Reactivating Filipino Youth Activism in the Age of Slacktivism

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Radical youth movements today are viewed as a chimera of a bygone era inspired by a now-defunct ideology. Many youth scholars believe that the birth of Web 2.0 technology, together with the continued influence of/emphasis on state-sponsored civic education, has drastically reconfigured the youth subculture and the youth's political engagement. This paper, though, argues that this reconfiguration is but a reflection of neoliberal capitalism still at work in our modern society. While conscious of the changing landscape of a youth culture that is now saturated by various forms of media, this paper, toward the end, reaffirms Jose Ma. Sison's call for the Filipino youth to be the vanguards of social change.

Keywords: *youth activism; youth culture; Web 2.0; slacktivism*

Youth Power

Today, the youth make up one quarter of the world's population. There are over 1.8 billion people aged 10 to 24 years old, Ninety percent of them live in developing countries. In the Philippines, Republic Act 8044 or the Youth in Nation-Building Act of 1995 define "youth" as those who are 15-30 years old. According to the Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Survey, there were 19.2 million youth in the Philippines in 2013. The youth aged 15 to 19 years old then had a population count of 10.2 million and those 20 to 24 years old totalled 9 million (University of the Philippines Population Instituted & Demographic Research and Development Foundation, 2014)

Many Filipino adults decry the seeming apathy of the young generation of Filipinos who they often view as too adventurous and impulsive, oblivious of cultural tradition, and disrespectful of traditional Filipino values. The youth are considered bereft of any reflexive capacity that could only be earned through proper moral socialization. This pejorative understanding of our young people is often caused by "moral panic" that every so often depicts

the youth as "anti-social" and as a "threat" to the moral order (Lupton, 1999; Bothius, 1985). The popular song "Batang Bata Ka Pa" by the Apo Hiking Society (1982), puts this issue in the most intense light:

Batang-bata ka lang at akala mo na
Na alam mo na ang lahat na kailangan mong malaman
Buhay ay di ganyan
Tanggapin mo na lang ang katotohanan
Na ikaw ay isang musmos lang na wala pang alam
Makinig ka na lang, makinig ka na lang (track 6)

(You are still very young and you still have a lot
of things to learn about and to understand in this world
That's the truth
You're wrong if you believe that
life is only one small paradise)

Containing Youth through Garrisoned Schools and Communities

State-funded agencies and the intellectuals of the ruling class proclaim, "What is wrong with the nation is what is wrong with the youth." Thus, following the functionalist paradigm in bourgeois social science, policy makers and scholars of the establishment device ways and means to contain the youth's radicalism and potential for social disruption. This approach easily slips into a form of benevolent paternalism that subjects the youth to "therapeutic economy" (Nguyen, 2005). They are targeted as passive recipients of charities and pre-packaged programs. They become testing grounds and guinea pig for global bio-political regulation. And they are monitored, sequestered and put under surveillance in walled communities, garrisoned schools to pacify their rather carefree propensities and spirits (Giroux, 2009).

The supreme irony here is that while they are taught social responsibility and civic virtues by state-funded agencies, they are deliberately prevented from full civic participation. Young people are caught in the limbo of bourgeois private-public divide.

Before Slacktivism There Was Revolutionary Politics

Yet it must be remembered that the youth have always been at the forefront of national struggle. Revolutionary leaders are relatively young. Lenin was first arrested at age 17 when he joined student protests; he wrote his *Development of Capitalism in Russia* at the age of 29. Stalin was first arrested

at 23 and joined the Bolsheviks a year later. At 29 Fidel Castro led an armed uprising against military dictator Fulgencio Batista and was captured in a failed attack on Moncada Barracks in Santiago. Then Che Guevarra joined Fidel Castro's forces at 27. Joe Marti, the great Cuban revolutionary was arrested when he was 16 for opposing Spanish colonialism.

Columnist Jarius Bondoc (2012) took a brief look back at Philippine history and identified youthful Filipino heroes, beginning with Jose Rizal, the leader of the Propaganda Movement against Spanish colonialism, who wrote a poetic tribute to the mother tongue, *"Sa Aking Mga Kabata"* ("To My Fellow Youth") at the tender age of eight. He wrote his first novel at the age of 26 and finished his second novel, *El Filibusterismo* in 1891 when he was 30. Graciano Lopez Jaena, at the age of 17, wrote a satirical article entitled "Fray Botod" which depicted the greed and vices of Spanish priests in the Philippines. He was only 32 when he founded the newspaper *La Solidaridad* in Madrid. The founder of the Katipunan, Andres Bonifacio, joined Jose Rizal's La Liga Filipina at 29 and at the age of 32 became the Supreme Leader of the Katipunan. When the Revolution began, his faithful comrade-in-arms Emilio Jacinto was only 21. Gregoria de Jesus, Bonifacio's wife, was only 18 when she became the custodian of the Katipunan's documents. Emilio Aguinaldo was the victorious general of the Revolution at age 27. He founded the first Republic in Asia three months after turning 29. Gregorio del Pilar became a general of the Katipunan at age 21. He had just turned 24 when he fought his last battle as Aguinaldo's rear guard at Tirad Pass in 1899. Apolinario Mabini was 34 when he took on the intellectual leadership of the Malolos Republic and drafted its Constitution. Macario Sakay was 31 when he continued the War of Liberation against the new U.S. colonizers from 1901 to 1904. Miguel Malvar was 36 when, after Aguinaldo's capture, he took over the Revolutionary government in 1901. Isabelo de los Reyes was 25 when he started writing in Ilocano and Spanish against the abuses of the colonizers. .

