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Interview

Resituating Reciprocity within Longer Legacies of Colonization: A Conversation

Shane Bernardo and Terese Guinsatao Monberg

Abstract

This conversation/article resituates the concept of reciprocity, as it has been theorized and enacted in rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies, within a larger framework of social justice, one that recognizes legacies of struggle, survival and perseverance. When situated within the Filipinx indigenous notion of *kapwa*, reciprocity takes a temporal turn not only in recognizing that building trust and reciprocity happen repeatedly over time but also in recognizing how enacting reciprocity extends beyond initial research contexts, participants, and outcomes. Enacting reciprocity requires slowing down in time and working with others in social justice work strategically, tactically, and repeatedly over longer durations. To see ourselves as reciprocal beings means that we continually see ourselves as members of a larger community invested in making structural asymmetries legible and open to deep revision.

Shane Bernardo is leading a workshop on food literacies in my undergraduate Language, Literacy, and Culture seminar in the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities at Michigan State University (MSU). As Bernardo leads us through a workshop around the terms "food security, food justice, and food sovereignty," I listen to students connect these concepts to their own experiences and families, models of community engagement, institutionalized definitions of literacy, and to histories of colonization. The discussion reminds me of the paths that Bernardo and I have traveled— separately and together[1] —to deepen our understanding of ongoing histories of Filipinx/American colonization and resistance, to untangle legacies of intergenerational trauma and wisdom, and to gather methods for building healing centered community-based spaces.

The story of how I came to meet Bernardo reveals a dense and generative network of Detroit-based community activists and organizers. In 2014, I contacted Emily Lawsin-Pinay poet, historian, community organizer, co-founder of the Detroit Asian Youth (DAY) Project, and current Vice President of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS)—about the possibility of taking students on a tour of Asian American Detroit, similar to the one she'd helped organize for the 2010 US Social Forum. Lawsin referred me to Bernardo and Soh Suzuki, an alum of MSU who credits his time there as motivating his work with Asian American communities in Detroit (Wey). In addition to his work with the Detroit Chinatown Revitaliza-

tion Workgroup, Suzuki is also a co-founder of the DAY Project, where he worked with Bernardo. This is how I met Suzuki and Bernardo, who led myself, Dr. Anna Pegler-Gordon, and our students on a tour that emphasized spaces of Asian American history and community organizing in Detroit. Since then, Bernardo and I have had several conversations revolving around food, place, and the questions that shape our lifes/work. Through this collaboration, we've also come to learn that we both have ancestral roots in the Cagayan Valley, specifically in the land (re)named the "Nueva Vizcaya province" by Spanish colonizers.

Taking into account the long ongoing histories and layers of colonization in the Philippines and throughout the Filipinx diaspora, Bernardo defines "food justice" as "expansive, deeply spiritual and part of a long journey of healing from intergenerational trauma" (4). A storyteller, healing practitioner, anti-oppression and food justice organizer, Bernardo sees food justice work as deeply grounded not only in the Filipinx diaspora but also in Detroit, a majority-Black city and the ancestral territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. Over the years, Bernardo has been involved with a number of organizations in Detroit connected to food justice and social justice, including his work as a facilitator for Uprooting Racism, Planting Justice—a group that works to address the injustice of racism in the Detroit Food System.

In rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies, definitions of reciprocity have often focused on the "give-and-take" that researchers negotiate with community members in the process of conducting research (Cushman; Takayoshi and Powell). These models of reciprocity call for researchers to be attentive to and accountable for establishing reciprocal relationships that are mutually empowering. While there is agreement that collaborative relationships are not always reciprocal, there is some disagreement about how well reciprocity can alleviate or mitigate asymmetries of structural power (even if only within the context of the collaboration/project). For example, Ellen Cushman recognizes that "asymmetries are not only always already present ... but are the very thing that can be used to forward the strivings of participants" (151). We want to expand this idea further. While the idea of give-and-take works toward more conscious negotiations of power between academic institutions and community members, a social justice framework calls for ongoing reciprocity beyond the immediate partnership.

Academic notions of reciprocity recognize that building university-community partnerships/projects often includes defining community needs and desired impacts, navigating roles and responsibilities, and collaboratively assessing outcomes. There is also a shared sense that shared commitment to work together over a sustained period of time enacts reciprocity. Less explicitly discussed in the discipline is how reciprocity takes shape within a social justice or food justice framework. Situating the idea of "give and take" within the layered histories and ongoing practices of settler (and other forms of) colonialism in the Philippines and the Filipinx diaspora, for example, foregrounds the asymmetrical relationships defining the givers and takers. It may be possible to temporarily alleviate these asymmetries of power within the context of a

specific project, but a more expansive form of reciprocity means doing the work of revising structures of power in continual conversation with others.

My own understanding of reciprocity extends temporally in various ways, from before my time as a graduate student to present and future conversations; my understanding continues to develop through conversations with community members and organizers within and beyond the academy. My ongoing conversation with food justice organizer Shane Bernardo, only part of which is represented here, confirms this deeper, broader notion of reciprocity. Bernardo and I see reciprocity as situated within a much longer timeframe that recognizes legacies of struggle, survival, collective resistance and commitment. In the conversation that follows, we examine the concept of reciprocity through the lens of food justice and the indigenous Filipinx notion of *kapwa,* "a 'reciprocal being' between self and other secured only in give-and-take over time between the parties involved" (Mendoza and Perkinson). Resituating reciprocity within an understanding of kapwa creates a much longer arc, one that recognizes how building trust happens repeatedly over time and that enacting reciprocity extends beyond any given research project, its participants/co-researchers, or its outcomes. Enacting reciprocity asks us to slow down in time and do the work repeatedly over long durations of time. To see ourselves as reciprocal beings means we see ourselves not as separate from and working with community members; we see ourselves instead *as* community members invested in making structural asymmetries legible and open to deep revision.

TM[2]: Let me begin by thanking you, Shane, for collaborating with me on this project, for the stories and knowledge you've shared with me. When we first met, you were working at Earthworks Urban Farm but as you've told me before, your work goes beyond any kind of employment. You've talked at length about how your work is tied to the place of Detroit and your relationship with the land, not just the Filipinx diaspora, but also Detroit as a majority Black city, and home to the Three Fires Confederacy. And when you came to speak at MSU, you explained how these relationships and knowledge systems were central to your work.[3] And I think they are also central to the ways we've talked about reciprocity.

SB[4]: Yes, I grew up working in my family's grocery store on the west side of Detroit. Our family helped cultivate a nourishing environment for Southeast Asian, West African, and Afro-Caribbean communities by carrying culturally relevant foods that facilitated the sharing of recipes, stories, and traditions connected to these foods. We were able to transcend otherwise transactional relationships between retailer and consumer even within a heavily racially segregated city over a sustained period of time.

That's where my idea of reciprocity first started to form. My own liberation is intertwined with those in Detroit, especially Black and Indigenous people. Our histories around western imperialism and colonialism are all intertwined—and colonization is still going on. It's not just in the past. Also, Detroit is on occu-

pied territory of The Three Fires Confederacy: the Ojibwe, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi.

TM: And this understanding stems not just from living in Detroit but also being part of the Filipinx diaspora, embodying those legacies of colonization, and taking an active role in reclaiming ancestral knowledge and wisdom.

SB: Yes. Because my parents came to the US after the 1965 Immigration Act, Leny Mendoza Strobel's book, *Coming Full Circle: The Process of Decolonization among Post-1965 Filipino Americans* has been really formative for me. In the book, Leny says, "As my identity shifted from being an immigrant to being a settler, I realized that questions of being an ethnic, diasporic, and transnational person are based on the paradigm that mutes the violent history of Native genocide on this continent. This history is connected to the colonial subjugation of the Philippines during the imperial era and now finds a new articulation in the global capitalist system that engulfs, suffocates, and threatens the survival of all species on the planet" (xii).

Like my ancestors, Native Americans were displaced by settler states of Spain, France, England, and subsequent settler nations like the US. When we recognize ourselves as part of the occupation of Turtle Island, for example, it allows us to understand our role in perpetuating the displacement of Indigenous peoples. This view of history creates greater clarity around how we maintain the status quo or dismantle it. Reconstructing history also makes it possible to identify with those who have been subjugated to similar forms of violence. It's really important to recognize that we all have a role in liberating our collective humanity starting with those whose land we are on. This common analysis also raises the importance of healing that comes from reconnecting with land through the practice of kapwa.

TM: Leny's work on kapwa has been sustaining me for a long time. I remember finding her *Amerasia* article, "A Personal Story: Becoming a Split Filipina Subject," (1993), when I was in graduate school. It was the first scholarly piece I'd found that was written by a Filipina/American decolonial scholar who not only uses story to theorize the legacy of imperialism on our land, bodies, minds, and relationships but also introduced me to the Filipinx indigenous concepts of Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino Psychology). At the time, I was in conversation with a group of American Indian/Indigenous scholars on rhetorics of empire, historical/cultural memory, sovereignty, and decolonization, so her work really resonated with me. I've followed her and the work of her sister, Lily Mendoza, who also writes about Sikolohiyang Pilipino and the Filipinx indigenous movement in the academy. Consistent with kapwa is the need for us to tell our stories. Can you say more about kapwa since it's so central to the way we are re-situating reciprocity?

SB: Yes. Kapwa is an ancestral principle and practice that preceded western contact. Founded in common indigenous wisdom of interconnectedness and interdependence, kapwa is often expressed through sibling, elder and ancestor rever-

ence, spirituality, cosmology, and Earth-based subsistence traditions. In both virtue and practice, we can maintain the sacredness of our relationships between ourselves and the Earth. If I harm you, I harm myself. If I love you, I love myself. There is a quality of intimacy and shared risk involved. We are not separate. We are connected.

TM: This is very different from the idea of give-and-take that is transactional rather than enacting "reciprocal being" or being in alliance or acting as an accomplice within a longer period of time going forward. Too often notions of reciprocity assume specific assumptions about time and space. For example, some researchers often see reciprocity as happening during the research project, so the relevant timeframe is the length of the project and the relevant landscape is the physical space of the interaction. But I see the temporal and spatial dimensions as having a much longer arc. When we think of kapwa or of resituating reciprocity within a framework of social justice or food justice, the arc of time expands deep into history and far into the future. And the space is similarly expansive. There are others beyond the research site or project who we are continually building "reciprocal being" with, who are teaching us about ourselves.[5]

SB: Exactly. By narrowly defining reciprocity as give and take, academia aligns itself with the extractive measures of capitalism as well as the violent history of Indigenous erasure. We see this within the tragic history of boarding schools both here on Turtle Island and within the missionary occupation of the Philippines, where, post-secondary education only existed within heavily fortified compounds where all commerce took place. Your literal survival meant adopting your oppressor's ways found within institutions of higher education because it led to social and economic mobility. When this happened, we lost our connection to kapwa when our indigeneity was forcibly traded for material comforts.

These structural and systemic disparities of power continue to persist and are still being practiced. The university encourages free thought as long as it doesn't challenge where it derives its power from. This is why it is so critical to deepen knowledge of self and formation of indigeneity. This is an ongoing process of being in relationship with the land, which creates a shared identity through which kapwa can be practiced. In other words, there's an "attunement" that happens within a shared sense of self. This aligning of identities rooted in one's indigenous relationship to land is what makes kapwa possible or reciprocity possible for that matter.

TM: In my own work, I'm often confronted with ironies, tensions, and ongoing legacies of colonization. Foregrounding structural and systemic disparities that inevitably inform how community partnerships and collaborations are initiated and developed is important, including the—always embodied—narratives we bring to those conversations. For example, savior narratives and community deficit narratives have been critiqued but are also ongoing, and what is often missing is a larger story of how these disparities came to be and continue. Thinking about attunement is something that's not often recognized in academ-

ic approaches to reciprocity as it's been discussed in rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies. Being in relationship with the land and with each other shifts how we might think about reciprocity. Negotiating terms of exchange as separate beings who come together in the context of a specific project is no longer the frame of reference. We become, instead, shared beings negotiating a shared future that harms or sustains us. Key to kapwa is coming back to the knowledge that we have living, breathing knowledge systems and traditions that preceded our separation into colonized subjects, diasporic subjects, and settlers—or even into academics vs. community members. Let's connect this back to food justice.

SB: Naturally, we all eat. We all have a personal relationship with food. Food justice therefore becomes a necessary framework for understanding kapwa.

Dr. Joan May Cordova, movement scholar and educator said once, "The revolution starts in the kitchen." This quote speaks to how food is an entry point to understanding one's connection to traditional food ways, cosmologies, creation stories, rituals and how these practices act as a medium for maintaining a healthy connection with the Earth. By using food justice to examine how kapwa is an intrinsic principle found within these cultural traditions, we can start drawing from a repository of ancestral wisdom that preceded being displaced by imperialism and colonialism.

Food justice is not just a theoretical framework though. It's also a praxis.

In learning and reclaiming of ancestral wisdom, we also need to unlearn how we've been colonized. Central to the ongoing practice of reclaiming ancestral wisdom is the parallel tradition of storytelling. Oral tradition is the primary way our subsistence traditions were handed down through countless generations. In practice, storytelling is an embodied practice that challenges authoritative notions of empirical knowledge found within academic institutions. Revalorizing folk tales, creation stories and embodied knowledge like intuition is primary to one's formation and sense of indigeneity. Whereas intuition is rooted in a deep intimate connection with one's ancestral lands, it was also one of the first things we lost when displaced by settler colonialism.

As an ongoing life praxis, food justice allows us to reclaim an ancestral identity in the form of traditional subsistence practices like kapwa, storytelling and intuition.

TM: As you're talking, I'm reminded of work of the late, amazingly brilliant Dr. Dawn Bohulano Mabalon on how Spanish and US colonization impacted Filipinx/American foodways. In her book chapter, "As American as Jackrabbit Adobo," she traces both how our food was seen as inferior, how the foodways created upon our journey to the US indexes colonization, history, culture, and struggle—but also how Filipinx Americans remained connected to the land to feed and sustain themselves. Dawn's passion and life's work were based in community and oral history. Her enactment of reciprocity is not transactional but honorable and has community sustainment at its core. Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales has talked about Dawn's famous saying that "history is *tsismis* (gos-

sip) with footnotes," which honors the storytelling tradition that is central to making history and this, too, enacts kapwa.

SB: Personal narratives are so critical for reconstructing history as well as our own identities. Stories have the power to both heal and normalize violence. As such, we also need to reclaim the practice of oral tradition and storytelling to right our proximity to each other in the diaspora, the Earth as well as our ancestors and sense of spirituality in regards to kapwa.

TM: In past conversations, we've talked about the connections between reciprocity, the diaspora, and food justice. Can you say more about how those of us in the diaspora (re)negotiate our relationships to the land and our foodways—and how you see the diaspora in relationship to food justice?

SB: Land is essential to any operative form of food justice. Without land or water for that matter, there is no food.

Being in the diaspora, you are met with the challenge of constantly negotiating your relationship with land that you are not indigenous to. This way of looking at diaspora can also include any land you are not native to including urban areas. Cities are very input intensive. The more dense they become, the more external inputs you need to sustain your everyday needs like food much less maintain any sense of food justice.

Essentially, the more sedentary you become, the less indigenous you are. One of the primary characteristics of indigenous peoples is migration. Which is counterintuitive to notions of indigeneity. You would think if you spent more time in one place, you would have a higher degree of intimacy. The ability to migrate from one place to another whether on land or water requires intimate knowledge of whole ecosystems and habitats.[6]

Whereas your primary orientation to a place is one of a wage earner, laborer or consumer, you lose any ability to be self-reliant. This is why food justice frameworks need to be grounded in an understanding of where, when and how you became part of the diaspora.

TM: In *Coming Full Circle*, Leny Mendoza Strobel says that kapwa "refers to a shared sense of inner self or 'I am part of you and you are part of me'" (71). We've been in dialogue, sharing stories since we met on the APA Detroit tour. And in practicing kapwa while writing this piece, we've come to know that we both have ancestral roots in the Cagayan Valley/Nueva Vizcaya province of the Philippines. We've talked about oral tradition, connections to the land, and languages that were spoken but not written. I've found that stories about where, when, and how my family and community became part of the diaspora are not always known or told. Intergenerational trauma impacts how those stories are held, carried, and passed on. But it's not just about our own stories, it's also about enacting our diasporic understandings through kapwa to see how these traumas, these forms of colonization, continue to impact people in the Philippines, in Detroit, today.

SB: Yes, and colonization is ongoing in the Philippines. Indigenous people, like the Lumad in Mindanao, a majority Muslim population, have been forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands since 1521. They refer to this as the four-hundred-year war. Modern day settler colonialism looks like multinational corporations mining for gold and starting huge pineapple plantations that displace trees and precious habitats along the coast. So whenever they have a really large storm or hurricane, they aren't able to withstand the massive flooding that takes place in those areas. So these multinational corporations are really displacing the local ecosystem that the people depend on for sustenance and for preserving their land-based traditions.[7]

In this vein, climate change is part of the legacy of colonialism and the ongoing displacement of indigenous peoples, both here and other former Spanish colonies that were taken under US imperial rule.

TM: This really reframes notions of food justice and reciprocity within that longer temporal arc. Colonization is continuous and has deep historical roots—and still frames how/why we enter into community with others and into community partnerships and collaborations. When practiced as a healing-centered space, community can help us practice kapwa—to come to know ourselves and to see ourselves in community with others, which—in turn—helps us to know ourselves. It's coming full circle, in Leny Strobel's words, again and again. Because of my own experience growing up in community and my work on FANHS, I see a much longer arc of time when we talk about working with, being in relationship with, and being reciprocal with community. This longer understanding, this relational, historical, and constellated framework of social justice means that reciprocity should be enacted not just once but continually over time.

SB: Building community and practicing kapwa go hand in hand especially when we start talking about healing from trauma that stems from being displaced. One coping mechanism of trauma is isolation. As trauma is internalized, shame becomes more and more pronounced. This shame triggers our fight, flight and freeze response and tells us to protect ourselves. Building community is the antidote to trauma. Kapwa is the antidote to trauma. Kapwa is ancestral wisdom that allows us to create a sense of safety, belonging and affirmation needed for individual as well as collective healing. By practicing kapwa and building community around a shared identity, we actively reclaim what western imperialism and colonialism forcibly took from us, our humanity.

TM: Many people think about how to develop community engagement projects around food justice issues and to how bring their students into these projects. I've spoken with faculty who approach community engagement with forms of reciprocity more like kapwa because they come from and work with communities that have histories of intergenerational trauma and long legacies of intergenerational wisdom. What would you say to faculty who are looking for ways to get students involved with the food justice movement?

SB: Community engagement is a really great way of getting involved in food justice work. But I encourage people to start where you already have community and where you already have relationships. Because there's a certain way that community service gets used that perpetuates and recreates systems of oppression. We may have really good intent, but we may insert ourselves in situations where we may not be the best one there that should be serving. So I always tell people to start with your own families and in your own communities, again, with people that you already have relationships with. And they may find that working with their own families and communities is probably the most meaningful work they'll ever do.

Notes

1. In referring to the paths we've "traveled--separately and together," we invoke these meanings in relationship to the indigenous Filipinx notion of kapwa. Connected to kapwa is the concept of loob or inner self, which is always seen in relation to community—as opposed to more Western notions of self as individualistic. As Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino psychology) scholar, Virgilio Enriquez explains:

> When asked for the closest English equivalent of kapwa, one word that comes to mind is the English word "others." However, the Filipino word kapwa is very different from the English word "others." In Filipino, kapwa is the unity of the "self" and "others." The English "others" is actually used in opposition to the "self," and implies the recognition of the self as a separate identity. In contrast, kapwa is a recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others (as quoted in Mendoza and Perkins 288).

For extended discussions of kapwa, loob, labas, and Sikolohiyang Pilipino, see also Strobel; David; and Nadal.

2. Terese Guinsatao Monberg's preferred pronouns are she/her/hers/they/them.

3. MSU's Asian Pacific Studies Program brought Shane Bernardo to campus to facilitate classroom workshops and to give a public talk in February 2018. His visit was made possible through a collaboration between MSU's Asian Pacific American Studies Program (APAS), the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities (RCAH), the Center for Regional Food Systems (CRFS), and the Asian Pacific American Student Organization (APASO).

4. Shane Bernardo's preferred pronouns are he/him/his/they/them.

5. On the importance of recognizing a sedimented notion of community, see Monberg's "Like the Molave: Listening for Constellations of Community through 'Growing Up Brown' Stories" (2016).

6. In her discussion of land-based literacies, Gabriela Raquel Rìos reminds us that "Indigenous relationality recognizes that humans and the environment are in a relationship that is co-constituted and not just interdependent. Additionally, Indigenous relationality recognizes the environment's capacity to *produce* relations" (emphasis added 64).

7. Filipinxs across the Philippines—including those from Nueva Vizcaya where we both trace our roots—have been organizing for decades against large-scale mining projects that have been displacing indigenous peoples. Mining policies like the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 have created favorable conditions for these companies to colonize the land.

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Author Bios

Shane Bernardo grew up working in his family's ethnic grocery store on the west side of Detroit, Michigan. For over 13 years, Shane's family helped cultivate a nourishing environment for Southeast Asian, West African, and Afro-Caribbean cultures through culturally relevant foods, recipes, stories, and tradition. Through shared food staples and customs, Shane developed a heightened awareness of social, economic, political and historical conditions his family had in common with others within a geographically, racially, ethnically and culturally stratified community. Shane is also a life-long resident of Detroit. He has been a facilitator for Uprooting Racism, Planting Justice, outreach coordinator for Earthworks Urban Farm, racial equity committee member for the Michigan Farmers Market Association, and Local Food Systems Coordinator for Detroit's Allied Media Conference. He has also been awarded fellowships with the Center for Whole Communities, Environmental Leadership Program, Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership, the Detroit Equity Action Lab, and Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture. Shane is a food justice organizer and anti-oppression facilitator focused on issues that lie at the intersections of food, health, healing and spirituality.

Terese Guinsatao Monberg is a third generation Pinay born and raised in Chicago. She is Associate Professor of Trancultural Rhetoric and Writing and a founding faculty member of the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities (RCAH) at Michigan State University where she has also directed the Asian Pacific American Studies Program. Her research and teaching focus on methodologies for uncovering, documenting, mobilizing, and renewing Asian American and Filipinx American rhetorical legacies. Her work has been published in *Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric*, *Reflections: A Journal of Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy*, *enculturation: a journal of rhetoric, writing, and culture*, and *Community Literacy Journal*. She is co-editor of *Building a Community, Having a Home* (with Jennifer Sano-Franchini and K. Hyoejin Yoon) and a special issue of *enculturation* on transnational Asian American rhetoric (with Morris Young). She serves as a Trustee of the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS).