

# **Tension at the Seams: Embroidery, Filipina Labor, and Exploitation in American Colonial Schools and Prisons**

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By the 1910s, the United States had firmly established state-run institutions to carry out its brand of colonialism in the Philippines, “benevolent assimilation.” The new colonial state promised to uplift Filipinos and bring modernity, industrialization, and wealth. However, an examination of embroidery production, one of the most profitable exports, in industrial schools and prisons, reveals a troubling story of racialized and gendered exploitation. These institutions appeared as exemplars of reform and the uplift, granting Filipino women and girls the education and skills to participate in an advancing and industrializing society. In actuality, prisons and schools provided a controlled environment where educating “pupil workers” and women prisoners became a way to create a vulnerable and exploitable workforce for the profit of the colonial state and American investors. By linking embroidery and labor to colonial education and prison systems, this paper questions the “benefits” of American colonialism and explores the hidden cost of uplift.

**Genevieve Clutario** is a cultural historian who specializes in interdisciplinary and transnational feminist approaches to gender, race, and colonialism particularly in relation to Filipino diasporic histories. She is currently writing her first book, *Beauty Regimes: Modern Imperialism, the Philippines and the Gendered Labor of Appearance*. In this book, Clutario explores who and what do the work of empire, analyzing how colonial and nationalist projects used fashion, beauty regimens, and public spectacles to police Filipino women’s bodies, while Filipino women used these same arenas to negotiate their own definitions of modernity, citizenship, and nation. She uses multi-sited and multi-lingual research that includes written, visual, and material evidence from the nineteenth century up until the early 1940s. Clutario’s other major research and teaching interests include Asian/American histories in global perspectives; comparative histories of modern empire; transnational feminisms; and gender, race, and the politics of fashion and beauty.

**Wednesday, February 7, 2018**

**12:00 Noon**

**Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue**