



EDITOR'S NOTE

Postcolonial theories, particularly those radical varieties that had remained steadfast to their historical-materialist root, continue to be relevant in studying contemporary processes of human interaction in a globalized context. While the meaning of the interconnectedness of peoples and their cultures in a globalized world is ambivalent, what sheer reality this same late capitalist world confronts an intellectual in the Global South are the same unassailable material and cultural inequalities—cutting across class, gender, and racial lines—that did not simply vanish in thin air. These neo-colonial relations are what drive a radical social critique that continues to be the hallmark of a postcolonial theory.

Two articles in this issue of *Humanities Diliman* argue for the continued relevance of this historical-materialist type of postcolonial theory. In his article, E. San Juan, Jr., critiques neoliberal, Euro-American cultural studies that had drifted away from its original radical critical vision to its current intense concern, beginning in early 1990s, with postmodern consumerist-spectatorial consumption, reception studies, nihilistic deconstruction, and so on. Labeling this as constitutive of “imperial cultural studies,” San Juan offers a cultural studies in its stead that is insistently counterhegemonic, i.e., one which foregrounds “ethnic writings” of subaltern voices that are grounded in concrete historicities and which are attuned to their collective needs. What San Juan endorses in his article is therefore an “ethnic” cultural studies that projects local writing as a striving for social, democratic, anti-imperial (or anti-capitalist) “concrete-universal.” San Juan supports his argument with writings by Afro-American Toni Morrison, Asian-Americans Maxine Hong Kingston, Carlos Bulosan, Frank Chin, and so on, Native American N. Scott Momady, the “magical realist” writing of Latin American Gomez-Peña and others. From these works on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, San Juan then briefly discusses works in Philippine Studies from the other side, i.e., from Virgilio Enriquez’s *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, which San Juan critiques as problematically linguocentric, to Zeus Salazar’s populist *Pantayong Pananaw*. San Juan believes that only a few contemporary writers, such as Ramon Guillermo and Reynaldo Ileto, have succeeded in writing radical social critiques, the important criteria of which are those that highlight the dominated’s collective aspiration for social justice, democracy, and equality.



If San Juan misses other Filipino radical writers, the next article by Rosario Torres-Yu complements his list and comes to the rescue. Linking these writers to the tradition of social realist Filipino writers such as José Rizal, Torres-Yu discusses the important works of nationalist or postcolonial writers Amado V. Hernandez and Bienvenido L. Lumbera. What is noteworthy in Torres-Yu's article is the manner by which she presents a rich context of the radical writer's works, i.e., in (1) specific economic histories of American imperialism in the Philippines that have been some of the reasons for the alignment of these writers with the national democratic Left and (2) the prevailing elitist, academic liberal humanism ideology that Lumbera particularly resisted. It was these that formed the background for espousing revolutionary ideas; the economic and cultural domination warrant them. At one point in their lives, both writers were incarcerated by the Philippine state for their revolutionary activities. Hernandez was active with labor unions, while Lumbera wrote radical anti-dictatorial writings during military rule in the country. Torres-Yu then proceeds to present the subversive content of Hernandez's works (poetry *Bayang Malaya* and novel *Mga Ibong Mandaragit*) that embody the voice of Filipino masses or workers, after which she defends the continuing relevance of Hernandez who upheld the vision of decolonizing Filipino consciousness. The latter is a matter that Lumbera cogently argues to be highly possible in the use of the vernacular Filipino language.

Setting aside radicalism, the two remaining articles in this issue tackle equally salient topics such as ethnicity and gender.

Salvador-Amores's study on the recontextualization of the extinct traditional tattooing among peoples of Northern Cordillera in Luzon is instructive of how tradition is "re-invented" in the present and given new meanings beyond that of its original indigenous culture bearers. In the past, tattoos were a sign inscribed on a human body to indicate a kin-based status identity. Salvador-Amores hints that it had a ritualistic, even magical, function. Today, however, after it had circulated in the modern world, channeled through different mediums, it had acquired a commodity value, another phase in the object's "social biography," and therefore new meanings. Tattoo, in its original place of production, was permanent and involved pain-inducing instruments. As a commodity at present, it has circulated in books and internet, which graphics are copied



on a permanent basis on bodies of urban youths and as (impermanent) graphic signs printed on T-shirts and *barong Tagalogs* (national dress for males). Both have become symbols of national or “ethnic” pride and Salvador-Amores notes that this is an example of “nationalism” that gets articulated in informal, everyday life. Moreover, Salvador-Amores argues that, unlike the past, urban tattoo practice signifies individualism.

Lastly, Uychoco reads female empowerment in Laura Esquivel’s novel *Like Water for Chocolate* and compares the characters of that novel, particularly Getrudis (the woman-warrior) with exemplary women in Philippine revolutionary histories such as Gabriela Silang and the healer *babayan*. Set at the time of Mexican revolution, Uychoco discusses the characters of the novel, which revolves around four women in a family. Each of these women is unique given her stance towards the patriarchy: the mother is a bearer of patriarchal tradition; the eldest, the breaker of this tradition; and the middle daughter, the embodiment of sufferer under the same tradition. It was the youngest woman in the family, however, who subverts patriarchy by exercising her agency outside its reach in the kitchen through cooking, a feminized activity that is a metaphor of that daughter rewriting female experience. Unlike her mother who was forced to marry a man she did not necessarily want, nor her sisters who were bound to men, the youngest daughter had autonomy that is exterior to the confining male-dominated space, hence the fullest creative agency to intervene in history.

José S. Buenconsejo
Editor-in-Chief

