

Trajectories of the Filipino Diaspora

E San Juan Jr

Abstract

Unlike the historic diasporas of the past, the worldwide dispersal of Filipino bodies is a product of transnational or globalised capitalism. Peripheralised by the colonial legacies of 300 years of Spanish rule and half-a-century of direct colonial domination by the United States, the Philippines now occupies the position of one of the main suppliers of cheap migrant labour for the entire planet. Nonetheless, despite this subalternity and marginalisation, the Filipino people have developed a rich and durable revolutionary tradition that informs their everyday acts of resistance and survival. This article explores both the structures and experiences of diasporic life shaped by the contradictions between the commodifying pressures of finance capitalism and the anti-imperialist, nationalist struggles of the Filipino masses.

Now the largest cohort in the Asian American group, Filipinos have become the newest diasporic community in the whole world: 7 million Filipino migrant workers, mostly female domestic help, work in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe, North America, and elsewhere. Diasporic groups are historically defined not only by a homeland but also by a desire for eventual return and a collective identity centred on myths and memories of the homeland. The Filipino diaspora, however, is different. Since the homeland has been long colonised by Western powers (Spain, United States (US)) and remains neo-colonised despite formal or nominal independence, the Filipino identification is not with a fully defined nation but with regions, localities, and communities of languages and traditions. Where is the nation alluded to in passports and other identification papers? How do we conceive of this "Filipino" nation, given the pre-emptive impact of US colonisation and now, on top of the persistent neo-colonising pressure, the usurping force of globalised transnational capital?

According to orthodox immigration theory, "push" and "pull" factors combine to explain the phenomenon of overseas contract workers. Do we resign ourselves to this easy schematic formulation? Poverty and injustice, to be sure, have driven most Filipinos to seek work abroad, sublimating the desire to return by remittances to their families; occasional visits and other means of communication defer the eventual homecoming. If the return is postponed, are modes of adaptation and temporary domicile in non-native grounds the alternatives?

The reality of "foreignness" cannot be eluded. Alienation, brutal treatment and racism prevent their permanent re-settlement in the "receiving societies," except where Filipino communities (as in the US and Canada, for example) have been given legal access to citizenship rights. Individuals, however, have to go through screening and tests. During political crises in the Philippines, Filipino overseas workers mobilise themselves for support of local and nation-wide resistance against imperial domination and local tyranny. Because the putative "Filipino" nation is in the process of formation in the neo-colony and abroad, overseas Filipino workers have been considered transnationals or transmigrants—a paradoxical turn since the existence of the nation is problematic. This diaspora then confronts the central issue of racism and ethnic exclusion or inferiorisation: can Filipino migrant labour mount resistance against globalised exploitation? Can the Filipino diaspora expose also the limits of liberal notions of citizenship? In what way can the Filipino diaspora serve as a paradigm for analysing

and critically unsettling the corporate globalisation of labour and the reification of identities in the new millennium? The following reflections are offered as a heuristic point of departure for further inquiry into this unprecedented historic event.

I might begin by situating the Filipino diaspora within its Asian-American configuration—since I am based here in the United States and my intervention proceeds from a concrete historic milieu. In David Palumbo-Liu's substantial volume *Asian/American*, the concept of "diaspora" performs a strategic function. It probably endows the slash in the rubric "Asian/American" with an uncanny performative resonance. Palumbo-Liu contends that diaspora affords a space for the reinvention of identity free from naturalised categories but (if I may underscore here) not from borders, state apparatuses, and other worldly imperatives. Although remarking that the concept of diaspora as an "enabling fiction" affords us "the ideological purchase different articulations of the term allow," Palumbo-Liu does not—if I'm not mistaken—completely succumb to the rebarbative post-colonialist babble about contingency ruling over all. I want to quote a passage from his book that might frame or provide parameters for the random remarks I will make here apropos of the theme and discourse of Filipino diaspora:

"...diaspora" does not consist in the *fact* of leaving Home, but in having that factuality available to representation *as such*—we come to "know" diaspora only as it is psychically identified in a narrative form that discloses the various ideological investments... This spatio-temporal construct approximates a psychic experience particularly linked to material history. It is only after the diasporic comes into contact with the material history of its new location that a particular discourse is enabled that seeks to mark a distance, a relation, both within and outside that constellation of contingency.¹

