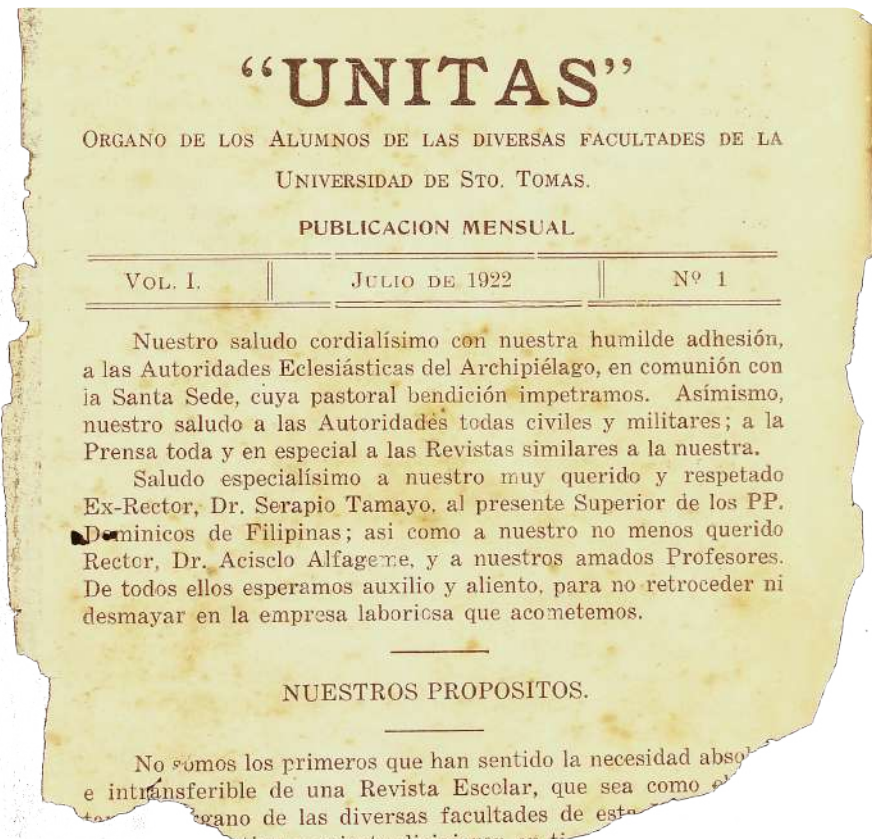


# UNITAS

SEMI-ANNUAL PEER-REVIEWED INTERNATIONAL ONLINE JOURNAL  
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH IN LITERATURE, CULTURE, AND SOCIETY



**UNITAS 100: Where Scholarship Stands the Test of Time**



UNITAS is an international online peer-reviewed open-access journal of advanced research in literature, culture, and society published bi-annually (May and November).

UNITAS is published by the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines, the oldest university in Asia. It is hosted by the Department of Literature, with its editorial address at the Office of the Scholar-in-Residence under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts and Letters. Hard copies are printed on demand or in a limited edition.

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### History and Coverage

Established in July 1922, UNITAS is one of the oldest extant academic journals published by a university in the Philippines as well as in Asia. Still, UNITAS is perhaps the oldest extant academic journal of its kind in the Philippines and Asia in terms of expansive disciplinary coverage and diverse linguistic representation through the decades. While always cognizant of disciplinary specialization, it has been “multi-disciplinary” in publishing scholarship that is intra-disciplinary within the humanities and the arts, and interdisciplinary across the other disciplines. As it was in the beginning, it has aimed for “unitas” by conjoining disciplinary difference through its pages.

Moreover, it has been multi-linguistic on the whole, allowing itself to evolve from a journal published purely in Spanish, and then in English, becoming bilingual eventually in the various issues in which articles are written in Spanish and English, or

as has been the case in the last several decades, in English and Filipino. And, of late, **UNITAS** has also published articles in other languages.

Apart from its disciplinary inclusiveness and crossovers, in almost 100 years of its existence, **UNITAS** has expanded the conceptual terrain of academic and topical coverage. It has published on cutting-edge and time-honored themes in which both established and emerging voices in research and scholarship are heard in articles that range across traditions, modernities, movements, philosophies, themes, politics, geographies, histories, musical types, architectural styles, gender relations, sexualities, government and non-government institutions, educational philosophies, media, forms, genres, canons, pedagogies, literary and cultural relations, and comparative studies, among others, in book review essays, critical commentaries, scholarly papers, and monographs. Such an expansiveness has allowed for establishing new lines of inquiry or exploring new lines of thinking about old ones.

### **Editorial Policy**

**UNITAS** invites work of outstanding quality by scholars and researchers from a variety of disciplinary, intra-disciplinary, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary principles, protocols and perspectives for its readership consisting primarily of academics, researchers, and graduate students, as well as of a diverse public consisting of scholars and leaders who are at the forefront of their fields and advocacies, undertaking research on multidisciplinary aspects of national and global issues within and beyond academia broadly from the perspective of but not limited to the human sciences.

In general, **UNITAS** aims to publish leading-edge and challenging articles and monographs in regular and special issues in relation to the critical currents and themes of the nation, the Asian region and the world which try to meet the various problems and opportunities of today's globalization.

Although single-authorship of articles remains typical, **UNITAS** encourages the submission of papers that are co-written by authors working across multi-cultural and multi-linguistic settings, which have resulted from an inter-cultural, inter-regional or inter-national collaboration of researchers in an effort to internationalize knowledge production, circulation and reception.

In particular, under the rubric of literary and cultural studies in Asia, **UNITAS** aims to be a platform for ethically engaged studies that represent intersections of national and international literatures, arts and cultures, crisscrossing critical and creative categories, authors and readers, "East" and "West," "North" and "South," text and

context, close readings and fieldwork, original works and translations, and theoretical and practical methodologies.

**UNITAS** welcomes submissions from all locations of the globe which are published in English, Philippine national and regional languages, and other foreign languages. Non-English language articles are required to submit an extended abstract in English containing the full argument rather than just a digest of the main idea.

Submissions to **UNITAS** are to follow the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the MLA Style Manual. During the evaluation process, unless otherwise recommended by the double-blind peer reviewers to use a different documentation format, articles must be published following the MLA guidelines.

### **Ethical Policy**

Every submission is assumed to have not been previously published and is not under consideration elsewhere for possible publication, unless it is a major submission meant as a reprint, and later approved for publication as such.

Plagiarism is the copying of large blocks of texts of someone's work and representing them as one's own. If plagiarism is ascertained after publication, the article may be withdrawn or retracted. Self-plagiarism or duplication of passages without proper citation will be evaluated on a case-to-case basis.

After the protocols of peer review and editing, **UNITAS** may or may not ask the authors to review the article prior to publication due to constraints.

Securing the publishing rights of all photos, images, or charts accompanying the article is the responsibility of the author.

Articles have to be submitted via e-mail to [unitasust@gmail.com](mailto:unitasust@gmail.com)

Address all communications to:

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UNITAS Logo by Francisco T. Reyes

About the cover: Cover of the first issue of UNITAS (Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1922).

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# UNITAS

## Marking History in Scholarly Journal Publishing

### **UNITAS in the early 20th century**

*UNITAS* is a journal published by the University of Santo Tomas, a pontifical university. The journal was established in 1922, centuries after the university was founded on April 28, 1611, during the Spanish colonial era. UST has the oldest extant university charter in the Philippines and in Asia; as such, for centuries, UST was the Spanish colony's flagship institution of higher learning. Long before American colonialism which began in 1898, UST had established itself as the "ground-zero" of knowledge production and education, producing national leaders, intellectuals, writers, artists, scientists, and national heroes who became prominent figures in their various professional and academic fields.

Understandably, when *UNITAS* was founded in 1922, it was one of the pioneering academic publications of the early 20th century in Asia that has survived to this day. As far as we have uncovered in the archives, *UNITAS* is the oldest existing multidisciplinary academic journal of its kind established by a modern, private university in Asia.

### **The pioneering publications**

During the early 20th century, when *UNITAS* was founded, a handful of academic and scientific journals were already in existence in the Philippines.

Of these, among the esteemed journals which have remained extant to this day, including *UNITAS*—albeit with changes in the name of the publisher and the name of the journal itself—are: (a) the *Philippine Journal of Science*, a science-based journal which was established by the Bureau of Science under the American colonial government but now published by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST); (b) the *Philippine Agricultural Scientist*, which was founded by the student body of the College of Agriculture of the University of the Philippines, now called *Philippine Agriculturalist*; and (c) the *Philippine Law Journal*, which, as the journal indicates, was “designed as a vital training tool for law students, and modeled after the student-edited law reviews of American law schools.”

Therefore, among the above-mentioned journals, *UNITAS* is one of those that has lasted a century; all, however, experienced a hiatus during the Pacific War years. Of these journals that we know about, it is one of only two journals (with the *Philippine Law Journal*), which has never had a change of publisher and name, leaving the journal’s “provenance” clear, legacy unbroken, and identity intact for about a century.

Best of all, only *UNITAS* has all the back and current issues since 1922 available online for the public at the UST Library, open-access, offered as a gift to scholars worldwide as *UNITAS* celebrates its centennial year in 2022; hence, this centennial issue.

## **UNITAS since 1922**

The history of *UNITAS* is proudly embedded in the intellectual history of this country. At the outset, *UNITAS* stood for, well, “unitas,” a fusion of disciplines. As conceived, the journal was to hold together between covers different “facultades” because initially, the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Medicine had their own separate journals. “Facultades” may be taken literally to refer to the different colleges and their departments that house particular academic disciplines as well their academic and teaching staff which the name “unitas” had hoped to conjoin. Indeed, other faculties would soon join *UNITAS*.



Wittingly or unwittingly, the decision to name the journal was both fortuitous and visionary. In the context of important reforms being undertaken by the university at that time and the modern future the journal was meant to help prepare the “facultades” for, “*unitas*” turned out to be setting up interdisciplinary conversations leading up to 2022, a century later. Indeed, the journal’s current interdisciplinary aspirations are rooted in the journal’s multidisciplinary pages as far back as 1922, its founding year. As the editors of the maiden issue had said in its editorial:

Hasta aquí triste es decirlo—pero las confesiones tristes y sinceras son las únicas que valen algo—hemos vivido separados, distanciados los unos de los otros. No ya las diversas Facultades, pero aún los mismos cursos de una Facultad apenas si se conocen, cuando no son antagonistas y casi enemigos. Hasta aquí, cada uno vivía para sí, sin acordarse de los otros, olvidando que somos un cuerpo, y que en el cuerpo organizado o todos los órganos y miembros marchan a una o el cuerpo muere y se descompone. Por eso hemos dado a la Revista el nombre de *Unitas* que quizá a no pocos parezca un nombre feo y antiestático. Séalo en hora buena, con tal que exprese nuestros pensamiento, que ¡Dios quiera! tengan cumplida realización. (“The First Dawn” 25)

Sad to say that—but sad and sincere confessions are the only ones that matter—we have lived so far apart from each other. Not just that the various colleges are segregated, but even the course offerings are strange to each other when they are not even opposed to each other like enemies. As yet, each one lived for himself, unmindful of others, forgetting that we are a body, and that in an organized body either all the organs and members coordinate with each other or the body dies and decomposes. That is why we have given the journal the name of *Unitas*, which may seem an unbecoming and unsightly name to some people. In good time, as long as it expresses our thoughts, may God allow the fruition of our ideas! (my trans.)

*UNITAS* was established by UST as an organ of the students of the various faculties of the University of Santo Tomas. By 1941, it became a faculty publication. In fact, the tagline in the first issue of *UNITAS* was “Órgano de los alumnos de la diversas facultades de la Universidad de Sto. Tomas (‘Organ of the students of the various faculties of the University of Sto. Tomas’), by which same tagline the journal would be known for years,

from 1922 to 1931. It would change to “official organ of the university from 1933 to 1937, and still, become “Revista de Cultura y Vida Universitaria” (“Magazine of culture and university life”) from 1938 to 1961. Later, it would be “the quarterly for the arts and sciences” from September 1961 to March 1977, and currently, “Journal for advanced research in literature, culture, and society.”

The journal’s maiden issue opened with a lengthy editorial about its purposes, “Nuestros propósitos” as a “revista escolar” (scholarly publication). It consisted of disciplinary divisions, including Sección de Ciencias Eclesiásticas, Sección de la Facultad de Derecho, and Sección de la Facultad de Medicina. Articles in its first issue were authored by Filipinos who would later become major national figures including Salvador Araneta, with his article, “¿Cómo están las cosas?” (“How Are Things Going?”), as well as regional political figures like Miguel Cuenco, with a series of articles entitled, “A los lectores de la *Revista Escolar de Derecho*” (“To the Readers of the *Law School Magazine*”) and “Nuestro cuerpo parlamentario” (“Our Parliamentary Body”). It also included articles that were mostly written in Spanish and partly in the English but the journal was also open to submissions written in French. With articles written in either Spanish or English since the beginning, historically, *UNITAS* issues have aimed to be not monolingualistic. In fact, *UNITAS* has been multilingualistic on the whole, allowing itself to evolve from a journal published in Spanish and English, eventually expanding linguistically by including articles written in Tagalog and other languages. Indeed, the linguistic evolution of *UNITAS* in this country’s multi-linguistic and multi-cultural setting is interesting in itself. As Fausto Gomez, OP, former editor of *UNITAS*, said fifty years ago:

Most of the articles and comments of the first volumes of *Unitas* were written in Spanish. From Volume V to X, they were in English and Spanish. After Volume X, onward, most of the articles were published in English. The last article in Spanish was written in the issue of June, 1966, by Fr. Victoriano Vicente, O.P., entitled, ‘El P. Alonso Sandin, Segun el Libro de Grados de la Universidad’ 9p. 269 &ff.). (“The *UNITAS*” 2)

Throughout the decades, the shifts in the language of the journal from Spanish to English and the recent opening up to other foreign (including Spanish) and major Philippine languages suggest linguistic diversity in academic discourse in which the “vernacular” has proven to be at par with any other major language, whether local or foreign, in terms of intellectualization. Still, that Spanish and English were the academic languages used in scholarly journals early in the 20th century in the Philippines is understandable because when *UNITAS* came out, the American public school system had been put in place and the English language was already being taught in schools.

Beyond the language question, as *UNITAS* began to publish more and more articles from the faculty members of different disciplines, especially after the Pacific War, its pages began to be more marked theoretically and methodologically by particular disciplinary protocols not only in the objective description and analysis but also in the critical evaluation and interpretation of their objects of inquiry as understood within the scholarly parameters given the political context of the historical period. Discursively, *UNITAS* aimed to address an audience that was “a happy medium between unproductive generalizations and elitist specializations.” Moreover, “As much as possible, what we hope to project is a happy balance of articles that appeal several notches above the level of the popular and the common, yet responsive enough to relate themselves to the changes and innovations around us” (Gomez, “The *UNITAS*” 5).

The main contributors during the early decades of *UNITAS* came from the ranks of the local intelligentsia, including the Filipino *pensionados* who had studied in “America” from whose ranks the next generation of artists, scientists, and intellectuals in the country would come, had yet to return from various universities in the United States. That, while the Filipino artists and intellectuals who had remained in the country for their higher education, were already writing articles for *UNITAS*— many of whom had taken part or had witnessed the Philippine Revolution and the Philippine–American War. These artists and intellectuals had also been trained by the local universities like UST and universities in Spain.

## UNITAS before WWII

Themes that continue to bedevil the country today have been studied and written about in the pages of *UNITAS* even before the Pacific War, including the following titles, as examples:

1. “Una iglesia indígena” (“An Indigenous Church”) written by a professor in theology (*un professor de teología*) (vol. 2, no. 16, Nov. 1923; vol. 2, no. 17, Dec. 1923; vol. 2, no. 18, Jan. 1924; vol. 2, no. 19, Feb. 1924; vol. 2, no. 20, Mar. 1924)
2. “Problemas de la legislación obrera en Filipinas” (“Problems of Working-Class Legislation in the Philippines”), Dr. Mariano D. Gana (vol. 2, no. 18, Jan. 1924)
3. “The Socialistic Dream” by Ramon O. Balana (vol. 3, no. 2, Aug. 1924)
4. “Las bellas artes y el placer estético” (“The Fine Arts and the Aesthetic Pleasure”) by “F. J.” (vol. 3, no. 3, Sept. 1924)
5. “The Philippine Woman and her Influence in the Future” by “C. del M.” (vol. 3, no. 4, Oct. 1924)

Also published in *UNITAS* were a series of linguistic studies entitled “Estudio comparativo de las nomenclaturas gramaticales del balarila del Instituto de la Lengua del Idioma Nacional y del Salitikan ng Wikang Pangbansa” (“A Comparative Study of the Grammar of the Institute of the National Language”) by Jose L. Sevilla et al. (vol. 20, no. 3, Sept. 1941), “A Criticism of Education in the Philippines” by Rev. Fr. Dr. Evergisto Bazaco (vol. 20, no. 3, Sept. 1941), and “A Survey of Culture in Modern Filipino Homes” by Pedro P. Talastas (vol. 19, no. 5, Jan. 1941).

## UNITAS during and after WWII

*UNITAS* was stilled by the Pacific War, as the rest of the country and the world lay in ruins. From January 1942 to February 1945, UST became known as the Manila Internment Camp, the largest of several camps in the Philippines in which the Japanese interned enemy civilians, mostly Americans, in World War II, housing more than 3,000 internees. *UNITAS* would resume publi-

cation in 1948 after the War. Like all the other publications in the country, *UNITAS* would come out again with issues that continued to concern scholarship relevant not only to the disciplines but also to Filipino society, the nation, and the world.

As *UNITAS* began to publish more and more articles from the faculty members of different disciplines, its pages began to be more marked theoretically and methodologically by particular disciplinary protocols in the objective description and analysis but also in the critical evaluation and interpretation of their objects of inquiry as understood within the scholarly parameters of the time.

*UNITAS* continued publication of important research and groundbreaking scholarship by prominent intellectuals in the country by 1948. One of the notable articles in *UNITAS* is “An Approach to Social-Economic Security” by M. Z. Landicho, MSC (vol. 21, no. 1, Jan.–Mar. 1948). Apart from publishing articles about the local topics, *UNITAS* also looked outward into the larger world other countries with a series of articles on other countries such as “The Legal Evolution of Nationalist Movement in Indonesia and Malaya,” (vol. 21, no. 2, Apr.–June 1948), “The Legal Evolution of Nationalist Movement in Burma and Ceylon” (vol. 21, no. 3, July–Sept. 1948), and “The Legal Evolution of Nationalist Movements in India and the Middle East” (vol. 21, no. 4, Oct.–Dec. 1948) by Mauro Mendez, LLM, who would later become a well-known legal scholar and esteemed diplomat.

It even published a pioneering study on Philippine music such as “La música filipina: Lo que es, y lo que puede ser” (“The Filipino Music: What It Is, and What It Can Be”; vol. 22, no. 4, Oct.–Dec. 1949) by Antonio J. Molina, a renowned versatile musician, composer, music educator, and academic. Other well-known contributors included Gregorio Zaide, Leonor Orosa Goquinco, Lino Brocka, Napoleon Abueva, President Diosdado Macapagal, and Florentino Hornedo, among many others.

Into the 1960s and the 1970s, *UNITAS* published rare archival materials as a service to the world of scholarship as it continued to be sustained by “its initial spirit of dedicated intellectual service.” (Gomez, “Retrospection of *UNITAS*” 27). As the editor explains, “The Unitas is venerable not only

from the standpoint of age but also from the quality and quantity of learned and scholarly literature” (26). While continuing the tradition of innovation and relevance in journal publication, *UNITAS* yet again expanded its reach. Fr. Fausto Gomez, OP explained that the journal became no longer just a quarterly publication “but also a series of publications” when in the 1960s, “Fr. Panizo began reprinting some monographic issues of *Unitas* as separate books” and publishing the annual UST Cultural Series. Aiming to provide an “integration of human knowledge” (Gomez, “Retrospection of *UNITAS*” 27), into the 1970s, *UNITAS* also published scholarly articles that were timely and relevant; a tradition that would continue to this day.

Apart from regular papers, *UNITAS* annually published scholarly articles “on major historical, political, economic, social and religious events of the country and the world” in a special issue of the UST Cultural Series (Gomez, “Another Chapter” 29). Of the existing journals in the country with an increasingly narrowing scope of specialist focus, *UNITAS* has remained steadfast in its broad multidisciplinary interest and interdisciplinary coverage. This owes to the articulated commitment of the journal to the “belief that a responsive scholarly journal caters to varying interdisciplinary motives” (29).

### **UNITAS today**

Today in 2022, a hundred years since its first issue, *UNITAS* has expanded the arena of its scholarly conversations with the rest of the world, transforming from a national to an international scholarly publication as befitting a journal of such a long and distinguished past from which one can trace back vignettes of the intellectual history of a people and developments in scholarly inquiries across the disciplines.

The scope or academic coverage of *UNITAS* has become both interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary while focusing on the humanities and the arts and related disciplines like history and philosophy. It has also welcomed contributions from professional fields like translation studies, music, and Architecture, and it has also opened its pages to the traditionally recognized social science disciplines as well as area or regional studies. Recent examples

in the direction of inter and intradisciplinarity include the special section on culture and the environment in volume 94, number 2, in November 2021, in which the papers combine environmental studies with cultural studies, economics, ecology, philosophy, and religion. In the same issue, a particular paper entitled “Metonymies of Ethnobotany and the Fellowship Discourse of Sagrada Familia Healers in Irosin, Sorsogon, Philippines” by Jesus Cyril M. Conde in which are deployed the interface of discourse analysis and literary and cultural criticism, botany and folk beliefs.

Apart from its renewed and consistent disciplinary inclusiveness and crossovers, in almost 100 years of its existence, *UNITAS* has in the last several years expanded even more broadly the conceptual terrain of academic and disciplinary coverage as indicated in the journal’s editorial pages. It has published on cutting-edge and time-honored interdisciplinary topics in which both established and emerging voices in research and scholarship are heard in articles that range across traditions, modernities, movements, philosophies, themes, politics, geographies, histories, musical types, architectural styles, gender relations and sexualities, educational philosophies, media, forms, genres, canons, pedagogies, literary and cultural relations, and comparative studies, among others, in book review essays, critical commentaries, scholarly papers, and monographs. Such an expansiveness has allowed for establishing new lines of inquiry or exploring new lines of thinking about old ones.

*UNITAS* has been honored by the support of the still-expanding International Editorial Board consisting of leading international scholars in their specific fields of specialization. This expansion of the board whose membership currently comes from different countries, disciplines, and scholarly and intellectual traditions, has been a reflection of the journal’s active participation in the international conversations on local and global issues that are both socially relevant and scholarly invigorating. Moreover, having gone global, online, and open-access, *UNITAS* continues to be alive and kicking, broadening its readership as it reaches its first 100 years, and taking that one giant step forward to gear up for the next 100 years.

## **UNITAS on Philippine Literary Theory and Criticism and Cultural Studies**

Multidisciplinary commitment notwithstanding, *UNITAS* remains true to UST's long humanistic tradition. Housed by the Department of Literature, *UNITAS* takes pride in the articles on literature and literary criticism it has published within the larger context of history, culture, and society. After all, UST has produced the most number of alumni in the roster of National Artists to date, among the top universities in the country.

Throughout the decades, in particular, *UNITAS* has published articles that may now be considered to fall under the rubric of Philippine literary criticism and cultural studies, which were written by major figures in the country's literary and academic scenes such as:

1. **Paz Latorena, "Educating the Literary Taste"** (vol. 24, no. 1, Jan.–Mar. 1951). Latorena (January 17, 1908–October 19, 1953). She was a poet, editor, author, and teacher and is considered as one of the important writers of the first generation of Filipino English writers, in both literary writing and education.
2. **Emerita S. Quito, "Structuralism: A General Introduction"** (vol. 44, no. 1, Mar. 1971). She was a Filipina philosopher who was known for her contributions to the development of Filipino Philosophy, Critical Thinking, and Language.
3. **Nick Joaquin, "Manila Has Been Many Cities"** (vol. 44, no. 3, Sept. 1971). Also known as Quijano de Manila, Joaquin (May 4, 1917 – April 29, 2004). was a Filipino essayist, fictionist, translator, and National Artist of the Philippines for Literature.
4. **Ophelia A. Dimalanta, "Philippine City Fiction as a Literary Genre"** (vol. 57, no. 4, Dec. 1984). Dimalanta (June 16, 1932–November 4, 2010) was a Filipina poet, editor, critic, essayist, teacher, and editor of various literary anthologies, and professor at the University of Santo Tomas for many years until postretirement.
5. **Florentino H. Hornedo, "The Changing Core Themes of Filipino Nationalism and their Literary Expression"** (vol. 62, no. 4, Dec. 1989). Hornedo is a professor and scholar of literature,



history, philosophy, and cultural studies who has contributed to Philippine literary studies with his research on Ivatan literature, from the Batanes islands in the northernmost Philippines.

6. **Bienvenido L. Lumbera, “DATING”: Panimulang Muni sa Estetika ng Panitikang Filipino** (vol. 70, no. 4, Dec. 1997). He was a multi-awarded poet, critic, dramatist, lyricist, comparatist, scholar of Philippine Literature, National Artist of the Philippines, and a recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature and Creative Communications.
7. **Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo, “Helen Yap: Translation and Self-Exploration in Travel Writing”** (vol. 93, no. 2, Nov. 2020). Hidalgo is a multi-awarded fictionist, critic and pioneering writer of creative nonfiction in the Philippines. She is Professor Emerita of English & Comparative Literature at the University of the Philippines Diliman and Director of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies.

### **UNITAS and the Office of the Scholar-in-Residence**

Hosted by the Department of Literature of UST, *UNITAS* is managed and run by the Office of the Scholar-in-Residence which sponsors international lectures; conducts seminars and workshops on research, academic and scholarly writing; organizes and hosts international conferences; and actively engages in international linkages. Under the Scholar-in-Residence’s leadership who is also the editor-in-chief, *UNITAS* has also expanded the arena of its scholarly contributions transforming the journal from a national to a global scholarly publication as befitting a journal of such a long and distinguished history from which one can have glimpses of the scholarly and intellectual history of a people.

In the last few years, *UNITAS* has become no longer just a journal. With the Scholar-in-Residence as editor-in-chief, *UNITAS* currently operates as a research, and scholarly writing center as well as an internationalization hub under the auspices of UST’s Faculty of Arts and Letters with *UNITAS* as a flagship output under the guidance of the Editorial Board consisting of

leading international scholars in their specific fields of specialization. During the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, *UNITAS* has conducted a much-needed series of online lectures and webinars for scholars, teachers, and students, providing them with knowledge, training, sources and materials for their research and teaching in order to overcome the serious constraints brought about by the pandemic.

*UNITAS* has also been actively engaged with other institutions and individuals as part of its national and international initiatives toward collaborative research and joint initiatives in journal publication work, specifically:

1. On the National front
  - a. It is an institutional member of CLASS (Cultural, Literary, and Art Studies Society, Inc.), geared toward developing the scholarship and pedagogy among senior high scholar and university faculty members as patterned after the goals and activities of the MLA (Modern Language Association of America).
  - b. It hosts foreign scholars for lectures at UST .
  - c. It conducts workshops on reviewing and editing manuscripts and other aspects of journal publication editorial protocols, to date.
2. On the International front
  - a. It organizes or coorganizes international conferences and colloquia held in the country and abroad (IAELC conference in UST in 2018; CLASS-cosponsored colloquia in Jakarta (Universitas Kristen Univ, 2018) and Yogyakarta (Sanata Dharma Univ, 2016), Indonesia; Seoul, South Korea (Konkuk Univ 2018; 2019); and Fukuoka, Japan (Kyushu Univ, 2019).
  - b. It has established linkages with universities and academic journals abroad in activities geared toward collaborative research.
  - c. Finally, *UNITAS* had led efforts to organize a network of Asian journals in a group called Asia Journals Network (AJN) which is slated for August 2022 to be conducted online. It is organized by the Office of Scholar-in-Residence and *UNITAS*, both headed by Maria Luisa Torres Reyes, as Scholar-in-Residence herself

and editor-in-chief of the journal. To be attended by academic journals from China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines as founding members, AJN is cosponsored by *Kritika Kultura*, the online journal of the Ateneo de Manila University.

*UNITAS* is now an international online peer-reviewed open-access journal of advanced research in literature, culture, and society published biannually (May and November). It has been “multidisciplinary” in publishing scholarship that is also now intradisciplinary within the humanities and the arts, and inter-disciplinary across the other disciplines while remaining cognizant of the scholarly protocols of disciplinary specializations.

It is celebrating its centennial year now, 2022, a rare feat in these parts, allowing for a *longue durée* of a perspective for those who might be interested in the study of the country’s intellectual history throughout the journal’s pages in the last 100 years. For the centenary, *UNITAS* has sponsored online activities which we have billed as “UNITAS 100” with the tagline, “Scholarship that Stands the Test of Time.” Among the activities are several sets of lectures each called “international lecture series,” which started in 2021 and will end in November 2022. The celebration is highlighted by the publication of this special centennial issue for which contributions have come from the members of the international board. Like the 50th anniversary of *UNITAS*, the centennial celebration affirms that the journal continues to have “a foot in its living past, and the other in the air, poised and ready to become a better medium of scholarship and relevance.” (Gomez, “The *UNITAS*” 7)

We end in the spirit of a passage from Fr. Fausto Gomez, in the golden anniversary issue of *UNITAS*:

Still we believe that there is plenty of room for improvement in the publication of *UNITAS* and specially, in the development of *UNITAS* publications. If, through the prism of this anniversary issue, we look back at yesterday, it is mainly to look forward ... But that in knowing living traditions of

yesteryears, we may find valuable help to build the UNITAS of tomorrow.  
(Gomez, “The *UNITAS*” 7)

Mabuhay!

**The Editor-in-Chief**  
**July 2022**

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# **Excerpts from the Golden Anniversary Issue of UNITAS**

# The Unitas

GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

## SUBSTANCE AND RELEVANCE THROUGH FIVE DECADES

### OUTSTANDING ARTICLES ON

NATURAL SCIENCES • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE  
PSYCHOLOGY • SOCIOLOGY • LAW  
POLITICAL SCIENCE & HISTORY • FILIPINO CULTURE  
LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE  
ARCHITECTURE AND FINE ARTS  
PHILOSOPHY • THEOLOGY • EDUCATION



*a quarterly for the arts and sciences*

JUNE-SEPTEMBER, NOS. 2 & 3, 1977

**Volume 50**





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This  
**GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY ISSUE**  
is dedicated to



**FR. JESUS GAYO, O.P.**  
Unitas Editor  
1948-1961

and



**FR. ALFREDO PANIZO, O.P.**  
Unitas Editor  
1961-1970

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## Three Editors' Viewpoints

### THE UNITAS THROUGH THE SEVENTIES

● Fausto Gómez, O.P.  
Editor since 1971

*The future of Unitas is somewhat contained in its present, which is present on the march, and the present of Unitas is a development of its past.*

Unitas, the official journal of the Faculty of the University of Santo Tomas, is today, through the 70s, what was yesterday, since its birth in 1922 — through its 50 years of publication.

### THE FIRST TWO DECADES

According to its maiden editorial, Unitas was born out of a need, "the absolute need" of the different faculties of the University (at that time, theology, philosophy, canon law, civil law, medicine, pharmacy and engineering) to have a printed mouthpiece for "the moral and scientific education that imparts this University."



Another important goal of the first editors is given in the very title they chose for their magazine, that is *Unitas: unity*. "Unitas will be — we hope. — an instrument of unity among the various faculties of our University; in unity, there is strength." Actually, *Unitas* merged the separate magazines of the UST Faculty of Law, *La Revista Escolar de Derecho* (1920-1922), and the UST Faculties of Medicine and Pharmacy, *Alma Mater* (1921-1922).

The magazine began exclusively as a monthly student publication (at that time, UST had around 1,500 students): "It is put out by students, that is, boys [there were no female students at that time at UST] more or less grown up, but always inexperienced, with the encouragement and counsel of our dear professors" (First Editorial: July, 1922). However, with Volume V, *Unitas* began to be mainly a faculty journal: "Unitas will be a scientific magazine to which the sages of our University will contribute; and they can do it in English, Spanish, or French" (Editorial, No. 1, 1926, p. 1).

In 1941, *Unitas* became the UST faculty organ almost exclusively written by professors: "Being the official organ of the Faculty of the University of Santo Tomas, all of our professors and instructors have a right to collaborate; and further still: it is expected that all colleges of this University" [by this time, also education and science, since 1926; architecture and fine arts, since 1931; commerce, since 1933, and the graduate school since 1938], "that all Colleges of this University will be represented with, at least, one article in each issue of the *Unitas*" (Vol. XX, No. 2, [1941], p. 1).

The history of *Unitas*, the all-encompassing publication of the university, is divided into two important periods: before (monthly) and after (quarterly) World War II. Up to Volume 20, No. 5 (November 1941), *Unitas* was really a multi-faceted monthly publication: many editors handled it and all kinds of topics were, at times, deeply or superficially studied. The contents of the journal during its first two decades were too wide and too different in weight — from theology to sports, engineering and news jottings, medicine and social life bits. Still, before World War II, the magazine was unique in the Philippines; and every issue contained, at least, one or two major articles on relevant topics. The matters most often treated were on theology, medicine, and pharmacy.

Most of the articles and comments of the first volumes of *Unitas* were written in Spanish. From Volume V to Volume X, they were in English and Spanish. After Volume X, onward, most of the articles were published in English. The last article in Spanish was written in the issue of June, 1966, by Fr. Victoriano Vicente, O.P., entitled, "El P. Alonso Sandin, Según el Libro de Grados de la Universidad" (p. 269 & ff.). From 1922 to 1931, *Unitas* was "el órgano de las diversas facultades." From 1932 to 1937, "official organ of the University." From 1938 to 1961 (Vols. XVI-XXXIV), "Revista de Cultura y Vida Universitaria." From September, 1961, up to March, 1977, *Unitas* was "the quarterly for the arts and sciences."

## THE THIRD AND FOURTH DECADES

The publication of *Unitas* had to be stopped at the outbreak of World War II, when the Japanese forces occupied Manila. Its pre-war period ended with the issue of November (Vol. XX, No. 5) of 1941; at that time, its editor was the late Fr. Evergisto Bazaco, O.P., who had been also one of the most prolific contributors to *Unitas*, particularly on educational matters.

During World War II (from 1942 to 1945), the University of Santo Tomas was made by the occupying Japanese forces a concentration camp for the Allied forces. However, *Unitas* did not resume publication until January of 1948. By this time, two more units of the University had joined the *Unitas* publication, that is the Conservatory of Music, established in 1945, and the College of Nursing, in 1946.

The post-war period of *Unitas* may well be subdivided into three different chapters, headed by its three editors.

Fr. Jesús Gayo, O.P., edited the *Unitas* for 13 fruitful consecutive years (1948-1961): he inaugurated the Second Dawn of *Unitas* with the January-March issue (Vol. XXI, No. 1) of 1948. Fr. Gayo changed its pre-war format, from 6 x 9 to 7 x 10, and from a monthly, 100-page magazine, *Unitas* became a quarterly, 150 pages, "*Revista de Cultura y Vida Universitaria*."

Fr. Gayo is a Dominican philosopher deeply interested in historical research. His background gives us the clue to the new directions and content stress of the quarterly, which will underscore theology, philosophy and historical research. During his editorship, three important sections were added: one, for the publication of outstanding theses defended successfully at the UST Graduate School; another, "*University of the Air*," containing relevant comments by UST professors, on a variety of subjects, aired over DZST (the university radio station); and the third and most innovative, "*Textos Antiguos*," prepared by the editor himself. Since 1956, a whole issue of *Unitas* has been dedicated to the UST Summer Cultural Series.

Fr. Gayo wrote also important articles in *Unitas*. In "*Textos Antiguos*," he printed unpublished historical records kept at the archives of the 366-year-old University of Santo Tomas and the Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary. Among them are the writings of Fr. Miguel de Benavides, the founder of the University of Santo Tomas. Other articles written by the editor include "*Catálogo de Impresos Filipinos conservados en los Archivos de la Provincia del Santísimo Rosario de Filipinas y de la Universidad de Santo Tomás de Manila*" (Vol. XXV, No. 1-4, 1952, pp. 313-368, 584-615, 830-856; Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, 1955, 115-153); and "*Rarezas Bibliográficas en la Biblioteca de la Universidad de Santo Tomás*" (Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, 1955, pp. 184-192).

Fr. Alfredo Panizo, O.P., took over the editorship of *Unitas* with the third issue (Vol. XXXIV, No. 3) of 1961. He went back to the old format of 6 x 9, and changed its direction to stress particularly Filipino culture and anthropology. Fr. Panizo is a Dominican philosopher actively engaged in anthropological and cultural research.



During the nine years of Fr. Panizo's editorship, *Unitas* became a rich source of information on Filipino culture. Among the best issues of *Unitas* during its 50 years of history are: *Stories and Legends from Filipino Folklore* (Vol. 39, No. 4, 1966, pp. 487-641); *The Cultural Minorities of the Philippines* (Vol. 40, No. 1, 1967, pp. 1-234); *The Hanunoo Mangyans and Pampango Folklore* (Vol. 41, No. 1, 1968, pp. 3-137); *Philippine Epics* (Vol. 41, No. 2, 1968, pp. 144-260); *A Critical Study of the Prehispanic Source Materials for the Study of Philippine History* (Vol. 41, No. 3, 1968, pp. 277-440); *The Woman in Early Philippines and Among the Cultural Minorities* (Vol. 42, No. 3, 1969, pp. 1-196). He also published an excellent monograph on *Population* (Vol. 39, No. 3, 1966).

Fr. Panizo had his hands full in the publication of *Unitas*. He also wrote many articles in his nine years as editor, on philosophy, ethics, and Filipino culture. Among them are *The Catholic Philosophy of Education* (Vol. 38, No. 3, 1965, pp. 378-386), *Infanticide and Population* (Vol. 38, No. 4, 1965), pp. 599-660; and *The Negritos or Aetas* (Vol. 40, No. 1, 1967, pp. 66).

## UNITAS THROUGH THE SEVENTIES

Philosopher Ortega y Gasset defines man, himself as "*Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia*": I am I and my situation. This definition of man can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to an institution, to a quarterly like *Unitas*. So much so that the UST quarterly's history can be elaborated, with its positive as well as its negative points, through its editors, who spearheaded the directions, the changes, the thematic stresses of the magazine — through its editors, and their "*circunstancia*" or situation. In 1971, Fr. Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., UST Rector, appointed Fr. Fausto Gómez, O.P., a Dominican professor of moral theology with a penchant for journalism — that is, for current happenings and events — as editor.

Perusing the 20 issues of our six-year editorship, we can see the background of the editor. Thus, theology, ethics, and other current relevant themes are given particular accent; on the other hand, and, possibly, unfortunately, the natural sciences and engineering are granted little space.

However, some of the lacunae present in the *Unitas* of the 70s are due partly to the existence of other UST publications. Lately, very few theses are included in *Unitas*. Thesis publication had its day with Fr. Jesús Gayo, O.P. What is the reason? Highly researched material or doctoral theses are published in the *Acta Manilana* (founded in 1965), the magazine of the UST Research Center. Thesis abstracts are included in the UST Graduate School Research Journal.

Similar explanation can be given to the absence from the pages of *Unitas* of deep speculative articles on theology, philosophy, canon law, and church history — largely underscored in the *Unitas* of the 1930s and the 1950s. For these matters, *Philippiniana Sacra* (established in 1966) is published three times a year. Likewise, if University news and light comments are not found in *Unitas* today as they were printed in its pages yesterday, it is because the University puts out *The Academia*, the 12-page UST quarterly paper.

Unitas today is also the UST Quarterly for the Arts and Sciences. It centers on culture and religion, and tries to be substantial and relevant for its readers, most of whom are educators and professors. Our March, 1972 editorial puts in this way: "Unitas will try to maintain a happy medium between unproductive generalizations and elitist specializations. As much as possible, what we hope to project is a happy balance of articles that appeal several notches above the level of the popular and the common, yet responsive enough to relate themselves to the changes and innovations around us."

During the last six years, the different issues of Unitas are catalogued as ordinary and special issues. The ordinary issues include one or two researched writings for our section Articles and Studies, three or four commentaries on current cultural events for the section Dialogue with the Times, and from 10 to 20 informative or critical reviews for the section The World of Books.

To these three sections, we have added another — which Fr. Alfredo Panizo, O.P., already had in some issues — University Forum, a sort of round-table discussion among experts on currently debated and debatable subjects.

The special issues of Unitas focused on a theme only or on various related topics. These extraordinary issues — at times double-issues — include the yearly publication of the UST Cultural Series — which began during the editorship of Fr. Gayo — and of some monographs.

As editor, I would tend to think that our best issues were the special ones on the UST Cultural Series not only by reason of its scholarship and relevance, but also by the praise they received from our esteemed readers, and the increase in sales and subscriptions they generated.

These issues are The Drug-Abuse Problem (Vol. 45, No. 2, September, 1972), Current Trends in Philippine Arts (Vol. 46, No. 4, Dec., 1973); The Manipulation of Man in Christian Perspective (Vol. 47, Nos. 2-3, June-Sept., 1974); Dialogue with the Times — Promotion of Women's Role, Philippine Youth, Philippine Development, Philippine Faith-Healing, The Devil and Modern Satanism, and Human and Christian Reconciliation — (Vol. 48, No. 2, June, 1975), and Human Settlements in Philippine Perspective (Vol. 49, Nos. 2-3, June-Sept., 1976).

Other special issues that were published during our editorship include Three Philosophers — R. Ardrey, K. Jaspers and E. Husserl — and their Current Impact (Vol. 44, No. 4, December, 1971); The New Constitution of the Philippines (Vol. 46, No. 3, September, 1973); Agrarian Reform and Cooperatives (Vol. 47, No. 4, December, 1974); The Literary Symbol in Modern Literature — text of Fr. Patricio V. Monis' excellent thesis, the only one published in Unitas lately — (Vol. 48, No. 1, March 1975); and New Educational Trends and P. Poveda's Relevance (Vol. 48, No. 3, September, 1975).

Among the ordinary issues of Unitas, we would like to mention some articles that deserve special mention: "The Literature of Antiquity, Antiquated?", by O. Alcantara-Dimalanta (Vol. 45, No. 1, 1972, pp. 5-20) "Divorce and the Indissolubility of Marriage" by Excelso Garcia, O.P. (Vol. 45, No. 3, 1972, pp. 44-64); "Transformational Generative Grammar in Foreign Language Teaching", by Andrew González, F.S.C. (Vol. 45.

No. 4, 1972, pp. 53-67; "Laws of Nature and Natural Law," by Antonio T. Piñon (Vol. 46, No. 1, 1973, pp. 23-38; "The Atman-Brahman Relationship in the Upanishads," by Magdalena A. Villaba-Cue (Vol. 46, No. 1, 1973, pp. 54-110); "The Paradox of Freedom in Louis Lavelle," by Emérita S. Quito (Vol. 46, No. 2, 1973, pp. 224-239); "The Filipino as Thinker and as Social Being," Leonardo S. Mercado, S.V.D. (Vol. 47, No. 1, 1974, pp. 80-111); "Multinational Corporations and Their Participation in Philippine Development," by Jovito R. Salonga (Vol. 48, No. 2, 1975, pp. 267-289); "The World Crisis in Education and Beyond," by B. Frank Brown (Vol. 48, No. 3, 1975, pp. 483-499); "The Vision of Poveda," by José F. Espinosa (Ibid., pp. 570-582); "The Catholic University in the Philippine Setting," by Ernesto A. Franco (Ibid., pp. 500-538); "Abortion in the Religions of Southeast Asia," by Gabriel Pastrana, O.P. (Vol. 48, No. 4, 1975, pp. 639-654); "Unamuno: The Man, the Writer, the Philosopher," by Ma. Luisa R. Tanglao (Ibid., pp. 693-721); "Christian and Non-Christian Ethics," by Pedro B. Gabriel (Vol. 49, No. 1, 1976, pp. 27-43; "Hindu Ethics: Man's Realization of Self-divinity," by Alfredo P. Co (Ibid., pp. 44-59); "The Catholic Choice of Rhythm," by Vicente J. A. Rosales, M.D. (Vol. 49, No. 4, 1976, pp. 474-501); "Medical Ethics in Connection with Torture of Prisoners and Other Persons Under Some Form of Detention," by Roberto Concepción (Ibid., pp. 542-572); "Myth and Reality: Church Marriage Tribunals in the Philippines," by Florencio Testera, O.P., (Vol. 50, No. 1, 1977, pp. 7-18); "The Vision of the Filipino: Moral Dimension," by Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P. (Ibid., pp. 76-91).

Among the issues which aroused great public interest is the March issue of 1978, particularly for its section University Forum wherein three professional experts analyzed — from three different angles — the medical, legal and moral perspective of the widely publicized "Death with Dignity" case of Miss Karen Ann Quinlan. Dr. Vicente J. A. Rosales, former Chief Justice Roberto Concepción of the Supreme Court and Fr. Francisco del Rio, O.P., answered our basic question "To Let or Not to Let Her Die?" from the viewpoints of medicine, law and moral theology, respectively.

The present chapter of *Unitas* is in general a continuation of the publication that *Unitas* was since the beginning and, in particular, the past that follows World War II. However, there is a new article, for *Unitas* is not only a quarterly publication but also a series of publications. In the 60s, Fr. Panizo began reprinting some monographic issues of *Unitas* as separate books. One of them is the *Cultural Minorities of the Philippines* (UST Press, 1967).

We have continued and expanded that tradition with the yearly *UST Cultural Series*. To these, we have added the publication of books, separate from *Unitas*. The first just came off the press — *The Timeless and Timely: Essays on Truth and Value*, by one of our best contributors, Dr. Pedro B. Gabriel (UST Press, 1977). These separatas form *Unitas Books* under *Unitas* form our series *Unitas Major*.

Another innovation we have introduced is the reprinting of scholarly and relevant articles originally printed in the *Quarterly*, and it is called *Unitas Minor*. We hope to help our professors and students with



these brief *separatas*. The first was Faith-Healing, Philippine Style, by various authors, and the tenth, Education and Values Tomorrow, by Fr. Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., and Prof. Ernesto Franco.

As we edit *Unitas*, we also attempt at writing a few articles on our field of specialization — moral theology. Among them are "The New Theology of Hope and the Liberation of Man" (Vol. 47, No. 1, 1974, pp. 182); "Man's Reconciliation with God," (Vol. 48, No. 2, 1975, pp. 385-405) and "Some Comments on the Theology of Liberation" (Vol. 49, No. 4, 1976, pp. 521-541).

## UNITAS TOMORROW

In this double issue which commemorates the Golden Anniversary of the publication of *Unitas*, we re-visit the past of the Quarterly — to pay tribute to our past editors and writers, to repeat, with today's props, yesterday's valuable message; to acknowledge, with deep gratitude and admiration, *Unitas'* enduring contributions to the development of the arts and the sciences in the Philippines.

We thank all those dedicated people who have made *Unitas* what it is today.

We express our gratitude, specially, to our former editors, Frs. Gayo and Panizo, to our current contributors and assistants, in particular, Dr. Josephine B. Serrano, Dr. Pedro Gabriel, Dr. Carolina Garcia and our dedicated associate editor, the untiring Prof. Roger Obusan.

Most of all, we thank the faculty members of the University of Santo Tomas, who wrote *Unitas* and the UST Rector, Fr. Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., who not only encouraged us, but also supported our endeavors and even contributed frequently in the *Unitas*. Moreover, we address a word of gratitude to the UST Research Center under Fr. Ciriaco Pedrosa, O.P., for its substantial financial aid to some special issue of *Unitas*.

Still we believe that there is plenty of room for improvement in the publication of *Unitas* and, specially, in the development of *Unitas* Publications. If, through the prism of this anniversary issue, we look back at yesterday, it is mainly to look forward from today's springboard: our basic reason is not that yesterday was better — and we pat ourselves at the back for the laurels won. But that in knowing living traditions of yesteryears, we may find valuable help to build the *Unitas* for tomorrow.

Teilhard de Chardin said that "the past has revealed to me the building of the future." *Unitas* looks back to its past from today, which is yesterday on the march, to build its future, which is today as project.

*Unitas* is proud of its past, committed to the present and open towards the future. *Unitas'* history and hope are symbolized eloquently in a man walking: a foot on the ground and the other in the air.

*Unitas*, on its 50th anniversary, has a foot in its living past, and the other in the air, poised and ready to become a better medium of scholarship and relevance — as the Faculty Quarterly of the University of Santo Tomas, the Catholic University of the Philippines.

## UNITAS — RETROSPECTIVA 1948-1961

● J. Gayo Aragón, O.P.  
Editor, 1948-1961

*En plena reorganización de la Universidad, finalizada la última guerra mundial en 1945, soñaba ya el P. Eugenio Jordán, O.P., Rector Magnífico en aquellos días, en la reanudación de la revista Unitas. Pero el personal se había reducido y las ocupaciones aumentado porque había de comenzarse prácticamente de nuevo y la avalancha de estudiantes superó las esperanzas. Ante la insistencia del P. Jordán en el Senado Académico, me ofrecí voluntariamente a responsabilizarme de la dirección de Unitas, aunque me hallase en idéntica situación que los demás, convocado de la urgencia para la Universidad de volver a contar con una publicación oficial. Aceptó sin dudar el P. Jordán el ofrecimiento y ya en comunicación con Decanos y Profesores pudo reaparecer Unitas en los comienzos del año 1948.*

*Nacida la revista como "órgano de los alumnos de las diversas Facultades de la Universidad" se convirtió enseguida en órgano del "Profesorado de la Universidad". Debería ser y sería desde entonces el instrumento oficial escrito que diera a conocer la investigación científica y ambiente cultural de la Universidad en sus diversas Facultades y Colegios universitarios, a la vez que lectura periódica para los mismos profesores.*

*Concebida la revista en esta nueva faceta como exponente de la realidad del ambiente científico de la Universidad ante el mundo intelectual de centros paralelos, los artículos que en ella aparecieran deberían ser al menos en su mayor parte escritos por profesores de la Universidad. No había nacido la revista como una mera capitalización de la Universidad y sus profesores para ser una publicación con determinados fines culturales en la que cabría la participación de escritores, voluntarios o pagados, aunque no tuvieran relación alguna con la Universidad. Es claro que así no sería la revista el exponente de la realidad del ambiente científico de la Universidad.*

*Ante la grande diversidad de Facultades y Colegios que formaban el conjunto de la Universidad no se ocultaba la dificultad de esperar que la revista fuera una publicación de público numeroso. Su destino sería sobre todo el cambio con las publicaciones similares y las grandes bibliotecas a las que acudieran estudiantes y profesores de diversas aficiones científicas, deseosos de realizar estudios de profundidad. Es claro que*

una revista por cada Facultad o grupo de colegios afines encontraría un público más unívoco, pero por el momento no podía pensarse en semejante solución.

Con el objeto de mantener esta línea científica de la revista, fue constante política editorial el dedicar la mayor parte de las páginas de la misma a trabajos que reflejaran de verdad una investigación científica seria, con preferencia a los escritos por profesores de la Universidad y preparados expresamente para ser publicados en *Unitas*. A falta de los mismos, en contacto con el Graduate School se acudió a las tesis doctorales preferentemente de los profesores de la Universidad y de asuntos relacionados con Filipinas y el Extremo Oriente. A la vez que estas tesis reflejarían el ambiente de investigación en la Universidad, resultaban ser estudios de hombres dedicados enteramente a la enseñanza y fruto de muchos años de investigación científica. Con ello se contribuía también a dar a conocer la calidad de la cultura filipina.

Esta programación editorial pudo realizarse puntualmente con la cooperación de los Decanos de las diversas Facultades y Colegios de la Universidad, especialmente de Farmacia, Liberal Arts y Graduate School y con la cooperación entusiasta de un buen grupo de profesores siempre dispuestos a mantener la revista en el alto nivel científico. Así, de las doce mil páginas de la revista publicadas durante el periodo de esta retrospectiva, unas nueve mil fueron dedicadas a trabajos verdaderamente científicos. La baja colaboración de algunas Facultades se debió, ya a su reducido cuerpo profesoral ya a la aparición de sus revistas propias.

La inmensa mayoría de estos estudios científicos correspondieron a temas, relacionados con Filipinas y el Extremo Oriente. Dar un juicio crítico de los mismos y de sus autores alargaría en extremo este resumen. Será suficiente mencionar solamente sus títulos para aclarar en síntesis lo dicho anteriormente. Citemos los siguientes: "Exposición y Crítica del Bautismo Aglipayano" y "Aglipayanism Unmasked — The Doctrine of Aglipayanism Compared with the Protestant-Episcopalian and Catholic", de Felix Vacas, O.P.; "The Iglesia ni Kristo" de Modesto Salvador Trani; "The Unjust Position of the Church in the Philippine Constitution" de Nicolas L.L. Rosal. "Ley Civil de Matrimonio de Filipinas" de Juan Ylla, O.P.

"The Outlawry of Subversive Organizations in the Philippines" de Marcos Herras; "The Police System of Criminal Investigation in the Philippines" de Eliseo A. Vilar; "Reforma del Sistema Penal de Filipinas" de Alfonso Felix; "The Philippine Prison System" de Alfredo M. Bunye; "La Metodología de la Comisión Codificadora de Filipinas" y "On the Philippine Declaration of Principles" de Antonio M. Molina.

"Occultism Among Early Filipinos" and "The Rorschach Technique Applied to Filipinos" de José A. Samson; "The Applicability of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory to Filipino Subjects" de Emmanuel Vit. Samson and José A. Samson.

"A Study of 250 Recidivists Confined in the National Penitentiary" de Rosalinda Dar Santos; "A Study of Juvenile Delinquency During Vacation Months in the City of Manila from 1946 to 1952" de Leticia D. Mabunay; "Comparative Wage Study Between Private and Public Employers in the Philippines" de Richard F. McMahon; "An Ethical Judgment on Agrarian



Reformatory Expropriations" de Manuel Piñon, O.P.; "La lucha por el poder en el Extremo Oriente" de Enrique Syquia y Pineda; "Proyección Filipina en lo Internacional" and "On Compulsory Religious Education in the Philippines" de Antonio M. Molina.

"The Part of the Philippines in the Opening of China to the West" de Paul Meibert Miller; "Education for the Masses in East Pakistan" de Jarlath D'Souza; "The Legal Evolution of Nationalist Movements in Indonesia, Malaya, Burma, Ceylon, India and the Middle East" de Mauro Méndez.

"El Bachillerato Español y el Filipino — Estudio comparativo" y "La Escuela Filipina en el pasado" de Evergisto Bazaco, O.P.; "Aportación de la Iglesia Católica al desarrollo de la agricultura en Filipinas" de Pablo Fernández, O.P.; "Los sellos de la Universidad de Santo Tomás de Manila" de Antonio González, O.P.; "Memorias de J. Rizal (diario inedito)" de Antonio M. Molina; "Pharmacy Past and Present", "Breve relación de la vida de Don León Ma. Guerrero, primer graduado de Farmacia de la Universidad de Santo Tomás" and "Chronicle of Philippine Pharmacy During the Spanish Period" de Lorenzo Rodríguez, O.P.; "Visaya, El Victorioso, notas para la Historia de Filipinas" de Alberto Santamaría, O.P.; "Escritos inéditos de Fr. Miguel de Benavides" fundador de la Universidad de Santo Tomas de Manila con introducciones y notas de J. Gayo Aragón, O.P.

"Algunas notas para el Estudio de la lírica Hispano-Filipina: Cecilio Apóstol, Fernando María Guerrero y Jesús Balmori" de Juana María Barangan; "Fernando María Guerrero, el Principe de la lírica Hispano-Filipina" de Medrano Bertol Rosa; "Spanish Elements in the Tagalog Language" de Consuelo Torres Panganiban; "La Doctrina China de 1593" de Antonio Domínguez; "La Doctrina Tagala de 1593" de Alberto Santamaría, O.P.; "Catálogo de los Impresos Filipinos conservados en los Archivos de la Provincia del Smo. Rosario de Filipinas y de la Universidad de Santo Tomás", "Ordinaciones Generales-Incunables Filipino de 1604" and "Rarezas bibliográficas en la Biblioteca de la Universidad de Santo Tomás" de J. Gayo Aragón, O.P.; "Manila, Metrópoli abandonada" de Manuel Mañosa.

"An Approach to Social-Economic Security", "Co-Partnership-Labor and Capital", "Asia's Recovery Program", "Some Aspects of Exchange Control", "Marshall Plan of Economic Program for Asia and the Far-East", "Financial Aspect of Philippine Economic Program", "Cooperative Economy in the Philippines" and "Some Measures of the Central Bank in Combating Inflation" de M. Z. Landicho; "The Deficiencies of the Management of the Economic Development of the Philippines" de Mariano B. Apacible, Sr.

"Music: Between God and Men — Marcelo Adonay", "New Treasures in Old Philippine Melodies", "La Música Filipina: Lo que es y lo que puede ser" de Antonio J. Molina; "National Spirit and Temper in Music" de Rosario Picazo.

Para cerrar este apartado sobre estudios relacionados con asuntos filipinos y orientales cabe mencionar la serie de veinticinco trabajos investigativos sobre plantas de Filipinas, en seguimiento de un programa bien

definido del entonces Decano de Farmacia, P. Lorenzo Rodríguez, O.P., muchos de cuyos estudios fueron dignamente apreciados por Sociedades Internacionales manufactureras de productos farmacéuticos.

Dentro de la temática general fueron publicados los siguientes estudios:

"El conocimiento intuitivo de Dios y la especie impresa" y "El Limbo de los niños" de José Blanco; "Pasibilidad afectiva de Jesucristo" y "Las pasiones de Cristo en el Evangelio" de Aniceto Castañón, O.P.; "La Penitencia pública en los primitivos siglos de la Iglesia", "Las indulgencias en la Iglesia primitiva" y "Abusos y errores en la concesión del perdón por vía de Indulgencia en el siglo XII" de Pablo Fernández, O.P.; "La Asunción en la Sagrada Escritura" de Narciso Domínguez, O.P.; "Congreso Mariológico-Mariano y solemnidad de Definición Dogmática de la Asunción de la Virgen" de Juan Ortega, O.P.; "La Asunción de la Santísima Virgen y Sto. Tomás de Aquino", "Maternidad Divina de María", "Tendencias actuales en la Mariología", "Las postrimerías de la Virgen María a la luz del Angélico Doctor", "La muerte de la Santísima Virgen en la tradición (siglos I-VI), y "Naturaleza de la S. Teología según la Encíclica 'Humani Generis'" de Félix Vacas, O.P.; "Las trasplantaciones quirúrgicas y la moral" de Andrés Ma. de Ravago, "On the Ethics of the Situation" de Victoriano Vicente, O.P.

"Génesis histórico-jurídica, alcance e interpretación del canon 1082" y "El canon 1082 ante el derecho civil" de Antonio M. Molina; "Nature of Marriage as Reflected in Canon and Civil Laws" de Excelso García, O.P.; "The Philosophy of Law" de Antonio Estrada; "The Modern System of Scientific Criminal Investigation" de Eliseo A. Vilar; "Man, Human Right and Law" de Valentín A. Francisco.

"Nature and Essentials of Logic" and "The Need of Catholic Philosophy as a Foundation for Human Life" de Angel de Blas, O.P.; "The Will and its Relation to Divine Causality and Knowledge" de Emérta S. Quito; "The Ordo-Concept in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas" de María Bruno Allmang; "La esencia del Kantismo" de Cirilo Gutiérrez y Velasco, O.P.; "La Providencia de Dios en sus relaciones con las criaturas" de Ricardo Sáez; "La vida frente al pensamiento", "Introducción a un estudio sobre la misión de las ciencias en la Filosofía Natural 'Aristotélico-Tomista'", "On Pure and Applied Research" and "On the Impact of Ethics on the Scientific Research" de Ciriaco Pedrosa, O.P.; "Philosophical and Scientific Psychology" de Antonio González, O.P.; "Beyond the Senses" de Francisco Villacorta, O.P.; "The Psychology of 'Spiritistic Phenomena'" and "The Modern Approach to Mental Disorders" de José A. Samson; "On Emotions" and "A Study on the Relationship Between Sensitivity to Pain and Intelligence" de Emmanuel Vit. Samson; "A Study of the Relationship Between Physique and Temperament" de Emmanuel Vit. Samson, Patria Ora-Maniquis, Zenaida de Dios Pardo y Natividad Saavedra; "The Determination of the Spatial Threshold Through Touch in its Correlation to Mental Ability" de José N. López; "The Role of Modern Social Trends in the Formation of Personality" de Lucina Heesen.

"Ideas Políticas de Sor María de Agreda" de Antonio González, O.P.; "Breve repaso de la Doctrina Social de la Iglesia Católica" de Cirilo Gutiérrez y Velasco, O.P.; "The Basic Principles of a Christian Society" de



*Raymundo Spiazzi, O.P.*; "The Freedom of the Press — A Critical Evaluation of the Totalitarianism and of the Liberal Theories" *de Antonio Piñón y Tiana*; "La Organización Corporativa de Portugal" *de J. Gayo Aragón, O.P.*

"Biochemical Diagnosis and Treatment of Cancer" and "The Trophoblastic Nature of Cancer" *de Manuel D. Navarro*; "The Early Diagnosis of Cancer by Aspiration Biopsy" *de J. Z. Sta. Cruz and M. Oca*; "The Intravenous Use of Human Ascitic Fluid in Shock, Nephrosis and Allied Conditions" *de Ricardo M. Molina, Hermógenes A. Santos and Mariano M. Alimurung*; "Noticias sobre la Seriológica de la sífilis", "Bases para organizar la campaña contra el peligro venéreo" y "Organización de un servicio social anti-venéreo" *de José Amador Guevara*; "Some Recent Advances in Pathology" *de Manuel D. Peñas*; "Artificial Insemination — A Critical Study" *de Jesús C. Bacala*; "A Study of Paracolobactrum Organismus Isolated from U.S.T. Hospital Patients" *de L. R. Cabatit*; "Metastatic Pulmonary Carcinoma Treated with Laetrille" *de Manuel Navarro, Desiderio Sta. Ana, José Zantua and Gregorio Moral*; "An Experimental Study of Acid — Base Reactions under Cyanide Metabolic Inhibition" *de Agustín Sevilla, Andrés R. Cruz, Jesús P. Celis, Luis Mayo LaO, José Pangan and Mauro P. del Casal*.

"Polarographic Analysis of a Native Copper Ore and of Different Alloys" *de Auxilindis Streibel*; "The Biogenesis of Certain Constituents of the Unsaponifiable Water in Marine Liver Oils" *de Robert Ryan Berueffy*; "Matrices of Rigid Motion" *de Lin Kee Kho*; "Notes on Spherical Motion" *de José M. Cue*; "Genocidio por medio de los abastacimientos de Aguas" *de M. Mañosa*; "Foundations of Mathematics Number Concept" and "Mathematics — Moderns Trend in Analytic Geometry" *de Santiaga Artiaga*.

"Synge and National Drama" *de Antony Cyril O'Connor*; "A Critical Study of the Creative Art of Leo Tolstoy" *de Josefina Cacho Reyes*; "Evolution of the Feeling for Nature in Spanish Lyric Poetry" *de Antonio González, O.P.*; "Vitalizing the Teaching of Freshman English", "The Natural Method of Teaching Applied to Language Classes" and "The Teaching of English as a Second Language" *de Josephine B. Serrano*; "A Suggested Scheme of Marking Pupils" *de Bienvenido A. Sison*; "A Comparative Study of Teacher Training in Belgium and the Philippines" *de M. Annunciata Schaerla-Ekens*; "Impression, Expressionism and Neo-Classicism in Piano Music" *de Stella Goldenberg Brimo*; "Dancing Fool — Character Etude for Pianoforte", "What is 'Modern' in Modern Music" and "Music, Art and Life" *de Antonio J. Molina*.

"Life Insurance and the Small Investor" *de Fernando L. Zulueta*; "La numismática romana con referencia a las monedas imperiales" *de Jesús P. Celis*; "El numerario áureo de las antiguas maníolas" *de J. P. Bantug*.

No debía sin embargo ignorarse que la revista era destinada a todos los profesores de la Universidad necesariamente de diversas aficiones y dedicaciones. Se pensó por tanto destinar cierto número de páginas de la revista a escritos de fácil lectura y de temas variados que pudieran inte-

resar a numeroso público. No tendrían estos escritos propiamente un carácter de investigación científica sino más bien de divulgación, no precisamente periodística, sino fruto del estudio de hombres dedicados a la enseñanza y por tanto de competencia científica. A estos escritos se añadirían informaciones culturales, conferencias y charlas científicas pronunciadas ya por profesores dentro o fuera de los recintos de la Universidad ya por insignes invitados a la misma. Sería así además la revista exponente de la vida cultural de la Universidad.

Copiosa resultó la colaboración de los profesores a esta sección de la revista con interesantes pronunciamientos sobre temas de la actualidad filipina. Aparecieron además oportunas informaciones sobre Congresos científicos internacionales o de la propia nación, así como de Asociaciones científicas de la Universidad o fuera de ella y notas históricas de personajes insignes en la cultura filipina. Mencionaremos únicamente las series de charlas culturales y conferencias científicas que periódicamente fueron programadas por las diversas Facultades y Departamentos de la Universidad.

Del 1950 al 1958 apareció la sección denominada "University of the Air" en la que se publicaron unas doscientas treinta páginas de las charlas culturales pronunciadas por profesores de Filosofía, Medicina, Farmacia, Liberal Arts, Educación, Ingeniería y Enfermería en la estación de Radio de la Universidad, dirigidas a la divulgación cultural y escuchadas por numeroso público estudiantil.

En el año 1955 dió comienzo la sección "Summer Cultural Series" con la publicación de tres conferencias médico-morales de Jesús Díaz, O.P., y partir del siguiente año fueron publicadas todas las conferencias. En el año 1958 apareció esta sección con especial disposición tipográfica con el fin de reimprimirla en separata en forma de libro debido a la demanda numerosa tanto de profesores como de estudiantes. Organizadas estas conferencias culturales veraniegas por la Secretaría General de la Universidad respondían sus temas a los asuntos de mayor actualidad en el ambiente científico, cultural y artístico de Filipinas en la respectiva temporada. Hasta el año 1960 fueron publicadas en esta sección unas setecientas cuarenta páginas de interesantes conferencias culturales. De especial mención es la pronunciada por el profesor Galo E. Ocampo titulada "Three Periods of Philippine Art", presentada a la impresión tipográfica como estudio completo del arte pictórico filipino con la extensión de cincuenta páginas de la revista. Suspendida esta serie en año 1961 reapareció en 1964.

Con el fin de dar a conocer el ambiente investigador en la Universidad en informar a los estudiosos interesados del mismo se dió comienzo en 1960 a la serie "Thesis Abstracts" y terminada en 1961. Era la síntesis de las tesis presentadas en el Graduate School con fines doctorales que podría prestar un servicio interesante de información científica.

Además de estas series conviene mencionar los trabajos dedicados a la celebración de conmemoraciones de acontecimientos culturales importantes o de personajes históricos de resonancia especial en la vida cultural y científica. En el año 1951 se dedicaron sesenta y tres páginas al "College of Education Silver Jubilee", en las que aparecieron varios artículos de diversos profesores del Colegio de Educación, todos ellos rela-

cionados con el tema de la conmemoración, con especial cita del estudio ampliamente desarrollado sobre "The Progress of Physical Education in the University of Santo Tomas" de Paz Cielo A. Belmonte.

En 1954 se dedicó el último número de Unitas del año, de doscientas sesenta páginas, al "Centenario del Dogma de la Inmaculada Concepción", en el que, comenzando con el Voto de la Universidad en favor de la definición dogmática de la realeza de la Virgen María, aparecen diversos estudios en las siguientes secciones: English Marian Literature, Tagalog Marian Literature, Literatura Española Mariana, Sección Teológica, Second National Marian Congress, Review of National Congress y Marian Stage Presentation 'Mundi Regina', original de Antonio Piñon.

En 1955, con ocasión del "Diamond Jubilee of Patronage of St. Thomas Aquinas over all Catholic Schools" se dedicaron cuarenta y nueve páginas con artículos de varios profesores sobre el tema, y como colofón "The Tiny Spark", a play in six acts on the Life of St. Thomas Aquinas, original de Jesús Ma. Merino, O.P.

En el mismo número y año se dedicaron setenta y ocho páginas a Pax Romana Catholic Educational and Cultural Conferences en las que vienen estudiados diversos temas referentes a la educación católica en la enseñanza, en la literatura, en el arte y en la vida cultural.

En 1959 se conmemoró el "Fifth Centenary of the Death of St. Antoninus" por la Facultad de Teología de la Universidad publicándose en Unitas varios artículos sobre la vida de San Antonino y su doctrina sobre la conciencia escrupulosa, la moralidad profesional y la vida socio-económica.

Para terminar conviene mencionar la serie de noticiarios que, con el título "Within the Campus", dió a conocer, durante los años 1949-1953, la vida interna de la Universidad en las diversas esferas escolares o extra-curriculares preparada por Ricardo C. Bassig, a quien debo reconocer su cooperación valiosa en el aspecto tipográfico de la publicación de la revista. Así mismo, la serie de Crónica de Filipinas en la que, desde 1951 al 1954, el profesor Antonio M. Molina sintetizaba periódicamente los principales acontecimientos de Filipinas, el cual merece mención especial de agradecimiento, no solamente por su colaboración constante y entusiasta en la aportación de estudios y conferencias para la revista, sino también por su asistencia técnica, durante todo este período de la revista, en la línea editorial de la misma.



## THE UNITAS — A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW

● Alfredo Panizo, O.P.  
Editor, 1956-1970

*The changing conditions of a university are reflected not only in its objectives and academic programs but also in its literary output and official publications. Such is the case with the University of Santo Tomas, and the Unitas has been part of this. In the course of its development, the Unitas has seen various changes in editorial policies, the nature of its contents, and its format in order to adjust to new ideas and demands as well as to serve the cultural needs of the university, in particular, and of the country in general.*

*The Unitas was started quite accidentally. The university administration in the twenties saw the necessity of putting together as one publication all the different journals on science and education which had proliferated in the campus at the time. This effort, however, was not too successful at first because of the widely divergent nature of the articles. The publication started becoming rather superficial, like a reader's digest, and had no definite editorial guidelines. Each of the early editors did what he could to adapt the publication to the circumstances in the university as well as to the interests of both the faculty and the students.*

*When I took over the editorship of this quarterly, the faculty made scant contribution, perhaps because they were being published in other journals still existing on campus. In my capacity as Dean of the Graduate School, however, I had the privilege of getting acquainted with many scholars both from the university faculty as well as from other universities and colleges. These scholars were in the university to do post-graduate work in a diversity of discipline. Excellent doctoral theses were presented to the Graduate School, some of which were the results of long years of scholarly research. The best of these studies were published in the Unitas as monographic studies. I think that they represent a great contribution to Philippine culture.*

*Our first important contribution was dedicated to the memory of the late Rector Magnificus of the University of Santo Tomas, the pioneer psychologist, Father Angel de Blas, O.P., who died in November, 1961. This was followed in a succeeding issue by an article on The Psychology of Mysticism which was a compilation of his last lectures. The work of compilation was undertaken by his best students. In this same issue was*

*A Survey of Relations Between Indonesian, Malay and the Main Languages of the Philippines. A great contribution to the field of linguistics, it was authored by Septy Ruzui, an outstanding scholar and diplomat from Sumatra.*

*On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Sir Rabindranath Tagore, Indian scholar and writer and winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, the Unitas published papers read in a conference which had been jointly organized by the Indian Embassy in Manila and the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. This was in September, 1962. The keynote paper was read by Indian Ambassador Sankar Nath Maitra; other related papers were read by well-known UST professors.*

*Our first contribution to the field of anthropology was an article by Edward Salkiya Kusman, Birth and Death Rituals Among the Tausogs of Siasi. Within the following years, in line with the growing awareness of national identity and heritage in the country, the Unitas expanded this into the Filipiniana Series which included monographs and articles on the Philippine heritage, the cultural minorities, and native folklore. To mention a few distinguished articles, the Unitas published a study on the Chinese migrations through Southeast Asia, both in pre-historic and historic times, by Darius W. Nggawa of Flores Island in Indonesia (1964); a monograph on the Cultural Minorities (1965); The Culture of the Bontoc Igorots by Carmelita Cawed Oteyza, herself a Bontoc native (1965); and Stories and Legends From Filipino Folklore by Sister Della Coronel, ICM (1966). This last was chosen by the Philippine Secretary of Education as reading material for all Philippine primary schools.*

*In March, 1967, the Unitas honored the memory of the late Dr. H. Otley Beyer, rightly known as the Father of Philippine Anthropology, by publishing a special issue entirely devoted to studies in Philippine anthropology. Among the articles in that issue were:*

*The Ifugaos by Lourdes S. Dulawan, a native of Kiangan, Mt. Province, authority on Ifugao culture and representative of the Commission on National Integration for the Ifugao area;*

*The Ifugaos a Hundred Years Ago by Dr. William H. Scott, lay missionary of the Episcopal Church and an eminent historian;*

*The Negritos or Aetas by Fr. Alfredo Panizo, O.P., Dean of the UST Graduate School and Professor of Physical Anthropology;*

*The Mangyans of Northern Oriental Mindoro by Marcelino Maceda, a graduate of ethnology from the University of Friburg, Switzerland, and Professor of Anthropology at San Carlos University;*

*Some Cultural Aspects of the Bukidnons on Southeastern Negros Island by Timoteo S. Oración, field ethnologist and professor of Silliman University;*

*The Origin, Folkways, and Customs of the Bilaans of Southern Cotabato by Santiago Cabrera, a Marist Brother and professor;*

*The Bataks of Sumurod and Kulakuan by Prof. José A. Samson, researcher and Psychology professor at the University of Santo Tomas;*

and A. Report of the Socio-Economic Present Status of the Cultural Minorities of the Philippines prepared by Neri Diaz Pascual of the Asia Foundation.

All through the years 1968 and 1969, several articles on the Filipino heritage were published. Among these were the article *Philippine Epics*, written by the late Dr. Antonia F. Villanueva; the English translation with annotations and critical analysis of the *Bikol epic*, Ibalong, by Emérito B. Espinas; and Dr. E. Arsenio Manuel's authoritative English translation of the *Mindanao epic Agyu*, which he did on a research grant from the University of Santo Tomas. Dr. Manuel was a visiting lecturer at the UST Graduate School at the time but was a regular member of the UP Department of Anthropology. He is one of the country's leading anthropologists, with a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and is an author of many publications including the prestigious "Dictionary of Philippine Folklore Bibliography".

The last contribution of the *Unitas* to both the *Filipiniana Series* and to anthropology was the study by Teresita R. Infante, *The Woman in Early Philippines and Among the Cultural Minorities*, which appeared as a monograph in September, 1969. It was dedicated to the outstanding Belgian missionary, anthropologist, linguist, botanist, and author, Fr. Morice Vanoverbergh, MSC, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of his arrival in the Philippines.

The *Unitas* always tried to present a variety of articles addressed to a divergence of interests among its readers, both in the university and elsewhere. Following the issue on the *Cultural Minorities*, a voluminous enterprise consisting of 234 pages and 47 pages of illustrations, I received many commendations from Europe and America. This gave the editorial staff the necessary incentive to embark on the *Filipiniana Series* mentioned above. However, the *Unitas* did not neglect the other fields.

In the summer of 1964, the *Unitas* started the practice of publishing all the papers presented in the annual *Summer Cultural Series*. This series centered on the general theme, *Guidance and Counselling for Filipino Students*. The following summer, the *Cultural Series* was on the fascinating subject, *The Psychology of the Filipinos*. The issue featuring these articles was well-received; consequently, all papers in subsequent *Summer Cultural Series* presentations were similarly featured. Among these were papers on literature, Philippine politics, and government.

The importance of education and its attendant problems in the world and in Asia also received attention from the *Unitas*. Fr. Thomas Lenert, OMI, an American priest working with various colleges in Mindanao, presented a critical evaluation of the eclectic philosophy then prevailing in the University of the Philippines and various other Philippine colleges. His research was a critique on the American influence on the Philippine public school system, especially the progress made in these schools by Pragmatism and Progressivism. Furthermore, the first issue of *Unitas* for 1966 covered the educational systems of several Asian countries, among them Malaya, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, Korea, Thailand, Ceylon, Taiwan, and the Philippines. The articles were written by the cultural attachés of these countries residing in Manila at the time. In the next issue, we presented another series of reports on higher education and its importance in leadership, international cooperation, technical progress, governmental administration, politics, and health. The articles came to



us from the delegates attending the ASAIHL Convention, the Four Conferences of the International Association of Universities held in Tokyo in September, 1965, and other conventions of the same nature held in different parts of the world.

In September, 1966, the Unitas addressed a most important and pressing problem: Population Explosion. The issue on this carried a foreword by President Ferdinand E. Marcos and was made possible by partial funding from the Ford Foundation. A group of competent specialists worked together to make this issue an excellent one. Some of the articles were: Facts and Factors of Philippine Population Growth, Economic Development and Population Pressure, Fertility Problems, Family Planning Under the Point of View of the Catholic and the Protestant Churches, Geographic Distribution of Philippine Population, and Internal Migrations and Population Distribution.

President Marcos said in his foreword: "The articles in this issue of Unitas, written by authoritative scholars whose researches into the problems emphasized here, could very well become the hardrock basis for any program designed to deal successfully and efficiently with population explosion and its resultant stresses." Two copies of this issue were sent to His Holiness, Pope Paul VI.

Another field which received the attention of the Unitas was the Humanities. In 1967, a monograph on Existentialism appeared. The articles were chosen and edited by Dr. Emérila S. Quito, graduate of the University of Friburg, Switzerland, and professor of philosophy in the University of Santo Tomas, who joined the editorial staff of the Unitas for a brief time.

Similarly, three outstanding research studies on literature were featured. The first was on Paul Claudel, Catholic Dramatist which was undertaken by Prof. Milagros Tanlayco with the assistance of the French Embassy in Manila. Prof. Tanlayco, who is very competent in the French language, sought to show the universal of Claudel's Catholic thrust against the prevailing prejudices against him as an author. In 1965, a superlative work by Sister Celine Marie Werner was published. Entitled The Image of Man in the Works of Outstanding Soviet Fiction Writers, it was inspired by Boris Pasternak's work "Doctor Zhivago". Four years later, this was followed by The Psychology of the Soviet Novel by Erlinda F. Rustia, professor of literature at the University of Santo Tomas and assistant editor of the Unitas for many years.

In addition, the Unitas had the privilege of publishing a great number of papers and monographs from prominent scholars and statesmen. Of special note are: Prehispanic Source Materials for the Study of Philippine History by Dr. William H. Scott. A graduate of both Columbia and Yale Universities, he is a well-known scholar and historian; Chinese Metaphysical Characters by Ju I-shiung, a renowned Chinese painter-scholar who presently lives in America; an inspiring speech delivered by the late Fernando Maria Castiella, Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs when he was conferred a doctorate, honoris causa, by the University of Santo Tomas; The History of Different Communist Movements of the Philippines by the historian Josefina D. Constantino; The First Philippine Assembly by the late Senator Camilo Osias; Mexican Heritage in the Philippines and The Moro-Moro — A Possibility For

Folkloric Theatre, both by the Mexican diplomat and historian, the late Rafael Bernal; and the informative work on Apolinario Mabini prepared by the Dominican historian, Father Fidel Villarreal, to commemorate the centennial of Mabini's birth.

It would be impossible to mention all the great minds who contributed to the quality of the *Unitas* during the period that I was its editor. I can simply state in conclusion that the intellectual life of the university community as well as those of its many readers were greatly enriched by the different aspects of life and of culture which the contributing scholars and writers shared with them. The work of editing this quarterly was made easier by the invaluable assistance of the many professors who helped as consultants and advisers. I wish to express here my personal and special thanks to Dr. Erlinda F. Rustia who worked with me through all the years that I edited the *Unitas*. Her capable performance helped me maintain the high standards of the magazine.



## Editorial Policies

### THE FIRST DAWN: JULY 1922 — NUESTROS PROPOSITOS

No somos los primeros que han sentido la necesidad absoluta e intransferible de una Revista Escolar, que sea como el portavoz y órgano de las diversas facultades de esta Universidad, que con tanto tino y acierto dirigieron en tiempos pasados, dirigen hoy y confiadamente esperamos dirigirán en el futuro de los Padres Dominicos, de la Provincia del Smo. Rosario.

Y decimos no ser los primeros en sentir tal necesidad, porque ya de mucho tiempo atrás venía sintiéndose, habiéndose tratado en más de una ocasión de dar a la prensa trabajos ya coleccionados y preparados en forma de revista. Pero no fueron solo conatos y proyectos; llegóse hasta la publicación por diversas facultades — la de Derecho y la de Medicina y Farmacia — de sus revistas respectivas. Todos sentíamos la conveniencia de algo más elevado y de base más firme. Hablóse; siguióse hablando; a unos planes sucedían otros, y hoy un proyecto, mañana otro y en el entretanto la idea fundamental y capitalísima de que Institución tan veneranda y de tanta historia y vida tuviera su órgano de expresión, su portavoz que la dé a conocer y la defienda sea necesario, fué convirtiéndose en algo así como un primer principio que ya nadie se atrevía a discutir, pero que nadie tampoco se atrevía llevar a la práctica, por aquello de que las grandes y áridas empresas se sienten y se palpan, pero no siempre se tiene la fuerza suficiente de

voluntad y las energías que supone el ponerlas en práctica y reducirlas a términos de realidad, como dicen los neo-filósofos ingleses.

Nosotros, quizá más atrevidos que los antes de nosotros frecuentaron estas aulas, nos lanzamos hoy a la arena y damos principio, llenos de fe y de entusiasmo juvenil, a la publicación de esta que queremos sea órgano de las diversas facultades de nuestra "Alma Mater" de lo mejor y más lucido de la intelectualidad filipina. Nosotros comenzamos, y ¡quiera Dios! que haya quien nos suceda y continúe nuestra obra, por el tiempo que las puertas de esta secular Institución estén abiertas a juventudes ansiosas de conocimientos científicos y de progresos morales.

Nadie espere que los trabajos en esta Revista publicados sean trabajos definitivos, que lleven en sus entrañas marcada la huella del genio o del sabio; ni siquiera hay derecho a esperar que sean artículos que enseñen algo nuevo a las gentes ilustradas. Porque ¡Qué cosas nuevas podríamos enseñar nosotros, que no hemos aun mal terminado una carrera? ¿Ni que trabajos definitivos podrán esperarse de los que apenas si han dado los primeros pasos y estos tumbos y vacilaciones en el aspero sendero de la vida y de la ciencia? ¿Ni cómo podrán marcar huella nuestros pasos de excursionistas por el campo científico, si son pasos de niño que comienza apenas a andar? Nadie se engañe, ni se llame después a engaño. Venimos plétóricos de vida, de entusiasmo y de amor; pero esa vida es incipiente; es capullo científico que habrá de abrirse más tarde y sólo será entonces, cuando flor de ciencia exhale perfumes embriagadores que llenen el espíritu de consuelo y conforten el alma, alimentándola con las eternas ideas de ciencia y de virtud.

¿Quién tomase en sus manos estas páginas y pretendiera encontrar en ellas encerrado un tesoro de ciencia, a buen seguro que desilusionado y en el colmo de la decepción habría de arrojarlos lejos de sí, sepultándonos en el profundo desprecio del olvido? Suya será la culpa, que no nuestra, pues tan clara y peladínamente hemos nuestra pobreza confesado.

No se nos oculta, aún con todas estas notas y aclaraciones, que viendo nuestra pobreza y nuestra miseria, no faltarán algunos que "rasguen" cómicamente sus vestiduras y nos moteje de "meticones" y presumidos; quienes de un movimiento de mano aristocráticamente enguantada, en su profundo saber nos mande y enchiquire en la categoría de los "estúpidos orgullosos", jovenzuelos de una "rising" empecatada y nacida en pecado, como concebida que fué en engaño y mentira. No nos asustará tal actitud; la esperamos y hasta sería para nosotros una desilusión dolorosa que tal no sucediera, pues ellos sería prueba más que suficiente, para demostrarnos que nuestra Revista es lo suficientemente pobre para no merecer el desprecio de tales y tan grandes "sabios".

Es verdad que nuestra obra es de muchachos más o menos crecidos, pero siempre inexpertos — y desgraciado el joven que por experto en los lances de la vida se tenga — y que con el mayor candor se lanzan a una obra de magnitudes grandiosas sin haber quizá pesado bien las dificultades presentes y los obstáculos futuros. Pero: ¿qué joven pensó jamás en las dificultades y obstáculos que el presente o el futuro puedan amontonar, para hacer más difícil y en ocasiones punto menos que imposible el avance de sus obras? Como todo joven, también nosotros queremos vivir del futuro, como viven los viejos del pasado, según bella expresión de gran Doctor de Aquino; pero para el joven el futuro no tiene dificultades y cuando mira adelante todo lo ve de color de rosa. Para el joven, el horizonte que delimita el futuro está siempre bañado en las más bellas tintas, tintas que no predicen sino bienandanzas y triunfos, como predicen lluvias y aguaceros torbonales los arboles de la tarde que en la vida es la vejez, llena no menos de achaques intelectuales que físicos, aunque haya sus honrosas excepciones, ni quiera esto decir ni significar falta de estima a la vejez.

Expuesta queda en las anteriores deslazadas cuartillas nuestra ideología negativa;

es decir lo que no vamos a hacer, y lo que nadie debe esperar de nosotros. Pero las negaciones no sirven más que para destruir y la destrucción significa muerte y la muerte es la enemiga mayor de la juventud, siquiera haya jóvenes afeitados que están llamando a gritos la muerte, como hay viejos gloriosos y robustos como robles que parecen rebosar satisfacción y dicha, vida y energías.

No es el ideal negativo — si es que se da tal ideal — lo que nos mueve a nosotros; tenemos un fin afirmativo, o positivo como hoy se dice. Y ese fin, llámesele positivo o afirmativo es, según que a nuestros ojos se presenta, de lo más glorioso y noble que puede darse, aunque bien pudiera suceder, que por uno de tantos contrastes comunes en la vida de los hombres, a alguien le parezca bajo, y mezquino, cuando no insultante y propio de sola nuestra pedantería. Quisiéramos — nadie se sobresalte, y déjenos explicar con holgura — infiltrar nueva vida y una vida más robusta, más fuerte, más llena de arrostos varoniles a esta nuestra tres veces Centenaria Universidad; y por ello y para ello hemos fundado esta Revista, que será todo lo mala que se quiera, pero que está concebida con la más buena y santa intención, que es la en líneas anteriores expuesta, claramente y sin tapujos, aún a trueque de que alguien quede prevenido en contra nuestra.

Al decir que queremos infiltrar en nuestra Universidad vida nueva, nuevos bríos y arrostos más varoniles, no queremos significar en modo alguno que en la actualidad esté escasa de ellos y caduca, como quien dice, aunque no falten lenguas maldicientes que así lo afirmen, porque tal les dicta su deseo de verla desaparecer, pues les hace sombra y les estorba. No queremos decir eso, pues si tal creyéramos a buen seguro que no seríamos sus alumnos. Se equivocan de medio a medio y de un modo el más lastimoso, por ser el de peor remedio, aquellos espíritus bonachones y confiados que se han llegado a figurar que las Instituciones docentes pueden vivir de su propia historia. No, la historia no sirve para nada cuando la lucha y de lucha tan intensa como hoy se desarrolla en el campo pedagógico se trata. Si continúan viniendo los alumnos a este glorioso centro de enseñanza es porque esta vieja matrona aun tiene en sus fecundos senos, donde se amamantaron cien generaciones, la leche riquísima de enseñanzas morales y altamente científicas; es que aun lleva en sus venas sangre científica y moral, savia de vida que comunica generosa y abundancia a los que a ella se llegan, como la comunicó en otros tiempos y cuando era la señora única y exclusiva en los amplios y dilatados dominios de la enseñanza filipina.

Por eso cuando decimos, que venimos nosotros con nuestra Revista a darle nueva vida, quiere únicamente decir, que nosotros por medio de este órgano periodístico vamos a llevar la fama de nuestro Centro hasta los últimos rincones del Archipiélago; que vamos a rebatir aquí tantas y tantas cosas como se dicen por ahí fuera de nosotros y en nuestra. Nosotros la daremos a conocer y traeremos a ella nuevos y más numerosos alumnos que con sus entusiasmos y su ardor den nueva vida y nuevos impulsos a las diversas facultades. Por medio de nuestra publicación sabrá todo el mundo cuan infundados y faltos de base son esos infundios de que estamos caducos y viejos; les haremos sentir nuestra juventud en plena primavera; por los ojos habrémos de meterles la realidad de nuestra vida pujante y poderosa, y sabrán, que si en otros tiempos de aquí salieron Araullos y Arellanos, también saldrán en lo futuro, pues el vientre de la madre vieja no es hoy menos fecundo que lo fuera ayer.

