

MONSTERS IN THE PACIFIC

The Philippines in the Hollywood Geopolitical Imaginary

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Abstract

The recent announcement of the American strategic pivot to the Asia Pacific calls for the examination of the ways by which the region, particularly its constituent states, is produced in and by the US imperialist imaginary. This essay responds to such critical imperative by analyzing the geopolitical imagination of the Philippine nation-space in the Hollywood giant monster films *Pacific Rim* (2013) and *Godzilla* (2014). The essay first discusses how the nation-state remains a crucial participant in the globalized expansion of capital, and how its participation is imagined in the realm of cinematic geopolitics. It then examines the development of the giant monster genre in relation to postwar geopolitics. Finally, the essay argues that the filmic constructions of the Philippine nation-space in the two films function to allegorize the country's position within the geopolitical design of American imperialism in the region.

Keywords

Asia Pacific, geopolitics, giant monster film, imperialism, nation-state, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Earlier this decade, the United States unveiled in a series of declarations its plan to intensify its influence in the Asia Pacific region through the policy of strategic pivot. The pronouncements came on the heels of America's expensive engagement in its global military strategy signified in popular political parlance as the "war on terror"—a grand campaign of international warfare engineered by the US government to establish its position as the sole post-Cold War imperialist power. Among the ends sought in this policy is the establishment of American domination over oil production in the Middle East "to control the global political economy within which the disposition of oil resources will be organized" (Smith 265). For over a decade marked by overseas military operations that took the form of counterinsurgency attacks and destabilization campaigns, rampant human rights abuses and mass murders, and excessive military expenditures amounting to about \$3 trillion, the war on terror has failed to bring about the realization of America's dream of global leadership. While the US government focused on this international militarist venture, the American economy suffered greatly from the blows of the 2007-2009 global financial crisis after experiencing a brief period of illusory prosperity generated by the housing bubble. Moreover, while this notorious military project has significantly expanded US neocolonial acquisition primarily through its installation of puppet governments in bombed territories, it has done nothing to eliminate the external threats to US hegemony.

A discussion of the major challenge to the vision of a unipolar global order governed by the US imperialist state gestures a return to Lenin, who identified one of the key features of imperialism: "the rivalry between several great powers in the striving for hegemony" (94). This struggle for hegemony among imperialist powers manifests perhaps never more prominently than in the realm of geopolitics, that is, the structuring of "world politics in terms of a global context in which states vie for power outside their boundaries, gain control (formally and informally) over less modern regions and overtake other states in a worldwide pursuit of global primacy" (Agnew 1).

The industrializing drive in advanced capitalist countries brings forth the crisis of overproduction. Thus, "the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe" (Marx and Engels 63). This explains the expansionist visions that materialize into the neocolonial encroachments of advanced capitalist countries upon less-industrialized territories. Eventually, the apportioning of the world as a result of the internationalization of capital constricts imperialist desires for further expansion, as Marx elaborated:

[As] the mass of production, and consequently the need for extended markets, grows, the world market becomes more and more contracted, fewer and fewer new markets remain available for exploitation, since every preceding crisis has subjected to world trade a market hitherto unconquered or only superficially exploited. (190)

As the contradictions among imperialist powers intensify, the fortification of neocolonial control becomes urgent. In Europe, the European Union controlled primarily by the unholy alliance of Western European powers France, Germany, Italy, and prior to the Brexit vote that is set to take effect in 2019, the United Kingdom, continues its political, economic and military domination. This alliance expands European markets vigorously at the expense of semi-colonial countries like those located in Eastern Europe. A parcel of Eastern Europe and Central Asia is still subject to the imperialist control of Russia. Meanwhile, Russia and China formed the transnational bloc composed of rapidly developing countries called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), another potential player in the global capitalist arena.

The Asia Pacific appears to be a most appealing geopolitical target for the United States. Constituent nation-states in the region have a long history of transnational engagements with America, particularly in the sphere of trade relations. The region is export-dependent on the US, absorbing 61% of US goods exports and 72% US agricultural exports worldwide in 2010. Moreover, the region's robust economic performance allowed it to recover rapidly from the blow of the recent global financial crisis. The region also stands poised to become the world's largest trading bloc, and with the continued rise in population, market opportunities are expected to further flourish (Barno et al. 160). The rise of China as an economic power capable of installing a regional hegemony and posing a serious threat to US interests in the Asia Pacific also drives the imperative to reinvigorate American participation in the area. In addition to China's rapid economic growth, the potential regional hegemon has demonstrated signs of aggression in its territorial disputes with its Asian neighbors. With the American economy badly crippled by the global recession and excessive military expenditures on one side, and a rising power to challenge its current influence on the other, the American rebalancing strategy could not be anything other than a desperate recourse of an imperialist nation-state in crisis.

This shift of the politico-economic focus of the US imperialist thrust on the Asia-Pacific region warrants an examination of how the region is constructed in/by the American imperialist imaginary. Remarkably, two Hollywood-produced science-fiction monster films that construct an American-led Asia-Pacific region in the dystopian future have been released recently—*Pacific Rim* (2013) and *Godzilla*

(2014). In their respective constructions of the region, the films insert, albeit briefly, the Philippine nation-space.