Individuals of course are not born heroes. They are created by the material forces of society at a particular juncture of history. Yet, historically and sociologically, the undaunted idealism of young people have propelled them to take leadership roles in social and political movements (Roszak, 1969; Keniston, 1968; Fornas, 1985).

Generation Gap or a Different Ideological Terrain?

Indeed, the Filipino youth have a glorious past, fighting for causes that led them to sacrifice their careers, families, and for many of them, even their lives. This idealism and patriotism in the young, surprisingly, hold even today. In fact the 1996 SWS survey found that they are proud to be

Filipino, easily declaring a willingness to defend the country in case of war (Sandoval, Mangahas, & Guerrero, 1998). But the youth's engagement in society and in political transformation will always vary, influenced by the social and economic forces operating within a society at a given time (Flanagan, 2004).

The essential problems that confronted our young Filipino heroes, namely, neo-colonialism, cultural imperialism, and oppression by class, gender, age and race, have remained. What Jose Maria Sison (1971), one of the founding members of Kabataang Makabayan, explained to the young members of the organization regarding the basic problems of Philippine society in the seventies is still very much true today:

> The youth today face two basic problems: U.S. imperialism and feudalism. These two are the principal causes of poverty, unemployment, inadequate education, ill health, crime and immorality which afflict the entire nation and the youth. The youth do not only suffer with their people the iniquities of U.S. imperialism and feudalism but are also the first ones to suffer them. (p. 15)

While the US military bases agreement with the Philippines was abrogated on September 16, 1991, the intervention of the US government on Philippine politics and economy continues (San Juan, 2007; 2009). Undeniably, though, the social and economic contexts of feudalism and US imperialism have changed. Young Filipinos today face other problems concomitant with U.S. imperialism and feudalism such as unemployment, the high cost of education, meaningless rebellion and alienation from social institutions especially family, religion and schools, commodification of romantic relationships, and exclusion from the vortex of feverish consumerism.

Moreover, the avenues for solving and dealing with these problems have changed drastically. Young people have found new channels to express their political views—in new social media, social networking, and cyberspace. In 2011, the global survey of the McCann group, "The Truth about the Youth" (Broek, 2011), revealed that given several choices of items they can keep, young people worldwide are willing to lose all their things except their gadgets. According to the results of the 2013 "Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study" of University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI), Filipino youth are digitally wired now more than ever. Six out of 10 are regular internet users, more than half have social network and email accounts, and 78% have mobile phones. They also spend six hours a week

online on average, some logging in as much as thirty-five hours of internet use (Cruz, 2015).

Indeed the internet and the new social media have enabled the Filipino youth to transgress territorial and traditional politics as exemplified in the 2013 Million March protests at Luneta and the various anti-corruption campaigns that organized youth from different social groups (Mangun, 2015). In addition, hacktivism or breaking into computer system for social and political purposes has also been part of our young people's use of Web 2.0 technology (Jordan, 2002). Ironically, the deep immersion of Filipino youth in the sea of cyberspace has created the new phenomenon called "slacktivism" or "easy online activism" (Reardon, 2013, p. 24). But it is essential to frame these global trends that define the terrain of young people's cultures today within the discourse of the diffusion of neoliberal economic policies throughout the world and its concomitant rationality of governing the minds of the young people.

It is inaccurate to claim that young Filipinos today have not changed since the days of the Katipunan and Rizal. Young people today breathe and swim in the culture of Web 2.0 and all its technological ramifications (O'Reilly, 2014). They do not just passively consume information and messages. They actively configure these signs and images based on personal and social preferences (Huq, 2006; Muggleton, 2000). Aside from exposing them to various ways of political participation, the new technology and media forms have redefined youth civic participation and shaped their overall nature (Bennett, Freelon, & Wells, 2010; Buckingham, 2008).

It is also equally inaccurate to depict today's youth, dubbed as the "millenials" or "Gen Y," as completely different from previous generations simply because of the much-touted information revolution that brought to life the K- or knowledge economy (Alsop, 2008; Gardner & Davis, 2013). This is a more pernicious claim insofar as it eschews all forms of traditional expressions of youth rebellion and resistance in favor of virtual public spheres. Cyberspace's extreme prophets argue that today's revolution, as seen in the Arab Spring, can now be accomplished without bloodshed through Facebook and Twitter. Worse, they substitute slacktivism or hashtag activism via cyberspace engagement for real organizing and hail it as the primary avenue of struggle (Dean, 2006; 2012). Buckingham (2008) rightly cautioned us about this:

> Young people may be "empowered" as consumers, at least in the sense of being able to access a much wider range of goods and services much more easily. But as yet there is little sense in which they are being empowered as citizens;

only a minority are using the technology to engage in civic participation, to communicate their views to a wider audience, or to get involved in political activity (p. 14).

