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JOSEPH PALIS, PhD
Issue Editor

FOLKLORE STUDIES PROGRAM
College of Social Sciences and Philosophy
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Banwaan: The Philippine Journal of Folklore is the peer-reviewed online Journal of the Folklore Studies Program of the UP Collehe of Social Sciences and Philosophy. The journal aims to provide a space for scholars working on folklore to exchange ideas, methodologies, and research findings. Recognizing the multidisciplinary nature of folkloristics, the journal welcomes articles from various disciplines.

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Table of Contents

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EDITOR'S NOTES

The Vernacularisation of Geographical Stories

In 1904, a book called *Philippine Folklore Stories* written by John Maurice Miller compiled and curated several stories purportedly culled from various regions of the archipelago. The preface offered this nugget of wisdom:

> As these stories are only legends that have been handed down from remote times, the teacher must impress upon the minds of the children that they are myths and are not to be given credence; otherwise, the imaginative minds of the native children would accept them as truth, and trouble would be caused that might be hard to remedy. Explain then the fiction and show the children the folly of belief in such fanciful tales. (p. 5)

Written with a reproving paternal voice underscoring a Christian-colonialist mission that denigrate particular stories (especially those of the occult and the otherworldly that were included in the book), Miller's preface reinforces an essentialist mindset where myths, and by extension folklore, are nothing more than 'fanciful tales'. Miller reprimands the 'folly' of 'native children' who may have heard these stories from their family and peers, for believing them as truth. That 'truth' is separate and not anchored from local lifeworlds because these 'fanciful tales' are not grounded in factual reality, shows how privileging a rational and logical (and scientific?) mindset is always oppositional to stories that have been tagged as folklore.

Ethnomusicologist Sandra K.D. Stahl argued in 1977 that while tradition is often acknowledged as almost indistinguishable from folklore research, "innovation is perhaps the most exciting aspect" (p. 9). What enriches our understanding of folklore is the recognition that today's innovation will become tomorrow's tradition. It is perhaps the acknowledgment of change and its indeterminate path towards futurities that underscore the enduring longevity of folklore studies and research.

What is innovative and what is folkloric? What do we make of folk narratives and people's stories? What are these stories that are being told, repeated and embellished, and what other forms do they take aside from their oral origins and traditions? What to make of the narratives that take the form of text, image, and practice? Folklore is seen less as a descriptor of traditional 'folk' ways but as an analytic, a framework, a method that think, un-think and reimagine people's narratives against the backdrop of constant change. In the incorporation of *kaalamang bayan* and *dunong bayan* in understanding newer folklore stories, approaches and epistemologies, linguist Jesus Federico Hernandez reminds us that these new forms of situated knowledges "provide[s] us the opportunity to develop a theory of folklore based on Philippine voices and experiences" (2021, p. vii)

Narratives of the people ("folk") and the storying of their lived-in landscapes, territories, and spatially contextualized places predate civilization. These vernacular geo-narratives are embedded, embodied and entangled in the practice of spatial storytelling. Although the usage and application among human geographers vary, geo-narratives can range from meaningful place experience (Bell et al, 2017), interpretation of oral and life histories and biographies (Kwan & Ding, 2008), and place-writing that define, rewrite and imagine a place (Palis, 2022).

The stories contained in this volume emanate from what Miller slightly dismissed as 'imaginative minds'—they are narratives rooted in place, of 'folk' performativities, and of the 'poetic and tragic murmurings of the everyday' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 71). The 'everyday turn' which first rooted in the 1980s grounds the vernacularisation of stories and the potential of non-elite knowledge to disrupt conventional wisdom by listening to other voices (Rancière, 1999). This is true when narrating silenced stories of human rights defenders swimming against the current in the violent necro-politics of Negros Island (De Guzman, Lopez and Ortega). Yet silence can be re-centered in unearthing, animating and nuancing geohistorical 'unwriting' (Bolata). The vernacularisation of stories likewise allow for the deployment of auto-ethnographic narratives validated through multiple histories of folklore to particularise the personal accounts of a martial arts practitioner's engagement with arnis (Pawilen), as well as in initiating conversations focusing on traditional practices to derive an indigenised metaphysics in the deployment of a 'particularist anthropological approach in Filipino philosophy' (Espiritu). Equally cogent are tales of everyday geopolitics that Palawan fishers navigate in a contentious maritime border zone that provide us a glimpse, through their stories, how their active forms of seafaring and placemaking disrupt and destabilise state-centric understanding of an orderly delineation of boundaries (Beatty). This is also in consonance with the stories gleaned from truck drivers in Manila's port area and the waterfront residents who are the subjects in Jewel Maranan's documentary *Sa Kuko ng Dantaong Kulang* (2018): vernacular tales of capitalist dispossession and marginalisation that are hiding in plain sight from the public (Hawkins and Palis).

These geo-narratives make no special claims of being definitive or unique. They are as varied as the amalgam of emotions that provided the impetus for the writers to narrate these stories in this volume. This is similar to what human geographer

Hayden Lorimer calls 'small stories' — or other ways to write "particular and locatable life experiences" (2003, p. 214) that do not purport to be the canon of grand narratives.

Vernacular stories should be seen as people's maps of meaning that both represent and emplace critical and emotional entanglements. In writing about vernacular mapping, cultural geographer Joe Gerlach explicitly says: "they ... add to our abstractions of the world, [they] generate maps that attend to the everyday, to reorientate and disorientate bodies and things in the spaces of day-to-day life" (2010, p. 165). It accords a recognition on the importance of the quotidian. The one that literary scholar Michael Sheringham calls "spaces, rhythms, objects, and practices" (2006, p. 2) of our lived spaces. In documenting the quotidian, the 'small stories', and the vernacular, the contributors of this volume are tasked not only to describe, portray, and depict but also to "illuminate, even define ... the central concerns and motifs" (Hau, 2000, p. 10) not as an end-product but as stories-so-far that continue to unfold even after research and field work formally ended.

As Donna Haraway says: "It matters what stories tell stories, what thoughts think thoughts, what worlds world worlds" (2018, p. 60). The tiny geo-narratives in this volume hopefully open up more provocations than resolutions, and continue to tell and assemble local stories-so-far: 'small stories' that are ongoing, unfinished.

JOSEPH PALIS, PhD
June 2022

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Geonarratives of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Negros Island, Philippines

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This paper is part of a broader research project funded by the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) of the Philippines that looks into the lives, spatialities, and practices of human rights defenders (HRDs) in Negros Island, Philippines. The research aims to give voice to HRDs who are largely misrepresented in various media platforms, and to reflect the realities of their precarious lives due to the existing culture of violence and impunity in the island. The data from the research were gleaned using various methods that include: document

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reviews, online focus group discussions (FGDs), mental mapping, webinars, and KoboCollect mobile surveys. These methods were used to reflect the geonarratives, the grounded experiences of HRDs. We feature map outputs from this project which demonstrate that places are repositories of memories of violence, fear, and abuse, but are also vital sites of hope, community, and mutual care among HRDs.

Keywords: *geonarratives, human rights defenders, Philippines, geographies of violence, geographies of care*

> *"The geonarrative storying that utilizes countermapping and unmapping practices can be deployed by community- based groups, activists, grassroots, and peoples' organizations to generate grounded data and information as basis to carry out specific participatory action research and development work for social justice." (Palis, 2022, p.701)*

Introduction to Geonarratives

In geography, the use of geonarratives can be traced back to the early works on qualitative GIS, with 'qualitative' referring to data that are not simply non-numerical/non-quantitative, but those data that provide rich contextual detail about social and material situations (Elwood & Cope, 2009). Qualitative GIS emerged as one of the responses to GIS being grounded heavily in positivism and quantitative techniques. Public participation and participatory GIS, feminist GIS, and critical GIS, reflective of diverse set of data from quantitative and qualitative methods, paved the way for the emergence of qualitative GIS. Spatial knowledge in its various forms such as photographs, mental maps, and narrative descriptions can be incorporated into GIS-based spatial analysis along with

qualitative methods that include interviews, ethnography, focus groups and others, reflecting different ways of producing knowledge (Elwood & Cope, 2009).

Qualitative GIS, originates from pioneering academic pursuits of feminist geographers and participatory GIS scholars (Kwan, 2008; Thomas, 2021). They have criticized the masculinist nature of GIS technology and its focus on quantitative data sets, hence failing to articulate ambiguities, social processes, and lived experiences (Thomas, 2021). In order to address this gap, feminist and participatory GIS scholars restructure GIS and utilize a mixed method design that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Qualitative GIS thus emerged as a "set of alternative geographies and alternative ways of visualizing spaces and places inhabited and experienced by diverse groups" (Mugerauer, 2000 p. 318-319). Qualitative GIS grounds the hybrid understanding of GIS and is viewed as "technology, methodology, and situated social practice" (Elwood & Cope, 2009, Chapter 1, p. 3).

Feminist scholars such as Mei-Po Kwan (2002) challenged the "bounds of GIS" to represent the experiences of women in various contexts. She mapped daily activities of women to determine the differential access to urban facilities based on gender (Kwan, 2002). Kwan (2008) also mapped emotions and feelings of a Muslim woman on her day-today travels around the city before and after 9/11. Another methodological innovation is the computer-aided qualitative GIS (CAQ-GIS) which was utilized by Kwan and Ding (2008) to retrieve and link interview data with its spatial locations. This innovation has been instrumental in exploring how narratives can be integrated, processed and interpreted in GIS. Kwan and Ding (2008) called this approach as "geonarrative" that uses GIS to conduct narrative analysis using qualitative and mixed methodologies. Thomas (2021) also referred to this approach as spatial storytelling wherein two interdependent research tools are utilized: narrative inquiry and visual mapping. Narrative inquiry pertains to the "study of experience as story" (Connelly &

Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). This is congruent with Massey's (2005) understanding of space as a 'simultaneity of stories so far … places as collections of those stories' (p.130). Visual mapping, on the other hand, challenges the notion of a conventional map wherein it situates the observer as outside and above the gaze (Massey, 2005). Thus, visual mapping as a research tool can be utilized to challenge abstraction and neutrality, and acknowledge the agency of the mapmaker (Thomas, 2021). In this regard, geonarrative is valuable as it integrates GIS with ethnography and grounded theory, allowing for the consideration of multiple ways of knowing that encompass qualitative and quantitative methods.

This research builds upon Palis' (2022) articulation of geonarratives, which he defines as 'place-writing – subjective stories that define, portray, delineate, emphasize, expand, rewrite, and imagine a place' (p.700), drawing from Massey's definition of landscape as 'stories-so-far,' stressing the 'producedness of space, and the fact that, above all, space is the dimension of multiplicity' (Massey in Featherstone, et.al., 23, p. 265). As Palis (2022) contends "geonarratives are embodied and practice-based geographical projects that entangle the individual with the created image through the act of storytelling" (p. 701).

This paper presents the geonarratives of human rights defenders (HRD) in Negros Island by mapping their lived experiences as they face ongoing harassment and threats as they conduct their advocacies. As a method, geonarratives may articulate a sense of place, particularly expressions of topophilia or love of place (Tuan, 1990), but we veer away from this and instead use them to account for the violences and atrocities rooted to place. For example, while notions of home are oftentimes portrayed as safe spaces, HRDs view them as unsafe. Also, we consider geonarratives as one of the many established modes of folklore expression, such as oral narratives, which provide alternative ways of mitigating dehumanizing tallies and reports of violences. As such, geonarratives

offer a novel way of expressing these narratives, effectively complementing other forms of folklore expression.

Human Rights Defenders in Negros Island

The Philippines has a long history of violence against human rights defenders (HRDs), the most bloody of which took place during the imposition of nationwide Martial Law by the former president and dictator Ferdinand Marcos from September 1972 – January 1981. Human rights abuses that include arbitrary detention, involuntary exile, torture, killings, and forced disappearances (*desaparecidos*) persisted during the Marcos administration until his ouster in the People Power Revolution on February 25, 1986. According to the Human Rights Victims' Claims Board (HRVCB), there were 11,103 victims of human rights violations from 1972-1986 (Human Rights Violations Victims' Memorial Commission, n.d.). Decades after the bloody regime, human rights violations continue to be recorded in various places in the country. The administrations that followed the Marcos bloody regime were also tainted with recorded cases of human rights violations. In a study by Louys (2019), the Philippines has been identified by various human rights groups as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for HRDs, particularly for land and environmental rights defenders, echoing a study by the Defenders of the Earth (2016) that named the Philippines as 3rd most dangerous country for environmental defenders, next only to Brazil and Colombia. HRDs are subject to abuse, violence, and harassment from state and non-state actors which involve the police, military, members of the judiciary, local and state authorities, security services, paramilitary and other armed groups, right-wing groups, the media, corporations (Landman, 2006).

This project focuses on the island of Negros, made up of the provinces of Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental, both locally and globally known for the sugarcane plantations and significant contributions of the sugarcane industry to

the Philippine economy (See Figure 1.). This monocrop industry is a colonial imprint of the Spanish occupation of the Philippines, one that has recurring and persisting implications on the unequal and unjust sociospatial relations among *hacienderos* or the landed elite and the tenant farmers. These relations are maintained through violent and non-violent practices that reinforce and re entrench the power of the plantation owners over permanent and temporary workers (*sacadas*). The non-violent practices include economic sanctions to punish non-compliant workers, posing the threat of dismissal from their sole source of livelihood; and using the rule of law against them by making up cases that can lead to the deviant worker's arrest, effectively threatening their economic survival. Violent practices involve intimidation and physical violence facilitated by the local police, private guards, independent armed groups, and in the past few decades, the Philippine Armed Forces (Kreuzer, 2011).

The unjust working conditions and deeply repressive policies gave rise to various forms of resistance from the impoverished in the island, especially the peasants. In 1971, the National Federation of Sugar Cane Workers (NFSW) was founded by Luis Jalandoni, a Catholic priest and then social action director of the Bacolod diocese along with Hector Mauri, an Italian priest. The grassroots communities aided by the Church was instrumental in informing the sugar farmers of the benefits of a collective effort in condemning the inequalities and unjust treatment that they experienced and expressing dissent on unfair practices. The NFSW also assisted farmers and farming communities and helped strengthen advocacies and clamor for land ownership (Inquirer Research, 2018).

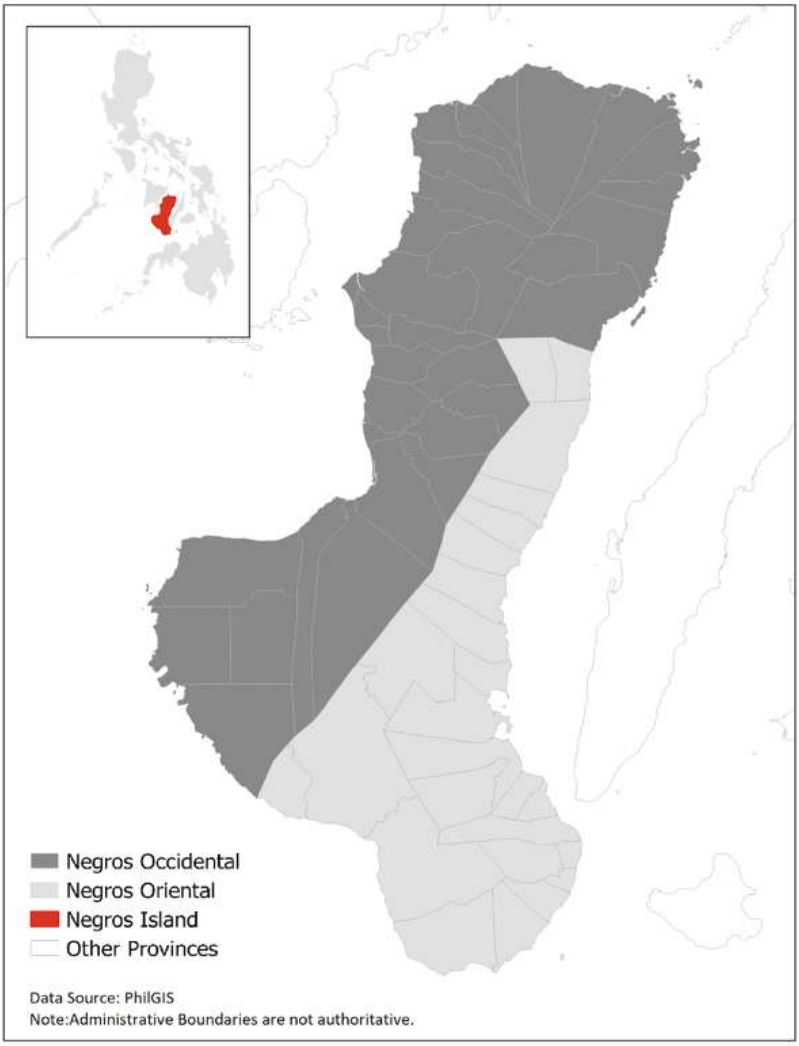

FIG. 1. *Location map of the study site.*

On October 20, 2018, in what is now known as the Sagay Massacre, nine (9) sugar workers and members of NFSW were killed in Hacienda Nene, Barangay Bulanon, in Sagay City, Negros Occidental, including four women and two

minors (Espina, 2018). The victims participated in a land cultivation and occupation activity called a *bungkalan*, from the Tagalog verb *bungkal*, which means to 'till the soil'. The *bungkalan* is practiced across the country to make productive use of idle but usually disputed lands. It is practiced by the Lumad in Bukidnon, Mindanao (Imbong, 2020), farmers in Lupang Ramos, Dasmariñas, Cavite (Ellao & Torres, 2021), and Hacienda Luisita, Tarlac, to name a few. The bungkalan serves as a necessary activity especially during *Tiempo Muerto,* a borrowed Spanish term that literally means 'dead time'. Farm workers practice *bungkalan* during this time, the period between planting and harvesting, to sustain their daily needs. On November 22, 2018, President Rodrigo Duterte signed Memorandum Circular No. 32, which identified the provinces of Samar, Negros Oriental, Negros Occidental, and the Bicol Region as sites of 'sporadic acts of violence' that were committed by lawless groups (Office of the President, 2018). This rationalized the deployment of military and police troops in these areas, effectively militarizing the communities, through *Oplan Sauron* – the implementing program of the Memorandum. Four months after the imposition of Memorandum No. 32, on March 30, 2019, 14 farmers were killed and 16 more were arrested in joint military and police operations in Canlaon City and the towns of Manjuyod and Sta. Catalina in Negros Oriental. The killings happened during the "Synchronized Enhanced Managing Police Operation" or SEMPO, or the joint police-military operations in Negros Oriental. The Philippine National Police (PNP) claimed that the victims were '*nanlaban*' which literally means "fought back," reminiscent of the killings of thousands of suspected illegal drug users and pushers in Duterte's "*Oplan Tokhang*, the war on drugs.

The Defend Negros, Stop the Attacks Network was launched a few months after the brutal killings of what is now known as the Negros 14. This network is composed of individuals, families of victims of killings and human rights violations, human rights advocates, and peoples' organizations who are

collectively clamoring to fight against the culture of impunity, killings, and political persecution in Negros Island (Burgos Jr., 2019).

The aforementioned instances and stories of violence and harassment foreground this research, aiming to highlight individual narratives and geographies of human rights defenders, focusing on their ideas of risk and security amid a climate of impunity and violence in Negros Island.

Geonarratives of HRDs

The research team utilized the following methods to gain insights into the geonarratives: everyday geographies and lived experiences of human rights defenders in Negros Island. The principles of ethical research - informed consent, beneficence and non-maleficence, anonymity and confidentiality, were stringently adhered to in the conduct of the research. The researchers are cognizant of the dangers that these stories might pose to the human rights defenders, and the safety and security of the research participants were considered at every level of the research process.

Methods

The team employed spatially-oriented qualitative methods for the research. The project was initially conceptualized to include a multi-sited fieldwork where qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and mental mapping workshops are done *in situ*. However, due to the travel and mobility restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary data gathering for the research was done completely online using mental mapping and KoBoCollect workshops to ascertain the geonarratives of human rights defenders and how they make and re(make) safe and unsafe spaces in Negros; focus group discussions to foster conversations and validate the individual narratives of the

HRDs; and webinars, where we shared the findings of the research to the participants and other stakeholders. Aside from a venue to share the data to the participants, the webinar also served as a venue for continuous validation and confirmation of their stories.

The sensitive nature of the experiences shared by the HRDs posed a grave threat to their well-being and safety and identifiable location markers were purposely removed from the research. The precarity of the conditions of the participants required that we do away with the locational specificity that can be afforded by GIS. Due to the risks faced by HRDs from multiple perpetrators, locational data was concealed and obscured to refrain from the identification of the participants' whereabouts.

The research team coordinated with 16 human rights defenders (HRDs) coming from several sectoral organizations working in several areas in Negros Island. All of the participants are currently active in community organizing and human rights work. Given the vulnerability of HRDs, pseudonyms were used throughout the study to ensure the anonymity of their identities. Due to the sensitive and precarious nature of the research focus, the team collectively ensured that caring geographies are created and manifested all throughout the research process.

Storying

Developments in geography made way for the consideration and inclusion of stories in broader geographical discourse. Traditional conceptions of spaces in narratives focus on space as just a backdrop to plots. Ryan, et.al. (2016) argue for new conceptualizations of spaces that can serve other roles in narratives, as "focus of attention, a bearer of symbolic meaning, an object of emotional investment, a means of strategic planning, a principle of organization, and even a supporting medium" (p.1) Spaces can be objects of representations in narratives, or can also

function as a setting where a narrative is physically deployed (Ryan, et.al., 2016. Focusing on space as an integral part of the narrative grounds the location-specific experiences of human rights defenders who are situated in Negros Island as a place that has been shown to be historically fraught with conflict on issues of land rights and labor conditions. The long history of unequal landowner – farm worker relations in Negros provided the necessary preconditions for resistance and acts of solidarity in the island.

Cameron (2012) contends that stories, while personal and particular, also reflect broader social and political contexts, therefore are useful in looking at the grounded experiences of human rights defenders, who largely operate within institutions that have historically failed to address their plight and demands. Stories and storying are powerful ways of reflecting individual narratives and collective experiences. These stories are "personal testimonies that show the complexity of human experience that defy easy generalizations" (De Guzman, et al, 2022, 36). By allowing the human rights defenders to tell their stories verbally (through interviews and focus group discussions) and visually (through the creation of mental maps), the research highlights their experiences as shaped by their individual characteristics and personal views.

A vital part of highlighting their experiences as HRDs revolve around how they view their advocacies and praxes. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR), suggested a "broad categorization" of HRDs, defining them as: "any person or group of persons working to promote human rights" (UN OHCHR, 2004, p. 6) which covers a range of human rights advocates, from voluntary workers to government officials and entities. Along with this definition, the document set minimum criteria for human rights work: 1) accept the universality of human rights, 2) have arguments that fall within the scope of human rights, 3) peaceful engagement. The framework offers an inclusive and standardized definition of HRDs, but the term remains ambiguous and fails to reflect specificities of contextualized experiences. Nah et al. (2013)

reflect on the discomfort of HRDs being affiliated with state forces, who are considered by the UN as HRDs in virtue, but most of the time, the police and military are the very same people HRDs fear. Fernandez and Patel (2015) reviewed the outlined qualifications for HRDs and argued for a definition banked on behavioral qualities of an HRD shifting the framework from asking who HRDs are to how HRDs act.

For this research, we explicitly asked the HRDs to provide their own definition of a human rights defender. According to the participants, HRDs are people who work to protect and promote not just individual human rights, but more importantly, collective rights of the toiling masses who have long been suffering from systemic violence. Given that rights are not inherently afforded equally or universally to everyone, their struggles are focused on the most vulnerable, oppressed, and exploited groups. Furthermore, a participant shared that being an HRD is so much more than a career, it reflects an entire belief system manifested in their quotidian lifestyles which affirm their perspectives and stances in fighting for human rights.

The following word cloud stemmed from the registration to a webinar organized by the research team, the University of the Philippines Department of Geography, and the Defend Negros Network, entitled "Defend the Defenders: *Talakayan sa Sosyo-Ekonomikong Krisis at Makasaysayang Pakikibaka sa Isla ng Negros*" held on March 2021. The webinar was attended by invited guest speakers from Karapatan Alliance Philippines – Negros, Silliman University, NSFW, the Diocese of San Carlos, Commission on Human Rights, and the research participants. The words shown in the word cloud in the shape of Negros Island reflect what the registrants of the webinar thought about human rights defenders. The word cloud provides a glimpse of the self-perceptions of HRDs at the time of the webinar, reinforcing their own definition of HRDs and reflecting the inherent temporal nature of their personal views of the work that they do. Understandably, as the webinar was mainly attended by HRDs, allies, and

supporters, the word cloud is dominated by positive words, such as brave, heroes, courageous, revolutionary, strong, and enduring, but unfortunately these views of HRDs are not shared by a lot of people, as HRDs still experience vilification from the public (See Figure 2.)

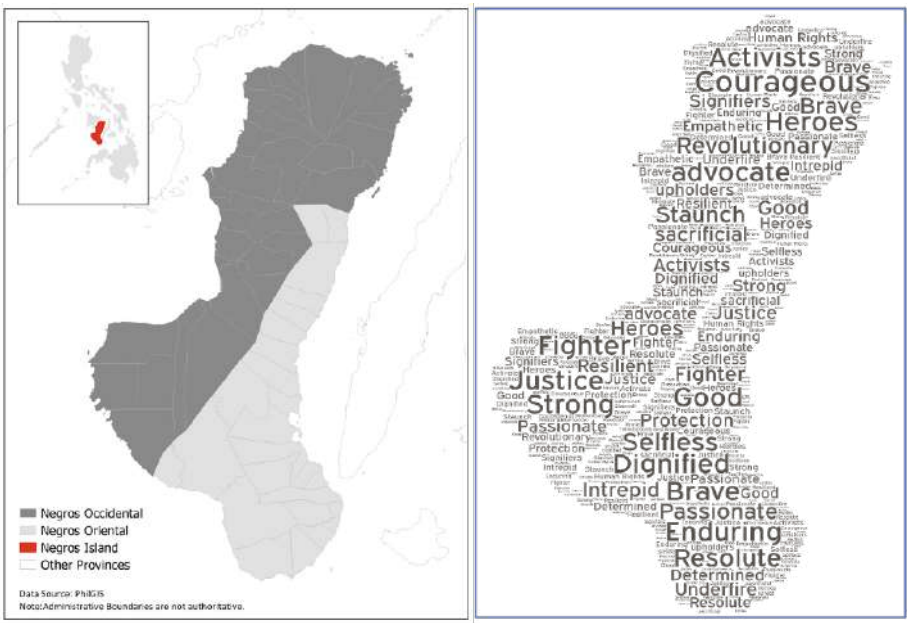

FIG. 2. *Word cloud showing words provided by participants in the Defend the Defenders Webinar held in March 2021.*

Mapping the grounded experiences of HRDs in Negros Island through the narratives of survivors contributes to the methodological efforts of exposing violent geographies and highly contested environments (See Tyner et. al., 2018; Curtis et.al., 2019). As Harley (1988) argues, "cartography as a form of knowledge and a form of power" (p. 279). Mental mapping places this power on individuals, allowing for the human rights defenders to take stock of their lived spaces and visually show their grounded realities.

Mental mapping workshops were organized via Zoom. In these workshops, the participants were given the chance to create their individual drawn mental maps. After a brief introduction to mental mapping and providing general guides to the participants, they were given time to construct their views and ideas of spaces around them. The participants were instructed to draw their mental maps to illustrate the places that they consider as dangerous and unsafe along with places that they deem as safe. They were given the freedom to make use of their own set of symbols to personally denote their feelings of safety and danger. They were also encouraged to include calls, demands, and aspirations in their mental maps. After the drawing session, each participant was given the time to discuss their mental maps and they were asked to elaborate on the visual representations of their ideas of risk and safety. Three (3) mental maps are included here for inclusion from the 16 maps that were created by the participants.

The following mental map was done by a long-time HRD, Harabas* (not his real name) who detailed safe and unsafe spaces in his neighborhood. The safe spaces in his map were marked using the color green, relatively unsafe spaces like roads were drawn in yellow, and unsafe places were shown using a red cross. The HRD considers the inside of his home as safe, along with the market, owing to it being a public space, and also because it is a site where his allies are. Roads are seen as spaces where they have to practice extreme caution, especially at night, because it exposes them to vehicles, specifically 'riding-in-tandems,' a two-person operation on motorcycles that usually carries out summary executions in the island. Places marked with red are unsafe places where they have experienced surveillance, intimidation, and harassment (See Figure 3). This mental map serves as a stark reminder that normal spaces such as the road from one's house to the market are seen as potentially life-threatening by human rights defenders because of their advocacy. While the house and the market are generally seen as safe as marked by the green boxes, it is surrounded by relatively unsafe and unsafe spaces, making it challenging to move from one place to another.

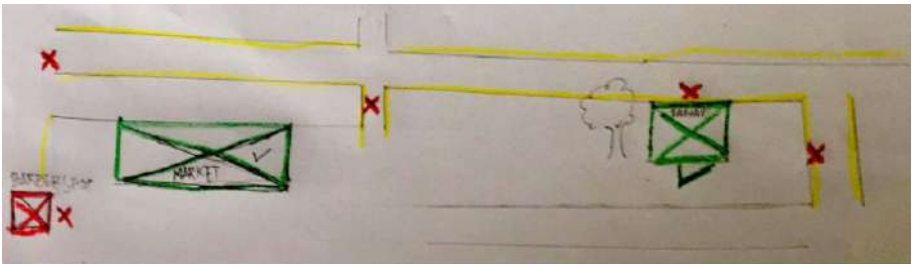

FIG. 3. *A portion of a mental map showing safe and unsafe spaces for Harabas. Mental mapping workshop, February 08, 2021.*

Flora* (not her real name) detailed in her mental map that there are no more safe spaces in the island. She has also shared that the attacks were constantly happening before the pandemic and even during the pandemic. This mental map does not only include details about physical spaces, but she also included the digital or online spaces such as Facebook and her cellphone, marking them as unsafe, due to the death threats that she receives regularly. This mental map echoes the narratives included in the mental map of Harabas, as they both consider streets and roads as spaces prone to extra-judicial killings (EJKs) (See Figure 4). In sharing her experiences using her mental map, she jokingly says, "I did not indicate a safe space, I could not see any, maybe in outer space." While it is no joking matter that almost all of the places they inhabit feel unsafe, her manner of recounting a harrowing daily experience is a testament to the passion and strength of these HRDs even as they experience highly dangerous conditions. Flora's mental map also shows her house as a relatively unsafe space, in contrast to Harabas' map that shows his house as 'safe.' Even public spaces such as malls are sites where she has experienced harassment and surveillance. The participants identified ways of coping to deal with the presence of risk and danger in their everyday spaces. These task-oriented coping mechanisms include direct efforts to maintain control and protect themselves from violence through strict adherence to security measures such as changing their movement patterns, avoiding certain

routes, lessening their travel frequency, employing different transportation modes and employing a buddy system to ensure their safety.

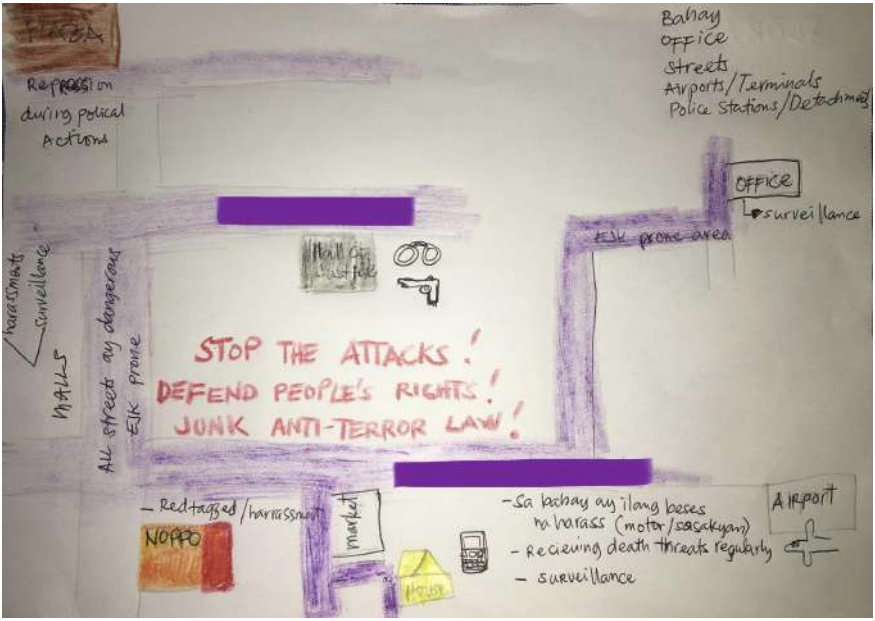

FIG. 4. *A detailed mental map of an HRD showing spaces of violence in Flora's community, which includes broader calls for human rights. Mental mapping workshop, February 08, 2021.*

Individual characteristics such as gender, age, as well as levels of education prove to have huge impacts on the perception of risk among HRDs. There are cases where women HRDs were at the receiving end of various rape threats and sexual slanders. The study indicates that women in general experienced higher levels of fear of violence than men, although according to the participants men experienced higher victimization rates. Men who have experienced some forms of violence, or are in contact with victims (Austin et. al., 2002 & Mawby et. al., 2020) have a high awareness of fear and concern for their safety and security. Some participants convey their sadness when recounting their lost friends, peers, and colleagues, even illustrating and narrating the critical event in their mental

maps. Majority of the participants exhibited a sense of fear and there is a certain resignation that at any given time and place they can be taken down and be killed.

Partz (not his real name) narrated the horrifying moment before his arrest and how a group of armed men pointed armed rifles on his head and told him to lie down, fearing for his life in the whole ordeal (see Figure 5).

> *…parang na-schock ako di ko alam kung gagawin ko, umiyak na lang at umiyak ako. parang hindi ko na naiintindihan, parang nawala na ako sa kalibutan o sa sarili, wala na akong masabi. …nung nagse-search na sila, kahit saang sulok ay mayroong baril, mayroong explosive, pati na yung room ko, may baril… yung mga baril, nilagay sa lamesa tapos pinipicturan nila ako parang ako ang may-ari ng mga baril…ang sama talaga ng loob ko na ginanun nila ako na wala naman akong kasalanan sa kanila at tsaka wala naman akong baril…"*

FIG. 5. *Mental map of Partz illustrating the moment he was asked to lie down with armed rifles pointed above his head. Mental mapping workshop, February 08, 2021.*

In a study conducted by Austin, Woolever, and Baba (1994), they discovered a positive relationship between levels of education and increased feeling of perceived safety; this was not the case, however, for some of the youth HRDs. As narrated by Lisa and Maya, both experienced persecution and intimidation within the school premises from their instructors, faculty administrators, and even fellow students. They were tagged as communists and were constantly being watched and monitored.

The dot density map confirms the feelings of fear and danger of Harabas, Flora, and Partz, and they reflect the actual recorded instances of the killings of HRDs in Negros Island (See Figure 6). Most of the killings were concentrated in the cities of Bacolod, Dumaguete, Escalante, Guihulngan, and Sagay. The map shows that Guihulngan City and Sagay City have the highest number of recorded HRD killings from 2017-2021, with 13 and 12 casualties respectively. The geonarratives presented in the paper humanizes these numbers as human rights violations are usually presented just as body counts and casualties. Their stories as told through their shared statements and mental maps provide another perspective of the extent of human rights abuses in Negros Island.

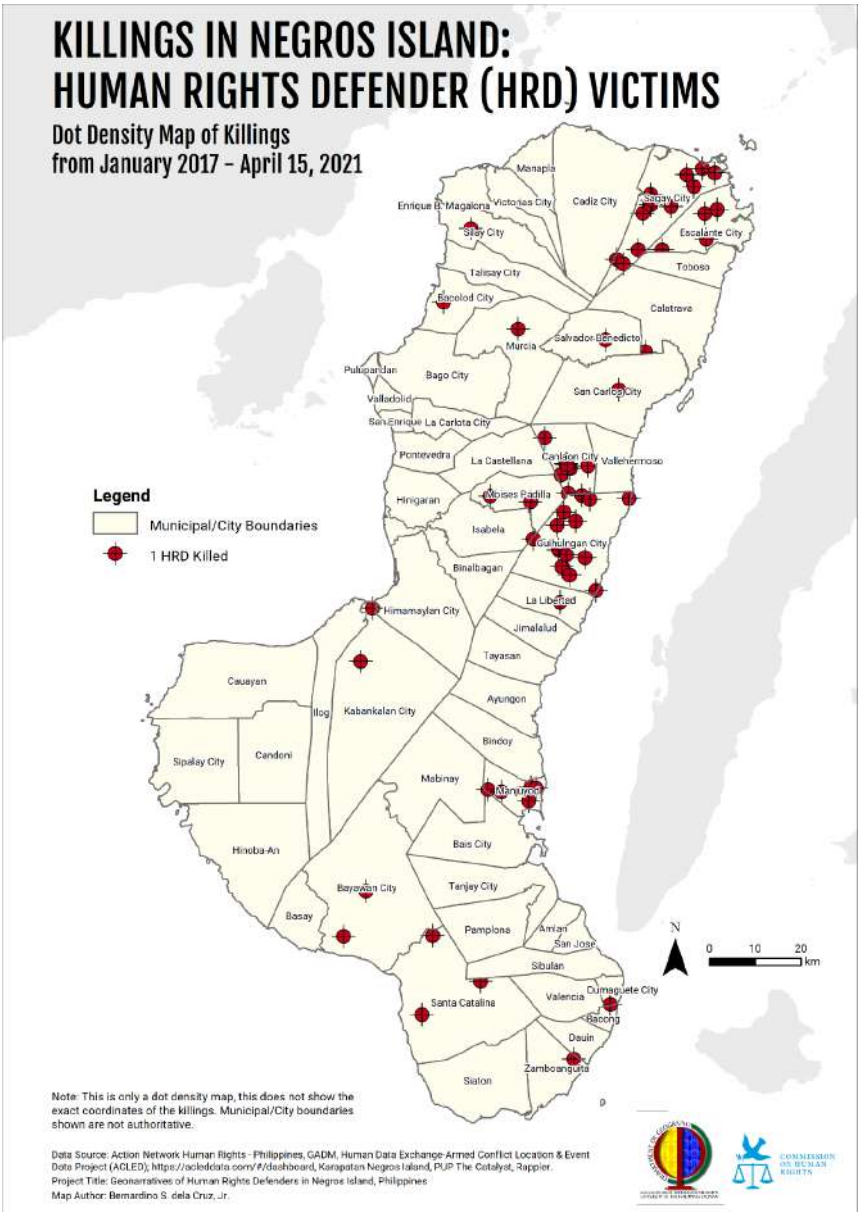

FIG. 6. *Dot density map of killings in Negros Island from January 2017 – April 2021.*

Conclusion

The HRDs in Negros Island have experienced different forms of violence that include intimidation, surveillance, red-tagging, death threats, and gender-based threats. Other forms of violence include the suppression of dissent, dispersion of mobilizations, forced evacuations, filing of trumped-up charges, forced surrenders and violent/arbitrary arrests, cyberattacks and online harassment, and killings. Geonarratives and storying are among a number of powerful tools that may showcase the individual experiences of human rights defenders in Negros Island. These individual narratives are informed and shaped by the long history of conflict and tension against land ownership and labor exploitation and injustices, and are part of the collective struggle against the culture of impunity in the island. Geonarratives and constructions of safe and unsafe spaces in Negros Island provide a glimpse into the everyday experiences of human rights defenders in the conduct of their work and are powerful statements that expose the long-standing abuses by multiple perpetrators against HRDs in an island fraught with contestation and conflict.

The grounded experiences of HRDs as narrated both visually and verbally contribute to efforts of exposing the realities of targeted populations in violent geographies as showcased in this research. Mental mapping and storying can be seen as complementary to other more established qualitative methods to understand the richness and depth of variegated folk subjectivities. The use of narrative inquiry and visual mapping through the use of mental maps effectively shows how policies imposed by the government reconfigured the activity spaces of human rights defenders. Places that are seen by most as safe such as the home become places of risk and danger due to the constant surveillance and threat of harassment against HRDs.

We have chosen to highlight these stories not only to humanize the body counts or casualties shown in the news but also to show that despite the constant

risks to their lives due to their human rights advocacies, the narratives also show that safe spaces are created with people who share in their collective struggle. The risks on their lives and well-being make ways of dealing and coping with these risks of tantamount importance. The security strategies and coping mechanisms developed and used by HRDs to cope with the dangerous nature of their advocacy within the culture of impunity in the Philippines reflect mutual care, support, and camaraderie. These are not just stories of fear and victimization but are also expressions of hope that social justice will be afforded to the disenfranchised in the country. It is our duty to tell these stories, not only to highlight their experiences, but also to ensure that we echo their calls to a wider audience, to #StopTheAttacks and to #NeverForget.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the Commission on Human Rights – Research Division. We would like to recognize and acknowledge the exemplary contributions of the two other members of the research team, Leonardo Miguel Garcia and Bernardino S. Dela Cruz, Jr. We are also grateful to the reviewers and their comments on the earlier draft of this manuscript, the reviews allowed us to clarify and improve upon the manuscript to better highlight these narratives. Finally, we express our utmost respect and gratitude to the human rights defenders for their stories, and for sharing with us their unbelievable courage and passion in fighting for social justice. *Padayon!*

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'We're Still at Sea': Migrant Fishers and International Encounters on a Maritime Border Zone

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University of Hawai'i

This paper draws on social science theories about the state and governance, geonarrative approaches, political economy of fishing, and the emerging field of Palawan studies to detail experiences of intra-provincial migrant fishers of the Philippines. It is informed by mixed-method approaches like semi-structured interviews, place-based observation, and discourse analysis. The fieldwork occurred in Manila and Palawan, 2018-2019. These methods produced three inter-related findings developed in the following text. First, fishers provide unparalleled understandings of place in remote, peripheral marine-spaces. Second, Palaweño fishers' geonarratives map translucent borders within ethnic, class, and gender landscapes of Palawan and neighboring provinces in the broader Philippine archipelago. Third, ad hoc engagement with fishers from other countries is emergent diplomacy on the open sea. Their encounters underpin the everyday geopolitics of maritime border areas and destabilizes state-centric imaginings of an ordered, homogenous territorial ocean-space.

Keywords: *Political ecology of fishing, migration, geonarrative, Palawan, Spratly Islands*

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My ancestors and relatives were fishers before.
That was the only way to survive, fishing
-A Cuyonon man living in Puerto Princesa City, 2018.

I struggled to keep balance in my *tsinelas* along a maze of muddy embankments as I followed a research informant through multiple rice-paddies. In that moment, I recalled that Palawan is one of the few places in the archipelago where equatorial spitting cobras live, oftentimes in settings like the one we were traversing. After navigating several paddies, we waited under the rickety roof of a *bahay kubo* as men holding sharpened *garab* finished their task. Weary from harvesting *palay*, they escaped the brutal sun, sharing stories about their experiences fishing in coastal Palawan and the maritime border zone further west.

This article traces the stories of inter-provincial migrant fishers, push/pull factors prompting their relocation, dreams of prosperity, and continued struggles as small-scale fishers in their new home, Palawan, Philippines. It draws on a range of literature on geonarratives, political economy of fishing, and Palawan studies. The following discussion develops three overarching ideas. First, Palaweño fishers are central for providing site-rooted understandings of place in remote, peripheral marine-spaces. Second, their geonarratives signpost translucent borders within ethnic, class, and gender landscapes of Palawan and neighboring provinces. Third, ad hoc engagement with fishers from other countries is emergent diplomacy on the open sea. Their encounters underpin the everyday geopolitics of maritime border areas and destabilizes state-centric imaginings of an ordered, homogenous territorial ocean-space.

This article is informed by fieldwork in Manila and Palawan, 2018-2019. Most of my time was spent in various municipalities of Palawan, including Puerto

Princesa City and the Municipality of Quezon (Figures 1 and 2). It is one component of a broader dissertation that details relatively sensitive political topics involving the Spratly Island dispute. Consequently, I omit personal names or use pseudonyms to protect informants from repercussions to their livelihoods or careers. I interviewed a broad array of stakeholders including fishers and their spouses, government employees, elected officials, and NGO workers. All the interviews with fishers and some government employees were conducted in Tagalog (with a mix of Cuyonon and Visayan) and later translated.

FIG 1. *Fieldwork sites were primarily Puerto Princesa City and the Municipality of Quezon in the Province of Palawan. Some archival research and a few interviews were conducted in Metro Manila.*

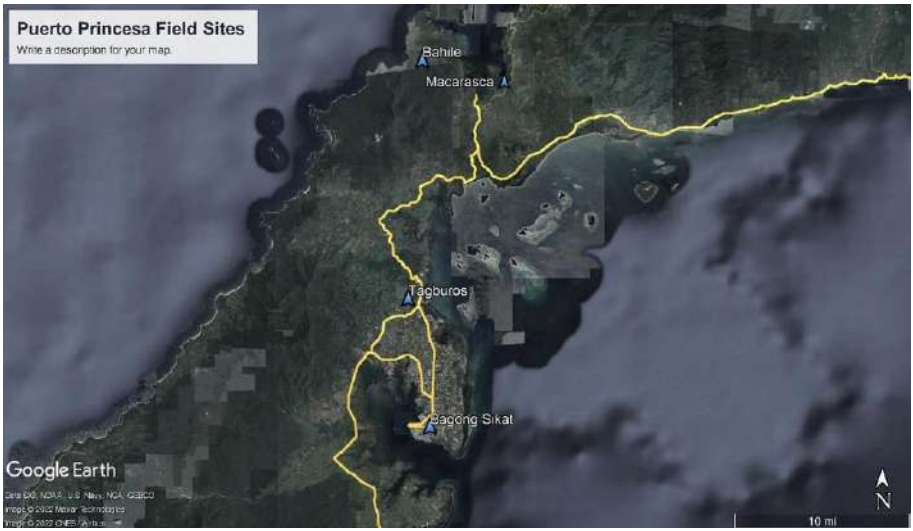

FIG. 2. *Field sites within Puerto Princesa City.*

The fieldwork involved approximately forty-five formal, semi-structured interviews and many other more informal conversations during my fieldwork. Tagalog is not my first language, but I studied it at my home university and other institutions. Furthermore, I hired an interpreter who was crucial during the earliest stages of data collection. However, logistical challenges caused me to also conduct interviews on my own at times. My primary target group was Palaweño fishers and, in particular, a group of fifty-four that the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) "deployed" to Thitu Island in late-2017. BFAR provided a list of names and barangays of the fishers deployed. My data collection approach was to first scout the interviewees alone, riding my motorbike to visit the barangay captain, ask permission to interview the fishers there, and schedule a time so the interpreter could be present. However, many times the barangay captain simply stated that interviews could occur immediately. Some of these locations were relatively far from Puerto Princesa City and I decided to conduct interviews

personally rather than wait for a later date and risk losing the opportunity. All interviews were audio recorded and the hired interpreter proved invaluable for translation during the transcription process. Inter-provincial migrants were not a target group for this project; the target group was largely the group deployed to Thitu Island. However, most fishers happened to be migrants, a reflection of the general cultural landscape of a borderland province.

Geonarratives and Practiced Materiality of Maritime Places

Overlap exists between geonarratives and the emergent materiality of place. Palis (2022) traces the utility of geonarratives as a method to visually detail place-based narratives. In subaltern settings, participant-produced maps can be "used as visual basis and prompt to discuss, tell and perform" individuals' stories (2022, p. 700). Such narratives often inherently differ from elite or state descriptions of those places. While the workshops described by Palis largely relied on countermapping to express "place-writing" (p. 700), the fishers involved with this current study expressed their understanding of place verbally. Additionally, I contend the very materiality of those places emerged through bodily practices and situated contexts of engaging fishers from other countries on the open sea.

This article focuses on the Palaweño fishers that physically traverse the disputed Spratly Island region, an area known as the Kalayaan Island Group in the Philippines. It draws on Dittmer's work on assemblage theory as well as Steinberg and Peters' "wet ontology" and later "more than wet ontology" (Dittmer, 2014; Steinberg and Peters, 2015; Peters and Steinberg, 2019). While the inability of state agencies to make peripheral marine-scapes legible results in varied understandings of Kalayaan space, the materiality of Kalayaan emerges through the experiences and everyday geopolitics of the folks that actually go there.

FIG. 3. *Fish port in the Municipality of Quezon, Palawan. The waters of Palawan and the nearby Spratly Islands are rich in marine resources.*

It is useful to assess two ideas from Dittmer's "assemblage and complexity" approach here. First, Dittmer argues that "assemblage embeds a relational ontology that dissolves the macro/micro scalar tensions at the heart of geopolitics" (2014, p. 386). Kalayaan space is imagined and maintained by countless stakeholders, government agencies, and military branches on local, provincial, and national levels. Dittmer further contends his approach "connects with arguments for geopolitics as everyday practice and as a local, bottom-up set of processes that

need to be studied as such – via disaggregation and attention to both specific sites and events" (Dittmer, 2014, p. 386). National-level Philippine government agencies actively construct narratives that a Kalayaan space integral to the state's territory indeed exists. However, the *materiality* of Kalayaan emerges through bottom-up, everyday practices, shared experiences, and site-specific events.

Inter-provincial Migrants and Everyday Fishing in Palawan

Palawan became a prime destination for migrants in the latter-half of the twentieth century. Known as the "Last Frontier" in the Philippines, the rugged, undeveloped island was considered an opportunity to escape violence and poverty in Mindanao and elsewhere. Indigenous groups like the Batak, Palawan, and Tagbanwa engage in shifting cultivation in the island's uplands (Eder and Evangelista, 2014, p. 4). The Islamic Molbog in the south and the Hispanicized Agutaynen, Cagayanen, Calamiane and Cuyonon in the north have resided in Palawan for centuries. In addition, a broad array of migrants has lived in Palawan for generations. Palawan studies scholars Eder and Evangelista write:

> These migrants and migrant-origin peoples include Christians from Luzon and the Visayas, Muslims from Mindanao and Sulu, and other indigenous groups from different parts of the Philippines. All of these peoples have figured prominently in the story of Palawan past and present. (2014, p. 4)

While Tagalog and English are considered the official languages of the province, fieldwork experience for this project reveals widespread usage of Cebuano or other Visayan languages. This is unsurprising since Palawan has been a migrant destination for decades, including many people from the Visayas and Mindanao. Additionally, Malay can be heard in southern areas of the island

(Macdonald, 2014, pp. 69-70). Autochthonous and indigenous languages include Palawano, Tagbanwa, Batak, and Molbog. Cuyonon, closely related to languages in the Visayas, has become the main autochthonous language of Palawan (Macdonald, 2014, pp. 68-69). Intra-provincial migration is also transforming the fisher profile in Palawan as some members of indigenous upland communities move to lowland coastal areas in seek of greater opportunities as fishers (Dressler and Fabinyi, 2011, p. 538).

Most of the fishers interviewed for this project are originally from other locations in the Philippines and moved to Palawan for potential economic opportunities. Consequently, Palawan is characterized by immense linguistic diversity (Eder and Evangelista, 2014, pp. 3-4). One fisher originally from Masbate explained, "People told us it was a good place for a livelihood, not like there where we were poor, so my parents moved here to Palawan." Johndel, a Cuyonon man in his forties, stated, "My ancestors and relatives were fishers before. That was the only way to survive, fishing." Except for Johndel, every fisher interviewed for this study was from the Visayas. He was the first in his family to be born in Puerto Princesa City after his relatives moved from Cuyo Island. He explained, "Of course our life here is only fishing." Several other fishers were originally from Samar, one moving to Palawan twenty years ago. Another moved from Bohol thirty years ago and others were originally from Masbate. One explained his relatives were sent to Palawan during Marcos' martial law. A different fisher moved from Cebu in 2001 to find work.

Unsurprisingly, inter-provincial migrants like Visayans and intra-provincial migrants like the Tagbanwa typically face restricted access to marine resources in the province. Consequently, they often rely on motorless vessels or work as crew members of larger fishing operations, experiencing low investment returns and continued vulnerability (Fabinyi et al., 2018, p. 106). One fisher said, "[I have been

a fisher] since I lived here but we [relatives] really began fishing in Samar. We are still at sea." This latter fisher's statement is particularly poignant, accentuating the challenges migrant workers face globally, including fishers in Palawan. His family left their homeland for better opportunities but find themselves still adrift at sea culturally and socioeconomically.

The group interviewed for this project are lifetime fishers but sometimes work in construction crews or as farmhands. Some plan their fishing trips around tri-annual rice harvesting. Their primary livelihood is small-scale fishing in nearby areas like Honda Bay or Ulugan Bay. They catch a variety of species including threadfin (*bisugo*), emperor (*amadas*), Spanish mackerel (*tangigi*), and grouper (*suno or Lapu-Lapu*) for the market or personal consumption.

Sometimes their fishing trips last several days, something they call *mag-dayo.* An approximate translation is to "go out" or "venture out" from your own place. However, it seems to have a more specific meaning among the fishers interviewed. For them, *mag-dayo* involves going to another area for several days, sleeping on an island or their vessel. One frequent *mag-dayo* destination is near Dos Palmas Island at the mouth of Honda Bay. A further destination is Roxas in northern Palawan. One fisher explained that while on one of these longer trips, he practices net-fishing during the day and goes spearfishing at night, catching squid (*pusit*), crabs (*alimasag*), and various coral fish (*isdang bato*). The duration of the *mag-dayo* depends on food supplies they bring and can catch. One fisher seasonally joins a crew to catch tuna (*tambakol*) near Tubbataha Reef Marine Park in the Sulu Sea.

The province is immensely rich in marine resources. This includes the Kalayaan Island Group. One government employee claimed that "probably seventy or eighty percent of Philippines catch is from the West Philippine Sea." Filipino leaders consider these waters to be supremely important because more than

twenty-two percent of the per capita protein intake in the Philippines is fish (Baviera and Batongbacal, 2013, p. 13). Most Palaweño fishers lack the capital, large-vessels, or equipment to exploit the marine resources in the Spratly Island region. Small-scale fishers rarely voyage far from the Palawan mainland unless they are employees on larger fishing operations. They oftentimes fish for sustenance and whatever they can sell at local markets. According to others, lack of capital is not the only factor restricting access to those rich waters. Rather, fear of encountering Chinese Coast Guard or other Chinese vessels also keep some from venturing far from shore.

However, there are large-scale commercial fishers from Palawan that can afford to operate in the Spratly Island region, despite potential danger. This second group of fishers are more involved with the global seafood market. One example is the live-reef fish (LRF) trade. In Palawan, this involves capturing species like leopard grouper alive to be shipped to luxury restaurants in China and elsewhere. As local communities in Palawan and beyond are increasingly integrated into the complex network of the global seafood market, fish become commoditized and the actual costs of fishery production is "masked" from consumers and others (Crona et al., 2015, pp. 1-8). Integration into global markets does provide opportunities for many local communities. Fabinyi et al. (2012, pp. 120-121) point out that commodity fisheries such as the LRF trade provide livelihood for many Palaweños. However, these benefits are varied; some large-scale fishers enjoy increased wealth while those they employ or other small-scale fishers sometimes experience greater poverty (Fabinyi et al., 2018, p. 94). Fabinyi et al. (2012, p. 129) write that the LRF trade is:

> arguably an example of how at a broad scale, the East Asian region is consuming or "appropriating" the marine resources of [Southeast Asia],

> yet the long-term environmental cost of this consumption is borne by [Southeast Asia]. (Fabinyi et al., 2012, p. 129)

They describe the regional LRF trade as an "ecologically unequal exchange" between Southeast Asia and China (Fabinyi et al., 2012, p. 129).

Tuna is perhaps even more important than leopard grouper and the LRF trade in Palawan. In 2007, the Kalayaan Island Group accounted for thirteen percent of the country's tuna production (Baviera and Batongbacal, 2013, p. 13). Furthermore, the potential annual yield of these waters is estimated at five million tons or around twenty percent of the country's annual fish-catch (Baviera and Batongbacal, 2013, p. 13). An officer of the Municipality of Quezon fish port explained plans to construct a large "international" fish port in southern Palawan, a development that could shift the Philippine tuna industry from Mindanao to Palawan. Such a plan could impact the fishing industry in the province immensely. The current tuna capital of the Philippines is General Santos City, Mindanao, although the officer claimed that most tuna caught in the archipelago is from the waters west of Palawan. A major fish port in Berong would foster cooperation between the municipalities of Kalayaan and Quezon to share generated income. A port in Quezon would shift the center of the tuna industry from Mindanao to southern Palawan, allowing direct exports to China, Malaysia, Vietnam, and beyond.

Fabinyi et al. (2018, p. 93) employ a "scaled political ecology approach to examine how access unfolds at the 'extractive ends' of seafood trade in the coastal frontiers of Palawan province." Palawan's unique geography provides opportunities to reconceptualize frontiers. It is useful to share a lengthy excerpt from Fabinyi et al. here to illustrate this. They write:

> In effect, frontiers are often portrayed as quintessential land-based territories...However, much less research emphasis has been placed on how politically, economically and ecologically connected coastal regions are also undergoing intense and rapid transformations. In many respects, marine enclosures, extractive zones and commodities production are part of frontier transitions as much as boom crops are in the interior. Yet compared to the agrarian smallholder cousin, the poor coastal fisher is the less visible 'surplus migrant' arguably left out of the popular frontier imaginary. (2018, p. 92)

The frontier of southern Palawan illustrates the limitations of state governance in the Philippines and the regionality of the economy. The friction of terrain (Scott, 1998, 2009) coupled with the inefficacy of borders to restrict mobility foster an environment of exchange and trade that transcends national borders.

FIG. 4. *Father and young son, small-scale fishers, returning to their barangay in Macarascas, Puerto Princesa, at dusk (left). Fishing village in Barangay Bahile, Puerto Princesa City (right).*

One migrant from the Visayas region described his situation as a fisher in Palawan. Originally from Masbate, he moved to the province in 1986 in hopes of greater income. He found little employment opportunities besides working as a crew member of larger fishing operations. He explained, "I have no way to work as a worker cause I'm older, my family will not allow me to be an employee [elsewhere], I'm older now." He quickly added, "of course, there is no other source of income" because he does not own a vessel. He and his friend sell their labor to large-scale fish owners. Despite their status as wage-earners, they are still not guaranteed a wage. He explained, "if we get the fish, [then we get] our income. No fish, no money." The vessels are crewed by fifteen to twenty men and have a capacity of approximately eight tons. They usually target a variety of species like scad, mackerel, and skipjack tuna.

FIG. 5. *Members of a large-scale fishing crew just returned to Quezon, Palawan from a two-week trip in the Spratly Islands (left). Municipality of Quezon Market where female fish vendors oftentimes sell fish-catch of male relatives (right).*

Orlando has lived in Quezon, Palawan since the 1980s. His first experience in the fishing industry was as a crew member of a tuna fishing operation. He had hopes of personally owning vessels, explaining, "of course, I worked on other vessels and I saw that they could have a vessel, so I dreamt to have my own. If you come from a place where you have nothing, of course you seek to improve life." He currently owns two medium-size fishing vessels. They typically only travel fifteen to thirty nautical miles out to sea. Like many fishers in the province, they usually leave in the morning and return to shore by evening. Like Orlando, Jhun also has a relatively successful migration story. Originally from Cabadbaran City, Occidental Negros, his family was driven by poverty to seek livelihood in southern Palawan in the 1980s. In the early 2000s, he invested in a fishing business and now personally owns three vessels. Each vessel is crewed by six to seven men and they target big-eyed scad, tuna, and squid. He indicated that it can be difficult to find enough fishers because there are so many fishing vessels seeking crewmembers. They change location depending on the season but typically only travel sixty to seventy nautical miles from the Palawan mainland due to fear of encountering Chinese vessels.

Many fish vendors in markets throughout Palawan are female relatives of fishers. They play a crucial role in the finances or the success of family business ventures. Maria moved from Masbate to Palawan with her family in 1975. Considered a matriarch of the extended family, they own five vessels crewed by sons and nephews. She explains their trips usually only last one day, saying, "They use stones, then chicken feathers, that's what they attach to the hook. When they return, I will sell my own fish here." They are also involved in the LRF trade, targeting leopard grouper. She explained her vessels are equipped with holding tanks for the grouper. Vendors from Puerto Princesa purchase them on arrival in Quezon and prepare them alive for shipment to Manila and, presumably, East

Asia. She suggested her sons do not visit Kalayaan because of the danger of Muslim "pirates" near Balabac. This illustrates fluid understandings of Kalayaan's location as well as an undercurrent of Islamophobia in the province. A common mistrust of "pirate" Islamic communities in the southernmost portions of Palawan is ironic because the only significant case of kidnapping for ransom in the province occurred in Puerto Princesa, not Balabac (Ch, 2001; Mendez and Romero, 2001). Furthermore, the perpetrators were members of Abu Sayyaf from Sulu, not Muslims from southern Palawan.

While extremists or kidnappers are unlikely a danger to Palaweño fishers, storms are. Maria shared a tragic story about a vessel named *40 Watch*. According to her, the tuna vessel voyaged to a *payaw* (fish aggregator device) in the Spratly Island region approximately ten years ago. A typhoon swept the sea and the vessel disappeared with all aboard. I was unable to find reports of this occurring in news archives. This does not discredit the story; local news agencies oftentimes fail to properly archive articles that occurred months ago. It would be unsurprising for a record of an event occurring a decade ago to be missing. Furthermore, reports of missing Palaweño fishers during the stormy season are common (Aning, 2012; Philippine Coast Guard, 2016; Ballarta, 2020). Illegal fishing practices like using dynamite can also pose dangers, not only to fragile coral systems, but to the fishers themselves. A Balabac-based fisher died from this in April 2021 (Ballarta, 2021).

Marie Cris is thirty-five years old and a fish vendor at the Quezon market. She shared a harrowing personal story about the dangers and fear involved with the fishing life. Several years ago, her husband's vessel failed to return at the expected time during stormy weather. Panicked, she contacted the Philippine Coast Guard, Quezon branch. During an interview, she expressed bitterness towards the Coast Guard's response which, in her opinion, was indifferent to her husband's danger. Fortunately, the storm only delayed her husband and he later returned safely. She

also suggested local government agencies are discriminating in who receives aid in the form of fishing gear or other equipment, saying, "Only those who seem to be close to them [government employees] are the only ones they give [supplies to]. Everything should be fair." Her family is involved in the leopard grouper LRF trade. In addition, her husband catches other species that she sells in the market in Quezon.

One of the few things fishers and state representatives interviewed for this project agree on is concern over ecosystem destruction from unsustainable fishing and China's island reclamation. A Municipality of Kalayaan administrator believes the damage caused by island reclamation will take many years to recover. Fishers reported extensive damage to the coral surrounding Thitu Island, suggesting dynamite fishing and the use of cyanide for catching live-reef fish like grouper are primary causes. Of course, they blamed Chinese, Malaysian, and Vietnamese fishers, although such methods are indeed practiced in the Philippines and throughout Southeast Asia. They reported only seeing larger species from deeper water like sharks, Spanish mackerel (*tangigi*) and barracuda (*rumpi*). Speaking about the reclamation of Subi Reef, some fishers emphasized that fish do not spawn in destroyed coral. They suggested the fact that they only observed larger species from deeper waters indicates other species are no longer spawning in the nearby coral-reefs. Furthermore, the only giant clams some of the fishers saw were already dead. In 2015, reports surfaced that Chinese giant clam harvesters were deliberately destroying reefs in the Spratly Islands (Wingfield-Hayes, 2015).

The former president of the Quezon Basnig Operator Association (BOA) reported at least five large vessels from the municipality currently fish for tuna in the Spratly Island region. This contradicts an officer of agriculture in Quezon. The Office of Agriculture is responsible for all fishers in the municipality. The officer's claim that no local fishers travel to the Spratly Island region reveals the

inability of local state agencies to make legible and keep track of Palaweño fishers. The Quezon BOA president is a migrant from Masbate who now owns two vessels. He was once interviewed by ABS-CBN, advocating that the government should provide job opportunities or aid for fishers during the stormy season, which typically occurs November to January. Each of the five vessels from Quezon that visit the Spratly Islands have a crew of seven or eight, are equipped for basnig fishing, and are accompanied by three smaller vessels. Basnig fishing is a method common in the Visayan region and usually employs nets. The large vessel is typically equipped with powerful lights to attract species at night while the smaller vessels set a net around the periphery.

Emergent Place in a Maritime Border Zone

One barangay captain in Puerto Princesa claimed that many fishers from Palawan visited the disputed waters in the 1990s, targeting yellow-tailed fusilier (*dalagang bukid*), surgeonfish (*labahita*), leopard grouper, mackerel (*tangigi*), skipjack tuna (*tulingan*), and yellowfin tuna. He lamented, "they don't go there now because they are afraid, the Chinese vessels have guns and can harass them." Consequently, according to him, many large-scale Palaweño fishers are forced to travel to the Malaysian national border near Balabac. Jhun, the migrant from Occidental Negro, expressed fear of fishing in the Spratly Island region, claiming he heard reports of the Chinese Coast Guard intercepting large-scale vessels from Puerto Princesa and confiscating their vessels or fish-catch in 2016.

Dionel and his crew are more mobile than many other fishers in Palawan and actually operate in two different seas. The crew lives in Puerto Princesa, which faces east toward the Sulu Sea. The business owner that employs them also owns a vessel on the west coast. If the winds are too strong on the east coast, they operate

in the west in the South China Sea. Oftentimes, Quezon and Balabac are some of the destinations during west coast trips. The length of these trips varies considerably, depending on fish-catch and weather. He explained, "when you leave here when it is calm, we return home after one week [of fishing]. But if it isn't calm or it is strong, you hide out on the islands; it will take you two or three weeks [to return home]." Other fishers also share stories of taking shelter from storms on deserted islands, even during three-day trips. Dionel explained their targeted species depends on the season; during the interview in June, they were catching large squid. Between October and February, they typically target tuna. Fishing in Balabac brings them close to the national border of Malaysia. Dionel uses GPS but reported that if they are careless, sometimes strong winds cause them to drift across the boundary. Chuckling, he explained when that occurs, the Malaysian Coast Guard is sure to chase them out of their national waters.

Many interviewees shared stories of encountering fishers from other countries in the Spratly Island region. One expressed indifference to these experiences, stating, "There are also fishermen from other countries, but I don't even ask where they come from." This apathetic response is an outlier among the interviews for this project. Most fishers reported either positive or negative descriptions of the fishers they encountered in the disputed waters. Dionel succinctly described Vietnamese fishers, saying, "there are good and there are others who are rude or stingy." The term "stingy" refers to a common practice of bartering or sharing goods with fishers from different countries. Another fisher had similarly negative opinions of other fishers, saying, "They are just there in the China Sea. They are greedy. Vietnamese, Taiwanese. They do sea turtle, do dynamite for *suno* [leopard grouper]."

Other Palaweño fishers shared more congenial experiences with other fishers. Jhun, the migrant from Occidental Negros, described bartering with Taiwanese

fishers. He indicated the Taiwanese enjoyed cigarettes from the Philippines. In return, the Taiwanese would share their own cigarettes, liquor, or noodles. Marie Cris described her husband's encounters with Chinese and Taiwanese fishers. According to her, Chinese were sometimes hostile while Taiwanese were usually friendly. The Taiwanese share food or noodles and fishing gear like hooks or lines. In return, the Taiwanese that her husband encounters are interested in Filipino *ulam* (partner of rice or entree).

As mentioned, Dionel and his crew travel more extensively and further from the coastline than many of the other fishers interviewed for this project. Unsurprisingly, he provided greater insight into encounters with fishers from other countries. He reported many Vietnamese fishers in large, more modern fishing vessels known locally in the Philippines as *lantsa.* Filipino fishers, even large-scale fishing operations, usually consist of smaller vessels than what the Vietnamese and others use. According to Dionel, the Vietnamese fishers in the *lantsa* catch tuna, sharks, and even sea turtles. Dionel and his crew give them Philippine cigarettes and some of their fish-catch. In return, they receive cigarettes from Vietnam and noodles. Typically, they rely on makeshift sign language to communicate. Sometimes the Vietnamese crew will have a Tagalog speaker on board, so they can communicate in greater depth. When this occurs, they discuss a variety of topics. Dionel stated:

> Depends, like we talk about our work, the mess [of a situation], of course our conversation focuses on, "why is it like this now?" The situation is so different right now. Until finally we talk about where they are from until we know each other.

Fishers from East Asia and Southeast Asia that frequent the disputed waters of the Spratly Island region are concerned with more than which marine species are in season. Their fish-catch and incomes are directly affected by the geopolitics of the South China Sea and increasing militarization of the Spratly Island maritime frontier.

While diplomats debate the dispute over the South China Sea during ASEAN and other forums, the fishers from various countries discuss the dispute among themselves during ad hoc encounters. Elected officials manufacture state-sponsored imaginaries of an uncluttered, ordered marine-space bounded by clearly demarcated territorial claims although most of them lack first-hand experience in the disputed waters. However, the very materiality and specificity of Kalayaan space emerges through the embodied experiences of Palaweño civilians, soldiers on lonely military outposts, and fishers chasing peripatetic marine life through an ever-moving, fluid Spratly Island region. Fishers perform nonstate diplomacy within site-specific contexts on the open sea, creating emergent yet temporary places that problematize the simplistic spatial imaginaries of state spokespeople. This exemplifies Dittmer's treatment of assemblage that emphasizes the dissolution of macro/micro scalar tensions at the heart of geopolitics. Fishers and other littoral communities embody the complex geopolitics of maritime Southeast Asia.

Conclusion

Fishers' international dialogue, bartering traditions, everyday experiences, and inherent mobility blur state-sponsored visions of the spatiality of the Spratly Island region. As government agencies publish declarations and maps averring a u-shaped line encompassing the South China Sea or tidy, clear exclusive economic zone

boundaries adjacent to national coastlines, the geopolitics of fishing produce alternative spatial realities in the Spratly Islands. The coordinates listed in Marcos' 1978 presidential decree (Presidential Decree No. 1596) declaring the existence of a Kalayaan Island Group have little to do with daily events on the water and marine spaces of the Spratly Islands.

Interactions between fishers and other civilians from different countries in the region produce emergent nonstate diplomacy, a site-specific alternative to state-sponsored imaginings of homogenized territorial claims to the Spratly Islands. Fisherfolk from maritime Southeast Asia inscribe place in Kalayaan with meaning and values largely divergent from state visions. The magnitude and weight of state discourse usually drowns out the stories of these marginalized communities. However, their voices, recollections, and geonarratives are the optimal sources for reflecting the actual spatiality of the disputed region.

While East Asian and Southeast Asian diplomats debate the dispute over the South China Sea during Association of Southeast Asian Nation meetings and other forums, the fishers from various countries discuss the dispute among themselves on the open sea, sometimes lamenting the current geopolitical situation. The materiality of Kalayaan emerges through the experiences and everyday diplomacy of the folks that are actually there.

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Marinduque Silencescapes: History and Stories of Local Silence

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Details constituting the sound environments in the island province of Marinduque can be extracted and reconstructed from the H. Otley Beyer Ethnographic Collection papers written by Asunción M. Arriola, Nieves Hidalgo, Eduardo E. Palma, Serapio Rolloqui, Cornelio C. Restar, and Miguel Manguerra (1916-1928) and the writings of Rafael J. Semilla (1970-71). With these sources one will be able to examine places identified with or produced by silence, which are here called "silencescapes". Given the challenges on defining, reading, and historicizing silences and silencescapes, there is a need to situate these places of silence within meanings and functions in a culture and society. As a study that examines how silences produce places, it attempts to contribute to the current scholarship on geo-narratives, local history, and countermapping.

Keywords: *silencescapes, Marinduque, geonarratives, local history, countermapping*

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Introduction

Fifty-four years apart, Asunción M. Arriola and Rafael J. Semilla portrayed with striking difference the sound environment in Marinduque during its Holy Week celebration.

Semilla described in 1970 an "exciting" soundscape. The local religious observance was dominated by the Moriones, or the Christian penitents dressed in Roman soldier attire and masks that signify the martyr Longhino (Saint Longinus). On Holy Wednesday, "at twelve o'clock high noon, the Morions with their full regalia appear in public in every town of Marinduque." Such appearance was characterized with playful crowd engagement: "grunts and gestures" to scare children, "mock sword duels and general mayhem," and *kalutang* playing, referring to a wood percussion instrument that "produces a sweet sonorous sound and yield monotonal music to the delight of the spectators." It was only during the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday that the celebration was pronounced "solemn". On "Holy Saturday," the capital of the province, Boac, was "in complete carnivalistic atmosphere," as the people enjoyed both the forthcoming resurrection of Christ and the Morion figures "frolicking" round the town. Lastly, on Easter Sunday, after the *Salubong* procession and the Misa Cantada, there would be a grand parade of the Moriones, the esteemed judges would select the prizewinners among the Morion participants, and the *Pugutan* play would begin with the search for Longhino, who would be mock-beheaded "at exactly twelve o' clock high noon." These Easter Sunday activities were accompanied by a band "playing good melodious pieces of music for the entertainment of the spectators" (Semilla, 1970, pp. 9-31, 36-37).

Compare this with the Holy Week observance in Gasan, a town next to Boac, half a century before. Writing in 1916, Arriola paid more attention to the activities

during the Sacred Paschal Triduum, the three days before Easter. During the first days of the week, people had to do all the daily activities, because the Triduum was reserved solely for acts of penitence, and on the morning of Maundy Thursday,

> many people go to church. After coming from church, they do their bathing because after twelve o' clock of this day, they can no longer take their baths. In the noon of this day, the bell will ring for the last time until Saturday morning. From 12 o' clock (Tuesday) [*sic:* Thursday] no one must go out in the street with umbrellas, no one must do any physical work, except cooking. The whole town is perfectly silent. No children are allowed to play out in the street. Most people spend their time going to church uttering their long continuous prayers, reading their religious books, and singing some songs which tell the story of Jesus Christ specially about his crucifixion. At about two o'clock during this day, certain noise is made thru out the whole town; and noise indicating the capture of Jesus Christ by Judas. The whole town is very quiet; no sound of music of any kind, no singing, no dancing, except the sad moaning voice of men and women who read the "Passion" of Jesus Christ written in dialects and in poetic form. It is very sad day among our forefathers, and even the people today (Arriola, 1916a, pp. 2-3).

The differences between these two celebrations indicate the metamorphosis of a local tradition, an unfinished history of a cultural form where aural perceptions and interpretations can be situated and examined. Between Semilla's "carnivalistic" and Arriola's "perfectly silent" there lies a set of "conceptual acceptations" and "perceptual phenomena" of and on sounds and silences that are worth investigating (Martorana, 2017). This would lead us into what I call "silencescapes".

A Conceptual Framework on Silencescape

A "silencescape" is a place identified with or produced by silence. Although slightly different, this definition owes inspiration to R. Murray Schafer's idea of a "soundscape" (1977, pp. 274-275). Just as how soundscapes are "marked" by unique sounds ("sound-marks") (Schafer, 1977, p. 10), silencescapes are also marked by "silence-marks". Marked by silence, a library is perhaps the quintessential example of a silencescape.

Yet, this definition of silencescapes and silence-marks has to be further validated. In defining silence, often employed is the via negativa: silence is the absence or lack of sound. Such resort to an antonym poses the ontological complexity of silence. Schafer asserts that the "nothingness" ascribed to silence is from a Western standpoint. Away from the Western ear, he foregrounds an Indian perception on sound: silence as the *anāhata,* meaning "unstruck sound," the highest form of sound rather than its absence (Schafer, 1977, pp. 256-262).

Riccardo Martorana (2017) argued that silence as "the state of absolute lack of sound" does not exist in nature and "is hardly achievable artificially." Thus, silence is "an abstract concept," which acceptations are tied to perceptual phenomena, and should be "considered as a perceptual experience of a human subject in relation to the sonic environment." Silence, therefore, does not necessarily connote the unheard and the unspoken. To assert the meaning and function of silence, one should examine why and how silence is distinguished, imposed, observed, and interpreted within a sonic environment. These questions would often lead us to understanding how cultures and societies operate.

Relevant here is the concept of "place," which is parallel to Schafer's spatialization of sound events, as he frequently refers to soundscapes as "sonic environment". Silencescape is a place produced by silence, rather than a mere space

where silence is produced. For Marc Augé, places are "invented," "established," and "symbolized"; its usage as a concept may refer at least to "an event, a myth, or a history" (pp. 43, 81-82). If we are to follow that silence is subjectively perceived, silencescape should then be recognized as a *place* rather than space, that is, subjectively constructed and construed through time by people, cultures, and societies.

Identifying silencescapes within a locality in a particular time period does not readily entail story-writing and storytelling, acts central to historical and geographical (or geo-)narratives. Primary sources may simply describe customs or rituals performed, or list what is heard. To extract stories and histories from a silencescape, its formation should be situated within weaves of meaning and function in a culture and society. It is from these specifics of "what it means" and "how it works" that stories of a place can be written and told.[1]

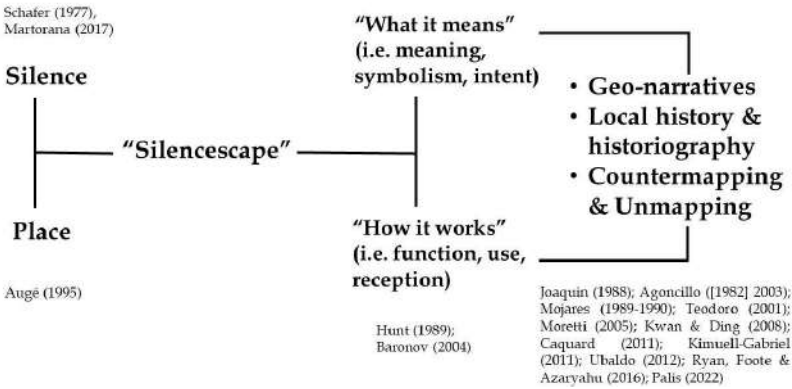

FIG. 1. *A conceptual diagram on "silencescape"*

[1] Lynn Hunt (1989, p. 15), after Fredric Jameson, sees the oppositional relationship between "what it means" (unity, which also refers to meaning, symbolism, and authorial intent) and "how it works" (difference, also function, use, and reader response). David Baronov (2004, pp. 85-109), however, treats both meaning and function as related components under structuralism and functionalism.

This study contributes not only to the interrelated fields of local history, geo-narratives, and countermapping but also to the cultural history of aural perception and experiences. So far, studies on Philippine soundscapes are rather sparse (To, Chung, Vong, & Ip, 2018), focusing on the historical reconstruction of auditory encounters (Guillermo, 2022), place-sensing and making (Stallsmith, 2011; Rivera, 2014; Escano & Sumaylo, 2017), and folkloric analysis (Derain, 2021). Further, soundscape history should address its own methodological challenges, especially the lack of audio-recording technology for documenting past sounds and silences. As Schafer (1977, p. 8) commented, "We may know exactly how many new buildings went up in a given area in a decade or how the population has risen, but we do not know by how many decibels the ambient noise level may have risen for a comparable period of time. More than this, sounds may alter or disappear with scarcely a comment even from the most sensitive of historians." With the historians' dependence on written sources, Ramon Guillermo acknowledges the need for "a relatively rich description of experienced sound environments" (2022, p. 22) to compose a substantial history of auditory phenomena.

What more to silence? How can one "write" and "read" silence, especially in documents? John Cage, who composed the controversial piece *4'33"* (1952), argued that there is no such thing as silence, even though the series of rests in his music sheet implies such (cf. Schafer 1977, p. 256; Ackerman, 1990, p. 191). Is it silence we hear when we "read" Jose Garcia Villa's blank poem, *The Emperor's New Sonnet?* Mojares, empirical as ever, would render silence with physicality. "A writer's self-doubt," for him, "are the silent spaces in a conversation" (Mojares, 1997, p. 9). "Tired with words," wrote he, "we often say that there is nothing quite as eloquent as silence. Yet this silence, this *human* silence, is defined by its opposite, it is what we find at the outer edges of words" (1997, p. 104). What Mojares

perceives as solid would be liquified in Gelacio Guillermo's "spill of silence," seen at the last stanza of the 1968 poem *The Beggar with a One-String Guitar* (2013, pp. 113-114).

> He would not pick a gay song from the streets.
>
> The string may break but he, his silence spilled
>
> Into the world one foot away from him, would tie
>
> The broken pieces once again into one wounded song.

These examples illustrate the need of reference point to read silences—it may be backgrounds on culture and history, or related (inter)texts or things. Deconstructing silence would also lead to inquiries on its socio-cultural meaning ("what it means") and function ("how it works"). In some situations, silence is merely symbolic. In a May 4 War Remembrance ceremony in Utrecht, The Netherlands, Schafer explains what silence signifies: "As the ultimate silence is death, it achieves its highest dignity in the memorial service" (1977, pp. 254-256). However, in most cases, silence can be both meaningful and functional, which seems to affirm Fredric Jameson's point on the inherence of "what it means" and "how it works" in language (Hunt, 1989, p. 16)—in this case, in silence and silencescapes. For Elie Wiesel (1986), silence during oppression and torment both *signifies* and *acts as* help to "the oppressor, never the victim" and encouragement to "the tormentor, never the tormented". "To be silenced" is not only to be deprived of speech, but also of the rights and freedom that such act of speaking contains and expresses.

Writing a history of silence is a search for meanings, functions, and stories. With Marinduque as the locality being studied, I used the Marinduque papers

from the H. Otley Beyer Ethnographic Collection of the National Library of the Philippines, the writings of Rafael J. Semilla, and relevant secondary sources.

Human Silence and Supernatural Sounds

Marinduque is an island province in Southern Tagalog region composed of six towns: Boac (the capital), Gasan, Buenavista, Torrijos, Santa Cruz, and Mogpog. Most of the locals identify themselves as Tagalog and speak a Tagalog dialect called Marinduque Tagalog. The island is surrounded by other provinces housing diverse languages: Batangas, Quezon, Mindoro, Bicol, and Romblon.

The ethnographic accounts written from 1916 to 1928 and Semilla's writings in the early 1970s contain details about Marinduque folklore, beliefs, superstitions, practices, and ways of life. Upon reading these sources, one may observe the wealth of information regarding the supernatural world and beings which the folk believed to exist. Aswang (*asuang*), tiyanak (*patianac*), kapre (*kaffier*), and other creatures appear in these accounts, and most of them were recognized through the sounds they produce, if not the sounds of animals that would warn people about their presence (Hidalgo, 1917, p. 4; Rolloqui, 1924, p. 11; Restar, 1924, p. 6; Semilla, 1970, p. 45-46; 1971, p. 39).

It is in this context of supernatural soundscape where human silence can be located. Places, after all, are not only defined by human subjectivities but can also be "inhabited by the supernatural, by a complex order of souls and spirits... that reminds [humans] that there are greater powers than [them] that inhabit and influence [their] environment" (Mojares, 2015, p. 144). In 1917, Nieves Hidalgo wrote about the need to be quiet when passing through the woods at night. "Old people in walking through the woods at night, do not allow the young people to

talk but instead made them pray. They believed that if they talk they might awake some of the mischievous spirits of the woods and thus become the object of their play; while if they prayed these spirits even though they have had intentions would be prevented from doing so" (p. 6).

Here, sounds conjure beings, while silence perpetuates invisibility. If making sounds interrupts the order of things, being silent interrupts such interruption. Through silence one might be able to hear supernatural sounds and act for one's safety. It is functional rather than merely symbolic, since, as Derain notes, listening becomes a matter of life and death (2021, pp. 34-35). Vigilance is implied in Semilla's remark: "At night the natives could hear weird enchanting sounds and could see flickering malignant light" (1971, p. 38).

It is followed by Hidalgo's discussion on the *bulong* ("whisper"). "These mischievous spirits are called 'bulong'. If a person becomes object of the fun of the 'bulong' a momentary malady, that causes one to lose his knowledge of the right direction thus causing him to wander away from the place where he is going, comes to him. However, if, as soon as he perceives that he has the 'bulong', he turns his clothes wrong side out, then he sees again his way and easily arrives home or to the place where he was going. The clothes are turned wrong side because they believe that 'bulong', which leads them astray, is inside the clothing and if this was not taken off and then turned out, the spirit would remain with the person and carry him away to their dark abode in the caves."

Perhaps, silence mediates the "hearing" of the *bulong*. One must be "more silent" than the soft-sounding *bulong* so that it can be heard and recognized. Semilla (1971, p. 40), however, provided a different definition: *bulong* is a "sort of prayer" which can make someone "immune from danger of any kind." These meanings of *bulong* construct an aural battlefield, wherein either side move

towards the absence of sounds. *Bulong* as either malevolent spirit or protective invocation is also connected to *ginhawa*, *balis,* and *gahoy,* which interrelate well-being, sickness, breath, and speech.

By the time the ethnographic papers were written, one may observe a kind of "progressive disenchantment" (Aguilar, 2013, p. 298) that partly reflects the mentality espoused by the American imperialist project in the Philippines during the early 20th century. Compiling these superstitions and traditions served to emphasize Filipino "ignorance" and justify the need for Americanized education. See how some writers framed these local beliefs. "All I have described above is still done in many barrios in Marinduque," wrote Arriola as she ended her paper on "primitive beliefs regarding death". "However, the superstitions are decreasing in number. They are coming to practice doing more sensible and personable things" (1916b, p. 9). Observe too how Miguel Manguerra (1928, p. 1), in his paper on customs and habits he labelled "peculiar," positions the American colonial legacy against the "conservatism" of the "uneducated mass".

> With the coming of the Americans, and the introduction of a liberal education to the masses, a social change may be said to have taken place. The products of the public schools, reared in an atmosphere of democracy, cannot help but regard with indifference and askance the old customs and habits which are still dear to the hearts of the old folks. The uneducated mass of the people are still very conservative in their ideas, and are greatly influenced by superstitious beliefs.

Returning to *bulong,* what was left after rejecting the strict obedience to aural codes of conduct is merely the knowledge of what supernatural sounds mean. Since the *bulong* exists outside the realm of science, being silent in the woods at

night ceases to be a life-saving recourse. Modernity, therefore, marks the divide between meaning and function in human silence and supernatural sounds.

Silences in Farming and Fishing

In 1928, Manguerra recorded a pre-harvest ritual.

> When the rice are already ripe and ready for harvesting the first thing to be done is for some old man, to go to the field before the sun rises, and cut some stalks of the rice and place them in a basket which he carries with him. When the basket is already filled, he then puts it on his shoulder and keeping himself very silent, proceeds direct to the store-house for rice, with head bent downward. He very carefully enters the store-house and after whispering some prayers, he places the rice on the floor at a corner of the house or 'kamalig'. This ceremony is done when there is full moon and when the tide of the sea is high. A cross is usually placed with the rice, before new stocks are added. (pp. 7-8)

A survey of harvest rituals in Romblon, Central Panay, Bohol, Bukidnon, Cagayan de Oro City, and Compostela and among the Kalinga, the B'laan, and the Jama Mapun identifies several common features: 1) an old person performing the ceremony alone, 2) communication to spirits through prayers and offerings, either to express gratitude or to appease; and 3) silence or the absence of any speech or conversation aside from solemn prayers (Demetrio, 1991b, pp. 533-537). F. Landa Jocano recorded that in Central Panay, after planting a bundle of *tigbaw* (Saccharum spontaneum), "[f]acing east, the farmer shouts that he is placing the markers as a sign that if anyone trespasses and dies, he is not responsible. Then he goes home in silence, retracing his footsteps and avoiding people. At home, he

takes his bamboo basket and returns to the field. He cuts seven stalks of the ripening rice, places them beside the basket, bites his harvesting knife, picks up the rice stalks again and ties them into a bundle. All the while he mutters his prayers. When the ritual basket is full, the farmer leaves the field. A safe harvest is now ensured" (Demetrio, 1991b, 534). Lourdes Tago-Gonzales described a corn harvest ritual in Bohol: "Before [the farmer] picks the ears from the stalk and places them in a secure place, he prays one 'Our Father,' one 'Hail Mary,' and the 'Credo' without turning his back. Neither does he speak a word to other people around him. He takes the ears of corn and places them in a secure place" (Demetrio, 1991a, p. 141). Edward Dozier described some taboos among the Kalinga: "After the initial ritualistic gathering (*inapulan*), all harvesters join in to help. No conversation, no singing, no whistling, shouting or laughing is permitted until the plot is half-harvested" (Demetrio, 1991a, p. 141).

Silence seems to be a medium through which the ritual performers or the community may thank and appease the spirits. As Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. (2013, pp. 301-302) argues, the "antisocial practice" (i.e. avoiding people; proceeding directly to the granary) implies "a sign of respect accorded to the spirits, allowing them to 'have' the rice before humans partake it," since the precolonial Filipinos' "magical worldview suggested that spirits resides in the grains of rice." Silence, therefore, not only acts as a medium of spiritual communication, but also a cancellation of any human interaction via speech. Breaking this silence is a taboo, and one should expect harm or damage to be caused by angry spirits in whatever form (cf. *gaba*, in Demetrio, 1991b, p. 536; illness, in Aguilar, 2013, p. 302).

Some fishing practices involved soundlessness, too. Silence is useful for fishermen's focus, especially in observing underwater flows, watching possible catch, and waiting for line tug (cf. Sikat, 1993; J. Soberano, 2022). Eduardo E. Palma (1917, pp. 6-7) discussed poison fishing in Santa Cruz. It uses *tuba* (croton

tiglium: *Tiglium officinale* Klotz.), *bayate* or *lagtang* (fish berry: *Anamirta jucunda* Miers.), and the roots of *tibalao* (poison vine: *Galedupa elliptica* Roxb.) and *tubli* (also poison vine: *Derris elliptica* (Wall.) Benth., *Milletia splendidissima* Vidal). The *tuba* fruit, mixed with earth and wood ashes, is fermented overnight before using. *Bayate* is pounded with crabs and ashes until it turns into powder. The sap of *tibalao* and *tubli* roots are known to make fishes "helpless" whenever they "smell" it. In poison fishing, Palma (1917, p. 9) recorded a "superstition" that involves silence.

> After the poison has been thrown into the water and its effect felt by the fishes the fisherman should keep absolute quiet, and should abstain from pointing with the finger or stick the dying creature before the whole operation is completed. If any one should exclaim any word of surprise in seeing the disorder and confusion among the fishes, the effect of the poison will be counteracted and the dying fishes will recover.

It was believed in Batobato, Bohol and Malaybalay, Bukidnon that noise would drive the fish away. An informant from Mambajao, Camiguin said that a fisherman "must not say anything" when he is fishing in the middle of the sea, because the weather would turn bad (Demetrio 1991a, p. 119). The writer Rogelio Sikat (1993, p. 44) mentioned in his diary that he and his Tatang (father) were both quiet when fishing, for the fear of "being heard" by the fishes.

Brad Madrilejos (2022), a student of philosophy from Romblon, shared in a personal conversation his insight about such silence.

> At least according to the fishing practices here in Romblon, it is taboo to talk or make noise during fishing because the fish can supposedly hear the noise and therefore become wary of the fisher's presence. Talking drives away any prospective catch... Although in my own experience this

> taboo is not rigidly followed given how fisherfolks in different boats talk to each other in order to determine which fishing spot offers more catch, if the current is stronger in deeper waters, etc. I think this adds an interesting inflection to the conception of the ocean as an aporetic space, as an 'endless realm of pure movement': this vastness that reveals the boats' presence is seen by these fisherfolk as a danger to be evaded through silence and the erasure of aural traces, not because the sea mutes all sound but precisely because it is a vector that facilitates the transmission of sound. In a way, the sea's aporia— at least according to the logic of these fisherfolk— comes about more as norm and less as nature; the sea is not a liquid sonic impasse but a porous— and pouring— aural amplifier.

According to Ocean Conservation Research (2018), fishes detect sounds through their cilia (nerve hairs) located at the lateral line, swim bladders, ossicles (ear bones), and otoliths (skull bones). In shallow water, fishes might hear human voices or mechanical noise. However, marine soundscapes involve sound production and perception that are different from the way humans do. It contains other aquatic "sounds" and "noises," making it difficult for deep-water fishes to detect above-water sounds. Nonetheless, this perception on "fishes' way of hearing" banks on both the recognition of auditory capacities of the more-than-human and the anthropocentric view over animal sound perception.

Silence in Mourning Human and Divine Deaths

Silence is also mandated during times of death. According to Arriola (1916b):

> While the baby is dying all the members of the family come near him, but must not cry loud otherwise, he will suffer, for his angel guard will not take him unless every body in the house is perfectly quiet (p. 2).
>
> If the father dies his body is kept in his own home mourned by his family for twenty-four hours [...] During the evening the house is very quiet; no music, no loud laughter, no loud talking; nothing is heard but the deep sighin [sic] and sad weeping voices of the family and friends. Sometime[s] they read Pasion of Christ, just to keep them awake (p. 5).

The age and social status of the deceased come with the kind of practices being performed. "If the deceased is not yet seven years old," said Arriola, "the family does not mourn for him. Instead they kill pig, chicken, catch fish and pound rice and have a big festival" (1916b, p. 2). "The death and funerals of older people, that is above seven years of age," Arriola continued, "are celibrated [*sic*] and performed [with] more solemnity and have more superstitious beliefs connected with it, than those of the young children" (p. 4). Silence is perceived in reference to age: the older the person, the "more solemn" the practice gets. Serious grieving for the dead father often reflects social importance, not too different from "mournful silence" accorded by precolonial Visayans to a *datu*'s death (Scott, 1994, pp. 91-92).

During the wake for a seven-year-old, "young ladies and young men are dancing (usually the native Filipino dance)" as others cook and prepare the table. "To have this dance they use guitar. The people in the house do not sleep the whole evening. In the midst of the night they take some refreshments, sometimes coffee, tuba, bananas, either fried or boiled, some cakes or 'suman'". In mourning an old person, only "deep sighing," "sad weeping," and "reading of the Passion" can be heard. As people bring the dead to the church and to the cemetery, as they place the body into the grave, as they kiss the hand as a sign of goodbye, "all these are

being done very solemnly... accompanied with weeping and sad sighing" (Arriola 1916b, pp. 2-6). Being awake in a wake is grounded in the belief that witches or aswangs might steal the corpse. Restar (1924, p. 5) noted, "if a dead body is not carefully watched it would be carried away and be changed with the body of a banana plant." Serapio Rolloqui locates where the aswang would stay: "When in a certain house there is a dead person, an 'asuang' usually sits at the top of the roof where it makes a small hole by means of which the dead is constantly watched by the creature" (1924a, pp. 11-12).

Mourning recognizes the void brought about by an old person's death. However, expression of void through silence is not only conveyed for human deaths, but also finds its epitome in the death of the Christian Lord. "When God dies," said Mojares (1997, p. 250), "it is not just this field, or street, or town He vacates, He is absent everywhere. What emptiness could be more empty than a world emptied of God." That's why, wrote Arriola (1916b, p. 3), "This celebration [of a seven-year-old child's death] is never done however during the last part of February ended with the Holy Week in March. During this time they read what we call in Tagalog 'Passion ni Cristo,' mean[ing] 'Suffering of Christ,' where in the crucifixion of Jesus is discussed." Through distinguishing "silence" from "silentness," Jose Garcia Villa's poetic register further amplified the aural meaning of divine death. The poem *84* (1993, p. 65) argues that even in His death, God fills the human soul.

> Silentness is not Silence.
>
> He's silent in silence whose
>
> Soul's geography is bare.

But silentness is deportment

Heroic, when the field is

Occupied. He's silent in

Silentness—whose God is there,

Or when God lies dying,

A finger to His lips. *Hush!*

Prompted in this paper's introduction, the contradiction between the "solemn" (Arriola, 1916a) and the "festive" (Semilla, 1970) in the Marinduqueñan Semana Santa is a "local evidence" of what Mojares calls as the "tension between Carnival and Lent". In Cebu, he described the "decline of piety" and the "diminishing old observances" such as "the total silence that reigned over the city," profaned by people who were "making noise, going out on the streets, and forgetting that it was a time of penance and soul-searching" (Mojares, 1997, pp. 59-60). Akin to mourning a dead father, silence expresses the spiritual vacuum carved out of Christ's death. Sounds would only take the form of "loud prayers in sad and moanful tunes" (Arriola, 1916a, p. 5). It was only after the triumph of Life over Death that the "joyful" and "festive" atmosphere would commence: the priest announces in the Saturday mass that "Jesus has risen from the dead," and "this word will be followed at once by loud happy voices and music with tolling of bells for about ten minutes" (Arriola, 1916a, p. 7). "They now can do some of their works, take their baths, go out somewhere, play some music and sing some lively happy songs." With the return of Life, people would also return to their normal, everyday life.

Remarkably, Arriola had no mention of the religious practice that rendered Marinduque as the "Lenten Capital of the Philippines"—the Moriones, a rite-turned-festival that honors the martyrdom of Saint Longinus. A Morion devotee wears an attire of a Roman centurion, sometimes modified with local designs and materials, and to stay anonymous, a mask would complete such look. The penitents also perform in the play called *Pugutan* ("beheading"). Loosely based on the *Pasyon,* it tells the story of Longhino (Saint Longinus), the Roman captain who became a follower of Jesus Christ after piercing the Lord's side and witnessing his resurrection. The play ends with Longhino's death by beheading (thus the term *pugutan*). Tradition says that this masked performance originated in the 19th century through the proselytizing efforts of the native priest Dionisio Santiago (Oliverio, 2020). It is in this context of popular devotion that the gradual metamorphosis of the Marinduqueñan Holy Week sound environment can be historicized.

Alfredo R. Roces (1961, pp. 258-259) noticed the Moriones' merry entertainment, culminating with the "sweeping flood of color and sound" on Easter Sunday. "Although the *moriones* are supposed to represent the Roman soldiers and Temple guards of Jerusalem, they do not keep very strictly to these roles. They will perform folk dances upon request, or serenade the ladies. They play pranks on their more sober fellow townsmen and frighten the children. They wander through the streets striking their cylindrical sticks (*kalutang*) together and producing a rhythmic, musical tinkling." Through the promotion of the Moriones by the national-level officials like President Diosdado Macapagal and Education Secretary Alejandro R. Roces in 1960s (Wendt, 2016, p. 114), this barrio-based "rite" of the common folk transformed into an elite, población-centered "festival" catered mostly for tourists, visitors, and semi-urban penitents (Peterson, 2016). Thus, Semilla in 1970-71 would speak more about the Morion figure along with

festive noise and "ejaculatory cries of merriment" (1971, p. 23), far different from Arriola's dead God and total silence in 1916. Liwayway Mendoza affirmed such soundly spectacle in an observance not later than 1974: "For seven days they [Moriones] go around the island's towns, playing hilarious pranks and making kalutang music, accompanied by brass bands. When addressed, they disguise their identities by speaking in high falsetto voices and uttering bird-like sounds... Beginning Holy Monday, the streets become alive with the spirit of celebration... By Holy Thursday, the colorful moriones are all over the town. They call on residents, singing songs and playing musical instruments" (1977, pp. 30-31).

The appearance of these bird-sounding, kalutang-playing Moriones in the población erased the accustomed "reign of silence". Furthermore, enmeshed within the culture-based tourism of President Ferdinand Marcos' regime, local politicians have co-opted these religious expressions. In the 1970s, the local politician Carmencita O. Reyes heavily modified the *Pugutan,* which was originally a spontaneous "community theater" enacted after the Easter *Salubong* (De la Paz, 2000). By shaping it into a scripted, Senakulo-like stage performance scheduled on Saturday evening, it was then too different for the local eye that a Marinduqueño commented: "When we're celebrating, God's still dead" (Peterson, 2016, p. 92). Thus, the redefined, postcolonial Morion brings with him not only a new cultural form and identity but also an altered soundscape of faith.

This narrative of cultural transformation results in the centralization of Longhino, the figure represented by the Moriones, over the mourning of Christ's death and celebration of His resurrection. Reinhard Wendt (2016, p. 114) observes, "The soldiers moved more and more to the center of the ceremonies in the Holy Week and became the Moriones festival's more important feature. Thus, the character of the festival was altered in a profound way. It became more professional, commercialized, and staged to attract visitors." Such tradition had a

history of Hollywoodization, promotion of cultural tourism, and intervention of political forces, which were often suited for the consumption of the local, national, and foreign elite, and in the long run, for the continuity of political power (Peterson, 2016). "[A]s the country moved into the Marcos years (1965-1986)," wrote Peterson (2016, pp. 83-84), "local politicians increasingly placed many popular performance forms under their patronage and sometimes their direct control." Along with these confluences not only of persistent cultural forms but also of political and economic forces are the transformation of sound perception ideologies, and of the aural places themselves. Different from Derain's sole articulation of "silence" as erasure by power in the context of aswang soundscape (2021, pp. 32-33), in this aural history of Marinduqueñan Holy Week we see how sounds erased traditions of silence. A silencing of silence by its inverse—making sounds.

A Detour to Words

If we are to agree that "music is language" (Ackerman, 1990, pp. 209-216), what lacks in these stories and discussion is the appraisal of aural concepts articulated in local speech. Given the language of the primary sources, the silence-marks are all registered in English: "silence/silent," "solemnity/solemn/solemnly," "quiet," "stillness," "solitude," "nothing is/was heard," "no music," no "talk," "no loud talking," "no loud laughter," "not loud," "no [birds] sing," and "without any conversation." This necessitates a detour to words, which explain local worldviews on sounds and silences.

Unlike Schafer's reduction of sonic perceptions into Western and Non-Western, Diane Ackerman (1990, p. 175), by returning to the words themselves, redefines linguistic boundaries of aural experiences. "In Arabic, absurdity is not

being able to hear. A 'surd' is a mathematical impossibility, the core of the word 'absurdity,' which we get from the Latin *surdus,* 'deaf or mute,' which is a translation from the Arabis *jadr asamm,* a 'deaf root,' which in turn is a translation from Greek *alogos,* 'speechless or irrational.'" The word "sound" itself has a Proto-Indo-European root **swen-*, which can be observed in Sanskrit (*svanati, svanah*), Latin (*sonus, sonare*), Old Irish (*senim*), Old English (*geswin, swinsian, swan*), and Old Norse (*svanr*). "Silence," however, originates from *silere* ("be quiet or still") that later appeared in Latin (*silens, silentium*) and Old French (*silence*) (Harper, 2022).

Words from Philippine languages have a rather different semantic field. It appears that words on sound and voice originate from the root **-neR* ("hear"). It can be seen in the Subanen/Subanun *bonug* ("to hear"), Aborlan Tagbanwa *geneg* ("hear, listen"), Tagalog *kiníg* ("listen to someone, or a sound"), Cebuano *lánug* ("loud, resonant, echo"), Manobo (Western Bukidnon) *dineg* ("hear") and *pemineg* ("listen to something, obey"), and Maranao *kaneg* ("sense of hearing, hear") and *neg* ("hear, hearing").[2]

The Proto-Western Malayo-Polynesian word **teneR* both denotes sound and voice, as observed in Casiguran Dumagat *tənog* ("noise, rattle; to rattle, to purr, to roar, to make a noise, to thump"), Sambal (Botolan) *tonóy* ("noise or sound"), Tagalog *tínig* ("voice") and *tunog* ("sound"), Bikol *tanóg* ("sound, noise") and *tingog* ("voice"), Hanunóo *tunúg* ("sound"), Cebuano *tunúg* ("sound of a musical instrument; resonant, producing a distantly loud sound; widely known; be distinctly audible") and *tíngug* ("sound, voice"), Yakan *tennug* ("hollow sounding, loud sounding, of brass gongs"), Isneg *tannúg* ("sound of musical instruments"),

[2] Blust & Trussel, 2010 (**-neR*: https://www.trussel2.com/acd/acd-r_n1.htm?zoom_highlight=%2A-neR)

Agutaynen *tonog* ("the sound of a radio, musical instrument, engine, a person's whistle, etc."), Palawan Batak *təńar* ("voice"), and Tausug *tanug* ("the volume of a sound or voice"). There are other words for sound such as the Ilokano *uni, timek,* and *ringgor.*[3]

When it comes to silence, words are more varied. To choose a few, Ilokano has *ulimek, kinaulimek,* and *panagulimek* not only for "silence," but also for "quiet, calm, peaceful, tranquil, serene". Negation of sounds through *awan* ("nothing, without") is observed in words for "soundless" (*awanan-timek, awanan-ringgor, awanan-uni;* synonymous to the non-negative *naulimek*) and "soundlessness" (*kinaawan-uni, kinaawan-ringgor*). *Linóng* in Hiligaynon is not only "quietude" but also "peace, tranquility, calm, calmness". It appears in Hiligaynon, with other words like *táwhay, dáit/daet,* and *húsay*, that silence is related to calm, peace, order, harmony, concord, and good social relations. The Cebuano *hílum* means silent, quiet, secret, and covert; *kahilum* is silence; *hilumun* and *mahilumun* is not to talk. Waray has *mamingaw* for "quiet and silent," connected to the Cebuano *mingaw* that denotes longingness, homesickness, and being left out. Silence in Bikol is *tunínong*; a period of silence in conversation is *báyaw;* to be silent on certain matters is *rírong;* and someone who does not talk much is a *giróng, púnok,* or *hálo.* Some languages, like Tagalog, Ilokano, and Bikol, also borrowed the Spanish *silencio,* written as *silensiyo or silensio.*[4]

In Tagalog, which the Marinduque people speaks, there is *tahimik* ("silent"), that can be turned into a noun by adding affixes *ka-* and *-an,* thus *katahimikan*

[3] Blust & Trussel, 2010 (**teneR:* https://www.trussel2.com/acd/acd-s_t.htm#10367); Agcaoili, 2011, p. 797; Mintz & Britanico, 1985, pp. 184, 206; Wolff, 1972.
[4] Agcaoili, 2011, pp. 781-782, 797; Wolff, 1972; Mintz & Britanico, p. 180; Santos, 2006, p. 599; Philippine Languages, 2015 (Ilokano, Cebuano, Hiligaynon, and Waray sections).

("silence").[5] Further, in an attempt not only to confirm if what the sources tell is indeed a "history of the present" but also to recenter the local language, this paper ends with a conversation.

A Conversation in Lieu of Conclusion

One sunny morning of January 2022, we interviewed Javier Soberano, a 79-year-old fisherman from Bognuyan, Gasan. At his house overlooking the sea between Marinduque and Mindoro, Lolo Ambey told us about his childhood experience that involved silence. "Tangis ako nung bata pa raw. Sabi nung Tatay ay, napigilan daw ako't nandyan ang Hapon... Nagalakad yung mga Hapon, nagabahay-bahay. Syempre takot ka. Ano na yuon."[6]

I tried to ask about what I read from the papers. Yet most of the time it was either he had not heard about it, or his story would flow to another. He shared his uncle's extraordinary tale during the Second World War. Luciano Nambio and his companion were captured by the Japanese. The soldiers stabbed them with bayonets. His companion died. To avoid further injury, Luciano chose to play dead. Soldiers gone, he crawled away to flee. He explained that Luciano survived because he had an agimat called *sa-tubig*. Associated with liquid properties, its power is to make one's body impervious to physical harm.

Lolo Ambey believes in the Santelmo, the souls of those who died in the waters. He said that he himself saw it once. The Santelmo loves to scare fishermen by making their catch disappear, but by ignoring it, fishermen would get their fish

[5] Santos, 2006, p. 599.

[6] "I was a cry-baby back then. Motioned my father [gestured to cover his mouth], stopping me [to cry] because the Japanese soldiers were already there… the Japanese walked, going from one house to another. Of course, you're scared. What a life!"

back or would even have more. More frightened than Lolo Ambey, my aunt Irene described it as a scary person with a flaming head that walks on water. The old man mentioned an anting-anting for fishing. *Tiwtiw* can be any object that appears in the middle of colliding river flows. At the seashore (*tabihan*), by pointing the tiwtiw on the water, heaps (*timbon*) of fishes would come to get the amulet. "Dito lang sa tabihan. Pag sa laot ay baka lubog ang bangka mo nun... Magasampahan ang isda sa iyo nun ay,"[7] he laughingly replied to my naïve question if one could show the tiwtiw in the middle of the sea.

However, despite believing in the Santelmo and the anting-anting, Lolo Ambey disproves that fish can hear human sounds. Between mishearing and repetition, we would see concerns beyond the strict binary of sounds and silences; it was rather the unconstrained amalgam of imagination and experiences, inviting us to recognize the ever-shifting boundaries of folk narratives and folk knowledge, of local stories and local science. Synonymous to wisdom, the "lore" in the "folklore" may best summarize such poetic and epistemic fusion.

> Javier Soberano [JS]: Oo. Minsan ngani kami'y nagahapin nun ay, wag ka anya magasamuk ka, maganon sa akin yung tatay ko— (Yes. Once we were fishing by *hapin*, don't be noisy, my father would tell me—)
>
> EJ Bolata [EB]: Maga-ano po? (Do what?)
>
> Marilyn Bolata [MB]: Magasamuk. (Make Noise.)
>
> JS: Magasamuk. (Make noise.)

[7] "Only here at the shore. If you're in the middle of the sea, your boat might capsize [because] fishes would jump on board."

EB: Samuk?[8]

MB: Yung nagaingay, samuk. (That making noise, *samuk.*)

JS: Nagaingay. [laughs] Wag daw magaingay— (Making noise. He said don't be noisy—)

EB: Bakit daw po? (Why?)

JS: Mawawala yung sibad. (The catch would disappear.)

MB: Ah, ganon po baga yuon? (Ah, is that the way things are?)

JS: Parang nakwan ngani, pama— (Seems a [superstition]—)

MB: Nagugulat siguro pag nagasalita ay naririnig— (The fish seems to be frightened; they would hear it when one speaks—)

JS: Hinde, yun ay parang pamahiin laang. Di man mapapakinggan ng isda yun dun sa ilalim! [laughs] (No, it was just a superstition. The fish under won't hear it!)

EB: [Laughs] Pero nasubukan nyo na po na kahit maingay ay may nahuli po kayo? (But have you tried catching fish while it was noisy?)

JS: Oo. Sarian ngani. (Yes. It really depends.)

[8] Brad Madrilejos (online communication, February 18, 2022): "[S]amuk in [R]omblomanon can both mean sonic and spatial cluttering. A marketplace can be kasamuk because it's noisy but it is also kasamok because it's cluttered and disorganized."

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A Sinawali of Folklore, "History", and Personal Narrative in Arnis

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This paper weaves folklore, historical narratives, and the author's personal experience as an Arnis practitioner. The study aimed to present possible folklore materials shared in the Arnis community that the author identified during his years of training with this martial art. However, this paper does not claim to represent all Arnis styles, to provide a summary of all folklore materials in Arnis, nor to answer debates about the history of the art. This paper highlights the author's experiences and reflections regarding the intersections of martial art, folklore, history, and personal narratives.

Likewise, this paper attempts to show personal narratives as part of folklore both as a type of folk story as well as a method to transmit and sustain folklore in the Arnis community. To further adhere to this theme, autoethnography is utilized to present personal experiences. The analytic type of autoethnography was specifically used to contextualize personal narrative with the Arnis community and further address the reliability of the story. The analytic type of autoethnography also provided a means to present personal narratives as folklore following the characterization that folk stories must come from various sources in the group, creating a sense of shared experience.

From this autoethnographic exploration, the author highlighted several aspects of Arnis training as a source of folklore. First is the historical narrative of the origins and the development of Arnis and the second is the actual training of Arnis itself.

Keywords: *Arnis, folklore, autoethnography, personal narrative, martial art, history*

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"Sinawali" in the Filipino Martial Art of Arnis refers to a *doble baston* or double stick drill that copies the pattern of weaving split-bamboo mats. This paper is therefore an attempt to weave folklore, history, and my personal experience as an Arnis practitioner. History in the title has quotation marks as some of the claims may not be part of official national or local history or might not have any additional evidence for corroboration if subjected to a more rigorous historical study.

Folklore here does not necessarily pertain to supernatural or fictional stories. Folklore, for the purposes of this introductory paragraph, pertains to the traditional knowledge as well as the process of passing said traditional knowledge in a community (Madden, 2019). There are various categories of folklore but the most common would be the "verbal lore" which include fairy tales, legends or myths that may present themselves as historical, songs, proverbs, jokes, among others (Madden, 2019, p. 12; McNeill, 2013). Further, this paper presents personal narrative as part of folklore transmission, continuation, and perhaps even innovation thus autoethnography was also tested and employed as a method to present folklore.

Disclaimers seem appropriate at this point since other practitioners might have other experiences or perceptions of their experiences as well as how to write about Arnis. First, this article is not about addressing debates about the origins, history, styles, or techniques in Arnis. Second, the folklore discussion does not pose to be an all-encompassing enumeration or summary of all the folklore-related materials in Arnis. Lastly, the stories are classified as folklore depending on the definition of folklore from related literature of folklore studies which will be discussed later, as well as my perspective as a social scientist because some alleged historical narratives were long debunked in anthropology or history for example.

In the initial draft of this paper, I acknowledged that I was trying to do a lot of things in one essay. I was attempting to explore a way of presenting or writing articles for folklore studies. There was also the endeavor to help define and redefine folklore in relation to oral tradition, personal stories, tradition and innovation, and embodiment of folklore through physical training and kinetic movements. To slowly transition from oral to kinetic ideas of folklore, there was a mixture of various forms of folk narratives in Arnis based on my personal experiences and comparing it with other sources. Then there was that effort to explore the idea of embodiment of folklore in terms of physical training and performing aspects of Arnis. So, it was admittedly ambitious as well as too complicated as was also noted by the reviewers.

In this version, the paper aims to present some folklore materials that I have encountered while practicing and studying the Filipino Martial Art of Arnis. I tried to focus only on personal narrative presented through the analytical type of autoethnography and sample folklore related to the history and training of Arnis.

By following said objectives and autoethnographic format, it is also my intention that the readers will be able to reconsider the following ideas. First, that folklore materials can be found not only in mainly oral performance or written texts but also in other contexts. They may still take on the oral or written form, but they can be interwoven with the teaching of other performed cultural expressions. Second is for the Arnis community to further explore and research on its rich tradition not only in relation to folklore but also those that connect to history, life stories, migrant narratives, gender concerns, and other possible topics.

Lastly, this is also a consideration of personal narratives or autoethnography as part of sharing and sustaining folklore traditions as well as presenting folklore studies. Using the analytical type of autoethnography also provides the personal

experience a shared context with other practitioners thus it can also be utilized by those who do not prefer or are not comfortable focusing only on one's personal life.

The following sections were arranged to tackle folklore and folklore studies, autoethnography, and the presentation and discussion of the data.

Folklore

Madden (2019) mentioned several categories of folklore such as material lore, customary lore, and verbal lore. Most definitions and focus of folklore studies however were predominantly anchored in oral tradition (Ben-Amos, 1971; Ben-Amos, 2014; Hernandez, 2021; Propp, 1997; Velcic, 1989).

Nevertheless, folklorists have also continued to debate and investigate the various definitions and classifications of folklore such as questioning what is tradition, what is folk, or what is lore (McNeill, 2013)? There also seems to be a reconfiguration of definitions against a perception of an unchanging culture that remains to be original as much as possible but looking into the role and relation of innovation to what is deemed traditional (Jacobs, 1893, in Bronner 2017).

For example, scholars argued that folklore can take a form on its own in relation to other cultural expressions and be transmitted or even adapted to various contexts of people (Ben-Amos, 1971). Stahl (1977) also posited that what we deem as traditional or folklore depends on how well a storyteller delivers the material, as well as how the audience perceive that version in relation to their idea of what the folklore should be. Thus, the individual may further enhance the narrative, or the folklore itself could have mechanisms to encourage personal creativity and innovation (Stahl, 1977).

By considering these dynamics between the group and the individual, innovations then must be acknowledged as actual parts of tradition. But such innovations are done through the process of taking ideas from what is deemed traditional, and then creating something seemingly new yet still grounded in the past (Hernandez, 2021; Stahl, 1977).

And it seems that the process of sharing the folklore plays into such dynamics of folklore. As also mentioned in the introduction, folklore is both the material as well as the method by which it is shared (Madden, 2019).

McNeill (2013) explained that one of the features of sharing folklore is that it comes from a variety of sources in the group or community in contrast to say pop culture that comes from an identifiable single source. Folklore therefore seems to have that communal and "since time immemorial" feeling but also allows itself to have various versions due to its different sources.

Ben-Amos (2014) for example focused on communication as folklore's main characteristic. Communication in this sense was further expanded to include visual and kinetic or "in motion and in performance" (Ben-Amos, 2014, p. 17). By including motion and performance, then we must consider the whole physical body as a tool for sharing folklore.

Folkdances would be an obvious example though some may prefer putting them in a different category. The argument here however is that folkdances are not just mere movements or performances but also embodiments of culture and history (Mendoza, 1998, Pusnik, 2010).

As mentioned in the introduction, the original paper attempted to discuss the embodiment of folklore as the physical body and kinetic motions were argued to also transmit folklore and traditional knowledge such as in folkdances. However, this revised version had to limit itself for now to the sharing of verbal folklore and

the discussion of personal narratives as part of folklore. Personal narratives such as diaries and family anecdotes are considered as a type or at least source of folklore though researchers tend to locate first the narrative's connection or rootedness to the community's experience and lore (Stahl, 1977; Velcic, 1989; Nguyen, et al., 2012).

With such definitions of the communal communication process of folklore, and with the reiteration of locating the personal within the wider context of a community's folklore, the use of analytic ethnography is further justified.

Autoethnography

First, I would like to present select definitions of autoethnography before I address what autoethnography means to me as a writer and researcher.

Autoethnography as a qualitative method focuses on sharing and examining the author's personal experiences, thoughts, and emotions in relation to various aspects of their social context (Ellis, et al., 2011; Kelley, 2014; Ghita, 2019). It combines personal reflection and scientific writing through adherence to ethnography which could translate to either a formal paper or a more literary narrative depending on the preference of the author (Ellis, et al., 2011; Denshire, 2014; Kelley, 2014; Ghita, 2019).

It is described as highly relational in character as the researcher selects significant memories and changes in their lives then subjects these personal narratives into analysis or even criticism to further understand their social and cultural context (Denshire, 2014; Ellis, et al, 2011). Neville-Jan (2003) also emphasized that autoethnographic narratives are not conclusions but rather

continuous stories offering insights and intimate humanity to abstract concepts or theories.

There are two general types of autoethnography. First is the evocative which focuses more on the experience of the teller, how they make sense of their experience, and probably share to a larger audience the narratives that may only occur to a certain group of people (Denshire, 2014; Kelley, 2014; Loo, 2017). The second one is analytical which aims to relate the personal narrative to other sources, compare similarities and differences of one's personal experience to others, and probably close the gap between the personal experience and the social group or community (Denshire, 2014; Kelley, 2014; Loo, 2017).

The validity of the autoethnography depends on how it connects with the readers as well as the collective experience of the group the writer relates to (Ellis, et al., 2011; Kelley, 2014). Reliability on the other hand depends on the truth or even the likelihood that the author experienced the events they wrote about (Ellis, et al., 2011; Kelley, 2014).

These definitions and characteristics of autoethnography provide an excellent platform for the examination of personal narratives as part of folklore because of their similarities. Stahl (1977, p. 10) argued that to see the traditional in the personal, we must first view traditions as part of a "continuing time" instead of something bound in the past, as well as an entity related to various factors and processes.

As part of a continuing time, folklore can accommodate personal narratives that have occurred in recent memory (Stahl, 1977). But these personal narratives or innovations of the story must still be composed of "of traditional resources, artistry, and interpersonal contact" with the community (Stahl, 1977, p. 13). Despite the uniqueness of the personal experience, the narrative can still be

situated in a larger time frame and geographical context where the individual also draws from practices, beliefs, and values of their group (Stahl, 1977). As suggested, looking at personal narrative as folklore based on its connection to the collective tradition, then comparing it to the process of writing analytic autoethnography where one's experiences are related to the whole group, presents us with the possibility of using autoethnography in folklore to study personal narratives as folklore.

Having said so, I see autoethnography first as a way to express myself of the knowledge that I have experienced first-hand and relate it to others who might have the same experience. The researcher also has his/her own observations but in other research methods, s/he still needs others to talk about their own perspectives, focus on others' narratives, and might only interject his/her personal opinions and approach in the latter part of the study. Autoethnography enables the researcher's experience to be the focus of the research.

Being essentially a personal account, autoethnographies can also be observed to have various formats depending on the topic as well as the style of the writer. There are those who share their experience only at the beginning of their paper or would fully insert personal narratives throughout their study. Since this is also a qualitative research method, the personal narrative is subjected to reflection or analysis in relation to a concept, framework, or other sources. This is especially true for the analytic type of ethnography.

I want to emphasize that this paper is of the analytic type of ethnography as I also want to situate and analyze my personal narratives beside similar stories. This enables at least a presentation of personal narratives as part of continuing folklore and innovations which are still anchored in tradition. This is also my personal preference as I do not think I can write using the evocative type, and the topic and

approach of the paper might not also fit the said style. The data presentation therefore presented my personal point of view first before comparing it with narratives of other practitioners followed by a discussion.

For the narratives of other practitioners, I chose to explore published or shared documents and videos instead of conducting interviews. I think there are a lot of materials already being released by the Arnis community that might already need condensing or digesting in some form so we can see the intersections of these materials. Further, conducting interviews, even online ones, became a personal challenge due to the pandemic as well as my full-time work and study schedule.

Instead, I have selected several articles from the Filipino Martial Arts (FMA) Digest which is a journal for Arnis and other Filipino Martial Art practitioners first published in 2004, several books on Arnis such as the Modern Arnis by Grandmaster Remy Presas, and documentary films on Arnis specifically "Eskrimador" (2010), "The Bladed Hands: A Documentary on the Global Impact of the Filipino Martial Art" (2012), and "Rebirth of the Rebellion Sport" (2017). Note however that the FMA Digest is unlike our academic journals that sometimes there is a lack of pagination or even the full name of the authors of the articles. It is more of a more flexible compilation of stories from various willing contributors. However, I have only included articles which had the names of the authors as much as possible.

As for the choice and the number of selected articles, these are just samples in order to situate or relate my personal narratives to the community's folklore traditions. As mentioned, additional validity and reliability of autobiographies would come in part from the reader.

By using the analytic type of autoethnography and comparing my personal experiences to those of the other sources, I hoped to satisfy the idea of locating

personal narratives in a larger context of tradition in order for it to be considered to be a part of folklore transmission and innovation.

Personal Journey

I first read about Arnis in an old elementary P.E. book for public schools. For the patched-up copy that I had, the pages on Arnis were found near the end of the book. It consisted of the basic angles of attack and consisted of several terms used in Arnis such as, if my memory does not fail me, *abecedario, buhat araw* (or something with "araw" in it), and *payong*.

For some reason, I was fascinated by it that I tried to understand the descriptions of the techniques, imagine and experiment how the techniques were performed, and memorize what I thought was the movement. It was not taught in elementary and high school, and I did not know any Arnis club or teacher in our area. We also had no YouTube at that time or at least an access to it.

In my second and third year in high school there was some sort of martial arts fad especially among the males due to practice teachers assigned at our school who knew Taekwondo. A short-lived Karate-Taekwondo club was also formed in a nearby town which I later joined. Several of our classmates also bought and shared books about other martial arts and I remember buying "Modern Arnis: The Art of Stick Fighting" by Grandmaster Remy Presas. Again, I was only studying Arnis with the help of this book, but I had no practice partner because others were not interested in a weapons-based art, describing it as impractical as you do not always have a stick with you.

Some of the things I've learned from the said book is that Arnis is that Arnis was used by Lapulapu against the Spaniards, that it was taught in traditional

version of schools called "bothoan", that it had various names such as eskrima and kali, that Arnis is a blade-based art with the stick as a training tool in preparation to the use of a bladed weapon, that the Spaniards banned its practice thus the Filipinos incorporated it in dances and moro-moro playes, and that Arnis got its name from the Spanish word for "harness."

It was already around the middle of my fourth year in high school that I discovered a martial arts club in Candon City. It was the SIKADSU Arnis-Karatedo Club, but Arnis was only practiced during Sundays as a supplement weapons art for Karate. I trained for at least 6 months when schedule and budget permitted with said group before the club shutdown and transferred to another location and I had to go to Baguio for my undergraduate degree.

It was around my second year in college that I again trained in Arnis with the Modern Arnis Tapi-Tapi, one of the two Arnis clubs in YMCA Baguio. Here, one of our three teachers taught us that there are other blade or stick-based martial arts around the world, but that Arnis is still arguably Filipino in its development. Since there is also a sport side of our training, I was introduced to the standard Anyos of Modern Arnis as well as creative Anyos. Repetition of basic techniques and drills were important, sparring was conducted every now and then, and I was also introduced to the old rubber tires as an effective training dummy.

After college and transferring to Metro Manila for work, it took around two to three years again before I did train on a regular basis. I did try Lightning Scientific Arnis International (LSAI) at the University of the Philippines Diliman for one Saturday session, around four weekends with the Lapunti Arnis de Abanico also in Diliman but work and study schedules as I have also been doing my master or arts classes did not permit me to continue further. Rapido Realismo Kali and Kalis Ilustrisimo were also of interest but again, the schedule did not permit any training

with said groups. Most of my training by this point is simply reviewing what I have learned in Baguio, from what I read, and from what I study on YouTube, until I discovered a small group near where I was staying which also suits my schedule and budget.

So, I trained around two to three years with the KALAHI Filipino Martial Arts Group until I obtained by black belt per their ranking. The group also enabled me to reconnect with the Arnis community and again learn stories such as, but not limited to, the following:

1. The oldest form of the art was brought to the archipelago from the Sri Vijayan Empire by either traders, the ten Bornean datus, or the Malays during their migration.
2. That Arnis was also used by Rizal, the Katipuneros, and the Bolomen as well as Filipino Guerillas during World War II.
3. The idea that techniques can be transferred from one weapon to another, with a few modifications providing Arnis a unique empty-hand application thus you do not always need to carry a stick or weapon.
4. That Arnis does not have to have a single and linear history or narrative of development as other styles could have been created or adapted depending on the needs of certain communities.
5. Some Arnis practitioners and styles have also incorporated traditional Filipino healing arts, such as the hilot, as well as some magic such as the *anting-anting*.

In addition to having to train with other practitioners both within our group and occasionally from other clubs or styles, joining social media groups especially in Facebook also showed me how diverse the opinions and perspectives are to these

narratives. While there are people who adhere to these stories and experiences, there are also those who continue to ask questions and be critical to alleged historical narratives and folk tales shared among practitioners.

Due to my transfer to Los Baños as well as the change of the group's venue, my training again became infrequent until the pandemic stopped our meetings. While we took a break especially during the first months of the pandemic as distance learning proved to be a challenge, I took up an online asynchronous course offered by the De Campo 1-2-3 Original.

Overall, my actual physical training with Arnis would be at least five years but my interest and journey with the art would be at least double that period.

Folklore and History

While self-defense and my fascination with Arnis as an art were the main motivations why I started Arnis, being with the community also exposed me to various stories especially in relation to the history of the art as well as the "secrets" in training.

As mentioned in the previous section, I learned that a historical narrative presenting Arnis as a bladed art originating from traders, *datus*, or migrants from ancient empires such as the Sri Vijaya and that it was initially banned by the Spaniards but the natives either trained in secret or creatively incorporated the fighting techniques in dances and plays. The prohibition of the Spaniards to carry weapons allegedly also led to the creation of a transparent barong Tagalog. Allegedly, the name Arnis also came from the Spanish word "harness" used to secure the weapon in mock plays.

National heroes like Lapulapu, Rizal, Bonifacio, and other Katipunan members were also said to be skilled in Arnis, and during World War II, Americans formed groups of Filipino "bolomen" to fight against the Japanese.

After the war, several Arnis practitioners allegedly fought each other in death matches called *juego todo* to test personal capabilities and to prove which style was the best. For some practitioners, amulets, charms, and the healing arts were also important aspects of their styles.

For some people or groups, such stories are real and make up the perceived history of their group if not the whole Arnis art and community. However, if we placed them under the rigors of scholarly scrutiny of history such as they should be able to provide various oral, written, and artifactual evidence, some stories could only be described as a legend or myth presented as history and is therefore a form of folklore.

Since analytic autoethnography and personal narratives as folklore should be situated in the stories of a personal group, I have also enumerated similar stories from sample sources to show that my personal narrative is also experienced by others in the community.

For example, in the books "The Filipino Martial Arts" by Dan Inosanto (1980), "Modern Arnis" by Grandmaster Remy Presas (1983), and "The Dan Anderson Encyclopedia of Modern Arnis Volume 1: A-1" by Dan Anderson (2016), all authors attempted to provide a concise history of Arnis. They mentioned the significance of migration and mixture of culture from Sri-Vishaya (Srivijaya) Empire, Majapahit Empire, Chinese, the Spaniards, and even the now-dismissed Wave of Migration due to lack of historical or archaeological proof was mentioned at least in the work of Inosanto (1980). Lapulapu was also frequently referred to as either a master of Arnis or an example where Arnis was first utilized against

colonizers. Then there is the attempt of the Spaniards to control Arnis so it changed from a blade art to sticks, then later on became blade oriented again during WWII.

FMA documentaries, specifically "Eskrimadors" by Kerwin Go (2010) and "The Bladed Hand" by Jay Ignacio (2012) also echoed the same narratives though they also focused on the contemporary history of the art. As Ignacio (2012) admitted in his documentary, the difficulty in having an accurate historical account for Arnis especially during the early Philippine period is the lack of historical documents or artifacts that can accurately portray the techniques or state the origins and evolution of the art as compared to the existence of European fencing treaties.

The contemporary history of Arnis however is laden with more oral traditions and written sources such as the *juego todo*, *anting-anting,* war experiences, and alleged personal encounters as highlighted by the abovementioned documentaries to pay tribute to the surviving grandmasters during filming. The following are just samples shared in "Eskrimadors" (Go, 2010). First is the story shared by Grandmaster Andres Cañete that his father had an *orasyon* or prayer for healing and would keep a cloth with the words with him for protection. Another is the separate stories of Grandmasters Anciong Bacon and Inting Carin surviving life threatening challenges and attacks.

It can be argued that the use of historical references, whether they are accurate or mixed with other forms of folklore, not only creates credibility for their styles but also that personal connection to one's ancestors, values, and identity. Grandmaster Cacoy Cañete said that seeking and training with Arnis comes naturally if it is in your blood (Go, 2010). Grandmaster Remy Presas insisted that talking about Arnis is not just about explaining the martial art but also sharing

Filipino history and culture (Ignacio, 2012). University of the Philippines Diliman Professor and well-known practitioner of the art Felipe Jocano Jr. also mentioned that even by just looking at the bladed weapons, Arnisadors are provided with a mental image of our history and traditions (Ignacio, 2012).

Then, the stories of the use if not the effectiveness of Arnis from the distant past becomes more real through the personal narratives of the so-called Grandmasters and teachers of the art. Personal narrative becomes part of the folklore of the group as a verbal proof that such and such techniques or styles work in real life. Personal narratives are also told and re-told by practitioners to add some kind of updated authority for their groups.

Training and Folklore

Aside from the historical aspect, personal narratives as folklore also exist in the training proper. In this section, I would like to focus on three features of the training.

First, finding a teacher or a group to train with and then sustaining that training is already a significant aspect of my Arnis experience. Second, that there were contradicting ideas regarding the practicality of Arnis. Non-practitioners would say that it is useless if you have no weapon, some practitioners combine the stick fighting part of Arnis with other empty-hand martial arts from Japan or South Korea, and some would demonstrate the concept of transferability of techniques from the weapons to the empty-hand. Such debates contribute to either the perception of Arnis as a dying art compared to the marketability of other martial arts, or as a complete and functional system sought after especially by foreigners. Lastly, the training itself highlights repetition of the techniques, the use of rubber

tires as a practice dummy, and even the idea that calluses and other injuries in the hand or arm are parts of strengthening the body. There are also terms utilized in training such as *pugay* which is the Arnis version of a bow to show respect for the opponent. I was also taught the importance of footwork both in offense and defense.

Looking at the three sample documentaries on Arnis, we have the common complaint about the prominence of foreign martial arts such as karate, judo, and now taekwondo and Muay Thai affecting the availability of groups teaching Arnis. Financial concerns of both students and teachers were also highlighted. Several teachers are convinced to migrate and teach abroad while a lot of Filipino students have to work for themselves and their families first, unlike some Western practitioners who could train full time several months in the Philippines (Go, 2010). The documentary "Rebirth of the Rebellion Sport" by Franco Mabanta (2017) also showed how personal family concerns of the athletes could sometimes disrupt training despite already being sponsored by the government.

Despite these challenges, a lot of Arnisadors keep coming back to the art for various reasons. The beauty of the art and its perceived effectiveness for self-defense is one (Go, 2010; Ignacio, 2012; Davis, 2006; Acosta, 2006; Knight, 2007). There are themes around fulfillment, purpose, and personal or family legacy as reflected in various Filipino Martial Arts Digest Articles such as "Guro Ariel Ramos" (2005), "Tapi-tapi: The Heart of Modern Arnis" (2005), and "CKIUSA" by Master Ed Goco Galang (2006). Lastly, packed with historical and cultural references, is the sense of patriotism and Filipino identity (Go, 2010; Ignacio, 2012; Mabanta, 2017).

Repetition of basic or core techniques is echoed by Master Burton Richardson and former Senator Miguel Zubiri (Ignacio, 2012), our SEA Games Arnis athletes

(Mabanta, 2017) and several articles in the Filipino Martial Arts Digest (Almagro and Macachor, 2006; Babao, 2007). Consequently, repetitive training creates automatic reactions to pressure tests or competitions (Balicki and Zubiri in Ignacio, 2012; Mabanta, 2017). These experiences all tie up to the idea of breaking the body, of callusing the hands, and of training the mind to perform within the arsenal of each style and adapt accordingly during actual application of the techniques.

We can also see the values deliberately or unintentionally taught through actions such as respect through *pugay,* patience and perseverance during repetition of techniques, and adaptability and resilience during the breaking of the body so that the techniques become second nature. From such narratives including the previous section, we can surmise that the physical training and performance of the techniques are part of the communication process of folklore in Arnis. At the very least, this involves possible imbibing of the values associated with the actions such as respect through the *pugay*.

These narratives are also not exclusive to Arnis but can also be found in other martial arts. Karate for example can be viewed as having an additional "world-of-meaning" and symbols that is communicated or passed down only through training and the embodiment of the techniques (Cohen, 2006, p. 75; Bride, 2016). Through specific movements, one can analyze historical background, values associated with warriors and war such as the Bushido, and a culture's perceived relationship of the body and its surroundings (Cohen, 2006; Farrer and Whalen-Bridge, 2011; Kusnierz, 2011)

Spencer's (2009) study on the callusing of the body of mixed martial artists presents us with similar narratives with that of breaking the body during training to instill techniques, proper mindset, and the tolerance to pain during

competition. He also noted that by undergoing the rigors of training and competition, his respondents felt that they became more interwoven with the community and its traditions (Spencer, 2009).

While the pieces of information in this chapter focuses more on the activities during training, it can still be argued that they comprise the folklore of the Arnis community. Again, I must reiterate that folklore in this paper does not pertain solely to any supernatural story or practice but generally to the form and transfer of traditional knowledge of a certain group which in this case is the Arnis community.

Such personal narratives regarding training become folklore by presenting a shared story of the struggle, pain, fulfillment, motivation, and certain aspects of training as an Arnis practitioner. These personal narratives also pass down lessons not only about how certain techniques work or how training usually goes during the practitioner's time, but also possible life lessons, values, and norms observed within the Arnis community. Looking at a larger picture shows how these personal narratives, shared as a shared experience passed by various sources to another generation for example, is similar to how folklore or the story of the people in the group is transmitted and perhaps even transformed. In a way, the life stories related to training add to the verbal lore of the group while the training procedures themselves add to the customary lore (Madden, 2019).

Arnis as a Context of Folklore

During the discussion, the folklore highlighted were those related to the history of the group as well as the training process of being an Arnis practitioner.

The folklore that relates to the history of the group consists of stories that attempt to explain the origins and the development of Arnis in general or per particular group or style. Some of the stories can be verified through a more rigorous historical investigation while some are arguably based on debunked information, such as the Malay as part of the wave of migration, or data that are difficult to ascertain due to lack of other evidence. This question of evidence is particularly challenging with narratives contextualized in Filipino societies or the Spanish colonial period.

Nevertheless, I acknowledged them all as a significant part of the historicizing process and identified the formation of each group and the Arnis community in general. For me, such stories somehow provided a sentiment that the art that I am training with is really rooted in Filipino history and culture and thus practicing it also helps in strengthening that Filipino pride and identity.

Related to this intersection of folklore and history are traditions of using amulets, charms, and other traditional Filipino healing arts. The clubs I have trained with however did not have this tradition.

Another shared narrative in the community is the training process. While each group, style, and teacher may have certain procedures, I have identified common themes in each story. The first theme is the struggle of finding a teacher and sustaining the actual training. The second theme revolves around the process of callusing or breaking the body in order for the techniques to be memorized and become second nature to the practitioner.

I think it must be reiterated once again that the term folklore here refers to the perceived traditional knowledge of the members of a group (the folk) that takes various forms of presentation and transmission. While the paper focused on the

verbal form of folklore, this form also made up of various types such as fairytales, proverbs, urban legends, poems, songs, jokes, and in this case personal narratives.

In this paper, I attempted to show how personal narratives can be considered folklore. First, personal narratives contain stories from the practitioners themselves as well as the stories that were passed down within their groups. These personal narratives, when shared to the group, may add to the stories that legitimizes their techniques or their style as well as reinforces the historical and traditional narratives of the Arnis community.

Second, personal narratives help in the transmission of shared stories similar to what other folklore forms are being transmitted. While a person can be seen as the original source, the shared narratives if taken presents a communal experience. Through partaking in such stories as both listeners and storytellers themselves, Arnisadors also become vessels of folklore which they can either retell based on how they heard it or change consciously or unconsciously based on their own interpretation, memory, story-telling capability, and added experiences.

Here we can also see the significance of using autoethnography, especially the analytic type, as it presented my personal experience but was also able to show that such narrative is also shared among other members. The use as well as the role of the various types of autoethnography in folklore research and martial arts studies could also be further explored. From either the perspective of a storyteller or autoethnography, further research can also be done to look into the innovative process of retelling folklore in Arnis or other martial arts.

Another topic that might further be investigated is the other forms of folklore associated with Arnis as well as the method of communicating them. An example is what the initial version of this paper attempted to explore- the embodiment of folklore. By embodiment I meant that how the body itself and its kinetic actions

through performed aspects of the art could also transmit tradition. While this was mentioned in the training section, concepts of performed tradition, embodiment of folklore, kinetic communication or transmission, and body callusing can be further studied.

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Towards a Filipino Metaphysics: Particularist Narratives of Traditional Healing Practices

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Metaphysics, seen as a legitimizing narrative or a paradigm (Lyotard, 1984), prop up a certain practice in providing the basis for its assumptions. While Western medicine can be properly characterized as governed by a biophysical model (Hewa, 1994; Bates, 2002), such a model for traditional healing practices in the Philippines has yet to be derived. No philosopher has attempted to derive an indigenous metaphysics from traditional healing practices. The only study made so far (Fajardo & Pansacola, 2013), however, needlessly pigeonholes these unique practices into incommensurable Western scientific concepts. While they collated data from healers all over the country, they attempted to use Western scientific concepts such as oxygen, carbon, electro-magnetic force, and others. These concepts dangerously obfuscate indigenous understandings of the human body and reality as a whole since they are directly lifted from a language and practice informed by Western metaphysics. Therefore, there has yet to be an adequate extraction of a locally derived metaphysics that informs and self-legitimizes these medicinal practices. Conscious of recent critiques to homogenizing tendencies in Philippine Studies (Guillermo, 2009) and Filipino philosophy (Pada, 2014; Abulad, 2016), specifically that of Mercado (1972) and Timbreza (2017), I attempt to derive a Filipino

metaphysics from the traditional healing practices of two traditional healers in San Mateo, Rizal of the Southern Tagalog Region in Luzon through a particularist anthropological approach in Filipino philosophy. I derive four distinct characteristics of this metaphysics which are distinct from the biophysical presuppositions of Western medicine: (1) a law of conservation based on the concept of "balik," (2) predestination, (3) an ontological dualism between the visible and the invisible, and (4) the performativity of words as utterances.

Keywords: *Filipino metaphysics, traditional medicine, usog, narratives, particularism*

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Introduction

With Nietzsche's pronouncement of the Death of God and Wittgenstein's recognition of the multiplicity of language-games, metaphysics as a grand narrative has fallen prey to incredulity. With the death of God, the singular grounding principle of all knowledge-systems have fallen to pieces. What we are left with are different, independent language-games—rule-governed activities that are not answerable to any external game other than its own (Lyotard, 1984; Wittgenstein, 2009). For instance, a game of chess need not justify its own rules. Chess, as a game, determines how many moves each piece has or what constitutes a win; in adopting these rules, it does not need any reason whatsoever. Lyotard (1984) makes the comparison to knowledge in general; knowledge only gains legitimacy through the narratives on which they rest.

With the multiplicity of language-games comes the problem of legitimation that Lyotard began investigating in the 1970s. How can we legitimize knowledge-systems today when the very principle of uncertainty—God—is dead, and when all we have left are scattered, independent language-games? What is left to inform our worldviews if metaphysics, as the study of the fundamental categories of the universe, is gone?

Being a fundamental science, physics seems to have claimed the privileged place vacated by metaphysics. Such fundamentality led the famed physicist, Stephen Hawking (2010), to declare that philosophy is dead, thinking that philosophy is only constituted by metaphysical discourses. It must be noted, however, that Hawking is wrong in this assessment of philosophy. Aside from the fact that philosophy is not just metaphysics, there is another way for metaphysics to persist, albeit in a very different form.

Metaphysics, however, need not go with metanarratives in their postmodern demise; it only has to scatter itself, serving as independent legitimizing narratives. Hence, worldviews need not be propped up in a vacuum; they can and should be held up by disparate and yet legitimate narratives which can rightly be called metaphysics. Therefore, if independent metaphysics prop up different knowledge-systems, we need to recognize differences in metaphysics when confronted with different knowledge-systems. It is these differences that philosophy ought to discern, at least according to Wittgenstein.

Such discernment of differences, however, is not evident in the treatment of traditional medical practices in the Philippines. Important studies on traditional medicine have already been produced by social scientists, most notably by F. Landa Jocano (1966), Michael Tan (2008), and Mercedes Planta (2017). As social scientists, however, they tend to focus their attention on social functions and cultural causes for the rise of these practices. Such tendency is still evident in other studies on the subject in the last decade (Dahilig & Salenga, 2012; Brolan, et al., 2014; Berdon, et al., 2016; Crisol & Oledan, 2016; Rondilla, et al., 2021). While such an approach is indeed important, it lacks the conceptual nuances that allow us to differentiate among legitimizing narratives. It does not allow us to differentiate between the conceptual systems that inform Western medicine on the one hand, and Philippine traditional medical practices on the other. For instance, at the risk of preempting succeeding discussions, the idea that the universe is mechanical is itself a metaphysical narrative. Only with such narrative can a biophysical model be accepted in medicine, treating the body as an automaton responsible for its own processes. Such legitimizing narrative for Western medicine has been unfortunately applied to traditional medical practices in the Philippines.

The most striking (and perhaps the most recent) example of this tendency to legitimize traditional medicine using Western metaphysics is the work of Fajardo

and Pansacola. In their work, *Hilot: The Science of the Ancient Filipino Healing Arts* (2013), they provide a systematization of traditional practices that Fajardo was able to document and practice. After discovering his own talent in "*hilot*" (a local massage technique), Fajardo began different apprenticeships under various healers in Cavite. He later on moved to Mount Banahaw where he grew to prominence as an independent healer. The work is therefore representative of what they call the "third phase of [Fajardo's] healing career,"[1] symbolizing "the wisdom of *hilot* with science," (Fajardo & Pansacola, 2013, p. 20).

The breadth of the work is itself commendable, but the attempt at legitimizing it is disturbing. It seems that these practices could only be legitimized by uncovering the science behind them. While Fajardo's understanding of traditional medical practices is undoubtedly solid, his attempt at understanding them scientifically is also undoubtedly reductive. First, he speaks of these practices as if they are homogenous, referring to an "*albularyo*" (healer) when in fact he has apprenticed with many. Second, he also asserts that according to a "*hilot* philosophy,"

> the Universal Law maintains that all entities and bodies—the universe, the earth, the individual and all that surrounds him—are made up of a single force that puts everything in its proper place and precise order as it is observed in the cosmos. (Fajardo & Pansacola, 2013, p. 48)

While such a formulation of a Universal Law may be true, it uproots the assertion from the specific cultural context that gave birth to it. Such generalization can only be legitimate if one assumes a homogenous Filipino identity that could properly unify disparate traditional practices. It is the same homogeneity that the work assumes in its title in calling these practices as "*the*

[1] The first one being his healing practice, and the second his pilgrimage to Banahaw.

Ancient Filipino Healing Arts." Although such Filipino identity has been assumed by earlier scholars as legitimate, Ramon Guillermo (2009) has proven that it is merely a phantom. I will discuss this point in the next section. Their attitude towards indigenous understanding of traditional practices is also disturbing:

> There was a dearth in the use of terminology for diseases in the ancient times. The *hilot* and the *albularyo* evolved by using idioms and religious traditions, thus clothing itself in myth and mystery. The **lack of research and understanding** of *hilot* has relegated it to quackery. With new tools of science however, *hilot* can now be explained and **validated as scientific**. (Fajardo & Pansacola, 2013, p. 22; emphasis added)

This paragraph is eerily reminiscent of the times when it was fashionable to call indigenous practices as "primitive," given the more "civilized" advancements of Western science. Fajardo and Pansacola needlessly reduce traditional medical practices to Western medical categories in the guise of legitimizing them. While it is true that these practices could be understood in terms of Western science, it would seriously curb the ability of these practices to speak for themselves and be legitimized by its own metaphysics. Such kind of legitimizing violently shatters the independence of indigenous knowledge systems such as traditional healing practices.

Indeed, much of our traditional practices may be considered quackery because of the prevalence in belief in Western medicine. However, the approach that Fajardo and Pansacola took is to make traditional healing practices fit into the Western mold. They do not realize that Western medicine was a product of hundreds of years of metaphysical speculation to which our own practices are foreign. Western medicine can arguably be rooted in the 18th century (Foucault,

1973) while others would push it back further to the 17th century (Hewa, 1994; Bates, 2002).

Therefore, there is a need to augment the absence of metaphysical discussions on Philippine traditional medical practices. I derive four distinct characteristics of this metaphysics which are distinct from the clinico-empirical presuppositions of Western medicine: (1) a law of conservation based on the concept of "balik," (2) predestination, (3) an ontological dualism between the visible and the invisible, and (4) the performativity of words as utterances. In this paper, I take what can be characterized as a *particularist* approach which I will now characterize.

