

Comments on Dr. Johanna Zulueta's
"The Space of 'Occupation':
Postcolonial Migrations in 'Occupied' Okinawa":
Imperial Spaces, Deimperializing Places

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Reporting on the employment of Filipinos within the United States Navy in and by 1970, the television documentary producer Timothy H. Ingram was compelled to describe the hierarchies and structures he found them laboring in as somewhat akin to plantation society and enslavement ("the floating plantation," as his report is strikingly titled). Of 16,669 Filipino enlistees in the Navy then, Ingram found over 80% of them stuck in the "steward rating," unable to move beyond service and menial work, and effectively barred from other possible placement ratings even if they might have possessed college degrees or have passed the necessary qualifying examinations (1970).¹ Most Filipino navy enlistees then, as "officers' stewards and mess hall attendants," performed a range of duties that is unambiguously describable as domestic and *domesticated*. Yen Le Espiritu notes that there were lucky ones who would make it to "higher" niches (other than the unlucky 40% who remained as "stewards") after a 1973 reform of employment policy allowed Filipinos to serve in 56 of the U.S. Navy's 87 available occupational ratings (1995, 16). But their mostly "clerical" work for personnel, disbursements, and commissaries were only slight improvements over the kinds of labor that Espiritu, and other studies before hers, document to have been typically and historically expected of these Filipino navy enlistees.²

Another subsequent critical report, based on interviews conducted by several U.C.L.A. Filipino American students with fifteen former U.S. Navy Filipino employees in 1974, continued to bear out Ingram's uneasily-secured and potentially scandalous findings. Ingram, indeed, reveals that he faced major stonewalling from the White House with his queries into the number of Filipinos working in the presidential dining room: his nine phone calls elicited nothing but "hemming and hawing and bureaucratic run-around" from the staff. Calls to the commander of the Naval Aide's Office, Ingram adds, provoked a reply that such questions as he was posing were "pretty complicated things to get into" and were referred to the Press Secretary's office where five more of Ingram's calls "were jockeyed back and forth between three people for two days with promises to get back with information" that was never provided (18).³

Quinsaas, writer of the critical student report, was so struck by the precision of Ingram's metaphor of "floating plantation" that he rewrote personal impressions (circa 1965) of Sangley Point off Manila Bay--historically the Filipino recruitment station and "the headquarters of the U.S. Naval Forces in the Philippines" up to the 1960s--as a "scenario" with which to introduce his discussion of the students' research. Quinsaas renders 1965-era Sangley Point in analogous terms:

The biggest housing space is taken up by the home of the admiral, who is Commander of U.S. Naval Forces in the Philippines. It is a huge, two-storey, white-washed structure surrounded by stately palms and finely trimmed shrubbery. A driveway curves around to the front door, where one is usually greeted by one of the Admiral's Navy Pilipino stewards[.] With its manicured lawns, shaded portals and ubiquitous dark-skinned servants dressed in white smocks, the whole scene is [reminiscent] of some ante-bellum southern plantation.

But beyond this analogy, Quinsaas actively reads against the grain of this military installation's "pacific" façade. He effectively describes Sangley Point as a form of American extraterritorial settlement that "floats" with the Navy's amphibious functions and operations. Its seeming *insularity* might have consisted in a geographic sense ("physically small, as U.S. Navy bases go, occupying about six square miles of the Cavite peninsula"--like an "island," indeed) and the fact that much of the space was developed for the base personnel's residential requirements as a secluded enclave (the wire wall girding Sangley Point and separating it from Cavite City was "interspersed with signs marked '*Bawal Pumasok*' [DO NOT ENTER]"). But a small airstrip, from which American aircraft were actually flying reconnaissance missions to nearby Vietnam then, betrayed something of its geostrategic value and belied one's immediate impression that this naval base "carrie[d] few of the trappings which mark a military installation at war."⁴ Forms of seemingly insular and residual American presence in a *former* U.S. colony, as it were, could disguise an amphibious or aerial (highly-mobile) power that was actually *at work*, and the amorphous *boundaries* or hierarchizations that they otherwise marked.

I begin with this sample description and partial analysis of the historical case and late-contemporary condition of Filipino enlistees in the U.S. Navy, within the limited space available, to lay out the predicate for my critique of, and establish some ground I share in common with, Johanna Zulueta's exciting work. Drawn, in part, from a manuscript being developed for publication (Campomanes, forthcoming), the exemplary discussion above also hopefully provides indicative evidence or illustration for a critical point about American neo/colonial modularity (in terms of its various "island possessions") that I briefly make later, toward the conclusion of this commentary.

