

**The Filipinization of Critical Pedagogy:  
Widening the Scope of Critical Educational Theory**

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## **Abstract**

The internationalist frame of critical pedagogy has drawn primarily from the standpoint of Latin American struggle. Unfortunately, the policies of military repression, forced disappearances, and widespread impoverishment in Latin America has been recreated in the present tense– Philippine-style. In my paper, I provide a brief overview of the various developments within critical educational theory rooted in the Marxist tradition. I then draw from Filipino cultural theorist, E. San Juan Jr. to “filipinize” critical pedagogy. I maintain that the “filipinization” of critical pedagogy provides educators with an important standpoint to counter the shallow policies of neoliberal multiculturalism in the United States and the unbridled racism that haunt people of color throughout the world.

**Keywords – critical pedagogy, Philippines, race studies, political economy, Marxist theory**

## **Introduction**

Over the past three decades, critical pedagogy has cross-fertilized with a multitude of disciplines and their respective theoretical traditions, which include postmodernism, feminism, critical race theory, and postcolonialism (Darder & Torres, 2003). There exist various irreconcilable differences between and even within the various theoretical frameworks. However, what loosely links critical pedagogy across all disciplines and theoretical frameworks is the desire to foster a deeper consciousness of asymmetrical relations of power and privilege. Yet, a critical consciousness is not the ultimate objective for critical pedagogy but more accurately a necessary step in transforming unjust relations of domination and oppression. This is true for a critical pedagogy grounded in the Marxist tradition. This particular strand of critical pedagogy builds upon Karl Marx’s famous maxim in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various way; the point, however, is to change it” (Selsam & Martel, 1971, pg. 318). In this paper I provide a brief overview of the various developments within critical educational theory rooted in the Marxist tradition. I begin with Karl Marx and his understanding of human consciousness. I then review the theorists and educational scholars who have taken up a Marxist analytic within the field while also providing an introduction to

divergent understandings of social class. In the second part of my paper, I speak to the recent emergence of critical revolutionary pedagogy (CRP). Addressing the critiques made against such a framework I embark on a framework to “filipinize” critical pedagogy that links a historical materialist orientation of critical pedagogy with the transformative activities of Filipinos in a global diaspora. It is my belief that such an approach provides an important standpoint to counter the shallow strategies of neoliberal multiculturalism in the United States and the unbridled racism most evident in U.S. “wars of terrorism” that haunt people of color throughout the world.<sup>i</sup>

### **Part I: Marx and Consciousness**

Marx is widely recognized for his work in philosophy, political economy, and even religion. While Marx did not write widely about education, he wrote groundbreaking analyses about the inseparable relationship between consciousness and human activity. In 1846, Marx, in collaboration with Friedrich Engels, completed *The German Ideology*. It was in this text that Marx’s theory of consciousness was first articulated. Marx and Engels maintain that human beings produce their life in a manner that is conditioned by their physical and social organization. Human consciousness is conditioned in a similar fashion. They state:

“In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven...We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process...Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life” (Selsam & Martel, 1971, pg. 190).

In this passage, Marx and Engels speak against the idealism that dominated the philosophical thought of their time (and which persists even to this day) where human consciousness was widely viewed as the antecedent to the real or material world. Contrary to idealism is the concept of materialism where consciousness is the byproduct of material world. Marx was critical of both forms of thinking, as he believed they shared a common problem of seeing consciousness and reality as nonreciprocal phenomenon.

Marx developed a theory of consciousness that refused the analysis of consciousness and material life as separate binaries. In fact, he viewed the two as an internal relation or more

specifically a unity of opposites where consciousness and reality mutually shape and interact with one another (Ollman 2003). In other words, consciousness and reality, reflection and action (praxis) are so closely linked that it is impossible to consider such concepts in separate terms. Marx also maintained that the greatest impact on consciousness is the experiences of people within existing social relations of production (Marx, 2001). In particular, capitalist production determines what and how people create their material world. To be sure, this does not mean that human beings do not have the capacity to consciously transform their realities. As Marx famously stated in *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx, Engels, & Lenin, 1974, pg. 120).

Marx warns that human consciousness does not necessarily mirror reality accurately or objectively because of the inherent contradictions of capitalist society (Marx, 2001). In fact, consciousness is often distorted given that the class, which is “the ruling material force of society,” also governs the production of knowledge and ideas (Marx & Engels, 1998). As a result, ideas that explain reality in a fragmented way or mask the contradictory nature of capitalism are widely disseminated. Such ideas that ultimately support the existing social order are known as ideologies (Eagleton, 1991). Marx and Engels explain that the ruling class, which establishes their social relations in agreement with their material productivity, is compelled to represent their ideologies as the universal interests of all members of society. In their own words, Marx and Engels explain, “the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one” (Marx, Engels, & Lenin, 1974, pg 44). Paula Allman astutely maintains that Marx’s theory of consciousness considered together with his critical analysis of capitalism clarifies how the unity of people’s thought and action (praxis) can exist in two conflicting forms. She states, “if people only engage in the social relations, into which they are born, assuming all the while that these relations, or practices, are natural and inevitable, then their praxis will be uncritical and will serve only to reproduce the extant relations and conditions” (Allman, 2007, pg. 34). On the other hand, people can struggle to see past the widespread ideologies that naturalize the status quo while they also struggle to create genuine conditions for equality. It is with this understanding of consciousness that a critical pedagogy

