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TOWARD A RENEWAL OF CRITICAL PRACTICE: REFLECTIONS ON THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT AND FILIPINO SELF DETERMINATION

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Abstract

This essay examines the significance of the developing Occupy movement within the United States, which emerged from a year of global protests (2011). It suggests that one way to broaden its vision of solidarity is to renew our critical practice (“conscientization and action” – borrowing from Brazilian educator Paulo Freire). A renewal of critical practice within the context of this essay involves examining the following more closely: 1) the dynamics of race and class in the United States and abroad, 2) the site of the academy (the politics of knowledge production), and 3.) the significance of our submerged histories of collective struggle for racial and economic justice. The essay asserts that the Filipino diasporic experience and ongoing struggle for self determination (Filipinos now constitute one of the largest—if not the largest—segment of the Asian American population) can offer useful theoretical tools for renewing our critical practice in the Occupy era. Two contemporary Filipino cultural texts, which reflect upon the dialectical relationship between Filipinos in the United States and in the Philippines, are examined: E. San Juan, Jr’s *Toward Filipino Self Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization* (2009) and Sari Lluch Dalena and Keith Sicat’s film *Rigodon* (2005). These texts provide theoretical concepts and methodological approaches for renewing our critical practice within and beyond the US academy: 1.) they encourage interdisciplinary fields, which have historical roots in movements for social justice from the 1960s/70s (Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies), to renew their commitment to creating social change; 2.) they shed light on the unique contributions of Filipinos to movements for social justice.

Keywords

Filipino Americans, Filipino Diaspora, US-Philippines relations, social justice movements and the academy

About the author

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In December 2011, *Time Magazine* announced the protester as its person of the year. The *Time* photographic essay documents the proliferation of collective protests around the globe—the Arab Spring, the *indignados* in Spain, the Occupy movement in the United States—to challenge oppressive regimes and forms of economic inequality. In an interview with novelist and author of the *Time* cover story Kurt Andersen, managing editor Richard Stengel asks why the protester had been selected. Andersen responded by recalling a time when the Civil Rights and antiwar movements were covered by major news outlets; however, over the past several decades mass protests seemed to have “fallen out of fashion as an effective political tool.” In light of this sense of political paralysis, 2011 is indeed significant for opening a new chapter of history with the return of a “global sense of protesting against governments that are perceived as corrupt and ineffectual” (“Why TIME”). According to Stengel, “Protests have now occurred in countries whose populations total at least three billion people, and the word *protest* has appeared in newspapers and online exponentially more this past year than at any other time in history” (“2011 Person of the Year”).

The Arab Spring emerging from the popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and other countries in the Arab world opened a space for what African American philosopher Cornel West calls the US Autumn. The Occupy Wall Street Movement launched on September 17, 2011 at Liberty Square/Zuccotti Park in New York City took the United States and the world by surprise as hundreds of thousands were inspired by the movement’s creative and spontaneous democratic approach to challenging the consequences of decades of neoliberal austerity measures (Dobnik, “Occupy Wall Street Reaches”; Trudell, “The Occupy Movement and Class Politics”). According to the Occupy Wall Street website, the movement seeks to:

fight back against the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process, and the role of Wall Street in creating an economic collapse that has caused the greatest recession in generations. The movement is inspired by popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, and aims to fight back against the richest 1% of people that are writing the rules of an unfair global economy that is foreclosing on our future.

Within the first few months of its existence, the Occupy movement gained tremendous support across the country and around the world. It also “won some grudging respect from mainstream media, recognizing that its protests resonate among huge sectors of the population” (“From ‘Occupy’”). By late November, despite the violent eviction of many major Occupy encampments and the reprehensible pepper spraying of nonviolent college students at UC Davis, the *New York Times* reported that the Occupy slogan—We are the 99%—had entered the “cultural and political

lexicon" (Stelter, "Camps are Cleared"). The Occupy movement, which has "spread to over 100 cities in the United States and actions in over 1,500 cities globally" (*Occupy Wall Street*), continues to deepen an awareness of class conflict in US society where the official unemployment rate is 9%. Additional data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, however, sets the unemployment rate at 16.5%—this "includes those who are discouraged from looking for work because there are no jobs, or they lack experience or skills or face discrimination, and those who work part time but want full-time jobs" (Trudell, "The Occupy Movement and Class Politics"). According to a recent report from the Pew Research Center, "two-thirds of the public (66%) believes there are 'very strong' or 'strong' conflicts between the rich and the poor—an increase of 19 percentage points since 2009" (Morin, "Rising Share").

When *Time Magazine*, a mainstream US news outlet, decided to focus on the figure of the protester as person of the year, *Al Jazeera English* interviewed Jesse Spector, a young Occupy protester. Spector's response gives voice to the ways in which a new generation of activists is creating new forms of collective subjectivities, which are in the process of becoming: "Real change is beyond any one person. It's about a movement and about a group of people and about a wave of change. So the fact that a whole concept, an idea, a gathering of Occupy that's spread around the country is now being named as the person of the year is incredibly exciting for what it means for social change" ("Time Magazine Names Protesters"). The coverage in mainstream corporatized media is a testament to the incredible strength, power, and promise of collective protests in the United States and around the globe for human dignity and economic justice. Cornel West, shortly after the launching of Occupy in New York City, commented on how the protests provide a much needed opportunity for a collective democratic awakening to the consequences of decades of neoliberal restructuring—an opportunity to call for a "transfer of power from oligarchs to ordinary citizens, beginning with the poor children of all colors and the orphans and the widows and the elderly and the working folk."