My interest in her paper is really conceptual and theoretical, and stems from my own research and critical interests in the history and culture of the U.S.-Philippine neo/post-colonial relationship, especially the concern to help "specify" --borrowing the term used by the British historian of the USA Gareth Stedman Jones (1970)--and discern the form/s that the American Empire takes and develops with the conquest and neo/colonization of the Philippines from 1898 onwards.

The argument which Zulueta develops in her work is all-encompassing, and its topicality crucially depends upon a sociologizing and historicizing excursus that, without question, she manages for the rest of the paper with commendable élan:

The continuing presence of the U.S. bases in Okinawa, as well as the military exercises being carried out in the southern Philippines under the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) seem to attest that Okinawa and America's erstwhile colony, the Philippines, have been and still are seen as strategic areas by the United States. Japan's "subordinated" position as a "client state" (McCormack 2007) of the U.S., where almost 75% of the country's U.S. military installations are concentrated in the main island of Okinawa, making it a "military colony" (Yoshida 2007; McCormack 2007: 156) in the literal sense of the word, as well as the post/colonial ties the world's largest superpower has with the Philippines, just goes to show that Asia has been and still continues to be a site where the U.S. exerts, not only its military, but also economic and political might. This being said, I indicate this as the "space of occupation" of the United States. For this paper, I set this "space of occupation" to be in the Asia-Pacific region (hence not including the Middle East and South Asia) with Okinawa at the centre of this "space". This is simply due to the fact that Okinawa hosts the most number of U.S. military installations in the region....

The author then follows the flows of what she calls "post/colonial migrations" throughout the "region" but with a focus on the Okinawan case and "in the context of existing American hegemony" in the Asia-Pacific (with some sustained attention paid to its clientelist relationship with partner and ally Japan), arguing that such migrations are not only due to "socio-economic and politico-economic factors, but are also triggered by continuing U.S. hegemony in the region and the need to perpetuate the status quo" (Zulueta 2011). One can have no quarrel with the research information that Zulueta then marshals to develop her complicated arguments and support her critical contentions. Indeed, at times, the veracity of this research information (centering on Okinawa as "an internal colony of the Japanese nation-state" and as "a semi-colonial territory" of the USA in Asia, including the massive evictions/displacements or almost routine yet historic abjection of its indigenes by the U.S.-Japan imperial partnership) seems too urgent and obvious that she risks repeating its citation several times in the paper if only

to ensure that its indisputability is vouchsafed.

Such research, particularly on (to use her terms) the “socio-economic” and “politico-economic,” as well as cultural, arrangements and formations spawned by the militarism--perhaps the old formulation, “military-industrial complex,” remains serviceable--that forms the base and basis for the U.S. World system in the Asia-Pacific region (with the defense of a presumably demilitarized ally like Japan as a geopolitical objective), is very much in sync with the cutting-edge and most recent transdisciplinary research and critique in this area undertaken by leading feminist and indigenous/activist scholars in Asian, Pacific Islander, and Asian American Studies.⁵ In terms of research information and critical objectives, then, one can find little fault with Zulueta’s paper.

Conceptual and Categorical Critique

I now wish to return to the theoretical and critical angle that, I believe, one must take on Zulueta’s work.⁶ I have every investment in helping Zulueta refine her conceptual and theoretical formulations in this paper for I find them very novel (she offers a distinctive terminology of her own, based on a certain strand of social and critical theorizing across the social scientific and humanistic disciplines). I also consider her theoretical tack here reflective of a trend that, in my opinion, should take more traction in the academic conversations about American empire in which we are, as Filipinos, both interested participants: *the comparative and comprehensive examination of the particular hegemonic formations that the U.S. establishes in its various dominions.*

The concepts and categories Zulueta uses are both historical and heuristic in character. For example, she takes pains to differentiate between *the Occupation* and *the “Occupation”* (in quotes) of Okinawa, the *former* term to refer to the 1945-1972 period of American military rule over it, following the surrender of Japan after WWII and its postwar remaking as a client state and subaltern partner in the American military-industrial complex that is thereby established; and the *latter* term to refer to both that historic Occupation and what she calls “the occupation of ‘place’ (i.e. Okinawa),” or the continuing and decisive U.S. militarist presence on the island with 75% of its base complex for the region being lodged there.⁷ Considered in relation to her characterization of the Asia-Pacific region as “the space of occupation” of the American empire--although in another place, she qualifies that “I use the concept of ‘space’ to describe this area in the simplest sense and refer to the fluidity of movement (notwithstanding nation-state borders) in the region”--such an aforementioned notion of “place” (and its contradistinction from “space” in succeeding formulations) does truly allow her to map the various striations, even sedimentations, of U.S. imperial hegemony throughout the Asia-Pacific with the occupation of Okinawa as “place” being, as she argues, its cornerstone.

There was, however, in the various senses of *space* and *place* as used, the

possibility of confusion. In my field of cultural studies and discourse analysis, one might characterize Zulueta's compositional rhetoric and her terminology as "over-determined" (a lay understanding of this would be: "unnecessarily complicated," for those seeking more parsimonious formulations; and "multiply and simultaneously determined," for those desirous of more ambiguous and open-ended analysis). Some of the phenomenological work of the cultural geographer and philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan on these fundamental concepts, over against, say Doris Massey's theorization of space which the author otherwise deploys, might come in handy here (1990 [1974]; 2001). In particular, and in ways I find extremely congenial to my own literary-critical bent (since it involves meaning-making and a kind of literary hermeneutics), Tuan's' basic distinction between *space* and *place* as critical concepts and analytical categories may help in accounting for the contingencies and contradictions that beset colonial and postcolonial discoursing over the milieux and environmental stakes of imperial encounters and power relationships.

Space, for Tuan, is the bigger concept than *Place*, given what he calls its 'countless alveoli' [from *alveolus*, cavity, womb, scope]. *Place*, in Tuan's terms, is simply defined as "a [S]pace charged with meaning or narrative." In short, *Space* might be the term to use when referring, generally, to dimensional units or demarcations of all kinds, and when aspiring to a certain objectivity about one's descriptions or delineations of them. To cite what might seem a pedestrian example (but which should adequately illustrate Tuan's elemental distinction), one might, with the term "planet," refer to the earth as a terrestrial "space" that is, in fundamental or essential characteristics, alike all such other entities in the universe that can go by that astronomical designation. But as a "space" inhabited by human beings--and on this account alone, in addition to their history of development within it, as species--a particular planet like earth becomes and gets localizable as all manner of "place" for human beings, and ceases to be mere terrestrial space (reflected, in turn, by the term "world" by which human beings designate the "meaning" or reality of this terrestrial space for them).

This distinction, heuristic as it is, may allow Zulueta to retain both her qualifying sense of the Asia-Pacific as the "space of occupation" of the USA that notes its hegemonic yet *untotalizable* reach across it (given "nation-state borders"), and to introduce Okinawa, indeed, as a "place of [U.S.] Occupation." Still, for Okinawans, the island might be a "place of [U.S.] Occupation" but it also remains a *space* "charged with meaning and narrative" particular to them, which is, as their own kind of place, e.g. as natal home. It is thus not the same "place," even as, *spatially*, one is speaking of the same island home for Okinawans and a gigantic base complex for Americans and Japanese at one and the same time. One can then highlight, as Zulueta somewhat does, but perhaps, with more elaboration than the mere statements of them in the paper, the deimperializing cultures and movements of Okinawan inhabitants and diasporics, including related resistance movements in other parts of the vast *spaces* over which the insular and insulated militaristic and

imperial presence of the United States, via Okinawa, otherwise seeks to preside, or claim as its virtual dominions.⁸

In conclusion, one might quibble with Zulueta's claim for Okinawa in the present (and historically) as a simultaneously "typical" and "unique" case of conditions and quandaries that arise wherever the USA maintains such areas of military basing and unilaterally claims neocolonial sway over them. The same argument can hold true, actually, for just about every other area of insular or archipelagic extraterritoriality that the United States has characteristically occupied and continues to subject to its neocolonial hegemony throughout the American Century (and what is now called the Pacific Century). That is to say, such extraterritorial dominions can be said to possess the typical characteristics of an insular neocolony of the USA and to manifest formations unique or particular to each one of them--one can make the same description, in other words, of Guam, Diego Garcia, Hawaii, the American Samoa, even the Caribbean island "possessions" of the USA, etc., with all sorts of contemporizing arguments pertinent to each case. The question, it seems, concerns the historical formation and precedence of the Okinawan model of American post/coloniality or imperial insularity, which must be traced to an alternative one that might better exemplify the development and consequences of an American empire that is insular and extraterritorial: the Philippines and the neo/post-colonial formation of Filipinos (as illustrated briefly with the specific case of U.S. Navy enlistees, at the beginning of my comments). At this point, we now know that this "extraterritorial insularity," if you like, of the American empire is a fundamental characteristic to it, which helps to explain the extreme difficulty of making it an object of critique (in terms of accounting and accountability), in the field of empire and postcolonial studies, especially of the comparatist kind.

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Notes

1. Also first cited in Quinsaas, "An Exercise on How to Join the Navy and Still Not See the World," in Quinsaas, et al. (1976, 108, 110, and 111n13). See Yen Le Espiritu, *Filipino American Lives* which also cites and culls Ingram's report after Quinsaas's lead (34n63).
2. Otherwise, Filipino navymen cooked and served the officers' meals as cooks and waiters, and maintained and cleaned the officers' "galley, wardroom and living spaces" as cabin boys. Off-ship, they served as houseboys for officers and as kitchen help, dishwashers, and bus boys in the Naval Academy mess halls. If their officers so wished, they could also be tasked to babysit household pets or to wait on the officers' wives as "personal servants." Ingram writes that "Filipino messboys also provided that added touch of luxury and class to the Coast Guard dining room for Department of Transportation executives" and were, in fact, a major point of contention as a set of perks between the Treasury Department (which then had jurisdiction over the Coast Guard) and the Department of Transportation (which was then seeking this jurisdiction for itself) in past interdepartmental discussions or negotiations. In addition to being "requisitioned to add class to important dinners" by yet another federal agency (the Defense Department), Filipino stewards also served presidential advisers, staff members, "assorted bigwigs," and the President in the White House dining rooms (1970, 18).
3. Jesse Quinsaas notes that Ingram's report was followed by a similar exposé in *Time* Magazine and suggests that it may have led to the "full-fledged investigation" (on the use of stewards in the military and the U.S. President's staff) conducted by one Senator, William Proxmire, in the early 1970s. This senatorial investigation, along with the demands of the civil rights movement, forced the Navy to revise its longstanding practice of limiting Filipinos to the steward rating by 1973, although in 1973, still fully 9,000 of 11,000 Navy stewards were Filipinos and they were curiously and inexplicably designated in U.S. Navy statistical categories not as "Filipinos" but as "Malaysians" (1976, 108); on slight improvements in Filipino employment status in the Navy since these investigations and the 1973 policy reform, see Espiritu (1995, 16).
4. For the "scenario" and quotations, see Quinsaas (97-98).
5. As embodied for example in the pioneering volume *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonizing Future in Asia and the Pacific*, edited by Shigematsu and Camacho (2010), or the work of such critical scholars as Lisa Yoneyama, Candance Fujikane, Vernadette Gonzalez, Jonathan Okamura, Wesley Iwao Ueunten, etc.
6. In my case, I do so from the perspective of our common location in the Philippine academy, where it remains unusual--unless they have acquired their academic training

and degrees abroad in recent decades--for Filipino sociologists and anthropologists to make their accounts of the social and cultural formation of their object communities include, if not subtend upon, a sustained and self-reflexive exposition of their compositional rhetoric and critical categories. The so-called postmodern (sometimes, linguistic) turn in social analysis and cultural anthropology remains a novelty for many Filipino practitioners, or is still largely seen as a development and kind of work to be met with skepticism (if not hostility) by local disciplinary institutional authorities (a situation as equally true of Philippine historiography, political science, and even, strangely enough, language studies/linguistics, with few exceptions). I do not have the space in this commentary to engage in institutional critique and speculate why this is the case in the formal Philippine academy, including and especially in its leading universities. I merely point out this state of social science research in the Philippine context--the fact that, methodologically, what has been, for sometime, a matter of course elsewhere still continues to be a matter of liminal emergence in our part of the globe--to highlight the achieved singularity of such a study as Zulueta's, and to express my appreciation of its conceptual daring and admirable theoretical self-consciousness, either of which is accomplished without sacrificing a certain notion of empirical rigor that still dominates or obtains in her own field/s.

7. For a comprehensive triangulation of the U.S.-Japan partnership with the somewhat analogous case of the Philippines (at least while it subsisted and still remains as a kind of neocolony), see the volume edited by Fujiwara and Nagano (2011).
8. Speaking of "space" and its colonizations or inhabitations/reterritorializations as "place(s)," Zulueta might also want to check out this new and exciting new field, *Nesology*, that seeks to study what one of its leading theorists Antonis Balasopoulous calls, "the island form." Balasopoulous himself seeks to promote a form of critique and a method of analysis germane to archipelagic societies and cultural formations which he terms, following Joan Brandt, "geopoetics" (geopoetics, in terms that favor Zulueta's own critical foci here, considers the "interrelatedness...of the poetic, the theoretical, and the sociopolitical" along with the spatial (2008, 24n24). Balasopoulous elegantly defines *Nesology* as both "the discursive production of insularity" (the island-form as pressed into all sorts of geopolitical and conceptual deployments) and its critical study or theorization, particularly in the context of colonial and neo/post-colonial histories.