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## <Book Review>

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**Sony Coráñez Bolton. *Crip Colony: Mestizaje, US Imperialism, and the Queer Politics of Disability in the Philippines*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2023.**

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contemporary book.

The volume's approach also opens questions about authorship: are these stories really spoken in the victims' own voices? Or do they inevitably come to the reader already influenced, perhaps by the framing offered by the Civic Women's Network style? Hara puts these questions squarely on the table in the translator's note. Of course, thinking critically about authorship is not to discredit these stories, but instead to offer further nuance for a richer reading. At the same time, it reaffirms the importance of acknowledging and thus working with authorship: all stories are crafted, and the craft is an important one, because well-crafted stories are not only available to be read, but also highly readable.

Although (from a story-craft and readability point of view) these stories are far from perfect, the collection remains compelling because it stands as one of the very few available opportunities to hear from victims of the violence in Thailand's deep south. This book is recommended reading for anyone seeking to better understand religious violence and the Thailand "beyond the smiles" (as the original Thai collection was titled).

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### ***Crip Colony: Mestizaje, US Imperialism, and the Queer Politics of Disability in the Philippines***

SONY CORÁÑEZ BOLTON

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2023.

In this stunning theoretical and archival work, Sony Coráñez Bolton dives into the interstices of global colonial strategies and postcolonial projects by re-examining culturally significant Philippine images and narratives using the lenses of race, disability, and queerness. It is a monumental feat that begins with something small: a childhood memory of his mother using three languages—Spanish, English, and Tagalog—that lets him map out his own positionality as a mestizo Filipinx American professor of Spanish.

Throughout *Crip Colony*, Coráñez Bolton takes great pains to tease out the meanings and possibilities of the *mestizaje*, which is fundamental to his analysis of the ways that Philippine and Asian racial hierarchies were trafficked from the colonizers to the colonized, the primary difference between which, he argues consistently, is one of "imagined capacity" (p. 15). Referring to inter-racial mixing, *mestizaje* has been celebrated as an empowering space for the hybridity and plurality of Latin American cultures, but it has also been criticized for its erasure of indigeneity and its

participation in eugenics-based nationalism. In the Philippines, historical accounts have always foregrounded, often matter-of-factly, the supposed inability of native people to attain advancements in civilization as the basis for denying sovereignty; but Coráñez Bolton is the first scholar to identify this explicitly as colonial ableism, drastically reframing our knowledge of these histories by deploying a “crip colonial critique” (p. 34) that launches from economic, rehabilitative, and social models of disability in imperialist contexts.

The book’s structure takes us on a spatial and temporal journey as Coráñez Bolton first establishes the geographical and transnational milieu within and from which he writes, before transporting us, in the span of four compelling chapters, to the late nineteenth to early twentieth century Philippines. It is in this period of Philippine nationalist consciousness transitioning from one empire to another that he locates markers of colonial rehabilitation, where native subjects are reformed to comply with colonizer standards. In an epilogue the author returns us to the same milieu as the beginning, but with the contemporary limned more concretely in the somber light of the global pandemic and Asian hate in America.

The introductory chapter kicks off by referencing the tricky challenges of representation and assimilation in American society, as well as the apparent historical affinity between Mexicans and Filipinos. It must be pointed out that Coráñez Bolton parses his use of “Filipinx,” a gender-inclusive term inspired by Latin American communities’ use of “Latinx,” in a lengthy endnote. Engaging with intersectional theorists, the chapter establishes the framework of crip colonial critique as the use of the “queerness of disability” (p. 9) in managing the *indio*, carefully distinguishing between the tactics and attitudes of various imperialists toward their colonial subjects while identifying the Filipino *mestizaje* as the nexus of Spanish and Anglo-American ideologies. Crucially, the chapter argues that any disability reading must not ignore the extolment of a master race or the erasure, whether literal or symbolic, of any people, being that constructions of incapacity have served as the justification for the violence committed on them.

The first chapter reorients Filipinx American studies as disability studies using the key concepts of “benevolent rehabilitation” and “colonial bodymind” (p. 34). William McKinley’s Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation outlined the US policy toward its new acquisition, the Philippine Islands, utilizing hegemonic education to erase the violence of the Philippine–American war that saw, among other atrocities, the massacre that reduced Balangiga to a “howling wilderness” and the massacre of almost a thousand Tausug villagers in Bud Dajo. Coráñez Bolton coins “benevolent rehabilitation” to show the “false promise of assimilation” (p. 34) and the colonial logic of disability that creates racial hierarchies. By breaking down the discourse of racialized disability in four artifacts—McKinley’s proclamation, a political cartoon of the colonial classroom, Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden,” and Jose Rizal’s “Filipinas dentro de Cien Años” (The Philippines a century hence)—he sheds light on the “colonial bodymind” as the intersection of “the primitive, incapable, and dependent” body whose weakness invites violence, and

“the assumption of its cognitive deficiency” (p. 34), revealing, additionally, how this perceived deficiency was also depicted as feminine and/or infantile. Particularly interesting about Rizal’s essay that Coráñez Bolton highlights is his description of the friarocracy’s systematic oppression of natives evidently with the aim to reduce them into seemingly mindless bodies, a process that Rizal called *embrutecimiento* (literally, “the rendering of one into a brute”) (p. 57). But the writings of the mestizo Rizal were also filled with potentially fruitful contradictions, as the next chapter shows.

The second chapter offers a reading of the iconic Maria Clara in Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch me not) as a bastard mestiza whose insanity at the end of the novel opens up possibilities for queer and disability analyses. While Rizal wrote the ending ambiguously (was her final performative act of wailing, reported rumor-like, evidence of insanity or of sorrowful defiance?), Coráñez Bolton’s argument for madness heightens the protagonist Ibarra’s *ilustrado* rationality. In fact, he declares Maria Clara not simply as Ibarra’s love interest but as his foil: her feminized frailty and madness versus Ibarra’s masculinized virility and reason. As the direct progeny of Spanish colonial violence, Maria Clara not only betrays Ibarra and all that he represents, but she also ends up in confinement instead of marriage. There is no heteronormative nation-formation task in which she can participate. The novel confines her to the convent-asylum because, Coráñez Bolton argues, “[i]f the *ilustrado* is a figure of reason over superstitious faith, then the colonized’s incapacity and perceived deficiencies need to be displaced from the *mestizo* national bodymind” (p. 71). In other words, she is too disabled for the kind of nationalist discourse promoted by mestizo heroes. Reading further within the crip colonial framework, Coráñez Bolton uncovers an “imposed silence” where “Maria Clara’s agency in this moment exceeds the authorial intent of Rizal” (p. 82), asking the question of what centering the “mad mestiza” might yield for discussions of Filipino nationalism (p. 95). Readers might wonder, however, why Coráñez Bolton never alludes to the most famous madwoman in all of Philippine literature, Sisa. What kind of colonial archive might the comparison of the mad mestiza and the mad *india* create?

In the third chapter Coráñez Bolton fast-forwards to the early years of American imperialism to examine how the new *ilustrados* navigated the road to self-governance by negotiating with, and enforcing, the imperial gaze. Through the genre of colonial travel narratives, focusing on Teodoro Kalaw’s *Hacia la terra del czar* (Toward the land of the czar), the chapter not only problematizes the Philippines’ Asian-ness but also pushes for a better understanding of colonization as “mass disablement” and postcolonial thought as “an insistent corroboration of capacity under the duress of genocidal imperial violence” (p. 130). Coráñez Bolton shows where Kalaw constructs the educated Filipino as proof of successful American civilization in contrast to Russia’s failed imperialism, and reveals Kalaw’s positioning as an able-bodied, able-minded, civilized Filipino who finds in the image of the disabled Chinese woman a victim of her culture’s savagery, “an object of pity, rescue, and rehabilitation” (p. 105). In other words, the Filipino mestizo striving to prove himself worthy

of sovereignty becomes an agent of US imperialism by building the case of his capacity on the incapacitation of others.

The fourth chapter continues the interrogation of benevolent rehabilitation in the figure of the “frenzied Malay” (p. 136). The phenomenon of the *amok* (as in, “to run amok”) and the *Moro juramentado* (Moro warriors who wildly attacked Christian soldiers at the cost of their own lives) has been studied in the fields of medicine, religion, and racial history, but analyzing 1930s reports on cases of amok, the chapter stresses the colonial tactic of singling out the violence of the native so as to normalize, justify, and de-emphasize the violence of the empire. While narratives of revenge and ritualization may be found in these accounts, they gloss over the systemic sociocultural factors born through and from a long history of Moro resistance. The colonial framing of the native Moro as the “mad and savage Indian” degrades him into a “sign of disorder” that warrants rehabilitation (p. 153). Coráñez Bolton thus expounds on settler colonial logic and how it manifested in the Philippines through benevolent assimilation: “it split the Philippine people from their Indigenous population, and disability—namely, madness—manages this split . . . the reigns of control and management of the Indians fell to civilized and ‘rehabilitated’ Filipinos themselves” (p. 155). And so the colonial classroom continued its work of rehabilitation, and the “madness” of the unconquerable Moro became the “convenient scapegoat” for the failure of colonial government to comprehend or solve existing conflicts among the many different Filipino groups (pp. 160–161).

In the epilogue, Coráñez Bolton reflects on the ways that colonial violence pervades his own life, from his very existence as the product of US militarism through which his white father met his mother on the US naval base in Subic, to the ramifications of being Asian in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thinking about the “model minority, the good student,” he sums up the US colonial classroom as “an act of benevolence, a site of struggle in the Philippines, a site up (*sic*) uplift for the model minority, and a site of unthinkable cruelty and tragedy” (p. 166) and wraps up the book by reiterating “the political necessity of cross-racial alliance” (p. 166), how the intersectional and interdisciplinary approaches can enrich American studies, and the primal role of language, especially learning different languages, in forging solidarity with other cultures.

What is delightful about Coráñez Bolton’s writing is that it allows us to follow the rhizomatic paths that his scholarship takes across cultures and histories, and while at times readers might stumble on his academic syntax, his evident curiosity, humor, and painstaking interrogations make it difficult to put down the book. Additionally, while the images and texts he discusses have long been part of Philippine colonial archives, his translations from Spanish and his reading of both queerness and disability into the archipelago’s history of colonization unearth new, alternative framings to the long-standing political and sociocultural problems that plague the national imaginary.

This book is a must-read for any scholar interested in colonialism, postcolonialism, settler colonial studies, hybridity, comparative literature, translation work, queer theory, mad studies, and

intersectional disability studies. And while Coráñez Bolton is clearly invested in American studies thanks to the country's contemporary political and racial climate, his work is indispensable to Philippine studies, where the discourse of disability is still primarily religious and clinical or rehabilitative. No Philippine scholar theorizes on disability and nation to this extent. Where the book does not bridge the titular "queer politics of disability" to reach present-day Philippine society, emerging scholars seeking to articulate their realities can build on Coráñez Bolton's research to fill in the gap.

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***Siting Postcoloniality: Critical Perspectives from the East Asian Sinosphere***

PHENG CHEAH and CAROLINE S. HAU, eds.

Durham: Duke University Press, 2022.

Is it still meaningful to speak of the postcolonial today? Scholars of postcolonial studies may recall how Arif Dirlik once criticized the term's overt partiality toward culturalist discourses, which renders the concept vacuous as it becomes "the repository of a grab-bag of issues that anyone can choose from in accordance with his/her political and intellectual inclinations." In his critique, Dirlik also delineates the pitfalls resulting from "the spatial and temporal generalisation" of the term's applicability, and proposes the "testing of the method against the evidence of its new context[s]" (Dirlik 1999, 155).

Implicitly echoing Dirlik's call, while re-evaluating the seminal impact of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), *Siting Postcoloniality: Critical Perspectives from the East Asian Sinosphere*—edited by Pheng Cheah and Caroline S. Hau—reinstates the postcolonial as a useful prism of knowledge production. It does so persuasively by examining checkered histories from vantage points that intersect with the familiar loci of Western imperialism but have generally been neglected by postcolonial studies. Notably, the book explicates the postcolonial disposition of those disregarded "sites" against an unfolding global backdrop affected by three occurrences: the United States' disproportionate influence—politically, socially, and culturally—over international order after World War II; the Sino-Soviet split in the mid-twentieth century which undermined the notion of monolithic Communism and turned bipolarity into tripolarity during the Cold War; and lastly, the geopolitical and economic rise of China in the twenty-first century.

Indeed, *Siting Postcoloniality* aligns as well with the scholarship of Chua Beng Huat, Hamid Dabashi, and Walter D. Mignolo, who advocate reckoning with world regions whose historical and