rooted in the Marxist tradition attempts to develop a truthful reflection of a complex and relational world, in order so that it may be understood and ultimately made anew. Adherents to this reemerging theoretical strand are adamant that creating such a world where human needs are not only considered but also met is impossible within the existing class structure of capitalist society.

## **Marxism and Educational Theory**

There are a great number of theorists who have utilized Marxism as a lens in theorizing the role that education plays in both reproducing and undermining the social order of capitalism. Of particular importance is Italian theorist, Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci was imprisoned during World War II for his rejection of fascism. While in prison, Gramsci compiled his Prison Notebooks, which was made public posthumously (Gramsci, 2001). Gramsci agreed with the Marxist-Leninist analysis that the ruling class utilizes physical coercion (police or military forces) to preserve dominion of society. He affirmed that no matter how powerful or repressive a regime, it could not sustain itself through physical coercion alone. To naturalize their power, the ruling class must direct and influence people to consent to their own oppression through a system of coordinated (political, religious, economic, cultural, and educational) alliances. Gramsci referred to the ruling class' combined use of force matched with their exercise of winning the people's consent (so that they will consent to their own oppression) as hegemony. For Gramsci, hegemony was never a complete or uncontested act of ideological reproduction. Since "common sense" is produced within a fluid combination of ideas and practices, there are always seeds of possibility for counterhegemonic projects to challenge and ultimately overthrow the existing hegemony. Therefore, with Gramsci's notion of hegemony there was also great emphasis in the idea of struggle.

Like Gramsci, the French theorist, Louis Althusser was interested in furthering a Marxist understanding of ideology in reproducing existing relations of production. However, in stark contrast to Gramsci, Althusser did not foreground the concept of class struggle in his conceptualization of Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) as sustaining features of a capitalist society (Althusser, 1971). For Althusser, RSAs are

comprised of the army, police, prisons, and other governmental forces that can justifiably utilize physical repression. ISAs consist of religion, families, media, cultural organizations, and education. While both RSAs and ISAs rely upon violence and ideology to maintain order, Althusser distinguishes between the two. He states, “RSA functions massively and predominately by repression, while, functioning secondarily by ideology...in the same way, but inversely, it is essential to say that for their part the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominately by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression” (qtd in Cole, 2008, pg. 31). Althusser believed that schools are an especially important for inculcating and reproducing dominant ideologies. Althusser is considered the leading architect of Structural Marxism, which became a major trend in Marxist scholarship within education (Allman, 2007) in the 1970s and 1980s.

Althusser’s structuralism was based on Marx’s brief and underdeveloped metaphor in his “Preface to the Critique of Political Economy” written in 1859 (Allman 2007). From this piece, Structural Marxists have developed the controversial idea of base/superstructure where the economic foundation or base is believed to be the determinant for a corresponding ideological superstructure (includes social, political, and intellectual consciousness). Working from a base/superstructure framework, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis published Schooling in Capitalist America (1976). In this book Bowles and Gintis argue that schooling as a social institution is not meritocratic, but rather a tool for molding the ideological perspectives of youth in order to reproduce capitalist relations. Bowles and Gintis were widely critiqued for adopting a “vulgar” interpretation of Marx’s political economy (Au, 2006). Educational scholars rightfully challenged Bowles and Gintis, maintaining that their analysis disregarded student agency in bringing about change in schools and larger society.

In an effort to highlight human agency, Paul Willis adopted a theory of resistance in his book Learning to Labor (1977). Utilizing qualitative methodology to gather data about working class boys, Willis tried to demonstrate that youth resist their determination of capitalist schooling in various ways. According to Mike Cole, the problem with Willis and other writings incorporating resistance theory in education is the unspecificity of the term. Referencing the work of Glenn Rikowski, Cole argues, “resistance in the work of the resistance theorists, has included for example, fucking, fighting, farting, fiddling, anti-intellectualism, racism and sexism” (Cole, 2007, pg. 34).