The Philippines occupies a specific position in the region as America's oldest neocolonial territory. Since the country was relinquished by Spain to America in the Treaty of Paris in 1898, the Philippines has been subjugated to the economic and political dictates of the US government. Through its interventions in the Philippine economy in the form of unfair trade policies, structural adjustment programs, and foreign assistance schemes, the US, in cooperation with the local ruling elites, has successfully trapped the Philippines in the clutches of anti-industrialization. While its Asian neighbors have already achieved the status of newly-industrialized countries, the Philippine economy is carefully engineered to remain in its semi-colonial and semi-feudal state to serve as exporter of raw materials and subcontracting practices to industrialized countries, and dependent importer of their surplus goods. Among industrialized nations, the US enjoys its status as one of the Philippines' major trading partners and largest foreign investor. According to the Office of the US Trade Representative, trade of goods and services between the two countries amounted to a total of \$24 billion in 2012 (2015). Recently, then-US President Barrack Obama and then-Philippine President Benigno Aquino III signed the Partnership-for-Growth (PFG) joint country action plan, which envisioned stronger inter-agency collaborations between the two governments. While this interstate agreement was articulated in the rhetoric of development and international cooperation, the PFG actually heralded another opportunity for the US government to gain greater ground in its interventionist schemes in the country's policy-making bodies.

What the present essay intends to do is an analysis of how these geopolitical entanglements of the Philippines with American imperialism in/and the Asia Pacific region are allegorically constructed through the insertion of the Philippine nation-space into the Hollywood texts *Pacific Rim* and *Godzilla*. First, I will discuss how the nation-state continues to exercise agency in the realm of geopolitics, despite the proliferation of narratives on its supposed decline in the age of transnational monopoly capitalism. This discussion, in turn, will elaborate on how the ontological problem of the nation-state manifests in America's geopolitical construction of the Asia Pacific region and how the Philippines is implicated in this construction. Second, I will briefly discuss how the giant monster movie is engendered by post-World War II global political tensions. Third, I will analyze the images of the Philippine nation-space in *Pacific Rim* and *Godzilla* as constructions of the imperialist imaginary.

THE NATION-STATE IN THE GEOPOLITICAL IMAGINARY

The growing interdependence of national economies has brought about discussions concerning the alleged weakening and eventual decline of the nation-state. Among the influential renderings of this postmortem for the nation-state is the thesis put forward by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their magisterial book *Empire* (2000). Hardt and Negri suggested that the decline in the agency of the nation-state in the face of globalization has logically given rise to a new regime of control free from the institutional mechanisms of political regulation. Displacing the nation-state as the structure of rule in the globalized order, this global formation of dominance called Empire is a “decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (Hardt and Negri xii). While this evaluation accurately diagnosed the emergence of non-statist formations or interventions that maneuver transactions in the domains of finance, judiciary, military, and even morality across the transnational grid (38), the dense architectural character of the Empire is more akin to the Kautskian idea of ultra-imperialism, which could not fully take into account the multipolarity of the global order—a landscape where rivalries among imperialist blocs and nation-states are constantly staged.

It is thus instructive to return to the classical Marxist view of the nation-state as the political superstructure through which the economic interests of the ruling order are upheld. The nation-state primarily functions as an instrument of the capitalist order “by supplying an elaborate legal and institutional framework, backed up by coercive force, to sustain the property relations of capitalism, its complex contractual apparatus and its intricate financial transactions” (Wood 17).

With the accelerated and intensified expansion of monopoly capitalist operations across the world, national economies become subsequently integrated with international financial and market formations. But to argue that this internationalization of local economies leads to the rise of a transnational structure of global economic governance that replaces nation-state formations is to ignore the fact that transnational capitalism primarily operates according to the complex interaction among the nation-states and the agents of monopoly capitalism. Nation-states are in fact necessary participants in the internationalization of capital. Within the domestic territory, the nation-state serves as the executive committee of its capitalist class in its accumulation of profits by legislating the further extraction of surplus value from the bodies of its citizens. In the transnational arena, the nation-state continues to represent these capitalist interests in their search for markets abroad by assuming political agency in the regulation and mandate of its terms of engagement with other nation-states and international financial institutions. While regional economic blocs might conjure the illusion of international economic

integration, each constituent nation-state actively performs in these transnational alliances to balance the play of competing and complementary economic and political interests in the domestic and international domains. Wood's formulation thus provides an accurate framework for understanding the role of nation-states in the international operations of capitalist accumulation: "the political form of globalization," is not a "global state but a global system of multiple local states, structured in a complex relation of domination and subordination" (20).