Like the words "hybridity," border crossing, ambivalence, subaltern, transculture, and so on, the term "diaspora" has now become chic and fashionable in academic conversations. A conference at the University of Minnesota on "Race, Ethnicity, and Migration" listed as first of the topics one can engage with, "Diaspora and Diasporic Identities," followed by "Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, and Forced Migration..." One indeed dreads to encounter in this context such buzzwords as "intersection" and "otherness" and "difference" now overshadowed by "globalisation" and "transnationalism." In fact I myself used the word "diaspora" as part of the title of my book *From Exile to Diaspora: Versions of the Filipino Experience in the United States*² only to find that there is another book in the Amazon.com list by a certain Jonathan Okamura with a title longer than mine: *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora: Transnational Relations, Identities, and Communities (Asian Americans, Reconceptualising Culture, History)*. Does anyone know more echoes, simulacras or simulations of these titles?

Okamura argues that Filipinos should be conceived not as an ethnic minority in the United States but as a diaspora. Not because they are dispersed, as the Jews were from their original homeland by the Roman imperial legions; but because overseas Filipino communities have "significant transnational relations" or linkages to their homeland. Okamura states that "a diaspora is a transnational social construction, that is, it is transnational in scope and is socially constructed through the individual and collective actions of immigrants/migrants." Okamura explains how he became interested in "diaspora" as "an exciting concept to capture [Filipinos'] transnational relations with their homeland as evident in *balikbayan* returnee visits, the sending of remittances and consumer goods, and long-distance telecommunication." Based in Hawaii, Okamura met Filipinos all over the world—not only in Manila but also in Hong Kong, London, and Belau.

An Autobiographical Aside

Let me interject a personal note: I have lived in the US for about 40 years now (the greater part of my life), with frequent visits to the Philippines without too many *balikbayan* boxes, unfortunately. And in my various travels I have encountered Filipinos in many parts of the world. In the early 1980s I was

surprised to meet compatriots at the footsteps of the post office in Tripoli, Libya, and later on in the streets and squares of London, Edinburgh, Spain, Italy, Tokyo, Taiwan, and other places. Have I then stumbled onto some global enigmatic phenomenon as a “Filipino diaspora”? Or have I socially and transnationally constructed this, dare I say, “reality” and ongoing experience of about 7 million Filipinos around the planet? Not to speak of millions of displaced indigenous peoples in the Philippines itself, an archipelago of 700 islands, “one of the world’s most strategically important land masses,” according to geographer George Demko.

For those not familiar with my other writings critical of postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches,³ I want to state outright that I consider such views about the Filipino diaspora half-truths closer to rumour, if not sheer mystifications. Spurious distinctions about cognition and perception concerning ethnic identity will remain vacuous if it does not take into account the reality of imperial world-systemic changes. Lacking any dialectical historical analysis of the dynamics of colonialism and imperialism that connect the Philippines and its peoples with the United States and the rest of the world, conventional studies on Filipino immigration and resettlement are all falsifications, at best disingenuous exercises in chauvinist or white-supremacist apologetics. This is because they rely on concepts and methodologies that conceal unequal power relations—that is, relations of subordination and domination, racial exclusion, marginalisation, sexism, gender inferiorisation, as well as national subalternity and other forms of discrimination. Lest people be misled by academic gossip, I am not proposing here an economic and deterministic approach, nor a historicist one with a monolithic enlightenment metanarrative, teleology, and essentialist or ethnocentric agenda. Far from it.

I might state at the outset a fact known to all observers: the annual remittance of billions of dollars by Filipino workers abroad suffices to keep the Philippine economy afloat and support the luxury and privileges of less than 1% of the people, the Filipino oligarchy. Since the 1970s, Filipino bodies have been the No. 1 Filipino export, and their corpses (about five or six return in coffins daily) are becoming a serious item in the import ledger. In 1998 alone, according to the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 755,000 Filipinos found work abroad, sending home a total of 7.5 billion pesos. Throughout the 1990s, the average total of migrant workers is about a million a year; they remit over 5% of the national Gross National Product (GNP), not to mention the millions of pesos collected by the Philippine government in myriad taxes and fees. Hence these overseas cohorts are glorified as “modern heroes,” “*mga bagong bayani*,” according to Cory Aquino, the most famous of whom are Flor Contemplacion and Sarah Balabagan.