West's sentiments are reflected in a lively panel discussion on the Occupy movement held after its two-month anniversary at The New School in New York City and co-hosted by *The Nation*. Journalists Naomi Klein, William Greider, Rinku Sen, Patrick Bruner, and filmmaker Michael Moore came together for the event titled "Occupy Everywhere: On the New Politics and Possibilities of the Movement Against Corporate Power." Bruner and others on the panel acknowledged that the Occupy movement represents a much needed psychic break—a shifting of public consciousness about structural inequality and about the process of creating change. Klein highlighted how the Occupy movement is the first major mass outcry against corporate power since the historic Battle in Seattle in 1999. After 9/11 the anti-globalization movement was submerged by pressing concerns of the global "war on terror."

The panelists spoke about the importance of sustaining and developing the Occupy movement. Klein encouraged her audience at The New School (and mentioned again in her recent conversation with activist, educator, and writer Yotam Marom) to acknowledge the exhilarating and frightening dimensions of this unique window of opportunity that the Occupy movement has opened in such a short period of time. It's exhilarating because of the return of mass outrage against decades of neoliberal restructuring and, at the same time, it's frightening because "no movement has ever successfully challenged hyper-mobile global capital at its source" (Klein and Marom, "Why Now? What's Next?"). In other words, Occupy is truly breaking new ground as an emerging economic justice movement.

One way to confront the frightening dimension of this historical moment is to engage what makes it so exhilarating. This means to broaden and advance Occupy's vision of solidarity, which is at the heart of its developing class consciousness, by renewing our critical practice. Borrowing from Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, critical practice refers to "conscientization and action" – the process of developing critical awareness of the contradictions of class society (developing critical consciousness about the world that we inhabit) in order to create transformative social change. A renewal of critical practice in the Occupy era involves examining the following more closely: 1) the dynamics of race and class in the United States (creating solidarity with communities of color), 2) the site of the academy (interrogating dominant modes of knowledge production, creating solidarity with students -- the "new public intellectuals" according to Henry Giroux), and 3) the significance of our submerged histories of collective struggle for racial and economic justice.

With regard to race and class, there have been brilliant moments of solidarity between Occupy, immigrant communities, and labor that hold much potential for future development: Occupy ICE (Immigration and Custom Enforcement agency) protest in San Diego, Occupy Wall Street-Espanol, and Occupy Wall Street Latinoamericano in New York, a coalition of immigrant activists and Occupy activists in San Francisco (Bacon, "Unions and Immigrants Join"). *ColorLines* publisher and journalist Rinku Sen encourages the movement to continue to deepen its connection with communities of color by recognizing "the role that racial discrimination, racial exploitation, racial hierarchy played in getting us to this very depression ... to the place where our economic systems do not work for anybody, including struggling white people" (qtd. in Moore, et al.).

Sen's comments allude to a Pew Research Center study of US Census data released in summer 2011 that "shows the wealth gaps between whites and people of color have grown to their widest levels in a quarter-century" ("Census: US Racial Wealth Gap"). According to Sabrina Tavernise of the *New York Times*: the "study... found that the median wealth of Hispanic households fell by 66 percent from 2005 to 2009. By contrast, the median wealth of whites fell by just 16 percent over the same period. African Americans saw their wealth drop by 53 percent. Asians also saw

a big decline, with household wealth dropping 54 percent” (“Recession Study”). The arrival of a “post-racial” America ushered in by the election of our first African American president and the so-called irrelevance of internal colonialism (a framework for understanding the experiences and material conditions of people of color in the United States) are rendered as wishful thinking in light of contemporary racialized economic inequalities. One of the challenges of the Occupy movement – if it is to strengthen and advance the 99 percent -- is to confront the deep divisions of racial-class inequality in US society, which have intensified since the financial crash of 2007-08 (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 19).

Writer and activist Megan Trudell comments on how the Occupy movement is responding to dire material conditions that have “largely collapsed the divisions [which existed during the 1960s and 1970s] between workers and wider social protest” (see also Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich). The occupiers who are students (burdened with tremendous debt and futures with no jobs) are beginning to see their connection with workers who are “staring at foreclosure and homelessness” (“From ‘Occupy’”). According to Occupy activist and journalist Patrick Bruner, “85% of the class of 2011 moved back ... with their parents” (qtd. in Moore, et al.). The courageous activism and developing class consciousness of students in the Occupy movement should encourage us to reclaim the academy as a space for critical thinking (Giroux, “Occupy Colleges Now”). This call to occupy/reclaim the academy is timely given the neoliberal “market colonization” of academic knowledge production, the professionalization of interdisciplinary fields that emerged from social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the criminalization of Ethnic Studies (specifically Chicano Studies) in Arizona. Educator and cultural studies theorist Henry Giroux urges his colleagues to learn from/participate with their students who are building the Occupy movement on campuses across the country: “the University of California at Berkeley, Harvard University, Florida State University, Duke University, Rhode Island College, and over 120 other universities.”

Here are a few encouraging developments from last fall that provide useful models of engaged intellectual-scholarly work in the Occupy era: Giroux’s *Public Intellectual Project* at *Truthout* (a forum for progressive academics), UCLA’s *Engaged Social Sciences Blog on Occupy Movements*, and a conference on Herbert Marcuse at the University of Pennsylvania that examined his work in light of the Occupy movement (speakers included Douglas Kellner and Angela Davis). One of the most significant developments is Filipina feminist Delia D. Aguilar’s call to occupy feminism—to reclaim it from academic mystification and to build upon its history of activism and rich contributions to class struggle (“Occupy Feminism”). Without a doubt, a revived feminism is much needed as Mimi Abramovitz reminds us of the “feminization of austerity” —the disproportionate impact of neoliberalism on the everyday lives of white women and women of color.

