

FROM GENEALOGY TO INVENTORY: THE SITUATION OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE AGE OF THE CRISIS OF GLOBAL FINANCE CAPITAL

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The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is "knowing thyself" as a product of the historical process 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.

–ANTONIO GRAMSCI, *Prison Notebooks*

ABSTRACT

The onset of global capitalism's crisis has exposed the fragile theoretical underpinnings of Asian American Studies as an academic discipline. Spellbound by deconstructive, rhetorical assumptions, all symptomatic of commodity-fetishism and alienation, mainstream Asian American critics continue to validate neoliberal pluralism while claiming to value difference and singularity. While rejecting American Exceptionalism, they ignore historical specificities and endorse individualist norms, affects, genealogical plurality, and performative discourses uncritical of free-market reification. What is needed is a return to a mode of critical inventory that takes account of historical capitalism, imperialist geopolitics, and the notion of collective agency necessary to destroy racialised ideological practices and institutions that maintain the exploitative capitalist

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division of labor, social injustice, and inequality of peoples based on private appropriation of social wealth.

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After the precipitous collapse of financial giants like Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Washington Mutual, Merrill Lynch and other US banks and the October carnage in the global stock market, US finance-capitalism's substance seems to be dissolving rapidly into shadows. US finance capital, once unimpeachable, is suffering a rapid slippage not into Derrida's vertiginous abyss of textual undecidability, but into bankruptcy. How are the humanities and literary studies, specifically that "peculiar institution" called Asian American Studies, being affected by this epochal and now traumatic event? Before we can answer our communities' challenge of understanding imperialism as a haunting predatory presence, indeed, the "history of the present" shock-and-awe of an unprecedented crisis, we need to review why Asian American literature—to refer tentatively to a discursive fabrication—seems unable to transcend its paralysing conceptualisation as a plural unstable ethnic identity, despite its imagined or hypothetical foundation in centuries-old civilisations (China, Japan, Korea). This paper rehearses and evaluates the key theoretical schematics and initiates a pedagogical critique of two Filipino American novels as an example of an alternative to the status quo.

For this modest academic exercise, it is not necessary to invoke the legacy of the pre-Columbian past to revitalize "the exhausted tropes of solidarity and coalition"; such tropes—except for a brief period in the context of the popular-democratic upheavals in the sixties—never appealed to the "political unconscious" of each specific "Asian" group undergoing the "labour of the negative," by which I mean the ordeal of their normative and routinised exclusion, exploitation, inferiorisation, stigmatisation, and destruction by the white-supremacist polity and its hegemonic apparatuses in the domain of the State and civil society. The rubrics of transnationality, citizenship, immigration and globalisation are the symptomatic indices of our contemporary predicament in the shadows of Empire.

ORIENTALISING THE BUFFER RACE

As the Vietnam quagmire deepened in 1966, sociologist William Petersen declared the Japanese Americans "a model minority", rescuing them from

the trauma of the internment years. A decade later, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* appeared in 1976, hailed as a breakthrough for Asians. After the US debacle in Indochina and the eclipse of the Civil Rights struggles, *Newsweek* in 1982 headlined a leading story "Asian-Americans: A Model Minority" (Kitano and Roger 1988: 51). This is the year in which Vincent Chin, a Chinese American mistaken for a Japanese man in Detroit, was killed by two white workers. The gospel of neo-liberal globalisation, also known as "the Washington Consensus," took off with a retooling of methodological individualism in "rational choice theory" and officially sanctioned Establishment multiculturalism. To maintain the hegemonic common sense of a racial hierarchy, the US dominant bloc requires a "buffer race" to split up the toiling majority, keeping blacks visible but subordinate, and thus deflect class conflict by preserving the civil-society consensus of white colour privilege (Gran 1999). To preserve the status quo, the identity of the white working class needs to be defined by race, not by class consciousness.

Before the ascendancy of the global village of multinational corporations and its administered pluralist ethos in the 1970s, the US elite under Nixon reinforced the racial hierarchy through its attacks on radical trends among people of colour; soon, covert and open repression encouraged religious separatism, national chauvinism, and the consolidation of the underclass (chiefly, African Americans). At this conjuncture, East Asians on the West Coast in particular were instrumentalised to breathe new life into the assimilationist syndrome. Later on, with the return of finance capitalism in the Reagan-Bush years and the influx of Irish and Mexican immigrants after 1965, modernism as an ideological disciplinary complex and structuring *habitus* (Bourdieu's 1993) is displaced by postmodernist tendencies—subaltern studies, deconstruction, post-colonialism, Foucaultian modalities of suspicion, etc. Asian American cultural production, with its scholastic authorities and texts, finds its niche in this new tri-polar world (US, Europe, Japan as leaders in the G7 bloc) characterised by the rise of Japan as a peer partner in global hegemony, with Asians as "no longer 'second class citizens'" (Gills 1993: 212).

With ethnicity today as the equalising mechanism of conformity, we rarely hear special pleas for the plight of "the model minority". In Taiwan-born Eric Liu's provocative brief for "model minoritism", *The Accidental Asian*, we find a rather nostalgic diagnosis of the madness labelled "Mongolophobia", an archaic but insidious belief that Asians threaten the American Way of Life. Liu ascribes this primal terror, the "fear of a yellow planet," to yellow journalism—*The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu, the Evil Genius*—and to the annals of early psychoanalysis. A history of collective

psychosis is recounted: the riots and lynch mobs against Chinese in the 1870s leading to the infamous 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act; the internment of Japanese Americans in the concentration camps during the 1940s; and, with the Wen Ho Lee scandal, the conspiracy theory regarding China as the new source of the "yellow peril".

But Liu believes that the "last judgement" is on the horizon. From "perfect Manichean scapegoats," or subhuman creatures to superhuman monsters or machines, Asians have multiplied and "breached the mainstream," with the "advance guard" reaching "the commanding heights of power," while a resurgent Asia is profoundly altering American language, manners and dreams. Liu prophesizes the third possibility, which reconciles extreme aversion and extreme idolisation: "Asians are, in fact, human; that they have left our imagination and arrived in our lives. Soon we may have to admit: We have already met the East, and it is us" (1998: 135). Welcome to/from Disneyland, gated Asians! In this sleight-of-hand version of Hegelian dialectics (unwittingly parodying Francis Fukuyama), Liu has ironically collapsed the heterogeneous Other into the banal Same. This passage from wholly Other into the worshipped "model minority"—still being resurrected by Helen Zia and other tokenising gatekeepers—may serve as an allegory for the vicissitudes of the Asian presence in the landscape of the United States in an era of globalisation, the post 9/11 war on terror and the crisis of a retrenching neo-liberal dispensation.

E PLURIBUS, UNUM?/OUT OF MANY, ONE?

