

Undergraduate Research Symposium May 18, 2012 Mary Gates Hall

Online Proceedings

SESSION 1N

MCNAIR SESSION - CULTURE SHIFTS, SOCIAL CHANGE, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: PAST AND PRESENT

Session Moderator: Devon Pea, Anthropology

Mary Gates Hall 295

1:00 PM to 3:00 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

Soft Slips of Flesh: The Female Body as a Place of Sexual Violence,??and Site of Economic, Social, and Cultural Exchanges

*Merzamia (Mimi) Cagaitan, Senior, English, Comparative
History of Ideas*

McNair Scholar

Mentor: Sonnet Retman, American Ethnic Studies

Mentor: Michelle Liu, English

My research aims to counter the notion that women do not mind the silencing, sexualization, and objectification of their bodies by providing a platform whereby the often unseen and unheard female body can voice a resounding reply that, on the contrary, she does mind, and very much so. My research examines works of contemporary historical fiction, like Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*, in order to explore the silencing of particular women in critical moments of capitalist transformation within and beyond the United States: the transatlantic slave trade, colonization, and imperialism, and the subsequent 20th century proliferation of neoliberalism, nation-building, and imperialism. It highlights this silencing by tracing traumas the female body endures. And does this specifically by defining the different female body parts that function as primary shock-absorbers as women who are coping with the effects of dislocation, displacement, and diaspora are not only gendered and sexualized in these labor markets but are also raced – a key component of representation and sexual exploitation. Vehemently criticizing the phallographic order responsible for these various states of uprootedness is Luce Irigaray, whose essay "This Sex Which Is Not One" is concerned with the search for and implementation of a uniquely feminine language. My research interrogates the possibility of such a language existing and the significance it would bear in breaking the uni-

vocal shroud restricting the expressions and movements of the female body. This analysis utilizes a Marxist reading of the commodification of woman and her sex, as well as Irigaray's conception of mimesis as it pertains to the recognition and viewing of the female. The injuries of being sexualized, gendered, and raced, unfortunately restrict the feminine discourse that female bodies could potentially produce by dehumanizing the female and rendering her nothing but a voiceless soft slip of flesh.