The US provides a particular case that dispels the mythology of the end of the nation-state. Roberts elaborates how the imperialist operations of the US exemplifies the continuing preponderance of the nation-state in global politico-economic affairs:

[N]ation-states remain the crucial regulatory mechanisms in governing capitalism, and the US state has been at the forefront in promoting those informal neoliberal governance mechanisms worldwide through the extension of financialization across the world; a specific type of hegemony that provides a rationale for establishing neoliberalism through informal governance. (835)

The ontological problem of the nation-state in the age of transnational monopoly capitalism becomes particularly apparent in the geopolitical constructions of the imperialist imaginary, in which mapping is employed as a violent signifying practice intended to target, contain, and command territories. In the search for international markets, the imperialist power concocts the fiction of an expansionist cartography necessary to structure its conquest—a geopolitical fiction that enacts representational violence on the imperialist power's targeted territories, as it compromises their respective presences and specificities. Arif Dirlik demystifies the constructedness of the geopolitical production of the Asia Pacific as a region conjured by the imperialist imaginary:

[In] a fundamental sense, there is no Pacific region that is an "objective" given, but only a competing set of ideational constructs that project upon a certain location on the globe the imperatives of interest, power, or vision of these historically produced relationships. (56)

In the imperialist imaginary, the region, signified using homogenizing labels like Asia-Pacific, Pacific Rim, and Pacific Basin, is constructed "as a kind of dreamwork in which the interests of capital provide the dominant hermeneutic for transcoding its multiple and tangled flows" (Eperjesi 63). American excursions in the area dating from the mercantilist era have been predicated on this imperialist mapping, which produces the Pacific frontier as the untapped basin loaded with possibilities for economic and political expansion, particularly as the oceanic space is envisioned

to provide a navigable route to the legendary China market. The region has been thus condensed geopolitically in relation to China. Noticeably, this geopolitical “dreamwork” that has tended to privilege China strategically elides over the ontologies of non-China nation-states in the Pacific. For instance, in the imperialist cartography at the turn of the twentieth century, the Philippines was identified only as “a zone of strategic relations,” as it was still China that remained privileged in the expansionist fantasy of America in the Pacific (94). Affirming this, the imperialist rhetoric of American historian and politician Albert Beveridge tied American manifest destiny to the pursuit of China:

The Philippines are ours forever, “territory belonging to the United States,” as the Constitution calls them. And just beyond the Philippines are China’s illimitable markets. We will not retreat from either. We will not repudiate our duty in the archipelago. We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race. We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world. And we will move forward to our work, not howling out regrets like slaves whipped to their burdens, but with gratitude for a task worthy of our strength, and thanksgiving to Almighty God that He has marked us as His chosen people, henceforth to lead in the regeneration of the world. (434-435)

Contemporary proclamations heralding the strategic pivot to the region are likewise abundant with references to this geopolitical fiction of the Asia Pacific, with China’s presence as the prime object of geographic, economic, and political control and containment once again particularly pronounced.

The geopolitical fabrication integral to imperialist intrusions has brought forth implications in the way the region is imagined in cultural forms. One of the popular modalities through which the geopolitical imagination is constructed is filmic representation. In *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, Fredric Jameson foregrounds the function of cinema as the site for the production of images that enable us, albeit unconsciously, to make sense of the totality of the world system. Cinema is the space for allegory—the epistemological frame that “allows the most random, minute or isolated landscapes to function as figurative machinery in which questions about the system and its control over the local ceaselessly rise and fall”—to stage its “historic reappearance” (2-6).

While this proposed hermeneutic proceeds from the critical task of uncovering the operant mystifications of the cartography of the global order through cinema’s function as national allegory, critics (Ahmad; Stam; Shohat) have pointed out how Jameson’s reification of the social totality—manifested particularly in his totalizing use of the “three worlds paradigm”—glosses over the heterogeneous ways in which individual nation-states experience and interact with the operations of

transnational monopoly capitalism (Tolentino, *National/Transnational* 103-104). Ironically, this is the same problem generated by the representational violence enacted by imperialist cartography to nation-states.

A potential intervention to Jameson's formulation here is a highlighting of the global-local nexus in what Jameson proposes as the conflation of "ontology with geography" (4) in cultural representations, filmic, or otherwise. The spatial presence of the local and national generated in the cinematic field of vision—no matter how minute, obscured, or effaced it may be—requires an analysis of how this representation is necessarily and particularly entangled in the dialectical interaction of the global and the local, the regional, and the national. It is with this emphasis on the interaction between the local/national and the international/global that Tolentino articulates a (re)definition of geopolitics: "a transnational cultural politics that effects the implementation of globalizing forces in the local national landscape, and demonstrates how the local might become a trope for situating past and ongoing globalization drives" ("Introduction" vii).

(Non)representations of the Philippine nation-space in the Hollywood imperialist imaginary allegorically conjure the nation-state's transactions with America and the Asia Pacific region. Tolentino, for instance, cites how the Philippine landscape is utilized as the simulacrum of the battlefields in Indo-China in Hollywood-produced "Vietnam films" like Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) (*National/Transnational* 151). The conflation of the Philippine landscape with the war-battered space of its neighbor is clearly indicative of the homogenizing and thus marginalizing dynamics of the American geopolitical imaginary in constructing the Asia Pacific region. In erasing the Philippine presence, the colonial violence inflicted by the Americans on the Philippines and the ensuing anti-imperialist struggles of the Filipino people are likewise anomalously obliterated from the filmed geography. In an earlier wartime film *Back to Bataan* (1945), the dramatization of American wartime intervention in the country rationalizes the necessity of American colonial tutelage, as well as legitimizes American excursion in the Pacific. Delmendo argues that this film exorcises "American colonial guilt via projection onto the Japanese," and "constructs Filipino independence as possible only through renewed subordination to the (soon-to-be) former colonial master" (193). More than half a century after *Back to Bataan's* release, the Philippine nation-state's enduring complicity to American imperialist imperatives affirms the chilling accuracy with which this film imagined the future of the US-Philippine relations and the Philippines' position in the Asia Pacific as a loyal accomplice to the US imperialist agenda in the region.

ATTACKS IN THE PACIFIC

The imagination of the Asia Pacific region finds recent popular incarnations in two blockbuster films—*Pacific Rim* (2013) and *Godzilla* (2014). Both were distributed worldwide by the major American media company Warner Brothers Pictures. Moreover, both were among the top-grossing films in their respective years of releases. *Pacific Rim* raked in a worldwide box-office gross of \$411,002,906 (“Pacific Rim”), while *Godzilla* earned a worldwide gross of \$528,676,069 (“Godzilla”). The box office appeal of these two films could be attributed to the renewed popularity of the science fiction film, particularly the giant monster (or giant creature) subgenre to which they both belong. Films in the genre have consistently proven to earn huge profits in the box office. Among the annual top-grossing films since 2000, at least one science fiction film is included. Remarkably, at least four of the highest-earning films in 2003 are science fiction films (Womack 71).

The modernization of film technologies, particularly the development of computer-generated imagery (CGI) in major industrialized countries like the US and Japan, particularly spurred the return of the giant monster subgenre to the screen during the 1990s. A far cry from the technologically deficient techniques that involved the use of miniature sets and rubber-suited extras in earlier genre entries, CGI has reinvigorated the subgenre by enabling the construction of more realistic monsters and the staging of more convincing scenes of urban annihilation (Hantke 236).

With the level of visual sophistication now achieved in the construction of cinematic monsters, the intervention of modern filmmaking technologies has updated and gratified humanity’s age-old obsession with the trope of monstrosity. Monsters have been conventionally interpreted as projections of human fears of pathology, difference, and disfigurement. These projections necessitate that the evocation and production of monstrosity operate through the apparatus of visuality, as it provides a concrete sensory mechanism for the perceiver’s immediate identification and repudiation of difference. But more than a construct that operates on the level of individual sensory and psychological stimulation, the monster’s body is a social text that bears political and cultural significations; as Cohen elaborates,

A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically “that which reveals,” “that which warns,” a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself. (4)

The dramatic rise in the popularity of giant monster films—along with the increased prominence of science fiction novels—during the 1950s has been attributed to the global political shifts of the period. The nuclear bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima during the Second World War generated massive global anxieties over the possibility of nuclear warfare. The proliferated images of the annihilated Japanese cities provided the public a popular image of the terror of the apocalypse, which was earlier mystified only in theological abstractions. The sense of unease over atomic warfare and the no longer remote possibility of massive annihilation was further aggravated by the intensifying tension of the nuclear arms race between the US and Russia during the Cold War. This widespread anxiety over the possibility of nuclear warfare and dysmorphophobic paranoia aroused by the radiation-induced disfigurement of the survivors of the nuclear bombings in Japan engendered Hollywood-produced cinematic constructions of monsters resurrected and mutated by atomic testing—from the hibernating dinosaur awakened by nuclear tests in *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1950) and the gigantic ants in *Them!* (1954) to the mutated giant octopus of *It Came from Beneath the Sea* (1955).

Moreover, these cinematic monsters functioned to animate the logic of global disaster. The science-fiction film is generally a dystopic fantasy conjured on the principle of what Sontag calls “the aesthetics of destruction” (44). Scenes depicting giant monsters attacking urban areas, destroying buildings, and disrupting transportation systems are essential ingredients in the genre, with the assault in the cities signifying the deconstructive assault to the industrial and political center. This geopolitical positioning of the monstrous rampage in the heart of the metropolis provides the film with an insurrectionary scenario that justifies the corresponding intervention of political forces, usually military, in the form of “invasions, usurpations, colonizations” (Cohen 13).

The emergence of the US as a superpower after the Second World War and its political posturing as the global police against the ideological and political influence of communism found expression in the militarist activities conjured in the narratives of the Cold War-era science fiction films. An enduring theme in the genre is the “fantasy of united warfare” (Sontag 46)—the necessity of peaceful transnational consolidation and suspension of international conflicts in the face of global disaster. But the images of global cooperation constructed to fulfill this fantasy are frequently premised on the necessity of a global leader. As anticipated, in the case of the Hollywood-produced Cold War science fiction films, this leadership—represented by scientists, political leaders, and military experts who responded eagerly to the state of emergency—still remains in the hands of the American characters.

