

# Speculations on the Filipino Diaspora

Recognizing Ourselves in OFWs;  
or Progress Over Our Dead Bodies

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**E. San Juan, Jr.**

University of the Philippines, Diliman

## Abstract

The almost four-decades-long experience of Filipinos working abroad has evolved into an emergent diaspora in the era of neoliberal capitalism. Reflexive critique of this ordeal has sharpened class/national consciousness coincident with the breakup of families and brutalization of female bodies. Initiated by the U.S.-sponsored Marcos dictatorship, the export of human labor has converted everyday life into a permanent emergency. This sociopolitical crisis continues to produce its dialectical irony. Commodification of psyche and communal life-ways intensifies alienation to the point where the collective subject begins to grasp the principles of self-consciousness and the will to exercise self-determination. We as teachers and students can translate this process of constructing an identity-in-difference—the Filipino nation/people—by conscientized pedagogical practice. We can help transform the contradictions of everyday life into a mobilizing and self-rectifying strategy/discourse of universal emancipation.

## Keywords

diaspora, labor-power, colonialism, capitalism, nationalism, culture, counterhegemony

In the era of “post-truth” and “alternative facts,” can we still talk intelligibly about 12 million Filipinos scattered abroad? And multiplying by the hour? Over four million reside in the United States (not including the million or so TNTs or undocumented aliens, which count among others the famous Jose Antonio Vargas). Other Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are distributed as follows (these figures need constant updating): Saudi Arabia: 1,029,000; United Arab Emirates: 477,000; Canada: 820,000; Japan: 226,000. The main source of remittances, now totaling \$29 billion (about 10% of GDP), are Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, UK, and the United States (IBON).

Since Pres. Corazon Aquino’s administration, these remittances have functioned as “manna” of a fabled cargo cult for us. It has solved the perennial foreign-debt burden, allowed the oligarchic few to continue to live in luxury, and the rest of 103 million folks to submerge/sublimate their misery in spending the money sent by their parents, children, relatives, in endless malling, consumption of mass-produced goods and the illusions (films, telenovelas, etc.) manufactured by the global culture industry (San Juan, “Overseas”). Aside from myriad cults and New Age panaceas, the repeated artifacts of technocratic advertising in social media and films, act now as the proverbial opium of the masses. Supplemented with the police and army, the coercive agencies of class-divided society, they function as the efficient instrument of political control and moralizing discipline.

This tally of the diaspora is forever incomplete, given the uninterrupted dispersal of Filipino labor-power around the world. I am quite sure there are Filipinas in Africa, Latin America, the Russian Federation, India, and other parts of the world, not to mention thousands of Filipino seafarers circulating around the world’s oceans—we have met them in cruises to Alaska, Hawaii, the Baltic, Mediterranean, Caribbean, and wherever laboring bodies and their intellectual byproducts are needed for corporate profit accumulation. They are needed also to reproduce the asymmetrical social relations in the various societies, as well as the geopolitical inequity in the hierarchy of nation-states.

We know at least some of them, our overseas relatives or friends or acquaintances, residing in some corner of North America, the Middle East, Europe, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan or other parts of Asia and Africa, including hundreds of cruise ships. We find them as far as the North and South Poles, working, living, surviving. I personally encountered some of them in Rome, Italy; Tripoli, Libya; Thessalonica, Greece; Taipei, Taiwan, and all over the United States, thousands of miles away from their homes in Metro Manila, Ilocos, Cebu, Iloilo, Samar, Leyte, Davao, Sulu, etc. from any of our 7,000 islands (San Juan, "Toward Filipino").

### In Quest of the White Whale?

In Herman Melville's classic *Moby Dick*, one encounters specimens of the colonized *Indios* such as Fedallah sprung from the "watery prairies of Asia, near the Manilla isles" (Takaki 288-289). In that microcosm of racialized U.S. society, the *Pequod*, where class and caste defined the place of the crew members, the despotic Ahab, in pursuing the fetishized whale, the profit-wired "machine-like monster," dooms the whole society. It is an allegory of industrial capitalism in its adventurist booty phase, a few years before Theodore Roosevelt compared the Filipino *insurrectos* to the savage Apaches during the Filipino-American War (1899-1913). Today, Filipino seamen dominate the intercontinental marine thoroughfares, serving the white-supremacist corporate Empire, while being victimized by pirates and druglords. There are rumblings of mutiny and other rebellions, smoldering beneath the deck of cruise ships and cargo tankers.

About 3-4,000 Filipinos leave every day, according to IBON reports. Over a million per year decide to cast their lot by traveling and residing somewhere else, as domestics, caregivers, or seafarers. About 3-5 coffins of these OFWs arrive at the Manila airport, with others suffering mysterious deaths. The latest I read was Felma Maramag from Tuguegarao, Cagayan, who was killed by two Jordanians. Of course, the famous victim of this practice was Flor Contemplacion, followed by others less celebrated: Sarah Balabagan, Maricris Sioson, and others executed for defending themselves or framed

by criminals—Mary Jane Veloso is the latest—with hundreds languishing in foreign jails (Pineda-Ofreneo and Ofreneo; Parreñas).

In 2008, according to media tabulations, OFWs remitted \$15.65 billion; in less than 10 years after, the figure rose to \$29.7 billion, about 10% of the gross domestic product (Migrante International). It is more than enough to sustain the economy where the privileged patrician minority enjoys their power and wealth over the staggering poverty and misery of the majority. The genie of this modern “cargo cult” sprang from Filipinas in Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, United Arab Republic, UK, and the U.S.

We don’t need to rehearse the origin of this phenomenon, a scattering and dispersal of part of the “body politic,” diaspora conceived as “hemorrhage” of a disrupted body. Is any emergency triage possible? Whence this symptom of a problem that, in its classic provenance, was ascribed to victims of the Roman Empire, the original Jewish diaspora? When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, the inhabitants were driven out, violently deracinated, and deported to other parts of the Empire.

We also don’t need to rehearse the dull, somewhat eviscerated “facts” of its origin. The Marcos dictatorship started the flow of migrant workers in 1974 with its Labor Export Policy (LEP). From then on, the neocolonial State institutionalized this last-minute escape of people from dire straits to solve the unemployment problem and provide a safety valve from angry, desperately anguished citizens (Beltran and Rodriguez). We now have entrenched bureaucracies in the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), and other State agencies. Henceforward, the flow has been managed according to scientific, updated Taylorizing schemes. It has been systematized, bureaucratized, technologized. We have systematic compilation and accumulation of data about them—“alternate facts”? “Post-truth” verities? Or just the humdrum signs and emblems of Foucault’s famous “biopower” rolling along in streamlined, computerized, cauterized fashion?

Within a global business platform, the exchange and circulation of migrant labor/bodies have been more intensively subjected to administra-

tive, regulatory biopower. This is chiefly in the interest of plotting market prices and currency exchanges, part of the attempt to rationalize an inherently anarchic market. In the age of Trump, terrorism, Brexit and the fear of refugees from the wars in Syria, Africa, and elsewhere, have triggered the frenzied call to purge the US body politic of illegal immigrants, prohibit the entry of polluting virus, and build a wall to ward off Mexicans. This is a symptom that migrancy of populations is a global problem (Anderson). The much-touted speed-up of communication and travel, the uncircumvented flow of money, bodies, etc., have now struck a moral nerve at the heart of the Empire. Or has it?

### Mapping Driftwood, Salvaging Driftwords

In the first chapter of my book *Learning from the Filipino Diaspora* (2016), I tried to explore some of the thematic cultural ramifications of the OFWs. We cannot continue to console ourselves with Cory Aquino's praise of OFWs as "mga bagong bayani." This is the anodyne for the national predicament, the ideology of pride in being "global servants" or most trustworthy subalterns of the Empire. Can we continue to suffer this patronizing rubric? Is it bribery and ironic blandishment for an embarrassing if not shameful emergency that has become a national disaster?

In retrospect, the haunting question is: How did we come to find ourselves scattered to the four corners of the earth and somehow forced to sell our bodies, nay, our selfhoods as commodities in the world market? How can we continue to lament our plight by the rivers of Babylon? Perhaps the ethical-aesthetic implications of this topic can be epitomized by Angelo dela Cruz (Gorospe 118). If you will recall, he was the truck driver who was kidnapped in Iraq during the US invasion, which led then Pres. Arroyo to ban travel in that war-torn country after 9/11. Many defied the ban and said they would rather dare travel to Iraq to work and be killed instantly, rather than suffer a slow death by hunger in their beloved homeland.

Does this existential quandary evoke Thoreau's reference to "lives of quiet desperation"? The pathos of this national predicament is captured by Angelo dela Cruz's response after his release by his kidnappers in July

2004 and catapulted to world-renown by the mass media and Internet. This is what our “bagong bayani”/new hero confessed to the media: “They kept saying I was a hero... a symbol of the Philippines. To this day I keep wondering what it is I have become.” It is a cry of existential poignancy—what can be more painful than deracination, uprooting of your body from the ground that sustains you? It evokes the testimony of one OFW who confessed that parting from one’s children moments before he flew away is like gutting out your entrails, literally a disemboweling. It resembles birth, the trauma of separation from the nourishing matrix. Such is the agony of the *desterrado*, uprooted, deracinated, unmoored, shipwrecked, flotsam and jetsam (Arellano-Carandang et al.).

It is indeed a national predicament, and a personal worry for some—perhaps a happy relief for many who continually wait for manna from abroad. In any case, it is now more central than incest (the Oedipal syndrome) or family feuds intervening with romantic couples (Romeo and Juliet). It confronts us more ubiquitously, demanding urgent explanations. Why engage with this historical phenomenon or process of the Filipino diaspora in literary and cultural studies? Do we consider it a theme, subject or topic, of literary works (novels, essays, poems, plays)?

Or do we use it as a conceptual framework in which to re-think the questions of meaning, nature, identity, psyche, the relation of private to public experience, and our national destiny? Is the idea or theme of the diaspora a more effective way to do “genealogical analysis,” that is, interrogating common sense and naturalizing norms so as to expose them as historical/discursive constructions? Why diaspora instead of national-democratic revolution, anticolonial struggles, desire for true autonomy and genuine independence?

It is not a question of either/or. Rather, it is a question of handling a new genre of interdisciplinary studies. By the nature of its historical parameters, its thrust is analytical and speculative. Its fundamental aim is a critique of common sense, normative values, naturalized categories about citizenship, national identity and destiny. It seeks to unravel the given social meanings and received paradigms that construct the truth of human beings,

the truth of experience and social life. It challenges the hegemony of the business/comprador elite based on the cash-nexus, the alienation fostered by the objectification of all human ties and by instrumentalizing everything. In short, it is a new pedagogical approach to re-orient scholarly and creative inquiries in literary and cultural studies (San Juan, "Reflections"; Aguilar).

### Triangulating the Pedagogical Terrain

Actually I would propose using the theme of the diasporic experience as a way of connecting all these other topics about nation, travel, transculturation, etc. so as to provoke an alternative way of criticizing and valuing our reading and writing experience. We may hope to engage with diaspora as a heuristic device to stimulate alternative approaches to the orthodox Establishment pedagogy that repeats the same institutional norms over and over, deadening our critical faculties and defeating the purpose of learning and thinking critically about ourselves and our relations. We need to transcend the limited formalist, purely aesthetic or moralistic modes of reading and interpreting in order to situate the literary work/art-work in the context of the lived experience of authors, readers, and communities of interpreters. The urgent task is to perform a cognitive mapping of the subtexts of those real-life contradictions given symbolic/imaginary resolutions in literary artifices and other cultural artifacts. We need to grasp the "structure of feeling" that enables the art-work to exert its own efficacy, its singular resonance in our lives (Jameson; Williams).

But before giving suggestions for curriculum development, it is necessary to frame this within the context of the educational institutions in our country and the position of the Philippines in the international polarization of intellectual labor.

We are a neocolonial formation defined by the contradiction between the exploiting minority elite and the exploited majority. We suffer from dire underdevelopment, whose symptom—unemployment/underemployment—stems from the lack of industrialization, failure of land reform, immiseration of the countryside, and thus the escape to countries abroad for work and even permanent settlement. We suffer from severe social inequality due to

the historic legacies of colonialism, the preservation of an oligarchic system of property relations, and hence the unequal distribution of wealth and power (Constantino; Lichauco). We have not acquired true independence and established genuine democratic institutions and processes.

The escape via Marcos' Export Labor Policy from the nightmare of the historic colonial legacy is agonizing, a tearing-apart of families, marriages, communities. It is tragic, painful, infuriating, and hopefully transformative. One is reminded of the Rizal family being evicted from their homes in Calamba at the end of the 19th century, out of which *El Filibusterismo* evolved, as well as the Katipunan. We recall many revolutionary heroes (such as Apolinario Mabini, Isabelo de los Reyes, and others) banished to Guam, Marianas, Hong Kong, and other prisons or quarantines for *dester-rados* outside the Philippines.