The neoconservative triumphalism of "free market" *Weltanschauung* from the Reagan administration through the collapse of Lehman Brothers marked a decisive turn in the way white-supremacist hegemony operated. The Cold War required a pretence or premise of defending the "Free World" from the evils of Soviet and Chinese communism. While the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration and Naturalisation Act opened the floodgates to more immigration from Asia, abolishing the "national origins" quota, it was the Vietnam War and its aftermath that dissolved the Chinese/Japanese monopoly of the cultural field of Asian America. In 1975, over 130,000 refugees from Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos were allowed into the US. It was at this point that formalist New Criticism in literary and humanistic studies, already battered by the Civil Rights movement's demand for a revision of the Western canon, had to be overhauled in order to allow the implementation of a new mode of racial hierarchisation. Because the old narrative of assimilationism and adaptation (retooled as the cyclic pattern of

suspicion and adjustment) has lost its potency in anticipation of finance-capital's ascendancy over a de-industrialised America, a new paradigm had to be invented to preserve the myth of consensual democracy. This is summed up in Lisa Lowe's (1991) triple shibboleths of "heterogeneity, hybridity, multiplicity."

With the advent of the Indochinese element and the heightened influx of Filipinos, Asian America—by which I mean the Chinese/Japanese monolith—had to confront a changing reality. This is not what Lowe had in mind, despite her claim of recognising the material contradictions among Asian communities in the US (see the synoptic analysis of those contradictions by Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich and Lucie Cheng 1994). For her, asserting ethnic multiplicity was a means of disrupting Eurocentric hegemony, quite a novel revision of Gramsci's original use of the concept as a political strategy of a proletarian-led historic bloc to overthrow capitalist power. But aside from intra-ethnic differential relationships and hybrid mixings, multiplicity serves as the theoretical wedge to displace the organising category of class, founded on the unequal division of social labour and therefore unequal power, as the ordering principle of US capitalism. Asians are now contingently determined by "several different axes of power, ... by the contradictions of capitalism, patriarchy and race relations" (Lowe 2000: 429). This may be useful in explaining the cycle of acceptance and abuse that historian Iris Chang observes in the history of the Chinese in the US (2003). But in effect, it merely replicates the repressive teleology of mainstream functionalist empiricism and its coercive agencies.

We no longer dream of the pleasures of victimhood, to be sure, at this late date. In the age of cosmopolitan self-help and cyborgian bootstraps, we want agency. Deploying Spivak's "strategic essentialism," Lowe claims that privileging this socially constructed uneven cultural terrain will enable Asian subalterns to contest and disrupt the discourses, laws, norms, rules and practices of racial prejudice, exclusion, discrimination, scapegoating, oppression, etc. She also invokes Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity as a matter of "positioning." Consequently, she rejects class solidarity because it erases ethnic particularity. This then becomes a theory of politics as social movements moving in parallel lines, diverse alliances and coalitions striving to transform hegemonic structures—to be sure, not only the capitalist one but also scattered racist and sexist hegemonies.

ESSENTIALISM OF THE SIGNIFIER

The eighties and nineties witnessed the propagation in the US academy of the ideas of Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, etc. following the decline of Althusserian Marxism. This was signalled by the revised Gramscianism of Stuart Hall, the founding father of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. One offshoot is Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, the scriptural testament for "new social movements," whose anti-totalising obsession resonates in the theory of "minority discourse" sponsored by David Lloyd and Abdul JanMohamed in *Cultural Critique* (Spring-Fall 1987). At the same time, the intervention of Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (1986) "racial formations" approach reinforced the vogue of cultural relativism and voluntarist idealism that conceives of society as a random collection of social practices lacking any necessary integrating structure (Callinicos 1982; San Juan 1992; 2002). Philosophical adventurism and Nietzschean metaphysics of "the will to power" began to prevail in Asian American literary studies. Recycling the Althusserian motif of "multiple articulations" to counter the ideology of pseudo-universal humanism, Lowe follows these revisionists in bolstering the deconstructive-anarchist trend in Asian American criticism.

With this linguistic/culturalist turn, criticism has become solipsistic and uncannily tendentious. Amy Tan's sensational blockbuster *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and its movie version may have sealed the fate of Asians as potentially subversive agents of social change. As soon as the Asian American canon began to be institutionalised in the 1980s as part of the "cultural war" manoeuvres, teachers/scholars in this peripheral region needed to justify their scholastic anti-legitimacy. By 1995, Lowe herself had to shift gears, instructing us that the Asian American canon (Bulosan, Okada, Kogawa, Cha) is really a defiance of the reigning Western canonical tradition that privileges unevenness, indeterminacies, inassimilable alterity, nonequivalence, irresolution above unification, reconciliation, development, linear narrative, uniperspectivalism, ethical formation, etc. as tokens of American imperial nationalism. She concludes her thesis thus: "The teaching of racial, ethnic, and postcolonial texts decentres the autonomous notion of Western culture by recentring the complexities of racial, ethnic, and postcolonial collectivities, and unmasks the developmental narrative as a fiction designed to justify the histories of colonialism, neocolonialism, and forced labour and to erase the dislocations and hybridities that are the resulting conditions of those histories" (1995: 66).

POSTMODERNITY'S REVENGE

The exorbitant addiction to Derridean maxims and post-structuralist doxa has continued unabated. As one of the Establishment gatekeepers, Shirley Geok-lin Lim prefaces her widely cited 1992 anthology *Reading the Literatures of Asian America* with an essay on the "ambivalent American", meaning herself as a "new American". She resents the habitual tokenism inflicted on fellow poets like the Polish Czeslaw Milosz, rejects Lynn Cheney's Eurocentric universalism, and invokes Werner Sollor's notion of symbolic "multiple choice" ethnicity as the way out and into the majoritarian consensus. Unfortunately she succumbs to the lure of the immigrant paradigm and all its insidious implications (including the belief that American English is a life-line for the pariah's salvation). Her idea of a dialogic identity—"identity on the cusp," as it were, construed as a compromise between a Utopian American future and the ancestral golden past of the native folk (as in Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart*, and in the work of other authors such as Kingston, Chin, etc.)—entails a pathos of wish-fulfilment that undermines the realism of her initial polemic.

Aesthetics individualism overrides the constraints of historical structure and other social determinants. With the shift from the white majority nation to a multiethnic nation of minorities, Lim hopes that the paradigm of conflict and ambivalence in Asian American texts "will be transformed into a productive multivalence: "'Valences' speak to the abilities to integrate, combine, fuse, and synthesise different elements. Conflict is almost always a product of dualities; perhaps synergistic commonalities will be the product of pluralities of ethnic figures, pluralism which we know is already on its way" (1992: 28–29). This may be an improvement over Elaine Kim's (1982) inaugural configuration of Asian American literature as modelled on the ethnic immigrant success story; but in actuality, it reinforces the pluralist/multiculturalist dogma of neoliberal globalised capitalism.

"Pluralism" may be an exhausted idea, but it can be refurbished disguised as "transnational" or "diasporic". Arjun Appadurai and Theodor Adorno are invoked by Susan Koshy to rescue entropic US hegemony. In an attempt to extend Lowe's standpoint into something contestatory and "ambivalence" into something contingent or aporetic, Koshy posits the notion that the inferential value of "Asian America" resides in "the catachrestic status of the formation" (2000: 491). Agreed that there is no objectively verifiable referent of "Asian America," Koshy's agnostic and complaisant response is that we should resign ourselves to "the limits of its signifying power." Do we need another exhibition of crippling Derridean

discourse whose purpose is to shift our concern from the analysis of the political economy of production relations to the metaphysics of sliding and floating signifiers? Ludic semiotics, to be sure, does not threaten the profit-making machine of the "free market." Nor does it question the ethics or morality of ruthlessly extracting surplus value from the super-exploited peoples of the world. This cultural/linguistic turn can only hide, if not obfuscate, the material contradictions that our critics claim to confront; rather, as Teresa Ebert and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh points out, "it generates an imaginary re-patterning of the social by displacing class with 'difference,' 'performativity,' and 'desire,' thereby remaking the social: erasing it as an effect of labour and rewriting it as an effect of meanings, affects, hospitality, and the unrepresentable" (2008: 29).

DISCOMBOBULATED AND COMPROMISED

This labour of decentring the Western bourgeois standards of truth, beauty and goodness was the primary task of Marxist ideology-critique before the Nietzschean/Heideggerian vogue. Despite the brief renaissance of Marxist thought in the 1968 May uprisings and the popularity of Marcuse and the Red Book, the heavy weight of Cold War repression aborted a full-blown mobilisation of the working masses. Within the Asian communities in the United States, youth re-discovered their ethnic roots and impelled the composition of linear narratives now anathema to Lowe and postmodernist epigones.

The histories of the "tribe" by Sucheng Chan and Ronald Takaki, however, recontextualised the protracted *agon* of the Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and Korean workers, their suffering as punctuated by collective insurrections and actions expressing solidarity with other groups. This perception of a multilayered narrative seems to have registered the significant theoretical intervention made by Robert Blauner—which, for me at least, exploded the myth that all Filipinos were immigrants and thus could not but follow the venerable itinerary of European immigrant success. Blauner distinguished colonised from immigrant minorities in the pluralist order; metropolitan nations incorporated "new territories or peoples through processes that are essentially involuntary, such as war, conquest, capture, and other forms of force or manipulation" (1972). The cases of the Philippines and Puerto Rico are the obvious examples. Colonisation—this time, the "internal colonialism" (Allen 2005) of racialised groups—and the immigration of ethnic Europeans represented two ideal types or polar ends of a continuum that explains the peopling of the US social formation.

Takaki understood this, but he could not hold onto and elaborate on this crucial distinction in his 1989 opus, *Strangers from a Different Shore*. His world-view was still imprisoned within the mystified ideal of American Exceptionalism, as attested to by his 1994 comment on the "culture wars" then raging at the end of the Reagan era.

Takaki locates the problem in the linkage of "democracy to national identity" (1994: 299), not to capitalism. Consequently, his solution to economic and racial inequality, including the intensifying exploitation of ethnicised or racialised workers, is the extension of rights and citizenship to everyone. There is a rich, flourishing archive of scholarly texts and discourses by Asian American lawyers (especially those engaged in "critical race theory") and activists devoted to this reform-minded approach, none of which has prevented the worsening inequality and anomic decay among Chinese, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Laotians, Kampuchians and Hmongs since the liberalisation of entry in 1965 (Hing 1998). The prophylaxis of citizenship rights offered by Lowe, Takaki, Okihiro and others should be laid to rest by Natsu Taylor Saito's (2002; 2003) cogent argument that such belief in citizenship as the cure can only reinforce the state's systematic "plenary power" over the others, especially in cases of immigrant persecution, dating back to the 1882 Exclusion Law. So we return to the analysis of the capitalist mode of production and reproduction as the enabling principle and legitimising guarantee of the racial polity (Meyerson 2000).

An affliction of similar proportions may be discerned in Gary Okihiro's apologetic (if not opportunistic) mode of historicizing the vicissitudes of Asian American existence in the late-capitalist United States. Okihiro intends to denounce the crimes of white-supremacist America on Asians, but at the same time, he doesn't want to be seen as an angry ideologue, an uncouth left-wing doctrinaire scholar; his tone varies, at once serious but complacently ironic; he strives to distance himself from the anecdotal Takaki and the more schematic style of Sucheng Chan via gestures that are at once hedging and temporizing, almost verging on a defence of McKinley's "Benevolent Assimilation" policy as eventually administered with Theodore Roosevelt's big stick. Okihiro may be the authentic by-product of Lowe's hybridized discourse-deconstructing machine.

At the end of the Cold War, the bombing of Yugoslavia, and the inauguration of a more fiercely predatory *pax Americana* with the impending US invasion of Iraq, Okihiro's confession of partisanship for the mystique of "multicultural America" speaks volumes, rivalling Eric Liu, and provides an explanation for the current stagnation and malaise in the

discipline: "But class has never, I believe, been central to our analysis. We persist in our belief in the push-pull (or some variant thereof) hypothesis of Asian migration, we see articulation as a racial encounter, and we present our work and subject matter as yet another aspect of multicultural America" (1998: 32). Okihiro and other functionaries in the academy cannot resolve the problem of duplicity (not ambiguity) while negotiating between the old panethnicity model based on racial formations (Espiritu 1992; San Juan 2002) and the siren song of incommensurable discrepancies and undecidabilities. This may be due to an Orientalised "cunning of history" missed by Edward Said.

THERAPY OR EXORCISM?

For this emergence in the nineties of the Asian American penchant for schizophrenic inquiry, the best diagnosis is, to my mind, the insightful and wide-ranging treatise of David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*. Palumbo-Liu comments on the schizophrenic symptoms apparent in three texts, among others: Daniel Okimoto's *American in Disguise*, Yoshimi Ishikawa's *Strawberry Road*, and Chang Rae Lee's *Native Speaker*. Just as Lowe manifests symptoms of the process of transnationalism and transmigration that forces into crisis once sacrosanct notions of citizenship and nationhood, the protagonists of those texts, in particular those of Lee's novel, testify to the splitting and disintegration of social and political subjectivity in the age of globalised finance-capitalism. Palumbo-Liu notes the following: "If the 1970s named Asian Americans as dual personalities, the 1980s and 1990s have produced a particular vision of the schizophrenic, one intimately linked to transnationalism" (1999: 320), who may no longer be amenable to the programmatic techniques of healing, reconciliation, and adaptation beloved by the pragmatic social scientists and technocrats of the Cold War era.

Faced with the civilisationalist racism of a post-9/11 Homeland Security State, Vijay Prashad for his part attempts to revive a moribund Ethnic Studies by replacing the epistemology of identity with that of polyculturalism. Comparative ethnic studies, for him, are the way to escape the deterministic, vulgar optic of class exploitation. One would think that this hegemonic apparatus of mis-representation would already have been rendered useless long before the actual bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, Bear Stearns, and so on—but not for Prashad. This refurbished version of the old cultural pluralism may also be discerned in current historiography—where, for example, the United State's "calibrated colonialism" (Kramer

2006) becomes a dynamic interactive field in which the coloniser and colonized transact the business of politics as equal partners. The fallacy of equating exploiter and exploited in order to ascribe agency/humanity to the subjugated but emotionally appealing victim vitiates many empirical studies of Filipino overseas migrant workers (Tung 2004). Supposedly novel in inventing agency for the colonised, this new epistemology in the disciplines of history and sociology interprets colonial domination as consensual negotiation between rulers and the ruled, reducing hegemony into an exercise in Habermasianesque rational communication. Polyculturalism thus becomes the alibi of imperialism that is suddenly capable of "bad faith."

It is thus not surprising to find Prashad nostalgically enthused about the obsolete panethnicity nostrum and the anti-totalism of Lowe's *Immigrant Acts*, unwittingly generating an aporia that is both paradoxical and unintelligible: for him, "ontological incompleteness" as fetishised by Lowe, Koshy and others "need not obscure for us the social completeness of identity and identification" (2006: 169). This rhetorical contortion may be an instance of what Fredric Jameson (1991) calls "schizophrenic nominalism," a post-modern malady in which the traditional markers of identity and historical progression, coherence and continuity have disappeared so that everything is now characterised by fluidity, disjunctures, aleatory slippages, nomadic drifts, and other symptoms that defy thought and logocentric reason. We enter a realm of ludic *terra incognita* about which we cannot speak, much less intuit and reflect.

MALAYS RUNNING AMOK?

At this juncture, it would be useful to explore how Filipino writers in the United States have responded to the shift from racialised pluralism to globalised differentiation. As everyone knows, Carlos Bulosan's problematic exemplum, *America Is in the Heart*, has become an ever-contentious object lesson. The reason lies in the fact that practically all readers ignore or choose to elide the historical singularity absent from textbooks and mass media: The Philippines was violently subjugated by US imperialism in the Filipino-American War (1899–1902) at the cost of 1.4 million Filipino lives (San Juan 2000; 2009). This is the submerged text of the first part of *America*, whose revolutionary impulse surfaces intermittently in the stories and essays but more fully in the novel of the McCarthy/Cold War period, *The Cry and the Dedication*. Because of the persisting amnesia about this ugly truth in monumental US history—only dredged up recently when apologists of the Iraq War invoked the "humanitarian" occupation of the

Philippines by the US military at the beginning of the twentieth century, or when the recently reported practice of "waterboarding" on Iraqi and Afghani prisoners was discovered to be a form of torture commonly used against captured Filipino insurgents—Bulosan remains unread, or inadequately appreciated, up to now.

Almost equal to if not surpassing the total population of Chinese Americans, the Filipino community (more than three million of 12 million Asians) in the US exists due to the political instability and economic underdevelopment of the Philippines (Hing 1998). Perhaps one should really define the Philippines from 1898 to 1946 (when the US granted formal independence, with many strings attached) not as a classic colony but as a dependency—thus, an internal colony in the way of the Native American territories. Virtually a neocolony today, the Philippine social formation cannot be understood by means of postcolonial concepts of hybridity, in-betweenness, interstitiality, and so on. Nor can the decolonisation of Asian American Studies' paradigms of cultural nationalism, identity politics or national assimilation be carried out using the phenomenon of the global diaspora to expunge anti-imperialist liberation struggles that mobilise the sedimented nationalist traditions of peasants and workers in the neocolonies. The durable recalcitrance of Filipino subjectivity saturated with nationalist memory-traces explains why, unlike the individuals in the relatively assimilated Japanese, Korean and Chinese middlemen strata, Filipinos—who have been disenfranchised and demonised for a long time—cannot function as the "buffer race" between the white majority and the castelike black underclass. This remains the case today, even though these colonised "nationals" were not locked out in 1882 or banned by the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907–1908 or by the 1924 Immigration Act, which favoured "desirable" Europeans and denied citizenship to Asian "aliens". Nonetheless, all Filipinos are Americanised to one degree or another and in more ways than one; and if Arif Dirlik is correct that Americanisation is synonymous with racialisation, then all Filipinos have been thoroughly racialised, "not just fitting into a racially organised society but also thinking racially" (2008, 1367).

A few years ago, I pointed out how the postcolonial notion of transnational citizenship, fluid and flexible, originated from the dynamics of circulating use-value whereby all goods and services (like health care provided by Filipino domestics) are commodified and made equivalent, translated or quantified into exchange value via the cash-nexus (San Juan 2005b). The Philippines to this day remains a neocolony, formally independent but politically a client state of Washington and the Pentagon. It functions as a strategic testing laboratory for US Special Forces fighting the

proxies of Al Qaeda (shadowy Abu Sayyaf bandits, some of whom work for local politicians and the government military) and was long prepared by more than a hundred years of trying to preserve the oligarchic rule of a corrupt and murderous elite whose subservience to the "Washington Consensus" guarantees the accelerating Filipino "warm body export", part of which services the US military bases in Iraq, Europe, Guantanamo, Hawaii, Guam, and elsewhere, including the secret "launching pads" of CIA clandestine operations in the Philippines itself (Mahajan 2002).

During the thirties and forties of the last century, Filipino workers exposed to the insurrectionary and seditious milieu of the islands were considered nasty troublemakers, aside from being perceived as a threat to the purity of Caucasian women. They collaborated in strikes with Japanese, Mexicans, and other ethnic groups on the Hawaii plantations and West Coast farms. From the outset up to 1946, Filipinos were legally considered "nationals" without any rights but nonetheless with the "duty of permanent allegiance" to the US nation-state (Hall 2002: 101). They were not allowed to vote, own property, start any kind of business or marry Caucasian women. However, Filipino surplus labour as a rule was Americanised enough to warrant candidacy for model-minority status; migration is thus valued as "an opportunity and mechanism for upward social mobility," according to functionalist sociologists (Carino 1996).

With post-9/11 racial profiling, the Filipino re-entered the target-*vision* of the alarmed racial polity—i.e., "white supremacy...as a political system in itself" (Mills 1999: 25). In August 2002, for example, 63 Filipinos were herded onto an airplane for a direct flight to the Philippines, all the deportees manacled during the flight. In December, a second batch of 84 Filipinos were deported under the same humiliating conditions, legitimised by the Absconder Apprehension Initiative Programme of the US Department of Justice (effective since 13 January 2001) and other laws that criminalised Filipinos as undocumented workers (Mendoza 2003). From October 2001 to April 2002, 334 Filipinos were deported on the basis of authoritarian executive orders justified by legislative actions (including the USA Patriot Act) under the Bush administration. This was quite unprecedented: Filipinos had never been deported in this brutal way in such large numbers. With the discovery of terrorists in their country of origin, Filipinos are now doubly marked as a "brown peril" of sorts, with affinities to Muslim Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, Indonesians, Afghans, and so on. The old somatic/physical markers of race and ethnic/cultural signifiers have now become either amalgamated with or sublimated into the prevailing computerised "terrorist" profile.

How does a novelist like Jessica Hagedorn, for instance, respond to this new regime of "civic nationalism" engaged in a "just war" to defend "civic order and democratic liberties"? How does this post-Cold War "insecuritisation" (Thornton 2002) under the aegis of the "global war on terror" provide an opening for Hagedorn's volatilisation of the old formal properties of mimetic art that foreground versimilitude of character and plot?

HAGEDORN'S UNTAMED FLICKS

As though afflicted with a severe attack of "repetition compulsion," Hagedorn presents a reprise of her 1988 *Dogeaters* in her new production *Dream Jungle*. We encounter here a post-modern repertory of combining parts and suturing disparate fragments. This technique of collage/pastiche may be viewed as imitation or copying without laughter. And since there is no original common language of bourgeois individualism and its attendant metanarrative, parody is ruled out. If the real—assuming there is some agreement that reality is out there—can no longer be captured or expressed by language and its resources, what is there to write about? What is striking in this setup (despite the postmodernist obsession with the materiality of the sign as image, not as a vehicle of meaning) is that readers and reviewers refuse to give up summarising, decoding, and making sense of the stitched-together bits and pieces of Hagedorn's artifice.

Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle* interweaves two constellations of events. The first centres on the wealthy playboy Zamora Lopez de Legaspi, who discovers a tribe of Stone-Age cave dwellers (alluding to the Tasaday tribe found in 1971 before Marcos' declaration of martial law). The second revolves around a servant girl, Rizalina Cayabyab, the daughter of Zamora's cook, who flees to Manila, becomes a go-go dancer, and meets an American actor, Vincent Moody. Moody happens to be working on the crew of *Napalm Sunset* (alluding to *Apocalypse Now*), a Vietnam-war movie being filmed in Mindanao, Philippines, where the indigenous Tasadays were discovered. These two event networks, for one reviewer, function as semantic indices to convey what Hagedorn feels are the effects of Spanish and American colonialism. They are decipherable signifiers that convey the novel's major themes, making this *bricolage* intelligible: "Explorers [Magellan, Coppola, other foreigners] turn out to be conquerors, Westerners are still bending Philippine destinies and lechery continues to bind colonizer and native" (Ramzy 2003). If so, then Hagedorn has wasted time and energy on banalities. At best, she has distracted our mind from the toxic and

barbaric disasters inflicted by US power on the peoples of Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines, and elsewhere.

What strikes our critical intelligence is the standard by which Hagedorn can be said to represent a Filipino response to the historical conjuncture I have addressed here. Tentatively, we can say that this schizophrenic mode of fabulation is actually both the form and the substance of Hagedorn's attempt to make sense of the historical period from the end of the Vietnam War to the 9/11 terror attack. Pastiche, variegated points of view, and the alternation of episodes, may indeed achieve what *The New York Times* reviewer suspects is Hagedorn's singular intent: to engage with the "unreliability of the realities it depicts" (Upchurch 2003). But then we have to ascertain whether the realities—among others, Secretary Manda Elizalde/Marcos' abuse of power on all levels, or the corruption of Filipinos by Coppola's filming of *Apocalypse Now* in the Philippines—have been convincingly presented and scrupulously documented as claimed by clever reviewers.

Metropolitan taste demands more than humdrum anecdotes. It turns out that Hagedorn's real aim of zeroing on "the societal repercussions of heavily staged-managed creations," such as the alleged anthropological findings or the publicity surrounding that and Coppola's representation of the Vietnam War experience, was achieved by simply intuiting or insinuating "her way around a dozen memorable characters and milieus, letting her concerns swarm beneath the busy surface of her narrative" (Upchurch 2003). That may be so, but this technical experimentalism itself relies on a dense texture of surface details, an incoherent assemblage that reproduces the illusion of an interminable present without depth or resonance.

As Shelley Jackson acutely puts it, Hagedorn's is "a scavenger aesthetic, choosy but eclectic" (2003). It chooses, yes, but it does so in a rather brusque, self-conscious, astutely exhibitionistic fashion. Given that Hagedorn (since *Dogeaters*) has rejected the typifying realism of the bourgeois narrative for the abstract, psychologising mannerism of high modernist art (Lukacs 1995), which constitutes the ideological aura of finance capital in the age of globalisation, we can conclude that *Dream Jungle* serves precisely the agenda of the racial polity caught in an emergency: namely, human existence is a matter of individuals with arbitrary experiences, society an accidental collocation of idiosyncratic characters, and history a wild, arbitrary and ultimately chaotic iteration of scenes for which there is no overarching vision or framework that can make sense of the whole. Isn't this a version of the fluid, heterogeneous, border-

leaping Asian American creature fashioned by Liu, Lowe, Lim and their disciples?

HOMECOMING TRAJECTORY

Let us now turn to Bienvenido Santos, a Filipino writer whose career spans two generations: the Manongs of the forties and the immediate postwar period, and the post-1965 immigrant community of professionals and exiles from the Marcos dictatorship. Now, the vintage Santos beloved by anthologists, the author of *You Lovely People* (1955) and *Villa Magdalena* (1965), can certainly be aligned with the "model minority" scheme that could not resist the inroads of alienating bureaucracy, consumerism, utilitarian standardisation, and the predatory Social Darwinism of the seventies and eighties. Santos' novel *What the Hell for You Left Your Heart in San Francisco* (1987) may be regarded as the melodramatic and at times self-ingratiating response of the petit-bourgeois stratum of the Filipino community to the shock of its continued marginalisation, subordination, and exclusion.

One peculiar feature of Santos' life may be contradistinguished from Hagedorn's. While Hagedorn's sensibility was shaped by the "Beat" generation of the sixties and the trendy cosmopolitanism of New York, Santos' world-view emerged from his forced stay in the US when World War II broke out in 1942 and from his voluntary exile from the Philippines when his novel *The Praying Man* was banned by the Marcos authoritarian regime in 1972. By circumstances and by choice, Santos aligned himself with the fate of the Filipino community in a period when the pressures of fascist power and reactionary ideology significantly affected the daily lives of his compatriots, with these pressures registered in the episodic but chronological unfolding of his 1987 narrative. It serves as the inchoate national allegory of Filipinos in the interregnum between World War II and the Iraq War.

Santos' attempt at a totalising narrative may be conceived of as an emergent national allegory—or, if you like, a national allegory-in-the-making. I believe that Fredric Jameson's theory of "national allegory" is more useful in describing the situation of Asian American writers trying to represent their group for the racial polity. The reason is that the personal and political for the Asian writer are always intertwined, given their reification and subjection to the dominant norms; hence the logical distinction between the spheres in Asian experience is not as rigid or fixed as European aesthetic doctrine since Kant and Coleridge would have prescribed. Jameson defines

his concept of national allegory: "Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (2000: 320). In a reaction to Jameson's hypothesis, Aijaz Ahmad (1986) calls attention to the sheer plurality of the cultural production in "third world" societies, which defies reduction to a formula. However, I contend that Jameson's paradigm takes into account distinct national bourgeois formations with specific histories determined by the international division of labour organised by imperialism. Imperialism is thus grasped here as a concept rather than as an experience. Unfortunately, Ahmad confuses these two spheres of discourse and analysis, generating a need to experimentally assess Jameson's theory and mobilise its potential with the necessary mediations, as I do here.

Jameson emphasises as a heuristic proposal the pervasive reification and alienation characteristic of the culture and sensibility of the metropole, part of which is relayed in colonial institutions and ideological practices. National allegory then functions as the typical colonised people's response to this ideological fragmentation and commodification. Of course, there exist sub-categories or variants of this archetypal response. By extension, an allegorical project of reconstituting a self-determining collective subject or subject-position may be discerned in those artists operating within the internal colonies of the US (Asians, Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans). From the perspective of "internal colonialism", the Asian communities resemble the underdeveloped "third world" of the sixties and seventies. What a world of difference it would have made if the canonical texts by Kingston, Bulosan, Okada, Villa, Theresa Cha, Frank Chin and others had been read as allegories for their specific nationality formations and not one-sidedly as emanations of individual psyches reacting to hostile environments.

Parenthetically, it may be prudent to remark that I will reserve a full exposition of this new approach for another occasion. Here I can only signal the inadequacies of past and existing theoretical frameworks wherein critical interventions can be launched. Such interventions will be collective and experimental in nature. In the process of critique, one may discern the seeds of emergent trends and new directions. Meanwhile, I suggest that Kingston's three major works—*The Woman Warrior*, *China Men*, and *Tripmaster Monkey*—be read as national allegories of a kind, as critical articulations of Asian American feminism wrestling with racialised patriarchy and class exploitation. I nominate two powerful examples of "national allegory" that elaborate a metanarrative of multiethnic solidarity: first, Yuri Kochiyama's

autobiographical assemblage, *Passing It On*, which resists Derridean or Foucaultian subsumption; and second, Marilyn Chin's shrewd recasting of the dramatic monologue genre in "A Portrait of the Self as Nation, 1990–1991" (1997: 159–163).

Realism and the Cartesian ego have been jettisoned together with all kinds of nationalism—except the unmarked vision of US *Herrenvolk* patriotism, and the equation of its national interest with democracy and liberty (of the "free market") everywhere. And so the hegemonic ideology continues to prove tenacious and instrumental for careerist ends. Otherwise, we could have easily liberated ourselves long ago from the corrupting spell of the "model minority" myth inflected in post-modern ambivalence, multiculturalism, and compensatory postcolonial mimics. National allegory requires a dialectical method that can historically mediate specific experiences and establish their coherence in a meaningful totality, a unifying meta-narrative of historical development anathema to our current orthodoxy. With finance-capital dictating the parameters of globalisation, Asian America remains locked up in a world of virtualisation wherein an emergent configuration of wholeness, autonomy, and unity dissolves in simulacra, spectacles, and illusions of alterity regurgitated from the mechanical reproduction of the commodified Same and finally assimilated into the absolutist Leviathan corpus.

ADUMBRATIONS OF PINOY EXISTENTIALISM

Conventional wisdom has recycled platitudes about the Filipino community in the US: it is family and clan-centred, regionalistic, with unique resources drawn from cultural heritage (barangay, plaza complex) such as the spirit of "bayanihan" (cooperation) and practice of "balikbayan" (returning to the homeland), which allegedly harmonise the native-born Pinoys/Pinays with the interfacing Philippine-born immigrants (Guyotte 1997). Santos's novel dramatises those stereotypes and clichés only to satirize them tactfully, as shown by the choreographed behaviour of the circle around Dr. Vicente Sotto, the employees and bureaucrats of the Philippine Consulate, the Filipino-American organisations at St. Joseph's Catholic Church, and Dante's students and colleagues at City College.

David Dante Tolosa's journey, ostensibly a hunt for his lost fugitive father, turns out to be an education/initiation plot, a learning process. Although filled with a menagerie of character types, whose relatives inhabit Hagedorn's *Dream Jungle*, Santos's narrative revolves around the writer Dante's search for a viable community. He pursues solidarity linkages with

American lost souls (Judy), enigmatic survivors (Cesar Pilapil), and anti-"model minority" derelicts like Professor Arturo Jaime's family. Right from the start, Dante moves to settle the issue of ambiguity by identifying himself as a typical Americanised colonial subject: born in 1938 "on the outskirts of the American naval base near Subic Bay in the Philippines. An oriental with broad hints of Malay-Indonesian, perhaps Chinese, strain, a kind of racial chopsuey, that's me. Better yet, for historical and ethnic accuracy, an oriental omelette flavoured with Spanish wine" (1987: 1). Well-meaning pastiche breaks down here into culinary grotesques.

In Dante's search for support for his project and his vocation, Santos allegorizes a whole nation's struggle for genuine sovereignty, for recognition as a singular nation. Not so much the character of Dante as the itinerary of the quest for solidarity, the deracinated individual's need to communicate and connect with others (the priority of audience and context for the Filipino artist) and thus to unify the fragmented collective psyche—that is ultimately Dante's over-riding motivation. His aim is none other than to articulate the dream of nationhood, to imagine the birth of national self-determination. It is not so much the solitary artist's *agon* for self-fulfilment that we see in Dante's comic if pathetic manoeuvres for self-recognition but more the Filipino organic intellectual's dilemma in deciding whether to succumb to self-indulgent anarchist gestures—as is the fate of Jose Garcia Villa, a contemporary exiled artist, and his kindred compatriots—or to mediate the shipwrecked psyche's anguish and craft with the suffering and oppression of the larger community to which, by descent or consent, he belongs. Dante confronts this ethical imperative during his sojourn in America.