The young and promising Occupy movement is still in the process of becoming. Perhaps we might turn to the Filipino diasporic experience and ongoing Filipino struggle for self determination (the Philippines continues to exist as a neocolony of the United States) as incredible resources for developing and advancing the Occupy movement. At more than three million, Filipinos perhaps constitute the largest segment of the Asian American population. In the following sections, I examine two Filipino cultural texts that offer tools for renewing critical practice: E. San Juan, Jr.'s *Toward Filipino Self-Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization* (2009) and Sari Lluch Dalena and Keith Sicat's award-winning film *Rigodon* (2005). These two texts situate the process of Filipino self determination (a process that, like the Occupy movement itself, is still in the process of becoming) within the context of the larger Filipino diaspora. One of the major keys to unlocking the collective potential of Filipinos to determine their future (to obtain national sovereignty) is to sustain the dialectical relationship between the struggles of Filipinos in the United States for racial and economic justice *and* the struggle of Filipinos in the Philippines for national sovereignty. These two seemingly different struggles are actually interrelated given the history of US colonial and neocolonial control of the Philippines. In addition to providing an inventory of key theoretical concepts from San Juan's *Toward Filipino Self-Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization* that are useful for renewing critical practice in the Occupy era (addressing the dynamics of race and class, interrogating dominant forms of knowledge production in the US academy, unearthing submerged traditions of collective struggle for racial and class justice), I turn to the film *Rigodon*, which concretizes San Juan's theoretical interventions.

RACIAL-CLASS FORMATIONS WITHIN A GLOBAL CONTEXT: EXAMINING THE FILIPINO DIASPORA

Toward Filipino Self-Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalization (TFSD) by E. San Juan, Jr.—one of the most significant and prolific intellectuals of the New Left generation (Denning, *Culture in the Age*)—is a collection of critical essays on US-Philippine relations from an interdisciplinary cultural studies approach. This collection builds upon two major strands in San Juan's large body of scholarship: 1) critical analysis of US-Philippine relations (*The Philippine Temptation*, 1996; *From Exile to Diaspora*, 1998; and *After Postcolonialism*, 2000) and 2) historical materialist critique within diverse interdisciplinary fields such as Cultural Studies, Ethnic Studies, American Studies, and Asian American Studies (*Racial Formations/Critical Transformations*, 1992; *Racism and Cultural Studies*, 2002; and *Working Through the Contradictions*, 2004). Synthesizing and advancing these two strands enable San Juan to build upon a rich tradition of Filipino subaltern resistance that bridges the experiences of Filipinos in the United States and in the Philippines.

What is significant about this collection, especially after our bearing witness to decades of neoliberalism and now a decade of a global “war on terror,” is that it challenges our deep historical amnesia regarding the history of US empire. This is not just a matter of remembering a particular historical date (when the United States occupied the Philippines, when the Philippines was granted nominal independence, etc.). Instead, this collection provides tools for shifting our entire framework for understanding US-Philippine relations. This requires historicizing the development of these two distinct nation-states in relation to each other within a global context of unequal relations of power—the United States as a racial polity and colonizing nation-state and the Philippines as a dependent nation-state.

What has been erased from our collective memory is the devastating Filipino-American War (1899-1913), which followed the Spanish-American War of 1898. John Sayles’s recent film *Amigo* brings attention to this episode in US-Philippine relations. According to Sayles, *Amigo* may be the third US film on the subject. San Juan reminds his readers that “[u]nlike Cuba and Puerto Rico ... the natives of the Philippine Islands had already overthrown Spanish rule and established the first Philippine Republic in 1898” (xi). 1.4 million Filipinos and several thousand American soldiers perished in the Filipino-American War, a battle over Philippine national sovereignty. The US colonial occupation (1898-1946) and subsequent neocolonial control of the Philippines were integral to the development of the US nation-state as a racial polity, which according to philosopher Charles Mills is “founded on white supremacy/Herrenvolk Exceptionalism” (qtd. in San Juan 18). The colonial/neocolonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines provides the context within which to examine the racial-national subordination of Filipinos.

To concretize the notion of racial-national subordination (a central concept for exploring the Filipino diasporic experience), we must review the contours of the Filipino diaspora: there are more than three million Filipinos in the United States (arguably the largest segment of Asian Americans), ten million Filipinos scattered across the globe as migrant workers, and 90 million in the Philippines where “eighty percent [of the population] survive on less than \$2 a day—forty-six million go hungry every day” (San Juan 164). With the US colonial occupation of the Philippines (1898-1946) and the brutal suppression of national sovereignty (Filipino-American War 1898-1913), Filipinos became “colonial subjects, subalterns of the US Empire.” From 1907-1949, Filipino migrant workers, many of whom originated from the Philippine peasantry, were subjected to racialized forms of exploitation in the United States: “Over one hundred thousand ‘Pinoys/Pinays’ and ‘Manongs’ (affectionate terms of address) helped build the infrastructure of US industrial capitalism as the major labor force in agribusiness in Hawaii and the West Coast” (San Juan 22). This generation of Filipino migrant workers is memorialized in Carlos Bulosan’s now classic text, *America is in the Heart* (1946).

The post-1965 immigration patterns (the movement of professionals from the Global South to the North) did not do much to transform the material conditions of Filipinos in the United States. The experiences of this generation illustrate the continued racial-national subordination of Filipinos. Within this context, the “model minority” category, according to San Juan, cannot be applied to the Filipino experience:

The Filipino American community at present occupies a peculiar position in the socioeconomic landscape. Although highly educated, with professional, military, or technical backgrounds, fluent in English and nestled in large relatively stable families (average households include 5.4 persons of which 2 are at least employed), Filipinos in general earn less than whites and all other Asian groups, except the Vietnamese. With women workers in the majority, Filipinos are invisible or absent in the prestigious managerial positions. Erroneously considered part of the mythical “model minority,” they are denied benefits under Affirmative Action and “equal opportunity” state laws. Labor market segmentation, cultural assimilation under US neocolonial hegemony, and persistent institutional racism explain the inferior status of Filipinos. (24)

The discrimination Filipinos experience today in the United States is part of a legacy of racism, which can only be unpacked through a systemic approach as opposed to one that situates the beginning and ending of racism within the individual. Racism is not only ingrained and embedded in the social and cultural life of the United States but also within its very economic structures and asymmetrical global relations of power. Racial subordination of Filipinos in the United States (unequal distribution of wealth and power) is inextricably interconnected with the national subordination of the Philippine nation-state by the United States. The exploitation of Filipino labor in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century is part of a larger historical narrative of the development of US industrial capitalism and the US nation-state as a racial polity. In other words, the exploitation of Filipino labor and the US colonization of the Philippines cannot be separated from the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of African Americans, and the exploitation of Chicano/Latino and Asian workers.

