To speak of empire today is to speak about a global dispensation of power predicated on, and furthering, the aims of capitalist accumulation in an era when the familiar components and dynamics of the international order of sovereign states, by means of which such accumulation took place, seem to have been dramatically, perhaps irrevocably, reorganized. To understand empire’s workings is hence to try to grasp an order of common ideals, sensibilities, and practices that no longer simply entail the protocols of proper belonging defined by the nation-state, or, protocols of full citizenship, that defined the rights of peoples in the age of national sovereignty. Certainly, as identitarian codes for understanding and regulating human differences cut against the measure of Man, race, gender, and sexuality have long served to organize the social divisions of economic production and political power within and across nation-states—perhaps exemplarily so during the age of decolonization (the true and obverse content of the age of freedom)—and continue to do so in the present. Yet over the last several decades, these codes have operated beyond a normative cultural logic of social identities (where they act as means of specification, disciplining and representation of individuals, groups, and nations as integral...
units of modern sovereignty). These codes now also operate within numerous calculative procedures of attribution, where they act as variables for partitioning and bundling organic and inorganic masses, matters, and potentials in new modes of value production and life extraction, which have resulted in both a proliferation of social differences (in shifting scales) and a staggeringly profound breach in the fates of human beings.

Beyond the protocols and ideals of political community established by a still expanding Euro-American humanism and rule of democratic sovereignty, which defined an older world order, today’s imperial order entails protocols for the enhancement and furtherance of life of an already recognized humanity, whose guaranteed rights to such life of the “already human” can be extended, but only to deserving candidates: those “becoming-human,” who aspire to the protocols of living that obtain under a transnational free market economy and expanding liberal-democratic “rule of law,” and those periodically expelled from humanity who petition for asylum from the ravages of that existence beyond the pale of empire. Seeing in the latter the making of a new humanitarian order, Mahmood Mamdani argues, “If the rights of the citizen are pointedly political, the rights of the human pertain to sheer survival; they are summed up in one word: protection. The new language refers to its subjects not as bearers of rights—and thus active agents in their emancipation—but as passive beneficiaries of an external ‘responsibility to protect.’ Rather than rights-bearing citizens, beneficiaries of the humanitarian order are akin to recipients of charity.”

I describe these features of the present to call attention to the shifting imperial mandates that racial and sex/gender regimes—as conjoined systems of producing, managing, and understanding (perceiving and naturalizing) social divisions of labor, discrepancies of privilege, resources, and life chances and qualities—have been crucial for fulfilling. But how? What is the role, for example, of racial logics in the work of empire? If struggles of decolonization in the past were always critiques and struggles against racism, insofar as colonialism was itself the invention of racism as we know it, how, in this present moment, are we to critically under-
stand the role of racial logics in the contemporary work and history of empire? How, in other words, can this critical work be the work of decolonization today?

“Race” and Empire Studies

Since the more blatantly brutal policing wars launched by the United States in the last twenty years, a growing body of work in empire studies has sought to take account of earlier moments of US imperialism, which decades of academic scholarship had actively forgotten. Analyzing the ideological representations and machineries of social practice of US colonial government, public administration, medicine and public health, state and civic projects, and popular culture in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hawaii, Guam, and Samoa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this work has been invaluable for foregrounding transnational processes of racism and racial (and gendered) formation across metropole and periphery, as well as for enabling an alternative genealogy of dominant US institutions and apparatuses that are key sites and instruments of racializing processes.

For example, Warwick Anderson’s Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines argues that the shift in Filipino resistance to US imperial occupation at the turn of the twentieth century, from practices of diplomatic negotiations to guerrilla warfare, shaped the logics and practices of the new American public health after 1910. Colonial health officers in the Philippines were among the first advocates of this new public health, which entailed a shift from a focus on sanitation to a focus on the private activities of individuals and the control of public spaces and social life in accordance with what he calls the “white American racial grid of intelligibility” of tropical pathology. This regime of “racial hygiene” as he calls it served as “a mode of population management and identity formation,” disciplining native corporeal and social practices to contain their predispositions to be bearers of disease and contamination, shaping the way Filipinos thought about their own bodies and their societies, but also in turn symbolically and directly influencing the new
public health in the United States, through the Pacific crossings of ideas and personnel. Reflecting further on these crossings, Anderson urges us to think seriously “about the extent to which urban health services in America that targeted immigrants and minorities were legacies of empire,” and to consider, more broadly, “the imperial dimensions of national embodiment in the United States.”

His own study traces the genealogy of the later international development regime, particularly in the arena of public health services, as well as the more contemporary global regime of biomedical citizenship to these early US colonial projects of hygiene and bodily reform in the Philippines.

Similarly, Paul Kramer’s *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* provides, on the one hand, “a history of the racial politics of empire, of the ways in which hierarchies of difference were generated and mobilized in order to legitimate and to organize invasion, conquest, and colonial administration,” and on the other, “a history of the imperial politics of race, of the way that empire-building interacted with, and transformed, the process of racial formation” (*BG*, 2–3). Looking at public statements, debates, state policies, private journals, and media representations of US and Filipino politicians, military and civil government authorities, and soldiers during and after the Philippine-American war in 1899 until World War II, Kramer argues that the mutual imbrication of Filipino and American nation building during the four decades led not only to racialized differences between the two populations but to a proliferation of new forms of racialized difference in both places, differences through which political capacity and agency were calibrated, delimited, and excepted in the process of negotiating the meaning and scope of national sovereignty. As he puts it, “It was not simply that difference made empire possible: empire remade difference in the process” (*BG*, 3).

The importance of this scholarship for foregrounding transnational processes of race-making and racism across metropole and periphery, and for enabling an alternative genealogy of dominant US institutions and apparatuses that are key sites and instruments of racializing processes, cannot be underestimated. At the same time, in a moment of late imperial capitalism when, as I described
at the beginning of this essay, the principles for establishing humanity as the new globopolitical subject is concordant with new modes of extracting value through the discrepant subsumption and surplussing of life—that is, in this arguably different moment of empire, in which globopolitical “citizenship” depends less on any particular normative national culture (not even imperial US culture) than on valorizable life (a calculus of social values)—the rapidly burgeoning histories of imperial race-making and, most importantly, a widely shared analytic focus on race as difference from a putative unmarked identitarian norm (of whiteness) raises questions about the political consequences of this knowledge. In the strong focus on dominant logics and institutions of producing, regulating, stratifying, measuring and specifying individuals and populations, through the racial differentiation of identities—indeed, in the disciplinary focus on race as difference—such works risk shoring up the very “grid of intelligibility” of disciplinary and regulatory power that US empire studies purports to critique.

I would venture further that the attention to processes of “race-making” as the primary object of study transnationalizes, without radically altering, the social analytic of a liberal democratic politics. Indeed, Kramer sees colonial “race-making” as “intimately tied up in a broader politics of recognition,” which he argues provided the ideological basis for brokering both empowerment and disenfranchisement for colonial subjects negotiating the treacherous road to political independence. On the one hand, this social analytic elides racisms and processes of racialization embedded in the successful assimilation to and inhabiting of the norm, such as nationality (and not just differences or exclusion from the norm). On the other hand, such an analytic overwrites historical imperial racial processes in the terms of what Jodi Melamed calls “racial liberalism,” a fantasy of official antiracism sutured to postwar US nationalism that she argues facilitated the containment of radical anticolonial and antiracist movements and fueled the further expansion of US global hegemony after World War II. Melamed observes that racial liberalism employs a paradigm of race as culture, which in its neoliberal revision increasingly displaces racial reference altogether, addressing racial inequalities as a matter of culture
and casting more conventionally legible racisms, such as those associated with slavery and colonialism, as (ultimately) disappearing. I read the social analytic of histories of imperial “race-making” as bearing the imprints of racial liberalism insofar as it understands “race” primarily through the rubric of political representation, that is, as a problem of lack or failure (or unevenness) of political recognition/rights on the juridical field stipulated on the liberal ideals of universal freedom and equality. It is from precisely the point of view of these ideals that “race-making” and “racial formation” are understood to be projects (and problems) of “difference.”

Such an analytic thus serves to obscure other forms of racism not primarily predicated on juridical subjects, including the racist violence of dominant forms of humanization embedded in everyday practical structures and protocols of living historically instituted through colonialism and now reorganized as the very basis for a new global political economy of life. Elsewhere I have written about the racist violence of this global political economy of life in terms of a distinction that is crucial to the operation of new processes of value-production, characteristic of the global financial economy, that is, a distinction between life worth living, that is, life with the capacity to yield value as living labor, and life worth expending, that is, life with the capacity to yield value as disposable existence. It is this contemporary mode of racism, whose productivity is manifested in global industries of war, security, bioeconomics, and humanitarian protection and is also at work in the conversion of the promised lifetimes of large swaths of national populations into monetized assets (securitized liquid reserves) by their own states in their respective bids to play the global financial market, that I fear is occluded (and, more, aided) by the shoring up of a grid of intelligibility of race as social difference.

If “race” as social difference is given both as object of analysis and as analytic principle (with “gender” as additional, value-adding variable), it loses its critical force as a theoretical question and political intervention. For example, in US empire studies of US-Philippines colonial relations, natives, in this case Filipinos, come to be seen as having agency in and through this already given racialized identity of their nationality, despite its relatively recent emergence
in struggle under late Spanish rule and its continuing inchoateness decades later and arguably up until the present. What the US colonizers themselves sought to accomplish—that is, the conversion of a radical political claim (“Filipino”) that instigated and emerged out of revolutionary struggle against Spanish colonialism into a disciplinary project of assimilation and tutelage under the imperial aegis of the United States (“Filipinization”)—is itself taken for granted as an established fact by contemporary scholarship.10

Historicizing the construction and self-making of “Filipino” as processes of “racialization,” even as part of a broader process of “race-making,” would seem only to affirm “race” as properties of total social formations, however contingent, flexible, and constructed those properties are contended to be. Such an analytic confirms the established fact of existence of the social subjects whose “racialization” (the mechanism of inscribing those value-laden meanings and qualities comprising “race” as difference) it meticulously critiques. In this dominant coding of sociality, academic knowledge furthers rather than radically alters the practices of an imperial project.

It would seem, even in critical work on empire, that more decolonizing remains to be done.

Imperial Reproduction as “Races”-Making

To my thinking, decolonization demands that we reconsider the reflexive ways we understand and code sociality, as well as the ways we think about historical continuity and change in genealogies of empire, both of which imply a particular notion of reproduction. If imperialism is the generalization or extended reproduction of the social relations of capital constituted through subjective norms of gender, race, and sexuality, it is undoubtedly an inheritance of particular institutions and codifications of human life and being. One of the most important of these institutions is the law. Angela Mitropolous asserts that what distinguishes the United States from the British Empire was its use of common law to expand and push through frontier spaces. “Common law, with its reliance on case law, unfolds through a subtle play between precedence and ap-
proximation . . . it navigates power through repetition and variation.” Mitropolous argues further that “it is the heteronormative household that determined, through precedent and approximation in common law’s unfolding, the extent to which property, contract and credit were recognized, considered as heritable and therefore guaranteed across time” (cc, 102). As the basic architectural unit of a Jeffersonian domestic economy, the heteronormative household figured centrally in US imperialism by modeling “the space through which the legal form of value was defined and imposed” (cc, 103).

Through this model of US domestic space working within the imagination of colonial legislative law, inhabitants of the non-sovereign Philippine Islands (Las Filipinas) who were formerly subjects of Spain were deemed unsuitable for US citizenship. Instead of being fully incorporated into the domestic space of the US nation, upon their colonization by the United States Filipinos were given the imperially recognized status of “nationals”—members of a “dependency—an unincorporated territory belonging to the United States and under its complete sovereignty—a part of the United States in an international sense,” as then dean of the College of Law of the University of the Philippines, George Malcolm, defined the Philippines in the Michigan Law Review in 1916. Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. argues that such a status—created with the country’s “first organic act,” the Philippine Bill of 1902—was founded on the immediate political precedent set by legislation for Puerto Rico and by the application of the US Chinese Exclusion Law to the Philippines in 1902. It is notable that through the colonial application of this US legal act, which was among the many “immigrant acts” racializing the US nation against the figure of Asia, in the making of Philippine nationality, “Filipino” would be legally racialized as not Chinese, despite the fact that the core of the emerging national elite, including the intellectual stratum that formed the Propaganda Movement against Spain in the late nineteenth century, consisted of mestizo Chinese-Filipinos. Furthermore, it is particularly important to underscore the fact that against the politically inclusive citizenship provision of the revolutionary Philippine government’s Malolos constitution of 1899, the “invention” of Filipino nationality legislated under US colonialism
was most directly shaped by the non-extension of the 1868 Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution to the United States’ new colonial acquisition (see “Bl.”). Insofar as the Fourteenth Amendment was framed to give citizenship to African American former slaves (excluding Native Americans), we could understand this non-extension as racializing Filipino nationality against the defining “cases” of both (indeed we could say Filipino is racialized as not black, and like Indian).15

I would hence argue that this national status of “Filipino” bore the legal memory of the earlier precedents set by the landmark cases Cherokee Nation v. Georgia (1831) and Scott v. Sandford (1857), in which the US Supreme Court judged both “Indians” and the “descendants of Africans” neither citizens nor aliens, on the basis of their disqualification from the right to own property. Insofar as indigenous people and slaves or the descendants of slaves constituted “two ways of not owning the self,” the Lockean condition of citizenship as self-ownership, they were not legally representable, that is, they did not have recourse to the law in asserting or seeking protection of their rights.16 Although both indigenous people and slaves and their descendants would subsequently achieve citizenship, these and other cases ideologically affirmed the values of white property-owning subjects, upholding “possessive individualism” (the individual as sole proprietor of his or her skills) as the criterion of citizenship and legal representation. These legal decisions and acts set precedents for deeming what is outside the national rule of law as also outside the bounds of civil and human status, which continues to be reflected in the attitudes toward “illegals” (as forms of non-personhood). Similarly, the “Filipino nationality” recognized and presupposed by the US imperial government in preparing the Philippines for eventual independence would require these conditions of legal subjectivity and the heteronormative household as the proper form of the self-managed territorialized domestic economy.

Part of my argument here, then is that there are complex relations of mutual inter- and intra-constitution between “minority” populations and colonial “nationalities” as they are forged as subsidiary, normative forms of citizenship under empire. Fol-
Following the logic of precedent and approximation, it is no accident that the experimental US colonial mass educational system tasked with making citizen-subjects out of Philippine natives found its test cases in the Hampton Institute for the schooling of Native Americans and the Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute for African Americans. In 1900, the first director of the colonial education bureau, Fred Atkinson, wrote Booker T. Washington to seek his advice on establishing education in the Philippines along industrial lines. Atkinson’s visits to Tuskegee and the Hampton Institute provided him with models of an industrial education that placed considerable emphasis on agricultural instruction, an emphasis that would facilitate the further integration of the national economy based on the export of raw materials within a broader international economy.

It is precisely through the heteronormative household installed by means of the political, economic, and social institutions of independent nationhood as norm (the imperial program of “humanization” of colonial peoples through the protocols of citizen-man, the precursor of the proper subject of globopolitical life) that the US technocratic production of Filipino subjects as particular forms of social relation to work, nature, and value, indeed as particular dispositions toward oneself and others, bears the gender, race, and sexuality imprints of the putatively unmarked culture of freedom of US liberal democracy. Put more broadly, it is through accession to, and not merely exception or exclusion from, a putative universal norm of modern free subjects that social groups are gendered and raced.

The installation of dominant US gendered roles through the heteronormative household can be glimpsed in the home economics programs of this mass educational system, which sutured a reformed private domestic life to a Jeffersonian domestic national economy and to an emerging international economic order. Jefferson’s ideal of an independent yeomanry informed the colonial Philippine rural education emphasis on training in farming and housekeeping, the growing of home gardens, and so forth. The gendered roles that such a household ideal were to foster are manifest in the differences between the Barrio Boy’s Creed and Barrio Girl’s Creed and their respective areas of training as stipulated in
the educational readers widely disseminated through the schools. While boys were to be trained in productive labor (“to kill weeds, increase crops, double the output of flock by keeping more chickens and careful breeding; growing larger crops; keeping a home garden to increase, vary and improve the diet; increasing the value of the land with fruit trees, fence vines, shrubs and flowers”), girls were trained for naturalized, free, domestic, “caring” labor (“to love chickens and pigs and goats and puppies as well as dolls and dresses . . . to take care of some domestic animals as well as my brother, who does not love them as much as I; homemaking; to give away flowers and cook vegetables which I myself raised”). Such a division of labor clearly entails the subjective imperatives and object-relations constitutive of the proper social relations of heteronormative households.

To see the interplaying constitution of subsidiary forms of citizenship under empire is to think beyond the discrete genealogies of particular racialized social groups, and to think beyond the homologies that buttress the perspective of imperial comparatism. To employ these discrete genealogies (even in arguments of “mutual constitution”) is to reproduce the effects of the juridical fictions of imperialism (and to think and imagine from within the rule of law that is its buttress). It is indeed to see that George W. Bush’s preposterous statement that the US colonial occupation of the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century could serve as a model for the contemporary occupation of Iraq was a genealogical claim that needs to be made for empire to continue. More than a hundred years after the Philippine-American War (1899–1913), which left between one-tenth and one-sixth of the native population dead and a legacy of military techniques of counterinsurgency and torture as well as police procedures of surveillance and domestic security that persist in the contemporary context, this earlier imperial project of capitalist expansion is deemed a success, serving as an instructive precedent for democratizing regime change today. Cited as precedent, this “episode” does in fact become part and parcel of the autobiographical narrative of imperial democracy. It confirms the geopolitical order whose installation over the next four decades until World War II (and with it the solidification of “The American
Century”) it helped to inaugurate. Empire studies risks a similar confirmation of this geopolitical order when its location of historical precedents for today’s imperial actions traces the very same narrative lines of continuity through which the imperial subject maintains its privileged representational being. It risks, in other words, being a discursive means of imperial reproduction.

In contrast, that earlier moment of imperial expansion might serve as a historical passageway connecting contemporary scenes of warehoused disposable populations within the United States with scenes of populations surplussed through an ongoing global anti-terrorist war waged not only by US forces but also by subsidiary or franchise state military forces everywhere. It foregrounds the submerged side of a general process of racialization through freedom that traverse the given racial orders of both metropole and colony, which are so central to the material and symbolic organization of imperial democracy.

In fact, John Blanco argues that for many of the white rank and file of US Army fighting in the Philippines, “the new episode of imperial conquest [was] the concluding chapter to the unfinished racial conquest of whites over blacks and native Americans.” We see evidence of what Blanco calls “the counterhistory of white redemption [that] draws from the popular memories of the Confederacy’s war against the emancipation of slavery, as well as the self-identified Anglo-Saxon wars against the indigenous populations on the westward frontier” (“RP,” 382) not only in the racialized representation of Filipinos as African Americans and Native Americans in public arenas of debate and visual culture but also in the fact that the height of US atrocities in the genocidal campaigns in the Philippines in the early 1900s coincided with the escalation of lynchings of black men in the United States during the same moment. Blanco shows that US public officials attempted to frame the violence of war in domestic metaphors and discourses of civil society. This domestication of violence in paternalistic metaphors of discipline, hygiene, and education, attested to by countless political cartoons of the period, was also in effect the suppression and internalization of the violence of a translocal, imperial war
through civil institutions like the Bureau of Health, the Bureau of the Interior, and the Bureau of Public Security.

