

*Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization.* By Neferti X.M. Tadiar. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009. 484 pp.

*Things Fall Away* is a tour de force of a book and in a short review like this one impossible to characterize justly without inflicting some measure of symbolic violence to it and to its author. Written in elegant, erudite, and impassioned prose, it offers a sophisticated, insightful and compelling re-working of the classical Marxist theory of labour/value primarily inflected through a post-colonial and transnational feminist standpoint as played out on Filipino women's bodies and Filipino landscape under the powerful and alluring sway of capitalist globalization.

A notable tone of *Things Fall Away* is its de-centering of perspectives that privilege transcendental-type explanations and constructions in what makes for proper political subjects, and thus the continued abstraction of social relations and everyday poetics in accounting for these transformative processes. At various points, her analysis discernibly intersects with those of Gayatri Spivak (notably her *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*), Luce Irigaray, Paolo Virno, and Raymond Williams among others, scholars who counsel the need to seriously dwell not only on the emergent forms of life constantly churned up by human subjects but also the creative transnational possibilities of post-Fordist capitalism. Tadiar further extends their utility by illuminating and fleshing out these structural conditions and agencies through a close reading of an array of contemporary poems, short stories, and novels authored by Filipinos. In juxtaposing them with the more familiar staple of academic writings on the ill-effects of globalization, she also makes the case for literature as a "worldly artifact" and lays bare the "hegemony of realist and historicist representation" (p. 17).

Indeed, "the book contends that the task of creating empowered historical subjects through the representation of submerged historical experiences was and continues to be of the utmost necessity" (p. 4). She further claims that paradoxically these subaltern experiences tend

to “fall away” from view in both global capitalist and nation state narratives of development as well as from social movement narratives of liberation (p. 5).

Tadiar’s project is unfolded in three separate but nevertheless closely articulated sites of poetics and praxis. The first section (“Feminization”) expands on her earlier work on the highly gendered exploitation and experiential practices of Filipinas locally and abroad by a host of predatory capitalistic agencies. More precisely, she suggests that “just as the national sex work and domestic labor industries depend on the expropriation of the social experiential practices of women, so does the specific regime of accumulation achieved by the Marcos state known as crony capitalism depend on the social experiential practices of informal labor” (p. 13). Undergirding a “state-sponsored prostitution” is the feminization and commodification of experiential practices which Tadiar calls a “syncretic sociability” or *kapwa* (shared subjectivity), a hallmark of centuries-old modality of Filipina social engagement. Despite the undeniable presence of the tropes of escapist romanticism in Tagalog popular literature, for instance, Tadiar nevertheless avers that it is the “living labor” of what Filipinas *do* together which exceeds the exigencies of capital and of their socially learnt skills of adaptation and coping.

Section two (“Urbanization”) shifts attention to the “City of Man” as ushered in during Marcos’ long regime and his globalist aspirations for Metro-Manila. A prominent feature of this urban milieu is marked by an “authoritarian modernization” which radically transformed the country’s mode of production and metropolitan space-time “in congruence with the demands of international capital” (p. 152). The array of trauma, maelstrom experiences, and spirit of adventurism engendered in its wake forms the subject of Tadiar’s deft unpacking of the history of disappearing and forgetting embedded in these urban spaces. Once again, she reminds us that in addition to the brute monopolization of the practices of value extraction, another key discursive strategy of Marcos was the political usurpation of “the collective power” issuing in the first instance from a radicalized social

experience of a general crisis in the late 1960s and early 1970s but also drawing from deeper roots in the Spanish and American colonial and early neocolonial eras.

The final section (“Revolution”) follows closely the historical states of exception examined in earlier sections. Here, she looks at the “surplus cultural resources” that are invented during the course of revolutionary struggle and the manner in which their “political possibilities remain unexhausted by progressive political organization and strategy” (p. 15). One area of literary examination taken up by Tadiar is the heuristic representational notion of the “masses” or “people” and by implication the content of what truly makes the nation. An ontological distinction is made between “revolutionary nationalism” and the “nationalism of the state”. The former is characterized by the late nineteenth century revolutionary struggle against exploitative Spanish colonialism. As she puts it, “it is this revolutionary, antagonistic imagination which is at the same time a praxis of struggle (as opposed to the stabilizing practices of and for a hegemonic “imagined community”) that distinguishes true — that is, progressive — Filipino nationalism from the nationalism of Western powers with which bourgeois Filipino nationalism becomes aligned” (p. 266). The disjunction and contradiction between the two typically forms the fodder for Filipino revolutionary literature lamenting for (and beckoning forth) the unfinished cultural revolutionary struggle. In this trope, these authors imagined themselves to be a unified historical subject and “the masses” as a feminine object of loss through which “the revolutionary subject constitutes itself as the agent of historical transformation” (p. 272). However, the paradox of revolutionary sovereignty as found in the novels and short stories is also its crucial deployment of the experiential technologies of grief, rage, and sorrow to animate and constitute revolutionary cultural praxis.

At nearly 500 pages in length, *Things Fall Away* does not make for easy reading. It requires a modicum of familiarity with the work of key post-colonial, feminist, and neo-Marxist theories in order to derive a fuller appreciation of its preferred theoretical apparatus.

Nevertheless, Tadiar's intimate acquaintance with the *habitus* of her country and her meticulous, innovative, and robust interpretations and extrapolations of not only these authors but also the array of Filipino writers whom she consulted offer a satisfying if not engaging foray into the subaltern agencies of the Filipinos and their country's historical experience.

YEOH Seng Guan