

6-1-2019

**San Juan, Jr., E. Filipinas Everywhere; Essays in Criticism and Cultural Studies from a Filipino Perspective. Manila, Phil./Brighton, UK: La Salle University Publishing House/Sussex Academic Press, 2017.**

Kenneth Bauzon Ph.D.  
Saint Joseph's College - New York, KBauzon@sjcny.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Bauzon, Kenneth Ph.D. (2019) "San Juan, Jr., E. Filipinas Everywhere; Essays in Criticism and Cultural Studies from a Filipino Perspective. Manila, Phil./Brighton, UK: La Salle University Publishing House/ Sussex Academic Press, 2017.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 10: No. 2, Article 17. DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1488  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol10/iss2/17>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact [phuffman@lindenwood.edu](mailto:phuffman@lindenwood.edu).

**San Juan, Jr., E. *Filipinas Everywhere; Essays in Criticism and Cultural Studies from a Filipino Perspective*. Manila, Phil./Brighton, UK: La Salle University Publishing House/Sussex Academic Press, 2017.**

Arguably among the most important contemporary cultural theorists today, E. San Juan, Jr. presents his readers with his recent labor of love, *Filipinas Everywhere; Essays in Criticism and Cultural Studies from a Filipino Perspective*. The title suggests the Philippine experience as a point of reference to a series of themes contributing “to the renewal of comparative cultural studies where received standards and assumptions have become untenable” (p. xvii). Interwoven through the chapters, San Juan offers new conceptualizations, methods, and insights from among selected thinkers, representing such themes as post-colonialism, neoliberal globalization, and modernism, among others, through which readers are taken on an intellectual journey. This journey commences with San Juan’s discussion of capitalism’s transition from its mercantile to its finance phases via the United States’ conquest of the Philippines in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War of 1898, as discussed in Chapter 1, “Filipinas Everywhere: Colonialism, Neocolonial Domination, and Imperial Terror.” Victory in this war consolidated the US presence in the Pacific, complementing the US hegemony over the Americas and laying the foundation for what is today referred to as neoliberal globalization.

In Chapter 2, “Globalization and its Vicissitudes,” San Juan describes the institutional mechanisms (e.g., the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the US Pentagon) that enforce this neoliberal global order. San Juan views these mechanisms as designed to corral the globe’s wealth and resources at the hands of the industrialized capitalist states, led by the US, and to hasten de-nationalization, foster uneven development, and preempt self-determination among most of the rest.

It is through the dynamics of contemporary neoliberal globalization that one may get a sense of the book’s title, *Filipinas Everywhere*, elaborated in Chapter 1. Through the colonial process, the Philippines became a virtual economic appendage of the US. Training and education of Filipinos were geared not towards creating a self-reliant, nationalist-oriented economy but, rather, towards servicing the needs of the global capitalist economy as a succession of governments adopted an aggressive labor export, with the expectation that Filipino workers would remit back much-needed revenue—except that these workers, dubbed “modern-day heroes,” largely feminized, have become a metaphor for exploitation, abuse, and often subjected to unspeakable violence (p. xii).

Taking into account the dire state of economic dependency of the Philippines, San Juan deploys the concept of unequal development as an explanatory tool. In one of the most insightful discussions on the subject, San Juan, in Chapter 3, “Postcolonialism, Uneven Development, and Imperialism,” asserts that the case of the Philippines should be looked at not in isolation but as part of a totality. With insight from historical materialism, San Juan writes: “Uneven development results from the peculiar combination of many factors which have marked societies as peripheral or central...” (pp. 47-48). San Juan uses this occasion to point to the poverty of post-colonial theory, the practitioners of which have all but repudiated what they regard as the “totalizing axioms” of historical materialism, making them, in effect, complicit “with the ‘New World Order’ managed by transnational capital” (p. 37).

This critique of postcolonialism is carried over into Chapter 4, “Critique and Praxis: Edward Said and Antonio Gramsci,” in which San Juan examines the intellectual legacies of Edward Said and Antonio Gramsci, respectively. First, San Juan acknowledges Said as a

founding father of a culture-oriented postcolonial studies, based on his 1978 book *Orientalism*. Said's status, however, is gradually being undermined, as San Juan explains, "by a free-wheeling empiricist area-studies," wherein postcolonial scholars have become "eclectic, pluralist, middle-of-the-road pragmatists" (p. 55). Consequently, postcolonialism has come to reflect "fetishism of textuality and its corollary metaphysics," distancing itself from "articulations of an emancipatory politics" (pp. 36-37). Even though Said never professed adherence to historical materialism, San Juan explains that Said openly admired the "heroic thinker," represented by the likes of "Vico, Marx and Engels, Lukacs, Fanon, Chomsky, . . . all openly anti-imperialist activists" (p. 56). San Juan's endeavor to trace the intellectual lineage between Said and Gramsci is particularly meaningful, recognizing not only Gramsci's neo-Marxian interpretation of Marx but also his influence on later cultural critics like Said.

The next two chapters, Chapter 5, "Pragmatism and Marxism: Project for a Dialogue," and Chapter 6, "Saussure/Peirce: Escaping from the Prison House of Language," may be said to be two sides of the same coin, with Charles Saunders Peirce as the common thread. In Chapter 5, San Juan is concerned with retrieving Peirce's original formulation, in 1878, of the requirements for Cartesian ideas to be "clear and distinct" but also meaningful in their "practical consequences" (p. 77). By "practical consequences," as San Juan explains, Peirce meant useful as a "guide to future practice, not current usefulness for private ends"; the preferred term used by Peirce to describe his ideas was "pragmatism" (p. 76). Peirce objected to the attribution to him of an instrumentalist meaning commonly associated with pragmatism but one which evolved into "neoconservative instrumentalism" and "philosophy of imperialism" (pp. 76, 79). As Marxist critics have attacked pragmatism, part of the chapter's task is to "rescue pragmatism from transmogrification" (p. 77), a task which San Juan succeeds in not only by proposing a dialogue on Peirce's methodology, particularly the role of "organic intellectuals" (pp. 82-84), but also through his use of pragmatist epistemology as a means of understanding Peirce's "immanent dialectics" (pp. 86, 89-91); his use of "hypothetical inferences tested by historical testimony and evidence," credited to the Marxian formulation of "the general laws of motion" of capitalism (p. 92); and his sense of realism, understood as "the germinal anchor of hope" (p. 94), which San Juan deems "as real as any weapon in the class struggle" (p. 94).

San Juan's exploration of themes laid out earlier would not be complete without reference to violence, torture in particular, and its process of legitimation. In Chapter 7, San Juan explores torture's ubiquity as a tool applied not just on individuals but also on whole populations, and wonders about the "jurisprudence and psychopathology" behind it as well as its acceptance as a "sociopolitical-ideological policy of States" (p. 112). In so doing, San Juan uses Franz Kafka's classic fable *In the Penal Colony* as a "heuristic Baedeker to the ecology of a planet where prisons/penal institutions function as model internal colonies of which the Guantanamo Bay maximum-security cells comprise but one obsessive mirror image" (p. 112). San Juan's critical attention to this subject could not be more opportune in the Kafkaesque post-9/11 world, in which even professed post-modernist intellectuals have pontificated on the use of torture but cannot seem to form a consensus about its banality as "an instrument of justice" (p. 112).

Perhaps the controversy over torture is traceable to the variety of critical assessments of Kafka's works themselves along with the fame or notoriety that has been imputed to him. San Juan cites, for example, the "extravagant" praise of Kafka by Parisian-born George Steiner, who viewed Kafka's other tale, *The Trial*, as "the most graphic moment of clairvoyance, of prophetic imaginings, in twentieth century literature" (p. 112). On the critical side, San Juan assembles critical comments interestingly from among socialist and Marxist writers themselves, ranging

from Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukacs, who bewailed Kafka's "blind and panic-stricken angst," to 1929 Nobel Prize in German Literature recipient Thomas Mann, who disavowed Kafka's "decadent modernism..." (p. 113). In the end, San Juan takes a nuanced view, leading him to produce, in this chapter, arguably among the most insightful distillations thus far of Kafka. San Juan upholds Kafka's canonical legacy, style, and method and recognizes the socialist ideological themes contained therein. Further, San Juan's assessment accounts for the post-Cold War and post-9/11 manifestations of torture occurring in the context of the United States' flailing assertion of its unilateral global authority, an opportunity that was missed by critics of Kafka writing either prior to World War II or during the Cold War period. Thus, San Juan is able to situate Kafka at a place where he (Kafka) can render judgment not only on the forms of torture that the US has presided over (e.g., over individuals at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and scores of so-called "black sites") but also over entire populations (e.g., the siege on Gaza and the starvation of Yemen) and through surrogates it has enabled (e.g., the Zionist State of Israel and the Wahhabi despots of Saudi Arabia, respectively). At this juncture, San Juan recalls an experience of Kafka's chief character, the Explorer, in which the Explorer visits the grave of the old Commandant but cannot decipher the tiny inscriptions in the gravestone. San Juan interprets this as "a parody of the Messiah's second coming, given the failure of the torture/justice apparatus to deliver justice and the promised deliverance" (p. 126). San Juan also interprets this failure as an indictment of the liberal class for manifesting the "vacillating if self-righteous mindset" of the Explorer himself, whose "weapon of methodological individualism becomes an apology for Abu Ghraib outrage, philanthropic rescue of veiled women, and mass drone killings" (p. 112).

Ironically, all torture is undertaken in the name of "justice"; subjugation and plunder—and the suffering they perpetuate—are a part of a "civilizing mission." A significant part of the rationale for this use of torture is discussed in the final, and essential Chapter 8, "History, Ideology, and Utopia: On Photography in Late Capitalism," wherein San Juan also lays out what would be, to many, a re-inventive way of combating the self-imposed amnesia or ignorance that accompanies contemporary "civilizing missions": the use of an early 18<sup>th</sup> century invention, photography. Early uses of photography have been commercially induced involving portraits and landscapes. In the US, it has been used to record, among other things, the gore of the Civil War and, in subsequent phases, industrial progress, commercial expansion, imperial conquest, and colonial occupation. San Juan also notes that images of subject peoples who were also brought into the US and exhibited at various World's Fair exhibitions were taken and preserved to justify the colonizing mission and to accentuate the industrial achievements and the illusion of superiority of Western civilization. Reason is readily discernible, as San Juan explains: "Capitalist hegemony succeeds because it allows the dominated/subjugated to be part of its articulation" (p. 138). This apparent benignity is characteristic of late capitalism dominated by corporate media, wherein "everything seems not only contradictory but thoroughly perverted and transmogrified by the cash/market logic of equivalence" (p. 139). San Juan gives tribute to writers like Walter Benjamin, John Berger, Stuart Ewen, Susan Sontag, and Naomi Klein, who have all "shown the insidious complicity of image-producing art/mechanisms with the logic of profit-making and capital accumulation...since [photography's] instrumentalization in 1855 at the Paris Exposition" (p. 139).

In the context of contemporary globalization, San Juan formulates the problem to be solved: "How do we subvert this usage [of photography] that promotes exploitation, destruction of the environment, permanent wastage of life and nature?" (p. 133). To answer this question, San Juan draws inspiration from other thinkers who have ruminated on the issue before him.

Among them is Walter Benjamin, who rhetorically asked, in 1931: “Is it not the photographer’s job...to reveal guilt in his images and finger the culprit?” (p. 132); another is Fredric Jameson, who more recently advised: “Always historicize!” (p. 133). While these views may seem simplistic, San Juan is not deterred from taking small, concrete steps that may be more than just symbolic in making a difference in the long run, viewing the solution to the problem as being a protracted one. In one such step, San Juan advises audiences to view a photo and “situate [it] in narrated time” (p. 133). Quoting John Berger, San Juan writes: “This narrated time...becomes historic time when it is assumed by social memory and social action” (p. 133). San Juan believes the photo “speaks volumes” when the viewer “can supply the narrative context from which meaning and signification can emerge” (p. 135). In dealing with the mass-media, San Juan places faith in the interpreter-turned-producer, seizing the mass-media means of production and reproduction, encouraging the viewer to “subvert its function as a powerful instrument of the ruling class for suppression and [to] mobilize it for counter-hegemonic ends...” (p. 136), an approach inspired by the Filipino exiles in Europe who founded the Propaganda Movement and their plebeian comrades in the Philippines, who turned the “[Spanish] colonizer’s weapons to overthrow their rule,” and from European intellectual/activists, from Marx to Ricardo to St. Simoun, who exposed the illusion and fragility of bourgeois civilization.

Kenneth E. Bauzon PhD  
St. Joseph’s College – New York  
[kbauzon@sjcny.edu](mailto:kbauzon@sjcny.edu)