Approach

In this paper, I avoid the generalizations that Fajardo could be guilty of and at the same time letting the specific cultural context speak for itself—an unprecedented approach in the literature on Filipino philosophy.

Romualdo Abulad (2016), following the works of Emerita Quito, currently classifies approaches to Filipino philosophy into two: the *anthropological* and the *expository*. While the latter approach is taken when philosophers study the works of other philosophers and/or engage with traditional problems, the former is an attempt at extracting a uniquely Filipino philosophy from anthropological data. In approaching Filipino philosophy, I obviously take the former approach in this paper.

The anthropological approach, however, has been criticized by Abulad as lacking in rigor in its method. With Leonardo Mercado (1972; 1976) as pioneering this approach, Abulad contends that "others who use the same method have thus far failed to improve in his work" (Abulad, 2016, p. 6). I contend that this failure

of method is due to Mercado's (and consequently those who followed him like Timbreza) took the same careless generalizations that plague the work of Fajardo and Pansacola.

Writing about his methods, Mercado confesses metalinguistic and phenomenological analyses (Mercado, 1972; Mercado, 1976). While he attempts to derive concepts from Philippine languages, his discussions are helplessly limited. For instance, he admits that he is only analyzing three Philippine languages, i.e., Cebuano, Tagalog, and Ilocano, whilst admitting that "what is deduced from [these] can mostly be applied as well to other Philippine languages" (Mercado, 1976, p. 10). Like Fajardo and Pansacola, Mercado assumes a phantom of a homogenous Filipino identity that only exists on the basis of hasty generalizations from scant data. Florentino Timbreza continued with the same anthropological approach, earning Abulad's ire (2016). Confessing a metalinguistic analysis (Timbreza, 1985) with some aspects of cultural/psychological determinism (Timbreza, 1986; Timbreza, 2017), he analyzes proverbs and phrases that seem to be taken as representative of the thought of the Filipino as a whole (Timbreza, 1992; Timbreza, 1985; Timbreza, 1986; Timbreza, 2017). Given the foregoing, there is reason to believe that Abulad is right in declaring that no advancement in method has been made in the anthropological approach since the publication of Mercado's pioneering work in 1972 (Pada, 2014; Abulad, 2016).

Some Filipino philosophers, however, who can be classified as employing the anthropological approach are more careful in their generalizations. Conscious of the dangers of a hasty generalization, Jeremiah Reyes (2015) notes that his work is "*a* Filipino virtue ethics, and not *the* Filipino virtue ethics, since the words introduced here are derived from Tagalog language and culture," (Reyes, 2015, p. 150). But with his contextualization of Filipino virtue ethics in the history of Catholicism in the Philippines, one cannot help but continue to read the

disavowed generalization into his work. The same can be said about the purely speculative approach of Leonardo de Castro (1995) on the concept of *utang-na-loob* or "debt-of-will," which, unlike Reyes', does not explicitly disavow generalizations. Nevertheless, even with their tamed generalizations, there continues to be a dearth of data that could properly inform their musings.

I therefore attempt to initiate a study in the anthropological approach by introducing a new method. Characterizing Mercado et al's approach as *generalist*, I characterize my approach as *particularist.* This approach takes Guillermo's *Pook at Paninindigan: Kritika ng Pantayong Pananaw* (2009) as its springboard. In sum, Guillermo criticizes Salazar's Pantayong Pananaw as assuming an essential Filipino identity while what can be characterized as "Filipino" can only be considered dialectical, and therefore dynamic and heterogeneous. As with any identity, indigenization happens dialectically (Guillermo, 2009); the creation of the Filipino as Filipino happens in the practice of *being* Filipino instead of participating in a pseudo-Platonic specter of Filipino-ness which the likes of Salazar, Mercado, and Timbreza assume. As Guillermo observes in Mercado's work:

> Hindi talaga matatanggap ang mga hungkag na ispekulasyon ni Mercado sa pagkarami-rami niyang aklat hinggil sa pilosopiya at "pagkataong Pilipino" na punung-puno ng ganitong uri ng pangangatwiran. Ang nakakapagtaka ay marami pa ring sumasakay at napapaniwala sa ganitong ispekulatibong pagtingin sa kulturang Pilipino. (Guillermo, 2009, p. 52)
>
> (Even with his numerous works on philosophy and on "Filipino identity," Mercado's empty speculation that happens to be filled with these arguments is indeed unacceptable. What's more curious is that

> many still believe this kind of speculative view on Filipino culture.) [author's translation]

Therefore, in order to pin down what is truly "Filipino," we need to consider identity's dialectical nature. It is this same notion of identity that one can find in postmodern thinkers like Gilles Deleuze in their idea that identity is a process (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009), and contemporary thinkers like Alain Badiou in his idea that the subject is a procedure (Badiou, 2005; Badiou, 2009). There is no singular identity as much as there is no singular Filipino identity. In a way, one can say that Guillermo ushered in a postmodern understanding of Filipino identity: one that is dialectic, and consequently particular. Defined as a "paradigm shift" and a "new beginning," (Abulad, 2019) the term "postmodern" adequately and properly qualifies this notion of Filipino identity.

Given the foregoing, it is nearly impossible for us to offer a metaphysics that is Filipino in the sense that it is "the" Filipino metaphysics. Any metaphysics derivable should be derived from a specific, particular practice. Any generalization that these practices may allow us to do cannot be rigidly applied to all other practices. At most, we can compare and contrast observations from one practice with another with the hope of seeing patterns that can at most be characterized as family resemblances.

Therefore, in considering a truly particularist approach, I chose two respondents from San Mateo, Rizal, a suburban town east of Manila, Philippines. In consideration of this approach, they cannot, in any way, be considered representative of the practices in the whole of San Mateo and in no way can they be representative of all practices across the archipelago.

I specifically chose the traditional medicinal practices in San Mateo because there has yet to be any documentation of these. It seems that the proximity of San

Mateo to Metro Manila could be the reason for researchers glossing over the town. Although this is understandable, it seems more interesting that with such close proximity to highly urbanized areas, with its own creeping urbanization, traditional medicinal practices continue to thrive. The extent to which these practices thrive, however, is beyond the scope of the study. Given the foregoing discussion, I maintain that these two practices can still be properly characterized as truly "San Mateo" practices, keeping in mind that any identification of identity is always dynamic and heterogeneous, never static and homogenous. Ultimately, as I attempt at characterizing a Filipino metaphysics, the goal is to sketch what supposedly informs these practices. As they are lived practices, they are always susceptible to change as the Filipino identity is.

Aside from the particularist approach, I was only able to conduct two interviews because it was done in the middle of the pandemic in the first quarter of 2022 as the Omicron variant swept the country. Nevertheless, having two sources is more than enough for the purpose of deriving an indigenous metaphysics through a particularist anthropological approach. These two informants were chosen specifically to contrast their length of practice: Source 1 (S1) has been a practitioner for 65 years while Source 2 (S2) only for around 20 years. The difference in age is my attempt at diachronically triangulating the data from the interviews. Both are female residents of San Mateo, Rizal who has spent their practice so far in the same town.

Both interviews were done face-to-face as both practitioners do not have adequate access to video conferencing software, either on the level of skills or on the level of hardware. Due to the advanced age of S1, we were joined by her daughter to augment her narratives. Her daughter's additions were verbally and non-verbally verified by S1. Both practitioners have been anonymized in the succeeding discussions, with S1 insisting that she does not want anyone to know

where she is to avoid people flocking to her for treatment. Verbal consent has been acquired to conduct the interviews and use what they shared for the purposes of this study.

The Practice

S1 had moved to San Mateo, Rizal when she was just 17 years old; she is now 81. It was around the same time that she discovered her ability to cure. She says that it was never learned; she just suddenly had the ability to diagnose and cure these illnesses. She claims that her method could cure anything, although her patients are required to believe in the process and desire healing before they can be cured. She also says that patients need to have pure intentions in order to be healed. Patients whose intentions are not pure usually hesitate in even entering her house. S1 conducts her healing in front of an altar whose prominent images include images of the Sto. Niño and Our Lady of Fatima. A huge rosary was also evident, encircling a drawing of an inverted star with an eye in the middle. The drawing was made on what looked like Manila paper and plays a central role in the conduct of S1's practice.

In diagnosing patients, S1 either feels her patient's pulse[2] or uses "*tawas*" (a diagnostic technique in Philippine traditional medicine). After feeling the patient's pulse, she hears a whisper from God on what the patient is suffering.[3] The patient could have a "*pilay*" (literally "broken bone" or sometimes "knots") which could be cured by *hilot*. If it is not *pilay,* it could be what she refers to as a "*sakit*

[2] This is also called "*himolso*" in a documented practice in Cebu (Berdon et al., 2016).

[3] The same form of diagnosis as divine revelation was noted by Jocano in the Tarong people of Ilocos Norte (Jocano, 1966).

na gawa ng tao" (anthropogenic illness). She says that most illnesses today are of this kind. These man-made illnesses, however, are not biological artifices. They are anthropogenic in the sense that they are willfully inflicted on the patient.

However, it is not clear when S1 chooses to use *tawas* over feeling the pulse, but distance seems to be a factor. S1 conducts *tawas* using grains of rice, sometimes without the presence of the patient. She first removes the covering of nine grains of unmilled rice. She then throws the grains to a tub of water while reciting Tagalog prayers. If any one of the grains move, there could be a "*bati*," or literally, "greeting." The gravity of the infliction is dependent on the intensity of the movement of the rice grains. The *bati* can either be from another human being or an unseen being altogether. It could also be a "*gawang hindi maganda*" (undesirable act). These acts could vary but could further be classified into "*barang*" and "*kulam*." It is unclear if all of these *gawang hindi maganda* can be classified into these two or just some of them. Nevertheless, S1 views *barang* and *hilot* as the same thing but only of different levels. *Barang* appears to be much more potent as it is able to wound while *kulam* cannot.

Her daughter, who seems to be her right hand person in dealing with these extreme cases, shared some of S1's experiences in curing *barang*. One case was a business-owner who had a wounded vagina where leeches and centipedes supposedly come out at night. S1 made her look at the drawing of the eye on the altar and recognized the perpetrator to be her husband's mistress. Apparently, these illnesses can be commissioned from practitioners of *barang* and *kulam*. A *mambabarang* supposedly has pets which they command to attack the target. They usually make their pets smell articles of clothing of the target or sometimes strands of hair. Another extreme instance of *barang* that S1 encountered was with someone whose cheek was torn, exposing the patient's teeth, with half of their private part also wounded.

S1 identified the *mambabarang* or *mangkukulam* through the patient's pulse. Just by putting S1's thumb on the patient's pulse, the spirit of the perpetrator is "caught" wherever s/he may be, as if using the patient's body as a medium. During the process of curing, the patient is described as "*wala sa sarili*" or roughly translated as "unaware," with the companion fully conscious to serve as witness. As if performing an exorcism, S1 commands the perpetrator to heal the patient once s/he is caught from the patient's pulse. In one instance, while S1 was "holding on" to the perpetrator (as it was not clear if it was a *barang* or a *kulam*) through the pulse, she commanded her daughter to boil water which the daughter subsequently poured on the patient's feet. The patient remained unburnt and unhurt; it would be the perpetrator who is supposed to have been burnt by the boiling water poured.

S1 also uses an oil as a cure. She uses her special oil for *hilot* and also as protection as if it were an amulet. S1 is particularly proud that her oil is clear and odorless. When it changes its clarity or gains a foul scent, it is supposed to have done its job to catch some of the illnesses that would have otherwise been caught by its owner. S1 produces the oil by praying over them using prayers in Tagalog.

S2, on the other hand, is only 35 years old and moved to San Mateo when she was just three. Unlike S1, she had learned her practice from her father who practiced it in Lopez, Quezon before moving. Like S1, however, it was not her choice to manifest the ability to cure. Out of all her many siblings, only two of them had the talent to cure. She discovered the ability when her niece/nephew had once been repeatedly hospitalized without getting cured. The niece/nephew had been vomiting, and was unable to stand up. She then had decided to cure him/her using *tawas* to which s/he immediately responded. It was at this instance that she discovered her ability to cure.

Unlike S1, S2 does not claim to be able to cure everything. S2 only claims to cure *sakit na gawa ng tao*. Using this category, she draws a fine line between afflictions that doctors can cure and those that she can.

While S1 is selective of her patients based on intention, S2 is much more selective. She only does *tawas* for relatives while she only does *hilot* to everyone else. Like S1, she refuses to be called a "healer" (*albularyo*) but for a different reason: avoiding people coming to her for cures. Avoiding people means avoiding what she calls a "*balik*," or literally "return." She says that a healer, when curing illnesses, supposedly gets the affliction she had cured from the patient. She even suggests that the illness returns to the healer twofold. According to her, this *balik* is also present more especially with the *mambabarang* and the *mangkukulam* who absorb the illnesses that they inflict on others.

In diagnosing, S2 uses *tawas* instead of feeling the patient's pulse. The method of *tawas* that she uses is through the use of a knife and a candle. She heats up an "*itak*" (butcher knife) which she then uses to melt a candle. She lets the molten candle drip onto a bucket of water while praying over it with Tagalog prayers. After the wax has hardened, she reads the figure formed. From the wax, she knows if someone had *bati* or "*balis*"[4] on the patient. The wax is then wrapped in plastic and placed beneath the patient's pillow until it disintegrates. By the time of disintegration, the affliction should have been healed.

While she uses *bati* the same way S1 uses the term, she provides more nuance to the term. While *bati* is a generic term for a greeting that causes illness, *balis* is a kind of *bati* that is only given by visible entities like people. S2, however, refuses to

[4] There seems to be no literal translation of *balis* in English. It is, however, semantically close to the more usual term *usog* which is an affliction coming from being greeted by another person who brings them.

cure anthropogenic illnesses that can be classified as *kulam* or *barang*; these supposedly require a higher level of skill, and even a higher resistance to *balik*.

S2 also differentiates between that which healers like her worship, and that which the *mangkukulam* and the *mambabarang* worship. She characterizes the former as "*puti*" (white) and the latter as "*itim*" (black). The *itim* is what she calls "Satan," while the *puti* is what she calls "Lord."

She also narrates that *balis* can only be cured through the saliva of the one who caused the *balis*. Those who usually cause *balis* are those who are hungry and those who have a strong foul odor. She says that *balis* caused by the latter is a lot graver, causing nausea to patients. If there is no way for the patient to get the afflicter's *saliva*, the patient's used clothes would be boiled. The water where the shirt was boiled should be ingested which will subsequently cure the patient's *balis*.

She also treats *pilay* with *hilot*. Unlike S1, she does not diagnose through the pulse but through touching the affected areas. If there seems to be a displaced bone, she massages it to cure the patient. Sometimes, however, immediate *hilot* cannot be administered without prior treatment. Leaves are sometimes used to place on affected areas before they can be massaged. The plants that she uses include "*tuba-tuba*," "*sambong*," "*tawa-tawa,*" and "*anonang*," typical medicinal herbs known to have curative effects in traditional medicine.

Metaphysical Presuppositions

Western modern medicine[5] is undoubtedly a hegemon in terms of medical treatment across the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the world

[5] Hereafter, "Western medicine"

governments' reliance on Western medicine in the development and administering of vaccines. Although a hegemon, Western medicine has seen at least two major developments, or as Thomas Kuhn would put it, "paradigms" (Kuhn, 1996). We could properly talk about two major paradigms in the history of Western science: the classical paradigm coming from the writings of Hippocrates and Galen, and the biomedical model which could be traced back to the 17th century (Bates, 2002; Hewa, 1994).

Bates and Hewa both employ the term "paradigms" in their discussions of Western medicine, avoiding the more abstract discussions on metaphysics. The inherent vagueness of the term paradigm which Bates himself admits (2002), prevents any theoretical presupposition that the term "metaphysics" suggests. However, hiding in this vagueness also prevents these paradigms from adequate philosophical scrutiny. It also diminishes the rootedness of these paradigms in the history of thought on the background of which it can only be properly understood. Besides, Hewa points to the fact that the reigning biomedical model is actually traceable to the writings of Descartes. Hence, using paradigms as a term cannot deny their intellectual roots in metaphysical systems. In consideration of the introductory remarks, these same metaphysical systems serve as the legitimizing narratives of the practices that rest on these models. Hence, these talks on paradigms are talks of legitimation.

The classical model was dependent on both the perception of the patient and the doctor, contrary to the biomedical model. With the publication of Harvey's *De Motu Cordis* in 1628, the classical model began to be questioned (Hewa, 1994). In this new paradigm, only the doctor's diagnosis matters (Bates, 2002) as Harvey notices that Galen's theories "were not developed on the basis of empirical research" (Hewa, 1994, p. 119). In the biomedical model, illnesses are not experienced, but empirically investigated from a third person point-of-view. Such

a view of the body is, of course, informed by the idea that the world is a machine that is objectively observable. Extending this idea to the body, Descartes reinforced Harvey's views by saying that the body is also a machine (Hewa, 1994).

Considering the body as a machine is an insistence on its inherent rationality for it cannot act mechanically without any order involved. Such an idea of a rational universe is a metaphysical assertion dating back from the time of Plato (*Timaeus and Critias*, 29d). With his idea that a demiurge has placed order in the universe, Plato showed that a *logos* or a reason is discoverable in it. It is clear, therefore, that these paradigms are only properly informed by the metaphysics that supply their notions. While Michel Foucault (1973) approaches Western medicine as a way of controlling discourse, its metaphysical underpinnings can hardly be denied.

With this adequate metaphysical grounding, Western medicine seems to be justified in its hegemonic place in the field of medicine. Such a privileged place has led some researchers to treat traditional medical practices as a threat, calling for the need to "widen the epistemological frames of sciences and clinical practice" (Salamonsen & Ahlzen, 2018, p. 367). Labeled as "CAM," (cf. Dahilig & Salenga, 2012) Philippine traditional medicine is at an unfair disadvantage from its Western counterpart in terms of its mode of legitimation. While the efficacy of Western medicine cannot be undermined, such an attitude towards these practices may be due to the lack of an understanding of its metaphysical grounding, i.e., its legitimizing narrative. In other words, the legitimizing (metaphysical) narrative of Philippine traditional medicine has yet to be derived. With this in mind, I now attempt at elucidating its metaphysical underpinnings. Whenever I refer to Western medicine, I refer to the biomedical model currently in use today.

Law of Conservation

The notion of a *balik* is the most explicit manifestation of a law of conservation that the practices assume. It seems as if what is given can only be returned and not destroyed. In the case of a healer, what she heals can only be relieved when she absorbs it herself, as if bearing the affliction for the patient that she cured. The illness, in this sense, cannot be destroyed but only passed on from one person to the next.

The notion of *balis* also presupposes such a law of conservation. Requiring the source of the *balis* to place her saliva on the patient means that the one who "gave" the illness is the only one to be able to take it away. The disease by itself cannot be cured; it needs to be cured by its source.

While such a law of conservation is not explicit in S1's narratives, it can be read into how she treats her patients. Whenever she encounters a *barang* or a *kulam*, S1 commands the perpetrator to "remove" the illness from the patient. The same principle is at play here to that of the *balis*; the source is the only one who could take it away. Nothing is destroyed; everything is just passed on. Such a principle is obviously absent in the Western germ theory (Bates, 2002; Hempel, 1966). A disease caused by a germ should obviously be eradicated, not coddled.

Predestination

The ability to cure illnesses made by man can only be given by God. These practices therefore assume a divine anointing which can also be read as predestined. The same idea can actually be found in a practice documented in Partido, Camarines Sur (Rebuya et al., 2020). While the informants there claim to have inherited their ability from their ancestors, they called it "a vocation from God," (Rebuya et al., 2020, p. 27). Western medicine may have once toyed the idea

of how procession-induced stress could lead to death (Hempel, 1966). However, the completely materialistic metaphysics that informs it has no need for God.

No one religion can also lay claim to this idea of God that both sources seem to have. For instance, S1 uses an eye on an inverted star which is absent in Christian iconography, but can be ascribed to more indigenous forms of worship (Ileto, 1979). On the other hand, although S2 calls the *itim* as "Satan," reminiscent of a Christian worldview, she does not dismiss the possibility of a Moslem worshiping the *puti*.

However, it can be argued that predestination cannot be read from the data available. While it is clear that the ability to cure is not a skill in the sense that it is learned, it is unclear whether they are fulfilling a destiny of sorts. An anointing can be given as part of one's destiny, but merely positing an anointing by God does not entail predestination. The latter presupposes a divine plan that has to be followed. Although this could be true, the data certainly implies an anointing which need not necessarily discount the possibility of a destiny being fulfilled. Besides, the notion of a *balik* implies a cosmic order that is completely compatible with the notion of destiny.

Ontological Dualism

The dualism that can be read in these practices is that between the visible and invisible, as if akin to the Platonic dualism between the world and the Ideas. However, understanding it this way would be misleading as they seem to be completely different dualisms. While for Plato, the realm of the invisible is the realm of thought (*Republic*, 509d-510a), such an intellectual ascent is not evident in these practices.

On the contrary, human beings seem to reside in between the two realms of the visible and the invisible. S1's ability to catch the spirit of the *mambabarang*

through the pulse seems to prove the unique standing of man in relation to these two realms. Something physical like the pulse seems to provide the medium through which something spiritual can be caught. The afflictions also do not seem physical at all; they are caused by spiritual things over which men and some spiritual entities are in command. Moreover, the oil and the molten wax seem to show that something physically tangible can cure something spiritual and intangible. Such a practice is similar to the use of amulets in other indigenous forms of worship.

A dualism between the good (*puti*) and bad (*itim*) can also be found between the *mambabarang* and the *mangkukulam* on the one hand, and the healers on the other. While it is tempting to read Manicheanism into this aspect, the evidence for such reading is scarce. Moreover, the dualism between *puti* and *itim* was only explicit with S2, while S1's practice seems to support it as she herself confronts these seemingly evil forces at work in the afflictions of her patients.h

These findings run contrary to Mercado's ascription of monism to the Filipino world view. He claims that "the Filipino's world view is non-dualistic," (1976, p. 191), assuming "the non-dichotomy between the profane and the sacred," (Mercado, 1976, p. 192). It is odd, however, to accept these observations given the foregoing discussion. My sources themselves disavow affinity to the *mangkukulam* and the *mambabarang*. There is a clear line between the profane and the sacred; otherwise, there would be no need for my sources to have administered their cures.

Performativity of the Word

The most striking feature of the indigenous metaphysics is the ability of words to cause. Such a treatment of words is in stark contrast to the so-called logocentrism of the West, at least according to Derrida (Garver & Lee, 1994).

While much of Western thought views language as a mere source of information (Russell, 1945; Wittgenstein, 1974; Ayer, 1936), these practices show that words are performative rather than informative. Such performativity, however, need not be confused with the performativity of language first forwarded by Ordinary Language Philosophy, specifically by John Austin (Austin, 2008). For Austin, performativity is about the semantic import of pragmatics, while in these practices, performativity is about its ontological causative powers. First, the healing powers of the oil and the molten wax do not come from their substance but from the prayers recited for them to be effective. S1's own practice shows how the diagnosis does not come from analysis but from a *whisper*. Additionally, she admits that the prayers are effective only insofar as they are how God speaks.

The most obvious manifestation of this performativity of words is the term *bati*. A greeting can only go as far as fulfilling a social function. In this metaphysics, however, *bati* can cause illnesses. This is also why the illnesses that the informants cure are considered anthropogenic in that they are *made to happen* through their own words, whether through *bati* or through *barang* or *kulam*. S1's method of exorcising these *barangs* or *kulams* is also an obvious proof of the performativity of words. She commands perpetrators to remove the illness, showing the ability of words to cause something to happen.

Conclusion

The biophysical model has adequately legitimized Western medicine, giving credence to its seeming hegemony. It is unfair, however, to our traditional healing practices to have no such philosophical model to rest on. While it is undeniable that their influence has shot up in recent years, no such legitimizing narrative has been derived nor produced. It has therefore been the task of this paper to augment

this lack of legitimizing narrative. I attempt to derive Filipino metaphysics from traditional healing practices.

In postmodernity, I characterize these legitimizing narratives as metaphysics, albeit in a more particular form. Instead of considering metaphysics as a grand, unifying narrative, I follow Lyotard in the independence of scattered language-games and Guillermo in the dialectical and heterogeneous nature of Filipino identity. Hence, in deriving an indigenous metaphysics, I take what I call a particularist approach that avoids the worrisome generalizations of Filipino philosophers who follow the anthropological approach. I characterize the only current anthropological approach as generalist.