The educational theorist who has gone the farthest in developing Marx's thinking within the field of education is Paulo Freire. In particular, Freire furthered Marx's theory of consciousness/praxis in his various writings on education as a crucial site for social transformation (Freire, 1989; Freire, P., Freire, A., & Macedo, 1998). Freire maintained that our objective reality is not fixed or permanent but constantly in transformation. Influenced by Marx's understanding of dialectics, Freire conceptualized the relation between the oppressed and the oppressors as a dialectical contradiction. For Marx, a dialectical contradiction is a unity of opposites in which one opposite is the negative (i.e. the oppressed) because its ultimate role is to abolish the relation and thus its position of subordination and the other opposite is the positive because its role is to preserve the relation (i.e. the oppressor) (Marx, 2001). In his famous book, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire states, "persons take equally contradictory positions: some work to maintain the structures, others to change them" (Freire, 1989, pg. 101). With such an understanding, Freire further posited that the oppressed internalize the oppressor's way of thinking and behaving in the world. Freire argued that education is the central avenue where the oppressed learn to internalize the oppressor's ideology, via "banking education." For Freire, "banking education" is an educative process of domination where students are imposed knowledge about their world that they memorize, store, and accept. This world is taught as fixed and unchangeable. Freire explains,

"The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them" (Freire, 1989, pg. 73).

To assist in a project of humanization where people can develop their human potentials in every aspect of their "being," Freire formulated a pedagogical approach. His "pedagogy of the oppressed" is an attempt to work with people in a process of struggle to combat the thick fog of ideological illusions. Building on Marx, Freire maintained that it is only in praxis that people will not only better understand their world but more importantly work towards its humanization. A number of critical theorists have taken up the Freiren project in a multitude of disciplines (Boal, 1985; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994; McLaren & Leonard, 1993; Morrell, 2004; Morrow & Torres, 2002; Shor & Freire, 1987).

By the end of the 1980s through the present, Marxism, as a theoretical tool of analysis, was widely deemed passé and relegated to the dustbins of history (San Juan 2004). This was especially the case within academic institutions of North America and especially consistent within the field of education (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005). The rejection of Marxist theory was due to a variety of reasons. The resurgence of neoconservatism in the United States, the decline of national-liberation struggles in the Third World, and the collapse of the Soviet Union all had demoralizing effects among Marxists. It was during this time period that the anti-Marxist intellectual trend of postmodernism gained immense popularity within academic institutions of North America (Hill, 2002). While this is not the space to provide a detailed explanation of postmodernism, it is important to note its central tenants. Building on the work of French intellectuals, in particular Michel Foucault, postmodernism rejects Marx's dialectics (Wood, 1997). It abandons totalizing theories of history, hierarchy, and the quest for truth (Cole, 2008). Furthermore, as a theoretical framework it locates power not as a function of classes or in a unified state apparatus but in the realm of the discursive (San Juan, 2007). In a postmodern world, a Marxist orientation that values universal struggle and historical totality were ultimately dismissed (Harvey, 1990). Furthermore, as a result of postmodernism's wide acceptance, the dualism of class struggle, inherent in Marxist theory, has either been ignored or repudiated (Kelsh and Hill, 2006). The differing conceptualizations of class relations between Marxist and non-Marxist orientations are important to consider as the theorization of class relations has significantly influenced critical pedagogy.

### **The Social Relation of Class**

By in large, theorists of critical pedagogy widely use class as a categorical term determined by income level and life-style. Drawing largely from Weberian and neo-Weberian frameworks which utilize class as a category that describes "life chances" for groupings of people, non-Marxist strands of critical pedagogy widely interchanges "class" synonymously with "socioeconomic status" (SES) (Hill, 2002). In other instances, class relations are utilized as a part of the "intersectional" triumvirate of race, class, and gender (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005). Marxist scholars within critical pedagogy have problematized this translation of class arguing that it renders the social relation of class as nothing more than a descriptive marker or an



indicator of cultural difference (Cole, 2008; Hill, 2002, Kelsh & Hill, 2006; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Rikowski, 1997). They further maintain that if critical pedagogy locates its analysis of class solely within the realms of identity, cultural difference, and/or lifestyle than the prevalent strategy for dealing with widespread educational and social inequality is to put a friendly face on capitalist exploitation through market redistribution.

In their essay, “The Culturalization of Class and the Occluding of Class Consciousness,” Deb Kelsh and Dave Hill critically examine the widely accepted classifications of class. They contend that non-Marxist conceptualization of class is problematic because it utilizes class as a social description devoid of material causes instead of a social relation rooted in history and unequal relations of production. This unequal social relation, where capital dominates over labor, structures all production practices and has only a single rationale, the creation of surplus value (profit). The production of surplus value according to Marx is the “absolute law” of the capitalist mode of production and it is created out of the work done during the portion of the working-day that the laborer is not compensated. Workers within this social relation are not only working to sustain him/herself (necessary labor time) but also working to create profit for the ruling class (surplus labor). Therefore, the existing social structure of capitalism is motivated parochially by the generation of profit and thus workers of all colors, genders, sexualities, and religions can never be rightfully compensated for what their labor produces. For Marxists, the historic effort of workers to end the inequality located at the point of production (exploitation), which exclusively benefits the capitalist class, is the basis of class struggle.

### **Critical Revolutionary Pedagogy: Criticisms and Promise**

Marxist approaches to educational theory and the subfield of critical pedagogy has gained new relevancy. Such scholarship refuses to ignore class as a historical reality and an antagonistic relationship of exploitation. Of particular interest are the writings of McLaren and his development of a “critical revolutionary pedagogy” (CRP). While one of the leading architects of critical pedagogy, McLaren has in some ways distanced his work from the field. He argues that critical pedagogy has been translated in many educational programs as synonymous with “social justice” (McLaren 2006). He problematizes the term ‘social justice’ maintaining that it often legitimizes capitalism and sidesteps the current nature of production that at its very root

requires the systematic exploitation of workers by capitalists. Therefore, McLaren is at the forefront in U.S. education developing a CRP that dialectically links the sexism, racism, and heteronormativity with the exploitation inherent in contemporary capitalist society.

The critiques made against CRP are reflective of the fundamental criticisms made against the larger project of critical pedagogy. The vocabulary of CRP has been a serious point of contention, especially for its theoretical complexity and laborious language. Criticisms that actually engage the ideas within CRP are rooted in postmodern theory, which I eluded to earlier, as well as feminist articulations that incorporate a diffuse power analysis upon issues of identity, culture, and race. A frequent critique wielded against CRP pertains to issues of identity and research standpoint. With the few exception of such scholars as Allman, Kelsh, Zavardadeh, and Farahmandpur the most recognized scholars who have greatly influenced the development of Marxist thought in educational theory have predominately been white male scholars. Accordingly, there has been suspicion about the standpoint of such scholars and in particular their ability to speak from the everyday lived experiences of racialized communities and other historically marginalized perspectives. This well-intended critique could eventually be silenced with a greater diversity of women and scholars of color who take up this powerful theoretical frame to work through the contradictions of their community's past and present. It is crucial that we credit contemporary Marxist theorists for introducing many North American educators to the emancipatory praxis of such individuals as Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, Frantz Fanon, W.E.B Du Bois, and Rosa Luxemburg. These important intellectuals were undoubtedly committed to the plight of the most marginalized men and women of the world. If it were not for the fruitful dialogue between Marxist theory and critical pedagogy the contributions of these radical thinkers and feminist philosophers might not at all be located within the archives of educational theory.

While CRP is breaking new ground within the respective field of education, its scholars do not pretend that they are introducing a new theoretical framework for genuine societal change. Rather, CRP is a theoretical tool sharpened by the friction of history. A weapon wielded in the hands of conscious human agents, committed in their analysis of the educational and social problems that constrain them in their present, that can alter the course of history and transform the realm of possibility for the future. CRP's potency and practical application can gain deeper relevancy in building upon the analysis of such individuals as W.E.B. Du Bois, Carlos Bulosan, C.L.R. James, Malcolm X, and Raya Dunayaskaya as well as the various feminist, indigenous,

and national liberation movements from around the world.

### **E. San Juan and the “Filipinization” of Critical Pedagogy**

In his famous book, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire contends that the fundamental theme of our epoch is one of domination. As a radical intellectual, he came to this conclusion in his engagement with the barbaric realities of state terrorism, impoverishment, and forced disappearances throughout Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s. In an act of courageous scholarly intervention, Freire outlined a method and practice for the actualization of freedom. His pedagogical approach takes the standpoint of the marginalized, with the belief that such groups are not only more insightful but also more motivated to change the circumstances of their oppression. Furthermore, Freire’s pedagogy was an act of communion to address not only the questions the oppressed sought to answer but also a commitment to act in the transformation of the very forces that constrain their emancipation (Freire, P., Freire, A. & Macedo, D., 1998). Freire would certainly agree with the observations of Terry Eagleton: “History would be transformed by its most contaminated products, by those bearing the most livid marker of its brutality. In a condition in which the powerful run insanely rampant, only the powerless can provide an image of that humanity which must in its turn come to power, and in doing so transfigure the very meaning of that term” (qtd. in San Juan, 2007b, pg. 65).

The multidisciplinary writings of Filipino cultural and literary theorist, Epifanio San Juan, Jr. continue the Freiren project and the vision of the world’s most marginalized that seek a lasting peace and a fuller humanity. Through an internationalist and historical analysis of the conditions challenging Filipinos, E. San Juan maintains that it is only in struggle that racialized groups can see beneath the surface of unjust social relations. In the Filipino struggle for national liberation, (a project that dates back to, at the very least, the Filipino-American War in 1898) emancipatory forms of knowledge production are in the process of becoming (Constantino, R. & Constantino, L., 1975; 1978). However, an authentic education that seeks to maximize human potential - as opposed to the profit for a small few- can only be realized in transcending the social relations of capitalist production (Allman, 1999, 2001; Cole, 2008; Hill, 2002; Norton & Ollman, 1978). For E. San Juan, this enormous task is not possible without a critical understanding of social class as a relation of owning land and human labor.