To further illustrate the racial-national subordination of Filipinos, it’s necessary to review additional details of the Filipino diaspora. The dispersal of nearly 10 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) around the globe is a continuation of this historical narrative of racism within our “new times” of corporate globalization and US empire. Over 70 percent of OFWs are women hired for domestic work (forms of indentured servitude) in Canada, Europe, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore. You’ll also find “[t]hirty thousand [OFWs] ... in Lebanon today and about the

same number in Israel, with thousands more in war-ravaged Iraq and Palestine, several millions in the entire Middle East” (San Juan 15). Their exploited labor helps to sustain the Philippines as a semi-feudal remittance society with an annual average of remittance at \$14 billion (San Juan 119). Currently, a population of 90 million is attempting to survive within a Philippine society in shambles due to US neocolonial economic control, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and various Structural Adjustment Programs (San Juan, TFSD; Aguilar, “Class Considerations”).

Each day in the Philippines is a tragic replay of multiple and overlapping departures and returns: an “estimated three thousand Filipinos leave the country... roughly a million every year” (San Juan 16), while three to five OFWs return in coffins to an increasingly militarized Philippines that has witnessed, over the years, the return of US troops under the Visiting Forces Agreement and the global “war on terror” (San Juan, TFSD; Aguilar, “Class Considerations”). Former Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo marketed OFWs to the world as “supermaids” and “modern heroes” (*bagong bayani*). It is imperative to acknowledge, according to San Juan, the specificity of the OFW experience as “modern slaves” –they “not only sell their labor-power but also their personhood ... this is key to grasping the complex phenomena of racial colonial subordination of the Philippines to the United States and the neoliberal global market” (145).

The militarization of the Philippines is connected to other forms of violence, especially against women. This is evident in the Subic Rape case. In 2005, a young Filipina (Nicole) in her early twenties “was gang-raped by four US military servicemen; one of the soldiers was found guilty ... only to be whisked away from a local prison by the US Embassy in the middle of the night” (Aguilar, “Class Considerations”). Massive abuses (from imprisonment to death) of progressive human rights activists from various sectors of Philippine society (youth and students, teachers, lawyers, clergy, indigenous communities, workers, and peasants) occurred daily under the Bush-supported Arroyo administration. Between 2001 and 2007, over 1,000 lives have been claimed by extrajudicial violence in the Philippines (People’s IOM). The situation has not improved under the current Aquino administration, which began in 2010.

On the other side of the diaspora, Filipinos in the United States (approximately three million) live a contradictory existence as one of the largest Asian American groups, yet their history, culture, and identities are rendered almost invisible. Oftentimes young Filipino Americans (as was my experience) yearn for the slightest representation of Filipinos in US media/popular culture as a form of affirmation. Lest we become obsessed over the possibility of celebrities such as Enrique Iglesias, Prince, Foxy Brown, Jay Z, *Glee* star Darren Criss, and former Pussycat Doll Nicole Scherzinger as being half-, part-, or even a tiny fraction Filipino, we must develop a critical awareness that moves us beyond the reification of identity, beyond the limitations of a corporatized

media that obfuscates the connection between the creation of identity (politics of representation) and the creation of a genuinely independent Philippines (the complex process of becoming). For example, very little media attention has been given to the fact that approximately 85,000 Filipinos have been targeted for deportation under the USA Patriot Act (Critical Filipina and Filipino Studies Collective). Multicultural celebrations of difference located purely within the realm of consumption leave us only with indigestion precisely because this “politics of difference” (which Asian Americanist Vijay Prashad calls “liberalism of the skin”) is not able to help us come to grips with (to develop a systemic analysis of) our condition of exile within the United States.

CHALLENGING THE DYNAMICS OF RACE AND CLASS: FROM RACIAL-NATIONAL SUBORDINATION TO THE DIALECTICS OF FILIPINO SELF DETERMINATION

In TFSD, San Juan advances a dialectics of Filipino self determination (form of global cognitive mapping) that challenges the racial-national subordination of Filipinos around the globe. He builds upon two interconnected histories of struggle—one of anticolonial struggle in the Philippines (for genuine political and economic independence) and another of anti-racist labor activism and solidarity work in the United States. Using the optic of racial-national subordination, he traces a narrative of anticolonial struggle in the Philippines in the following:

US conquest entailed a violent racist, genocidal suppression of the Filipino revolutionary forces for decades. The foundational inspiring “event” by public consensus is the 1896-1898 revolution against Spain and its sequel, the Filipino-American War, together with the Moro resistance up to 1914 against US colonization. Another political sequence of events was the Sakdal uprising in the thirties followed by the Huk uprising in the forties and fifties—a sequence that was renewed in the First Quarter Storm of 1970 against the neocolonial state. (13)

This memory of a “long durable tradition of Filipino subaltern resistance” against colonial occupations and class exploitation, particularly from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, gave shape to the courageous anti-racist labor militancy of an entire generation of Filipino migrant workers in the United States to which Carlos Bulosan and Philip Vera Cruz (two major figures of U.S. working class history) belonged.

As they participated in the multiethnic labor movement in the United States, Bulosan and Vera Cruz sharpened their critique of the US colonial/neocolonial subordination of the Philippines. Bulosan supported the anticolonial struggles in the Philippines (through his labor organizing and editing of the 1952 ILWU *Yearbook*) and understood a connection between the exploitation of the

peasantry in the Philippines and the racist exploitation of Filipino workers in the United States (this is concretized by the dialectical interplay between the various parts of *America is in the Heart*, which begins in the Philippine countryside). Vera Cruz, who served as vice president of the UFW, expressed his opposition to the US-Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. Bulosan and Vera Cruz's grasp of the racial-national subordination of Filipinos enabled them to see how the struggle for Filipino self determination must connect the experiences of Filipinos in the United States and in the Philippines.

This history of anti-racist class struggle critical of the unequal relations between the United States and the Philippines was recovered by a later generation of Filipino Americans. In the following, San Juan examines how the development of Filipino American radicalism during the 1960s and 1970s built upon an earlier tradition of Filipino subaltern resistance. In the process, he sheds light on his own politicization.

They were politicized in the mid-sixties and seventies, learning mass politics in the activities of the antimartial law organizations, the Union of Democratic Filipinos, and other interethnic coalitions. They supported the Manongs (such as Philip Vera Cruz) at the forefront of the Farm Worker's Union struggles in California and the ILWU struggles in Seattle, Hawaii, and elsewhere. While teaching in California and Connecticut, I was politicized by the Civil Rights struggles in the late sixties and early seventies, as well as the national-democratic struggle in the Philippines, together with these young Fil Ams who discovered Bulosan and Bonifacio, who visited the Philippines on their own or in small groups to affiliate with the Kabataang Makabayan and other progressive sectors during the First Quarter Storm, before the declaration of martial law and after. (140)

The intellectual-activist work of this particular generation of Filipino Americans raised public awareness about the US neocolonial control of the Philippines (US-Marcos dictatorship) and made crucial interventions in the fields of Asian American Studies (introducing Carlos Bulosan and Philip Vera Cruz), American Studies (opening a space for Howard Zinn to shed light on the Philippine-American War—Zinn is one of the first American historians to do so), and Philippine Studies (publication of Schirmer and Shalom's *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance* among other texts on the Philippines and the Filipino experience).

The task of the current generation of Filipino Americans is to reactivate this tradition of resistance, which has been repressed by decades of neoliberal attacks on mass movements for social justice. There are hopeful signs of young Filipino Americans excavating this tradition of Filipino resistance (a dialectics of Filipino self determination) with the formation of the Critical Filipina

and Filipino Studies Collective in California (see their excellent 2004 report “Resisting Homeland Security: Organizing Against Unjust Removals of US Filipinos”) and the emergence of young Filipino American activists and cultural workers in other parts of the country who see a connection between the racial harassment and profiling of Filipinos (and other people of color) under the USA Patriot Act and the massive human rights violations and extrajudicial killings of activists in the Philippines (over 1,000 victims) in the name of a global “war on terror.”

THEORETICAL INTERVENTIONS FOR THE OCCUPY ERA: BEYOND THE DEFERRAL OF HOPE

San Juan’s TFSD enables a rethinking of dominant frames of intelligibility within interdisciplinary fields of study that are concerned with the formation of subalternity, marginality, resistance, and oppositional cultural production (Asian American Studies, Ethnic Studies, American Studies, Postcolonial Studies, etc.). Our reviewing San Juan’s theoretical intervention is timely given the fact that the US academy has become one major site for developing the Occupy movement – where college students are deepening their class consciousness and forging connections with the working class. Indeed, according to Barbara and John Ehrenreich, the “iconic figure of the Occupy movement [is] the college graduate with tens of thousands of dollars in student loan debts and a job paying about \$10 an hour, or no job at all” (20). San Juan opens a space to theorize new ways of becoming (specifically the formation of collective subjectivities that emerge through mass movements for social justice) by drawing upon rich traditions of historical materialist critique and Filipino subaltern resistance (that bridges the United States and the Philippines). Ultimately, San Juan’s theoretical intervention pushes against the dominant postmodern approach in cultural studies, which is unable to grasp the complexity of the Filipino process of becoming—in particular, a dialectics of self determination that challenges the racial-national subordination of Filipinos around the globe.

Concepts such as contingency, ambivalence, indeterminacy, the demise of the nation-state (postnational), and transnationality are deployed within cultural studies through the “postmodernist doctrine of nominalist relativism—that only atomistic sense-data, not general concepts, can provide experimental knowledge” (San Juan 27). In other words, postmodernism’s privileging the local over the global and the singular over the universal generates a micropolitics of identity that disavows “any universal standard or ‘metanarrative’” (San Juan 27). These metanarratives (or grand narratives) that postmodernism rejects are the “Enlightenment, democracy, progress, socialism, national liberation” (Amin 21). Of course, each of these projects (metanarratives/grand narratives) contains contradictions, which must be engaged.

In order to appreciate the significance of San Juan’s theoretical intervention against

postmodernism, it's instructive to turn briefly to Egyptian economist Samir Amin who, leaning upon philosopher Nkolo Foe, reviews Marxist and postmodernist approaches to reading modernism. Amin states that the contradictions of modernism "originated in the discourse of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century in Europe, together with the triumph of the historical form of European capitalism and imperialism that goes with it" (21). While modernism's "ambition to be universal" affirmed bourgeois individualism (the rights of man over woman) and a form of white supremacy (the denial of the rights of non-European peoples), it was also a form of progress away from the "alienations and oppressions of the *Anciens Regimes*." This form of progress was limited, however, because it was situated firmly within the confines of capitalism/imperialism (Amin 21).

