“LAND IS LIFE”:

Reflections on E. San Juan, Jr., Considerations for Filipino Critical Theory, and Notes for Environmental Justice in the United States and the Philippines

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Abstract

In this article, I situate E. San Juan, Jr. as a key intellectual figure in the development of Filipino Critical Theory. I explore the ways that San Juan's interdisciplinary and dialectical analysis of capitalist totality can offer a rich intellectual landscape to address issues of global justice—particularly environmental justice for Filipino/as in the United States and in the Philippines. Building upon San Juan's rich scholarly archive to analyze the interaction between humans and their environment, this paper foregrounds his contributions for Filipino Critical Theory as an emergent interdisciplinary theoretical framework to reflect upon where Filipino/as have been and put into focus what kind of world they can struggle to create.

Keywords

Filipino Critical Theory, Environmental Justice, climate change, historical materialism

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INTRODUCTION

In 2006, I helped organize a conference in Seattle, Washington for alumni of the Philippine Studies Program. Epifanio San Juan, Jr. was the keynote speaker for this gathering of college students and community activists exploring matters of social justice, identity, and international solidarity. Over the course of two days, he shared personal anecdotes and critical perspectives of what he would later term *the Presence of Filipinos in the United States*. During his keynote address—an address he would later publish as the final chapter in a book—he explains:

Becoming Filipino...is a process of dialectical struggle, not a matter of wish-fulfillment or mental conjuring...it is a collective political project. For Filipinos to grasp who they are, more importantly, what they can become...we need to examine again the historical circumstances that joined the trajectory of the Philippines and the United States, of Americans and Filipinos, constituting in the process the dialectical configuration we know as Filipino American in its collective or group dimension. The Filipino in the United States is thus a concrete historical phenomenon understandable neither as Filipino alone nor American alone but as an articulation of the political, social, economic, and cultural forces of the two societies with their distinct but intersecting histories. (*On the Presence of Filipinos in the United States* 156).

A decade has passed since San Juan urged this small yet politically committed group to channel their collective ideas, experiences, and actions toward making the world a better place. His comments echo the sentiment of another revolutionary theorist Frantz Fanon who proclaimed, “Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 145). Toward this end, I have turned to San Juan’s theoretical writings on countless occasions to explore how contemporary Filipino/a Americans can nurture alternative possibilities in how we relate to one another and the earth.

In my research, I have explored how the radical praxis of present day activists is comparable to, as well as completely unique from, previous generations. I investigate how Filipino American youth are understanding themselves in relationship to, and in dialogue with, other racialized formations in the United States as well as with the ongoing struggles for genuine democracy and self-determination in the Philippines. San Juan’s brilliant writing has been instrumental in my work as well as public intellectuals and community organizers interested in recreating ourselves and the institutional structures responsible for the intensifying articulations of white supremacy, growing economic inequality, and accelerating environmental catastrophes as a result of global climate change.

Along with the immense contributions San Juan has made to my theoretical orientation, he along with Delia Aguilar have mentored me throughout my graduate studies; advised me patiently in the steps needed to take initial research questions and translate them into a political project grounded in history and critical theory; written countless letters of support toward gainful academic employment; and sent me consistent care packages with artifacts and notes of encouragement that strengthened my analytical position while fortifying my morale. Quite simply, the unyielding mentorship of San Juan has contributed immeasurably in who I am and hope to become as a scholar, educator, and advisor.

In the pages that follow, I situate San Juan as a key figure in the development of Filipino Critical (FilCrit) Theory. San Juan's scholarship spans six decades, which I will briefly survey later, has made important analytical contributions to four modes of global domination: capitalism, racism, (neo)colonialism, and patriarchy. In his ambitious scholarly works he places the history, cultural production, experiences, and praxis of Filipino/as at the center of his analysis. Through this generative dialogue, San Juan critically examines the important tensions, intersections, and contributions that Filipino/a intellectual-activism offers critical social theory. In the pages that follow, I explore how San Juan's interdisciplinary critique and dialectical analysis of capitalist totality can offer a rich intellectual landscape to further develop a praxis promoting FilCrit Theory equipped to intervene in the systematic destruction of the diverse global environments where Filipino/as reside. Drawing upon San Juan's scholarship to deepen our understanding of the interaction between Filipino/as and their environments is especially useful for an emerging interdisciplinary theoretical framework of FilCrit Theory to reflect upon where this particular population has been and put into focus what kind of world they can struggle to create. As such, my intention in this think piece is twofold. First, this article allows me to broadly conceptualize the transformative contours of FilCrit Theory. Second, I want to assist in propelling FilCrit Theory forward by placing San Juan's insights in dialogue with radical strands of environmental activist-scholarship. Before focusing my attention here, I want to briefly frame San Juan's individual experiences, writings, and personal accomplishments within a wider collective memory. His life experiences serve as a resource for those invested in learning about the struggles of an earlier generation toward the emancipation of humanity and the earth from the ravenous destruction of global capital.