Complementing this image of American leadership is the image of annihilated cities functioning as dehistoricized signifier for the apocalypse. To exorcise American nuclear guilt, the apocalyptic landscapes are ruthlessly detached from their historical source—Japan. The Asia Pacific region is thus obliterated from the cinematic field of vision, conjured merely in the realm of the political unconscious as specters of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. American cities thus serve as surrogates to the cities destroyed not only by nuclear power, but by American expansionist violence in general. But while they are obliterated and forced to absence onscreen, nation-spaces that are historically linked to American imperialist excursions and Cold War-era political exercises like the Philippines and the countries in Indochina act as historical specters that haunt these surrogate cinematic landscapes.

In stark contrast, the recent genre incarnations like *Pacific Rim* and *Godzilla* directly implicate the region in constructing the imperialist fantasy of global leadership. This increased visibility of local presences, not just in science-fiction films, but also in several Hollywood productions, may be attributed to the fact that the contemporary operations of Hollywood production companies as steadily globalized industries have pushed them to engage more vigorously in international collaborations—expressed in various practices such as the use of shooting locations in local landscapes, the casting of local actors, and the appropriation of local cultural elements in the filmic narrative—to widen their international marketing appeal.

In the case of the two monster films, the pronounced presence of the region might be explained in part by Hollywood's transnational cultural transaction with Japanese cinema, as evinced by the films' explicit borrowing from the Japanese giant monster genre kaiju (from *kaijueiga* literally 'monster film'). In *Pacific Rim*, the gigantic monsters are identified by the generic label Kaiju. *Godzilla* is, of course, a reincarnation of what is arguably the quintessential kaiju in popular imagination, the *gojira* of postwar Japan whose image has stood as the iconic anti-nuclear cinematic metaphor. Similar to the Cold War giant monster films, the *kaijueiga* genre has also served as a cultural expression of the anxieties generated in Japan at the aftermath of the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In the succeeding portions of the essay, I will analyze the dynamics of representation in these two films, and their construction of the Asia Pacific region and the Philippine geopolitical landscape through the lens of the imperialist imaginary.

PACIFIC RIM'S DUMPING GROUND

Prior to its Philippine release in July 2013, the *Pacific Rim* had already sent waves of anticipation among Filipino audiences owing to the Philippines' supposed inclusion in the film. Cinematic paratexts heralded the country's guest appearance: a teaser shot from the trailer was released by Warner Brothers and Legendary Pictures, and the trailer was released worldwide in December 2012. The paratextual artifacts showed the news flash "Kaiju excrement contaminates city," with the place captioned "Manila, Phillippines [sic]," against the vista of a large mound of waste resembling a garbage dumpsite surrounded by heavy-duty excavators and bulldozers in a hazy urban backdrop.

These paratexts generated different reactions from Filipino netizens. Many observers took offense at the portrayal of the city as dumping ground for the Kaiju's excrement, echoing previous complaints about recent representations of the city in American popular imaginary—the slum areas of Manila in *Bourne Legacy* (2012) and, most controversially, the portrayal of Manila as "the gates of hell" in Dan Brown's novel *Inferno* (2013). Others defended the inclusion of Manila by invoking the film's narrative logic—the city's proximity to the sea would have indeed rendered it vulnerable to any attack from a coastal monster. Netizens also noticed the misspelled name of the country in the place caption in the news flash, an error which was later on corrected in the film ("Netizens on 'Pacific'").

The spatial logic that commands this inclusion of the Philippine nation-space in the film is generated by the film's narrative positioning in the titular Pacific Rim. Directed by acclaimed Mexican filmmaker Guillermo del Toro who envisioned the film as tribute to Japanese kaijueiga, *Pacific Rim* imagines a planetary future plagued by destructive attacks from Kaijus, gigantic monsters that emerge mysteriously from a fissure that opened deep in the Pacific Ocean. In order to protect humanity from the aggressions wreaked by these monsters, the countries located in the Pacific Rim embark on a coalition to launch the Jaeger (literally "hunter" in German) program. Jaegers are gigantic robots designed to combat the Kaiju. Each machine is operated by two neural-linked pilots who will share its mental lode and work synchronously to control the robot's movements. For a certain time, the Jaegers are able to defeat Kaijus, and the victorious pilots are accorded celebrity status. Eventually, the Kaijus unleash more frequent and more ferocious attacks. Several Jaegers are launched, only to meet destruction at the hands of their stronger, more violent monster foes. In 2025, several countries call for the termination of the project due to the deaths of Jaeger pilots, opting instead to construct gigantic coastal walls to obstruct the monsters. The project is relocated to Hong Kong where it will be formally terminated—a decision met with

much objection from Stacker Pentecost (Idris Elba), Jaeger commander. It is from this scene that the film's dramatic present unfolds.

Pacific Rim's vision of international cooperation bears the imprint of the discourse of American planetary leadership earlier imagined in its Cold War-era predecessors. Inadvertently, this construction of US imperialist hegemony is structured through the binary logic that informs the ideological rhetoric of the war on terror. Halfway through the film, the mysterious provenance of the Kaijus is finally revealed. Unlike the post-war kaijus of Japan and the Cold War destroyers of Hollywood, these coastal giants are not wild beasts that mutated through nuclear power, but cloned monsters created to serve as weapons of an alien race intent on invading the planet. By endowing these Kaijus with the hive mind, the film fully constructs these gigantic monsters as the homogeneous embodiment of evil, against which the American-led transnational forces that intend to protect the planet are transposed in Manichaeian fashion.

The first Kaiju attack set in San Francisco rationalized the construction of American hegemony against the backdrop of Pacific-based chaos. Akin to the narrative of the 9/11 tragedy, the assault on the American city not only emphasizes US's geographical affinity to the Pacific Rim, but also legitimizes its involvement in the fight against these planetary monsters. The montage of flash reports centering on the subsequent chaos sowed by the Kaijus even highlights Barack Obama's pronouncement: "We will stand against this threat." This insertion of Obama's rhetoric of global cooperation, along with scenes depicting financial collapse and militarization, gives the film a veneer of documentary realism and thus foregrounds the allegorical correspondence of the film's fictional world to the *realpolitik* beyond cinema. Through the deployment of signifiers that refer to contemporary historical reality, the film suggests undeniable parallels between its fictional future and the contemporary age—both are marked by the presence of Obama, both are set in a period afflicted by militarization and economic crisis, and both require transnational cooperation with American leadership at its helm. What Sontag identifies as the fantasy of united warfare is gratified with the formation of the American-led Pan Pacific defense corps that operates the Jaeger. The earliest Jaeger pilots all come from the United States and celebrations of their early victories against the Kaijus are signified through the waving of the American flag. In the scene when the world leaders virtually confer with Pentecost regarding the decision to terminate the project, the United Nations (UN) Spokesperson who speaks in behalf of the members of the council hails from the US.

Moreover, the film's main dramatic arc belongs to the American Raleigh Becket (Charlie Hunnam), a former Jaeger pilot who is devastated after his brother, also his Jaeger co-pilot, was killed in one of their confrontations with the Kaiju. Pentecost

recruits him to embark on another operation, this time with Mako Mori (Rinko Kikuchi), a Japanese lady adopted by Pentecost, as the new co-pilot. In one of their earliest operations, Raleigh discovers that Mori is hounded by a traumatic past. When she was a young girl, her parents were killed when a Kaiju attacked Tokyo. She was rescued by the Jaeger driven by Pentecost.

Mori's traumatic past ruthlessly revises the Japanese trauma narrative caused by the American-perpetrated nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the film's flashback scene, the devastated cityscape of Tokyo is violently purged of Japan's post-nuclear victimology and occupied instead by the arrival of the heroic Jaeger operated by the American Pentecost. There is irony in the fact that Jaeger has German etymology; while the robot conjures the phantom of Japanese complicity with the Axis powers, it also obliterates the historical animosity between Japan and the US by serving as the vehicle for America's messianic rescue of the helplessly ruined Japan. The film's construction of US-Japan relations allegorizes US occupation in Japan, as well as its sponsorship of Japan's post-war rehabilitation, particularly the development of its military-industrial complex. This sponsorship was significantly propelled by the American Cold War strategy of insulating Asia Pacific nation-states from the looming influence of socialism in the region.

According to Lichauco, America's decision to transform Japan into its apparatus to establish US economic and political supremacy in the region has two requisites. One is America's encouragement of Japan's industrialization, as it was the sole country in the region that was industrialized before the war. Another is the assurance of a sustainable source of raw materials to feed Japan's industrialization (48). Araneta thus writes how American protectionist scheme in Japan eventually wreaked debilitating effects on the Philippine economy:

The indifferent economic development of the country... was due to America's policy toward Japan and the Philippines. This policy was the result of the *Dodd's Report*, which (US President Harry) Truman accepted, and which had, as its objective, to make Japan the industrial workshop of Asia and the Philippines a mere supplier of raw materials. (55)

According to the Senate Economic Planning Office (2007), Japan is the Philippines' second largest trading partner, serving as one of its largest sources of foreign investments. The Philippines also imports heavily from Japan. These goods include electronic supplies and industrial equipment. The Philippines's brief spatial presence in *Pacific Rim* is founded on the country's political and economic status as blueprinted by US geopolitical engineering in alliance with Japan's industrializing scheme. In the flash report that circulated in the pre-screening paratexts, Manila is shown as the casualty of the second Kaiju attack. The Kaiju's excrement in the country's economic and political center functions as visual idiom for excess

in an age of capitalist crisis. As the search for markets abroad becomes the primary response to the crisis of overproduction in monopoly capitalist countries, neocolonial territories are constructed geopolitically as absorbents of excess. In this expansionist narrative, the city receives the illusory artifices of modernity as it is “the locus of transnational operations” (Tolentino, *National/Transnational* 134), and hence, the port of industrial excess. In the flash report, the city of Manila is rendered as immobile space, fixed violently to its position as dumping ground of surplus, and helplessly cleaned by the robotic excavators. This imaging of the Philippines as passive recipient of excess is affirmed in another scene shown a few minutes later after the flash report, in which the initial success of the Jaeger project is shown to result in the emergence of market for the sale of the mutilated parts of defeated Kaijus. An obviously computer-generated semi-rural vista is shown very briefly, bustling with the noise and movement of jeepneys, pedicabs, and motorcycles through the street. The country’s semi-industrialized condition here is signified here through its backward transportation system and the absence of high-rise buildings that abound First World cityscapes. Towering above the busy Third World landscape are gigantic Kaiju parts that hold electric wires and serve as pillars for shanties. More explicitly, the country’s complicity to its import-dependence is represented here with the surplus no longer merely forced by crisis but bought and absorbed by the community.

