

Undergraduate Research Symposium May 17, 2013 Mary Gates Hall

Online Proceedings

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MCNAIR SESSION - ECONOMIES OF EXPLOITATION, CULTURES OF RESISTANCE

Session Moderator: Sonnet Retman, American Ethnic Studies

295 MGH

3:45 PM to 5:15 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

Behind the Veils of Industry: The Filipina Mail-Order Bride as the Ultimate Western Male Fantasy

Merzamia Sison (Mimi) Cagaitan, Senior, English, Comparative History of Ideas

EIP Scholar, Mary Gates Scholar, Presidential Scholar, McNair Scholar

Mentor: Michelle Liu, English

Despite its negative associations with criminalized activities such as human trafficking, sex tourism, and prostitution, the modern mail-order bride industry continues to flourish – facilitating thousands of international marriages between “American men” (a category that includes all “Caucasian” or “Western” men) and foreign women (the majority of whom originate from Latin America, Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia). While there are legitimate factors tying the industry to the aforementioned criminal activities, my research will not dwell upon (nor will it altogether dismiss) a victim discourse in considering the life experiences of marriage migrants. Instead, my research will seek to recast women’s role in this international marriage-scape as agents who, despite institutional and structural limitations on their mobility and quality of life, manage to achieve forms of women empowerment through strategic participation in the international marriage market. In particular, I focus on women marriage migrants from the Philippines, a country of origin which, in being “formerly colonized by the United States, and currently neocolonized by U.S. corporate capital, best illustrates how colonial and military dominations are interwoven with sexual domination to provide the “ultimate Western male fantasy.” Part of an orientalist discourse, this “fantasy” posits Filipino women as politically passive, sexually exotic, and domestically compliant. My research utilizes the theoretical frameworks of Intersectionality and of Social Construction to examine how this “fantasy” combines sexualized racial stereotypes with racialized gender stereotypes to the harm of particularly Asian (and Asian Pacific American) women. Despite the various harm this colonial sexual mythology engenders,

case studies, a literature review, and content analysis reveal Filipino marriage migrants to be empowered women who are strategically, creatively, and, oftentimes, successfully, utilizing the same colonial fantasy to their economic, social, and national advantage – a counter-narrative marked by processes of self-construction, participation in hypergamy, and the production of a corollary female fantasy.

Cinema of Loss: Exploring the Role of War and Trauma in Burundian Films

Alejandro Les (Alex) Guardado, Senior, English (Creative Writing)

McNair Scholar

Mentor: Kate Cummings, English

In 2007, filmmaker and journalist Christopher Redmond co-founded the Burundi Film Center in eastern Africa. This non-profit organization allows Burundian filmmakers and other citizens to engage with cinematic art forms and communicate their culture through film. Furthermore, the BFC opens avenues for Burundian artists to explore the significance of some cultural themes, such as family relationships and sexuality, in their works. My research will focus on the cultural themes presented in these films as they arise from a perspective on war and trauma. Specifically, I will do a close reading of each film to study the significance of family relationships, sexuality, and education within a framework of war and trauma. A close reading of these films requires a careful and critical analysis of the narrative and imagery onscreen. This method allows me to analyze each film with a focus on particular images, dialogue, and narrative elements. My close readings of these films will aim to offer explanations and conclusions on how war and trauma inform these cultural productions. This methodology benefits my research because the subject of war and trauma is not always overt in these films. Theoretical works that inform my analyses come from Judith Butler’s work on vulnerability and affect, and David Eng and

David Kazanjian's work on mourning. I will analyze these texts in relation to the BFC student films that I discuss in my research. To conclude my research, I will offer a thorough discussion and explanation of how these cultural productions contribute to Hutu-Tutsi cultures and to the nation of Burundi. Specifically, I will provide insight on the implications of film-making practices in Third World countries.