E. San Juan's latest foray of writings, which interweaves an analysis of nationalism, culture, class, race, and history, has important implications for critical pedagogy. In particular, the infusion of E. San Juan's work to the archive of critical educational theory provides the discipline of education with a needed internationalist scope to interrogate the "globalization of racism" (Macedo, 2006) or what Manning Marable calls a "global apartheid." Under global apartheid today, the logic of a master race ("herrenvolk") is embedded in unequal political and economic exchanges that impoverishes the vast majority of people in the countries of the "Global South" (Marable 2004). The Philippines is one such country devastated by policies of structural adjustment, privatization, as well the ongoing presence of the United States military to buttress the native administrators of neocolonialism (Foster & McChesney, 2004). Using E. San Juan's two recent books, In the Wake of Terror and U.S. Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines as an axis, I embark on a project to "filipinize" critical pedagogy that will link the historical materialist orientation of critical pedagogy with the transformative activities of Filipinos in a global diaspora. It is my belief that such an approach can provide an important standpoint to counter the shallow strategies of neoliberal multiculturalism in the United States and the unbridled racism most evident in U.S. "wars of terrorism" that haunt people of color throughout the world.<sup>ii</sup>

### **In The Wake of Terror: Class, Race, Nation, Ethnicity in the Postmodern World**

In The Wake of Terror: Class, Race, Nation, Ethnicity in the Postmodern World, E. San Juan provides a powerful assessment of various mainstream theorists who speak to the issue of 'race.' In fact, his comprehensive analyses of postmodern and poststructural ("post-al") theories that examine racism are often sharp and unforgiving. Such critiques are not made to belittle left leaning theorists who many undoubtedly have a genuine desire for racial justice. Rather, E. San Juan's writing is an effort to push theory away from a state of either apologetics or paralysis towards a living instrument for concrete social change.

This book is an important resource to understand how academic understandings of 'race' have become consumed in interstitial alibis and nuanced enigmas. E. San Juan argues that if intellectuals continue to turn their backs on the historical specificity of racialization and the role such processes play in the retention and enhancement of capitalism, academia will be nothing

more than a site for the production of methodologically sophisticated projects that are ineffective when put into practice. Such research projects will encourage the merriment of cultural difference but will ultimately lead to dead ends in realizing racial justice so long as the structural configuration of capitalism is left unexamined and unaltered (Zavarzadeh, 2003). E. San Juan's thesis is clear, "I urge that we focus our attention on contradictions, not on consensus, the ensemble of economic and political contradictions that underlie the racializing process in society (San Juan, 2007a, pg. 145.) His pedagogical lesson is especially important to incorporate in the field of education as exchange relations between various cultures are often theorized as reciprocal but in reality the social, political, and economic relations between the people of such cultures are anything but equal.

E. San Juan points out that the understandings of "culture" and "identity" remain largely disconnected from asymmetrical power relations immanent in the lived experiences of communities of color throughout the United States. As a result, the mainstream logic in urban schools in solving the problems of racism and ethnic conflicts is representably the various strategies of multiculturalism. The fight for a *genuine* multiculturalism, where one ethnic group or culture does not dominate U.S. society, is in fact an important political project. However, can such a vision truly exist within the present capitalist system? For the ideas of a diverse and democratic society to be realized in not only one's mind but also in the physical world, E. San Juan is adamant that we interrogate the totality of capitalism and the contradictions of history. Yet, with the marriage of multiculturalism and neoliberalism the reality of racial oppression in U.S. history is erased and replaced by celebratory lip service to the ideas of identity and difference (San Juan, 2002). The brutality of history evident by the genocide committed against Native Americans; the enslavement of African Americans; the colonization of territory from the peoples of Mexico, Cuba, Haiti, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines; and the systematic appropriation of Asian labor is rendered discontinuous from the social realities of the present. Consistent with his earlier writings, E. San Juan will not allow us to forget this past (San Juan, 2000; San Juan, 2002; San Juan 2004). Linking his incisive historical analysis to the barbarism of our present, In the Wake of Terror is an important warning to the current theorizing of 'race.' Specifically, if critical pedagogy does not address racism in tandem with the social structures that sets racism's virility in motion - capital accumulation and class rule - then social theory will

be an impotent instrument to address the racism that seethes our present day institutions of criminal justice, housing, healthcare, and education.<sup>iii</sup>

Last year's educational debate in Arizona demonstrates that the benevolent language associated with neoliberal multiculturalism might no longer be relevant in a society mired in crisis. In April 2008, Arizona Republican Russell Pearce introduced Senate Bill 1108 (SB 1108) that would prohibit public schools in Arizona from teaching course material deemed counter to "American values and the teachings of Western civilization." Furthermore, this xenophobic legislation would prohibit public schools, community colleges, and universities from allowing student groups to operate if its mission, in any way, organized around the criteria of 'race.' Republican John Kavanagh, was reported as saying that he hopes this measure would return cultural studies in Arizona to a "melting pot" model where various ethnic groups "adopt American values." E. San Juan's writings can strengthen our analysis to confront such policies intended to pacify unruly subalterns here at home and abroad. For E. San Juan, such an analytical confrontation requires linking racism with the underlying mode of production that set such ideology in motion: capital accumulation and class rule.

SB 1108 is a rallying point for those wary of the present condition of America's social fabric. It is nostalgic attempt to return to a supposed time period when success was based on the values of individualism, hard work, ingenuity, and perseverance. Such logic espouses "American Exceptionalism," where U.S. democracy translates to amity and good will to all humanity and equal opportunity for all within its borders. Within this framework, the desire is to renew the values of a "color-blind" American society especially since the struggle for racial justice reached its successful zenith with the inauguration of an African American president.

Of particular interest is E. San Juan generative engagement with Critical Race Theory (CRT) in an important essay titled "From Racism to Class Struggle." CRT has made important contributions to our understanding of the everyday lived experience of youth of color battling against the logic of white supremacy within the field of education. One of the architects of this framework, legal scholar, Richard Delgado, recently reflected on the work done under the banner of CRT. He stated, "I'm worried that the younger crop of CRT theorists are enamored by the easy arm-chair task of writing about race in the word and not race in the world...A new movement is needed" (qtd in Cole, 2007, pg. 117). After reviewing the historical context of CRT's formation (the 1970s and 1980s), E. San Juan recommends that a transformative

movement is feasible through CRT's incorporation of a Marxist understanding of class. E. San Juan argues that CRT is unable to fulfill its objectives of promoting racial equality and institutional change within the United States because it does not make the necessary connection to move us towards challenging the system on which racism and racialization feeds. While adamant that not all individual instances of racism are reducible to the economy, E. San Juan argues:

“A study of racist practices and institutions, divorced from the underlying determinant structure of capital accumulation and class rule that allow such practices and institutions to exercise their naturalizing force, can only perpetuate an abstract metaphysics of race and a discourse of power that would reinforce the continuing reification of social relations in everyday life” (San Juan, 2007a, pg. 101).

Over the past two decades, CRT has made inroads into various disciplines but outside of the United States it is relatively unknown. Surely, ‘race’ relations in the history of the United States carries a unique position and deserve special emphasis. However, E. San Juan makes the prudent observation that because CRT leaves relations of production untouched it is unable to adequately come to grips with pressing issues worldwide. Such issues include perpetual “wars on terror,” and a globalized racism (i.e. Islamophobia) that keeps a U.S. populace compliant to ruling class motives of global profiteering. Sociologist, John Bellamy Foster reminds us that at no time “can we turn our backs to the worldwide impact of racism, militarism, and imperialism nor forget that capitalist societies are historically associated with all three” (Foster, 2006). Let me now turn to E. San Juan's recent book on the Philippines, the neocolonial laboratory of the United States, where the torment of racism, militarism, and imperialism is felt everyday. It is in the Philippines where a vibrant critical pedagogy can be found among a people tempted by the ideas of freedom and national liberation.

### **Visiting with Philippine Educators**

In September 2008, I visited the Philippines for a month to hear personal stories from educators, youth, and community members who are struggling to transform their historical conditions of exploitation and colonization. The concepts that I read in academic texts, such as

"oppression," "repression," and "exploitation" refused abstraction in the Philippines. For many people in the Philippines, such words reflect the experiences of the everyday. During my time there, the contradictions of the global economy sharpened as the United States economy entered into crisis. It was clear for many Filipinos that an economic crisis unseen since the Great Depression would create deeper hardship for them as rice and gas prices continue to soar far beyond the wages of a Filipino population whose majority earn less than \$2 a day.

During a trip to visit a public school, I had the opportunity to hear more about the conditions of a tricycle driver. He works more than 10 hours a day with his work hour beginning at 6 am. I was told that in a day, he makes approximately 100 pesos (2 dollars). Such long hours and low pay for many workers in the Philippines is not an anomaly. Leisure time is a privilege. While talking with many public school educators, I learned that it was not possible to work as a schoolteacher and have basic amenities met. Therefore, all the educators that I spoke with, on top of being public school teachers, had at least one other job (i.e. tutors). Even while working numerous jobs, public school teachers acquire private loans to compensate their wages pushing them into debt. A schoolteacher who I spoke with told me that along with being teaching he was also a fisherman and tricycle driver.

One of the big campaigns initiated by the Alliance of Concerned Teachers, was a 9,000 peso (\$191) salary increase over the span of three years. Approximately, 2,000 teachers marched on Congress in a powerful illustration of class struggle as they demanded just compensation for their labor time. The teachers' chants to "upgrade teachers salaries now" would be a tremendous victory as public school teachers earn in entire year, what their counterparts in the United States earn in one month.

While the conditions for teachers are bad, the conditions for students in the public schools are far worse. Many teachers that I had the privilege to speak with reported that a student to teacher ratio of 100:1 was not uncommon. In a few public schools that I visited, classrooms were so overcrowded one classroom was partitioned with chalkboards to accommodate more students. Students were forced to learn their daily lessons outside under trees and in hallway corridors. I learned that student to teacher ratios are not the only ratios that exist for students. There is a toilet / pupil ratio. In some of the worst cases, there are schools with 1 toilet for 2,000 students.



Teachers shared with me the great challenge that exists in instructing students who are malnourished. In one public high school, teachers informed me that they estimate that 75% of their students are malnourished, but they reminded me if I were to visit the province areas and other rural areas of the islands, the students' conditions would be "far worse." A group of committed teachers from Pasig invited me to their home as they shared personal stories of struggle. They told me that many of their students are scavengers, picking plastic bottles and bags before and after school to contribute to their family incomes. I was told that one student, "Manuel," walks more than 2 hours (one way) to attend school each day. I was unable to meet Manuel the day that I visited his school because he was not in attendance. I later learned that he was absent from school because his sister had died that day from asthma.

What are the global conditions that have created such paltry educational conditions in the Philippines? Ever since the 1970s, global capitalism and the United States' role as global hegemon have experienced a prolonged crisis arising from systemic overproduction.<sup>iv</sup> The social system of capitalism has been unable to secure new areas for sustainable productive investment at home, which among other things has led the ruling class to turn to market expansion abroad.

Historically greater profit and exploitation of workers have been accomplished through various means such as technological and industrial advances. However, such advances have been largely unbeneficial to the majority of the Filipino polity resulting in technological progress serving the narrow-minded interests of profiteering as opposed to human need. As a result, a global working class have been greatly deskilled and impoverished. Furthermore, structural adjustment programs have forced greater trade and investment liberalization on neocolonies such as the Philippines to exploit their labor, to plunder their raw materials, and to control their local economies. In the 1990s, unsatisfied with the extraction of massive economic surplus generated from the debt burdens of the "third world," the benefactors of neoliberalism turned to a strategy of "accumulation by dispossession." Through a cannibalistic process that David Harvey lays out in his book, The New Imperialism, public utilities (i.e. water) and social services (i.e. education) were turned into sinister opportunities for privatization and profit.

## **U.S. Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines**

For those wondering why critical pedagogy needs to engage the history and present day realities that E. San Juan unearths in his important writings, I make the argument that educators have a responsibility to understand the world in which they are preparing future generations to live and work. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we exist in a world of *global* capitalism and racism. Therefore, if Paulo Freire is an important intellectual that educators can draw upon to understand an epoch of capitalist domination in Latin America, than E. San Juan is the intellectual we can turn to in our attempts to transform the current epoch of imperialism and racism in the Philippines.

Radical educators throughout the world have turned to critical pedagogy and the specific writings of Freire as a valuable resource for locating the roots of injustice as well as the sources for future liberation. The internationalist frame of critical pedagogy has drawn primarily from the standpoint of Latin American struggle. Unfortunately, the history of military repression, forced disappearances, and widespread impoverishment in Latin America has been recreated in the present tense– Philippine-style. U.S. Imperialism and Revolution in the Philippines is invaluable book for not only shedding light on the atrocities taking place in the Philippines but also to demystify what binds the project of U.S. Empire.

Various critical theorists have argued that the mainstream preoccupation with postmodernism in academia serves as an ideological support for global capitalism and the New Imperialism (Harvey, 2005; Hill, 2002; McLaren, 2005, Wood, 1997). E. San Juan builds upon their arguments with a particular focus on the Philippines as a contested site for “globalization.” His writings are always welcome, as “the Philippines remains a tell-tale gap or omission in the public understanding of world affairs” (San Juan, 2007b, pg. xxi). E. San Juan maintains that if Philippine history and its relationship to the United States are at all examined in academia, triviality and mysticism have polluted the intellectual atmosphere, allowing white supremacy and exploitation to become acceptable points of view. Utilizing a class-based analysis, E. San Juan’s essays can foreground important issues such as language, indigenous struggle, and nationalism as useful sites for a project of humanization in the Philippines. His utilization of historical materialism as a tool to study the concrete conditions in the Philippines counters the superficial labels of economic determinism and dogmatism commonly made against such an orientation. The author maintains, “the whole or totality of history is an ideal but it does not necessarily dictate a necessary future – the future depends on what we do at present to realize it” (San Juan,

2007b, pg. 125). Accordingly, E. San Juan is not concerned with absolute truths but with social change for Filipinos in a global diaspora. Such a project is urgent as structural adjustment has resulted in such widespread unemployment and poverty that 80% of its population earns no more than 2 dollars a day.<sup>v</sup> For those engaged in teaching against such conditions they face the brutalities of state terrorism waged by President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Since Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (GMA) took office in 2001, there have been more than 1,000 reported cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings against peasants, workers, women, artists, students, journalists, urban poor, teachers, religious leaders, and labor organizers.