The domestication of racist violence (what Blanco calls “race as the sign of war, the state of war as constitutive of race relations” [“RP,” 382]) through civil structures and institutions in the post-colony can be viewed as playing out the geopolitical race narrative that Melamed argues is at the core of racial liberalism, that is, the integration of minoritized populations within US democratic society and advancement toward equality defined through a liberal framework of legal rights and inclusive nationalism. In this way we see the way a shared logic of imperial “reproduction” is at work in the construction of racialized socialities here and abroad, indeed, of “ethnicities” as particular, minority subjects within universal projects of enfranchisement, empowerment, and even liberation.

Social Reproduction as Life-Making

So far I have argued that it is crucial to see such intricate connections between racialized sub-populations as the invisible lattice-work or circuit board of a shared logic or order of imperial “reproduction,” that is, the production of the social relations of the global free world. These connections do not imply any simple continuity of being of these discrete social identities, but rather a continuum of processes of social making that cut across and confound the very racialized collectivities they importantly help to constitute.

However, if we only track this imperial “reproduction” of racialized socialities and maintain the grid of intelligibility through which such socialities are produced, we miss another level of social reproduction, this time on the side of quotidian social struggle, which is neither tethered to nor constrained by continuity, succession, lineage, or consistency of sociality as subject. This level of social reproduction, sometimes understood through the category of reproductive labor, consists of those generative associations and acts, social capacities and aspirations, agencies of imagination and practice, that can also act in fugitive, dispersive, and insurgent fashion. As the designation of this array of life-making, life-renewing capacities and practices, reproductive labor is wrongly
conflated with the conception of reproduction as “the production and conservation” of dominant social relations, and indeed as the production and maintenance of a stable sameness. For life-making, perhaps especially under conditions of foreclosure, negation, and dispossession, may very well and often does consist of practices that can corrode rather than preserve the putative sociality of one’s naturalized belonging, in part by involvement in and mediations of other socialities.

We might consider, for example, the role of native wives in the Southern Philippines, Aceh, Borneo, and elsewhere across the arc of the Indian Ocean to East Africa, in the anchoring and shaping of that transnational skein of networks composing the Muslim diaspora of the Hadrami—Arabs from Hadramwt, Yemen—that Engseng Ho shows constituted itself over centuries as a potential rival empire to European and US empires. Counting Osama bin Laden as its most prominent recent figure, this specter of diasporic sociality now draws out some of the most virulent forms of racialization of Muslims in Europe and North America in the contemporary context of resurgent US imperialism. As Ho describes it, the Hadrami diaspora brought together not just peoples from the homeland, but peoples in destinations throughout the Indian Ocean as well. Here, Hadramis played a major role in the expansion of Islam. . . . In their marriages with local women, Hadramis and their offspring become Swahilis, Gujaratis, Malabaris, Malays, Javanese, Filipinos. They became natives everywhere. At the same time, the men and their offspring continued to move throughout this oceanic space, for reasons of trade, study, pilgrimage, and politics. Throughout this space, a Hadrami could travel and be put up by relatives, who might be Arab uncles married to foreign local aunts. Many men had wives in each port. In the arc of coasts around the Indian Ocean, then, a skein of networks arose in which people socialized with distant foreigners as kinsmen and as Muslims.23

Native wives served as anchors, port homes, seemingly fixed milieus of accommodation in the geography of this diaspora’s movements, yet they do not figure prominently in this or any other account
of emergence of a counter-empire. They were nevertheless vital to the social reproduction of the local and transnational peoples for whom they were enabling means of life. Like the local, “native” wives of the Hadrami, Filipina domestic workers and caregivers in Europe, Asia, America, and the Middle East (including Israel and Palestine, where Filipina women as well as transwomen work on both sides of an ongoing racialized war) mediate and shape socialities that ultimately may not claim them as one of their own, or as bearing the proper lineage and agency of cultural transmission of their host or patron communities.

If we stick to given continuist narratives we may miss what passes in between and among given social identities in ways too indiscernible and too indeterminate or too destabilizing—perhaps too infrasubjective and infrasocial—to be thought through the macro process called “identification” or even subjectification, as the other side of racialization. We miss forces that are transient and fleeting despite the pivotal role they might play in the renewal as well as mutation of the social geography of global empire, which we might equally understand as the racial and gendered relations of production of capitalism. The imperial reproduction of these relations might subsume the life-making practices of social reproduction of its subjects, yet the very foreclosure of other forms of life entailed by such imperial reproduction, not to mention the harshness of living exploited, devalued life under capitalism, sets the conditions for the uneasy alignments, discordance, and outright antagonisms between the reproduction of imperial relations and the social reproduction of individual and collective lives.

We cannot therefore think about the continuity or reproduction of capitalist production without also considering the necessary violence of preventing workers from “running away,” that is, from flight from their function within capitalist relations. It is in this context that we can recognize the salience of what Marx understood as processes of “original accumulation,” those processes of annihilation of the means of subsistence, which secures workers from “running away”: “Individual consumption provides, on the one hand, the means of for the workers’ maintenance and reproduction; on the other hand, by the constant annihilation of the
means of subsistence, it provides for their continued re-appearance on the labour-market.”

Destruction of the means of subsistence might be understood in terms of the assault on the social reproductive capacities of particular populations and groups. The destruction of welfare services serves as only one contemporary example of such assault. Permanent war, land appropriation through agribusiness, speculative settlement or real estate development, and so forth continue to be some of the more spectacular forms of dispossession, but there are also quotidian forms of exclusion from material and cultural resources, or forms of enclosure of the so-called general intellect, that serve as emergent non-subjective modes of racist dispossession. Meanwhile, the gendered reproductive capacities of individual disenfranchised women as well as men from those very disposable populations whose own social reproductive capacities remain under assault are harnessed to the social reproduction of advanced industrial households and families. In this latter context, migrant third-world domestic workers’ desires are often “outlawed,” their naturalized families and kin splintered transnationally, even as they form new, informal networks, non-normative “families” to assist in their own reproduction. Thus, on the one hand, racial, gendered norms are deployed to reproduce the “class” subjects of globopolitical humanity; on the other hand, these social forces of reproductive labor are continuously prohibited or impeded from becoming subjects at all.

Within this uneven and contradictory arena of social reproduction, it is therefore important to attend to practices of dissolution that might issue out of the excess and leftover of life-making on the part of those serving as the means of reproduction of others. We might attend, for example, to the practice and discourse of Filipina wives of Japanese men “running away” from their homes and roles as reproducers of the Japanese family. As Lieba Faier shows in her ethnography of Filipina wives in rural Japan, the acts and stories of Filipinas running away (stories told and circulated by Filipinas themselves) serve to create potential and actual spaces of extradomestic life and in this way to contribute to conditions of instability and insecurity for the very Japanese family that they were expected
Running away was at once an alternative strategy for survival, allowing some Filipina women to continue supporting their families in the Philippines while leveraging better conditions of life for themselves in Japan, and a tempting but also terrifying life option that is dangerous, promising, and unsettling. Running away is not only an act of freedom on the part of the enslaved but also a risk-taking, adventurous, and ordinary practice, part of the historical repertoire of everyday life-making on the part of native wives, the gendered mediators and means of inter-ethnic, inter-national social reproduction and exchange.

Running away is one example of social practices of making viable life on the part of those who serve as the means of reproduction of others that both supports and corrodes privileged forms of sociality. It highlights a realm of actions and processes that takes place beneath the threshold of intelligibility of imperial races-making and its racial liberal critique, actions and processes that I designate and understand as forms of *remaindered life*. Remaindered life is an analytic category for thinking about life-sustaining forms and practices of personhood and sociality that, despite being pushed into permanent outmodedness and illegibility by the discursive and practical mandates of imperial reproduction, persist in creative, transformed ways as practices of living—important “soft” technologies or means of social reproduction—particularly among more disenfranchised social groups. It is, in my own thinking, also a political imperative to attend to and continue the work of decolonization.

**Remaindered Life: Vital Platforms of Social Reproduction**

Anna Tsing writes about the defining tracks and grounds, channels and landscape elements enabling global flows as relations of production that are hidden by a dominant model of “circulation” that many scholars adopt to frame their analyses of globalization. Rather than following money as the *ur*-object of flow, she urges an attention to the social conditions of that flow, the means and infrastructure of place-making that circulation requires. Tsing’s perspectival shift is useful here to think about the way that con-
temporary immigrant domestic workers and caregivers, as much as the native wives of the Hadrami diaspora, serve similarly as the enabling channels of not just a geographical movement of privileged forces of agency (money and its socio-subjective correlates, i.e., sovereign subjects) but also a chrono-historical movement of privileged forms of sociality (discrete communities persisting through time). To the extent that these domestic workers and native wives serve as feminized means for the transgenerational survival, renewal, continuity, and futurity of social subjects made legible within the political frame of empire (whether as legitimate or illegitimate nations or diasporic peoples), it is important to understand the forms of life and practices of life-making that shape their role as vital media of other lives. As conduits of other people’s wills and aspirations, accommodating and conforming to the bodily, emotional, psychical, and metaphysical requirements of individuals and communities, to which they are attached as vital, component yet alienable parts, they act in a very practical but also otherworldly sense as forms of human media—technologies of reproduction rather than full-fledged sovereign (self-determining, self-owning) individual subjects.

To understand the life-making capacities of such human media beyond their role in the reproduction of legible subjects under empire (i.e., beyond the conservation of the sameness of social being of the latter) means to consider the plural ontologies enabling and guiding their performances of this mediatic role. It means considering the permeability, extendability, divisibility, and mutability of selves, the porousness of social belonging (family, household, kin, community), and the transmissibility of potency and life across persons as well as across divisions of the living and the dead that this mediatic role entails, salient features of lifeworlds in which histories and practices of spirit-mediumship and debt-bonds continue to bear contemporary significance.

