

# Forward Editor's Note

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The purpose of the Forward section is to publish excerpts from recently published or forthcoming works in American Studies with a transnational theme. In one sense, this mandate makes my task as section editor easier: by definition, we only consider works that someone else already thought good enough to publish (and, most of the time, has already proofread). It also means that the pieces that I read for Forward are new and fresh. The diversity of subject matter, ideas, and approaches with which I am thrown into contact on reading is astounding and gratifying. For me there is the thrill of discovery in locating and evaluating the different works, especially those by less established scholars, that come my way. On the other hand, to me falls the sometimes daunting task of being the gatekeeper in soliciting or judging contributions. Apart from the duty of deciding whether a piece submitted to us actually meets our high quality standards, there is the continuing issue of whether the subject at hand falls within our field of inquiry. For all the pragmatic attempts that our editorial board members have made to delimit the boundaries of our journal's reach, the limits and even the definition of transnational American Studies remain unstable and open to a certain challenge—all of which is actually far from a bad thing.

The current issue's Forward selection contains a group of works that, by a happy chance, are linked together by a common theme: the workings of American culture in international settings. The use of international comparisons evokes a familiar paradigm—the relation between “inside” vs. “outside” views of the United States—but shows how many-sided and slippery that apparently simple binary can be. Even more, the essays in this section suggest in different ways how ambiguous the political and moral issues surrounding such clashing views can appear to a detached observer.

An excerpt from Jennifer M. McMahon's *Dead Stars: American and Philippine Literary Perspectives on the American Colonization of the Philippines* discusses the implantation of American schools in the Philippines during the US occupation and centers on how colonial authorities, in conjunction with US educational experts, introduced American literature as a tool to inculcate American values in their

students. McMahon reveals the ways in which three different sorts of classic texts, Washington Irving's "The Alhambra," Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery*, and Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Essay on Self-Reliance" were introduced into Philippine schools. There they were read in differing and sometimes contested ways by the colonizers, who intended them both as an instrument of inspiration and of (self-) control, and the colonized, who absorbed them, took to them, or rejected them in ways unexpected by the educators.

The text by Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, which forms the introduction to their anthology *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific*, also deals with US occupation of Pacific Islands during the twentieth century, but in conversation with the imperial role of Japan in the region and the conflict between the two. *Militarized Currents* represents a new addition to the growing literature (of which Gary Okihiro's 2008 book *Island World* is perhaps the best-known example) on the importance of US empire and transnational exchanges in the Pacific in defining American culture. Shigematsu and Camacho's chapter underlines the horrific role of militarization, not just in its destabilizing impact on the ecology and political structures of areas as diverse as Guam, the Marshall Islands, the Philippines, and Korea, but also in blocking cultural autonomy and imposing masculinist values.

Wen Jin's text is an extract from her book *Pluralist Universalism: An Asian Americanist Critique of U.S. and Chinese Multiculturalisms*. She examines what she terms the "competing multiculturalisms" of China and the United States through discussion of contemporary fiction by transnational ethnic Chinese writers based in both countries. It is a remarkable kind of "Asian American" book in that it simultaneously deconstructs "American," "Asian," and "Asian American" identities of transnational writers such as the underrecognized Alex Kuo. Beyond the literary critique, Jin examines the contrasting national styles of the US, whose multiethnic liberalism is informed by a history of antiracist struggle, and China, whose ethnic policy is driven by the legacy of socialist revolution.

Even as Wen Jin challenges traditional definitions of what is "Chinese," "American," and "Chinese American" writing, David J. Vázquez deconstructs (indeed, bulldozes!) national and disciplinary borders in defining Latino writing. Vázquez's *Triangulations: Narrative Strategies for Navigating Latino Identity* presents a cross-border inquiry into how Latino/Latina writers use first-person narrative (fiction, memoir, *testimonio*) to examine and express a variety of identities, and how in turn they have drawn on these identity categories, as he terms it, to "navigate the troubled racial waters of the United States." One particularly intriguing aspect of Vázquez's book is his discussion of John Rechy, the famed gay writer and "sexual outlaw," within the canon of Latino literature.

Andrea Geiger's *Subverting Exclusion: Transpacific Encounters with Race, Caste, and Borders, 1885–1928* reveals how Japanese immigrants to North America arrived with notions of "race" and status already formed by their experiences in Japan. This

hierarchical approach to society then shaped their understanding of the race-based laws that excluded them in the United States and Canada, and the various forms of action that they undertook in response. Geiger's work extends the concept of transnational American Studies, not only in its look at American life through the experience of transpacific subjects, but in its cross-border exploration of the Pacific Northwest as a distinctive region with a common culture.

The final text is Brendan Shanahan's incisive study of Honoré Beaugrand's *Jeanne la fileuse*. Beaugrand's work, a fictional narrative of French Canadian migration to New England originally published in serial form in 1878, is at once a political tract on emigration and French Canadian society, a pioneering diasporic novel, and a muckraking study of New England industrialism. Shanahan shows how the appearance of multiple editions of the work, spaced across time and national borders, highlights the shift in meanings and the conflicting messages intended to be drawn from it by its publishers. Adding a neat extra layer of transnationalism to these connections is the context of the essay's production itself. Shanahan, a New England native, discovered the novel after he crossed borders to study at McGill University in Montreal. His essay was accepted for publication by *Je Me Souviens*, a US journal of Franco-American cultural studies, while Shanahan was still an undergraduate. (I first came into contact with the author after he had completed his studies, and his essay was already in press with the journal).

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