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Taking the Square: Mediated Dissent and Occupation of Public Space

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to the mechanism of the institutions as well as to the agency of the individuals and their families.

Forced Migration is a sound study of the connectedness between Mexico and the Philippines. It gives a valuable overview of the Spanish colonial history of the Philippines and offers interesting angles for the understanding of the phenomenon of forced migration in the Age of Enlightenment. It combines thorough historiographical analysis with insights from meticulously scrutinized archival material, resulting in a highly readable and elucidating book.

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MARIA ROVISCO AND JONATHAN CORPUS ONG, EDS.

Taking the Square: Mediated Dissent and Occupation of Public Space

London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016. 244 pages.

Taking the Square: Mediated Dissent and Occupation of Public Space joins the conversation on how to think about the public sphere beyond the classical ideal that Jürgen Habermas has sketched out. It connects with the theorizing stream of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (*Public Sphere of Experience: Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*; Verso, 1993), who deem the public sphere as the “social horizon of experience,” thus expanding the definition of this phrase beyond institutions and practices like the press, public opinion, and public places. Places, presence, and publicity, which are presupposed in a public sphere, are useful elements to think about when reading the ten essays in this book.

Mediated dissent refers to protests and other forms of oppositional communicative practices that are presented through media technologies (2–5). At the same time a mediated public sphere can be found on the internet. The internet is such an imposing public space that one of the contributing authors, Paulo Gerbaudo, calls it “digital-popular,” a take on the Gramscian phrase “national-popular,” which refers to the commonly held beliefs of subaltern groups (39). Many of the case studies in the book show how online discursive spaces are bound up with physical spaces of

protests. These physical locations constitute another type of public sphere, the public square. The fusion of mediated dissent and protests in physical places has worked for social movements in communities in Leyte and Samar hit by Typhoon Yolanda (international code name Haiyan) and Hong Kong's "Umbrella Revolution" and has functioned as a metaphorical stage for performance-as-protest in Tahrir Square in Cairo and the Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

Two chapters look at mediated dissent in the Philippines: "Protest as Interruption of the Disaster Imaginary: Overcoming Voice-Denying Rationalities in Post-Haiyan Philippines" by Nicole Curato, Jonathan Corpus Ong, and Liezel Longboan (77–96) and "Minority Groups and Strategies of Display and Dissent in Physical, Virtual and Hybrid Spaces" by Cheryll Ruth Soriano and Ruerpelt Jiel Cao (207–25). It is worth focusing on these two case studies as examples of how social movements negotiate online and offline limitations to put forward practical and symbolic claims and enact agency.

The case study on how the people in Samar and Leyte found their collective voices in the aftermath of the 2013 tropical storm Haiyan follows the activities of People Surge, a group that demands transparent relief and rehabilitation procedures from the government and participation in the rebuilding process. Haiyan was one of the strongest storms to hit the planet, and the Philippines was ill-prepared for the destruction it caused over vast swaths of coastal communities, municipalities, and cities. The study seeks to find out how "voice-denying rationalities" (79) have shaped postdisaster events.

Broadly defined as ways of thinking that silence political speech in disaster-affected communities, voice-denying rationalities are also the effects of discourses the government puts forward. The official postdisaster discourse tries to set rehabilitation narratives in a three-fold manner: first, priority shall be given to basic needs for survival over communication needs; second, political demands have to yield to calls for sobriety and national unity; and, third, since the protests seem divided along political lines, the authenticity of the voices of the community of sufferers have to be doubted (81). As a result of this official discourse, rather than granting sufferers the right to freely speak, they are rendered voiceless.

The idea of silencing is challenged by an implied assumption in the case study that disasters are sites of justice or spaces where the delivery of needs and communication is oriented toward respect, honesty, and equity.

Voice-denying rationalities are reinforced by the axiom that postdisaster recovery is possible through a resilient human spirit; thus, accusations of incompetence, corruption, and neglect leveled against the government are simply signs of victims being ungrateful and could delay the rebuilding process. While voice-denying rationalities generally operate at the level of discourse, they can be transcribed into the realm of practical human needs, as seen in the inadequate food and shelter provided by the government of Pres. Benigno Aquino III. Furthermore, silencing also involves blocking out the probing voices of the affected communities.

Instead of addressing the deficits and disparities in the giving of assistance, the government used red-scare tactics to discredit the survivors' alliance. In their limited engagement, some aid and relief organizations preferred to rally around the slogan of resiliency foisted by the government. This resiliency discourse, however, implied that suffering and recovery should remain an individual concern and not progress into collective action. However, as discussed by the case study authors, while moral and compassionate responses might be effective at the individual level, the survivors' groups articulated political responses in public spaces in which the voice of one became a common sentiment. Still, voice-denying rationalities discouraged the staging of alternative views even in the presumably freer Facebook groups. For instance, a meme showing a bamboo pole with leaves bearing the colors of the country's flag, thus symbolizing the Filipinos' resiliency, was among those that were most circulated on social media instead of the images of suffering and shock (87). The preference for the meme suggests that the logic of silencing had infected digital spaces of dissent, in which passivity and fatalism set the terms of discursive participation.

The growth of People Surge suggested that physical spaces of dissent were not inconsequential, even though some users of social media and politicians were hostile to the group's political messages. The authors note that in 2015, two years after Haiyan, the alliance became the sole voice that continued to hold Aquino's government accountable. People Surge also mobilized big crowds for commemoration events. These actions were expected from the group because the conditions and the void the survivors felt had not changed much.

The second case study examines how minority groups such as LGBT groups, like Ladlad, and the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) claim both physical and virtual spaces to assert their presence and demand recognition

of their rights. It argues that the two groups carefully choose the physical spaces of protest that they occupy to forward their struggles. For example, the CPA's venues of protests are near the communities that have resisted the entry of government projects, such as the Chico River Dam, into the indigenous peoples' ancestral lands, which are also the sites where their martyrs are buried. For LGBT groups, the locations of pride parades signify the groups' resolve to be heard and seen. Their venues are familiar places, like Malate, Manila's erstwhile center of gay culture, and Plaza Miranda, which is adjacent to a Catholic church, a veritable symbol of conservatism and heteronormative dogma. By inserting themselves in supposed heterosexual spaces like the church's square, it is as if the LGBT groups are advancing their appeal toward the bishops and the public to end all forms of discrimination, faith-based or otherwise.

The study also describes how spaces of protests have been extended online to express the groups' standpoint on issues. The websites of Ladlad and CPA, the owners admit, are basic content-wise but are nonetheless useful for they offer spontaneous curation of the groups' activities and a space to express political demands like the defense of their rights to self-determination and against discrimination. The authors of the study focus on creative activities like poetry, videos, drawings, and other forms of artistic expression that constitute the idea of community but whose definition is also evolving among the LGBT groups and CPA members.

For the LGBT and indigenous peoples' groups, the physical and virtual spaces of dissent are safe havens where stigmatization and discrimination become nonexistent and self-representation is valued. Dances, beauty contests, and songs and solemn rituals involving stylized body movements complete the workings of "display and dissent" (215) as identity-forming projects. The performative dimension of these public discourses does not only address the audience but also the performers themselves, as a form of interlocution that strengthens the sense of belonging within minority communities. This type of performance can be linked with Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* (Zone Books, 2002), where he regards as counterpublics the groups that sponsor queer discourses to the extent that they provide oppositional interpretations of the dominant heteronormative discourse and supply a different imaginary by combining personal and impersonal speech acts.

It appears that the authors of the second case study prioritize bodily performance as the effective identity-enhancing practice. But what about

minority groups that do not represent themselves in this way? There are shades of differences among similar groups in modes of dissent and in how they address and occupy public spaces. This prioritization may render other forms of dissent secondary and could lead to the neglect of other subjectivities and actions that do not qualify as bodily performance as such. If such relative importance is transposed into social media interaction, what would then count as acceptable speech acts? How would the websites of minority groups, as counterpublic spheres, admit other interpretations of identities and protests?

In all, the two case studies examined here, which describe the publics that emerged from the various experiences of political struggles in the Philippines, are useful models of direct participation that hurdled discursive and social barriers. They also provide lessons on how grassroots organizations and identity politics may transcend their limited agenda and connect with the larger space of dissent and publics.

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