

The Field

Dialogues, Visions, Tensions, and Aspirations

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Filipino Studies: Palimpsests of Nation and Diaspora is a collection of chapters that offers both critical commentaries on the state of Philippine Studies as well as innovative works that offer novel frameworks and alternative vantages for the study of the Philippines and its diaspora. Written by a group of Philippine-, US-, and Canada-based Filipino and Filipino American scholars, the chapters are also critically aware of the positionalities, constraints, and opportunities that make this work possible. After years of occupying a vexed and ambivalent position in area studies and Asian American Studies, Philippine, Filipino, and Filipino American Studies have emerged in the past fifteen years as a trenchant and vibrant academic presence. Proof of this ascendancy is a long list of notable works that have become widely read not only in North America and Europe but also in the Philippines where many of these works have been republished by local university and private presses. The circulation of ideas in the field has been transnational, though sometimes fraught and problematic, as is reflective of the kinds of work presented in this volume.

This anthology is the outcome of a series of conversations, shared wishes, and fervent longings for an intellectual forum for the ideas of several US-based Filipino, Filipino American and Filipino Canadian scholars.

Many contributors to this collection incidentally come from the Big Ten or the group of land-grant universities mostly in the American Midwest that hosted a wave of Filipino scholars in the early twentieth century called *pensionados*. These *pensionados* were sent by the American

colonial government to study in US universities and eventually assisted in the integration of the Philippines into American imperial rule as part of its tutelary project. Ironically, they would also become crucial to the rise of Filipino cultural nationalism and the prelude to Philippine independence. The papers in this volume struggle to engage and assess the legacies of imperial power and its ideas, and redirect the trajectories of American empire by creating a set of critical optics to frame ongoing intellectual engagements with the exigencies of colonialism and postcolonialism, as well as the contemporary challenges of transnationalism, globalization, and diaspora.

Propelled by a pivotal semantic inspiration from the word “palimpsest,” the chapters in this collection attempt to uncover the mercurial “layerings” or shifting stratigraphy of power that obscure or erase and at the same resurrect specific historical, cultural, and political experiences. Like the palimpsest, these chapters are not isolated reflections but rather emerge alongside, parallel to, against, and despite other writings, thoughts, and ideas in other sites and spaces. In her magisterial ethnography of Bicolano rural poor, Fenella Cannell (1999) deployed the idea of the palimpsest to think about subaltern practices that are part of structured and structuring relationships between rural Bicolanos and more powerful “others,” such as rich urban Filipinos, the Christian God, or America. Therefore, under the sign of the palimpsest, this collection is a moment in a continuing power struggle that forms a series of stratigraphic shifts, movements of layers, of inscriptions, erasures, and reinscriptions or overwritings. Whether addressing Filipino coloniality, the contested memories of World War II, the “voyage” of Filipino men and women into the US metropole, or the state of migrant labor, the chapters assembled in *Filipino Studies* build over old ones, never fully obliterating previous ideas, scratching away obfuscating strata, and deciphering the links between the past and present with a hopeful longing for various kinds of futures.

Time, History, Layers

To understand the rich variety of essays produced under in this collection requires a historical contextualization albeit in very broad and abbreviated strokes. Laying down such a context is admittedly a difficult task given that each of the chapters seeks the revision of that very

history. It is easy enough to recount *modern* Philippine history, if one means its history *after* the arrival of colonialism. For four centuries, the archipelago was a Spanish colony, a Catholic country, and a military outpost of Spain in the Far East. The Philippine colonial economy was bound to the trans-Pacific Manila-Acapulco galleon trade, administered by the Viceroyalty of New Spain (Mexico) for two centuries, until the Latin American independence movements ended the connection. In the mid to late nineteenth century, as part of a reorganized and liberalized Spanish empire, the Philippine economy developed and an economically prosperous middle class made up of Spanish, Chinese mestizo, and *indio* background emerged to challenge Spanish hegemony. The children of this class studied in Spain, and their wider horizons provided the basis for the emergence of Filipino nationalism and the decolonization movement that culminated in the country's first declaration of independence on June 12, 1898, and the founding of the Philippine Republic.