Furthermore the celebratory mood of some pundits about new technologies and the youth often "represents not a description of what children or young people actually are," as Buckingham (2008) rightly argued, "but a set of imperatives about what they should be or what they need to become" (p. 15). This is not another dismissive condemnation of what is "wrong" with the "apps generation" (Gardner and Davis, 2013).[2] but a cautionary argument. In fact, any serious study of youth activism in the 21st century has to necessarily deal with this drift towards slacktivism and other forms of political expression of the millennial youth.

Mapping the Terrain of Alienated Youth

It is the thesis of this paper that in order to address the creation of spaces of political hope among the Filipino youth, one must be sensitive to the cultural lifestyle fostered by the changes in the exchange relations in production in our current society. As Engels (1880) stated clearly:

> The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view, the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in men's better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the philosophy, but in the economics of each particular epoch. (para. 1)

Engels (1880), in effect, is suggesting that if we are to seek the key to unlock the far-reaching changes in youth culture and its milieu, we have to look for it in the economic transformation happening in the wider society and the world. The birth of Generation Web 2.0 technologies, case in point, is not independent of economic shifts in global capitalism. The new tools that global capitalism create are never neutral. As Harvey (2005) explained,

neoliberalism's endeavour "to bring all human action into the domain of the market" requires "technologies of information creation and capacities to accumulate, store, transfer, analyse, and use massive databases to guide decisions in the global marketplace" (p. 3). Today, even the Filipino youth are entangled in this network of "technologies of information" designed to spread the scope of capital to the remotest spaces in the globe (Dean, 2006).

Capitalism and the Construction of Youth as Citizen-Consumer

Youth as a stage in life is a modern construction (Falk & Falk, 2005; Bennett, 2007). The term "youth" was invented partly to justify the schooling of young people. What many mainstream scholars of youth tend to elide is how the transition towards industrial capitalism forced modern nation-states to provide mass schooling for young people who were not yet ready to enter the labor market but must be kept busy to avoid getting into trouble. Such education allowed society to train them to become citizen-workers while their families attended to their own social reproduction (France, 2007).

Under modern capitalism, the paradox of governing the youth lies in trying to generate broad social interest while making individual choice a prerequisite to such activity (Giroux, 2009). In short, how to subject individuals to standardized curriculum, products, and consumerism while giving them the illusion of individualized choice (Morch & Andersen, 2006). In the West, existentialism became a way out of this paradox. This bourgeois philosophy rejected heroically the alienation of young people under capitalism by championing the necessity of living "authentically." But the futility of existentialist rebellion ended up championing bourgeois freedom that further bolstered the individualist philosophy of the market.

Today, existential rebellion has been replaced by post-modern pop philosophies that celebrate differences and consumerist multiculturalism. Neoliberal capitalism creates a new problem for young people: how to pursue one's narcissistic interests while hoping it will redound to the common interest. So while neoliberal capitalism extends the market to all areas of life, the state also checks this excessive privatization and incessant individualism through civic education. This is made clearer when one examines closely the new General Education Curriculum (GEC) of the Philippine Commission for Higher Education (CHED) where young people are to be taught to value ethical principles and political engagement but only so they can easily bear the responsibilities of market aberrations. This corporatized civic education is captured in the survey of McCann (Broek, 2011) that shows young people worldwide being adept consumers who demand truthfulness from products they consume, but rather than challenging the marketization

of everyday life, they are transformed into schizoids: citizen-consumers. Thus, citizenship is now defined as the intelligent consumption of products, with bogus corporate social responsibility rather than critical engagement (Giroux, 2002). As Kennelly (2011) pointed out, the social forces of neoliberal capitalism in relation to shaping young people's civic engagement today "are in many ways the antithesis of political engagement, premised as they are upon an ideology of individualized consumerism and meritocracy and the erosion of collective ties" (p. 8).

The Filipino Youth in the Throes of Global Capitalism

To understand the changes in the youth's response to social problems and economic crisis, one has to look into the havoc wreaked by capitalism on their lives. A 2010 government survey found the Philippines had some 6.24 million out-of-school youth (OSY) that year, mainly due to a lack of personal interest to go to school, followed by the high cost of education and the desire to work. According to the office, the term OSY refers to family members six to 17 years old who are not attending a formal school as well as family members 18 to 24 years old who are currently out of school, not gainfully employed and had not finished college or a post-secondary course. Based on the 2012 Labor Force Survey, there are 4.2 million out-of-school youth in the country according to the study of the National Youth Commission (NYC). A 2010 NYC survey showed 64% of them want to go back to school. One out of eight Filipinos aged between six and 24 is an out-of-school youth (OSY), according to the 2010 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS) of the National Statistics Office (NSO). This translates to about 16 percent of the estimated 39 million Filipinos in that age bracket, or 6.24 million people. It said that among the main reasons cited by both males and females for not attending school were "lack of personal interest," "high cost of education," and "looking for work." Lack of personal interest was also the commonly cited reason for OSYs 13 to 17 years of age, followed by the high cost of education. For OSYs aged 18 to 24 years, looking for work was cited as the main reason among males, and marriage among females, she added (Olchondra, 2014).