Heeding my particularist approach, I specifically chose two narratives of traditional healing practices from San Mateo, Rizal. From these narratives I derive four distinct characteristics: (1) a law of conservation based on the concept of "balik," (2) predestination, (3) an ontological dualism between the visible and the invisible, and (4) the performativity of words as utterances.

This paper is the first attempt of a philosopher to grapple with the metaphysics of traditional medical practices in the Philippines. It immediately places the philosophical approach in sharp contrast to the social scientific approach. The latter approach aims to "show how culture functions in the area of health and illness," (Jocano, 1966). Planta, following Tan (2008), would only provide "a nuanced portrayal of Filipino culture through an examination of the historical development of medicine in the Philippines," (Planta, 2017, p. xxvi), leaving behind the issue of its metaphysical legitimation. A new philosophical approach to these practices, therefore, opens up a new way of seeing them.

Instead of looking at them merely functionally, the philosophical approach provides a way of looking at them conceptually which allows for their proper

scrutiny independent of biophysical frameworks. Future studies could therefore dwell on analyzing the derived metaphysics in this paper, properly juxtaposing it to the biophysical assumptions of Western medicine. Moreover, with the dynamicity inherent in identity, more particularist narratives from San Mateo (or in other places in the Archipelago) can be studied to derive a metaphysics that could supplement or maybe even supplant that of the practices I documented.

The preceding study also has implications in the conduct of Filipino philosophy, specifically the anthropological approach. The "Filipino" can no longer just be considered as a necessary illusion (Rennesland, 2021), since there is now a real object of study for Filipino philosophy. The Filipino may not be a Platonic specter hovering above beings, but it can now be seen in the most particular practices in the Philippines.

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Geonarrating Subaltern Stories-so-far

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This article narrates and interrogates the spatial politics of Manila's port area. We ask how land reclamation schemes can be understood as state-led projects that, in part, produce dockside space to secure the uneven relations of capitalist circulation. We draw on interviews with truck drivers conducted during their idle times of waiting outside the entrance gates to the city's piers. Truckers' experiences reveal how Metropolitan Manila's local municipalities, port contractors, and labor unions regulate the daily rhythms and abstract times of port work. We also examine and analyse Jewel Maranan's documentary Sa Palad ng Dantaong Kulang (2017) as it narrates and gives voice to stories of dispossession among urban poor communities living on reclaimed land on Manila's waterfront. For most of the men, women, and children Maranan features, global economic and political forces prove to be far more menacing than the shady North Harbor characters looking to make a few pesos. This article concludes by considering how drivers who labor under these circumstances individually and collectively reclaim and leverage control over the concrete times of their daily work. Like the lives of the truck drivers in the port area, Jewel Maranan's film provides an exceptional portrait of the work necessary to sustain communities and families as the flows of global capitalism continue endlessly beyond the makeshift walls of residents' homes.

Keywords: *waterfront, port area, dispossession, reclamation, film*

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In August 1964, the cover of the Philippines Free Press featured a cartoon with passengers, luggage in tow, stepping off a docked vessel at Manila's North Harbor. Three waterfront characters eagerly await the new arrivals: a shipping operator, a stevedore, and a taxi driver. In rendering these three as menacing animals, a pig, wolf, and crocodile respectively, the illustrator signals that these three are not to be trusted by the sea-legged provincial travelers. Nearby, a monkey masquerading as a police officer covers his eyes, willingly blind to whatever waterfront mulcting is set to unfold next (Figure 1).

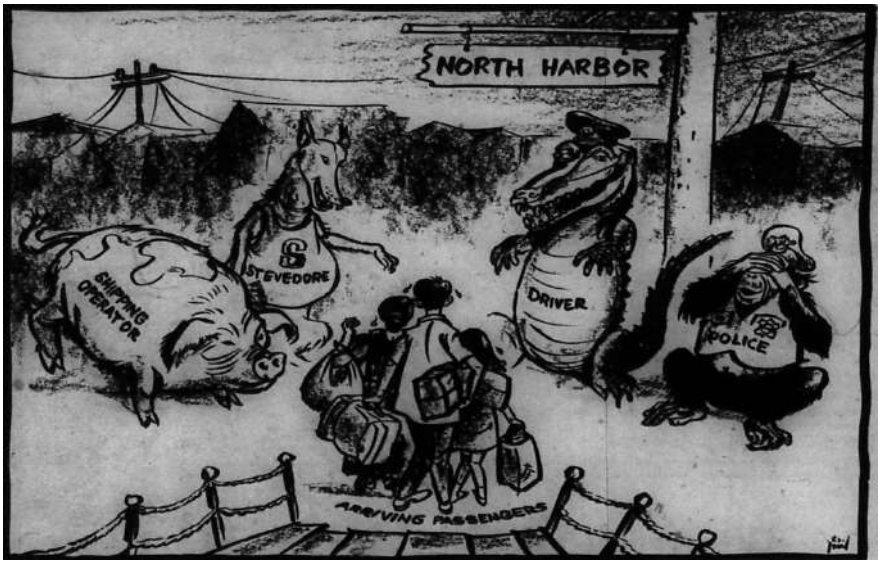

Figure 1: Political Cartoon, Philippines Free Press, August 8, 1964.

The accompanying article entitled, "Gate of Hell," paints a bleak picture of North Harbor's passenger shipping industry and the illicit economies operating on the waterfront. For Free Press journalist Wilfrido Nolledo this landscape was a paradise for swindlers, smugglers, and unscrupulous day

laborers. Taxi drivers and jeepney barkers welcomed passengers with inflated fares. Baggage carriers seized luggage and demanded payment for unsolicited services, and fake customs agents levied made-up-tariffs on the new arrivals. Tondo thugs who lived in the nearby shanties threatened anyone who might have protested the petty rackets. It was this unforgiving scene that supposedly introduced thousands of provincianos to the city, "You can imagine what this grotesque tableau must do to the country boy seeing it for the first time. What horror it must strike in the rural breast…[New arrivals] scrimp and save for their passage money, leaving their huts behind, always with the fond image, Manila, Manila. When they get there, Manila is nothing more than North Harbor—the pearl of the piers."[1]

North Harbor returned to the glossy magazine pages a few years later. In February 1968 President Ferdinand Marcos and his Secretary of Public Works, Antonio Raquiza, toured the port area. With hoisting machinery in the background, a photographer from the Sunday Times Magazine snapped a staged shot of the two men pointing at a detailed map of future construction.[2] Marcos' visit signaled his endorsement of a P261 million mega-infrastructure project that would give rise to what is today Manila International Container Terminal (MICT), the country's busiest cargo port. Yet the camera lended undue credit to its subjects: the mega-infrastructure project had been planned and drafted under President Diosdado Macapagal.[3] By this time, engineers and construction workers had begun to reclaim hundreds of hectares of land from

[1] "Gate of Hell," Wilfrido Nolledo, *Philippines Free Press*, August 8, 1964

[2] *Sunday Times Magazine*, February 1968.

[3] "Planning Aspects of the Manila International Seaport," *Philippine Architecture, Engineering, & Construction Record*, Jan. 31, 1964, pp. 14-15, 21; "Philippine Ports & Interisland Shipping: Status, Problems & Program Development" by Cesar J. Reyes in *Philippine Architecture, Engineering, & Construction Record*, April 1967, pp. 96-104; Tupas, Rodolfo. "Changing the Profile of Manila Bay," *Sunday Times Magazine*¸ March 31, 1968, pp. 26-29.

the seafloor. With their photographer in tow, Marcos and Raquiza walked along a partially-completed one-kilometer-long wharf on which cranes would be built to service the loading and unloading of foreign cargo vessels.

In the opening pages to a popular history on the metropolis, Nick Joaquin writes, "The site of Manila was reclaimed from the sea—and the sea is still trying to get it back."[4] Joaquin refers here to the environmental process carried out over millennia in which sediment from the Pasig River settled and provided the city's foundation. In contrast to the paces of geomorphology, the naturally smooth curvature of the city's harbor has been subjected to more than a century of massive-scale earth moving, dredging, and the reclamation of land from the seafloor and riverbed. Building upon unrealized Spanish plans, by 1905, a contractor working for the American colonial government had dredged some five million cubic tons of earth and reclaimed 148 acres of newly-made land for a new port area in South Harbor.[5] Some sixty years later, the expansion of the international port complex under Macapagal and Marcos inscribed a new layer onto a seascape that has been perpetually remade by the demands of a global economy.

Seaside Scenes

Jewel Maranan's 2017 documentary film, Sa Palad ng Dantaong Kulang (In the Claws of a Century Wanting) transports viewers to the 21st century

[4] Joaquin, Nick. 1990. *Manila, My Manila: A History for the Young*. Manila: Republic of the Philippines, p. 4.

[5] "Report of Operations on Improving the Ports of the Philippine Islands for Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1905," July 28, 1905, Curtis McD. Townsend, pp. 14-15, Folder 13110, Box 677, Record Group 350, United States National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

Manila waterfront.6 The urban poor communities living on reclaimed land serve as the principal setting for Maranan's film. She also takes viewers to other Tondo neighborhoods around North Harbor. With a film title that nods to legendary Filipino activist filmmaker Lino Brocka whose films recuperated and re-centered the lives of the dispossessed urban Filipinos marginalized by the capital-centric City of Man landscape of the Marcoses, her subjects are not victimized by the gangsters or swindlers depicted in the 1964 Free Press article. Instead, another round of capital investment to expand port facilities threatens to displace their families, demolish their homes, and upend their livelihoods. For most of the men, women, and children Maranan features, global economic and political forces prove to be far more menacing than the shady North Harbor characters looking to make a few pesos.

The Port of Manila is a built environment dedicated to facilitating the timely circulation of commodities and the turnover of capital. For Henri Lefebvre, the production of industrial spaces aims to facilitate and reproduce the conditions of repetitive work necessary for capitalism's survival.7 Maranan's opening scenes and lingering frames throughout the film feature these industrial rhythms: dockside cranes sway back and forth, truck drivers wait day and night to enter storage yards, and backhoes dig, move, and deposit mud. Shipping container stacks watch over all this activity like small mountains. Such shots depict the cyclical, well-trodden paths of the bodies and machines that enable global circulation and consumption (Figure 2).

[6] The Young Critics Circle awarded Maranan's documentary the "Best Film of 2018."

[7] Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The Production of Space*. Malden: Blackwell.

Figure 2: Land reclamation at Port of Manila (J. Maranan, 2017)

Yet, as Maranan makes clear, this is not simply an industrial space. The areas outside the port complex's gates are home to thousands of Manila's urban poor. Maranan's subjects carve their own paths through this newly made land, making their own claims to this unsettled earth that was once on the seafloor. As trucks drive past windows, doorways, and the entrances to housing compounds, she sets up her camera inside these communities and guides viewers through the rhythms of these residents' daily life: a mother watches for mosquitoes while her children sleep, young grade school students complete their homework together, and Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle preaches in a sunlit, open-air mass. Parents cook their children dinner and sing them to sleep at night. Residents peddle goods in the informal economy and sell their labor in the formal one. They gossip with one another inside their homes and hold formal neighborhood meetings in collective spaces. The filmmaker provides an exceptional portrait of the work necessary to sustain communities and families as the flows of global capitalism continue endlessly beyond the makeshift walls of residents' homes.

In what comes closest to Agamben's gestural cinema, the almost wordless film evokes and recovers what is lost among subaltern urban dwellers living in the city's center and in its peripheries. Where spoken

language fails, gestures portray conditions of possibilities, imagined geographies and hopeful futures even as these also drown out and disappear along with the flickers from a thousand globalized and industrial sunsets. Maranan's film is a snapshot of several lives on the waterfront that, like Agamben's notes on gesture, manifest the inequality by the wordlessness adopted by the film. Or as Agamben describes it: "In the cinema, a society that has lost its gestures tries at once to reclaim what it has lost and to record its loss"[8]

In our interview with Maranan, she alluded to this loss of gesture when she was confronted with what she calls "lifelong cyclic impoverishment of a population" that manifests in the systemic inequality of the community she was working in. Speaking of the lightbulb moment that narrated the oft-told Philippine lifestory of the everyday people, Maranan said:

> It was no longer a simple and unquestioned dichotomy of being rich and being poor. The system that I was totally immersed in became visible to me. It unfolded before me as something that leaves its traces as a visual system, a system of things, of everyday sights, objects, connections and movements – something that can be illustrated, demonstrated, and even depicted in film. All this understanding culminated in one moment while I was talking to a community midwife about how mothers in Tondo give birth, with the sight of an empty roadside funeral fundraising for the long overdue burial of the dead across the road from us, interrupted by the rolling of container vans on the road between— foreign-looking, but bearing the most weight and certainty and dictating the rhythm

[8] Agamben, Giorgio. 'Notes on Gesture' (1992), in *Means Without End*, trans. V. Binetti and C. Casarino (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 53.

> of the whole port landscape. (Email correspondence and interview with the director, 2021)

Amid these intimate portraits of the city, Maranan slowly and subtly reveals the larger political forces at work: Tagle's visit comes after a fire has destroyed homes inside a dense housing compound. In another episode, as some of her subjects perform their evening chores, news anchors on a nearby television discuss the planned demolition of other informal settlers' homes along the city's esteros and creeks.[9] In neighborhood meetings, residents debate the complex politics of urban housing. This, as the viewer quickly learns, is a time of significant change for many of the film's characters. It is a time of planned, state-led demolition. A series of government actors reveal the stakes for us in terminologies and language that are not always clear to either the viewer or, more importantly, the residents of Tondo. Victims of the fire and certain residents whose homes are within ten meters of the Pasig River Easement zone are slated for demolition. What is merely background noise for her subjects, Maranan artfully uses the television program's audio to reveal the political stakes of the moment. Slum dwellers living in flood-prone areas, as Maria Khristine Alvarez and Kenneth Cardenas argue, are increasingly rendered by the Philippine government as not only themselves vulnerable but also hazards endangering the rest of the city to flood events.[10] Maranan captures the impact of these government policies: Tondo residents must consider government offers of cash assistance and housing loans to relocate to Bulacan and Cavite. The film's final hour is marked by dramatic scenes of

[9] For more on housing, relocation, and flooding in Metro Manila see: Alvarez, Maria Khristine and Kenneth Cardenas. 2019. "Evicting Slums, 'Building Back Better': Resiliency Revanchism and Disaster Risk Management in Manila," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 43, Iss. 2, pp. 227-249.; Saguin, Kristian Karlo. 2022. *Urban Ecologies on the Edge: Making Manila's Resource Frontier.* Oakland: University of California Press, pp. 140-157.

[10] Alvarez and Cardenas, pp. 237-238.

demolition: swinging hammers, falling concrete walls, evicted residents pleading with authorities. Some accept offers to relocate. As cargo trucks pass by loaded with the freight of global commerce, their own worldly belongings are laid out on the sidewalk while they await government transport to the relocation sites (Figure 3). This is stunning and subtle cinematography, and it captures the highly-charged politics of urban housing in Manila.

Figure 3: Residents with their possessions await relocation (J. Maranan, 2017)

Many of the residents we meet refuse to relocate. In what appears to be an impromptu meeting in a narrow alley, a community leader and member of a community organization opposed to demolition makes an impassioned speech against accepting the government offers to leave. She makes clear to her audience that boarding a government bus will displace residents from their urban livelihoods and familiar communities. Provincial relocation sites, she

emphasizes, offer few opportunities for employment, and residents will likely fall into debt on their government housing loans. Skeptical of the government narratives, she insists residents are being forced out to accommodate foreign investors, and as she puts it, if they were genuine about providing housing to the community, "they can easily reclaim hectares from the sea." Some of the final scenes depict residents who refused to leave rebuilding amid the rubble of the violent demolitions.

At this moment, Maranan's viewers must question whether the supposed environmental concerns of the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission are the real reason for demolition. Some might even question the source of the fire. In her own words, the director, who spent more than two years living in Tondo, described this larger political moment and her own orientation to the community,

I worked as a full-time community organizer, living in the communities around the port area right after graduating from film school. There was no film in mind at the beginning. I was completely outside an artistic mindset. Instead, I was in a mindset of problem-solving for a community I was serving as a volunteer social worker trying to come up with ways for how the rights and dignity of the residents of the Tondo Foreshoreland area can be asserted in the face of unjust and unconsultative mass evictions, demolitions and arbitrary relocation, which was a consequence of the Manila North Harbor Privatization and Modernization Project that got a green light around 2010 favoring the private takeover over of the country's premiere port by giant business led by Manny Pangilinan and Reghis Romero II. While big processes were taking place and decisions were being made in business and government offices, the people most directly affected by these decisions were completely isolated, their futures suspended, and their fates seemingly in the hands of invisible unsympathetic forces. (Email correspondence and interview with the director, 2021)

Routes in the Sand

Not all of the residents are facing eviction. Maranan also features a dockworker who fastens and unfastens the lashing cables that secure containers on cargo vessels. Despite a seemingly stable job and membership in a labor union, he too lives in informal housing. Neither his home or his livelihood is threatened, but Maranan's time spent with the dockworker and his family portrays the hardships and mundane doldrums of life in this community. Despite a few comforts, like satellite television, it is clear that his salary does not provide much. Some of our interviews with the city's truck drivers reveal that they too dwell in precarity. There is a devastating irony here. Many of Maranan's subjects were displaced to expand the port and widen its roads. Yet, many of the truck drivers who transport freight across these roads labor without the comfort of home and a permanent place to sleep.

In early March 2020, just a few weeks before the pandemic upended the globe, Rey, a driver, invited us into his truck with a wave. He was parked in the "Truck Holding Area" of MICT, a site that also appears in Sa Palad ng Dantaong Kulang. Rey was waiting to enter the port facilities at his scheduled time to pick up a shipping container. For now, he had time to pass and agreed to our interview. In front of us, a line of trucks with empty chassis inched forward for their own appointments to enter the pierside storage yards. Rey's stories and experiences echoed details from the handful of interviews and informal conversations we had with other drivers elsewhere in the port area in the weeks prior. Rey did not have a permanent home in the city, usually sleeping in his cab after parking it near the palatial Manila Hotel. Securing such a spot typically required a small payment to guarantee his protection from city traffic officers and private security guards that patrolled the area. He typically returned home to his family in the provinces only a few times a year. His employer owned a garage in Bulacan where he could sleep and bathe, but, as he explained, he preferred to stay in the city and only returned to the

trucking company's garage about once a month. His truck cab was both the source of his income and his bed.

In another interview, a pahinante, or truck driver's assistant, informed us that despite living in Novaliches, Quezon City, he usually only returns home to his family on Sundays, sleeping in the truck outside warehouses or in the port area the rest of the week. As we chatted, he recounted his journey the night before: after dropping off freight in the city earlier in the morning he and his driver raced back across the city and arrived at the port area at 4 AM. They had good reason to rush back. During peak hours of Metro Manila's morning and evening commutes, most cargo trucks are banned from plying major thoroughfares. Police, Metro Manila traffic enforcers, and local municipalities write tickets for drivers caught on the roads and highways during truck ban hours. Repeat offenders are subject to escalating fines and license suspensions. Trucks with appointments to pick up or drop off cargo in the port area--known as "bookings" in the industry--are exempt from this truck ban. The exemption, however, does not apply to trucks who do not have active business in the port. Bookings grant truckers access to the port terminal at designated time slots. Nearly all reservations require a fee. To decrease citywide traffic and port congestion, the port operators' online appointment booking system incentivizes work during non-traditional hours. The terminal operators offer transactors free pick-up and sometimes rebates during Sundays, early mornings, and late nights. They also levy penalties and fines for late arrivals or if a driver misses their pick-up slot.[11]

Importantly truck bans restricted truck mobility after drivers and assistants dropped off merchandise. If drivers and pahinante arrive at their

[11] For an excellent overview of truck bans see, Llanto, Gilberto M. 2017. "Cargo Truck Ban: Bad Timing, Faulty Analysis, Policy Failure." In *Unintended Consequences: The Folly of Uncritical Thinkin*g, edited by Vicente B. Paqueo, Aniceto C. Orbeta Jr., and Gilberto M. Llanto, pp. 21-36. Quezon City: Philippine Institute for Development Studies.

bodega during the morning or evening when the citywide truck ban is in effect, the law prevents them from plying Metro Manila roads after their appointment window has expired. If, for example, a truck finishes a delivery to Cavite at 5:45 AM and their booking exemption has expired during travel and unloading, the crew has to wait in Cavite until 10:00 AM before they can legally return to the streets of the metropolis. The same policy affects afternoon and evening deliveries. Drivers are paid "kada biyahe" (each trip), so there is no money in waiting. Instead, drivers usually pay for food or entertainment while they pass the hours. They must also often find temporary places to park their trucks to rest or sleep.

After describing life on the road, traffic and truck bans, one pahinante described his work as "hinahabol ang oras" (chasing time), an illustrative example of days spent both racing against truck bans and waiting in various parts of the city or nearby provinces when the restrictions could not be beat. As one veteran driver stated rather simply of the truck bans, "Sakit sa ulo yan" (it's a headache). Erratic work schedules furthered the problems. Many drivers and pahinante had little control over when company dispatchers might call or book an appointment for them. Veteran drivers also lamented that the electronic scheduling system decreased the number of available trips, and thus, opportunities to earn money.[12]

[12] For analysis of the trucking industry in Manila see, Bacero, Riches S., Monorom Rith, and Alexis M. Fillone. 2022. "Truckers' perceptions on truck regulations and policies in a developing country: A case study of Metro Manila, Philippines." *Case Studies on Transport Policy* 10 (2): 764-776; Bacero, Riches S. and Alexis M. Fillone. 2019. "Review of the National and Cities' Truck Policies in Metro Manila." UP-Diliman National Center for Transportation Studies, Working Paper; Castro, Jun T., Tetsuro Hyodo, and Hirohito Kuse. 2003. "A study on the impact and effectiveness of the truck ban scheme in Metro Manila." *Journal of the Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies* 5: 2177- 2192; Castro, Jun T. and Hirohito Kuse, 2005. "Impacts of Large Truck Restrictions in Freight Carrier Operations in Metro

In consultation with the national and municipal governments, port management implemented the online booking systems in 2015 to reduce congestion and streamline the movement of cargo.[13] Yet, as drivers and assistants explained, the systems produced stressful temporal pressures. Truck bans and industry regulations dictated the times and routes of port work and transformed truckers' lived geographies. The port construction projects featured in Maranan's film evicted and displaced Tondo's waterfront communities to expand roads and port facilities. Yet neoliberalism's own obsessions with managing the temporal rhythms of capitalist circulation created hardship and precarious housing for the truck drivers and trucking assistants who transport goods on these new roads.

When we excavate some of the histories that have produced this industrial landscape, we reveal a series of stratified layers of political, social, and economic processes. One of Maranan's final shots lingers on a backhoe reclaiming land along Manila Bay. Maranan subtly brings her audience back to the community activist's poignant observation: "They can easily reclaim hectares from the sea" (Figure 4). A simple question also returns: reclaim hectares for whom? It is in the expansive spaces and quiet moments of Maranan's beautifully shot film that she forces her audience to struggle with this question. We might implicitly know the answer, and this is certainly not a story that celebrates hope and resiliency. Yet, in the film's detailed storytelling and its intimate depiction of marginalized lives, the future—like

Manila." *Journal of the Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies* 6: 2947-2962.

[13] Kalambakal, Jupiter. 2017. "Manila International Container Terminal: Implementing The Terminal Appointment Booking System (TABS)." PTI (Port Technology International) Edition 75: Mega-Ports & Mega-Terminals. For more on the politics of traffic in Manila, see: Sidel, John. 2020. "Averting 'Carmageddon' through reform? An eco-systemic analysis of traffic congestion and transportation policy gridlock in Metro Manila." *Critical Asian Studies* 52 (3): 378–402.

the reclaimed land from the sea—always remains unsettled and perhaps malleable for more livable geographies.

Figure 4: Residents at a community meeting (Maranan, 2017)

Continuing Stories-so-far

Like the lives of the truck driver and pahinante in the port area and in the lives of the community in Jewel Maranan's film, violence is stifled, transformed into willful survival, and when violence comes back in another more virulent form, transgressively bypassed and creatively stomped like pests. Violence here is the globalized ideal of neoliberalization; the lives of commonfolks at the margins bore the brunt of these state-imposed cruelties. Will they outlive this gruesome practice of promoting open markets and free trade at their expense? Will the landscape change if they give in to the lure of relocation? Is home within the derelict place they are forced to leave behind, or to the yet unseen landscape of affordable housing, alienated livelihoods and continued dispossession? Or to paraphrase Agnes Varda, is there a landscape inside people? Maybe if we open up people, we will not find beaches, but residues of what we were forced to swallow which remain un-regurgitated in the course of our lives.

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