Hegemony in politics and art is a matter of calibrating the ratio of force and consent. Dante has been driven into exile by geopolitical forces beyond his control. His reservoir of "consent," fuelled by conscience or naiveté, is what explains Dante's sympathy for Estela, the invalid in a wheelchair in a mansion on Diamond Heights—the child whose inability to control the psychosomatic symptoms of her life symbolises the existential plight of the Filipino community. Estela's fascination with the blazing lights of San Francisco from the Heights echoes the general Filipino enchantment with the surface glitter of industrialised America as the incarnation of the mythic "City on the Hill," the promised land of freedom and equality and redemption. The scene epitomises Bulosan's enduring fantasy of a fabled America, innocent and virginal before the Puritans' bloody errand in the wilderness.

This theme of fantasy and disillusionment is recapitulated by Santos for this period of "colour-blind" racism and brutal fascist violence in the

Philippines and other US imperial outposts before the advent of a "global apartheid" (Marable 2006). Unfortunately, this doctrine of American Exceptionalism—a Messianic ideology embodied in the policy of "Manifest Destiny" and affiliated slogans of the Cold War and Bush's "war on terrorism" (Pease 2000)—appears as a healing trope, though ironically fused with this depiction of a horribly diseased, helpless Filipina child. Ultimately, the "American Dream" evaporates in the flood of sordid disenchantments that hound Bulosan's characters, a lesson not lost on Santos's protagonist. Dante survives owing to a peculiar mixture of native resources: susceptibility to seduction, intellectual naïveté, convivial will power, sensuality, and strong animal instincts. At times, he manifests the DuBoisian virtue of double-consciousness. For the mass audience of the global North, however, Dante serves to personify the model citizen of impoverished, underdeveloped "third world" countries vulnerable to the temptations offered by the World Bank/International Monetary Fund, the US Agency for International Development, and transnational corporate investors hungry for super-profits.

ASIAN AMERICA: A UTOPIAN PROJECT?

What I find somewhat disconcerting, though in hindsight perfectly understandable, is how Santos resorts to a tired humanistic formula to resolve his protagonist's problems. Having gone through grotesque and painful ordeals in his search for some mooring (as emblematised by the lost father) in a chaotic consumerist milieu, Dante finally settles on an ending to his existential search. The novel's closing scene, with his final goodbye to Estela, may be read as an attempt to transpose to this vacant placeholder the old Jamesian "central intelligence," a scene that emits something like the "Great Gatsby" intuition that would reconcile all contraries and pacify everyone. Dante imagines Estela watching the landscape before her as her limbs twist, eerily crying and frothing, with the convulsions of the "wounded beast" that operates as Santos's "objective correlative" for the diseased body politic and the metropolitan wasteland at the end of the Vietnam War and the onset of deadly Reaganite repression and missile warfare against the unruly "third world" subalterns in Libya, Nicaragua, Grenada, Philippines, etc. (Blum 2005):

There are no stars blinking at our feet, no encrusted jewels, such as you might imagine, winking over our heads. We are flesh and blood, tired before the day is over, seeking to find after the rains, a

welcome door, a smiling face, both the familiar and the strange. Surrounded by strangers, we look for friends in a continuing search against despair.

We have left native land but our hearts are still there, not here, Estela, not in this golden city by the bay. We like to think we gain a lot from day to day in hope that we are not as we often suspect we are, sentimental fools. But we believe in love, that's all we live for, love. But what the hell is that? And like you, Estela, we carry our own deformities as nobly as we can, but unlike you, we hide them well (1987: 191).

Unlike Hagedorn's slyly cynical if proprietary distance from her creations, Santos' empathy is, to my mind, somewhat patronising and even excessive given the real worth of the problems his characters are grappling with. Perhaps Santos senses this danger of pathos-becoming-bathos; indeed, he catches himself and asks rhetorically: "What the hell for you left your heart in San Francisco"? The colloquial register seems to offer a fitting denouement to a memorable verbal performance, analogous to how the Chinese artist Zhang Huan incarnates genealogy in his theatrical art. In enacting "Family Tree," Zhang asked three Chinese calligraphers to write directly on his face and shaved head until all his skin was covered. As the substance (Chinese folktales, poems, names) is obscured, the form becomes legible: the ink-brushed characters gradually darken his entire head. In the last of a sequence of nine photographs of this unrepeatable happening, Zhang's face is completely black, "as if erased by, or completely absorbed into, language" (Cotter 2007). This may apply to Hagedorn's art, but not to Santos's stylized realism and his stubborn drive to articulate the tale of the "tribe."

In any event, Santos' performance values signifiers—but not at the expense of signifieds and their sociohistorical grounding. References to public conduct and speech-acts are not manipulated simply to produce an effect of psychological reality; they index the kaleidoscope of scenes and characters to specific embodiments, to concrete historical contexts: Marcos' authoritarian rule and the suspended state of animation of the Filipino petty bourgeoisie in California. In a time when "Only English" had become the latest outburst of the racial polity (San Juan 2005b); with de-industrialisation, outsourcing, and cutbacks wrecking middle-class lives; with the abject failure of *Brown vs. Board of Education* to remedy *de facto* discrimination; and when the gains of the Civil Rights struggles have been co-opted or eviscerated by right-wing assaults on social services and public

programmes (though long before the Katrina disaster would demonstrate that equality and freedom for people of colour remained only a hope or dream) Santos dared to write in Tagalog and other vernaculars with English words. Maxine Hong Kingston praised Santos for this miraculous feat, for his being "a master at giving the reader a sense of people speaking in many languages and dialects" (Cruz 2005: 36). This dialogic, more exactly polyphonic or heteroglossic (after Bakhtin), method of constructing the scaffolding of a particularized "national allegory" is, I contend, a much more subversive and radically transformative strategy for thwarting finance-capital's attacks on immigrants, ethnic minorities, and internally colonized peoples than the calculated ruses and panaceas of multiplicity, leveraged ambivalence, transnational cosmopolitanism, and other new-fangled nostrums sold in the now-bloody, turbulent marketplace.

ON THE EVE OF THE COLLAPSE

Meanwhile, history unfolds as we engage in our Wittgensteinian language games. We are informed by a *New York Times* op-ed piece (31 March, before the present crisis) that the era of the white man and woman has ended, with the "baton" passed to Asia, with soaring growth rates in China, India and Vietnam, 450 million cell phones in China, and Hong Kong's "efficiency and high-speed airport" making "New York seem third-world." Postmodernist motifs abound in this passage: "These alternate faces of globalisation—fluidity and tribalism—define our frontier-dissolving world. Everything passes. In the 17th century, China and India accounted for more than half the world's economic output. After a modest interlude, the pendulum is swinging back to them at a speed the West has not grasped" (Cohen 2008). And so, inscribed in this cosmic panorama, the unfortunate episode involving Caltech aerodynamics professor Dr. Tsien Hsue-Shen, who was deported at the start of the Cold War, or the somewhat comic refusal to allow Congressman David Woo to enter the Dept of Energy hall in Washington DC to deliver an invited speech celebrating Asian History Month, need not deter us. Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence or some updated version of Kierkegaard's "Repetition" may appear more "sexy" than this challenging project of national allegory. We beg to differ.