### **Crisis of the Neocolonial Formation**

By its inner logic, the capitalist market of international labor proceeds through cyclical crisis, devolving to fascist, militarized barbarism. After the disaster of 9/11 and the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere, this business of warm-body-export has become more acute because of the precarious "underdevelopment" of the country. We are dependent on an erratic global labor-market subject to unpredictable disruptions. We are vulnerable because of our unstable socioeconomic situation. We live in a violent over-determined formation where profound socioeconomic inequalities prevail (for a recent survey, see Miranda and Rivera; also regular socioeconomic reports from IBON).

President Duterte's regime is a symptom of these manifold inequalities. We have, among others, a serious drug problem whose current militaristic-authoritarian solution has led to over 12,000 Filipinos killed, half of whom are victims of vigilante or police criminality; there seems to be no justice for them (Coronel; Dalangin-Fernandez). We have violent confrontations between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (oriented to following U.S. dictates) and the New People's Army, between the government and various Muslim groups, foremost of which is the Abu Sayyaf. But all these



are symptoms of what I have already mentioned: the persisting social injustice and inequalities inherited from our colonial/neocolonial history (Sison). These contradictions can only be resolved by promoting the counter-hegemony—that is, the moral-intellectual leadership of the progressive bloc of nationalist, people-oriented forces—over against the conservative, reactionary bloc of landlords, corrupt politicians and bureaucrats, and fascist military and police.

On the topic of violence, I am not referring to conflicts between individuals, among psychologically troubled persons resorting to force to resolve quarrels. We have, overall, the legacy of structural violence due to unresolved grievances and historic penalties imposed on Lumads, non-Christian groups, and of course the contractual workers, poor peasants and fishermen, and slum dwellers—millions of our citizens, victims of continuing structural violence due to unemployment, lack of housing, medical care, education, and other vital needs necessary for humane existence. What can academic studies on diaspora contribute to understanding and elucidating the causes of this pervasive violence in our society?

### **Beleaguered Ivory Towers**

In this setting, our educational system, configured by the colonial and neocolonial pressures of U.S. political-cultural hegemony, has been geared to supplying other countries with trained personnel: doctors, nurses, engineers, architects, lawyers (our lawyers and tax accountants function like call-center personnel, doing work for offices abroad). Our educational institutions do not match the needs of our economy; they serve to produce human labor-power for other countries in line with the unequal distribution of power and wealth among nation-states as a result of historical rivalries.

All over the world, including the Philippines, the emphasis on science and technology has marginalized courses in the humanities, history, and other social sciences. General education for civic responsibility and rationality has been subordinated to a quasi-vocational training, or training to acquire specific skills needed to perform technologically defined tasks in business society. We need to resolve the contradiction between the alien-

ating individualist business ethics dominating our lives and the humanist, emancipatory ideals of our revolutionary tradition (Lanuza).

Commodified scientism has trumped the humanities in the academy. This applies to cultural and language studies in general. The teaching of English, within the larger department of literary or cultural studies, is now geared to producing teachers for high school and colleges to prepare youth for work abroad, or for employment in prestigious local corporations or bureaucratic careers. No one would be insane enough to say we are preparing them to be scholars in our own literature (either written in English, Filipino, or the various languages). Previously the nationalist tendency in University of the Philippines and elsewhere was to encourage M.A. and Ph.D. students to focus on local authors and local cultural traditions in art, music, theater, etc. No longer is this the case, for a long time now, since I took my Bachelor of Arts degree in 1958.

### **Toward Conscientization**

For this occasion, I limit myself to reflecting on the possible academic usefulness of exploring this historic conjuncture in our country. Here are a few reasons that we can discuss regarding why the historical phenomenon of the diaspora (in this case, the OFW as contemporary reality) can be useful in revitalizing literary/cultural studies in the Philippines. We can engage in arguing how a critical pedagogy can be developed by way of deliberating on the problems of OFWs. The following observations might schematize for the benefit of those unfamiliar with this topic the ethico-political implications of the modern diaspora problematic:

1. Diaspora unsettles what is taken for granted, deemed natural or normal, customary, respectable. It purges habitual conformism, devotion to stereotypes, and fixation on group-thinking. What do migrants, expatriates, émigrés, refugees, and exiles have in common? Distance from the homeland, the natal surroundings, and the taken-for-granted habitat.