The problematic lack of agency—military and technological—accorded to the Philippines in the geopolitical imaginary of the *Pacific Rim* prompted one Filipino reviewer to ask “why there was no mention of any effort on our part to stave off the giant attacks on our own” (Dimacali 2013). Clearly, the Philippines’ fantasy of industrialization is not accommodated in the imperialist imaginary. Moreover, American military excursions in the country in the form of joint military exercises and establishment of military bases function as political strategies through which the US government preserves the country’s neocolonial status as well as its power in the Asia Pacific region. As such, the country’s military dependency on America falls neatly within its imperialist design in the region.

GODZILLA’S MINING GROUND

Similar to *Pacific Rim*, *Godzilla* naturalizes the establishment of American hegemony in the face of planetary disaster. This time, the militarist orientation of US imperialist thrust is explicit, as the central dramatic arc belongs to Ford Brody (Aaron Taylor-Johnson), a US Navy explosive ordnance disposal technician. Brody’s mother (Juliette Binoche), a scientist, died in the explosion of the Janjira Nuclear Power Plant in Japan. Against official state protocol, Ford’s father (Bryan

Cranston) stubbornly insists on discovering the cause of the seismic tremors that shook the power plant, and finds out the existence of gigantic nuclear-feeding winged creatures called MUTO (Massive Unidentified Terrestrial Organism). Ford eventually becomes involved in the US Navy's conquest to hunt the MUTO.

The film's opening credits sequence reimagines American excursion in the Pacific during the 1950s. Shot in vintage lenses to simulate the cinematic look of productions during this temporal frame, the sequence suggests that the excursion was propelled primarily by the imperatives of scientific research, and not by economic expansion or Cold War politics. The existence of a mysterious giant creature in the Pacific supposedly prompted the expeditions of Project Monarch, which is eponymous with the notorious mind control program of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Visually constructing the imperialist rhetoric of benevolent assimilation, scenes of American soldiers pleasantly mingling with Asian locals are interspersed with scenes depicting the blueprinting of American military strategy to contain the mysterious creature in the Pacific. In the concluding scenes of the montage, American soldiers congregate by the beach as they watch the coastal launching of the nuclear bomb, presumably to kill the creature lurking in the Pacific. While the mushroom cloud emanating from the weapon's hypocenter eerily conjures the attack on the Japanese cities, American guilt is purged in this version, as US presence in the Pacific is mystified and rationalized through the imperatives of scientific research. Similar to the revisionist mode of *Pacific Rim*, *Godzilla* obscures the political and economic drives to its expansion in the Asia Pacific and dehistoricizes the nuclear attack.

After the opening credits sequence, the Philippines, where seismic tremors indicating movements of the giant creature are detected, is shown in the year 1999. The Project Monarch's helicopter carrying two scientists—the Japanese Ichiro Serizawa (Ken Watanabe) and his British Assistant Vivienne Graham (Sally Hawkins)—intrudes into mountainous greenery scarred by a gigantic mining excavation dotted with thousands of busy workers. The camera pans through a huge excavating machine bearing the label “Universal Western Mining” as the helicopter touches the ground. An American supervisor guarded by armed locals approaches the Japanese scientist as he alights from the helicopter. The supervisor reports that the valley fort on which heavy machines to dig uranium deposits are set up had collapsed, killing about forty workers and revealing a large underground cavern. They descend to find the fossilized carcass of a gigantic creature nestled deep into the hollow. Near the skeleton is a hatched spore of what is later revealed to be the nuclear-feeding MUTO. The camera zooms out and shows large footprints leading from the cavern to the ocean.

In an interview, Director Gareth Edwards revealed that the Philippine scenes were actually shot in Hawaii. To make the Philippine scenes realistic, dialogues spoken in Tagalog are heard in the background, barely audible against the foregrounded exchanges among the foreign characters (Nepales). In what is actually a reversal of the spatial imaging in the Vietnam War films, the exercise of spatial surrogacy foregrounds the Philippine spatial presence against Hawaii's erasure. This foregrounding in turn reiterates the country's position in the imperialist imaginary as neocolonial exporter of raw materials.