Meanwhile our young people today face the nemesis of high unemployment rate. The country's unemployment rate will go down by at least half if youth unemployment is solved, claims the Department of Labor. Sec. Baldoz noted that youth unemployment, while it had decreased by 1.1 percent, or by 13,000–from 16.8 percent in April 2013 to 15.7 percent in April 2014–still accounts for almost half, or 49.8 percent, of the country's total unemployed placed at 2.924 million. There are 1.456 million unemployed youth as of April 2014, according to the Philippine Statistical

Authority's Labor Force Survey, accounting for 16 percent of the total youth labor force of 9.254 million. In this survey, the youth belong to the 15-24 age bracket. The Labor Secretary sadly admitted, "The fact remains that youth unemployment rate is more than double the national unemployment rate and, therefore, this is a challenge we all need to address" ("DOLE set to launch," 2014).

Extracting Super-profits from Juvenile Labor

Many neo-Malthusians, when confronted with economic problems, tend to shift their discourse away from risk model to the language of human capital. Under the rubrics of human capital, the current colossal change in K-12 and CHED's reorganization of the tertiary curriculum are massive forms of social re-engineering that are designed to shepherd the youth towards more productive uses for capitalist enterprises. Giroux (2009) characterized American youth as expendables—disposable in the age of globalization. "No longer seen as a social investment or the central element of an increasingly embattled social contract, youth are now viewed as either consumers, on the one hand, or as troubling, reckless, and dangerous persons, on the Other" (p. 3). In poor and developing countries, though, they become a vast reservoir of cheap labor for transnational companies. The Philippine Business for Education (PBEd) even strongly emphasized the economic feature of K-12:

> Certainly, with K+12, business shall be able to open its doors to hiring high school graduates as is the practice in almost all other countries in the rest of the world. Consequently, K+12 also further opens up doors to global opportunities for our young Filipinos. We also call on the members of the legislature to support this program, to be guided by a real concern with what is best for our youth rather than what is merely popular. Those who insist on throwing obstacles in the way of K+12 are condemning our kids to poverty and sabotaging their opportunities for a better life. ("PBEd calls on business continuity," 2010)

Raising the Young Neoliberal Subjects: Policing the Youth

Young people, being a vast reservoir of human capital, are policed by the state. When young people take risky behaviours, policy analysts and adults create "moral panic" to increase the surveillance and control of the youth (Cohen, 1972). And what could be more worrisome to middle class families than being confronted with unruly highly sexualized youth. This is made

glaring in the recently concluded nationwide study by Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Survey of the University of the Philippines Population Institute (**YAFS-UPPI)** which showed that one in three youth between the ages of 15 and 24 are having sexual intercourse before marriage, compared to 23 percent a decade ago. But while young people appear to be getting more sexually active in the predominantly Catholic nation, 78 percent of the youth surveyed are not using any form of contraception or protection against sexually transmitted diseases when they are having sex for the first time. The same study also found that around 14 percent of girls aged 15 to 19 are either pregnant for the first time or are already mothers. That is up from about six percent recorded by an earlier **YAFS** study in 2002 (Au-Yeung, 2014). The narrative of the seemingly irresponsibility of young people easily lends credibility to the cliché that our youth cannot be relied upon as the future of the nation and they still have to be socialized according to the standards of the adult world. This "deficit model" of youth assumes that young people are incapable of political thinking and deliberation. According to this model, they are "socially constructed as citizen participants only in future tense: ill-equipped to participate in social and political decision making as youth, only capable of this participation as adults" (Gordon, 2012, p. 9). Young people are supposed to be walled in a garden of innocence. But such stereotype typically applies generally to young people with middle class background (Anyon, Hassrick and Schneider, 2009). It is non-existent among the children of poor families who have to face the stark but harsh realities of poverty early on.

What is lost in this welter of moral panic fomented by government and entrepreneurs of morality is the recognition of how economic turmoil ensnares young people. The moralistic discourse of state-sponsored "risk analysis," bereft of any political and economic bases, contributes further to the middle class myth of "the innocent youth" who have to be protected from the corrupting influence of society. In effect, the youth are prevented from dealing with their problems on their own and are kept in check through massive social programs. The withdrawal of state support for social services has a great impact on the quality of lives and future of our young people. By dismantling subsidies to education, health, and the consequent reduction of employment opportunities, young people are prone to alienation and the seduction of neoliberal narcissism. Unable to work but bombarded with endless signs of consumption, they are barred from redressing their problems. They blame their families for the destruction of their future, and resign themselves to the mantra of neoliberal capitalism, "It's you who failed, not the system!" or, as Bauman (2007) explained:

The oft-repeated assurance "this is a free country" means: it is up to you what sort of life you wish to live, how you decide to live it, and what kinds of choices you make in order to see your project through; blame yourself, and no one else, if all that does not result in the bliss you hoped for. It suggests the joy of emancipation is closely intertwined with the horror of defeat (p. 87)

Our society promises a lot of opportunities for the youth. They are schooled to believe that everything is equal and individual freedom is the highest virtue. They are promised the "American dream"—equal opportunities and success if they work hard enough. Education becomes their ticket out of poverty and misery. In truth, though, the state has abandoned them by adopting the deregulation and privatization of social services. As a result, young people drop out of schools and they become non-productive assets. Those who are able to join the workforce are confronted with market competition in the neoliberal jungle, and the structural inequalities that such system generates defeat the promise of equal opportunity. They then easily become target of surveillance and global media consumerism (Giroux, 2001; Robbins, 2008). Meanwhile the mass media portray them as happy and carefree in a hyper-connected world of virtual realities and identities. In short, they are caged in the "predatory culture of capitalism" (McLaren, 1995, p. 2).

