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*From Globalization to National Liberation: Essays of Three
Decades* (review)

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From Globalization to National Liberation: Essays of Three Decades. E. San Juan, Jr. Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2008. xviii + 344 pages. University of Hawaii Press, 2009. \$38.00 paper.

The selected essays, interviews, and lectures of the past three decades by E. San Juan, Jr., a major Filipino American public intellectual and 2009 fellow of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute, bear witness to a global shift from a politics of despair to a politics of hope. This collection provides a richly textured interdisciplinary approach to reading the shifts, transitions, and contradictions of global capitalism, specifically about how “the ideology of neoliberal transnationalist exchange has evolved, after 9/11, into the unilateral ‘American Exceptionalist’ discourse of the ‘war on terrorism’ and the more contentious ‘clash of civilizations’” (xvi). In exploring the ideological transition from globalization to a US-led Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), San Juan recognizes new forms of national movements for self-determination developing as a powerful collective global force: “[T]he battlefronts of Palestine, Colombia, Mexico, Nepal, the Philippines, aside from those in the Middle East, are mounting a formidable united front from the grassroots to oppose the destructive maelstrom of globalizing corporate power” (xviii). This theme of transitioning from the dominance of finance capitalism (globalization) to the global reach of subaltern resistance rooted in national liberation, first explored in San Juan’s earlier works such as *The Philippine Temptation: Dialectics of Philippines-U.S. Literary Relations* (1996) and *After Postcolonialism* (2000), is especially useful for reimagining Cultural Studies and American Studies as part of an international challenge to US racial imperialism.

The collection’s point of departure is a much-needed interrogation of the “post” that frames our current intellectual moment, whether it is the “end of theory,” a “postnationalist” globalized world, or the “post-racial” US society of the Obama era. Part One engages theory, specifically the debates concerning frames of intelligibility offered by postcolonial theory. San Juan resuscitates the silenced subaltern by writing against the politics of despair present in postcoloniality. A careful reconsideration of primary sources within the field of Gramscian studies opens a space for San Juan to resituate the relationship between the subaltern and the critical intellectual within a larger context of international solidarity. Rethinking dominant theoretical frameworks enables intellectuals to hear current subaltern

alternatives, from the Maoist overthrow of the centuries-old monarchy in Nepal to the reinvigorated national liberation struggles sweeping Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador.

Part Two reclaims key concepts such as nationhood and class, which postcolonial theory and the neoliberal ideology of globalization have replaced with notions of cosmopolitanism and hybridity. Advancing Michael Löwy's Marxist approaches to the historical phenomenon of nationalism in *Fatherland or Mother Earth? Essays on the National Question* (1998), San Juan examines the global dispersal of Filipinos from a Southeast Asian archipelago still in the process of becoming self-determined after a century of US colonial and neocolonial control. A detailed cognitive mapping is provided to highlight the interconnectedness of Filipino experiences throughout the diaspora: the racial oppression in the United States of Filipinos (now considered "the largest Asian American ethnic group in the U.S." [ix]), the exploitation of overseas Filipino workers (approximately nine million, "mostly female domestic help" [89]), and the gross human rights violations of the eighty million people of the Philippines under the Arroyo administration (300). While earlier publications such as Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease's *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (1993) and Abe Ignacio et al.'s *The Forbidden Book: The Philippine-American War in Political Cartoons* (2004) have interrogated the violent erasure of the colonial conquest of the Philippines from our collective memory of US Empire, San Juan explores the unique unfolding of Philippine subaltern struggle within the realm of a "Filipino praxis of alter/native writing" (125-30). This decolonizing aesthetic can be discerned in the cultural production of Filipino artists Carlos Bulosan, Pete Lacaba, and Levy Balgos de la Cruz, among others.

Part Three demonstrates the possibility of critical literacy in the age of empire informed by what Noam Chomsky sees as the responsibility of the intellectual to "insist upon truth . . . to see events in their historical perspective" (qtd. in San Juan 29). Pushing against the Cartesian dualism implicit in deconstructive approaches to reading, San Juan turns to Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics to articulate an alternative framework for literary analysis. An exploration of Peirce's "thought in motion" (triad of sign, object, and interpretant) leads to innovative readings of the sign "terror" as deployed in the GWOT and representations of state terrorism in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000), a haunting novel of the Sri Lankan civil war. San Juan's meditation on Sri Lanka enables him to provide insight into the raging civil war in the Philippines. His close reading of the Philippine national sovereignty movement unravels the Colin Powell doctrine, which not only positioned the Philippines as the second front in the GWOT but also categorized Philippine subaltern resistance

as “terrorist.” Drawing on a global Marxist archive that spans the work of Lenin, Trotsky, Frantz Fanon, and Carol Pagaduan-Araullo, San Juan reveals how the GWOT uses the concept of terror to criminalize forms of dissent.

If Cultural Studies and American Studies are to be relevant in these times marked by war and the collapse of global capital, these fields must develop approaches that address the centrality of race in the formation of the US nation-state (remembering its racialized genocidal foundation) and in its policies abroad. They must also engage the contributions of current national liberation struggles in the global south to our worldwide struggle for dignity and respect for all humanity and the entire planet. San Juan’s collection illustrates how an enduring history of Philippine subaltern movements for self-determination (“silenced” by both the GWOT and postcolonial theory) functions as the “Achilles heel” of US imperial hegemony in Southeast Asia as well as a source of critical renewal for Cultural Studies and American Studies. *From Globalization to National Liberation* reminds us that the responsibility of the intellectual is to cultivate solidarity—to hear new sounds, rhythms, and voices of transformation around the globe.

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