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Symposium on Philippine Studies

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Reorientations Notes on the Study of the Philippines in the United States

This essay traces three reorientations in studies of the Philippines in the United States, in the wake of a critique regarding American Orientalism in the late 1990s. The first is the rediscovery of the American empire at the heart of American national history and, by implication, of the buried significance of overseas colonies. Second is the renewed interest in comparisons between and among empires, colonies, and nation-states. Third is the emergence of “diaspora” as an analytical frame for understanding both Filipino global migrations and Filipino American cultural politics.

KEYWORDS: PHILIPPINE STUDIES · ORIENTALISM · UNITED STATE · EMPIRE · COMPARISON · DIASPORA

As late as 1974, Fred Eggan, the director of what was then the first Philippine Studies Program at the University of Chicago, could still comfortably retrace the colonial lineage of the field. An anthropologist who had studied with A. Radcliffe-Brown and written on the Pueblo Indians, Eggan (1974, v) approvingly cites a passage from H. Otley Beyer's book, *Population of the Philippine Islands in 1916*, which nicely summarized the *raison d'être* of American scholarship on the islands:

The Philippines contains individuals and groups as primitive in type and culture as are to be found in any region of the world—with the exception perhaps of Australia. They contain also groups that are civilized and others at all stages of intermediate development. Almost the whole history of human economic and social evolution may still be studied in actual existence within the boundaries of the archipelago; but the inroads of civilization are rapid, and this condition will not last. It is to be hoped, therefore, that educated Filipinos will awake to the importance of preserving for future generations the history of their own race, and that scientists of other countries may grasp the fleeting opportunity to record knowledge of interest to the world at large.

Indeed, with independence, the American task of teaching Filipinos about the value of their history and culture seems to have been realized. Eggan (*ibid.*, vii–viii) concludes by noting with pride that the Department of Anthropology, University of the Philippines, and the National Museum were, as of the 1970s, completely staffed by “Filipinos fully aware of the importance of understanding their own history and culture.” The mission of American Philippine studies not surprisingly was understood as the continuation of the American colonial policy of tutelage. Its underlying assumption, again not surprisingly, was the same as that of U.S. colonialism: that Filipinos were incapable of understanding themselves and therefore required the training and supervision of American experts. American philanthropy would reap its rewards in the form of a type of Philippine studies by and for Filipinos schooled enough to know how to conserve their primitive cultural heritage while furthering the emergence of an American-style modern civilization.

American Orientalism

Nearly a quarter of a century later in 1998, Reynaldo Ileto (1999) in his Burns Distinguished Lecture at the University of Hawai'i methodically dismantled this narrative about Philippine Studies. In “Orientalism and the Study of Philippine Politics,” Ileto demonstrates how the colonial trajectory of American knowledge about the Philippines entailed the reduction of everything “Filipino” into all things that were different from and by necessity inferior to all things “American.” Patron-client ties were regarded as impediments to the achievement of the kind of possessive individualism best suited to liberal democracy; Philippine party politics revolved around personalities rather than issues; “big men,” “warlords,” and “bosses” dominated clans and factions (versus representative leaders accountable to their constituents in the American version), so that violence, corruption, and venality were regarded as permanent hallmarks of Filipino political culture (rather than negotiation, integrity, and uprightness in the American polity).

Ileto accounts for the recurrence of American Orientalism—the production of knowledge about the Philippines wittingly or unwittingly in tandem with American colonial ideology, though not necessarily continuous with colonial and neocolonial policy—in relation to the larger historical context within which it has unfolded: war. First, the Filipino-American War, and later on the Cold War, shaped the limits of American scholarship on the Philippines. Citing in particular the work of Carl Landé alongside the dehistoricizing literature on Filipino “values” during the 1950s and 1960s, Ileto argues that the culturalist approach to patronage was part of a largely uncoordinated but no less effective response to the aftermath of the Huk rebellion and the resurgence of nationalist scholarship, especially among former members of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP). It was as if American Orientalism was part of a counterinsurgency warfare directed at discrediting and containing challenges to the epistemological categories of American scholarship.

One need not completely agree with Ileto's criticisms, or concur with his list of targets, to grant his larger point: that American thinking about the Philippines since 1898 has been implicated to a lesser or greater extent in the logic of U.S. colonial rule. Just as important, Ileto suggests somewhat obliquely that American Orientalism also comes out of a studied evasion and willful ignorance of American historical realities. In this connection, he concludes that “it is the question of America itself, how it defines itself, which

has haunted representations of the colonial ‘other’—the Philippines—from 1898 on, [and] continues to bedevil even modern scholarship on the Philippines” (ibid., 64–65).

Mapping the Field

How much has changed in the ten years since Ileo’s blistering critique of American Philippine studies? In the wake of the Cold War and in the midst of the so-called “war on terror,” has the U.S. understanding of its own history sufficiently changed so that scholarship about its former colonies would have also shifted in tone and focus? What is at stake in these shifts? How have the geopolitical conditions of the last ten years altered the perspectives from which to see the Philippines and its dispersed and displaced populations? And what of the practitioners of Philippine studies in the U.S. today? Who are they, where do they come from, how are they trained, and why do they even care about Filipinos and the Philippines? Finally, given the evisceration of federally funded area studies programs with their emphasis on fieldwork and language learning, the study of the Philippines recently has tended to migrate to American studies, ethnic studies, English, and comparative literature, and occasionally to anthropology, political science, and history departments. In the light of these institutional changes, would it make more sense to talk about American studies of the Philippines (or “Filipino Studies”) rather than Philippine studies in the U.S.? What difference would it make?

Let me address briefly these questions by sketching a partial map of the field, seen mostly from the ground up rather than from the top down. Like all such maps, it can provide at best possible orientations rather than definitive directions, pathways that seem to grow out of and connect with other pathways rather than deliver us to a final destination. In place of Orientalism then I propose to trace a series of reorientations.

What are the more recent reorientations of Philippine Studies in the U.S. or, if you like, American studies of the Philippines? I would like to suggest at least three. First is the rediscovery of the American empire at the heart of American national history and, by implication, of the buried significance of overseas colonies in the formation of the metropole. Second is the renewed interest in comparisons between and among empires, colonies, and nation-states. And, third is the emergence of “diaspora” as an analytical frame for understanding both Filipino global migrations and Filipino American cultural politics.

Rediscovering Empire

Let us first look at the question of empire. Without doubt two of the most important theoretical influences on recent American scholarship in the Philippines have been the works of Edward Said and Michel Foucault. In their distinct ways both have focused on the cultural constitution of power along with the power-laden effects of culture. While power is founded on violence and the ever-present workings of coercion, Said and Foucault have also pointed out the myriad ways by which it makes itself felt through a network of disciplinary practices in such sites as prisons, religions, education, medicine, literature, archives, and of course in the mechanisms of governing. The notion of the disciplinary constitution of power has animated the American rediscovery of empire.

While earlier studies of imperialism tended to stress its political economic aspect, studies from the 1990s to the present tend to subsume the importance of capitalist expansion into questions of cultural hegemony. Beginning with the seminal collection of essays written shortly after the first Gulf War, *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, edited by two English professors, Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (1993),¹ there has been a steady attempt to foreground the cultural workings of imperialism in such sites as canonical literary texts, census and photographs, advertising and consumer culture, world expositions, art and architecture, and above all in the constructions of race and gender. The foregrounding of culture as the matrix for empire has made it possible to see its vital importance in the unfolding of American life. As the editors of *The Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* describe the essays in their forthcoming volume, “they all attempt to make empire visible within US history through a paradoxical argument that small colonies had a profound impact upon this large continental nation” (McCoy, Scarana, and Johnson in press).

Projects aimed at rendering empire visible from the perspective of its colonial periphery are perhaps what Ileo had in mind in his concluding comments above. The zeal with which the study of empire has taken hold in the U.S. academy lately is no doubt a response to the history of the first and second Gulf Wars, and the ongoing “war on terror.” But it is also driven by the need to counter the persistent forgetting of the legacy of U.S. imperialism among Americans, both in and out of the academy. The amnesia about empire stems in part from the tenacious hold of American exceptionalism: the article of faith at the heart of American nationalism that holds that the

United States is a city on a hill, the last best hope of democracy, and thus exemplary and exceptional in its capacity not only to nurture freedom for its diverse populations but also to export it to all parts of the world whether they want it or not.²

Like the various messianisms of earlier empires, American exceptionalism has done the cultural work of obscuring the imperial character of America's history. Indeed, from its founding in an anticolonial revolution against Britain, the United States had already nursed dreams of expansion. As John Adams, one of the founding fathers and second president of the United States, once put it, the thirteen colonies rebelled so that they could form "an independent empire" (cited in Jones 1970, 64). From the late eighteenth through the nineteenth century, continental expansion proceeded through the theft of Native American land and the exploitation of African and immigrant labor. The last phase of this overland expansion was the war against Mexico in 1845, during which the term "manifest destiny" was coined to explain the massive territorial growth of the U.S. The continental empire set the stage for overseas expansion at the expense of the peoples in the Caribbean and the Asia-Pacific regions by the late nineteenth century. Recent scholarship has sought to deconstruct this nationalist mythology by pointing out the complex ways by which the American metropole, like the imperial powers of Europe, not only shaped the colonies but was also shaped by them. Let me cite a few important examples.

Michael Salman's work has drawn attention to the role of abolitionist discourse in justifying colonial intervention and "pacification" of Filipinos. His book, *The Embarrassment of Slavery* (2001), shows how the emancipatory and egalitarian ideology of the antislavery movement was transformed into a touchstone of imperial ideology seeking to "liberate" native peoples under the yoke of both Spanish colonialism and a "corrupt," mixed race colonial elite. His subsequent work on what he calls "the carceral continuity" between the Iwahig penal colony, where prisoners were allowed a measure of self-government, and the larger Philippine colony shows how colonial experiments in prison reform not only served as models for colonial uplift but also found their way back to the U.S. (Salman in press).

Paul Kramer's recent and much-awarded book, *The Blood of Government* (2006), is equally ambitious and far-reaching. Kramer argues that U.S. colonialism involved a double invasion: on the one hand, Americans forcibly established their presence in the archipelago by way of a brutal and

protracted war; on the other hand, Philippine products along with Filipino laborers "invaded" America, at least from the perspective of white nativists, farm lobbyists, American academics, and politicians from the 1920s to the 1930s. The history of this double invasion suggests three things. First, that the Filipino-American war, whose end was officially declared by Theodore Roosevelt on 4 July 1902 in order to speed the transition to a civilian administration and quell anti-imperialist protests in the U.S., was never really over. Indeed, the experience and legacy of war continued to shape the limits and possibilities of American policies and practice and Filipino collaboration and resistance both in the Philippines and in the United States. Second, that despite efforts to repress its memory and gloss over its effects, the war forces us to think of Philippine and American history within a common optic of imperial expansion, and thus of the transnational orientation of the histories of both countries. Such makes a purely nationalist view of either U.S. or Philippine history untenable as each is always already contaminated by the legacy of the other. And, third, that U.S. colonialism considered as a double invasion allows us to revise the history of racial formation from a more comparative perspective. The American presence in the Philippines and the Filipino presence in America amounted to what Kramer (in press) calls the "racial re-making of empire" as well as the "imperial re-making of race."

The mutually constitutive relationship between empire making and race making is richly documented in the history of the war and its aftermath. The idea of empire as a white man's burden realized in the violent encounter with nonwhite others had at least two effects. It not only added new terms to the rich and ever-expanding lexicon of American racism; it also resulted in the ethnic specification of the very meaning of whiteness itself. Given the ethnically diverse composition of the U.S. army confronting Filipino fighters, American forces, with the exception of course of African American troops, came to be homogenized as "Anglo-Saxons." But just as empire re-made race, so too did race shape the consolidation of empire. For example, during the war, Filipinos were subject to the most vicious racial invectives—"gooks," "niggers," "Injuns"—and subjected to what Kramer (2006) refers to as a war of "racial extermination" (not to be confused with "genocide"). After the war, however, these racial slurs were transmuted into the more familial though no less patronizing term "little brown brother" in the interest of securing Filipino collaboration and promoting colonial tutelage. At the same time, Filipinos were also classified into "civilized" and "uncivilized"

groups, conflating religious with racial differences that determined whether they were to be ruled by a civilian or a military government.