Marxism and postmodernism both critique the contradictions and limitations of capitalist/imperialist modernity. What differentiates the two approaches is that the latter abandons socialism (a metanarrative/grand narrative) and "poses a return to the pre-modern, pre-capitalist alienations" that in the end only "facilitates the fragmentation of the majority of the population and makes them accept adjustment to the logic of the reproduction of domination by the imperialist oligopolies" (Amin 22). Postmodernism's privileging of micropolitics and retreat from transformative class struggle (return to the past) prevent the development of a systemic critique of global capitalism. A postmodern politics of difference, therefore, reduces concepts such as race, class, gender, and sexuality to a playful intersecting of fluid (yet fragmented) identities removed from a systemic analysis of how these forms of difference are produced and reproduced within global capitalism. This form of analysis refrains from producing knowledge about ways to challenge and transform global capitalism. Hope for transformative change is, therefore, deferred. Instead, what's ultimately produced is knowledge about how to merely survive *within* (and accept the conditions of) global capitalism with the dexterity of a hybrid, a cyborg, a transmigrant, a transnational, or a postnational who belongs nowhere and everywhere at the same time.

San Juan's approach to examining the Filipino diasporic experience builds upon theoretical insights of feminist, anti-racist, and Third World struggles (the collective movements of the gendered/racialized/colonial-neocolonial "Other" that have historically challenged the limitations of capitalist/imperialist modernity) *without* abandoning the notion of national sovereignty (another metanarrative/grand narrative) (27). As a way to sustain a dialectical relationship between forms of difference (hybridity/multiplicity, race, gender, sexuality) that are silenced by totalizing grand narratives *and* a commitment to collective emancipation, San Juan meditates upon the dialectical interplay between the liberation of the vast and diverse Filipino diaspora from racial-national subordination (the context that shapes/distorts the everyday lived experiences of Filipinos around the globe) and the national struggle for Philippine sovereignty. San Juan's TFSD is an "oppositional

project of inventing a singular national-popular will/subject-position [applied to the Filipino diaspora] as a response to the loss of national sovereignty, commodity-centered alienation, and the general crisis of Enlightenment-oriented modernity” (xiv). San Juan continues to sustain this dialectical relationship between the specific/particular and the universal in his application of the concrete universal—“a totality that embraces multiplicity and individuality”—to key Filipino cultural texts such as those written by Carlos Bulosan (74). From this approach, we can see *America is in the Heart* as a text generated through the dialectical interplay between Allos (the protagonist—singular individual) and Bulosan (author—labor activist and engaged public intellectual) who represents the collective experience of Filipino peasants, workers, and the “wretched of the earth.” This collective experience of exploitation and resistance (informed by a global vision of Filipino self determination) is articulated through Allos’ individual experiences and intellectual/political development as the novel unfolds (San Juan 82). The task of the contemporary Filipino artist/intellectual is to advance this method of examining the process of becoming Filipino—to articulate ways of situating “multiplicity and individuality” within the context of a struggle for Philippine national sovereignty.

RIGODON: ON BECOMING FILIPINO POST 9/11

Rigodon (2005), an independent film directed by Sari Lluch Dalena and Keith Sicat, reflects upon Filipino immigrant experiences in post 9/11 New York City. Featured in numerous film festivals, *Rigodon* received the Best Feature Film Award at the 8th International Panorama of Independent Filmmakers in Greece. According to Dalena and Sicat, the film “follows the spiritual journeys of three Filipino immigrants (Amado the aging boxer, Salome the ‘dreaming war-bride,’ and Dante the ‘rebel-poet’) in New York City whose lives intertwine in the age of racial profiling and government crackdowns.” The complex, multilayered structure of the film, which illuminates the interconnectedness of the characters’ lives and the complexity of Filipino history and identity, resonates with the meaning and significance of its title. The rigodon, a group dance introduced to the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period, “has two concentric circles of dancers moving in opposite directions, resulting in new partnerships as the circles rotate.” The filmmakers state that the rigodon dance functions as a metaphor for the multiple colonial histories of the Philippines—Spanish, United States, and Japanese—and the constant movement of Filipinos (10 million) around the globe (“The Rigodon”).

With its use of haunting dream sequences, prayers, and monologues, the film provides visually stunning representations of interconnected lives and overlapping histories. Dante, who crafts new identities for undocumented Filipino immigrants, provides fictionalized citizenship

documents to Amado. Salome, a Filipina married to a white American male (Mitch Molloy), rents out a unit in her apartment complex to Amado who's trying to succeed as a boxer in the United States. Their lives are not only connected by location and individual circumstances but also by their shared experience of racial-national subordination: alienation in the United States (structural racism) and dislocation from the Philippines (exile). Amado is driven to become successful in the United States by his desire to financially support his wife and children in the Philippines. Salome is caught in between her longing for the Philippines and her desire for assimilation. The latter is represented by her prayers for a white child: "Please give me a blue-eyed blond child like his father ... [a child with] orange freckles and pink skin." Dante, the "rebel-poet," yearns to make sense of his alienation, which he sees as part of a collective experience of Filipino immigrants in the United States.