Pero y ¿qué necesidad tenemos de una Revista, y menos de una Revista escrita por jóvenes sin ciencia y lo que es peor sin arte literario alguno? ¿No está convencido todo el mundo de que la prensa es la gran mentira moderna, la destructora de todo cuanto signifique seriedad y verdadero progreso científico? ¿Que necesidad tenemos de tales andanzas, ni de tales músicas?

La prensa será todo eso de que sus enemigos la acusan; pero el hecho es, que hoy

por hoy se impone, o mejor, se ha impuesto. Apenas hay centro alguno de importancia que no tenga su Revista: Y ¿por qué habíamos de ser nosotros menos? Las instituciones por muy fuertes y consistentes que parezcan, y por mucha savia de vida que lleven en sus venas, vienen a quedarse anémicas y a morir finalmente, si periódicamente y en conformidad con el medio ambiente en que viven y con las circunstancias que les rodean no se mueven y se modifican. Hay espíritus que se llaman fuertes — y podríamos citar algunos — que se creen superiores porque dicen no vivir en conformidad con el medio ambiente, ni les importa un camino de lo que les rodea; tienen, dicen, sus convicciones y son espíritus lo suficientemente fuertes para no vivir de las circunstancias. Pero esos espíritus fuertes resultan muy flojos cuando en contacto con la realidad, toda su bravura desaparece y son mansos como corderos y dóciles como la cera y maleables como el oro.

Todos tenemos que pagar tributo a las circunstancias y al cambio de los tiempos; las instituciones, al igual que los individuos, tienen que vivir en conformidad con el medio — ambiente, y en su lucha por la existencia, sólo las más fuertes y las que saben acomodarse mejor a las circunstancias que las rodean, son las que sobreviven y se presentan siempre fuertes, siempre robustas, siempre llenas de vida. Como las células del animal se renuevan periódicamente, así la textura de las instituciones debe reformarse, y sería un loco quien tratase de impedirlo.

Si no se quiere, pues, que nuestra siempre gloriosa Institución — y la llamo nuestra, pues pertenece por igual a los dignatarios, a los profesores y a los estudiantes, pues a ella hemos todos consagrado nuestros amores y su nombre llevamos grabado en el alma con caracteres indelebles, pues son de fuego de amor — se endurezca y pierda su flexibilidad, la flexibilidad que le da vida, es preciso que se renueve y se mueva en consonancia con los tiempos y se acomode a las condiciones pedagógicas que la rodean. Este el mayor deseo de cuantos hoy emprendemos la publicación de esta revista, en la queremos reflejar ese movimiento de adaptación y renovación constante. Queremos y deseamos con toda el alma, que todo en esta Casa Solariega de la mayor y mejor parte de la intelectualidad filipina, se mueva y avance con empuje cada vez creciente, mejor dicho, siga moviéndose en lo futuro como se mueve hoy, y como se movió en el pasado.

Quizá no pocos crean ver en todo lo dicho algo como una intromisión por nuestra parte en cosas que a nosotros en modo alguno nos atañen. No fué tal la intención al escribir lo que antecede. Hemos únicamente reflejado en el papel lo que hemos oído cien veces. Para otros, puede que el publicar una revista, sea algo así como innovación peligrosa, ya que no faltan quienes, aun siendo por otra parte muy ilustrados y competentes creen que la prensa no es más que un aristocrático, si se quiere, de perder el tiempo y de “dar la lata al prójimo”, como dicen ellos, si bien ningún periodista les puso jamás el revólver al pecho, para que lean los artículos y noticias que tanto les molestan o dicen molestarlos. Otros nos tacharán de temerarios, por lanzarnos a una tan árdua empresa sin contar quizá con los arrestos necesarios.

Sin queremos colocar a nosotros mismos en el plano de entes superiores — pues no faltaría un Paco que viniera con la rebeja y nos hiciera saltar de tal plano para colocarnos en otro más en conformidad con sus gustos y deseos, — a nosotros nos parece, nos pareció siempre y, si Dios no lo remedia, seguirá pareciéndonos — a menos que esos espíritus selectos y fuertes nos prueben con hechos y no con afirmaciones, que no vamos a creer y acatar por el mero hecho de ser suyas — que las revistas son hoy por hoy una necesidad y un medio de propaganda y unión excelente y que nosotros — aún a trueque de que alguien afirme que estropeamos nuestras facultades — debemos tenerla. Dentro y muy dentro de las actividades de la Universidad entra la Revista y ha de ser, según confiamos el lazo de unión que aune voluntades y corazones y nos haga unos, dándonos cada vez más fuerza y más pujanza.



Nuestra norma de conducta habrá de ser la mayor libertad dentro de la integridad de los principios. Se nos acusa a los católicos de ser intransigentes; lo que se ha demostrado es que la Iglesia haya sido intransigente cuando se trataba de algo que no afecta a sus principios básicos y fundamentales. Dentro de la necesidad imperiosa y de la intangibilidad de los principios, que son divinos y a Dios no hay quien le enmiende la plana, caben todas las hipótesis y teorías, todos los progresos científicos y artísticos que se quieran. Nuestra "Alma Mater" ha seguido siempre fielmente e también esta norma de conducta. Ha conservado íntegro y sin disminución la más mínima en su brillo el ideal grande que sus fundadores la dieron; desde los tiempos memorables del ejecutor testamentario del gran Arzobispo Benavides hasta nuestros días, su preocupación constante fué siempre el mostrar a las juventudes filipinas el camino recto y seguro por "do han ido los pocos sabios que en el mundo han sido", Fué siempre y es y seguirá siendo siempre una institución que forme tanto la inteligencia del alumno en las disciplinas científicas, cuanto el corazón mediante enseñanzas morales, que modelen la vida moral de sus alumnos. De estos claustros, de humilde apariencia salieron en el pasado grandes hombres; y este es hoy también el troquel donde se fabrican grandes caracteres que, serán mañana hombres honrados y profesionales, plenamente conscientes de sus derechos y de sus deberes. En el corazón mismo de Filipinas escribieron los Dominicos el nombre aureolado de gloria de la Universidad de Sto. Tomás, y en la médula misma de los huesos lleva inyectada esta nación el germen de su regeneración y grandeza, que allí dejarán profesores de tan grande talla como el González, el Arzobispo Nozalea, el gran reformador P. Velázquez y el sapientísimo P. Casto de Elera.

No queremos en modo alguno que sobre nuestras cabezas caiga la maldición de haber sido ingratos ni por un momento a una Institución a la que tanto debe nuestro pueblo. Si aquellos hombres del pasado eran grandes y extraordinarios, no menos grandes son los que hoy nos guían y nos alientan. Cada año dan a esta venerable institución aspecto de nueva juventud; planean reformas y más reformas, que llevan a la práctica sin necesidad de grandes ruidos ni grandes alharacas. Seguros estamos, que si los cientos de grandes hombres que de las aulas de Sto. Tomás salieron y que son hoy el orgullo más legítimo del pueblo filipino, levantarán la cabeza de la almohada mortuaria en que la tienen posada, y vieran las mudanzas y trasformaciones de esta su "Alma Mater", llorarían de gozo y contento al ver que la fue su Madre, lo sigue siendo de otros muchos y la que a ellos los formó, forma también a otros, caminando siempre hacia el monte santo del progreso, sin estancarse, sin detenerse, subiendo siempre, siempre; siempre perfeccionándose, moviéndose, reformándose.

Pero en todas esas reformas y movimientos de adaptación conserva y conservará siempre el ideal, los principios básicos, las normas pedagógicas — científicas que la experiencia de sus mayores le legaron.

Nosotros queremos en nuestra Revista reflejar ese movimiento de cambio y de trasformación, en medio de esa inmovilidad, de ese estancamiento de principios. Vengan pues trabajos de cualquiera clase que sean; nadie será rechazado, por muy avanzadas que sus ideas parezcan, con tal que en nada sufra menoscabo el tesoro de nuestros principios. Tenemos los brazos abiertos para todos y entre ellos serán todos bien recibidos. Nadie tema; y lléguese todos los alumnos, que para todos es la Revista. Que todo el mundo sepa que también nosotros sacrificamos en los altares, no de Minerva, que no es más que creación de la fantasía griega, sino del Dios Sapientísima que nos crió a Su imagen y semejanza y que, en expresión del gran Poeta de los Salmos, puso en nuestra frente un destello de Su lumbré divina, para que iluminase nuestros pasos por los ásperos y difíciles senderos de la ciencia; que cumplimos con el precepto de no tener envueltos en fríos sudarios los tesoros que Dios nos concedió, sino que los centuplicamos, mediante el trabajo metódico y ordenado.

Restanos exponer la última, si bien la más importante, en nuestro entender de todas las finalidades que tiene nuestra Revista; nos referimos al deseo vehemente que movió a los fundadores e iniciadores de la misma de procurar por su medio la unión cada vez más estrecha y la cordialidad mutua entre las diversas Facultades. Hasta aquí triste es decirlo — pero las confesiones tristes y sinceras son las únicas que valen algo — hemos vivido separados, distanciados los unos de los otros. No ya las diversas Facultades, pero aún los mismos cursos de una Facultad apenas si se conocen, cuando no son antagonistas y casi enemigos. Hasta aquí, cada uno vivía para sí, sin acordarse de los otros, olvidando que somos un cuerpo, y que en el cuerpo organizado o todos los órganos y miembros marchan a una o el cuerpo muere y se descompone. Por eso hemos dado a la Revista el nombre de *Unitas*, que quizá a no pocos parezca un nombre feo y antiestético. Séalo en hora buena, con tal que exprese nuestros pensamientos, que ¡Dios quiera! tengan cumplida realización.

Con ponernos incondicionalmente bajo la guía sabia y prudente de los Superiores de la Universidad y a la disposición de nuestros lectores, damos por terminada la exposición de *Nuestros Propósitos* al fundar esta Revista.

— Los Editores

*Unitas*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1922, pp. 3-11.

## THE SECOND DAWN: JANUARY-MARCH 1948

The sturdy and aged oak bends its boughs before the strong and violent winds, forbearing the desolation of the hurricane, only to stand erect once again defying and victorious. And the timorous bird seeks safe and comforting refuge in the recesses of roof-tops in order to soar once more, happier and more joyful, in the limpid skies following the tempest.

In like manner, men, fearfully shrink in the face of the impressive and threatening convulsions of modern wars. And they devote all their activity to the sacred intimacy of their soul, meditating in all silence on the serious problems of their own being, until they be allowed, with the termination of the travails of armed conflict, to return to the breathless tempo of modern life.

*Unitas*, as sturdy as the gigantic tower of its University and young as yet in its twenty springs, withdrew likewise, in utter contempt of the wreckers of the peaceful life of men, seeking able protection in the hidden and silent archives of human knowledge. Not that it would die ignominiously under the scythe of those violators of the peace of mankind, but that it might witness a dawning, more golden still, once the self-imposed rest should have come to an end.

And it comes again to men of learning in order to continue fulfilling the accurate mission that its founders clearly left it expressed in its own name. 'Unity' in the varied composite of the Faculties and Colleges of the University, guiding the multiple sciences of insatiable human knowledge to the origin of all knowledge and unity; the first Cause: God.

A new section is featured. In it will be published the works and writings, hitherto unpublished, of our former professors, if only by reason of the historical interest they

entail, let alone the exceptional merits of the same. It is true that but very few of the studies made by the first professors of our University have been able to withstand the rigors of time, for, as Fr. Francisco de Acuña, O.P., left it said in the year 1682, "because of the utter lack of money, therefore, that would allow their publication, of Religious that would undertake or help therein, and of these impossible printers, so many of our writings have been ruined and are being ruined day by day; which writings, because of too much handling . . . or because eaten by the moth . . . have thus been consumed or are being consumed in our cells and libraries."

With this series we intend to make public the silent, if enviably profound, labors of this multisecular University. She is the luminous tower of light, whose rays — messengers of peace to the conscience of man — have illumined the farthest corners of the East and have lasted till the present generation.

In this second dawning of our Magazine, with the anxious and fleeting years of the war relegated to oblivion, we join, in the eager esteem of the learned, those impatient readers of ours of 1941. Dreams do not matter in the life of man.

— The Editor

*Unitas*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1968, p. 3-4.

## A RETROSPECTION OF UNITAS' 40 YEARS: SEPTEMBER 1961

The *Unitas* is venerable not only from the standpoint of age but also from the quality and quantity of learned and scholarly literature.

Its initial issue was quite unassuming and unheralded by wordy press notices. Forty years ago the students and professors of the Faculty of Law started out on the stirring task of putting out a law journal. Their efforts were rewarded when the journal came out in 1920 bearing the Spanish name, 'Revista Escolar de Derecho'.

Like begets like. Following the example of the Faculty of Law, the student body and faculty members of the College of Medicine of this University put out their own journal which bore the appellation, *Alma Mater*.

The stage has been set then for what, at least from the viewpoint of every faculty member of this university, should be a historic fusion. The two journals were fused and symbolic of and consistent to the purpose of the fusion, it was given the Latin name of *Unitas* (Unity).

The *Unitas* came out from the press in 1922, a significant event indeed especially if we, who can see through the perspective of the passing years, consider the substantial contribution it has made in the field of religion, culture, the humanities, and the theoretical and practical sciences. Since then it has steadily served as the official organ of the faculty of the University of Santo Tomas.

A stirring and unselfish dedication to further the horizons of the human intellect calls for emulation. And so a year after the initial issue of the *Unitas*, in 1923, a sister publication, the 'Boletín Eclesiástico', official interdiocesan ecclesiastical organ, began its

long career. It has been published monthly by the university up to the present day, the publication being interrupted only during the war.

Consistent to its meaning and to its initial spirit of dedicated intellectual service, *Unitas* has published through the years a great variety of cultural and scientific articles using Spanish and English as the media of expressions. It does not have, of course, the appeal that popular and creative magazines have for mass readership. However, it has maintained the standards proper to and expected of such a learned publication and, therefore, has a strong hold to readers of scholarly disposition. It has published authoritative articles on humanities and theology, discussed celebrated legal cases, profounded medical and pharmaceutical investigations and discoveries, expostulated and commented on literature and the arts. It is a treasure trove of information to many generations of scholars, students and mentors alike.

Great Filipino writers, historians and scientists, have used the pages of the *Unitas* to propound their views and ideas. In the field of history, for instance, we can mention the names of Gregorio Zaide, Dr. José Bantug, Eufronio Alip, Antonio Molina and Fathers Evergisto Bazaco, Alberto Santamaría and Jesús Gayo, O.P.

Noted artists like Victorio Edades and Galo Ocampo have added color to the pages of the *Unitas* with their realistic appraisal of modern art.

Figuring in the field of pharmacy and chemistry were renown contributors like Anacleto del Rosario, Basilio Tolosa, José Lugay, E.T. Karganilla, Alfredo Diy, Emma Unson and Fr. Lorenzo Rodríguez, O.P.

Mathematical problems were discussed by Eduardo Hazañas, José M. Cue and Ciriaco Pedrosa, O.P.

Authoritative articles on engineering were submitted by S. Artiaga, M. Mañosa, A. Casanova, J. Cabarrus and M. Montaner. It was through the pages of the *Unitas* that Fr. Roque Ruaño, O.P., divulged his celebrated theories on construction, earthquakes and the geology of the Philippine Islands.

Perhaps the best contribution to the *Unitas* in the field of theology, philosophy and literature were the excellent essays of several Dominican Fathers like Francisco del Río, Felix Vacas, Angel de Blas, Antonio González, Johannes Maurer and the celebrated professors, Paz Latorena, Josephine Bass-Serrano, José Hernández and Joaquina Lucas.

Comprehensive studies and commentaries on Canon and Civil Law of the Philippines were regularly submitted by the late Fr. Juan Ylla, O.P., and Gabriel La O and by Roberto Concepción, Nicolás Belmonte, Joaquín Ramírez and Antonio Estrada.

Before the UST Journal of Medicine came into existence in 1940, many professional physicians shared with the *Unitas'* readers their medical experiences and physiological investigations. Among the regular contributors to the biological sciences were Dr. Jesús Celis and Dr. Pablo Anido.

Profound studies in business and economics were made public through the *Unitas* by Jacinto Kamantigue, Macario Landicho, Pedro Rivera, Bibiano Meer and many others.

Final mention should be made of the important linguistic problems frequently discussed in the *Unitas* by the Alveros and the Panganibans.

While providing for the universal integration of human knowledge, the traditional policy of the *Unitas* made it impossible to meet the requirements of the various specialized sciences and courses offered by the University. It is for this reason that today, the University of Santo Tomas has nineteen different publications which aim to complete



the academic education and scientific training of students in the different colleges and faculties.

But the *Unitas* has still a mission to fulfill. Inspired by the growing interest of the public over the contemporary socio-cultural issues and the fabulous advances made in science, *Unitas* must move on adapting itself to new circumstances and to the imperative progress of the nation.

It is of interest to note that the present format of the *Unitas* is not an innovation but rather a regression to its initial dimensions as it came out for the first time in 1922 up to Volume 17 in 1938.

*Unitas* shall reflect in the issues to come the intensive academic life of this University — the first in the Orient, and the progress of the Philippines as a whole.

The long and fruitful life of this distinctive journal reflects greater significance today seen in the light of the 7th Golden Jubilee celebration of this University. Founded three-hundred-and-fifty years ago in 1611, the University of Santo Tomas is a fountain for all those who thirst for knowledge and wisdom.

— The Editor

*Unitas*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1961, pp. 1-4.

## ANOTHER CHAPTER: DECEMBER 1971

The *Unitas*, adapting new editorial direction, has an expanded book review section. The current cultural awakening and intellectual stirrings are dramatized by new titles being published by Filipino authors. We hope to keep you in stride with this emerging body of thoughts and ideas of Filipino scholars through this revitalized Book Review Section. In the coming issues we intend to introduce more innovations in line with the signs of our times and the changing life of the academe. (*In This Issue*, December 1971)

The growing cult of catering to the mass audience that publications and other forms of mass media have joined to attain greater number of readers — and subscribers — may have an intellectually unhealthy effect. It involves the danger of departing from the traditional norms of appealing to a specialized readership and going down to the often subterranean level of the so-called average readers. We do not, however, seek to serve only the intellectual specialist. *Unitas* will try to maintain a happy medium between unproductive generalizations and elitist specialization. As much as possible what we hope to project is a happy balance of articles that appeal several notches above the level of popular and the common, yet responsive enough to relate themselves to the changes and innovations around us.

The section, Notes and Comments, will, from now on, be integrated in the *Dialogue with the Times*; issues and topics of contemporary significance will be analyzed from different angles to achieve a real cross-fertilization of ideas; moreover, this section will include summary reports of important congresses, seminars, and conferences.

With the encouraging support from our readers and subscribers, we hope to

continue making the *Unitas*, through *Articles and Studies*, *Dialogue with the Times*, and *Book Reviews*, a representative publication which mainly focuses on the Arts and Sciences. (*In This Issue*, March 1972)

As we lend a helping hand to Philippine book publishing, which really deserves all the assistance it can get, this issue has twelve book reviews by scholars and experts whose interest and professional skills are relevant to the subject touched upon by the volumes. (*In This Issue*, December 1972)

For a vibrant medium to keep in touch with the controversial issues of our times, it has to be contemporary in perspective. This is the overriding motivation which made us introduce a special section, "Dialogue with the Times," started only a year ago. Its objective is to generate exchange on major issues which affect our social, economic, and political environment. (*In This Issue*, March 1973)

We have always taken an editorial posture that stresses balance in the themes discussed in our articles. This is rooted in our belief that a responsive scholarly journal caters to varying interdisciplinary motives. (*In This Issue*, March 1974)

Since we began our editorship of *Unitas* four years ago, we have earnestly tried to publish issues on a variety of important topics. Aiming at bridging scholarship and relevance, we came out with ordinary and special issues. The ordinary issue contained a few researched writings for our Articles and Studies Section, some comments on current cultural events for the section Dialogue with the Times, and a good number of informative and critical reviews for the Book Review Section.

The special issue centered on a particular subject or on various topics of current interest. Yearly, we have published a special issue containing the written lectures of the UST Cultural Series, on major historical, political, economic, social and religious events of the country and the world. (*In This Issue*, June 1975)

Starting with this issue, *Unitas* will have a new section, *The University Forum*, which will feature round table discussions among experts on currently debated and debatable topics. (*In This Issue*, December 1975)

Continuing a highly fruitful tradition, the 365-year old University of Santo Tomas organized last summer its 22nd Cultural Series to study the complicated issue of *Human Settlements*. This special double-issue of *Unitas* published the proceedings of the Series, adding to the lectures and panelists' reactions a section on Documentation.

Every year, for over two decades, *Unitas* has faithfully published in a special issue the written lectures of the UST Cultural Series, focussed on major historical, political, social or religious issues. Loyal to its objectives, the organizers of the Series consistently adhered to substance and relevance. Good examples - judging by the favorable reaction of our readers - were *The Drug-Abuse Problem* (September 1972); *Current Trends in Philippine Arts* (December 1973); *The Manipulation of Man in Christian Perspective* (June-September 1974); and *Dialogue with the Times* (September, 1975). (*In This Issue*, June-September 1976)

- The Editor



# The Allegory of the Billiken in Nick Joaquin's *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*

Capitalism as Religion in the Philippines under US Rule (1902-1946)<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

At the center of Philippine writer Nick Joaquin's masterpiece, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (published in 1961), is a series of dialogues and debates around an image worshipped by the central character, Connie Escobar. This image, as we discover, is a Billiken, which is a Buddha-like image that was largely responsible for inciting a doll craze in the United States towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. In this essay, I bring the history of this image to bear on an interpretation of Nick Joaquin's novel, which revolves around the author's diagnosis of the postwar Philippines. My analysis highlights Joaquin's threefold critique of capitalism, Christianity, and the state in their historical conjuncture; one that, paradoxically, coincides with the identification of the Philippines as an independent and national republic in 1946. By studying this critique, I show how the baroque ethos that drives much of Joaquin's writing features a poetic and political project that involves the dismantling, disentanglement, and disengagement of each object of critique with the other two.

## Keywords

Billiken image, Capitalism, Christianity, Orientalism, Philippine nationalism, postwar Philippines, US Commonwealth period

Then I'm right and the world is wrong... Right to make you afraid; right to destroy your little faith, your bogus confidence; right to make you all aware of your lies with my lie!

Connie, in *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (270)<sup>2</sup>

At the center of Philippine writer Nick Joaquin's masterpiece, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* (published in 1961) is a series of dialogues and debates around an image worshipped by the central character, Connie Escobar. This image, as we discover, is a Billiken: an impish, perhaps mischievous looking figure, which was largely responsible for inciting a doll, ivory fetish, and good-luck charm craze in the United States towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century (see figures 1-3).<sup>3</sup> In our day, college sports fans may recognize the billiken as the mascot of St. Louis University (see figure 4).



Figure 1: Billiken doll. Downloaded from: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/doll-original-billiken-doll-horsmen-doll-co/aQHDCudAOQ9B9A>



Figure 2: Billiken ivories (photo courtesy of Joe Mabel, Creative Commons license cc by-SA 3.0: see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billiken#mediaviewer/File:MOHAL\\_Billikens\\_01.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billiken#mediaviewer/File:MOHAL_Billikens_01.jpg))



Figure 3: Billiken good luck charm, from the 1940 film "Waterloo Bridge" (1931: © Universal Pictures USA)





**Figure 4: Statue of St. Louis University billiken mascot (photo by Wilson Delgado 2004: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stu\\_billiken.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stu_billiken.jpg). Copyright public domain)**

The inventor's source of inspiration is unmistakable. At a glance, one might easily confuse it with a Chinese Laughing Buddha, if a somewhat overly caricatured, elfish-looking one: a parody of Orientalia for American consumers, invented and consumed in the age of US World's Fairs held in various cities across the country during the first decade of the twentieth century (see Kanesaka Kalnay, "The Billiken Doll's Racist History").<sup>4</sup>

Transplanted to the Philippines during the years of US rule, however, the relationship between the sign and its antecedent become lost, enigmatic. Not coincidentally, this murkiness turns out to be one of Nick Joaquin's central themes in his diagnosis of colonial society and its aftermath. As the Philippines prepares to take its place among Asian countries as a new, fully fledged independent national republic, how independent, how national, and how republican can we understand it to be? Interestingly enough, these questions become aligned and expressed through the prism of the first qualifier: how *Asian*?

I begin this essay with the sign of the billiken in Nick Joaquin's novel because it deepens the ambiguities of the legacies of enlightenment and Orientalism in the politics of Philippine cultural identity, at the moment of the country's formal declaration of national independence (July 12, 1946). For the billiken not only signifies the grotesque phantasmagoria of Orientalism; but also its entanglement with the growth of consumer society in the Philippines during the four and a half decades of US colonial rule. In bringing to a close the half-century of *ilustrado* debates on the nature of Philippine culture under colonial rule, Joaquin pits the abstract and idealistic premises of both the enlightenment and pan-Asianist discourses against this emerging society, urging us to reflect on their usefulness or obsolescence.<sup>5</sup> As I will argue, Joaquin's invocation of the Orient and the discourse of Orientalism through the figure of the billiken allows us to recognize and reevaluate the colonial origins of the idea of Asia—Asia as an idea, perhaps too an ideology, that was fashioned as much by Western thinkers as by Eastern.<sup>6</sup> And to what degree would Philippine “liberation” from both US and Japanese rule restage a past history of unfinished revolution?

## I.

The year is 1948. We first encounter the Billiken in Joaquin's novel as an idol ensconced in Binondo, Manila's Chinatown, where Connie brings dolls to the Billiken as a strange, propitiatory offering. As the narrative weaves in and out of flashbacks of Connie's childhood, her family's origins, and her unexpected arrival in Hong Kong two years after the formal declaration of



Philippine independence by the United States (in 1946), we come to understand Connie's devotion to this pagan idol as tied to her conviction that she has two navels. Both are symptoms of a delirium brought on by a series of traumas that refer at once to Connie's past and to the Philippines as a nation born twice: the first time in 1896, when the Philippine revolution led to the declaration of the short-lived first Philippine Republic; and the second time in 1946, when the United States "granted" the Philippines formal independence after the Japanese surrender to the US in the Pacific War. But it is Connie's devotion to the carnival god she calls Billiken that endows her delirium of possessing two navels with a seemingly diabolical intention. Her strange piety signifies not only her apostasy from the Church, which serves as the primary point of religious reference for the majority population; but also her fidelity to a pagan idol whose location in Binondo implies a sinister Asian origin.

An understanding of Connie's devotion to the Billiken takes the reader into the dark heart of the protagonist's trauma, which entails a brief summary of the novel. It begins in Hong Kong (2 years after the end of the Pacific War and the declaration of Philippine independence). Connie, the daughter of an aristocratic family, has fled from Manila to Hong Kong in search of a certain Pepe Monson. Pepe belongs to a community of diasporic Filipinos there, where the revolutionary government during the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of the Philippine revolution was exiled after their initial defeat in 1897 by Spanish forces (see figure 5). While most returned to the Philippines in the renewal of hostilities by the Philippine Revolution against the Spanish government (and later, the United States), Hong Kong had already become a place of refuge and resettlement for Filipino veterans. Many leaders sought refuge in Hong Kong again, after the defeat of Filipino revolutionary troops by the US government in 1899.



Figure 5: Hong Kong Revolutionary junta in exile (US National Archives, 391-PI-34)

Pepe's father, a former general of the 1898 Philippine war against the Americans, has spent his life in exile in Hong Kong, anticipating his eventual return to the homeland when it finally achieved independence.<sup>7</sup> After only a brief visit to his native land after Philippine independence in 1946, however, Pepe's father returns to Hong Kong, a bitter and broken man, with the conviction that the bright promise of Philippine independence has gone terribly wrong (67-74). His melancholy disturbs and perplexes Pepe and his brother (Father) Tony, who grew up under the oscillating hopes and fears of their father for the country's independence. This hope ties them to a country they have never visited while also endowing their lives in Hong Kong with a perpetually transient, displaced sense of belonging. Indeed, Joaquin's portrayal of this conundrum anticipates the experience of many emigres and their children today, whether these children of the diaspora are raised in the US, Canada, or England: anywhere that Filipino professionals have opted to settle and plant new roots.<sup>8</sup>

Connie seeks out Pepe under the pretext that, as a horse doctor, Pepe might know something about the anatomy of beasts and monsters, and

might therefore help her understand why she was born with two navels.<sup>9</sup> As readers we are led to observe Connie's constant state of distress and anxiety, the roots of which take us back in time through the history of her family from the US takeover in 1899 to the end of the Pacific war (WWII). Along the way, we learn about the attrition and withering away of the revolution's erstwhile leaders and poets, who become supplanted by a generation of compromised intellectuals and crass opportunists. Joaquin portrays the leadership of this generation in a rather harsh light: characters like Señora Concha Vidal and her first husband either spent their lives justifying their resignation to the Philippines' colonial status; or cynically exploiting the inequalities of colonial rule to line their pockets and build their fiefdoms. Indeed, Connie's father turns out to represent both extremes: he begins as a soldier in the revolution but abandons his patriotic ideals in order to become a doctor who performs abortions for the young women of aristocratic families (91). Moreover, he acquires a reputation for extracting from these women sexual favors. Connie's father later becomes a senator under the Philippine Commonwealth, where he exploits his public office and public funds for private gain.

As a child, Connie takes refuge from the negligence of her parents by retreating into a fantasy world in which her only companions are a doll and the squat, smiling, Buddha-like image of the Billiken in her backyard. This Billiken, the narrator informs us, was rescued from a carnival that was held annually during the period of US colonialism. As Connie grows up, however, she is gradually brought into the world of her mother: the aging beauty Concha, whose first husband Esteban Borromeo lived and died as a poet believing in the future of Philippine independence (167-178). Stripped of her illusions, which mirrored the hopes and aspirations of her generation, Concha eventually marries Connie's father out of desperation. When Connie herself comes of age, she marries one of her mother's friends, a feudal baron from the South named Macho. A year into their marriage, however, Connie discovers that her husband was, and in an emotional sense remains, her mother's lover (94-96).

Summarizing the plots of novels is always an unpleasant task: I do so only to trace the roots of Connie's state of emotional and historical trauma. Joaquin allows us to read Connie's life as simultaneously a bildungsroman of a child growing up in the US-sponsored Philippine Commonwealth and an allegory of Philippine history. Connie grows up the child of a traitor to the ideal of Philippine independence; and later experiences the double betrayal of her husband and her mother, who have together implicated Connie in the perpetuation of their own infidelity.<sup>10</sup> It is during this period of crisis that Connie returns to her parents' house after 1945, which has been destroyed in the US firebombing of Manila (246-252). Sifting through the ruins, she finds her Billiken with two bullet-holes in its great belly. She rents a chapel in Binondo's Chinatown and places the statue there, where she begins to bring it doll offerings and burn joss sticks as a form of reverence (57).

## II.

What do we know of this Billiken: this carnival god and the cult that Connie creates around it? Unbeknownst to Connie (but probably known by the author), the Billiken does not originate in the mystical pagan Orient, but paradoxically in the US. It was patented by a certain Florence Pretz of Kansas City, Missouri, in 1908.<sup>11</sup> While the significance of its name to its creator remains shrouded in mystery, one cannot overlook the coincidence between the doll's invention and the election of William Howard "Billy" Taft to the US presidency that same year (figure 6). Not coincidentally, Billy Taft also served as the first US governor-general of the colonial government in the Philippines, when military rule ceded to a civil colonial order. The association between the Billiken and President Taft was certainly clear to the dollmakers and manufacturers who took advantage of the Billiken image's immense popularity by plagiarizing it: one variation of the Billiken was thus spelled "Billy Can."



Figure 6: President William Howard Taft riding a carabao in 1904 (photo courtesy of: [http://www.reddit.com/r/HistoryPorn/comments/1fk73r/william\\_howard\\_taft\\_riding\\_a\\_carabao\\_xpost\\_from/](http://www.reddit.com/r/HistoryPorn/comments/1fk73r/william_howard_taft_riding_a_carabao_xpost_from/))

Similar to the “Teddy bear” invented and patented during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, then, the Billiken paid homage to the head of state by paradoxically reducing him to a cute and harmless doll for children. Unlike the teddy bear, however, the Billiken incited a doll craze that swept the country between 1909 and 1912, involving the skyrocketing of doll sales and the expansion of doll manufacture in the US to an unprecedented scale. “The doll was a hit without parallel in the toy trade,” writes US cultural historian William Leach, and it appeared on display “in hotels, in restaurants, and department stores, and in homes throughout America... [F]or the first time, Americans began to spend millions on toys and playthings” (Leach, 230).

Leach ascribes this phenomenon of doll craze to the transformation of popular religion in the US at the turn of the century, in which the interpenetration of big business and the government led to the creation of civic institutions of social welfare like the YMCA / YWCA, Christian Youth



Organizations, and the Salvation Army. What is significant about Leach's analysis, however, is the way he shows how the merger of public and private interests represented in these institutions also promoted the development of a uniquely American ethos. This ethos freely conflated the accumulation of wealth by capitalism with an abstract sense of religious spirituality, without firm grounding in the historical development of the world religions from which that religious sentiment was originally derived. It was in the US, Leach argues, where Christian charity and capitalist profit found their perfect marriage, to the degree that it became possible to identify one wholly in terms of the other. In this milieu, popular religiosity manifested itself in the search and consumption of mind cures, in investment and involvement in civic charity institutions, and in the disintegration of religious belief into a general theosophical understanding of the spiritual mysteries. Certainly, the US world fair expositions contributed to this dissolution, insofar as it brought the comparative knowledge of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and the myriad variety of the religions of indigenous peoples throughout the world, to the ordinary American.<sup>12</sup> In this environment the Billiken found its calling. For, along with a slew of other good luck charms, "rabbit's feet," and cute household deities, possession of a Billiken promised good luck, or the eventual providence of "things as they ought to be." As the image of the Billiken token illustrates, possession of the Billiken works "like money" while maintaining a quasi-sacred or non-monetary value (see figures 7 and 8).



Figures 7 and 8: The main face of this pocket piece reads “THE GOD OF THINGS AS THEY OUGHT TO BE,” along with the 1908 copyright; the reverse side reads: “GOOD LUCK: I am the God of the Chinese / So always keep me near / Misfortune’s frown will disappear / At one flash from my eye / Be sure that I am on the spot / When projects you begin / I am the god of luckiness / My name is Billiken.” Image downloaded from: <http://www.churchofgoodluck.com/Billiken.html> (last accessed 6/30/10)

The Billiken thus marks the threshold of a transformation in American popular religiosity: a form of religiosity freed from traditional institutions of piety and thereby disposed to invest in civic and political institutions at the turn of the century. In fact, one of the most important manifestations of this secularized religious sentiment was the providential characterization of US imperialism, which led to the US takeover of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Cuba (the latter *de facto* rather than *de jure*).<sup>13</sup> A speech by Indiana State Senator Albert J. Beveridge demonstrates this identification perfectly. Speaking in September 1898, with the future of US policy toward the Philippines still uncertain, Beveridge intones the following: “It is a mighty people that He has planted on this soil,” and continues:

...a people imperial by virtue of their power, by right of their institutions, by authority of their Heaven-directed purposes—the propagandists and not the misers of liberty. It is a glorious history our God has bestowed upon His chosen people: a history heroic with our faith in our mission and our future; a history of statesmen who flung the boundaries of the Republic out into unexplored lands and savage wilderness...a history divinely logical, in the process of whose tremendous reasoning we find ourselves today.<sup>14</sup>

In Beveridge's speech, the role of divine providence becomes inseparable from territorial expansion, international defense against foreign invasion, the securing of overseas consumer markets and resources, and even the banning of silver as a form of monetary currency (which unfairly fixed the market of Latin American goods to the US monetary standard of value).<sup>15</sup> "Have we no mission to perform, no duty to discharge to our fellow-man?," Beveridge inquires, "...And shall we reap the reward that waits on our discharge of our high duty; shall we occupy new markets for what our farmers raise, our factories make, our merchants sell—aye, and, please God, new markets for what our ships shall carry?" ("March of the Flag," web). The "secularization" of religious sentiment in the US corporation, the growth of consumer markets and technology, and the mass culture of world's fairs at the end of the nineteenth century, thus obscures the simultaneous and juxtaposed process by which these same entities and social forces become an object of cult veneration: the process by which capitalism becomes a kind of religion, facilitating the interchangeability of predestination and self-interest as they appear in the policy of US imperial expansion.<sup>16</sup> In Beveridge's imagination, the Philippines became one of many "lands of our duty and desire" (52).

The spiritualization or mystification of US market capitalism returns us to the peculiar nature of the Billiken's manufacture and circulation. Despite the inventor's clear references to one or several of the many manifestations of the Buddha (which Ms. Katz must have seen at one or more of the many US World's Fairs); and despite the invocation of William Howard Taft as America's current head of state, the Billiken object was clearly not "meant" to be revered as an image of worship or cult. On the contrary, as a commodity that does not even pretend to serve a practical use, its identity brazenly flaunts the triumph of commodification over any and every faith or world religion, just as American popular religiosity brazenly flaunted the middle classes' independence from any and every form of transcendence or promise of future salvation. As a recent writer proudly stated: "Billiken became the first *Patented God*" (*italics added*).<sup>17</sup> And yet, the nihilism that accompanies

the triumph of a “patented God” over all others paradoxically demands and exacts an even greater piety, and aspires to an even greater cultic status, than the religions it mercilessly destroys. This is, in fact what happened to the Billiken, which now boasts a church located in the small town of Wauconda, Illinois, as well as Osaka, Japan, and even Siberia (ibid.).

Walter Benjamin, following Marx’s insight into the commodity as fetish, observed how the destruction of religion under capitalist modernity became a faith unto itself.<sup>18</sup> This is precisely what the billiken makes manifest. In his brief essay “Capitalism as Religion,” Benjamin isolates four aspects of capitalism that transform it into a peculiar super-cult, “super” in the sense that it absorbs and overrides all others. The first is that it represents a faith without a theology or dogma beyond its own existence. The second is that it ceaselessly demands a celebration and profession of this faith: a permanent holiday that is also a permanent observance of the ecstasy of consumption. The third aspect is that it “makes guilt and debt pervasive.”<sup>19</sup> The guilt of having abolished all means of human transcendence forces the acolyte of capitalism to seek redemption in every nook and cranny of the universe; and to cynically conclude from every failure to find it a mere reaffirmation of our faith in nothingness. If we follow Benjamin’s lead regarding the transformation of capitalism into a new religion—a religion that zealously preached the negation of every form of transcendence before the act of consumption—we can see how the Billiken in Joaquin’s novel emblemizes this paradoxical cult without dogma: inspiring a strange piety that preaches nothing but fealty and indebtedness to the artificiality of our own projections, for their having saved us from having to hope for divine salvation. In contrast to hope, the Billiken’s task is to convince its believers that “life’s worth living / And that everything’s worthwhile.”<sup>20</sup>

### III.

The historical understanding of the Billiken provides us with a key to deciphering Joaquin’s interpretation of enlightenment and the Orientalist legacy in Philippine *ilustrado* thought.<sup>21</sup> On the surface, critics like E. San Juan have rightly pointed out that Connie’s devotion to the Billiken cult

dramatizes a larger theme to be found elsewhere in Joaquin's work: the Filipino/a's eternal struggle between a presumably pagan-inspired resignation to a divinely preordained Fate, on the one hand; and a(n equally presumed) Christian-inspired recognition of our ultimate "freedom" from fate.<sup>22</sup> This reading, however, only gets us so far; most notably, it omits the crucial historical context of the author as a child of the Philippine Commonwealth under US rule, which is essential to the understanding of the formal declaration of independence in 1946. Inserting this historical context allows us to see how Joaquin identifies the fatalism and the cynicism that corrupt all of the characters in the novel to some degree. This condition arises neither from an Orientalized understanding of Philippine values like *bahala na*; nor does it arise from the perceived exhaustion of Karmic rebirth in Eastern religions. In contrast to both, the fatalism and cynicism behind Connie's strange piety for the Billiken cult arises from *forty-six odd years of US colonial rule, which perverted and twisted every meaning of freedom and independence into its antithesis*. Under the promise of Philippine independence, the US strengthened and ramified all relations of colonial dependency; under the promise of eventual freedom, Filipinos became slavish consumers of market commodities, producing a derivative US culture that Joaquin elsewhere described as "Sajonismo."<sup>23</sup> In the same way that Rizal's dream of Filipino independence became twisted into a parody of freedom in Pardo de Tavera's reflections on "the Filipino soul," so too did the genuine trauma of Filipino defeat and surrender before US forces become perverted into grand phrases like "benevolent assimilation," "colonial democracy" and "Westernization."<sup>24</sup> One of the novel's characters correctly intuit the lie of Philippine independence after 1946 when he first arrives in Manila:

Paco sensed an unreality... One smiled and floated away, insulated from all the drab horror of inadequate reality by the ultra-perfect, colossal, stupendous, technicolored magnificence of the Great American Dream. But the strain showed in their faces...sweating from the violence of their exertions and from sheer terror of not being up-to-the-minute, of not making an impression, of not being able to do what everybody else was doing. So they jerked harder, and laughed more naughtily, and sweated agonized... (Joaquin, *Woman Who Had Two Navels*, 48).



The passage resonates strongly with the watercolor drawings sketched by the wartime-era painter Trudl, whose husband served as an Austrian diplomat in the Philippines during the 1940s (see figure 8). While Trudl captures the collective exuberance of Philippine liberation from Japanese rule in 1945, her watercolors also hint at a more disturbing aspect of that liberation. The shimmering figures appear to lose all sense of form: an aesthetic representation that can be read as the complete surrender of Filipinos to the romance of having been “saved” by the same US forces that were responsible for the destruction of Manila by firebombing. Their reflections, in turn, would anticipate works like Kerima Polotan’s *Hand of the Enemy* as well as the essays of Renato Constantino.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 9: Trudl’s depiction of a dance hall after the Philippine “liberation” from Japanese rule by US forces (copyright pending)

In the simultaneously ecstatic and catastrophic unreality of the postwar Philippines, Connie begins to search for her “first” origin, which takes her back to the institution of hypocrisy at all levels of state and society with the US takeover of the Philippines. On one level, her faith in Billiken can be

read as a critique of the previous generation's failure to establish their "cult" of national independence, i.e., to bequeath to her the correct knowledge of her origins and a memory of the values that accompanied that knowledge. Speaking to this critique, Joaquin writes of the revolutionary generation:

In two swift decades they would find themselves obsolete—discarded and displaced persons gathering in each other's parlors to revile the present and regret the past. The future of which they had so happily babbled had turned into a dead end. They were to have no continuation; a breed and a history stops abruptly with them (*Woman*, 170).

This critique of the revolutionary generation, however, finds its counterpart in the equal failure of Connie, Paco, Tony and Pepe Monson's generation to preserve the past and bring it up to date with the present. In the following passage, Pepe Monson reflects on his father's disillusion with the national project post-liberation:

[Pepe] felt the emptiness of his father's silence. In their different ways they had all betrayed and forsaken the old man... They had apostatized, leaving the old man to carry on his cult alone. Now the cult had abruptly come to an end; the candles had all been extinguished and removed. There was only a vacant darkness, a vacant silence (68).

The billiken, then, stands between and sublates two tragedies and two corresponding critiques: the tragedy of failing to live up to the revolutionary dream by venerating its memory; and the tragedy of allowing a US caricature of the Orient, and the culture of commodity fetishism more broadly, to install itself as an object of cult adoration.<sup>26</sup> Its sinister, demonic aspect, in other words, arises from Connie's decision to worship it as an idol. In doing so, she scandalizes those around her by revealing their complicity in the hypocrisy of colonial society. By worshipping a "false god," she forces both the revolutionary generation and its aborted progeny to reflect on both the forgotten cult of revolutionary forefathers and the omnipresent cult of commodities and commodification.

Not coincidentally, it is a priest who most strongly reacts to Connie's cult of devotion to the Billiken; for the central obsession of colonial Christianity for the better part of three centuries in the Philippines as well as the Americas had been the extirpation of so-called idolatry. In this case, perhaps without realizing it, this priest is in fact responding to the US colonial legacy:

-- [Priest]: [P]eople like you are the devil's fifth-columnists: you make us not sure. You spread fear and distrust until we begin to doubt our very senses, until we begin to believe in a world where people have two navels, a world where it is always Saturday night and carnival time.... You come creeping among us, whispering: *Come to our Sabbath, come to our carnival.... Abandon the effort, relax, let everything come to a stop....*"

...

--[Connie]: Surely, one doesn't merit (a witch's) burning for telling a silly lie, for keeping a silly doll?

-- [Priest]: And (witches) too, began, just as innocently: a silly little lie, a silly little doll. *But the lie becomes a fact; the doll grows a fist and becomes master.* Your Billiken has found you (Joaquin, *Woman* 267-68 *passim*. Italics added).

The white-robed priest identifies Connie's "idolatry" as an "obsession with evil" (266). But do his words not also describe the very message that the Billiken fetish preached to the American and Filipino publics at the turn of the twentieth century? For what other world does the commodity inaugurate, but one in which "it is always Saturday night and carnival time," provided that one enters into the ever-expanding circuit of commodity exchange and circulation? Following the same logic as the Billiken, the shibboleths of "US tutelage," and the "earned right to freedom" all begin as "silly little lies" that uphold forty-odd years of colonial dependency, interrupted only partially by the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. Point for point, our good priest sets out to denounce the blasphemy of Connie's false-god worship; yet ends up underlining the cultural devastation wrought by US colonial capitalism as religion in the image of the Billiken.

#### IV.

The US origins of Connie's "Chinese doll" or billiken redirect the debates on cultural identity to the very place nobody wants to look. At a time when former leaders of the Philippine revolution like Generals Emilio Aguinaldo and Artemio Ricarte were making their last, desperate pitch for relevance in a society that no longer recognized them; and younger leaders flirted with the idea of being Asian or "Oriental," few writers beyond Joaquin paused to reflect on what many Filipinos had actually become. The tragic dimension of Joaquin's novel arises from the painful reckoning of this legacy, which set the nation on a course toward a cultural schizophrenia that mirrors Connie's deliriums.

From this tragedy, however, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* also labors to imagine and stage a rescue from what Renato Constantino later critiqued as a postwar "society without purpose" (see Constantino, 11-30). Connie's ambiguous heroism, in this respect, stems from her determination to take the religion of colonial capitalism *seriously*: to the point of supplying the professed nihilism with a proper theology and dogma. If the revolutionary cry of independence found itself compromised and corrupted by years of colonial servitude under US imperialism; and if the radical notion of messianic freedom had found itself captured and prostituted by an Americanized, formless "spirit of capitalism"; then Connie's mission would proceed by taking seriously the diabolical machine that makes of freedom a fetish. She does this by eschewing both the cynicism of her father, which thrives on the illusory, "Sajonista" freedom possessed by the new elite; and the disenchanting freedom of her mother, expressed in her fatalism to blindly follow a sense of tradition in marriage while mocking it in her love affair with Macho. To the hypocrisy of her mother's piety, Connie opposes a sincere piety to the practice of hypocrisy. And to the apostasy of her father from the revolutionary dream, and the ensuing legacy of secret guilt it bestows, Connie opposes a blind faith in the power of apostasy.

Finally, to the Orientalization of Philippine culture through the cult of the Billiken, Joaquin juxtaposes the survival of the revolutionary dream of independence through the experience of the Hong Kong emigres, and more

broadly the forces of exile and diaspora.<sup>27</sup> As a man who has spent his entire life looking at the past and regretting his historical oblivion, Doctor Monson's encounter with Connie, in which she confesses to him as she would a spiritual minister, coincides with a vision in which he suddenly glimpses the past looking "back" at him: staking its truth-value on his capacity to interpret and translate the past to the younger generation (Joaquin, *Woman* 302-306).<sup>28</sup> Their encounter allows for an ambiguous, new rite to emerge: a confession, which allows each character to confront the historical shortcomings of their respective generations, and forgive:

Kneeling down, he laid a hand on the girl's head, praying to be joined to her grief, yearning to be part of her pain. She felt his hand blessing her and knelt up and crept to his breast and he flung his arms around her and embraced her, embracing in her the grief of all the generations he had failed to know.... Clapsed in each other's arms, in a foreign land, the young girl and the old man mutely implored each other's forgiveness (306).

It is through the enactment of a rite that has been emancipated from the institution of the Catholic church that Doctor Monson finds himself able to not only reverse the experience of colonial disenchantment, but also re-evaluate the historical fate of his exile as a *decision* and *necessity* for future generations: "exile had, after all, been more than a vain gesture...his task had not ended with that other death in the pinewoods...he had stood on guard, all these years, as on the mountain pass, while something precious was carried to safety.... Here he was, home at last" (331-332). As Doctor Monson closes the revolutionary generation's life-chapter in diaspora, he absolves and sets free the woman who had two navels, Connie, to begin *another* diaspora on the Asian frontier of the new Philippine Republic.

## V.

As an allegory of "Sajonismo" disguised as Asia, the billiken embodies the irreconcilable and opposed trajectories of Philippine cultural identity in the aftermath of the Pacific War. The contrasting duality of the billiken in many ways reflects the name of its principal acolyte, Connie—a name that refers at once to "con," or deception, and "Constance," or faith keeper. In keeping



faith in the billiken as a “con,” the protagonist disrupts all the stable categories of West and East, insider and outsider, tradition and modernity, the Philippines and Hong Kong. Conversely, however, Joaquin also encourages us to read this monstrosity against the grain: to recognize Connie as vindicated in her attempt to unmask the faithless “faith keepers” of Philippine tradition and modernity (represented by her parents) and escape the living hell they had destined for her.

Scholars who seek in Joaquin’s masterpiece a “national allegory” or “foundational fiction” that provides a utopian vision for the fledgling Philippine republic in the age of decolonization must have felt disappointed and betrayed.<sup>29</sup> Far from representing a paragon of virtue and sacrifice, Connie pursues a line of deterritorialized flight across the cultural geography of the Philippine Commonwealth: disavowing her parents and husband, not to mention breaking up her lover Paco’s marriage and the bonds of ethnic community among the Hong Kong émigré community. Instead of settling or sacrificing herself for the newly independent Philippine republic, she abandons it, and escapes with Paco to Macao: a satellite cosmopolitan center in Southeast Asia where Paco can pursue his career as a jazz musician. Instead of surrendering to the telluric and nostalgic call of the native land, the couple cuts themselves adrift, to explore the contact and entanglements of cultures across oceans and lands. Even more scandalously, contrary to the revolutionary generation’s condemnation of Connie’s flight, Joaquin aims to show that her action falls in line with the principle of the revolution from the very beginning. That principle was to effect a radical rupture with the colonial past, even as that past worked to reinvent itself as some bright and necessary future. Having secured this truth, the elder Doctor Monson pronounces *Nunc dimittis*, from the hymn or Canticle of Simeon, in which the biblical character Simeon sees the messiah in the temple of Jerusalem and asks for permission to die: “Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace” [Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word].<sup>30</sup> By elevating Connie to inheritor of the revolutionary legacy, Joaquin defies the colonial institutions that the revolution had inadvertently engendered or retrenched: a predatory elite, a sycophantic religion.

The dissonant chord that Joaquin's final message strikes to any present or future construction of memory of the Philippine Revolution and its unexpected twin, the Philippine Commonwealth, makes it all the more striking that he was elevated to the canon of Philippine National Artists during the time of President Marcos (1976). Perhaps if the President and First Lady had read *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, they might have thought twice about the author's nomination. But then again, one of the surest ways of disarming a writer is their canonization. In 1956, while Nick Joaquin was writing his novel, the Philippine Congress passed a bill mandating all educational institutions to offer courses on the anticlerical nineteenth-century writer and advocate of colonial reform, José Rizal. Rizal's novels identified the monastic religious Orders as the veritable cornerstone of colonial rule in their impunity, unaccountability, exploitation, and hypocrisy. Copies of his books were burned and forbidden, and Rizal himself was excommunicated. Fifty years later, the Philippine government officially recognized Rizal as the nation's most prominent patriot and hero. Yet it did so by permitting the publication and teaching of "expurgated editions" of his novels in secondary education.<sup>31</sup> In many versions of the expurgated editions, censors redacted any criticism pertaining to Catholic theology, pastoral administration, or the religious Orders.

One hundred and twenty years after Rizal's martyrdom, the Philippines has the third largest population that professes the Roman Catholic religion in the world; and boasts being the largest Christian nation in Asia.

## Notes

1. The phrase “Capitalism As Religion” was the title of an essay by Walter Benjamin: see *Selected Writings*, v. 1: 1913-1926, 288-291.
2. Nick Joaquin, *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*. Originally published in 1961.
3. For a history of the billiken doll against the historical background of the US at the turn of the twentieth century, see William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, 230-247 *passim*. See also Erica Kanesaka Kalnay, “The Billiken Doll’s Racist History,” web.
4. In *The Woman Who Had Two Navels*, Joaquin himself describes the billiken as “squatting like a buddha” (57).
5. On the influence of pan-Asianist discourses on Philippine politics in this period, see the collection of essays in Eliseo Quirino and Vicente Hilario, eds., *Thinking for Ourselves: A Collection of Representative Filipino Essays*.
6. This is of course the central thesis of Edward Said, *Orientalism*. See also Wang Hui, “The politics of imagining Asia: a genealogical analysis,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8:1 (2007), 1-33.
7. Like Pepe, Nick Joaquin’s father Leocadio also fought in the Philippine Revolution as a colonel in the revolutionary army.
8. Yen Le Espiritu has analyzed the condition of “differential inclusion” among children of the Filipino diaspora in the US: see *Home Bound: Filipino-American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries*. For other insightful discussions of Filipino diaspora, see Rick Bonus, *Locating Filipino-Americans: Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space*; and Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller, and Christina Szanton-Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States*.
9. The reference to Connie as a monster also occurs throughout the novel: cf. for example 236 and 258. But the billiken is also described as such (264).
10. Indeed, these conflicting historical legacies manifest themselves on the very level of her name, Constance for fidelity, which later takes on the Americanized form “Connie” as a homonym for “con” or swindle.
11. For a brief summary of this doll’s history and patent, see Leach, *Land of Desire*, 230.
12. On the impact of the World’s Fairs on US popular education and the imagination, see Robert Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*.
13. For an example of “divine guidance” in President William McKinley’s decision to seize possession of the Philippines and suppress the revolution taking place against Spain, see Brewer, 37 and 45.

14. See Albert Beveridge, "The March of the Flag," Modern History Sourcebook website (<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1898beveridge.asp>). Accessed 2/25/22.
15. One of the most vociferous and eloquent opponents of this US policy was Cuban national martyr José Martí: see his famous essay, "La conferencia monetaria de las Repúblicas de América," in *Obras completas* v. 6, 157-172.
16. See Walter Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion," 288-291. For an insightful discussion of the rise of the corporation in America, see Alan Trachtenberg's classic study, *The Incorporation of America*.
17. Cited in "Billiken History: In Search of the Billiken's Roots—the People Behind the Throne," Church of Good Luck, web.
18. "As against this, the commodity-form," Marx writes, "and the value-relation of the products of labour, within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation, between men, themselves, which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations, both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is, therefore, inseparable from the production of commodities" (*Capital*, 165). Originally published in 1867.
19. Benjamin elsewhere notes, in his study of Franz Kafka, that the German word for guilt and debt are the same (*schuld*). See *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, xx.
20. At the 1909 Alaskan-Yukon Pacific world exposition held in Seattle, Washington, the second stanza of the card that accompanied the purchase of a Billiken figurine reads as follows: "I am the God of Happiness, / I simply make you smile / I prove that life's worth living / And that everything's worthwhile; / I force the failure to his feet / And make the growler grin, / I am the god of Happiness / My name is Billiken." Image downloaded from "Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition (1909): Pay Streak Amusements" website, History Link.org (web).
21. For a fuller account of this tradition in ilustrado thought see Resil Mojares, *Brains of the Nation*; Megan Thomas, *Orientalists, Propagandists, and Ilustrados*; and Blanco, "Orientations and Orientalizations of Philippine Nationalism in the Twentieth Century," in *Filipino Studies: Palimpsests of Nation and Diaspora*, eds. Martin Manalansan and Augusto Espiritu, 56-83.
22. See, for example, E. San Juan, *Subversions of Desire*.
23. See "The Filipino as 'Sajonista,'" in *Rediscovery: Essays on Philippine Life and Culture*, eds. Cynthia Nograles Lumbera and Teresita Gimenez Maceda, 219-235.

24. See Blanco, "Orientations."
25. Kerima Polotan, *Hand of the Enemy*. First published in 1962. Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness*. See in particular "Society Without Purpose," 11-30.
26. This point is, in fact, the central argument behind the publication of Philippine revolutionary General José Alejandrino's *La senda del sacrificio: Episodios y anécdotas de nuestras luchas por la libertad* [The Path of Sacrifice: Episodes and anecdotes of our struggles for freedom]. The work was republished, in English, as *The Price of Freedom* in 1949.
27. One may speculate that the character of Doctor Monson may have been inspired (at least in part) by the exiled Philippine revolutionary general Artemio Ricarte (known as "El Víbora"), about whom Joaquin wrote eloquently in his contribution to the cult of national heroes, *A Question of Heroes: essays in criticism on ten key figures of Philippine History*.
28. This theme runs unevenly throughout Joaquin's work. See, in particular, *Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* and the short stories "May Day Eve" and "Guardia de Honor," in *Tropical Gothic*. For an analysis of the play see John D. Blanco, "Baroque Modernity and the Colonial World," in *Kritika Kultura* 4 (web).
29. The idea of Third World novels as national allegories was first developed by Frederic Jameson: see "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," 65-88. Jameson's theory received a stinging rebuke by Aijaz Ahmad: see "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" 3-25. For a more nuanced treatment of novels as national allegories in 19<sup>th</sup> century Latin American fiction, see Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. More recently, Ruth Pison has discussed national allegories in the context of Martial Law fiction: see Pison, *Alternative Histories: Martial Law Novels as Counter-Memory*.
30. See "Nunc dimittis," Wikipedia entry (web).
31. Republic Act No. 1425—"An act to include in the curricula of all public and private schools, colleges and universities courses on the life, works and writings of José Rizal, particularly his novels *Noli me tangere* and *El filibusterismo*, authorizing the printing and distribution thereof, and for other purposes" (June 12, 1956), cited in the Chan Robles Virtual Law Library ("Philippine Laws, Statutes, & Codes") (web). For an excellent analysis of the Rizal Bill against the background of post-Independence literature, see Caroline Hau, *Necessary Fictions: Philippine Literature and the Nation, 1946-1980*, 1-47.

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# Violent Heat

## Apocalypse Now between (De-)Colonization and the Cold War

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### Abstract

In this article, I try to illuminate how decolonization and the Cold War intersect in the cases of film (making) and literature. In particular, I study heat as a metaphor and what it reveals about the nexus of decolonization and the Cold War. To this end, I scrutinize three “sites”: the film and film set of *Apocalypse Now* and the novel *The Sympathizer* which critically dissects both. The third “site” is *Heart of Darkness* which served as the basis for the script of *Apocalypse Now*.

I suggest, *Apocalypse Now* echoes a colonial medical history of “tropical neurasthenia,” relevant as a concept during the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), among other places. “Tropical neurasthenia” in the Philippines entailed the fear of the U.S. military that its soldiers would demise physically and mentally in the heat of Southeast Asia.

However, *Apocalypse Now* does not merely reproduce the discourse of “tropical neurasthenia”. Instead, the heat in the film brings to light the physical and moral decay of U.S. soldiers as the result of a violent U.S. empire. It is thus a tropicity which recognizes the colonized people’s gaze of the violent colonizer.

### Keywords

*Apocalypse Now*, *Heart of Darkness*, *The Sympathizer*, the Philippines, tropicity, tropical neurasthenia, decolonization, Cold War

In 1964 Richard Nixon, who had lost the U.S. presidential race against John F. Kennedy four years earlier, criticized the Democratic administration for its alleged passivity, saying, “The Cold War isn’t thawing; it is burning with a deadly heat” (Nixon 299). With this temperature-infused rhetoric, he not only cast doubt on the supposed “thawing” of frozen diplomatic relations between East and West, but also questioned the “cold” stalemate between the two power blocs and fueled the conflict with his language. The extent to which Nixon backed up his words with action has since come to light: in 1968, as a presidential candidate, he sabotaged the pacification efforts of incumbent President Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) in Vietnam (Farell). LBJ, for his part, had contributed massively to the military conflict in Southeast Asia: in 1964 and 1965, he ordered air strikes against North Vietnam and sent U.S. ground troops to South Vietnam, lest Vietnam, like a falling domino, tip other countries in Asia into the “communist abyss” along with it (Lawrence).

This conflict in Southeast Asia is called the “Vietnam War” in the U.S. and the “American War” in Vietnam. In recent historiography it is named the “Second Indochina War,” to distinguish it from earlier and later conflicts and to make clear that the conflict area included Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (Lawrence 1).<sup>2</sup> The “Second Indochina War” represented one of the many theaters in the so-called Third World<sup>3</sup> where the logic of the Cold War perpetuated pre-existing (decolonization) conflicts as “hot” wars. While the East-West conflict was perceived as a cold stalemate in the North, the aggression pent up under the frozen surface was discharged—as perceived—in these “hot” wars in the South. The structure of the systemic conflict allowed Europe to experience a period of peace while the Third World was beset by violence (McMahon 6-7; Westad; Greiner et al.). Between 1945 and 1990, approximately 200,000 people died in conflicts in the Global North compared to 19,800,000 people in the Global South (Painter 525). However, a simple causal relationship between the Cold War and hot wars in the Global South cannot be assumed. In addition to the bipolar logic of the Cold War, processes of decolonization and accompanying nationalist projects, local and regional conflicts, and rival population groups, who in turn used the logic of the systemic conflict to internationalize their disputes, were

decisive factors in these wars. The analytical simplification of the Moscow- and Washington-driven “proxy wars” in the Third World does not do justice to the complexity of the historical phenomena (McMahon 6-8).

With this article, I join the scholarly endeavor of thinking about the Cold War and (de)colonization together to understand conflicts in their global dimension. I specifically analyze what heat as a metaphor reveals about the intersection of decolonization and the Cold War. I will subject three interwoven “sites”—in the broadest sense—to a *close reading*: the film *Apocalypse Now* (directed by Francis Ford Coppola), the set in the Philippines where it was filmed, and the literary treatment of both the film and the events that took place on the film set in Viet Thanh Nguyen’s novel *The Sympathizer*. This article will come full circle when I integrate a discussion of Joseph Conrad, whose *Heart of Darkness* was the basis for the script of *Apocalypse Now*. The film *Apocalypse Now* lends itself to such a study because in it the phenomena of decolonization, the Cold War, nationalism, and the First and Third Worlds collide and interlock. In the film, heat is key to several central scenes. Thus, in addition to analyzing the metaphor of heat, I examine the sections of the film in which heat functions as an important character.

The following questions guide me in my analysis: How is the metaphor of heat mobilized in its linguistic, physiological, emotional, geographical, and climatological manifestations in the various locations? How are the different expressions of heat related? What historical contexts are brought into play when heat appears as a character? How can the Cold War, colonization, and decolonization be interpreted in terms of heat?

Although the “Vietnam War” in U.S. culture and society has been an object of study (for example, Milam), as has the “American War” in Vietnam (see, for example, Guan), the analysis of heat in the “Vietnam War” from a cultural-historical perspective represents a gap in the existing research. Anthropologist Michael Taussig laments the absence of heat in stories and films and analyzes heat in the reportage on the “Vietnam War” written by journalist Michael Herr, which the latter published in 1967. In this reportage, heat stands for sensory overload and violence (Taussig 32).

In the present text, heat also represents violence, but the metaphor extends far beyond this. I argue how heat in the film *Apocalypse Now* represents violence stemming from an imperial Cold War conflict fought out in the Southeast Asian jungle. The film echoes the colonial Western concept of tropicality, whereby the tropical landscape and the people in it are imagined as indolent and extreme in opposition to the temperate Westerners in their temperate environments, as David Arnold has argued (1996, 2000, 2005). Tropicality and the “tropics” that emerged 500 years ago but solidified in the 1700 hundreds as a Western fantasy was “a pathological space of degeneration” (Driver and Martins 3, Arnold, *The Problem of Nature* 143). What travel literature, art, and science had been to the making of tropicality envisioned through landscapes in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Driver and Martins 3-20), were literature, film, and photography in the case of the Vietnam War, and especially *Apocalypse Now* (Bowd and Clayton 637). *Apocalypse Now*, I claim, echoes tropicality, specifically an older colonial medical history of “tropical neurasthenia” which was apparent during the Philippine-American War (1899-1902) and afterwards. The discourse of “tropical neurasthenia” by which the U.S. military feared succumbing physically and mentally to the moist heat remained prevalent until the 1920s (W. Anderson 7, 77, 145). After U.S. scientists in the Philippines debunked the idea of environmental determinism in the tropics, they laid the groundwork for modern microbiological causes of illness that are intrinsic to bodies and behavior (W. Anderson 76, 82, 87, 103).

*Apocalypse Now* continues the discourse of tropicality within the context of colonizing “proxy wars” during the Cold War, by showing how U.S. soldiers descended into madness within the heat of the jungle, as I will show. I also claim, however, that tropicality illuminated through the prism of heat in the film complicates its concept because tropical heat exposes the physical and moral decay of the U.S. men as the result of a violent U.S. empire. It is thus a tropicality which recognizes the colonized people’s gaze of the violent colonizer. Heat, consequently, exposes Western tropicality as a projection of its own violent demise onto the colonized environment.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, I argue that there is a subversive element to the implementation of heat in



*Apocalypse Now*, which was not the case with early 20<sup>th</sup> century neurasthenia which lacked the notion of U.S. self-critique (W. Anderson 134). The imperial Cold Warrior in *Apocalypse Now* is no longer “unmarked and unseen” (Rafael 200) by Southeast Asian people. Instead, he (sic) has internalized their gaze.

That a mental impact remained (or surfaced) after the U.S. soldiers’ return home manifests itself in the shift in medicine towards Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD). The diagnosis PTSD is tightly linked to the Vietnam War (Golterman 197-212; Jones and Wessely 130-131; Crocq and Crocq 53). The experience of heat in the jungle and the concomitant mental and physical demise of Western white men thus could not be resolved by removing them from the tropical environment and returning them back home to the U.S. because this was the experience that was intrinsic to the U.S. empire<sup>5</sup>—as I argue from a cultural analytical perception. The Philippines and other cases show how tropicality remained a historical constant well beyond the 1920s and parallel to the development of current “modern” Western medicine (W. Anderson 76, 87; Weinstein and Ravi 2009).

### ***Apocalypse Now: The Self-Centered and Self-Critical Trauma***

The film *Apocalypse Now* has been instrumental in shaping the image of the “Vietnam War” among the U.S. public. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola and with a budget of approximately \$31.5 million (Chong 154), the film hit theaters in 1979, at a time when the war had been considered officially over by the U.S. for four years, but combat operations continued in Southeast Asia. The lavishly produced war drama, shot in the Philippines between 1976 and 1979, became a major commercial success in the United States (Gonzalez 144). In 2001, Francis Ford Coppola released an extended version called *Apocalypse Now Redux*, which is the basis for the analysis in this text.<sup>6</sup> The plot revolves around U.S. Army Captain Benjamin L. Willard, played by Martin Sheen, who is sent by his superiors on a secret mission to kill Colonel Walter E. Kurtz, portrayed by Marlon Brando, who is considered insane. Kurtz operates in Cambodia with his own army and independently of the U.S. military. The action of the film is meant to take place in 1969.<sup>7</sup>

Heat played a central role in the film's narrative, as well as on the film set itself. Right at the beginning of the film, it lures the viewer to the action: the camera's gaze turns to the edge of a rainforest. The sound of beating helicopter rotors announces the impending attack. Within seconds, the forest is engulfed in a napalm inferno. Jim Morrison of *The Doors* sings in a rapt but haunting voice that "this is the end". This single sequence of images immediately legitimizes the film's title: *Apocalypse Now*. The biblical quotation refers to the moral dimension of the "Vietnam War," which led to the end of humanness and thus of humankind. At the same time, the contemporary, nuclear interpretation of the apocalypse resonates in the film. In particular, the moral high ground—self-perceived and perceived abroad—of one of the countries that had defeated National Socialism burned in the heat of the fire: the United States now found itself in a war of a different kind than World War II. The focus on the Cold War in Washington, DC, as well as in Moscow<sup>8</sup> and Beijing,<sup>9</sup> obscured the fact that broad sections of the population in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were waging a nationalist, anti-colonial war of liberation, and thus their decolonization efforts vis-à-vis France, now directed against the United States, were appearing in a new incarnation (Lawrence 28).

In the opening scene of the film, images of the jungle on fire merge with shots of Willard lying on the bed of a hotel room, staring at the ceiling. There, fan blades mingle with helicopter rotors. In turn, flames appear on Willard's sweating face. While he smokes a cigarette, the viewer follows the camera deeper into the scorching heat of the inflamed rainforest. This superimposition of images insinuates an intermingling of Willard's memory of and fantasy about a real, hot conflict inscribed in his sweating body that is also being played out in his mind. Scantly clad, Willard at times stares into space and is enraptured, at times flailing and crying, at times motionless. Is he awake? Is he asleep? Is he conscious? This combines "real" scenes in the hotel with images of the jungle and fire, which emerge from the unconscious and reveal the abyss therein<sup>10</sup>. For Francis Ford Coppola, the psychoanalytical approach to the story was central: "Willard's journey up the river is also a journey into himself [...]" (qtd. in Cowie 35). One of the images of the jungle

shows Willard, daubed with camouflage paint and with a distorted look in his eyes, rising to commit the murder of Kurtz—which only becomes visible at the end of the film. The heat, the jungle, and the savage Willard can be seen as representations of Willard's unconscious and highlight his primitive side. The violence of the U.S. soldiers, long hidden from the U.S. public and only addressed later on in the course of the “Vietnam War,” becomes visible here. Willard's loss of control in the hot hotel room makes it clear that he is no longer “master in his own house” (Sigmund Freud: “Herr im eigenen Haus”), nor master of the situation. The U.S. had reached its limits in creating a liberal-democratic world order in the binary system conflict between liberal capitalist democracy and communism of the Cold War. The self-confidence of the U.S. soldiers of the “Greatest Generation” of World War II gives way to the insight the “Vietnam War Generation” gained over its own abysses and limitations.

This is also accompanied by the end of the fantasy of omnipotence and naiveté in the self-image of the young superpower. The reasons for the U.S. defeat are manifold and will not be discussed in detail here. It is obvious, however, that despite its technological superiority, the U.S. failed, among other things, because of the perseverance and military effort of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), operating out of Hanoi, and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (FNL),<sup>11</sup> which used guerrilla methods in the south against the South Vietnamese government (Republic of Vietnam, or RVN) in Saigon and its U.S. allies. Ultimately, the U.S. also crumbled under pressure from the communist Vietnamese population, whose will to resist the U.S. was steadfast and omnipresent. Furthermore, the difficult conditions in the rainforest, and not least the heat, posed great challenges to the U.S. soldiers (Lawrence 107).

In the song *The End*, which plays during to the opening scenes of *Apocalypse Now*, Jim Morrison refers to Sigmund Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, which Freud describes as an elemental emotional phase in a boy's childhood, and which encompasses rivalry with and fear of the father—and in the case of the United States, many of the fathers of the generation fighting in Vietnam had come home victorious from World War II.

Defeat in the “Vietnam War” threatened the masculinity of Willard’s generation, which had already been considered endangered since the 1950s. Experts warned against too much mother love (known as “momism”), which would prevent the development of a “healthy” masculinity in sons (Vicedo 236-237). Oedipus is also referenced in the film’s conclusion when Willard murders the father figure Kurtz. The pain of the sweating Willard, naked at the end of the hotel scene, meanwhile, is “chauvinistic” (Tomasulo 151) because the “Vietnam War” is portrayed in the film as a U.S. and not a Southeast Asian trauma (Chong 29). Yet, there is a subversive layer to this post-“colonial breakdown” (W. Anderson 134), as the U.S. in the character of Willard is depicted as violent in the isolation of his room while facing himself in the mirror: The violence of the U.S. empire is self-inflicted and self-reflected.

The anxieties about masculinity in the context of heat that are visible in *Apocalypse Now* also point to older scientific-medical discourses that were virulent in the Philippine-American War (1899-1902). U.S. military surgeons employed social Darwinist reasoning to explain the high rate of illness among their soldiers. According to them, the climate in the Philippine archipelago was intolerable to the “Anglo-Saxon” man (W. Anderson 24-25). The “white constitution” would “degenerate in the tropics” if no hygienic measures were taken. According to military-scientific discourse, which also reflected nineteenth-century European colonial literature, “loss of virility,” “neurasthenia,” “melancholy,” and “insanity” could result from prolonged residence in hot climates (W. Anderson 40-41). In the face of this heat, the colonization of the Philippines risked failing, as one U.S. military captain wrote: “The Anglo-Saxon branch of the Teutonic stock is severely handicapped by nature in the struggle to colonize the tropics [...]” (Munson 861). Nevertheless, the colonization mission was not fundamentally questioned (W. Anderson 134). Until the 1920s, the nervous breakdowns of white U.S. Americans in the Philippines were still considered a biological reaction to the humidity and heat and diagnosed with the term “tropical neurasthenia.” Only later did Sigmund Freud, and thus psychodynamic explanatory models, enter colonial health discourses in the Philippines, albeit selectively (W. Anderson Chapter 5).<sup>12</sup> However, psychoanalysis also fed off the racial-co-

lonial discourses of contemporary, European high imperialism. In *Totem und Taboo* (Westerink), Freud had developed the category of the “primitive” to name the early and repressed stages of mental development, thereby reproducing the social Darwinist anthropological model of the “evolutionarily backward primitive” (Brickman 4, 52). In *Apocalypse Now*, the traces of “tropical neurasthenia” and colonial-inspired psychoanalysis are visible: the (white) U.S. Americans are in danger of going insane and losing their masculinity because of the hot, tropical environment, while a relapse into the infantile/primitive seems inevitable given the presence of postcolonial subjects, as will be pointed out later in the text.

However, the cinematically realized screenplay, written by Francis Ford Coppola and John Milius, simultaneously contains a subversive, and self-reflective anti-colonial critique as mentioned, also because the story is based on *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novella in which he denounces the brutality in King Leopold II’s “Congo Free State” (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*).<sup>13</sup> Eleanor Coppola, who filmed her husband’s shooting with her own camera, accordingly called her documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker’s Apocalypse* (*Hearts of Darkness* 1991). The anti-colonial critique remains ambivalent in Francis Ford Coppola’s film, as it was in Conrad’s work. For although Conrad denounces the greed and violence of imperial Europe in Africa, his view of the continent remains colonial-racist in character (Simmons 20-21, 23-24). Francis Ford Coppola, for his part, understood himself to be making an anti-war film (Cowie 36) in which the Southeast Asian population waged an anti-colonial war of liberation first against France and then against the United States. In this way, Coppola interprets the “Vietnam War” as the “Second Indochina War” or as a continuation of Western imperial ambitions in the Global South (Dommann 20). At the same time, the film contains a colonial, asymmetrical view of Southeast Asian people because they are relegated to nameless, voiceless, and faceless extras (Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies* 65, 121).<sup>14</sup> Not least, the ambivalence of *Apocalypse Now* (Tomasulo) toward the independent Philippines is also evident in its asymmetrical co-production, or “exploitation cinema,” together with the Philippine film producer, Eddie Romero. “Exploitation

cinema” in the case of the Philippines refers to U.S. directors and producers having access to cheap Philippine production sites and labor, among other things (Barker and Imanjaya 234, 236, 238, 240).

This self-critical, anti-colonial/colonial ambivalence can be decoded using the motif of heat in *Apocalypse Now*: It represents, among other things, the imperial violence perpetrated (and experienced) by the United States and masculine vulnerability and fragility in the Cold War. This U.S. white male vulnerability would contribute to the establishing of diagnosis of PTSD by the early 1980s. At the same time, however, it also refers to older colonial discourses of the early 20th century about the “degeneration of white male bodies in the tropics.”<sup>15</sup> The gaze of the audiences exposed to *Apocalypse Now* and other Hollywood war films becomes that of the colonizer, colonized, and anti-colonial resistance. Hollywood war cinema, such as *Apocalypse Now*, colonizes and mainstreams the collective memories of the war in Southeast Asia while using the viewers’ gaze to render them complicit in the war crimes committed. Yet, as Jasmine Nadua Trice states, Filipino audiences can refer to Philippine references and depictions with laughter as a form of repudiation of this process (Solomon 25; Trice 992-993).

The heat in the film creates a “narrative effect” (Taussig 36-37) and is at the same time a subject with which the characters interact physically and mentally. The high temperature is also a constant companion for the soldiers. In the film, the heat merges with the elements of water, air, and earth, thereby reinforcing the impression of the heat’s omnipresence, as shown in the next sections.

The scenes that are discussed in the following take place on water. Here, the heat that can be measured climatologically, captured linguistically, and inscribed physiologically in the body embeds itself in the narrative. In the first example, Willard and his crew chug along on the Navy patrol boat to the mouth of the fictional Nung River, which he must go up to reach Kurtz. The officer steering the boat discusses with Willard the possible entry points into the river: “There’s about two points where we can draw enough water to get into the Nung River. They’re both hot; belong to Charlie” (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 21.45 min). The crew must therefore cross hot zones—i.e., dangerous



territory controlled by “Charlie,” as the U.S. forces disparagingly called the FNL. Willard doesn’t let this upset him; casually and with a cigarette hanging crookedly out of his mouth, he leans against the ship’s cabin and nonchalantly states: “Don’t worry about it.” That “coolness” is a misplaced emotional aggregate in these climes is suggested by Officer Phillips’s reply: “You know, I’ve pulled a few special ops in here. About six months ago, I took a man who was going past the bridge at Do Lung. He was regular army, too. I heard he shot himself in the head” (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 22.03 min). The dialogue echoes Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In it, the protagonist Charlie Marlow, who works for a Belgian trading company, is informed by the ship’s captain during a trip upstream on the Congo that another European passenger had recently committed suicide (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 17). The heat here thus signals the threat of violence and the present conflict.

More heat-on-water sequences follow. In several scenes from *Apocalypse Now*, Willard sets himself apart from the group on the deck to read Kurtz’s file. As he does so, the camera zooms in close on the heavily sweating Willard, creating intimacy. In one of these scenes (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 22.29 min), beads of sweat cover his bare torso; even wiping his forehead brings little relief. This connotes the inhospitable environment while suggesting that studying the files makes Willard sweat. His thoughts are heard on the voice-over: “I couldn’t believe they wanted this man dead. Third-generation West Point, top of his class... Korea, Airborne, about a thousand decorations, etc., etc.” (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 22.25 min). The camera looks over Willard’s shoulder, allowing the viewer to read along: “Master’s Degree, Harvard University, History (Thesis: ‘The Philippines [sic!] Insurrection: American Foreign Policy in Southeast Asia, 1898-1905’)” (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 22.39 min). Kurtz’s biography is deeply embedded in the U.S. empire and spans several generations. Like his father and grandfather, Kurtz graduated from the U.S. Army’s officer school and elite academy at West Point. Intellectually, too, Kurtz belongs to the *crème de la crème* of U.S. society, having studied at Harvard University, which is often referred to as an institution of global U.S. *soft power*. He devoted his thesis to the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), in which the Filipinos fought against U.S. colonization. In

this way, *Apocalypse Now* bridges the gap from anti-colonial Filipino resistance to anti-colonial Vietnamese resistance. This also makes apparent how “The U.S. bloody suppression of resistance by Filipinos, what has come to be known as the Philippine-American War, became a precursor of Vietnam War, the U.S. using similar tactics and strategies in both cases” (Tolentino 231). In 1969, Philippine activists demonstrated against the Vietnam War by bringing to the public’s attention that both the Philippine-American War and the Vietnam War were violent expressions of the U.S. empire. These ties between the Philippines and Vietnam through U.S. imperial reach also played out directly when Philippine army officers travelled per instruction of the U.S. and Philippine governments to South Vietnam in the 1950s to instruct soldiers of the Vietnamese Army in anti-communist counterinsurgency. The Filipino officers aimed to teach their Vietnamese colleagues the knowledge they had gained from successfully fighting the communist Hukbalahap (Huk) in the post-World War 2 period in Central Luzon. In general, the Philippines needed to serve the U.S. as a role model for democracies in Asia (Man 48-102, 128). These historical ties through empire are also subversively exposed in this film sequence, along with the price the U.S. must pay for it: one man’s flagship career in the empire leads to madness, is the message that resonates. At the same time, the very physical depiction of a white, sweaty man echoes U.S. colonial discourses of health. The colonial configuration of white masculinity, meanwhile, contains another component. The frontier in the West was closed when the Pacific Ocean was reached at the end of the 19th century, thus removing the (imagined) site where (white) U.S. Americans could demonstrate their independence, combativeness (against “Native Americans”), and self-reliance. The war in the Philippine archipelago opened a new frontier where colonial masculinity was fought for (Anderson 44). John F. Kennedy confronted the consumerist and potentially effeminate young men in the postwar period with the New Frontier, which was intended to explore the potential of society, economics, science, and technology. The disaster in Southeast Asia, for which Kennedy was partly responsible, can also be understood as an additional New Frontier, where young men were to demonstrate their mascu-

linity beyond the consumer society of the postwar period (Hoffman chapter 1; Watts chapter 9).

During another period of studying the files, a sweating Willard again sits on the deck of the River Patrol Boat. We can hear the U.S. military radio station carrying the weather service all the way into the rainforest: “Good morning, Vietnam. [...] It’s about eighty-two degrees in downtown Saigon right now, also very humid” (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 1.14.08 h). The bare torsos of two other crew members attest to the presence of heat outside the capital, which makes their bodies seem even more vulnerable. This time Willard reads an article written by Kurtz. In it, Kurtz writes of the “Vietnam War,” “As long as cold beer, hot food, rock and roll, and all other amenities remain the expected norm, our conduct of the war will gain only impotence. We need fewer men and better. If they were committed, this war could be won [...]” (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 1.15.49 h). This passage highlights U.S. postwar anxieties about insufficient virility and criticisms of consumer orientation and “outward-oriented” conformity among young U.S. Americans at the expense of an “inward-oriented” “commitment” (Riesman et al.).

But the heat also comes from the air: the greatest narrative and visual effect in the film is achieved by the use of incendiary bombs, above all the napalm bombs. The metaphorical heat of the violent conflict is also found in the technological heat of war. The technological heat, which the U.S. pilots drop over the rainforest in the form of napalm bombs, appears, apart from the opening sequence, in another scene that went down in film history: Lieutenant Colonel Bill Kilgore (Robert Duvall) orders an attack on a village and has Richard Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” played from the loudspeakers. The helicopters glide in aestheticized form over the sea and rainforest to the bustling FNL village, which is subsequently annihilated with the gasoline-based incendiary napalm and other weapons. This Wagnerian scene quotes D. W. Griffith’s infamous Civil War and Reconstruction drama *Birth of a Nation* (Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies* 117), in which Ku Klux Klan horsemen are staged as heroes and musically accompanied by the *Ride of the Valkyries*. Kilgore insults the defending Vietnamese as “savages” during the

attack (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 44.28 min). The U.S. empire thus contains a racist component that is added to the fire of the napalm.

Colonial psychological discourses also flow into the final sequences of the film, which I analyze under the aspect of the heat on earth, after having delineated the heat on the water and in the air (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 2.25.51 h): a decimated crew reaches Kurtz's hideout in the depths of the Cambodian jungle, which is guarded by indigenous Montagnards.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the troop members decaying and dying, they are also psychologically unraveling. The heat takes the form of stifling humidity, which manifests itself in Willard's soaking wet T-shirt and dripping hair. Finally, Willard emerges at the deepest point of his journey into the unconscious, which simultaneously involves an (evolutionary) regression into childlike, "primitive" realms, symbolized by the Montagnards, who Kurtz calls "children" (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 2.30.43 h).

When Willard enters the dark cave in which Kurtz has holed up, Willard remarks: "It smelled like slow death in there. Malaria and nightmares. This was the end of the river, all right" (*Apocalypse Now Redux* 2.37.32 h). Kurtz, languishing in delirium, wipes the beads of sweat from his head in a pointless endeavor. The colonial narratives of "neurasthenia," psychoanalysis, and heat are condensed into this moment.

### **The Heat on the Set: Postcolonial Entanglements of the Coppola Complex**

Francis Ford Coppola, the film crew, and the set have been referred to as the "Coppola Complex," which mirrors a military-industrial complex by profiting off available technology and the trauma of the Vietnam War. (Chong 154). This capitalist system became entangled in postcolonial contradictions on a social and material level (Sussman 24-28; Chong 156). In particular, the recruitment of over 200 Ifugao from Batad to portray the "primitive" Montagnards resurrected the colonial spirit. The Filipino indigenous Ifugao were known in the U.S. for their supposed "primitiveness," which the U.S. also used to justify its "civilizing" mission in the Philippines (Chong 157-158). Using indigenous populations from Northern Luzon as

Vietnamese indigenous people defaced their cultural and historical identities, thereby “[...] reifying them as a transcultural native subject” (Tolentino 239). In addition, Francis Ford Coppola very much performed within the tropes of white Hollywood masculinities as both the colonial “frontier adventurer/romantic auteur” in a jungle that needs to be pacified, and as the industrialist/entrepreneur” who would later monetize the movie’s success with an *Apocalypse Now*-themed retreat for tourists in a pacified Belize jungle (Trice 991, 996). The motif of tropicity within this tourist destination is evident. Rolando Tolentino describes how the film acts like a colonizer by “conflating identities and geographies” (244). This conflation results in an erasure of the history of the Philippines, as Laurence Castillo argues: “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.” (87).

The several hundred Filipino extras (Hawkins 282), one of whom died in an accident on the set, were paid three dollars a day; the 140 Vietnamese, recruited from a “Vietnam War” refugee camp in the Philippines, six dollars and 25 cents. The U.S. nationals received \$25 to \$50. The power imbalance also manifested itself in the sexual exploitation of children in Pagsanjan at the hands of some of the members of the Coppola Complex, as the *New York Times* reported (Mydans). Coppola’s collaboration with Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos, whom the U.S. government supported and who provided Coppola with military infrastructure (including the Huey helicopters from the Valkyrie scene), resulted from a once colonial and, at the time of filming, neocolonial and Cold War connection between the Philippines under martial law and the United States. The same helicopters could be in use on the film set one moment and flying missions against Muslim insurgents in the south or the communist guerrillas of the New People’s Army the next (Sussman 25-26; Tolentino 237; Trice 995). *Apocalypse Now* was filmed during the period of martial law that had been declared by Marcos and which lasted from 1972 to 1981. Despite serious human rights violations for which Marcos was responsible, the U.S. provided him with military equipment for the fight against communism. And Coppola benefited

from this military equipment in turn. In addition, U.S. military personnel had secured access to military bases even after the official decolonization of the Philippines based on an asymmetrical treaty of 1947, the U.S.-Philippine Military Bases Agreement (Shalom 3-12). Before typhoon Olga destroyed the film set, the Coppola crew had resided in Olongapo (Cowie), where the U.S. Navy had occupied Subic Bay, one of these military bases. Not least, U.S. and Filipino troops were disembarked from the military bases to Vietnam during the “Vietnam War” (Lawrence 111).

At this historical juncture of decolonization and the Cold War, Sheen took a starring role both in the film and on the film set of *Apocalypse Now*.<sup>17</sup> Sheen had suffered a heart attack and received last rites from a Filipino priest before being rushed to a hospital in Manila. Officially, this incident was communicated as a “result of heat exhaustion” (Cowie 93). Sheen himself self-critically referred to the unstable U.S. heroism in the Philippine heat when he spoke to *Rolling Stone* about his near-death experience and subsequent nervous breakdown: “My spirit was exposed, I cried and cried. I turned completely gray—my eyes, my beard—all gray. [...]. No one put a gun to my head and forced me to be there. I was there because I had a big ego and wanted to be in a Coppola film” (qtd. in Vallely). Sheen obviously took the above-described medical-scientific discourses on the physical and psychological decay of the white man in the Philippine “tropics” literally to heart. Francis Ford Coppola also absorbed the colonial scientific diagnosis of impending madness, as his statement at the 1979 Cannes Film Festival makes clear: “My film is not a movie. My film is not about Vietnam. It is Vietnam. It’s what it was really like. It was crazy. And the way we made it was very much like the way Americans were in Vietnam. We were in the jungle, there were too many of us, we had access to too much money, too much equipment, and little by little we went insane” (qtd. in *Hearts of Darkness*, 46 sec). Thus, the jungle and the heat also symbolize the limitations that could not be overcome even by the almost obscene<sup>18</sup> amount of technology and resources that were used for the film in the Philippines and for the war in Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> In the film, Kurtz speaks to Willard and addresses this brutal obscenity through the metaphor of “fire” that connotes heat: “We train young men to drop fire



on people, but their commanders won't allow them to write 'fuck' on their airplanes because it's obscene" (*Apocalypse Now Redux*, 3.07.32 h.).

The true obscenity, Kurtz implies, lies in the violence that takes the form of air-dropped explosives. Nowhere, according to historian David L. Anderson, did the military-technological superiority in the "Vietnam War" tilt so lopsidedly in favor of the United States as in the air. The United States spent \$100 billion on this superiority. Between 1962 and 1973, over eight million explosive devices pelted Southeast Asia: 1 million over North Vietnam, 500,000 on Cambodia, three million on Laos, and four million on South Vietnam, an ally of the U.S., in support of its own ground forces. This gives South Vietnam the dubious honor of being the most bombed country in human history (D. Anderson 48).

### **Viet Thanh Nguyen's *Spy Who Emerged from the Heat*: The Struggle for Interpretive Authority**

It is these air raids that the unnamed protagonist-narrator and spy in Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel *The Sympathizer* refers to (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 186). The agent works for the South Vietnamese Army, which is allied with the United States, but also secretly informs the FNL. After the fall/liberation of Saigon—depending on one's perspective—he flees into Californian exile with his South Vietnamese superior. From there, he sends secret messages to his communist handler, encoding a nonfiction book titled *Asian Communism and the Oriental Mode of Destruction: On Understanding and Defeating the Marxist Threat to Asia*. In the following, Nguyen's spy quotes from this text, which was written by famed author Richard Hedd. Nguyen only thinly veils the historical Hedd who in reality was Richard Helms, the former director of the CIA who was responsible, among other things, for the violent Phoenix Program in the "Vietnam War." Via the character of Helms, Nguyen formulates a critique of the CIA's inadequate and stereotypical knowledge that demonstrates a limited "intelligence" concerning Southeast Asia. In doing so, he also takes the U.S. academic intelligentsia, in particular the "Orientalists," to task. They created the intellectual breeding ground that made the devastating air attacks against the Southeast Asian population possible and, in the

broadest sense, caused a Cold War culture to flourish. With *The Sympathizer*, Nguyen committed himself to the spy novel, resurrecting a genre that played a crucial role in shaping Cold War culture. Nguyen also reads the 1950s' *The Quiet American* against the grain throughout his text (Clary). But unlike John le Carré's spy, Nguyen's spy does not come in from the cold, but from the heat. Recalling his time as a student on the U.S. West Coast (even before he found his way back there as a refugee), he recounts how he infiltrated the Vietnamese student organizations on a California campus:

[...] the anti-war faction of Vietnamese foreign students, a handful of whom assembled monthly at a sterile room in the student union or in someone's apartment, passions running hot and food getting cold. I attended these parties as well as the ones thrown by the equally compact pro-war gang, differing in political tone but otherwise totally interchangeable [...]. Regardless of political clique, these students gulped from the same overflowing cup of loneliness [...] hoping for the body heat of fellow sufferers in an exile so chilly even the California sun could not warm their cold feet (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 112).

Here, the coldness of the lonely, diasporic existence is metaphorically combined with the heat of shared emotions and bodies of other Vietnamese students. The fault line goes beyond political affiliation, running instead along the divide between the "Third World" on the one hand and the "First World" on the other: the migrants perceive the Golden State as physically and emotionally cold. The communist spy longs for his homeland, closely tied to the memory of his warm-hearted Vietnamese mother and at odds with his punishing, emotionally distant French father, against whom he harbors Oedipal fantasies of murder (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 466, 472)—paralleling the figure of Willard, who murders his über-father Kurtz to the no less Oedipal soundtrack of *The Doors*. The agent's father had been a colonizing priest in "Indochina" and had pedophilic inclinations toward his then 13-year-old mother (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 267, 351-352). "The hot fever of homesickness" (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 200) precedes by only a few sentences the news that his mother has died, whereupon he experiences how "the hot lead of sorrow [...] [poured] into the mold of my body" (Nguyen,

*The Sympathizer* 201). When he joins the crew for the cinematic “Vietnam War drama” *The Hamlet* by the Greek-American “auteur”—clearly recognizable as a reference to Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*—to ensure the authentic representation of the Vietnamese on screen, he feels transported to a native, nostalgic aggregate state on the set in Luzon: “Indeed, I felt at home the instant I stepped from the air-conditioned chamber of the airplane into the humidity-clogged jetway” (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 194). And in the night quarters for the film crew, “I laid down on the slightly damp sheets, which also reminded me of home, where the humidity soaked into everything” (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 195). These examples also show how Nguyen forges coalitions based on climate and belonging that do not fit the Cold War schema of the capitalist West on the one hand and the communist East on the other, but rather show how the hot, decolonizing Third World resists the cold, colonizing First World, here first and foremost the United States. The coldness manifests itself, as mentioned, in the cold Californian exile, in the air-conditioned technology of the airplane coming from the cold of the West, as well as in the bodies of the U.S. American actors. Although U.S. Americans in the novel also sweat and suffer from the heat in Southeast Asia, the main characters, and thus main culprits—“white men [who are] wearing suits,” (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 468-469) who decide the fate of Vietnam in “air-conditioned rooms” (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 468)—remain cold, as does Claude, the U.S. CIA agent stationed in South Vietnam: “Amid short tempers, Claude stayed cool, having lived here so long he barely perspired in the tropical humidity” (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 7). Martin Sheen’s character represents the cold, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant wrapped in New England boat club garb: “[...] sporting a white T-shirt and khakis, his perfect ankles exposed because he wore no socks with his boat shoes, he was cool as ice cream even in the tropical weather” (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 205). In addition, U.S. Americans use the coldness of the air conditioner as a scientific instrument of torture: “[...] the use of air conditioners [was] to keep the room at eighteen degrees Celsius, cool even by Western standards and freezing for the prisoner. This is an experiment [...] to see whether a prisoner will soften up under certain conditions” (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 243). At the same

time, the spy barely survives the U.S. violence that comes in the form of hot, explosive dynamite on his own body (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 237). While Sheen's character embodies the passion of a "sexually repressed fraternity initiate" (204-205), the heat connotes lived heterosexuality and masculinity for the protagonist and other Vietnamese characters. For example, he muses about death, "The hot body of a pliant woman was what a man wanted in the cold, long afterlife [...]" (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 268).<sup>20</sup> Parallel to the U.S. protagonists, Nguyen (*The Sympathizer*) portrays the FNL protagonists as no less cold. When the protagonist was still active as a communist guerrilla in Southeast Asia in the 1960s (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 394), he met with his best friend and client Man in a Catholic church each time they conducted a clandestine exchange of information. At such a meeting, the main character hopes for absolution from his friend for his planned violent actions.

"Innocent men would die as a result of my actions, wouldn't they? Of course, men will die," Man said [...]. "But they aren't innocent. Neither are we, my friend. [...]" I shivered in the humid climate of the basilica while the dowagers droned. Contrary to some perceptions, revolutionary ideology, even in a tropical country, is not hot. It is cold, man-made. Little surprise then, that revolutionaries needed natural heat sometimes (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 145-146).

The hot wars, it can be concluded, were contested in the climatic heat of the "tropics" on the basis of cold ideologies, be they liberal-democratic, communist, or (anti-)colonial. These ideologies are all enmeshed in male guilt with religious connotations, as the scene between Man and the protagonist in a church suggests. Nguyen makes the question of guilt the central motif of the narrative, as it is clothed in the genre of confession, which in turn is explored on two levels: the "confession" can be read both as a confession in the Christian sense and in the revolutionary-communist sense, as Nguyen explains in a radio interview (Nguyen interview). The entire narrative is a flashback that the imprisoned spy presents to his tormentors in a North Vietnamese "re-education camp" in the form of a forced confession to receive communist absolution from them. The spy is tortured despite his affiliation with the FNL on the grounds that he had been exposed to,

and possibly succumbed to, capitalist ideas in the United States. One of his torturers is aware of the influence of the USA, but also of the USSR: “They [the great powers] have tested their techniques, their weapons, and their ideas on our small country. We have been the subject of that experiment they call, with a straight face, the Cold War. What a joke, given how hot the war has been for us!” (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 448). The empires of the North thus turned Vietnam into a laboratory in which they tested their Cold War ideology and technology on the Vietnamese. Not unlike the torture room, Vietnam degenerates into a space of violence.

### **Soft Power of the U.S. Empire: Hollywood and Harvard**

*The Sympathizer* traces the main character’s futile efforts to influence the portrayal of Vietnamese people in *The Hamlet*, as well as how they and the Filipinos are treated on the set.<sup>21</sup> The spy is no match for the Hollywood industry, which rivals U.S. military power in imperial might. In *Apocalypse Now*, the Vietnamese serve primarily as screaming, doomed humans or as corpses, and the number of sentences they speak is kept to a minimum. With his award-winning novel, Nguyen, a Vietnamese American, influences the collective U.S. memories of a bloody war that claimed the lives of 58,000 Americans and over 3 million Vietnamese (Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies* 102). Nguyen’s work was concerned with having Vietnamese characters speak to each other and to an imagined Vietnamese readership. He was also keen to undermine Hollywood as a source of the U.S. soft power that had won “the war in memory” (Nguyen interview), even though the United States had emerged from the war as the loser (Nguyen interview).

Harvard University joins Hollywood as the equivalent East Coast center of soft power when CIA agent Claude celebrates it as the birthplace of napalm: “the very light of Western civilization” (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 436). The heat of napalm burns and disfigures the face of Man, the spy’s revolutionary friend, beyond recognition. Man says to the spy, “Oh, how much it hurts! But what can I tell you besides the fact that being on fire feels like being on fire?” (Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* 435). The sticky napalm burns at extraordinarily high temperatures, which is why it is so destructive as a weapon

(Neer 16). When Harvard professor Louis Fieser and his associate Emanuel Hershberg were conducting experiments in their laboratory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, they found that divinylacetylene turned from a liquid into a gel when exposed to air. And when the gel was ignited, it burned very strongly. “[T]hey burned with an impressive sputter and sparkle,” Fieser recorded (Fieser 12). The two chemists’ laboratory work contributed to the “success story” of napalm, which was first used as a weapon in Sicily in August 1943. Between 1963 and 1973, 388,000 tons of U.S. napalm bombs were used in Southeast Asia (Neer 56, 111).

Harvard’s intellectual soft power shaped not only this incendiary weapon, associated more than any other with the “Vietnam War,” but also the bomb that dominated the new Cold War conflict: the atomic bomb. When it was first detonated, it established absolute heat as the ultimate Cold War threat scenario. In 1940, Franklin D. Roosevelt created the National Defense Research Committee (NDRC). It initiated an academic-military-industrial alliance in which scientists were given virtually inexhaustible funds to advance innovations for the war effort. Harvard chemist and president James Bryant Conant was commissioned by the NDRC to launch research into bombs, fuel, gas, and chemical problems (Neer 7-10). One Harvard College graduate played a key role in the development of the atomic bomb: theoretical physicist Robert Oppenheimer. He, along with an army of other scientists, successfully researched the creation of the atomic bomb as part of the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos National Laboratory. The site chosen for the first nuclear explosion was an inhospitable strip of desert about 320 km south of Los Alamos. The explosion had blinded the scientists before they were overwhelmed by the heat and pressure wave as witnesses to the nuclear age (Hunner 67-69). Radioactivity had left desolate marks on humans and animals, as well as the landscape around Ground Zero. The name *Hot Canyon* was given to the worst contaminated area (Marnham 235). This hot, nuclear desert zone, of course, bears no comparison to the Japanese experience with the atomic bomb. To describe the heat emitted by the atomic bomb, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, nine months after the dropping of “Little Boy” on Hiroshima and “Fat Man” on Nagasaki, used the following formulations:



“The enormous heat produced by an atomic bomb has no true counterpart in ordinary explosions. [...] In Japan, people within several hundred yards of the bomb were charred black, while those more than a mile away received a severe ‘sunburn’” (Marshak et al. 6).

Uranium, a central component of “Little Boy,” had been imported by the U.S. mainly from the Belgian Congo through the mining company *Union Minière du Haut Katanga*, which had once acquired the rights to the minerals from King Leopold II who had established the Congo Free State. Between 1943 and 1945, 8,000-10,000 tons of uranium ore were shipped to the United States. This process relied on a colonial infrastructure, as part of the Belgian colonial state and its predecessor, the Congo Free State, which had cost the lives of up to 10 million Congolese (Marnham 138-139, 215-218; Nzongola-Ntalaja 22). The local population was harnessed into the Manhattan Project via forced labor and, if necessary, driven with the *chicotte*, a whip (Marnham 216). The uranium transports, which went from Kinshasa (called Léopoldville during the colonial period) to Matadi, from where it was shipped to the United States, took the same route as that followed by Joseph Conrad on his journey through the Congo (Marnham 218). In his diary, the Polish-British writer Conrad, who had signed on with the Belgian company *Société Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo (SAB)*, recorded: “Arrived at Matadi on the 13th of June 1890” (Conrad, “The Congo Diary” 99). *SAB*, like many competing companies in the late 19th century, had turned its focus to the exploitation of rubber due to falling ivory prices in Europe (Gondola 66-67). Last but not least, the Matadi-Kinshasa route takes Conrad’s character Marlow deeper and deeper into the “heart of darkness” of European atrocities, the culmination of which is embodied by the colonizer Kurtz, with whom *Apocalypse Now* begins: “While Willard, having completed his mission, sets himself down from the blazing shore downstream from Kurtz, the latter breathes with his last breath, ‘The horror! The horror!’” (*Apocalypse Now Redux*, 3.09.03 h).

## Conclusion

In Coppola's cinematic treatment, heat marks the end of U.S. naiveté and the realization of its own violent abysses, as well as the limited influence of the U.S. on other countries. In the heat, the boundaries between the conscious and the unconscious, between reality and fantasy, and between right and wrong dissolve. The omnipresence of heat in the film, in which it is itself also an actor, connotes vulnerable masculinity; it threatens to destroy male bodies that express violence physiologically through intense sweating. The heat, however, represents not only conflict and the threat of the adversary, but also a prolonged U.S. colonial project, succinctly expressed in the Philippines and reimaged in the "Vietnam War." Madness then is the consequence of the U.S. empire, as suggested in the character of Kurtz. Despite the film's anti-imperial critique, older colonial scientific discourses about "degenerating white bodies in the hot tropics" are adapted for the Cold War context. Sheen and Coppola drew on these colonial narratives when talking about the experience of filming in the Philippines. A (post)colonial continuity can also be seen in the fact that the film could only be made thanks to an infrastructure that sprang from the U.S. colonial state in the Philippine archipelago and continued during the Cold War. Further research should test the thesis of heat against other Vietnam movies during the Cold War, such as *Full Metal Jacket* or the *Deer Hunter*.

The heat in the novel *The Sympathizer* reveals the text as a migration narrative about the loss of a home and mother: The longing for Southeast Asia burns hot. The new existence in the U.S., on the other hand, makes the diasporic Vietnamese shiver. It is the Vietnamese bodies—in exile and at home—that, unlike the super-cooled Anglo-Saxon bodies, are flesh and blood and can generate vibrant heterosexuality. Using the metaphor of heat, Nguyen creates the following binaries in his Cold War text that defy East-West logic: he traces the remembered conflict first along the line of the First World (cold) and the Third World (heat), and second, along the line of the men who actively participate in the conflicts—independent of their ideology—(cold) and the rest. Finally, geographical, institutional, and metaphorical links can be made between *Apocalypse Now*, the set in the Philippines,

and *The Sympathizer*, ultimately leading to the heat of the exploding atomic bomb—one of the highest temperature points of the Cold War.

## Notes

1. The author originally published this article in German: Wirth, Christa. "Gewaltige Hitze: *Apocalypse Now* zwischen (De)kolonisierung und Kaltem Krieg." *Der kalte Krieg: Kältegrade eines globalen Konflikts. Nach Feierabend: Zürcher Jahrbuch für Wissensgeschichte*, edited by Silvia Berger Ziauddin et al., diaphanes, 2017, pp. 61-84 (copyright). This article was translated into English, updated, and revised by the author. For their helpful comments, I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers. For critical reading of the German version, I would like to thank: Silvia Berger Ziauddin, David Eugster, Lisa Schurrer, Stefan Sandmeier, and Barbara Holler.
2. Nevertheless, the more common term "Vietnam War" will be used in this article.
3. In this article, "Third World" and "Global South" are used interchangeably. The term "Third World" itself dates back to the Cold War; "Global South" is a product of the 1990s.
4. Tropicalism accessed through heat is as an extrapolation of the concept of 19th century Philippine nationalists' tropicality "which reversed the colonizers' racial-geographic prejudice and asserted an identity as civilizable tropical people capable of genius." (Aguilar 2016).
5. The violence and break down is intrinsic to the empire though not to the individual soldier, as part of the concept of PTSD is that it can happen to anybody given the circumstances, independent from their individual make-up (Goltermann Chapter 4).
6. In this text, the analyses and time references refer exclusively to *Apocalypse Now Redux*. Coppola did not shoot any new scenes for *Apocalypse Now Redux*, and the motifs are the same in the *Redux* version as in the 1979 version. All of the film passages discussed in this text, with one exception at 1:15:49 h, occur in both in *Apocalypse Now* and *Apocalypse Now Redux*.
7. In *Apocalypse Now*, the character "Chief" reads a newspaper article about the Manson Family murders in 1969.
8. After the opening of formerly communist archives.
9. For the Chinese perspective, see for example: Jian.
10. Marguerite Valentine writes how reality and fiction cannot be separated in this scene. It symbolizes the unconscious.
11. The US disparagingly called the FNL "Viet Cong."
12. Although the physical resilience of white men in the tropics was already conceivable in 1905.
13. Linda Constanzo Cahir writes about the parallels between Conrad's short stories and Coppola's film.

14. This othering also happens vis-à-vis the named Black U.S. soldiers on the boat heading upstream, as they all perish, unlike the white U.S. soldiers (Dawson 229-230).
15. For an analysis of the colonial-medical discourse on “degeneration” in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, see Charlotte Rogers, Chapter 1.
16. Montagnards is a collective French term for various indigenous groups in the Vietnamese highlands; see Chong, 157.
17. Marita Sturken draws a parallel between the failure of the film crew in the Philippine jungle and the failure of the U.S. soldiers in the Vietnamese jungle; see Sturken 98.
18. In the context of images of Vietnamese people disseminated in the media in the U.S. and of violence by and against Vietnamese bodies, Chong speaks of the “oriental obscene.”
19. Baudrillard uses the example of *Apocalypse Now* to compare the power of the U.S. film industry with the power of the U.S. military industry (60).
20. Further examples of heat and sexuality/masculinity in *The Sympathizer*: pp. 313, 315, 351.
21. Nguyen is not the first author with a transnational yet U.S. voice to literarily adapt *Apocalypse Now* as well as the story of its filming. Filipino-American writer Jessica Hagedorn had already fictionalized the “Coppola Complex” in the Philippines in 2003 in the novel *Dream Jungle*.

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# Brechtian Theatre and the Glocal South

## The Case from South Africa

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### Abstract

The *glocal* scale offers a more productive frame for analyzing the *transculturation* of theatre, particular Brechtian theory and practice, than either the singularly local or the generalized global. Glocalization brings into focus networks of imaginative representation that may be missed in overbroad applications of global frameworks, particularly the Global South. Thinking *glocally* also enables historians to trace legacies of transculturation—the production of new forms and practices that emerge from these encounters through *embodied transmission* through performance. In contrast to the binary opposition between center and periphery that bedevils the “postcolonial,” glocalization tracks multiple lines of contestation, including those sites of theatrical and social contestation that acknowledge the glocal domination of elites in the South as well as the subordination of subaltern classes in the North and thus encourages more precise attention to ways in which people and ideas from the north are not *merely* from the north. Dissident socialist theatre-makers occupied glocally subaltern positions in Germany acted on their understanding of class struggle rather than any presumption of European superiority. Conversely, their black interlocutors in South Africa engaging with European culture, whether genteel Anglophile or militant Communist, as well as popular African practices, understood the glocalized entanglements of north and south. Using as a case study the transcul-

turation of Brechtian theory and practice in testimonial plays and other forms in anti-apartheid and post-apartheid performance, glocalization tracks *mutual and multiple* networks of transculturation that move within as well as across diverse Souths and Norths.

### **Keywords**

Glocalization, transculturation, Brecht, South Africa

## Prologue

A literal-minded historian might begin an essay on Brecht in South Africa with the first professional production of a play by Brecht. A critical historian might point out that the term “professional” hides discrimination that denied blacks professional training during the apartheid era. In 1963, two years after the Berlin Wall, the more radical opposition groups, the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress, and the South African Communist Party, were banned, and the police enforced detention without trial.<sup>1</sup> In this period, white players treated Brecht as a canonized author rather than a leftist, as his politics were not welcome in a state that was violently suppressing non-violent opposition. Thus, at the same time as the German Democratic Republic was elevating Brecht posthumously to the classic socialist pantheon after his dissidence no longer a threat to the state, anti-communist white South Africa saw in Brecht a guarantor of access to Western civilization “at the tip of Africa” as the apartheid Department of Information put it in 1966 (1).

With these ironies in mind, the critical historian might compare the all-white *Caucasian Chalk Circle* that was subsidized by the state in 1963 with the more modest but more influential production in 1964 by blacks who earned their living not as actors but as teachers, clerks, and industrial workers. Working with Athol Fugard who was not yet the renowned leader of overseas tours that he became in the 1970s and 1980s, the Serpent Players used *Verfremdung*—best translated as critical estrangement-- as well as their own experience of apartheid to create theatre.<sup>2</sup> In particular, they combined their experience of political persecution and dramatic conflict to forge their own *Lehrstück* [learning play] *The Coat* (1966) to test scenarios for political action. This experiment preceded the better-known *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973), devised by Fugard and actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona, which set the format for the distinctively South African political theatre of the 1970s and 1980s. Characterized by vigorous movement, rousing song, direct testimony of the oppressed, and satiric impersonation of the oppressor, these collaborations included *Survival* (1976), *Woza*



*Albert!* (1981), and Junction Avenue Theatre Company (JATC)'s critical history plays such as *Randlords and Rotgut* (1978).

This era may seem long ago now that South Africa has navigated nearly three decades as a democratic nation but the role of political theatre today depends on transnational history and the multiple currents and networks that have made this history. The common assumption that South African political theatre begins with Fugard (Mda "Theater") is incomplete because it omits the impact of international socialist movements that shaped Brecht's formation in the 1920s and South African theatre and politics by the 1930s, long before Fugard. In order to evaluate the visible history of "Brecht in South Africa," which appears to begin with white amateurs in the 1950s, we need to investigate the virtual history that emerges from the intersection of international socialist and local syncretic forms from the 1920s, forms which have since been claimed as Brechtian, even though Brecht was one of many in Weimar Germany influenced by socialist agitprop alongside the Berlin cabaret and the Bavarian *Volkstück* [folk play]. Recognizing the formation of this political theatre through the interaction of native and immigrant progressives in South Africa enriches our understanding of the explicitly Brechtian theatre that followed, from the Serpent Players in the 1960s to the anti-apartheid heyday of the 1970s and 1980s, to the current theatre tackling post-apartheid social problems. The history of Brechtian theatre in South Africa thus begins *before* Brecht's plays take the stage.

The historical ironies mentioned above affect the interplay between Brecht and political theatre not only in South Africa but also in what used to be called the Third World, those parts of the globe resisting the pressures of both capitalist and state socialist forms of imperial overreach. Even if, as researchers on political theatre in Brazil (Pelzer), India (Dharwadker), or the Philippines (Torres-Reyes) point out, practitioners have deployed Brecht's plays and Brechtian modes of estranged, gestic, and other forms of analytic performance to critique local elites, some members of those elites have treated Brecht as a sign of arrival in the club of Western culture. Despite these ironies, the interplay between Brecht and local theatre practices in South Africa can illuminate the promise and the pitfalls of transcultural

turation elsewhere, hence this paper's goal to situate Brecht in South Africa and the *glocal* South. Before discussing Brecht in South Africa in more detail, I should define the key term *glocal* and its collocation with *transculturation*.

### **Glocal scales and glocalized stages**

The idea of the Third World (*le tiers monde*) emerged in part from the French Revolutionary concept of the third estate (*le tiers état*) that challenged aristocratic and clerical authority in 1789 but dates more directly from the Bandung Conference in 1952 of postcolonial nations, whose Non-Aligned Movement disputed the hegemony of first (capitalist) and second (communist) blocs. The idea of the Third World has in the last several decades given way--even if the fact of its continued subordination has not--to the Global South, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union ended the rivalry between capitalist and communist blocs. But as guiding concepts--capitalized to highlight their ideological weight--the Global South and the Global North may be *too global* to aid the analysis of complex networks of transculturation, to the extent that they replace the Cold War polarity of East vs West with a similar oversimplified South vs North. To be sure, the division between the rich North and the underdeveloped South, even in its original 1980 articulation by former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, was more complex than a simple hemispheric split; the Brandt line dipped down below the equator to scoop Australia and New Zealand into the North, while it relegated some countries in the northern hemisphere, such as India and China, to the South. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, historian Arif Dirlik, writing in the inaugural issue of *The Global South*, highlighted the "predicaments" and "promise" of the concept "global South" (12), as competing revisions have shifted to include China, India, and in some cases Brazil and South Africa as players in global networks. More recent critics have attempted to draw attention to discrimination in supposedly rich countries by conceptualizing the "South in the North" (Smith 5) and calling for the investigation of areas, peoples, and cultures affected by structural inequality in the North, such as the underdeveloped rural South of the United States (hereafter: U.S.).

Nonetheless, the formulation “South in the North” still preserves “the North” as the norm from which the subaltern “South” diverges.

*Glocal*, on the other hand, sets up a more productive scale of analysis than either the singularly local or the generalized global. Introduced by urbanist Eric Swyngedouw in the 1990s and refined in his 2004 answer to the question “Globalisation or ‘Glocalisation’?” the *glocal* frame foregrounds “networks, territories, and rescaling” and thus the ways in which “local, urban or regional configurations” both connect and complicate supranational links among cities and countries. By attending to smaller-scale permutations, the *glocal* scale corrects the “global” tendency to “obfuscate, marginalize and silence intense and ongoing socio-spatial struggle” (25). Swyngedouw uses *glocal* to highlight “socio-spatial struggle” or lines of tension in the realm of geography, especially the pull and push between cities of *glocal* prominence and their hinterlands. His examples are European but his model works in other contexts. In the Philippines, for example, one might look at the history of Manila as a *glocal* point of contact between Spain and China (Tremmi); in the U.S., one could contrast the global prominence of New York as capital of transnational finance with Chicago’s “second city” subordination but revise that alignment by pointing out Chicago’s past and present *glocal* pull for migrants from the South and the Midwest (Kruger “Glocal South Sides”).

The *glocal* scale also allows performance studies to bring into focus networks and sites of imaginative representation that may be missed in overbroad applications of global frameworks, whether in exchanges between practitioners in cities of *glocal* stature, such as between Chicago and Johannesburg (Kruger, “Glocal South Sides”) or translations and reformulations of dominant European cultural theories on sites at the edgy of Europe such as Croatia (Blazević and Feldman). More than the idea of “post-colonial Brecht,” which retains the binary opposition between center and periphery, “European nations” and “the countries they colonized” (Silberman 244), *glocalization* tracks multiple lines of contestation, including not only US imperialism that has engaged in economic exploitation often without colonization but also those sites of theatrical and social contestation that acknowledge the *glocal* domination of elites in the South as well as the subordination

of subaltern classes in the North. Thinking *glocally* also enables theatre historians to trace legacies of not only of interaction and mutual influence but crucially of *transculturation*-- the production of new practices that emerge from these encounters--(Ortíz 97-98), in particular through what I would call *embodied transmission* through performance.

The glocal scale also encourages more precise attention to ways in which people and ideas from the north are not *merely* from the north. In the turbulent years of Weimar Germany (1918-33), dissident socialist theatre-makers occupied glocally subaltern positions and acted on their understanding of class struggle rather than any presumption of European superiority. Conversely, black interlocutors of these socialist migrants in South Africa engaged with European culture, whether genteel Anglophile or militant Communist, as well as popular urban African practices, and thus understood the glocalized entanglements of north and south. Unlike globalization, which implies the adaptation, often painful, of people of the South to the norms of the North, *glocalization* tracks *mutual and multiple* networks of transculturation that move within as well as across diverse Souths and Norths.

### **Brechtian Theatre Before Brecht: Glocalization of International Socialism**

We can see the glocal transculturation of international leftist theatre, which we might call Brechtian, in action a good generation *before* any play by Brecht appeared on a South African stage. Already in the 1920s, the black literate class of New Africans were experimenting with African, European and (African) American practices--from indigenous storytelling to school-taught drama, blended with forms from nationalist hymns to vaudeville sketches, to challenge exclusive Western claims to modernity, in the name of universal emancipation.<sup>3</sup> By the 1930s, this activity included theatre sponsored on the one hand by neocolonial institutions such as the British Drama League, and on the other by industrial unions and the Communist Party, which were among few integrated organizations in this segregated society. The Drama League was neocolonial in that it subjected educated Africans to the norms of genteel English culture and sponsored English comedies by

Oscar Wilde and similar playwrights. In contrast, unionists, whether white (Guy Routh) or black (Gaur Radebe), worked within egalitarian structures to create plays on topics such as segregation and forced removals from the land. These projects were enriched by leftist immigrants, especially the Berliner Kurt Baum and British Belgian André van Gyseghem, who shared the techniques of European avant-gardists with black interlocutors. Baum had worked in Berlin with Erwin Piscator, who used the term *episches Theater* to describe the “narrative progress of [discrete] scenes” propelled by a strong political point of view (Piscator 74)—thus incisive narration rather than grandiose epic—prior to Brecht, who used “epic” thereafter to distinguish critically estranged theatre emphatically from dramatic empathy (Brecht 63). Van Gyseghem observed Vsevolod Meyerhold at work in the Soviet Union and the Living Newspaper in the U.S. and drew on their vivid visual design and precise ensemble work for projects as distinct as the anglophile Pageant of South Africa and African revisions of American labor plays such as *Stevedore* by Paul Peters and George Sklar. The Garment Workers Union, which included white Afrikaner women and men of color under the leadership of Jewish unionist Solly Sachs, produced plays and pageants to dramatize labor struggles and tension between Afrikaner Nationalism and international socialism. The Bantu Peoples Theatre (BPT) produced local versions of metropolitan experiments such as Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* directed in 1936 by Van Gyseghem and performed in African English, and drama on pressing issues such as Routh’s *Patriot’s Pie* (1940) about African conscription, or Radebe’s *Rude Criminal* (1941), about men criminalized by laws restricting Africans seeking work in South African cities. Although these plays were never published, BPT documents invoked international socialism to focus on “the economic disintegration, the breakdown of tribal economy, and the impoverishment of Europeans, the massing of classes in their trade unions and employer organizations,” as well as the “emotional complications of race and colour” at home.<sup>4</sup> These projects prompted Herbert Dhlomo, a prolific if at the time largely unpublished playwright now celebrated as the father of South African drama, to turn from plays about African kings, whose heroic pathos recalled more Friedrich Schiller’s Romanticism than

Brecht, to experimental drama on labor themes, such as *The Workers* (1941), which reflected the influence of expressionism, in this case Brecht's contemporary Georg Kaiser.

### **Learning Beyond Brecht: From the *Lehrstück* to the Testimonial Play**

Although their names may be unknown to many South Africans as well as readers abroad, the practitioners mentioned above created political theatre a generation before Fugard and before Brecht's work circulated in South Africa. Their engagement with Soviet and German experiments alongside African practices shows the global reach of the socialist and modernist trends that shaped Brecht, as well as the glocal particulars that transformed this inheritance at home. Even if these currents ran dry for a generation after the Afrikaner Nationalists took power in 1948 and created the police state that survived until democratic elections in 1994, they trace a long history of anti-apartheid theatre and thus provide essential context for Fugard's discovery of Brecht in the 1960s and for performative transculturation more generally. *The Coat* (1966) blended Fugard's reading of *Brecht on Theatre* (Willett ed.) and an incident at one of many political trials involving members of the Serpent Players to dramatize the choices facing a woman whose husband, convicted of anti-apartheid activism, left her his coat before departing for prison. In the manner of Brecht's *Lehrstück*, the company created an experiment for practitioners to test social as well as theatrical action. The performers focused not on the portrayal of sympathetic character but on the analysis of social relationships--between the waiting wife and her impatient son, between the police and the political group to which the convicted man belonged, and between the black performers and their different audiences--black in the township as against the white theatre appreciation group in town. Using the coat to prompt debate about who needed this and other scarce resources and why, the participants were engaged not only in representing social relationships on stage but in enacting their own dealings with each other and apartheid institutions from the law courts to employment and residence discrimination. This experimental staging of alternate scenarios

for action has made *The Coat* an important model for theatre training and revival into the post-apartheid 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Serpent Players' more famous play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972), which toured Britain and the United States with *The Island* (1973), and later reached stages across Europe and the Americas well as in China, was also prompted by an object. In this case a studio photograph of a smiling black man in a suit led actor John Kani to remark that the man looked happy most likely because his pass—the document every adult African had to carry in the apartheid era--was in order. In the drama that Kani, Ntshona and Fugard made about such a man. Sizwe Bansi [the nation is strong], who is denied authorization to work in the city, is persuaded by Buntu [humanity] to appropriate the authorized pass of a dead man, Robert Zwelinzima [heavy world], whose body they find in an alley (see Fugard and casts). In contrast to the sober presentation of *The Coat*, this weighty decision in *Sizwe Bansi* was preceded by lively comic sketches improvised in the African variety concert manner by Kani who developed his character--a garrulous township photographer--while also impersonating his former mates and bosses at the Ford factory where Kani himself had worked, nosy neighbors, and even township cockroaches. But the scenario returned unexpectedly to Brecht when the township audience interrupted Kani in the quieter role of Buntu as he pasted Sizwe's photograph in Robert's pass with a vigorous debate about whether he should risk the illegal act of tampering with official documents (Fugard 31-32).

This debate highlighted the power of theatre as testimony and established the *testimonial play* as the distinctive anti-apartheid form. Whereas the Serpent Players had emerged in a period of deep repression in which theatre could risk only indirect political expression, the rise of militant anti-apartheid activism, inspired in part by the U.S. Black Power movement and by African decolonization, especially of neighboring Mozambique in 1974, emboldened activists to stage more agitational performances, even if this activism ended in prison or exile. Among those groups who mixed influence by Brecht and the imperatives of anti-apartheid testimony, Workshop '71 was founded by white Witwatersrand (Wits) University lecturer Robert McLaren (aka



Kavanagh), with black workers. Their testimonial play *Survival* (1976) was created by four performers who testify directly to the audience, explaining in sober Brechtian reporting how the individuals they represent landed in prison, whether for overt political activity or for speeding to get an ill parent to the hospital, concluding with a rousing anti-apartheid chorus calling for an end to “these days.” (Workshop ’71 167). The play’s critical use of multiple points of view drew on Brecht’s epic practice continued to inspire audiences in town and township even after the student uprisings in Soweto and beyond led the censors to ban the play. Police threats sent the performers into U.S. exile and the director to graduate training in Britain and later theatre practice in Zimbabwe, but remaining members collaborated with others to create a repertoire of plays in this testimonial mode. Some of these plays were written by individuals such as Maishe Maponya’s *Hungry Earth* (1978), which depicted the structural poverty that forced black rural men into the mines—and still does so today—or Gcina Mhlophe’s *Have You Seen Zandile?* (1986) whose author-actor dramatized her own and other women’s conflicts with their mothers’ enforcement of African patriarchal norms of submission and early marriage. More frequently, these testimonial plays were like *Survival* the product of workshops. *Born in the RSA* (1985) by director Barney Simon and the original cast at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, which was from its founding in 1976 to the 1990s South Africa’s most influential home for anti-apartheid drama, was prompted by the state of emergency and the cast members’ diverse experiences with apartheid violence to depict a range of characters, including not only militant activists and their hardened opponents in the police force but also people caught in the middle trying in vain to avoid politics. Using African hymns, struggle songs, and American showtunes to comment on the action, this play and its kin drew both on Brecht and on the musical, in both its Broadway and township variants.

In post-apartheid South Africa since 1994, testimonial theater practitioners have turned their sights on new social problems, such as the rate of HIV infection here and in neighboring states, which is still among the worst in the world. DramAide, the longest-lasting applied theatre organization, founded by Lynn Dalrymple, and HIV educators such as Dennis Francis,

and others working at the interface between art and activism have applied Brechtian techniques and the forum theatre and participatory dramaturgy that Augusto Boal repurposed from Brecht to challenge HIV+ people and their kin to experiment with new roles and thus change their understanding and enactment of social mores as well as sexual behavior. In the initial rush of the AIDS epidemic in the 1990s, these organizations aspired to use theatre didactically in the hope of curtailing risky sexual and social conduct, but 21<sup>st</sup> century projects have broadened scope to encourage participants and target audiences especially young people to learn by way of participatory dramaturgy how better to negotiate the social and economic constraints and incentives affecting their behavior and thus to better their options for action beyond the stage. Ideally, these are action that might bring closer to realization the South African Constitution's mandate promulgated and reiterated by the Dept of Arts and Culture *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* in 1996, which, in sharp contrast to the apartheid document defending "aspirations to European culture" (1) in 1966, argued for "access for all to, participation in, and enjoyment of the arts" as a "basic human right" (7).<sup>5</sup>

### History and Comedy as Sites of Critique

The historical dimension of epic theatre may have been eclipsed by testimonial plays that focus on urgently pressing problems but critical history plays have drawn on Brecht's practice of critical historization to narrate and analyze South African history. This historical investigation distinguished the work of Junction Avenue Theatre Company (JATC: 1976-99), whose members included director Malcolm Purkey, designer and now world-famous artist William Kentridge, and worker-players such as Ramolao Makhene who had his start with Workshop '71. In collaboration with writers in Wits University's History Workshop, JATC created musical history plays. *Randlord and Rotgut* (1978), like the article by historian Charles van Onselen whose title it borrowed, critiqued the collusion between mining capitalists, Boer farmers, and liquor producer that kept black miners working despite bad wages and conditions from the consolidation of the mining industry around 1890 to the present, and thus highlighted both the power of the

global trade in gold and the glocal networks of power and resistance more complicated than a simple opposition between capital and labor or black and white. *Sophiatown* (1986) depicted the more recent history of apartheid from the 1950s to the 1980s; the play used original songs as well as quotations from the memoirs of exiled writers to celebrate the eponymous neighborhood's vibrant integrated culture and progressive politics that were destroyed by apartheid in the 1950s to build a white suburb called Triomf. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *Sophiatown* is back and the critical history play *Sophiatown* has endured despite a plethora of nostalgic film and stage treatments of the period that writer Louis Nkosi ironically called the "fabulous fifties" (24). JATC's last play *Love, Crime, and Johannesburg* (1999), created in the uncertain transition from Nelson Mandela's presidency (1994-9) which favored democratic reconstruction and development to Thabo Mbeki's neoliberal administration (1999-2008) which favored developing a black elite through what he called Black Economic Empowerment, revised the drama of capital and corruption that it began with *Randlords and Rotgut*. *Love, Crime and Johannesburg* loosely adapted Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, especially Brecht's reminder that owning a bank was more dangerous than robbing one, to dramatize the ways in which post-apartheid capitalism was corrupting former struggle heroes as well as enabling new and old elites to exploit development funding for their own gain.

Although recent history plays use a more conventional family saga framework than JATC's epic "narrative progression," some weave Brechtian elements into more intimate family drama. Neil Coppen's *Abnormal Loads* (2012) uses 21<sup>st</sup> century reenactments of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Zulu and Anglo-Boer battles to explore rivalries and resentments in a town in perennially contested KwaZulu-Natal province. The central character Vincent is compelled by his Anglo grandmother to reenact his Anglo grandfather but turns to the legacy of his Zulu father who was likely killed by apartheid police. Haunted by his father's ghost, Vincent responds ambivalently to his grandmother's role play; his estrangement is thus political and psychological as well as theatrical. Drawing also on the history of colonial dispossession, *The Native Who Caused All the Trouble*, an anti-apartheid play

written by theatre makers Vanessa Cooke and Danny Keogh in collaboration with historian Nicholas Haysom (1983), was based on a 1937 incident in which a Sotho man, Tselilo (played by Kani), claimed ownership of land in Cape Town. In 2017, Nwabisa Plaatje revised the original to highlight the gendered dimension of labor, with the actress Faniswa Yisa playing Tselilo, who kept her womanly appearance while showing the character's masculinity.

In addition to critical juxtapositions of past and present which recall Brecht's epic historicization, testimonial plays have used sketch comedy that draws on African variety skits while also recalling the satirical cabaret that was an important part of Brecht's inheritance. *Woza Albert!* (1981), devised by Simon, Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema, spins a skein of sketches from the premise of a visit to apartheid Johannesburg by Jesus, mixing clowning with pointed indictment of state violence from the colonial period to the era of high apartheid. It is possibly the most revived play in the anti-apartheid repertoire, and its combination of politics and physical comedy with sober reportage animating minimal props came to dominate the Southern African stage, even in the post-apartheid twenty-first century. Another play much revived into the 1990s was Zakes Mda's *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (1978), which was written in exile in Lesotho, and in this context, turned to satirizing post-colonial states whose corrupt leaders betrayed the promise of liberation. This drama depicted corruption in an unnamed African country where veterans from the independence struggle freeze to death in a park from which the newly rich attempt to evict them. Younger post-apartheid playwrights draw on this satiric example to challenge present-day malfeasance, as does Omphile Molusi's *Itsoseng* (2008-9) that played at home and abroad in the first year of the notorious presidency of Jacob Zuma (2008-18). Author-actor Molusi used pointed political commentary, inventive play with found objects and plastic tarp, and physical comedy to dramatize resentful displaced people who torch Itsoseng shopping center, as well as the fat cats who pocketed the rebuilding funds, as well as a broader indictment of the rampant corruption in government that the crusading Public Protector in the Zuma era called the "state of capture" (Madonsela).

## Critique, Care, and Performance in the Suspended Revolution

Brechtian techniques have been taught now for two generations by community theatre studios as well in university drama departments, and have certainly provided practitioners with tools to educate and entertain audiences with critical depictions of current conflicts such as those between venal elites and the deepening impoverishment of the majority. But the enlightenment premise—which animates activist theatre as it did Brecht—that exposing social conflicts hidden by ideology or false consciousness will emancipate publics as well as performers—has met unexpected obstacles. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC; 1996-2002), in which two thousand out of a documented twenty thousand survivors of torture and other human rights violations testified in public hearings, prompted theatre practitioners to work with survivors without always acknowledging the gulf between testimony and emancipation opened up by the retraumatizing effects of recalling unspeakable pain. Among the few that succeeded, the collaboration that brought together the survivor group Khulumani (Speak out!), the Centre for Violence and Reconciliation, and theatre facilitator Makhene produced *The Story I am about to tell*, which used theatre to provide tools and space for survivors speak in their own voices, but complemented this public exposure with group therapy to fortify participants against the re-traumatization that it might provoke. Even with therapy, the experience of repeated self-exposure could prove fatal, as in the case of Duma Khumalo. Khumalo joined Khulumani in 1996, and in the context of *The Story* told his story of being convicted for a political murder that he did not commit, only to be reprieved at the last minute due to international pressure—after he had been measured for his coffin. In the succeeding years, he tried to clear his name by giving talks and appearing in a better-known play, *He Left Quietly* (2002-5; published 2008) devised from his TRC testimony by director Yaël Farber. Khumalo, who had pondered the imponderable question on stage—“Is it possible that I stayed here among you—the living—long after my soul left my body behind?”—committed suicide in 2006 (Farber and Khumalo 188), ten years after the TRC began hearing testimony.<sup>6</sup> Acknowledging the limits of enlightenment theatre in the wake of the TRC, the strongest drama

in 21<sup>st</sup> century South Africa combines a critique of economic and social injustice with reparative work to restore psychological and affective bonds.

Adding to Brecht's critical pedagogy and Boal's participatory dramaturgy, practitioners have used the work of local analysts of political impasse and the "suspended revolution" (Habib) and therapist-theorists analyzing patriarchal violence and the abuse of power (Gqola; Gobodo-Madikizela) to reshape socially engaged theatre that accounts for affect as well as action, care as well as critique. In contrast to the glocal dominance of Johannesburg in the anti-apartheid moment, Cape Town has in the post-apartheid period become the center of theatrical experiment. I therefore turn in conclusion to organizations that bring together the skills of trained theatre artists in Cape Town and practitioners in the townships and informal settlements on the arid Cape Flats.

Baxter Theatre and its development extension *Zabalaza Intsika* (Xhosa: stand firm pillar) have produced work with seasoned as well as emerging players that brings together expertise and experience of diverse stakeholders to dramatize the violent impact especially on women and girls of growing inequality as well as endemic poverty, while showcasing the capacity of designers as well as performers for tragic and lyrical scenography as well as social satire (Morris). *Karoo Moose* (2007) by Baxter's artistic director Lara Foot is set in an impoverished village in the arid Karoo, hundreds of kilometers from affluent Cape Town and depicts women, children and the men who prey on them in a world "where children don't stay children for very long and where adults cannot really afford to be adults" (Foot 9-10). The players blended Xhosa *iintsomi* (storytelling) with experimental forms including poor theatre inspired by Jerzy Grotowski and mime from Le Coq and other schools, as well as techniques of estrangement, quotation, and musical punctuation from Brecht to represent both the specific conditions of hunger and struggle in a Karoo village and spin a tale that has universal resonance. The drama juxtaposes the harsh experience of fourteen-year-old Thozana, played in the 2007 premiere and 2016 revival by Chuma Sopotela whose recent work has deepened her performative investigation of gender violence, traded to a thug by her drunken father with the magical tale of a

moose. The moose, an exotic import, apparently fell off a truck bound for a game farm. Its presence, rendered by players carrying long reeds that evoke the moose's antlers, charms the villagers until they realize that they can kill and eat it. This contrast between supernatural dread and everyday ordeals like chronic hunger, embedded in the overall tension between aspiration and exhaustion, pervaded the revival staged in 2016, the year of the damning *State of Capture Report* (Madonsela) detailing the Zuma regime's expropriation of public funds, even if it ends on a note of hope with a vivid picture of actors miming children riding out on a brightly coloured bus. This tension highlighted the artificiality of "fictional solutions to real social problems," as Brecht warned the purveyors of Stalinist "realism" in 1953 (268) as well as the challenge of effecting real change. In *Karoo Moose*, the entangled problems of poverty, misogyny, AIDS and government incompetence may appear overwhelming, but rather than presuming to offer global solutions, the play modestly suggests the potential of individual and collective agency in the glocal scene.

Also based in Cape Town, Magnet Theatre has worked with people in informal settlements to create drama about migration, especially about people who have come from the impoverished Eastern Cape seeking work in the affluent Western Cape. While some are able to support families back home, others struggle and return only after death, including those who die young of AIDS. Some of these bodies are conveyed to ancestral burial sites where they can be interred where their umbilical cords lie as tradition requires but others, such as those in Mandla Mbothwe's *Ingcwaba lendoda lisecalen' kwendlela* (The man's grave is next to the road; 2009), haunt the national highway that links one of South Africa's most affluent provinces with one of its poorest. Marshalling choral groups singing praises and dirges as well as named characters whose journeys to the glocal center of Cape Town and back are marked by simple props like abandoned shoes and suitcases weighted down by stones, Mbothwe extends the testimonial form to bear witness to suffering exacerbated by neoliberal policy and corrupt governance, while at the same time celebrates the lyric power of the Xhosa language and sacred song to honor the ancestors.



### **In Lieu of Concluding, Looking Forward**

Attempting to represent material conditions and invisible forces together may seem to contradict the critical aspirations of a Brechtian “theatre of the scientific age.” Nonetheless, the two plays sketched above reflect the achievement of companies that have created evocative and thought-provoking performances and established networks for pedagogy as well as play to create scenarios to change their world. Change has come more slowly than the more militant anti-apartheid activists featured in the earlier part of this essay may have wanted but the theatre makers working today’s vibrant if imperfect democratic South Africa aspire to meet the constitutional mandate to create structures and practices that promote not only individual liberties but also social rights such as access to justice and wellbeing. In the trans-culturation of Brechtian theatre with a view to dramatize current conditions of struggle and possibility, they have made an important contribution to improving the lives of individuals and communities in South Africa and to highlighting the potential of theatre in other points in the glocal South.

## Notes

1. For the history of the anti-apartheid struggle, see Karis et al. This essay revises “Brecht in Southern Africa,” published in *Bertolt Brecht in Context*, and also draws on my books *Post-Imperial Brecht* and *A Century of South African Theatre*. This essay reframes my thoughts on Brecht within the *glocal* as against the global South, which I began to develop in “Glocal South Sides.” My intention here is to show essential elements of Brechtian theatre in a range of South African contexts without burdening this essay with dense citation. For detailed analysis and more bibliography, readers might consult the above publications.
2. The editors of the new and expanded *Brecht on Theatre* chose to leave *Verfremdung* untranslated (5-6) in contrast to the inaccurate but familiar “alienation” (Willett); “alienation” translates *Entfremdung* (Marx’s term for dispossession) and is thus the opposite of *Verfremdung*, which is adequately rendered by *critical estrangement*.
3. For the “New African” intermediate class, see Couzens; for New African theatre and anti-apartheid drama, Kruger, *A Century*, 37-74; 121-46
4. Bantu Peoples Theatre, *Drama Festival Program* (25-27 July 1940), 10; Johannesburg Public Library, Strange Theatre Collection; for discussion, see Kruger, *A Century*, 38-43
5. For these and other developments in post-anti-apartheid theatre between apartheid and post-apartheid eras, see Kruger, *A Century*, 147-65
6. For this and other performative responses to the TRC, see Kruger, *Post-Imperial Brecht*, 337-375, and *A Century*, 157-65; for the TRC hearings analyzed as performance, see Cole.

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# The Rise of the Global Elites in Market-Driven Societies, or, (American) Men Behaving Badly

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## Abstract

This article examines the rise and spread of the American discourse and ideology of hyperconsumption in the 1980s through the popularization of sociological types called the “yuppie” in the 1980s and the “bobo” in the 1990s. By the twenty-first century, these types would be part of the “global elites”. The article discusses two iconic cultural texts— Oliver Stone’s film *Wall Street* (1987) and Bret Easton Ellis’ novel *American Psycho* (1991)—that sought to intervene in debates on the perils of hyperconsumption through their portrayals of the male criminal financier, even as real-life politicians like William Clinton and Donald Trump became figures and active promoters of the self-branding elite.

## Keywords

hyperconsumption, global elite, *American Psycho*, *Wall Street*

This article examines the historical, material, geopolitical, and ideational contexts that gave rise to the American discourse and ideology of hyperconsumption in the 1980s. The emblematic figure of the hyperconsumer is the '80s sociological type called the “yuppie,” which in the 1990s would morph into the “bobo” and join the ranks of the so-called “global elites” in the 2000s (themselves beneficiaries of globalization promoted by a succession of U.S. governments). The article revisits two iconic cultural texts about financiers— Oliver Stone’s film *Wall Street* (1987) and Bret Easton Ellis’ novel *American Psycho* (1991)—that intervened in debates centering on hyperconsumption, which came to be identified as a specifically male (and criminal) practice, even as real-life entrepreneurs like George Soros and politicians like William and Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump became emblematic figures and active promoters of the self-branding elite.

Daniel Stedman Jones (263-64) argues that, from the mid-1970s onward, the appointment of Paul Volcker as Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve Board and the deregulation of the airline, transportation, and banking sectors under the Carter administration marked an important shift in the thinking and logic of American development and trade policy.

Volcker addressed the Great Inflation by raising interest rates, setting monetary targets and relying on monetary aggregates to control the money supply and send signals to the public about the government intention to seriously tackle inflation (217-19). In the banking sector, Carter’s Depository Institutions and Monetary Control Act (1980) relaxed financial restrictions on banks and broadened their lending powers, followed later on in the Reagan years by the Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act (1982), which allowed banks to offer adjustable-rate mortgage (Stedman Jones 340-41).

The Reagan administration would go even further, advocating increased deregulation and market liberalization, tax reform and large-scale tax cuts (for example on capital gains, the rate of which was reduced from 70% to 28%), cuts in public spending, and fiscal and monetary policy to stabilize the value of money (263-65). Under the Wilson, Callaghan and Thatcher administrations, the United Kingdom also embarked on similar-minded reforms,



aimed mainly at cutting public spending, at privatization and nationalization of industries and limiting the power of the trade unions (263).

The raft of policies focused on promoting monetarism, deregulation and market-based reforms would be associated with advocates of so-called “neoliberalism,” who belonged to a trans-Atlantic network of entrepreneur of ideas, politicians, journalists, and business funders of think tanks and other institutions (2). Originally formulated as a critique of “creeping” totalitarianism (in its Nazi and Communist forms) based on the European (Austrian and German) experience and critical of state interventionism during the American New Deal era, neoliberals such as Von Mises, Hayek, and Friedman went against the Keynesian ideas of demand management and large-scale public investment and social spending (15).

Instead, the dream they peddled was that of a market-driven society (20), a society modeled on the “democratic” power of the self-interested but rational consumer and underpinned by individualism and market fundamentalism (a term used by George Soros) (23). These advocates viewed the market as a “democratic arena”—a realm of freedom—capable of exercising discipline and promoting greater efficiency (70) and prosperity. Allowing the market to operate freely would lead to better delivery of economic and social goods and services (57), an assumption that led to the market becoming an organizing principle for microeconomic reform (in such areas as health care and education), particularly the privatization of state assets, nationalization of industries, public utilities and public services in the U.K. (82). In turn, the market was seen as a “breeding ground of democratic and human rights” (113). The role of the state would be limited to the areas of defense, security and protection of the citizenry; to offering basic social safety net; supervision of monetary policy, protecting private property rights, and discouraging monopolies (335). Contrary to the idea of small government advocated by some policymakers, the size of government actually expanded from \$521 million in the U.S. and 193 million pounds in the U.K. in 1900 to 39 billion dollars for the U.S. and 3.5 billion pounds for the U.K. in 1949 to 1.3 trillion dollars for the U.S. and 158 billion pounds for the U.K. in 1990 (23-24).

With privileging of the market as a realm of (individual) economic--and by implication, political--freedom came a newfound acceptance of inequality as a necessary and unavoidable evil (338). Moreover, the policies implemented during this era had one important consequence: they reversed the pattern of redistribution of the postwar era, which had tended toward redistribution from the rich to the poor and the expansion of the middle class, to a new pattern of redistribution from the poor to the wealthy and a section of the middle class (338). This pattern would continue well into the Clinton years and the era of globalization (338).

Meanwhile, the taming of inflation and the consequent lowering of interest rates helped to jump-start the American economy once more, stoking corporate earnings and setting the stage for a bull market in stocks that lasted through most of the 1980s (Carey and Morris 37; Mahar 5). The trend toward corporate conglomeration of the 1960s had largely fallen out of favor with investors and conglomerates started to sell off pieces to concentrate on their “core business” (Carey and Morris 31). Specific types of financing, financial instruments, and financial institutions became popular—notably the junk bond and collateralized debt obligation, the rise of private equity-backed or -owned companies, and the phenomenon of takeovers (including hostile), mergers and acquisitions, and leveraged buyouts. Investment firms like Blackstone would earn their reputations in this era, often with substantial financial backing from Japanese capital (54). The investment firm Kohlberg Kravis Roberts’ (KKR) buyout of RJR Nabisco, the tobacco and food giant, “embodied the raucous, rapacious ethos of the late 1980s” (97; see the full account in Burrough and Helyar).

### **Specimens of the New Elites: Yuppies, Bobos, etc.**

The financial service sector (and the service sector more generally) became increasingly important to the American economy while manufacturing entered a period of decline (Krippner 178). The migration of labor-intensive production facilities to developing countries, where labor was cheaper, resulted in the hallowing out of industries like steel and mining, even as Asian countries began upgrading their technologies to compete in elec-

tronics, semi-conductor, and other industries. Critics have spoken of the phenomenon of “financialization,” defined as “a pattern of accumulation in which profits accrue primarily through financial channels rather than through trade and commodity production” (174).

Thus, while the working class saw their wages stagnate and opportunities for upward social mobility dim, the market boom was simultaneously ushering in an era of conspicuous consumption as a group of people—notably those working in finance (in particular, those involved in private equity, mergers and acquisitions, investment banking, and hedge funds) (Friend 2017, 440)—joined and, just as important, came to exemplify the class of new elites.

These new elites would be called different names—“yuppies” (young urban professionals, coined by *Chicago Tribune* columnist Bob Greene in 1983; see Hertzberg 66-82 for a discussion of the evolution of the term), “bobos” (bourgeois bohemians, coined by David Brooks), the “new elite” created by meritocracy (Young), the “superclass” (Rothkopf), and the “aspirational class” (Currid-Halkett), as well as the more specialized “creative class” (Florida), “symbolic analysts” (Reich 177- 80), “new class” of “intellectuals and technical intelligentsia” (Gouldner), and “professional-managerial class” (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich).

There are differences and nuances among these terms, but the most important characteristics of these new elites are, apart from the fact that they work in cities:

- 1) products of meritocracy, they are highly educated and invest a great deal in the acquisition, processing, and manipulation of information and expertise;
- 2) they are often first- or second-generation wealthy;
- 3) they work for a living, rather than depend on inheritance;
- 4) they make their money not just from the traditional sources of wealth (such as manufacturing, real estate, and finance), but from information and technology, creative and cultural, and other new industries;
- 5) they are highly mobile; and
- 6) they are part of a global, cosmopolitan cohort of elites.

Christopher Lasch observes of these elites that “[T]he market in which the new elites operate is now international in scope. Their fortunes are tied to enterprises that operate across national boundaries. They are more concerned with the smooth functioning of the system as a whole than with any of its parts. Their loyalties—if the term is not itself anachronistic in this context—are international rather than regional, national or local. They have more in common with their counterparts in Brussels or Hong Kong than with the masses of Americans not yet plugged into the network of global communication” (Lasch 34-35).

They work for a living. In the U.S. in 1916, the 1% top received only one-fifth of their income from paid work, but by 2004, the number had increased to 60% (Piketty and Saez, cited in Freeland 43), and top executives replaced top capital owners in the income hierarchy during 20<sup>th</sup> century (Freeland 2012, 43). The share of capital income excluding capital gains dropped from 42% of market income excluding capital gains in 1979 to 21% in 2002, while the labor share of income for top income groups was higher in 2007 than it had been before World War II (44). In other words, the top income earners belong to the class of the “working rich”. Wages have now become far more important for the top 0.01%, with wage and entrepreneurial income making up 80% of their and only 20% from capital income; this pattern is in direct contrast to the sources of wealth of the top income people before World War II, who were mainly rentiers deriving money from their wealth holdings (mostly dividends) (Piketty and Saez 12).

These American elites have strong educational backgrounds, and few were born in abject poverty. Their money is often newly minted. In 1982, 40% of the Forbes 400 were the first generation to run their own business; by 2011, this figure had risen to 69% (Freeland 45). The crucial change in postwar college admissions policy and standardized testing allowed bright outsiders to come in, measured by standardized test (Brooks 25, 27). In 1980, American college graduates earned 35% more than high school grads; by mid-1990s they earned 70% more, and those with graduate degrees 90% more. In other words, the wage value of a college degree had doubled in 15

years and rewards for intellectual capital increased while rewards for physical capital have not (36).

Hitherto, the trend had been against the top one-percenter in the postwar era. Between 1940 and 1970, the gap between the American 1% and the rest shrank: the income share of the top 1% fell from 16% in 1940 to 7% 1970. In 1980, CEO made 42 times average worker salary. This was in large part a consequence of high taxes, robust economic growth and high minimum wage (Freeland 2012, 17). But in the Reagan era, tax cuts had created a situation where, in 2009, the top 1% paid 23% of income in tax; the top 0.1% just over 21% and top 400 taxpayers less than 17% (79).

Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez found that from the mid-1920s to 1940, the share of income of the top 10% fluctuated between 40% and 45%. During World War II, this share declined to just above 30% and remained flat at 31-32% from the postwar period up to the late 1970s (8). Then, it started to climb again, crossing the 40% level by the mid-1990s and is now at a slightly lower level than the share of income before World War II (8). The biggest shift in income was not, however, between the top 10% and everyone else; it was within the top 10-percenters. The social gap would therefore not just exist between rich and poor but also between the super-rich and “merely wealthy” (Freeland 34).

Moreover, the pattern of distribution of wealth worldwide would also be quite uneven. The rise of the global middle class has been mostly concentrated in China and other countries in “resurgent Asia” (Milanovic 19; these countries include India, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia). While the recent decades have witnessed the emergence of a global plutocracy, there has been at the same time the stagnation of groups in the rich world that are globally well-off but nationally middle- or lower-middle class (3). Mainly Asian countries have been catching up with the rich world (170).

The global income distribution that marked the high globalization era of 1988-2008 has seen real income gain among people around the 50th percentile of global income distribution (80% growth over 20-year period [18]), but has been lowest among the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile, most of whom are in the lower

middle class of rich world (11), almost all from OECD countries like the U.S., Japan, and Germany (19-20).

Inequality appears in meritocratic garb, as highly educated, hardworking and successful people have seen the most wealth gain (188). The American middle class has decreased from 1/3 of population in 1979 to 27% in 2010 even as the income of the top 5% has risen (197).

In other words, the greatest winners of globalization—a term valorized and promoted as “a pervasive force in our world” and a geo-economic and geopolitical strategy by the William Clinton administration (see “Clinton Presidency”)—and liberalization have been the Asian poor and middle classes; the greatest losers are the lower middle classes of rich world (Milanovic 20). At the turn of the twenty-first century, the U.S. still dominated the top 1% of global elite: half of the global top 1% were Americans (12%), the rest from Western Europe, Japan, and Oceania, with Brazil, South Africa and Russia contributing 1% each (22; in Japan, UK and France, their 3-7% population are in the global top 1%; Germany 2%, China and India fewer than 1% of pop in global top 1% [37, see chart 38]). By 2012, however, the income of China’s top 1% would converge with the global 1%, signifying that Chinese elites have joined the ranks of the global elites (Segal 3), and by 2020, China would surpass the U.S. in the number of dollar billionaires (Heng).

### **Model of Emulation: George Soros**

In the 1980s, before the information and communication technology revolution created a new breed of heroes, the “heroes” who commanded the lion’s share of publicity and were held up as models of emulation were mainly involved in finance, with all the aggressive risk-taking and high-living it entailed.

Take, for example, George Soros. Born in 1930, Soros left Nazi-Germany-occupied Hungary for England, and was educated in the London School of Economics. He started his first hedge fund, Double Eagle, in 1969, and by 1970 had established his second hedge fund, Soros Fund Management. Double Eagle was later renamed Quantum Fund. Soros would style himself a “financial and philosophical speculator” (Murphy) and, in 1992, Quantum

would place a \$10 billion wager that the pound sterling would devalue, and in the process, earn \$1 billion in profit. But before he became the Man Who Broke the Bank of England (as well as Sweden) (Murphy), and long before he shorted \$2 billion worth of Thai baht in a move that both predicted and precipitated the Asian financial crisis (Mallaby 201), Soros first achieved celebrity status and cemented his reputation by profiting from the devaluation of the American dollar in the wake of the 1985 Plaza Accord.

In the summer of 1985, Soros tried to judge the timing of dollar's reversal by betting on the dollar's fall. In August 16, his Quantum owned \$720 million worth of main currencies against which dollar would fall—yen, marks, sterling (Mallaby 90)—an exposure that exceeded all the equity in the fund by a margin of \$73 million. When the dollar went up, he lost \$20 million on September 9. (91) But Soros held two weeks more short on the dollar. In September 22, 1985, James Baker assembled counterparts in France, West Germany, Japan, and the U.K. at the Plaza Hotel to come to an agreement about coordinating intervention in currency market to push the dollar downward. News of the Plaza Accord delivered Soros an overnight profit of \$30 million, as the yen rose 7% against dollar the next day, largest one-day jump in history.

Soros had seen clearly ahead of time that the Reagan administration wanted to manage the dollar down, but he had no idea how this intention would play out and no foreknowledge of the Plaza meeting. The Plaza Accord helped make Soros a legend. Rather than cashing in his bet against the dollar and resting on his laurels, Soros piled on harder, as he sensed that this was merely the beginning. The Plaza meeting ended on a Sunday; on Monday Soros called Hong Kong and bought more yen. When his firm's traders began taking profits in small sub-portfolios, Soros got angry and said he would assume their positions. The Friday after the Plaza Accord, he would amass an additional \$209 million to holdings of yen and marks, and an extra \$107 million worth of short positions on dollars (92-93).

The rewards from the Plaza trade were astonishing. In the four months following August, Soros' fund jumped by 35%, yielding a profit of \$230 million (his account of this was later published as *The Alchemy of Finance* in



1987, which made him a celebrity [Soros 153-200; Mallaby 93-94]). Other hedge fund managers also made money from the Plaza Accord: Tiger's Julian Robertson had shorted Japanese bank stocks (Mallaby 125), and a quarter of his huge gain in 1985 came from a bet against the dollar—a smaller version of the Plaza Accord play made famous by Soros (125).

But such ventures could also prove risky. Although hurt by Black Monday in 1987, his short position in Japan paid off as the Nikkei stock index fell, cushioning losses. But when stocks collapsed on Black Monday, the Hong Kong stock market tried to staunch losses by suspending futures exchanges and closing down, and when Wall Street rallied on Tuesday, portending a rally next day in Japan, Soros could not get out of his short position. By Wednesday, the Nikkei had leaped 9.3%, its biggest one-day gain since 1949, but Soros could do nothing (99). Quantum risked the evaporation of confidence that could destroy any leveraged fund, so Soros decided to dump Quantum's entire \$1-billion position (100), which Soros considered the worst call of his career. This cost him \$200 million (101).

The Plaza Accord confirmed government influence over exchange rates. But since the mid-1980s, cross-border flows of money had roughly tripled. Hedge funds and other players now commanded large war chests and the balance of power had shifted. In August 1992 George H.W. Bush tried to bring about the concerting of the purchasing of dollar by 18 central banks, but now there was so much private capital sloshing through currency markets that central bank efforts failed to budge the dollar (158).

After the 1987 Black Monday crash, a profound change took place. In 1990, 600 hedge funds sprouted and by 1992, there were more than a thousand. Financial commentators hailed the Big Three—Soros, Robertson, and Michael Steinhardt—and 1993 was celebrated as the “year of the hedge fund” (130).

The amount of money made by these hedge fund managers eclipsed the salaries of CEOs of the investment banks. In terms of CEO salary, that of the top quartile had fallen from \$813,000 in 1934 to \$645,000 in 1974, as CEOs caved in to social pressure to keep their salaries down (Freeland 133-34). The median pay of CEOs of S&P firms rose from \$2.3 million in 1992 to \$7.2

million 2002 (135). But in 2004, top 25 hedge fund managers earned more than all 500 S&P500 CEOs combined (119-20). While in 2006, Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd C Blankfein took home \$54 million (Mallaby 3), hedge fund managers got even more: the bottom guy on the hedge fund magazine *Alpha's* list of top 25 hedge fund managers reportedly took home \$240 million. The private-equity partnership Blackstone Group gave Stephen Schwarzman \$400 million, but the top three hedge fund moguls were each said to have earned more than \$1 billion that same year. Six hedge fund managers pocketed a combined total of \$2.15 billion in 2016 (3).

### **Morality Tales from the “Decade of Greed”**

Americans remember the 1980s as the “Decade of Greed.” The Reagans themselves had set the template for making money out of their stint in public office. The First Lady Nancy Reagan became a target of criticism for accepting designer clothes. Her inauguration wardrobe—a \$25,000 gown, a \$10,000 mink coat, and a \$1500 alligator purse—was heavily criticized in light of the fact that the national unemployment rate was nearly ten percent (Linehan 152). The presidential inauguration was an \$8 million-dollar extravaganza that, along with similar lavishly produced ceremonies for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and the 1986 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Statue of Liberty, projected not only opulence, but more important, national confidence which had been badly damaged by the Vietnam War debacle (Mills 16-18). She also came under criticism for ordering \$209,508 worth of Lenox china for the White House at a time when her husband’s administration was proposing a \$41 billion tax cut in welfare programs and the Department of Agriculture was cutting the school lunches by declaring ketchup an acceptable vegetable for school lunch programs (Kelley 350, 373-74; Linehan 153).

Ronald Reagan himself would set a new standard for reaping a post-presidential windfall in earnings by accepting lucrative speaking engagements, charging \$50,000 per speech and collecting \$750,000 in his first three weeks of retirement by delivering the same speech over twenty-one days (Kelley 614). In 1989, Ronald Reagan accepted \$2 million from the Fujisankei Communications Group in Tokyo to embark on a ten-day trip to Japan that

required him to deliver two twenty-minute speeches and make a few guest appearances; the Japanese government would also donate \$2 million to the Reagan presidential library (616).

In their time, the Clintons would embrace this monetizing of their political careers: by 2016, their net family worth was conservatively estimated at \$110 million, the fortune deriving in large part from six-figure speeches they have given (in 2013, for example, Hillary earned \$8.5 million for 36 speeches, most of them costing sponsors such as Goldman Sachs and Fidelity Investments \$225,000 per speech; meantime, Bill earned even more, reaping 10.22 million for 34 speeches the same year) and from the million-dollar contracts each got for their books (D. Gross).

On American TV, top-rated soap operas like “Dallas” (1978-1991) and “Dynasty” (1981-1989) chronicled the lives, romances, scandals, and foibles of the super-rich, in this case, a pair oil magnates from Texas and Denver respectively, while “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous” (1984-1995) provided the public with glimpses of the houses, jewelry, costumes, and lifestyles of entertainers, business tycoons, superstar athletes, and others. Even as money-related words like “yuppie,” “upscale,” “privatization”, “takeover,” “raider,” “white knight,” “greenmail,” and “golden parachute” entered popular usage, the writer Tom Wolfe coined the term “plutography” to describe the prevailing aesthetic of the era, which was obsessively concerned with the “graphic depiction of the acts of the rich” (Mills 13, 14, 21).

Although most American individual investors remained wary of putting their money in the stock market between 1982 and 1987 (between 1981 and 1985, the number of individual investors increased by only 6 million), they were titillated by stories of the wheeling and dealing, the getting and spending, that happened on Wall Street during those boom years (Mahar 58).

While the sex and shopping novels of Judith Krantz had already anticipated the age of consumption, the women’s novels nevertheless still had a positive, empowering content in terms of affirming women’s desires, ambition, and work (discussed in Hau). But in the 1980s, the unfettered greed and conspicuous consumption unleashed by the new elites—who

were predominantly men (as recent as *Forbes*' 2012 ranking of billionaires, only 104 out of 1,226 were women, and the number would have been far less if we subtracted wives, daughters and widows [Freeland 85])—would become the subject of a series of highly publicized morality tales of male criminality (in striking contrast to the aspirationality and sexual freedom of women-centered sex-and-shopping novels) and excess, the most notable of which are the 1987 Oliver Stone film “Wall Street” and the novels *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987) by Tom Wolfe and *American Psycho* (1991) by Bret Easton Ellis (both novels would be made into films released in 1990 and 2000 respectively, and *American Psycho* would be further reincarnated as a London [2013] and Broadway [2016] musical).

#### *Gordon Gekko: “Greed is Good”*

The emblematic figure of cocaine-fueled, adrenaline-pumped greed in these morality tales is the corporate raider Gordon Gekko, convicted of insider trading, in “Wall Street”; the stockbroker Sherman McCoy, convicted of vehicular manslaughter, in *Bonfire*; and the misogynistic, homophobic, investment banker-serial killer Patrick Bateman in *Psycho*.

In the wake of a series of financial scandals involving insider trading, violation of securities laws, Ponzi scheming, and others, which had implicated financial “wizards” like Michael R. Milken, head of junk-bond trading department of Drexel Burnham Lambert, the hedge fund manager Bernie Madoff, and the stock trader Ivan Boesky (see, for example, Stewart 1991), these morality tales criticized the excesses and unethical practices of this new toxic-masculine breed of Wall Street, who were most often compared to swashbuckling pirates.

Memorably played by Michael Douglas, Gordon Gekko (the press calls him “Gordon the Great”) is the quintessential corporate raider. Gekko’s father sold electrical supplies, his mother worked in a dish factory. The father’s death from a heart attack was enough to shatter the working class family’s fragile finances—the family lost its house. Gekko did not go to an Ivy League university, having graduated from City College, and would remain contemptuous of the “high paid MBAs from Harvard,” who “never make it.”

“You need a system, discipline, good people, no deal junkies, no toreadores, the deal flow burns most people out by 35. Give me PSHs -- poor, smart and hungry. And no feelings.” The film captures the frenetic energy of trading on the floor—the machismo and sexism, the adrenaline charge of selling and wheeling and dealing and high-end consumption. To be a player, according to Gekko, one had to have 50 to 100 million dollars, and “fly your own jet.”

He gives a chance to one such person, Bud Fox, a stockbroker (he calls himself a “accounts executive”; his father calls him a “salesman”) at a middling firm who dreams of working in an investment bank. Bud’s repeated attempts to get an appointment to see Gordon Gekko finally pays off when he gives Gekko inside information on Blue Star, the regional airline company his father works for, and Gekko makes money in betting on the rise of Blue Star stocks following a favorable court ruling.

Bud’s own father, who makes \$37,000 a year and lives in Queens, wants his son to work in Blue Star as a supervisor, but Bud tells his father that he “could make more money in one year as a broker than five years at the airline.” Even with his rising income, Bud is subject to a different scale in the revolution in rising expectations. With his scholarship to New York University, a \$35,000 salary on his first year, rising to 50,000 the past year, Bud still feels that “50K don’t get you to first base in the Big Apple [New York City]...I pay 40% in taxes. I got a rent of 15,000. I got school loans, car loans, food, park my car costs me three bills a month, I need good suits, that’s \$500 a pop, shoes...” When father offers son the rent-free house back in Queens, the son declines: “I gotta live in Manhattan to be a player, Dad. There’s no nobility in poverty anymore, you know.”

Bud hears other traders talk enviously about a twenty-six-year-old trader named Marty Wyndham who makes \$650,000 out of mergers, drives a Porsche Turbo Cabriolet worth \$75,000, owns a house in Westhampton and a penthouse on Second Avenue, and works tirelessly (waking up at 2:30 am and “never sleeps”).

From Gekko, Bud learns that the “most valuable commodity I know is information.” Bud watches Gekko outwit Larry Wildman, an Englishman who is “one of the first raiders.” Wildman wants to take over Anacott Steel

with the intention of turning it around, modernize it, but is forced to buy back the stocks that Gekko has bought up (based on intelligence Bud gathers from watching the Englishman's movements) at a much higher price. "We're talking about lives and jobs, three and four generations of steel workers," he tells Gekko. To which, Gekko scoffs: "You must be wearing a mask you're laughing so hard behind it, Larry...Correct me if I'm wrong, but when you took CNX Electronics, you laid off 8,000 workers, Jessmon Fruit about 6,000, ..."

At a stockholder's meeting of Teldar, a paper company he has acquired a large chunk of stock in, Gekko utters the following famous lines:

America has become a second-rate power...The new law of evolution in corporate America seems to be "survival of the unfittest"...I am not a destroyer of companies, I am a liberator of them. The point is, ladies and gentlemen, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed works, greed clarifies, cuts through and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed in all its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, for knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind, and greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the USA.<sup>1</sup>

Bud's work with Gekko pays off, affording him a four-bedroom apartment on the thirtieth floor of the Upper East Side, overlooking Central Park, and a girlfriend, an interior designer and art aficionado who also happens to have been Gekko's former lover. Bud asks Gekko to take over Blue Star with the idea of doing a Wildman by appointing Bud as president so that he would expand the company. But then he finds out that Gekko only means to break up the company and sell off the assets. As revenge, he approaches Wildman, and persuades him to buy a controlling share of the company, but not before Bud manipulates the stock price so that it would plummet and Gekko dumps his stocks at a loss. Bud is arrested for insider trading and cooperates with the authorities to wear a wire and secure the incriminating evidence of Gekko's complicity in the insider trading. In the sequel, "Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps" (2010), we eventually learn that Bud worked to

turn Blue Star into one of the largest private jet carrier and sold it at a huge profit, making millions.

The film draws a line between the parasitical, piratical pursuit of quick-buck “trading” and the productive, creative act of running companies. Gekko’s relentless pursuit of profit is borne out by the fact that he collects art mainly with the intention of making money off of it. While Gekko is the proverbial upstart and outsider, coming from a working-class family and by implication not a member of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant class (WASPs), the WASP stockbroker is the focus of Tom Wolfe’s bestselling novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987). It was Wolfe who coined the memorable phrase “master of the universe” to characterize the new breed of elite, drawing inspiration from the American animated show “He-Man and the Masters of the Universe” (1983-1985) which followed the adventures of a blond-haired, big-muscled Prince Adam whose Sword of Power transformed him into “He-Man, the most powerful man in the universe.”

Unlike Gekko and Bud Fox, who come from the working class, Sherman McCoy is a Yale-educated WASP who owns a pre-war apartment (“the sort of apartment the mere thought of which ignites flames of greed and covetousness under people all over New York and, for that matter, all over the world” [Wolfe *Bonfire* 9]) in Park Avenue, for which he pays \$2.6 million, borrowing \$1.8 million and paying \$21,000 a month in principal and interest, with a million-dollar balloon payment due in two years (55). Even though he is one of the best brokers in Pierce and Pierce, a company that hires Jews, Irishmen, Greeks and Slavs, but not women and blacks (62), he too counts himself a victim of the revolution in rising expectations: “*I’m already going broke on a million dollars a year!*” (140-41)<sup>2</sup> For him, people in his trade ought to be making \$250,000 a year within five years of working in the company, or else they are “grossly stupid or grossly lazy.” If by age 30, they are making half a million dollars, that sum still “had the taint of the mediocre” (58).

The impact of globalization and the global elites on New York real estate can be seen in the changing pattern of ownership of 740 Park Avenue, arguably the most prestigious of these “pre-war” co-op apartments. Located in Manhattan’s so-called “Gold Coast,” the Upper East Side rectangle formed



by Fifth and Park Avenues between 59<sup>th</sup> and 96<sup>th</sup> Streets (M. Gross 740 1), and opened in 1929, 740 Park has seen ownership of its apartments change from a combination of old “aristocratic” elites (for example, those whose ancestors came on the *Mayflower* and who are listed in the Social Register) and new moneyed elite of bankers and industrialists (7) to oil money like the Rockefellers (138-139). American allies like France, Germany and Japan had bought units for their embassy staff. In the case of Japan, the government had bought the unit of Angier Biddle Duke, Jr. (a descendant of the tobacco Dukes and the old Quaker family Biddles) for \$200,000 in 1965 for its U.N. Representative, and sold the same unit to billionaire David Koch for \$17 million in 2004 (308, 375). Prominent figures in businessmen and financiers like Edgar Miles Bronfman, Saul Steinberg, Henry Kravis, Ronald Perelman, Steve Mnuchin, and Stephen Schwarzman (who paid a record \$30 million) bought apartments in the 1980s to 2010s (332, 406, 463, 483, 503). Winston Lord also lived there (490); Henry Kissinger was interested but did not make an offer because he “wasn’t in the league yet” (360). The Taiwanese and Hong Kong Chinese would be represented by Miranda and Hamburg Wang and Peter Huang (472-473). The less exclusive but equally expensive 15 Central Park West condominium attracted not only American buyers, but foreign buyers who made their money in the new technology and creative industries and in emerging markets (including Israelis, South Koreans, Mainland Chinese, Greeks, Indians, South Americans, and Filipinos) (M. Gross *House* 208-209). In other global cities, the same pattern holds: sixty percent of real estate worth more than 2.5 million pounds in London owned by foreigners (Freeland 63).

McCoy has some inkling of the “colossal vanity” not only of his expensive shoes but his expensive lifestyle (Wolfe *Bonfire* 271) and dreams of escape and an alternative way of life (232-33). While Sherman thinks that bigotry is a “sign of low-rent origins, of inferior social status, of poor taste” (12), his own bigotry implicates him in a fatal hit-and-run involving two African-American kids who approach him as he works to clear the path for his car when he and his mistress get lost in the Bronx. Sherman and his mistress Maria Ruskin—the wife of an aged financier—assume that the two

black men are predators and with Maria in the driver's seat, his Mercedes Benz runs over one of the boys. The resulting investigation that leads to Sherman's arrest and trial for vehicular manslaughter exposes the racial and class tensions that divides New York City.

*Patrick Bateman, Fan of Donald Trump*

Bret Easton Ellis' 1991 novel *American Psycho* takes the issue further by turning his WASP, Harvard-educated Patrick Bateman (who, in Ellis' homage to Wolfe's *Bonfire*, works at the same firm, Pierce and Pierce, as Sherman McCoy) into the ultimate apex predator—a serial killer. Although the novel remains ambiguous on the issue of whether Bateman kills in real life or else is imagining the killing in his own mind, the novel clearly sets itself up as a critique of unchecked predatory capitalism and conspicuous consumption. *American Psycho* riffs on Emile Durkheim's idea of the stock exchange as more murderous than any serial killer (Ruggiero 24) by making a serial killer of the Wall Street trader.

Like Judith Krantz novels, *American Psycho* is clotted with brand names, as when Patrick sees his friend Price "wearing a six-button wool and silk suit by Ermenegildo Zegna, a cotton shirt with French cuffs by Ike Behar, a Ralph Lauren silk tie and leather wing tips by Fratelli Rossetti" (Ellis 4-5). But consumption here has negative associations as the novel highlights the envy, insecurity, and violence at the heart of this relentless acquisition and competition among peers.

The proverbial "boy next door" (18, 20), somebody who looks like he came straight out of the magazine *GQ* (90), Bateman is all about surfaces and appearances, obsessed with fashion, books, food, movies, serial killer books, and other forms of pop culture. We never see him actually working; the novel suggests that he has a secure job because the company belongs to his father. Much as Bateman hates his work (237), he is a stickler for conformity, and wants to "fit in" (48). His hero is Donald Trump (194), whose bestselling *Art of the Deal* Patrick has read (189), and whose sons Donald, Jr. and Eric in real life still sport the yuppie slicked-back hair (Garner), also famously worn by Gordon Gekko, that is a hallmark of the Greed Decade.

For Bateman and his ilk, the competition and one-upmanship center on a series of status markers, including this darkly comic scene in which the men compete with each other over their business cards:

...I decide to even up the score a little bit by showing everyone my new business card. I pull it out of my gazelleskin wallet (Barney's, \$850) and slap it on the table, waiting for reactions.

"What's that, a gram?" Price says, not apathetically.

"New card." I try to act casual about it but I'm smiling proudly. "What do you think?"

"Whoa," McDermott says, lifting it up, fingering the card, genuinely impressed. "Very nice. Take a look." He hands it to Van Patten.

"Picked them up from the printer's yesterday," I mention.

"Cool coloring," Van Patten says, studying the card closely.

"That's bone," I point out. "And the lettering is something called Silian Rail."

"Silian Rail?" McDermott asks.

"Yeah. Not bad, huh?"

"It is very cool, Bateman," Van Patten says guardedly, the jealous bastard, "but that's nothing..." He pulls out his wallet and slaps a card next to an ashtray. "Look at this."

We all lean over and inspect David's card and Price quietly says, "That's *really* nice." A brief spasm of jealousy courses through me when I notice the elegance of the color and the classy type. I clench my fist as Van Patten says, smugly, "Eggshell with Romalian type..." He turns to me. "What do you think?"

"Nice," I croak, but manage to nod, as the busboy brings four fresh Bellinis. (Ellis 44)

Bateman hides his violent disposition behind a façade of political correctness and liberal rhetoric. He lectures his dinner companions on the pressing issues of the day and American foreign and social policy:

"Well, we have to end apartheid now. And slow down the nuclear arms race, stop terrorism and world hunger. Ensure a strong national defense, prevent the spread of communism in Central America, work for a Middle East peace settlement, prevent U.S. military involvement overseas. We have to ensure that America is a respected world power. Now that's not to belittle our domestic problems, which are equally important, if not *more*. Better and more affordable long-term care for the elderly, control and find a cure

for the AIDS epidemic, clean up environmental damage from toxic waste and pollution, improve the quality of primary and secondary education, strengthen laws to crack down on crime and illegal drugs. We also have to ensure that college education is affordable for the middle class and protect Social Security for senior citizens plus conserve natural resources and wilderness areas and reduce the influence of political action committees.”

\* \* \*

“But economically we’re still a mess. We have to find a way to hold down the inflation rate and reduce the deficit. We also need to provide training and jobs for the unemployed as well as protect existing American jobs from unfair foreign imports. We have to make America the leader in new technology. At the same time we need to promote economic growth and business expansion *and* hold the line against federal income taxes and hold down interest rates while promoting opportunities for small businesses and controlling mergers and big corporate takeovers” (15)

If this spiel sounds reasonable, what Bateman does (or imagines himself doing) is not. He preys on a series of Others, making them objects of his racist, sexist, homophobic, and class violence—the poor and the homeless (126), non-whites (black and Asian and Jews) (129, 333, 152), women, including prostitutes (289), small children (298), homosexuals (159, 165-66), and the elderly (285, 370).

Despite the fact that he is surrounded by Japanese electronics (he and his colleagues argue the merits of a Sansui stereo system [25, 100]; in the novel, Bateman apparently likes sushi, and Sony alone is mentioned as a brand several times in relation to Bateman and his colleagues’ collection of alarm clock, Walkman, TV, Watchman pocket TV, palm-size Handycam, CD player, 8-mm. camcorder, multidisc player [Ferry 101]), Bateman responds to the prevalent anti-Japanese rhetoric of his colleagues (his colleague Luis Carruthers screams, “Bateman, I *hate* the Japanese....Little slanty-eyed bastards” [145]; another, Charles Murphy, goes on “a tirade against the Japanese—‘They’ve bought the Empire State Building and Nell’s [a club]’ [Ellis 180]) by murdering an Asian-looking delivery boy whom he mistakes

for Japanese but turns out to be Chinese, “accidentally killing the wrong type of Asian” (181).

His violence against women is particularly horrific—involving mutilations and, in one particularly horrible instance, putting a hungry rat inside a woman’s vagina—and made the novel controversial and subject to feminist criticism when it was first published.

Worse, the novel suggests that this kind of savagery and violence does not really put a spanner in the works, as the society that nurtures it is also prone to deny its reality. Bateman becomes interchangeable with other yuppies (in the novel, characters look like with their slicked-back hair and brand-name suits and eyeglasses), and even his killing sprees, if they happen in reality, are routinely glossed over and denied. Having left a colleague’s corpse in the colleague’s apartment, Bateman returns to find the apartment all cleaned up and on the market, and is told by the real-estate agent to just go away. In a club, Bateman has the following exchange with his date:

She inhales on the cigarette, then blows out. “So what do you do?”

“What do you think I do?” And frisky too.

“A model?” She shrugs. “An actor?”

“No,” I say. “Flattering, but no.”

“Well?”

“I’m into, oh, murders and executions, mostly. It depends.”

“Do you like it?” she asks, unfazed.

“Um...it depends. Why?” I take a bite of sorbet.

“Well, most guys I know who work in mergers and acquisitions don’t really like it,” she says. (205-206)

In his review of “American Psycho,” Norman Mailer nicely captures the intent of the novel: “American Psycho is saying that the eighties were spiritually disgusting, and the author’s presentation is the crystallization of such horror. When an entire new class thrives on the ability to make money out of the manipulation of money, and becomes altogether obsessed with the surface of things—that is, with luxury commodities, food, and appearance, then, in effect, says Ellis, we have entered a period of the absolute manipulation of humans by humans: the objective correlative of total manipulation is

coldcock murder” (Mailer 159). Mergers and acquisitions, hallmarks of the Decade of Greed, are no different from murders and executions wrought by systemic violence and the social structures and institutions that buttress and preserve it.

### **“The Me Decade”+“The Greed Decade”= Clinton, Trump, and the Aspirational Class**

The attempt of new elites to craft their personas against the masters—now depicted in popular culture as monsters—of Wall Street is behind the rise of what David Brooks calls “bourgeois bohemians” (bobos for short) in the 1990s and 2000s. This educated class champions radical, countercultural values of the 1960s along with the entrepreneurial values of the 1980s (Brooks 10) to create a “hybrid culture” (11).

As meritocrats, they define the value of life in terms of self-actualization (18), self-expression and self-fulfillment. Just as the language of neoliberal economics (with its talk of productivity, efficiency, investment, and consumption) would infiltrate and reshape the idioms and practices of sex and romance (as we have seen in Krantz’s novels), so too would it redefine personal identity in terms of the accumulation of “human capital,” a term that conferred economic value on the labor made possible by a person’s knowledge and creativity, talents and skills, social attributes and work and other habits, experience, judgment, and even wisdom. In fact, the coming decades would witness the popularization of differentiations of the term “capital” alongside existing terms like financial capital, individual capital, natural capital, and instructional capital: social capital (the social networks and relations one relies on to produce goods and services), cultural capital (education, intelligence, styles of self presentation that enable a person’s social mobility), and, what else, sexual or erotic capital (degree of social and other advantage attained through sexual attractiveness).

David Brooks characterized the Bobos’ preoccupation with self-fashioning this way: “this isn’t crass and vulgar selfishness, about narrow self-interest or mindless accumulation. This is higher selfishness. It’s about making sure you get the most out of yourself, which means putting yourself in a

job that is spiritually fulfilling, socially constructive, experientially diverse, emotionally enriching, self-esteem boosting, perpetually challenging, and eternally edifying.” (134)

They want jobs that give them satisfaction and let them enjoy their work. They are “curators of [their] possessions,” in terms of patronizing upscale retailers for their clothes, gourmet bakeries and patisseries for their baked goods, furniture shops for quality handmade furniture, and upmarket groceries for locally sourced and organic food. Instead of going to just any resort beach, they travel to Galápagos for educational purposes. They prefer to stay in hard-to-find hotels in remote places instead of taking big ocean cruises.

For these bobos, the declass   are those people who “embrace glitzy materialism” and are “overly snobbish” and “anti-intellectual,” and their list of non-role models include Donald Trump (47-48). Their politics tend to be (but are not necessarily) liberal and favor multicultural pluralism (though critics point to the hidden racism and sexism that underpin liberal rhetoric), inclinations that make them the target of right-wing attacks, as seen in the ad taken out in 2004 by the Club for Growth against Democratic Presidential candidate Howard Dean: “Howard Dean should take his tax-hiking, government-expanding, latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, *New York Times*-reading, body-piercing, Hollywood-loving, left-wing freak show back to Vermont, where it belongs” (“Conservatives”; Tierney).

As consumption of luxury goods is now mainstreamed and rendered commonplace, democratized and made available to middle classes and even the poor, these new elites favor inconspicuous consumption (Currid-Halkett 10, 21), concerned with accruing “cultural capital” and knowledge. This is borne out by statistics: in terms of American consumer behavior, the top 1%, 5%, and 10% spend less as percentage of consumption on conspicuous consumption relative to U.S. average spends on same good. The middle class (those in the 40<sup>th</sup>-60<sup>th</sup> percentile) spends more, while wealthy and very poor spend less. Inconspicuous consumption tends to cluster around nonvisible, highly expensive goods and services such as education (particularly in brand-



name schools), health care and child-care, and labor-intensive services like nannies, gardeners and housekeepers (26).

The top 1% spent 0.1% of total expenditure on status goods in 1996 (about four times as much as everyone else on apparel, watches, cars and socially visible goods (30), but by 2014, the number had gone down to almost 0 percent (29). Educational expenditure, however, has increased 60% since 1996, and among the top 1%, 5% and 10% it increased by almost 300% (29). These parents put much effort into overseeing their children's education and extra-curricular activities (music, dance, volunteer work, etc.) to make sure the children—now called overachievers—can get into the “top schools” and get good jobs after graduation.

Politically, they tend toward reform rather than radical change. According to David Brooks, the Clinton/Gore administration embodied the compromising spirit of bobos—who combined the self-absorbed, aspirational impulses and countercultural values of the 1970s “Me Decade” (a term coined by Tom Wolfe) and the status-obsessed, acquisitive impulses and materialistic values of 1980s “Greed Decade”—and the middle-ground liberal politics they represented: the Clintons had both been 1960s antiwar protestors and yet, in 1978, Hillary Clinton had worked as a futures trader, making a “killing” by turning her \$1000 investment into \$100,000 (and also attracting public attention on suspicion of trading on inside information provided by her lawyer James Blair) (see Lebaton).

The Clintons married bohemian ideals to bourgeois ambitions, embracing school uniforms and traditional-sounding gestures, while also allowing condoms in school and other liberal-sounding measures. Bill Clinton advocated a balanced budget without painful budget cuts, toughened their war on drugs but increased spending on rehabilitation, promoted reform welfare without meanness, preserved public school while championing charter school alternatives, and instigated a “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy” on gays in military (Lebaton 257). Their style of politics appeals to affluent suburbanites and to people who control money, media and culture.

Interestingly, Brooks’ prescription for what America should do at home and abroad sounds like something Patrick Bateman would not have hesitated

to pay lip service to, at least publicly: reform at home and activism abroad. In the international sphere, this means pick up obligations that fall to the world's lead nation: promoting democracy and human rights everywhere and exercising American might in a way that reflects American ideals (272).

At the same time, this lifestyle has generated its share of adverse reactions and blowbacks, most notably from those who either did not benefit from the economic boom that created the conditions for flourishing for the new elite or who disagreed with the so-called liberalism (with its implications of non-religiosity, lax morality, feminism and environmentalism, and upliftment or betterment of non-whites) of the elites. According to Mark Lilla, the central disagreement today is not between sixties and eighties, but between those who have refused the sixties *and* eighties on one side and those who reject the fusion on the other. (259)

The face of this reaction was himself an icon of the Greed Decade—Donald Trump, Bateman's hero—who, despite his outsider and declassé status, can certainly be counted as part of the new elites. His gift lay in perfecting the art of self-branding and selling his name on a scale that far exceeds Krantz's novelistic heroine Princess Daisy (Krantz *Daisy*; discussed in Hau 97-98). Born in Queens, New York, educated in Wharton (University of Pennsylvania's business school), and a second-generation real-estate developer, he parlayed his father's political and business connections and leveraged his father's money to build a series of luxury buildings in New York City that combined condominium and business spaces. His first major building was the Trump Tower, the two-hundred-twenty-six-unit condominiums of which went on sale in 1982; the lowest price paid was half a million dollars for a one-bed apartment (Kranish and Fisher 94). The Donald and his family set the benchmark for the glitzy, ostentatious lifestyle of the rich and the famous by moving into the three-storey penthouse, in a fifty-three room "gilded triplex [that] boasted a twenty-nine-foot-high living room, maid's quarters, ceiling murals of Renaissance cherubs, crystal chandeliers, a remote-controlled Romanesque fountain, blue onyx mined from 'deepest, darkest Africa,' and its own elevator" (96). Trump would acquire show-

case homes, build golf courses, run his own winery and the Miss Universe pageant, and own his own airline and football team, with mixed success.

Trump moved into the casino hotel business and attempted to raise the money to build the 1250-room Taj Mahal hotel and casino in Atlantic City by having Merrill Lynch Capital Markets issue \$675 million worth of junk bonds with an interest rate of 14% (5% above the prime rate). This saddled Trump with a yearly interest of \$95 million (138). In 1990, Trump found himself short of cash and missed a payment on one of his casinos, Trump Castle Hotel and Casino (188-89); a confidential assessment by Kenneth Levanthal & Co. found that out of Trump's twenty-two assets—the casinos, the yacht, Manhattan's Plaza Hotel, and all the rest—only three were running a profit and Trump had piled up \$3.2 billion of debt (189). Facing bankruptcy (his real net worth, which he would never reveal, was estimated at \$200 to 300 million in 2011 [304]), Trump turned to marketing himself as a brand name.

His celebrity status enabled him to license his name to a wide variety of products ranging from men's shirts, neck ties, cufflinks and underwear, bottled water (Trump Ice), and fragrances with names like Donald Trump The Fragrance and Success for Men by Donald Trump and Empire by Donald Trump (includes deodorant stick), to eyeglasses, home furnishings (includes dining table and chairs, beds, chests, bar stools, display cabinets, desks, consoles, sofas, side tables, ottomans), chandeliers, wallets, mattresses, steaks, beer and vodka, and even urine-sample test kits (for vitamin deficiency) and the controversial Trump University (224-227; see also Anthony, Sanders, and Fahrenthold). By 2018, however, one year after Trump became president, and owing to his anti-Muslim and anti-immigration rhetoric and policies, only two companies—one from Panama and one from Turkey—were licensing his name to sell furniture, bed linens and home goods. While he still owned a number of properties in New York (the Trump Building at 40 Wall Street; the commercial floors of Trump Tower; two properties on East 57<sup>th</sup> Street and housing co-ops on East 61<sup>st</sup> and East 43<sup>rd</sup> Streets, and minority shares in 1290 Avenue of the Americas and a high-rise), most of the other buildings bearing his name that were constructed in America and around the world were not owned by him; instead, he licensed

his name, without putting up much money, to (and in some cases entered into contracts to manage) projects such as Trump International Hotel and Tower, Trump Palace, Trump Park Avenue, and Trump Place (Kranish and Fisher 306), and also Trump International Hotel and Tower in Vancouver, Panama, and Toronto (divested in 2017). By 2016, he was receiving income from at least twenty-five different licensing deals (Kranish and Fisher 224; see Yanofsky for a list of entities for which Trump serves as an executive).

As part of his personal branding, he starred in the reality show “Celebrity Apprentice” (2008-2015) and appeared in cameos as himself in movies like *Home Alone 2* (1992) and *Zoolander* (2001) and television shows like *The Nanny*, *Sex and the City*, and *Saturday Night Live* (in which he informed the show’s performers of what he considered the deal breaker: “Make fun of my kids, do whatever you want. Just don’t say that I don’t have that much money.” [Kranish and Fisher 269-70]). These were shows in which he played himself and got to advertise the luxurious trappings of the Trump “empire” (213). His high visibility made him a “household brand” in Middle America and arguably paved the way for his presidential campaign (217, 221). “The name just sells,” he has been quoted as saying (272).

And despite the fact that he has a record of switching between the Republican and Democratic parties, contributed to Hillary Clinton’s senatorial campaign, and even once criticized Pat Buchanan for the negative things he said about Jews, blacks, gays and Mexicans (285), he himself would cannily exploit the seething discontent (often tinged with anti-immigrant and racist sentiments) wrought by globalization, fashioning himself as a champion and spokesman of the white middle- and lower-middle classes who had lost out to globalization, while simultaneously holding himself up as a model of the rich and famous to which these people could aspire.

If Donald Trump’s life has played out like a reality-TV version of *Scruples* and *Princess Daisy*, bestselling author Judith Krantz paid Trump the ultimate compliment by making Trump a character in her fourth number-one-bestselling novel, *I’ll Take Manhattan* (1986). Set in the Big Apple, New York City, the novel follows heroine Maxime “Maxi” Amberville as she finds meaning in life by taking over the fashion-trade magazine her father had

founded and turning it into a hip and wildly successful magazine for women. To illustrate her glamorous, ultra-luxurious lifestyle, Krantz makes Maxi a resident of the apartment on the sixty-third floor of the Trump Tower (Krantz *Manhattan* 111). Maxi also counts The Donald as her “pal” (115). Krantz does her research on Trump Tower, telling her readers that “Almost half of Trump Tower is owned by foreigners” (393). Krantz even burnishes Trump’s name and legend by creating a scene where, pressed for cash, Maxi meets with Donald Trump, “the brilliant, ambitious young real-estate man whom even his enemies had to admit was disarmingly unaffected” (377), and asks him to sell her apartment for her so that she can revive her father’s magazine. In that scene, Trump provides the following information about his Tower—that there is a waiting list for apartments like Maxi’s; that next to his own apartment, Maxi’s apartment is the biggest and best; and that her apartment is four thousand square feet (371.61 square meters), unusual for being “an ‘L’ [shape] and an ‘H’ thrown in together” (377). Krantz helpfully informs readers that Maxi “loved her apartment the way he [Trump] loved his, as a part of herself, as an extension of her capacity for life and [in selling it,] had nothing else left to sacrifice” (377). Just as Krantz celebrates Maxi’s glitzy lifestyle by giving her the second-best unit in the Trump Tower (next to Donald’s own penthouse apartment), so too does Krantz contribute to the making of Donald Trump as an icon of the 1980s by turning him into a character in her best-selling homage to New York City.

The best and worst thing that ever happened to Trump was his decision to run for presidency. On the one hand, he gained global recognition and used his term in office to push his “brand,” as business and foreign governments eager to curry favor patronized his business establishments (Eder, Lipton, and Lehren). On the other hand, he faced considerable domestic and international backlash—and ultimately lost his re-election bid—for his incompetence, especially his mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic; his 30,573 false or misleading claims and polarizing rhetoric; his cozying up to authoritarian leaders; his alienation of U.S. allies; his nepotism and cronyism; and his unethical behavior in private and in business and politics (Kessler, Rizzo, and Kelly). Intense public scrutiny of his personal, business,

and political activities served to puncture, if not discredit (among his hard-core fans), the myth of the self-made, savvy, ambitious billionaire entrepreneur-turned-politician he has spent a lifetime retailing.

## Conclusion

This article traces the dividing line that separates not only the yuppies from the bobos, but also the bobos, who seek a compromise between the values of the 1960s and the 1980s, from Americans who reject both the 1960s and the 1980s. A new group of elites is emerging as new wealth is created in the tech sector, with the rapid growth of American Big Tech companies like Google (Alphabet), Amazon, Meta (Facebook), Apple, and Microsoft. Furthermore, new dividing lines are being drawn in the twenty-first century, as the next generation of “woke consumers”—to be “woke” is to be “alert to injustice in society”—achieve critical mass (McKinsey and Company 45). Woke consumers tend to be millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and Gen Z (born in and after 1997) and have a keen interest in or are active proponents of social and environmental causes. They self-consciously fashion their lifestyles, employment choices, and shopping habits—their spending power is estimated at USD 350 billion in America alone—to reflect their beliefs and activism and favor brands that either align with or promote the values they themselves espouse (45-46). These consumers’ heightened (and often critical) scrutiny of companies’ stances and policies on social and environmental issues is putting pressure on companies to review and change their marketing as well as strategic and operational decisions (47). Like the supporters of Trump, woke consumers also explicitly define themselves against both yuppies and bobos, albeit at the opposite end of the political spectrum. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss in detail the mechanisms and consequences of woke consumerism. For instance, will woke consumerism as a movement spread from the western world to the global elites in the developing world? Suffice it to say that morality tales proffered by financier novels and films like *American Psycho* and *Greed* arguably played a role in shaping forms of counter-consciousness, both “Left” and “Right.”

## Notes

1. Gekko's speech was inspired by arbitrageur Ivan Boesky's 1986 commencement speech before the graduates of the University of California-Berkeley School of Business Administration, where he famously proclaimed that "Greed is all right, by the way...I want you to know that. I think greed is healthy. You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself" (quoted in Mills 20-21).
2. A 1993 survey of relatively affluent baby-boomer Americans with household incomes of \$50,000 revealed that they felt it would take \$1 million to make them feel financially secure (Mahar 117).



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# The Coloniality of Linguistic Entrepreneurship

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## Abstract

Neoliberalism as a lens through which language learning—and by extension education in general—is viewed is insufficient in accounting for the transforming nature of education and language learning today. In other words, the neoliberalism of education and language learning—operationalized, for example, through the practices and ideologies of *linguistic entrepreneurship*—is imbricated in historically-mediated sociopolitical relations. This can be exemplified by the case of the Philippines where entrepreneurial discourses and practices – for example, language learning for employment opportunities, pursuit for profit and as a moral obligation to society—are historically traceable to the Philippines’ enduring encounters and confrontations with 20<sup>th</sup> century (neo)colonialism. Linguistic entrepreneurship fittingly describes the dispositions, practices and ideologies of the neoliberal language learner, but as soon as this language learner becomes the neoliberal Filipino speaker, it becomes politically imperative to historically unpack the ‘Filipino’ in language learning. In this sense education and language learning are characterized primarily by their coloniality, mediated by the logics of neoliberalism; linguistic entrepreneurship is mobilized in conditions of coloniality.

## Keywords

linguistic entrepreneurship, neoliberalism, coloniality, language learning

## 1. Introduction

In *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, Peter De Costa, Joseph Park and Lionel Wee (2016) have published a conceptual paper, “Language learning as linguistic entrepreneurship: Implications for language education” which has initiated a conversation around the notion of linguistic entrepreneurship as a lens through which we may understand the neoliberal nature of language learning today (De Costa, Park and Wee 2019; Pujular 2019; Rasool and Winke 2019). This paper seeks to join the conversation by conceptually expanding the idea of linguistic entrepreneurship along the lines of the colonality of neoliberalism. According to de Costa, Park and Wee (2016), and reiterated in de Costa et al. (2021), *linguistic entrepreneurship* refers to the changing nature of language learning today which does not simply take a market-driven perspective but, more crucially, it also frames the need for language learning in moral terms: it “presents the learning of languages as a responsibility of a good citizen and ideal neoliberal worker” (p. 140). That is, one is affectively confronted with a moral desire to learn a language (English, for example) because it is one way to improve oneself and contribute to the nation’s development. Success—or failure—in language learning, therefore, is placed squarely on the individual learner, thus removing or obscuring the role of state institutions, hegemonic ideologies and structuring social conditions in configuring one’s language learning trajectory. In this paper, the argument pushes the definition further by locating linguistic entrepreneurship *centrally* within conditions of colonality. The logics of neoliberal language learning demands the deployment of the lens of colonality, thus complicating the conditions within which we learn language—“global” English specifically—today.

Thus, this paper—primarily a conceptual one—specifically aims to show the durability of the colonality of language learning and education today, mediated by what may be referred to as neoliberal practices and ideologies. In particular, it aims to show that linguistic entrepreneurship as referring to ‘new’ dispositions and practices of language learners today should also be seen in the light of colonialism’s “replicants” (Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui 2008) because the colonality of life remains “the most general form of domi-

nation in the world today” (Quijano 2007: 170). The paper uses the case of the colonality of English language learning in the Philippines by drawing on the complex and multilayered nature of an English Language Teaching (ELT) project funded by the United States as part of its anti-terrorism campaign in Mindanao where most of the country’s Filipino Muslims live. It draws on newspaper articles about the project, resource materials produced by the American company which developed the ELT software used in the teaching in Philippine classrooms, as well as interview data drawn from the work of Tabiola (2015) and (re)examined in Tupas and Tabiola (2017), and Tupas (2020).

## **2. The neoliberal learner in conditions of colonality**

Neoliberal formations and dispositions should be understood as “*situated neoliberal assemblages*” (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2014: 39, *italics supplied*), that is, within the historical specificities of their emergence, generation and reproduction. In other words, neoliberal education and language learning—operationalized, for example, through the practices and ideologies of linguistic entrepreneurship—is imbricated in historically-mediated socio-political relations. In the case of the Philippines, entrepreneurial discourses and practices—for example, language learning for employment opportunities and pursuit for profit (De Costa et. al. 2016: 696)—are historically traceable to the Philippines’ enduring encounters and confrontations with 20<sup>th</sup> century (neo)colonialism. Therefore, there is a need to look at the colonality of education and language learning, but this time mediated by the ethical logics of neoliberalism.

Coloniality differs from colonialism. While colonialism refers to relations between nations or peoples where one’s sovereignty depends on the power of another (Maldonado-Torres 2007), coloniality refers to “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration” (243). In other words, “coloniality survives colonialism” (243). Thus, when one speaks of the neoliberal dimensions of education and language learning, one may have



unwittingly erased coloniality from the equation (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. 2014). In the same manner, linguistic entrepreneurship fittingly describes the “new” dispositions, practices and ideologies of the neoliberal language learner (e.g., learning English as a form of self-improvement and service to the nation; being a resourceful and risk-taking student in order to prove one’s worth as a learner), but as soon as this language learner becomes the neoliberal Filipino speaker, it becomes politically imperative to historically unpack the “Filipino” in language learning who is not a monolithic entity in the first place.

Consequently, if we try to view Filipinos as linguistic entrepreneurs, it is therefore important to ask how their embodied colonial history becomes a defining feature of their learning experience. Linguistic entrepreneurship is mobilized in conditions of coloniality. Premised on the primacy of neoliberalism, linguistic entrepreneurship nuances, even reconfigures, but does not override the coloniality of conditions and experiences of language learning, a point about language learning (especially the learning of English) which has been examined extensively by scholars in the past (Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 1994; Canagarajah 1999). According to Hsu (2015), the history of language learning in the Philippines is “an element of overseas colonial rule” (124), thus central to one’s interrogation of neoliberal dispositions and practices in education today is the coloniality of these dispositions and practices in the first place. Consequently, curricular revisions along the lines of decolonizing options (Kumaravadivelu 2014) cannot happen if conquest, and the vestiges of colonial content, dispositions and attitudes in teaching materials, methodologies and classroom practices, are “invisibilized” (Hsu 2015: 125).

### **3. A brief critical linguistic history of the Philippines**

Throughout direct American colonial rule in the Philippines at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the English language was imposed as the sole medium of instruction, and this policy continued even after the Philippines was given nominal independence in 1946 because, having been convinced by the altruistic intentions of American colonial rule, “we [Filipinos] believe no education can be true education unless it is based on proficiency in English”

(Constantino 1970/2000: 438). Thus, “the early postwar Filipino educational thinking was almost a carbon copy of the American colonial position on all issues” (Foley 1978: 69).

In 2009, the Philippines began to implement Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) which eventually became one of the core features of the Revised Basic Education Law or popularly called the K-12 law (Nolasco et al. 2010; Tupas 2015). This means that schools around the country are mandated by law to use the mother tongue as the language of instruction from Kindergarten to Primary 3. However, the MTB-MLE Philippine version is by itself, according to one of its main proponents, a “castrated” version (Nolasco 2013). The decision to use the mother tongue until Primary 3 was a bitter political compromise with members of the Philippine Congress who, in fact, rallied to bring back English as the main medium of instruction (Lorente 2013). Around seventy years after Philippine independence from the United States, the Philippines remains, in the words of Lorente (2013), “in the grip of English”. How it is that we are still in the grip of English will be the subject of the following sections. As will be seen later, the “mad rush to learn English” (Hu 2005: 30) has swept much of the world today because of neoliberal globalization, but being “in the grip” allows us to see how English remains inextricably linked with colonially-shaped structures of sociopolitical relations (Tollefson 1986). We will find how, through one recent example, the promotion and learning of neoliberal English “evidences coloniality, as it continues a colonial pattern of language and power beyond the period of formal colonial administration” (Hsu 2015: 125).

#### **4. The coloniality of language learning: an example**

Between 2007-2012, a two-year intensive English programme was implemented in at least 26 universities in Mindanao, Philippines, in order to improve students’ chances in the job market. Called the *Job Enabling English Proficiency* (or JEEP) Project, the initiative targeted communities effected by decades-old Muslim and communist insurgencies. The two-year programme consisted of two main parts. The first year (JEEP-Start) was focused on

developing students' General English skills, while the second year (JEEP-Accelerate) was meant to capitalize on gains from the first year by focusing on English for Specific Purposes (GEM Completion Report 2013: 33). This would purportedly prepare students for specific industry English language needs and requirements (e.g., business process outsourcing (BPO), tourism, nursing, allied health services and maritime services). JEEP itself did not come up with its own curriculum document but in deploying the use of a particular computer-based English language learning programme (to be discussed below), JEEP's curricular philosophy and objectives were thus articulated through the winning language learning software company's teaching and learning objectives, as well as learning theories.

JEEP was part of the Growth with Equity in Mindanao (or GEM) Program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) purportedly in support of the Philippine government's efforts to promote and bring back peace and development in Mindanao. USAID is essentially a US government agency which is tasked to provide foreign aid to any country in the world which requires assistance to reduce poverty, provide healthcare, improve political governance, and develop self-sufficiency among people (see <https://www.usaid.gov/>). The region has been the traditional homeland of Muslim Filipinos since the 14<sup>th</sup> century or before the onset of Spanish colonization in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Milligan 2005; Hawkins 2008). From being the majority population of the region, Muslim Filipinos through various mechanisms of disempowerment which intensified during the time of American colonization through forcible dispossession of land, are now a minority population in the region. However, an Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was created in 1989 during the term of President Corazon Aquino, with the aim of addressing years of neglect of and historical injustices suffered by Muslim Filipinos by providing them with some autonomy over their political and cultural affairs. Currently, five provinces are part of the ARMM, namely Lanao del Sur (except Marawi City), Maguindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan. The total population of the ARMM is 3,781,387 or 3.7% of the entire population of the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Office 2016). Although GEM covered all of Mindanao,

it concentrated its efforts on ARMM and conflict areas where the government has been fighting organized Muslim resistance forces for around five decades now.

#### *4.1 JEEP and the (continuing) military presence in Mindanao*

JEEP was implemented at the time the United States was highly involved in what is referred to as “the US-initiated Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)” (Feickert 2005). The program was officially discontinued (although its sustainability is such that it is still being implemented by individual universities, the program having been incorporated into the schools’ courses) because of controversy back in the United States when several American legislators complained that the program was helping Filipinos take jobs (especially in call centers) away from Americans by teaching the former how to speak English more proficiently (May 2012). As mentioned above, the explicit motivation for JEEP was the need to help university students improve their proficiency in English with the hope that they would become competitive in the job market, find good-paying jobs, help uplift the economic conditions of Mindanao, and thus help solve the socioeconomic roots of armed conflict and Muslim disenchantment in the region. What is less explicit about the program is its role in sustaining and legitimizing American presence in the region through a more recent form of benevolent assimilationist strategy, where a development aid project such as JEEP is funded for its role in arresting the rising danger of terrorism in the region. The US military presence in the country, largely concentrated in the Mindanao region, intensified again after the 9/11 attack when it provided high-technology intelligence and expertise support to the Philippine government as it pursued insurgent forces in the area. According to Michaels (2011), “an important precept of the US military’s counterinsurgency doctrine” (para. 27) is its emphasis on development projects such as education, road infrastructures and sustainable livelihood programs because of the belief that socioeconomic and cultural marginalization is one of the major root causes of terrorism and rebellion. USAID spent around \$100 million for these development projects largely found in Mindanao. Over-all, the most recent US counter-insurgency

mission in Mindanao “is a rarity in the U.S. war on terror: a largely successful counterinsurgency at minimal cost in lives and dollars” (para 7).

Scrutinizing the rhetoric surrounding the justification for JEEP, what we see is an interesting overlaying of entrepreneurial and explicitly market-driven agenda. On the one hand, the moral (entrepreneurial) imperative to improve oneself through the English language through hard work and self-reliance may be seen through the following excerpt from the speech of then US Ambassador to the Philippines, Kristie Kenny, during the inauguration of the project in Western Mindanao State University.

This is a project of the United States to help you get jobs by learning English. We are investing in you, so it's up to you to use that investment. Never ever settle to being less than by your best...(Learn English) so (when) people hire you for job they can pick you because you are the best that you can be (“US Ambassador Kenney inaugurates” (2009).

The market or business view is a different view because the focus is not on the moral imperative for individual young Filipinos to improve themselves through the learning of English, but rather on the potential of the project to contribute to the growth of certain industries. Several business leaders supported the project for its contribution to the development of Mindanao but it is anchored in the belief that the project would directly impact the positive growth of different industries in the country, as well as sustain Filipinos' niched leadership in particular jobs in the global market, for example the maritime field where “Filipinos are leaders...so it's important to build up our ability to communicate” (“Davao region maritime colleges turn” 2011: para. 2). This makes Filipino seafarers “more marketable after graduation” (para. 5). In the inauguration of the JEEP project in another partner school, the President of the Philippine Call Center Alliance expressed elation over such a project which offered students opportunity to train for future work in the Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) Industry: “BPO companies are encouraged by how the *community* is helping to develop the industry by looking for ways to improve the manpower tool” (“JEEP project in Zambo” 2009: para 11, italics supplied).

What we see in the framing of JEEP is a disarticulation of its broader role as a development project in support of a counter-insurgency agenda through the interlacing of entrepreneurial and instrumentalist discourses. This is what is meant by the colonality of English language learning today which is realized through linguistic entrepreneurship which implicates both market and self-improvement arguments, discourses and practices. From helping develop Mindanao through job placements and, thus, financial security of its people, JEEP is now a project initiated by the “community”. The onus is on the individual students themselves if they would exploit the resources around them in order to improve their chances in the job market and help (re)build Mindanao. JEEP is framed as an essentially neoliberal linguistic entrepreneurial enterprise, thus masking the broader historical and political conditions which produce it. This is unsurprising given that similar rhetoric of the importance and instrumental value of “colonial English” (Hsu 2015) articulated in the beginning of American direct rule in the Philippines “naturalized and neutralized the process of imperial conquest” (138). Such an instrumentalist view, in fact, coalesced with the veneration of capital early on among American colonialists in order to produce the belief that the “‘greatest portion of unrest’ among Moros spawned directly from a ‘lack of commercial relations’, and that ‘employment, with the opportunity to accumulate property’ would ‘be the great civilizer’ in Mindanao and Sulu” (Hawkins 2008: 424).

#### *4.2 JEEP and the colonality of classroom practices and ideologies*

The JEEP classroom is referred to as the “JEEP Laboratory”. In one classroom (see Tupas and Tabiola 2017), a signage ENGLISH ONLY can be seen inside the laboratory. Students are assigned individual cubicles with computers, and thus are expected to work alone most of the time. The center of work in the JEEP classroom is the use of a language learning software manufactured and designed in the United States. Students log on to their computer, put on their headsets and then work on exercises which demand a lot of repetition and automaticity. Students are expected to master American English and work towards American native speaker-level proficiency. They

only listen to American English speakers. Before students are able to move to the next level of exercises or lessons, the software tests them using an assessment rubric which aims towards the American native speaker ideal. The “educated native speaker” (DynEd International, Inc. 2006), according to the software course developer, is the highest level of proficiency toward which the Filipino students must aim. Referring to speaking exercises, one teacher explains that the typical aim of the learning is “to copy the virtual native speaker” (in Tupas and Tabiola 2017: 5). Here is one description of another teacher in what happens when students engage in incessant repetition in order to achieve automaticity in English language learning (in Tupas and Tabiola 2017: 5):

Try to repeat again and then listen to your own recording and then record it again because it is through speaking that you get that knowledge that the knowledge retains more. Yeah. I think that's the reason why there's you know repeating. And although there's repeating because we cannot be good communicators at one instance. Like this speaking this sentence. So you need to you know repeat this sentence again and again. That is for you to be also a practice of your speaking skills. Speaking skills you need to you're able to listen to your own speech so can assess “ay kapangit diay nako paminawon or kabati” [ah I sound awful] so the good thing with that is that before you speak to a group of people you have already heard yourself speaking. So you record it until it becomes pleasing to hear or to listen so “yun” [that's it]. That's the reason why we have recording we have repeating basically for speaking purposes and for the retain [sic] of information.

Let us note in the quote above how repetition and automaticity implicate the effective and moral dimension of entrepreneurship because the expectation is that one must in the end avoid sounding awful in order not to be embarrassed when speaking to others. Moreover, by listening to oneself in order to sound like a “native” speaker, the language learning practice in fact highlights the unsoundness of the pedagogy employed. It does not promote intercultural communication which has in recent years been one the major objectives of research on the pluralities of English (Galloway and Rose 2014; Kubota 2001).



According to the software developer's manual, the enabling language learning theory that frames the mode of English language learning in the JEEP classrooms is what is referred to as *Recursive Hierarchical Recognition* (RHR) which is described as “cognitive, brain-based approach to English language learning [which] resonates with how the human brain has evolved to search for, recognize and employ language patterns for efficient language processing” (DynEd's Blended Approach 2014). It is meant to trigger and deploy “procedural memory” which facilitates learning even without conscious understanding. Language learning, thus, is like learning how to ride a bicycle or playing an instrument because the emphasis is on skill development (see DeKeyser and Criado 2013). Over-all, the mode of learning that students are engaged in is one that is centrally focused on learning how to speak like an “educated native American English speaker” through repetitive learning to achieve automaticity in the use of English.

“The embodied nature of linguistic skills,” according to De Costa et al. (2016), “means that it is simply not possible to evaluate learned language abilities, while bracketing out the speaker and her sociolinguistic histories” (701). Thus, framed in this manner, the learners in the JEEP project embody linguistic skills which are imbricated in conditions of coloniality even if they are also shaped by linguistic entrepreneurial neoliberal rhetoric. To put it in another way, linguistic entrepreneurial and instrumentalist rhetoric together works as a newer discursive medium of neocolonialism; it adds and nuances, but not replaces, the coloniality of language learning and education as contextualized in the Philippines. While the moral imperative to engage in language learning is present in the rhetoric—e.g., the students' individual responsibility to make English language learning work through JEEP; the need to listen carefully to one's speech in order not to sound awful and thus avoid being embarrassed—enactments of such an imperative occur in conditions and structures of coloniality. The point here is that the JEEP project cannot be divorced from the grander agenda of legitimizing the continuing US military presence in Mindanao in order to push back the growing power of terrorism in the area. US military presence (and in fact, dominance) in the region which goes back to when direct US colonial governance was estab-

lished at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hawkins 2008; Milligan 2005), has consistently been criticized by certain sectors in society, but projects such as JEEP obscure the political and ideological motivations of such a presence.

Consequently, the infrastructures of teaching and learning which are privileged in JEEP classrooms operate under similar conditions as well: the use of computer, self-study, repetition and automaticity as modes of language learning, the imposition of an English-Only policy in the classroom, and the compulsory use of a software which privileges the norms of the “educated American native speaker”. They are continuities of ideologies and practices (Maca 2017) which can be traced back to American colonial education characterized by, among many things, “the use of imported American-authored, US-centric textbooks which helped sow the seeds of the ‘American Dream’ in Filipino consciousness” (311), as well as the use of “mechanical methods of teaching the language [English]” (Martin 2014: 476). In and of themselves, of course, mechanical methods are not automatically colonial in nature and their continuing use today an indication of their coloniality. Rather, the imperialist structures within which such mechanical methods are mobilized—promoting decontextualized learning among individual students—extend to the present through a complex configuration of contemporary geopolitics and neoliberal linguistic entrepreneurial discourses and structures discussed above. The privileging of “native speaker” norms, the use of monolingualist methods of teaching, their accompanying disavowal of the usefulness of multilingualism in the teaching and learning of English, and the harnessing of individualist dispositions and skilled bodies in language learning and education in general (Martin 2002; 2014; Maca 2017; Tupas 2019), are trajectories of coloniality in the Philippines. There are changing trends in language teaching, Pennycook (1989) asserts, but “these tend to be a reordering of the same basic options, and to reflect the social, cultural, political, and philosophical environment” (600). This is because “ELT theories and practices that emanate from the former colonial powers still carry traces of those colonial histories” (Pennycook 1998: 19).

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the discussion in the preceding sections of the paper, linguistic entrepreneurship as a moral imperative to learn a language and an economic investment (De Costa et al. 2016) is pursued from a position of relative privilege. For example, the experience of *jogi yuhak* or early study abroad among (mostly middle class) young Koreans to “get ahead” not only to be competent in English but, more importantly to speak like a “native speaker,” is language learning as a moral imperative to improve oneself and maximize one’s value as human capital in the service of the national economy and the global market. Similarly, elite foreign students who study in Singapore schools as scholars of the Singapore government aim to align themselves with the host country’s ideology of meritocracy by becoming resourceful, adaptable and self-reliant students. They align themselves “with the moral imperative to *strategically exploit* language-related resources for enhancing...[their] worth in the world” (696, *italics supplied*; see also Starr & Kapoor 2021).

On the other hand, Filipino English language learners are somehow positioned differently, as exemplified by discourses emanating from the JEEP project and the practices associated with it. They are not mainly positioned as global citizens. The “value of [their] human capital in the global stage” (p. 697) is measured against their potential of becoming what Lorente (2012) refers to as “workers of the world”, or, what Parreñas (2001) calls “servants of globalization”. In this sense, the underlying ideologies of JEEP are not unique to English language ecologies of Mindanao but, in fact, resonate with past (Constantino, 1970/2000) and recent (Lorente 2012; 2013) justifications for the primacy of English language competency in other parts of the Philippines as well. Surely, Filipinos engage in English language learning in order to harness their linguistic skills and use them to be globally competitive, but their participation in the new economy is largely pursued from a position of relative weakness (for example, in relation to Korean learners in *jogi yuhak* or Chinese elite scholars in Singapore). Their English language experience is conditioned by colonially-shaped structures and conditions of relations between the United States and the Philippines, described above in terms of the continuing presence of the former through its military interven-

tions in its global anti-terrorism campaign, and the imbricatedness of classroom practices and ideologies with coloniality. The neoliberal character of education and language learning is one of the latter's defining characteristics, sustaining and nuancing—not erasing—the enduring legacies of colonialism.

Nevertheless, while the paper has mapped out the specific configurations of the coloniality of neoliberal linguistic entrepreneurship in the Philippines, as a contemporary sociopolitical and economic condition as mentioned early on in the paper, coloniality remains a pervasive form of domination in the rest of the world as well (Quijano 2000: 170). Thus, linguistic entrepreneurship or neoliberal language education in other sociocultural contexts is embedded in conditions of neocoloniality too (for example, see Park 2015, for Korea; Tupas, 2016, for Singapore; and Sharma and Phyak 2017, for Nepal).

For Filipinos learning English, or at least for those who belong to Sibayan and Gonzalez's (1996) great majority of Filipino learners who are unable to speak the desired "Standard" English necessary to access most highly paid jobs in the market, it is not so much their rush towards learning it (because they have been doing it for more than a century already), but rather their being "in the grip" of English (Lorente 2013) that defines their current relationship with the English language. Disentangling the structures of coloniality in linguistic entrepreneurship will go a long way in understanding—and transforming—language learning today.

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# A Fantasy of Survival and Class Stink in *Parasite*

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## Abstract

This essay attempts to revisit Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite*, an internationally acclaimed film, in terms of its subtle delineation of distorted class politics and argues that the film effectively dramatizes and criticizes the cruel logic of neoliberal capitalism. Concentrating, especially, on the irony of stink as an invisible trigger of dormant class consciousness of the lower class against the rich, this paper discusses the way the olfactory smell functions as the Lacanian Real that never goes away and always returns as the indelible mark of class division. What I call "class stink" plays a crucial role in breaking apart the internalized illusion of individual survivalism: it returns as the repressed signifier that nullifies the fantasy dream of free social mobility and fair opportunity for all in the game of the survival of the fittest. Stink drives the lower class to realize the futility of outsmarting the upstart by cunning parasitism in the merciless game of social Darwinism, and it violently revivifies die-hard class antagonism lurking behind the fantasy of material affluence. Stink, like a virus, lays bare the Real of class antagonism which enables and at the same time debilitates what we call the normal: there remains something irrepressible at the normality of neoliberal capitalism. *Parasite* is thoroughly political in its radical debunking of social Darwinism in South Korea and in its subtle dramatization of the politics of class stink.

## **Keywords**

*Parasite*, social Darwinism, fantasy, stink, virus

## 1. Anti-capitalist Ethics in Bong's Films

As many critics have already indicated, there abound lots of “references to capitalism” (Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi 2021, 91) and its destructiveness as they manifest in Bong Joon-ho’s cinematic connection of “political economy to political ecology” (Lee and Manicasteri 2018, 3). Bong’s two recent masterpieces, *Snowpiercer* (2013) and *Okja* (2017), amply support this opinion. Bong’s political ecology actually dates further back to his monster thriller *The Host* (2006) where a man-made, lizard-like, chemical creature threatens human biosphere. Bong’s *Parasite* (2019), as many have argued, seems to continue his overall social critique in terms of political economy and social ecology. Class politics under capitalist society here also takes the particular undertone of a political ecology in the form of “class stink.” Stink in *Parasite* functions as the invisible and irrepressible olfactory blemish which instantly stigmatizes the poverty, an indelible mark of class reality that cannot be wiped out under the veneer of neoliberal consumerism. Indeed, the olfactory smell plays a crucial role in several key scenes in *Parasite* such as air sanitizer fume, urine of a drunkard, uncleanly exposed toilet, drain water flooding, and even peach fur. Most of smelly cuts are symbolized as the stigma of poverty.

This essay attempts to re-examine *Parasite* as a film about the perverse political ecology in South Korea where the fantasy of individual survivalism effectively depoliticizes and substitutes for class confrontation: neoliberalism attempts to disavow class reality by making the lower-class forge “their own destruction” (Turner 1999, 176). And I argue that stink is the invisible signifier of the Real which cracks the smooth space of neoliberal survivalism. In this respect, the South Korean society in Bong’s films is a sort of metaphorical replica of capitalist society at large, just as the luxurious mansion in *Parasite* graphically symbolizes the class division of South Korea.

Bong started his filmmaker’s career after he graduated from Korean Academy of Film Arts as a director of his debut film *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (2000), which, though a box office flop, somehow garnered critical acclaim among cinephiles and festival organizers. His name was widely known for the unexpected success of his second feature film, *Memories of*

*Murder* (2003), which deals with the mystery of serial killing in a small town outside Seoul. Set in the 1980s when the political turmoil over democracy was at its height in South Korea, the film, together with *The Host*, questions the absurdity of the state power or the oppressive uselessness of political system in the matter of solving crimes and addressing people's sufferings. Back then, Korea was a kind of 'police state' ruled by a military dictator (Jeon 2011, 77). This film sets the tone and the style of Bong's filmmaking: an obsessive setup of every detail of the *mise-en-scène* together with his thematic search for the ethical critique of social reality. The critique is ethical because he does not directly accuse one evil target of wrongdoings but lets the film in itself stand as a powerful critique of social ills and systemic blindness (Jeon 2011, 88). This is what renders his films distinct from those of Lee Chang-Dong, another Korean *auteur* who has been preoccupied with problematizing, with firm moral sensibility, the tragic hypocrisy in a particular social phenomenon, at least, until the recent film *Burning* (2018).<sup>1</sup>

*The Host* was a huge blockbuster hit, drawing more than 13 million people to about 1,800 screens nationwide. It is focused on the survival of a family living along Han River where a biological monster was accidentally created by the US army. Unlike Hollywood blockbusters of alien creatures, the film does not applaud the family who saved the whole country from annihilation as heroes. The film rather indicts the utter incapacity of the defunct state system and its biopolitics as the last resort to people's safety and survival. The bio-chemical monster could be an apt symbol of military-industrial complex which is ultimately backed by neoliberal capitalism, relentlessly driving the lives of ordinary people into the precarious and insecure competition of the survival of the fittest (Moon and Moon 2020). Allegorical as it is, the film sincerely showcases the sinister aspects of structural violence.

His next feature, *Mother* (2009), continues to develop an ethical critique of sociality in the wry portrayal of South Korean society in terms of its perverse oedipal drama: castrated patriarchy and its distorted supplementation by hysterical motherhood. Bong even goes beyond his usual ethical critique and attempts to deconstruct categories of colonial ethics themselves, obsessively ironizing the subtle conundrum of deep "familial paradigm"

prevalent in Korean society: a fatherless Korean man can thrive, while a man without mother is hardly able to survive. This is a crucial cultural question par excellence; South Korean society has been not only feeding on the sacrifices of neurotic women (mothers) but also mostly dependent on the hystericization of them (Kim 2010, 924). In the end, it is the very neurotic mother who holds responsible for all the social abnormality of Korean society, including the perverse masculinity and misogyny of her sons. But the final message of the film is clearly apocalyptic: “Who would throw a stone at this neurotic woman?” The society at large is also responsible for this abnormality.

As is well known, *Snowpiercer* is an overt anti-capitalist allegory, a kind of grand-scale fantasy of class struggle and the final annihilation of the capitalist system. In this respect, the film is indeed anti-systemic, but not socialist or communist in its political stance. The film is, as in any other of Bong’s films, highly critical of the ruling class or powerful people, but the director also calls our attention to the ethical, if not existential, frivolity of the underprivileged (Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi 2021, 90). Though it avoids falling into the trap of morally taking one side over the other, the film’s ethical equivocality ends up a dream-like fantasy in which all things have to be completely destroyed, or at least derailed, in order to be reinstalled by “irrational outbursts of destructive violence” (Žižek 2012, 53). The film seems to take the stance of pure anarchism; as the director here appears to discard both his belief in the critique of systemic violence and his hope for the political resistance against the system under global neoliberal capitalism (Fisher 2009, 17).

Of course, the state *is* part and parcel of the capitalist system of exploitation; hence, the only available form of resistance against such a system would be to simply extricate ourselves from the unbridled exploitation of the wealthy and their state partner. Any effort to politically subvert the established order or attempt to stop the function of the system with glitches or frictions fail not because anti-systemic resistance lacks power or is short of valid tactics (Žižek 2012, 90). In *Snowpiercer*, the problem lies deeper than these contingent elements: it’s our own reified desire that helps lubricate



the smooth function of system itself. In this psychology of fetishistic desire, there is no difference between capitalists and workers. The ultimate message of the film would be: even if some suffer more than the others, the only way out of this nightmarish system is, in so far as we are all in the same train, to keep imagining the total derailment and complete re-installation of the system itself. In this sense, *Snowpiercer* is indeed post-apocalyptic.

*Okja* is a sort of ecological variation of what *Snowpiercer* has left unsolved. Multinational capitalism now goes even further than simply trying to artificially create what we call nature. In *Okja*, nature itself has to be redefined as ontologically indistinguishable from the artificial and cultural or, at the least, the idea of nature has to be deconstructed as ideologically untenable. This involves more than what we call biopolitics: it's not about controlling or manipulating the process of nature in order to secure the infinite permissiveness of our desire (Schulze 2018). What the film ultimately tells us with the awful fate of *Okja* is that the disfigured form of nature in today's capitalism is, nonetheless, neither worse than what we have enjoyed so far nor the worst of what we have imagined. The problem is our innate anthropocentrism which tends to see nature as opposed to what we call human. Human beings are described to be the most unnatural elements of the entire universe. Bong's ethical imagination allegorically touches upon the post-apocalyptic politics of ecology in which everything human loses its meaning.

## 2. The Popularity of *Parasite*

One of the reasons why *Parasite* achieves unprecedented applause by winning the Oscar in the Best Picture category might be that it does *not* feel like a foreign film except for an inch of subtitles (Dargis 2019).<sup>2</sup> What does it mean? Is it an acknowledgement that *Parasite*, despite its linguistic strangeness and cultural heterogeneity, is not seriously different from the familiar Orientalist delineation of its foreignness like any other such contenders before it? There is, however, nothing particularly exotic or orientalist in the way the film realistically describes the intensity of fierce battles for survival in the Korean "branch" of global neoliberal capitalism (Ehrlich 2019). The claim of *Parasite*'s

universal appeal is said to come from its seemingly pro-capitalist or at least *non-anti-capitalist* stance. As for its overall political orientation, it has been argued that *Parasite* does not favor any one side of class division. Rather the film “evenhandedly,” that is, politically correctly, depicts the good, the bad, and the ugly altogether (Kim 2019). It seems to confirm that Bong’s films are ethically equivocal and that they are thereby not very political in the strict sense of the term (Klein 2008, 872; La Force 2019).

This critique becomes more complicated when a number of critics in Korea as well as those in other countries start to criticize the very “political equivocalness” or the “mechanical Political Correctness” of the film in terms of class struggle (Nam 2021, 37; Kim 2019). Their argument is that the film does not give the working class its due, while it pays an undue respect for the magnanimity and good will of the rich, negatively highlighting the lack of solidarity among the underprivileged. Undoubtedly, the Kims’ brief occupation of luxurious mansion by cunning, deceit, and their violence against the housemaid couple appear doubly frustrating, not in spite of, but because of their self-inflicted humiliation: “the life of the poor floats away in the drain water” (Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi 2021, 105). Their subsequent downfall into the pit of the flooded semi-basement home causes extreme unease in the viewer for its moral ambiguity: the Kims deserve the downfall, the viewer seems to feel, but at the same time their humiliation is unmerited and excessive. Moreover, the film’s pivotal scenes frequently appear to dramatize ugly battles in the mud among the underprivileged for their futile attempts at social ascendancy, which conveniently replace the class struggle between the have and the have-nots (Bong 2019). As one critic puts it, Bong’s gesture concerning class struggle may be termed as *cynical*: “a shrug over inequality” (Kim 2019).

Indeed, Kitaek and Gunse, the two old incapable patriarchal figures in the underworld, blatantly showcase their respect for the boss, Mr. Park, who unwittingly supports their survival. And it is ironic that these two “parasitic” families fiercely fight with each other at the basement for the fatal game of the survival of the fittest in the absence of their revered owner. Rather than the class struggle of the “downstairs” against the “upstairs,” the battle

is waged “under the ground” between the people of basement and those of semi-basement. What would have been a political confrontation turns out to be an intra-class strife for survival. Paradoxical as it is, both supporters and opponents of the film completely agree on the same point: *the film is not political enough*. The former valorizes the virtue of ethical evenhandedness, while the latter condemns its apoliticality or political blindness. As will be made clear later on, I argue that both of them are untenable for their lack of attention to *why* and *how* the movie subtly problematizes the perversity of class politics itself.

Curiously enough, these critiques explain why *Parasite* has earned unprecedented popularity throughout the world. Those who are critical of the director’s political attitude often praise the film for its extremely realistic and detailed depiction of the very pervert class politics in South Korea and consider it as a highly symptomatic representation of global capitalism itself. As such, neoliberal capitalism tends to feed on the reified desire of the poor who become forgetful of class exploitation, entirely immersed in the endless game of individual survival; indeed, in terms of reification, no class show “any qualitative difference in the structure of consciousness” (Lukács 1968, 98). For them, *Parasite* is a must-see movie for the enlightenment of class reality after 2008 (Gabilondo 2020, 14).

On the other hand, people who are enthusiastic about the movie usually pay attention to the aesthetic quality of social satire and the unique cinematic rhythm of the plot. They specifically point out the cinematic finesse with which the director lets the viewer find out the absurdity of meritocracy and survivalism in today’s class politics. If the movie adopted the familiar formula of class struggle between the have and the have-nots, it would not have given such a pleasurable experience of watching a social drama. The greatness of *Parasite*, for them, lies in its seemingly frivolous but tragi-comical mixture of lightness and seriousness. One of the reviewers even suggests that with *Parasite* Bong’s movie finally amounts to a “*sui generis*,” a hybrid genre of film that defies easy categorization (Ehrlich 2019).

Either way, the popularity of *Parasite* seems to come from the assumption that it concerns, seriously or not, class politics itself (Nam 2021, 36).

Every character, more or less, is to be identified with a type of individual representative of a certain class, generation, and gender, easily discernible in any capitalist society, or with an aberrant who embodies deviousness and exceptionality (Noh 2020, 254). For example, Moongwang, the ex-housemaid to the Park family, is conceived of as an older-generation female worker whose self-esteem as a real host of the mansion does not coincide with her actual plight as a precarious employee. As Kijung rightly recognizes about Moongwang, “she may look like a sheep, but inside, she’s a fox. Sometimes she acts like she owns the house.” (*Parasite* 2019). Moongwang has also been secretly hiding her deranged husband in the cellar effectively parasitizing the employer and later boasts her authority as a legitimate housemaid over her substitute. In terms of her class typicality, she simultaneously plays *and* does not play a consistent role as an employee. Is *Parasite* then really a movie about class struggle or an allegory of its postmodern, neoliberal perversity?

### 3. A Movie about Social Darwinism

In fact, *Parasite* is not a film about class struggle or the lack thereof, in the way *Snowpiercer* is an allegory of global class struggle. There is certainly the class antagonism between the Kims and the Parks, as when the Parks keep reminding themselves and the Kims of the virtue of “not crossing the line” and as when the daughter Kijung openly laughs at the innocent credulity and blatant snobbery of the Parks. The latter scene also demonstrates that the rich people like the Parks really are *upstarts* who have no sense of “culture,” unable to distinguish the glittering surface from the cultured intellect. Indeed, so much of the humor in the movie come from this cultural blindness. Both families seem to illustrate the two different versions of *anti-intellectualism* prevalent in Korean society: a snobbish attachment to anything that smacks of intellect and a cynical disaffirmation of any intellect in the upper-class individual. As a social group, however, neither the Kims nor the Parks, except for a parasitic underground pair, are depicted to be a representative of the upper and the lower class respectively. Luxury and wealth notwithstanding, the Parks still lack the element of culture, while the Kims act as if they can enjoy the pleasures of the rich people in spite of their

shabby economic condition. Despite a clearly demarcated material division, there exists, psychologically, only *one* class in the movie, the middle-class. They seem to think and act as if they all belong to the same class. And this psychological fantasy constitutes the unconscious core of their perverse class consciousness.

What I mean by “middle-class” here is not identical with the Western notion of the “bourgeoisie” whose class instinct is defined against the upper class and the lower class (Marx 1972, 106); in the context of Korean culture, it has a specific ideological implication. The Korean middle-class concerns less with economic status or political power than with cultural and psychical self-identity: the middle-class identity involves more or less a strong sense of *independence* (Gabilondo 2020, 15-16). Economic independence for the Parks; psychical one for the Kims. Especially, the Kims know they are poverty-stricken but consider it as a temporary inconvenience. When Kitaek says, “She [Mrs. Park] is rich but she’s still nice,” his wife nonchalantly adds, “Not ‘rich, but still nice.’ Nice because she’s rich, you know? Hell, if I had all this money, I’d be nice too!” (*Parasite* 2019). To say that only the middle-class is represented in the film does not mean, therefore, that the film exclusively depicts middle-class realities among diverse class arrangements; rather, it means that there seems to literally exist, as far as class consciousness is concerned, only one class identity in the Korean society. That’s why no apparent class antagonism pops up even when particular scenes are expected to provoke a humiliating confrontation between the Kims and the Parks (Octavia 2021, 29). Instead, the actual conflict occurs only in the underground.

For example, Mr. Park, Kitaek, and Gunse, though clearly distinct in their current economic status, all actually share the experience of belonging to the same lineage of individual “middle-class” entrepreneurs. The youngest Mr. Park, with good educational background, succeeds as a venture businessman probably during the upsurge of digital industry boom after new millennium; the oldest Kitaek, now dependent upon the family after a series of failures in the fierce economic competition, has the history of independent businessman who probably was forced to retire early or became bank-

rupt during the financial crisis in 1997; Gunse, an anachronistic unemployed who, as one of precarious workers whose monthly paycheck amounts to less than 1,000 dollars (the so-called “0.88-Million-Won generation youth”), entirely relies upon his wife to survive, still holding on to the dream of becoming a high-ranking law officer despite having already failed the test several times (Park 2020). Coming from diachronically different generations of the same middle-class cluster in the post-2008 South Korean history, they happen to dwell *vertically* in the same synchronic space (Gabilondo 2020, 20). Such is the reason why all these older males do not harbor any class animosity against each other.

Thus considered, the class struggle in this film, if there is one, actually showcases the psychical conflict within the self-same class consciousness. The ambivalent respect and jealousy of Kitaek and Gunse towards Mr. Park could not be the example of typical *inter*-class antagonism, but the display of the “loser sentiment” toward the current winner in the game of economic survival. This *intra*-class affective economy of ambivalent feelings is indeed *agonistic*, not antagonistic: life is just a game of survival whose chance of winning is set equally for all participants. The only difference among them is the individual capability for social success. Thus, any means available for outwitting the wealthy opponent are allowed in so far as the rules are strictly followed. You could be winners or losers temporarily, but not a permanent victim: the game of survival is entirely contingent upon individual efforts regardless of participants’ current economic status as long as the fair competition is guaranteed (Fisher 2009, 14). What really matters in this intra-class social organism is not political justice but procedural fairness. The idea of *social Darwinism* effectively takes the place of political justice.

The law is the survival of the fittest.... The law is not the survival of the ‘better’ or the ‘stronger,’ if we give to those words anything like their ordinary meanings. It is the survival of those which are constitutionally **fittest to thrive** under the conditions in which they are placed; and very often that which, humanly speaking, is inferiority, causes the survival. (Spencer 2010, 379-80; Emphasis added)

As a disadvantaged contestant, all you have to do in this game of “winner takes it all” is not to remain a loser by any means possible. This game of survival is not about power but persistence and durability. So the socially inferior, as Spencer emphasizes it, can be the fittest for the survival without necessarily being a better or stronger one (2010, 380). In this situation, no one openly admits to their being the victim of social exploitation because the very acknowledgment of one’s own unjust victimhood could be the most pathetic way of being a loser.<sup>3</sup> As such, *Parasite* is indeed a film of class struggle as a fantasy game of survival without justice.

Only in terms of “absent” inter-class politics for justice and the fantasy game of universal survival can the stratified relationship of three patriarchs become mutually parasitical. Kitaek and Gunse are “actual” class parasites to the host Mr. Park who unwittingly supports the bare survival of their family. Seen from the perspective of this class politics, the two parasites are indeed pathetic for the lack of what Spencer calls “social consciousness” (2010, 19; Gray 1981, 180). But when you approach this economic host-parasite relationship in terms of the intra-class psychical interdependence, Mr. Park, together with his family, is the one who completely counts upon their “parasitic labor” and requires social recognition of his superiority from them. Indeed, Mr. Park turns out to be the real parasite whose legitimacy as a host entirely relies on the acknowledgement of laboring parasites.

The same goes with Mrs. Park. After she let the first housekeeper go, for example, Mrs. Park finds herself utterly incapable of managing household affairs, even struggling to fix a meal: an ironic parasitism of the host that undercuts the logic of neoliberal meritocracy. No wonder then that the Parks are, at some points, seen to be mere role-players in the pre-arranged game carefully coordinated by Moongwang and later by the Kims. The Kims are able to outwit the Parks precisely because they are keenly aware that the clever use of devices of imposture in intra-class struggle, such as trickery, fraud, forgery, disguise, manipulation, defamation, does not constitute a breach of rule in this fantasy game played upon tilted ground (Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi 2021, 100). They know they are not better or stronger than the Parks but the fittest for the game. For them, the act of outwitting the oppo-

nent supplements their inferior condition; the game is concerned less with the unjust parasitizing than the legitimate “outwitting” of inept upstarts.

The efficacy of smooth outsmarting a competitor by clever pretense of servitude and not by direct confrontation, is clearly manifested in several key scenes where the Kims celebrate their victory at a driver’s buffet, at their semi-basement abode, and at the splendid upstairs of the Parks’ mansion. They are neither ashamed of themselves nor are they feeling *guilty* at all towards the Parks, not only because they did not commit any serious fraud like violent subversion or direct occupation but because they really think they are saving the Parks out of their own stupidity. They could keep their sense of dignity or even superiority intact by assuming the invaluableness of their service relative to their humble paycheck. The Parks like to put themselves in the position of the master who orders servants around, but ironically this privilege to rule can only be possible on the condition that the trace of their becoming *nouveau riche* can be successfully covered up and that their employees dare not cross the line which separates the world of masters from that of servants (Gabilondo 2020, 17). There is nothing unjust or unfair in this intra-class rivalry between the imposture of the Kims and the snobbery of the Parks.<sup>4</sup> As Kiwoo emphatically explains, “All you’ll need to do is walk up the stairs” (*Parasite* 2019). A fantasy game of social mobility only follows the logic of money and a smart game plan in the mire of mutual parasitism.

#### 4. The Sympathy for the Vengeance

Strange as it may sound, it is this very lack of a sense of shame and guilt that explains the tragic fate of the Kims (Noh 2020, 251). Up until the discovery of a secret underground dweller, Gunse, the movie was chiefly shot through the perspective of the Kims as individuals and as a group. Especially, the two members of the younger generation, Kiwoo and Kijung, take the central place in the film’s diegetic narrative (Jeon 2021, 4). Despite plotting an imposture, Kiwoo and Kijung easily earn the audience’s sympathy early on probably thanks to their overtly “positive” attitude towards life. They do neither complain of the shameful family situation in which they have to “parasite”



the neighbor's Wi-Fi service, nor feel vulnerable to unhygienic exposure to disease, nor suffer from their semi-basement stink. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that they feel uncomfortable or even ashamed of their poverty, and understandably so. When her father tries to get rid of the smell, Kijung calmly adds, "It's the basement smell. The smell won't go away unless we leave this place" (*Parasite* 2019). Therefore, either they have been so adaptable as get used to a life of minimum necessity or they imagine their indigence to be simply a matter of temporary inconvenience (Noh 2020, 251).

The Kims are not *workers* in the strict sense of the term except for doing some part-time jobs of folding pizza boxes; nor are they pursuing or planning something meaningful for social success. Kiwoo is jobless in his twenties having failed three times at college admission for unknown reasons; Kijung, his younger sister, seems to idle away most of her time on gaming and surfing the web for some forgery skills. They are not typical youths of their generation in South Korea, who are driven to the world of fierce competition and surrender to the pressure of constant self-improvement (Moon and Moon 2020). They are not depressed youth of a burnout society either (Han 2015, 5). Nevertheless, they do not appear to be losers, let alone victims of social injustice like their parents precisely because they look like they have opted to *voluntarily* get out of the competition without any "plans," doing nothing for the moment, despite being constantly short of money and work. As Kitaek advises his son, "You know what kind of plan never fails? No plan. No plan at all. You know why? Because life cannot be planned" (*Parasite* 2019). Perhaps they are simply forced to drop out of the competition for the lack of investment for self-improvement.

What makes them peculiar, however, as the representative of the "millennium generation" in South Korea is the sheer "resilience," or the suppleness to "nudging" their presence whenever the opportunity comes up (Serres 1980, 196). The wisdom of their parasitism seems to come from "the capacity to define boundaries not as structures" but "as different operators of change to the pre-existing state of the system" (Jeon 2021, 9). Social boundaries are, for them, not an insurmountably fixed barrier but a manageable huddle to be stepped over in order to succeed. Indeed, to keep being resilient

without desperately striving to achieve something while patiently waiting for the opportunity of nudging is the very quality highly needed for the enjoyment of happiness and well-being in the era of neoliberal positivism. The film envisages Kiwoo and Kijung as those who have learned how to manage themselves in the game of survival as well as how to simulate themselves as *attractive*. As commodities that are always already available, they have learned how to enjoy themselves amidst an intolerably incompetent family. They are indeed the uncanny parasite to this culture of self-management and individual self-simulation (Jeon 2021, 6).

This is why Kiwoo has no trouble fantasizing himself as a mature man as if he already has “plans” for everything on behalf of defunct family. He and Kijung too are so adept and smooth in dealing with the “simple but nice” Mrs. Park that they seem to really believe that they themselves are for real. Kiwoo also imagines himself to be in charge of the revival of the whole family, acting as if he is the new patriarch replacing his old “plan-less” father. Ironically, all that he plans to achieve, at a sneak party at the mansion, for the revival of the family turns out to be making money by becoming the son-in-law of the wealthy Mr. Park, which looks truly bizarre, a plan that mimics the desire of his buddy. And Bong’s black humor here is at its best when one person’s seriousness turns out to be another’s laughter for all its absurdity. He has no “real” plan of his own to fulfil for he is only good at *imitating*—or “copying and pasting,” to borrow the popular slang—what was already established. Significantly, after the penultimate catastrophe at the mansion on a rainy night, Kiwoo asks himself what his smart buddy would do in a situation like that. Kiwoo’s resilience is more akin to the desire for social recognition than that of individual independence (Jeon 2021, 7). No wonder he feels sorry for having failed to take care of the family when he hears his father repeating the hollow wisdom of “no plan is the best plan” at the shelter. His ambitious scheme to manage his life and his family would not be possible at all without parasitizing the laid out plans of others.

In this sense, Kiwoo is less a loser in the game of social evolution than an involuntary straggler maladjusted to the rule of the game despite his strong will to be a regular player in survivalism. He remains outside in

the game of resilient nudging oneself into the cracks of established order; a self-proclaimed *avenger* and *victim* of his own parasitic fantasy of becoming a man of meticulous planning and careful management. That is why our sympathy has to be drawn towards, and at the same time withdrawn from, Kiwoo precisely at the moment his fantasy drives him into sheer madness and frenzy (Noh 2020, 255). He becomes dangerous at the end not because of his possible madness for violence but because of his sheer, absurd, if resilient perseverance for planning itself. He lives in the fantasy world that dreams of restoring the crumbled patriarchy of his father. But this fantasy has already eaten him alive. He has become a parasite of his own dream.<sup>5</sup>

## 5. Stink as the Real

If we approach the film in terms of the politics of space, we instantly recognize that the majority of actions take place at the mansion of the Parks, which was built by a famous architect, Namkung Hyunja.<sup>6</sup> In one way or another, all the characters in this film belong to this mansion as *parasites*. Even the Parks, the current inhabitants of the house, are parasites in that they do not know much about the mansion despite being its owner (Jeon 2021, 5). The only person who really connects with and cares about the house is the ex-housemaid-cum-butler, Moongwang. Not only does she manage the house impeccably but also boasts herself to be the real caretaker of the house. For her, the Parks and the Kims are but temporary owners and imposters, that is, parasites, who have no meaningful claim of acquaintance with the house itself. At some point, she even refers to the Parks as “these kids” while speaking with the Kims. Moongwang’s intimacy with the house is revealed in the scene where she and her husband used to enjoy themselves as the “real” hosts listening to the music over tea in the living room in the absence of the actual owner. She thinks that only she deserves to be acknowledged as the true “cultured” owner.

The house itself symbolizes the mysterious *host* on the basis of which all the middle-class parasites (bugs) survive and multiply like a virus (Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi 2021, 102). As Moongwang has probably learned from the teaching of a wise architect, the house as host is not a thing to be

possessed. There is something fundamentally anti-capitalist or *communal* in the mansion, and the tragedy of intra-class resentment, rather than of inter-class antagonism, originates from the fierce efforts not to remain a loser in the game of occupying the house; that is, of being a true host-as-parasite. This partly explains why Gunse tries to attack Kiwoo and actually killed Kijung instead of Kitaek and Mr. Park. They are the real threat to him because he knows instinctively that their resilience and nudging would easily outwit every opponent in the game. Though Gunse's counter-attack is a sort of act of revenge for the harm done to him and his wife, what lies beneath his resentment toward the younger generation is the precautionary measure to obviate the possibility of being outwitted. Gunse is wise enough to detect that the whole scenario of the Kim's occupation must come from the younger members who know how to pass themselves off as real.

On the other hand, it's not entirely clear why Kitaek stabs Mr. Park rather than targeting Gunse who killed his daughter, the only compassionate person who worries about Gunse's safety. The whole sequence of abrupt violence in the middle of birthday party at the mansion tacitly frames the inevitable outburst of class antagonism. Kitaek's unexpected reaction to Mr. Park in the middle of Gunse's intrusion has nothing to do with the game of survivalism: it concerns rather with the acute sense of shame and humiliation that Kitaek felt at that moment as an inferior employee. For Kitaek, the class humiliation by the rich Mr. Park appears more detrimental than the Gunse's instinctive act of revenge. What spurs Kitaek's class instinct is Mr. Park's inhumane, class-ridden gesture of avoiding Gunse's stink, which reminds Kitaek of the injustice, not unfairness, of being systematically discriminated not as an economic minority but as a nonhuman parasite. This explains why Kitaek's penultimate act of killing transforms the illusionary intra-class antagonism into a sort of anti-colonial solidarity among parasitic lower-classes (Park 2020). On behalf of smelly Gunse, Kitaek revenges against the class humiliation. It is thus quite significant that Kitaek wears a Native American warrior bonnet when he stabs his urbane, highly americanized boss to death in revenge for his olfactory disgust toward class stink. It is not Kitaek but Mr. Park who actually "crossed the line" by his overt

antagonism toward class stink. Spurred by Gunse's stink, Kitaek's unconscious sense of "basement smell" returns and makes him penetrate into the sanitized body of Mr. Park. Stink as the Real knows no boundary like a virus (Octavia 2021, 30).

In that sense, the shame of stink is the most powerful instigator of the class antagonism in *Parasite*, rendering useless the rules of the whole game the characters have been playing. Indeed, it is the rich Mr. Park, not the poor Kims, who constantly crosses the class-dividing line at will, which he himself strictly imposed on Kitaek. Indeed, the most conspicuous sign of such a random intrusion is none other than Mr. Park's humiliating repugnance against stink. The stink of the underground, especially the smell of indigence in the flooded semi-basement house, is the last thing people like Mr. Park want to share not only for its sheer repugnance but also for its traumatic symptom. Stink always crosses the line of class division: almost like an uncanny Real itself which is formless, invisible, silent, but deadly enough to remind you of "the return of the repressed" (Ridgeway-Diaz et. als 2020, 792). Isn't Kitaek's feeling of shame and humiliation similar to what Gilles Deleuze refers to "the shame of being a man" (1997, 1)?

As long as the Kims are in control of the host of upstairs, "parasites" downstairs never worry about the danger of stink. But when they are back to the flooded, cramped quarter of semi-basement, they shudder at the sight of their crumbling "house," of what was left of their own shabby space, deeply ashamed of their poverty-driven life as parasites. Remember the powerfully emotional scenes of Kitaek looking around the flooded house when Kijung, utterly frustrated, tries to smoke at the upper-decked, backed-up flush toilet. The film realistically but at the same time beautifully traces the vertical downfall, that is, the shameful defeat, of the Kims into the pit of the dungeon. The Kims once succeeded in outsmarting the Parks and making them snobbish dupes, but they ultimately fail to pass the unexpected test of stink as the Real: "that which always returns to the same place." (Lacan 1978, 49).

In this respect, the smell of stink as the uncanny Real brings back the futility of *objet a*, a fantasy object and an absent cause of the Kims' desire to

be the winner of social survivalism. Once summoned, it demarcates you; it stigmatizes you; it humiliates you like the traumatic encounter with the monstrous real, which is nothing but the phantasmal actualization of our own perverse desire. Stink disqualifies the Kims at the game of middle-class survivalism and returns them to the place where they belong as a pathetic specimen of the lower class. Like the Real, stink haunts you; it “interpellates” you into the class antagonism rather than the neoliberal game of survivalism (Octavia 2021, 26). Unconsciously reacting to the equally instinctive hatred of Mr. Park against what reminds him of that which he tried so hard to repress, Kitaek brings back “the repressed class struggle” onto the surface. And for this upsurge of class instinct, Kitaek has to be foreclosed from the surface once again like Gunse. He persists in the underground sending unreturned signals of class antagonism, but his existence as “class stink” should be obliterated in order for the game to continue. No wonder he is doomed to replace Gunse’s invisibility as a parasite of the system itself. With stink, *Parasite* indeed becomes the revenge drama of class struggle, a perverse one at that.

Where does the film then stand with respect to the *event* of Kitaek’s class antagonism towards the rich and Kiwoo’s fantasy of retrieving the name of the father? *Parasite* stands equivocal in individual ethics and ambiguous in class politics. It is ethically equivocal in that the film sympathetically depicts the agony and shame of the poor while depicting the hard reality that for all their tenacity and outfoxing there is no chance for the Kims to have done better. It is also politically ambiguous in that the devastating shame of the Kims is so powerfully affective that to imagine them to actually attempt to revenge the rich becomes difficult. *Parasite* demystifies the belief in the pre-given class consciousness of the poor and the myth of automatic solidarity among the exploited. It also de-demonizes the rich from the stereotypical configuration of monstrous evil. *Parasite* is less concerned with class politics and social critique than the psychoanalysis of perversity inherent in neoliberal survivalism.

*Parasite* is thus an intense meta-ethical and meta-political allegory of today’s *agonistic* parasitism under the neoliberal capitalism in South Korea.

In this respect, it is a movie dedicated not to the fantasy but to the resilience of Kiwoos and Kijungs who might have survived through the neoliberal Korean society where there are now only parasites. Though parasites, however, they might generate “fluctuating, circuitous, and potentially creative nature of living process” (Jeon 2021, 7). One might say we have only one class in Korea, the class of parasites, which rely on neoliberal capitalism as host, but this may also be the delusion of our own making. It is only when the collective fantasy of becoming an independent host collapses once and for all with the intervention of class stink as the Real that these human “parasites,” that is, what Deleuze calls “the missing people,” (Deleuze 1997, 4) will be able to change the neoliberal, class-drive capitalist system itself.

## 6. Stink as Virus

The stink as the signifier of class antagonism totally changes the narrative development of the film. Until Kitaek’s abrupt killing of Mr. Park, *Parasite* seems to belong to a black comedy half-allegorizing and half-satirizing the absurd class structure of the South Korean capitalism. Like the Covid-19 epidemic virus, the stink of the underground suddenly appears as the silent and fatal blow to the seemingly “bourgeois” life of the “upstairs.” The stink of the Kims and Gunse, however, cannot be eliminated not only because they actually dwell in the smelly, barely-sunlit places but also because they themselves are incapable of sensing it. Their smell turns into class stink in certain places and by a certain group of people. For it instantly stigmatizes them as the type who ontologically belongs to the lower class and hence deserves social segregation, just like black skin or virus infection. Stink effectively brings them back to the realm of class antagonism and the possibility of justice. When Kitaek witnesses Mr. Park, holding his nose, tries to retrieve the car key in order to simply get away from the murder scene, he seems to feel as if he is reduced to a deadly virus threatening the lives of human hosts.

The biological stink in *Parasite* illustrates how rich people, as a class, have been treating the lower class; for them the members of the lower class are not human enough to be granted equal social status and be allowed to play in a fair game. Like a virus, they must not be allowed to cross the

class dividing line. The absurd dénouement of the last sequence delivers the message that the game of survivalism is none other than the collective fantasy of the lower class who want to believe in the social Darwinism of their survival as the fittest. But there is the rub. For all their idea of meritocracy, the upper-class have always been class-antagonistic in their relationship with the lower class through and through. They are the ones who constantly cross the line they themselves make. For the rich, the lower class stink should be tightly controlled, quarantined, for that matter, in keeping with their unconscious class antagonism. But like the virus, the class stink as the Real could not be totally eliminated since the rich are not only the host unwittingly supporting parasitic people but the parasites themselves as well entirely depending upon their opponents. Ironical as it is, the stink lays bare the class antagonism concealed underneath of what we call “the normal”: there remains something irrepressible at the normality of neoliberal survivalism. After the upsurge of stink, however, there is no way back to the normal; it becomes abnormal with the perseverance of viral stink which “constitutes a dynamic of general reversibility” (Jeon 2021, 9). Indeed, stink in *Parasite* effectively disrupts what we have believed to be normal territories and divisions, breaking apart the fantasy of social mobility.

Though incarcerated like a ghost, Kitaek at last survives with his son. His ghostly presence makes it impossible for the system to return to normal.<sup>7</sup> He keeps sending uncanny messages to the surface, trying to reach his schizophrenic son who still dreams of impossible subversion. Kitaek’s viral existence works like a “self-reproducing machine predominantly dependent upon the cultural and political environment to which the host organism belongs” (Žižek 2020, 79-80). Through his son, Kitaek attempts to destroy the host organism he parasites with the compulsive repetition of telecommunication. *Parasite* leaves his ghostly presence unavowed as a fatal stain or an uncontainable trauma of the surface system: Kitaek’s survival discloses the fact that “something is fundamentally wrong with this cultural and political system” (Fisher 2009, 17). *Parasite* is thoroughly political in its radical debunking of social Darwinism in South Korea and in its subtle dramatization of the politics of class stink.



## Notes

1. Lee Chang-Dong's films, from *The Green Fish* (1997) to *Peppermint Candy* (1999) and to *Poetry* (2010), realistically problematize the absurdity of compressed modernity in Korean society and usually sympathize with the tragedy of social outcasts and victims. But with *Burning* (2018), Lee's cinematic realism turns towards a psychological drama. See Kang 2021.
2. As to the film's success, some critics refer to the specific Korean sentiment towards imperial past (Moon and Moon 2021). Others even point out the efficacy of "national branding" in terms of the film's cultural diplomacy (Lee 2020). But the general assessment would be that *Parasite* is no more a "Korean" film than *Snowpiercer* and *Okja* are globally-oriented ones.
3. The nonsensical absurdity of this game theory is indeed the gist of neoliberalism in that the ground on which they play the game in equal terms is always already "tilted." The rule of the game itself allows the different starting point: the wealthy and privileged "gold spoons" are way ahead of the disadvantaged "clay spoons" even before the game starts. And there are a lot of under-privileged who do not even dream of competing in the game. *Parasite* nakedly lays bare this absurdity of neoliberal survivalism and the idea of meritocracy, which is built upon the collective fantasy, if not ideology, that the intra-class struggle for survival has nothing to do with class struggle for justice. (Fisher 2009, 17).
4. There are indeed some complaints about the unreality of the way the Parks are depicted so ridiculously "gullible." See Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi (2021) 104.
5. The unreality of Kiwoo's trait as an involuntary straggler manifests itself all the more clearly when it is compared to the social antagonism of Jongsu in Lee Chang-dong's *Burning*, who has no desire for the social recognition. See Kang (2021).
6. Namkung is a Korean surname and the given name, Hyunja, means literally a wise man.
7. Virus is, like stink, as such neither alive nor dead in the biological sense of the term. Unlike stink, however, viruses thrive and reproduce themselves within living cells. They are "parasitical" lump of protein entirely dependent upon the host they come in contact with. Virus moves like a life form when it replicates, but its replication cannot lead to the evolution of a more complicated form of life. It eats out, as it were, what procures it a pseudo-life and thereby completes its own demise within the infected body. Like a cancer cell in a tumor, virus has no life of its own but is powerful enough to destroy the very organism that is the source of its life. The host is not passively infected by lively viruses; it actively transfers inert viruses into other living organisms. (Žižek 2020, 79).

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# Walking Mobility

## Focusing on the Expression of Walking in Modern Japanese Novels

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes walking as portrayed in Sōseki Natsume's *Sanshirō* (1908) and Yasunari Kawabata's *The Dancing Girl of Izu* (1925), Takeo Arishima's *Descendants of Cain* (1917), and *A Certain Woman* (1919). Of course, walking in everyday life is essential, but the interest of this study is the depiction of the different types of walking and the distinctiveness of each kind in these literary texts. Specifically, the four stories discussed in this paper describe the "types" of walking of two male intellectuals, an illiterate peasant family and an elite woman across the city of Tokyo and the rural villages in modern Japan, which, as the paper tries to show, unravel the ways mobility is experienced historically by human beings on the level of the literary significance of literal motion as experienced socially through physical bodily movement.

The description of walking in a literary text means more than just moving from one place to another. In a capitalist society, humans may crave high mobility. Yet, people have not stopped walking in a post-industrial society although they have walked differently from context to context. Across cultures, walking has various meanings and forms, and literary texts portray the social body as people walk in the midst of the rapid development of mobility technology. In this paper, explored are the different types of walking: walking in a city, walking in a mountain, walking in a civilized manner, and walking to

live in order to explain the various forms and meanings behind this everyday action.

In particular, *Sanshirō* shows how urban space is given meaning as a place only when people move around it. In this novel, a young intellectual who comes to a big city for the first time communicates with his body, as he walks around the city, and develops into a subject. In *The Dancing Girl of Izu*, the protagonist who is walking her way to a travel destination, from which a transient set of experiences of a carefree traveler is accumulated. Such an experience allows for a degree of pleasant but momentary camaraderie with someone with a different social status. It is in stark contrast to *Sanshirō*, whose main protagonist exerts an effort to transform a space into a place quickly upon arriving in the capital from his rural hometown. These stories may be said to represent “civilized walking.”

In *Descendants of Cain*, the depiction of walking extends to a struggle against nature and a wandering image of diaspora, which does not appear in civilized walking. However, in *A Certain Woman*, Yōko catches the gaze of random members of the public, especially men, signaling the beginning of a time when a woman’s walking becomes an object of the masculine gaze. From this attention, we realize how modern culture might have developed from a male perspective in the name of civilization. The analysis of walking allows us to consider that walking in modern times is not a meaningless, plain, and neutral human activity, as the aforementioned novels might suggest. Set across a city, the mountains and rural environment, the novels, if read more closely, imply that the action of walking is embedded in a dense hierarchy of assumed relations of meanings, in a city and the mountains and rural environment. Walking here is thoroughly controlled by the habitus already at work.

### Keywords

Walking Mobility, Modern Japanese Novels, *Sanshirō*, *The Dancing Girl of Izu*, *Descendants of Cain*, *A Certain Woman*

## 1. Why walking mobility?

There are many different types of walking; we stroll or walk in a hurry to a destination, or sometimes we stop for a second before a traffic light and walk again. We take a brisk walk along the river for exercise or take an unhurried walk whilst talking with someone. We take a leisurely stroll, looking at things near us, or we walk, while thinking of what we will talk about with the people we may encounter (Urry 63-65).

Walking is a familiar experience, and people walk at their own unique pace, stride length, and habit. Walking is an act executed by the whole body in its encounter with the environment: roads, people, landscapes, buildings, and shops (Solnit 29). While walking, the human body communicates with the environment—sidewalks, moving vehicles such as cars and bicycles, street noise, birds chirping in the scenic nature, obstacles at construction sites, chaotically parked cars, and traffic lights—with the accompanying senses of sight, hearing, and smell.

There are many images of walking in literature. However, since most people take walking for granted, they do not pay much attention to its meaning. This study explains why walking is organic to the significance of literary texts by exploring some scenes of walking in Japanese literature, the author's main field of interest for research. Of course, we have entered the high-mobility society, away from the era of the minimal mobility allowed by a walking society, where people will soon benefit from hi-tech vehicles powered by artificial intelligence (AI), such as moving cars and drone taxis without the need for drivers. Still, such apparent convenience could limit as well as expand the physical mobility of people and change their culture. In fact, as we already know, horse-drawn carriages, bicycles, automobiles, and trains had changed people's walking culture dramatically when they became widespread (Urry 64).

As people walk, they encounter streetcars, driveways, sidewalks, bicycle paths, subways, shops, cultural facilities such as museums, parks, and many more. Various meanings may be derived from the gait of people walking across these places. Of course, there is a clear difference between walking on a well-maintained pedestrian path in a neat and wealthy residential area

and walking while avoiding cars in a narrow and congested alley. And these differences will create a myriad of cultural meanings and form a hierarchy of significance. Just as Urry has already pointed out in his discussion of the historical phenomenon of walking from prohibition to leisure walking itself is also a site of a kind of “class struggle.” Urry cites the example of the post-industrial Britain, but he also reminds us that walking is not an isolated phenomenon.

The novels depict patterns of walking that embody significance beyond physical movement. By carefully reading the novel, the reader can see that a walking culture is emerging with a hierarchical social structure. In this regard, this paper examines the expression of walking in four novels that are highly regarded among the novels depicting modern Japan. These four texts are about the following: an elite male young man walking through a metropolitan city as a symbol of civilization, an elite male young man going on a healing journey on a country road, a sad peasant family wandering in search of a place to live, and a woman who suffers from the immobility to walk in early modern times. These texts share an important characteristic of walking which we usually call a gait. On the one hand, the elite men of the first two types represent the modern intellectuals of Tokyo Imperial University. On the other hand, the lower-class peasants of the last two types who are marginalized by capitalists and endowed with barbarism and diaspora, show the darker side of modern Japan. Also, work representing women’s everyday life form a theme about how they are alienated from modern cultural life itself through the expression of walking. A social hierarchy in life is revealed more clearly by paying attention to walking.

Indeed, today, people are increasingly dependent on modern technology for the convenience of everyday life. But from a human-centered point of view, the advancement of a vehicle has resulted in a ‘transformation of walking culture.’ In a capitalist society, humans may crave high mobility. Still, it is naïve to think that vehicles with advanced technology serve humans because quite the opposite is true. Literary texts record people’s social bodies when they walk in the context of the rapid development of mobility technology. Indeed, paying attention to walking expressions in the

study of today's literary texts is very useful for reading the text's social and historical context.

## 2. Walking in a city and walking in a mountain

Sōseki Natsume (1867–1916) is one of the most influential modern Japanese novelists. His works depict Japanese intellectuals struggling to adapt to modern times when Japan opened its ports and achieved modernization (Ishihara 251). Yasunari Kawabata (1899–1972), who became known to the world as a representative Japanese writer by receiving the Nobel Prize in 1968, lyrically portrayed the futile intellectual in modernized Japan (Toba 71). This paper analyzes the different aspects of walking of young intellectuals through novels written by two leading Japanese novelists, Sōseki Natsume and Yasunari Kawabata. Sōseki Natsume's *Sanshirō* (1908) and Yasunari Kawabata's *The Dancing Girl of Izu* (1925) are both growing-up-age narratives. Both novels convey walking as a means of expressing the coming-of-age story of two young men who come from the elite class.

In *Sanshirō*, the protagonist is a young man named Sanshirō, who first came to Tokyo from a rural area to attend Tokyo Imperial University. This novel depicts the experiences of Sanshirō, an elite young man from the countryside of southern Japan, as he arrives at the University of Tokyo for the first time. He soon becomes accustomed to his surroundings, fellow students and professors. It also depicts his interaction with several young ladies and his first experiences of love. Through Sanshirō and those around him, the text describes aspects of the Meiji-era Japanese modern society.

After moving to the capital city of an expanding empire to attend university, Sanshirō reflects while walking around the big city.

Many things surprised Sanshirō in Tokyo. First, he was surprised to hear the tinkling sound of trams. He was also surprised to see so many people getting on and off the tram while making that sound... What amazed him the most was that it was still Tokyo, no matter how much he walked. Besides, lumbers and stones are everywhere, piled up for construction works... and everything seems to be under construction simultaneously. It is a great move. (*Sanshirō* 21-22)<sup>1</sup>



The reason Sanshirō walks through Tokyo is to experience modern civilization. He communicates with the city by walking down the streets where construction is underway, for example. The people getting on and off the tram represent a giant modern metropolis where it is no longer possible to move by walking alone. As a newcomer in Tokyo, he experiences the city as a space without a sense of place. He is attracted to building construction sites and a desolate development site with no traces of life: “A place is a space in which traces of a subject’s experiences and historical memories are recorded” (Shin 2021, 606).

On the other hand, space is the basic unit expressed in latitude and longitude without attachment to a place (Cresswell 2). As Sanshirō’s communication with the city did not get a sense of place through walking, he could not imagine the city by his bodily sense. For example, people get a sense of place on their own, and believe that they know everything about a city like a long-time resident, even if they have not actually walked around every corner of it.

The first experience of walking in a big city renders all that is routinary and self-evident unfamiliar. Sanshirō “stands in the middle of Tokyo and sees trams and trains and people in white and those in black moving(22)” and becomes “anxious” (22) that he would fall behind in that world. For Sanshirō, Tokyo is a ‘moving’ city. Indeed, the novel realistically depicts the anxiety of modern times through the relative senses of the city and the subject. People regard trams, trains, construction sites, and buildings as icons of modern, urban civilizations. However, as the protagonist walks around the big city for the first time after leaving his hometown in the countryside, he feels a sense of detachment from civilization with no relationship, causing the subject anxiety in the face of mobility technology.

However, he soon begins to feel a sense of place in this city and uses it to become accustomed to a civilization and eventually becomes a part of it. The country bumpkin Sanshirō explores Tokyo on foot, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by intellectuals he made friends with, conversing whilst walking. He goes to concerts or sports events with his friends or walks together with a girl he has a crush on. In other words, the expansion of

the modern city has also expanded to the urban space from which to source literary material.

That evening Sanshirō went to an area where Mr. Nonomiya lives to meet him, but it was a bit early, so he took a walk to 4-Chome<sup>2</sup> and went into a big import store to buy a shirt. ... Coincidentally, Mineko and Yosiko came in to buy perfume. After saying hello, ....

The two smiled, came to him, and helped him pick out a shirt together. Finally, Yosiko said, “Why don’t you pick this one.” Sanshirō bought it. This time, they turned to Sanshirō for advice on perfume. (*Sanshirō* 211-212)

In novels, walking that even serves to make people’s relationships intimate by accident is a familiar scene. We have also often seen in the media how new relationships are built while walking. Urban space is given meaning as a place only when people walk around it, passing by theaters and shops selling imported goods. Sanshirō once felt uncomfortable in Tokyo, where new buildings were everywhere being constructed. But soon he discovers and becomes familiar with the various places in the city through walking and accepts the city culture over time. After a shopping trip, Sanshirō happens to walk with a beautiful woman named Yosiko because they are heading in the same direction. Walking creates a relationship with people and has a different meaning depending on where they walk. Walking around the library, lecture halls, the pond in front of the medical school, and exhibitions at the Tokyo Imperial University, Sanshirō becomes acquainted with the elite intellectuals he meets in these different places.

Filled with deep anxiety about city life, another young man goes on a trip to destress. Yasunari Kawabata published *The Dancing Girl of Izu* (1925) less than 20 years after *Sanshirō*. It is a story about an elite student living in Tokyo who travels alone to the Izu Peninsula to cultivate mind and body. The narrator, who is also the main character, meets with a troupe of five traveling musicians, one man, and four women, while heading for the Mount Amagi tunnel. He is impressed by the beauty of the youngest-looking woman in the troupe and decides to follow them. After traversing the tunnel, he starts a conversation with her, making him laugh, and realizing that she is still a

young, innocent girl. While walking together, the main character overhears Kaoru, the youngest-looking woman, and the other woman saying what a nice person he is. This innocent voice uplifts him from his melancholia. He does not ignore them, but he realizes that they cannot keep traveling together. So, eventually, he breaks up with them on the way back to Tokyo.

The type of walking in this journey is quite different from the kind that helped Sanshirō discover the “signs” (Kamei 4) of the city. In those days, walking was a common means of travel, similar to the tradition of pilgrimage in pre-modern times. The young man is a typical protagonist of a coming-of-age novel, as he grows up while walking in the midst of and communicating with nature. He is 20 years old and goes to the First Higher School, Japan<sup>3</sup>. While travelling through Izu, he happens to meet a company of itinerant actors and they travel together. The traveling theater troupe consists of a woman in her 40s, a young couple, and two teenage girls, and the main protagonist is strongly attracted to the youngest ‘dancer’ at first sight. The troupes are wandering clowns who are looked down upon even by the old woman at the tea house, but enjoying the comfortable and warm atmosphere, the main protagonist gradually feels free from the restraints of distorted emotions.

