dumdum 9)

Again in the poem “Camping Out,” Dumdum appropriates a form of the topographical model of the unconscious. However, unlike in “Night Deer” where it is the persona which initiates the encounter with “dark night,” here it appears that it is night

itself which, this time, insists on the encounter—“Night catches me / on a triangle edged with grass” (lines 1, 2).

It is an act of surprise which the persona sees the necessity of protecting himself from. Unlike the harmless deer, however, this encounter is with a “wild boar beset by fireflies” and a “one-eyed insect.” Dumdum continues his depiction of the dream-work through the image of an animal; but he does this in what seems to be a doubly distorted portrayal. These are not animals which appear as they are described in the natural world. In fact, they are aberrations of them. These are far different from the subservient deer, in that they are persistent, and more importantly open to the possibility of, to borrow a psychoanalytic term, transference. To interpret this image in psychoanalytic terms, they are more insistent in overcoming the barrier of repression.

For Freud, this encounter with the unsettlingly strange was the encounter with the “uncanny.” And by “uncanny” he meant the “class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (Freud, “The Uncanny” 930). Dumdum’s images of the boar and the insect are to be understood as feared not because they are totally strange but because they are, in a sense, “partly” so. They frighten not because they are altogether *not familiar* or *not known* but because they remind us of that which is in fact, known and familiar. They represent aberrations.

At the end of “Camping Out,” the persona in the poem, however, makes a surprising decision--- he “will have no roof.” Having already built three walls, the persona is expected to ensure his “safety” by building a roof, but he chooses not to do this because, as the persona says in the poem, he realizes that to build a roof would have “a star for his enemy.” The clever way in which Dumdum ends this poem radically changes not only the way we understand the persona’s predicament but also the way we reckon with the whole nature of the “strange” for, rather than being an a priori state which the “I” merely reacts to, the last line signifies that perhaps it is, in fact, an *effect* rather than the *cause* of such an attempt at protection. The star becomes an enemy not because it is to be feared in the first place, but because it becomes ominous once the roof is built. Similarly, one is led to deduce that the animals become feared not because they are to be feared in the first place, but because they become reason for fear only when the wall is built.

This idea of the strange as *produced* and not *reacted to* is actually similar to the ideas of Lacanian psychoanalysis on the “nature” of the unconscious. Jacques Lacan was a famous French psychoanalyst who is well known for having re-interpreted many of the ideas of Freud. One of the most famous Lacanian axioms is that “the unconscious is structured like a language.” Building on ideas derived from structuralism (specifically the

works of de Saussure and Jakobson), Lacan proposed that in the same way that meaning in language does not lie in some transcendental signified but is produced through a process of signification (passing through a signifying chain), so too is the unconscious to be understood not as some preexisting state *before* consciousness but as something produced only in the moment the child enters what Lacan calls the Symbolic Order. This symbolic realm (of language), as opposed to a previous “profuse” Imaginary realm, is defined by Lack. Here, each signifier brings with it the notion of an absence in which it merely “stands in” for. And the meaning of words is not defined by some transcendental signified but is a product of being *different* from other signifiers. It is not surprising, therefore, that the unconscious itself is seen in these theories as ultimately that which is *different from* consciousness, and “Other.”

According to Lacan, the unconscious is that which is unknown and alien to the Subject and, therefore, that which lends itself to the idea of otherness. For Lacan, “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other.” It is that which the subject does not recognize to be himself, and which he experiences as *other than himself*. To some extent it is even the place where the subject *refuses* to recognize himself.

According to this theory, however, the subject and the other are not mutually exclusive and non-contiguous. The Subject will project his own desire in the Other, and the Subject is the place where the Other will see himself.

It is evident in the way Dumdum represents the whole concept of “otherness” in his poems that his ideas of “representing” this otherness are not far from those expressed in psychoanalytic theory. This “otherness,” for example, is depicted as an “alien night” made known and tamed through the metaphor, or two grotesque creatures whom one must “protect oneself from,” and who, we realize at the end of the poem, are really the products of such a “protection” rather than the cause for the *need* of such defense. In “Camping Out,” this “other” is not only distorted but also persistently intrusive.

In the context of “otherness,” it is interesting to return to and re-read the poem “Birthplace.” For at the literal level, as we have already established earlier, this poem presents a persona’s nostalgia for that from which he came, and for that which is presumably most known. It is of interest therefore, as we have also discussed earlier, that such “knowledge” is based precisely on the *refusal* of that knowledge, and in as much as it is familiarity denied, affinity refused, it is ultimately “Other.” This is the birthplace as much of the persona as it is the birth of everything *not him*, Other, unconscious. Dumdum it seems echoes Lacan’s words: “I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think” (Lacan, qtd. in Leitch 1295).

**"THE GIFT OF SLEEP"**

Which brings us, finally, to the poem whose title is likewise the title of this collection:

Now I am blessed with this sudden sight:

a tree on the side of the hill and smoke  
rising below

Far greater to blessed than to be given  
5 as I would have given myself  
time in that room in the dark back  
of this view: the smoke rising like a hand  
in benediction

And as I refuse the sleep I refuse  
10 I accept (the wind passing through my soul  
as the dog ambles past the gate)  
the remoteness of the bonfire

What home I have is on this hill,  
and if my eyes hold on to the tree on the side,  
15 it is because it is the last landmark of a country  
I am soon to leave, and I pat the dog,  
Wanting to return.

(Dumdum 18)

In "The Gift of Sleep," we begin literally, with a dream of a sudden sight-- "a tree on the side of the hill and smoke / rising below," and a dream that comes in the form of a blessing. Already, the "gift"-ness of this dream presupposes an "otherness" *from which* this dream comes. This statement is uttered by the persona in direct comparison to the possibility that the dream came from him in "that room in the dark back / of this view." Here, Dumdum once again makes a possible allusion to the "room of consciousness." This room, however, is seen as dark and is positioned at the background, both descriptions of which are usually connected to the unconscious rather than to consciousness--the unconscious as dark and as "hovering behind" the conscious wakeful state. This is an



indication that, perhaps, Dumdum, at this particular point in the collection, veers from the common idea of the “secondhand” role of the unconscious and highlights its *primariness*.

In Line 9, Dumdum uses a double negative—“And I refuse the sleep I refuse.” Once again, we find shades of the ideas regarding this *acceptance of the unconscious*, as really a reaction against the repressive acts of consciousness—a refusal of a refusal.

Finally, two conflicting concepts are presented by Dumdum in the rest of the poem: that of the “remoteness of the bonfire” and the “home” that is described as “on the hill.” The dialectic between “home” and “remote” really harks back to the dialectic between the “known” and the “unknown,” Subject and Other, and ultimately consciousness and the unconscious.

In German, the word “uncanny” translates into *unheimlich* which literally means “Un-homely.” The word *heimlich*, therefore, becomes of interest to Freud because while on the one hand, it connotes that which is homely, familiar, and tame (hence Un-*heimlich* as “unfamiliar” and therefore to a certain extent also “uncertain”), on the other hand, *heimlich* also means “secret,” “withheld from” and “held out of sight” -- the complete opposite of the first definition which actually hints on the known (Freud, “The Uncanny” qtd. in Leitch 935). The ambivalence in the word’s meaning led Freud to define the uncanny as not so much the fright caused by the encounter with the *not* familiar, but precisely with the *all too* familiar in the form of the repressed. The unconscious was to be seen, therefore, to adapt Dumdum’s terms as a “remoteness” that was perfectly “homely,” or, to turn it the other way, a “homely perfectly remote.” The “other” was therefore, not only that which was completely opposite but also completely fundamental to the subject:

I am soon to leave, and I pat the dog,  
Wanting to return.

To leave the dream, was at the same time, to return to it.

## THE GIFT OF THE UNDECIDED

As we have already seen, the poems in *The Gift of Sleep*, as they are both ruminations and explanations on dreams and wakefulness, adopt many of the ways in which the unconscious has been represented in psychoanalysis: the unconscious as a place (topographic model), as tension that needs to be released (hydraulic model) against the restriction of the repressive ego, or, ultimately, as Other which is in direct contrast to the

Self and yet at the same time fundamental to it.

It is to be stressed, however, that while it is unclear whether Dumdum was conscious of these representations and wrote these poems as a deliberate expression of these representations, this paper has hopefully illustrated how the poems in the collection do appropriate and express such acknowledged representations and ideas. Again, this paper does not propose “definitive” interpretations of these poems but merely hopes that the understanding of these poems has been greatly enriched because of this “psychoanalytic” perspective.

The task of representation is always a tricky one, especially when the *means* of such a representation never actually captures the *object* represented. It is, however, doubly tricky when such a *means* is language itself—its meaning perpetually deferred-- and the *object* is the unknowable—the unconscious.

## NOTES

- 1 This collection was first published in 1982 (New Day Publishers) and was subsequently published in 1999 together with his other poetry collections, in *New and Selected Poems* (Ateneo de Manila Office of Research and Publication).

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