E. San Juan maintains the important task for scholars to critique neoliberal configurations of the state, which maintains a monopoly on military and police forces and institutionalizes the pilfering of a country's natural resources. However, the author maintains that a critique of corrupt presidential leadership alone cannot address the roots of Philippine injustice and deprivation. Without an understanding of workings of U.S. Imperialism and its inbuilt tendency for growth and spatial expansion, blame can be directed towards a nascent Filipino nationalism united in the goal to oust foreign power as well as the project to attain national sovereignty. E. San Juan contends that because power has been widely accepted as diffuse and virtually independent of class struggle and politics, "post-al" theories run the risk of regurgitating a "white-supremacist triumphalism" (San Juan, 2007b, pg. xxvii).

The case of the Burgos family serves as an educative case in point to the historical atrocities confronting a Filipino polity and the role theory must play in elucidating such conditions. Edith Burgos is the widow of Jose Burgos, a journalist who was integral in the launching of opposition newspapers at the height of Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship. In 1982, the Philippine police detained Jose in an effort to suppress and intimidate dissident voices. Despite threats to his life, Jose survived and would later receive the 1986 International Journalism Award of the Inter Press Service for his dedication to the ideals of press freedom. In his acceptance speech, he said: "If I had my way, I would rather that this award should go to each and everyone of the Filipino media men who were killed or who vanished during those years of unspeakable oppression." Twenty-two years later, Jose's wife, Edith Burgos is alone in the search for her son, Jonas, a present-day "desaparecido." Jonas Burgos, is an agriculturist who advocated for farmers' rights in the Philippines. He was reported abducted by elements of the Philippine military in April 2007. To be sure, the atrocities that continue to torment the

Burgos family and countless other Filipinos is not some discursive aberration that can be understood outside of history and divorced from the logical consequence of an economic order and its political manifestations. E. San Juan's writings serve as an important reminder that "theory to be intelligibly valid cannot exceed the limits of reality" (San Juan, 2007b, pg. 151). What's more, for a valid theory to be transformative it cannot be locked within the corridors of our mind but embodied in our collective action.

Critical pedagogy has much to learn from a long history of libratory praxis in the Philippines. The activities of Filipinos in a global diaspora who are learning about the world, not simply by reflecting upon it but by changing it, is an invaluable resource to augment critical pedagogy from the ground up.<sup>vi</sup> The "filipinization" of critical pedagogy provides educators with an archive of practice and theory that educators "can dare use, test, enrich, and appropriate for a future waiting to be born" (San Juan, 2007b, pg. 154). A future of universal human rights, global economic justice, and peace where genuine expressions of democracy and multiculturalism can flourish may seem a utopian dream. While the future is never guaranteed, with a "filipinized" critical pedagogy we can gain strength in an awareness of a longstanding Filipino struggle that is stubborn in its refusal to accept that something so desired and necessary is not worth fighting to attain.

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<sup>i</sup> The term, term “wars of terrorism” is borrowed from the writings of Roy, A. (2003). *War talk* (1st ed.). Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press.

<sup>ii</sup> The term, term “wars of terrorism” is borrowed from the writings of Roy, A. (2003). *War talk* (1st ed.). Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press.

<sup>iii</sup> The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) recently criticized the United States for its two-tier society that negatively impacts America Indians, Blacks, Latinos, and other racial minorities. (See: <http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/03/12/7626/>)

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<sup>iv</sup> Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford, England ; New York, Oxford University Press.

<sup>v</sup> San Juan, E. *In the wake of terror : class, race, nation, ethnicity in the postmodern world*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

<sup>vi</sup> I highlight the concrete embodiments of a "filipinized" critical pedagogy through the medium of cultural production within the Philippine diaspora. See my individual AERA 2009 paper, titled "Critical Filipino Hip Hop and Education: Praxis and Possibilities within Cultural Studies."

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Download Citation on ResearchGate | The Filipinization of Critical Pedagogy: Widening the Scope of Critical Educational Theory | The internationalist frame of critical pedagogy has drawn primarily from the standpoint of Latin American struggle. Unfortunately, the policies of military repression, forced disappearances, and widespread impoverishment in Latin America has been recreated in the present...  
In my paper, I provide a brief overview of the various developments within critical educational theory rooted in the Marxist tradition. I then draw from Filipino cultural theorist, E. San Juan Jr. to "filipinize" critical pedagogy. The Filipinization of Critical Pedagogy: Widening the Scope of Critical Educational Theory. Peer reviewed Direct link. Viola, Michael " Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, 2009. The internationalist frame of critical pedagogy has drawn primarily from the standpoint of Latin American struggle. Unfortunately, the policies of military repression, forced disappearances, and widespread impoverishment in Latin America has been recreated in the present tense--Philippine-style. In my paper, I provide a brief overview of the