SAN JUAN IN CONTEXT

San Juan—also known as Uncle Sonny—was born in Sta. Cruz, Manila, Philippines on December 29, 1938 to Epifanio San Juan (father) and Loreto Samia San Juan (mother). Entering into adulthood in the Philippines during the 1950s, San Juan was influenced by the asymmetrical relationship between the United States and his homeland, evident in the cultural and military influence in the country after World War II as well as the emergent responses of popular democracy. In 1958, San Juan graduated magna cum laude from the University of the Philippines – Diliman. In 1959, while completing his master's degree at UP-Diliman, San Juan met his future wife, Delia Aguilar, in a graduate course on literary criticism. The two married and had their first child, Karin Aguilar-San Juan in 1962. Their second child, Eric San Juan, was born in 1966.

In 1960, San Juan received a Fulbright Award to complete his doctorate degree at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Upon completing his Ph.D. in 1965, San Juan taught at the University of California-Davis for a year before returning to the Philippines to teach English and Comparative Literature at his alma mater (1966–1967). In 1966, he translated the renowned Filipino labor leader, Amado V. Hernandez's poetry, published as *Rice Grains: Selected Poems of Amado V. Hernandez* (1966). San Juan returned to the United States in 1967 as an Associate Professor of English at the University of Connecticut (1967–1979). This period of San Juan's life coincided with the rise of national liberation movements in the Third World, fueled particularly by youth in the Philippines, as well as the civil rights movement in the United States. In 1972, the same year Martial Law was declared in the Philippines by U.S. supported Ferdinand Marcos, San Juan published *Carlos Bulosan and the Imagination of Class Struggle*. This book revived interest in Bulosan's literary production and radical politics within Filipino/a activist communities and influenced Asian American literary scholarship. His works on Bulosan as well as his introduction to Georg Lukacs' *Marxism and Human Liberation* (1972) situated San Juan as a preeminent Marxist scholar as he began to utilize historical materialism as the central lens to explore the social constraints and emancipatory possibilities of a Filipino/a polity.

As the Marcos regime dispersed Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) throughout the globe in the 1970s as the primary means to buttress an export-oriented economy, San Juan analyzed the formation and unique qualities of the Philippine Diaspora as a committed intellectual in the United States. San Juan has held professorships at Brooklyn College, City University of New York (1977–1979), the University of Connecticut (1979–1994), Bowling Green (1994–1998), and Washington State University, Pullman (1998–2001).

The 1990s were a prolific period in San Juan's scholarship. In 1992 he published *Racial Formation/Critical Transformations*, which received numerous awards for its incisive critique of neoliberal multiculturalism and the dominant theoretical modes of analyzing race and difference that were ubiquitous in the North American academy. For his groundbreaking work on this text, San Juan received numerous accolades and human rights awards. In 1995, San Juan anthologized Bulosan's poetry, short stories, and letters in *On Becoming Filipino*. The same year, he facilitated the publication of Bulosan's unfinished literary novel, *The Cry and the Dedication* that depicted the revolutionary imaginary that was brewing in the Philippine countryside after World War II. Other important publications where San Juan confronts the global mechanisms of subalternity, patriarchy, and racialization include: *From Exile to Diaspora* (1998), *After Postcolonialism* (2000), and *Racism and Cultural Studies* (2002), *Working through the Contradictions* (2004), and *In the Wake of Terror* (2007). All these texts solidify his place in the canon of postcolonial, ethnic, and Asian American studies.