The Philippines is considered as the world's fifth richest country in terms of mineral resources. The country holds the largest nickel deposits, and abounds with gold, copper, and even non-metallic and industrial minerals like marble, rock aggregates and other quarry materials. Since the American colonial period, the huge potential for profit through mining has generated huge interest among foreign mining companies to invest in the country. Contemporarily, the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 provides the nation-state's legitimization of the imperialist takeover of the country's mining resources which are exported heavily to major industrialized countries like the US, Japan, and Canada. Tujan thus describes the act:

The Mining Act is a clear example of how the current neoliberal economic paradigm is translated into the wholesale opening up of Third World natural resources to corporate exploitation, especially global monopoly corporations. Not only does it remove investment controls for foreign exploitation of mineral resources, but the Act provides more privileges and incentives over the welfare of the country's environment, its rural communities and its indigenous peoples. (153)

Godzilla's representation of the Philippines as a mining space normalizes foreign presence with the mining company's oxymoronic name, Universal Western Mining. Moreover, the space is emptied of any signification that registers the Filipino people's sense of agency—armed locals with covered faces stand as security personnel to the American supervisor, and ant-like workers toil under the fetishizing gazes of the foreigners seated comfortably in the helicopter. Moreover, the tragic deaths of mining laborers are rendered peripheral in the narrative, even hinted at as necessary to push forward the discovery of the mysterious creature that lurks beneath the mountain. The Philippine geopolitical presence thus enacts an unproblematic articulation of the capitalist instrumentalization of human lives in the globalizing drive to extract resources from neocolonial territories.

The film's director revealed that "there was a scene that didn't make it to the movie but it's in Tagalog, with translation, where a dying man talked symbolically about how people came, raped the earth and scarred her flesh and now she has given birth to a demon. Man versus nature is a big theme within the film" (Nepales). This

environmentalist commentary becomes particularly pronounced in the climactic battle between MUTO and Godzilla in an artificially constructed Chinatown district in San Francisco, an illusory condensation of East and West within the territorial reaches of American imperialism. Here, Godzilla's defeat of the MUTO provides what appears to be a counterpoint to the triumphalist mythology of US-led transnational cooperation in *Pacific Rim*. American militarist leadership in the transnational sphere, here particularly depicted in the scene announcing the US military's supervision of the facility in Japan where the MUTO is kept, is rendered inept in the face of planetary disaster. Serizawa's articulation summarizes this view: "The arrogance of men is thinking nature is in their control and not the other way around."

While the film's resolution echoes the anti-nuclear message conveyed by earlier *Godzilla* films, one cannot say that it fully extends to a critique of imperialism. For one, the entry of American presences in Asia Pacific spaces, particularly the Philippines and Japan, is left unquestioned, with the strictures and regulatory mechanisms that function to assert the political force of national sovereignty seemingly dislodged in the name of planetary cooperation. The staging of the attacks in the US further prevents *Godzilla* from taking the anti-imperialist turn, as it provides the spatial logic for the valorization of the efforts of US military to contain the monsters. The futility of American efforts—and by extension, humanity, of which the Americans are packaged as paradigmatic—is explained to have rooted from humanity's epistemological limitation, not from the imperialist expansion of capital, nor from the conversion of virgin territories to income-generating spaces. As such, the potentially radical critique of the deleted scene becomes conjured but only through an abstract environmentalism that is framed within the anthropocenic ecological discourse—the dehistoricized mythology that detaches the environmental question from the perpetrations of the capitalist system and instead enacts it as the existential struggle between humanity and nature.

CONCLUSION

Dispelling popular speculations concerning the decline and eventual death of the nation-state, this essay asserts that the continuing participation of the nation-state in the transnationalization of capital affirms that the nation-state remains an indispensable presence in the realm of geopolitics. The cinematic geopolitics is one realm that warrants an analysis of how the nation-state is incorporated in the imperialist imaginary.

The emplacements of the Philippine nation-space in *Pacific Rim* and *Godzilla* clearly contribute to the mythologization of American imperialism in popular culture. The representation of Manila as the dumping space of the Kaiju excrement in *Pacific Rim* normalizes the country's position as importer of surplus from industrialized economies, particularly the US. In *Godzilla*, the Philippine nation-space is represented by the mining site, and is thus reiterated as source of cheap raw materials, as well as a territory subjected to foreign corporate intrusions that are protected by its own government.

Translating these spatial presences into politics, the essay concludes that these filmic representations (re)produce the Philippines as a nation-state helplessly subjugated under US imperialist initiatives. What these modes of representation seek to undermine and downplay is the fact that the nation-state is not just an entity that demonstrates unconditional docility in the face of the incorporating mechanisms of imperialism. The nation-state's engagement with the operations of globalization involves a significant measure of negotiation with and response to the internal resistance enacted by its citizens. For instance, the image of Manila in *Pacific Rim* does not even accommodate the fact that protest movements are staged frequently in the country's urban spaces as expressions of dissent against US neocolonial intrusions. *Godzilla* also obliterates the anti-mining protests of indigenous communities, as well as the frequent guerilla attacks launched by the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist revolutionary armed wing New People's Army in several mining areas. Asia Pacific countries are arenas for the increasing power of mass movements that register public indignation against imperialist policies, particularly structural adjustment programs by neoliberal financial formations. Nation-states are more than ever spaces of contestations—they are terrains of the struggle between imperialism and anti-imperialism movements.

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