As a 20-year-old, I accused myself harshly repeatedly that I had a bad temper as an orphan. I could not resist the choking gloom and came to the Izu Peninsula for travel ...

On the way, notices were on the entrances of several villages.

--No beggars and clowns are allowed in the village. (*The Dancing Girl of Izu* 33-34)<sup>4</sup>

The main protagonist begins to walk when he goes on a trip to figure out the problem that made him a troubled man. For him, travelling is an act of asceticism to feel differently in a touristic space and reflect on how to recover from his suffering in urban civilization. It is interesting to see how different the people and places that Sanshirō encounters while walking around Tokyo with all its intelligentsia and signs of civilization such as trams,

a university library, and magnificent buildings. Walking on a country road is the story of a young man, the protagonist of *The Dancing Girl of Izu*, and a “clown” with whom he walks; a wide gap separates them in terms of social status. Unlike the young man from Tokyo, the wandering clowns, regard the country road as a road to places with memories of episodes that happened in the past. Experiencing discrimination and treated as beggars, they faced an immobility situation because they were not allowed to enter the village.

A hierarchy of walking is also established among people who walk together. The protagonist’s “depression” begins to be alleviated while communicating with companions from a low social status while walking with them on the road trip and begins to feel better. The wandering clowns invite him to their hometown, but despite his romantic feelings about the dancer, he turns down her invitation and heads back to Tokyo. Moreover, he seems to have become more mature when he returns to Tokyo after saying good-bye to the dancer at the end of the trip. What has made maturity possible was that he was not walking in Tokyo. However, since travel is a temporary experience, his walking and travelling are ultimately similar to a tourist’s gaze. Therefore, it is possible to communicate pleasantly with a person from a different social status. Although deeply imbued with lyricism while walking with the young dancer in this narrative, the protagonist has no room to develop his love. He has no intention of transforming the space of his travel into a place, but he is still consuming that experience. It works in stark contrast to Sanshirō, who makes efforts to transform a space into a place quickly upon arriving in the capital from his rural hometown. Walking in modern times between a city and the mountains is not the same or equal between people; it is hierarchical.

Although both young protagonists in these novels walk on unfamiliar land and grow up along the way, walking acquires different meanings. Here we can see that even walking is hierarchical.

### 3. Walking to live

*Descendants of Cain* (1917), written by Takeo Arishima (1878–1923), is set in Hokkaido, where tenant farming was widespread in the modern period. In

this novel, we can see the first part of the novel, where the Ninemon family comes to settle in this desolate land, alongside the last scene, where they leave after failing to settle down. This modern novel depicts the miserable condition of tenant farmers' families in Hokkaido, Japan, where nature is the enemy of the main character. The central character appears at the novel's beginning trying to settle on a farm and fighting against nature; however, in the end, despite his desperate efforts, nature abandons him after causing discord with the villagers and owing so much debt. Although he fought fiercely against nature, his family burns their house and leaves the village.

Casting a long shadow on the ground and holding the reins of the skinny horse, the man walked silently. Carrying a baby whose head is big like an eel on the back as well as a large, dirty bag, his wife limped little by little and plodded after him five or six metres behind.

Winter in Hokkaido stretched to the sky. The west wind, passing from the East Sea into Uchiura Bay, blew like waves through the Iburi steppe leading to the foot of the Makkari Nupuri mountain called Ezo Fuji. It is a bitter wind. .... Not even a single tree grew on the meadow. He and his wife moved like two staggering trees on a lonely, straight road.

The two walked, not saying a word as if they had forgotten to speak. Only when the horse was peeing did the husband reluctantly stop. His wife finally caught up in the meantime, lifted her load on her back, and sighed. When the horse had finished urinating, the two began to walk silently again. (*Descendants of Cain* 87)<sup>5</sup>

The novel's first scene functions as a foreshadowing that hints at the theme. For the main character, walking is a matter of survival. It is not about a metaphorical 'nomad' but about a disadvantaged migrant's mobility in desperate search for a place to live. What draws the reader's attention is how the family walks through the vast expanse of nature, with no infrastructure in society such as paved roads, restaurants, shops, traffic lights, or bus stops. This novel is highly acclaimed by the Japanese literary circle for its depiction of nature that is so far away from civilization. However, it is meaningless to evaluate this novel which depicts "wild and uncivilized" people from a binomial either perspective of "civilization versus barbarism." Instead, it

is natural to simply leave the reader's five senses to the literary sensibility of what such primitive walking is like. If all cultural apparatuses around us disappear and we walk alone, what will it mean to us?

It is common to imagine things not here. We wish for a problematic situation to disappear, travelers look forward to the scenery that will unfold before them, or someone imagines in a flashback images of the days of their old hometown before it changed and became modern. Imagining barbarism from the vantage point of a civilized mind is no different from longing for things that no longer exist if they ever did exactly as imagined. It is like dreaming of rural life because of the difficult life in cities.

In *Descendants of Cain*, the family, plodding along with the child on the mother's back and the horse, represents the most basic state of human existence. This solitary family's walking reminds us of a 'march of suffering' or the wanderings of a diaspora. The novel's title also reminds us of Cain, expelled from the Garden of Eden due to his sin and wandering.

However, there is no communication while this family is walking. There is no cultural activity such as admiring the scenery or conversation about the next destination. The expression "walking silently," implies that in the context of this novel, walking is an act signifying their fight against nature in order to survive. The discovery of "wildness" of nature and the characters received praise from critics due to the strong impression created by the first part of the novel. In fact, in the later chapters of this novel, the protagonist's anti-social violence and anti-moral desires are narrated in the community marked by a peasant culture. Indeed, primitive walking without communication, as expressed in the introduction, had an enormous power on the readers which influenced the overall evaluation of this novel because intellectuals and critics in Tokyo in 1917 must have felt a kind of defamiliarization from scenes depicting the family walking in *Descendants of Cain* (Yamada, 92-94). What matters here is that the act of walking has a significant influence on shaping the subjectivity of characters. Modern Japan has been focusing on civilization, and has formed a huge discourse around the topic, thereby excluding the nature of the diaspora as shown by the main family in this novel.

The family walks in silence as if practicing asceticism. Furthermore, the wife has a disability in one of her legs projecting such a lonely walk without the elements of culture and society, suggesting hardship that lies ahead. As a peasant, Ninemon fails to settle down due to his rebellious temperament. Faithful to his instincts, he leaves the village as if he were exiled. The novel ends with the following passage:

When they came out on the national road, it was covered with snow. Ninemon took the lead and walked carefully to avoid falling into the snow pit. The couple kept on moving forward with large luggage, with faltering steps. As she passed a cemetery, the wife walked with her palms together towards it, crying aloud as if purposely (Note: their child was buried in the cemetery). When the couple came to the village, they had a horse. They also had a newborn baby. Nature has taken the baby and the horse away from them.

From that point on, there were no houses in sight. Dry branches, broken by the raging snow, often ran towards them like spear blades. The tree, swaying violently in the strong wind, ran wild like a witch's hair.

There was an *Abies sachalinensis* forest in the distance. With bare trees all over, a tree had gloomy dark green leaves. Its straight stems stretched endlessly, reaching up to the sky and capturing the sound of the wind like a roar. The husband and wife approached the forest like tiny ants and were sucked into it. (*Descendants of Cain* 127-128)

In this novel, the final scene follows the two people walking silently, as they did in the beginning. They are still walking strenuously, but mobility is getting more difficult for them. They walk painfully due to the threat of sinking snow pits and snow-capped spear-sharp branches. Walking without a future is to walk simply to survive a given situation. This novel suggests that whereas they used to walk to live, now they have to walk to survive.

Unlike the walking in the hopes of falling in love with the prince as in the fairy tale *The Little Mermaid*, walking in this novel might not be that captivating. It is probably because the theme of this novel connects readers to the dark side of civilization through the image of aimless walking. The novelist assumes that the primary issue a human subject who walks upright

needs to tackle is his survival, and culture is only secondary. This memory of the past primitive state, is an area that is hard to imagine for us. Therefore, walking in order to live becomes a powerful expression that deconstructs the taken-for-granted life of the subject. It might be why the literary circle in Tokyo sang the praises of this novel.

#### 4. Walking in a civilised manner

The ethical incongruity between the protagonist and society is discussed in a paper on the protagonist's walking in *A Certain Woman* (1919), another novel by the writer of *Descendants of Cain*. This study examines civilized walking in *A Certain Woman* which is a story about the passionate life of charming divorced woman, Yōko, who is a single mother of 24 (Shin 2021, 601-613). This novel begins with a scene of Yoko preparing to depart for the United States to get married to Kimura after her parents' death. While on a long sea voyage to the United States, Yoko falls passionately in love with an officer on the ship (Kurachi). In the end, Yōko returns to Japan, suffers from bullying and disease, and the novel ends with her demise. As discussed above regarding *Descendants of Cain*, the opening chapters are vital for this novel, too.

As she was passing Shinbashi, the second bell rang indicating the departure. The sound of the bell was heard in the misty September morning air, though it was not as thick as the fog. (*A Certain Woman* 7)<sup>6</sup>

The heroine first appears on her way to the train station riding a rickshaw. Her whole body becomes one with a rickshaw vehicle, protected by mobile devices and invisible to passersby. She is not walking, but the vehicle, more precisely, the person who is pulling it is, carrying her, so readers cannot see her walking at all. In other words, a moving body not only expresses the unique meaning of a person, but also associates it with the cultural and technological contexts of its time. From that point onwards, she appears to the readers as a body whose every movement has a cultural code.

It is common knowledge that the train departs soon after the second time the bell rings at a train station. So, the rickshaw driver carrying the



main character Yōko is running fast to catch the train, and at the ticket gate, a young man named Kotō, who is escorting Yōko, is begging the station attendant to wait for her. It is well known in mobility theory that the modern concept of punctuality began with the advent of the train (Gately 37). As such, the act of delaying the train at the beginning of this novel might be viewed as a kind of provocation against the well-established framework of modernity. Particularly in this part of the novel, because the heroine is late for her departure time, one would expect that she would hurry up to catch the train, but instead she just continues to walk on all too slowly.

Yōko, who is leaving to marry her fiancé who lives in the United States, is on her way to Yokohama to buy a steamer ticket to take her to the United States (See Shin 2017, 218-219). She is accompanied by Kotō, a friend of her fiancé, because it is dangerous for a woman to travel alone. She wants to go shopping in Yokohama where there are many shops selling imported goods.

On the platform, everyone standing, including the station attendants and those who came out to see someone off, looked towards the two people. With no regard for it, Yōko walks slowly, intimately shoulder to shoulder with the young man, guessing what is in the pack the rickshaw man handed him or saying there is no city like Yokohama... When the two entered the train, everyone looked at them, and Yōko enjoyed watching the young man being shy like a naive girl and angry at her. (*A Certain Woman* 8)

When a film that should have been fast-paced turns slow, the effect on the viewer is palpable. Everyone cannot help but anxiously watch Yōko as she is walking too leisurely, she has to be hurrying up. Considering that walking so slowly in a public place and drawing the attention of people as a result is unseemly even for men, it would have been considered more inappropriate for a woman to draw attention in the modern era when the status of women was conventionally believed to be far lower than men (Shin 2021, 605). As she gets off the rickshaw to take a train, her slow movement seems deliberate, as she is conscious of the audience's gaze. Just like what has been referred to as primitive walking without communication as in the first scene in *Descendants of Cain*, walking in *A Certain Woman* delivers a message very strategically.

In the context of the setting, the train station square, waiting room, and platform are modern public places. Indeed, it is the first modern Japanese novel that draws attention to women walking in public places. If the train is a symbol of modernity, walking in public places is also a symbol of the subject's emergence. Having accelerated modernity, mobility also enabled the emergence of the subject, constituting an integral (Pooley 598-599, Kim 222) element of modernity, as walking helped make possible such an emergence into the public realm. Women had access to such mobility, but there were restrictions on women's walking in those days because they were still widely discriminated against. Yōko gets off at Yokohama Station, the largest port in Japan in modern times, and walks around the port with Kotō, but with apparent difficulty.

Using the parasol as a staff, Yōko gingerly descended from the deck and came out to the ticket gates with Kotō's help. But as she walked slowly, the other passengers passed, leaving only the two of them behind. 14 - 15 rickshaw drivers for the station, who had not found customers, gathered in front of the waiting room, looking at the slender Yoko and talking about something. Words such as 'the girl' and 'foreigners' whore' were mixed into their obscene chatter. The coarse, vulgar atmosphere of the open port immediately vexed Yoko's nerves. (*A Certain Woman* 21)

Here, we can think about the characters walking for survival in *Descendants of Cain*, suffering from heavy burdens. A parasol appears as an accompaniment to Yōko's leisurely walking in a large Japanese city around the same time as when a family walks desperately for survival in another part of the country. Her fragility emphasizes her "slender" femininity, as the sight of a woman walking becomes an object of the masculine gaze. From her walking as an object of such a gaze, we realize how modern culture developed from a male perspective in the name of civilization.

We have discussed four types of walking in modern Japanese novels. As suggested by the analysis, the description of walking in a literary text means more than just moving from one place to another. Of course, walking in everyday life is essential, but the types depicted in these novels are quite representative in general.

In 1908, when *Sanshirō* was published, Tokyo was a large city with over two million people. This novel is about a young intellectual who came to a big city for the first time, communicating with his body by walking around the city, and in the process, transforming into a subject. This insight has not attracted much attention from critics engaged in metadiscourse research but it is important to point out, as suggested by this analysis, that through the exploration of walking mobility in literary works, a body's ordinary physical movement becomes more than meets the eye. We realize the significance, for example, of witnessing how a young intellectual who is used to living in a big city walks on the mountain trails in the countryside alongside people with totally different habitus from that of the city, evoking a lyricism that we feel in travel. However, the main character walking here is thoroughly controlled by the intellectual environment already working, because his walking in the mountains is temporary, and his walking in the city is his first time to do so.

Walking as an idea is modern. Walking as understood in a modern sense did not exist in *Descendants of Cain*, where the characters walk in an environment of immobility. There are no palpable cultural and social elements in their silence; no destination, hopes, and desires. In this novel, primitive walking in order to live is a struggle against nature and diasporic wandering—which is very unlike civilized walking. Interestingly, Yōko in *A Certain Woman* catches the gaze of the random public, especially men, signaling the beginning of women's walking, depicting how modernity in the culture of feminine walking began in Japan in the context of modern inventions.

The four novels discussed in this paper describe the walking. Literary texts have helped us look into the lives of humans in the past, and provided a basis of possibly shared feelings with contemporary readers. Finally, through a close analysis of novels that focus on one of the most ordinary physical movements of human beings such as walking, we can begin to imagine how people in the past might have been fundamentally constituted by the development of mobility technology. Of course, the few significant works of this Japanese case cannot incorporate the expression of walking in the larger

context of modern Japan. Nevertheless, beyond the problems of infrastructure and walking that Urry has pointed out, we can validate that modern Japan was not only hierarchical, but also gendered, even when people were walking on the same path.

## Notes

1. Quoted from the Japanese edition (Natsume, Sōseki. *Sanshirō*. Shinchosha, 1986).
2. Chome is the Japanese notation for dividing districts into blocks.
3. It is the best high school in Japan, and students are admitted to the third year of the Tokyo Imperial University after graduation, so it is equivalent to the first or second year of the Tokyo Imperial University.
4. Quoted from the Japanese edition (Kawabata, Yasunari. *The Dancing Girl of Izu*. Shinchosha, 1986).
5. Quoted from the Japanese edition (Arishima, Takeo. *Descendants of Cain*. *The Collected Works of Takeo Arishima*, vol. 3, Chikuma Syobo, 1980).
6. Quoted from the Japanese edition (Arishima, Takeo. *A Certain Woman*. *The Collected Works of Takeo Arishima*, vol. 4. Chikuma Syobo, 1979).

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# Pisting Yawa

## Rodrigo Duterte and the Language of the Street

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### Abstract

The essay explores the role that language plays in explaining the consistently high popularity of President Rodrigo Duterte. It argues that far from being fearful of or threatened by the President, Filipinos find themselves in affinity with Duterte because both share the same languages of the street. The essay does so by looking at the effectiveness of Visayan and its variant “Davao Tagalog” in keeping the crowd and Duterte bonded together, and the different meanings Filipinos attribute to everyday obscenities that are generally missed by the “Duterte Studies Industry.”

### Keywords

*Bisayang Dako, Davao-Tagalog, putang-ina mo, Rodrigo Duterte, Visayans*

Laughter does not possess a single rhetorical force even within the context of humor. It can be the laughter of hostile ridicule or the laughter of friendly appreciation: one can laugh *with* others and *at* others. As such, laughter can join people together and it can divide; and it can do both simultaneously when a group laughs together at others. (Michael Billig 2005: 194)

It's like, you can crack green jokes with your close friends. So the people feel that Digong is close to them because he cracks green or *bastos* jokes with them (Anonymous Dabaweno, April 5, 2022)

## Introduction

In an online search under the category “President Rodrigo R. Duterte” at the University of Hawai’i Hamilton library’s on-line catalog, the first 5 pages alone yield 15,798 citations. This makes Duterte the third most studied president of the Philippines after Gloria M. Arroyo (22,229 entries) and Ferdinand E. Marcos (18,135), and just slightly ahead of Joseph P. Estrada (15,377).<sup>1</sup> Arroyo and Marcos have more citations, given that their rule extended beyond their constitutionally mandated presidential tenure. The rest lagged far behind: Corazon C. Aquino (9,237), her son Benigno C. Aquino III (5,519), and Fidel V. Ramos (3,836). When broken down into separate categories, the list included 8 books (including a bizarre piece titled *Samurai President of the Philippines: Spiritual Interview with the Guardian Spirit of Rodrigo Duterte* by a certain Ryuho Okawa), 2 book chapters, 1 dissertation, 103 journal essays, 4 films, and a conference devoted solely on Duterte. This virtual “Duterte Studies Industry” (DSI) signified an academic shift into “new directions in their analyses” (Thompson 2019) of Philippine politics with the rise of a seemingly idiosyncratic president. With a few exceptions, the DSI’s intellectual curiosity is generally oddly personality focused. If the sociopolitical contexts are added to the analysis, these are often more recent (the start of his presidency), national (Manila), and related to refining concepts (“fascist,” “federalism,” “illiberalism,” “neo-bossism,” “populism”). The moral anger is palpable in many of these writings; some are openly contemptuous of Duterte’s demeanor.



There is also that lingering puzzle behind his popularity, which is dealt with in several ways. Duterte is supposed to be a “fascist original [and] father figure who will finally end...the ‘national chaos,’” by leading an “electoral insurgency against the country’s elite democracy” (Bello 2017, as quoted by Curato 2019, 1). He is the Marxist-nationalist radical who would end “U.S. imperialist” control of the country (Maboloc 2020) and destroy the oligarchy (Maboloc 2020a). An anthropologist refers to Duterte being inspired by a Hobsbawmian “social-bandit morality” when he uses state power to correct the social wrongs of society (Kusaka 2017), while a historian calls him the “sovereign trickster” who “endears himself to his supporters as a dissipator, one whose performative excess gives expression to what is at once forbidden and desired” (Rafael 2018,155). Political scientists trace Duterte’s fame to voters’ desire “to reject aspects of democracy... they consider inconvenient or ineffective in exchange for Marcos-era ‘discipline’ and ‘stability’” (Thompson and Teehankee 2016, 133). They find solace, according to a sociologist, in his “penal populism,” where “the language of toughness, control, and immediate gratification is prioritized over the long-term but the tedious strategy of building an effective justice system” (Curato 2017, 150).<sup>2</sup> Policy analysts agree, stating that Duterte has successfully tapped into a lingering “anti-elite sentiment” of Filipino towards “the way the post-EDSA governance favoured the political and economic elite” (Casiple 2016, 180).

These works have considerably deepened our knowledge of Duterte and his atypical presidency. Yet significant gaps remain. First, there is a predisposition in many of these studies to assume that Duterte’s callous language and boorish behavior were unprecedented in the history of Philippine politics. Second, Duterte’s acceptance may have come from his adept exploitation of anti-elite and anti-Manila sentiments, but precisely how these are conveyed to voters and produce an avid response is unnoticed or ignored.

This essay addresses two aspects of these gaps in the DSI literature by “bringing the local back in” (a nod to Theda Skocpol). It hopes to show a more nuanced picture of Duterte’s politics that may help us understand why—despite his brutality—he is still highly regarded by Filipinos. Finally, one needs to examine how Duterte and his advisers are able to successfully

transmit their messages to the public. I would suggest that the transformation of mass media in the 1980s, particularly the nationalization of television, laid the groundwork for Duterte to reach a wider audience while “consolidating” his influence among the largest voting bloc—the Visayans.<sup>3</sup> But more importantly, if we shift our lens away from Duterte and focus on “the crowd”—the mass of supporters who listened to his campaign speeches and television appearances—we find little attention in the DSI. This is because the effort to seriously put the “crowd” in the picture involves being literate in Duterte’s and his supporters’ languages.<sup>4</sup> Many of these writings also start from the assumption that the crowd—the ordinary people, as it were—appears not to share his bile.<sup>5</sup> But the laughter and cheering are there, shown in hundreds of television segments and social media uploads. We therefore need to explain *how* this political rapport came about and why, far from being hoodwinked by Duterte’s diatribes, Filipinos see themselves as actively engaged in conversation with their president. I would argue that this has something to do with a street-level argot that both the President and the public share and are comfortably at ease with.

Scholars of various political colors—from the Marxist social historians George Rude (1995) and E.P. Thompson (1963), and the Catholic-conservative historian Eugene Genovese (1976), to the anarchist political anthropologists James C. Scott (1987; 1992), and the left-wing historical anthropologist Eric Wolff—have underscored the importance of *mentalité populaire* and a history from below when explaining rebellions, protests, and resistance. If we assume Casiple (2016) is right in his observation that a large number of Filipinos still hold this strong “anti-elite sentiment,” then there is also a basis for arguing that these millions of “Dutertards” represent some form of popular protest that would draw the attention of these scholars.<sup>6</sup> Thus it is in the spirit of these “pro-people” scholars that this essay seeks to explain why, in understanding Duterte’s popularity, the crowd must always be considered an embedded part of the analyses. And the best place to start is at Davao City’s Crocodile Park, where then-president-elect Rodrigo Duterte gave his “thanksgiving speech,” and the reaction of his supporters and observers like myself to some of the things he said.

Chico de Calle

As he was closing his long-winded monologue, Duterte vented his ire on the persistent inquiries by journalists into his health.<sup>7</sup> He said he became more incensed when his rival, Secretary of Local Government Manuel “Mar” Roxas, took advantage of this query and mocked Duterte for his non-response. Roxas further stoked the fire by expressing doubt that Duterte could last in a fistfight. Below is the segment of the address in which Duterte ranted.<sup>8</sup>

Table 1. President Rodrigo Duterte Speech at Thanksgiving Party, 4 June 2016<sup>9</sup>

<p>“Naa pay usa ka reporter ngari <i>DotDot</i>, ikaw pay ngil-ad. Nangutana ug, ‘How is your health? Ingon nako, ‘I’m fine, I’m good.’</p> <p>Sagot pa naman sa ako, putang ina, ‘Saan yong medical report mo?’</p> <p>Binastos gani...Eh di giingnan nako, ayaw na lang...ako, himatyon. Pag-gawas ako’y kontrabida. Maayo ba na ana-on nimo ang tawo?</p> <p>Ug ingnon ta ka ‘kumusta and kondi-syon sa bisong sa imong asawa, dawbi? Unsa man ang iyang...naay vaginitis o wa, kay baho ra ba na!’</p> <p>Eh...ganoon eh. Binastos man ko... Kapila na gud sa eleksyon gipangutana ko, kaming Roxas. Miabot pa mig sinagpaay...</p> <p>Unya ingon siya nga medical report. Ayaw na lang, maghubo na lang ta, padak-anay tag otin, gusto ka? Gamay man tug otin, kay igwat mag lubot. Bayot!!” (<i>Rappler</i> 2016).</p>	<p>And here was this reporter, DotDot, who wanted to portray me as a charlatan. He asked me, “How is your health?” I replied, “I’m fine, I’m good.” Then that son-of-bitch added, “But where is your medical report?”</p> <p>That was so insulting...So, I told him, forget about it, yeah I’m dying. And now he’s making it appear that I am the villain. Is that a proper way to treat a person?</p> <p>So, what if I ask you, “How is the vagina of your wife?” What’s happening to it...does it have vaginitis or not, because that would make it smell!”</p> <p>Ehhh...that was it...That was so rude... I remember the countless if times I was asked that question...Even by [Manuel] Roxas, and so we almost ended up slapping each other...</p> <p>He also asked me for the same medical report [and I said] Let’s stop playing this game. Let us just drop our pants at the same time and see whose penis is bigger...That fellow has a small penis, you know, because he has a flat ass... that homosexual!!</p>
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If one watches the video closely, one cannot help but notice that the crowd erupted in laughter at what Duterte said, while his Manila allies—notably the vice presidential candidate Alan Peter Cayetano—looked clueless. The president-elect and the crowd did not mind. This image also shows Duterte’s uncanny ability to switch audiences with very little effort on his part. He prefaced his tirade against the media by addressing “DotDot.” We do not know who “DotDot” is, but we can surmise that he (she?) and Duterte are close friends. Duterte then immediately turned to the public to heap insults on the journalists and Roxas to the delight of the crowd.

Duterte is, of course, not unique. Commonwealth President Manuel L. Quezon was known for his proclivity to use the curse word *puñeta* (Doronila 2011; Guingona 2013, 21). But Carlos Quirino recalled that Quezon’s foul mouth went beyond his use of this Spanish word that either meant having sex, moving one’s bowels, or expressing anger by clenching one’s fists at someone you hate. In his article “Anecdotes about Quezon,” the historian wrote:

When [then Senate President] Quezon was campaigning against the H-H-C Act in Tanawan, Batangas (country dominated by Jose P. Laurel, of the OsRox faction), he was greeted coolly. Quezon spotted a cross-eyed man and said, “Hey, *putang ina mong duling*...What are you doing here?” (italics mine)

Quezon, according to Quirino, then “placed his arm around the shoulder of the cross-eyed man who smiled broadly in return” (recall Duterte and DotDot). This touch of friendliness thawed out the crowd, and good-natured laughter erupted, followed by cheers and applause. Needless to say, the political meeting was a success. “‘Who was that cross-eyed man you greeted, Mr. President?’ asked one of his henchmen after the meeting. ‘I’ll be damned if I know his name,’ replied Quezon. ‘This is the first time I’ve ever seen him in my life!’” (Quirino 1962, 239-243).

Other politicians were more cautious with their use of profanities or were able to express these with no historian like Quirino within earshot or journalist willing to commit them to print. In another politician’s biography,

Quirino appended a list of the colorful Senate President Eulogio “Amang” Rodriguez’s “mangled” English that included an incident in which an increasingly irritated Amang muttered angrily while waiting for his driver to pick him up: “Where could the *kalahating hindut* have gone?” (Quirino 1983, 41). *Kalahati* means “one-half,” while *hindut* is the Tagalog slang for sexual intercourse, which, unlike the other slang word *kantut*, means the “gentle and careful” insertion of the penis (Tan, n.d.). Incensed as he was, Amang remained fond of his driver, the half-fucker incapable of completing coitus.

Quezon, Amang, and others fastidiously kept separate the language of the state and the language of the crowd, conscious of the dignity of their offices. Even local bosses conformed to this protocol. A classic example was the Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) relationship with the late Ronaldo Parojinog, who was mayor of my hometown Ozamiz City but known more as the head of the *Kuratong Baleleng*, a “dreaded Mindanao mafia” that began as an anticommunist vigilante group but would later “become a diversified kidnapping, smuggling and extortion syndicate with close links to officials in Northwestern Mindanao and elsewhere” (Torres Jr. 2004). Among the accomplishments the ADB’s 2010 Report listed included the completion of a PHP161-million “glitzy new mall” in Ozamiz City that “can accommodate up to 955 stalls and 14 rentable spaces in addition to offices, banks, food chains, a recreational area and a stage.” A grateful Parojinog declared that “With full occupancy, and with efficient collection and use of fees, the public mall can be a good source of revenue for the city” (Mangahas 2010, 13). What the glossy left out were Parojinog’s criminal connections. The mayor and 14 others would later be killed in a police raid on 30 July 2017, after President Duterte accused him as one of several local officials involved in producing and distributing drugs. Mikhael Bakhtin eloquently put it when he observed: “Profanities and oaths were not initially related to laughter, but they were excluded from the sphere of official speech because they broke its norms; they were therefore transferred to the familiar sphere of the marketplace” (1984, 17).

This divide between the official language of the nation-state and the language of local power continued unnoticed or ignored by the media.

However, by the late 1990s, there were indications that this had weakened. Signs of this intermixing became evident during the short reign of President Estrada when his campaign team came up with a brilliant tactical plan to get voters to his side. They published a collection of his alleged quotes that supposedly “massacred” the English language. *ERAPtion: How to Speak English without Really Trial* (Jurado 1994) became a national bestseller, and Estrada—action star, tough city mayor, confessed womanizer, lackluster senator, and vice president—won by a huge margin of 10.7 million votes over the intelligent, savvy, and polished Speaker of the House of Representatives, Congressman Jose de Venecia, who only received 4.2 million votes.

Rodrigo Duterte went one step further, not only refusing to keep the language of the state and the language of local power apart; he brought in the coarseness from the gutters of the provincial towns and small cities to the presidential palace. And unlike Estrada, Duterte was enabled by revolutions in media technology and a capacity to switch and mix languages to reach a wider audience which responded by giving him the kind of support that would be the envy of his predecessors. This atypical posturing was what attracted DSI observers. His profanities either would preface or justify what happened next - the extra-judicial killings (EJK) of thousands, the majority of the victims from the poor. Yet, viewed from below, these obscenities are also a perfect explanation as to why Filipinos, *especially the poor*, adore their President.

### **Appropriating Chairman Mao**

In a peculiar but perhaps not unexpected way, most Filipinos saw themselves as members of specific ethnolinguistic communities and as citizens of the Republic, with the former often taking precedence over the latter. Hence Tagalogs (the language of the lower part of Luzon) were as conscious as the Visayans (the language of most of the Visayas and Mindanao provinces) and the Ilocanos (of northern Luzon) of this linguistic divide. This gulf, however, began to narrow with the advent of broadcast media, beginning with the transistor radio. The radio became a household necessity in 1959

when electric grids spread nationwide, thereby allowing Filipinos, especially those in the rural areas, to listen to a wide range of programs, from music, radio-plays, and news (Mojares 1998, 338). A decade later, 62 percent of Filipino households owned transistor radios, and even if the distribution was uneven, this new household necessity could be found in areas as far-flung as the Sulu archipelago. This high demand in turn increased the number of stations nationwide and turned radio into “the freest mass media *system* in Asia if not the world” (Lent 1968, 176, *italics mine*). The Marcos dictatorship took over the radio and television networks, but in 1986, after driving Marcos to exile, President Corazon Aquino returned these media establishments to their owners. These media moguls would then pour considerable investments on expanding the reach of their telecommunications. By the 1990s, there were 338 stations across the country, with 78 percent of households having access to their programs; in 2013, 65.6 percent of Filipinos were listening to the radio, 41.4 percent of them at least once a week (Vera Files 2020).

Radio, however, played second fiddle to television. In 1960, there were only three television stations whose coverage was mainly in Manila, while outside the national capital, Cebu and Dagupan cities each had a station. It took another seven years for television to grow gradually, with the Lopez family-owned ABS-CBN (color television came in 1966) leading the way. By 1971, ABS-CBN and its rivals were broadcasting in full color. ABS-CBN would also demonstrate its power to shape public opinion when it helped get Marcos reelected as president, with Fernando Lopez winning the vice presidency for the third time. During martial law, the government took over ABS-CBN and converted it into a public corporation whose function was to broadcast propaganda on behalf of the Marcos dictatorship. The Lopezes regained control of the company in 1986 after Marcos’s ouster and family enterprise growth continued (Enriquez 2006, 134–135).

In 1998, Duterte, then a congressman representing the 1st district of Davao City, did something no other Mindanao politician before him had ever done. He produced his own Sunday talk show on ABS-CBN’s Davao channel where, for an hour, he would respond to the “concerns” of his constitu-

ents. Carolyn Arguillas, Davao journalist and editor of *Mindanews*, wrote that the show would “ensure his continued presence among the Dabawenños whom he had served as mayor from 1988 to 1998.”<sup>10</sup> Duterte called his show “*Gikan sa masa, para sa masa*,” which was a Visayan translation of Chinese leader Mao Zedong’s famous slogan “From the masses, to the masses.” Every Sunday morning, Dabawenños would watch in delight as Duterte discussed local and national issues, spewed bile, hurled threats, smeared his political rivals, shared funny asides, and dispensed fatherly advice to his audience. Each episode may start with Duterte sharing his political insight, which would soon degenerate into loutishness. Here, for instance, is a segment of a YouTube video of “*Gikan sa masa, para sa masa*,” where Duterte’s thoughts on illegal drugs turned into a vow to do heinous things to captured members of drug syndicates. This came in at the 8:40 mark of the interview, lasting until 9:50:

**Table 2. Rodrigo Duterte, “*Gikan sa masa, para sa masa*,” 1 November 2014 (as quoted in Abinales 2015)**

<p>“Ako, wala gyud ko mang-ambisyon sa tinuod lang. Pero kung ako’y president, ipatulon gyud nako nang bala sa inyo, mamatay man. Ipatulon ko na ug mobabag na sa inyong butbot dinha pa-operahan ta mo. Padak-an nako nang inyong buslot diha sa lubot aron moagas na lang nang hugaw diha...”</p>	<p>“In truth, I am not aspiring [for the presidency]. But if I become president, I will make you (... members of drug syndicates) swallow the bullet. I will make you swallow it, and if it gets blocked inside your anus, I will have you operated on. I will widen the hole in your anus so that whatever dirt is inside you will easily flow out [of it].”</p>
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“*Gikan sa masa, para sa masa*” gave the National Telecommunications Commission headaches, but the government body regulating the media could do nothing to the “must-watch show for [Dabawenños] for or against Duterte” (Arguillas 2020). Ratings for the program easily topped the Sunday television edition of the Catholic Mass and prayer sessions of the non-Catholic ministries. For over a decade, Dabawenños eagerly watched the show, and when “Mayor Digong” (Duterte’s nickname) missed one, a collective sigh of lament was palpable (Abinales 2016). Politicians in other provinces saw the show’s propaganda power and began to produce their versions of the



program. While nowhere near as colorful as Duterte, they knew that, thanks to the local channel station, voters would get to hear their voices and recognize their faces—a “recall” that came in handy on election day (Back 2001, 14).

In 2016, Duterte’s advisers attempted to nationalize the talk show, this time launching the presidential version, “*Mula sa masa, para sa masa*” (the Filipino translation of Mao’s slogan), on 18 August 2016. This one did not have the same impact as the Davao version and lasted only for a year. But it was enough to shock Filipinos—especially those in Metropolitan Manila—who were suddenly confronted with this kind of street talk from the highest office in government. To the people of Davao City and adjacent provinces, however, the shock value of Duterte’s rhetoric had all but dissipated as they’ve heard Duterte lash out before. The failure of “*Mula sa masa, para sa masa*” would be more than offset by the ubiquity of the “texting culture,” (Soriano et al. 2015), the appearance of YouTube in 2005, and Facebook’s video platform in 2007. Scholars have argued that his camp’s adept use of social media won Duterte the presidency (Aguirre 2017; Curato 2017). This is quite true, but one can also make the case that Duterte had successfully tapped into these new technologies, with “*Gikan sa masa, para sa masa*” as his dry run. Besides, despite the brief and unlamented life of “*Mula sa masa, para sa masa*,” it was unlikely that most households missed the talk show because of television’s omnipresence.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Bisayang Dako, Tagbis and Bislog**

The problem with finding a plausible explanation for Duterte’s appeal is that the DSI relies a lot on the mechanics of the poll survey. This methodology may be a useful way of tracking public sentiment, but it does not delve deeper into the reasons behind Filipinos’ high regard of the president.<sup>12</sup> This essay suggests that a possible answer may be found in the languages that Duterte and his fans share. Far from seeing him as a huckster, Visayans associate Duterte with familiar characters they simultaneously love and worry about.<sup>13</sup> He is “your drunk *lolo* (grandfather) or uncle,” who is the *bugal-bugalon* (naughty) because he is *buguy* (a rascal). Women are called *bugay* and

men *bugal-bugalun*. Duterte is prone to engage in *yaga-yaga* (ridiculing) and can manipulate people with statements that are both funny and insulting. (“*Pagkatawa dala binoang pero tungod kay mag-una ang pagpakatawa dili kaayo sakit paminawon o dibdibon. Sa binogoy pa nga panoltihon, maayo mo-cooking ug tao*”).<sup>14</sup>

Then there is this feeling among Visayans that they “own” Duterte. A Davao friend pointed out that Visayans are charmed and shocked at the same time at the sight of Duterte eating with his hands at a food stall in Davao City (“*nagkinamot lang kaon sa carinderia*”), saying that in doing this he has proven himself “one of us” (“*Kini! Ato gyud ni. Bisaya gyud!*”). Activist Mindanao priest Fr. Amado Picardal, who went into hiding in 2018 after Duterte supporters threatened to assassinate him, lamented how much many of his fellow religious had campaigned and voted for Duterte in 2016. When he asked a fellow cleric serving the Davao community the reason why he supported Duterte, the answer echoed what one hears on the street (“*ato ni bay*”) and was often even couched in religious idioms: “My classmate who told me he voted for Duterte *after a process of discernment* was most likely influenced by regionalism rather than the Holy Spirit” (Picardal 2020).

Subsuming religious beliefs under the rubric of “*ato ni bay*” resonates with the reorientation someone makes once one joins the *barkada* (the in-group, the gang, the clique, or, in millennial terms, the squad). Jean-Paul Dumont observed this change when a group of “young adolescents...solidified their mutual friendship into a *barkada*.” He writes:

What has changed was the way in which they spoke of those who had been so far their *higala* (“friend”) and who now became their *barkada*, since each individual member of a collective *barkada* was also called a *barkada*. In other words, the word designates in general the group, that may be used as well to refer to any and each member of that group. [People] did not relate to each other anymore as persons but as members of a male *barkada*, that is, acted as a group (1993, 427).

Among the Visayan *barkada*, Duterte is not only *ato ni*, but he is also *Bisayang Dako* (which literally translates to the “Big Visayan”), which refers to either

the leader (*dako* being big; hence big man) or someone who truly is Visayan to his core (*dako* here now means wide *and* deep).

Yet, the question remains: how do we explain Duterte’s draw among non-Visayans who also laugh at his rants? Again, I think it has to do with language, precisely what we Visayans call “Davao Filipino” or “Davao Tagalog.” In a short, odd essay on the topic, linguistic scholars Feorillo A. Demeterio and Jeconiah Louis Dreisbach (2017) cite an M.A. thesis describing “Davao Tagalog” as a “Filipino creole continuum consisting of two segments: the one being used by the city’s Cebuano population, which is sometimes called *Tagbis* (a portmanteau for Tagalog and Visayan) or *Bislog* (a portmanteau for Visayan-Tagalog), and the Davao Filipino that is being used by the city’s Tagalog/Filipino population.” It was, argues the authors, akin to (similar to Singlish (Platt 1975, 363-374). Table 3 lists examples that distinguish Davao Tagalog from Cebuano and Tagalog and how proximate they are to each other.

Table 3 lists examples that distinguish Davao Tagalog from Cebuano and Tagalog, and how proximate they are to each other. Demeterio and Dreisbach rely mainly on the study of Jessie Grace U. Rubrico, who calls *Tagbis* and *Bislog* a “Filipino Variety of Davao City” (FVD) and describes it as one of many “emerging varieties of Filipino which developed from the grammatical properties of Tagalog” by being “influenced by non-Tagalog speakers whose native language competencies interfere with their usage of Filipino” (2012, 1).<sup>15</sup> If Manileños are comfortable with *Taglish*, Rubrico argues, so are Davao City residents with their seamless mixing of English, Visayan, and Tagalog. She classified FVD into two types—the first, which closely “resembles the Metro Manila variety of Filipino” (2012, 8) and the second, which is indigenous to the Dabawenños: “a blending of Bisaya and Tagalog” (Tables 4 and 5) (2012, 9). To Rubrico, FVD’s “variety allows its speakers to freely explore Filipino without the hindrance of ‘correct grammar’ as defined by the Filipino language authorities in Manila” and thus “empowers non-Tagalog Filipino speakers to actively participate in its evolution, and to bring about the de-Tagalization of the national language” (2012, 1, as quoted by Dolalas n.d.,7).

Table 3. Davao Tagalog compared to Tagalog/Filipino and Cebuano, with corresponding English translations (Demetrio and Dreisbach, 2017, 3)

Davao Filipino	Visayan/ Cebuano	Tagalog/Filipino	English
Kainit masyado ngayon uy!	Kainit kaayo karon uy!	Masyadong mainit ngayon!	It's so hot today!
Manghiram ka gud ng pala, doon sa kapitbahay.	Manghuwam ka gud ug pala didto sa silangan.	Humiram ka nga ng pala doon sa kapitbahay.	Go borrow a shovel from the neighbor.
Ka-cute gud masyado nitong bag nagibili ni Mama para sa akin.	Cute gud kaayo kining bag nga gipalit ni Mama para nako.	Masyadong cute itong bag na binili ni Mama para sa akin.	This bag that Mama bought for me is so cute.

Table 4. Tagalog-English Code Mix (Taglish) (Rubrico 2012, 8; FVD italicized)

English	FVD
Pretending to be serious at work and keeping busy at the internet.	Nagpapakas <i>erious</i> sa <i>work</i> and naglilibang sa <i>net</i> .
Why did I have to fall in love?	Kung bakit pa kasi ako <i>nainlove</i> ?
Brother...our friend Bobby Alvarez is relaxing, you know.	<i>Bro, don't do that...</i> naglilibang si Pareng Bobby Alvarez eh.
Come now, let's go to your favorite (place)!	<i>Let's go</i> na po, sa paborito <i>nato</i> .
Dad, I love it here, buy now, this instant!	Dad, I love it here, <i>buy na, now na!</i>
Recycle now.	<i>Mag-recycle</i> na.

Table 5. Tagalog, English and FVD (Rubrico 2012, 10–13; FVD italicized)

Tagalog	English	FVD
Totoong mabait si Weng.	Weng is really good-natured.	Mabait <i>bitaw gyud</i> si Weng.
Sinabi nang huwag!	You shouldn't do that!	Huwag <i>lagi</i> ba!
Ang galing niya talaga!	She really is excellent!	Galenga talaga niya <i>gyud uy!</i>
Aanhin natin yan?	What shall we do with that?	<i>Anohin</i> man natin yan?
Anong nangyari sa iyo diyan, Bryan?	What happened to you there, Bryan?	<i>Na-ano</i> ka diyan, Bryan?

Hindi pa siya dumarating kasi.	S/he has not arrived yet. (What's taking her/him so long?)	Hindi pa <i>man siya nag-dating</i> , uy.
Ayaw kasi nilang lumapit sa akin, eh di ayaw ko ring lumapit sa kanila.	Because they don't want to come near me, so I also don't want to go near them,	Ayaw kasi nilang <i>mag-lapit</i> sa akin, di ayaw ko na ring <i>maglapit</i> sa kanila.
Sinabi kasi ni Helen na mag-absent si Bernard bukas.	Because Helen said that Bernard will be absent tomorrow.	<i>Gisabi</i> kasi ni Helen na mag-absent si Bernard bukas.
Nakakainis talaga siya!	S/he really makes me mad!	<i>Makainis</i> man yan siya, uy!
Alam ko na man yan.	I already know that	Alam <i>man nakin</i> yan <i>ba!</i>
Saan nga ba kita nakita?	Where have I seen you before?	Saan <i>nakin</i> kita nakita <i>gani?</i>

*Bislog* and *Tagbis* were indeed hardly ever heard beyond the Davao provinces for the most part of the 20th century, thriving in themselves because of the constant flow of migrant-settlers from central and northern Philippines to the Davao frontier.<sup>16</sup> Their opportunity to become nationally known, as it were, came in the 1980s, with the nationalization of television. With greater frequency the rest of the country began hearing these FDV varieties, especially when ABS-CBN and GMA 7 made regional reports part of their daily evening news. An illustrative case is this excerpt from the Mindanao segment of ABS-CBN's national evening news on 24 September 2012, which Dolalas quoted in her essay:

Interviewee: “Walang sistema ang PRC sa pagbigay ng numbers tapos kami kanina nag-initiate na kami na magpila, maglista [...] kay wala mang announcement na retakers lang ang i-ano nila [...] ngayon.” [Translation: “The PRC [Professional Regulatory Commission] had no system of giving numbers so earlier we ourselves initiated the lining up and listing...because there was no announcement as to whether they would only consider retakers at the.”] (n.d., 4).

Dolalas then breaks down the interview into its various FDV components, eruditely explaining it as follows:

In the interview, the Tagalog verb *pagbigay*, although correct in form, but in the context it should be *pagbibigay*. (Binisaya: *paghatag*). *Tapos* is also borrowed from Tagalog (Binisaya: *dayon*). *Kami kanina* is a literal translation of the Binisaya *kami kaganiha* although it would be more appropriate if *kanina kami* was used in the sentence. The Tagalog verb *pila*, when used as a past tense, should be affixed by *-um-* in proper Tagalog grammar (Binisaya: *nilinya*). However, in accordance with the Binisaya morpho-syntax *mag+verb*, the *-um-* affix is non-existent in Binisaya and is generally replaced with *mag*. In the phrase *kay wala mang*, *kay* is the Binisaya equivalent of *kasi* or *dahil*, while *mang* is a shortened form of *namang*. Moreover, the Tagalog verb *kunin* used in the context should be *kukunin* in proper Tagalog. *I-ano* is not really a word but because the Binisaya language also uses the verb form *i+verb*, it can be presumed that the interviewee must have reverted to her native language's grammar. It can also be noted that "Davao Tagalog" also code-switches to English" (n.d., 4–5).

Dolalas has only this 2012 episode to cite, but it is safe to assume that Davao correspondents would regularly *and unconsciously* shift to FVD in their accounts to the nation since regional reports became a part of the nightly news. Thus, in a way, by the time Duterte assumed the presidency, Filipinos were ready to "hear" him.

Duterte could go completely Visayan when addressing his audience in central Visayas and most of Mindanao. But because of *Bislog* and *Tagbis*, he can likewise reach out to non-Visayan-speaking communities. FDV has allowed Duterte to occupy this liminal space where he can effortlessly mix both languages and slip from Visayan to a Tagalog that is impure because it is unlike the language in Tagalog-speaking provinces in Luzon. This is because Davao Tagalog, according to Demeterio and Dreisbach, has "clauses where most words are from the Tagalog-Filipino language, and where such Tagalog-Filipino words are processed using the Cebuano language morphosyntactic rules." Today, Filipinos will continue to remain loyal to their regional lingua franca where languages intermix, but they have learned enough Filipino vocabulary *to be at once local, regional, and national*.<sup>17</sup> And all this is enough to keep a crowd attentive, especially when spiced up with vulgarity. Duterte may still have a local boss's mentality, but, thanks to FDV, the nationalization of the television industry, and now social media, those

provincial thoughts—which include his death threats—can now be heard across the archipelago.

### The Richness of *Putang ina mo*

A final point on language. As a child in 1964, I remember listening to a campaign ditty directed against the candidate for vice-president Fernando Lopez. The singers changed the lyrics of the American scout song “On Top of Spaghetti” with these lines: “*Si Fernando Poe Lopez, walay karsones, ang otin talinis sa public service.*” Roughly translated the new version goes: “Fernando Poe Lopez, has no pants, his penis is so sharp, for public service.” His middle name in this ditty, “Poe,” is not his—it is the surname of action star Fernando Poe Jr. In hindsight, something in the campaign version was quite significant: it was sung in unison by the candidates and the crowd. This act of “upset[ing] conventions” (Rafael 2018, 153) was, therefore, not exclusive to Duterte; it was an “insurgent energy” that both candidates and supporters expended against the elite and the establishment. This, in turn, was the result of a shared political affinity between listeners and candidates. In Duterte’s case the “vulgarity embedded in a public political speech, even though socially sanctioned, is able to *positively affect receivers’ behavioral intention*” (Cavazza and Guidetti 2014, 544) because Filipinos also identify with these argots.<sup>18</sup> Every Duterte curse is every Filipino’s expletive, and as Nick Joaquin eloquently put it:

Ultimately, it’s slang, Tagalog slang, that builds, extends, and enriches the national language. It, in fact, is the national language, not Pilipino, though academicians may be horrified by its vulgarity and shocked by any suggestion to dignify, by inclusion in their lexicons...Yet these are the words that Filipinos use, and these are the words that are fusing our various dialects into one. (Joaquin 1980, 4)

Hence the cuss phrase “*putang ina mo*” (son of a bitch) is something one hears not only from Duterte but also from the most devout of Catholics. It is, in fact, the most offensive and most popular three-word expletive “used to show anger, shock, frustration, joy or surprise” (Berowa et al. 2019, 166). The range of emotions that employs *putang ina mo* also indicates that the

phrase's connotation could vary depending on the social and situational contexts. In Crocodile Park, Duterte's string of *putang ina mo*'s was strikingly monotonal. Still, the crowd's reaction differed based on what story their former mayor was talking about and how the audience, including his friend DotDot, interpreted each outburst. Rafael may have noticed fear in his listeners' eyes whenever Duterte made a threat, but while this feeling may have prevailed that night, there was "anger, shock, frustration, *joy or surprise*" too (Berowa et al. 2019, 167, underscoring mine).

The notoriety and waggish character of *putang ina mo* are reinforced by the diversity of its interpreters. At one end is the blog by millennial Isabelle Laureta whose list of "Totally Useful Filipino Swear Words and How to Use Them" tagged *putang ina mo* as both a derisive comment and a sign of affection. Alongside the most repulsive variations of the phrase (*Tangina*, *Taena*, *Anak ka ng puta*, *Puking ina*, *Kingina*, *Amputa*), sit departures showing appreciation (*Putang ina, ang gwapo ni Piolo*," or "*Tanginang subject 'to, feeling major amputa!'*"), again indicating how context matters (Laureta 2015).<sup>19</sup> At the other end are Santiago Kapunan, Reynato Puno, and Consuelo Ynares-Santiago, members of the first division of the Supreme Court, who in 2000 overturned a lower court decision declaring *putang ina mo* defamatory (and hence criminal). Their ruling was written in legalese, but the justices' opinion clearly recognized *putang ina mo*'s reputation (Geronimo 2021: 52). The justices wrote:

[The] expression *putang ina mo* is a common enough utterance in the dialect that is often employed, not really to slander but rather to express anger or displeasure. In fact, more often, it is just an expletive that punctuates one's expression of profanity (Supreme Court of the Philippines First Division 2000).

Caught in the middle are a whole bevy of writers, including American Filipinos like Mike Alvarez whose fluency in Filipino is suspect but who unproblematically writes this sad scene in his short story:

Nana Ming never doled out punishment, but grandma did, and I was worried she might tell her. Grandma once caught me yelling *Putang ina mo*



(“Your mother is a whore) at my eldest brother Mark, who was taunting me...She removed one of her wooden shoes and struck me in the buttocks with it. When I said that I’d heard her say those exact words to a neighbour, she struck me again with impudence. It wasn’t so much the pain that I dreaded, but the humiliation accompanying it (2016, 291).

These multiple connotations assigned to *putang ina* likewise indicate one other thing: when due consideration is given to the context in which these are used, one encounters a lively elaboration, revision, and even redefining of cuss words and images by both the speaker and the receiver. Take Duterte’s other favorite profanity, *pisting yawa*, the Filipino equivalent of “dammit” or, if used as a noun, refers to an imp, a devilish person (Berowa et al. 2019, 166–167; Laureta 2015). In his extensive *A Dictionary of Cebuano Visayan* (1972), John Wolff shows the many different ways in which Visayans use *yawa* depending on the contexts and to whom it is addressed (Table 4).

Table 5. Variations in the use of the word “yawa” (Wolff 1972, 1202-12-03)

Word	Meaning	Usage
<i>Yawa</i>	Devil; a devilish person	<i>Ag yawa, mudayig nimu sa atibangan unya mang libak sa luyu.</i> (The devil praises you to your face but behind your back she stabs you.)
	Expression of anger, annoyance, frustration	<i>Yawa! Pukawun ta aning maayung pagkahinanuk.</i> (Hell! I was just sleeping nicely, too!)
<i>Litsing yawa</i>	Expression of extreme irritation or frustration	<i>Litsing yawa. Imu na pud nang gibali.</i> (God damn! You broke it again!)
<i>Yawa ra</i>	Expression of strong disbelief	<i>Yawa ra! Di giyud na musalir!</i> (Hell! That’s not going to work!); <i>Yawa ra! Tinuud ba nga gitirahan ang Prisidinti?</i> (Really? You mean they shot the President?); 2. Exclamations [of surprise]: <i>Yawang ninduta ning imung balay, Siyung!</i> (Jesus! What beautiful house you have, Siong!)
<i>Yawang</i>	Pause word used when one cannot find the right term	<i>Kanang yawang, kuan unsingalan?</i> (That damn, what do you call it?)

<i>Giyawaan</i>	Be possessed with blinding and uncontrollable fury	<i>Sa iyang kasuku giyawaan siya.</i> (He was possessed of a blinding, uncontrollable anger.)
<i>Mayawaan</i>	Be inspired by the devil	<i>Ayaw pagduwa ug kutsilyo kay tingalig mayawaan ka.</i> (Don't play with the knife or else the devil will bring something bad to you.)
<i>Muyawa</i>	Ruin; cause to flop	<i>Mga dulun nga muyawa sa tanum.</i> (Locusts that utterly destroy a crop.)
<i>Nayawa</i>	Caught in or be in a bad situation	<i>Nayawa na ta ani nga nahutdag gasulina nga layu sa istasyon.</i> (We are in for it running out of gas from the station)!
<i>Nayawaan</i>	Be made devilish	<i>Pari ang maghingilin sa panuway sa tawu nga yawayawaan.</i> (A priest exorcises evil spirits from a person's body.)
<i>Yawaun</i>	Castigate severely, get hell	<i>Yawaun (yawaan) ka run naku ug dili mu pasagdan nang makinilya.</i> (You will get hell from me if you do don't let that typewriter alone.)
<i>Giyawaan</i>	Be possessed of a blinding and uncontrollable fury	<i>Sa iyang kasuku giyawaan siya.</i> (He was possessed of a blinding, uncontrollable fury.)
<i>Muyawa</i>	Ruin; cause to flop; be ruined	<i>Mga dulun nga muyawa sa tanum.</i> (Locusts that utterly destroy the crop.)
<i>Yawa-yawa</i>	Be or become a hell (hellish)	<i>Nayawayawa ang ilang pagpuyu tungud sa pagkabisyusu sa iyang bana.</i> (Their home life has become miserable because of the husband's excessive indulgence in vice.)
<i>Yawayawaan</i>	Be made devilish	<i>Pari ang maghingilin sa panuway sa tawu nga yawayawaan.</i> (A priest exorcises evil spirits from a person's body.)
<i>Kayawayawa</i>	Be somewhat spoiled	<i>Nagkayawayawa ang atung pangaligu kay nalimtan ang sud-an.</i> (Our picnic was kind of spoiled because we forgot the food.)
<i>Yawan-un</i>	Devilishly evil	<i>Yawan-unn nga mga panghunahuna</i> (Diabolical thoughts)

This everyday term therefore assumes different connotations, based not only on feelings, but also on contexts. It could be used to make light of the moment (*Nagkayawayawa ang atung pangaligu kay nalimtan ang sud-an*),

describe a dreadful process like exorcism (*Pari ang maghingilin sa panuway sa tawu nga yawayawaan*), signify anger (*Sa iyang kasuku giyawaan siya*), express frustration or regret over being caught in a tight situation (*Nayawana ta ani nga nahutdag gasulina nga layu sa istasyon*), and show admiration (*Yawang ninduta ning imung balay, Siyung*). The last example is quite interesting because *yawa*, which is generally associated with the devil, morphs into Satan's antipode, Jesus, when expressing surprise.

*Yawa's* mélange of meanings exists, because all Visayans consider it part of their everyday conversations—as a malicious word, a playful reminder, an impish description, and, of course, as an epithet used by someone expressing her hate at another person. Take that instance when a teary-eyed Duterte murmured to himself while in a campaign stop in his family home of Danao City, Cebu, 1 minute and 43 seconds into his speech, “*Yawa, gisipon man ko*” (“The devil in me, I’ve got this running nose.”).<sup>20</sup> In Wolff’s lexicon, Duterte used *yawa* here after being “in or caught in a bad situation” (1972, 1202) or when acting fatherly. And in both cases, there was no apprehension in the faces of his listeners; they simply howled in laughter.

In short, *yawa*, as well as *putang ina mo*, are *inato* (ours)—*ato ni!* One must add here, however, that vulgarities are not exclusive to Tagalog and Visayan. Crudities permeate Visayan as much as they do other language groups, including Hokkien (Fujianese) in which swear words of the southern Chinese language have become regular fare in conversations in homes and the marketplace. Growing up in Misamis Occidental in northwestern Mindanao, I would regularly hear *piaosi* (*putang inal!*); *lan jiao* (penis); *twa-lan-jiao* (big dick); *lanchiaubin* (dickface); *chao-chee-bai* (smelly pussy); *chai-chee-bai* (kiss your pussy); *gonggong* (fool); and *hausiau* (something fishy; up to no good!). *Gonggong* and *hausiau* have entered everyday Filipino vocabulary.<sup>21</sup>

Rafael’s (2018) use of the Visayan words *pusong* and *bugoy* to describe the extent of Duterte’s big act as a “sovereign trickster” may hew closely to the Visayan definitions of these terms, but his textual analysis also missed something. And this is how much *bugoy* and *pusong* are quotidian expressions whose interpretation could be extended beyond their original meanings. *Pusung/pusong*, for example, refers to someone who “is good in putting

up a front of innocence when committing mischief” (Wolff 1972, 859); a rascal or a rogue, as it were. Yet *pusung* in everyday Visayan can also show some grudging acknowledgment, even respect, toward not the mischief, but the displays of arrogance that one who has reached a certain level of success would typically exhibit. This is one meaning that did not make it to Wolff’s book, but one that I encounter *and even use* with some regularity (as in “*Labihang ka-pusung na ana niya human madatu siya*”—He has become so *pusung* after he became rich). Dumont notices something similar in his study of the Filipino word *barkada* which Wolff defines as “people one goes around with.” Dumont states:

It [*barkada*] appeared in Wolff’s compilation [1972] where it receives a thorough and perhaps overdignified treatment. As a noun, it refers to ‘people one goes around with,’ while as a verb, it is translated as ‘to go around together.’ Had I been a little less unsuspecting in my initial consultation, I would have noticed that Wolff’s examples also gave more alarming glosses, not only ‘gang mates’ but also ‘cronies,’ with whatever supplementary context during the Marcos years. I should also have noticed under the same rubric Wolff’s [1972] mention of the adjective *barkadur*, truly a giveaway that he translated as ‘fond of going around with one’s gang’ (Dumont 1994, 403).

## Conclusion

Are the millions of Duterte supporters a mob or are they representatives of “the people”? Patricia Chiantera-Stutte argues that the term “the people” could either be “taken to mean ‘people in movement,’ whether by violently claiming a place in history and politics in opposition to the political order or by irrationally supporting a leader” (2018: 157). These “people in movement” may have dissimilar demands based on different analyses of society, but this “plurality” of “protest issues” would eventually be condensed “into a single common denominator” depending on how protest leaders or vanguard parties redefine and explain them to “the people.” The election of Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 was that “single common denominator” that brought together a variety of demands and desires, including contradictory ones. These ranged from Visayans and Mindanawons feeling “aggrieved” at Manila’s corruption

and apathy toward their regional aspirations (Valdehuesa 2014; Yusingco 2016; Lorenzana 2018) and Manila's vicious war against the Moros (Vitug and Gloria 2000; Coronel 2005; Jubair 2007). Duterte's large pool of supporters includes those from the lower classes who intensely dislike the dishonesty and trickery of the elite (Reyes 2017), especially their betrayal of the spirit of people power (Bautista 200, 8–26); poor and middle-class communities fearful of the “drug scourge” (Abinales 2016a; Cabato 2019; Petty and Schuettler 2019; *The Economist* 2020); and elite hypnotic attraction to Duterte's no-nonsense approach to politics and his strong-arm tactics.<sup>22</sup>

Nicole Curato and Jonathan Ong attribute this widespread popularity to “a rejection of professionalized and hyperstylised political performance in favour of performances of ‘authenticity,’ more resonant with the vernaculars of reality television and social media” (Curato and Ong 2018, 4). They drew their conclusions based on a “grounded, ethnographic perspective” that focused on “particular practices of speaking and listening in Duterte's populist politics [and thereby] bridge perspectives in the political sociology of populism...and everyday politics...with work in media and cultural studies on voice and listening” (2018, 2). Curato and Ong's essay is, therefore, an essential corrective to the tendency of scholars to just treat Duterte's populism as uni-directional, i.e., he curses and cajoles, and his supporters laugh and applaud.<sup>23</sup> This essay goes up a notch by examining Visayan and Davao-Tagalog—the language and the dialect—that Duterte and his supporters (sans the elite) use to interact with one another. In so doing, it hopes to provide readers a closer glimpse of how exactly Duterte and three-quarters of adult Filipinos “talk to each other” (Lema and Kasolowsky 2021).

Despite the complete domination of political dynasties, the more frequent use of state violence, including legal prosecution of critics and the return of crony capitalism, the consensus of scholars and pundits is that the Philippines remains a democracy.<sup>24</sup> This may be true given how much politicians and Filipinos still consider a democratic ritual—elections—critical in the nation's life. Filomeno Aguilar Jr., however, cautions that elections were also “a time of tension between the sacred and the profane, the ideal and the expedient” (Aguilar 2005, 92). This was the case from 1986 to 2010, but by

the second decade of the 21st century, the “sacred” side seemed to have relinquished a lot of space to the profane.

Here is where Chiantera-Stutte’s study can fill in the gap. She calls Bonapartism the “suicide of [a] democracy” that has “degenerate[d] into a system that is controlled by the few but nonetheless supported by the masses.” In this debased form, the leader—“the new prince”—becomes “the symbolic catalyst of the masses’ hope” and comes “to enjoy an unlimited power between the masses and public opinion.” Furthermore, Bonapartism is a “dynamic [that is] possible only after the democratic revolutions have made the political ambitions of the people into legitimate claims and given away to the masses’ demands to be the protagonists of political life. Only democratic masses can be so blind as to insist on their central role in politics while at the same time remaining unconscious of the degeneration of democratic institutions; only they can believe in their participation in politics, and at the same time, trust completely the ‘new Caesars’” (2018, 170). Chiantera-Stutte had European neopopulism in mind, but this could very well apply to the Philippines. And a crucial factor in Duterte becoming that “symbolic catalyst of the [Filipino] masses’ hopes” is the shared love for the language of the street.

Is Duterte portentous of a new kind of political leadership as Philippine democracy stands at death’s door? His provincial origins may not be different from those of other strongmen, especially when it comes to the use of coercion (see, for example, the story of Luis “Chavit” Singson, as narrated by Robson 2002). Yet, in many senses, Duterte is also distinct if we see him as representing a new source of strength in local politics. And this is the role that language has played in amplifying his “performance” as mayor, whose local credentials and competencies had been enough to launch him to the presidency instead of taking the longer, if customary, Congress-Senate-Vice President-President path to national power.<sup>25</sup>

## Notes

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1. This comparison must be taken with a grain of salt. I only listed 15,978 by the fifth “page” of the online search, but the search for the other presidents went beyond five “pages.” That said, this unevenness still highlights the inconsistency of academic, pundit, and activist interests in Philippine presidents.
2. According to Curato (2019, 117), Duterte’s campaign “laid bare the hidden injuries in people’s esteem, which in turn, emboldened his constituencies to demand recognition for their latent suffering.” Political scientist Cleve Arguelles agrees (2019).
3. I am aware of the variations in the Visayan language and non-Visayan languages as well as who is considered Visayan and the diversity of non-Visayan Filipinos based on location and histories. A part explanation of this is in the section on the Davao-Tagalog below.
4. For an example of the powerful relationship between language and political mobilization see Gerald M. Platt and Rhys H. Williams, “Ideological Language and Social Movement Mobilization: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Segregationists’ Ideologies,” *Sociological Theory* 20, 3 (November 2002): 328-359.
5. The exception here is Kusaka (2017). A derivative argument is to (unconsciously, if not hesitantly) regard Filipinos as dupes who could be easily conned by a populist trickster, by laying on their supposed anger toward “hypocritical elites in the center by those in the peripheries” (Kusaka 2017, 67).
6. “Dutertard,” the sobriquet given to a Duterte supporter, combines the first two syllabus of the president’s last name and the last syllable of the word “retard” has been added to the *Urban Dictionary* website.
7. Duterte was 70 years old when he ran for the presidency.
8. Roxas was also known to have cursed in several rallies but his attempt to imitate Duterte backfired, as it was seen by many as hypocritical. Kinder critics traced his *faux pas* to an over two decades of erratic messaging (Cupin 2016).
9. “President Rodrigo Duterte Speech at Thanksgiving Party, 4 June 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4fbVlrpRDI>. The entire speech had been cut into different segments. The same lines can be found in *Rappler*, “Thanksgiving party for president-elect Rodrigo Duterte,” 4 June 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SNrbJqmwZk>. The cursing starts at 5:20:44 in the *Rappler* stream.
10. In addition, Arguillas pointed out that “the three-term limit had caught up with Duterte, hence the decision to run for Congress, an elective post he found

- boring, but which gave him time to bond with daughter Sara, then a law student in Manila.” Personal communications, 18 January 2022.
11. In 2013, 4 out of every 5 households owned a television and 81 percent of Filipinos between the ages of 10 and 64 were inveterate television watchers (Philippine Statistical Office 2013, 41). The percentage continued to rise, and in 2016, a private media survey revealed that 96.6 percent of Filipinos were watching television.
  12. The polling body Pulse Asia does provide some context before presenting its findings, but this is often only related to the main events of the month, or between two surveys. See for example, Pulse Asia, “February 2022 Nationwide Survey on the May 2022 Elections, March 14, 2022, <https://www.pulseasia.ph/february-2022-nationwide-survey-on-the-may-2022-elections/> (accessed 15 March 2022).
  13. I would like to note here that first language is Visayan. And it is a particular “variety” of Visayan that has some degree of coarseness in it, no different from President Duterte’s Cebu Visayan.
  14. The English term that best describes these portraits is “charientism,” an insult disguised as a jest or a compliment to fool people. Translated: “He mixes being funny and being indiscreet, but because the laughter comes first, [it] absorb[s] the insults from his indiscretions [which are then taken] lightly. Or in the language of the local thugs, he is good at *frying* [metaphor for fooling] the people.”
  15. Davao-born anthropologist Jowell Canuday has reminded me that the “transmutation and therefore shifts in [the use of Davao Tagalog] does not only apply to Tagalog *but also to Visayan*” (italics mine), explaining: “*Daghan og ‘mag’ ang Davao Tagalog ug Davao bisaya: Magpunta man tayo doon, magkain na tayo, magpa-Manila ka? Unya sa Bisaya mag, mag-adto ta, instead sa Cebuano nga mangadto ta, magtan-aw ta instead sa manglantaw ta or motan-aw ta. Unya mga words na ‘alangan!’*” to stress a matter of fact [Davao Tagalog and Davao Visayan use the syllable “mag” a lot: Let’s all go (*magpunta*) there, let’s eat (*magkain*), are you going to Manila (*magpa-Manila*)? A Davao Visayan will say *mag-adto* for “to go,” while a Cebuano says *mangadto ta*; the former will say *mag-tanaw ta* (let’s see, let’s watch), while the latter, *manglantaw ta* or *motan-aw ta*. Then there is the frequent use of the interjection “*alangan!*” to stress a point of fact].” Personal communication, 18 March 2022. I thank Canuday for pointing out this important feature of Davao Tagalog.
  16. This linguistic by-product of the region’s relative isolation from the rest of the country had its precedence in the colonial period, when Japanese/Okinawan, Tagalog, Visayan, Spanish and American interaction led to the emergence of what Shinzo Hayase calls “Abaca Japanese” (1984, 218), a patois similar to *Bahasa Malayu*, the market language in the Dutch East Indies. “Abaca Japanese”



- disappeared after World War II when the Americans repatriated the Japanese/Okinawan community. *Bislog* and *Tagbis* would take its place.
17. I am extremely grateful to Caroline S. Hau for this insight.
  18. The contradictions that Rafael notices, however, remain valid. In their “experimental study [on] the effect of [Italian] politicians’ profanity and gender,” (2014, 537), Cavazza and Guidetti also discovered that the “the vulgar message delivered by the male politician was at the same time the most influential and the one considered least persuasive” (2014, 544).
  19. These nuances are not exclusive to *putang ina mo* alone. Other aspects of Filipino sexuality, including lust and desire, have a collection of terms and phrases (Tan .n.d.).
  20. The video can be found in the Facebook page of someone who calls him/herself “Duterte Social Media Supporter, and who posted it on 24 February 2016.
  21. I thank Carol Hau for an engaging and fun conversation on these Hokkien cuss words.
  22. As one mesmerized medical activist-turned-Duterte supporter put it, Duterte had done “amazing things” and “got things done that other presidents haven’t.” Lorraine Badoy added snidely, “The didn’t even try” (Quiano and Perry 2016).
  23. Just how important are “laughter” and “vulgar” in the study of Southeast Asian populism? The highly useful overview by Paul D. Kenney (2019) only mentions the word “laugh” once, and this from a quote by Casiple (2016). “Profane” does not appear in the text.
  24. Thompson calls it “bloodied democracy” (2016), “Illiberal Democracy” (2019a), and “Oligarchic Democracy” (2020); Teehankee and Calimbahin, “Patronage Democracy” (2022); Kreuzer “strongman-democracy” (2019).
  25. I am, again, grateful to Carol Hau for this connection between language and (local) power.

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# Tapat

## Ang Teatro Para sa Tao

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### Abstract

In the face of repressive conditions brought about by an authoritarian leadership, theater artists should identify and affirm the goal that can provide meaning, guidance, strength, and inspiration to their work as theater artists today and in the near future. That goal should be the attainment by the Filipino of his/her fullness as a human being or TAO, and the elimination of all obstacles that prevent the complete development of the Filipino in all levels of his/her being—physical, psychological, social, intellectual, spiritual, political, social, cultural, and economic.

Such re-affirmation is necessary in view of the fact that in the past decades the human being and his full development as such has been deprioritized or marginalized in favour of a) the avid search for and insistence on a Filipino identity in reaction to the dominance of US culture, beginning in the 1970s; b) the persistent belief that creating theater for the “greater majority” (“nakararami”) is the same as creating a theater of liberation; and c) the adherence to the ideology of the National Democratic Front, which in the 1970s seemed to be the only ideology that could oppose the iron rule of the “New Society.” But Filipino identity, even as studies on it continue to multiply, has proven to be so porous and elusive that it would seem to be more useful as a point of departure rather than as a point of destination for the Filipino’s search for solutions to his



problems. Moreover, the concept of the greater majority has been appropriated by populist leaders who have beguiled the greater masses of the Filipino people with the “advantages” of strongman rule, which has turned out to be exploitative of the very same masses after all. Finally, the credibility of Left ideology has been eroded by the decision of its leadership to boycott the Snap Elections and the EDSA People Power revolt in 1986, the indiscriminate purging of government spies among its ranks after 1986 which wrongly included true and faithful cadres, and the elimination of leaders and members of a break-away group that questioned an absentee leadership that favored centralism to democracy. Today, artists of all genres need to go beyond the search for a “Filipino identity,” the “welfare of the majority,” and the ideology of the Left to affirm an alternative goal—the full development of the Filipino as human being or TAO.

In the word TAO is included a) the full development of the Filipino in all levels of his/her being, as explained above, b) which can only be attained by defending, promoting, and strengthening the basic rights of the Filipino as human being. These rights include: a) the right to live and defend one’s life; b) the right to live in peace as a citizen of an independent country; c) the right to earn a decent living to support one’s self and one’s family; d) the right to protect the environment which is the cradle of all life; e) the right to defend and promote one’s ethnicity; f) the right to choose one’s companion, friend, or partner, of whatever gender; g) the right to develop one’s spirituality, by oneself or with the help of one religion, provided that religion respects basic human rights; h) the right to participate in the running of government through free elections and through the responsible exercise of the freedom of expression using the arts and media. If these rights are respected by all political and social institutions, there will reign and flourish among Filipinos the supreme value which Virgilio Enriquez identified as “pakikipagkapwa-tao,” which recognizes “an inner self shared with others” and which in turn proceeds from “collective values shared with the rest of humanity.” Hopefully, the reign of “pakikipagkapwa-tao” will result in or lead to the reign of peace and prosperity in society.

But such a compassionate society remains a distant reality in our time. Rampant is the violation of human rights and the culture of impunity. To stop

such violations, the people at large must be informed about them and must see them as violations of the human rights of their fellow Filipinos. Unfortunately, the simple exposition of social realities is easier said than done. Today, the truth, if “inconvenient” for those in power, is mangled, suppressed, replaced or summarily erased by trolls and hacks, who are showered with fat checks, privileges, and protection by government officials who fear a citizenry with independent minds. Theater artists, therefore, must find creative ways to speak the truth about the abuses of an authoritarian regime (killings of the drug war, government corruption, compromise of territorial integrity) and about the socio-politico-economic issues both from the past and in the present that plague contemporary Philippine society (patriarchy, oppression of women, children, LGBTQ+, labor, and ethnic groups, deforestation, among others).

The exposition of such issues to different Filipino audiences necessarily implies the creation or evolution of a theater aesthetics that would be shaped by a) the dramatic text and the theater artists’ understanding of it, and b) the interaction between the artists (including playwrights, directors, actors and designers), the target audience (its level of politicization, language of everyday communication, taste in theater), the place of performance (from open-air stage to fully equipped closed theater with proscenium stage), the time/occasion of performance (from fiesta event to Virgin Labfest festival), the social conditions of the time (e.g., under martial law, the use of a Theater of Metaphor), the production budget (from student productions in a rural elementary school to a subsidized professional performance by a CCP resident company), and medium (e.g., the rise of plays created for the internet during the pandemic). Given these variables and the massive and constant exposure of theater artists to influences from both local and foreign performing and media arts, a theater that seeks to expose social realities to different types of Filipino audiences will necessarily evolve not one but many types of aesthetics, all of them valid if they succeed in their goal of convincing audiences to defend, promote or strengthen the basic rights of all Filipinos.

The urgency of such a committed theater for artists proceeds from a) the need for artists to abandon their perceived neutrality, not only because neutrality will further enable autocratic leaders but also because choice is ines-

capable when one writes in a language that other people can understand; and b) the need to replace with a more equitable system of governance the ruling economic and political hierarchy that privileges a few elite families to the prejudice of more than 70 percent of the total population. If artists are able to reorient their efforts toward a theater that protects, promotes, and strengthens the rights of the TAO, they would have found their dream, a theater that will enlighten and lighten all their efforts and give true meaning, significance, and gravitas to their artistry.

### **Keywords**

Philippine theater, aesthetics, political theater, human rights, new humanism

Malamang sa hindi, marami sa mga artista ng teatro ay nagdaraan ngayon sa isang panahon ng agam-agam, dahil masidhi at malalaki ang mga problemang kinakaharap natin at ng ating teatro sa kasalukuyan, lalo na sa pamamahala ng isang lider na may kamay na bakal.<sup>1</sup> Ano nga ba ang magiging papel ng teatro sa harap ng mga nakapanlulumong pangyayari sa ating lipunan ngayon? Ano ba ang hamon ng dulaan sa mga artista ng ating madilim at mapanganib na kasalukuyan? Ano nga ba ang maningning na mithiing magiging tanglaw, gabay, lakas, at inspirasyon ng gawaing pantanghalan sa ating panahon, at malamang sa susunod pang mga panahon?

Mungkahi at pakiusap namin na gawin nating puno't dulo ng lahat ng ating pagpupunyagi sa teatro **ang TAO<sup>2</sup>, at ang kanyang paglaya sa lahat ng balakid sa kanyang pag-unlad, upang makamit niya ang kanyang kaganapan sa lahat ng antas ng kanyang pagkatao—pisikal, sikolohikal, seksuwal, intelektuwal, ispirituwal, pulitikal, sosyal, kultural, at pangkabuhayan.** Pansinin na ang ginagamit nating salita ay TAO, na siyang esensiya nating lahat—babae, lalaki, at iba pang kasarian, matanda at bata, mayaman at mahirap, edukado man o hindi, tagabayan man o tagabukid, Kristiyano, Muslim, lumad at animista, o anupaman ang pananampalataya.

### **A. TAO: ang Puno't Dulo ng Teatro**

**Kailangan nang ibalik ang TAO sa sentro ng tanghalan at kultura,** dahil sa nangakaraang panahon ay isinaisantabi siya ng ilang konsepto at ideolohiya na higit nating pinahalagahan: 1) ang mithiin ng pagka-Pilipino, 2) ang konsepto ng “nakararami,” at 3) isang ideolohiyang sekular na nanaig sa lipunan natin noong dekada 1970 at 1980.

Una, **simula noong dekada ng 1970, matamang pinag-ukulan muli ng pansin ng mga taong-tanghalan at ibang manggagawang pangkultura ang paghahanap sa ating pagka-Pilipino o ang identidad na pangkultura ng Pilipino,** bilang tugon sa patuloy na pamamayagpag ng kulturang Amerikano sa lahat ng sulok ng bansa. Pinalaganap ang Filipino bilang wika ng tanghalan at isinalin at in-adapt ang mga klasikong dula ng Europa at Amerika.<sup>3</sup> Pinag-aralan ang mga anyo ng dulang tradisyunal na

binale-wala ng edukasyong Kanluranin.<sup>4</sup> Sinaliksik at itinanghal ang mga sining mula sa tradisyong pangkultura ng mga katutubo<sup>5</sup>, ng mga Kristiyano o Muslim sa labas ng Kamaynilaan, ng mga urbanisado at edukado sa malalaking lungsod ng bansa. Sa agham panlipunan, pinagtuunan ng matalisik na pagsusuri ng mga nangungunang mananaliksik simula noong dekada 1970 ang sikolohiya, historyograpiya, at antropolohiyang Pilipino at para sa Pilipino.<sup>6</sup>

Ngunit kaakibat ng ating paghahanap sa ating pagka-Pilipino ang realisasyon na maraming aspeto ng identidad na minana natin sa ating mga ninuno (katutubo man o Hispanisado) ay naiwan na ng panahon o hindi na katanggap-tanggap. Ang sistemang piyudal at awtoritaryan ng elite na batay sa dami ng ari-arian at lakas ng kapangyarihan, ang kolonyal na isipan at panlasa na minamata ang kayumanggi at produktong lokal, ang hidwaan at iringan na bunga ng makitid na rehiyonalismo, ang page-etsapuwera sa ibang relihiyon, ang pagtataguyod sa sariling pamilya at sa pamilya lamang, ang kahinaan ng konsepto ng bansa, at ang kawalan ng malasakit sa kapwa.<sup>7</sup> Tunay nga. Ang malaking bahagi pala ng minanang kulturang Pilipino ay hindi lamang hindi dapat ipagmalaki, kundi manapa’y dapat nang baguhin o ibaon sa limot.

At sa pagbabago ng kulturang ito, aling kaugalian o pagpapahalaga kaya ang ating bubuhayin at alin ang kailangang baguhin o burahin? Ano ang gagabay sa atin sa pagpapasiya kung ano sa dating kultura ang ating iwawaksi at alin ang mahalagang baunin sa kinabukasan? Bilang tagapagmana ng kulturang Pilipino, tayo ang huhubog ng bagong kultura na uusbong sa dati, at sa gayong transpormasyon, dapat nating buhayin at palawigin yaon lamang mga kaugalian, paniniwala, at pagpapahalaga na makatutulong para matamo ng ating mga kababayan ang kanilang kaganapan bilang TAO sa lahat ng antas ng kanilang pagkatao.

Pangalawa, **inakala natin noon na kung ang teatro ay pumapanig sa kapakanan ng “nakararami,” ito’y teatrong tunay na mapagpalaya at naglilingkod na sa sambayanan.** Ang “nakararami” ang isa sa naging pamantayan sa depinisyon ng dulang Pilipino, na tinalakay namin sa sanaysay na “What Is Philippine Drama?”<sup>8</sup> Hindi mali ang konseptong ito,

ngunit kailangang linawin na ang “nakararami” ay hindi tumutukoy sa dami ng bilang, kundi sa karapatan at kapakanan, lalo na ng mga walang salapi o poder na siyang nakararami sa ating lipunan. Ngunit dapat ding ibilang sa kanila ang mga nakaangat sa buhay na ang mga karapata’y niyuyurakan din (e.g., mga mayayamang babaeng binubugbog ng asawang matso). Mahalaga ang ganitong paglilinaw, sapagkat sa panahon ng diktadura, nagagawang mapapaniwala at mapahanga pa nga ang “nakararami” nating kababayan sa mga lider na populista—sa pamamagitan ng “fake news” at pag-astang “masa” at “macho man” ng mga lider. Dahil sa ganitong populismo, nagmimistulang bulag at pipi ang nakararami sa kaliwa’t kanang patayan sa ngalan ng “war on drugs,” ang mala-Hudas na pagpabor sa Tsina na ibig sumakop sa teritoryo ng Pilipinas, ang pagkandili sa mga korap na opisyal, at kawalan o kalabuan ng direksiyon sa pamamahala ng bansa, lalo na sa panahon ng pandemya. Sa ganitong pambubulag, hindi na nakikita ng “nakararaming” masa ang walang habas na paglabag sa karapatang pantao.

Pangatlo, **may isang ideolohiya na sinunod ng mga artista ng teatro sa dekada 1970 at 1980 dahil tila ito ang nagsusulong sa kapakanan ng sambayanan at, higit sa lahat, lumalaban sa paniniil ng diktadurang Marcos.** Isinulong nito ang “pambansang demokrasya” o “national democracy” at ang pagtatayo ng isang gobyerno at ekonomiyang malaya sa kontrol ng banyagang bansa. Sa mga organisasyong nahanay sa National Democratic Front (NDF) na binuo ng kilusan, isinulong ang isang kulturang siyentipiko, makabayan o anti-imperyalista, at maka-masa.

Ngunit di rin nakaligtas ang nagtaguyod ng ideolohiyang ito sa alitan ng mga lider at kasapi. Humiwalay ang kilusan sa agos ng sambayanan, at ng kasaysayan na rin, nang iboykot nito ang Snap Elections at EDSA Revolt ng 1986 (sa kabila ng pagtutol ng marami nitong kasapi). Lalo pang nalagasan ito ng malaking kasapian nang puksain nang walang pakundangan ang mga “espiya” sa loob ng kilusan, kasama na ang maraming tapat na kadre na napaghinalaan pala lamang. Noong mga unang taon ng 1990, pinaslang din ang maraming lider at miyembro ng kilusan na tumutol sa paglakas ng sentralismo at paghina ng demokrasya sa pamamalakad ng kilusan. Mula noon, dumami pang lalo ang kumalas sa kilusan upang magtatag ng

kani-kaniyang organisasyon. Ang ganitong mga hidwaan, hiwalayan, at pag-iirangan, at ang paghina ng kilusan sa pangkalahatan, ay bunga nga marahil ng tinawag ng historyador na si Ken Fuller na “lost vision” o paglaho ng orihinal na bisyon ng mga kilusang mapagpalaya—ang pagpapaunlad sa ekonomiya ng Pilipinas sa pamamagitan ng industriyalisasyong makabayan, na malaya sa kontrol ng mga banyaga.<sup>9</sup>

Maraming tapat na tagasunod ng kilusang ito ang nawalan ng loob nang makitang hindi rin naman pala paglilingkod sa sambayanan ang layon nito kundi ang pagsakmal at pagkamal sa higit pang kapangyarihan. Sa gayong pagkamulat, marami ang lumayo, mayroong nanlumo. Ngunit mayroon ding nagpatuloy sa paghahanap ng tamang landas, bagamat kinailangan muna na maintindihan nila na wala palang ideolohiya na may monopolyo sa katotohanan. Higit sa lahat, naging malinaw sa kanila na magkaiba pala ang *ideals* o mithiin ng isang tao (para sa isang malaya at makatarungang lipunan) sa kanyang piniling ideolohiya, na kung tutuusi’y isa lamang partikular na analisis at pagtanaw sa mundo at stratehiya sa pagkilos para makamtan ang *ideals* o mithiin (ng malaya at makatarungang lipunan). Ideals must be distinguished from ideologies. Kaya naman, kung tahasang nilalalabag na ng isang kilusan ang batayang karapatan ng tao, kasapi man o hindi, dapat lang na talikuran na rin ang kilusang ito at kanyang ideolohiya at balikan ang orihinal na mithiin na di nagbabago o natitigatig. At iyan nga ang nais nating gawin sa pagbabalik natin sa dapat na maging tunguhin at inspirasyon ng ating pagpupunyagi bilang mga alagad ng teatro—ang TAO.

**Kung gayo’y ano nga ba ang kahulugan ng TAO? Sa katagang ito ay nakapaloob: 1) tulad ng nabanggit na, ang tao mismo sa lahat ng antas ng kaniyang pagkatao—pisikal, sikolohikal, seksuwal, intelektuwal, ispirituwal, pulitikal, sosyal, kultural, at pangkabuhayan; at 2) ang kaganapan ng tao bilang TAO, na nakakamit sa pagsasanggalang, pagtataguyod, at pagpapalakas ng kanyang mga karapatan.**

Kasama sa mga karapatang ito: a) ang karapatang mabuhay at ipagtanggol ang sariling buhay; b) ang karapatang mabuhay nang payapa bilang mamamayan ng isang malayang bansa na may sariling ekonomiya, pulitika, at kultura; k) ang karapatan na kumita ng sapat para mabuhay at

makabuhay ng pamilya; d) ang karapatan na alagaan ang kalikasan na siyang sinapupunan ng buhay; e) ang karapatan na ipagtanggol at pagyamanin ang bawat etnisidad; g) ang karapatan na makapag-aral at linangin ang mga talento; h) ang karapatang pumili ng magiging kasama, kaibigan, at kabiya, anuman ang *gender* o kasarian nito, kahit pa ito di kilalanin ng batas o simbahan; i) ang karapatan na payabungin ang kanyang kaluluwa, sa tulong ng alinmang relihiyon, kung ang relihiyong iyon ay hindi mapang-api sa kapwa at marunong gumalang sa mga karapatang pantao; at l) ang karapatang makilahok sa pagpapatakbo ng pamahalaan sa pamamagitan ng malayang eleksiyon at pagpapahayag ng sariling kaisipan at damdamin sa mga demonstrasyon, mga sining ng dula, musika at sayaw, sa mga sining biswal, sa *print media*, radyo, telebisyon, at bagong midya. Karamihan sa mga karapatang ito ay kinilala na noon pang 1948 ng Universal Declaration of Human Rights ng United Nations.

**Kung ang mga karapatang ito ay igagalang ng mga lider, at ng mga institusyon ng gobyerno, relihiyon, at lipunan, sisipot at mamumukadkad ang *value* o pagpapahalagang tinatawag na “pakikipagkapwa-tao,”** na ayon sa pangunahing iskolar ng sikolohiyang Pilipino, si Virgilio Enriquez, ay siyang pinakamataas na halagahin ng mga Pilipino. Ito umano ay pagkilala sa ating “shared identity, an inner self shared with others,” na batay o nanggaging sa mga “collective values shared with the whole of humanity and the deep respect for the dignity and inherent worth of a fellow human being.” (Enriquez 2008, 52). Kung maghahari ang pakikipagkapwa, tiyak na magiging payapa ang ating lipunan at marahil higit na gaganda ang kabuhayan, dahil mapangangalagaan ang mga karapatang pantao ng mga mamamayan at mabibigyan sila ng pagkakataon na paunlarin ang sarili sa lahat ng antas ng kanilang pagkatao.

## **B. TAO at Katotohanan**

Kung tutuusin, malayong-malayo pa tayo ngayon sa minimithing lipunan ng pakikipagkapwa-tao. Ito’y dahil ngayon ay lalo pang umiigting ang paglabag sa mga karapatang pantao. Tila hindi tayo natututo sa nakaraan at inuulit natin ang mga trahedya sa ating kasaysayan. Sa dami ng krisis na kinakaharap



ng bansa ngayon, malinaw na wala naman talagang nabago sa sistema o istruktura ng lipunang Pilipino, kaya't iyon at iyon ding mga suliranin ang ating binubuno.

Para masugpo o makontrol ang mga paglabag sa karapatang pantao, kailangang maisiwalat muna at maunawaan ng mga mamamayan ang mga ginagawang paglabag dito. At hindi madali o awtomatiko ang paglalahad ng katotohanan sa ating lipunan ngayon, pagkat pilit itong ikinukubli, kinakalimutan, binabaluktot, binabaligtad, hinahalinhan ng fake news. Sistematiko ang pagsupil at pagbura sa katotohanan para mapagtakpan ang kakulangan ng mga namumuno. Organisado ang mga kampon ng disimpormasyon, at sagana sa pabuya, pribilehiyo, at proteksiyon.<sup>10</sup> Kaya naman kailangang matutong manaliksik ang artista ng teatro, mula sa manunulat hanggang sa direktor, taga-disenyo, at mga aktor. Kailangang maging mapagtanong, kritikal, mapanuri, maabilidad sa pagtuklas ng katotohanan, marunong kumilatis sa totoo at sa imbento, may tainga sa balita, at mga matang sanay magmanman, magtala, at magtanda.

Ang ganitong masinop na pananaliksik ang kailangan para labanan ang pinalalaganap na mga kasinungalingan at mailahad ang tunay na datos hinggil sa mga isyung kinakaharap natin ngayon. Pangunahin sa mga ito ang sumusunod:

- 1) Mga isyung pulitikal na nag-ugat o lumaganap sa kasalukuyang panahon:
  - a) Ang lideratong awtokratiko na gumagamit ng dahas at batas para mapalawak at mapanghawakan ang kapangyarihang pulitikal, na tinukoy ng *devised play* na **RD3RD** (2017) nina Ricardo Abad at Anton Juan Jr., isang paghahambing kay Pangulong Duterte sa tiranong si Richard III ni Shakespeare;
  - b) Ang war on drugs at EJK na pumapatay sa mga mahihirap, ngunit walang nahuhuling malalaking drug lord, na siyang ibinunyag ng **Tao Po** (2018) ni Maynard Manansala;
  - c) Ang mga taktika ng pananakot, pag-bully, at pagsupil sa taumbayan, na siyang pinadama ng **Kundiman Party** (2018) ni Floy Quintos;

- d) Ang sistematikong paglikha ng fake news ng mga bayarang trolls at *fake social media accounts*, na tinukoy at idiniin ng ***Game of Trolls*** (2017) ni Liza Magtoto at ***Pilipinas with All the Overcoat*** (2017) ni Eljay Castro Deldoc;
  - e) Ang pagbura o pagrebisa sa tunay at madugong kasaysayan ng martial law ni Marcos, na tinudla ng pinakamaraming akda, mula sa mga dulang hango sa mga nobela ni Lualhati Bautista tungkol sa martial law tulad ng ***Dekada 70*** (2017) at ***Desaparesidos*** (2018) hanggang sa mga dulang sinulat noong martial law tulad ng ***Pagsambang Bayan*** (1977) ni Bonifacio Ilagan at ***Buwan at Baril sa Eb major*** (1985) ni Chris Millado, hanggang sa mga bagong dulang nagsisiwalat ng tortyur ng mga aktibista sa kamay ng militar ni Marcos, tulad ng ***Indigo Child*** (2016) ni Rody Vera;
  - f) Ang korupsiyon at maruming eleksiyon sa gobyerno, sa dulang ***Walang Kukurap*** (2012) ni Layeta Bucoy;
  - g) Ang pagtatangkang baguhin ang konstitusyon (*charter change*) at ipasok ang pederalismo para mapanatili ang administrasyon sa posisyon, kahit tapos na ang kanilang termino, tulad ng inilahad ng ***Charot*** (2019) nina J-Mee Katanyag at Michelle Ngu.
- 2) Mga isyung sosyal na nagpapatuloy hanggang sa kasalukuyan:
    - a) Ang pagsupil sa kababaihan at paglaban nila sa sistemang patriyarkal, sa dulang tulad ng ***Tumawag kay Libby Manaoag*** (1998) ni Liza Magtoto;
    - b) Ang pagkutya at pang-aapi sa mga gay, sa ***Hanggang Dito na Lamang at Maraming Salamat*** (1975) ni Orlando Nadres at ***Kung Paano Ko Pinatay si Diana Ross*** (1992) ni Rody Vera;
    - c) Ang suliranin ng mga kabataan sa gitna ng kahirapan, sa ***Juan Tamban*** (1979) ni Malou Jacob, at
    - d) Ang kolonyal at awtokratikong sistema ng edukasyon na nagsasamantala sa mga guro, sa ***Sistema ni Propesor Tuko*** (1979) ni Al Santos.

- 3) Iba pang mga isyu na kailangang harapin mula noon hanggang ngayon:
  - a) Ang masalimuot at malungkot na buhay ng mga OFW, na ipinakita ng *Care Divas* (2010) ni Liza Magtoto;
  - b) Ang pagkalbo sa mga bundok ng malalaking korporasyon na malakas sa Malacanan at ang matinding pagbaha na dulot nito na pumapatay sa libo-libong mamamayan, na isiniwalat ng *Noli at Fili Dekada 2000* (2007) ni Nicanor Tiongson;
  - c) Ang mga isyu sa etnisidad na kalimita’y itinatago o ikinahihiya, sa *Ang Buhay ng Apoy* (2015) ni Auraeus Solito;
  - d) Ang mga isyu mula sa kasaysayan, tulad ng kolaborasyon sa panahon ng Hapon sa *In My Father’s House* (1988) ni Elsa Coscoluella at
  - e) Ang mga personal na isyu sa pamilya na likha ng amang piyudal na kumokontrol at sumisira sa buhay ng kanilang mga anak, tulad ng matutunghayan sa *Ulilang Tahanan* (1996), salin ng *The Forsaken House* ni Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero, at *Biyaheng Timog* (1984) ni Tony Perez.

Ilan lamang ito sa mga dulang tumalakay sa mga isyung buhay hanggang ngayon, na nagiging hadlang para matamo ng bawat Pilipino ang kaniyang kaganapan bilang tao.

## **K. Ang Estetika ng Sining para sa TAO**

Upang maintindihan, magustuhan, at ganap na masakyan ng manonood ang sinasabi ng ating dula, kailangang matuklasan o matukoy ng artista ang estetikang babagay sa nilalaman nito. Ang estetika ng bawat dula ay bunga ng a) teksto ng dula at ng pagkaunawa ng mga artista ng teatro sa nilalaman nito, at b) ng interaksyon ng mga artista ng tanghalan at tugon nila sa mga konkretong kondisyon ng pagtatanghal—ang manonood, ang lunan at lugar ng pagpapalabas, ang badyet ng produksiyon, at, nitong kailan lamang, ang bagong midyum ng internet.

Una, **ang manonood ang pangunahing konsiderasyon sa pagpili ng dula at ng wikang gagamitin nito.** Kailangang piliing mabuti ang

dulang babagay at maaaring mag-angat sa antas ng konsiyentisasyon ng mga manonood. Dapat iwasan ang adbenturismo sa isang banda, at ang konserbatismo naman sa kabila. Kailangang tandaan na dapat iangat ng dula ang kamalayan ng manonood mula sa antas na kinalalagyan nito.

Kailangan ding piliin ang wikang mag-uugnay sa artista at sa manonood sa antas na intelektuwal at emosyonal. Ito ang wika na nag-iingat ng mga salita para sa kanilang mga saloobin, damdamin, kaisipan, pakikipag-ugnayan sa isa't isa, yaong nagtataglay ng mga katagang may kulay, amoy, hipo, lasa, at tunog na tumitimo sa puso at isipan ng manonood. Ito'y walang iba kundi ang katutubong wika, na sinasalita at kinalakhan ng mga manonood sa isang partikular na lunan. Sa teatrang pangkomunidad, ito ang pang-araw-araw na wika ng nayon o baryong yaon; sa kabesera o siyudad ng isang lalawigan, ito ang lingua franca ng probinsiya o rehiyon; sa malalaking sentro sa Metro Manila at sa labas nito, ito ang wikang Filipino.

Mahalagang tandaan na sa wikang katutubo lamang maaaring magkaroon ng diyologo ang artista, dula, at manonood na gamit ang sarili nilang estetika. Sa banyagang wika, natatali o nakokontrol ang ating artista at manonood ng pag-iisip at pagpapahalagang nakapaloob sa wikang Kanluranin. Halimbawa, sa pagpili ng Ingles bilang wika ng dula, agad nababago ang dinamiko ng relasyon ng artista, dula, at manonood. Waring nagkakaroon ng guwang sa kanilang pagitan, isang negatibong aliyenasyon ng manonood sa pinapalabas at nagpapalabas, kaya malamang na di magagap ang dula ng manonood kundi sa makitid na antas intelektuwal lamang—sa utak, pero hindi sa puso. Sa kabilang banda, sa paggamit ng katutubong wika, nagkakaintindihan ang artista at manonood sa antas na intelektuwal, kultural, emosyonal, at nabubuo ang isang pakikipagtalastasan sa pagitan ng dalawa na di nasasagkaan ng wika o kulturang banyaga.<sup>11</sup>

Pangalawa, **ang manonood na rin at ang mensahe ng dula ang magpapasiya kung anong anyo o estilo ang gagamitin at paano ito iaangkop sa uri at panlasa ng mga taong manonood.** Ang tema at naratibo ba ng dula ay mas mapatitingkad kung ang gagamiting estilo ay realistiko o *stylized* na realismo? Ang pagtatanghal ba ay maaring gumamit ng estetika ng dulang “palabas,” na may tawanan, kantahan, sayawan, na siyang

kinagigiliwan ng karaniwang manonood na nahirati na sa ganitong uri ng aliwan sa pelikula at telebisyon? Dito’y mahalagang saliksikin o kilalanin ng artista ang uri ng panlasa at lebel ng intelektuwalisasyon ng manonood.

Pangatlo, **batay sa lunan na paglalabasan, maaari ring magbago ang estetikang gagamitin sa pagtatanghal ng dula upang magkaroon ito ng “dating” sa karaniwang manonood.** Ang direksiyon, pagganap, disenyo ng entablado at kostyum, pag-iilaw at tunog ay magbabago batay sa kung ang dula ay ipapalabas sa isang bukas na entablado sa plasa sa harap ng simbahan na may isang bombilyang nakasabit at isang nakatayong mikropono lamang, o ito’y itatanghal sa isang lehitimong teatrong may *proscenium stage* na kumpleto ang mga ilaw, *sound system*, at maganda ang *acoustics* at mga *dressings room*, o ito’y ilalabas sa isang malaking klasrum na kinonvert para maging “theater-in-the-round” o “sala theater” kaya sa isang hayskul o bahay sa lalawigan.

Pang-apat, **kailangan ding iangkop ang dula at estilo nito sa panahon o okasyon ng pagpapalabas.** Kung ito’y itatanghal bilang bahagi ng pagdiriwang ng Foundation Day ng isang provincial high school sa football field, kailangang “masaya” ang dating ng palabas at “madaling masakyan.” Pero sa isang “festival of plays” tulad ng Virgin Lab Fest na ginaganap sa Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), may hamon sa at pagkakataon ang mandudula, direktor, mga aktor at tagadiseno ng produksiyon na lumikha ng mga dulang kakaiba, kritikal, at malayo-sa-kalakaran ang paksa at tema, at mapusok at eksperimental ang pamamaraan. Sa panahon ng martial law kung kailan pinakawalan ng militar ang kanilang mga espiya para manmanan ang mga dula ng mga progresibong grupo, nabuo at lumaganap ang matatawag nating “Teatro ng Talinghaga.” Dito gumamit ang mga artista ng estilong metaporikal o alegorikal para tukuyin ang iba’t ibang uri ng paniniil ng gobyerno sa panahong iyon. Iniwasan ang tahasang pagtukoy sa mga realidad ng martial law para maiwasan din ang detensiyon o pagkakakulong, at ginamit bilang talinghaga para sa kasalukuyan: a) ang mga kabanata sa kasaysayan ng bayan, tulad ng panahon ng Okupasyong Amerikano noong 1900, sa ***Walang-Kamatayang Buhay ni Juan de la Cruz, Alyas...*** (1976) ni Lito Tiongson; b) ang mga anyong tradisyunal tulad ng

komedya, sa ***Sandaang Panaginip*** (1981) ni Rene Villanueva, sinakulo sa ***Sinakulo*** (1977) ng Babaylan, sarsuwela tulad ng ***Pilipinas Circa 1907*** (1982) ni Nicanor Tiongson, panunuluyan tulad ng ***Panunuluyan nina Birheng Maria at San Jose sa Cubao, Ayala, Plaza Miranda, atbp.*** (1979) nina Al Santos, Alan Glinoga, at Rody Vera, drama simboliko tulad ng adaptasyon ng PETA ng ***Kahapon, Ngayon at Bukas*** (1991) ni Aurelio Tolentino; k) mga salin ng mga progresibong dulang banyaga, tulad ng ***Makbet*** ni Shakespere (1984) at ***Ang Buhay ni Galileo Galilei*** (1981) ni Bertolt Brecht; d) ang mga pabula at alamat ng panitikang bayan, tulad ng ***Maranatha*** (1974) ni Rodolfo Galenzoga, ***Mga Kuwentong Maranao*** (1974) at ***Halik sa Kampilan*** (1983) ni Frank Rivera, at ***Dupluhang Bayan*** (1976) ni Domingo Landicho. Sa ating panahon kung kailan bumabangon na muli ang multo ng batas militar, nagamit na ng ilang artista ang epiko, tulad ng ***Lam-ang: An Ethno-musical*** (2019) ni Eljay Castro Deldoc para tukuyin ang abusadong lider, ang adaptasyon at “devised play” para ipakita ang katangian ng martial law ni Marcos tulad ng ***Alpha Kappa Omega*** o ***Batch '81*** (2019) ni Guelan Luarca, at ang salin sa Filipino na ***Ang Pag-uusig*** (2017) ng klasikong dulang Amerikano, ***The Crucible*** ni Arthur Miller, para punahin ang kultura ng takot, disimpormasyon, at iringan na pinalalaganap ng rehimeng awtokratiko.

Panlima, sabihin pa bang ang **badyet ng isang produksiyon ang isa sa pinakamahalagang konsiderasyon sa pagpili ng dulang itatanghal at pagbuo ng produksiyon nito?** Iba ang estetika ng dulang musikal na itatanghal ng isang *resident company* ng CCP na may tulong na pinansiyal mula sa CCP at sa NCCA, sa estetika ng adaptasyon ng ***Caucasian Chalk Circle*** na ipapalabas ng isang grupo ng mga estudyante sa *basketball court* ng isang maliit na kolehiyo sa Mindanao, na may kakarampot na pondo. Pero anuman ang badyet, hindi nangangahulugan na ang produksiyong may malalaking isponsor ang tiyak na magiging higit na maganda kaysa maliit na produksiyon na “beg, steal or borrow,” pagkat ang kasiningan ay wala sa laki o liit ng pondo kundi nasa *insight* at imahinasyon ng direktor, aktor, at tagadiseno ng produksiyon. “The poverty of a production need not mean the poverty of the imagination.”<sup>12</sup>

Pang-anim, **sa panahon ng pandemya at ECQ lockdowns**, nasara ang mga tanghalan, at tanging internet ang naging paraan ng komunikasyon ng taumbayan. Di nagtagal at inilabas ng Tanghalang Pilipino ang ilan sa kanilang popular na produksiyon sa IWantTV. Ngunit ang mas mahalaga, **nagsimula nang lumabas ang mga dulang sadyang ginawa para sa internet**. Isa sa mga naunang halimbawa nito ang “reimagination of Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex” para sa internet na pinamagatang *Password: 03d1pu5\_R3x* (2021) ng Tanghalang Ateneo.<sup>13</sup> Dito ginamit ang Hari ng Tebas bilang metapora para sa isang lider na bakal ang kamay pero bulag naman sa katotohanan. Kapuri-puri ang kolaborasyon ng mga artista ng teatro at ng pelikula sa dula, sapagkat napanatili at napatingkad pa nga nila ang drama ng naratibo: una, sa pamamagitan ng madamdaming pagganap ng mga aktor at epektibo, bagamat simpleng, disenyo ng produksiyon; at pangalawa, sa malikhaing pag-edit at pagpapagalaw ng mga imahen sa iskrin—na inaayon sa sitwasyon at emosyong nananaig sa eksena.

Malinaw sa lahat ng ito, na **walang iisang estetika ang teatro noon man o ngayon**. Sa halip, may pluralismo ng estetika, sapagkat ang estetika ng bawat dula ay nililikha ng artista bilang tugon sa ispesipiko at natatanging kondisyon ng lunan, panahon, badyet, midyum, at manonood. Bukod dito, sa bawat produksiyon, dapat tuklasin at gamitin ng artista ang alinmang estilo, anyo, teknik o *devise*, saan man ito nanggaling—sa loob o labas ng bansa, sa tradisyunal o modernong tanghalan, sa sentro man o sa rehiyon, sa radyo, telebisyon, internet o pelikula (huwag matakot na manghiram, pero huwag namang mangopya)—para maparating niya sa manonood ang malalim at kritikal na pagka-unawa sa mga isyu ng lipunan ngayon at maganyak ang manonood na tumulong para masugpo ang mga kanser na ito.

## **D. Ang Mga Artista ng Teatro Bilang TAO**

Ngunit bakit nga ba kailangan pang pag-aksayahan ng pawis, luha, at dugo ang paggawa ng dula? Ano ang halaga nito sa manonood? Ano ang halaga nito sa artista? Paano ba natin titingnan ang artista at ang gawaing panteatro at ang tungkulin nilang umugnay sa manonood ngayon? Ano nga ba ang hamon sa artistang Pilipino ng ating panahon?

Ang unang hamon ay: **bumaba ang artista mula sa toreng garing ng kawalang-pakialam.** Una, tanggapin man niya o hindi, ang kawalang pakialam o “neutralidad” ay nagpapalakas pang lalo sa mga kaaway ng katotohanan at karapatang pantao. Pangalawa, ang konsepto ng “art for art’s sake” at ng artista na walang ideolohiya kundi ang sariing sining ay matagal nang ibinasura, pagkat walang batayan sa katotohanan o sa katwiran.<sup>14</sup> Kahit pa sabihin ng artista na siya’y lumilikha para sa sarili lamang, di niya matatakas ang katotohanan na ang paglikha ay pagpili at ang pagpili ay desisyong pulitikal. To write is to choose, and to choose is to commit. Bukod dito, sa paggamit niya ng wika ng lipunang kinabibilangan niya, hindi maiaalis ng artista na, gustuhin man niya o hindi, mababasa ang kanyang akda ng ibang tao at ang taong iyon ay mababago ng kaniyang sinulat, para sa mabuti man o masama. At kung gayon din lamang at di pala maiiwasan ang paglaganap ng kaniyang mga inakda, bakit hindi na lamang niya gamitin ang kaniyang panitik para maiangat ang kapakanan at maisulong ang mga karapatan ng kaniyang kapwa tao?

At kung ang artista ay nasa teatro, lalo nang mahirap na iwasan ang pakikisangkot sa lipunan. Una, tunggalian ang diwa ng bawat dula at ang tunggaliang iyon, kahit ang pinakapersonal, ay may kinalaman sa mga pwersa sa lipunan na nakatutulong o nakahahadlang sa kaniyang pag-unlad bilang ganap na tao. Pangalawa, ang teatro ay sining na di tulad ng panitikan. Ang tula ay maaaring likhain ng makata sa dilim ng kaniyang pag-iisa, ngunit ang teatro ay sining na kolektibo. Napakaraming artista ang kailangan para mabuo ang isang dula—mula sa mandudula na kailangang pakinisin ang kaniyang dula sa tulong ng direktor at dramaturg, hanggang sa direktor na siyang bubuo ng pangkalahatang interpretasyon ng dula, na kailangang isalin naman ng ibang artista sa kanilang pagganap at sa disenyo ng tagpuan at kasuotan, ng ilaw at tunog. Nasa kalikasan ng sining ng teatro na makipag-ugnayan ang artista sa kapwa niya artista, at ang produksiyon sa manonood ng dula. Sa teatro, hindi ka nag-iisa at hindi ka maaaring mag-isa.

Ang pangalawang hamon ay galing sa sambayanan na mismo. **Sa isang bansang Third World na tulad ng Pilipinas, mahigpit ang pangangailangan—at obligasyon pa nga marahil na maituturing—**



**na ang artista ay matutong dumamay sa pasyon na pinagdadaanan ng bayan.** Sa isang bansang higit sa pitumpong porsyento ang sumasala sa pagkain at ibang “basic needs” at walang lakas na ipaglaban ang kanilang mga karapatan, samantalang sampung porsyento lamang ang yumayaman at naghahari-harian sa ekonomiya at pulitika, masidhi ang hamon sa bawat Pilipino, lalo na sa mga artistang edukado, mulat, at may angking talino, na makibalikat sa pagbabagong malaon nang hinihingi ng ating lipunan, sa pamamagitan ng inyong mga akdang pansining.

**Kung aakuin ng mga artista ang ganitong tungkulin, ang kanilang apisyon o hilig sa teatro ay magiging misyon at direksiyon ng kanilang buhay.** Kung ang lahat ng artista ng teatro ay magkakaisa at maglilingkod sa dakilang layunin na ipaglaban ang kapakanan at karapatan ng TAO, ang gawaing panteatro ay magkakaroon ng tunay na saysay, malalim na kahulugan, at di matatawarang gravitas. Ang ganitong komitment ang magiging batayan ng pagkakapatiran ng mga artista ng teatro, ang gabay sa lahat ng daraanan nilang pagsubok, at ilaw na magmumulat sa libo-libong kapwa nila Pilipino. Kung magbubuklod ang mga artista sa ilalim ng bandila ng Teatro Para sa Tao o TAPAT, ang bawat dula ay magiging “detonator” (tulad ng pelikula ng Third Cinema ng Argentina),<sup>15</sup> ibig sabih’y magiging okasyon para magkaroon ng talakayan sa pagitan ng mga artista at ng manonood pagkatapos ng dula. Higit sa lahat, ang bawat pagtatanghal ay magiging tunay na ekspresyon ng kolektibong paglikha, at matibay na apirmasyon ng mismong pagkatao ng mga matatapang na artista ng bayan, pagkataong nabubuo sa kanilang taimtim at tapat na pakikipagkapwa sa mga kapatid na artista at sa kababayang manonood.

## Mga Tala

Unang binasa ang sanaysay na ito bilang *commencement speech* ng awtor para sa *virtual graduation* ng TAMPOK YATTA (Youth Advocates Through Theater Arts) theater workshop ng National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) noong 11 Abril 2021. Inedit muli bilang artikulo para sa jurnal na *Unitas*.

1. Inilarawan ang kamay na bakal at pamamahaling “maton” ni Rodrigo Duterte sa “Rodrigo Duterte: A Fascist Original” ni Walden Bello at “Duterte’s ‘War on Drugs’: The Securitization of Illegal Drugs and the Return of National Boss Rule” ni Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, sa Nicole Curato (ed.), *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte’s Early Presidency*. (2017) Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
2. Gagamitin natin ang TAO, na binabanghay sa malalaking letra, para tukuyin ang tao sa kaniyang kaganapan sa lahat ng antas ng kaniyang pagkatao.
3. Isa sa nanguna sa pagsasalin at adaptasyon ng mga dulang banyaga noong mga taong 1966-7 si Rolando S. Tinio, sa kaniyang salin ng *Death of a Salesman* ni Arthur Miller at *Glass Menagerie* ni Tennessee Williams, at ang Philippine Educational Theater, sa kanilang salin ng *The Visit* ni Friedrich Dürrenmatt nong 1969.
4. Ilan sa mga pag-aaral ng dulang tradisyunal na nalimbag noong dekada 1970 ang *A Short History of Philippine Theater* (1971) ni Isagani Cruz (pat); *Kasaysayan at Estetika ng Sinakulo at Ibang Dulang Panrelihiyon sa Malolos* (1975) ni Nicanor G. Tiongson; *Theater in Society, Society in Theater* (1975) ni Resil B. Mojares; at *The Iloilo Zarzuela 1903-1930* (1977) ni Doreen G. Fernandez.
5. Ilan sa mga pag-aaral tungkol sa mga grupong etnolinggwistiko sa dekada 1970 ang *Muslims of the Philippines* (1973) ni Cesar Adib Majul; *Discovery of the Igorots* (1974) ni William Henry Scott; *Jama Mapun* (1976) ni Eric Casio; at *T’boli Art in Its Socio-Cultural Context* (1978) ni Gabriel Casal.
6. Ang mga mahalagang pag-aaral ay ang *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology* (1998) ni Virgilio Enriquez; *Sikolohiyang Pilipino: Teorya, Metodo at Gamit* (1982) ni Rogelia Pe-Pua (pat.); ang mga sanaysay ni Zeus A. Salazar tungkol sa Pantayong Pananaw sa *Pantayong Pananaw: Ugat at Kabuluhan* (1997) nina Atoy Navarro, Mary Jane Rodriguez, at Vicente Villan (mga pat.); at ang *Larangan* (1998) ni Prospero R. Covar.
7. May talaan at deskripsiyon ng mga negatibong ugali, paniniwala, at halagahin ng mga Pilipino sa dokumentong “A Moral Recovery Program: Building a People—Building a Nation.” 1988. Senate Committees on Education, Arts and Culture and on Social Justice, Welfare and Development, 9 May.
8. Ang dalawa pang pamantayan ay ito: a) na ang dula ay dapat maging **repleksiyon** ng buhay at mga karanasan ng mga Pilipino; at b) na ito’y

- tumugon sa mga **pangangailangan** ng mga Pilipino sa iba't ibang panahon. Ang tatlong pamantayan ay karaniwan nang pinaaiigsi sa mnemonic acronym na RPN (Repleksiyon, Pangangailangan, Nakararami). Tingnan ang Nicanor G. Tiongson, "What Is Philippine Drama?" Theater Studies I, Documentation, Research and Publication Office, Philippine Educational Theatre Association, 1983. Ang unang bersiyon ng sanaysay na ito sa Filipino, na pinamagatang "Ang Dulang Pilipino," ay unang nalathala sa *The Literary Apprentice 1976-1977*. Virgilio Lacaba (pat.). 49: 1, 1-28. Muli itong isinama sa *Panitikan at Kritisismo II* ni Rosario Torres-Yu (pat.) Manila: National Bookstore, 143-164.
9. Ito ang opinyon ni Ken Fuller na ipinahayag sa kaniyang *The Lost Vision: The Philippine Left 1986-2010*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2015. Basahin ang komprehensibong salaysay at pagsusuri ng paghina ng kilusang sosyalista sa bolyum na ito.
  10. Tinatalakay ang penomenong ito sa "The Rise of Trolls in the Philippines (And What We Can Do About It)" ni Jason Vincent A. Cabañes at Jayeel S. Cornelio, sa Curato (pat.), *A Duterte Reader*.
  11. Tinalakay ko ang bisa ng paggamit ng wikang katutubo sa panitikan sa aking sanaysay na "Wika ng Panitikang Pilipino sa Ating Panahon," binasa bilang professorial chair lecture noong 1981 at isinama sa antolohiyang *Lingguwistika at Panitikan*, Alfonso Santiago (pat.). Manila: Rex Book Store, 1984
  12. Una kong ginamit ang pangungusap na ito sa artikulong "Salvador F. Bernal: Theatre Designer Par Excellence" para ipahayag na hindi naging balakid ang maliit na badyet para makalikha si Bernal ng maganda at makahulugang disenyo ng kasuutan at set para sa isang produksiyon.
  13. Ang produksiyon ay pinalabas ng Tanghalang Ateneo sa internet noong 22, 25, at 27 ng Pebrero 2021. Ito'y pinamagatang *Password: O3d1pu5\_R3x* ng direktor na si Ronan Capinding at tinampukan nina Miren Alvarez-Fabregas, Marian Rivera, Katski Flores, at Yan Yuzon bilang Oedipus.
  14. Isa sa mga matanda ngunit matalisik pa rin na sanaysay na nagsuri sa konsepto ng Sining para sa Sining ay ang "Art for Art's Sake: Its Fallacy and Viciousness" mula sa *The Art World*, 2: 2 (May 1917), 98-102. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25587887>. Downloaded 02-02-2019.
  15. Ayon sa sanaysay na "Toward a Third Cinema" nina Fernando Solanas at Octavio Getino, ang pelikula ay maaaring gamiting taga-lunsad ng talakayan at edukasyon tungkol sa mga paksang pulitikal. Ang sanaysay ay nasa Bills Nichols (pat.), *Movies and Methods*. 1976. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

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# Music Labels and Digital Competitors

## Tracing the Great Rollercoaster of the Last 20 Years\*

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### Abstract

This paper examines the tense relationships between the large music labels and the emerging digital companies. Looking back at the anti-digitization feelings in the music industry of the last twenty years, it proposes a radically different picture than what those sentiments feared. It argues that the collapse of global music revenues between 2001 and 2014 reflects the “excessive” expenses imposed on many consumers by the rigid format of CDs—too many songs or too high quality for every day listening for the taste of many consumers who then started to look at alternatives to CDs. The paper relates this evolution to the increasingly excessive duration of copyrights which has strongly induced the research labels to be less efficient and diligent.

It then looks forward by comparing the business practices of the labels and digital companies for the three main market functions ensured by these firms. First, when informing the consumers of the existence of the cultural works produced, the digital companies are much more efficient than the labels, hence have compensated the informational deficits of the latter. Second, when fighting piracy, the subscription policies of the streaming companies

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distributing the musical works copyrighted by the labels have substantially contributed to the fight against piracy. However, when distributing the works produced under their own copyrights, digital companies are likely to succumb to the same fatal attraction as the labels—overpricing until massive piracy forces them to rectify. Finally, when paying the music revenues to their authors, digital companies could help to rectify the bad management practices that labels have left to proliferate for their own narrow interests.

### **Keywords**

Digitization, music labels, streaming services providers, information, piracy, singers and composers, copyrights.

## Introduction

Over the three last decades, the most crucial source of change in the interactions between culture, society, and the economy has undoubtedly been digitization. In the 1980s and 1990s, digitization occurred mostly in the goods sectors—CDs replacing cassettes, digitized equipment for printing, recording, or filming instead of mechanical equipment. This required a notable restructuring of the related manufacturing sectors, but it left relatively unscathed the large incumbent “cultural” companies—music labels, book publishers, or film studios—involved in the creation and distribution of the cultural works *per se*.

Then there has been the shift toward internet-based technologies to access these cultural works, challenging the usual “physical” access channels—individual stores or retail chains. This restructuring was largely unanticipated by the large incumbent global cultural companies and is best illustrated by the tense relationship between the music labels and the digital companies on which this paper focuses on (but the same fundamental issues have also emerged in the book and film industries). Buttressed by their market power based on increasingly tight copyright laws, the largest music labels, predominantly located in the United States (US), Europe, and Japan, have resisted these changes for as long as possible.

As a result, the evolution of the music sector has been described as “apocalyptic” until the mid-2010s (Johnson 2015): overall global music revenues collapsed from USD 28.9 billion in 1999 to USD 14 billion in 2014 (IFPI 2021, p.11). The music labels have complained that this apparently endless plunge was the result of “unfair” competition from digital companies. Such sentiment has been echoed by a number of successful singers and composers. This powerful coalition of money and fame has disseminated the view that, by facilitating piracy at a scale never seen before, the digital companies have deeply undermined the economic basis of the previous prosperous decades—portraying digitization as the major or even sole culprit for the deep troubles of the music industry.

Yet since 2015, global music revenues have grown again while digitization has been deepening its reach and has been a key engine of this recent

U-turn. Such an evolution contradicts the complaints of the previous period. This market reversal after a free fall of fifteen years raises thus a first series of questions that this paper addresses. Have the major music labels misinterpreted the source behind the collapse of the market? Have they explored alternative explanations to the argument of the “unfair competition” from the digital companies? In particular, have the labels made a thorough review of their own business practices: have they checked whether they have been as efficient and/or diligent as they should have been for defending the commercial success of their authors?

The second series of questions that this paper examines are forward oriented. Now that the digital companies are firmly involved in all activities of the music industry—not only distribution, but also granting copyrights and producing new music—what could be their impact on the industry as a whole? Have some of their business practices been a welcome counterbalance to the lack of efficiency or diligence of the traditional labels? Answering this second set of questions requires a look at the three main market functions of the firms involved in the music sector: informing the consumers of the existence of cultural works produced, fighting piracy by adopting pricing policies that prevent as much as possible illegal behavior, and paying a fair share of the music revenues to their authors in an efficient as possible manner.

This paper is organized into six sections. Sections 1 to 3 focuses on the first set of questions raised above: the evolution of the global music revenues, an explanation of the collapse from 2001 to 2014 which is consistent with the rebound thereafter, a brief economic analysis of the current copyright laws which is much needed to fully grasp what has happened. Sections 4 to 6 deal with the second series of questions. They compare today’s business practices by the labels and digital companies for each of the main market functions: “informing” consumers, fighting piracy, and paying a fair share of the music revenues to their authors. This paper focuses on economic arguments. But, at every step of its development, it stresses the crucial consequences of all these changes for the “culture” of a country, its cultural creativity and diversity.



Lastly, a much deserved word of caution. The issues dealt with in this paper are extremely complex. A short article cannot give justice to all of them. As a result, the approach has been to focus on issues too often ignored in the literature: the excessive burden imposed on consumers by a rigid CD format, the costly side of the copyright laws from a cultural perspective, and the day-to-day bad management practices of the labels—all issues necessary to have a complete assessment of the current situation from an economic point of view and to develop a point of view insisting on cultural creativity.

**Section 1. Global music revenues since the early 2000s: The great rollercoaster**

Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of the overall revenues for the global music industry from 2000 to 2020 (IFPI 2021). It shows a sharp plunge since 2001, followed by a rebound since 2015. Adding all the revenues—CDs, streaming, performance rights, etc.—helps to understand the mounting concern among the music labels: the overall music revenues reached a nadir in 2014 when they were roughly 60 percent of those in 2001.

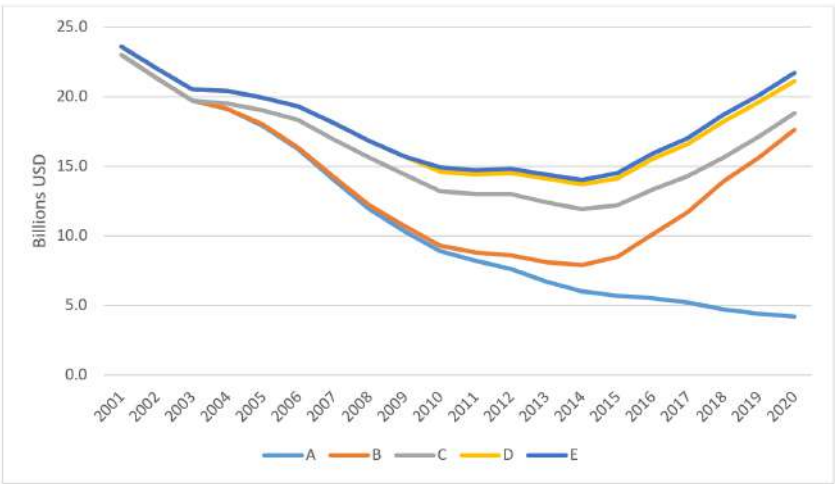


Figure 1. Global music revenues

Source: IFPI, 2021. Note: The presentation differs slightly from IFPI in order to make more visible the restructuration process of the music industry over these twenty years. Curve A represents the “physical” (CD & disks) sales, curve B the sum of the physical and streaming sales, curve C the sum of the physical, streaming and download sales, curve D adds the sum of the previous sales and the performance rights, and curve E adds on the synchronization rights.

This overview based on aggregate revenues has induced most of the commentators to focus their criticism on digitization and all online activities. The most famous illustration of this defensive stance occurred on July 11, 2000, when US Senator Orrin Hatch of the US Senate Judiciary Committee handed the microphone to the heavy metal band Metallica’s drummer, Lars Ulrich, to talk about the online service Napster which had only been established the previous year. Ulrich explained how his group discovered that their entire catalogue of music was available for free on Napster (Johnson 2015). Though Napster’s lifespan was very short (for reasons explained in Section 5, it closed down its service in July 2001), the damage in terms of digitization’s reputation was done, with many famous singers and composers echoing Ulrich’s complaint. In 2014, Taylor Swift attracted media attention by loudly quitting Spotify—then a streaming company struggling for survival—and stating that “music should not be free,” and that “individual artists and their labels will someday decide what an album’s price point is” (O’Neil 2014, Delbyck 2017). Ironically, only three years later, she reversed her position and returned to Spotify, presumably because, as shown by Figure 1, streaming revenues were becoming fast the main source of music revenues.

Two major transformations should have sent warning signals that the criticism focusing on the impact of digitization was too simplistic. The first was during the years 1994–2000 in the US music market. Since 1985 there has been high and uninterrupted growth in US music revenues which came to a complete halt in 1994—that is, several years before 2000 or 2001 which can be seen as the starting point of substantial online music activities (Waldfoegel 2018, p. 41).<sup>1</sup> In other words, serious problems were evident in the US music market long before the emergence of digitization. Figure 1 shows that the collapse of music revenues has been largely driven by physical (CD) sales. But

it also shows that the other components of the overall music revenues have exhibited vigorous growth that has required the support from digital companies. In particular, Figure 1 shows that concerts and physical events have increasingly regained the economic importance that they have not enjoyed since the 1950s due to the success of the recording industry—a coming back that could only be seen as very positive from a cultural perspective.

The second warning signal came from Korea. Retrospectively, these fifteen years of intense criticism against digitization are a source of great astonishment because none of the large music labels—allegedly “global”—seem to have paid attention to what was going on in Korea in the 1990s and 2000s. The Korean music companies have actively embraced digitization a decade or so before their counterparts in the Europe, Japan, or the US. By the early 2000s, they have already developed new strategies which have demonstrated the possibility to be both profitable and culturally innovative in a digitized environment subjected to weaker copyright practices than those prevailing in Europe, Japan, or the US (Parc and Kawashima 2018). Crucially this radically different environment has not limited the global rise of the Korean pop industry nor held back Korean creativity and innovation. For instance, the number of K-pop groups has increased from 17 (2009) to 66 (2014) (The Seoul Shinmun 2015; Parc and Kawashima 2018).<sup>2</sup> This truncated view of the global music market held by the major labels has prevented them to make a thorough review of their business practices—in particular whether their activities have actually been more the source for their difficulties than digitization.

## **Section 2. The collapse of music revenues (2000-2014): an alternative interpretation**

The data in Figure 1 has been widely used by observers to explain the apocalyptic evolution of the music revenues. Such an interpretation assumes that selling CDs and digital music are similar operations. However, this is a flawed perception. Before the internet, music consumption almost exclusively relied upon selling “music-as-a-product:” the price of a CD reflects the fact that it “embodies” a bundle of songs (10 to 12 in general) that consumers

can listen to for an undefined duration (as long as the CD is in good shape) and can be consumed at an undefined frequency (the consumer can listen to the CD many times or only once). By contrast, internet-based “streaming” consists of selling “music-as-a-service:” the fee to be paid to a streaming provider is paid for a specific song provided for a defined duration and frequency.

As selling music-as-a-service is such a radically different business than selling goods, digital companies have had to design new types of payments—a process that has taken time to develop and refine (see Figure 1). At first, “online stores” started to sell songs to be downloaded by their regular consumers. Then, other companies gave to consumers the possibility to pay “subscription fees” for accessing the kind of music they want to listen to. In its latest versions of this second type of payments, consumers pay these fees to digital (streaming) companies which allow them to extract directly the musical works they want from the catalogue of music they provide. In this case, a vast catalogue of music is an absolute pre-condition for the success of the streaming service providers—a key point of the tensions between music labels and their digital competitors (see section 5).

Comparing pre-internet “prices” and post-internet “fees” makes thus no economic sense because the services offered by these two distribution channels are radically different. In 2000 consumers who wanted to listen to a song at home had to buy a CD album (worth 15 to 18 USD) with other songs they did not necessarily like, a sound quality which can be too high for everyday listening, and years of usage beyond their initial interest. In 2020, for much less than one USD, the same consumers could access the desired song through a streaming website, with sufficient enough quality, and for the desired limited period.

In other words, the technical quality of CDs has imposed vast “unwanted excessive costs” on the consumers of music. The problem is that the excessive costs associated with CDs have left consumers with no money for buying other songs—hence, a tremendous restriction on the diversity and creativity for the music industry. By contrast, streaming revenues represent a much

more accurate measure of the “true” value of the demand for music expressed by the consumers.

This result suggests the need for a reinterpretation regarding the collapse of the revenues observed during the transition period 2000-2015. This plunge reflects more the existence of the “excessive” costs of CDs in the early years of the period than some kind of digitization-generated depression at the end of the period.<sup>3</sup> Note that this drastic reinterpretation is consistent with the growing dissatisfaction among consumers revealed by the sharp halt in the US music market during the second half of the 1990s, before the proliferation of digital music. And the fact that the aggregate revenues of the music industry in 2020 are close to catching up with the aggregate revenues in 2000 (see Figure 1) reflects the fact that, once the restructuring among the various components of the music demand—less CDs, more streaming and performance rights—has been achieved, the music industry is coming back to its overall level of business activity in 2000. That this restructuring has been painful for some parts of the music industry—the CD makers and the artists reluctant to participate to live events—is undeniable. But the industry has not been ruined—the “creative apocalypse that wasn’t” (Johnson 2015).

### **Section 3. The roots of the problem: the impact of the current stringent copyright regime**

This reinterpretation of the plunge in music revenues raises then a series of questions on the respective business practices of the labels and of the digital companies that are of primary importance for understanding the present and future of the music industry. These questions require a careful analysis of how the copyright regime works that is provided in this section (for a remarkable history of the copyright issue, see Baldwin 2014).

In a nutshell, this regime relies on two pillars. First, copyright law grants the “sole and exclusive copyrights” to the “authors,” mainly the composers and singers in the case of the music industry. Their intent is to create a society in which the authors are at the top of the decision-making process in the music industry and are rewarded appropriately.

There is, however, a second pillar that makes largely irrelevant the first one by putting in place a radically different decision-making process. It is based on the “private contract” by which each “author” devolves the “effective use” of their copyrights to the record label. The standard language of these contracts is unambiguous (Parc and Messerlin 2021):

The Author hereby grants and assigns to the Publisher, its successors, representatives, and assigns, the sole and exclusive right to publish (i.e., print, publish, and sell) the Work in the English language in all forms in the [country in question] during the full term of copyright and any renewals and extensions thereof, except as provided herein.

These contracts clearly shift the effective decision power from the authors to the labels: once they have been signed, a “very unequal bargaining” situation prevails between the singers/composers and their labels (Towse 1999, 2003). The labels can then take alone all the decisions concerning the physical production, distribution, marketing, and payment of the authors’ earnings. The only—possible—exception to this unequal balance of power are the few singers or composers who are successful enough to have some negotiating leverage with their labels.

To sum up, private contracts transform “copy-rights” from “author-rights” into “label-rights” (a broadly similar situation exists in the film and book industries). It is crucial to realize that the main reason for this shift to ‘label-rights’ has nothing to do with the authors: its goal is to protect the labels holding the copyrights from any attempt by rival labels to distribute or market the works during the duration of the copyright (at least 70 years after the author’s death). In this respect, the history of book publishing is particularly illuminating. A frequent practice from 1450 (the invention of the printing machine) until the mid-nineteenth century (the first full-fledged copyright laws) has been the publishing of successful texts by several publishers at the same time (and not always with the consent of the authors). For instance, the best seller of the late 1400s—*Ship of Fools* (1494) by Sebastian Brant—was printed by more than 40 publishing houses between 1494 and 1574 (80 years, that is, almost the current duration of copyrights).<sup>4</sup>

Based on this second pillar, the major music labels have considerably strengthened their dominant position by imposing an increasingly longer “duration” of copyrights.<sup>5</sup> Such a situation has not been propitious to healthy pro-competitive business practices among the labels when determining their pricing policy and their cost management practices. On the pricing side, labels are induced to fix high prices allowing them to enjoy “supra-normal” profits. On the cost management practices—a criticism rarely made, but just as crucial—the lack of competition does not induce labels to be as efficient and/or as diligent as possible when managing the commercial life of their copyrighted works. This aspect is reinforced by the fact that copyrights are a clear case of the so-called “principal-agent dilemma” where an “agent” (the label) acting for a “principal” (the singer or composer) is better informed on the principal’s activity than the principal. This situation is a source of intrinsic and systemic inefficiency in the industry (Parc and Messerlin 2021). Combining these price and cost aspects means that the labels can be best described as monopolistic firms suffering from systemic cost inefficiencies.

Figure 2 helps to visualize these various elements. The vertical axis represents the earnings (say in US dollars) of the work. The horizontal axis shows the time (say years), with OD representing the whole legal duration of the copyright. In the real world, the flow of revenues generated by a cultural work such as a song has roughly a bell-shaped curve (Australian Productivity Commission 2016, Gowers 2006): it starts from zero dollar when the work is launched (time Q), grows, reaches a peak (time R), and then declines. The commercial life of the song ends at time S. After time D, the song is no more copyrighted: it falls into the public domain and any firm or individual can distribute the musical work without paying fees to the initial copyright holder(s) if they find a profitable opportunity to do so. In this case, the musical work begins a whole new life in a fully competitive environment, illustrated by the curve DYZ.

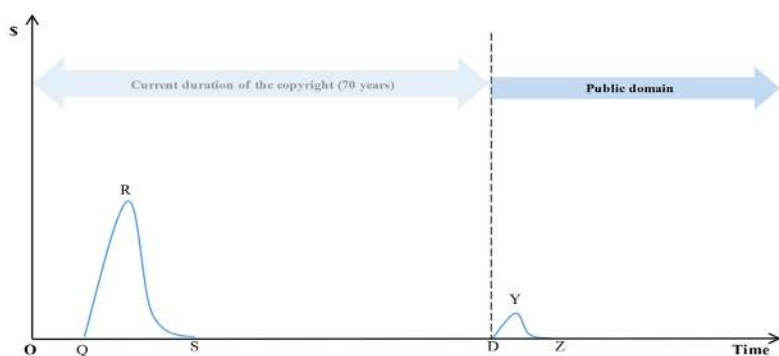


Figure 2. Copyrights: the reality

Source: Parc and Messerlin, 2021

It should be stressed that the commercial life  $QS$  for the vast majority of musical works is very short (a few months or years) compared to the almost century-long legal duration  $OD$  of the copyright. Such a situation creates two problems. First, the works that only achieve “average” success and thus possess a limited commercial life have to wait many years—illustrated by segment  $SD$  in Figure 2—before acceding to the public domain and having the possibility to escape the systemic flaws of the monopolistic and inefficient labels. This long delay imposes a huge cost on the composers and singers in terms of missing opportunities for promoting their production. In fact, segment  $SD$  is so long that it is almost like a death warrant for most of these works. More importantly, it represents a continuous impoverishment of the cultural creativity and heritage for the whole society since most of these average works will fall into oblivion.

Second, and paradoxically, this remote public domain is also a huge cost for the vast audience of the few highly successful works. This is because the copyright holders and the labels of these successful works will do their best to extend the copyright period and their associated “supra-normal” profits by using many tricks. One of the best illustrations of this behavior



in the music industry is provided by Maurice Ravel's *Bolero*, one of the most widely performed musical piece in the world (Predota 2020). *Bolero* was first performed in 1928, as part of a ballet production. When Ravel died in 1937, unmarried and childless, the copyrights for the work were transferred to his brother Edouard who thought for a while to use these revenues to fund a "Nobel Prize" for music. Ultimately, he made his nurse the solo beneficiary of the Ravel estate. In 1960, when Edouard died, a fight erupted between the nurse's family and Ravel's distant relatives. After a protracted legal dispute, the nurse's husband (the nurse died in 1964) won the court case in 1970. Ironically, the *Bolero* saga caught the eye of an official from the French Society of Authors, Composers and Publishers of Music who left this organization to establish a conglomerate of firms first in Gibraltar and later in the Virgin Islands that would manage *Bolero*'s revenues estimated to be worth roughly 55 million US dollar (for the period between 1960 and 1970). With third party interest, the years 1970-2016 witnessed renewed attempts to expand further the duration of *Bolero*'s copyrights by invoking "co-authors"—such as the painter of the scenery of the 1937 ballet performance. Had these efforts to prolong the copyright duration been successful, it would have delayed its release into the public domain until 2039 at least. Fortunately, these efforts failed and finally *Bolero* entered the public domain in 2016—79 years after Ravel's death, including an additional copyright duration of eight years granted to all music works for "compensating the effects" of World War II. This saga makes it hard to believe that a scheme so easy to manipulate can be said to provide robust support for culture. Clearly this makes a case for a need to reform the system.

#### Section 4. Informing consumers

The following sections shift the analysis to the future relationship between labels and digital companies. To what extent digital companies have improved and could further improve the main functions of the music market—the first one being informing the consumers of the existence of cultural works produced? Indeed, from a cultural perspective, the largest upheaval generated by digitization has occurred in the capacity to inform consumers as well

as producers about the vast universe of works which are in existence. In this respect this section stresses that the almost endless “informing” capacity of the internet services providers has been a powerful counterforce to the inefficient or negligent behavior of the music labels. The informing function can be distinguished into two broad categories.

First, “pure” advertising activities seek to highlight the existence of a work to the largest possible group of consumers and producers of musical works. When searching the internet for a song or a musical work, consumers and producers alike can find at almost no cost a host of related songs, texts, movies, and “grey literature” (unpublished papers or documents) that the search algorithms hosted by the digital companies suggest are of potential interest. The information capacity of the digital companies is much higher than the corresponding capacities of the labels for obvious technological reasons: the algorithms for Google, YouTube, or Naver are much more powerful than those of the labels. Moreover, the information produced by digital companies is not limited to the production of works by a specific label, but it includes the production of the works among all of them—allowing comparisons and cross-fertilizations.

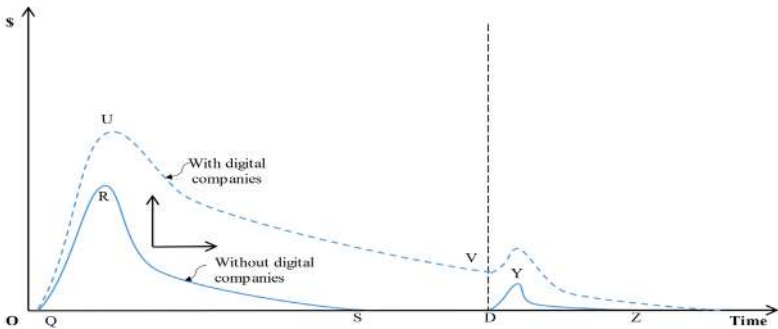
This feature is essential for a clearer understanding of national and global cultures, as shown by the very recent case of *Bambi, a Life in the Woods* (1923) which entered the US public domain in 2022 with some other 400,000 sound recordings (Center for the Study of the Public Domain, Duke University, <https://web.law.duke.edu/cspd/>, Hiltzik 2022). It is amazing to note that, throughout the 95 years of its copyright period, *Bambi* has witnessed only two translations of the book, both by the same editor Simon and Schuster, one in 1928 and the other one 91 years later, in 2019. Presumably, the 2019 translation was a preemptive move by the editor as the book entered the public domain in 2022. Remarkably, since January 2022, two more translations have been proposed by two different editors, allowing a better comparison between the book of *Bambi*—a rather somber story featuring brutal hunters and heartless nature—and the Walt Disney movie—where hunters are heard but not seen and nature is compassionate.

The fact that digital companies have vast research-processing capacities has another major positive impact on music production. Revealing works from the distant past that were previously inaccessible or forgotten is a powerful counterforce to the “chilling” effect of tight copyright laws on music production. Before digitization, risk-averse music producers would have hesitated to unleash their creative ideas out of fear that they could be embroiled in costly legal trouble as there was always a chance that they might inadvertently infringe upon the copyrights of forgotten works by other music producers (Rethink Music 2015).

The second advertising activity consists of “promoting” musical works. This is usually done by making the works available for sale (CDs) or through fees (streaming), but it is also increasingly pursued through entirely new business strategies made possible by digitization. For example, works could first be released free-of-charge on the internet to attract the attention of potential consumers and then be integrated into other activities, such as physical events (concerts) with a fee-paying audience. This is a common practice in the Korean pop industry and has been the case since at least the 1990s (Parc and Kim 2018) where K-pop groups upload their latest songs onto the internet for free and then organize concerts, “tours,” or events for a fee. In this context, a much larger set of relations has emerged between the music producers and the consumers based on “fandoms”—between the artist and each fan as well as among the fans themselves—generating vast revenues and changing the social and artistic environment of the music industry (Otmazgin and Lyan 2019). In this respect, it must be stressed that these fandom-related activities are not included in the global music revenues, which is a systematic under-evaluation of the contribution by the digital companies to the music industry.

Of course, making works more visible via the internet for a longer period increases their chances to be sold and thus reenergizes their commercial life. However, from a cultural perspective this commercial aspect may not be the most important one. Rather, it is the capacity to boost creativity and diversity that has been neglected by inefficient labels that should be stressed. As illustrated in Figure 3, the informing activity of the digital companies

shifts the bell-shaped curves of every musical work both upwards and rightwards.<sup>6</sup> An upward shift reflects the increased awareness on the existence of the work at time  $t$ , hence its increased likelihood to be purchased. A rightward shift mirrors the increased awareness of the existence of the work on a longer period. The combined result is the shift of all the bell-shaped curves to the north-east—from QRS to QUV (with V being located either between S and D, or above D as shown in Figure 3 if the information effect of the digital companies is large enough).



**Figure 3. The “advertising” effect by digital companies**

Source: I would like to express my deep gratitude to Prof. Jimmyn Parc for allowing me to use this figure from his forthcoming work.

This combined north-east shift needs to be carefully assessed. It illustrates the gains in efficiency that, everything else being constant, the labels can achieve due to the information activity of the digital companies. These gains should thus not be confused with those created by technological changes in the case of music, such as saving on the costs of printing CDs, transporting them to retail outlets, and stocking them until they are purchased. Figure 3 does not reflect this kind of improvement. Rather, it focuses on the gains in efficiency that the labels and the music producers can derive from more

effective information on all the existing copyrighted works collected by the digital companies, like Google or Naver.

From a cultural perspective, this improvement has two key effects. First, the rightward shift of the QRS curve is particularly crucial for the “average” musical work—those which have had a potential that has not been properly highlighted due to inefficient or careless distributors. A longer visibility means a longer memory of past achievements, hence more opportunities for these neglected works to be “re-discovered.” This is particularly important for the cultural life of a country if one considers—as this paper does—that “average” works are the critical base that prepares the ground for new ideas and approaches in subsequent musical works. The “culture” of a country should not be seen only through the lens of its successful works. That would miss many aspects of the evolutionary process of this culture and indeed would probably make it very hard to understand correctly.<sup>7</sup> In other words, expanding the visibility of all past works sets the opportunity for a richer and more robust “accumulable” culture in the future (Parc and Moon, 2019).

Second, the north-east shift of the bell-shaped curves for the “average” works are likely to be larger—in proportion—than its equivalent for the very successful works. This is because the labels tend to be more efficient and/or diligent for successful works than for average works simply because they have much more at stake in terms of their own revenues. In short, digitization reduces the discrimination by the music labels in favor of the most profitable works: it benefits proportionally more the authors having created “average works” with some untapped potential than the successful authors. This is a conclusion that may surprise people who tend to perceive digitization as always reinforcing the existing discrimination among the works.

This analysis raises a final question. What have been the business reactions of the historical labels to the informing capacities of the digital companies which are equivalent to free advertising? Have they “passed on” to their authors and consumers some of the gains from the free offering they have benefited from? And/or have they used the information on the works which compete with those produced by their authors in order to sharpen their future supply? For the time being, these questions do not seem to have

attracted much attention in the public debate—an omen not propitious to the music industry as a whole and to the welfare of its consumers.

## **Section 5. Fighting piracy**

The second key function of a label is to fight the piracy of the works it has copyright over. Piracy has been by far the dominant accusation among the labels against digital companies in the early 2000s and was mostly fueled by Napster's business model which was launched in June 1999. It was a digital service based on an easy-to-handle peer-to-peer file-sharing technology, allowing users who had computers and access to download music for free—an unsustainably low price or fee for producing music in the long run. In fact, Napster's life was very short—it ended in July 2001—and there has been no attempt to relaunch such a platform.

Napster's failure has revealed the fact that, to be sustainable, the business strategies of the online streaming companies should satisfy two conditions, not one: their fees should be low enough to attract consumers from the labels but high enough to convince the labels—which own 75-80 percent of all the music rights—to put their copyrighted works on the streaming platforms. In 2014, Spotify's streaming service offered this right balance of qualities: instant access, positive user experience, modest subscription fee, and a vast catalogue. The right mix of these features has been a powerful force to reduce piracy by making it a substantially less attractive option for most music consumers. Following this, Spotify then needed three more years to reach an agreement with the US music copyright holders in order to consolidate its business for the long term, and to convince critics that the new streaming music industry could offer tangible returns for authors, labels, and consumers in a sustainable manner.

This brief overview shows that digital companies have significantly contributed to the fight against piracy when they distributed works copyrighted by labels. Would that still be the case when digital companies copyright the works of their “own” music producers? To answer this question one needs to understand that the magnitude of piracy depends crucially upon the pricing policies among the initial copyright holders. If the labels price

their copyrighted works based on “reasonable” costs and “normal” profits (as in competitive markets), then piracy will remain limited. By contrast, if the prices of the copyrighted works are based on “supra-normal” profits and “excessive” costs—two factors that copyright laws encourage as shown in Section 3 above—then large-scale piracy can easily prosper. In short widespread piracy is a self-inflicted injury that companies holding copyrights impose on themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Three revealing episodes of the labels’ monopolistic behavior in the CD markets during the whole 2000s illustrate this point. First, in 2000, the six major world music labels were sued by the US and EU competition authorities for price collusion in the CD retail sector—a practice that has increased the CD sale price in the US by an estimated 2 to 5 USD (for a total price around 15 to 18 USD) (Federal Trade Commission 2000). The industry reacted with a series of mergers which brought down the number of major music labels to three (totaling 85 percent of CD sales in the US). This move can be seen as a legally acceptable substitute to fix prices. Second, in the mid-2000s, CD producers in the EU have lodged complaints against alleged dumping by CD exporters from other countries (China, Hong Kong, and Malaysia in the 2005-2006 EU antidumping cases). Although these complaints have not led to the imposition of formal antidumping duties, they have generated a “chilling” effect on foreign exporters as so often happens (Messerlin 1990). This has induced these exporters to restrain their supply and/or to increase their prices in the EU—in short to soften their competitive pressures in the EU markets. Third, the substantial and persistent differences among CD retail prices in the various EU Member States during these years are reflective of a long-lasting lack of competition among the firms operating in these markets: none of the labels has sought to take advantage of this situation by importing into the more expensive markets in the EU CDs from cheaper countries in the bloc as a way to reduce the price differences among the regional markets.

The success of the digital companies in taming piracy has depended upon one crucial condition: the catalogues of musical works held by the digital providers should be vast enough to compensate the low fees per stream by

ensuring that their online works receives a very large number of streams. To achieve this result, digital companies have faced a major obstacle: thanks to the private contracts, the “effective use” of copyrighted works has been in the hands of the labels—the *de facto* owners of 75-80 percent of copyrighted musical works. The last two decades have thus witnessed very tough negotiations between the labels and the streaming operators on the access to musical works.

These conflicts have been so intense that they have led digital companies to circumvent labels by investing directly into the production stage of the music industry, hence copyrighting music works. In this context, would the digital companies pursue the same business approach as the major labels? The above analysis of the copyright laws presented in Section 3 and 4 leaves little doubt that, once in the business of copyrighting singers or composers, digital companies are likely to follow the same behavior as the music labels—possibly to the point of setting subscription fees high enough to fuel piracy again in the streaming sector.

## **Section 6. Paying the authors**

Over the last decades, the labels have pursued several bad management practices in paying their authors. These practices have been made “necessary” to cope with the fact that the labels have not invested enough to have an accurate, transparent, and checkable system of information on the earnings of their authors. What follows describes briefly the most prevalent bad practices—the “dirty secrets” of day-to-day copyright management that are described in great precision in a thorough study by Rethink Music (2015) on which the following paragraphs are based.

First, the information on the commercial success of the works provided by most labels does not generally allow the authors to actively monitor their earnings in a rigorous manner. The labels often provide a long list of revenues and costs that authors have a hard time to doublecheck, digest, and analyze, even more so because this information is often not produced in a friendly digital form.<sup>9</sup>



Second, this lack of information has been made more costly by the complex legal structure of the different copyrights in place. In the music industry, the two basic rights—sound recording and musical composition—often are combined with at least half-a-dozen other rights, such as those related to mechanical reproduction or public performance (for a thorough presentation of all these rights in the British case, see Monument 2017). Each of these rights generates revenues according to specific rules for the various beneficiaries concerned. This arcane system leads to wide differences between the revenues granted to the authors by the labels.

Third, as one should expect, all these complexities have led to endless errors and omissions in the calculated earnings. The risk of mistakes has been compounded by the fact that the labels often use a system of explicit or implicit “advance payments.” In the case of the authors, advances are often paid at the beginning of their contracts—transforming authors’ revenues into *de facto* loans and the copyrights into quasi-financial assets for 70 years or more. The labels have also shifted a notable share of the financial burden of their investments to physical retail stores by imposing them to buy more copies of the newly released music works than they could reasonably sell, and to pay these copies in advance (and return them at a later stage).

Fourth, these advance regimes raise the thorny question of adjusting the advances received to the revenues actually earned by the authors during the commercial life of their works. Labels tend to cope with these difficulties in very casual ways. Revenues that could not be quickly attributable to an author are placed into escrow accounts until the right copyright holder is found, hence generating long delays before finally paying them. In the case where there is no clue on who to pay, the “orphan” revenues are distributed among authors of the labels according to formulas having little economic sense (such as distributing these revenues among all the authors of the label proportionally to their earnings, that is, giving the lion’s share to the most successful authors) or even allocating these orphan revenues to the labels themselves.

Finally, further bad practices have been extended to the musical works broadcasted in shopping malls or public events. In most OECD countries,

copyright regulations deal with these cases by requiring that the organizers of these events pay the revenues to the right holders through the so-called “collective collecting societies” (CCS). Ideally, the CCS should get the most accurate information on the true occurrences of all the musical works broadcasted in each mall or event. However, they have instead often relied on crude sampling methods for measuring the occurrences of the works in a limited number of malls or events judged as “representative” and extrapolating these samplings to all the other cases. In fact, there are countless anecdotes on strange CCS decisions. For instance, in 2005, Pierre Merejkowsky was asked to pay a fee of 1000 euros for having whistled for seven seconds the “*Internationale*”—the well-known hymn of the international socialist movement—in the film *Insurrection Resurrection* (2004) for which he was actor and director (Vulser 2005). The reason invoked was that, as the composer of the “*Internationale*” died in 1932, his work was not yet in the public domain (it entered in 2014).

The main conclusion of this brief overview is that the bad management practices of the labels have been very hostile to “culture.” In particular, they have tended to reinforce the discriminatory treatment of the earnings in favor of the labels and their successful authors and heirs, and against their “average” authors—those that this paper considers as a key reservoir of cultural creativity and diversity in the country. It is also important to note that these bad practices tend to be more prevalent in the case of authors outside of the country in which the label is based.

Can these practices be amended—and if yes by whom? A preliminary condition would be to build an efficient and transparent information system based on a harmonized nomenclature of all the conceivable rights and earnings in each national cultural industry. It happens that digital companies have shown their capacity to manage streaming services which, in terms of informational requirement, are much more demanding than those required by CDs. For instance, it is reported that a single typical song generates 700,000 separate revenue streams per year. However, the possible contribution of the digital companies to the improvement of the day-to-day management of the authors’ earnings depends critically on the cooperation of the

labels which should not be taken for granted since the labels extract some benefits from the current bad management practices.

## Conclusion

This paper provides two sets of results. First, it challenges the general perception held toward the evolution of global music markets over the past two decades. It argues that their collapse between 2001 and 2014 reflects more the existence of “excessive” expenses imposed upon the music consumers at the beginning of this period rather than the existence of depressed revenues at the end of the period. The rigid format of CDs has imposed on many consumers an overwhelmingly high level of expenses compared to their “true demand” of music—too many songs per CD, too high quality, and excessive durability. This explanation fits well with the complete halt in the growth of the US music market between 1994 and 2001, that is before the onset of online digitization. Second, in using digitization as a scapegoat for the troubles of the global music markets, the major labels have been unable to make a much-needed critical review of their business practices. This is also partly explained by the tight enforcement of copyright laws which has induced labels to be systematically less efficient and diligent than they should have been. This second factor has greatly contributed to make particularly dramatic the collapse of the revenues and the adjustments needed.

The second set of results deals with the current and future relationships between the labels and the digital companies regarding the three main functions pursued by these two types of companies.

First, digital companies have been able to provide access to an abundant information on virtually all existing cultural works regardless of the copyright and for free of charge. In this respect, these digital companies have exerted a powerful counterbalance to the inefficiency or negligence of the major labels. From a cultural perspective, this effect is particularly crucial for the works which are not among the few successful ones—the “average” works. A longer visibility of these works is important for the cultural life of a country if one considers—as this paper does—that they are the critical

foundation that prepares the ground for a richer “accumulable culture” in the future (Parc and Moon 2019).

Second, there has been the widespread fear among the labels and many authors that digitization would ruin the music industry by fueling piracy. In this respect, the Napster episode—though it lasted only roughly one year and has not reemerged—has left deep scars. Today though, it should be observed that when digital companies distribute musical works that are initially copyrighted by the labels, the modest “subscription fees” they charge have constituted an effective anti-piracy policy. This shows that the true solution to piracy remains in the hands of the cultural companies—whether labels or digital companies—rather than governments. By contrast, when digital companies are investing in their own production of copyrighted works, they are likely to follow the precedent of the major labels—the copyright laws created intrinsic incentives to “over-price” the access to the works, whoever the copyright holders are.

Finally, can digital companies avoid the many day-to-day bad management practices toward paying their authors as pursued by the major labels over the past fifty years—difficulties for the authors to monitor their earnings, endless errors and omissions, and debatable practices on what to do with the earnings of the forgotten or unknown authors? The capacity of digital companies to manage huge databases makes them good candidates to improve the situation. However, to be successful, this role would need the active cooperation of the labels that should not be taken for granted because these bad management practices have been profitable to them, either by reducing their operating costs or by increasing their revenues.

This paper has focused mostly on the behavior of firms—incumbent music labels or new digital companies. Future research could explore whether there is a role for governments on these issues. One role would be to contribute to building well-designed international standardized nomenclatures covering all types of copyrights and their associated earnings. A second role—much more ambitious—would be to reduce the powerful incentives existing in the current copyright laws which induce firms to inefficiency or negligence. As argued in a previous paper (Parc and Messerlin 2021), redu-

cing the duration (at present at least 70 years after the death of the authors) of the copyright laws would be a huge step forward in this respect.

## Notes

1. To our knowledge, IFPI has not published the equivalent of Figure 1 for the years 1994-2000.
2. A similar evolution with US popular music has been thoroughly examined by Waldfogel (2018).
3. Indeed, the music labels have recognized the burden imposed on consumers by the “full” CD format, hence they launched various formats, such as the Mini CD single which was designed to be a replacement for the 7-inch record.
4. See Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021666796/#:~:text=-Following%20the%20first%20edition%2C%20which,%2C%20Dutch%2C%20and%20Low%20German.>
5. The fact that the longer the duration, the stronger the monopoly power of the label vis-à-vis both its authors and the competing labels explains why the last century has witnessed a series of successful efforts by labels to lengthen the duration of copyrights: 14 years in 1790, 28 years in 1831, 47 years in 1968, 50 years in 1970 and 70 years (initial term) in 1998 in the US and extended to all other industrial countries.
6. In Figure 3 as in Figure 2, the location and shape of curve QRS has two meanings. On the one hand, it reflects the intrinsic “attractivity” of the musical work for consumers: the more attractive a song, the higher and longer its bell-shaped curve of revenues compared to the curves of the other songs. On the other hand, they mirror the “quality” of the business practices by the labels—how efficiently and diligently the label in question has been handling the distribution and marketing of the copyrighted work at stake. For the same song, a more efficient and/or diligent label gets a bell-shaped curve higher and/or longer than a less efficient and/or more negligent label. This analysis can be illustrated in Figure 2 (and 3) by drawing a set of bell-shaped curves ranking the labels by their efficiency and diligence at any period: the least efficient and diligent label would be illustrated by a curve close to the origin O, and the most efficient one by a curve far away from O.
7. In fact, this explains why rediscovering ancient culture places so much effort in the study of the inherited “average” works.
8. Of course, these basic considerations vary depending on specific factors: the consumers’ attitudes with respect to piracy can vary from country to country; the fact that pirated works may be of lower quality than original works may not always matter (the “higher” quality may not have value for consumers); the most expensive part of piracy is often related to the distribution of the pirated works, not to their production; and, last but not least, the cost of eliminating pirated works.

9. This explains the huge number of managers hired by singers and composers in order to better understand and monitor their revenues. However, these managers are often an additional source of institutional difficulties and of costs for the authors.

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# This Genre Which Is Not One

## The Philippine Multicharacter Film

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### Abstract

The use of multiple characters in film may sound like a commonplace occurrence, but by actual standard definitions of characters, most commercial movies have historically only featured primarily heroes, or at most heroes with partners or antagonists. The dismantling of this unarticulated rule, which insisted that the audience be able to identify with the same character throughout a film narrative, began to be explored after the collapse of Classical Hollywood and the influx of European influences in US and global cinema. The Philippines had its own mode of multicharacter presentation, sustained via the launching of multiple stars in distinctively named batches. The persistence of this mode of narrative film practice as a commercially recognized (and profitable) genre preceded the same handling of multicharacter films in the West. It also enabled local viewers and critics to perceive and appreciate formally grounded critiques of Philippine society and culture.

### Keywords

smorgasbord movie; milieu realism; Ishmael Bernal; genre progressivity; Marcos dictatorship; Golden Ages

Movies with multiple lead characters had difficulty acquiring recognition in film practice—and, concomitantly, in film studies as well. Paradoxically, such films tended to persist in the guise of various generic categories: the love-triangle setup, for example, was more usually announced and marketed as a romantic comedy, while a narrative that featured a gangster, his gun moll, and the detective who hunts him down would be presented as a suspense thriller.

The preceding samples turned on the presence of three characters each for a crucial reason: triangulated relationships may be arguably considered as constituting the minimal number of characters essential in identifying a plot situation as “multiple”: that is, neither heroic nor dual (which, observing critical convention, may be arguably one major character and her or his obverse). The tendency of these narratives to be unstable as equal-opportunity presentations often results in the triangle collapsing into one or two of the characters—the person torn between two lovers, for example, or the gangster and/or the detective. This may be the reason why conventional commercial cinema, especially during the Classical Hollywood period, was perceived less in terms of number of characters than in terms of other generic markers.

This article will be considering the reconfiguration of multicharacter cinema into a generic category unique for its time in the Philippines. It will track the origin of the genre as the successful marketing strategy of a studio associated with the country’s First Golden Age, and its persistence into and transformation during the Second Golden Age ushered in by the pro-filmic martial law regime of Ferdinand E. Marcos. It will observe the parallel developments in European, American, and Third-World cinema that impacted Filipino practitioners, even as the recognition of multicharacter movies as a type of genre arrived later in the global scene. Finally, it will problematize the possible future scenarios for this filmmaking mode and genre, during the period when the technological conditions of production and distribution have been permanently altered by digital innovations.

## Land of the Morning

Film was introduced to the Philippines toward the twilight years of Spanish colonial rule. The first chronophotographic screenings were held on December 31, 1896, the day after the execution by firing squad of José P. Rizál, the polymath patriot whom the Americans eventually declared the Philippines's national hero (Deocampo, *Cine* 47-53).<sup>1</sup> Typical of the Americans' intervention as colonial newcomers anxious to prove themselves better than their European counterparts, the US (among other things) dismantled Spain's clerically administered system of governance and replaced it with secular government, promoted public education and the use of the English language (in contrast with the Spanish friars' insistence on learning local languages in order to retain Spanish as a language exclusive to the colonizers and their compradors), and conflated the necessary militarization of anti-colonial strongholds with hygienic measures intended to control the spread of cholera and other infectious diseases (see Anderson).

Not surprisingly, one of the first film endeavors during American colonial rule actually constituted a race in 1912 between two US entrepreneurs to provide a feature film based on the life (and death) of Rizál, several years before the first film produced and directed by a Filipino, Jose Nepomuceno's *Country Maiden* (*Dalagang Bukid*, 1919), was released (Deocampo, *Film* 16, 261-93; see Figure 1). In effect, the US reintroduced to the Philippines the idea of the people coexisting with a foreign occupant as in much the same way, it also reintroduced film—and succeeded where the Spaniards had faltered. Part of the reason was external, since the US was in the process of dominating global cinema production and could easily facilitate its own citizens' production, distribution, and exhibition activities in its overseas territories.



**Figure 1.** A scene from *Country Maiden* (directed by Jose Nepomuceno, 1919). In *Manila Nueva*, 13 Sep. 1919, from Tofighian (79).

Understandably, Philippine film practice paralleled structures and trends observed by the US during the Classical Hollywood period, and allowed itself an increasing measure of non-US global influence at roughly the same moment that the US yielded to the libertarian and technical changes wrought by European art cinema, from the 1960s onward. By the end of the 1950s, the same vertically integrated system that was busted in the US by the decision, known formally as *United States v. Paramount Pictures Inc.* (334 US 131) or the Hollywood Antitrust Case, effectively ended an era dominated in Philippine practice since pre-War times by an oligopoly of three major studios. All three continued operating into the Second Golden Age, but were challenged by a glut of independent production companies, many of which were founded and run by stars headlining their own projects.<sup>2</sup>

Among the so-called Big Three, Sampaguita Pictures is of special significance, not just in terms of multicharacter film production but also in its participation in Philippine political history. Having been the outfit where beauty queen and aspiring starlet Imelda Romualdez screen-tested right before she became the wife (via whirlwind courtship) of a then-rising politician, Ferdinand Marcos, it was able to claim the right to produce the

Marcoses' biographical campaign-movie, Conrado Conde et al.'s *Destined by Fate: The Ferdinand E. Marcos Story* (*Iginuhit ng Tadhana*, 1965, see Figure 2),<sup>3</sup> as well as its sequel for Marcos's re-election, Eddie Garcia's *Heaven's Fate* (*Pinagbuklod ng Langit*, 1969). Its owner's daughter and heir, Marichu Vera-Perez Maceda, became part of Imelda Marcos's powerful Blue Ladies circle and was appointed one of the directors of the Marcos regime's official film agency, the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines.



**Figure 2.** Ferdinand E. Marcos (second from left) celebrates winning the Philippine presidency with the personnel of *Destined by Fate*: Luis Gonzales, left (who played Marcos); Gloria Romero, second from right (who portrayed Imelda Marcos); and “Doc” Perez, film producer. From *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 31 Mar. 2012.

Sampaguita Pictures modeled itself after Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios' “more stars than there are in heaven” motto (Carey 159). It was therefore no surprise that its founder, “Doc” Jose R. Perez, dared to embark on launching a significant batch of 10 new performers—the only First Golden Age outfit to attempt star-building after the 1950s. What was of longer-term import was the more commercially motivated announcement that the studio's movie projects would start featuring the new faces, collectively called “Stars '66” after the year of their launch. The film projects would also collectively be known as smorgasbord movies (after the Swedish buffet,

redolent of the *lauriat* but avoiding, following then-prevalent racist practice, any association with Chinese culture—see Appendix A).

## Star Wars

A few years after the declaration of martial law in September 1972, also marking the start of the Marcos dictatorship, Philippine film practitioners ushered in what has since been described as the Second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema.<sup>4</sup> Sampaguita Pictures became increasingly inactive and was superseded by the now-semi-active Regal Films, the most successful Philippine film studio of all time, with over 800 titles since its first regular production in 1976.

The smorgasbord-movie concept persisted in large-cast film projects, but without the production companies identifying the film type or its originating studio. Even Sampaguita Pictures dropped the practice of using the term, possibly because it no longer became profitable to do so. An even likelier reason is that the multi-episode multi-lead movie transmuted into a then-unnamed subgenre of melodrama, focused on fallen women, usually sex workers.<sup>5</sup> These hostess films (to belatedly adopt South Korean terminology) would have challenged any First Golden Age studio's carefully cultivated wholesome image. In fact, the major Philippine multicharacter filmmaker, Ishmael Bernal, directed a sex-comedy for Sampaguita's subsidiary VP Pictures (from the owners' family name, Vera-Perez), titled *Bad Example: I Have Seven Wives* (*Huwag Tularan: Pito ang Asawa Ko*, 1974), but was discouraged from working again with the outfit because of the meddling by "Doc" Perez, "who replaced scenes in [the film] against his wishes" (Bernal et al. 102).

That Bernal's self-described first sex-themed film with Sampaguita was also his last (Bernal et al. 101) is of symbolic significance, in terms of Sampaguita's abandonment of the smorgasbord format, or at least the terminology it used for it. Bernal would continue tinkering with multicharacter arrangements as well as with hostess-film assignments, and would finally manage to come up with the first recognizable Filipino multicharacter movie with *Pleasure* (*Aliw*, 1979), an interwoven narrative on three female

nightclub workers. *Pleasure* was his final film assignment for Jesse Ejercito (brother of deposed Philippine President Joseph Estrada), although they continued collaborating in other capacities. They had planned on one final project together, *Siyete Belyas* (which translates as both “seven beauties” and “seven [taxi] dancers”), featuring Ejercito’s own update on Stars ’66, comprising seven actresses collectively known also as *Siyete Belyas*.

Ejercito was known as both a risk-taking producer and a savvy star-builder, and had launched several actresses to capitalize on the so-called bold trend, a soft-core tempering of the pre-martial law’s hard-core *bomba* (or “bomb”) sex melodramas.<sup>6</sup> The aforementioned Regal Films, headed by Chinay (Chinese Filipina) “Mother” Lily Yu Monteverde, coined a new term, bold, for its highly profitable soft-core productions. Mother Lily also effectively preempted Ejercito’s *Siyete Belyas*’s film foray—which had reached only as far as a theater revue titled *The Belles Are Swinging*—by launching the Regal Babies, a more recognizable Stars ’66 appropriation with three young women paired with three young men (Constantino). Regal’s closest rival, Viva Films, introduced a more *Siyete Belyas*-type group, all-men rather than all-women this time, collectively named after their launching movie, Maryo J. de los Reyes’s *Bagets* (1984).<sup>7</sup>

With the swing to a libertarian policy necessitated by the inauguration of the Marcos regime’s Manila International Film Festival in 1982 (as a pre-event to be followed by the actual festivals in succeeding years), reinforced by the Marcoses’ defensive posture following the assassination of opposition leader Benigno S. Aquino Jr. in 1983, several batches of women stars had to be launched in order to meet the demand for profitable sex-film productions, which once more crossed over from “bold” to hard-core. The most famous ones were the series of actresses introduced by Rey de la Cruz, who selected batch themes and renamed the women accordingly (David, “The Fantasy World of Rey de la Cruz” 12). In chronological order, these comprised the “softdrink beauties” (Coca Nicolas, Sarsi Emmanuelle, Pepsi Paloma, plus an “uncola,” Myra Manibog); the “hard-drink beauties” (Remy Martin, Chivas Regal, Vodka Zobel, and Brandy Ayala); and, after the 1986 people-power revolt, the “revolutionary beauties” (Aida Dimaporo, Ava



Manotoc, Vanessa Ver, Lota Misuari, and Polly Cayetano—all named after then-controversial political figures). The satirical wordplay quickly became the template for all the other local star-builders—witness, for example, the early 1980s’ so-called and nearly forgotten “street beauties” (Ayala Buendia, Aurora Boulevard, Remedios Malate, Lerma Morayta, and, in reference to the Pasig River’s Jones Bridge, Bridget Jones).

## Genre Complications

The main reason for the gap between the emergence of multicharacter films and their recognition as a distinctive genre is that film genres conformed to the popular practice of literature, rather than the original distinctions it made based on formal properties. That is, rather than defining genres using the filmic counterparts of poetry, drama, fiction, et al., film practitioners, scholars, and audiences relied on the classifications deployed by narrative literature (including theater), such as comedy, drama, musical, horror, war, Western, etc. Compared to the form-based differences that marked early literary practice, the popular idea of genre tends to induce complications in determining consistency across categories (Langford 4-5), although it admittedly allows for shifts in individual generic trends and the constant redefinition of samples.

Official (US Academy) recognition for the multicharacter contributions of American filmmakers arrived later—specifically, when the Oscars set aside its recognition of Ang Lee’s initially favored *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) in favor of Paul Haggis’s *Crash* (2004, Figure 3). As if to reaffirm its increasingly controversial decision, the Academy decided to give its life achievement award the next year to Robert Altman, who specialized in the form, and whose peak achievement, *Nashville* (1975), swept all the available major critics’ prizes for its year of release but was cold-shouldered by the Academy in favor of a more conventionally plotted entry. The *New York Times* argued that it was time to recognize “movies with multiple story lines” (Farber), and quoted filmmakers Miranda July (“To me a single story seems like a very classical form, almost as if you’re competing with the Greeks”) and, more extensively, Stephen Gaghan (“Tolstoy said that the most important

element in writing fiction is your ability to master transitions. [A multiple-narrative film] turns out to be such a cinematic idea. You can cut from a radical cleric addressing disaffected young people to a massive yacht in the Mediterranean. There is a lot of power in those juxtapositions”). A later *Times* article reviewing a recent release, Ray Lawrence’s *Jindabyne*, closes with a reference to “the kind of multi-stranded narrative that has become... the dominant genre of international prestige filmmaking” (Scott).



**Figure 3.** Officer Johnson (Kathleen York) provides a report on an officer shooting to Detective Graham Waters (Don Cheadle) and his partner Ria (Jennifer Esposito). A series of random events highlighted by an opening collision where Detective Waters and Ria were involved will culminate in another vehicular accident toward the end of the narrative in *Crash* (directed by Paul Haggis, 2004). Film still by Rialto Film, from Cine Image.

The predicament for anyone interested in studying multiple-character films is that narrative studies of character (as a theory, not as any specific literary entity) are not as abundant as studies of, say, plot or story. Jonathan Culler describes character as “the major aspect of the novel to which structuralism has paid least attention and has been least successful in treating” (230), while Roland Barthes critiques the valorizing of character in the practice of

New Criticism as “an individual, a ‘person,’ in short a fully constituted ‘being’ ... [who] stopped being subordinate to the action, embodied immediately psychological essences” (104); he describes this modification as an attempt to step forward from the notion of character in Aristotelian poetics as “secondary, entirely subsidiary to the notion of action: there may be actions without ‘characters’ ... but not characters without an action” (105). Barthes upholds structural analysis’s “utmost reluctance to treat the character as an essence, even merely for purposes of classification” (105), and points out the futility of privileging a “class of actors” by citing as an example the existence in many narratives of

two adversaries in conflict over some stake; the subject is then truly double, not reducible further by substitution. Indeed, this is even perhaps a common archaic form, as though narrative, after the fashion of certain languages, had also known a *dual* of persons.... If therefore a privileged class of actors is retained (the subject of the quest, of the desire, of the action), it needs at least to be made more flexible by bringing that actant under the very categories of the grammatical (and not psychological) person. (Barthes 108-09)

Eventually, and possibly inevitably, it was US film scholar David Bordwell who addressed the issue of what he termed “network narratives,” in *Poetics of Cinema*. In a stand-alone article, “Mutual Friends and Chronologies of Chance,” he noted how from the 1990s onward, several Hollywood films went beyond the single-protagonist or dual (romantic and/or rival) protagonists in their narrative construction, maintaining that the three-or-more characters’ interactions were controlled by happenstance (chapter 7). Bordwell provided exemplary readings of large-cast samples, starting with Robert Altman’s *Nashville*, but he made no distinction between the latter film and those with fewer protagonists beyond noting how more characters would result in more complexity. His insistence on perceiving these films’ characters as isolated enabled him to conduct atomized microanalyses of specific samples in his survey of the field. More productive for this project was Bordwell’s recommendation, in his introductory article, “Poetics of Cinema,” to be aware of three possible approaches in providing a poetics of any filmic phenomenon: the analytic method, which describes

the material; the historical method, which situates it in a specific period and setting, to better understand its practitioners' motives and preparations; and the audience response, which grasps the viewers' receptiveness and reading strategies (chapter 7).

A book-length study, María del Mar Azcona's *The Multi-Protagonist Film*, came out within the present decade to enlarge mainly on Bordwell's discourse. The text, from its title onward, identifies the form as a genre unto itself and attempts to solve the predicament of identifying what type of character appears in multicharacter movies; on the other hand, many types of lead characters may not necessarily be technically protagonistic—antagonists, for example, or romantic interests, or narrators; in an extreme instance, in *Nashville*, a nearly invisible character, Hal Phillip Walker, makes his presence felt throughout the film solely via his voice recordings. Azcona usefully defines the film-texts as marked by a “wider” group of characters without a strict hierarchy among themselves (2), brings up overlooked commentators such as still-to-be-translated scholar Margrit Tröhler and scriptwriting manual author Linda Aronson, and echoes the importance Bordwell imparts to editing as a means of providing “intensified continuity” (39).

Like Bordwell, Azcona regards an increase in the number of lead characters as resulting in greater complexity, and considers the globalized multicharacter sample, emblemized by Stephen Gaghan's *Syriana* (2005), celebrating its demonstration of the so-called butterfly effect and its use of an open ending as “recurrent convention” rather than as a means of enabling sequelizations (140-43). It is in these terms that the practice of multicharacter cinema in the Philippines departs from US discourse, aside from its earlier designations as a genre.

### **Audience as Starting Point**

A number of factors can be marshaled as possible explanations for the receptiveness of Filipino movie-goers toward multiple lead-character films. Perhaps too literal, one observation would be the close resemblance in the Philippines between film theaters and Spanish-era Catholic churches. For

local audiences to look front and upward while seated in rows in regular attendance, one need only replace altars with screens in order to complete the analogy. The element of multiplicity comes in when we consider the spectacle available in the major traditional churches: the *retablos* (see Figure 4), or altar pieces, reminiscent of Mexico, where “the foci were the niches containing the *santos* [icons of the saints]” (Javellana 156).



Figure 4. The *retablo* behind the altar and Mass assemblage, at the Chapel of the Holy Guardian Angel at the Holy Angel University in Angeles City, Pampanga Province. Photographed by Robby Tangingco, used with permission.

Such feudal ideals lay behind the Marcos dictatorship’s plan to repack Manila as a larger entity—a metropolis encompassing over a dozen cities (originally only four), with Imelda Romualdez Marcos appointed by

her husband as its governor in 1975. Replicating the Spanish-era rural town model, the area was named Metro Manila after its crown jewel, Manila (known during the colonial era as the “Pearl of the Orient”); Manila itself would be further distinguished by being called the City of Man, with the reclaimed area, known as the Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex, serving as the equivalent of the town plaza (Lico 83-126).

In attempting to track the origin and development of the Philippine multicharacter film genre, we also wind up with a taxonomy and a set of terminologies distinct from those used by US practitioners. Only one name, the smorgasbord film, referred to the productions (of a specific studio) that featured multiple lead characters. Other specialized types of multicharacter films, usually with the minimum of three, centered on love triangles or what may now retrospectively be termed the hostess films. Yet except for omnibus-episodic features, these types of films were “multiple” in conception only, since the commercial narrative tendency to focus on singular heroes or (romantic or antagonistic) couples was difficult to avoid, and required conceptual skills that practitioners still had to develop.

One Sampaguita star, Eddie Rodriguez, set up his own studio to specialize in love-triangle films, starring himself as actor (and essential hero) caught between the romantic desires of two women. He had hired Ishmael Bernal for a project that would have been the artist’s directorial debut, but the latter had insisted on too many comedic innovations; as reported by Petronilo Bn. Daroy, “Although his name was retained in the credits as director, Bernal, on the first day of the showing of the film, was compelled to disown it” (Bernal et al. 6). Bernal maintained the triple-character structure throughout the early part of his career, mostly via love triangles. However, after Altman’s *Nashville* made a splash among the intelligentsia, his friendly rival Lino Brocka came up with a nominally similar attempt with *Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday* (*Lunes, Martes, Miyerkules, Huwebes, Biyernes, Sabado, Linggo*, 1976), a hostess movie where an entertainer represented each day of the week in a nightclub in the US naval base’s red-light district, but whose narrative eventually focalized

on a young man who visits the club in search of his mother (who turned out to be one of the older entertainers).

From this point onward, Bernal began introducing destabilizing elements to his love-triangle assignments, such as banishing the central male character in *Mole on the Water* (*Nunal sa Tubig*, 1976) or allowing all three to accept a polyamorous arrangement in *You Are Mine* (*Ikaw Ay Akin*, 1978). With a triple-character hostess film assignment in *Pleasure* (1979), Bernal managed to interweave the women's narratives without favoring any single individual as exemplary or as representative of the others. Instead of having each character's story unfold one after the other (per the standard episodic "hostess movie" procedure), the filmmaker could maximize their interactions in their workplace and resist favoring any one of them (see Figure 5). Each of the characters (the minimum of three) could have a series of lovers as a requisite of her profession; but with the narrative constantly returning to the working woman, none of the relationships needed to be valorized over the others. With Bernal's literary background, he was still able to devote some attention to characterization so that the central "hostesses" in *Pleasure* manage to have distinctive (if standard) developments. Their individual resolutions build up to a variation on the personal-as-political principle, where their private and professional concerns overlap, and require a benevolent dressing-down from their nightclub manager.



Figure 5. Three triple-character exercises from Ishmael Bernal (left to right): *Mole on the Water* (1976), a male-centered love triangle where the man recedes from the conflict he created before returning to resume his responsibilities; *You Are Mine* (1978), another male-centered love triangle where the man persuades his lovers to arrive at an understanding between them; and *Pleasure* (1979), where the male figures become secondary to the concerns of nightclub workers. From the *Pro Bernal Anti Bio* group on Facebook, used with permission.



With the triumph of *Pleasure* as both a commercial attempt and a triple-character narrative, Bernal effectively ushered in an era of multi-character film production in the Philippines—a mode of practice that complemented the studios’ and talent managers’ strategy (recapitulating the Stars ’66 tradition) of launching new stars in identifiable batches. Bernal immediately followed through with increasingly larger numbers of lead characters—*Underage* (*Menor de Edad*, 1979—see Figure 6) with six women and *Manila by Night* with 13 lead individuals. Although the “smorgasbord” term was no longer in vogue, producers, practitioners, and critics began to use the term “milieu movie” to refer to the multicharacter format. A specialized area of application, drawn from the “city film” properties of *Nashville*, *Manila by Night*, and a few other samples from global cinema may be induced from the generic recognition and “milieu” terminology used by progressive Philippine artists.



Figure 6. Four of the six women characters in Ishmael Bernal’s *Underage* (*Menor de Edad*, 1979; another Filipino film with the English title *Underage*, also with multiple women characters, came out in 1980). The release print was forced to append a textual coda (opening awkwardly with “Having lived through these restless years, the *menor de edad* found the right way to adulthood,” translated by the author); observers could readily deduce that it was imposed by the Board of Censors for Motion Pictures, which then comprised military personnel and their underlings. Inadvertently such an ending made the film reminiscent of an earlier Hollywood release, George Lucas’s *American Graffiti* (1973). From the *Pro Bernal Anti Bio* group on Facebook, used with permission.



## Social Reality

The method by which *Manila by Night* et al. permit, so to speak, the proliferation of multiple characters would be familiar to people who have seen any of the several multicharacter movies that have virtually become the “official” narrative format of American independent productions. A major character is presented, along with other major characters who may happen to be in the same setting; then the character(s) encounter—sometimes intensively, sometimes merely by chance—a previously unintroduced major character, whom the narrative will proceed to follow, and so on, reminiscent of Max Ophüls’s *The Roundabout*, based on Arthur Schnitzler’s play *Reigen*, written in 1897 (published 1900 though not performed until 1920). This narrative strategy of following one character after another, however, yields a text that introduces and possibly develops a group of people without allowing the viewer to find out how their social relationships function beyond their incidental connections with one another.

The way to genuinely facilitate the depiction of relationships is by having the characters interacting with one another as often as possible, in the manner of contemporary US indie films that center on groups of friends within a community. This permits us to witness a social group with the simultaneous satisfaction of following the development of a number of major characters. One possible disadvantage here, as evident in what we may call the BFF (best friends forever) movies, is that the social group comprises more or less similar social types. A political awareness may be fostered in the characters by their circumstances, as manifested in Lawrence Kasdan’s *The Big Chill* and John Sayles’s *Return of the Secaucus Seven*, the movie to which *Big Chill* paid tribute (Ryan and Kellner 272-79). Yet the depiction of social mechanics is still not facilitated by this method; at most, what we might be able to study definitely is a demonstration of group dynamics via each character’s attendant social aspects.

Would the addition of more characters, representing as wide an array of social types as the text can sustain, provide us with the necessary kind of realism that we are asking for here—complexifying rather than (as Bordwell acknowledges) complicating the presentation? That appears to be the case

in Robert Altman's *Nashville*, but Azcona ventured to add another device, all present in the last three films mentioned: many scenes of social gatherings where several, if not all, of the characters are present. *Nashville*, for example, features a number of circumstances (mostly concerts, but also an airport arrival and a highway pileup) where several characters get together, and builds up to the final outdoor concert where everyone shows up.

With an unexpected proliferation of lead performers, *Manila by Night* succeeded where smorgasbord movies could not but, like *Nashville* and a few other exemplars in world cinema, proceeding from a paradox in classical film narrative (Appendix B). The paradox turns on the presentation and development of character: the less "crowded" a lead character is by other characters, the more she or he can be developed. For this reason, secondary characters are understood as conforming to types or, at best, character sketches (i.e., well-developed types). The challenge in creating a small-group narrative, comprising at least three major characters, is the ability to develop each one to the point where she can be distinct from the others; this development, in fact, can be enhanced by each character's interactions with the others, so the crowding, in this case, works to provide opportunities for any character to be advanced in conjunction with at least one other character. Having two or more characters' dramatic arguments simultaneously advanced in the plot was made possible with the perfection of the deep-focus technique in classical Hollywood, plus an equivalent use in sound, perfected in Robert Altman's Lion's Gate system (Schreger 350).

Hence, when the group onscreen is numerically expanded to the point where full individual character development becomes impossible within a standard screen-time limit, and the film continues to refuse to uphold a hero or even valorize at least a small sector (in effect reducing the narrative scope to focus on a group), the logical expectation is that the movie will fail to advance a character; it would, again at best, be a "mere" conglomeration of successful types. Why, then, does the complaint regarding this shortcoming in characterization never arise in critics' responses to films such as *Nashville* or *Manila by Night*? The answer is that the perception of a character is never really abandoned. When a filmmaker enables types to flourish within the

context of a progressive social critique, an opportunity to develop a different, singular type of character becomes available.

This character does not reside in any of the narrative's actors, but operates on an abstract level. It is, in fact, society that becomes the character—possibly a society defined by the geographic and temporal circumstance that the movie inspects, but a character in dramatic terms nevertheless (David, “Primates in Paradise” 89-90). The society in question experiences a crisis, attempts to seek solutions that in turn generate new crises, and reaches a point (of no return) where a resolution becomes inevitable. As an example, “Manila” in *Manila by Night* attempts (via its characters) to pursue romantic happiness in the course of survival, but these essentially bourgeois-aspirational attempts inevitably lead to frustration and duplicity, so that after each character, unawares, violates a personal commitment, she or he winds up damaged and abandoned by everyone else, most painfully by the very person that they had counted on for love and support. The film narrative distinguishes individual characters by clarifying the degree of pain and heartbreak—and occasionally even hopefulness—that they experience.

### Progressive Turn

The last point to make about multicharacter film design would be its most potentially controversial one: can we consider this form radical, or transgressive, or (put another way) queer? As mentioned earlier, Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner attempted to prescribe what for them constituted progressive cinema—including the “group” or multicharacter film—as well as other characteristics like open-endedness, distantiation, generic playfulness, and attempts at demythologization (269-82). They take care to warn that “the criterion for judging such matters should be pragmatic, one that measures the progressive character of a text according to how well it accomplishes its task in specific contexts of reception” (268).

The approach I would propose comes from an earlier mode of practice, one whose once pre-eminent significance was eventually downgraded, if not dismissed altogether, by the argument presented by Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni's influential *Cahiers du Cinéma* editorial, “Cinema/Ideology/

Criticism,” in which films with political content but conventional (realist) form are considered less productive than those that use form to expose the machinations of ideology (31-32). Comolli and Narboni’s categorization of films according to their combination of formal and ideological properties validated the revaluation of classical Hollywood auteurs and consequently led to a more critical regard of social-realist texts. The opprobrium regarding films that had once laid claim to political awareness and social discursiveness might have been well-deserved, if we consider how Third-World cinemas (including the Philippines’) tended to observe the predictable dichotomy between “commercial” genre production and “artistic” social-realist projects. The modes of reception manifested the filmmakers’ lack of fuller social commitment: the genre products were created for local mass audiences, while the serious outputs were exported to assuage the consciences of foreign-festival jurors and audiences.

If we ascribe the realist property of a film like *Manila by Night* to its specific grounding in time and space, we can see how its depiction of the existence and interaction of types of characters signals its presentation of a cross-section of society. The only additional factor is the infusion of a progressive perspective, in order for us to be able to claim that such multi-character films are social-realist in the way that older attempts (following the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critique) could only hope to be, but were hampered in their observation of conventional film heroics. In Philippine film production, as in Hollywood, only a select few could pull off the multiple-character film format. Among Filipino practitioners, the term they used to describe their projects was “milieu”—a word that recalls the “social” in social realism.

Thus, with the elements of commercial profitability, formulaic description, spectatorial recognition, and some names (milieu movies in general, milieu realism in exceptional cases) coined by practitioners to describe the activity, we can definitively conclude that the multiple-character movie, during the period that it remained a format in Hollywood and elsewhere, was already a distinctive film genre in the Philippines. It reminded Philippine audiences of their then still recent familiarity with smorgasbord films,

and attested to their capacity to follow multiple lines of action along with in-depth compositions and simultaneous delivery of dialog.

At the risk of over-idealizing the milieu-film genre, I'd like to suggest that subtle and transgressive forces were at play. The Philippine Third-World audience, like many elsewhere, attended film screenings in order to amass their store of knowledge and pleasure. In the case of foreign films, the typical viewer would be made to identify with an idealized representation of herself onscreen, enacting the enchantments of material prosperity in fabulous, if not fantastic, locales. With a milieu movie, the viewer could witness a representation of character close to herself—and more than that, she would witness other types playing out conflicts and issues recognizable to her and other members of the audience. Although the Western or Westernized film would be typically bigger-budgeted and consequently feature bigger stars, the comparatively less-affluent nature of the milieu movie, with its compensatory accretion of lead actors, would paradoxically have a grander effect on the native viewer; it were as if she moved from an austere, though well-appointed transept chapel that featured one saint (the Western-style movie star) to the center of the cathedral, facing the *retablo* with its impressive proliferation of icons.

With *Manila by Night's* combined notoriety (nearly a year-long ban, with the release version marked by a title change as well as the longest list of cuts and deletions ever imposed on a Filipino movie) and prestige (a sweep of the critics' prizes as well as the distinction of the first local film invited to compete at the Berlin International Film Festival—disallowed from participating by the military censors ban), milieu filmmaking became code among practitioners and critics for politicized production. The multicharacter projects required by commercial outfits, usually featuring teen talents or sexy stars, were actually exceptions that proved the rule, since some of these supposedly politically harmless projects would also occasionally (and mystifyingly) encounter censorship troubles, notably in the case of Maryo J. de los Reyes's post-*Bagets* return to Regal Films with *Schoolgirls* (1982).

## Slings & Arrows

One may be able to attempt to track the development of the milieu movie via the connections made by its primary innovator. In 1980, the same year *Manila by Night* was released, Ishmael Bernal volunteered to mentor a young woman director, the then-twenty-seven-year-old Marilou Diaz-Abaya. She had just released a feminist ensemble film titled *Brutal* (1980), whose plot was echoed in Marleen Gorris's debut film *A Question of Silence* (*De stilte rond Christine M.*, 1982) in which a woman is arrested for committing a crime but refuses to speak to anyone about it. In *Brutal*, the woman, along with her conservative mother, her promiscuous best friend, and the female journalist covering the case, all function as lead characters. The journalist's investigation serves as the framing device, and the plot utilizes flashbacks to reveal clandestine acts and hidden motives. Ricardo Lee, the scriptwriter of *Brutal*, was one of the script consultants for *Manila by Night*.

All that had to happen for Bernal to cement his mentorship was to introduce Diaz-Abaya to his pre-*Manila by Night* producer, Jesse Ejercito; in 1982, the team (with Diaz-Abaya directing, Ejercito producing, and Lee scripting) came up with the feminist multicharacter film *Moral*, which features four unruly women characters, former classmates at the national university (Figure 7). They contend with forces of change, brought about by Western liberalism, that conflict with the military dictatorship's reactionary tendencies. By way of acknowledging Bernal's (specifically *Manila by Night*'s) influence, one character was a shoplifting druggie who slept around as her way of defying convention, another was an ex-wife who carried the flame for her now-out gay husband, a third a frustrated writer whose chauvinist husband insisted on keeping her pregnant, and the fourth an ambitious but untalented singer who readily bedded anyone willing to boost her career, including a lesbian talent manager at one point.



**Figure 7.** The women in Marilou Diaz-Abaya's open-ended *Moral* (1982): former college chums and now grown-ups with their share of joy, heartbreak, and trauma, bring their friend (seated front beside the driver) to the airport where she plans to migrate to the US. Screen capture by ABS-CBN Film Restoration, used with permission.

Lee also continued his scriptwriting assignments for Bernal, collaborating on the Regal Baby project *Are These Our Children?* (*Ito Ba ang Ating mga Anak?* 1982). The attempt to ascribe Third-World angst and ennui to middle-class youngsters begged a comparison with the genuinely subversive exposés of *Manila by Night*, the more recent project paling in comparison. As a result, Bernal's and Lee's subsequent projects—*Affair* and *Miracle* (*Relasyon* and *Himala* respectively), each starring one or the other of the country's rival top stars, and both released in 1982—observed the traditional linear-heroic narrative format and won box-office and critical acclaim.

Even before Lee ended his collaboration with Bernal over some professional differences (Lee 21-22), Bernal took another stab at a multicharacter film, with *Capture: Jailhouse Boys* (*Bihagin: Bilibid Boys*, 1981), written by a one-time collaborator, Deo Fajardo Jr. From then on, his occasional milieu projects featured other writers: *Working Girls* (1984, with a sequel in 1987, written by Amado Lacuesta Jr.), featured seven female office employees in Makati, the business district (now city), during the period of protest actions that led to the February 1986 people-power revolt; *The Graduates* (1986,

written by Rosauro de la Cruz), was about freshly minted bachelor's-degree holders seeking employment during the period of instability following February 1986; and *Street-Smart* (Wating, 1994, written by Floy Quintos), which happened to be Bernal's final film, depicted a new lost generation, reminiscent of *Are These Our Children?* and set during a period of post-authoritarian democratic space and developmental difficulties.

The directors who launched and maintained an early 1970s camp trend along with Bernal also flourished in Regal Films and made their share of box-office milieu projects: Joey Gosiengfiao with *Underage*, *Temptation Island* (both 1980), and *Story of Three Loves* (1982), and Elwood Perez with *Summer Love* (1982). Another filmmaker with an extensive output of multicharacter projects was *Manila by Night* script consultant, Mel Chionglo, who for Regal Films made the more mature Regal Babies films *Summer Holiday* (1983), *Teenage Marriage* (1984), and *What Happens When You're Gone* (*Paano Kung Wala Ka Na*, 1987). He also did a soft-core film, *Company of Women* (1985), and after Brocka's demise, he did the planned sequels to his colleague's single-heroic *Macho Dancer* (1988) with multicharacter texts titled *Midnight Dancers* (1994) and *Twilight Dancers* (2006).

Aside from his connection with Bernal, Lee was involved as the writer of several of Chionglo's projects. Another milieu practitioner emerged as well, Jose Javier Reyes, who scripted *Summer Holiday*, as well as *Gold, Silver, Death* (*Oro, Plata, Mata*, 1982) and *Bad Bananas on the Silver Screen* (*Bad Bananas sa Puting Tabing*, 1983), the breakout and second film of Peque Gallaga, another *Manila by Night* script consultant as well as its production designer. Gallaga's subsequent milieu movies included the prestige Regal projects *Virgin Forest* (1985), *Demon Foundling* (*Tiyanak*, 1988), and *One Godless Day* (*Isang Araw Walang Diyos*, 1989). As director, Reyes paid tribute to Bernal's *Working Girls* with his *Makati Ave.* (*Office Girls*, 1993), crafted the ensemble piece *Once There Was a Heart* (*Minsan May Isang Puso*, 2001), and directed a remake of *Working Girls* (2010). Bernal's erstwhile assistant director and bit player, Joel Lamangan, similarly did *Yesterday's Promise* (*Pangako ng Kahapon*, 1994, written by Lee), *Philippines (Filipinas)* (2003), and *Desperate Women* (*Desperadas*, 2007) as his contributions. Initially typecast as a flaming



queen, *Manila by Night* performer Bernardo had two multicharacter projects afterward: the gay-rights comedy by J. Erastheo Navoa, *The Outed Butterflies* (*Mga Paru-Parong Buking*, 1985), and the migrant-worker drama *Invisible* (*Imbisibol*, 2015, see Figure 8), whose director, Lawrence Fajardo, has specialized in the milieu format with *Amok* (2011) and *Handcuffs* (*Posas*, 2012), and the aforementioned *Invisible*.



**Figure 8.** Overseas Filipinos in wintry Hokkaido in Japan, in Lawrence Fajardo's *Invisible* (2015), adapted from a play and developed with a deliberate degree of improvisation, following the example set by Ishmael Bernal. Upper row, left to right: a same-sex couple (one of whom, Bernardo Bernardo, also performed in *Manila by Night*) worry over the elderly partner's declining health; a young arrival loses his job and consequently his legal status. Lower row, left to right: a migrant wife, who rents rooms to undocumented compatriots, worries when the young man confesses to accidentally killing a fellow worker; a middle-aged sex worker who squandered his earnings decides to turn himself in to throw police off the trail of the troubled young man. Screen captures prepared by Lawrence Fajardo, used with permission.

A number of other practitioners who were less directly influenced by milieu projects, but occasionally dabbled in them, include: Danny L. Zialcita with the queer comedy *The Manly, the Pretty, and the Shy* (*Si Malakas, si Maganda, at si Mahinhin*, 1980); Carlos Siguion-Reyna with *Your Missus, My Missus* (*Misis Mo, Misis Ko*, 1988) and *Three ... Together* (*Tatlo ... Magkasalo*, 1998); Mario O'Hara with *Three Mothers, One Daughter* (*Tatlong Ina, Isang Anak*, 1987); Jeffrey Jeturian with *Fetch a Pail of Water* (*Pila Balde*, 1999),

*Larger Than Life* (Tuhog, 2001), *Bridal Shower* (2004), and *Bikini Open* (2005); and Armando Lao with *Soliloquy* (*Biyaheng Lupa*, 2009), an impressive debut that, alongside Bernal's *Manila by Night* and Diaz-Abaya's *Moral*, belongs to an order of outstanding exemplifications of the practice. Not surprisingly, Jeturian and Lao were mentored by Lee, Jeturian had worked with Diaz-Abaya, and Lao wrote most of Jeturian's multicharacter films.

Contemporaries of Bernal who were also considered critics' favorites include Celso Ad. Castillo, who deployed the format in the soft-core films *Virgin People* and *Snake Sisters* (both 1984), which starred the previously mentioned Softdrink Beauties, and the Viva Films melodrama *When Does Wrong Become Right* (*Kailan Tama ang Mali*, 1986). Mike de Leon, who like Lino Brocka (and unlike Ishmael Bernal) was introduced to Cannes Film Festival, bookended his Euro film presentations with multicharacter projects: the comic-musical surrealist fantasy *Are You Nervous?* (*Kakabakaba Ka Ba?* 1980) and a glossy melodrama, *Heaven Cannot be Sundered* (*Hindi Nahahati ang Langit*, 1985).

Finally, Bernal's friendly rival Brocka managed to catch up with the sex-themed *Caught in the Act* (1981) and *White Slavery* (1985), achieved his late-career peak with the postmodern political thriller *Dirty Affair* (*Gumapang Ka sa Lusak*, 1990), and *Father ... Why Did You Abandon Me?* (*Ama ... Bakit Mo Ako Pinabayaan?* 1990) before his accidental death cut short his career. The projects that Brocka had in the pipeline, some of which were completed by others (as either film or stage productions) all evinced his willingness to grapple with increasingly complex narratives and epic-scale casts of characters, convincing several observers that he had been aspiring to the same peak that Bernal had attained earlier.

## Beyond Film

The emergence and triumph of Philippine multicharacter film projects preceded institutional appreciation of cinema, inasmuch as the then-incoming presidential administration of Ferdinand Marcos may have been appreciative of film, but deployed the medium (at least initially) for propagandistic purposes. Hence most of the initial efforts of Sampaguita Pictures'

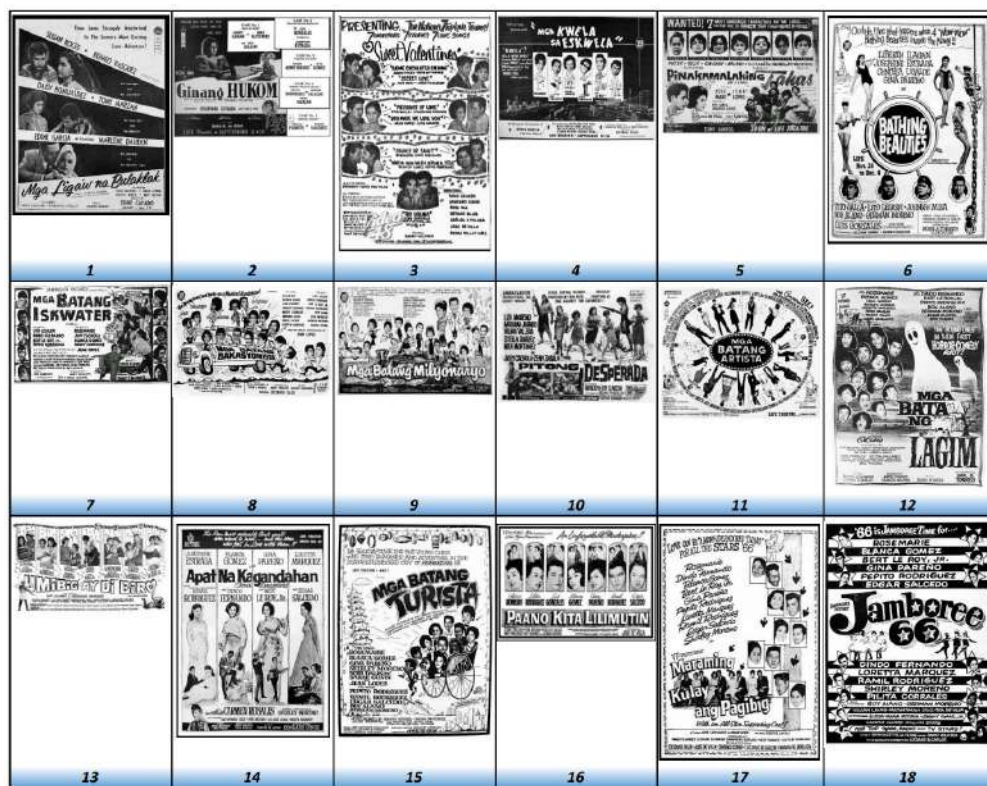
smorgasbord movies, as well as prototypes attempted by filmmakers even in other studios, are considered lost. Succeeding work occasionally benefited from preservation by virtue of occasional favorable critical reception, but the vast majority of available texts exist only in far less satisfactory video formats.

Nevertheless a number of studies have been conducted on certain canonical titles (notably Gregorio Fernandez's *Malvarosa* and Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night*), while more intensive inspections and analyses of the genre and its impact on cultural and critical discourse will have to be further encouraged. As a sample, an intriguing historical quirk that occurred during the late-1960s period of social upheavals was evident not just in the extensive protests and demonstrations, but also in film theaters everywhere. In defiance of the first Golden Age studio practice of launching Euro-featured performers who were tall, fair-featured, Caucasian, and "classy," mass audiences insisted on stars who resembled them and ensured that only projects that featured these new types could be remunerative. The old-style talents (including several from Sampaguita Pictures) had to content themselves with the hard-core pornographic features that appropriated a term, *bomba*, from the violence that attended the open-air political events.

Several intriguing possibilities for further applications of the multicharacter approach can already be gleaned in the installment-based presentations of television series as well as film sequels. (Questions of progressivity may have to be deferred, however.) An even more challenging area would be the multiplot and multimedia real-life "global village" dramas that play out over the worldwide web, including social media. Philippine milieu practice still maintains its own significant intervention, via the attention it pays to social realism(s) as observed, propounded, and disputed in large-scale (actually large-cast) narratives.

The tools of big-data analysis may eventually prove helpful in facilitating observations and basic analyses for such future attempts in studying multicharacter narratives in new-media contexts. Understandably, these will require separate and intensive treatments in (initially speculative) research projects.

## Appendix A



The smorgasbord movie and its predecessors, in order of release: 1, *Wildflowers* (1957); 2, *Madame Judge* (1960); 3-5, *Sweet Valentines*, *The Cool Kids of School*, *Biggest Escape (of 7 Helpers)* (all 1963); 6-13, *Bathing Beauties*, *Slum Kids*, *Vacationing Kids*, *Millionaire Kids*, *Seven Women Bandits*, *Showbiz Kids*, *Kids of Horror*, *Love Is No Joke* (all 1964); 14-15, *Four Beauties*, *Tourist Kids* (both 1965); 16-18, *How Will I Forget You*, *Love Has Many Colors*, *Jamboree '66* (all 1966).

All were produced by Sampaguita Pictures and/or its subsidiaries, VP Pictures and Dalisay Pictures (from the name of Sampaguita's film theater); no. 10 was by Ambassador Productions, but its talents and stars were all also

identified with Sampaguita. All had multiple stars and (except for the first) were multi-episodic, with nos. 3, 15, and 17 (the first-declared smorgasbord film) featuring multiple directors. Newspaper layouts culled from *Video 48*, with permission from Simon Santos.

## Appendix B



Some of the dozen-plus characters in Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night* (1980), in a chronologically arranged series: 1, Virgie nags her family so they could attend the folk-pub performance of Alex, her eldest son, which would be interrupted by gunfire; 2, Kano, a lesbian drug pusher, leaves the pub and goes to the massage parlor where her blind foul-mouthed girlfriend, Bea, is quarreling with another masseuse; 3, Kano brings her friends to the parlor rooftop where she shares some pot with Bea and Bea's girl Friday, Gaying; 4, the next morning, Virgie's policeman husband pleads for a quickie but their session is cut short by a visit from Miriam, a former colleague of Virgie in the flesh trade; 5, Manay, a gay couturier, brings groceries to his boyfriend Febrero and his wife Adel, a nurse who works the night shift; 6, Bea reminds her husband Greg to bring her and her kids once he arrives in the Middle East; 7, after selling some drugs Kano recommends Bea to Alex

and his friends (Alex will be asking Manay, his new lover, to find help for Bea's blindness); 8, Manay makes the acquaintance of Bea and Kano, with whom he talks about love and perception; 9, on their way to Adel's workplace, a psychic woman tells Bea that she used to be a coquette who broke men's hearts; 10, Adel meanwhile uses her nurse's costume to camouflage her profession as a call girl, although some of her johns are fed up with her promiscuity; 11, depressed from losing the chance to regain her sight, Bea is comforted by Kano with narcotics and sex; 12, Febrero is informed by his waitress-girlfriend, Baby, that she is pregnant—unwelcome news for the polyamorous beefcake; 13, Baby asks Adel to help her get Febrero back, but Adel informs her of Febrero's dalliances and advises Baby to get an abortion; 14, having beaten up and driven away Alex for his drug use, Virgie retrieves her son at Manay's atelier; 15, Virgie is still unable to invite Alex to join their family's Christmas dinner and scolds her daughter for being unruly; 16, victimized by an illegal recruiter in Bangkok, Greg tells Bea that he found work for both of them, but she resists violently when she realizes they'll be performing in a live sex show; 17, Baby tracks down Febrero and screams about his cowardice and how Adel's a call girl (a fact he already confirmed); Adel is strangled in an alley but when Manay, with his friends and lovers, goes to the morgue, they find her corpse has been switched with that of an older woman—the final straw for Manay, who breaks down in front of everyone. From the published screenplay by Ishmael Bernal in *The Review*; used with permission.



## Notes

1. Rizál's death jump-started the Philippine Revolution against Spain, the first anti-colonial uprising in Asia. The movement transmogrified into the Philippine-American War after the US sought to claim the colony for itself by paying Spain US\$ 20 million as one of the terms in the Treaty of Paris (ending the Spanish-American War) of 1898. The revolutionary army's leadership was riven by a schism occasioned by an *ilustrado* or elite wing wresting control from its proletariat founder and rightful Philippine President, Andrés Bonifacio.
2. Edgar Morin's *Les stars*, translated into English as *The Stars*, recounts the predicaments of star studies and argues that the term "star system" should be invested with more precision than the everyday pejorative usage of how serious political or art films may be compromised by the salaries and demands of popular performers (6-7); he points out that from 1920 to the early 1930s, a system that he described as a "glorious era" prevailed in Hollywood (6), just as a similar system emerged in the Philippines between the First and Second Golden Ages.
3. The Marcoses were possibly inspired by the skillful exploitation of mass media by John F. Kennedy in winning the American presidency. The then-incumbent President, Diosdado Macapagal, responded by commissioning talents associated with the other First Golden Age studios to produce his own biographical movie, Lamberto V. Avellana et al.'s *Triumph of the Poor* (*Tagumpay ng Mahirap*, 1965). During the Manila Film Festival where his challenger's movie was shown, Macapagal's favored entry, Gerardo de Leon's *World of the Oppressed* (*Daigdig ng mga Api*, 1965), showcased the government's land-reform program and was hailed by its viewers as possibly the best Filipino film ever made; unfortunately, no copies of it can be found.
4. Initially described as "New Philippine Cinema" by Bienvenido Lumbera and periodized at 1976 (to coincide with the founding of the Filipino Film Critics Circle, of which he was a member), the Second Golden Age was suggested by Joel David as starting from Lino Brocka's breakout in 1974 and ending with the collapse of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986.
5. South Korea, which had near-parallel periods of colonization, war, dictatorship, and democracy, also had a spate of films on sex workers during the Park Chunghee regime. Korean critics and practitioners, though, readily coined a term, "hostess films" (see Yu's article and Kim's dissertation), that may also be retroactively applied to the Philippine samples.
6. Ferdinand Marcos apparently allowed the relaxation of censorship rules during periods when he wanted to incite moralist outrage in the public and in mass media. The two periods when hard-core sex scenes could be witnessed onscreen were during the early 1970s *bomba* trend (when sex-themed films were produced

with soft-core scenes and subsequently screened with more explicit insertions) as well as during the mid-1980s anti-dictatorship protest period following the assassination of opposition leader Benigno S. Aquino; the latter strategy backfired, however, because the tide of public and US neocolonial support had turned away from Marcos in favor of the opposition, culminating in the February 1986 people-power revolt that deposed his regime.

7. “*Bagets*” is the gay-lingo conflation of the Filipino word “*bago*,” meaning new (i.e. youthful), and the English verb “gets,” used in the sense of picking up a potential sex partner. Variations on the term include “*pagets*,” where the prefix “*pa*” describes someone who wishes to be picked up; “*nagets*,” with the prefix “*na*” indicating past action (hence a partner with whom sex had already been consummated); and “forgets,” referring to someone too old to still be desirable.



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# Lumbung Commoning

## Reflection on Kampung Network Research/Activism

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### Abstract

This article critically reflects on my engagement in kampung-network research/activism in Indonesia since 2017. I start the discussion by foregrounding what is personally at stake behind the motivation to embark on the journey, and the answer helps map the cultural climate of Indonesia and the strategic yet precarious position of kampung communities. The middle section of the article examines ethics of research/activism and discusses the challenges of transdisciplinary participatory research. This incomplete journey serves as a basis for theorizing on the strategies of cultural commoning which center on the metaphor of the lumbung, or rice granary and its articulation. The article closes with trajectories for emerging projects in the South-South transnational commoning.

### Keywords

lumbung, kampung, network communities, commoning, research/activism

## Introduction

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic which is classified as zoonotic disease, scholars have identified global capitalism which has exploited the planet beyond its carrying capacity—as the root cause of global disasters.<sup>1</sup> Alternative praxis of commoning, in the form of sharing resources and mobilizing collective effort in grassroot communities, on the other hand, has become pivotal in dealing with multi-dimensional impact of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

Studies in commoning have been in the scholarship since in the 1990s with Ostrom's collective idea of *Governing the Commons* which reversed Hardin's neoliberal perspective.<sup>3</sup> Garreth Hardin in his 1968 seminal essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons" argued that only privatization can secure the sustainability of an ungoverned common resources, like forests, fishing area. Ostrom, in her rebuttal, showed that bottom up, community and collective maintenance of the common resources worked better. Since then, the term "commons" and "commoning" refer to collective and community effort in maintaining tangible and intangible resources for the common good have been widely used. It has been discussed from various disciplinary perspectives, from economics to the social sciences and humanities. Cultural studies scholarship has contributed to the study of commoning, among others among subculture, artists, and civilian groups in various fronts.<sup>4</sup>

This article is not about commoning per se, but about the process of engagement with kampung network communities in Indonesia, which develops into a scholar/activist practice of commoning that is yet in the making.<sup>5</sup> Kampung is a Malay word for "village hamlet," or "urban informal settlement." As fast urbanization occurred in the region and worldwide, the term kampung retained a pejorative connotation of being poverty-stricken, outdated, and not in par with the force of progress. However, starting from mid-2010s, there was a reverse movement of kampung revitalization in Indonesia, which was articulated both from the government and the civil society sectors. The kampung revitalization occurred in the intersection of differing interests, resulting in contradictions and complexities. In this paper, I focus on my involvement as scholar/activist in grassroot initiatives that use commoning as a method of activism, i.e., the collective and collabo-

rative effort in sharing kampung intangible cultural resources for kampung sustainability. The paper will examine the problems and contradictions that kampung-commoning has to deal with in negotiating with the forces on the ground and discuss its future sustainability and relevance.

Not a smooth and planned process, the experience is to throw light into the challenges of scholar/activist working in today's globalized world set in the fast-track neoliberal mode, with social and cultural fragmentation due to local-global disruptions.<sup>6</sup>

Written in a personal narrative style, the article begins by reflecting on my relations with two kampung activist network (connected via Whatsapp group), namely the Jaringan Kampung Nusantara and the Jaringan Kampung Bekasi. After contextualizing the kampung commoning within the national trajectory, I will evaluate the organic and complicated processes of doing ethnography and transdisciplinary work. The following section focuses on the concept of lumbung (rice barn/granary) which has been prevalently used to symbolize the collective work entailed in the kampung commoning. I will discuss the way the articulation of the lumbung metaphor intersects with state initiatives, social movements, and transnational project. A utopic project which is not free from complexities and problems in its implementation, I argue that the lumbung commoning speaks to an urgent need for a collective solidarity facing the world in crisis.

## **In the Beginning**

Contrary to what is considered as good research in handbooks, most of my significant research topics fall into place unplanned in haphazard ways, in coincidence with gruelling existential anguish. The topic of my doctoral dissertation, for instance, originated from an unfinished paper for a lecturer in whose class I felt like an invisible other. In the height of the Gulf war in the 1990s, my abject mental state actually helped me to research into the issue of Otherness in American literary and journalistic representations during the Greco-Turkish war in the 1890s.

In a slightly different way, I came to get involved in one kampung network community in September 2016, a distressing year. In January

2016, an informal chat from the Center of Gender and Sexuality Studies at Universitas Indonesia, which offers free counselling to gay students, leaked into media and was made viral. It was the beginning of a year-long persecution, hate speech, and bullying from all corners including cabinet ministers, house of representatives, religious leaders, as well as the conservatives within the university. The wake of moral panic and stigmatization against sexual minority lingered long afterwards, causing fear and trauma among many students.<sup>7</sup> As the initial debate only fuelled rampant anti-gay sentiment, LGBTQ activists advised supporters to dodge by being low-key and silent until the hysteria die down. It was an excruciating time for cultural studies scholars and progressive activists in Indonesia, a moment of paralysis. It was the time that I stopped using Facebook and rarely checked social media, until a colleague from the Jakarta Arts Institute introduced me to a kampung-network community called Jaringan Kampung Nusantara (Nusantara Kampung-Network), abbreviated as Japung.<sup>8</sup>

While other social media groups were not immune to the divisive agitation about sexual minority, I found that the Japung Whatsapp group chat was in a different plane altogether. In contrast to many other groups, moral dogmatism found no place here. Instead, the chat room has a relaxed atmosphere, often filled with silly chat and inside jokes, alternating with discussion about kampung issues and cultural matters. The group consists of cultural activists, artists, musicians, dancers, handicraft artisan, village administrators, cartoonist—who either live in urban kampungs or rural villages, or intellectuals who are concerned with kampung issues. The network connects kampung activists living in Java (mostly in East and Central Java) and some in Bali and Kalimantan. The coordinator of the group is Redy Eko Prasetyo, a musician who works as a staff in a university TV station, who lives in an urban kampung surrounded by gentrified residential settlements and campuses. His initial concern was to safeguard his urban kampung from being grabbed by real estate companies by establishing his kampung as a centre of cultural activities. The Japung network spawned from this purpose, as Redy Eko Prasetyo invited arts/cultural workers, and kampung activists to join the Whatsapp group. Japung connects about 100 kampungs, and about

150 kampung activists. Among them are a wellknown transgender dancer, Didik Nini Towok, and a Jazz-ethno musician Trie Utami, who is active in working with traditional musicians on the grassroot level. Getting to know like-minded activists with progressive perspective made me feel at home in the group, fulfilling a pressing psychological need in the time of homophobia. In January 2017, I met them for the first time, offline, in their anniversary gathering in Batu, to the west of Malang in East Java. Afterwards, there were a series of activities that I joined, among others giving cultural literacy workshops to teachers in a village in East Kalimantan.

In 2019, as I have become actively involved in various programs of the Japung network, I was invited by another social media group that links kampung activists in a specific area, i.e., Bekasi, a satellite city north east of Jakarta. A larger section of the area called Cikarang<sup>9</sup> has been designated by the central government to be a centre of industrial estate, with the aim of being the biggest in Southeast Asia. The development has taken place with the cost of marginalizing informal settlements that have been there for decades. There is a stark contrast between the two groups. The Bekasi group connects about 180 kampungs in 23 regencies in the Bekasi area. The WhatsApp group participants, which include factory workers, farmers and some environmental activists, have less social capital compared to Japung network. While Japung group's orientation is intellectual and secular, the Bekasi group is religious and political, with strong class sentiment. Unlike Japung's light and humorous banter, the discussion of the group is filled with concerns and reports of environmental problems, with critical if not oppositional standing towards the authorities. Local authorities are seen as corrupt officials with political and economic interest in prioritizing investors, while kampung dwellers are given attention only during political elections. As the Bekasi area is crossed by several rivers, there is strong concern about river pollution caused by industrial and residential waste and flooding due to hasty development without considering environmental impact. Many members of the group participate in the "Save Cikarang River" movement, monitoring and collecting river waste voluntarily in one of the main rivers crossing the Bekasi area. As the members of the group are native residents of the area,

local ethnic languages are used, and collective memories about place names and history are exchanged with the purpose of keeping local cultural heritage alive. The coordinator of the group is Komaruddin Ibnu Mikam, a respected informal leader who set up free environmental school for kampung children in his neighborhood, a wetland wedged between two rivers.

The two kampung groups, with their own different *raison d'être*, came to me in the time when I was questioning the efficacy of cultural studies scholarship in engaging with the power structure. For me, participating in the kampung activism is not a distraction, but a round-about way of dealing with the cultural politics of the time.

### **Lumbung Commoning**

Although the two kampung network—Jaringan Kampung Nusantara (Japung) and Jaringan Kampung Bekasi—in their own contexts deal with different challenges, both share a common strategy in mustering collective work and solidarity. One local image that is used in their icons for group identity is the rice barn, or *lumbung* in Malay. Originating from the rice culture, each rural village used to have two kinds of rice barns. One is the household one, usually made of one line of bamboo rack along the kitchen walls, where harvested corn and other crops are stored. The other one is a village rice barn for storage for rice harvest. What is kept in the village barn belongs to the whole community, serving as food security in time of need.

Lumbung as a granary for the storage of rice harvest is known all over Indonesian islands, and is called by different ethnic languages (over 700 languages). It has different shapes according to each region, but with a similar architectural pattern of pyramidal or steep roof, with a loft or space within it, the central storage area and the hollow space under the stilts.

Its existence is thought to be as old as rice farming in the region. A temple called the Lumbung Temple in Magelang built in 874 in Magelang, Central Java, suggests that Lumbung is an ancient heritage. Koji Sato argued that Lumbung used to be a sacred place that served as a model of the pile dwelling in the Asia Pacific region (31).





Fig.1. Logo of Kampung-Network Organization.  
Source: Toni Masdiono, with the permission from Japung Nusantara.

At present, with urban expansion and land grabbing for extractive and consumptive industries, granaries are disappearing. However, in my experience with various grassroots activism, be it in urban or rural villages, I found how the symbol of lumbung is widely used (fig. 1.) as an organizational logo, a symbol of the collective spirit.

In fact, lumbung becomes a symbol of an effort in gathering collective memory and cultural resources (tangible and intangible) for the common benefit of the people.<sup>10</sup> The following steps are abstracted from the observations I gathered from my interaction with both the kampung network and five kampungs in the city and regency of Tangerang, West of Jakarta in various projects. In 2013, when Jokowi was still the governor of Jakarta, he initiated the thematic kampung, whereby each kampung should find a specific theme

connected to their unique characteristics as their identity. The thematic kampung idea was widespread all over Indonesia.<sup>11</sup> As each kampung tries to construct their identity, they start by identifying what are available in the community (old people who knows history of the community, kampung dweller with knowledge about the history of the village, legends and stories, traditional music, dance, craft, herbal medicine, alternative healing method or grandmother's recipe which carries local culinary heritage).

Second, they construct space and ways for "storing the knowledge" (digital website, books, or small village or kampung museum). Another initiative is to beautify the kampung area. As the kampung space serves as the area for commoning, it is deemed important for the inhabitants to feel comfortable. They turn unused lots into children's playgrounds, common spaces for smokers, or day markets. Making murals and decorating the kampung alleys with lampions and canopies, and painting houses, are standard practice.<sup>12</sup> The thematic kampung trend and the kampung beautification easily fall into the more convenient short cut of touristic orientation—which the State also promotes through the Ministry of Tourism.

While such a short cut can divert the real purpose of commoning, creative ways in attracting millennials to stay or return to kampung is crucial. The challenge is to turn the cultural lumbung into something that can generate income and vacancy. Engaging youth to work on a locally based system for reactivating, reviving, and developing the cultural resources has been one main focus of kampung commoning. Setting up various workshops to relearn local arts or agrobusiness, is one example. In some of the kampungs I visited, the older traditional recipe can be packaged in a millennial style of menus in kampung *warung* (inn) styled as cafes, where young villagers learn to do business.

In relation to the issue of regeneration is the emphasis on the importance of organizing the sustainability and distribution of the lumbung benefits (or harvest) for economic and social welfare. Here lies the value of transparency through democratic and participatory process. Kampung assemblies are held in deciding priorities for commoning. During the pandemic, food security for laid off workers was urgent. In the urban farming initiatives

done by various urban kampungs during the pandemic. They revived a tradition called *jimpitan*, the practice of chipping in a cup of rice daily per household to be put in the kampung storage in order to be distributed in the time of need. To enhance food security, a number of urban kampungs cleared up an empty spot for urban farming and put up a schedule chart on the alley walls to remind people of their schedule in taking care of the garden.

Although these collective initiatives are locally anchored in different communities all over Indonesia, in the past five years they started to connect with each other through a digital social media platform and created a larger commoning network. Japung network, for example, came into existence due to the need of one village to find support for their cultural festival. In preparation for such a festive event, the village community from youth to the elderlies participate in reliving the kampung heritage through the food bazaar and arts performance. Japung also introduces the practice of *sonjo kampung*, a Javanese term that means “kampung visit.” Activists from other kampungs literally visit one kampung—usually the one that has some event or need—to give support or to share ideas in an open forum, attended by kampung inhabitants, from youth to the kampung administrator.

In the Bekasi kampung network, the WhatsApp group chat serves as a discussion forum, and on particular days, a venue for an “evening lecture” in which invited experts or activists in a specific field can share knowledge or give advice on specific kampung problems, such as regulations in social forestry, or practical tips in urban farming, beekeeping, or river fishery. The talk is usually done through the voice messages and the discussion is moderated by the WhatsApp group administrator through chat or voice messages. The discussion can last for more than two hours into the night. By inviting other practitioners or experts, several kampung networks got connected. For instance, Redy Eko Prasetyo, the coordinator of Japung, and some other Japung activists got invited to give evening lectures. Afterwards, they stayed as members of the Bekasi group. In this way they can share information and events organized by one kampung network to the others. All of these are done through social media—which allows activists in different provinces and islands to connect with one another.

**Multi-stakeholder commoning**

In an ideal condition, the commoning could be extended to include multiple stakeholders of kampung welfare, such as the state (in this case local government), the academia, the NGO and the private sectors. In the digitally mediated commoning, the urban and rural kampungs are connected through the social media platforms like the various kampung members from several islands in the Japung network, or the inter-connection between some kampung network communities such as Japung and the Bekasi group. The annual return to the village during the Ramadhan holidays also connects the urban and rural kampungs, and can potentially be a potential link for commoning between said kampungs. Informal leaders in each kampung as well as arts/cultural workers and religious leaders can be influential agents of change in supporting kampung projects (fig. 2). Partners for commoning include NGOs and institutions working on urban and rural kampungs such

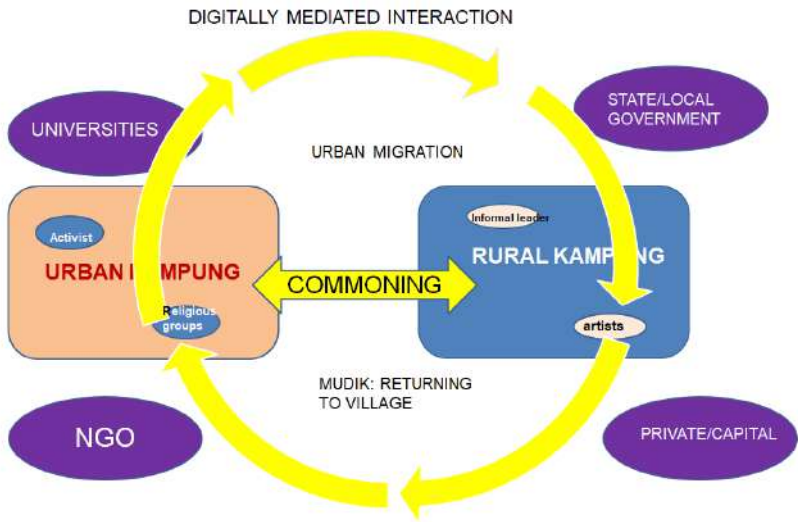


Fig. 2. Diagram of Multistakeholder Commoning.  
Source: Melani Budianta.

as the Urban Poor Network, Rujak Center for Urban Studies, and Dian Desa and other local NGOs.

As for commoning with the university, Redy Eko Prasetyo, who is working within a university unit, proposes the concept of *kampung lingkar kampus* (campus encircled kampung). Redy's urban kampung called Kampung Cempluk is literally surrounded by private campuses, and a number of students stay in the affordable rooms rented by kampung dwellers. Students also find it convenient to live there as there are many small warungs (inns) offering cheap homemade dishes. Redy proposes a strong collaboration between campus and the kampung neighborhood, offering scholarships to kampung youth, employing kampung inhabitants in the campuses, giving free public workshops and inviting kampung arts groups in the campus events.

Other linkages that have traditionally been used are research and community service programs that are part of the responsibilities of university lecturers.<sup>13</sup> However, in the older, more common perspective of community service, the kampung communities merely serve as subjects of inquiry or subjects to be enlightened or empowered, not partners in knowledge production. In 2018-2019, I was involved in a multi and interdisciplinary research involving a number of faculties (faculty of medicine, technology, economics, environmental science, social and political sciences, humanities, psychology) to examine sustainable living in five kampungs in the Greater Jakarta areas. As each discipline has their own methodology and perspective, it is quite a challenge to have a thorough interdisciplinary dialogue among the faculties, let alone transforming it into a transdisciplinary commoning that positions kampung subjects as partners.<sup>14</sup>

Another stakeholder that is to play a significant role in commoning work is the State and the local government. In the national level, two significant milestones have been reached which allowed kampung activists and cultural workers to strengthen their commoning work. In 2014, Indonesia issued a village law to regulate village governance and ensure transparency and participation of village councils in deciding significant matters regarding village affairs, including budgeting (Law of the Republic Indonesia no

6 2014). In 2017, another law is issued on advancement of culture, underlining the State commitment to safeguard “the diversity of cultures” which is seen as “the nation’s asset and identity that are indispensable to the advancement of the national culture” (Law of the Republic Indonesia number 5 of 2017). Acts of intolerance towards local cultures mentioned earlier are in outright contradiction of the spirit of this law. Various programs have been conducted by both the Ministry of Village, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration (referred here as Ministry of Village) and the Ministry of Education and Culture (referred here as Ministry of Culture) to facilitate the work of cultural commoning on the grassroots level which encompass the following steps: the identification of tangible and intangible objects for cultural advancement, and the advancement and the utilization of the cultural resources for the welfare of the community. The Ministry of Culture has also set up programs and incentives for local communities to hold workshops and projects that ensure the sustainability of cultural advancement through collaboration with local universities and the private sectors.

The two laws should theoretically guarantee inclusivity in village governance and cultural advancement. In practice, however, in the era of decentralization, these regulations are not easily implemented. Relationships between local governments and their constituents cannot be generalized. Yet, reports from members of the Bekasi network group about the way administrative leaders use their position to be land brokers for private investors shows the murky face of village politics. On the other hand, a number of villages have gone far in showing that rural villages can take a lead in cultural advancement. On August 15, 2020, at the height of the covid pandemic, Panggung Harjo village in Bantul, Central Java, organized the Village Cultural Congress, publishing 21 volumes of proceedings of webinars and discussions taking place since two months earlier. Wahyudi Anggorohadi, a young village head of Panggung Harjo declared on the occasion that “it is the village that will set Indonesia’s new cultural rejuvenation and framework” (Kafa,1). However, such optimism was to face complex realities on the ground.

## Internal and External Challenges for Kampung Commoning

In reality, practicing the lumbung commoning in different villages has different problems. One common challenge is internal cohesion. Albeit being administered by a village head or, in the urban kampung, by a neighborhood coordinator for about 40 households, and another coordinator for dozens of neighbourhood units, the inhabitants of kampungs do not always share the same culture or livelihood.<sup>15</sup> Many rural villages which used to have a strong rice farming culture are now inhabited by farm laborers without land ownership, and those with various odd jobs that supply the needs of the nearby cities.

Indonesia, like many countries in the region, has for decades witnessed an escalation of urban expansion and developmentalism characterized by aggressive extractive industries and business exploitation of rural area.<sup>16</sup> Land grabbing and land use change depleted rural communities and those living near forest areas from their sources of living, resulting in marginalization and urban migration. In the case of eviction, what is being taken away are the community, their cultural resources and the collective knowledge regarding the place, values, arts, tradition and the natural environment where they live. When villagers migrate to the cities, they usually occupy affordable housing in the sprawling informal settlements, which were there before the city expanded, or which grew along with the development of the formal residential, industrial and commercial complexes. The urban kampung area, due to their proximity to developed areas in the city, provide affordable food and serve as meeting places for city dwellers. These urban kampungs, however, are not safe from precarity as the spaces are prone to be gentrified, which indicates another cycle of eviction. Besides eroding traditional values, neoliberal forces which foreground individualistic orientation and monetary transaction also curtail the communal spirit as indicated by Rutherford (10).

In such a situation, it is not an easy task to initiate a collective commoning effort. This problem was discussed at length by 20 village representatives in a workshop I coordinated in 2018 in collaboration with the Ministry of Village. Quoting one of the participants, “without a strong collective

bond, it is every person for his/her own good.” The spirit of *gotong royong* or helping one another, which is considered as one characteristic of the Indonesian societies, is not as evident as it is believed to be. One factor that contributed to this was the shift from voluntary collective organizing of village work into pay-for-work projects initiated by the central government. Initially this infrastructure development program was initiated in order to give additional income to villagers. The uncalculated side impact is the erosion of the voluntary *gotong royong* spirit. Another dimension is the socio-cultural context. Comparing her experience with those shared by the representatives from villages in Java, one village activist from outside Java noted that it is more challenging to initiate collective ideas in the outer islands. In this case, the demographic density in Java and the influence of Javanese culture is seen to be one differentiating factor.<sup>17</sup>

Since *kampung commoning* depends on bottom-up initiatives, nothing will materialize unless there are villagers who are motivated to come up with specific ideas for a collective program to solve economic hardship or social inertia in their village. Not all villages have grassroots activists with innovative ideas and ability to awaken their fellow villagers’ interest and to garner participation for the collective work. Leadership here plays a strong role. Strong leadership without the support of wider participation from the community, however, will not be sustainable. One lesson learned about the consequences of too strong a leadership came from Kampung Glintung in Malang, East Java. Bambang Irianto, a Japung member, was a strong charismatic leader whose leadership tended to be one-man decision making over the *kampung* community that adhered and followed his guidance. He chased away drug addicts and trouble makers, and turned the previously flood-prone and poverty-ridden urban *kampung* in crowded alleys into a green *kampung* with biopore infiltration system. The crowded houses were remade into beautiful spots for selfie photos. Each small house was to contribute to the alley urban-farming area, and he established a *kampung* co-op that earned hard cash. He named his *kampung*, Glintung Go-Green. The success of his green *kampung* won him international awards and made him a *kampung* consultant at the national level. However, dissatisfaction brewed among



kampung inhabitants who felt excluded from the kampung affairs. After 7 years of Bambang's leadership, the kampung inhabitants selected a new coordinator who immediately replaced the kampung brand, from Glintung Go-Green to Glintung Kultur, shifting the emphasis to the arts and culture activities of the kampung youth.<sup>18</sup>

From the other end, unlike the ideal concept of multistakeholder commoning outlined earlier, internal conflict can occur because village heads or urban kampung coordinators do not support initiatives from village activists. Such a problem was reported in two case studies about cultural activism by Japung activists. Both in subvillage Karanggreneng, Central Java and in Kampung Temenggung in Banyuwangi, East Java, the local administrative leaders did not give any support nor attention to initiatives proposed by their village activists. However, when the efforts of kampung commoning were successful, they benefited from its popularity. In fact, in the second village, the newly elected regent hijacked the program and instead of supporting it, they took it under their control and changed it to suit their political agenda.<sup>19</sup>

On a positive note, since the mid-2010s, with the slogan "developing Indonesia from the peripheries," the Jokowi government has channelled financial support to regencies especially in rural area that can be used for kampung development.<sup>20</sup> Initially, the focus is on infrastructure development, with the target of economic empowerment. Different ministries, however, push different programs within their assigned scope. While the Ministry of Culture pushed for cultural advancement, the Ministry of Tourism promoted tourism. Investment on tourism per se, however, can have an adverse impact on the kampung neighborhood. Kampung in a popular resort area experienced marginalization as the local government brought outside investors to develop the area. Gentrification, superficial kampung beautification is within this neoliberal capitalistic mode. Many urban kampung fell into this instant make-over trap. Others tried to negotiate with the trend by first prioritizing the effort in gathering cultural resources for the village to build their collective identity and their local production. In doing so, the village was turned into a cultural centre for knowledge production. In one Japung activist's term "it is a village-based tourism, not a tourist village."<sup>21</sup>

Another force that has been taking place concurrently is the rise of conservatism and Islamization of the Indonesian urban middle classes. The rise of conservatism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century occurs worldwide, as noted by Kaufmann in his book, *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth; Demography and Politics in the Twenty-first Century* (2010). In some countries like the USA, Kaufmann showed that conservatism that cut across all religions has worked in curtailing progressive laws (xix). Indonesia, the 4<sup>th</sup> most populous country with 88% Moslem population has been known for its moderate religious outlook. With the rise of conservatism through the new media and new religious dynamics, there have been indications of the rise of more puritan strains (Akmaliah, 19). Events that were captured in social media in the early months of 2022 confirm this tendency. Early in January, a viral video of a young man caught throwing food and flower offerings to the crater of Mount Semeru, denounced the indigenous practice of giving offerings as a sacrilege. In mid-February, an Islamic scholar made a controversial statement to ban the wayang shadow puppet, considered as a national heritage, because he considered it *haram* or forbidden according to Islamic law. Still in February, the city of Malang in East Java, known as a tourism area, was heated with civilian protest after the mayor announced the city as a *halal* city. The hardening of Islamic fundamentalism, “a process of deepening commitment to standards of normative Islamic belief, practice, and religious identity.” (Rickleffs in Kuipers and Askuri, 45) did not happen overnight. The *Tarbiyah* or *dakwah* movement among students in secular campuses in Indonesia in the 1970s is considered to be the root of the growth of political Islam. In the era of democratization after the Reformasi of 1998, there is “a pattern of religious commodification and consumption” which according to Fealy is due to forces of “modernization, urbanization, and globalization” (Fealy in Kueipers and Askuri, 47). While the prevalent Islamic fashion and lifestyle is a welcoming expression of a democratic society with a majority Moslem population, the growing intolerance towards difference is a matter of concern.

Horizontal conflict between fundamentalist and syncretic religious groups often occurred in the villages.<sup>22</sup> Bachtiar Djanan M, another Japung activist who worked as consultant for village-based tourism, encountered

two such instances while working with Cempaka village in Tegal, Central Java, and the Luwi Jawa village in Banyuwangi, East Java. In the first village, he was helping the village community prepare a river festival, which includes the performance of *sintren*, a traditional dance with mystical trance elements. The plan was viciously opposed by a group which considers such performance as *syirik* or heresy. In the second village, the plan was to promote the traditional coffee industry as a basis for village tourism. Some villagers associated the word tourism and the coming of foreigners into the village with the infiltration of Westernized liberal lifestyle. Bachtiar and the organizers in the two villages managed to assuage the conservative groups, in the first village by involving a respected religious leader as mediator, and in the second village by dialogue and explanation. Such a confrontation also occurred during one of my trips with Japung activists to support the Buen festival in Bangun Mulya village, in North Penajem Paser, East Kalimantan in 2018. When we were about to have a meeting, the host of the festival excused himself to go with a special team to the village border as there was an urgent news that a conservative group was to “attack” the village as a protest of what was presented in the festival. Fortunately, like the earlier instances, the confrontation was resolved peacefully. In all of the cases, the role of the moderate Islamic organization of Nahdatul Ulama, one of the biggest religious groups in Indonesia with its syncretic orientation, is crucial in dealing with the rising fundamentalism on the ground.

However, a different battle occurred in the digital media where intolerant and verbal attacks against religious and lifestyle differences are launched. As mentioned earlier, the intolerant acts against ritual and wayang shadow puppet were made viral through the social media, and the media cuts across the divide of the city and kampung, urban and rural. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia ranked second to the Philippines in the amount of time spent in social media.<sup>23</sup> With about 61.8 % penetration, 170 million of Indonesia’s population are on social media.<sup>24</sup> While the extent of social media use explains the growth of digitally mediated kampung network communities, it is also an arena where attacks against local rituals and traditions are waged. In this post-truth era, the digitally savvy, the loud and the aggressive cover

more ground—without any willingness for a dialogue. The Japung group has served as a haven for solidarity and diversity. Yet, except for uploading cultural events and discussions, the Japung network, with its moderate activists has not done much intervention to hold up the rising fundamentalism in the media. The Bekasi network is even susceptible to religious conservatism and identity politics provocation, although tempered by the WhatsApp group moderator and a number of moderate activists in the group. The digital media here serves as the very arena for the battle of forces. Globalization, for better or for worse, seeps through digital connections which link the local and the global, and complicate the issues on the ground.

The two forces of neoliberal capitalism and religious fundamentalism in tandem work against kampung communities. While the neoliberal greed through extractive developmentalism shrinks the space of urban and rural kampungs, the narrow-minded religious dogmatism censures their traditional arts, rites and the rich cultural heritage that Indonesia is known for.

### **Transnational Lumbung and its challenges**

How does the commoning done locally across Indonesian kampungs translate into transnational context? The adoption of *lumbung* as a theme for Documenta, German arts festival held every five years in Kassel, Germany is an example of the global adoption of the local practice. In February 2019, ruangrupa (abbreviated as ruru), an arts collective located in Jakarta, was announced to be the host of Documenta 15, a 100 day-cultural exhibition held in Kassel, Germany starting June 18, 2022. The title of the ruru project for the exhibition is Lumbung. This is not an ordinary arts exhibition, but a long process of arts and cultural communing, involving an artistic team beyond ruru to select 14 arts communities/collectives and around 53 artists from all continents, with alternative community-based arts practice to be lumbung members and lumbung artists. Most of these artists/members are from the Global South, among others Palestine, India, Cuba, Trinidad, Mali, Thailand, Philippines, and Indonesia. A number of European collectives and Australian artists are those working for the marginalized, queer, aborigines, asylum seekers and refugees.

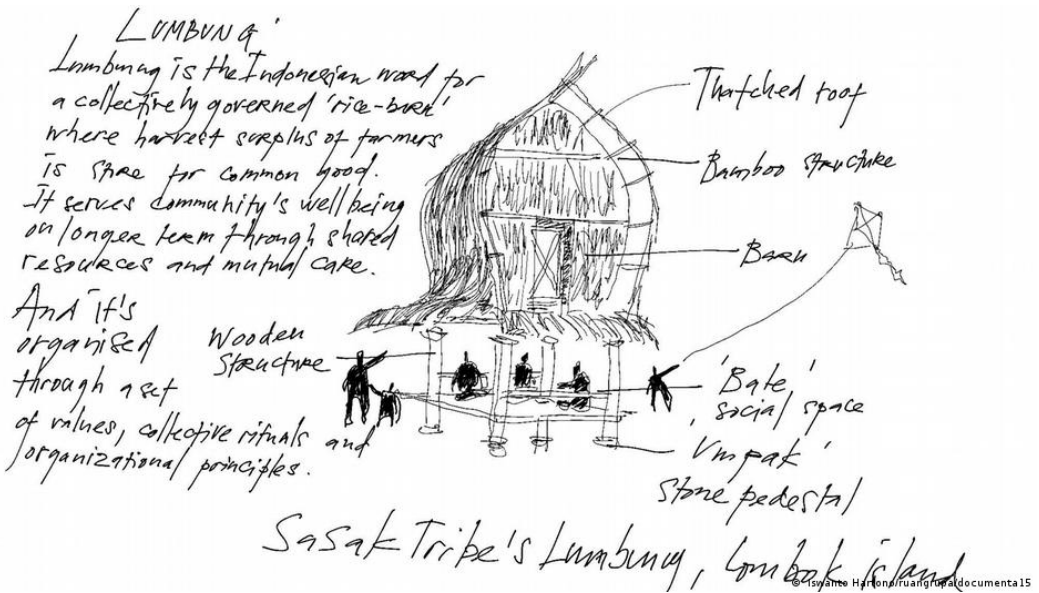


Fig. 3. Lumbung sketch by Harvester Iswanto Hartono

Source: <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung>. With permission from Documenta 15.

The concept of Lumbung informs the selection of members and artists, the process as well as the output of the exhibition, which is “collectivity, resource building and equal sharing” (Documenta 2022, 1). Different from the neoliberal arts practice that tends to be elitist, the lumbung practice opens up the division between arts and everyday life, extending participation to cultural communities. The outreach, is therefore beyond artistic criteria, as explained in the website of Documenta:

... “rice barn,” is a collective pot or accumulation system used in rural areas of Indonesia, where crops produced by a community are stored as a future shared common resource and distributed according to jointly determined criteria. Using *lumbung* as a model, documenta fifteen is a collective resource pot, operating under the logics of the commons. It is an agglomeration of ideas, stories, (wo)manpower, time, and other shareable resources. At the center of *lumbung* is the imagination and the building of these collective, shared resources into new models of sustainable ideas and cultural practices (1) (fig.3)

Most of the Lumbung artists/members have actually integrated the concept in their work, such as the Boloho from Guangzhou, China, which has friendship as their “business model,” valorizing equality and mutual aid over hierarchy.<sup>25</sup> Another one, Arts Collaboratory, sets up commoning practice across Asia, Middle East, Africa and Europe through dialogical assemblies called *bangas*. The art based on the lumbung concept foregrounds the importance of not only a space for gathering resources (ideas, thoughts, energies, local cultural idioms and arts practices) but also the collective, non-centralized and inclusive process of making the lumbung community. The first step was to set up a ruru house in Kassel, which Documenta rented from an unused mall to create a *nongkrong* or “hang-out” space for informal conversation as well as a working space where artists as well as other people can meet and share ideas. This is “a space to meet and to get noisy—to then transform this noise to voice. By sharing our resources into one, we could share many and diverse stages, spotlights, and resonances to the voice” (*Asphalt*, Chapter 1).

As interaction and dialogues in the arts ecosystem in Europe are often formalized, ruru inserts a strategy of negotiation in the form of “a play between formalities and informalities” (1). The fact that the first announcement of the lumbung artists and arts community members was published in *Asphalt*, a street magazine sold by the homeless and disadvantaged in three cities in Germany, was a strong anti-elitist statement and informality. Humor and generosity are among the nine lumbung values that are to color the ambiance and atmosphere of the whole lumbung process, as well as the principles adopted by each invited member organization. Others include the underlining of a sense of sufficiency for each member, independence from political or commercial pressures, transparency, regeneration, and local anchoring. The last one speaks of the strong local grounding of each lumbung member in its community and cultural context. This explains the use of colloquial words such as *nongkrong* from Jakarta youth slang, *majelis* (assembly/gathering) from an Arabic borrowing in Indonesian/Malay language.

The concept of collecting resources to be shared for common purposes is not merely theorized but put into practice in the following procedure as follows:

1. The Artistic Team of Documenta 15 in conversation with a group of organizations and collectives—the lumbung members—have developed a common pot of resources together. Each member artist/organization contributes to this lumbung with their resource surpluses, such as people, time, space, food, money, knowledge, skill, care, and art.
2. The different collectives and organizations started to *nongkrong* months ago online and in Kassel in order to build trust.
3. They have built mechanisms for how to use and distribute the resources through meeting in assemblies, or *majelis*es, and forming working groups around the economy and wellbeing of the lumbung.
4. The lumbung members create a surplus through the *majelising* and working groups, and this surplus is shared with others. The mechanisms and shared infrastructure created by the lumbung inter-lokal—the network of lumbung members—are shared with their own ecosystems as well as the group of lumbung artists. (*Asphalt* 09/21, 1)

The procedure above shows the organizing and maintaining of the lumbung. One term that is used for reporting what is gained during *majelis* is called harvesting and the artists/writers who do the reporting are called harvesters. Harvesting can be done through sketching, visual abstraction, writing and other means of getting the gist of the *majelis* meeting and sharing them to a wider audience.

While organizational meetings usually prioritize output and timely scheduled agenda, *majelis* meetings underline process and participation. In one of the early *majelis*, it took almost one hour for each *majelis* participant to introduce themselves and “checking in” by mentioning locally anchored resources chosen by the moderator. The principle of inclusion in a safe and convenient, friendly and equal atmosphere is crucial in *majelis* and other lumbung work. The arrangement of the bigger *majelis* assembly

and the mini *majelis*, where clusters of artists/members work together to plan the exhibition projects is also challenging because of the diverse time zone. It is therefore understandable, that the list of members are not defined geographically but according to time zone: Fondation Festival Sur Le Niger (Universal Time Coordinated), INLAND (Central European Time), Mas Arte Mas Accion (Colombia Time), Britto Arts Trust (Bangladesh Standard Time), FAFSWAG (Aotearoa Time), etc.

Like *kampung commoning* occurring in many parts of Indonesia, the transnational *lumbung* of Documenta 15 shows the rise of the peripheral voices in asserting alternative political economy sorely needed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One caveat to note is that, while establishing *kampung commoning* in one village is challenging, as described earlier, forming it across transnational borders is even more demanding. A few months before Documenta 15 was officially launched, it already became a subject of political controversy. The *lumbung* network curated by Documenta 15 includes artists and collectives from Palestine, and this stirred a historical wound that Germany still had to heal from. An attack published in January 2022 through the Wordpress blog of a group called an “Alliance against Antisemitism Kassel” demanded to expel the curator of *lumbung* exhibition and to stop some artists from participating in the exhibition on the grounds of antisemitism. The alliance found the names of the artists/ arts collectives as signatories of an open letter to protest the decision of the German Parliament to ban the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement against the Israeli government.

In their position as the international curator of Documenta 15, *ruangrupa* wrote a response in May 2022, showing that the attack is based on false accusation, rumor and racism. In the response, *ruangrupa* also protested against racist humor used in the alliance’s blog, making fun of the term *lumbung* as follows: “*ruangrupa* has launched the so-called ‘*lumbung*’, which is not an alcoholic mixed drink, but means ‘collectively managed rice barn.’”<sup>26</sup> In the counter letter, *ruangrupa* pointed to the derogatory allusion of *lumbung* with an alcoholic drink:



.... an allusion to the infantile racist joke-name “Lumumba” for a cocktail mixed with cocoa and rum, named after the assassinated Congolese freedom fighter and former president Patrice Lumumba. Such racist jokes are seamlessly intertwined with the accusations of antisemitism that were adopted by numerous major German newspapers—largely uncritically and in defiance of basic journalistic standards. The fact that this falsification of history in the name of silencing and censoring free speech and expression was so carelessly adopted in the name of Germany’s special “historical responsibility” is not without a certain ironic quality. The consequences are extremely serious, however, revealing the dangerous proximity between German historical ignorance and racist smears. (ruangrupa)

The anti-semitist controversy, which haunts the Documenta 15 event, is an example of the challenges faced by trans-national commoning. Such commoning occurs in certain time and space, which is not free from national political baggage and historical contexts. What happened in Kassel betrays orientalist perception about unfamiliar terms coming from a non-European language, identity politics and uneasy attitude about uncommon artistic practice. How the lumbung exhibition survives through the challenges is yet to be seen.

### **Ethics in Kampung Research/Activism: a personal reflection**

From the Japung network to transnational lumbung in Kassel, my engagement with the kampung commoning has been informal, unplanned and organic. It was outside academic work, and was not intended to be a scholarly research, nor the kind of community engagement formalized by universities. In due time, however, there comes a realization that doing research together with the kampung network can serve as an important means to strengthen activism. History of a group, the challenges that the group face, projects that succeed or fail, lessons learnt, facts and documents, important interaction and discussion are often left undocumented. All of these, if gathered, can generate knowledge, understanding and critical evaluation for the group. Members of the group, although not all, might participate in the research facilitated or initiated by the researcher. The research undertaken may have different forms, but the basic principle is that it should allow the

group to learn and grow together. Various terms are used by scholars to refer to such a project: participatory community research, engaged research, transdisciplinary research, with slightly varying definitions.<sup>27</sup> One that is close to what I did with the kampung network communities is “engaging stakeholders as co-producers of knowledge” (Utrecht, 1). In this aspect, transdisciplinary research can be seen as an act of commoning in gathering and sharing resources. There is a flow of give and take in the process, but in retrospect, what I learned from the two kampung communities is more than what I can share with them.

Unlike regular research projects with a developed plan, rigid schedule and well-defined output, the overall work of kampung research/activism is organic, long term in its duration and its process and not output oriented. That being said, it does not mean that the process could not be broken into small, reasonably realistic projects that build into a long-term knowledge production.

With the Japung kampung network community, the initial step towards producing knowledge together was to gather and then publish a collection of stories, with each activist sharing his or her kampung engagement. When I proposed the idea, it was met with enthusiasm, but I soon realized that implementation was not easy. As leaders of their respective kampung communities, the activists’ schedules were tight. Writing was an extra burden that many could not afford, and something that a few of them did not feel at ease in doing. In dealing with the problem, I made use of the resources in my university to set up a team of co-authors. After the initial offline meeting in the closest, most accessible city for all participating members, activists who needed assistants were paired up with “writing partners.” A workshop was arranged by the university, inviting other scholar/activists from the region (Malaysia, Thailand) and Indonesia and participating Japung members to gain comparative perspectives. In 2018, the project materialized in a collection of 17 essays on kampung issues and stories of activism. The book, published by a non-commercial publishing company, was made available to all Japung members, with the online version to be shared to the wider public.<sup>28</sup>

An offshoot of this writing project was an opportunity, facilitated by the Association of Cultural Studies, to invite 4 kampung activists to present their stories in one panel at the Crossroads, the ACS international conference in Shanghai in 2018. My university team assisted the presenters with translation and rehearsed presentations. It was a wholesome experience for me to chair such a special panel and to see the way the activists blended in with international members of ACS in the conference. The whole process of publishing the book and connecting with scholars in the conference then gave me the opportunity to publish “Smart Kampung, Doing Cultural Studies in the Global South” in 2019.

The whole process can be summarized in the following steps: 1) identifying what the group needs; 2) proposing a project that can fill the need; 3) clarifying position, what I can bring to the group, what the group can contribute, what the output will be, how the process will be conducted and how it benefits the group and myself as a researcher; 4) facilitating the participants to present their experience, knowledge and perspective and providing support for capacity building in the process.

With the Bekasi group that faces pressing issues related to environmental hazards and community survival in the face of outright marginalization, I have so far only played the role of clearing house to find practitioners and experts from various fields to give advice to the group. There is a plan to do collaborative mapping of the problems as well as resources of the Bekasi kampungs, among others traditional knowledge, river/water technologies, endemic plants and natural resources, language and place history/toponymy. Second is to agree on small projects that a team of interdisciplinary scholars can collaborate with some activists in the group in order to strengthen the bargaining position of the kampung communities vis-à-vis the local government and the private sectors. With the onset of the pandemic, however, the plan has not been materialized.

In today's academic culture, research involving human subjects is regulated with rigid procedures, with written consent. Activism-based research like what I did with Japung, is organic and informal, but ethical matters are in fact crucial. Different from common research, in which scholars from

outside the group do research on a community group, in Japung case the research is done by members of the same group. The relationship is long term, not one time project to gather data and then leave the research subjects never to see them again. Whatever gathered from the group should be under consent and the research result should be shared to the group for the benefit of the larger community. No quotes from group chats should result in harmful consequences, so unanimity is the best policy in using group chats as research data. The question that often arises is about critical distance. If a researcher is part of the group, how can she or he maintain a critical distance? There is no way out of subjective bias, whether one is a member of a group or external to it. However, the pressure for not causing discomfort within the group is a real problem. One way to do it is to write in such a way that critical evaluation is not personalized but abstracted as lessons learnt for the whole group and discussed within a conceptual framework.

Reflecting back to the beginning, I found that my engagement with the kampung commoning has been a journey of knowledge making, of discovering possibilities and limits, conceptual as well as practical. What is meaningful for me is that the knowledge production is a shared process that will never cease in finding alternative spaces within the current and future hegemonic structures.

### **Conclusion: Moments of Articulation**

Nationally as well as globally, the act of commoning has been on the rise due to some conjoining forces which amplify its articulation.<sup>29</sup> First, commoning is seen as an alternative to the neoliberal paradigm with its extractive developmentalism that has been seen as the roots of all problems. Deforestation has been deemed responsible for inviting zoonotic diseases such as the covid pandemic. Second, the pandemic has necessitated community-based surveillance and solidarity in providing aid and support, arising from the realization that one ill person can endanger the whole community. During the lockdown period, commoning for food security such as community urban farming and gathering resources to be shared like the practice of lumbung have been adopted by grassroot communities.

It is in this juncture that the kampung commoning that has been going for some time as a grassroots movement is attuned with the larger context. Nationally however, the local contestation is more complex. The village law aims to reverse the earlier tendency to treat villages and rural areas as objects of development to be subjects with rights for determination. The cultural advancement law speaks for the concern about the erasure of languages and local cultural resources under globalization and right-wing conservatism. On the ground however, the neoliberal urbanization trend, corruption, identity politics and marginalization of kampung communities are still gaining force. The kampung commoning occurs within this crosscurrent, finding spaces for negotiation.

Scholars of literary and cultural studies—especially those born in the fifties like me—have learned about the constant sway of historical pendulum. The question is, how sustainable is the commoning trajectory when the neoliberal force is still in place. Is it merely a utopic flame that will flicker, or will it effect a change before the carrying capacity of the planet is exhausted? At present, although the arts and cultural dimension of the State/society is in sync to support the cause of commoning, the political economy and the financial sector still go towards the regular, opposite direction. In this conundrum, the kampung and lumbung commoning faces external as well as internal tension. In spite of that, lumbung/kampung work is a space for sanity, at least for me, an opportunity to do meaningful transdisciplinary collaboration to exert a change, little as it may be.

## Notes

1. The pandemic has prompted scholars to critically question the neoliberal paradigm, such as done by Giroux. More specific discussion about the relationship of the pandemic and natural exploitation can be seen in Arenas.
2. Before the onset of the covid pandemic, Castells already discussed various alternative economic praxis which foster solidarity and mutual benefits in lieu of neoliberal money-making ventures. See also Georgiou and Titley.
3. See Elinor Ostrom's rebuttal of Garreth Hardin's classical essay. Ostrom shows how communities sharing the commons are the most reliable party to govern it for collective use.
4. See special edition on covid and commoning in *European Journal of Cultural Studies* edited by Kay and Wood.
5. Kampung (or kampong in its English version) an Indonesian/Malay word that denotes a rural village or urban informal settlements, connotes both nostalgic association to a home origin as well as a backward, impoverished village. In the context of the urban expansion in Indonesia as well as in other metropolitan cities in Southeast Asia, the kampung has either been urbanized, gentrified, or diminished.
6. See my previous publication on this topic, Budianta and Hapsarani.
7. See the report of the case written by Asmarani.
8. See the discussion of this WhatsApp group in Budianta and Hapsarani (242-243).
9. See the promotional advertisement of the area in KNIC.
10. The term cultural lumbung has now gained currency. In 2018, in collaboration with the Ministry of Village, my research team from Universitas Indonesia created a module for a two-day workshop for 20 villages from 8 provinces in November 2019. The term cultural lumbung is used in the module and it is reported in the website of one participating village, the Dermaji village in Kafa.
11. The gimmick can be quite shallow and instant, such as calling their kampung as colorful kampung, and use paint to color the houses, roof, and turn the kampung to be a selfie place for youth visitors.
12. Another motive for kampung beautification is the aim to turn kampung as an object for tourism, a unique place for selfies. This shows how kampung commoning is not done outside the neoliberal paradigm.
13. The three responsibilities (Tridharma) of university lecturers in Indonesia include teaching, research and community service, which is tabulated in their administrative report.
14. Within the neoliberal paradigm that universities are now entrenched, commoning practice is still not dominant. Ego-sectoral interest within disciplines and programs is the most challenging stumbling block. Similarly, many

- state ministries are yet to increase coordination with other ministries in dealing with kampung issues, in particular in sharing the same pool of data.
15. In formal housing complexes, one neighborhood unit, consisting about 40-60 households, is administered under RT (Rukun Tetangga), chaired by the head of RT. Dozens of RT are administered under RW (Rukun Warga), with head of RW as coordinator. In informal kampungs, however, one RT can have up to two hundred households, and some stay in the same permanent or semi-permanent houses.
  16. For a discussion of peri-urban development of the Greater Jakarta area and impact on the kampungs, their inhabitants and their everyday life see Leitner, Nowak and Sheppard; and Herlambang, Leitner and Liong.
  17. In the workshop, participants from diverse kampung in Indonesia shared their commoning efforts, and learned from one another.
  18. The success as well as problem faced by Kampung Glintung has been documented in Budianta and Hapsarani, and in various media.
  19. Bachtiar Djanan M recounted the occurrence in Kampung Temenggung in Budianta and Hapsarani (187-206), and shared the confrontation in Kampung Luwi Jawa in a phone interview with Budianta (10 June 2022). With decentralization, decision making on kampung affairs rests on local government, especially regents and village heads. As Indonesia is spread out in over 17.000 islands which are culturally and demographically diverse, each village experiences different dynamics of power relations with local administrators, which also varies with the periodic changes of leadership. There is almost no censorship from the central government on village matters. Stigmatization on being leftists, like it was in the cold war era, was experienced sporadically by villagers who fought over communal land against deforestation and eviction due to extractive industries.
  20. Jokowi's "Development from the Peripheries" was announced in his presidential campaign in 2014.
  21. See Bachtiar Djanan's discussion on this village-based tourism in chapter 6 in Budianta and Hapsarani (83-87).
  22. Among the moderate Islamic groups that support traditional syncretic practices is the Nachdatul Ulama, one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia. Their Islamic leaders (kyais) and youth groups are spread out in the villages. However, the number of hardliners is growing, not only among urban population, but also in the rural area. These groups are usually very vocal in censoring traditional arts and culture, which they deem to be not in line with their dogmas.
  23. The data is obtained from Kemp.
  24. See Kemp.
  25. See the list and profile of Documenta-fifteen Lumbung members and artists in Documenta 2022.

26. The quote is taken from ruangrupa's response.
27. See Wickson, Carew, and Russel for a discussion on transdisciplinary research. As for terms for research that relates to activism, see engaged scholarship as outlined by Peterson and a discussion on scholar/activist by Tilley and Taylor. Another term used mostly for health practitioners is community based participatory research.
28. See Budianta and Hapsarani.
29. I am referring here to Li's use of Stuart Hall's concept in examining subject positioning of the indigenous identities of two villages in Li (4).



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# BTS and Global Capitalism

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## Abstract

This essay aims to discuss the “machinic enslavement” of capitalism across the globe through the illustrative example of a Korean boy band (BTS). I argue that the rise of the BTS fandom is a cultural repercussion of depthless commodification in connection with the political logic of nationalism against the capitalist nihilism. Endorsing the concept of interpassivity, my argument will suggest that the interpassivity of fandom reveals the “depthlessness” of global capitalism against nationalism. The fans do not want to act as subjects but as delegates of their desire. What they desire is not the fulfilment of their wanting but the ongoing state of desiring as such. They are not interested in the object of the desire but the craving deference of the pleasure for the desire, for they must stop desiring if they can easily own the object. Therefore, BTS is not only a cultural commodity but also an intangible object beyond the pleasure principle.

## Keywords

BTS, interpassivity, nationalism, a nation-state, Deleuze, Guattari, Pfaller

## 1. BTS as a Global Commodity

On the 26th of October in 2018, *Tokyo Sports*, a well-known right-wing newspaper in Japan, reported that Jimin, one of the members of BTS, the mega-popular Korean boy band, wore a T-shirt, on which the image of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima during the Second World War was printed. The newspaper insisted that Japan cancel their appearance and scheduled performance at the Tokyo Dome. Jimin apologized for his ignorance regarding the perceived symbolic meaning of the shirt and promised his Japanese fans to mull over the violence of the warfare more carefully. He did not admit that he had any political aim with what was indicated in the shirt because he simply wore it out of respect for one of his fans who had sent it to him as a gift. However, the words repeatedly printed on the shirt against the image of a mushroom cloud were “Patriotism, our story, liberation, Korea,” a slogan to justify the nationalist sentiment of the country.

Whatever his real motivation was, the incident quickly boiled down to Jimin’s naivety; nevertheless, because of his apology the controversy was quickly quelled. However, I argue that the controversy about the message on Jimin’s shirt was not accidental but the consequence of a paradox between nationalism and cosmopolitanism in global capitalism.

As a global commodity, BTS should be cosmopolitan; nevertheless, as members of a nation-state, the members of BTS cannot transcend their nationality. Jimin’s performance to commemorate Korea’s National Liberation Day by wearing the shirt enraged not just Japanese nationalists, but also sparked a heated debate among BTS fans in Japan about the shirt’s message. The printed phrases appeared to encourage the United States’ deployment of atomic bombs against Japan, which pacifist Dorothy Day described as a “colossal slaughter of the innocents.”<sup>1</sup> At the same time, worldwide news organizations such as the BBC, CNN, and *The Guardian* were drawn to the controversy. They speculated that Jimin wore the shirt in question to express a political opinion influenced by the rising tensions between South Korea and Japan. However, Big Hit Entertainment, the company that manages BTS, stressed that Jimin’s printed shirt was not meant to convey any political message.

The company insisted that the artist was not responsible for the message because he had no intention of stirring the dispute in the first place. In short, the company seemed to confirm that Jimin was clueless about the deeper meaning of the commemorative gift, and his deviation resulted from a naive attitude towards *realpolitik*. The company's clarification is a usual response to such negative criticism, but in my opinion, their answer is the start of another problem, rather than the conclusion of the conflict. If the proclamation about Jimin's deed is correct, he is nothing else than an immature person who cannot understand the humanitarian issues concerning atomic bombing. This implies that BTS's ethical statement about their love for humanity is suspect. As is generally known, they were invited to speak before the United Nations General Assembly and were awarded the Order of Cultural Merit by the Korean government. As a result, Jimin's lack of awareness of humanistic concerns clashes with the image that BTS would like to project.

Meanwhile, things would have worsened if the announcement were wrong and Jimin had known its political implication well. It would have meant that, together with the company, he lied to people so that he could quickly extricate himself from difficulties. Both are worse. Jimin would tend to please his fans who had sent him the shirt. His deed was not politically wrong and morally right. The gesture of wearing a gift is not necessarily a politically motivated act, as it could simply be a gesture of gratitude. However, the effect of the action brought forth an unpredictable result. Why did this disturbance take place then? Of course, it is not due to Jimin's fault. In response, some journalists in South Korea argued that BTS must establish more practical strategies for the global market by diluting the touch of "Koreaness." This kind of advice for better business bluntly reveals the symbolic implication of BTS and other K-pop industries.

One could argue that Jimin is a victim of the K-pop industry, which has strategically positioned its cultural products as "global commodities" beyond national borders. Ironically, in this effort, Korean pop idols like BTS must abandon their "Koreaness." In this context, Jimin is caught at the center of the dialectical relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Even

some journalists are convinced that BTS is a commodity for the global market and as such, it needs to erase its nationality, tactically. On the contrary, the controversy concerning Jimin's shirt is not caused by the lack of a musician's strategic approach to the global market but by the iron cage of the dialectical relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. The dialectics of identity is where the national question arises. In this sense, the problem of BTS has nothing to do with individual moral integrity or cultural awareness but rather a structural over-determination revolving around a nation-state.

The Enlightenment idea of "cosmopolitanism" aims at the production of civil society. Immanuel Kant argues that hospitality is an essential characteristic of cosmopolitanism.<sup>2</sup> The point is that personal kindness does not rest on philanthropic generosity but the "right to visit, to which all human beings have a claim, to present oneself to society by virtue of the right of common possession of the surface of the earth."<sup>3</sup> However, Kant did not know that nation-states would eventually control the common. After the First World War, the temporary imposition of passport controls became permanent, and the laissez-faire era of international migration ended.<sup>4</sup> Nationality relies on the technical partition of the common right. Kant thought that the right to travel across the territories is self-evident, yet, the right to travel needs another right, i.e., the political right to insist on the right to visit or reside in any nation-state. The dispute with Jimin's shirt revealed the clash between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, but still, the episode does not mean the two values are incompatible. As Hannah Arendt points out, "once they had left their homeland they remained homeless, once they had left their state they became stateless; once they had been deprived of their human rights, they were rightless, the scum of the earth."<sup>5</sup> In other words, a nation-state is the foundation of such a common right, the condition of humanity, which can allow anyone the legitimacy to get in or out of national borders.

## **2. The Problem of the Nation and the State**

Two historical arguments of nation-states might be considered here. First, a conservative viewpoint that "the nation-state is the 'realized' form of the nation, that nations without corresponding states remain frozen in a form of

infancy.” And second, a Marxist one that states that “the tendency towards the articulation between the nation and the state is an effect of the development of capitalism.”<sup>6</sup> Jimin’s understanding of the relationship between the nation and the state would be close to the former, i.e., the traditionalist understanding of the nation-state. However, this identification of the nation with the establishment of the state is unsuited to cosmopolitanism. Following this logic, there is no cosmopolitanism without the nation-state; the nation-state is the materialization of the nation—the juridico-political substance of an imagined community. Proceeding from this reasoning, Jimin would believe that he did the right thing when celebrating National Liberation Day. Still, the disturbing truth is revealed because this national “romance” regards Japan as the nation’s enemy. From the perspective of what might be regarded as a kind of Manichean dichotomy, any violence destroying the opposite is the best—the more ruthless to the foe, the better to us. Nationalism cannot justify its logic from within but rather gains its meaning by defining the enemy from without because the origins of any nation are not self-evident.

There is a fundamental discrepancy between the nation-state and the nation in the imaginary, yet nationalism as fantasy seals the split seamlessly. The ideological unity of the nation and the state is inevitably disrupted by capitalism. In this view, nationalism is an intellectual interpellation to develop nation-state subjects and advance the imagined basis of legal nationality.

