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**Catherine Ceniza Choy and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, eds.**

*Gendering the Trans-Pacific World:  
Diaspora, Empire and Race*

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# Book Reviews

CATHERINE CENIZA CHOY AND JUDY TZU-CHUN WU, EDS.

## **Gendering the Trans-Pacific World: Diaspora, Empire and Race**

Leiden: Brill, 2017. 438 pages.

As the inaugural volume of the new Brill book series “Gendering the Trans-Pacific World: Diaspora, Empire and Race,” this work is a collection of essays that looks at the transpacific world as a site where gender, race, and empire (in all its forms and transfigurations) become important analytic frames in understanding macro- and micro-interactions. Divided into five parts, this anthology invites readers to pay close attention to the transpacific as a significant location for human activity that deserves serious academic exploration. The editors, Catherine Choy and Tzu-Chun Wu, identify the book’s main intellectual contributions: (1) “to explore ‘Pacific World’ frameworks to understand the connections between the lands, people [sic], cultures, environments, and nations that are in and border the Pacific Ocean”; and (2) to “foreground the gendered nature of the trans-Pacific world” (3–4). The chapters in the book, which cover a “wide range of interdisciplinary or disciplinary approaches, historical actors, thematics, chronologies, and geographies” (5), are arranged according to the two stated objectives. The book is composed of what the editors call “traditional and non-traditional works” (5)—consisting mainly of scholarly and original research, and “think” pieces that reflect the authors’ questions about, critiques of, or contributions to the field of transpacific studies.

Denise Cruz and Karen Leong, in separate essays in part 1, begin with a critique of existing scholarship, methodologies, and frameworks used in the study of the transpacific world and map out potential trajectories for transpacific studies. Cruz not only identifies best practices in transpacific archival research but also suggests a multisited approach to it. Leong, for her part, problematizes the transpacific as a geopolitical concept and critiques Asian American studies scholars for focusing their discourse on the US–Asia geographic imaginary while ignoring Oceania, the Pacific Islands, and settler-colonial logics.

The five chapters in part 2 reveal the geopolitics involved in American empire building and its racial, sexual, and gender implications. Tessa Ong Winkelman examines the emerging sexual geographies of interracial intimacies in different regions in the Philippines during US colonial rule. Erika Huckestein and Mark Reeves discuss the opposing geopolitical worldviews of British socialist Sylvia Pankhurst and Filipino political leader Carlos P. Romulo during the interwar years. Ji-Yeon-Yuh demonstrates how the overlapping empires of Japan and the US shaped Korean women's migration to Japan, China, Hawai'i, and the US and their subsequent remigration to Korea. These overlapping empires also shaped their individual and communal choices in their marriage, career, and work. Rumi Yasutake critically explains how racial and gender stereotypes, born out of a history of colonization, influenced the power dynamics operating among native Hawai'ian and Asian as well as local and mainland white women, in the women suffrage movement in Hawai'i. Lastly, Liza Keanuenueokalani Williams looks at the native Hawai'ians' experience of contemporary American colonialism, which is facilitated by Hawai'i's military–tourism complex and results in hypersexualizing and overrepresenting native Hawai'ian women.

In part 3, the essays illuminate how intimacies—familial ties, friendships, and intimate relationships—affect and are affected by larger sociopolitical and economic factors in the transpacific world. For instance, Gladys Nubla explores how America's civilizing mission justified the colonization of the Philippines and popularized the trope of the Filipina/Filipino as child, which later came to be sexualized. Chrissy Yee Lau looks at the development of multiple “affective economies” (198) in relation to the role of female Japanese immigrants in the US. Kimberly McKee explores male Korean adoptees' performance of masculinity in the US

and South Korea, focusing on Dan Matthews's docu-series, which features his journey to South Korea and his reunion with his biological parents. Finally, Milian Kang shows that Asian and Asian American mothering are contested sites of racialized reproductive politics.

Part 4 allots space for assessments of beauty and body politics, underscoring these concepts of ideal beauty and body as significant categories in analyzing colonial racism, immigration exclusion, disease, and human trafficking. Genevieve Clutario traces the history of beauty pageants in the Philippines and examines how these contests have become platforms for nationalist expression. Fang He's chapter looks at how the practice of foot-binding became a means for Chinese women to subvert American laws against Chinese immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Laura Nelson's piece explores the possibility of using a transpacific approach to gather insights on the increase in the cases and possible prevention of breast cancer among young women in South Korea. Stella Oh's essay examines the ways by which two novels that depict the trafficking of Korean women to North America provide a form of ethical optics in interrogating narratives of trauma and commodification.

