

BOOK REVIEW

*Capitalism, The American Empire,
and Neoliberal Globalization:
Themes and Annotations from
Selected Works of E. San Juan, Jr.*
by **Kenneth E. Bauzon (2019)**

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Born on 29 December 1938, Epifanio San Juan, Jr. is a known scholar on the Filipino diaspora. His works draw from his subject position as a Filipino educated in the University of the Philippines for his undergraduate degree, and in Harvard University for his postgraduate degrees. As a student of the University of the Philippines in the 1950s, he has lived through the Philippine version of McCarthyism spearheaded by the Congressional Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities. Later, he moved to America in the 1960s at the height of the Cold War. He writes poetry and scholarly essays on the themes of anti-imperialism, racism, migration and the US Empire from the 1950s up to the present (“San Juan, Jr., Epifanio”).

From the title alone, Kenneth E. Bauzon’s *Capitalism, The American Empire, and Neoliberal Globalization: Themes and Annotations from Selected Works of E. San Juan, Jr.* draws from the ideas of San Juan. And as admittedly “encyclopedic” is San Juan’s scope (ix), this book has the equally ambitious goal in

drawing links between capitalism as a system of accumulation of value, the American empire as the preeminent state that ensures the persistence of this system amidst potential competing systems, and the contemporary neoliberal globalization, as a reincarnation of classical colonialism, and investment with all the *accoutrements* essential to conquer the commons for private profit [...] (19).

At first glance, one expects that the book is a study on the works of San Juan. Rather, Bauzon recognizes San Juan’s “interventions” (ix) as Bauzon writes on colonialism and empire. San Juan’s ideas

are at times interspersed within the body, but oftentimes, they are explained as lengthy endnotes, which are worth reading itself. Bauzon notes that he is inspired both by Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States 1492-Present*, which writes history from the vantage point of the oppressed and therefore glossed over by mainstream views of history; and by Jose Rizal's annotations of Dr. Antonio Morga's *Sucesos De Las Islas Filipinas*, where Rizal refutes Morga's interpretation on how the Filipinos have become colonized (viii, xii). Thus, the "interventions" occur at various levels, and not from San Juan alone. There are the "interventions" of various scholars who have also written on the subject of Philippine and American history, capitalism, postcolonialism and the empire. And most importantly, there is the "intervention" of Bauzon (though he is not as explicit in this) who synthesizes and maps these ideas.

Bauzon's background in history and political science becomes apparent, as he focuses on history, political theory, and political economy, and not on literature, of which San Juan is a major figure both in literary criticism and poetry. Nonetheless, the discussion also ventures into how cultural practices such as photography and ethnography during the American colonial period propped the image of Filipinos as "uncivilized" and "savages" (87). The latter part of the book looks into knowledge production during the Cold War through practices in the US academe, as well as problematizes racism and postcolonialism as it occurs in the West.

With its interdisciplinary approach, the book appeals to readers from both the humanities and the social sciences. The book also traverses the American colonies in the Philippines, Hawaii and Fiji, as well as America itself through pointing out the problematics of race and class among people of color living in the "belly of the beast". Though these are themes that are taken from San Juan's works, one also notices the parallelisms of San Juan's subject position to that of Bauzon's. Educated in the Philippines in Silliman University, he took postgraduate studies in Duke University and assumed a teaching position in St. Joseph's College in New York. Filipino-American scholars such as San Juan and Bauzon have a growing interest on the neocolony, diaspora and multiculturalism since they articulate issues closer to "home". Yet, Bauzon is critical of the tendency of the academe of fetishizing the identity politics in postcolonialism (quoting Arif Dirlik: "When Third World intellectuals have arrived in First World academe" [qtd. in 2]) by criticizing postcolonialism as "avoiding" questions on the unequal power relations inherent in global capitalism.