With the escalation of human rights abuses in the Philippines in 2001, San Juan founded and has since directed the Philippines Cultural Studies Center in Storrs, Connecticut. Focusing on the American Empire in the Philippines, San Juan's archive also includes the following works: *U.S. Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines* (2008), *Balikbayang Sinta: An E. San Juan Reader* (2008), *Toward Filipino Self-Determination* (2010), and *Between Empire and Insurgency* (2015).

For more than five decades, San Juan's multidisciplinary body of scholarship has demystified the ideologies of capitalist development, enabling committed activists and radical intellectuals to situate their aspirations for social transformation within the struggles taking place in the Philippines and throughout the Third World. In this moment of environmental crisis, how can a new cohort of Filipino/a scholar-activists build upon his work to challenge the neoliberal rendering of Filipino/a bodies and natural resources as disposable market commodities? What do we find when we turn to San Juan and his Filipinized tradition of critical theory? In addressing this multi-layered line of inquiry, I focus my attention on San Juan's dialectical analysis and the cultivation of radical Filipino/a praxis that can inform the ongoing development of Filipino Critical Theory, one that further animates global justice and environmental movements.

SAN JUAN AND FILIPINO CRITICAL THEORY

San Juan's entire body of scholarship underscores the necessity of radical capitalist critique offered by historical materialism in order for oppressed groups such as global Filipino/as to transform themselves and their material, social, and environmental conditions. He is adamant in saying that "we need to take our bearings by trying to achieve a total, in-depth picture of these complex processes, the contradictions we need to take into account, the realities and possibilities for change in light of local and international political alignments. But in this task, we will not find any constructive help from the academic experts" (*Toward Filipino Self-Determination* 142). Consequently, the same asymmetrical economic structure that San Juan critiques throughout his writings that analyze the conditions of superexploitation and pillage in the Philippines has congruently nurtured fertile soil for the academic illusions of accommodation and reform in the United States.

In his interdisciplinary writings, San Juan is forthright in his critiques of what he describes as ideological mystification by academics who "perpetuate a discourse of power that would reinforce the continuing reification of social relations in everyday life" (*In the Wake of Terror* 101). In other words, because struggles against social oppression take place on a terrain defined by capitalist social relations, critical theory must refuse the hegemonic trends of dissociating various social oppressions from the mechanisms of capital accumulation and class rule, as San Juan argues. For him confronting a capitalist mode of production is key in not only grasping the ongoing neocolonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines but also the exploitation and mass exportation of OFWs to countless locations around the globe. To be sure, several contemporary scholars have produced detailed and sophisticated works that have contributed to the production of knowledge of the Filipino/a immigrant experience in social theory, cultural criticism, education, and throughout the social sciences. San Juan argues that such work can be further enriched and radically positioned to address major global problems of our time through dialectical and historical materialist critique.

At the heart of San Juan's critique is the academic trend across various disciplinary boundaries where social class is dematerialized and turned into vague, individualistic, metaphysical, or unidentifiable notions of identity and consumptive lifestyle. He argues that in academic scholarship "you will find criticisms of racism, gender, intersections of this and that but you will not find a serious critical analysis of social class, the extraction of surplus value from labor-power" (*On the Presence of Filipinos in the United States* 97). By grounding his examination of the various forms of oppression and social differences in the labor/capital dialectic, San Juan offers a vital means in dismantling the naturalized ideology and institutionalized

structures that propel the violence of racism, patriarchy, and other dehumanizing social relations.

San Juan recognizes that the academy is one of many important sites for ideological and institutional struggle. His hope lies in a new generation of perceptive students who will “work through the contradictions” to critically analyze what is happening in this world as well as what they are learning in the classroom. Of interest to my own work is San Juan’s dialectical understanding of the coalitions that can be forged between scholars, students, and activist formations in incubating a counter-consciousness needed in the restructuring of entrenched global relations. San Juan would agree with the insights of Filipino historian Renato Constantino when he observes:

Activists have to be scholars and scholars have to be activists. Scholars can no longer be isolated and activists can no longer be untheoretical. Each must assimilate the virtue of the other in order to become more fruitful, more creative. Only thus can they evolve a theory appropriate to our reality, and action appropriate to theory. (*Neocolonial Identity and Counter-Consciousness* 290)

Throughout his writings San Juan is consistently clear that the successful transformation of daily life will not be realized through theory alone or by the valiant efforts of individuals but through a vigorous and globalized anti-capitalist movement led by historically marginalized communities.¹

San Juan invites a new cadre of Filipino and Filipino/a American youth to animate and build upon a rich history of social movement organizing with revolutionary theoretical insights that can reveal the operations of economic and political power that frame our lived human experiences. He is adamant that revolutionary theoretical analysis cannot rely solely upon the documentation of diverse human experiences. While counter-stories and oral histories of human struggle are invaluable and rich sources of data, such experiences also need to be critically analyzed within the historical and material conditions that frame them, namely a capitalist international division of labor that privatizes wealth yet democratizes misery, displacement, and despair.