Dante is an allusion not only to Dante Alighieri, the Italian philosopher and author of the *Divine Comedy* (the *Inferno* section explores various circles of hell) but also to a major character (of the same name) in Carlos Bulosan's posthumously published novel *The Cry and the Dedication*. The novel, which dramatizes the Hukbalahap peasant insurgency against Japanese occupation of the Philippines, examines the lives of a group of anticolonial insurgents (from different sectors of Philippine society) while simultaneously shedding light on the material conditions that led to their politicization and their collective struggle for a liberated country for all Filipinos. The Dante character in Bulosan's novel is also a rebel writer just like the Dante character in *Rigodon*. Bulosan's Dante, who returns to the Philippines from the United States to participate in the peasant insurgency against Japanese occupation, represents a link between the Filipino labor movement in the United States and the organized subaltern resistance in the Philippines. In one scene, two activists discuss Dante's accomplishments as a rebel writer. Hassim explains to Old Bio that Dante, in his writing, has reconstructed a long tradition of Filipino subaltern resistance to colonial occupations: "tracing our history from the revolutionary viewpoint, from Chief Lapu-Lapu and his pagan men who killed Magellan and most of his mercenary soldiers and drove the others to their boats and thence to Spain, to the formation of the underground in the Mt. Arayat, where Alipato took the military leadership in our latest struggle against tyranny" (Bulosan, *The Cry* 5). Like the Dante character in Bulosan's novel, Dante in *Rigodon* opens a space for viewers to consider what African American historians Mary Frances Berry and John Blassingame call a "long memory" of racial-national subordination and subaltern resistance.

One example in the film of sustaining a "long memory" of the Filipino experience is a moving scene where Dante creates a new identity for Amado. After presenting a packet of documents (social security card and birth certificate) to Amado that explains his new identity based

on a fiction of national belonging (he's now "officially born in South Carolina"), Dante asks him to read a passage from Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* (1946). The selected passage depicts the protagonist's (Allos) painful departure from his peasant family in Binalonan, Philippines for the United States. On one hand, this reminds Amado to never forget the Philippines as he assumes a new fictional identity in the United States; on the other, this scene brings attention to the ways in which Amado and Dante's dislocation and alienation within the United States is a continuation of what Bulosan's generation experienced. Bulosan's *America is in the Heart* is both documentary and critique. The text documents the experiences of exploitation of peasants in the Philippines and Filipino workers in the United States. At the same time, it offers methods for challenging global capitalism as it traces the ways in which Filipino migrant workers in the United States are able to draw on traditions of subaltern resistance in the Philippines.

Dante opens a space for Bulosan's generation to function as an interlocutor with the film. Through the character of Dante, a bridge or link is created between two generations of Filipinos in the United States—Bulosan's generation of the 1930s and 1940s (a generation of farmworkers and militant labor organizers) and the post 9/11 Filipino community in the United States. In the dream sequences where Dante is interrogated about his crime in the United States, he responds, "I am a Filipino." This is another allusion to Bulosan who summarized his experience of being a Filipino in the United States with the following: "I feel like a criminal running away from a crime I did not commit ... And the crime is that I am a Filipino in America." *Rigodon* is a meditation on the ways in which the racial-national subordination of Filipinos during Bulosan's period has manifested into new forms in the post 9/11 period. In another dream sequence, Dante is standing in the midst of massive antiwar rallies that brought much needed attention to the racial profiling of Filipinos under the USA Patriot Act, which was not disconnected from the return of US troops to the Philippines—considered the second front of the global "war on terror." One scene in the film captures the voiceover of a Filipino male who asserts, "After September 11, there is a systematic targeting of Filipinos for deportation that is related to legacies of US colonial rule." The USA Patriot Act is part of a long history of anti-Filipino racism in the United States: from the signs that greeted Filipinos on the West Coast during the 1930s in bold type—POSITIVELY NO FILIPINOS ALLOWED—to the cruel surveillance and criminalization of progressive Filipinos (including Bulosan) during the Cold War period.

In the dream sequence of antiwar rallies, Dante is positioned as a distanced spectator of the activity around him. Though he bears witness to an enactment of collective agency, Dante is unable to participate. This distancing brings attention to a crucial difference between Bulosan's generation and the generation of the post 9/11 period. This difference is the lack of organized mass resistance

and solidarity among Filipinos. Bulosan's generation contributed greatly to the labor movement in the United States, eventually laying the foundation of the United Farmworker's Movement. The conflicts of the characters in *Rigodon*—alienation, isolation, exile—speak to the need to imagine and create new forms of collective subjectivity that are able to resist and challenge new (intensified) forms of racial-national subordination in the post 9/11 period.

RIGODON: FROM EXILE TO SOLIDARITY

Harassed and under surveillance by the INS because of his ability to create new fictions of national belonging for undocumented immigrants, Dante is given an ultimatum by Agent Moody—provide ten names or eventually face imprisonment. Later in the film, Dante breaks down and surrenders to Agent Moody in a church. Prior to his arrest, he performs a decolonizing gesture by rearticulating the Lord's Prayer and adding the following: "Save us from this war! Pity our country. Why are these nations in turmoil?" This gesture functions as a post 9/11 lament for the absence of Filipino solidarity (singular national-popular will/subject position) in the United States, which Bulosan began to articulate in his work, and the absence of Philippine national sovereignty (a result of the Filipino-American War 1899-1913).

This final scene of agonizing surrender, in which a weeping and isolated Dante is brought to his knees, provides a visual representation of different histories of colonialism that inform the Filipino experience. It's significant that although Dante is kneeling in a church (which signifies a legacy of Spanish colonialism), he is flanked on both sides by symbols of US racial-national subordination. What appears to be a US flag is positioned to the far distant right of Dante while Agent Moody waits patiently in the background. She enters the scene from Dante's left. It's instructive to remember that a Philippine Republic free of Spanish rule was established in 1898. It is this national sovereignty that was violently abolished by US colonial rule. Today it is US neocolonial control of the Philippines that provides the context for the contemporary Filipino experience of exile (dislocation, alienation, uprootedness, homelessness, marginality, racialized Otherness). In the absence of collective identity and struggle (solidarity) and a home (national sovereignty), characters such as Salome and Dante turn to religion as a way to make sense of their experiences of exile. Without a firm understanding of the traumatic loss of Filipino sovereignty (which includes the systematic silencing of a history of Filipino subaltern resistance), theories of transnationality, postnationality, and heterogeneous identity formations within interstitial spaces are unable to capture and make sense of the experiences of the film's characters (Dante, Salome, Amado, Samira)—all of whom are yearning for a home that has yet to exist. San Juan reminds us:

“Whether here in the United States or in the Philippines, we [Filipinos] are, whether we like it or not, still entangled, caught, implicated in this ongoing process of struggling for liberation” (52).