Predatory Culture of Neoliberal Capitalism

Our epoch is described by the prophets of capitalism as the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992). It is the triumph of neoliberal capitalism at the cost of horrible social and economic sufferings. And this triumph rests mostly on the exploitation of the youth, their working class serving as a vast reservoir of contractual underpaid labourers while their middle class becomes a captive audience for interminable consumption of images, objects, and lifestyles. Economically deprived or not, young people are blackmailed, either consumed or excluded. Giroux (2009), writing about the predatory marketing strategies of global capitalism on young people, observed:

Given the power young people have to influence the spending habits of their parents, corporations have developed a number of strategies that encourage children to pester them to buy sought-after merchandise. By constantly bombarding kids with messages about what is cool, trendy, and available, corporations set the stage for encouraging kids to nag their

parents on trips to the supermarket, the mall, and other venues that offer children's products (p. 51).

In the Philippines, this predatory strategy of capitalism is expedited by massive remittances from Filipinos working abroad. The Philippines is one of the largest migrant sending countries around the globe, supplying labor migrants to over 100 countries, and the leading female migrant sending countries along with Indonesia, with more than 8 million (10%) out of the 85 million Filipinos were working or living abroad. In 2006, Filipino migrants sent approximately US$300 billion in remittances to the Philippines (Reyes, 2008). This massive migration industry has created young Filipinos who have already assimilated the neo-colonial consciousness of their migrant parents: to work abroad for higher salary even if they have no diploma.

Young Filipinos who remain in the country work as part-time or full-time call center agents, and they are an inexhaustible source of capitalist profits. Many call centers are located conveniently in commercial complexes. This ensures a steady consumption of products. The study of the UP Population Institute entitled "Lifestyle and Reproductive Health Issues of Young Professionals in Metro Manila and Metro Cebu," which focused on the profile and lifestyle of young workers in the call center and non-call center industries in Metro Manila and Metro Cebu, aged 18-34 years old who have at least completed sophomore year in college and who have been working in shifts, found that there is a "high level of consumption of chips, burgers, fries, and fried chicken" among these workers. The study also showed that 72% of call center agents surveyed preferred drinking over partying (62%) or videoke gimmicks (59%) for their leisure activity ("Call center workers diet," 2010).

As the state abandons its commitment to social services, especially to education, migration and the BPO industry increase the youth's purchasing power. With their buying powers bloated, they become easy targets of neoliberal capitalist consumerism. These young people, more than anyone else, are the most integrated into the complex trap of neoliberal "regime of living" and are the most exploited, becoming part of the lowest end of the food chain of a winner-take-all capitalism as vendors, construction workers, and laborers for fast-food chains. A top fast food restaurant in the Philippines that hires mostly young people, for example, is notorious for its low pay and routine use of "endo"—a shortcut for "end-of-contract" workers with short-term and unprotected work arrangements. This kind of labor arrangement is also called "5-5-5" because workers are endlessly hired and fired every five months to prevent them from becoming permanent or regular workers.

Those who cannot find gainful employment under the highly competitive labour market engage in illegal trades like drug trafficking or are forced to become sexual workers and part-time criminals. Delinquent youth become easy targets of law enforcement or become assets of the state in the surveillance of juvenile criminals.

Growing Up Wasted and Consuming
Under Neoliberal Regime of Living

In Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) we find the following statement: "Neoliberalism... has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (p. 3). Its philosophy espouses the survival of the fittest and promotes competition among individuals, institutions, and nations, freeing all from what are construed as the burdensome chains of social justice and social responsibility. The relationship between the state and the people under neoliberalism is aptly described by Rose (2004) as that of the state taking over the maintenance of "the infrastructure of law and order," while the people are expected to "promote individual and national well-being by their responsibility and enterprise" (p. 139).

Neoliberal policies create a "regime of living" (Collier & Lakoff, 2005). This regime of living constitutes the ways young people define who they are and how they conduct their lives as individuals and as members of a collective. One of its elements is "the constant attempt to produce new, more appropriate kinds of subjects, what we might call 'souls' that fit contemporary, and especially, future systems of accumulation" (Olds & Thrift, 2005, p. 274). Olds and Thrift described this shift in neoliberal policy towards a K-economy as:

> A rhetoric and metric of modernization based upon fashioning citizens who can become an actively seeking factor of production, rather like a mineral resource with attitude. And that rhetoric, in turn, has been based upon a few key management tropes—globalization, knowledge, learning, network, flexibility, information technology, urgency—which are meant to come together in a new kind of self-willed subject whose industry will boost the powers of the state to compete economically, and will also produce a more dynamic citizenry. (p. 275)

In this continuing assault by neoliberal ideology, young people are thrown into a world saturated by consumerist logic and an economy in which premium is placed (even in academia) on the "new" (if not "improved"). Yet this preoccupation with the "new" conditions young people to view social relations as speeded up and in constant flux, and nothing ever stays still. Things and people are reduced to the same level of existence: disposables. A contradiction then exists between the civic commitment demanded by state-sponsored citizenship education, on the one hand, and the celebration of carefree individualism, on the other. David Harvey (1990) provided an accurate description of this trend:

> It ["throw away society"] meant more than just throwing away produced goods (creating a monumental waste-disposal problem), but also being able to throw away values, lifestyles, stable relationships, and attachments to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being. These were the immediate and tangible ways in which the "accelerative thrust in the larger society" crashed up against "the ordinary daily experience of the individual." (Toffler, p. 40)" (p. 286).

