



AMERICAN
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SOLIDARITY: WHAT LOVE LOOKS LIKE IN PUBLIC
2023 ANNUAL MEETING VIRTUAL SESSION

**Translation and Archipelagic Thought:
American Solidarities and Melting Points**

15 December 2023 | 4:00 pm EST | bit.ly/asa-panel

PANELISTS

Brian Russell Roberts, Brigham Young University
Adrian De Leon, University of Southern California
Craig Santos Perez, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa
Eryn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, University of California Los Angeles
Elena Lahr-Vivaz, Rutgers University—Newark

CHAIR

Susan Gillman, University of Southern California, Santa Cruz

Allied with the ASA 2023 conference theme of solidarity, this panel examines two realms of solidarity-making: translation and archipelagic thinking. Translation has been a mode of solidarity-making to the degree that it has constructed bridges—no matter how contingent or tenuous—between languages and cultures. Meanwhile, archipelagic thinking has also attuned itself to questions of solidarity or connection among different islands, as, for instance, the Cuban theorist Antonio Benítez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island* (1996) has described the very character of an archipelago as a “discontinuous conjunction” (2).

And yet these two realms of solidarity-building have not remained neatly in their separate spheres. In fact, the Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant has viewed translation and archipelagic thinking as interdependent, coconstitutive, and existing in solidarity with each other. In his *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* (1996), Glissant posits a crucial intersection between the project of translation and the practice of archipelagic thought. He argues that translation involves an acceptance that “somewhere else’s truth fixates on our truth here” (44), framing translation as fundamental to our “ever-multiplying world” of “roaming dizziness” (45). Thus, he writes, “La traduction est...une des espèces parmi les

plus importantes de cette nouvelle pensée archipélique,” or, “Translation is...among the elements most essential to this new mode of archipelagic thought” (45).

In considering the archipelagic Americas and American-connected archipelagoes beyond the Americas, what could it mean—in ways that may exceed Glissant’s own thinking—to suggest that translation and archipelagic thought are or may exist in solidarity, as intertwined, interdependent, and even co-constitutive practices? For translators and translation studies scholars, what could it mean to take the ocean-island complex of the archipelago as a methodological template? For scholars of archipelagic thinking (which has emanated from numerous archipelagic regions across the planet), what could it mean to take translation as a structuring metaphor for how we understand the ontologies of the archipelago? And how we understand the epistemologies that the archipelago makes possible? Beyond structuring metaphors and methodological templates, what other and perhaps unforecasted solidarities might arise between archipelagic thinking and translation? And, of course, when and how do such solidarities fall apart, arriving at melting points beyond which solidness is no longer useful or desired? Addressing the conjunction of translation and archipelagic thought, the papers in this panel bring into conversation American, America-connected, and US imperial regions: Indonesia, the Philippines, Guam, Vietnam, Korea, the US South, Cuba, Spain, and Brazil.

INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS

Translation, Archipelagic Thought, and Wawasan Nusantara

Brian Russell Roberts, Brigham Young University

This presentation opens by framing the “Translation and Archipelagic Thought” session, specifically tracing relations among the categories of translation, archipelagic thought, the Americas, and solidarity. The presentation concludes by examining the interanimation of these categories within a novel by the Indonesian modernist writer Mochtar Lubis.

Within American Studies and cultural criticism more generally, translation and archipelagic thinking have been two important modes of solidarity-making. Translation has constructed bridges—no matter how contingent or tenuous—between languages and cultures. Meanwhile, archipelagic thinking has hinged on connection among different islands, as, for instance, the Cuban theorist Antonio Benítez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island* (1996) has described the very character of an archipelago as a “discontinuous conjunction” (2). Importantly, the Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant has viewed translation and archipelagic thinking as interdependent, coconstitutive, and existing in solidarity with each other. In his *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* (1996), Glissant posits a crucial intersection between the project of translation and the practice of archipelagic thought. He argues that translation involves an acceptance that “somewhere

else's truth fixates on our truth here" (44), framing translation as fundamental to our "ever-multiplying world" of "roaming dizziness" (45). Thus, he writes, "Translation is...among the elements most essential to this new mode of archipelagic thought" (45).