By focusing on both the contingency and structuring agency of race, Kramer (2006) debunks the view that U.S. imperialism was exceptional and different from Europe's. The unstable yet powerful significance of race helps to explain why the U.S. decided to set its colony on the path of independence after a decade and a half of occupation. Kramer argues convincingly that the two independence laws, Jones Law of 1916 and the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1935, were in fact politically expedient responses to American nativists' desire to exclude Filipino workers as much as they were calculated ways to redefine colonial hegemony without the political complications of colonial occupation. These laws were less about granting the Philippines independence (for it has continued to be a neocolony of the U.S.) as they were about making the U.S. independent of the Philippines. Where earlier scholarship had almost completely ignored or downplayed the significance of race, Kramer thus shows how race invariably *and* contingently figured in every aspect of colonial occupation.

My third example is Warwick Anderson's seminal book, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (2006). Like Salman and Kramer, Anderson stresses the importance of the colonial periphery to the metropolitan center, this time in the area of medicine and public health. His account of the history of hygiene under U.S. rule—from the installation of proper toilets, in order to discipline the “promiscuous defecation” habits of Filipinos, to the rebuilding of wet markets and the clean up campaigns after fiestas to prevent the spread of germs—points to the emergence of a new kind of colonial subject: the “biomedical citizen.” Closely attending to the assertiveness and delusions of white colonial medical officials beset by the specter of native bodily excess, Anderson shows how race and biology defined civic identities in the colony and shaped the terms of public health as a discourse of citizenship in the United States. Whereas Salman and Kramer focus on the sociological aspects of race making as a shifting determinant of colonial rule and collaboration, Anderson shows how the overlapping discourses of race and science produced the conditions of possibility for comprehending the embodied existence of colonizers and colonized. With unfailing irony, Anderson reads the poetics of colonial public health as a kind of overheated and ever-expansive rhetorical machine that turns on (in both senses of that term) a series of lurid figures:

the asymptomatic native disease carrier; the promiscuous Filipino defecator; the anal-retentive American; the white male hysteric suffering from tropical overexposure or what was then referred to as “Filipinitis,” to cite only a few. Such lurid figures conjoined by the discourse of colonial medicine served to excite the colonial imagination and incite policies of reform and programs of intervention.

The ability to reproduce as well as allow oneself to be enveloped in the rhetorical machinery of colonial medicine had powerful material effects. It reshaped the personal hygiene habits of Filipinos of all classes, thanks largely to sustained cleanliness campaigns in schools, fiestas, and marketplaces. It also propelled U.S. medical officials to far-flung careers. Anderson traces the career trajectories of colonial medical officials, showing how their experience in the colony allowed them to establish research institutes in Ivy League universities, redesign leper colonies, revamp public health structures in the U.S., and lead international campaigns against diseases in Europe using Philippine models. Anderson thus demonstrates how the Philippine colony influenced the American metropole and beyond, serving as a laboratory for transnational medical innovation.

The orientations of these recent studies of the U.S. empire in the Philippines inform other recent works, some of which are worth mentioning. Alfred McCoy's forthcoming book on the history of colonial policing, for example, unearths the origins of America's national security apparatus based on the use of torture and surveillance in the Filipino-American war. Anne Foster's (in press) work on the history of drug laws in the U.S. demonstrates how American efforts to control the traffic in opium in the Philippines allowed for the redefinition of drug addiction from a criminal to a medical condition. It also led to the first anti-drug trafficking legislation in the U.S. in 1914 authored by no less than New York representative Francis Burton Harrison shortly before he became governor general of the colony. Kristin Hoganson's *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (1998) details the ways by which both pro- and anti-imperialist discourses on the U.S. annexation of the Philippines responded to a felt crisis in masculinity and were saturated with gendered understandings of America's emergent overseas possessions. Julian Go's (2008) recent book comparing the responses of Filipino and Puerto Rican elites to U.S. colonial tutelage shows how the former translated American ideas in terms consistent with their

understanding of “reason” predicated on the ethical imperative of reciprocal obligation. Rather than negate their assumptions, colonial tutelage affirmed their views of a morally sanctioned social hierarchy and provided them with a means with which to seek greater autonomy and eventual independence.