This is a modest proposal. This is not the appropriate occasion on which to elaborate in nuanced detail a new theory of Asian American Studies suitable for this new millennium. All I can do here is sketch alternative routes and emancipatory possibilities. What I am proposing here in this brief survey of critical theories is the need to shift our attention away

from the current nihilistic and cynical impasse. Instead of privileging the "free play" of discourse released from any contextual anchoring, we must focus on the entire intellectual formation of Asian organic intellectuals (instanced in Peter McLaren's interview of Lisa Chin [1994]). We need to examine the structure and dynamics of specific cultural modes of production in each Asian collectivity given the systemic constraints of late capitalism. In the process, we move beyond the now routinised genealogy of power/knowledge to the inventory of concrete historical limits and possibilities for radical transformative praxis.

An effective counter hegemony against the disingenuous and ingenious weapons of the racial polity sustained by a protofascist State—the Homeland Security State of Bush and the neoconservatives—which has gutted constitutional rights and international law (practicing torture, "renditions," pre-emptive bombings, unwarranted surveillance, and other abuses of power) demands that progressive scholars draw up an inventory of our resources derived from both the native cultural legacy and the Western Enlightenment, however riddled with "orientalising" traits, to forge a synthesising plot of collective emancipation for working peoples across colour-lines and ethnic boundaries, as well as across class, gender, and religious barriers. We need to collaborate together in a struggle that will destroy the foundation of the racial polity in the unjust division of social labour and the unequal power stemming from that exploitation, which is the overarching narrative of all communities fragmented and divided among them in the shadow of a dying Empire.

CONCLUSION

After the disaster of September 2001 and the raging wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, humanistic studies in the US has become more nakedly instrumentalised in the campaign to repair the US ruling elite's hegemonic ascendancy in the world. In the process, Asian American Studies has suffered retrenchment along with Ethnic Studies and remains subalternised. Its status as an internal colony of American Studies persists despite its claims to independence because its theoretical and political conditions of possibility still accept neoliberal "democratic" pluralism and the antinomies of commodity exchange as its overarching world-view. One tell-tale evidence of this is the recently updated *2007–2008 National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac* edited by Don Nakanishi and James Lai (2007). For the contributors, Asian American group empowerment is based on subscription to the two-party system, electoral rituals and schemes

utilising community-based organisations for hierarchical partisan interests. Even the non-conformist gesture of Lt. Ehren Watada is subsumed by many observers within the formal statutory limits of questioning the presidential power to make war. Such narrow legalistic approach conforms to the textualism and moralism of current literary scholarship delineated earlier.

Over a decade has passed since the publication of King-kok Cheung's orthodox guide, *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (1997). But the trends remain metaphysically idealist and formalist despite disavowals and disclaimers. Take the exemplary essay by Donald Goellnicht, a model of the fallibilist reflexive white male critic. He argues that Asian American texts, primarily those by women writers such as Joy Kogawa, Trinh Minh-ha, Theresa Cha, should be read as "theoretically informed and informing" (1997: 357). Fine, but for what purpose aside from classroom exhibitions? How do the ideals of heterogeneity and multiple shifting subject-positions help us grasp and destroy racist and sexist predatory practices in our communities, not to mention the brutal interventions in the Philippines, Pakistan, Thailand, Bangladesh, and other Asian dependencies of US corporate power? Imperial violence has worsened since 1997. Goellnicht's essay may have affixed the good-housekeeping seal on the postmodernist dogma of the tricky performative self and its hybrid epigones.

Everything now seems geared to global market operations. There is no doubt that neopragmatic cultural pluralism, despite its ironic and self-mocking modality during the Bush years and earlier, has no quarrel with hybridity and even the appeal to citizenship. Both Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish are extolled as good patriots. Commodity exchange, the contradiction between use-value and exchange-value, contains infinite contradictions, antinomies, paradoxes, as the Marxian tradition has fully demonstrated. Postmodernist love of Nietzschean/Foucaultian drive for singularities, enigmatic ambivalence, aleatory subject-positions, and Lacanian absences (fomented by Slavoj Žižek) can be readily assimilated to the versatile technologies of the cyber market and financial speculation. Likewise, despite its rejection of the repressive concepts of bourgeois nationality, identity politics, and national assimilationism, orthodox postcolonial theory (inspired by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak) serves as the foundational template for an academic industry blind to the tortures in Guantanamo prison cells and in the horror chambers of Bagram airport in Afghanistan, not to mention multiple renditions and indiscriminate slaughter by Hellfire missiles launched from US Airforce drones anywhere in the world. Postcolonial theory, or for that matter diaspora and global studies on offer, is unable to free itself from its derivation from nihilistic,

methodologically individualist premises redolent of the Cold War that undermine its own quest for agency. If any such agency materialises, it is that of the highly rewarded academic "star" in the metropolitan lecture circuits and chic salons of New York, Paris, London, and Rome.

Colonisation, to be sure, proceeds under other logos and nomenclature. Despite the invocation of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and other "third world" heroic protagonists, postcolonial theory rejects dialectics and the historical unity of opposites for a world made uniform and thus exchangeable by logic of formal democracy where abstract, statistically equal individuals operate as buyers and sellers of commodities. In short, the general world-view controlling humanistic studies, including Asian American literary studies, in the US remains the ideology of capitalist relations of production and reproduction. What's the alternative?

Lest I be accused further of indulging in a denunciatory mode of debunking and the polemical advocacy of Gramscian inventory or Jamesian allegory, I would like to endorse Teresa Ebert's brilliant work *The Task of Cultural Critique* as an initial move toward a pedagogical alternative for Asian American Studies. Ebert's summarising precept is both strategic and principled:

If cultural critique is going to matter and become more than delightful entertainment for the cynical, it must abandon the mythologies of singularity and become materialist. It must become an explanation of totality and understand the singular in the collective. Difference is honored only when the subject is freed from needs. Under all other conditions, difference is merely another name for the boundless rule of the entrepreneur in the free market where use value is obscured by exchange relations and human labor is traded. Materialist critique is a critique for totality. It is not diverted by the profusion of details, textures, and heterogeneities that capitalism manufactures in order to obscure the material logic of the exchange of human labor for a wage. Cultural critique becomes critique-al only when it becomes a critique for collectivity and joins the cultural struggles for social freedom from necessity.... (2009: 196).

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