This kind of consciousness produces young people who are not easily persuaded to commit to a cause or join highly organized and demanding social organizations and activities. The "liquid" youth, to borrow a term by Bauman (2000), under the privatizing fiat of neoliberal ethos, do not want to be coerced into joining social movements. They just want to "shop around" (p. 74). They abhor long-term commitments and promises. They prefer networks from which they can easily log-out and disengage to commitment (Bauman, 1990). They are impatient with long waiting when nothing happens. They need practical results. They need instant solutions. Young people today live in a society of "disposables" and "instants" (Harvey, 1990). Socialized into a "to-see-is-to-believe" consumer culture, they demand guarantees. Their enthusiasm for a collective goal is directly proportional to the possibilities of getting what they demand in the near future. They easily become fans and members of "neotribes" that celebrate fads and social trends that deliver quick and instant gratification (Maffesoli, 1996). Their life of consumerism "is guided by seduction, ever rising desires and volatile wishes—no longer by normative regulation" (Bauman, 2000, p. 76). Thus, neoliberal capitalism has produced a mass of young people worldwide who shy away from the old styles of political involvement and instead engage in newer forms which they think are safer, such as slacktivism. According to

Wikipedia entry on slacktivism, the term is a shortcut to the phrase "slacker activism." The term, originally positive in meaning, refers "to bottom up activities by young people to affect society on a small, personal scale (such as planting a tree, as opposed to participating in a protest)" ("Slacktivism," n. d.).

As a mode of governing subjects, neoliberalism also operates on interests, desires, and aspirations of the bodies of the youth. The anonymity of online games, role playing games (RPGs), and cyberspace in general gives young people breathing space to negotiate for their identities without compromising their privacy and ego ideal. They can lampoon politicians and celebrities, cyberbully friends, post and create events, or simply ignore a friend's requests. Slacktivism, and its cousin, "clicktivism," which is "used to describe activists using social media to organise protests," give them the feeling of omniscience ("Slacktivism," n. d.). The more narcissistic young people tend to suffer more from this engagement. In need of constant affirmation, they tend to suffer from people non-liking their cyber selves and those who are indifferent to their rants (Kim & Lee, 2011). Falsely believing that the new social media is an avenue to exercise their rights and civic duties, they tend to retreat further into their own world of friends and narrowing social circles (Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014).

Producing Neoliberal Youth:
Entrepreneurial and Technopreneurial

According to Rose (2004), the birth of neoliberal form of governing subjects did not mean the dismantling of the state; rather, it meant the full mobilization of the state to create a more free market:

> Politics must actively intervene in order to create the organizational and subjective conditions for entrepreneurship. The organizational conditions: de-nationalization of publicly owned enterprises; minimization of rigidities in the labour market; ensuring ample availability of skilled labour; acting against all that which seeks to inhibit the freedom of the market. The subjective conditions: restructure the provision of security to remove as many as possible of the incitements to passivity and dependency; make the residual social support conditional, wherever possible, upon demonstration of the attitudes and aspirations necessary to become an entrepreneur of oneself; incite the will to self-actualize through labour through exhortation on the one hand and sanctions on the other. (p. 144)

According to Ong (2004), the purpose of neoliberal educational reform is to create young subjects who adept in technology while they are able to process information and use these in market exchange. For Chris Arthur (2012), the by-products of neoliberal education are "self-managing, autonomous, and enterprising" subjects (p. 46). Under neoliberal governance, freedom is defined no longer as freedom from want, which might be provided by the state. It is life on benefits: it is the capacity for self-realization which can be obtained only through individual activity. The entrepreneurial spirit that supplants Max Weber's analysis of "Protestant ethic" is combined with the requirement of learning new technologies. According to Ong (2005), "Technopreneurial values, that stress a mix of technical and entrepreneurial excellence in citizen-subjects, are now detached from culture and ethnicity, putting a premium on agile knowledge subjects who can help build a globally connected knowledge society" (p. 344).

What this calls for is the creation of Web 2.0-informed K-12 graduates who are ethically grounded but globally and technically competitive. This entails learning through risk-taking, using the western values of initiative and independent-thinking. But even if we assume that millenials are "digital natives," that is, they were born into a 4G technology-saturated environment, not all of them possess the skills necessary to utilize the vast array of digital tools available to them. Participatory skills are too often the exclusive province of empowered and self-selected elite. This problem is exacerbated by one of the fundamental characteristics of user-generated content—namely that "it tends to follow power-law distributions; a minority of participants produce the vast majority of contributions and receive correspondingly disproportionate attention" (McLeod, Shah, Hess, & Lee, 2010, p. 407).

The contrast between the so-called "television generation" and the "net generation," while legitimate, might have been exaggerated. Like the technology they now control, the values of the "television generation" have become increasingly conservative, "hierarchical, inflexible and centralized." By contrast, Buckingham (2008) describes the "N-Geners" as:

> Hungry for expression, discovery, and their own self-development: they are savvy, self-reliant, analytical, articulate, creative, inquisitive, accepting of diversity, and socially conscious. Those who make this distinction often see generational differences as produced by technology, rather than being a result of other social, historical, or cultural forces." (p. 13)

This description simply widens the gap between young people who are still "migrants" from the "digital natives". But as David Buckingham (2008) pointed out:

> This relentlessly optimistic view inevitably ignores many of the down sides of these technologies—the undemocratic tendencies of many online "communities," the limited nature of much so-called digital learning and the grinding tedium of much technologically driven work. It also tends to romanticize young people, offering a wholly positive view of their critical intelligence and social responsibility that is deliberately at odds with that of many social commentators. It is also bound to ignore the continuing "digital divide" between the technology rich and the technology poor, both within and between societies. (p. 13)

Ironically, the guardians of neoliberal morality, for all their free market fanaticism, recoil from fully celebrating the Web 2.0 technology and its concomitant culture. Still relying on the notion of the youth being irresponsible, they police how young people use technology, limiting their use to social purposes only so as to disable their potential to disrupt the reign of hegemonic ideas in the market. Hacking, bullying, cyber defamation, and accessing and tampering with computer-stored information, cyber vandalism are monitored and outlawed.

Corporatizing and Privatizing the Lives of the Youth: "Have Fun!"

McCann Ericson reports that new social media has made young people around the world armchair activists or slacktivists (Broek, 2011). Young people do not want rigid rules to be imposed on them. They veer towards anarchistic social affiliations that demand little or nothing at all of their time and resources. For Zizek (2004) this has to do with the superego erosion or decline of tradition, the multiplication of new sources of "authorities" under neoliberal capitalism, and the generalization of permissiveness of our culture. Instead of liberation, young people today find themselves enslaved to a new and infinitely more demanding authority, one that refuses to acknowledge the binding character of rules and reigns by coercive force: the neoliberal imperative to consume.

The youth today belong to the "selfie" generation who asks, "If they do it there, why can't we do it here?" to interrogate absolute moral norms. They demand honesty from advertisers and are easily angered by false promises

from brands, yet they do not demand the same standard from themselves. They believe that the brands and logos will solve the major problems of the world. So while they rebel against collective rules and regulations, they easily fall under the spell of more powerful forces in society like brands, logos, and fandom (Giroux, 2001; Mclaren, 1995).

Neoliberal capitalism produces young people and children who are self-absorbed, narcissistic, and over-indulged. Their main problem is more about self-image and less about politics. Neoliberalism produces "dividualism," a term coined by French philosopher Giles Deleuze, defined as the distancing away from social and collective concerns towards privatization of entertainment through media home entertainment (Taylor, 2013).

Bettelheim (1970) thought once that youth rebel because they want to prove they are not insignificant. Rebellion becomes a shortcut to make the adult world recognize the relevance of youth. Today, mainstream youth have so many things to rebel against—unemployment, poverty, high cost of education, global warming, wars, and racism. But they are "cool," that is, they have retreated into their private selves, seemingly satisfied with their gadgets and "apps." While the McCann study did say that social justice is valued among the youth, it also shows that this value is good insofar as it is directed towards erring brands and corporations with no social responsibility. The old generations, who sympathized with the struggles of the basic sectors of the masses fighting under the banner of equality and justice, are now replaced by a mass of young people who are championing the "struggle for recognition" or identity politics especially in the area of sexuality. With the erosion of authoritarian traditional sources of power and the proliferation of different consumer-driven lifestyles that traverse classes, young people more and more become easily seduced and swallowed by the vortex of the latest trends in western youth values and styles. The individualizing process of youth self-making therefore is defined not in terms of a cacophony of rich cultural lifestyles but the proliferation of symbolic styles derived mainly from predatory culture of neoliberal capitalism. McLaren (1995) described the nature of this beast, which he called the "predatory culture" of neoliberal capitalism:

> In predatory culture, identity is fashioned mainly and often violently around the excesses of marketing and consumption and the natural social relations of post-industrial capitalism. Life is lived in a "fun" way through speed technology in anticipation of recurring accidents of identity and endless discursive collisions with otherness because in predatory culture it is virtually impossible to be cotemporal with what

one both observes and desires. Predatory culture is the left-over detritus of bourgeois culture stripped of its arrogant pretense to civility and cultural lyricism and replaced by a stark obsession with power fed by the voraciousness of capitalism's global voyage. (p. 2)

Given the massive assault of this predatory culture of neoliberalism on the young people's consciousness, McLaren (1995) averred that "[t]he social, the cultural and the human has been subsumed within capital." Under the superego injunction of "Have fun!", McLaren continues that predatory culture:

Refuses to wager on the side of radical hope; instead, it cleaves false hope out of the excrement of image-value….Predatory culture is the great deceiver. It marks the ascendancy of the dehydrated imagination that has lost its capacity to dream otherwise. (p. 2)

Given this gloomy prospects for critique and social change, we should strongly refuse any foreclosure for the possibility of utopian imagination among the youth. From Lacanian psychoanalytic point of view, Zizek diagnose this situation as society of "generalized perversion". Sharpe and Boucher (2010) explain: "According to this diagnosis, the new epoch is characterised by 'generalised perversion', by the elevation of transgression into the norm, within which individuals seek to make themselves into instruments of the universal superego imperative to 'Enjoy!' consumerism" (p. 150).

Reaffirming Youth Radicalism in the Age of Decaffeinated Activism

Throughout history, the youth have been the segment of the population most likely to reject the status quo and to act to change society for the better (Otto & Otto, 1969). Their developmental nature make them particularly susceptible to adopting an activist orientation toward citizenship. Indeed, as Otto and Otto pointed out, "The adolescent brings to the social scene an idealism, integrity and commitment to values which penetrate to the very heart of dysfunctional institutions and social structures" (p. 55). The potential for emancipatory consciousness and for the formation of a counter-culture is therefore immanent in the very nature of young people's consciousness (Roszak, 1969).

Unfortunately, Filipino youth activism, exemplified best during the First Quarter Storm, has been marginalized by state-sponsored civic education aimed at containing the more radical expressions of the youth movement. Radical youth movements today are seen as a chimera of the bygone era of a now-defunct ideology. The state-sponsored civic education simply dilutes and channels youth activism towards slacktivism that supports government programs and state ideologies, while remaining blind to the neoliberal "regime of lives" that shape the curriculum. Youth activism today, therefore, is "decaffeinated." Like corporate social responsibility, it is equated with being "cool" and "hip." It lets one maintain moral integrity without disturbing or questioning the exploitative conditions of production.

This is unfortunate because in spite of the sweeping changes our nation and the world have experienced, the economic and social conditions that confronted the Filipino youth in the seventies remain with us today. The condensation of the problems of the Filipino youth that Jose Maria Sison (1971) explained to members of the Kabataang Makabayan during its founding, is valid even today:

> With the continuing triumph of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines and the stability of its control, it is the chief task of the Filipino youth to resume and complete the unfinished revolution under the banner of national democracy, to expose and oppose the national and social iniquities caused by U.S. imperialism and its local reactionary allies.

> And the task of the youth in the face of these problems must be duly re-affirmed:

> *Kabataang Makabayan*, as the vanguard organization of the Filipino youth, should assist in the achievement of an invincible unity of all national classes and forces to push further the struggle for national and social liberation in all fields—economic, political, cultural, military—against the leading enemy, U.S. imperialism, and against the persistent and pervasive main enemy, landlordism. Both have frustrated the national-democratic aspirations of the Philippine Revolution of 1896 and have made the suffering and exploitation of our people more complex and more severe. (p. 16)

The only difference between today and five decades ago is that capitalism and its predatory nature has permeated almost all areas of social and cultural life. The logic of the market is de-territorialized in almost all spheres of social life that it has become second nature. Thanks to Web 2.0 technologies, neoliberal capitalism is able to invade territories unknown to capital before, thereby further colonizing the territories already colonized, and further strengthening the grip of capital on the lives of the youth.

Young Filipinos today face formidable challenges. They must be willing and ready to learn and deploy the technologies of Web 2.0 civilization while challenging the ideological meanings and utilitarian values of these technologies that promote the predatory culture of neoliberal capitalism. Since ideological terrains have expanded to new unchartered territories, they have to learn how to take advantage of these new unchartered domains and territories to work against the predatory culture of neoliberal capitalism, while acknowledging their tendencies to easily play into the hands of neoliberal desire. For instance, it cannot be emphasized enough that mobile phones are tools that can supplement the work of activists but not replace them (Cullum, 2010).

It cannot be denied that new technologies, together with the new social media, have empowered the youth beyond what earlier generations could have imagined. Slacktivism, for all its political shortcomings, is still a form of civic engagement in the age of prevalent dystopianism. Interestingly, the political cynicism of the Filipino youth may be an expression of their disillusionment with the political scams that pester bureaucrat capitalism. But such political defiance is not equivalent strategic resistance against the trinity of feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucrat capitalism. Young people have to realize that slacktivism and clicktivism cannot substitute for real organizing. Charlotte Robertson (2014), herself a millennial, argues, "Activism should not be an isolating experience. Activism should be rallying, speeches, emotion. So let's step away from the computer, put down the cell phone, and reconnect with the real world in order to take on and help solve its problems" (n. p.).

Mao's (2013) acute observation must be applied to new terrains of struggles today—"It is conceivable that there are still some who maintain that revolutionary literature and art are not for the masses of the people but for the exploiters and oppressors" (p. 46). In the same manner, new technologies and novel expressions of youth rebellion should not only be for the purveyors of consumerism and predatory culture. Just as Mao persuasively advised that cultural workers "should take over the rich legacy and good traditions that have been handed down from the past ages" (p. 53), so young people today cannot simply dismiss the new technologies

and the spaces of resistance they open. But neither can they embrace them uncritically. For these technologies bear the imprint of neoliberal violence (Allmer, 2014).

The new spaces created by the new social media and social networks should be exploited by young people to advance their emancipatory interests against imperialism and predatory culture of global neoliberal capitalism. Activists might even find ways to use social media itself to overcome the challenge of a lack of long-term commitment to social change movements. They could find ways in which social networking groups could intensify or strengthen commitment and networks and to engage the youth in ways that increase knowledge about social concerns and where their action should be oriented (LaRiviere, Snider, & O'Meara, 2012). This calls for creativity. And activism is all about creativity.

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