Drawing upon important thinkers—such as Constantino, Fanon, Rosa Luxemburg, Georg Lukacs, Raymond Williams, Antonio Gramsci, and Amil Cabral—who have stretched Marxist thought to account for (neo)colonialism, patriarchy, racialization, and radical cultural production, San Juan evaluates global capitalism and its particular yet interrelated consequences for Filipino/a communities in the Philippine neocolony and the internal colonies of the United States. In other words, San Juan offers theoretical tools to grasp the logic of global

capitalism and its insatiable appetite for the accumulation of wealth that has led to imperial expansion in the Philippines and throughout the Third World in order to secure sources of raw materials, cheaper labor, and new markets for the more industrialized nations of the Global North. He is also an invaluable intellectual resource in his ongoing criticisms of the intellectual/cultural logic of desire, reform, and individual subjectivity that mirrors neoliberal economic policies in the U.S. and its widespread exportation abroad.

As many scholars including San Juan have already clarified, the ideology of neoliberalism arose after the late 1960s and early 1970s when the wealth and power of the American ruling class was threatened by a constellation of diverse organizing around matters of economic justice, civil rights, the Vietnam War, ethnic studies, and women's rights. Neoliberal policies introduced during the 1970s (up until now) have consolidated class power by opening new fields for capital expansion both locally and abroad. This has led to the further privatization of education, health, transportation, and other public sites while purging notions of community and "the collective good." Proponents of neoliberal ideals especially within the academy and the media have dangerously diminished concepts of community, the public, or collective consciousness, supplanting them with hyper individualistic notions of freedom, desire, and personal responsibility. Throughout San Juan's writings, he is quite clear that neoliberal ideology and its complementary analysis within the academy have rejected in their entirety a Marxist class analytic in favor of a politics of "difference" and "diversity." He maintains such a tout court theoretical maneuver is ill-equipped to intervene in pressing matters of our time, which includes the ceaseless growth logic of global capitalism surpassing the limits of our earth's planetary boundaries.

San Juan's revolutionary analysis provides FilCrit Theory with an operational and culturally relevant theoretical lens to not simply adjust our lives to an existing social order but, more so, build a more just society wherever Filipino/as reside. For San Juan, such a historic task must critically address the role of capital in syphoning the natural resources (and labor power) of the Third World to enrich those at the top of global imperialist hierarchy. Furthermore, such an undertaking is doomed to fail through individual efforts alone but must be carried out as a collective political project. It is with this understanding that I position FilCrit Theory in dialogue with other scholars, such as the Critical Filipino & Filipina Studies Collective (CFFSC) in cultivating what we are calling Critical Filipino/a Studies.²

San Juan is an important theoretical figure in my specific work to forward Filipino Critical Theory. I position Filipino Critical Theory in contributing to critical theories, research methods, and educative social practices that seek the transformation of unjust global social relations including an intensifying environmental crisis that

has led to extreme weather events, rising sea levels, the devastation of entire ecosystems, the loss of biodiversity, and dwindling agricultural production and food yields. Born in the process of historical and systematic analysis that grows from collective struggles to change unjust relations, I position Filipino Critical Theory in connecting local efforts for social transformation within the United States to the conditions of a neocolonial polity dispersed throughout the globe and the not-yet-realized pursuit of sovereignty in the Philippine homeland. Furthermore, Filipino Critical Theory can suggest an alternative understanding of relationships forged between Filipino/a Americans and a global Filipino/a polity.