Removal from the customary space/place of living is certainly distressful and disorienting. Being put in prison was a common experience for rebels like Balagtas, the Cavite mutineers, the Propagandistas (Marcelo del Pilar,

Lopez Jaena) and the deported—Rizal, among others, together with thousands during the Spanish colonial period. When the United States conquered the islands, those who refused to swear allegiance to the United States were deported to Guam, the famous ones being Gen. Ricarte and Apolinario Mabini who produced his immortal memoirs, *La Revolucion Filipina*. One can treat Rizal's two novels as works of exile, just as Villa's poems and fiction, and Carlos Bulosan's entire body of work, particularly *America Is in the Heart*, as well as many short stories by Bienvenido Santos, NVM Gonzales, and other exiled artists (San Juan, *Between Empire*).

2. Diaspora interrogates the idea/discourse of homeland as a fixed territory. It generates a new subjectivity or agency, the nomadic in the process of imagining and refashioning a new habitat. It lends significance to the notion of deterritorialization, made famous by Deleuze and Guattari's treatises, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

In this context, our present homeland is a neocolonized one, conquered at the cost of over a million Filipinos killed, quarantined and exploited since 1899. Is there another space/time one can designate as homeland? The Albania of Balagtas? Rizal's forest or wilderness where the tulisanes retreated? We also encounter this in many novels from Francisco Lacsamana's *Anino ng Kahapon* to Macario Pineda's *Makiling* to Amado V. Hernandez's *Bayang Malaya* and Jun Cruz Reyes' *Etsa Puwera*. If the homeland is a utopian future, what is the present Philippines comparable to? Can it be prefigured or condensed in a negative trope of the "Pearl of the Orient Seas," its flamboyant and ostentatiously hygienic malls as an image of dystopia?

3. Diasporas evoke the power of imperial occupation—the Roman Empire for the Jewish, European colonialism for African slaves transported to the New World; imperial inroads into China, India, Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, etc. Wars, pogroms, fascist programs of internal ethnic cleansing—they all foreground the saliency of racism/racializing ideology, white supremacy, as justification for occupation and subjugation of non-white populations. Our current diaspora is a product of imperial subjugation by the United States, and by the modernizing impact of global capitalism and its neoliberal ideo-

logical agencies, in particular the liberalized labor-market and its stockpiling of mass-produced consumer goods and services.

The recruitment of Filipino workers for the Hawaiian plantations is the inaugural moment. We were neither citizens nor aliens. Called “nationals,” Filipino bachelor-workers drifted from place to place, establishing solidarity with other ethnic/racial groups via strikes, collective resistance, networks of cooperation for survival and fighting back. Unable to return, most Filipinos settled in the United States and Canada, just as many today are settling in Italy, UK, Germany, and countries allowing temporary stays and/or family reunification.

4. Diaspora foregrounds the phenomenon of moving commodities—body exports—embodying labor-power for the global capitalist market. Diaspora thus introduces into our theater of critical analysis and judgment the nature of commodifying bodies and personhoods, as well as psyches, dreams, illusions, the unconscious. *Quanta* (quantity) replaces *qualitas* (quality) as measure of value, in that exchange-value acquires paramount import over use-value, or at least eclipses the latter on which it is parasitic.

### Identity Perplex

Filipino domestics and/or caregivers have replaced biological mothers of the host employer, becoming surrogates and maternal Others in which Filipino nationality/colonial speakers of English become valued as contributors of symbolic capital. The Singaporean film, *Iloilo*, can be viewed in this light. We do not yet have something like Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* that would portray Filipino nannies as singular actants or character types in a new genre of Menippean satire. The latest imbroglio surfaced concerning an expatriate’s remorseful revelation that the family’s maid called “Lola” who lived with them for many years was actually a slave, though others claimed that (following Michel Foucault) she maintained her dignity and self-respect all along (Solow). Shades of the lord-bondsman dialectic in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of the Spirit*?