These and several other recent works are all joined precisely by the task of making visible the workings of empire as a way of life; as the context for redefining race, health, and citizenship; as the pathway to bureaucratic and academic careers in and out of the metropole; as a conduit of disciplinary power; and as a determinant of metropolitan state formation. Nonetheless, while marking a significant advance over earlier works, much of the recent work on the American empire share with previous scholarship a common shortcoming. This has to do with the failure to engage vernacular source materials and the alternative views of empire, nation, and everyday life that these contain. Much of the new scholarship is based on archival resources primarily in English and Spanish. The widely known works by Reynaldo Ileto, Milagros Guerrero, Resil Mojares, Bienvenido Lumbera, Soledad Reyes, and others testify to the great richness of vernacular sources and literature in delineating the varied response of colonized subjects. With rare exceptions, American scholarship, unlike British, French, or Dutch scholarship on empire, seems unable to invest the time and cultivate the sensibility required to develop a degree of fluency in the languages of the colonial periphery. Unlike the study of other regions in the world, the American study of the Philippines still tends to set aside the importance of local languages.

Hence, much of the focus of the new scholarship on empire continues to be on colonial elites—American and Filipino—as well as metropolitan actors. This brings up the question: is there perhaps a danger that the critical study of empire, with its inability to hear and read vernacular languages, risks annexing the study of the Philippines into merely another branch of the postcolonial study of America? If a postcolonial understanding of U.S. history requires the unearthing of the imperial as a structuring force of the national, and therefore of the ineluctable ties that bind colonial and metropolitan histories, what are the risks in continuing to set aside the varied worlds contained and conveyed by the vernacular languages of the former? These are urgent questions that deserve a more extensive treatment no doubt in a separate essay.

Making Comparisons

Let me now proceed to a second orientation in recent U.S. Philippine Studies: the turn to comparison. Alongside the rediscovery of colonialism’s centrality in American history, there has also been a surge of interest in comparative studies of empires and nations. The work of the multilingual, non-American, Anglo-Irish Cornell professor Benedict Anderson of course has been immensely influential in encouraging this comparative turn. Beginning with his now canonical book, *Imagined Communities* (1983) which highlighted examples from the Philippines, his essays in *The Specter of Comparison* (1998), and more recently his wide ranging book on the intertwined histories of anarchism and anticolonial nationalism, *Under Three Flags* (2005), Anderson has dramatically realigned the study of the Philippines on the global stage.

By situating the history of Philippine nationalism, especially with regard to the writings of Filipino *ilustrados*, in relation to the history of other social movements—for example, nationalisms in Southeast and East Asia, anarchism in Europe, anticolonial revolutions in the Caribbean and Latin America—Anderson has decisively deprovincialized the study of the Philippines, pointing out again and again the nation’s cosmopolitan origins. His ability to read sources in several languages has enabled him to track the shifting meanings of sociopolitical concepts and ethnic and racial categories as these traveled across imperial and national borders. In doing so, he puts forth constellations of figures and events—Rizal crossing the ocean en route to Europe at precisely the same time that Rimbaud is on a ship heading toward the Dutch East Indies; Puerto Rican activist Ramon Betances living two doors down from the same Paris building as Valentin Ventura; Isabelo de los Reyes acquiring his organizing skills while living in Barcelona and reading Marx, Kropotkin, and Malatesta. He combines detailed textual explications with metonymic chains of historical and geographical associations to open up novel perspectives on well-known events.