This paper asks what it could mean—within the archipelagic Americas and the American-connected archipelagoes beyond the Americas—to understand archipelagic thought and translation as existing in solidarity with each other. For translators and translation studies scholars, what could it mean to take the ocean-island complex of the archipelago as a methodological template? For scholars of archipelagic thinking (which has emanated from numerous archipelagic regions across the planet), what could it mean to take translation as a structuring metaphor for how we understand the ontologies of the archipelago? And how we understand the epistemologies that the archipelago makes possible? And, of course, when and how do such solidarities fall apart, arriving at melting points beyond which solidness is no longer useful or desired? In addressing these questions, I turn toward Mochtar Lubis's novel *Twilight in Djakarta* (1963), which was originally written in Indonesian but did not receive its first publication in that language. Rather, its first publication was in English in the United States, and the book was the first Indonesian novel ever published in English. Addressing this novel in relation to the session's preoccupations, I draw on the Mochtar Lubis papers at the University of Chicago to examine the novel's translational history vis-à-vis the novel's treatment of Indonesian state's officially endorsed Wawasan Nusantara or Archipelago Perspective.

An Asynchronous Archipelago: American Manila, Nationalist Iconography, and the Colonization of the 'Philippine' Diaspora, 1916-1941

Adrian De Leon, University of Southern California

This presentation destabilizes the formation of the 'Philippines' by charting the insidious role of Manila in the colonization of non-Tagalog diasporas from across the Southeast Asian archipelago. Extending the works of scholars like Vicente Rafael (2000; 2016), Rick Baldoz (2011), and Dawn Bohulano Mabalon (2013), I argue that Philippine native elites and migrant middle-class leaders across the Pacific came to behold Ilokano (Northern Philippine) and Bisaya (Central Philippine) migrant workers as a possible source. In other words, I argue that, through the medium of nationalist literature and iconography, Manileño elites colonized the diaspora to create a Filipino subject that would come to regard Tagalog as the rightful national language and Manila as the rightful capital city of their future homeland.

Prior to the Great Depression, most migrant workers from America's westernmost colony identified with hometown associations and spoke predominantly in their home vernaculars. However, under the aegis of Filipinization (1916-1934), during which the United States began to people colonial bureaucracies with native administrators, Manila's growing community of nationalist elites began to reckon with the affairs of the vagrant and destitute masses across the Pacific as the future subjects of a nation yet-to-come. As

such, they encouraged Tagalog-language education and funded organizations that would compel these migrant workers to practice in the aspirationally bourgeois language and culture of a provisionally independent Philippines. After 1935, during the Philippine Commonwealth, the myriad measures of success that nationalist organizations enjoyed in the US West Coast enabled elites to speculate on the future of return migration, envisioning the Philippine diaspora as a future population that could help the home government colonize Mindanao, the recalcitrant southern frontiers of the archipelago.

By focusing on the transnational aspects of Manila, Tagalog, and Philippine nationalism, this presentation argues for the importance of Asian American diasporas not only in the study of United States imperialism, but in the formation of Southeast Asian statecraft and (post)colonial nationalisms. It takes on an archipelagic critique of diaspora and statecraft that sees the island nation (and, indeed, all nation-states) not as a historical inevitability, but as an ongoing project of colonial conquest. In bridging surplus populations (diaspora) and territorial consolidation (homeland), this presentation brings the notion of “internal colonialism” (Ramón Gutiérrez, 2004) under scrutiny by calling it by its more precise name: settler colonialism.

“Manaotao Sanlagu”: Visualizing Solidarity between Homeland and Diasporic CHamorus

Craig Santos Perez, University of Hawai’i, Mānoa

CHamorus are the indigenous Pacific Islanders from the Marianas archipelago, a 15-island chain located in the western Pacific region known as Micronesia. A long history of colonialism has led to the archipelago being divided into two U.S. political entities: the unincorporated territory of Guåhan (Guam) and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Since the 1950s, CHamorus from the Marianas have migrated to the states due to military service, economic and educational opportunities, and health care access. Today, more CHamorus live in the diaspora than in the Marianas. The history of migration and diaspora has not only separated the CHamoru population, but it has also created tension, negative stereotypes, and misrepresentations between homeland and diasporic CHamorus. To explore this phenomenon, I will examine *Manaotao Sanlagu: CHamorus from the Marianas* (2022), an ongoing visual documentary by CHamoru Pulitzer-Prize winning photojournalist Manny Crisostomo. This project includes photographic portraits of 600 diasporic CHamorus, a 220-page book, videos, a website, and feature articles in the Pacific Daily News, the major newspaper of Guam. I will highlight how the translation of “diasporic CHamorus” as “manaotao sanlagu” (“our people overseas”) attempts to articulate solidarity and transoceanic love. I will also argue that this project utilizes an archipelagic aesthetics to translate the CHamoru diasporic experience to homeland CHamorus in order to re-unite “our people” into what I term an “archipelago of belonging.”