The final part of this anthology stresses the mobility of culture across the transpacific world and its impact on the lives of men and women in this region. Nobue Suzuki shows how US colonialism in Asia transformed the racial and gendered identities of Filipino male athletes and entertainers in Japan, while Shawn Schwaller demonstrates how the popularization of South Pacific-themed restaurants in Los Angeles led to the sexual objectification of Polynesian women. Craig Santos underscores the multifaceted lives and identities that Pacific Islander men perform as a result of American conquest and globalization. Hyungji Park also raises cross-cultural inquiries on the gender dimensions undergirding Western and Eastern conceptualizations of vampires. Finally, Lan Doung promotes the utilization of a trans-Vietnamese feminist theory in understanding Vietnamese culture in general and Vietnamese filmmaking in particular.

This anthology opens a variety of academic and research trajectories for its readers. As a whole the book problematizes the "trans-Pacific" both as a geopolitical concept and as an approach to understand the logics behind aggression, resistance, and cooperation. As a geopolitical unit, it encompasses Asia, America, Oceania, and the Pacific Islands. It illuminates the traffic of peoples, cultures, ideas, and resources within and across this

diverse and contested territorial trope. It exposes patterns of migration and diaspora born out of a history of colonialism and empire building. Thus, it brings to the fore issues of displacement, racism, class, and gender between and among peoples—depending on their specific circumstances or positions—in situations of conquest, commerce, and cultural exchange.

As a theoretical framework, the “trans-Pacific” shifts from a “teleological and nation-centered narrative of U.S. exceptionalism” (6) to a multifaceted understanding of power relations at the level of nation-states and governments and how such politics are reflected in intimate and personal relations of people, settling or in transit in the transpacific world. A transpacific framework also exposes the different and oftentimes convoluted layers of power in the complicated spectrum of the colonized and colonizer’s positioning. Thus, the simple binary of colonizer–colonized and its attendant duality of the powerful and powerless, although valid, do not capture the nuances involved in colonialism and neocolonialism. The book investigates these specific and intersecting layers of power vis-à-vis the state and the individual.

Because the focus of such a transpacific framework is on power relations, it becomes an essentially gendered approach to the study of migration, racism, and empire building. All dimensions of transpacific world making are problematized using the core analytical category of gender. The essays in this work illuminate this important component and discuss the various methods that allow hierarchical power structures to be reified and replicated in gendered and racialized ways. Thus, the book presents a landscape of racial and sexual geographies that are continuously created and recreated through a history of migration and diasporic waves and through uneven formations of sociopolitical and economic structures across the transpacific regions.

Looking at the experiences of specific nations and peoples involved in the transpacific geographical imaginary, the contributors in this anthology, in one way or another, touch on the role that the US has played in defining the fates of natives, migrants, and settlers. They highlight the processes involved in making American or Western culture the standard that is imposed on, subtly or otherwise, and integrated into the very social fabric of the Asia-Pacific. The intersecting and also complementary structures of the military, entertainment industry, the government, and the economy facilitate such imposition and integration. Nonetheless, the

authors have also stressed the multifarious ways by which natives, migrants, and settlers have negotiated their positions in the transpacific milieu and/or have selected certain American or Western standards to survive or prevail in such a highly racialized and gendered context.

The result of these interactions is a cultural hybrid that is both conflicting and compatible. There are clashes here and there, but also reconciliation and compromise hither and thither, all in an effort to reassert a people's need for identity and autonomy. The authors show that the transpacific world is a convoluted social space with schizophrenic qualities that can only be understood by paying close attention to the processes that have produced, sometimes simultaneously, moments of tension and peace. These processes are not only manifested in the larger social, political, and economic forces unfolding in the transpacific world, but are also shown in peoples' relationships, emotions, and cultural experiences.

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JAYEEL SERRANO CORNELIO

## **Being Catholic in the Contemporary Philippines: Young People Reinterpreting Religion**

London and New York: Routledge, 2016. 186 pages.

Stemming from Jayeel Cornelio's doctoral thesis at the National University of Singapore, *Being Catholic in the Contemporary Philippines: Young People Reinterpreting Religion* is a serious and incisive study by a sociologist of religion. It bears the marks of the author's visiting studentship in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University and postdoctoral fellowship at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen. Although the book is about religious youth in the Philippines, it engages with the global scholarship on religious identity, which is laid out in chapters 1 and 2.

The first chapter underscores the study's significance in terms of the expansion and vibrancy of Christianity in the Global South. "As Christianity