This is an unprecedented and mind-boggling phenomenon. Over 1,000 concerned Filipino American students made this the central topic of the 1997 FIND CONFERENCE at SUNY Binghamton where I was a keynote speaker. These concerned youth were bothered by the reputation of the Filipina/o as the “domestic help” or servant of the world. How did Filipinos come to find themselves dispersed and scattered to the four corners of the earth? What are we doing about it? In general, what is the meaning and import of this unprecedented traffic, Filipina/os in motion and in transit around the planet?

Retrospective Marginalia

Let me refresh your readers’ memory with some textbook commonplaces. Some compatriots in the US, eager to pre-empt the pilgrims in New England, cite the fugitive “Manillamen” of the 17th century who escaped from the galleon trade, fled their Spanish masters in Mexico, and found their way to Louisiana, as one of the first Filipino Americans. But their settlement disappeared quickly in a few years, blown away by fortune and illwinds. There was no significant group of inhabitants from the Philippine Islands in the North American continent or anywhere else—except for a few student enclaves in Spain in the latter half of the 19th century—until the annexation and colonisation of the Philippines by the United States in 1898 as part of the spoils of the Spanish-American War. With the

exclusion of Chinese and Japanese workers by various immigration laws from 1882 to 1924, the recruitment of Filipino labour for the Hawaii plantations began in earnest in 1907 and continued without letup until 1935, when immigration was cut to 50 a year. From the 1920s to the 1930s, Filipino contract labour in the US totalled about half a million—most of these workers eventually settled in the US mainland rather than return to their native villages. If there is a collective trauma or primal scenario of loss to which postcolonial scholars and cultural critics would gesture, it would be nothing else but the destruction of the institutions of Filipino sovereignty established by the Philippine revolution of 1896-98, the suppression of Filipino revolutionary bodies by the United States military forces, in the Philippine-American War (1899-1903) that cost over a million lives. We are still living with the legacy of this defeat and occupation, this time in a neo-colonial consumerist dependency.

There was no real Filipino diaspora before the Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s. It was only after the utter devastation of the Philippines in World War II, and the worsening of economic and political conditions in the neo-colonial set-up from the late 1960s to the present, that Filipinos began to leave in droves. During the Marcos martial law regime, the functionality of overseas contract workers (OCW) was constructed and/or discovered by the elite and its hegemonic patrons as a response to both local and global conditions. From the Aquino to the Estrada regime, OCW productivity serves to keep the rotten system afloat. Overseas Filipino Workers is now a category of citizens in the Philippines and in so-called “receiving” societies like Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Middle Eastern kingdoms, and assorted European states—including Yugoslavia.

It is now a banal truism that globalisation has facilitated the mobility of goods, services, information, ideas, and of course people—and may be assorted cyborgs. The postmodernist anthropologist James Clifford has invented the idea of contemporary travelling cultures—a version of the cargo cults—borne by nomadic or diasporic intellectuals. Globalisation has proceeded to the extent that in our reconfigured landscapes, according to the experts in liminality and interstitial spaces, boundaries have shifted, borders disappeared, and everyone has become transculturised. Americanisation, or Disneyfication, has spread physically and in cyberspace. There is also the parachuting transnationals or transmigrants that Aihwa Ong has described, as well as mutations of expatriates, refugees, and exiles—including our own Filipino TNTs (an indigenised form of hide-and-seek, according to some wits), our Filipinised version of “undocumented aliens.”

Given these transformations, the reality and idea of the nation, of national sovereignty, have become the subject of theoretical speculation. Linked to that are concepts of identity and its attendant politics of difference, notions of citizenship, nationality, cosmopolitanism, belonging, human rights, and so on. It is in this milieu of globalisation, where ethnic conflicts and universal commodification coexist in a compressed time-space locus within the post-modern dispensation⁴, that we should pose the question of the Filipino diaspora.

Instead of pronouncing here my *obiter dicta* on this topic, I would like to engage readers briefly with questions on the historical and ideological specificity of the Filipino diaspora. One way of doing this is by interrogating certain themes and notions presented by James Clifford in his essay on “Diaspora”.⁵ I offer the following “talking points” for exchange. Clifford dissents from Safran in proposing “an ideal type” of diaspora based on the Jewish paradigm. The main features of this ideal type are: 1) dispersal from an originary habitat, 2) myths and memories of the homeland, 3) alienation in the host country, 4) desire for eventual return, 5) ongoing support for the homeland, and 6) a collective identity defined by the relationship to the homeland. Responding to the globalisation process I mentioned earlier, Clifford espouses a de-centred or multiply centred diaspora network. He rejects teleologies of origin and return because he perceives multiple transnational connections that provide a range of experiences to diasporic communities; these experiences depend on the changing possibilities, the obstacles, openings, antagonisms, and connections in the host countries.

Given the various histories of displacements none of which coincide, diaspora is for Clifford the site of contingency *par excellence*. He envisages a “polythetic field of diasporic forms” articulating multiple discourses of travels, homes, memories, and transnational connections. Clifford conceives of diaspora as a “loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement,” hence his ideal is that of a tribal cosmopolitanism, a modern version of the old cosmopolitanism of tribal groups shaped by travel, spiritual quest, trade, exploration, warfare, labour migrancy, and political alliances of all kinds. Can Filipinos be conceived of as tribal cosmopolitans in that context?

Narrativising the Nation-People

The testimony of diasporic narrative may be a useful pedagogical device to ground my observations here in the experiences of Filipina migrant workers as synthesised in literary form. Prior to the disruption of the postcolonial impasse and in order to situate postcolonial difference in the Philippine context, I would like at this juncture to concretise the crisis of bourgeois metaphysics and its political implications in contemporary Filipino expression.

In general, imperialism and the anarchy of the “free market” engender incongruities, non-synchronies, the Other inscribed in liminal and interstitial space. Capital accumulation is the matrix of unequal power between metropolis and colonies. The historical reality of uneven cultural development in a US colonial and, later, neo-colonial society like the Philippines is evident in the visible Americanisation of schooling, mass media, literature in English, and diverse channels of mass communication (advertisements, TV and films, etc.). In my previous work (*The Philippine Temptation, History and Form*, and other books), I have described the domination of US symbolic capital on literary and critical discourse since the annulment of the Spanish language and the indigenous vernaculars as viable media of expression in the public sphere at the start of US colonisation in 1898. The ascendancy of the hegemonic discourse of liberal utilitarianism expressed in English prevailed throughout the period of formal independence and the Cold War until the martial law period (1972-86) when an authoritarian order reinforced semi-feudal and tributary norms. Meanwhile, Pilipino (now “Filipino”) has become a genuine *lingua franca* with the popularity of local films and television serials, aided by the prohibitive costs of imported Western cultural fare. Backwardness now helps hi-tech corporate business. Since the 1970s, globalisation has concentrated on the exploitation of local tastes and idioms for niche marketing while the impact of the Filipino diaspora in the huge flow of remittances from OCWs has accentuated the discrepancy between metropolitan wealth and neo-colonial poverty, with the consumerist *habitus* made egregiously flagrant in the conspicuous consumption of domestic helpers returning from the Middle East, Europe, Hong Kong, Japan, and other places with *balikbayan* boxes. Unbeknownst to observers of this post-modern “cargo cult,” coffins of these dead workers (one of them martyred in Singapore, Flor Contemplacion, achieved the status of national saint) arrive in Manila at the rate of five or six a day without too much fanfare.

In addition to the rampant pillage of the national treasury by corrupt Filipino compradors, bureaucrat-capitalists and landlords, the plunder of the economy by transnational companies has been worsened by the “structural conditionalities” imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Disaggregation of the economy has registered in the disintegration of ordinary Filipino lives due to forced migration because of lack of employment, recruiting appeals of governments and business agencies, and the dissolution of the national homeland as psychic and physical anchorage with the triumph of commodity-fetishism. I want to illustrate the phenomena of postcolonial hybridity as a symptom of uneven capitalist incursions in a story by Fanny Garcia⁶ “Arriverderci,” written in 1982 at the height of the Marcos-induced export of Filipina bodies to relieve widespread immiseration and curb mounting resistance.

Symptomatic of a disaggregated and uneven socio-economic formation are the narratives spun around the trauma of dislocation undergone by over 7 million OCWs, mostly women. This

unprecedented haemorrhage of labour-power, the massive export of educated women whose skills have been downgraded to quasi-slavish domestic help, issues from a diseased body politic. The marks of the disease are the impoverishment of 75% of the population, widespread corruption by the minuscule oligarchy, criminality, military/police atrocities, and the intensifying insurgency of peasants, women, workers, and indigenous communities. The network of the patriarchal family and semi-feudal civil society unravels when women from all sectors (except the very rich) alienate their “free labour” in the world market. While the prime commodity remains labour-power (singularly measured here in both time and space especially for lived-in help), OCWs find themselves frozen in a tributary status between serfhood and colonising petty-bourgeois households. Except for the carceral condition of “hospitality” women in Japan and elsewhere overseen by gangsters, most Filipinas function as indentured servants akin to those in colonial settler societies in 17th century Virginia, Australia, Jamaica, and elsewhere. But unlike those societies, the Middle East, Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore and other receiving countries operate as part of the transnationalised political economy of global capitalism. These indentured cohorts are witnesses to the dismemberment of the emergent Filipino nation and the scattering of its traumatised elements to state-governed territories around the planet.

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 ambitions, including her 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 dramatised in Vicky’s earlier experience.

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 honour, to refuse bodily invasion by the Italian master. Nelly and her friends contribute to send Vicky’s body back to the Philippines.

In the triple personas of Vicky held 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 not in the corpse but in the act of gendered solidarity and national empathy. Without the practices of communication and co-operation among the Filipina workers, the life of the individual OCW is suspended in thrall, a helpless fragment in the nexus of commodity circulation.

What I want to highlight, however, is the historicising power of this narrative. Marx once said that capitalism conquers space with time. The urgent question is: can its victims fight back via a counter-hegemonic strategy of spatial politics? Here the time of the nationalising imagination overcomes displacement 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. We see that the routine life of the Filipino community is defined by bureaucratised 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:

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.

Mis-Representations

The most telling symptom of uneven development caused by the new international division of labour is the schizoid nature of Filipina response to serf-like confinement. This response has been celebrated by postcolonial critics as the exemplary act of "sly civility," a tactic of outwitting the enemy by mimicry and ambivalent acts. We read a tabulation of this tactic in Garcia's description of Nelly's plans to tour Europe by touching base with friends and acquaintances throughout the continent, an escape from the pressure of responsibility for Vicky or accountability to anyone. Here is the cartography of Nelly's "imagined community" which generates the deterritorialised citizen of global capital. The space of recreation may relieve the pressure of alienated time, but it cannot ultimately resolve the dilemma of diaspora.

We discern the contradictions immanent in Filipina agency as she negotiates her position in the locus between wage-labour under serf-like conditions and the mobility promised by the "free market" of late capitalist Europe. This situation may provide us the source of scaling the postcolonial dilemma suffered by Filipinas, conceiving scale as (in Neil Smith's definition) "the geographical resolution of contradictory processes of competition and co-operation". But the chance for an escape to resolve the contradictions is foiled for the moment when Nelly and her friends learn of Vicky's death. Contrary to postcolonial alibis concerning de-centred subject-positions, Garcia's narrative posits an interrogation of presumed agency. Is the charm of adventure enough to heal the trauma of dislocation and obviate the terror of rape? Are the opportunities of consuming images and experiences offered by the wages of indentured labour enough to compensate for the nullity of citizenship and the loss of intimacy and the support of family and community?

What is clear is the dialectical unity of opposites embedded in the geopolitical predicament of OCWs captured in Garcia's narrative.⁷ The Filipino diaspora here is defined by the Filipinas' social interaction and its specific differentiated geography, an interaction characterised by family/kinship linkages as well as solidarity based on recursive acts of mutual aid and struggle for survival. The political struggle over the production of scale in global capitalism is translated here in Nelly's mapping of her co-ordinates as she plans her tour of Europe, a translation of abstract space into places indexed by Filipino friends and acquaintances. This is not postcolonial ambivalence or hybridity because it is centred on the organic bonds of experience with oppressed compatriots; Nelly's affiliation with Vicky is tied to a web of shared stories of intimacy, dehumanisation and vulnerability. The Euro-centric fabrication of Otherness is qualified if not neutralised by Nelly's collectively assigned task of communication with Vicky's family, a task that prefigures and recuperates even if only in symbolic terms the interrupted struggle for national autonomy and sovereignty on the face of disintegration by transnational corporate aggression.

Postcolonial disjunctures are reproduced by acts of revolt and sustained resistance. Such acts constitute a bad example for metropolitan citizen subjects of industrialised democracies. Racism still prevents them from uniting with their victims. While it would be exorbitant to claim that global capitalism has been dealt a blow by Filipina agencies of coping and life-maintenance, I would suggest here that this mode of representation, which I would categorise as a type of allegorical realism common to progressive Filipino writers and artists, enables us to grasp the totalising virtue of Filipino nationalism as it inhabits diasporic subjects. Perhaps this virtue manifests itself only as a potential reservoir of energies that can be mobilised in crisis situations; still, the cultural and ideological resistance of neo-colonised Filipinos overseas testify to its immanent presence in what Lenin called "the weak links" of the imperialist chain around the planet, not only in the peripheral dependencies but also in the margins now transposed to the centres of empire.

Let us examine the Filipino genre of diaspora, its tendencies and idiosyncrasies. My first thesis is this: Given that the Philippine homeland or habitat has never cohered as a genuinely independent nation—national autonomy continues to escape the nation-people in a neo-colonial formation—Filipinos are dispersed from family or kinship webs in villages, towns or provincial regions first, and loosely from a neo-colonised (some say “refeudalised”) nation-state. This dispersal is primarily due to economic coercion under the retrogressive regime of comprador-bureaucratic (not welfare-state) capitalism; migration is seen as freedom to seek one’s fortune, experience the pleasure of adventure, libidinal games of resistance, etc. So the origin to which one returns is not a nation or nation-state but a village, town, or kinship network; the state is viewed in fact as a corrupt exploiter, not representative of the masses, a comprador agent of transnational corporations and Western (specifically US) powers.

Second thesis: What are the myths and memories of the homeland? They derive from assorted childhood memories and folklore together with customary practices of folk and religious celebrations; at best, there may be signs of a residual affective tie to national heroes like Rizal, Bonifacio, and latter-day celebrities like singers, movie stars, athletes, and so on. Indigenous food, dances, and music can be acquired as commodities whose presence temporarily heals the trauma of removal; family reunification can resolve the psychic damage of loss of status or alienation. In short, rootedness in autochthonous habitat or soil does not exert a commanding influence, or it exists as a faint nostalgic trace. Meanwhile, language, religion, kinship, family rituals, and common experiences in school or workplace function invariably as the organic bonds of community.

Third thesis: Alienation in the host country is what unites Filipinos, a shared history of colonial and racial subordination, marginalisation, and struggles for cultural survival through hybrid forms of resistance and political rebellion. This is what may replace the non-existent nation/ homeland, absent the liberation of the Filipino nation. In the 1930s, Carlos Bulosan once observed that “it is a crime to be a Filipino in America.” Years of struggle in inter-ethnic coalitions, of union organising, have blurred if not erased that stigma. Accomplishments in the civil rights struggles of the 1960s have provided nourishment for ethnic pride. And, on the other side, impulses of assimilationism via the “model minority” umbrella have aroused a passion for neo-liberal multiculturalism. But compared to the Japanese or Indian Americans, Filipino Americans as a whole have not made it; the exceptions prove the rule. Andrew Cunanan is the spectre that continues to haunt “melting pot” Filipino Americanists who continue to blabber about the “forgotten Filipino” in the hope of being awarded a share of the obsolescent welfare-state pie.

Via strategies of community preservation and other schemes of defining the locality of the community in historical contexts of displacement, the Filipino diaspora defers its return—unless and until there is a Filipino nation that they can identify with. This will continue in places where there is no hope of permanent resettlement as citizens or bonafide residents (as in Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and elsewhere).

Fourth thesis: Some Filipinos in their old age may desire eventual return only when they are economically secure. In general, Filipinos will not return to the site of misery and oppression—to poverty, exploitation, humiliated status, unemployment, hunger, and lack of dignity. OCWs would rather move their kins and parents to their place of employment in countries where family reunification is allowed: in the United States, Italy, Canada, and so on. Or even in places of suffering provided there is some hope or illusion of future improvement.

Fifth thesis: Ongoing support for nationalist struggles at home is sporadic and intermittent. Do we see any mass protests and collective indignation here at the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), for example, and the recent invasion of the country by several thousand US Marines? During the Marcos dictatorship, the politicised generation of Filipino Americans here was able to mobilise a large segment

of the community to support democratic mass struggles, including the armed resistance, against the US-Marcos authoritarian rule. Filipino nationalism blossomed in the late 1960s and 1970s, but suffered attenuation when it got re-channelled to support the populist elitism of Aquino and Ramos, and the lumpen populism of Estrada. This aspect is subject to political organisation and calculation, hence the intervention of Filipino agencies with emancipatory goals and national democratic principles is crucial and strategically necessary.

Sixth thesis: In this time of emergency, the Filipino collective identity is in crisis and in a stage of formation and elaboration. The Filipino diasporic consciousness is an odd species, a singular genre: it is not obsessed with a physical return to roots or to land where common sacrifices are remembered and celebrated. It is tied more to a symbolic homeland indexed by kinship or particularistic traditions which it tries to reconstitute in diverse localities. So, in the moment of Babylonian captivity, dwelling in "Egypt" or its modern surrogates, building public spheres of solidarity to sustain identities outside the national time/space "in order to live inside, with a difference" may be the most viable route (or root) of Filipinos in motion—the collectivity in transit, although this is subject to the revolutionary transformations emerging in the Philippine countryside and cities. And other radical changes in the geopolitical rivalry of metropolitan powers. There is indeed deferral, postponement, or waiting—but history moves on in the battlefields of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao where a people's war rooted in a durable revolutionary tradition rages on. This drama of a national-democratic revolution will not allow the Filipino diaspora to slumber in the consumerist paradises of Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, or Seattle. It will certainly disturb the peace of those benefiting from the labour and sacrifices of Overseas Filipino Workers who experience the repetition-compulsion of globalised trade and endure the recursive trauma of displacement and dispossession.

Finally, a very provisional and indeed temporising epilogue—if I may beg leave from those Filipina bodies (at least five a day arrive at the Manila International Airport) in coffins heading home: Filipinos in the United States (and elsewhere, given the still hegemonic Western dispensation)—if I may quote the concluding lines of my article in the cyberspace on Filipino Americans—are neither "oriental" nor "Hispanic," despite their looks and names. They might be syncretic or hybrid subjects with suspect loyalties. They cannot be called fashionable "transnationals" because of racialised, ascribed markers (physical appearance, accent, peculiar non-white folkways) that are needed to sustain and reproduce Euro-centric white supremacy every day. Ultimately, Filipino agency in the era of global capitalism depends not only on the vicissitudes of social transformation in the U.S. but, in a dialectical sense, on the fate of the struggle for autonomy and popular-democratic sovereignty in the Philippines where *balikbayans* still practice, though with increasing trepidation interrupted by fits of amnesia, the speech-acts and durable performances of *pakikibaka*, *pakikiramay*, at *pakikipagkapwa-tao*.

E San Juan Jr is Chair, Department of Comparative American Cultures, Washington State University, Pullman, USA.

Notes

1. David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1999, p 355.
2. E San Juan, *From Exile to Diaspora: Versions of the Filipino Experience in the United States*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1998; George J Demko, *Why in the World*, New York, Anchor Books, 1992.
3. E San Juan, *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*, New York, St Martins Press, 1998.
4. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989.

5. James Clifford, "Diaspora" in *The Ethnicity Reader*, Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex (eds), Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 1997.
6. Fanny Garcia, "Arrivederci" in *Ang Silid na Mahiwaga*, Soledad Reyes (ed), Pasig, Rizal, Anvil Publishing Co, 1994.
7. For a hermeneutics of OCW stories see San Juan, *op.cit.*, 1998.