There are indie media films or documentaries already dramatizing this Filipina predicament, including those on Flor Contemplacion. However, we

are also swamped with sentimental melodramas like *Milan, Dubai*, and various commercialized replications. But in truth, these confections are narcotics to distract us. The Filipino diaspora is not a stage for compounding dreams and fantasies. For one, it is definitely not a transcultural or transgendered dilemma but, rather, a labor-capitalist dialectic with a classic class-conflict matrix. Thus this particular loci resonates with universal consequences and world-historical ramifications.

5. Both sexuality and racial identity are brought into the stage when embodied in diasporic characters/figures. Diaspora heightens our awareness of the significant role that racial markers and gender makers play in configuring our role and place in the international setting. This explodes the homogeneity of the Filipina as exotic Malayan/Hispanic subject of patronizing discourse—as in mail-order bride advertisements—made sophisticated by Eurocentric scholars, whether Filipinos, American, etc. The fashionable rubric of “transnationalism” acquires poignant ambiguity in the case of Filipinas metamorphosing into syncretic, hybrid or ambidextrous protagonists in social encounters far from the homeland.

6. The actant or performative role of diasporic Filipinas in literary and cultural discourse reminds us again that humanistic studies today (aesthetic, ethical inquiries) are no longer compartmentalized into strict taxonomic categories. They are by historical necessity interdisciplinary complex speculations, blending historical, sociological, political, anthropological, linguistic, philosophical, etc. They challenge the old positivistic, narrowly empiricist philology, as well as the once dominant formalist New Critical approach.

### Reconstructive Cartography

In the United States and Canada, the Civil Rights struggles in the Sixties and Seventies, together with the feminist, youth and multiethnic struggles, forced a drastic revision of the canon. They unsettled scholastic categories inherited from the Victorian era. They destroyed the entrenched white-supremacist standards of quality, ushering in authors/readers from ethnic, gendered and racialized outsiders. Filipino scholars were of course influenced by these trends; but they simply expanded the offerings and authors.

They did not effectively change the formalist/individualist approach that excluded political readings and historicist critiques. We still await canon revision and reflexive dialogues on methods and procedures to synchronize what we are doing in the classrooms with what is happening to our students and teachers in the larger society outside the academy.

Again, the aim of introducing this framework of the Filipino diaspora is to reorient our vision/sensibility regarding our individual responsibility in society. It is to initiate a re-thinking about ourselves as a people and as citizens of a nation-state with a specific history. It is to kindle a conscientization of our minds and *loobs/souls* beyond the rigid paradigms of traditional patriarchal-feudal society (Eviota).

In reflecting on the export of souls/bodies, a postmodern version of the Faustian wager, we are forced to scrutinize the inventory of our national identity as a palimpsest of codes, the key to which has been lost and must be found, invented or recast. Antonio Gramsci wrote this thought-provoking passage about the problem of self, identity, ethos in his *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935), which we need to ponder as the propaedeutic slogan for the day:

The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical processes to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory (324).

A corollary to this proposition is Gramsci's notion of culture not as a simple accumulation, or indeed a dry-as-dust inventory of facts, dates, information culled from libraries, etc. We pride ourselves in being cultured, being knowledgeable or well-informed about a million facts, items summarized in tomes and whole archives. But this hoarding, as those familiar with Paulo Freire's teaching know, is nothing but the banking system of education, thoroughly based on the logic of accumulation in business society, our present-day neoliberal free-market global order.

In contradistinction, Gramsci proposes an entirely radical definition. He contends that culture “is an organization, discipline of one’s inner self, a coming to terms with one’s own personality. It is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one’s own historical value, one’s own function in life, one’s own rights and obligations” (324-25). Fundamental to this is the acquisition and cultivation of a historical awareness, a historicizing sensibility, attuned not just to our personality but to our place and participation in our specific time and place, in our society. This awareness will be actualized in the narratives we construct of our journey toward national independence, exercising genuine sovereignty.

In my view, reflection and inquiry into the discourse of diaspora, the investigation of discursive practices of what we may call the *habitus* of diaspora, can induce in us that historical awareness and reflexivity required to usher us into what Immanuel Kant called the “age of autonomy”, when we no longer need tutors and can think for ourselves and accept responsibility for our choices and actions. This thinking will be realized in our diverse narratives of homecoming. Can this solve the dispersal, scattering, disruption of our body politic? Can this provide jobs for millions so that they do not have to leave their families and homes? Will this solve the wound of division, heal the fissures and cracks in the body politic?

But, on second thought, in the neocolonial situation, the body politic has never been really unified or homogenized—except through consumerist regimentation and the vicarious fulfillments induced by State ideological apparatuses. But somehow a visceral urge surfaces in the diaspora. When Filipinos meet in the plazas of Rome, Hong Kong, Taipei, Los Angeles, or Singapore, they incorporate the lost homeland in their exchanges, rituals of eating, singing, playing, the repertoire of *bayanihan* and *pakikisama*, etc. They perform the communicative utopia that Habermas dreamed of recreating in the European Community. For them, any moment or any fissure in the continuum of time, the Messiah may appear.

As the Messiah tried to console his companions before his final departure, we may follow in his wake. The Messiah will be there when one or two of his comrades gather wherever and whenever they find themselves—

remembrance materializes in such encounters and thus reconstitutes the dismembered body. Diaspora may trigger these acts of remembrance and ultimately deliver collective redemption. The study of diasporic writing may be construed as an act of remembrance and collective deliverance.

### **Rhizomatic Analysis in Action**

At this point, I want to illustrate the phenomenon of neocolonial disintegration and ideological reconstitution of the “third world” subject as a symptom of uneven capitalist hegemony, in a fictional account by a Filipina author who writes in Filipino, the national language. Consider this an experiment in symptomatic hermeneutics (see Balibar and Macherey). Fanny Garcia wrote the story entitled “Arriverderci” in 1982 at the height of the Marcos-induced export of Filipina bodies to relieve widespread immiseration in all sectors of society and curb mounting resistance in city and countryside.

Garcia’s ascetic representation of this highly gendered diaspora yields a diagnostic illustration of postcolonial schizophrenia. In the opening scene, Garcia describes Filipina domestics in Rome, Italy, enjoying a weekend break in an excursion outside the city. One of these domestics, Nelly, meets a nondescript compatriot, Vicky (Vicenta), who slowly confides to Nelly her incredible experience of physical hardship, loneliness, and frustrated ambition, including her desperate background in her hometown, San Isidro. Vicky also reveals her fear that her employer might rape her, motivating her to inquire about the possibility of moving in with Nelly whose own crowded apartment cannot accommodate Vicky. Spatial confinement resembles incarceration for those who refuse the oppression of live-in contracts, the latter dramatized in Vicky’s earlier experience.

Dialogue begets intimacy and the shock of discovery. After trust has been established between them, Nelly learns that Vicky has concealed the truth of her dire situation from her relatives back home. Like others, Vicky has invented a fantasy life to make her folks happy. After a short lapse of time, Nelly and her companions read a newspaper account of Vicky’s suicide—according to her employer, she leaped from the fifth floor of the apartment due to a broken heart caused by her sweetheart, a Filipino seaman, who was



marrying another woman. Nelly of course knows the real reason: Vicky was forced to kill herself to save her honor, to refuse bodily invasion by the Italian master. Nelly and her friends manage to gather funds to send Vicky's body back home to the Philippines. When asked how she would explain Vicky's death to the next-of-kin, everyone agrees that they could not tell the truth. Nelly resolves their predicament with a fictive ruse:

“Ganito na lang,” sabi ni Nelly, “nabangga ang kotseng sinasakyan n’ya.” Sumang-ayon ang lahat. Pumunta sa kusina si Nelly. Hawak ang bolpen at nakatitig sa blangkong puting papel na nakapatong sa mesa, naisip ni Nelly, dapat din niyang tandaan: sa San Isidro, si Vicenta at Vicky ay si Bising (1994, 334-335).

[“Let’s do it this way,” Nelly said, “she died when the car she was in crashed.” Everyone agreed. Nelly entered the kitchen. Holding a ballpoint pen and staring at the blank piece of paper on the table, Nelly thought that she should also remember: in San Isidro, Vicenta and Vicky were also Bising.]

In the triple personas of Vicky nurtured in the mind of Nelly, we witness the literal and figurative diaspora of the Filipino nation in which the manifold layers of experience occurring at different localities and temporalities are reconciled. They are sutured together not in the corpse but in the act of gendered solidarity and national empathy. Without the practices of communication and cooperation among Filipina workers, the life of the individual OFW is suspended in thrall, a helpless fragment in the nexus of commodity circulation (for a postmodernist gloss on this story, see Tadiar). Terror in capitalist society re-inscribes boundaries and renews memory.