Nationality is the pre-condition to human rights. A man’s right is not automatically given by natural law but rather obtained by the citizenship of nationality. Unlike Kant’s proposition, cosmopolitan citizenship is founded on the paradox of “human condition” in the modern age; we, human beings, have no self-evident right to reside in any place without nationality, even if we travel around the international borders. There is no such thing as the absolute right of self-determination except in the nation-state as a historical phenomenon. Nationality is the real border in the age of the nation-state. Those who have no right to reside within the boundary will be regarded as “the scum of the earth.” This stateless status is called refugees. In my opinion, the existence of refugees proves how the nation-state serves as a

form of capitalist accumulation. Refugees, who do not have any national identification, are deemed as reckless as waste. They have no legal right to allow them to work in the nation-states. They are “useless” because they are not exchangeable in the national mode of production. If refugees desire to be exchanged, they must commodify themselves. The commodification of their labor-power is the only way to exist in capitalism. Citizenship is the legal right to sell living labor in the nation-states. However, the case of BTS clarifies that the juridic-politics must approve any commodity of the nation-state. Of course, the commodity goes global, but its trade or sale must have juridical approval. As Karl Marx points out, “commodities cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their own right.”<sup>7</sup> This juridical relation is nothing else than but the contract between different individual wills, which depends on “the economic relation.” Based on this contract, each person exists as a representative and an owner of any commodity.

It was in the early twentieth century when there were “extraordinary upheavals concerning the form of the nation” which included “the assertion of new linguistic sovereignties and newly discovered national borders.”<sup>8</sup> Establishing a common language within a specific territory is necessary for national formation. In this sense, the invention of the nation is related to the imaginary fabrication of a nationalist story. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein point out that “the history of nations, beginning with our own, is always already presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to these entities the continuity of a subject.”<sup>9</sup> The relationship between the nation and each subject is presented in a narrative form. However, this nation-form as a narrative is immanent in the nation’s construction. As Balibar clarifies, the nation-form is the assemblages of apparatuses and practices that initiate an individual as “*homo nationalis* from cradle to grave.”<sup>10</sup>

The nation-form is the “interpellation” of the subject or the subjectification of the individual. In this way, the history of nations is always already given in the form of a narrative. The imaginary nation or community in the past never exists but is continuously invented through the myth of origins and national continuity. Therefore, “the formation of the nation ... appears as the fulfillment of a ‘project’ stretching over centuries, in which there are



different stages and moments of coming to self-awareness.”<sup>11</sup> The establishment of the nation-states is the consequence of contingent events, which have nothing to do with the cause or destiny of each nation. Nations have no historical lineages or experiences, but their myth of national golden ages is created by nationalism. Nationalism has been used for mobilizing the “free” individuals in the modern State and their national orientation is the by-product of capitalism, even though its sentiment seems firmly rooted in mythical origins.

### 3. The Machinic Enslavement of Capitalism

The myth of the authentic State has given rise to the modern invention of a nation. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari conceptualize *Urstaat* for explaining the relationship between production and the State. For them, there has never been one State but rather many coexisting variations of the primal State even in a specific period. The possible proliferation of many States comes up from the desire of the *Urstaat*, “whence the variations, all the variants of the new alliance, falling nevertheless under the same category.”<sup>12</sup> To quote Deleuze and Guattari,

The State was not formed in progressive stages; it appears fully armed, a master stroke executed all at once; the primordial *Urstaat*, the eternal model of everything the State wants to be and desires. “Asiatic” production, with the State that expresses or constitutes its objective movement, is not a distinct formation; it is the basic formation, on the horizon throughout history. There comes back to us from all quarters the discovery of imperial machines that preceded the traditional historical forms, machines characterized by State ownership of property, with communal possession bricked into it, and collective dependence. Every form that is more “evolved” is like palimpsest: it covers a despotic inscription, a Mycenaean manuscript.<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, it is “a double error” to say that “the development of commodity production is enough to bring about feudalism’s collapse” and that “feudalism of itself is in opposition to the State.”<sup>14</sup> Even though capitalist States and socialist States come to exist, the traits of the primordial despotic State still remain. Unlike much of development theory, which justifies the

beginning of capitalism as the end of feudalism, commodity production reinforces the condition of the feudal features, or the State with the feudal remnant retains commodities against “the decoding of flows.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it is useless to list the differences between each political regime according to “the manner of conscientious historians.”<sup>16</sup> No doubt, this point brings back Louis Althusser’s critique of Paul Ricœur about the objective knowledge of history. In opposition to Ricœur’s emphasis on a historian’s interpretation of history as the ground of objectivity, Althusser defended the objectivity of history, which already embraces such subjectivity from within.

Following Fernand Braudel’s assumption, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that capitalism came to exist through the State-form. Once capitalism attains the modern State as its models of realization, the global axiomatic of capitalism begins to be realized like “a single City, megalopolis, or ‘mega-machine’ of which the States are parts, or neighborhoods.”<sup>17</sup> When capitalism completes an axiomatic, all States and all social formations gravitate towards “isomorphic in their capacity as models of realization.”<sup>18</sup> This capitalist axiomatic is nothing else than a centralized market system, in which “even the socialist countries participate.”<sup>19</sup> The *machinic enslavement* of capitalism results from its dominant State-form over diverse social formations. This rule of the central State is the way by which capitalism traps the Third World. Deleuze and Guattari clearly indicate:

Throughout a vast portion of the Third World, the general relation of production is capital—even throughout the entire Third World, in the sense that the socialized sector may utilize that relation, adopting it in this case. But the mode of production is not necessarily capitalist, either in the so-called archaic or transitional forms, or in the most productive, highly industrialized sectors. This indeed represents a third case, included in the worldwide axiomatic: when capital acts as the relation of production but in noncapitalist modes of production. We may therefore speak of a polymorphy of the Third World States in relation to the States of the center. And this dimension of the axiomatic is no less necessary than the others; it is even much more necessary, for the heteromorphy of the so-called socialist States was imposed upon capitalism, which digested it as best it could, whereas the polymorphy of the Third World States is partially organized by the center, as an axiom providing a substitute for colonization.<sup>20</sup>

However, this capitalist domination always already contains its paradox from within. When its global organization turns to be the capitalist axiomatic, it cannot help implying “a heterogeneity of social formations,” which “gives rise to and organizes its ‘Third World’.”<sup>21</sup> The establishment of the capitalist State is a machinic processes rather than a consequence of development. Even if its capture is dominant, there is always something that escapes from the processes such as towns or war machines. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari point out that capitalism hides the trace of the *Urstaat* beneath “the blows of private property, then of commodity production,” and thus “the State witnesses its decline.”<sup>22</sup> The main features of capitalism (i.e., private property, wealth, commodities, and classes) are “*the breakdown of codes*.”<sup>23</sup> From this perspective, Deleuze and Guattari bluntly demonstrate that the advent of the State does not proceed by “progressive homonization, or by totalization, but by the taking on of consistency or the consolidation of the diverse as such.”<sup>24</sup> The triumph of capitalism has nothing to do with its inner necessity but instead, with the contingent crystallization of the machinic processes.

This observation leads us to understand the fandom around BTS. If the juridical foundation of the State is not necessary and capitalism is the contingent consequence, there might not be any legitimate contract between individual wills. Furthermore, the fans’ activities are inappropriate for the juridical relationship between BTS and the entertainment company. As a cultural commodity, consumers cannot own BTS as such, and the contract belongs to the relation between BTS and Big Hit Entertainment. The only thing that the fans can do within the monetary exchange system is to enjoy consuming the volatile moments of BTS’s performance. Today’s development of telecommunication technology, (i.e., social media and streaming services), makes it possible to retain the temporal experiences in the “digital tertiary retention” in Bernard Stiegler’s sense.<sup>25</sup> Audiences can watch what they want anytime by replaying those recorded performances. However, they do not want to give up the authentic relationship with their idols. Technology provides them with a medium that enables them to sustain their

feeling continuously. In this vein, the BTS fandom, i.e., A.R.M.Y, is contradictory to the contract. Their bond with BTS is not a profit-based but rather an affinity beyond any economic interest.

#### **4. Re-enchantment without a Miracle**

One may argue that the fans' emotional consumption of their idols is useless, and I believe such uselessness is the political implication of the BTS fandom. It is possible that, to some degree, the participation of fans is a political act depending on the social or political advocacy that the K-pop group claims to represent. In this sense, BTS is a channel through which fans practice global solidarity and recognize their trans-national citizenship. The creation of the trans-national zone is the purpose of their participation in BTS's fandom. However, far from the common opinion about this kind of fandom, I would say that BTS A.R.M.Y's enjoyment is not ascribed to interactivity but rather to interpassivity. According to Robert Pfaller, interpassive people keep away from their desire and transfer it to "other people, animals, machines and so on."<sup>26</sup> Interpassivity is how people delegate passivity to others rather than activity. It is as if they act, but they do not. Interpassivity, by which they pass on their desire to the idols, is the crucial aspect of the BTS fandom.

This transference does not mean vicarious satisfaction but instead refers to a "double delegation," which creates the representative agent of their pleasure and the rituals to hand down their belief in the illusion they have assigned to "an undefined naive other."<sup>27</sup> With interpassivity, consuming the cultural commodity does not come with any kind of belief. An example is the case of the *Squid Game*, a recent Korean drama on Netflix which will be discussed with the homeostasis of capitalist perversion in this mechanism in mind. As is well known, capitalism even sells a critique of capitalism. In fact, even Netflix produces and distributes *The Social Dilemma*, a documentary that criticizes the big data industry like Netflix itself.

However, this paradox does not mean that capitalism totalizes our unconscious. Instead, it implies that we enjoy the "interpassivity" of voluntary obedience to the regime. The concept of interpassivity explains a way by which we gain enjoyment by renouncing our freedom to choose. In terms

of interpassive arrangements in the case of *Squid Game*, its dramatic setting provides for its innate reception. We already “know” the problem of capitalism that the Netflix product is supposed to show us before we even start to watch it. In this actualization of media, (i.e., the mechanical operation of online streaming), our participation as a Netflix spectator in the process turns out to be mere excess. In other words, the inner logic of the Netflix series (the utilitarian critique of the excessive desire, such as the subduction of unfair enjoyment from the distribution of pleasure) consummates itself without the presence of audiences in its realization.

By enjoying *Squid Game*, in relation to the case of BTS, we can refrain from our surplus appreciation of capitalist obscenity and hand it over to Netflix. This disinterested mode in the process of delaying the fulfilment of our desire is the ideological entailment of the new media. The normalization of surplus desire seems to reach even higher level in interpassive arrangements of algorithmic mechanisms. Now you do not need to think about what you should watch. More than that, you do not need to desire what you really desire. This normal state of voluntary obedience is the condition for retaining the capitalist mode of production.

The interpassive behavior might be regarded as an ideological response to capitalist nihilism. This nihilism would be related to “the anarchistic turn” of capitalism in Catherine Malabou’s sense, which marks “decentralized currencies, the end of the state’s monopoly, the obsolescence of the mediating role played by banks, and the decentralization of exchanges and transaction.”<sup>28</sup> This horizontal anarchism of global capitalism arouses the hierarchical movements of populism within the nation-states, which justify its national identity or authenticity. An attempt to bring forth the depth of a nation resists the decentralization of the political economy.

Contrary to this nationalist inclination against globalization, the orientation of BTS fandom seems to take an opposite direction. The interpassivity of the fandom reveals the “depthlessness” of global capitalism against nationalism. The BTS fans do not want to act as subjects but as delegates of their desire. What they desire is not the fulfilment of their wanting but the ongoing state of desiring as such. They are not interested in the object of the

desire but the craving deference of the pleasure for the desire, for they must stop desiring if they can easily own the object. BTS is not only a cultural commodity but also an intangible object beyond the pleasure principle. Their emotional disposition to these idols is like a response to a magic show, not a participation in a religious rite. They enjoy it but do not believe any “miracle” there. They consider themselves ordinary people, but as Jacques Rancière points out, “the common people *are* the army.”<sup>29</sup>

In this sense, I think the BTS A.R.M.Y is a symbolic answer to the disenchantment of commodification. They do not love BTS as a commercial product but rather wish to sustain the magical illusion they have staged through the boys’ fiction.

## Notes

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# Poetry Against Calamity

## Post-capitalist Economic Media and the Decolonization of Money<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

“Economic Media” conceptualizes the already well advanced convergence of communications media and monetary media that currently subsumes species creativity to the detriment of planetary well being and ecology. The calculus of exchange under racial capital threatens to fully colonize daily life, converting even poetic aspirations for a better world into fodder for capital extraction. How to keep practices of radical care, food assistance, mutual aid and liberation from collapsing back into feeding racial capitalism, its computational colonialism and Neo-imperialism? A perennial question, navigated here through a critique of the political economy of mediation and the social relations its global operating system would organize—paradigmatically through and as social media, but effectively everywhere. In this essay, this navigation takes the form of an hypothesis offered in the imperative: We must attack money and we must decolonize it. Money as a digital system of writing has been vertically integrated into all other digital systems such that its logic overdetermines the parameters of life. Such an attack—waged not in place of other struggles but as a way of securing their gains—entails seeking a new type of writing, beyond contemporary digital archiving and accounting, that allows for the people to

collectively write our own futures in accord with our own values, in expressions denominated by our own activity and activism. I call this writing decolonial ecography and see it as necessary to the flourishing, which is to say the materialization of the poetics of an abiding and yet-emergent Communism.

### **Keywords**

Decolonization, Ecography, Cryptocurrency, Poetry, Money, Economic Media

Feel what I feel when I feel what I feel  
When I'm feelin', in the sunshine!  
Everybody loves the sunshine.

—Roy Ayers

You are cordially and indeed enthusiastically invited to participate in the investigation indicated by the prose that follows this opening salvo. Though written with the conviction that the strategic offer here articulated has become, through long effort, relatively coherent, it is very likely that the torquing of various concepts stresses them beyond easy recognition—some sentences may require a patient attention normally reserved for poetry. It is a lot to ask. The historical and indeed financial evisceration of language forces us (that is semantically, but also politically forces us) to make words do new tricks, tricks that do not collapse back into more lubrication for capital and fascism. To avoid such collapse, we must literally change our minds and our reading-writing practices—no easy task. Ultimately we must also transform the media that platform our thoughts and communiques. In a growing body of work I have endeavored to script a pathway to such change incrementally by attempting a thoroughgoing reconceptualization of a primary substrate of expression itself, that is, of language/writing in its particular historical condition as currently captured by computation and financialization. There appears below new terminology including the term “economic media” — a concept created to expand our understanding of media that simultaneously transmit semiotic and economic values and that will be further defined here through its rhetorical and grammatical positioning in relation to other concepts, and that awaits further definition by others. This process of reconceptualization is in fact a principal means by which I, with my limited capacities, have endeavored to change my own mind and practices and to begin to walk a path that leads out of racial capitalism. My proposition regarding the reading-writing practice here is to let this work percolate and stimulate where it may, and further, I request that where necessary the reader-writer open themselves to more conscious participation in a set of mutations that, according to the logic of this piece have happened, are happening and, in the

most significant gesture here, must consciously happen if we are to overcome global capitalism, along with its fascisms and climate change. Breathe and breathe in the trans-subjective. The reader-writer may see and feel that the political and indeed historical injunction expressed here is not only to reconceptualize socio-semiotics and their relation to production under conditions of financialization and racial capitalism, but to begin to alter the *technics* of expression at the level of transmission, archivization, datification and machine architectures. Without a doubt there are mistakes and incomplete ideas herein and the presentation is admittedly flattened by the compression of the multiple forces being constellated through a soico-cybernetic approach, but I would wager that if the reader-writer feels their way they can also test many of the ideas by engaging in a hermeneutic process and interrogating the sentences should they develop an interest in doing so. In that, I suppose, this text is like many other (poetic) texts—it would resist premanufactured thinking and coheres as one learns how to read-write it. Where it differs from many however, is that it is designed to pay communist dividends. Nonetheless, I apologize in advance for any unnecessary difficulties I may have inadvertently introduced here.

—JB, May 30, 2022

We begin with the following processes and historical structures expressed as noun phrases: Colonization, dispossession, forced migration, militarization, global hunger, heteropatriarchy, homo/transphobia, racism, climate injustice, the possibilities of classless societies and of emancipation from oppression, the legacies of social differentiation, problems of individuality, alienation and psychopathology, extrajudicial killings, failed and future revolutions, fascist states. Unsurprising that the text before you (like the world around you), in wishing to transform the current calamities, seeks significant aspects for the addressing of local and also world-historical problems in the yet-living and new knowledges of the politically marginalized, and in the socialities and world-making capacities of the oppressed. It should also be unsurprising that counter-power is to be found in the aesthetic, the affec-

tive, the organizational, the resonant, the performative, the cybernetic—the living tissues that mediate our objects, be they nouns or machines.

However, the key question posed on this occasion regards especially this last notion, the cybernetic interdependence of all planetary denizens: the emerging *media* of the social, psychological and ecological interconnection and disaster. We refer to the objectified and objectifying processes whose functionality overdetermines the conditions of living: textualization, photography, datification, computation, monetization. Therefore the question of cyber-mediation must also include the question of the *media* of reparative expression and decolonial resurgence. In a world with so much pain and so many cries, lamentations and organized actions against oppression, we ask aloud: How can we keep the calls and struggles for solidarity, for justice, for liberation from oppression from being absorbed and reincorporated into what are now the default racial capitalist production regimens? How to keep practices of radical care, food assistance, mutual aid and collective concern from collapsing back into feeding racial capitalism and its mediation of life on Earth? A perennial question, one urgently posed by capital's power to turn revolt into profit. What may be surprising here is the *strategy* by which we propose to navigate *the political economy of mediation and the social relations that its global operating system would organize*. We propose it in order to move towards an answer that is *not* supportive of neo-liberal sharing in the dividends of global extraction. There is no neo-liberal solution just as there is no end to world-historical violence under racial capitalism. In what follows, this navigation takes the form of an hypothesis offered in the imperative: We must attack money and we must decolonize it.

With this theme of an attack on money for the purposes of its (and our) decolonization in mind and in the imagination, explored through teachings from the critique of political economy, we aim for something unorthodox: *to reimagine the protocols of monetary media in order to transcend racial capitalism and its colonial order*. It's ordering. Critical race theory, feminism, abolition feminism, media theory, decolonial writings and radical finance would indicate that such transformation is only possible if we constantly access our aesthetic and affective capacities as a poetics of relation: their/our powers of

persistence, survival, and facility for relation, forms of knowledge and care that can be mounted against, in spite of, and in excess of oppression. And radical transformation that would include liberation from various forms of oppression as well as decolonial resurgence is possible only as a collective and, ultimately, a global project—as *practice* and as *politics*. We could even say “as program,” a program, or rather a programming, for the overcoming of racial capitalism and a revaluation of value(s).

Existing monetary media (for the moment, think “money as capital”) have through and as computation grafted themselves to all other media forms—monetization underpins social mediation (as language, practice, information, etc.) at 0 to  $n$  levels of remove—today all utterance and all expression is tied to computation and financialization, just as plastic and pollutants permeates the global ecosystem. The tractor beams of finance leave no utterance uninflected. The current program for global expression, which is at base a financial one, entails a continuous reprogramming, a semiotic and financial re-encoding of the *futures* scripted and thus articulated by capital. Through a kind of cybernetic *detournement*, these futures must be redirected, as co-authored futures (this term is intended in both the temporal and financial sense, and authorship here expresses both the author-function and authority). The co-authorship and indeed collective authorship of futures is to be understood here as a practical poetics of both expression and production. It involves not only new modes of expression, but new forms of writing and of platforming writing. A poetics of relation may yet inform our futures, our post-capitalist economies to be.

Many recently published and forthcoming books, among them Dean Spade’s *Mutual Aid*, Arturo Escobar’s *Designs for the Pluriverse*, Safiya Umoja Nobel’s *Algorithms of Oppression*, Mark Alizart’s *Cryptocommunism*, Robert Meister’s *Justice is an Option*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, Bauwens, Kostakis and Pazaitis’s *Peer to Peer: The Commons Manifesto*, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons*, and also their *All Incomplete*, Kara Keeling’s *Queer Times, Black Futures*, Jayna Brown’s *Black Utopias*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s *As We Have Always Done* are reaching for this beyond capital. *From within it*. From a within that is also a

without—an “immanent outside.” In different ways, yes, but there is widespread agreement regarding the pernicious bankruptcy, accumulated injustice, and global failures of the current system. These books and their discourses are among the conversations that we would engage here. Ambient in the ether we find sustained attention to problems with logistics, informatics and computation, attention to postcapitalism, attention to abolition feminism, to afro-futurism and Black futures, and to decolonization. We find anti-imperialist, workerist and queer positions. Those seriously seeking post-capitalist alternatives are aware of the violence of settler colonialism, of land-grabbing, radical dispossession, genocide, policing militarization, fascism, imperialism, economic extraction and outright war. We are aware of this thing called racial capitalism and that, as Jodi Melamed says, “racial capitalism is capitalism.” And then there is the protest and forced migration rising up on our screens and in the streets all around the world.

But writing cannot simply remain what we know as writing if our criticisms and laments are to be much more than poetic gestures and beautiful hauntologies. From (and as) the living remains of communism (our anar-chive) we must seek, and seek practically, collectivization. The poetic function of our texts of liberation contains within itself the world-making crystals of radical social change. In preserving the legacies of struggle and the calls for justice by revitalizing them in the present, they already program changes in sensibility and sociality that could change the world. However, much of the disruption created by these programs is enclosed by the media-environment, which is to say the semiotic and financial limits imposed by capitalist hegemony.

The collectivization of the means and media of production, and for now let’s also say a redistributing of risk (and reward) by collectivizing, democratizing and communizing the authorship of the *terms* of value (yes, the terms), which means, precisely, *its expressions, its abstractions, its codes* becomes the fundamental political challenge of the 21st century. We seek to intervene in systems of accounting and of account and the forms of numeracy that inform, encode, and functionalize expression. We must explore the integrated circuits between expressivity and the registration, archivization and



functionalization of all forms of writing in the social. For some of us, it may be difficult to understand dollars, RMB, Euros, Pesos and Rubles as forms of writing, units of account inscribed on media, capable of producing state changes in ledgers, just as it is sometimes difficult to remember that computation is also writing—algorithmic writing—1s and 0s registered and erased according to rulesets.

However, keeping in mind social media, attention economy, ordinary wages and forms of servitude, we may observe that these and other forms of monetary writing are everywhere active and include but are not limited to monetization, ledgers of account, the issuance of credit and debt, the development of synthetic financial instruments and contracts, and the speed-of-light computational processing of these inscriptions. A moment's reflection reveals that such forms of writing, either as bank ledgers or as the 1s and 0s electronically inscribed to record and process these ledgers (or, for that matter, inscribed when you post on Facebook), are indeed fully integrated with one another as moments of capital investment and stand at the ready to quantify and absorb nearly all social activity via networked computation. Information is at present inseparable from banking, both endogenously within the financial system and exogenously throughout the social and indeed perceptible world. We note that this process of encoding by means of information bound to capital and particularly fixed capital exercises a profound force of overdetermination on the future. Those who have accumulated value through the historical dispossession of others organize the future so that their capital may increase through a compounding of injustice.

From Marx (by way of Max Haiven), we can say that value is encoded in commodities. It is encrypted in their "hieroglyphics" (Marx) and decrypted in markets through pricing. Laundering injustice (Joque), this encryption collapses social meaning (as well as history, experience and narrative) both in commodified objects and in what will become computationally legible as "information." Value and money have themselves *become* information whose full amplitude as the abridgement of complex networked processes is never to be restored by capitalism. Although the historical transition from commodity to information is a leap akin to that figured in the dissolve from

bone as pre-historic murder weapon to spinning starship in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, this mutation of the commodity form into its actually existing future as informatic matter describes our situation. The state change in matter introduced by labor to create commodities have become the state changes introduced in discrete state machines. The objectification of labor, as commodities and now as information, and the placing of these products on the market by institutionalized regimes of racial capital (a placement that is at once posited and presupposed by informatics) serves to drive the further extraction of vitality from the people of the world, creating ever more massive accumulation of capital for a few and mass dispossession as well as ecological collapse for the many.

From the remains of Communism we seek responses to counter-histories *anarchived* by the commodity form and its imaginaries, yet written in lives of struggle. The ghosted lives entombed in the production of our objectified world arrayed through vast injustice, haunt and clamor. These ghosts would and do speak in and through today's myriad oppressed. Positing a strategically synthetic set of moves this writing calls for radical and indeed revolutionary modifications to what is already a cyber-social relationship to a historically emergent logic of risk, to what, in *The World Computer* I called "computational racial capitalism" (Beller 2021). Our objects and our monies, let's imagine, might transmit information differently, might host a different order of social relations that at present are collapsed and repressed in the connectivity and functionality these forms currently provide. They might unleash historical repression and express the claims of the oppressed. We call on the term "economic media" to serve as both the concept capable of diagnosing the harrowing computational *convergence* of expressive media with financial media and as a *strategic* understanding of the current relations of racial capitalist extraction that will illuminate what is to be done.

In what will no doubt be controversial, the energies informing this exercise of writing would strive to hasten the opening up of the design space and programming capabilities of what we critically identify as *economic media* to what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney call "the undercommons." To attempt even to imagine this coalescence, to imagine under-commoning economic

media is to think dangerously, to risk mixing the sacred and the profane, to risk handling a double-edged sword, and to risk betraying that which, because of its intimacy with the legacies of survival under conditions of irredeemable oppression, is most beautiful and real. To dare to imagine money as a medium not just driving struggle and producing such immense and innumerable suffering, but as a medium *of* struggle, of complex expression, and of liberation in the deepest sense, means that we first grasp critically the relationship between money and writing, that is, between monetary media and semiotic expression. It means that we critically analyze money itself not just as a system of accounts, but as a form of writing and as a medium capable of *collateralizing* expression (Kockelman). Under capitalism, denotation, demarcation, archivization and semiosis itself become means to collateralization. Collateralization affects the field of the possible (the relational) that would otherwise be endemic to expression. Heliotropically it bends the growth of meaning towards the fusion-light of racial capitalism since only that which can feed itself by means of its flux (or that which protects itself through opacity) is slated to survive.

Whether as an archival mark on a stone tablet indicating the number of cattle owed, or as a database of user information, written marks, when strictly bound to economics, create forms of credit which can be used to procure liquidity. Collateralization processes expand and exercise their logic on the semantic field and simultaneously organize and affect practices of all kinds. Sovereign states, banks, creditors, insurance companies, media companies use these recording strategies to securitize assets such as citizens and debtors. States' credit-worthiness is indexed to the condition of their citizenry and tax base, media companies' market caps are indexed to their user-base. With computational media (social media most obviously, but really all computational media), and the emergence of *computing platforms as fixed capital* we see that writing and discourse itself have been commandeered by this process of collateralization. It is not just the fact of users but their expressive power that is collateralized. Influencers and other forms of attention aggregation express the fractal logic of this value-capture and collateralization by means of digital inscription. Capital moves in and through

our meaning making, capturing our product and turning the platform risk inherent in the expense of capture into wagers on value. This information, itself the result of computation and of the colonizing computation of the social, amounts to a structuring of new types of assets that can be borrowed on to fund its further development as media of value extraction.

To imagine money as a medium of struggle, expressivity and even liberation means that we go back to the origins of writing in cuneiform and recall that these first semantic inscriptions were indeed methods of account (Sachy)—in all senses of that word. And it is also to recall that there have been and still may be methods of account that are not capitalist. If it seems unnecessary to remark that non-capitalist forms of accounting *may* still exist, the reader has not, in my view, fully gleaned the depths of informatic colonization. Although the extensive encroachment on general semiotics by monetary media has been fundamental in executing the programs of racial capitalism over the past several hundred years, we wager that we might yet take back the powers of inscription and abstraction. Notably, the earliest writings in Mesopotamia were promissory notes, records of credits and debts. Writing, it seems, has always been an account of values that transmits and indeed becomes a means to further create values in the future. And yet writing could and did do so much more (and less) than capitalism, it could, even as it transformed species life, speak to experiences and futures far beyond the purview of value, that is, of *the value form*—the form of value indexed to labor time and its historical alienation. Capital, speaking very generally, has transformed, erased or vectoralized these processes according to its designs. And indeed, writing-as-monetary-media, has in fact reasserted over other modes of writing this primary function of economic accounting almost paradigmatically today, albeit in a register that is oftentimes unconscious, since it is ordinarily perceived to be distinct from the immediacy of expression.

This generalized writing, namely that of information and its transaction in and as markets, collected through ubiquitous computing, becomes the omnipresent other scene of nearly all expression's double-articulation as semiotic expression and as data on computational substrates. As Google's

self-renaming as Alphabet might testify, language in the present historical conjuncture, now carries with it, *avant la lettre*, the logic of capital even in its most intimate expressivity. Language has become a site and indeed means of capitalist production (Virno), which is to say racial capitalist production. We could say that since writing has been subsumed by information, meaning has been besieged by the totalitarianism of financialization and with that, the politics of capitalist precarity. Thus we see the crisis in the distribution of wealth, in health, in governance, in gun control, in ecology and in our inability to say anything about it that has real structural transformational effects.

Today, with the full financialization occurring as the colonization of the lifeworld by informatics, it is as if every utterance has become, inescapably, a wager on the value form—an effort to get a return on investment. Our speech, like our postings, teaching, talking and writing, has become a wager within capital to get more capital. Increasingly this situation prevails across regions and cultures and permeates every aspect of everyday life. Each speech act or written word becomes in effect a derivative, a risk instrument seeking liquidity (currency, “likes,” and yes, money) as access to a share of the social product. Therefore, in response to the fetishism around human capital as the soul which must be put to work in capitalist production, we must *reverse subsume* the poetic expressivity that lies in the word (and indeed in art, photography, in music and in making) and seize the word (and allied forms of expression in every art, including the most ordinary and mundane arts of mankind life) as a medium for the transmission and creation of values, *plural*. These values, the deeply plural forms of care that exist only in sharing and relation, cannot be severed from their implantation and expression in forms of community and solidarity nor collapsed back into the value-form of racial capitalism—what we here refer to as “value”—if they are to retain their character, their qualities, and also, their revolutionary power. They are concrete, local, specific, relational, even if they must seek their way in a matrix of datification and abstraction.

Poetically, analytically, pragmatically and technically, we must recognize monetary media themselves—dollars, pesos, and their ledgers of account—as *protocolized* forms of writing. States write on bills, banks receive bills and

issue depositors credits written on their ledgers. These forms of writing and the derivatives thereof extend throughout the world system as the financialization of nearly everything and have set their designs on all other forms of expression. Media companies, universities, students, the poor are all subject to the codes of capital and bound by its protocolization of the rules of inscription. Who can issue their own money?—a key question. Monetary media are forms of writing that absorb and re-articulate other forms of mark making. We might repurpose these various media of inscription to mean otherwise, to mean and thus *to do* things other than what is done by existing monies and their derivative forms of capitalization. We might seek values-transmission media that do not produce accumulation on one side as a direct function of dispossession on the other—as occurs in the wage relation or in interest bearing capital that in the last instance metabolizes labor. We might seek monetary media that are not colonizing, extractive and racializing in their very implantation and utility, as are the current forms of economic media, but rather serve to sustain, organize and foster practices of freedom, decolonization and emancipation. Monies for poetry and revolution means currencies of poetry and revolution. These imply alternative methods of account. (Lopez)

Knowing full well that monetary media and its accounting practices have been drivers of capitalist expansion (Lenin, Luxembourg), colonization (Cesaire), epidermalization (Fanon, Hall, Browne), we should seek to intervene in the methods of inscription essential to capitalist economy, as well as the network of inscriptions ordained by money as capital. Monetary inscriptions, the methods of issuance and account of current money, along with its invested algorithms of datification, securitization, and monetary issuance, must be revealed as *protocols* of measure and accounting. Furthermore, we must become fluent in how these protocols are networked through institutions, imaginations, communications and nearly all other social practices. We must recognize that these protocols, globally networked and operating in accord with mathematics, are, despite their often unspoken claims to conceptual neutrality, nonetheless always already political. To want to understand money as such, as a network of networks, indeed as a *global computational*

*operating system*, (built “behind our backs”) means also that we imagine the possibility of making conscious what is socially unconscious, and beyond that, reprotocolizing systems of account and thus also of issuance.

For the moment, we break off here, having, I hope, glimpsed the necessity of re-protocolizing the global operating system that is the integrated financial and informatic world of racial capitalism, its economic media and the world computer. We will find, I think, that just as importantly as rerprotocolizing networks of account (how accounting is administered, how credit is issued and value apportioned) we also become fluent in *how to denominate values*. The futures that our protest and higher acting call into being must become the bases of values. Such denominations will program by encoding the performances of the refusal and indeed prohibition of extractive relations because they will provide economic options that allow the active, real-time election of non-extractive socio-economic activity. We may choose and create cooperative, decolonial currencies as vectors of becoming, rather than, rather than national ones so long as we can design and host such on computational platforms that are also and at the same time collectively owned. This emergence is a matter of technics, politics and poesis— strategies of engagement with space, time, computation and relation that would allow historical claims to persist semiotically and economically in order to realize our highest aspirations and most sacred hopes. The values we express must indeed back our expressions and not be liquidated (as they currently are) by their form and platform.

This persistence of plural, collective values in ways capable of altering the probability distribution of possible futures, can only be done if our most dear collective values which I will but summarize and abstract here as love, solidarity, sustainability, justice, humility, and mutual aid, are able to materially organize economy itself. Expression must not be subsumed by capital but, in the decolonization of economic media, must ordain economic and social relations through sharing risk and equity in ways that are equitable, sustainable, mutually aiding and just. Economy must itself become poetry. This means that we create cyber-social networks whose practices and practitioners (we are already here) are dedicated to specific forms of

liberation and social justice and whose participants themselves—by means of their sociality—may back the currencies we ourselves issue on a new type of network. We need to create alternative currencies whose purchase on the future increases as the power of our social movements increase. We might mint tokens designed for just these purposes similar to the way we mint images and poems. And we might create currencies that are non-extractive, capable of abstraction without extraction. We are talking about semio-monetary forms fostering stranger mediated solidarities rather than colonizing through territorialization and extraction as do current monies and communications. Semio-monetary forms that create concrete kinship, solidarity and shared equity by sharing risk and futurity. Social media and cryptocurrency provide the way forward as they are, in their current form, the means by which new collective organization has been empowered and is expressed, even as this emergence is also exploited by platform owners and the fixed capital of computing and institutions. We must learn to collectivize our capacities for collectivization and to render the econometrics of such organization *cooperative* and assure that platform equity is collectively held. This would be but a first phase, a generalization of ownership moving towards a dissolution of ownership. A collectively expressive financialization moving towards the ultimate anachronization of finance. A material expression that reveals the signature of all in each and every object.

Therefore, we must embark on the decolonization of economic media and of money itself through a reimagining and re-engineering of the protocols of writing. Urgently we must learn to understand and remake economic media in order to re-engineer the grammar of the multitude. Only through a reworking of the protocols for the writing processes that comprehensively inscribe expressivity, finance, and computational code can we sustainably create interconnected friend2friend economies, expressive of mutually agreed upon values because working toward the performative realization of those values: economies that are functional, sustainable, non-extractive, just, abundant, poetic, loving, beautiful. Post-capitalist. Decolonial. Communist.



## Note

1. This text is adapted from a work in progress provisionally entitled, *Of Communism: Notes for the Decolonization of Money*.

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# Interdisciplinary Reflection on Ethical Literary Criticism and Literary Theory Framework<sup>\*</sup>

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## Abstract

Ethical literary criticism is a new theory generated from the trend of ethical criticism. It was founded on the basis of the theory of the three stages of human civilization, namely, natural selection, ethical selection, and scientific selection. Focusing on the analysis of ethical choices in literary texts with terms such as ethical choice, ethical identity, ethical will and so on, ethical literary criticism interprets all kinds of literary writings, dissects examples of ethical choices in different environments and contexts, and emphasizes the ethical value of literature in search of moral enlightenment and instruction for the readers. Through the deployment of its own terms, ethical literary criticism can be used to obtain new interpretations and understanding of literary texts, and effectively solve the problems raised by the literary text.

Any theory must have its own theoretical framework. If there is no theoretical framework, arguments cannot constitute a theory. As a theory, ethical literary criticism was founded on the central category of ethical choice. As the framework of ethical literary criticism, it is the basic structure and model of the system. It is not only the underlying logic of literary theory but also its basic principle.

### **Keywords**

Ethical literary criticism, literary theory, framework, ethical election, ethical choice

## I. Theoretical Misreading of the Trend of Thought

As early as 1968, Roland Barthes, a contemporary French literary theorist and critic, ventured into the idea of the “death of author.”<sup>1</sup> More than 30 years later, Hillis Miller discussed the “death of literature” in his work *On Literature* (2002)<sup>2</sup>. He said, “The end of literature is at hand. Literature’s time is almost up. It is about time.”<sup>3</sup> The death of literature echoes the death of the author, and highlights the question of whether literary theory is suitable for explaining literature. It is the failure of literary theory to explain the changes in literature that leads to the question of the value of literary theory.

In fact, the death of literature means the death of literary theory. In 1987, Professor Stein Haugom Olsen at The University of Oslo published *The End of Literary Theory*, an early work on the death of literary theory. Since then, many works on topics of “the end of theory”, “the death of theory”, “the death of literature”, “the end of literature” and other issues have been published, namely, *The Significance of Theory* (Terry Eagleton, 1990), *The Direction of Literary Theory* (Steven Earnshaw, 1996), *After the death of literature* (Richard B. Schwartz, 1997), *Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism* (Martin McQuillan, 1999), *The Future of Theory* (Jean-Michel Rabate, 2002), *After theory* (Terry Eagleton, 2003), *The Death of the Critic* (Rónán McDonald, 2007), *Death-drive: Freudian Hauntings in Literature and Art* (Robert Rowland Smith, 2010), *Death Representations in Literature: Forms and Theories* (Adriana Teodorescu, 2015) and *The Birth and Death of literary theory: Regimes of Relevance in Russia and Beyond* (Galin Tihanov, 2019). They are all the representative works that relate to the fate and “death” of literary theory.

Since the discussion focuses on the death of literary theory, what is theory or literary theory? A theory is a systematic rational knowledge and a knowledge system in a particular field. In *Ci Hai*, a well-known Chinese dictionary, theory is defined as “a system of concepts and principles, and a systematic rational understanding with characteristics of comprehensiveness, logic and systematization.”<sup>4</sup> The entry of theory in *Modern Chinese Dictionary* explains theory as “The systematic conclusions about the knowledge of nature and society that people generalized from practice.”<sup>5</sup> In *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, theory means “the coherent set

of hypothetical, conceptual, and pragmatic principles forming the general frame of reference for a field of inquiry.”<sup>6</sup> The explanation of theory in *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* is that it is “A supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained.”<sup>7</sup> In *Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*, theory is “a system of rules or principles.”<sup>8</sup> From the definitions cited above, a theory is a principle derived from practice that comprises systematic viewpoints, concepts, and terms. So, theory is an ideological system that explains various things.

Literary theory refers to the system of literary principles, rules and terms and concepts of literature associated with critical practice. Specifically, it is a summary of the laws of literary writing, appreciation, and criticism, which are mainly used for the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of literary texts and issues. In *Theory’s Empire* Richard Freadman and Seumas Miller stress that “the theory itself will consist of a set of claims or principles in respect of some object or phenomenon; and the objects or phenomena may be widely varying in nature.”<sup>9</sup> In *Literary Theory*, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren also define literary theory as “the study of the principles of literature, its categories, criteria, and the like.”<sup>10</sup> In short, the different viewpoints on what theory or literary theory is, share some common points as follows: First, theory should be a systematic system; Second, theory is an abstraction of the phenomenon with accepted conclusions in accordance with logic; Third, it is a tool of thinking. Hence, the methodology used to analyze, understand, explain, understand, and evaluate the literature also falls under literary theory.

The many definitions of literary theory notwithstanding, their basic feature is that first and foremost a system, a framework which is not an unsystematic or unstructured issues or ideas. If we examine the so-called literary theories from this perspective, we may have to reflect on them more deeply this time and question whether they are literary theories or not.

Why should we raise the question of what literary theories are? We have to wonder what theories are after all because we theoretical trends, ideas, concepts, and categories which are conventionally associated with

what are called literary theories can be quite confusing. In the case of China, for example, as a result of the country's reform and opening-up, various Western theories have been translated and introduced as literary theories. With the help of academic journals and conferences, particularly scholarly exchanges between China and Western countries, Western theories have quickly entered Chinese academic circles, which have become popular. However, if we take a closer look at the leading theories which we are so familiar with, we may have to rethink and redefine them. For example, if we try to define feminist, ecological or cultural criticism, and other Western theories that we teach in universities, discuss at different academic conferences, and use in our papers, we might have to clarify important definitions.

What are these so-called theories? How should they be understood and defined? If we reflect on those theories -- including feminism, culturalism, post-modernism, post-colonialism and so on -- that we have been following for decades, upon closer scrutiny, we might find that they are not by definition systematic theories. Instead, although the insights that have been developed around them are valid and significant in themselves, they consist of critical viewpoints borne out of thoughts and ideas on literature and literary criticism, history, politics, society, and culture. Indeed, many of these theories which we accepted as trends have exerted a great influence on literature, philosophy, culture, and society, even dominating our thoughts. Obviously, it is easy to confuse trends with theories. Nevertheless, by and large, it is the systematic nature of the discourse that distinguishes theories from trends. As suggested earlier, without a theoretical or discourse system, they cannot be regarded as systematic theories. For example, feminism, which came into being for advocating political equality between men and women and fighting for women's right to vote, is a trend of thought in society but by definition not a theoretical system in literary theory. In fact, it was widely accepted more as a political trend than as a theory as such. In the field of literary criticism, although feminism argues for political values and issues in literature, it is difficult to define it as literary theory per se. Similarly, ecological criticism came from environmental pollution and the ecological crisis caused by modern industry. Although it has been widely accepted in literature, it



is not a literary theory per se but a social, political, or cultural trend. There are other similar trends accepted in literature that are literary viewpoints or ideas but not theories for want of a theoretical system.

A trend is a prevailing tendency or inclination which is the product of the times, the common identity of society and the generally accepted social thought. It is also a kind of ideological tendency that reflects the common interests, understanding, needs, and aspirations of certain groups at a certain period. Its characteristics are as follows: (1) it is the ethical expression of a group rather than that of an individual; (2) it is socially accepted rather than a personal standpoint; (3) it puts forward unsystematic ideas and views or theoretical thought but not theories; (4) it is a kind of non-instrumental idea that needs to be explained but is not used for explanation; and (5) it is not a principle that can appear or disappear in historical environment at certain times. Overall, the trend could breed theories, but it is not theory itself. It can put forward questions but not solve them. Therefore, theory and trend are two different concepts that need to be distinguished from each other by definition.

If we make a distinction between theory and trend, it might be much easier to see why the questions such as “the end of the theory,” “the death of the theory,” and others coming from “theory terminators” have been raised and discussed by scholars. The above questions may have been caused by misreading and misunderstanding because, for example, although scholars who hold the argument of the death of theory, still use the term “theory” to discuss the theoretical questions, what they are referring to is not the end of the theory but the trend of thought. Many trends such as humanism, classicism, enlightenment, realism, romanticism, symbolism, and others have disappeared or died before and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whether they were social, cultural, or literary thoughts, they came to an end and died. Even if some thoughts, such as humanism and classicism, have been revived in the name of neo-humanism and neoclassicism, they now constitute new trends in the new era and environment.

Trend of thought always belongs to a specific period, environment, or social community. It could only enjoy a certain life cycle in history and exist

in the environment for a certain context. If the time and environment were to change, the trend will end and die. However, the end or death of one trend often means the rebirth of another, such as romanticism being replaced by realism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and revived in some forms of modernism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Compared with the trend of thought, the life cycle of theory is much longer. For instance, the theories of epistemology, relativity, labor value, clash of civilization, and other theories are still alive while others have died. Because there is a close connection between theories and trends – especially since theories often come from trends and trends were produced on basis of theoretical ideas -- it is often challenging to distinguish between them clearly. Therefore, when we discuss the end or death of the trend, we should distinguish it from the theory to avoid falling into the trap of misreading trend for theory.

It is important to pay attention to the following broad theoretical issues: the construction of new theories born of trends and to those theories used to explain the death and rebirth of the trends, the replacement and development of society, the changes of ideas in the past, present, and future, and the indispensable literature and art in our lives. As suggested earlier, we cannot formulate a theory without a framework that is not only its cornerstone and basic law, but also its principle and logic. Without the framework, the theory cannot come into being.

## **II. The Theoretical Framework is the Cornerstone of Theory Construction**

According to Steven Knapp and Walter Michaels in their 1982 essay,

The issues of belief and intention are, we think, central to the theoretical enterprise; our discussion of them is thus directed not only against specific theoretical arguments but against theory in general. Our examples are meant to represent the central mechanism of all theoretical arguments, and our treatment of them is meant to indicate that all such arguments will fail and fail in the same way. If we are right, then the whole enterprise of critical theory is misguided and should be abandoned.<sup>11</sup>

Since then, in particular, from early 21 century, the “death of theory” has been a largely attractive topic in literary studies. In fact, the death of literary theory is linked to several other questions such as the death of literature and death of the critic. In his book *On Literature*, Hillis Miller says, “It cannot be denied that literary theory contributes to that death of literature.”<sup>12</sup> He stresses again, “The efflorescence of literary theory signals the death of literature.”<sup>13</sup> To ask what use literary theory is without literature, is to also ask a similar question about the critic’s role. In *The Death of the Critic*, Ronan McDonald deplores the decline of literary criticism and seeks to explain the value of critics. The death of the critic means the death of literary theory because without the critic, there is no theory. However, some scholars, such as Galin Tihanov, asserts in his work *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory* (2019), that the death of literary theory means the rebirth of literary theory, implying some confidence in the importance of literary theory. Galin Tihanov is right because theories will not disappear; while we see some theories disappearing, we also see new theories emerging.

Whether it is the death of literary theory or the death of literature, to a large extent, it is just a different expression for the death of literary trend, which is the result of misreading or misinterpreting trend as theory. Generally, trend looks like theory because it is not only composed of thought but also gives birth to theory. It is due to their similarity that the trend is mistaken for the theory. The trend is the soil that breeds theory but it is not theory itself as it doesn’t become theory. There may have been a sprout of theory growing out of a trend but it may have died before it was born when the trend became obsolete. This shows that the trend is very important for generating theory, but there is a more important premise for generation of theory: the theoretical framework. Trend is a social basis for the development of theory, but it is not the cornerstone to build theory. Constructing theory, similar to building a house, requires a solid foundation, namely, the theoretical framework which is indispensable to theory construction.

What is referred to as the framework of literary theory is the basic structure of literary theory which can be also called its model of the system. It is not only the underlying logic of literary theory but also its basic principle. It

is also a research path to finding new literary interpretations and giving birth to new literary arguments. Any theory must have its own theoretical framework. If there is no theoretical framework, arguments cannot constitute theory.

Why is it necessary to stress the framework of literary theory? Without a good framework as the basis and premise, theoretical viewpoints cannot be bred, literary theory and discourse cannot be generated, and the questions on the death or end of the theory cannot be answered. Whether theory or trend is dead or not, the current theory cannot solve literary problems in today's reality. Hence, it is necessary to construct a new theory, but first, we need to find the framework for the construction of theory.

What is the best way to construct a new framework? Adherence to a scientific outlook is a basic requirement. Challenges include the perceived split between humanities and science and the serious lack of scientific spirit which hinder the development of humanistic studies; hence, there is a need to discuss the value of science to literary theory. As early as in 1959, in his lecture delivered at the University of Cambridge entitled "Two Cultures," C. P. Snow asserted that literary intellectuals and science are two opposing poles. He said, "Literary intellectuals at one pole—at the other scientists, and as the most representative, the physical scientists. Between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension— sometimes (particularly among the young) hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding. They have a curious distorted image of each other."<sup>14</sup> As the two poles cannot be reconciled, literary intellectuals cannot break away from old ideas to develop a new framework for the construction of literary theory. For a long time, the study of literature, especially literary theory, has been regarded as subjective to the extent that it is deemed to belong to the field of "ideology," which is irrelevant to science and technology. However, the rapid development of science and technology such as brain science, neurocognitive discoveries, invention of biochips, in the application of artificial intelligence technology in humanities, has changed the nature of literary studies. Hence, traditional subjective study characterized by ideology has gradually changed into scientific thinking directed by scientific principles and technical analysis. It is

becoming a trend. Historically, the scientific turn of linguistic research is the precursor of this change and can be regarded as the forerunner of the scientific turn of literary studies. Following the example of linguistic research, scientific factors must be considered when constructing a new framework of literary theory and criticism. In contrast to the traditional ethical, aesthetic, and cultural framework, the new framework is to be constructed in consideration of advanced scientific thought. In fact, over the years, science and technology are more and more used to solve literary problems in the real world and promote the rapid shift of interest within literary studies from the humanities to science in an interdisciplinary way. In the age of science, the new framework of literary theory cannot be constructed without science and technology. Furthermore, it must be produced as a result of interdisciplinary research of brain science, neurocognition, and artificial intelligence with literature. The current replacement of human translation by machine translation and poems written by Microsoft's AI indicates that literary studies has become more and more integrated with science and technology now than before.

To formulate the basic theoretical framework of literature, it is necessary to break through the structures of ethical, aesthetic, and cultural frameworks, rethink past theories and methods from an interdisciplinary standpoint, and reflect on past ideas, viewpoints, and conclusions in a critical way. It is on the basis of new understandings, ideas, and conclusions that we can construct a new interdisciplinary framework of literary theory as the foundation of ethical choice in literature. Thus, an innovation in literary theory, in the form of a literary framework, can be realized in the interdisciplinary studies of literature.

In China, the five Confucian virtues of “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith” are the moral codes. These are the long-cherished core ethics of Confucianism in Chinese history, as well as the theoretical framework of politics, literature, and arts in the Chinese feudal society. In the long history of China, these five virtues are both the ethical basis of the political system of feudal society and the ethical standards of literary writing and criticism. On this basis, Confucianism, which has long occupied a domi-

nant position in Chinese academic circles, lasted for more than 2,000 years from the Western Han Dynasty to the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. After the founding of New China or the People's Republic of China, although some thoughts relating to Confucian ethics continued to play a role, new socialist thought took its place in the mainstream. In the Western literary world, the ethical tradition has existed for a long time. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, many modern ideas have gradually become mainstream. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, an obvious tendency toward ethical return appeared in the literature, as well as an ethical turn in the literary world in the 1980s.

In the field of literature, aesthetics has undoubtedly been the most influential literary thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Since the 1980s, the concept of aesthetics as an ideology has not only become the leading thought in Chinese literary theories but has also been regarded as an essential attribute of literature. As an increasing number of people joined in the discussions, talks and writing on aesthetics of literature have become a trend, making it popular to talk and write about aesthetics. In literary studies, aesthetics is the most-used term, which is the focus of discussion when scholars talk about literature and write papers. Although some scholars have questioned the theory of aesthetic ideology which Chinese scholars have coined to explain literature, their doubt is drowned out in the tide of aesthetic discourse. The theory of aesthetic ideology is not only regarded as the most important innovative achievement of literary theory in China since the new period but has also developed into a basic framework of literary theory. As a matter of fact, the main literary theoretical systems are constructed around aesthetic ideology, and the same is true for many literary viewpoints. In the view of these literary theorists, like political correctness, aesthetic ideology in literary theory and criticism cannot be questioned, let alone given up.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Western literary critics began to analyze literary works from a cultural perspective. In the 1990s, Huntington published his paper, "The Clash of Civilizations" and the work entitled, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World*. Huntington has emphasized the importance of "culture" much more than any other time in history, and

argued that culture will be sowing division and causing conflicts, generating strong repercussions in the western cultural and literary theoretical circles. In this regard, cultural criticism has focused not only on analyzing texts and symbols but also connects the objects of analysis with social events and cultural phenomena. It analyzes the internal structure of the text and investigates the text environment, the system of production and reproduction, as well as its dissemination and acceptance. This focus has provided a new space for literary research. The fact that there is no accepted definition of cultural criticism does not prevent it from becoming one of the most influential trends of thought. In the 1990s, Western cultural criticism entered China and quickly developed into one of the most influential trends in Chinese literature. It not only gave birth to the upsurge of cultural studies there but also had an important impact on Chinese traditional literary concepts and research methods.

But ethical, aesthetic, and cultural criticism are accepted under vague definitions but it has not diminished the scholars' enthusiasm for theories, nor has it affected their ability to become the framework of literary theory. Ethical, aesthetic, and cultural criticisms have been the three most influential literary trends in China since the 1990s. They are not only the three major frameworks of Chinese literary theory, but also basis for the generation of literary thoughts, view-points and topics. So, they have enjoyed an important long-term position in Chinese literature's theoretical circle. However, their inherent defects of theoretical logic make it difficult to form a theoretical system based on them. Aesthetic criticism, for example, has had the greatest influence among the three theoretical trends and produced many viewpoints; yet, it is difficult to construct its literary theoretical system.

### **III. Ethical Literary Criticism after the Theory**

The question of whether literary theory is dead has been a topic of long-term discussion in academic circles. Factually, what literary theorists care about is not the death of the theory, but the lack of a useful theory. Although there are many theories pervading the world, they exist as trends rather than as theories. As literary theories, they cannot answer basic questions such as the

literature's definition, its origin, function, values and so on. They tend to raise urgent questions which demand serious answers. What should we do? We need to construct a useful and effective new theory.

Literary theory needs to be constantly updated and perfected so that it can be useful for responding to questions in history and reality, both at present and in the future. Only by constructing new theories can we found the basis to discover new methods and explain the questions that have remained unsolved for a long time. Ethical literary criticism is such a new theory generated from the trend of ethical criticism. Unlike other current trends, it was founded on the basis of the theory of the three stages of human civilization and takes ethical selection with ethical choice as its core theory to construct its theoretical system and discourse to differentiate itself from the trend of the ethical criticism that appeared in the United States in the 1980s. In general, ethical criticism in U.S. is only a trend without its own theoretical system and concepts. However, by focusing on the ethical choices in literary texts -- and using its own theoretical terms such as ethical choice, ethical identity, ethical will and so on -- ethical literary criticism interprets all kinds of life phenomena in literary writings, analyzes ethical problems arising from complex relationships, such as man and self, man and others, man and society, and man and nature, dissects examples of ethical choices of different people in different environments and contexts, and analyzes the occurrence, development, and results of ethical choices. It adopts the viewpoint of the educational function of literature and emphasizes the ethical value of life experience in the search for moral enlightenment and instruction in literature. Through its own terms, ethical literary criticism can be used to effectively solve the problems raised in literature and obtain new interpretations, understandings, and conclusions.

Take Hamlet as an example. He asked himself: "To be or not to be, that is a question!" Traditionally, most scholars understand Hamlet's self-questioning as his reflections about life and death. However, if we analyze his self-questioning in terms of ethical choices, we will realize that Hamlet is not thinking about life and death, but about how to make his choices; that is, whether it is right or not for him to avenge his father. In fact, Hamlet is



faced with an ethical dilemma. Revenge for his father is his ethical responsibility and moral obligation, so his revenge is legitimate. But if he takes revenge, he will violate the ethical taboo of patricide for killing Claudius, his stepfather. This is a serious ethical crime. So, what Hamlet is faced with is the question of whether it is moral or not for him to avenge his father. That is to assume that it is immoral for him to kill his stepfather for revenge. The dilemma is that his revenge is justified, but it is not justified if he avenged his dead father. It is the ethical dilemma that is preventing him from making his choice and so he asks the question of “to be or not to be”.

The ethical choice of Hamlet is about what choice he makes is to be a moral human being. Not only it is necessary for Hamlet to experience the choice of being a human, but for the people to experience this choice. Ethical choice is our life. In fact, we are making ethical choices all the time, so we all live in ethical choices. The value of literature is to write down all these ethical choices as examples of our ethical choices in real life. By dissecting, elaborating, and evaluating these ethical choices, ethical literary criticism provides us with moral enlightenment. Ethical choice is both the most basic phenomenon and the deepest structure in our life and society. So, it is also the basic structure of literary ethical criticism.

In the theoretical system of ethical literary criticism that I have in mind, ethical choice or ethical selection with ethical choice is its core theory. It can also be said that ethical choice is the basic principle and theoretical framework. The arguments, viewpoints, terms and concepts of ethical literary criticism are all generated from ethical choice or ethical selection with ethical choice.

In English, the Chinese term “lún lǐ xuǎn zé” translates to “ethical selection” and “ethical choice” at the same time. Since there is no appropriate term that corresponds to it in Chinese, we have to use the term “lún lǐ xuǎn zé” to refer to two things, namely: ethical selection and ethical choice. The difference between them is that ethical selection refers to the entire process of ethical choices, and ethical choice refers to the actions of choice. Ethical selection is a singular term, while ethical choice is plural. The former refers to a new process of civilization of human beings after natural selection,

while the latter refers to a series of choice actions to finish the ethical selection of humans and humanity. From this perspective, as far as the individual is concerned, life from birth to death is a process of ethical selection made up of ethical choices. The process of ethical selection is closely integrated with ethical choices and cannot be separated therefrom. Both humankind and human beings need to complete the process of ethical selection through countless ethical choices. All activities of human beings, whether productive, social, emotional, or spiritual, are all actions of ethical choice. Above all, we live in ethical choices, upon which the life and existence of human beings are based. The same is true for ethical choices in literature.

In general, ethical literary criticism holds that literature is the product of ethical choices of human activities and the art form of ethical expressions at a specific historical stage. Human beings invented written symbols and recorded their lives, events, and understandings through writings. Records in written words are texts that make up literature. Therefore, the emergence of literature is the result of ethical choices, and its value lies in the description of humans' ethical choices. Literary works focus on human beings, narrating their lives, and expressing their feelings through ethical choices. They teach how to be a moral man by narrating examples of choices in life and society. Hence, ethical choices constituting ethical selection becomes the theory of ethical literary criticism. In this way, the function of literature has been recognized.

Ethical choice is not only the core composition of literary works but also the basic structure, namely, framework of literary theory. In other words, its structure or framework is ethical choice. In terms of ethical literary criticism, it can be used to read, understand and interpret literature. That is to say, we read, understand and analyze literary works by virtue of ethical choice.

In contrast to moral criticism, ethical literary criticism, on the other hand, emphasizes the interpretation of literature from a historical point of view, rather than simply judging the moral value of literature as good or bad. It focuses on analyzing the objective ethical causes, processes, results, and impacts of all kinds of ethical choices in literature to avoid subjective

aesthetic evaluation and ethical prejudice in literary interpretation due to personal aesthetic taste and tendency. Then, ethical literary criticism can be summarized as follows: (1) ethical literary criticism is a theory and method of literature; (2) the theory of the three stages of human civilization is its theoretical basis; (3) ethical choice or ethical selection with ethical choice is its theoretical framework; (4) literary texts and works are critical objects; (5) the main path of criticism is the analysis of ethical choices and identity; and (6) its purpose is was to obtain instructions from different examples of ethical choices in the literature for being a moral human.

As a literary theory, we can further summarize the theoretical system of ethical literary criticism based on the following ethical choices: (1) an ape obtains human form through natural selection by way of evolution but can obtain human essence by ethical selection through ethical choices; (2) ethical selection is made up of ethical choices and has become the core theory of ethical literary criticism; (3) the aim of ethical choices is to be moral humans by way of teaching and learning; (4) literature or a literary text is a tool for teaching and learning, but it is still necessary to have an explanatory text for the use of such tools; and (5) the task of ethical literary criticism is to write instructions for readers to use literary tools, to read and understand literary texts and guide them to make choices for being moral humans.

## Conclusion

As a literary theory, we can summarize the theoretical system of ethical literary criticism on the basis of ethical choice: After ape obtained the human form by way of evolution in natural selection, human being appeared and entered ethical selection. In the stage of ethical selection, man is trying to acquire human essence by way of ethical choice to be a human being instead of an animal. In essence, ethical choice is the choice of being a moral man and its method is teaching and learning. What to teach and what to learn? It is literature that is the tool for teaching and learning and the tool is the literary text. The question now is how to use this literary tool to read, understand and explain the texts for teaching.

As discussed earlier, ethical literary criticism constructed its theory of ethical election with ethical choice in the new century on the basis of the three stages of human civilization, namely, natural selection, ethical selection and scientific selection. Ethical selection presupposes natural selection and takes scientific selection as its future. Since we evolved from animals to become human beings, we have been trudging along the long road of ethical choice, and trying to find ways to become human beings. After the written symbols were invented by human beings, they were used to record the experiences of human beings and then the texts consisting of written symbols became literature used as a tool by human beings; that is, as a tool for teaching and learning of human beings. For human beings, the importance of literature is not only as a tool to record human life, but also to learn from recorded human, develop habits, and form ethics through literary forms. This was the way the earliest ethics appeared, and the society was put in order. However, due to the limitation of cognition, human beings cannot use this tool skillfully because they do not know how to learn from literature how to make ethical choices. This is where ethical literary criticism comes in. Through the analysis of the examples of ethical choice in literature, we get instructions on how to read, understand literature, and learn from it to make better ethical choices in real life. It is precisely for this purpose that ethical literary criticism has constructed its theory of ethical choice and developed the terminology for interpreting and criticizing literature.

In the theoretical system of ethical literary criticism, ethical choice is its basic framework. Based on the framework of ethical choice, ethical literary criticism not only has formed its theoretical system with a series of concepts such as the viewpoint of ethical expression, the viewpoint of literary texts, the viewpoint of literary teaching, the viewpoint of language generation and so on, but also formed its critical discourse with terms such as Sphinx factor, human factor, animal factor, ethical choice, ethical identity, ethical dilemma, ethical environment, ethical context, natural will, free will rational will and so on. In this way, ethical literary criticism can be easily used in the study of literature.

In the context of discussion on the end of theory and the death of theory and from new perspectives, ethical literary criticism explores the origin, the form, the function, the value and other issues of literature from its generation. By integrating literature with ethics, philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, computer science, neurocognitive science and others, it tries to abandon obsolete ideas, answer the questions on the death of literary theory, and discuss the change and evolution of literature. Through the influence of science, literary forms, content and style of literature will inevitably undergo great changes in the new century. Some old literary forms will disappear, and some new literary forms will be born. This trend will lead to the renewal of literary concepts and innovation of literary theory. It can be said that the ethical literary criticism was born at this time. As an interdisciplinary theory, it combines literature with linguistics, philosophy, psychology, economics, politics, law, computer science, and cognitive neuropsychology. Indeed, the interdisciplinary turn of ethical literary criticism has arrived.

## Notes

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# Land Tropes and Resistance in Two Southeast Asian Agricultural Novels

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## Abstract

The Philippines and Malaysia have ancient land traditions that express human affinity to the land. In Southeast Asia, land is sacred. The land is soil and is called the skin of the earth. But it has not escaped the grasp of modernity and capitalism, and humanity is complicit in exploiting it. This study uses ecocriticism to examine the response of land to human intervention and the break in the formerly symbiotic relationship between the two. The study examines the use of land tropes and expressions of resistance using the subgenre of the agricultural novel in Shahnun Ahmad's *Rope of Ash* and NVM Gonzales' *A Season of Grace*. The study will contextualize the friction between nature and human progress by showing the transformation in the cultural discourse pertaining to land as both countries face the demands of economic advancement and nation-building.

## Keywords

land tropes, ecological resistance, agricultural novels, ecocriticism



In Southeast Asia, ecocriticism is a newly emerging field. Not that there are no concrete actions against environmental degradation or literature discussing the various issues and ideologies informing ecological preservation, but these matters taken as literary and critical materials are still rare. It is ironic that given that much of Southeast Asian culture is related to Nature—its religions, songs and dances, weaving, pottery, etc., its pursuit of progress and modernity seems to exclude its significance. Some countries subject to extreme natural disasters view the incidents as people disasters, often sidelining Nature as an important actor. It is essential to provide articulative space for the ecocritical concerns of Southeast Asia, mining its literature for ecological wisdom as well as questions, especially in the context of modernity and nation-building.

One of the most recent methods of understanding cultural phenomena comes from the field of science. Recent natural events that have affected lives worldwide such as climate change seem to have reignited interest in the role of nature, not only as a method of explaining the empirical but also as an articulator of the historical and the cultural. Not exactly new, this approach to literary texts has taken on refurbishment, combining with other disciplines to promote a more inclusive representation, not limiting discourse to a human one but including non-human elements as well (Tope 133)

At this point, a simple definition of ecocriticism is in order:

Ecocriticism examines the representation and relationship between the biophysical environment and texts through ecological theory. Environment and text are both inclusive categories: environment comprises flora and fauna, soil and water, climate and weather, industry and commerce; texts comprise artifacts as diverse as literature, film, the internet, journalism, policy papers, rocks, spoor and trees. (Mason, Szabo-Jones, Steenkampf 1)

As a critical lens, ecocriticism contains several tropes. One would be the land trope or land narratives. This trope pertains to the assumption of humanity's primordial attachment to land and how human incursion, technology, and industry have wrenched man's connection to it. bell hooks, an African American writer, claims that "black people 'were first and foremost a people of the land' with a strong love for nature before their lives were

fundamentally altered by industrial capitalism in Northern cities” (cited in Gerhardt, hooks 53).

This study examines one of Southeast Asia’s primordial constants that has been affected by the tides of progress and transformation of cultural values at the onset of modernity. Despite widespread economic development after independence, much of Southeast Asia has remained linked to its land—an economic resource as well as a cultural and ideological base. It is livelihood, it is tradition, it is precious. It is industry but it is also lifestyle and philosophy. The life of a farmer/peasant is inextricably connected to the land and history has proven that his socio-political identity is constructed according to the way s/he embraces the land or rejects it.

This study will look at the definition and cultural perceptions of land, from science to *ethnie*. It will examine the land trope specifically regarding the issues of land usage in agriculture in two Southeast Asian countries in the early post independent years. Two novels, *Rope of Ash* by Malaysian author Shahnnon Ahmad and *A Season of Grace* by Filipino author NVM Gonzalez, illustrating agricultural attitudes towards land will be the objects of study: the first for the Malays’ cultural affinity for the land stemming from tradition and religion, and the second for the Filipinos’ resort to slash-and-burn farming as a result of dispossession and poverty. The study will use an ecocritical lens to understand the land-agricultural issues of both Malaysian and Filipino societies in early post independent life and provide an ecocritical assessment of how the two novels address the issue of land.

## What is Land

What is land? Land is soil. It is called the Skin of the Earth. It is a mixture of minerals, organic matter, gases, liquids and countless organisms that together support life on earth (*Encyclopedia of Soil Science*). Soil serves as a medium for plant growth, a means of water storage, supply and purification, a modifier of Earth’s atmosphere, and the habitat for organisms (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soil>). Soil is a major component of the Earth’s ecosystem. Following the atmosphere, the soil is the next largest carbon reservoir on

earth and is potentially one of the most reactive to human disturbance and climate change (Amelung, et al.).

Land is also bodies of water, flora and fauna. Land includes rivers, and other bodies of water where soil goes. Land includes the forests, the grasses and plants that provide oxygen to the atmosphere. Land includes the animals that are dependent on other animals and plants and on land for its habitat.

Land is an important and beloved resource but man has not been a careful client. In the past, there was little awareness of soil sustainability and man's agricultural practices often led to soil—and land—degradation. Man's neglect and abuse caused decline in soil fertility, carbon and biodiversity; lower water retention capacity; disruption of gas and nutrient cycles; diminished quality of water and air; threat in food and feed safety.

In a study titled "Soil Quality and Sustainable Evolution," authors Gergely Toth et.al. mention the existence of soil response. It is this that sparked my interest in the topic. In a sense, the effects of soil degradation listed above are already the land's language for payback time. The language of science elides the ethical dilemma that often accompanies the choices humans make in their relationship to the land. I would like to explore the complexity of this relationship and the process by which land responds to and resists man's incursions into the natural world.

The issue of land usage is an old trope and has often been seen as a socio-political issue. Its visioning as an ecological undertaking is perhaps even older as traditional communities have often practiced ecological prudence towards land but were certainly not bound to any theory. Land continues to be a contentious issue in Southeast Asia as it remains a flashpoint between communities and policy makers, and between tradition and industry.

In this study, I focus on the agrarian use of land, not only because much of Southeast Asia is still agricultural but also because it is an area that seems not to have received the attention it deserves. William Major points out that even in ecocriticism, there seems to be a neglect of agrarian issues and the plight of farmers is sidelined by the economic and political conversations about environment. "We fail to appreciate that there is a long-standing envi-

ronmental ethos inherent in a relationship with the land seen most notably in agrarian writings” (52). Advocating what is termed “agrarianism,” Major emphasizes the need to study man’s relationship with the land, not just as a source of inspiration and pleasure, but a source of work. In this study, two agrarian novels will be examined in terms of land philosophy, land use, and ecocritical conversations with the land. Land will be seen not only as a source of work but also as a living natural entity with a relationship with its tillers. What affects man affects it too but it is dependent on man for sustainability and protection.

The imminent incursion of industrialization and the solidification of the nation building process during the post-independence period have posed challenges to agricultural Southeast Asia. The colonial economic policies have proven that land is a vital component of economic development as a source of cash crops that will fuel food production but more importantly, serve as raw materials to industrial products. In early post-independent life, peasants who were used to traditional farming had to deal with economic policies that challenge long held traditions. To reap the benefits of the economic policies, which translates into higher income, better educational opportunities for their children, improved standard of living, farmers have to compromise or even release their long-held relationship with the land. This we see in the Malaysian novel, *Rope of Ash*.

When there is no land to till, one moves where there is land available. The farmers of archipelagic Philippines move from one island to another in search of land to till. More often than not, these are dispossessed peasants whose lands have been taken away by big landlords or big companies for cash cropping. Just as often, they are peasants who cannot afford to buy their own land. These farmers are pushed to the hinterlands where there are unclaimed lands. They practice slash and burn farming, burning forest lands so they can plant rice, the people’s staple. This we see in *A Season of Grace*.

In both novels, the discourse of the state and nation building underpins the narrative, more overt in *Rope of Ash* and implicit in *A Season of Grace*. Peasants’ relationship with the land is subject to the pressure of state desire

and the fictional direction of each novel is informed by each community's response to such pressure.

Admittedly, the issue of land usage especially in agriculture is essentially anthropomorphic in nature. Agriculture is the cultivation of land for survival and economic purposes, often relegating land simply as a resource or worse a commodity. In essence, agriculture is against land, against the environment, given the lack of mutuality between man and land. Be that as it may, the exploitative reality is revealed and countermanded by an ecocritical reading of these literary narratives, hopefully raising questions about cultural attitudes towards land resource in the two countries.

### **Rope of Ash**

Ecocriticism allows a reader to take the point of view of nature, of the land, in the engagement regarding needs. Human needs take precedence, according to one argument, but can land resist? Is land completely passive and silent? How does land deal with human economic excess? The philosophy of land is explored in the first novel, *Rope of Ash*, by Malaysian author Shahnnon Ahmad. The novel is Ahmad's first, published in 1965 in Bahasa, and translated into English in 1979.

The novel is set in Bangkul Derdap, a small and relatively isolated farming community that faces a crisis because the government has offered support for the community if they agree to plant more than once. The condition is that there must be 100% consensus among the villagers. The obstacle is the family of the main character, Semaun. This family has been living marginally, ostracized by the community because of acts of violence Semaun's father has allegedly committed. Semaun is regarded as a tough challenge because he is reputedly bull headed and belligerent. The village headman nonetheless attempts to convince Semaun to follow the village's decision to plant twice but is met with expected resistance.

The narrative is set in the context of Malaysia's efforts towards rural development in the 1950s and 1960s leading towards the New Economic Policy (NEP) that sought to eradicate poverty in the process of nation building (Abdul 60). As a reaction to the riots of 1969, the NEP has been largely

directed at the rural Malays. Its first objective was to be achieved by facilitating access to land, physical capital, training and public amenities for the economically privileged. The second would be brought about by reducing the dependence of the Malays and other indigenous groups on subsistence agriculture and by increasing their share of the country's wealth through greater ownership of the corporate sector (Andaya and Andaya 303).

Double cropping, along with other measures, was introduced to alleviate the burden of wasted opportunity in single cropping. Single cropping in *Rope of Ash* is shown as the Malay's manifest relationship with the land. The Malay farmer knows only too well that land can resist when abused.

The philosophical highlight of the novel is articulated by Semaun in his arguments against planting twice, as seen in the following lines from *Rope of Ash*:

We plant once a year, that's enough. We don't want to torture the land we've inherited. The fields are our soul. Our heart. We were made of earth. We return to the earth. What will happen if we torture the earth, our soul? It will be angry with us. And what if the earth is angry? The rice will fail. The earth will kill us. (31)

Mankind is too arrogant. He never feels compassion for the earth. The earth has feelings as well. But it can't tell us what they are. (32)

The land won't complain, Semaun chimed in. It hasn't got a mouth. There's no way it can cry out for mercy. (33)

Our ancestors cared for it, as carefully as they cared for their own children. (33)

The land needs to rest. The land couldn't take it. It would make us humans thin too.... (35)

Semaun's proclamations seem to suggest that Malay conversations with the land have been ongoing for centuries. These arguments come from Malay traditional thinking that reveals the Malay's epistemic connection to the land. First, land is inherited but not owned. The Islamic belief and even *adat* (Malay code of behavior) for that matter, enjoins man to be the custo-

dian of the land. A person is judged by his stewardship of the land; therefore, he must take care of it as if it were his child.

Other agrarian novels in Malay echo Semaun's sentiments. Exploring the Malay's relationship with the land, Zalima Mohd Lazim, in her study of Khadijah Hashim's novel, *The Wave of Life*, explains the primeval and perhaps indigene bond with the land. She concludes that the characters' central core in their identity is "linked to their strong connection to the land" (528).

To Awang and Milah, land is their birth right not just because they were born there, but most importantly because they have earned the right to live there as they had invested time and energy, working long, hard hours to claim the land. Land is not just *tanah pusaka* (ancestral land) that will be passed down through the generations, it is also a valuable commodity that could be utilized to produce goods that could be sold or bartered, and the proceeds used to better the lives of their family. They have a very close connection to the land as they become masters of their environment due to effective utilization of the abundant natural resources, utilizing nature in their farming methods and thus are able to reap the benefits of living so closely with nature (528-529).

There is a deep intimacy between humans and land. While there is in the passages above a personification of land and perhaps an anthropomorphic rendition of its language, one cannot ignore the presence of an emotional and spatial affinity between human and land. What is important is the conversation between human and land, the persona knowing and feeling the torture the land goes through because they are of one heart, one soul.

Historically, the Malay's affinity with the land and their refusal to leave it has led to the importation of labor from China and India, which altered Malaysia's demography unequivocally. The British needed workers for their plantation and railroads but could not persuade the Malays to leave their villages. Culturally, rural life is seen as the preferred pristine life, while the city is seen as a net of sin and corruption. For one who leaves for the city, land abandonment has cultural consequences.

There is also in this ancient wisdom the awareness that land must rest. Here lies the most interesting aspect of this land philosophy. According to Ismail Noor and Muhammad Azaham, in Islamic belief, man "does not have

the right to use any of the rich resources inherently found on the face of the earth to suit his personal caprice, whim or fancy, nor for the promotion of this own myopic, nationalistic, ethnic or tribal agenda nor for his domination of others” (89). Man “should not exceed his limits, nor feel overly rejoiced on embracing the force of nature” (90). This is the philosophy of Enough. Man extracts only what he needs from nature, allowing nature to recuperate and maintain its health and balance. This is sustainable use of Nature.

Science backs this up. Continuous farming can lead to land degradation: This causes erosion which commonly occurs following the conversion of natural vegetation to agricultural land—carrying away fertile soil and fertilizers, pesticides, and agrochemicals. When natural vegetation is cleared, and when farmland is ploughed, the exposed topsoil is often blown away by wind and washed away by rain (Toth et al.).

Traditional farming makes the farmer touch land, and thus the intimacy is created between the tiller and the tilled. The farmer knows his soil, his climate, and his plants. His knowledge of the soil allows him to decide what kind of rice variety to plant, where, and when to plant it. Traditional farming is compromised when farmers are promised a tractor if they plant twice.

This land philosophy or land ethic is unfortunately demonized by Malaysian politics as backward, anti-progress, anti-capital and is responsible for miring Malays in poverty and useless tradition. State narratives consider land philosophy a millstone around the Malay people’s necks and is a result of their lack of education, superstition, and valuing of rural life. In the novel, Semaun is criticized for his adherence to this land philosophy and may be blamed for his fellow villagers’ inability to receive government support. The prospect of a second or third planting is a government effort to alleviate poverty among the Malays, including wresting them away from their land tradition. Implicit here also is the state’s desire to raise the economic capacity of the Malays on par with the other ethnicities in Malaysia. Land tradition is a cause of Malay poverty, and the Malay’s economic lag behind the other migrant races. The state took Malay poverty in the rural areas seriously, that “massive public investment was shifted to the rural areas” (H. Osman-Rani 208).



Without ecocriticism, the Malay government seems to be right in its initiative to promote economic mobility among Malay farmers. In fact, in the novel, Semaun gives in to the decision of the village because of personal circumstances. Perhaps this is due to his debt of gratitude to the village headman, or maybe he is now complying with the Malay value of communality. But ecocriticism makes the reader confront an ethical dilemma. Must this deep spiritual and cultural knowledge of the land be laid aside for economic progress? Must this symbiotic even compassionate relationship with the land always be deemed backward? Must land always be sacrificed in the name of economic development? After all, where has progress taken us? How should we balance human and nature's needs? What is ecological knowledge teaching us? The ecological contradictions, ambiguities, ironies continue.

Land resistance is a concept recognized by the Malays. Can land speak? In her study of Mapuche poetry, Eva Palma suggests that it does. Man has to listen to it. Land can resignify man (145) by changing the viewing actor, meaning, land configures man. Land can get angry. In Malay philosophy, land can resist by refusing to yield. "And what if the earth is angry? The rice will fail. The earth will kill us" (*Rope of Ash* 31). Drought for instance may be climatic but it is land language too. When land hurts, it can withhold too. It can cause hunger and death. From being the great giver, land can deny. Land here is a main character, an object of contention, but also a participant in and articulator of resistance.

As stated, the discourse of agriculture remains anthropomorphic. Land is inherited, used with care as far as the Malays are concerned, but still regarded as a resource. The state's offer elides the human care for the land, acting as what Garrard et.al calls a "skeptic" agent that wants to prove land protective tradition to be baseless. The state's skepticism of the Malay tradition of land usage is proof of the state's distrust of human abilities to take care of the environment and adds another layer of anthropomorphic arrogance towards land.

## A Season of Grace

Nature's resistance is more overt in the second novel, *A Season of Grace* by Filipino author NVM Gonzalez. Written in 1956, it chronicles the hardships of the slash and burn (*kaingin*) farmers in the Philippine island of Mindoro.

Slash-and-burn farming, swidden farming or *kaingin*, is defined as “a cultivation method of cutting living trees to clear land, burning the biomass after letting it dry and planting a crop in the ashes in an appropriate season. After harvest, the cultivated area is left fallow long enough for soil fertility to recover” (Myllantaus, et. al. 267-268). Farmers have practiced this kind of farming since ancient times but in later centuries, it has acquired a negative reputation as a cause of deforestation. “Because of their primitive methods of cutting tropical forests, burning the felled timber, planting crops for three or four years, until the soil nutrients have leached from the soil and they must begin the slash-and -burn cycle over again, forest farmers are considered the greatest threat to the world's tropical forests” (Kennedy 230).

The Philippines has a total land area of 30 million hectares (ha) covering more than 7,100 islands. 53% or 15.88m ha is forestland although only about 5.4m ha have forest cover. Deforestation is at an alarming rate of 100,000 ha per year that is partly blamed on slash and burn farmers (Bugayong and Carandang). Many years later, the Philippines will increasingly suffer from destructive landslides due to deforestation. Waters rushing down from the mountains due to typhoons will flood towns and cities and cause disasters.

While slash-and-burn farming sounds destructive, there are those who believe that it has actually been beneficial to Nature. Scott documents that the 16<sup>th</sup> century Visayans used this kind of farming but no harm on nature has been recorded. In fact, the real culprits of deforestation are said to be commercial logging and intensive farming.

Be that as it may, the early years of Philippine independence has seen how large-scale agriculture has pushed people to the upland areas. These are mostly poor peasants who have no land or whose lands have been co-opted by big landowners or companies. This can be seen in the light of the agricultural crisis in the Philippines during the early post-independence years.

By then, agriculture had shifted to cash crop production and cultivation for export.

Just to contextualize the plight of the *kaingero*, it is good to look at some statistics. “More than half of the Philippines’ 100 million people live in rural areas, and more than a third of them are poor. Agriculture is the primary source of income for poor rural people and the one source for many of the poorest households” (<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/w/country/philippines>). While the incidence of poverty depends on the region, most of those in the rural areas, including the upland areas, are poorest due to low agricultural output, lack of access to resources especially financial ones, lack of infrastructure and unsustainable practices which leads to deforestation.

The upland resources are therefore the only free resource available to the farmer who has no land. There are no land titles involved, no taxes to pay. By dint of hard work, a farmer can eke out a small living, and begin somewhere. The *kaingeros* are pioneers cultivating unowned virgin land which they can leave any time or settle in if things are good.

Husband and wife, Doro and Sabel, join a community of pioneers in the tiring activity of taming the forests and laying claim to farmlands which they subject to slash and burn techniques. They are joined by migrant laborers who sail from other islands, suggesting the lack of farming opportunities in more populated places. There is even a crippled girl whose disability does not deter her from the back breaking work of the *kaingin*. The thing that binds the community is their poverty but it is alleviated by the communal help they give each other.

The novel however suggests that people like Doro and Sabel are forced to venture into the forests because this is the only way they can work the land. Implicit is the long history of peasant dispossession and the inability of the poor to acquire land through legal means. Slash and burn farming is done to stave off hunger. Unlike the Malay peasants, the Filipino farmer seemed to look at the land as a mode of production, his indigene relations to it broken by long years of servitude under the colonizers, landowners and corporations.

This situation probably also stems from the feudal practices imposed by the Spanish colonizers who treated the land as commodity, as a source of income. Land was also forcibly taken from the natives. The Spanish made the Filipino peasants work the land but not enjoy its bounties, cutting the affective ties between farmer and land. The land could have meant dispossession, oppression, yet it is much needed for survival.

Without ecocriticism, the novel reflects the courage, persistence and even nobility of the Filipino peasant. They want to survive, they turn to nature. They face grave danger when they fell trees, conquer the swamps, till their plots, practically will everything to grow. This is a testament to the strength of the human spirit. Gonzalez draws a lyrical tribute to the *kaingin* farmer as can be seen in what seems to be a paean or an ode to him.

Doro bundled the reeds carefully and took them to his new clearing. “To this year’s clearing!” he knew he might have said with a tickle of pride.

He kindled the twigs and leaves piled waist high over logs and tree stumps. With his torch he took the fire from off one pile to the next. The river wind breathed lusty life to the small fires, and these grew wild and ran about. Then the blaze built an arch from what used to be a stand of hinagdong and wild bananas reaching as far down as the dao tree. There was the clean smell of fire, and the parrots screamed ceaselessly.

The fire left the tall, old dao tree untouched. But it consumed, like a hungry beast, the lauan trees. Like the crater of a small volcano, the lauan tree-stumps that the fire had left last behind stood in the sun emitting puffs of smoke. Slivers of white ash slipped down their gutted sides.

A live crackling flame cut through the cleared portion of the second growth and it looked as if the fire would reach the bamboo brakes on the river bank. A breeze pushed the blaze indeed toward a growth of tall slim poles of bamboo at the edge of the clearing, and loud explosions rent the air. It happened that a thick growth of wild bananas came in its path and the fire could move no further. The bursting bamboo poles were silenced as they fell against the pulpy, wet stalks of the bananas, exuding a thickish earth-smell and sending the parrots that had come from nowhere it seemed, round the clearing again and again.

The heat lingered all evening and then the stars came. Doro sat before his plate of rice. Already Sabel had put Little Porton and Eloy to sleep. She joined him, sharing his plate of rice; she noticed that the food did not interest him.

“I’m too tired,” he explained.

Now through the open window, the river wind came. It swept past the eaves of the kitchen shed, crossed over the new clearing and there began raking up in the night the burnt leaves of lauan and hinagdong. The night became heavy with the smell of ashes.

Sabel spread a mat on the floor. She laughed when Doro crawled toward it and, a minute later was snoring. His body had the tang of burnt tree bark and the odor of scorched loam. (*A Season of Grace*, 149-150).

This is slash and burn farming. It cuts sections of the forest, burn it to ash, let the ashes seep into the ground, then plant crops (“Slash and Burn Agriculture”). Human effort and strength needed to burn the forest is emphasized here. Doro like a conqueror glories in the burnt trees that will later give way to rice fields. The destruction of forest is man’s victory over Nature. Unfortunately, Doro and Sabel’s community does not seem to know the damage they are doing, of the long term repercussions of their economic activities. The urgency of survival does not give the forests time to recuperate. Unlike the ancient Visayans, these Mindoro *kaingeros* are actually lowlanders whose knowledge of agriculture is lowland based. It will be decades before the government teach the farmers how to do swidden farming without harming the forests. It will also take decades before the government declares *kaingin* illegal.

The novel also mentions that capitalism has reached the isolated village of the *kaingin*. Commercial logging becomes a rival for land cultivation in the upland areas. The merchant catches the needs of the farmers, makes them indebted to him, and buys their labor with exploitative wages. This drives the farmers further into the forests. Land turns into a commodity that serves those with money and disadvantages those without.

As mentioned earlier, the farmers become the biggest threat to the forest lands. Agriculture becomes the nemesis of ecological balance. Without their knowing, the community of *kaingeros* engage in a battle with the forest. The relationship between land and humans is more violent with land at the losing end. The anthropomorphic aspect of the agricultural process entails a conquest of nature and unlike the Malay tradition, there is hardly

any cultural or spiritual affinity between land and humans in the farms of Mindoro. The struggle for survival is two fold: human and natural. Humans need the forests to survive, the forests struggle against human aggression. But the novel probably inadvertently records land resistance against human violent imposition. Land is not passive and is given agency by the narrative.

Sabel more than Doro feels the land's resistance. Her consciousness records the forest's hostility. The isolation in the homestead underscores that the humans are the intruders who have yet to learn that in the forest, they are the vulnerable minority. The jungle is an axiomatic presence, humans a contentious presence. The falling trees block their movement inland. Mosquitoes give them a dose of malaria, incapacitating the axe and the incinerating hand. The hawk that swoops down on their chickens is vengeful for its destroyed home and source of food. It too steals from the thief. The snake bites the intruding foot. The parrot screams not out of pleasure but out of distress, hurting human ears for its burnt habitat. Some trees refuse to fall, despite being burnt, defying human effort and needs.

The most gripping image is that of the black mice that come out at night to ravage the rice in the field.

"Better watch out. Those creatures have ears. Better say nothing ill of them," Nong Tomas said.

"They're vengeful," Blas Marte said.

"You mean they're good folk—they're the good folk," Sabel put in. For why speak ill of them? They're all God's children—we all are, she believed. And she almost said it aloud too. She was for saying that the mice merely paid a neighborly visit. They were the visitors, the little folk who remembered other little folk, and, remembering had not forgotten to come.... (A *Season of Grace*, p. 52)

Nature can exact land justice. As humans claim animal feeding grounds, so do the mice. The food raids not only starve humans, they also delay or stop further incursions. Sabel calls the mice the good folk to avoid antagonizing them. She humanizes the mice, calling them God's children. She acknowledges them as neighbors who have come for a visit. She subconsciously realizes that the mice, displaced by her and her husband, have every right to her rice grains, perhaps even suggesting that they are all unfortu-

nate creatures who are just hungry. The appeasement is meant not only to promote goodwill and stop the raids but also to acknowledge human vulnerability in the face of natural displeasure.

The novel then raises the issue of whose needs comes first. The farmer asserts his in his struggle for survival and forgets the need for sustainability. Probably, in Doro and Sabel's circumstances, they do not know they have a responsibility to the land and to the generations of Filipinos who will be connected to it. Their community does not seem to be aware of Nature fighting back. Slash and burn farming has almost come to a full stop in the Philippines. But the ravage on land resources has not. Mining, real estate, tourism and just everyday human activities will eventually take its toll on the land and we anxiously await its justice.

To conclude, land tropes provide a contentious site between the needs of man and those of nature. Economic development seems to have cut that precious intimacy between land and man every time the issue of survival and progress is raised. Land traditions do exist but could be abandoned for economic mobility. Land has been commodified by colonialism, human greed, and indifference. It has also become a resource to urgent but short-term alleviation of poverty. Ecocriticism has provided a lens by which pro-human novels on human grit and effort can be reread as containing Nature's language of resistance. It may reevaluate the significance of land traditions not as an obstacle to human progress but as a force towards it. Agriculture remains an anthropomorphic discourse and land usage is an anthropomorphic privilege. The Malay culture provides a tradition of land care and the Filipino forests resist agricultural incursion into virgin soil. Land speaks and resists so we must listen to it.

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