Fenella Cannell insightfully describes social processes of interaction in the contemporary context of lowland Christianized Philippines in such terms, foregrounding an array of habits and gestures in the context of everyday life that evidence the extant workings of practices that appear to have their origins in precolonial and early colonial times. Cannell observes in contemporary practices
of spirit-mediumship, marriage, funerals, and transvestite beauty contests the workings in particular of the social logic and model of power characteristic of precolonial and early colonial Philippine societies, “which functioned dynamically on the basis of infinite gradations of debt-bondage” (pi, 10). She notes the way everyday social encounters operate as dynamic engagements with and negotiations of a specifically Southeast Asian notion of power (an energy animating all organic and inorganic matter) that entail possibilities of either depletion or augmentation among persons who act both as mediating bearer-agents of power and as “their own mediatory objects” (pi, 231) in such negotiations; the way wives might construct themselves as “the reluctant objects of other wills and other desires,” “a kind of forced gift of herself” (pi, 46) that in turn (as a kind of return gift) obligates others, compelling others’ obligations for the gendered value of their submission; the way spirit-mediums serve as conduits of a patronage that functions ambivalently as both benevolent and predatory forms of “help” (pi, 95), while at the same time becoming themselves, through the gift of healing, a kind of patron to those they help; and finally, in their mastery of a genre of transformative performance in which all members of the community have a shared interest, the way transgender bak-la beauty-contestants and singers, “become the temporary bodily ‘lodging places for potency’ . . . [epitomizing] recapturings of power, not literally through possession, but through a wrapping of the body in symbols of protective status, and a transformation of the person by proximity to the power it imitates, which are in many ways akin to it” (pi, 223).

In all these specific contexts, human actors engage in forms of mediation in which their own bodies and selves are offered up as mediatory apparatuses (as object and site) for the transaction and transmission of quantities and qualities of power and value across realms of social interaction (both visible and invisible) that are to some extent congruent, but also importantly imperfectly aligned with, the social field of exchange under capitalist democracy.

I too have written on the different ways that Filipino women in particular participate in their own export and exchange, as a medium of exchange, the way they and their families speak of their bodily lives as collateral for loans they take to gain overseas place-
ment, while they themselves offer that very bodily life as the ante
to risk in the cosmic gamble of overseas adventure that they em-
bark upon. Rather than simply an ideological effect of capitalism,
these practices of self-lending draw on the same seemingly anach-
ronistic “political economy” and ontology, which the extant prac-
tice of spirit-mediumship, in its instantiation of fungible, extend-
able, divisible, alienable, transformable, and combinable selves,
continues to be based on as well as renovate.

The kinesthetic, aesthetic (sensorial and perceptual), affective,
and cognitive entailments of using and inhabiting bodily selves as
media suggest precisely what I call remaineder life, which I view
as the unabsorbed residue of an epistemic translation and real sub-
sumption of “non-human” forms of life by capitalist production
and exchange. Women (and men) who become “helpers” of other
communities, as well as their own, whether as domestic workers,
nurses, caregivers, or foreign or native wives, draw on and revi-
talize older vocabularies and repertoires of action where the lines
between submission and volition, bondage and sentimental attach-
ment, obligation and gift, servitude and care, are constantly negoti-
ated in transactions of personal and social well-being and potency.
As the means of generation and renewal of the life of communities,
and the means of transmission of the properties and values that
ensure affective, identificatory, and genealogical continuity across
spatial and temporal distances, such “helpers” (vital yet auxiliary
agents of reproduction of legible social subjects) perform functions
and services that issue from older social mediatic capacities, which
I have elsewhere shown to have been designated for regression and
outright eradication by the imperial project of instituting the prac-
tical subjective ideal of the self-possessed citizen-man through the
apparatuses of colonial governmentality.

The exercise of such regressive mediatic capacities—adaptable,
mimetic, bodily, kinesthetic, and sensorial tendencies seen as inimi-
cal to the development of the proper capacities of autonomous, free
subjects—can be gleaned in the “high-fidelity” analog performanc-
es of Filipino jazz musicians coursing throughout East and Southeast
Asia throughout the twentieth century, historically mediating the
transmission of US black and Latin American musical sensibilities
and modernities across Asian worlds and beyond (such that the lan-
guorous tropical structure of postcolonial feeling conveyed in Wong Kar-Wai’s trilogy of films of the late twentieth century becomes indelibly marked by and traceable to Filipino Latin jazz musicians in the nightclubs of Shanghai and Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s). Indeed, in these musicians’ technically exact bodily rendition of voices, sounds, styles, looks, and other qualities of the performing arts that they did not themselves author (their “slavishly” or “mechanically” mimetic bodily capacities of reproduction of the performances of others) as much as in the intimate caring bodily mediatic performances of domestic workers, nurses, caregivers, and wives, we glimpse some persons’ real, practical function as “vital platforms of social reproducibility” (“RL,” 484). Such examples should make us attend to that level of social reproduction occluded by proper genealogies of national and transnational, ethno-racial belonging and to glimpse other orders of being and action through which discontinuous itineraries (of flight, of fate-playing, of magical transformation, or redemption) are pursued.

