

Sony Coráñez Bolton. *Crip Colony: Mestizaje, US Imperialism, and the Queer Politics of Disability in the Philippines*

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Crip Colony, authored by Sony Coráñez Bolton and published in 2023, probes the US colonial project in the Philippines, particularly how its construction of Filipinos' mental fitness led to political disablement of the majority of colonized Filipinos. This disablement was articulated in racial hierarchies and attributed characteristics of incapacity for political sovereignty and independent thought to the *Indios* while differentiating the status of the Filipino *mestizaje* as "the evidence, product, and agent of colonial rehabilitation" (p. 7). Bolton, a professor of Spanish and English and the program chair of Latinx and Latin American Studies at Amherst College in Massachusetts, utilizes understudied Spanish archives or Spanish-language Philippine literary texts written by *ilustrados* during US colonial rule as well as historical sources related to American Studies to demonstrate how *ilustrado* discourses served as useful analytical tools. He critiques these discourses as an embodiment of a dominantly-abled, male national culture founded

on the native's capacity for self-government that was constrained by its heterosexual normative emphasis. The author draws on theories from crip, queer, disability, race, and postcolonial studies in interrogating this historical phenomena, creating an interdisciplinary analysis of the transnational impact of US imperialism.

Bolton primarily argues that the *mestizaje* set themselves apart from the colonized *Indio* to represent themselves as able-bodied and able-minded and aligned with the American colonial project of benevolent assimilation by showing their capacities for rational thought. The *mestizaje* as "a racial ideology of ability" was constructed at the expense of representing the colonized *Indio* as "queerly deviant Indian" who needed rehabilitation and reform (p. 7). In this sense, *mestizaje* became a tool for and evidence of the effectiveness of the American rehabilitation efforts in the Philippines. They suited the popular colonial discourse of "civilizing mission" that underscored opportunities for improvement of Filipino colonial subjects within the process of benevolent assimilation facilitated by the US colonial state. In this book, Bolton introduces an approach called *crip colonial critique* that analyzed how disability discourses were utilized by the Americans to justify US colonialism and reinforce the need for rehabilitation of Filipinos in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. This approach examined how the politics of ableism was "understood as a difference in imagined capacity" (p. 15) and was embedded in colonial relations of power between the United States and the Philippines.

Using the lens of crip colonial critique, Bolton scrutinizes the role of *mestizaje* in replicating racial and gendered hierarchies in the "rehabilitative and civilizing" logic of the US colonial project. To accomplish this goal, Bolton applies Gayatri Gopinath's "scavenger methodology" in his crip colonial critique to analyze his four case studies, specifically interpreting disability, gender, and racial discourses in literary works such as Jose Rizal's *Filipinas dentro de Cien Años* and *Noli Me Tangere*, Teodoro Kalaw's *Hacia la terra del czar*, Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden* and also in visual

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materials and political cartoons in American magazines and newspapers. Bolton describes scavenger methodology as an approach used to “read presumably heteronormative texts against their grain via the lens of a queer subject whose relationship to national heteronormativity is qualitatively and perspectively different” (p. 34). Using this methodology, Bolton interprets not only the racial and gendered discourses entrenched in these various sources but also dissects their ableist undertones, thus contributing to sharpening the analytical frames of empire studies by pioneering the use of disability lens in interrogating US colonial rule.

Throughout the four case studies, Bolton applies crip colonial critique to examine the role of mestizaje or Filipinos born from interracial mixing as a product and agent of colonial rehabilitation during US colonization. The role of mestizaje, as the focal point of his analytical frame, weaves the narrative of the book in a coherent whole. The introductory chapter establishes the relevance of Filipino mestizaje as a unit of analysis in examining the colonizer’s construction of their colonial subjects’ imagined incapacity or disability, which led to the creation of racial hierarchies within the colonial society under the American rule. Examined through a gendered lens, the disability or cognitive deficiency attributed to Filipino subjects—except the mestizaje—shows a colonial construction of disability associated with the female gender. This was evident in Bolton’s Chapter 2 where he employs his colonial crip critique framework in interpreting the disability discourse in Rizal’s *Noli*, specifically in the lives of its two major characters: Maria Clara and Ibarra. Bolton juxtaposes Maria Clara’s madness to Ibarra’s rationality as an *ilustrado*. Bolton argues that contrary to Ibarra who represented mestizo’s rehabilitated bodymind, Maria Clara’s insanity embodied the perceived cognitive deficiencies generally attributed to Filipino colonial subjects. Bolton employs a similar strategy of racialized and gendered juxtaposition in Chapter 3 where he uses Kalaw’s travelogue to compare the status of Chinese women with bound feet and their lack of mobility to Filipino mestizos’ (e.g. Kalaw) capability for travel and observing the difference between American and Russian imperialism. According to Bolton, the Filipino mestizaje,