Disrupting Narratives: Expressions of Resistance During the U.S. Occupation of the Dominican Republic, 1916-1924

Jessica Anne (Jessica) Gonzalez Nissen, Senior, History, International Studies: Latin America

Mary Gates Scholar, McNair Scholar

Mentor: Ileana Rodriguez-Silva, History

In many ways, popular understandings of the U.S. Occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1916-1924 and its complex consequences are incomplete. This understudied "intervention" has been virtually dismissed in U.S. collective memory, justified as one of many "reasonable" campaigns of the early 20th century necessary to ensure the emerging political and economic hegemony of the United States, and has been subsequently forgotten. As a result of this forgetting, what remains in U.S. collective historical memory is notably lacking a human element, prizing the actions of governments, politicians, and landed elites over the impacts to and responses of everyday people. This study attempts to disrupt the dominant narratives by uncovering some of the ways in which Dominican people resisted the conditions imposed by foreign invasion and occupation, paying particular attention to non-violent forms of resistance. By drawing upon newspaper articles, musical lyrics, and poetry in order to supplement our understanding and to serve as a foundation for critique of existing scholarship, this study also has the potential to demonstrate not only how the Dominican people have historically negotiated with, struggled against, and survived foreign actors, but also how they have transformed the very mechanisms that have sought to "civilize" them.

Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes: The Integrated Audience's Gaze on Black Performance

Alexander (Alex) Catchings, Senior, English

EIP Scholar, Mary Gates Scholar, McNair Scholar

Mentor: Sonnet Retman, American Ethnic Studies

This talk explores African American cinema, and the ways black representations emerge in different commercial contexts to appeal to interracial audiences. Understanding independent "black cinema" as films that intend to resist voyeuristic spectatorship, this talk distinguishes the economic disparities between expressly black cinema versus commercial cinema that employs specific, trope-centered representations of black characters. This discussion pivots around Manthia

Diawara's theoretical framework from "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance" (1988), which suggests that commercial films bearing the intent to propel negative narratives of African Americans can be viewed with a resistant, critical spectatorship by viewers of differing races. While Diawara is correct, and some directors have been producing more independent black cinematic works, this talk lays out the enduring economic boons and ramifications from continued voyeurism in black and commercial cinema. Pieces of cultural production addressed include Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000), Tyler Perry's *Madea* franchise, Tate Taylor's *The Help* (2011), Bruce Joel Rubin's *Ghost* (1990), and variety television shows including Richard Pryor's 1977 *The Richard Pryor Show* and Lorne Michaels' *Saturday Night Live* (1975). Ultimately, this talk analyzes how box office gains and television ratings both reflect and interact with black iconography and representation. Through this undertaking, a better understanding can be had as to the extent of veracity and implication when black artist Ralph Ellison notes that, "Movies are not about Blacks but what Whites think about Blacks."

"Black Folks Passing for Black Folks": The Black Middle Class, Hip Hop, and "Black Authenticity" in the 21st Century

Janelle White, Senior, History, American Ethnic Studies

EIP Scholar, Mary Gates Scholar, Presidential Scholar,

McNair Scholar

Mentor: Sonnet Retman, American Ethnic Studies

In Touré's 2012 book, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What It Means to Be Black Now*, Touré quotes Henry Louis Gates, stating, "if there are 40 million black Americans, then there are 40 million ways to be black." While there exist as many ways to be black as black Americans, and while American pop culture and mainstream media are experiencing new exposure to different modalities of blackness, the rhetoric of black authenticity and the perceived need to prove oneself based on a racial category are still prevalent. Through a close reading of excerpts from Stew's play *Passing Strange*, Colson Whitehead's novel *Sag Harbor*, and Paul Beatty's novel *White Boy Shuffle*, I will use the analytics of authenticity and blackness in literature to explore how identity manifests itself for black males in hip hop music. In focusing on rappers Childish Gambino and Kanye West, I complicate a static popular image of blackness that is transformed through different modes of socio-economic status and education level by these artists. My research explores the lingering rhetoric of authenticity, focusing on contemporary intersectionalities of identity in regards to gender, socio-economic status, and race. These intersectionalities can conflict and influence one another for individuals who struggle to personally define themselves, while simultaneously being defined by their communities. In focusing on how black identity is created within the arts, specifically literature and music, my research aims to

unpack the idea of “authenticity” surrounding blackness and make meaning of the ways in which black male teenagers and young adults explore, qualify, and define their identity in regards to race. Ultimately, my analysis sheds light on a more heterogeneous representation of black identity, while suggesting that restrictions on identity for black Americans are not obsolete in the 21st Century.