Archipelagic Translations across Language and Space: Connecting Vietnam, Israel-Palestine, and Korea in the US Imperial Frame

Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, University of California Los Angeles

This presentation explores what the conjunction of translation and archipelagic thought can elucidate about the resonances of US military empire across multiple sites. The archipelago suggests repetition with a difference; the clustering together of multiple islands of US imperial formation, whose connections to one another may at first seem submerged below the surface. To think the archipelago and translation in relation is to analyze how concepts are unevenly translated across distinct islands of US war-making, that together make up a larger archipelago of US empire. This presentation proceeds in two parts, as way to draw conceptual linkages between my first and second book projects. Part one focuses on linguistic translation. Drawing from my first book, which explicitly theorized the archipelago as a spatial analytic for examining multiple spaces of Vietnamese refugee resettlement, US empire, and Indigenous decolonization in conjunction, I examine the imperfect translation of key terms such as “return” and “new immigrants” from Hebrew to Vietnamese, from Israel-Palestine to Vietnam, as a means to grapple with resonant politics of land contestation in the wake of US empire. I engage Walter Benjamin’s ruminations on the “task of the translator” and Gayatri Spivak’s insistence on the “catachretic” nature of all translation with the ultimate goal of offering potentials for solidarity between Vietnamese Israelis and Palestinians, given the structural antagonisms imposed by what I call the “refugee settler condition.” Part two draws from the lessons of part one to consider spatial translation. Taking linguistic translation as a model for spatial translation, I examine how the North-South civil war geography of Cold War Korea is imperfectly translated into the North-South civil war geography of the nineteenth century United States. Analyzing key passages from Susan Choi’s 1998 novel *The Foreign Student*, I reflect on how an archipelagic framework is helpful in mapping these spatial translations.

Archipelagic Translations on (and beyond) the Palenque

Elena Lahr-Vivaz, Rutgers University—Newark

In 2004, at a gathering of the Unión de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos (UNEAC) held in Pinar del Río, Cuba, the so-called “Grupo Palenque” was born. This far-flung group of Afro-Cuban poets, whose informal membership included writers living in Cuba, Spain, and Brazil, later launched a blog, “Del Palenque... y para...” (active from 2007 to 2014). Featuring work by Palenque poets, as well as poems, essays, interviews, and artwork by a transnational (and often translated), multiracial group of writers and artists, the blog highlights poets’ desire to transcend the borders and boundaries implicit in the notion of the island, and to forge instead a more open, archipelagic space that allows their work and identities to bridge continents and spaces.

As I argue here, the alternate, archipelagic space of identity that the poets seek to create

through their blog departs “from,” or *del*, the overly simplistic notions of race manifest in the group’s very name, and gestures “toward,” or *para*, a space in which (trans)national diversity is celebrated. At the same time, the scandal surrounding the 2013 publication of Palenque writer Roberto Zurbarano’s controversial *New York Times* op-ed (“For Blacks in Cuba, the Revolution Hasn’t Begun”) points to the untranslatability of words and concepts, and, more generally, to what Édouard Glissant theorizes as opacity: the lack of transparency that is part and parcel of the poetics of Relation, as well as multicultural communication.

BIOGRAPHIES

Brian Russell Roberts is Professor of English and Humanities College Professor at Brigham Young University, where he was director of the American Studies Program from 2016–2022. In 2015 he was a Fulbright Senior Scholar at Universitas Sebelas Maret in Surakarta, Indonesia. His essays have been recognized with awards including the MLA’s Darwin T. Turner Award for best article of the year in *African American Review* and the International Association of Inter-American Studies’ Best Article in Inter-American Studies Award. Over the past several years, he has published extensively on archipelagic locales and archipelagic thought, with a particular emphasis on US and broader American intersections with the archipelagic. Recent books in this vein include: with Keith Foulcher, *Indonesian Notebook: A Sourcebook on Richard Wright and the Bandung Conference* (Duke University Press, 2016); coedited with Michelle Ann Stephens, *Archipelagic American Studies* (Duke University Press, 2017); and *Borderwaters: Amid the Archipelagic States of America* (Duke University Press, 2021).

Adrian De Leon is an Assistant Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. He is the author of *Bundok: A Hinterland History of Filipino America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2023). His next project, *Balikbayan: The Invention of the Filipino Homeland*, is under contract with the University of Washington Press. Adrian is also the author and editor of three books of creative writing, including most recently, *barangay: an offshore poem* (Buckrider Books, 2021), which was named as one of 2021’s best Canadian poetry collections by CBC Books.

Adrian’s writing on Philippine indigeneity and transpacific migration has been published by journals such as the *Radical History Review*, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, and *Trans Asia Photography*. His research has been featured on *Washington Post*, *Rolling Stone*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Guardian*, *VICE*, *National Geographic*, and *ABC Nightline*. With filmmaker Dolly Li and theater scholar Danielle Bainbridge, he has worked on two shows with the Center for Asian American Media and PBS Digital Studios: *A People’s History of Asian America* (2021), which was nominated for Best Short Format History series at the World Congress of Science & Factual Producers; and *Historian’s Take* (2022), which was

nominated for a 2023 NAACP Image Award. In recognition of his public scholarship, Adrian was awarded the 2022 Engaged Scholar Award from the Association of Asian American Studies, and will serve as the 2023-2024 Jack and Nancy Farley Visiting Scholar in History at Simon Fraser University.

Dr. Craig Santos Perez is a native CHamoru from the Pacific Island of Guåhan (Guam). He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of San Francisco and a Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. He is a professor in the English Department, and an affiliate faculty with the Center for Pacific Islands Studies and the Indigenous Politics Program, at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa. Perez is the co-editor of six anthologies and the author of five books of poetry and the monograph, *Navigating CHamoru Poetry: Indigeneity, Aesthetics, and Decolonization*, which received the MLA Prize for Studies in Native American Literature, Cultures, and Languages. He has received fellowship from the Ford Foundation, Lannan Foundation, Mellon Foundation, and the American Council of Learned Societies.

Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi is an assistant professor of Asian American Studies at UCLA (Tovaangar). She received a PhD in Rhetoric from UC Berkeley in 2018. Her work engages critical refugee studies, comparative ethnic studies, and transpacific studies. She is the author of *Archipelago of Resettlement: Vietnamese Refugee Settlers and Decolonization across Guam and Israel-Palestine*, published open access by University of California Press in April 2022, and co-editor with Vinh Nguyen of *The Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives*, published open access by Routledge in February 2023. Her writing has appeared in *American Quarterly*, *Critical Ethnic Studies*, *MELUS*, *Amerasia*, *Canadian Review of American Studies*, and *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory*. In summer 2022, Dr. Gandhi organized a public history exhibit entitled *Remembering Saigon: From Vietnam to Guam*. She is currently working on a second book project, tentatively entitled *Revisiting the Southern Question: South Korea, South Vietnam, and the US South*. Dr. Gandhi hosts a podcast, *Distorted Footprints*, through her Critical Refugee Studies class.

Elena Lahr-Vivaz is Associate Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies at Rutgers University–Newark, where she specializes in Latin American literature and film. She holds a PhD in Hispanic Studies from the University of Pennsylvania, and taught at this institution, as well as Swarthmore College, before joining the faculty at Rutgers. Dr. Lahr-Vivaz is the author of *Writing Islands: Space and Identity in the Transnational Cuban Archipelago* (2022) and *Mexican Melodrama: Film and Nation from the Golden Age to the New Wave* (2016; published in Spanish as *El melodrama mexicano. Cine y nación desde la Época de Oro hasta la Nueva Ola*, 2019). Dr. Lahr-Vivaz serves as a board member of the Society of Senior Ford Fellows and as director of the SOMOS NJ Poetry & Culture Festival.

Susan Gillman is Distinguished Professor of Literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is the author of *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America* (1989) and *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the*

Occult (2003). She has worked collaboratively on several essay collections, most recently with co-editor Christopher Castiglia, *Neither the Time nor the Place: Today's Nineteenth Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022). Her new book, *American Mediterraneans: A Study in Geography, History, and Race* (University of Chicago Press, 2022) traces the strange career of the "American Mediterranean," a scholarly metaphor and folk geographical concept used from 1799 to the present in multiple disciplines, genres and languages, as a point of departure for a transnational and translational study of the Americas.