with their effort to show their capacity at the expense of incapacitating Chinese women, proved that US colonial rehabilitation in the Philippines was successful. Meanwhile, Chapter 4 emphasizes the role of the rehabilitated mestizaje as the new administrators in the colony in managing the cases of “mad” Moros running amok. The Filipino elite’s role in governance increased with the Filipinization of the insular government in the second half of US colonial rule.

Crip Colony’s strength and main contribution to Philippine historiography, Disability Studies, and Global South Studies rests on its cutting edge analytical frame of crip colonial critique that opened the area of inquiry on the intersection of US colonialism, disability, race, and gender and enriched existing historical scholarship on American rule in the Philippines using the lens of cultural and disability studies. For instance, Bolton’s interesting reading of the *ilustrado’s* representation of women or female body as disabled, as seen in his discussions on the footbinding of Chinese women and on the portrayal of Maria Clara as incapacitated, offers a nuanced approach in colonial history of the Global South by particularly underscoring how the combined gendered, disabling, and transnational impacts of colonialism and imperialism could be unpacked using crip theory as analytical optic. Moreover, the book, through its effort to shed light on the racialized management of Filipino natives in various colonial disability discourses, stresses how understanding racial politics also mutually constitute crip colonial discourses. These discourses intensified social fragmentation in Philippine society as shown in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the *mestizaje* on one hand and the political and mental disablement of the majority of Filipino colonial subjects on the other hand.

The book also presents an original analysis on US imperialism by foregrounding disability discourses and mainstreaming the writing of disability history in Philippine historiography using mainly modern Spanish-language Philippine literary texts as primary sources. Bolton’s effort to use these understudied Spanish texts in American empire studies in

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combination with the widely utilized literary and visual materials on US colonization (e.g. Kipling's text and political cartoons of US expansion) is commendable as he brilliantly draws on these combined sources to braid his arguments on the central role of mestizaje as agents of US colonial rehabilitation. Although gendered and class analyses are familiar approaches in the study of the Spanish language literary texts Bolton examines, he advances them in innovative ways by foregrounding their intersection with imperialism and by extending his analysis beyond the national borders of the Philippines and the United States through comparative discussions of Chinese women and Russian imperialism. By extending his geographical scope, Bolton effectively establishes the merit of using the disability lens and crip theory in transnational history and empire studies, a worthy contribution that warrants proper recognition.

To further appreciate the book's contribution, readers may supplement its historical analysis by using other relevant sources that were not utilized by the author like the various colonial laws and annual government reports on education, public health, and social welfare. These sources can provide the necessary historical and contextual background to better analyze disability and colonialism as a unified ideological structure that is aligned with his crip colonial critique. For example, in addition to the ableist undertones of official pronouncements from American administrators that provided rationalization of US imperialism, the Americans also constructed various notions of disability, other than the political disability Bolton identified. These notions, conveyed in numerous colonial laws and policies, were presented as tutelary, civilizing, and modernizing efforts to improve the material and social condition of the Philippines as a modern democratic state. In this regard, from a historian's point of view, *Crip Colony* addresses the gap in disability research in Philippine colonial history using an approach that focuses more on the disciplines of cultural, literary, and gender studies than a historical one as his use of primary sources on American colonization in the Philippines remains minimal in scope. The book is theoretically dense and may be a challenging for

non-specialists, who may need to reread it to fully grasp its main arguments. It would be advisable for non-specialists readers to familiarize themselves with Bolton's earlier related works and shorter articles to better understand Crip Colony.

Lastly, because the discussion of disability largely centers on the author's interpretations and cultural readings of disability symbols and metaphors in literary and visual materials, the book leaves limited space for historical scrutiny that would nuance American colonial policies toward disability and disabled. An exception appears in Chapter 4, which focuses on cases of Moros reported to have run amok and perceived as mad by colonial administrators. This may be beyond the author's original intent, but it is helpful to point this out for scholars of colonial disability studies to appraise the book's focus and content. Nonetheless, *Crip Colony*, with its groundbreaking analytical frame of crip colonial critique and excellent use of Spanish texts in the context of US empire studies, highly deserves the attention of scholars and readers interested in colonial disability research, Global South and transnational history, as well as those engaged in gender and queer studies.

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