Philippine independence was short-lived, however, as the United States invaded the country and made it a US colony through the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars. The United States, in the throes of its own Age of Progressivism, that is, of full-scale movements of social and political reform, established a public education system in which English became the official language, a civil service system, a US-style system of political representation, in addition to improvements in public health, transportation, and communication. During the Commonwealth phase (1935–46), a women's suffrage law was passed and a ten-year timetable for independence was established. At the same time, it cannot be doubted that US colonial rule left a problematic legacy, creating economic dependency, instilling colonial patronage politics, and establishing racial hierarchies, as for instance, expanding the Chinese Exclusion Laws to the Philippines. As before, Filipino elite political leaders as much as the Filipino masses were extremely engaged in independence agitation from the United States. Then followed four years of Japanese occupation under the "East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." A Second Philippine Republic under Japan's protection was proclaimed. Despite the American departure, Filipinos launched a guerrilla war against the Japanese, especially in response to various atrocities committed by the Japanese military. One of these was the forced enslavement of Filipino "comfort" women for sex and recreation, which only came to be

known several decades later. After World War II, and American reoccupation, the Philippines was granted independence, though with so many strings attached to the United States as to make it a virtual neocolony.

The Philippine Republic has properly been a postcolonial nation for close to seventy years, its existence punctuated by economic prosperity alternating with economic crises, widespread poverty, political corruption, and indebtedness. It has experienced a serious peasant rebellion, nearly two decades of authoritarian rule, a long-standing communist insurgency, and an even longer protracted struggle with its Muslim minority. In the process, the Philippines has developed strong traditions of dissent, mass mobilization, and a national media unifying an extremely diverse population. Globalization has, on the surface, helped lead to economic growth in the twenty-first century, although the most powerful super storm in all history, Typhoon Haiyan, has slowed down that progress.

Migration has always been a crucial element in the making of the Philippines and of the Filipino overseas communities. In the Spanish colonial period, this involved internal migrations that led to the population of “frontier” areas in the Philippines, transoceanic crossings to Mexico through the galleon trade, which led to unexpected twists as in the founding of a pre-US Civil War Filipino settlement in Louisiana, and to the European sojourns of the *ilustrados* (elites). In the twentieth century, waves of migrants, regular and irregular, have come back and forth from the United States, as labor migrants, members of the US military, professionals, and political exiles.

While men had dominated the migrant pool to the United States for most of the century and women had been a distinct minority, the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act led to a gender transformation among Filipino Americans, with women now the clear majority in the community. As is the case with other immigrants, Filipinos have undergone the same difficult struggles of adjustment, discriminatory barriers to employment, and hostility to their presence. The vast majority of immigrants decided to remain in the United States although economic globalization and transportation have facilitated their visits to the Philippines as tourists (“*balikbayans*”) with their visible “balikbayan box” (package of goods for the homeland visit) or as return migrants, alongside their second-generation children who may be visiting the country for the first time. The challenges of being in between two countries, two continents

divided by great oceanic distance, and two different cultural formations have led to hyphenated identities and biculturalism or multiculturalism, indeed a common questioning of self and identity.

During the 1960s, Filipinos in the United States were swept up in several overlapping strands of political activism, from the antidictatorship struggle against Ferdinand Marcos to the Asian American movement to the Filipino American movement to sporadic participation in American Indian, Puerto Rican, African American, and anti-Vietnam War activism. Filipino American women and men were also actively involved in gay liberation, feminist, and Third World feminist movements. As with many other American ethnic groups, Filipino American identity, culture, and institutions emerged during the 1970s and 1980s in response to this surge in mass democratic politics, its critique of American racism, and its positive embrace of racial identity. While the surge in civil rights and black power had a positive impact upon the rise of various ethnic empowerment movements, these also made possible the critique of the very black/white binary that afflicts American racism, viz. the way race, racism, racists, and racial victims are interpreted in the larger society as matters pertaining only to white oppressors and black victims, excluding all other ethnic groups that do not fit the paradigm.

In recent years, there has been an ongoing attempt to resurrect buried artistic and political models, including Carlos Bulosan's writings and the poetry and autobiographical memoirs of early Filipino and Filipina migrants and activists, as well as those of diasporic, literary intellectuals like Ben Santos, Jose Garcia Villa, and N. V. M. Gonzalez. There was a surge in literary and artistic activity among Filipino Americans, including poetry (Jeff Tagami, Virgie Cerenio, Jessica Hagedorn), plays (Melvin Escueta, Jeanie Baroga), novels (Peter Bacho, Linda Ty-Casper, Ninotchka Rosca, Jessica Hagedorn, Tess Uriza Holthe, Brian Ascalon Roley, R. Zamora Linmark), and artwork (Carlos Villa, Manuel Ocampo) displaying artistic innovation circuitous routes and the multivalent, complex sensibilities of Filipino-ness.

Organization of the Anthology

This collection of chapters is organized into four intersecting parts. While all the chapters are advancing specific frameworks and research

itineraries, the first section puts together the more explicit agenda-setting and field-wide critical inquiries. Looking at both the genealogy as well as the politically necessary future trajectory of the field, chapters by Tadiar, Rodriguez, and Blanco explore what it means to have a relevant and vibrant project of analyzing the Philippines and its diaspora in the present time as well as attempting to envision possibilities for the future.

The next section, “Colonial Layerings, Imperial Crossings” is a combination of period-specific studies by Alidio, Rodriguez, Go and Bascara that strongly maintain a recalcitrant approach to traditional historiographic renditions of Filipino and Filipino American histories and more specifically interrogating the conceptual viability and the historical contingencies of colonialism and empire. From histories of Philippine elites, racial ontologies, and colonial education to the Japanese occupation of the islands and the subsequent intrusion of the Cold War and decolonization/“independence” from the United States, these chapters are compelling pronouncements about how and what should be studied under the sign of “Philippine colonial history.”

The Filipino Body section focuses on the notions of embodiments, aesthetics, and desire where processes of Filipino racialization, gendering, and sexualization as constitutive of colonial, postcolonial, and national projects. The chapters by Cruz, Diaz, Ponce, and See are cartographic exercises on the ways in which womanhood, queerness, and desire are culturally produced and historically situated within and fleshed out through the exigencies of Filipino national and transnational institutions, personhoods, and affective ecologies.

“Philippine Cultures at Large: Homing in on Global Filipinos and Their Discontents” is the final section. It brings together the chapters by Benitez, Bonus, Guevarra, and Ignacio all of which investigate the transnational and diasporic mediated predicaments of Filipinos and Filipino Americans. From undocumented migrant status to return migration to the workings of arts, these chapters partake of the ethos behind the critical historical reframing and unraveling that works contained in the second section have offered. These chapters also direct theoretical and conceptual attention to what “should” be important to understand about the Filipino diasporic/transnational (im)mobilities and settlement in the twenty-first century. Home and return are no longer mere spatial endpoints or temporal nodes of ontological completion in the

diasporic cycle; rather, they are scattered in ambivalent moments and spatial elsewhere.

Overall, the chapters in this anthology are far from just being explorations of various sorts of genres, sites, and texts. These chapters put forward bold and formidable declarations about the productive and innovative frameworks that open up new archives and landscapes of knowledge for Filipino/Philippine/Filipino American Studies in contemporary times.

Philippine Studies, Filipino Studies, Filipino American Studies: Tensions and Challenges

To put it simply, this anthology is neither the first nor the final statement on the Philippines and its diaspora. Numerous interdisciplinary anthologies about the Philippines and its diaspora have been published before. We acknowledge our indebtedness to that work for helping spur and stimulate the project for this collection. Tiongson et al. (2006) and Coloma et al. (2012) are collections that deal with Filipinos in the United States and Canada, respectively. They are focused on issues of invisibility and representation and are projects that seek to put forward archives of experiences of Filipinos in both countries. Tolentino's (2011) edited volume of *positions: east asian cultures critique* provide critical perspectives on late twentieth- century- and early twenty-first-century cultural productions marked by the end of martial law and shaped by the oeuvre of one of the foremost film director, the late Lino Brocka. Rafael (1999) is a collection of mostly previously published works of United States, Philippine-, and Australian-based scholars and aims to "call attention to the frayed and porous passages between what is inside and outside not only of the Philippines but also that which is commonly thought of as the 'West'" (xv). Patajo-Legasto (2011) is a voluminous collection with a sizeable section on Filipino American experiences but depends on an eclectic telos and genealogy of Philippine Studies.

The chapters in this volume speak from a particular transnational location, the American academic landscape, and other social locations. They do not speak "for" all Filipinos and Filipino scholars everywhere and at all times; instead, the contributors speak "from" structurally, historically, and politically positioned viewpoints and perspectives. The collection does not purport to speak as the sole and primary source about

Philippine subject matters, but clearly emerges from several strong intellectual traditions and angles, one of which is Filipino American Studies.

Filipino Studies goes beyond identity and invisibility questions, to think more capaciously about cultural production, social justice and transformation, structural politics, historical passages, and collective actions. We recognize the undercurrents and histories around the building of Filipino American Studies that opened up new and strong spaces for the study of the Philippines in the American academy where it previously occupied a marginal and lowly status in area studies, more specifically, Southeast Asian Studies. While Filipino American presence was limited in the US academia throughout most of the twentieth century, scholarly productions on Philippine and Filipino American subjects has skyrocketed in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As one indicator, while in the early years, Filipino American academics were but a small presence in the annual meetings of the Association of Asian American Studies, the Filipino caucus now includes more than eighty members, most of them tenured or tenure-track faculty, postdoctoral scholars, and advanced doctoral students, each actively engaged in every facet of associational life. As humanities and/or social science scholars, they are especially passionate about migration studies, queer studies, race, gender, class, colonialism, postcolonialism, and labor studies.