One thing to bear in mind when reading this book:

While it deals with historical subjects, it does not conform to the strict narrative format that one may expect. It selects certain themes, explores the ideas behind these themes, and seeks to identify the motives, the forces, and the effects inherent in the events or consequences that these ideas have given rise to. (ix)

By adopting a historical materialist lens, the book begins in Chapter 1 with a discussion on the political theory of the Enlightenment and how positivism and the quest for progress led to European colonization. This is in contrast to the continuing control of America to its neocolonies through "semi-autonomous institutions" (14). Chapters 2 to 5 present historical accounts on the rise of the American empire in the Pacific through the subjugation of the natives such as the Malolo Massacre in Fiji in 1840, the usurpation of the Philippine Revolution through the assassination of Andres Bonifacio, the betrayal of Emilio Aguinaldo, and the false promises of US support to Aguinaldo's leadership. Chapter 5 expounds more on McKinley's Benevolent Assimilation and the White Man's Burden as the guiding policy to justify American rule in the Philippines. It also exemplifies racialized state violence in the counterinsurgency and pacification campaign through the recruitment of the Black American soldiers (popularly known as "Buffalo Soldiers") to fight in the Philippine-American War, the quelling of the Moro insurgency in the Mindanao-Sulu region, and the conscription of native collaborators such as the Macabebe scouts. The battle is waged ideologically through colonial education (and here Bauzon elaborates on Renato Constantino's *The Miseducation of the Filipino*).

The last three chapters move to the present situation in both America and neocolonial Philippines. Chapter 6 ventures into political economy as privatization, trade liberalization, deregulation, and militarization through unequal treaties with the World Trade Organization and the IMF-World Bank continue to bind the Philippines to America at the wake of the Cold War. Chapter 7 criticizes the knowledge production in US academia during the Cold War and criticizes multiculturalism and postcolonialism as evading historical determinism. Moreover, a discussion of race without class in the United States that stresses upward mobility and personal responsibility does not acknowledge the structural problems that disenfranchise the racial minority. Finally, Chapter 8 reiterates the global inequality that results in the current environmental crisis. It ends by affirming the anti-imperialist struggle.

While all these concepts and historical accounts are nothing new or groundbreaking this day, the book offers a comprehensive and systematic account on the workings of the American empire from past to present—in the colonies, the neocolonies and the belly of the beast. As it is a materialist critique, it also discusses history, political economy, political philosophy, and delves into the ideological underpinnings of such concepts. This covers a lot of material that is supported by reputable scholars in the field.

Bauzon intends that the book's "unique feature" is to explore San Juan's writings as he discusses the rise and workings of the American empire (ix). The epigraphs per chapter help in grounding San Juan's ideas. However, expect to see more of San Juan in the lengthy endnotes and not in the main chapters. Much of San Juan's analysis appears in the main body of Chapter 7 on "The Racialized State" and "Knowledge Production and the Cold War in the United States". Since the book is extensive, owing in fact to San Juan's wide-ranging coverage, sometimes the reader gets lost as various facets of the American empire is explored. The book lacks a sustained narrative, as it is too broad. It would help if the reader would take each chapter piecemeal, and use the endnotes as a roadmap to San Juan's works.

The book remains valuable and a relevant read among the international audience, Filipino-Americans, Filipinos living in America, and Filipinos in the Philippines. Currently, America is still plagued with issues of racism, which gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement, and Americans themselves are still living in a society with unequal wealth distribution despite its liberal ideals of individualism, progress and enterprise. There should also be awareness of the continuation of Cold War tactics of suppressing dissidents that stem from the American colonial period through its present iterations of red-tagging of dissenters. This is stamped through the passage of the Anti-Terror Act in the Philippines under the Duterte presidency. More importantly, San Juan (as noted by Bauzon) acknowledges the national democratic struggle in the Philippines as a continuation of Bonifacio's anti-colonial struggle, and a consistent force to dismantle the American empire.

REFERENCE

"San Juan, Jr., Epifanio." *Panitikan.ph*, 25 Jan. 2020, panitikan.ph/2014/06/07/epifanio-san-juan-jr/.

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