### **Beyond the Binary of Self and Others**

What I want to highlight, however, is the historicizing power of this narrative. Marx once said that capitalism conquers space with time (Harvey, 2000). The urgent question is: Can its victims fight back via a counterhegemonic strategy of spatial politics? Loading space with dizzying motion, collapsing it into multiple vectors and trajectories, may be one subversive strategy. In Garcia's story, the time of the nationalizing imagination overcomes displace-

ment by global capital. Fantasy becomes complicit with truth when Nelly and her friends agree to shelter Vicky's family from the terror of patriarchal violence located in European terrain. Geopolitics trumps transnational hybridity or ambivalence when the production of space is articulated with habits, customs, daily routine of the female worker (for this insight, see Rose).

We see that the routine life of the Filipino community is defined by bureaucratized space that seems to replicate the schedule back home; but the chronological itinerary is deceptive because while this passage lures us into a calm compromise with what exists, the plot of attempted rape and Vicky's suicide transpires behind the semblance of the normal and the ordinary:

...Ang buhay nila sa Italia ay isang relo—hindi nagbabago ng anyo, ng direksiyon, ng mga numero.

Kung Linggo ng umaga, nagtitipon-tipon sa loob ng Vaticano, doon sa pagitan ng malalaking haliging bato ng colonnade... Ang Papa'y lilitaw mula sa isang mataas na bintana ng isang gusali, at sa harap ng mikropo-no'y magsasalita't magdadasal, at matapos ang kanyang basbas, sila'y magkanya-kanyang grupo sa paglisan. Karaniwa'y sa mga parke ang tuloy. Sa damuhan, sa ilalim ng mga puno, ilalabas ang mga baon. May paikot-ikot sa mga grupo, nagtitinda ng pansit na lemon ang pampaasim, litsong kawali na may Batanggenyo, at iba pang hatiang batay sa wika o lugar. O kaya'y ang mga propesyonal at di-propesyonal. Matapos ang kainan, palilipasin ang oras sa pamamagitan ng kuwentuhan o kaya'y pagpapaunlak sa isang nagpapasugal. Malakas ang tayaan. Mga bandang alas-tres o alas-kuwatro ng hapon, kanya-kanyang alis na ang mga pangkat. Pupunta sa mga simbahan pinagmimisahan ng mga paring Pinoy na iskolar ng kani-kanilang order. Sa Ingles at Pilipino ang misa, mga awit at sermon. Punong-puno ang simbahan, pulos Pilipino, maliban sa isa o dalawa o tatlong puti na maaring kaibigan, nobio, asawa o kabit ng ilang kababayan.

Matapos ang misa, muling maghihiwalay ang mga pangkat-pangkat. May pupunta muli sa mga parke, may magdidisco, may magsisine. Halos hatinggabi na kung maghiwa-hiwalay patungo sa kanya-kanyang tinutulan... (329-330).

[Their lives in Italy resembled a clock—never changing in shape, direction or numbers.

On Sunday mornings they would gather inside the Vatican, there between the huge rocky pillars of the colonnade... The Pope would appear at a window of the tall building, and would pray and speak in front of a microphone, and after his benediction, they would all join their groups upon leaving. Usually they head for the parks. On the grass, under the trees, they will spread their packs. Some will circle around selling noodles with lemon slices, roast pork with catsup, and other viands. The picnic begins. Ilocanos congregate among themselves, so do those from Batangas, and others gather together according to language or region. Or they socialize according to profession or lack of it. After eating, they will pass the time telling stories or gambling. Betting proceeds vigorously. Toward three or four in the afternoon, the cohorts begin their departure. They head toward the churches where Filipino priests, scholars of their orders, hold mass in English or in Filipino, together with songs and sermon. The churches overflow, all Filipinos, except for one, two or three whites, who may be friends, sweethearts, wives, or partners. After the mass, the groups will again separate. Some will return to the parks, others will go to discos or movie houses, until around midnight they will go their separate individual ways to wherever they are staying.]

Resignation is premature. This surface regularity conceals fissures and discontinuities that will only disclose themselves when the death of Vicky shatters the peace and complicates the pathos of indentured domesticity. Thus we find ourselves mourning our sister, the mother of all migrants and exiles in our shrunken, suddenly claustrophobic planet when computer-armed Ahabs, now in their apocalyptic terrorizing mode, still roam and plunder the core and the peripheries of the post-anthropocene world.

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