To cite just two examples: he begins his discussion of Isabelo de los Reyes’s *El Folklore Filipino* with a familiar biographical zig followed by a sudden geographical zag: “He was born on July 7, 1864 in the still-attractive archiepiscopal coastal town of Vigan—which faces Vietnam across the South China Sea . . .” (Anderson 2005, 9). In drawing our attention to Vigan’s location in relation not to Manila but to Vietnam, Anderson jars us into seeing the country not as a solid nation but as an archipelago, broken up

and oriented in multiple ways. In doing so, we are led to think of the “local” or provincial as that which is always straining toward the regional and the global. The shock that comes with recognizing the absolute newness of the Philippines and the international origins of its national borders can be seen in another example. In discussing Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere*, Anderson (ibid., 54) begins by deftly contextualizing its writing within the world of Bismark’s Berlin; the rise of the “global left” in the wake of the Paris Commune; the invention of dynamite as the anarchist weapon of choice; and the sputtering liberalization of Spain in the midst of anticolonial revolutions in its Cuban and North African colonies. These coincidences amid simultaneities, as playful as they are provocative, alter the very act of comparison. They offer in their montage-like approach what Walter Benjamin calls dialectical images: images of the past held up, however briefly, as they flash by between memory and forgetfulness. In doing so they underline the enduring cosmopolitical dimensions of nationhood, what elsewhere I have referred to as the promise of the foreign (Rafael 2005).

The strength of Benedict Anderson’s thinking can be seen in the number of students he has trained. Although they may be based elsewhere, their works nonetheless traverse the paths of American studies of the Philippines. To name only a few: Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso, whose *State and Society in the Philippines* (2005) allows us to see the continuities and differences between Filipino notions of power and sociality with that of the rest of Southeast Asia; Eva-Lotta Hedman and John Sidel (2000), whose book on twentieth-century Philippine political history has drawn careful attention to the vernacular terms of popular nationalism and the various formations of civil society groups; Caroline Hau’s penetrating analysis of nationalism and literature in the twentieth century in her book *Necessary Fictions* (2000), and her subsequent work on the figure of the “Chinese” and the writings of Tsinoy in the Philippines.

Writing Diaspora

I want now to move on to the third and final reorientation in recent American studies of the Philippines or, more precisely, of Filipinos: the use of “diaspora” as a descriptive and analytical category for addressing the growing legions of overseas and immigrant Filipinos. As a term of description, “diaspora” entails, as Rhacel Parreñas (2001, 269) writes in *Servants of Globalization*, the “forced dispersal of a particular group of people from their

homeland to a multitude of countries.” It has also been used, perhaps more problematically, to designate immigrant Filipino populations, usually in the United States (while other immigrants in, say, Canada or Australia, get far less attention). Martin Ponce (2006) has recently pointed the difficulties inherent in the descriptive and sociological uses of the term “diaspora.” For starters, it begs the question: who constitutes the Filipino diaspora? What do nurses in Houston, domestics in Florence, Catholic priests in Central Asia, engineers in Saudi Arabia, soldiers in the U.S. forces in Iraq, second generation Berkeley students, first generation *manong* in Honolulu, TNT (undocumented) service workers in San Francisco, and tenured professors in Kyoto have in common aside from the fact of having some ancestral connection of varying proximity to the Philippines? “Diaspora” like the similarly problematic coinage “global Filipinos” repeatedly fails as a term of identity simply because it is unable to subsume and so account for the social formation of such a broad diversity of “Filipinos.” Still the term persists in part because it seems for the moment the only workable way to think about the dispersal of so many Filipinos outside of the Philippines and account for the structural violence visited by globalization that forces them out of the nation. It is also the related structural violence of racism and sexism that leaves Filipino immigrant populations feeling less than assimilated, “homeless,” if you will, in the U.S. Indeed, it is out of this anxiety of assimilation that the most widespread of Filipino American self-conception is fashioned: the woeful sense of invisibility and the paradoxical desire for recognition from the very powers that withhold it. If “diaspora” refers to anything then, it is to this sense of “invisibility,” of felt absence, exile, difference, and so forth that Filipinos experience abroad, or, in the case of second- and third-generation Filipinos, confront in the racially charged societies into which they are born.

“Diaspora” thus refers not so much to what is essentially “Filipino” but to what is always already missing for which the term “Filipino” seems at best to be a stand in. This in itself is instructive. As Ponce (2006; 2008) points out, following the work of African-American scholar Brent Hayes Edwards (2003), “diaspora” is most productive as a term of address. Rather than refer to a social group with a common culture and origin, diaspora is perhaps more useful as a way of speaking to, of, and for diverse peoples whose identities and identifications are far from settled. The “Filipino diaspora” cannot then be thought of as a duly constituted, fully formed community. At best, it is a periodic gathering and dispersal of folks through a variety of media and

often through the lingua franca of English and Taglish. Such communities of discourse, if we can call them that, are constantly coming to terms with and forever coming short of articulating their “Filipinoness” alongside their jagged, irregular, and volatile connections to the Philippine nation-state.

It is in this regard that we can think of the ethnographic and historical works of Yen Le Espiritu (2003), Enrique Bonus (2000), Martin Manalansan (2003), Catherine Choy (2003), Dorothy Fujita-Rony (2003), Augusto Espiritu (2005), Theodore Gonzalves (2001), Linda España-Maram (2006), Jonathan Okamura (1998), as well as the literary writings of Jessica Hagedorn (1990), Zak Linmark (1995), Luis Francia (1993), among many others. Each in her or his own way examines the diasporic conditions of Filipino Americans, highlighting the historical forces of imperialism and racism that underlie their differences from but also broach their possible sameness with other Americans and Filipinos from the Philippines. Put differently, “diaspora” provides a medium for generating communication, or more precisely for communicating, what nevertheless eludes communicability. Additionally these scholars share a vexed and ambivalent relationship with the related fields of Asian American and Asian studies. On the one hand, they see in these fields shared concerns and alliances around issues, for example, of immigration, race, gender, and the geopolitical, transnational construction of such topics. On the other hand, they have also experienced a sense of neglect, marginalization, and disregard for the specificities of Filipino American history. The spectral outlines of a “Filipino diaspora” are thus conjured as an imperfect token with which to sum up these tense and tenuous ties with these academic “homes.”

In a similar vein, the scholarship of Rhacel Parennas (2001), Neferti Tadiar (2004), and Jonathan Beller (2006a, b) focus on the conjunction of physical, emotional, and aesthetic labor among Filipinos swept up in the remorseless crush of neoliberal globalization, whether they are Overseas Filipino Workers in Rome or Japan, exiled political activists, feminist poets teaching Tagalog in U.S. universities, or independent filmmakers and painters moving between the Philippines and other parts of the world. They, too, are part of the Filipino diaspora only if this means that they are engaged in ongoing conversations and disagreements that defer the appearance of their social identity. They thus repeatedly posit yet leave open the question of who or what is Filipino, anticipating referents that are always yet to come. In this way, diasporic Filipinos, if they exist, bring to mind the first Filipinos, the

generation of Rizal who on the threshold of a new century felt the power of a certain communicative force circulating within the Philippine colony and throughout the world. Seizing this communicative force, which subsequent generations would retrospectively give the name “nationalism,” they had yet to figure out who they were speaking as, speaking for, and speaking to.³ This was because the term “Filipino” was already adrift from its racialized, creole moorings even as it was yet to become a term of national belonging. Like these not-quite-Filipinos of the late nineteenth century, diasporic Filipinos of the early twenty-first century share in their difference something in common. As revealed in the scholarship emanating mostly from the United States but also increasingly from other regions of the world, including of course the Philippines, it is an expectant feeling that comes from living in a world in motion, and of their possible though by no means definitive roles in that world’s transformation.

Notes

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- 1 See also Amy Kaplan’s influential book, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002).
- 2 For a succinct overview of the history of the term “exceptionalism” in the U.S., see Rogers 1998, 21–40.
- 3 For a discussion of nationalism originating as a telecommunicative force that was experienced as the capacity to bring distances—geographical, ethnic, linguistic, and social—up close, see Rafael 2005.

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