San Juan brings our attention to Filipino scholar Renato Constantino’s comments on the ways in which Spanish and US colonialisms (*Rigodon* is concerned with overlapping histories of colonialism) have been ideologically justified: “Spanish colonialism Westernized the Filipino principally through religion. American colonialism superimposed its own brand of Westernization initially through the imposition of English and the American school system which opened the way for other Westernizing agencies” (41). While Spanish colonialism used religion to ideologically justify its hegemony in the Philippines, the United States used the English language to ideologically justify class divisions within Philippine society and its suppression of Filipino subaltern resistance. Applying the concept of concrete universal, San Juan asserts that the development of a Filipino national language can play a significant role in the process of achieving Philippine national sovereignty/self determination. If language is a site of class struggle and an “important social practice through which [Filipinos] come to experience themselves as subjects with some critical agency” (44), the formation of a national Filipino language that embraces the rich linguistic diversity among Filipinos (there are over 100 languages in the Philippines) must be an invaluable part of enriching the struggle for a genuinely free and independent Philippines.

As San Juan calls for the development of a dynamic national Filipino language, Dante’s demise in the film speaks to the need for Filipinos in the United States to develop a common language of solidarity that affirms and situates the rich diversity of the Filipino community (generational differences, class, religion, language, sexuality, citizen/undocumented) within the larger context of struggling against all forms of social injustice and human exploitation. The ability of the INS to pit Filipinos against each other highlights the need for a renewal of the concrete universal (“a totality that embraces multiplicity and individuality”) in ways that confront the new challenges of becoming Filipino in the post 9/11 period. While Dante is asked by Agent Moody to betray ten undocumented immigrants in order to gain freedom from surveillance, Samira, an undocumented Filipina Muslim mother whose husband (Mohsen) is an OFW in Egypt, is manipulated by the same INS agent to capture him. New racial formations of the post 9/11 period call not only for a deepening of solidarity within the diverse Filipino community but also a deepening of solidarity with Arab and Muslim Americans who are also subjected to forms of racial profiling. To be sure, the struggle for self determination in our post 9/11 period is a shared one—from the Philippines to Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine. Currently there is talk between Washington and Manila to strengthen US military access to the Philippines (Cushman and Whaley, “Manila Negotiates”).

SEARCH, DISCOVER, RECLAIM

At the beginning of the essay, I mentioned that one way to broaden the Occupy Movement's vision of solidarity is to renew our critical practice (creating critical consciousness for action). Within the context of this essay, a renewal of critical practice involves developing a deeper understanding of 1.) the dynamics of race and class in the United States and abroad, 2) the dominant forms of knowledge production in the academy, 3.) the significance of our submerged histories of collective struggle for racial and economic justice. E. San Juan, Jr's *Toward Filipino Self Determination* and Dalena and Sicat's *Rigodon* address these three dimensions of the call to renew critical practice in the Occupy era.

The theoretical concept of racial-national subordination is central to examining the ways in which the dynamics of race and class have (and continue to) shape the lives of Filipinos in the United States, in the Philippines, and around the globe. Understanding the racial-national subordination of Filipinos can enrich the Occupy movement's developing class consciousness as it strengthens its solidarity with multiple communities of color in the United States. San Juan's application of the concrete universal – “a totality that embraces multiplicity and individuality” – addresses the call to embrace and advance our submerged histories of struggle. Particularly the ways in which Filipinos in the United States have mobilized (from Bulosan's generation to the organized opposition to the Marcos dictatorship) to challenge US neocolonial control of the Philippines. Today, at over three million, Filipinos in the United States (a large and diverse community) have the potential to play a decisive role in challenging the US neocolonial control of the Philippines, which functions as the linchpin of the racial-national subordination experienced by Filipinos around the globe. The idea of the concrete universal – “a totality that embraces multiplicity and individuality” – can also strengthen the Occupy movement as it continues to organize across race, gender, and sexuality (forms of difference) without abandoning an overarching critique of global capitalism.

These two theoretical contributions from San Juan (racial-national subordination and the concrete universal), which are reflected upon in Dalena and Sicat's *Rigodon*, also push against the dominant mode of knowledge production in the US academy precisely at a time when a large section of the Occupy Movement (college students) is holding colleges and universities accountable to create relevant and useful forms of knowledge that could bring about transformative social change. The Occupy students are opening a space for those interdisciplinary fields that emerged out of New Left movements (Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, Lesbian and Gay Studies, etc.) to reconnect with their histories of activism. The theoretical interventions of San Juan's TFSD and Dalena and Sicat's *Rigodon* can help invigorate these interdisciplinary fields and provide students the tools they need to reclaim their education.

When I was a student in college, I was captivated by a line in an essay by Filipino American activist Steven De Castro: *paghahanap, pagtuklas, at pagbawi* (search, discover, and reclaim). Perhaps one of the most exhilarating aspects of the Occupy movement is that it offers us an opportunity to search, discover, and reclaim our collective histories of class struggle. Filipinos are now building upon a history of struggle from Bulosan and Vera Cruz's generation as they participate in the Occupy movement in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Makati City, Quezon City, and the University of the Philippines. These actions offer ways of expanding the Occupy movement and deepening the movement for Filipino self determination. Both of which are in the process of becoming as we reclaim our histories and our futures ... as we work together toward a Global Spring.

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