To be able to see and trace the meandering itineraries of these human mediatic performances of “immaterial” social production not only across discrepant socio-geographical landscapes (East, South-east, and West Asia as well as Europe and the Americas) and across discontinuous histories (ethno-racial, national, regional), but also within the dispersed transpersonal space-times of intimate, affective, kinesthetic interaction and communication in everyday life, is to see examples of reproductive labor producing a surplus (of life, of labor) no longer as accummulative or eliminable excess (value or waste), as entailed by the global capitalist economy, but rather as a non-identical permutation and proliferation of plural qualities, conditions, and effects.

I want to emphasize the importance of attending to these remaindered forms of life-making as potentially radical, corrosive, transformative supplements to our critiques of dominant processes of racial inscription. Beneath the level of given social identities, whose genealogies we participate in making and revising so they become the proper protagonists of our critique, remaindered forms of life point to subaltern human pathways of transmission and influence through which life-making affective properties and sensibilities are invisibly passed across distinct communities.
What, then, might it mean to reconsider “race” as a theoretical question and political intervention rather than a category of social exemption or exclusion or a descriptive category of “difference” (as a sign of marginalized social being)? It seems to me that it means attending to these subaltern pathways of social and self formation that remain beneath the threshold of visibility of raced subjects (both dominant and subordinate), the proper borders of their own self-presencing. It means to ask how “race” operates within and results from practices of reproducing social life, generating lines of affiliation, stratification, and descent; determining and allocating proper distributions of value, right, power, and futurity; producing and maintaining relations of exploitation, expropriation, and violence at levels and through means beyond the ideological field within which “race” operates as a discriminatory, representational sign of social being. It means letting go of our uninterrogated attachment to the ideal of abstract, free subjects that undergirds the grid of intelligibility of racial liberalism and its critique of empire, with its premise/promise of a state of freedom already achieved, a humanity already realized. It means opening up the histories of capitalism, racism, and empire to the plurality and heterogeneity of extant and shifting social logics and practices of naturalized obligation and bondage—the conditions and inventions, the untold creative agencies and impeded potentials, as well as pain, of non-free life—operating as both productive forces of capitalism and imperialism and as subaltern forces of other life-making.

To decolonize thus means to ask, How do we mobilize other social analytics to bring into operation remaindered forms of social intelligence, imagination, and sensibility that might not only dispute what is given in empire and the very frames within which such things (like “race as difference”) are given but also, in doing so, how do we set the stage (create the platforms) for radical departure from the given conditions of life under empire now?

Notes

1. This is a world order that renewed itself through the crises of two world wars (particularly, according to Hannah Arendt, the crisis of fascism and totalitarianism that precipitated World War II) but up


far as conversation and exchange between these fields (i.e., between empire studies and critical race and ethnic studies) are rare or discordant, issuing from quite discrepant methods and premises.


7. Whatever claims about the material effects of this conceptualization of “race” in terms of a politics of recognition (e.g., lack of recognition as enabling and contributing to substantive racial inequality, viewed as matter of distribution), they are set in terms of an understanding of representation that is predicated on a liberal democratic separation between the political and the economic. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313; and Wendy Brown, States of Injury (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).


10. As a category of national identity, the category “Filipino” is certainly also central to the social analytic of postcolonial Philippine nationalist historiography, but it is not predominantly deployed as a racial category. While contemporary empire studies might historicize the “invention” of the Filipino (following nationalist scholarship), much of this new work deploys “Filipino” as a category of racialized national identity, one that functions simultaneously as the object of study and an organizing principle of the analysis. That is to say, “Filipino” continues to stand in as a particular totality, in contradistinction with but also “in relations with” other ethno-racial identities, such as “American,” “African American,” “Native American,” etc.—pre-constituted subjects who are “racialized” through these colonial, historical representations (but presumably not the representational apparatus of the scholarship on empire).


14. The recommendation of the extension of this law was made by Brigadier General Elwell S. Otis, head of the military government set up in 1898 after the US takeover, and was supported by anti-Chinese sentiments among the collaborating Filipino elite. The complex, contradictory history of *indios* (natives) and the “Chinese” within the archipelago shows that the processes of racialized differentiation began earlier, with the colonial Spanish state, but it is with the invention of Philippine citizenship that “Filipino” is transformed into a racialized legal status. Caroline S. Hau, “‘Who Will Save Us from the Law?’ The Criminal State and the Illegal Alien in Post-1986 Philippines,” in *Figures of Criminality in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Colonial Vietnam*, ed. Vicente L. Rafael (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asian Studies Program, Cornell University, 1999). Richard Chu, *Chinese and Chinese Mestizos of Manila: Family, Identity, and Culture, 1860s–1930s* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

15. How Filipinos become racialized as not Indian, that is, as not savages (the split between *indio* and savage), is another story that also traverses Spanish and US colonialism.


27. I write about migrant domestic workers as *replicants* and as domestic technologies in *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences in the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004). Hereafter cited as *FP*.