In conceptualizing such a theory, I do not believe it necessary to completely reimagine conceptual frameworks of radical knowledge production, political projects of global justice, and strategies of human resistance. Models have come before us that we must learn from to incorporate more holistic visions into our praxis so that we can more effectively challenge and confront the atrocities of our time. But in reviewing the academic literature, what is consistently absent are scholarly works that adequately foreground the contributions of Filipino/as in social movement formations and their efforts toward constructing another possible world. Without a firm grasp of our own history and material conditions, any attempt to mobilize social theory for our community's emancipatory objectives runs the risk of mechanically cloning the experiences, tactics, and analysis of others while neglecting the requests of the important educational theorist, Paulo Freire, to be creative in regards to our own circumstances and aspirations for the future.

In conceptualizing FilCrit Theory, my purpose is not to homogenize or extrapolate social movement struggles into some broad set of laws that can be mechanically followed regardless of historical, cultural or social context. Rather, my hope is to untangle how historically specific Filipino/a struggles internalize and offer alternatives to the problematic of a global capitalist system that ultimately impedes the potentialities of our lived environments and common humanity.³ The scholarship of San Juan and his dialectical analysis to integrate—without diminishing particular manifestations and local struggles—to the totality of capitalist production is an invaluable resource. With this in mind, I want to offer initial reflections for further engagement that can position Filipino Critical Theory in contributing to the advancement of knowledge production that radically critiques the destructive privatization of our lands and lives.

TWO NOTES FOR FILIPINO CRITICAL THEORY: ENVIRONMENTAL STRUGGLES FOR LAND AND LIFE

San Juan encourages scholars of Filipino/a American and Filipino/a Studies to “study Marxism and apply it to the study of U.S history” (*On the Presence of Filipinos in the United States* 94). An observation first introduced by Marx certainly remains relevant today yet requires further elaboration:

All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is progress towards ruining the long-lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development, as in the case of the United States, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker. (Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* 234)

Scholars such as San Juan have built upon Marx's insights, recreating them for new geographical contexts and time periods. Filipino Critical Theory must further engage and enrich historical materialism in light of the structural inequities that are affecting Filipino/as dispersed throughout the world. The global climate crisis is one such example linked directly to human activity and a capitalist mode of production that has no concern for planetary and ecological boundaries. Filipino Critical Theory can further build upon theory as well as the radical praxis—both past and present—of Filipino social movements that are struggling to overcome systemic conditions that undermine the “original sources of all wealth.” It is to the relationship of capitalist production with our land and natural environment that I now turn.

Note 1: The Historic Case of the International Hotel: Land and Filipino/a American Lives in the San Francisco Bay Area

Within a United States context, Filipino/a immigrants have been historically concentrated in cities. This phenomenon is connected to a history of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines and the enduring processes of uneven geographical development. Geographer David Harvey has explored the links between urbanization and capitalist modes of production, arguing that the geographical and social concentration of surplus perpetuated by capitalist production has likewise resulted in an unequal distribution of people, resources, and wealth in cities. He maintains

that “urbanization has always been, therefore, a class phenomenon of some sort, since surpluses have been extracted from somewhere and from somebody, while control over the use of the surplus typically lies in the hands of a few” (*Rebel Cities* 5). The process of capitalist urbanization has resulted in the dispossession of large segments of populations in U.S. cities, consisting largely of immigrants, African American, and working class communities. The transformation and destruction of daily urban life under capitalism has also set in motion alternative imaginaries where land is not alienated from diverse community formations but channeled in the service of socio-ecological needs. A concrete example that demonstrates this particular idea is the historic efforts of the Filipino/a community in San Francisco to save the International Hotel (I-Hotel).

The I-Hotel was one of the last remaining artifacts of a once vibrant Manilatown in the heart of downtown San Francisco. Historically, Manilatown consisted of blocks of low-cost housing, small businesses, local restaurants, and community organizations. Filipino manongs as they were affectionately called—or the first generation of Filipinos who migrated to the United States in the 1920s and early 1930s—were drawn to this ethnic enclave as they would find sanctuary from their travels and seasonal labor in the canneries of Alaska to the agricultural fields of Washington and California’s Central Valley. However, after World War II, thousands of Filipino immigrants had been displaced in the city as a result of capitalist expansion. According to Larry Salomon, “[m]ore than 4,000 low-income units were torn down in favor of high-rise buildings (including the famous Transamerica Pyramid and the Bank of America’s world headquarters) and parking lots. Four out of every five low-cost residential hotels in the area were gone by the end of the 1970s” (Salomon).

In March 1968, with its affordable monthly rate of \$50 serving the housing needs of the urban poor and an elderly manong community, the city developers and business magnates targeted the I-Hotel for demolition. In its place was the proposal to build a more profitable multi-level parking structure. The battle over the I-Hotel lasted for more than a decade, culminating in the summer of 1977 with a violent eviction and, a few years later, the demolition of the hotel. Nevertheless, this land struggle galvanized the San Francisco community, politicized Filipino/a American youth involved in the emerging ethnic studies movement, and nurtured the formation of diverse community-based coalitions with the intent to prioritize people’s rights over private property rights.

Filipino Critical Theory can gain much through a sustained, historical, and systemic analysis of the processes underlying capitalist urbanization—more commonly described under the misnomers of “urban renewal” and “community revitalization.” We must identify the social forces that are defining the terms of

“renewal” and “revitalization” as well as critically analyze what specific ends they are attempting to realize. If anything, the displacement of entire immigrant and working-class communities in various metropolitan regions has only intensified in our present moment. With the advent of neoliberalism, capitalist overaccumulation has grown even more concentrated and mobilized toward corporate interests thereby reshaping the landscape of San Francisco’s Bay Area as well as Seattle, New York, and countless other U.S. cities.

What are other ways our cities and urban ecologies can be remade? What role will Filipino/a Americans play in the reconstitution of our nation’s metropolitan areas? I believe the intellectual and political task for Filipino Critical Theory is to contribute tangible answers to these questions, envision alternatives, and support a completely different kind of relationship to the diverse environments that Filipino immigrants and Filipino Americans inhabit. San Juan reminds us that such an undertaking is not an individual endeavor but a collective one that “depends not only on the vicissitudes of social transformation in the U.S. but more crucially, on the fate of the struggle for social justice and popular-democratic sovereignty in the homeland” (*After Postcolonialism* 127).

I have argued elsewhere that U.S. born Filipino Americans are framing their complex collective identities as intricately linked to the dialectical conditions of repression by, and resistance to, U.S. imperialism in the Philippines (“Toward A Filipino Critical Pedagogy”). Such a connection between Filipino/a Americans and a Philippine Diaspora must be grounded in an unwavering solidarity that is dialectically aware that environmental destruction on a local and global scale are indicators of an extractive, destructive, and unsustainable mode of production. In other words, the dominant agenda of capital—which has captured every sphere of society—is the very foundation of the systematic exodus of Filipino/a lives and labor power to various geographical locations and primarily metropolitan areas throughout the world; the (neo)colonial dispossession in the Philippines; and the accelerating global climate crisis with the Filipino/a people being one of the most vulnerable populations to catastrophic floods, droughts, and worsening typhoons.

Note 2: Capitalist Urbanization and Climate Change in the Philippines

In the case of the Philippines, the relation between the urban and the rural has been radically transformed. The Filipino/a peasantry has been systematically dispossessed, a phenomenon that has engendered sprawling urban growth concentrated in the archipelago’s capital. It is estimated that 60% of the Philippine population currently reside in the urban core and that by the year 2030, this

population will reach 85 million or approximately 70% of the island's total population. Harvey offers a cogent explanation for the increasing urban populations and their worldwide consequences, arguing that capitalism "needs urbanization to absorb surplus products it perpetually produces. Hardly surprising therefore that the logical curves of growth of capitalist output over time are broadly paralleled by the logical curves of urbanization of the world's population" (*Rebel Cities* 24). The increasing concentration of Filipino/as living in urban environmental squalor and destitution is one of many indicators of a "metabolic rift" where capitalist production is exceeding the limits of urban and planetary boundaries.

While the majority of Filipino/as now resides in urbanized areas, the Philippines is predominately an agricultural country with enough fertile lands to sustain the fundamental needs of its entire population. The country's abundant natural resources and diverse ecosystems have been mired in a rapid state of destruction, degradation, and decline as a result of its (neo)colonial relationship with the United States and corollary adherence to export-oriented policies imposed by global economic institutions. The dislocation of entire rural communities, the unhealthy concentration of people in the metropole, the loss of biodiversity, the dwindling agricultural production for national food yields, these are all interconnected consequences of climate change in the Philippines. In fact, this country is one of the most vulnerable to climate change for the reasons mentioned above as well as the worsening typhoons that cross the islands each year.

The unquenchable growth logic of capitalist production has facilitated multinational businesses to enter the Philippines and promote large-scale mining, logging, and other corporate enterprises that have devastated the Philippine ecology while making its entire populace more susceptible to historically massive typhoons and catastrophes. This was made evident in the large-scale casualties in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan (also referred to as "Yolanda"). As highlighted in the collectively written "Typhoon Haiyan Relief: A Critical Filipino/a Perspective," Typhoon Haiyan which formed on November 3, 2013 and dissipated on November 11, is the most powerful tropical cyclone ever recorded to make a landfall. With waves almost as powerful as a tsunami engulfing entire coastlines, Haiyan has affected almost 13 million people in 44 provinces in the Philippines, leaving nearly 8,000 dead or reported missing. These environmental disasters cannot be understood and more importantly altered without a critical accounting of the environment and its relationship to human activity and the practices of capitalist globalization.

Similar to the mass destruction in the Philippines caused by Typhoon Haiyan and Typhoon Ondoy before it, the mechanisms of corporate globalization have enabled an international ruling class to pillage the resources of the islands, leaving behind

an entire population submerged in the swollen overflows of structural adjustment, debt, and privatization. The rule of the high water is the doctrine of neoliberalism where every layer of the nation's social fabric is a site of looting, as the market has become the organizing logic of an entire social sphere. Again, the natural disasters that will continue to sweep the islands as a consequence of enhanced environmental degradation can only be ameliorated through the disruption of capital's expansionist drive both in theory and in practice.

I believe that San Juan can further equip Filipino Critical Theory with analytical and historical insights and a dialectical method that can promote research projects contributing to transformative knowledge and addressing global climate change and its severe implications for a global Filipino/a polity. E. San Juan would agree with the insights of Barbara Smith that "the most accurate and developed theory... comes from practice, from the experience of activism" (49). As such, Filipino Critical Theory must draw from the lived experiences and political standpoint of insurgent activists and organic intellectuals involved in a global social movement for genuine sovereignty, truly sustainable, and lasting peace in the Philippines.

CONCLUDING WITH DIVERGENT OPTIONS

The Philippines has already concretely changed the world. In 1991, Mount Pinatubo erupted, releasing high volumes of sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere. Naomi Klein in her book, *This Changes Everything*, noted that the sulfuric acid droplets released from the volcano stayed in the earth's stratosphere and within a matter of weeks circulated and surrounded the entire planet. These sulfur droplets prohibit the full heat of the sun from reaching the earth's surface by acting like a multitude of tiny, light-scattering mirrors. As a result, the year after Mount Pinatubo erupted, global temperatures dropped by half a degree Celsius, which at that time counteracted the full effects of global warming. Today, some environmental scientists are proposing what they call "the Pinatubo Option" to address the symptoms and not the root causes of global warming.

Essentially what this option entails is utilizing technology to artificially inject sulfuric acid into the earth's atmosphere as a cooling effect. Klein argues that the central problem with the "Pinatubo Option" is that "it does nothing to change the underlying cause of climate change, the buildup of heat-trapping gases, and instead treats only the most obvious symptom—warmer temperatures" (*This Changes Everything* 259). In fact, the potential ramifications of "the Pinatubo Option," or any environmental alternative that does not address the "business as usual"

industrial emission of carbon dioxide, far outweigh its benefits. For instance, if this geoengineering practice would be enacted, it could not be stopped. This is because soon after the injection of sulfur dioxide is discontinued, global warming would scorch and overwhelm the planet's surface at once. Another deadly implication of "the Pinatubo Option" is that a drop in land temperature caused by a weaker sun would lead to decreased global rainfall.

Akin to the sulfur dioxide that circulated and surrounded the entire planet after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo, Filipino/as have been circulated to nearly every location of the world. Can this dispersed global polity contribute to other more sustainable options in addressing the central causes of climate change? How this globally disparate population becomes an organized revolutionary force must be a central subject of concern for Filipino Critical Theory in our 21st century context. As I have only begun to argue here, such a task can build upon San Juan's scholarship to understand the historical origins and motives for Filipino/a demands of justice. This is an endeavor of not only theorizing life but immersing oneself in the collective process of transforming it. San Juan elaborates: "What is needed in any society... that is seeking to transform itself are intellectuals or cultural workers, who would commit themselves to a labor of critique and pedagogical service to the masses, who would stake out partisan goals rooted in the solidarity of all the working people, the united front of all sectors, who seek common goals" (*Balibayang Sinta* 24).

Filipino Critical Theory must not only draw upon diverse critical perspectives but the praxis of Filipino American activists and their allies who travel to and immerse themselves in the Philippines through educational exposure programs. The radical praxis of exposure participants offers the world another option that can be enacted for global and environmental justice.

Educational exposure programs are potentially transformative sites where connections are made between U.S. struggles around race, gender, sexuality, identity, and other forms of difference to the neocolonial conditions in the Philippines and the fate of a population dispersed throughout the globe. A common phrase utilized by Filipino/a American activists who have conducted such travels and have returned to the U.S. is "land is life." Environmental activist Katrina Pestano explained how this phrase was introduced to her during her educational exposure program to the Philippines, and it captures her understanding of a national democratic social movement being waged in the Philippines. While Pestano first immigrated to California from the Philippines at age 10, she returned to the Philippines in 2009 when Typhoon Bopha hit southern Mindano. Pestano explains that by going on an exposure trip in the Philippines she witnessed how integral land is to the everyday life of the Filipino/a people:

The reason why people fight for their land is basically they will literally die without it. So really realizing why the struggle is so important because they are so much more connected to it [the land] than everyone else is....that land is life. They could live off the land and its resources to be [utilized] for self-sufficiency but [instead] the natural resources of the country are exported. (Personal Interview)

How Pestano has utilized her experiential learning upon her return is more telling than the actual exposure trip itself. Pestano has been one of the leaders of the local “sHellNo” campaigns involved in the successful direct actions against this multinational oil company and its utilization of the docking port in Seattle. She explains: “Unless we figure out a way to stop them and stop climate change from continuing its course, these storms [in the Philippines] will continue to happen. It’s life or death for my people” (qtd. in Baskin). Pestano and other youth activists in Seattle have not only forged connections between their Filipino/a American communities and a national democratic social movement in the Philippines, she has also nurtured the formation of diverse coalitions between indigenous, radical feminists, and the LGBTQ communities in tackling global climate change. It is praxis such as this that Filipino Critical Theory must continue to draw confirming San Juan’s belief that “experience and social practice, not mere ideas, can precipitate change” (*Toward Filipino Self-Determination* 140).

The extension of San Juan’s thoughts, analysis, and insights in the ongoing development of Filipino Critical Theory will not transform the world. Critical theory cannot change the world. It can, however, assist in the process of changing people. San Juan’s work has helped to change an entire generation of Filipino/a activists, cultural workers, intellectuals, and youth in the United States, the Philippines, and throughout the Philippine Diaspora. This organized collection of people can be the very source that contributes to a world made anew. Out of our relative obscurity, Filipino/a Americans—in solidarity with among many forces such as the national democratic movement in the Philippines, #BlackLivesMatter activists, a global environmental movement, and racialized immigrants and refugees dispersed throughout the world—are discovering a collective mission to align economic, political, and social systems in harmony with the natural rhythms of our earth. The question still remains; will we fulfill this historic endeavor, or betray it?

Notes

1. Naomi Klein recently shared a similar thought process pertaining to the specifics of climate change in her commencement speech to the graduating class of 2015. She states, “The hard truth is that the answer to the question “What can I, as an individual, do to stop climate change?” is: nothing. You can’t do anything. In fact, the very idea that we—as atomized individuals, even lots of atomized individuals—could play a significant part in stabilizing the planet’s climate system, or changing the global economy, is objectively nuts. We can only meet this tremendous challenge together. As part of a massive and organized global movement” (*Climate Change is a Crisis We Can Only Solve Together*).
2. The mission of CFFSC is “to organize educators and scholars to interrogate and challenge histories of Western imperialisms (Spanish and U.S. imperialisms), ongoing neocolonial relations in the Philippines, and their relationship to past and present Filipina/o migrations through our research and teaching both within the university and beyond it” (Critical Filipino & Filipina Studies Collective).
3. Such a project is an intellectual, political, and activist project. It requires collective and global organization against the unsustainable practices of capitalist production that has appropriated the lives and lands of a global Filipino/a polity.

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