While recognizing the importance of this visible presence and emergent status in the American academy and in bringing area studies and ethnic studies in conversation with each other, the contributors in this collection do not consider themselves and their works as uncritically applying ethnic studies ideas on race and other so-called American theories to the Philippine context. Rather, they are involved in an exploration of the tenability and plasticity of ideas and concepts. Instead of focusing on the exceptional character of the Philippines, the chapters seek capacious ways to calibrate the dangers, pleasures, and possibilities of cutting across knowledge formations and traditions to then set them against the geographic reach of Filipinos scattered all over the world.

In addition to recognizing the strong ethnic studies undercurrent of the various chapters in this collection, it is equally important to note that this collection is not solely a product of ethnic studies scholars as can be gleaned from the biographies of the contributors. Contributors include scholars trained in area studies and other disciplines. As such, *Filipino Studies* brings together conversations between fields such as critical eth-

nic studies, cultural studies, area studies, and the traditional disciplines (for example, literature, anthropology, and so on).

In bringing this collection together, the editors acknowledge the tangled web of “roots and routes” of intellectual production around these objects of study. In this anthology, Philippine Studies, Filipino Studies, and Filipino American Studies are used in various contexts. While it is instructive to attend to the various ways in which these categories are used—while Philippine Studies is popularly seen as the area studies based concentration on the nation and the state, Filipino Studies involves the global diaspora and Filipino American Studies focuses on the Filipino experiences in the United States—the chapters in this anthology defy these seemingly static notions and fields. This collection, because of its central organizing or core metaphor of the “palimpsest,” suggests that knowledge production is about the layering, erasures, and reinscriptions of histories, spaces, and cultures or a deep engagement with the “porousness” and permeability of intellectual, cultural, and political borders as Rafael (1999) astutely suggests.

However, the problems of borders are not just semantic; they are also issues of unequal power distribution. Reynaldo Ileto (2014), Caroline Hau (2014), and Francisco Benitez and Laurie Sears (2014) have trenchantly presented and skillfully mapped the tensions and issues that are at the heart of numerous debates and polemics around the study of the Philippines and its diaspora. The issues of collaboration and the politics of citation are just two of the numerous pressing issues that pervade projects such as this collection. The problem of authority and authenticity—who speaks for whom—calls to mind what Hau (2014) has termed as “epistemic privilege,” which points to the unequal and situated distribution of intellectual range and prominence, or to put it another way, the politics of intellectual location. The evaluation of one’s scholarship and its mode of circulation depend on one’s distance from the center of power. In this case, research works on the Philippines are subjected to divergent standards, nativist impulses, eruptions of “Western” guilt, elitist language, and various modes of academic chauvinisms and exclusions. The circulation and reception of *Philippine Palimpsests* will not be an exception.

We look toward possible links and strategies to overcome the difficulties. Many of the contributors are typically the only “Philippine experts”

on their campuses. While this virtual isolation places an extraordinary burden on pedagogy, research and institutional visibility, and survival, the meeting of various scholars through conferences may be one way to assuage this onus. The Palimpsests conference together with those at the University of Hawai'i Center for Philippines Studies and the biannual ICOPHIL (International Conference on Philippine Studies) are just among a few attempts to link and connect scholars into a communal hub and network of collaboration, conversation, and debate.

Clearly, these are not enough. More creative and effective strategies and activities need to be forged to address the various issues discussed briefly mentioned above. However, because of the Global North site of this anthology's publication, distribution/dissemination and the institutional affiliations of most of its contributors, we are aware of the limits and possibilities of reaching various reading communities across regions and borders. Nevertheless, we offer these chapters as a contribution toward expansive dialogue between and among scholars and other audiences in various sites. We recognize the difficulties and hurdles, but as a collective effort, *Filipino Studies*, true to the organizing semantics of the word palimpsest, are open to the revisionary and trace-like qualities of knowledge formations. We reject the static hierarchical formations of native versus stranger, nation versus diaspora, and of the here and there. However, we also appreciate and concede the multidirectional, striated, and inter/intra scalar power arrangements in the production of academic knowledges about the Philippines. We are open to more hopeful and sometimes ambivalent thoughts and longings for a viable future or set of futures. We remain committed to exploring other processes of building alternative strategies for collaborative knowledge formations. In the final analysis, we go by what Caroline Hau (2014:56) has wisely admonished scholars on the Philippines which is to interrogate our own positionings, to think of our works not as final statements that excludes other scholarship but are open, generous gestures, and attempts toward new conversations and collaborations, in order to think more broadly and aspirationally about emancipatory politics and futures, and to open up capacious vistas of "what it means to live as, and call oneself, Filipino."