# Reviews

***The Filipino Primitive*: Accumulation and Resistance in the American Museum. Sarita Echavez See. New York: New York University Press, 2017. viii + 237 pp. $30.00 paper. ISBN 978-1-4798-2505-9.**

Sarita See's newest monograph invites us to think critically about accumulation and knowledge production through a compelling analysis of imperial archives and collections of the Philippines. See's project pivots on Karl Marx's notion of primitive accumulation, the temporal and historical enclosure of lands that served as the foundation for capital's development, by reframing the temporal primitive (the origins of capital) as always already a *racial* primitive. See thus asserts that primitive accumulation requires the accumulation of the racial primitive, and this accumulation includes the accumulation of knowledge. American knowledge production about the Filipino primitive is a generative starting point for apprehending See's broader claims because much of the imperial archives that she attends to are ambivalent about their own origins. In Part I, See argues that the condition of possibility for the museum is the accumulation of knowledge about the racial primitive, yet the museum that houses Philippine collections is unable to articulate how or why this knowledge was acquired. The imperial archive relies on an epistemology of accumulation while it simultaneously depends on the forgetting of the colonial dispossession that allows for such accumulation. See's assertion that American knowledge production is actually knowledge *extraction* has broader implications. In a time when interdisciplinary departments such as ethnic studies and women's studies are rapidly losing resources at the hands of the university, See challenges us to relinquish, rather than hold on to, the desire for propertied forms of knowledge. In Part II, See looks at anti-accumulative forms of sociality and obligation that already exist in the practices of the illiterate and in ironic mimesis, leaving us to consider an overarching question: what would it mean, as scholars, to embrace scarcity, loss, and lack and what can we learn from the illiterate?

In Part I, See examines various Philippine collections and exhibits at the University of Michigan and at Harbor Beach, Michigan, arguing that the university and the museum function as colonial enterprises through the accumulation of the racial primitive. Chapter 1 introduces

us to the crisis of representation in the University of Michigan Museum of Natural History by illuminating the contradictions between the historical decontextualization of the Philippine display *and* its foundational history to the museum. This chapter reveals how a logic of object accumulation preceded (and perhaps took precedence) over the study of the objects themselves. The academic accumulation of the Filipino primitive was less about understanding the Philippines and more about understanding the nature of academia itself. See also forwards the important concept of knowledge *nullius* in this chapter; expanding on the settler colonial concept of *terra nullius*, defined throughout the book as "empty land by way of emptied land," See offers knowledge *nullius* as the colonial logic that the racial primitive is without knowledge (47). The Filipino primitive is rendered incapable of knowing itself therefore justifying the intervention of the Western scientist for preserving and collecting this knowledge. Chapter 2 looks at how these initial collections and studies lent themselves to progressive policy implementation in the Philippines, revealing empire and progress as co-constitutive forces. Importantly, See discovers subversive Filipino voices and demands amidst what she calls "progressivist imperial" archives. Looking at various forms of tribute gifted to former governor-general of the Philippines Frank Murphy by Filipino subjects (now hoarded and displayed in Murphy's home-turned-museum as symbols of the racial primitive's gratefulness to the US), See argues that specific demands were attached to these forms of tribute, illuminating an unintended alternative reading of the archive.

Part II of See's monograph further explores alternative and anti-accumulative economies of debt, belonging, and knowledge production. Chapter 3 provides an innovative reading of Carlos Bulosan's short story *The Romance of Magno Rubio* and the Ma-Yi Theater Company's play adaption of the tale. A story about an illiterate Filipino farmworker who falls in love with a white woman he has never met, *Romance* is an example of the radical possibilities of illiteracy, plagiarism, and the unteachable. Magno Rubio, the titular character, finds himself deeper in debt as he pays a friend to write letters to Clarabelle, the woman he loves and who ultimately betrays him. Magno's reckless actions reveal the exploitative nature of capitalism while his illiteracy marks his unteachability in the ways of epistemological accumulation. Interestingly, Bulosan was accused of plagiarizing this story, but See asserts that we should read this as part of a tradition of folklore, mimesis, and nonpropertied knowledge production. Chapter 4 further elaborates on this tradition of mimesis through an analysis of artist Stephanie Syjuco's *RAIDERS*, an exhibition that displays wood cutouts of what appear to be Asian vases akin to those found in antique stores or "Asian" displays in art or anthropology museums. Syjuco's work ironizes the accumulative logics of the museums examined in part I by requiring viewers, through the uncanniness of the counterfeit, to take a "second look" at the act of collecting, archiving, and selling. In her conclusion, See examines some of Syjuco's other works that have been associated with DIY

practices and the resurgence of craftivism to further elaborate on how the "second look" exposes accumulative logics. We live in a time where the supposed transparency of a commodity's production is considered politically ethical and has become a marketing strategy to sell more commodities while obscuring the accumulative practices inherent in their production/consumption. However, if we look past the assumption that Syjuco's works are a form of "craftivism" and take a "second look," we can see how Syjuco's analogue "crafts" rely on digital resources and applications, much in the same way craft artists rely on social media and platforms such as Etsy to sell their works and make a (barely) livable income in a time of increased unemployment. This "second look" is an important practice because it allows us to see how accumulative logics proliferate, even in spaces that are avowedly anti-accumulative.

Perhaps the most important intervention that See makes is her call to imagine other forms of relationality and knowledge production outside of accumulative epistemologies. For example, within Filipinx/American studies, the invisible, erased, or forgotten Filipinx is a common trope that often ignites a desire for recuperation and recognition. Though scholars within Filipinx American studies have been critical of this fact for some time, See's argument here adds to this critical conversation by reminding us that the will to knowledge, to be knowable, is not only a project of empire, but is also made possible by the Filipino primitive. In other words, recuperating the invisible Filipinx is part and parcel with American imperial knowledge production and accumulative epistemologies. See's work, therefore, offers anti-accumulation, mimesis, irony, and illiteracy as a platform to further rethink Filipinx American ways of knowing and being in the aftermath of empire and the university. More broadly, for scholars and teachers working in the university amidst the COVID-19 crisis, See's provocation to consider anti-accumulative alternatives is most relevant and prescient. How do we proceed with our scholarship and with our teaching in a time of loss, lack, fear, and the unknown? Perhaps we need to take a "second look" at our own frustrations and desires to return to "normal" and develop ways to create knowledge and communities that resist an epistemology of accumulation that relies on the racial primitive.

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**_The Nightcrawlers_, directed by Alexander A. Mora. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Documentary Films, 2019. 40 mins.**

During his run for the presidency, Rodrigo Duterte vowed to launch a war on drugs so ruthless it would overwhelm the country's funeral parlors. Filipino voters gave him a mandate in 2016 and, as Alexander A. Mora's *The Nightcrawlers* shows in harrowing pictures drenched with blood and neon, the self-nominated butcher from the