

Archipelagos of Narratives: (Re)constructing National and Diasporic Identities in Filipino
Art, From Martial Law to the Present

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ABSTRACT

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Art, From Martial Law to the Present

Laia Karmela Nalian, M.A.

As an archipelagic nation numbering over 7,000 islands, the Philippines is home to a vast number of cultures and peoples. This diversity means that one's identity hinged on region, language, or locale, despite the kinship these peoples have historically shared. Spanish and American colonization have only interfered in the Philippines' heterogenous cultural landscape, which has resulted in a Westernized sense of self fractured from its precolonial and indigenous roots. The Philippines' exposure to the global market, with foreign powers entering and overseas laborers departing, has rendered it a hotbed of cultural influences that also invites conflict and further dispersion of the country's sense of identity. As a nation whose cultural identity has been hegemonized by Western society, Filipinx abroad and island-side struggle to piece together elements of what it means to be 'Filipino'.

Through personal, social, and cultural excavation, Filipinx artists articulate national and diasporic qualities of Filipino identity that subvert the essentialist, colonial narratives historically imposed upon by Western powers. Anchored between martial law (1970s) and the present, I cite the works of Roberto Villanueva, Cian Dayrit, and Club Ate, who use their relationships to place in their work to critique grand narratives to unearth the stories, mythologies, and cultural practices eclipsed by history.

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Introduction

In other parts of Asia, language, customs, and religions clearly establish the difference. Such Asians make no bones about their alien nature; but Filipinos mislead with a Western veneer, create impressions and lull strangers into false premises and postures. If it is any comfort to the perplexed Westerner, other Asians too find Filipinos enigmatic; sometimes strangely Western, sometimes familiarly Asian, always neither one nor the other.¹

This passage, retrieved from a tourist guidebook on Filipino customs and etiquette, speaks to the aporetic quality that defines Filipinx identity and nationhood. Shaped by four hundred years of colonial administrations - Spanish and American occupation—the Philippines today continues to be a terrain for intersections between global and local development.² This, in turn, has carried over repercussions in a people grappling with linguistic, cultural, and racial complexities. The uneven process of crafting one homogenous, Filipinx identity can be summed up into a crisis of basic identity diluted by Spanish—and Catholic—oppression, American interference from beginning the early 20th century and globalization.³ And as a place whose experiences and peoples “can be described by a book” by and for the colonizer or foreigner, the authority of such texts reproduces the legacy of territorial and colonial domination over the archipelago for mass consumption.⁴

Diverse cultures, identities, and folklores shape the approximately 7,600-island archipelago and, historically, have posed complexities to the colonial order in their total unification under one nation. One notable example involves the politics of language: of the hundreds of spoken languages in the Philippines (Fig. 1), only two have been coined the official languages of the country and go so far as to represent it linguistically, English and Filipino. In this context, the term ‘Filipino’ designates a standardized version of Tagalog and

¹ Alfredo & Grace Roces, *Cultureshock! Philippines: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Singapore: Times Editions Pte Ltd, 1985), 7.

² E. San Juan Jr., “Towards a Decolonizing Indigenous Psychology in the Philippines: Introducing Sikolohiyang Pilipino.” *Journal For Cultural Research*, vol. 10 no. 1 (2006), 48.

³ Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire Masques Blanc* (Paris: Les Éditions Seuil, 1952): 46.

⁴ Edward Said, *L'Orientalisme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003): 113.

distinguishes itself from the ethnic group which also speaks it. Given as well that both Spanish and English were historically also given precedence towards establishing a national language, the political implications of this differentiation demonstrate the extent to which other Philippine indigenous languages (and bodies) have become excluded from the political sphere.

To this end, Filipino identity is a fragmented one, whose threads stretch overseas in a world that is increasingly becoming globalized. American interference in postwar national political affairs and the haphazard extraction of indigenous cultural elements by the same government that plunder the ancestral lands of indigenous communities only stress the extent of this division. Filipino-American scholar E. San Juan Jr. asserts that from a postcolonial perspective, the desire for newly independent peoples to reaffirm a sense of national identity is an integral aspect of decolonization. Filipina scholar Melisa Casumbal-Salazar identifies this facet of decolonization as an “anxiety of simulacra”.⁵ As a nation whose artistic and cultural identity had been hegemonized by Western ideas for over four centuries, Filipinx both at home and overseas suffer the existential consequences of a pastiche of identities superimposed and bisected into each other in place of retrieving something that encapsulates the term Filipino. Professor Sarita Echavez See summarizes the struggle in defining the parameters which concretize the plight surrounding Filipino identity:

Historically configured as the object of Western anthropological study, Filipinos cannot ‘have’ culture. Filipinos instead ‘are’ culture, displayed as dehumanized objects in past World’s Fairs and present-day natural history museums in the United States. This drastically uneven allocation of culture – who gets to have culture and who gets to be culture – is an intrinsic part of the workings of Western modernity and racism. However, Filipinos have internalized this colonial idiom and uncritically accepted the idea that Filipinos ‘have no culture’...⁶

⁵ San Juan Jr., “*Sikolohiyang Pilipino*,” 53; Melisa Casumbal-Salazar, “The Indeterminacy of the Philippine Indigenous Subject,” *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 41 no. 1 (2015), 84.

⁶ Sarita Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press): xxxiii-xxxiv.

The paradoxical nature of the Philippines as both a distant archipelago and a “satellite sphere” of global contact leads therefore to a conjuring of exotic, spiritual spaces, multicultural in this international exchange that also breed violence, exploitation, and political and social turmoil.⁷ Over the span of forty years, the Philippine political and social climate has shifted very little from Marcos’ regime to the quasi-fascist ideals espoused by former president Rodrigo Duterte. The struggle for workers’ and Indigenous Filipinx rights, freedom of self-expression, and against the corruption and unpunished extrajudicial executions that have highlighted martial law continue to the present.

My thesis argues that the articulation of national and diasporic identities by Filipino artists active during President Marcos’ era of martial law and the present day subverts the prevailing, essentialist narratives forged by centuries of Western colonial and imperial nation-building and religious hegemony.⁸ Much research has already been done on the specific negotiations in diasporic and national Filipino identities, respectively, in addition to the intangibility of defining Philippine indigeneity. However, there is little scholarship that has analyzed the intersections between these identities and within the social and political fabric of Philippine history, let alone through an artistic lens. Using representations and relationships to place – physically, cartographically, or culturally - the following artists to take a critical stance against the cultural essentialism and ‘grand narratives’ instrumentalized by and for neocolonial and neoliberalist agendas. I specifically examine the intersections between border thinking, Indigenous epistemologies, and sexuality in relation to Filipino identity.⁹

⁷ Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom”, *CR: The New Centennial Review* vol. 3 no. 3 (Fall 2003), 331. Footnote.

⁸ Although President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. was elected in 1965, he signed Proclamation No. 1081 on September 21, 1972, before the end of his second term, mandating martial law in the Philippines. This was a way to maintain political power and influence over the archipelago until his exile in 1985.

⁹ Rooted in decolonial theory, border thinking frees knowledge from colonial and modern contexts in favor of alternative ways of knowing and thinking. In a Filipino context, border thinking promotes a decolonial approach towards traditional knowledges, thought processes, and ways of thinking utilized by mainland and diasporic Filipinx people.

I begin my analysis with a survey on the history of the Philippines and its colonization in Chapter One. Chapter One also addresses the advent of Filipino nationalism, beginning during the Spanish Revolution, and sheds light on the paradoxes inherent in the formation of a monolithic cultural and national identity based on Western concepts of governance. Chapter Two discusses the late Roberto Villanueva, whose transient land art installations such as *Archetypes* intersected environmentalism and indigenous Filipino visual culture during the martial law period. Villanueva's decision to merge these elements pointedly examines the effects of urbanism and pollution in the Philippine capital, Manila, notably because of corruption and Western influence. Jumping forward two decades later, I study two examples of contemporary Filipino art that offer various reinterpretations on Filipinx national and diasporic identity, subverting the canon in the process. In Chapter Three, I focus on artist and activist Cian Dayrit, who weaves textiles and the visual language of maps to critique land dispossession and the displacement of ethnolinguistic communities at the hands of the Philippine government. I focus on his tapestries, *Neocolonial Landscape* and *Tropical Terror Tapestry*, because they exemplify a visualization of space inherent in the dynamics between land dispossession and identity erasure. In addition, Dayrit's work seeks to uplift the voices of peoples indigenous to the Philippines, similarly to Villanueva's incorporation of traditional Ifugao visual culture. Entering the diaspora, Chapter Four expands on this identity-based framework. Based in Australia, Justin Shoulder and Bhenji Ra of the art collective Club Ate celebrate queer Filipinx identities within the diaspora through transforming Filipino folklore and evoking queer Filipinx futurisms. Club Ate's video series *Ex Nilalang* opens a portal to alternative dimensions that, imbued with Filipino folklore, celebrates the experiences of queer diasporic Filipinx.

As work that seeks to unpack cultural and national identity, I would be remiss to not disclose my positionality. I am a bisexual Filipina artist and immigrant who is currently

residing as an uninvited guest on unceded Indigenous lands that are under the custody of the Kaninen'kehá:ka Nation, and whose research has been carried out on Tiohtià:ke/Mooniyang/Montréal. Having immigrated to the U.S. at an age where I had a recollection of my childhood in the Philippines, my identity as a Filipina fluctuates within certain contexts. This research originally sprung from a place of childhood nostalgia, homesickness and memories of the Philippines that only exist in my mind's eye. However, my experiences navigating spaces and interactions with other Filipinx/os in the diaspora and at home also shaped the parameters of my research. The language barrier between myself and my Filipinx peers, who were first or second-generation immigrants and did not grow up speaking Tagalog or any other Filipino language contrasted the solid relationship I maintained with my farmer and working-class relatives in the homeland. I write therefore from a crossroads; not necessarily to piece together the multifaceted puzzle of identity but rather shed further light on how identities converge and resonate with each other.

Theoretical, Methodological, and Positional Foundations

My research is primarily grounded in postcolonial and decolonial studies, contemporary art history, and Filipinx studies. Over the course of my research, I developed several questions, including the following: how do the legacies of colonialism, bordering, and imperialism shape the sociocultural and political dynamics within the Philippines today? In what ways does space intersect with the processes of retrieving and celebrating culture and identity? What is there to say about the relationships between urbanized Filipinx artists and the integration of indigenous aesthetics? In the same vein, how does examining the relationships between urbanized and indigenous Filipinx/a/os illuminate the dynamics of cultural production on a national scale? These inquiries helped situate the brunt of my research and the theoretical and methodological frameworks that guide it.

Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Zeus Salazar operate as the foundation of my research. Said's seminal text *L'Orientalisme* conceptually attends to how Western Orientalists, through images of the Orient by scholars and travelers alike, constructed the Orient to justify colonial domination of the Other. He speaks to the conjuring of the Orient as a sociopolitical, ideological, scientific, and fantastic subject by Orientalism which also stripped the Orient of any form of agency.¹⁰ This notion of the Other has already come into play in the past, notably within the work of Frantz Fanon, who engages with its social-psychological effects due in part to its construction by colonialism and racism. In *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, Fanon's existential approach to racialized subjectivity demonstrates the extent to which colonialism morphs human beings and one's very sense of reality in total domination. He counters the essentialism inherent within colonial power structures, such as the construction of blackness by white society with a vision of subjectivity that negates these schemas, into a zone of non-being inside which calls a rebounding "yes vibrating with cosmic harmonies."¹¹

The work of Filipino historian and anthropologist Zeus A. Salazar complements my postcolonial foundation as it advocates for an 'indigenized' approach to Philippine historiography and academic discourse. Part of Salazar's work concerns an exclusion of Western or foreign concepts and languages to orient discourses towards local cultures rather than outsiders' interests.¹² For example, his text, *Ang Pantayong Pananaw*, or "The *Pantayo* Perspective" critically responds to Philippine history and historiography that had previously been written about from a Western point of view. Combining the root word "tayo" and the

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalisme*, 15. Original translation: *Bref, à cause de l'orientalisme, l'Orient n'a jamais été, et n'est pas un sujet de réflexion ou d'action libre.*

¹¹ Fanon, *Peau Noire*, 14. Original text: « *Nous montrerons ailleurs que souvent ce qu'on appelle l'âme noire est une construction du Blanc.* »; Ibid, 8. Original text: « *L'homme est un OUI vibrant aux harmonies cosmiques.* »

¹² Zeus A. Salazar, "Ang Pantayong Pananaw Bilang Diskursong Pangkabihasnan". In *Pantayong Pananaw: Ugat at Kabuluhan* (Quezon City: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 2000), 2. Original text: ... *kabuuang nababalot sa, at ipinapahayag sa pamamagitan ng isang wika; ibig sabihin, sa loob ng isang sagsasariling talastasan/diskursong pangkalinangan o pangkabihasnan.*

prefix “pan-”, the title alludes to an inclusive/exclusive approach to history.¹³ Much of Philippine history has been documented and written about by foreigners, from Pigafetta’s journals to Dean Worcester’s ethnographic photography, which extracts elements of Filipino culture while excluding the histories of its inhabitants. Ultimately, Salazar sought to reform the dissemination and teaching of Philippine history by rejecting the Western imperialist discourses that historically shaped it.

Although Fanon, Said, and Salazar provide the groundwork of this research, postcolonialism’s shortcomings stem from a lack of inclusivity within the scholarship on the grounds of gender identity and race, referring to the affected parties as solely masculine. In addition, the ontological shortcomings within Salazar’s scholarship include a failure to address other issues such as class inequality and state-sponsored violence against marginalized communities, including peasants and ethno-linguistic groups, because of his focus on the privileged elite minority during martial law. Therefore, I utilize a decolonial methodology to address the present-day structural violence at the hands of the elite minority who continue to profit of and perpetrate the same hegemonic, colonial institutions that historically oppressed them. I refer to Mignolo’s concept of border thinking in relation to decoloniality as the grounds for a division from Western notions of territory and how previously colonized countries imagine borders. In addition, the link Mignolo presents between immigrant consciousness and border thinking builds on the intersections between diasporic identities and decolonization.¹⁴ I also use Sylvia Wynter’s notion of race to articulate the human condition, i.e., the theological and philosophical evolution from ‘human’ to ‘Man’ that is defined by racial and class privilege, and the latter’s sheer

¹³ A translation for “pantayo” would be “from us for us”, which conceptually embodies a similar connotation to terminology such as “mutual aid” or solidarity. Likewise, “pangkami” means “from us only us”. The nuance between “tayo” and “kami” lie in who or what is excluded physically or conceptually.

¹⁴ Walter Mignolo, “Geopolitics,” 274.

overrepresentation.¹⁵ Wynter also includes the present-day struggles of this overrepresentation in relation to race, class, gender, the environment, and the unequal distribution of the planet's resources.¹⁶ Scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith also informs my research through her criticism of Western frameworks of knowledge and research practices from the position of an indigenous, colonized woman.¹⁷ I especially concentrate on Tuhiwai Smith's critique of the 'researcher's gaze' and the decentering of the West as the center of legitimate knowledge and, therefore, a superior civilization.¹⁸

Conceptualizing my research from my diasporic perspective was also imperative to highlighting the visual and conceptual ways Filipinx identities converge and disperse across the globe. E. San Juan Jr.'s writing on the Filipino diaspora has been essential to my research. Focusing on the Filipino-American perspective, his essay, "The Filipino Diaspora" surveys the history and sociocultural Professor Sarita Echavez See's book *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance* is a pointed exploration of Filipino-American visual and performance artists who engage with the aftermath of U.S. colonialism in the Philippines. Echavez See contextualizes the Filipino diaspora and its tensions with the homeland under America's amnesia over its history of imperialism. Although written from a Filipino-American position, both *The Decolonized Eye* and "The Filipino Diaspora" establish the foundations of diasporic identity and the transnational dissemination (and even disruption) of culture. Mignolo contributes to this theoretical framework by critically examining the overlaps between the diaspora, decoloniality, and border thinking from both sides of the Pacific.

Finally, Indigenous scholarship has also enriched my methodology. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg author Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's book *As We Have Always Done* is a

¹⁵ Wynter, "Unsettling," 260.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 1.

¹⁸ Ibid, 67.

cornerstone of Indigenous critical writing and for this thesis. Simpson's framework of Nishnaabeg intelligence and her use of the concept of grounded normativity serve as both a theoretical and methodological point of departure for this research by allowing me to examine the meaningful intersections between indigeneity, resistance, and the formation towards a tangible Filipino identity.¹⁹ In particular, grounded normativity helped to differentiate from the shallow 'curation' of Filipinx identity as described by Salazar. The book's chapters "The Dispossession of Kwe" and "Land as Pedagogy" also contributed to a more meaningful and mindful analysis of the works I chose. Both chapters dive into land and autonomic dispossession at the hands of the Canadian settler state, under legislation, exploitation, or naturalization, and the resulting transformation of Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous peoples and their lands into capital.²⁰ "Land as Pedagogy" addresses both this dispossession and the ways engagement with the land through pedagogy poses a direct confrontation with settler colonialism and colonial violence. Indigenous knowledges, spirituality, and ways of thinking are embedded within land practices, which directly contests settler authority and land exploitation.²¹

¹⁹ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

²¹ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 166.

CHAPTER ONE: Piecing Together a *Nasyon*: An Overview of Philippine History

Prior to Spanish contact in the 16th century, the various ethno-linguistic groups that populated the archipelago did not identify themselves under one single banner, although they shared cultural and racial affinities and fostered kinship between one another.²² Efforts to unify all 7,600 islands began under Spanish conquest through Christianization under the colonizers' civilizing mission.²³ A race-based colonial caste system was also established, which also established the creation of the *ilustrados* (Fig. 2). The *ilustrados* were middle-class Filipinos with access to education outside the Church and with the advantage of traveling and studying abroad in European countries, such as Spain. Their secular education in European institutions exposed them to ideas oriented towards the social and political conditions of their time.²⁴ These ideas included liberalism and nationalism, the latter of which was heralded by prominent *ilustrados* such as writer José Rizal. Filipino revolutionaries took this nationalism in stride, calling for a movement of liberation from Spain that soon triggered the Philippine Revolution at the end of the 19th century. Simultaneously, American forces began involved in the conflict during the Spanish-American War in 1898. The Treaty of Paris, issued the same year, ended the war, and saw Spain cede control of the Philippines and its other colonies to the United States. In addition to continuing Spain's civilizing mission, the Philippine archipelago saw changes such as the establishment of English as the official language and the implementation of secularized, Western educational systems. The latter sought to Americanize the population by way of establishing colonial mentality and

²² Salazar, "Pantayong Pananaw," 4. Original text: "*Bago makaugnay ang mga dayuhang Kastila noon ika-16 na dantaon, wala pang iisang pantayong pananaw ang mga grupong etnolingguwistiko sa buong archipelago, sa kabila ng kanilang pagiging magakakamag-anak...*"

²³ Although a majority of the Philippine archipelago was conquered by the Spanish, the indigenous peoples of the Cordilleras in northern Luzon and the Islam-practicing Moros of southern Mindanao resisted colonization for 350 years until American occupation.

²⁴ Salazar, "Pantayong Pananaw," 6. Original text: "*Dahil ang edukasyon ng mga ilustrado ay hind isa seminary, mas nakauton sa tunay na daigdig (higit sa lahat, sa kalagayang panlipunan at pampulitika) ang kanilang pag-isip.*"

patriotism. It would not be until the aftermath of the Second World War, in the last half of the twentieth century, that the world saw the beginnings of a Filipino nation take shape.

E. San Juan Jr. precises that the rise of nationalism began during the 1960s in reaction to American interference in Philippine affairs and the Vietnam War. This incited the “political mobilization” of students, women, peasants, communists, and workers threatening the U.S. and President Ferdinand Marcos.²⁵ Marcos, who was denounced for fraud during the 1969 re-election by protestors and under fear of a communist “insurgency,” proclaimed martial law over the Philippine archipelago in 1972 (Fig. 3).²⁶ As a necessary measure to “save the republic and reform society,” his government effectively suspended all constitutional rights, including the closure of Congress, the dissolution of the political party system, and assuming all judiciary powers.²⁷ The subsequent fourteen years of Marcos’ dictatorship were marked by state violence, censorship, curfews, and civil unrest. Marcos also maintained a strong alliance with the U.S., whose military bases were still in operation, while accumulating debt that pushed the country into a recession. The mid-1980s saw a turning point in Marcos’ government. Benigno Aquino Jr., a staunch critic of President Marcos, was assassinated on arrival to Manila’s international airport in 1983 after spending three years in the United States due to medical reasons.²⁸ The aftermath captured for the world to see exposed the full extent of the regime’s inhumanity and increased anti-Marcos sentiment. In 1986, the Epifanio de Los Santos Avenue (EDSA) Revolution, also known as the People Power Revolution (Fig. 4) toppled the Marcos administration, leading to Corazon Aquino’s accession to presidency and the Marcos family’s exile to Hawaii.

²⁵ San Juan Jr., “*Sikolohiyang Pilipino*,” 52.

²⁶ Portia L. Reyes, “Claiming History: Memoirs of the Struggle against Ferdinand Marco’s Martial Law Regime in the Philippines,” *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 33 no. 2 (July 2018), 462.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 459; *Ibid*, 463.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 466.

Post-EDSA, the Aquino administration endeavored to dismantle the institutions used by Marcos and restore peace to the country. President Aquino promised economic, labor, and government reform, and reconciliation with Indigenous Filipino groups such as the Muslim Moros. However, the populace grew increasingly disillusioned by the administration with the slow response to economic revitalization and interpersonal conflict within President Aquino's own Cabinet.²⁹ The latter significantly complicated Aquino's tenure with Marcosian loyalists being appointed and other conflicts of interest towards centralizing labor. Aquino's failure to issue the labor and agrarian reform she had initially promised resulted in the death of 13 farmers during a rally near the presidential Malacañang Palace, which is known today as the Mendiola Massacre.³⁰ The sociopolitical tensions and frustration rampant during the Aquino administration ebbed following the election of President Fidel V. Ramos, but the Philippine government saw a slew of scandals and corruption by the 21st century.³¹

The election of President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 spurred a period marked by controversies such as The War on Drugs, which has been denounced for its extrajudicial killings of mainly impoverished Filipinx/a/os. In addition, the Duterte administration entered conflict with the indigenous, Muslim-practicing Moro communities in the southern part of the island of Mindanao and posed a threat to freedom of the press. Contemporary Philippine politics has seen the culmination of this sociopolitical tension with the election of Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of former president Ferdinand Marcos and a participant of the political dynasties that have maintained its grip on Philippine society.

²⁹ David A. Rosenberg, "The Philippines: Aquino's First Year," *Current History* vol. 86 no. 519 (April 1987), 55.

³⁰ Joel Rocamora, "Discontent in the Philippines," *World Policy Journal* vol. 8 no. 4 (Fall 1991), 638.

³¹ See, for example, M.R. Thompson, "Presidents and 'People Power' in the Philippines: Corazon C. Aquino and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo." In *Dynasties and Female Political Leaders in Asia: Gender, Power, and Pedigree* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013).

Fragments: Towards a “National Culture”

When examining the characteristics of Filipino identity, imperial and colonial influences are just some of the layers that have impeded the peoples’ conception of a culture and identity that is wholly Filipino. During the 19th century, the nationalist sentiment that the *ilustrados* developed stemmed from their educated background insofar as their opportunities to study abroad exposed them to European liberal and nationalist ideas. Filipino nationalism supported the idea that Filipinos were equipped with the knowledge and reason to govern their own land as their colonizers. Nationalists expressed their ideas of liberation and cultural sophistication in the language of the colonizers using the very concepts that they learned from them.³² This paradigm of reference to the colonizer/foreigner would impact the formation of a ‘national culture’. Walter Mignolo argues that the ranking of languages *not* of European or the Greco-Latin family were decidedly inferior, and by extension the people who spoke them.³³ In the case of the Philippines, the *ilustrados*’s privileged backgrounds and ability to communicate with their colonizers meant they possessed “the world expressed and implied by that language” in comparison to the ethnic lower classes.³⁴ By the time of the Spanish Revolution, these conditions allowed the *ilustrados* to not only inherit their society from their colonizers, but to establish a Filipinx elite who benefitted from their newfound socio-cultural capital.³⁵ Salazar adds that as a result, “Filipino intellectuals would be imprisoned within the framework of American and Western thought.”³⁶ This referential relationship inherent within

³² Salazar, “Patayong Pananaw,” 8. Original translation: “*At ang mga ideya, konsepto at iba pang elementong pangkalinangan na kanilang gagamitin ay yaong mga natutunan nil amula sa, at naiintindihan ng, mga kolonyalista*”.

³³ Walter Mignolo, “Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: on (de)coloniality, border thinking and epistemic disobedience,” *Postcolonial Studies* vol. 14 no. 3 (2011), 275.

³⁴ Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 16. Original text: « Un homme qui possède le langage possède par contrecoup le monde exprimé et impliqué par ce langage. »

³⁵ Salazar, “Patayong Pananaw,” 8.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 12. Original translation: “*Sa madaling sabi, makukulong ang mga intelektuwal na Pilipino sa balangkas ng kaisipang Amerikano at Kanluranin.*”

Filipino identity and culture is one of the two factors that contributes to its simultaneous fragmentation.

Part of the complexity in defining a Filipino ‘national culture’ also involves the relationship between urbanized, Westernized Filipinx people and the ethno-linguistic groups across the archipelago. Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that:

The ‘idea’ of the West became a reality when it was represented back to indigenous nations through colonialism. By the nineteenth century colonialism not only meant the imposition of Western authority over indigenous lands, indigenous modes of production and indigenous law and government, but the imposition of Western authority over all aspects of indigenous knowledges, languages, and cultures.³⁷

In the spirit of Salazar’s previous commentary on the *ilustrados*, Tuhiwai Smith’s quote highlights the assimilation of colonized peoples such as it affects their ways of being and relating to one another. I raise a cultural example of this tension: in 1972, the National Artist Award was created as a means of recognizing significant contributions to the Philippine arts. Criteria to be eligible for the award include Philippine citizenship for ten years, artists who have helped foster a sense of nationhood through their work and have received national and/or international recognition.³⁸ Twenty years later, the National Living Treasure Award was established, conferred to traditional artists who “reflect the diverse... cultural traditions that transcend their beginnings to become part of our national character.”³⁹ The cognitive dissonance intrinsic to the creation of these programs captures the Filipino anxiety of proving the existence of an authentic, national culture. As the National Artist prize can be awarded for art forms of Western origin, the National Living Treasure is only considered for the tangible, cultural heritage possessed by an indigenous person, not necessarily by their personhood. Casumbal-Salazar describes this relationship as the

³⁷ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 67.

³⁸ NCCA as cited in Casumbal-Salazar, “The Indeterminacy”, 87.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

“subject” versus the “artifact.”⁴⁰ The irony in the support for preserving ‘national heritage’ while turning a blind eye to the state violence against indigenous Filipino groups demonstrates the superficial desire to prove to the international community a newly independent nation’s capacity for cultural sophistication.

The complexity in articulating indigeneity can also be witnessed across the Filipinx diaspora. In his essay “The Filipino Diaspora”, E. San Juan’s six theses describe the ways in which diasporic Filipinx/a/os tap into their heritage: notably the “myths and memories of the homeland” borne of nostalgia and traditions.⁴¹ Within the expanse of history and imagination, diasporic methods of preserving the vestiges of one’s origins also conjure Indigenous identity. This, according to Filipina scholar Melisa Casumbal-Salazar, is to “oppose the persistence of colonial historical narratives and hierarchies of difference, roots itself in genealogies of anti-colonial resistance and flourishing, and articulates itself in and through Filipino languages and thought-worlds.”⁴² In the case of the American diaspora, Filipinx-Americans are vulnerable to both hypervisibility and invisibility, the latter being a product of America’s own imperial amnesia and oppression of Filipinx-Americans.⁴³

Returning to the politics of language, Salazar’s choice to write exclusively in Tagalog points to the limitations of Western languages such as English and Spanish to capture the meaning of conditions and ways of thinking and feeling in Filipinx/os’ lived experiences.⁴⁴ I too am mindful on my choice of language as I navigate a subject under the institutional framework of academia. Navigating the repercussions of the overt corporate nation-state, it is essential to keep in mind the underlying intersecting mentalities and perceptions that

⁴⁰ Ibid, 90.

⁴¹ E. San Juan Jr., “The Filipino Diaspora,” *Philippine Studies* vol. 49 no. 2 (Second Quarter 2001), 262.

⁴² Casumbal-Salazar, “The Indeterminacy,” 81.

⁴³ Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye*, 127.

⁴⁴ Salazar’s use of Tagalog in his writing, while sets him apart in the academic sphere, also brings to attention the limitations in that decision. After all, the Philippine archipelago consists of more than 7,600 islands with over 120 languages spoken. Given that Tagalog is now second behind English as a language also spoken by the educated, the ongoing paradigm of linguistic accessibility in the Philippines continues.

contradict and subscribe to the imperial or capitalist agenda. The political and social turmoil during martial law sparked a generational shift in consciousness among Filipinx artists and scholars, who began to reflect on the relationships between identity, history, and place. For Filipinx artists, art functioned to explore their communities' stories while interrogating national history, work that continues into the present.

CHAPTER TWO: Ephemeral Monuments: Sustainability, Indigeneity, and Community

in Roberto Villanueva's *Archetypes: Cordillera's Labyrinth*

Lapit mga kaibigan, at makinig kayo

Ako'y may dala-dalang balita galing sa bayan ko

Nais kong ipamahagi ang mga kwento

At mga pangyayaring nagaganap sa lupang ipinangako

- Asin, *Balita* (News)⁴⁵

At the height of his career in 1989, installation artist and filmmaker Roberto Villanueva tapped into the form of the labyrinth in the creation of his land installation *Archetypes: Cordillera's Labyrinth* (Fig. 5). Constructed on the grounds of the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Baguio, a wall of reeds spirals inwards for 2,000 feet and terminates at a round stone platform called a *dap-ay* (Fig. 6). This space functioned as a sacred meeting place for the Ifugaos, an ethno-linguistic group located in the mountainous northern Luzon, and with whom Villanueva collaborated in the creation of *Archetypes*. Over a span of two weeks, visitors walked through the twelve-minute path, with no resting stops along the way, to arrive at the secluded inner space.⁴⁶ Villanueva envisioned a work that fused community participation, environmental advocacy, and the Ifugao values to juxtapose the commercial land exploitation and deforestation taking place in the country.

Roberto Villanueva's practice initially developed under the cultural sphere of American influence, having been trained in Western painting and sculpture. Although his adoption of Ifugao knowledge and aesthetics would come to him later in life,

⁴⁵ Filipino folk band Asin released *Balita* in 1979 at the height of martial law in the Philippines. The band differentiated themselves from the popular music of the time with their socially conscious lyrics such as this song. The opening lyrics describe the narrator bringing news of their domicile, alluding to the tragedies occurring in southern Mindanao against the Indigenous Moro groups.

⁴⁶ Katrin De Guia, "The Filipino Culture-Bearer Artist as Shaman: Roberto Villanueva: The *Mumbaki* One." In *Kapwa: The Self In the Other – Worldviews and Lifestyles of Filipino Culture-Bearers*, ed. Katrin De Guia (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 2005), 57.

environmentalism has remained a steady focus of his practice.⁴⁷ Scholar Midori Yamamura writes that Villanueva's regular travels to the island of Palawan since adolescence exposed him to its tropical rainforests rich in biodiversity, remaining "almost untouched... during the colonial period."⁴⁸ Witnessing the steady rise of pollution in the city and dwindling forests, Villanueva began to politicize his work.⁴⁹ For example, his documentary *The Forest Is Newly Grown*, a film commissioned by the Bureau of Forestry, captures the rapid deforestation taking place, from illegal logging to the spread of monocultural woodlands.⁵⁰ Shot in collaboration with the United Filmmakers Organization, who sought to blend art with environmental activism, the film concludes with footage of forest preservation practices based on indigenous knowledge to encourage reforestation.⁵¹

In 1978, Villanueva and his family moved to the city of Baguio due the rising dissent in Manila. They followed a similar wave of relocation among artists and those seeking political asylum from Manila, seeking to escape the violence and persecution under Marcos. Baguio was nestled in the Cordilleran Mountain Range, a region home to different ethno-linguistic communities such as the Ifugao and Kalinga. The Cordillera peoples succeeded in preserving and maintaining their traditions, cultures, and ways of life despite colonization. Its mountainous terrain impeded full assimilation of the region unlike most of the archipelago. The Cordilleras' autonomy and historical resistance to colonization attracted artists, scholars, and thinkers during the 1970s because of Marcos' violent, capitalist regime that benefitted foreign parties.

Villanueva's rejection of his Western training in favor of indigenous values and aesthetics reflected a generational shift in consciousness among Filipino artists, scholars, and

⁴⁷ Yamamura, "Archetypes," 122.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 125.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 136.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 125.

⁵¹ Ibid.

thinkers in the 1970s. Filipino artists of the time turned away from Western paradigms and conventions of artistic beauty and merit. Instead, they chose to reference colonial history and precolonial sources within their artistic practices.⁵² The transition towards indigenization among Filipinx artists of the time reflected what people experienced within the social and political climate of the 1980s.⁵³ As E. San Juan Jr. writes, local knowledge helped forge a “universalizing concept of peoplehood” embedded within a historically specific genealogy of struggle.⁵⁴ For Villanueva, the ways of living, knowing, and sense of community of the Cordillera peoples synthesized with his environmental advocacy. He began to envision the artist’s role as like that of the *mumbaki* in the same way they nurtured their communities spiritually and culturally.⁵⁵ The land is life, and he recognized that people “must reconnect with the terrain and geography of their Indigenous heritage if they are to comprehend the teachings and values of the ancestors, and if they are to draw strength... that is independent of colonial power...”⁵⁶ Villanueva successfully realized a series of ephemeral art installations, including *Archetypes: Cordillera’s Labyrinth*. The installation incorporated forms embedded in Ifugao visual culture and local community participation.⁵⁷ The work was also purposefully designed *not* to stand the test of time, borne from the artist’s environmental concerns. After “borrowing” the materials he used for his works, Villanueva reintegrated what he used; stones were returned to the river or a garden where they were found, the soil

⁵² San Juan Jr., “Sikolohiyang Pilipino,” 53.

⁵³ Yamamura, “Archetypes,” 122.

⁵⁴ San Juan Jr., “Sikolohiyang Pilipino,” 53.

⁵⁵ In Ifugao culture, *mumbaki* refers to a male shaman and spiritual leader who is responsible for performing *baki*, which are sacred rites and prayers to the deities. *Mumbaki* carried out these rites during public occasions, such as a harvest or for the welfare of a community member. Oftentimes they are considered the masculine counterparts to *babaylan*, another class of shamans in other parts of the Philippines; Yamamura, “Archetypes,” 135.

⁵⁶ Alfred Taiaiake and Jeff Corntassel, “Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism,” *Government and Opposition* vol. 40 no. 4 (2005), quoted in Kohir Zolia, “The Aporia of Indigeneity,” in *interventions* vol. 18 no. 4 (2016), 613.

⁵⁷ Yamamura, “Archetypes,” 136. Full quote: “Finally, to elaborate on the participatory aspect of *Archetypes*, even though Villanueva had a plan for his artwork, he left a huge share of the details to participants, making them “collaborators” as opposed to assistants.”

was “scattered on the ground”, and the charred remains of dried flowers and plants were recycled into pigment.⁵⁸

When considering the origin behind the name of his ephemeral installation, Villanueva had already conceived indigenous art as inherently archetypal.⁵⁹ In his text “Archetypes by Roberto”, the artist describes the source of this concept as one that “harks back to the depths of antiquity, back to primal roots. Archetypal forms are shared by all... regardless of time, space, and culture,” and that therefore, indigenusness was an “inherent direction of Filipino art.”⁶⁰ Labyrinths have long appeared throughout human history, from Ancient Greece and Egypt to Australian Aboriginal cultures.⁶¹ In Villanueva’s case, the spiral can also be found in the rice terraces of the Cordilleras (Fig. 7), built by the ancestors of the region’s ethno-linguistic peoples, and preserved by their descendants. Through demonstrating the ingenuity inherent within traditional Ifugao ways of thinking and practices, *Archetypes* subverted the colonial legacies of land exploitation, deforestation, and present-day environmental pollution to prove the existence of precolonial technical prowess and sustainable ways of working the land.

The attention *Archetypes* incited reached the city, and a curator from the Cultural Center of the Philippines invited Villanueva to present the work in Manila. Installed on a much larger scale into its metropolitan surroundings, *Archetypes* offered the city a different perspective on urban planning and the local environment. In its modernized space, the work inserted an indigenous perspective on the ways of living in the metropole. The labyrinth forced viewers to reflect on the reality of the city’s inhospitality—a city where pedestrians literally share the road with cars and other vehicles, for instance. Manila also suffers from

⁵⁸ Katrin De Guia, “The Filipino Culture-Bearer,” 55.

⁵⁹ Yamamura, “Archetypes,” 130.

⁶⁰ Roberto Villanueva, “Archetypes by Roberto,” quoted in Yamamura, Midori. “Archetypes: Cordillera’s Labyrinth,” *Antennae* vol. 2 (Summer 2021), 132.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 132.

heavy traffic congestion, with few public transportation options in the city due to the country becoming a market for the automobile industry under U.S. colonization.⁶² *Archetypes*' sensuous traits juxtapose Manila's concrete chaos; the "rustling music of the wind blowing through the *runo* reeds" offer auditory respite and evoke lush tropical foliage.⁶³ In a public space dominated by permanent and manmade structures, *Archetypes*' natural transience captures a sense of liberation as a work capable of traveling across different spaces and contexts while remaining anchored to its indigenous Philippine roots.

Archetypes distinguished itself as well from early land art, especially in its creative process and treatment of natural systems in a space. For example, the creation of Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (Fig. 8) involved blasting "244,800 tons of earth and rock" to form a trench into the land.⁶⁴ By contrast, Villanueva and his Ifugao peers constructed the *Archetypes* installation through traditional engineering and borrowing natural materials.⁶⁵ As writer Katrin De Guia recounts, he worked with indigenous and natural materials "as canvas' instead of 'on canvas.'"⁶⁶ In foregoing manmade machinery and land degradation and extraction, Villanueva highlights the extent of his concern for the environment that consciously reflects on place and the relationships between its living-and-nonliving constituents. This separation also lent a commentary on the Western consumerist and capitalist tendencies of the art world. In particular, the visual documentation and donation of Heizer's work to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 1984 pointed to the ironic profitability and reproduction of art.⁶⁷ Villanueva objected to this Western hegemonic framework by consecrating his installations to the earth. Despite the little documentation and

⁶² Yamamura, "Archetypes", 133.

⁶³ De Guia, "The Culture-Bearer," 57.

⁶⁴ Beth Carruthers, "Art, Sweet Art," *Alternatives Journal* vol. 32 no. 4/5 (2006), 26.

⁶⁵ Yamamura, "Archetypes", 133.

⁶⁶ De Guia, "The Culture-Bearer," 57.

⁶⁷ Yamamura, "Archetypes", 133-134. Full quote: "At odds with *Double Negative*, Villanueva's *Archetypes* refused to fit into a capitalist circuit or Western institutional framework."

exposure of *Archetypes* and other works, Villanueva ensured that his art remained free from a system that could perpetuate and profit off it. The Earth itself is its own monument that neither institution nor edifice can touch.

Community participation was integral to the organic nature of *Archetypes*. In addition to his collaboration with the Ifugao in installing the artwork, Villanueva invited *mumbaki* from the Cordilleras to “inaugurate” the completion of the *dap-ay* with a communal feast called *cañao* that traditionally celebrated life events.⁶⁸ Villanueva recognized the value of community-based art as a method of inviting people from all walks of life to reflect on their “indigenous cultural heritages” and their responsibility to the land.⁶⁹ *Archetypes* as a work invites engagement because it builds “a different world within which we live... fused to land in a vital way.”⁷⁰ From accounts of the walk through the labyrinth, visitors remarked a stirring feeling of solidarity when arriving at the *dap-ay*. Writer Guia Albano-Imperial recalls:

The labyrinth experience... begins with a creepy feeling of finding oneself in a blind situation. One hurries up to the next turn only to find a duplicate of the first alley. Anxiety increases with the third circling path, and the fourth, which seems to be the longest. Then quite suddenly a corner turns to the circle of warmth – a campfire which... evokes the feeling of home.⁷¹

The spirituality imbued within the creation and commemoration of *Archetypes* can also be found in the incorporation of traditional objects throughout the labyrinth’s corridors and, notably, the *dap-ay*. Traditional *dap-ays* included *bulul*, carved wooden figurines posed sitting or standing (Fig. 9) atop a base. In Ifugao culture, *bulul* represented the spirits of ancestors and were used to guard and protect rice crops and were included in healing and harvest ceremonies. Incorporating these highly symbolic and traditional objects is a testament

⁶⁸ Ibid, 135.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 20.

⁷¹ Yamamura, “Archetypes,” 135.

to the artist's goal of immersing the visitors into the breadth of culture and history that make up the Philippines. Villanueva recognized the significance of this facet of Ifugao knowledge and spirituality in the consecration of the space which Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes as:

... tremendous, ubiquitous source of wisdom that is the core of every system in the physical world. The implicate order provides the stories that answer all our questions. And the ways we are taught to access that knowledge is by being open to that kind of knowledge and by being engaged in a way of living that generates a close, personal relationship with our Ancestors and relations in the spirit world through ceremony, dreams, visions, and stories.⁷²

Navigating the labyrinth to gather at the same space, the communal *dap-ay*, cultivated both a process of reflection on heritage and a sense of kinship that encouraged people to care for the earth collectively. Villanueva conceived a decolonized space that bridged the social and cultural gaps between Filipinx/o groups, celebrating centuries of kinship and the lands upon which they reside.

⁷² Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 157.

CHAPTER 3: Unraveled Narratives: Cian Dayrit’s Embroidered Counter-Cartographies

In the forty years since the end of martial law, little has changed of the Philippine political and social climate. In the 1980s the People Power (EDSA) Revolution sought to incite change in the corrupt, elitist government that Marcos established.⁷³ Instead, the Aquino and Duterte administrations only confirmed the sheer influence Manila’s elite held over the country. For example, although President Corazon Aquino (1986-1992) succeeded in restoring order and democracy to the country after Marcos’ exile, the lack of agrarian reform her administration promised resulted in frustrations among farmers.⁷⁴ In addition, Presidents Aquino and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001-2010) both belonged to long-standing political and commercial dynasties, who ultimately benefited from the very Western frameworks that their predecessors, the *ilustrados*, appropriated. Filipino historian Zeus Salazar denounced the continuing exploitation and abuse of Filipinx/os by the influential elite and the government through their weaponization of class difference:

The example in politics has already been pointed out: to ensure election to Congress, politicians will speak the people’s language (Tagalog or P/Filipino and/or the language of the ethnolinguistic group they belong to), but upon arriving in Manila, they will make laws in English that cannot be understood by the majority... Thus, the political relationship between the people and the politician... does not rest upon true understanding. The understanding is hindered by the great cultural divide that the elite use to dominate through political power...⁷⁵

Nevertheless, advocacy for workers, impoverished communities, and ethno-linguistic peoples persists against the systemic violence and injustice with social and cultural grassroots organizations. For example, active since 2018, artist and activist Cian Dayrit utilizes cartography, needle, and thread to weave a critical lens on institutions of power and the

⁷³ The 1986 Revolution gathered millions of Filipinos to march along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, Manila’s principal artery, to end the Marcos dictatorship. The street name has been shortened to EDSA and became associated with the turning point of martial law.

⁷⁴ See page 12.

⁷⁵ Salazar, “Ang Pantayong Pananaw,” 16.

excess of violence. Drawn to activism as an undergraduate painting student at the University of the Philippines, Dayrit joined protests against the tuition-fee increases that were a response to the Arroyo administration's hefty allocations of the national budget to military and counterinsurgency operations in the provinces.⁷⁶ Dayrit's practice continues to develop in response to sociopolitical developments in the country, but at its core seeks to interrogate the ways in which art has "privileged narratives" over others in depictions of space.⁷⁷ He employs a form of cartography called counter-mapping that contests the state's spatial visions of territory.⁷⁸ Dayrit deploys counter-mapping to assemble multiple visions of space. It recognizes and reconciles the abstraction of land, including the multiple spaces that exist simultaneously.⁷⁹ Dayrit's socially-driven practice is also grounded in collaboration. Since 2016 he has collaborated with embroiderer Henry Caceres and has hosted counter-mapping workshops with students, activists, and farmers that help reconceptualize these communities' spatial narratives.⁸⁰ Because the state's partitioning of space habitually overrides the spatial perceptions of residents and communities, participants traced their histories to the land on which they reside to contest the state's indoctrination and possession of territory for economic or political means.

As a product of surveillance and observation, the map has historically been used as a nation-building tool within colonial and imperial pursuits, allowing a visual of colonized territory conducive to exploitation. Canadian author Charmaine Nelson states that the standardization of cartography in the West originates from its function to not only render a

⁷⁶ Marv Recinto, "How to Wipe Colonialism Off the Map: Cian Dayrit's Subversive Cartography." *ArtReview Asia* (13 December 2021). Accessed 21 May 2023. <https://artreview.com/how-to-wipe-colonialism-off-the-map-cian-dayrits-subversive-cartography/>

⁷⁷ William Kherbek, "Counter-Cartographies: An Interview with Cian Dayrit." *Berlin Art Link* (19 January 2021). Accessed 15 May 2023. <https://www.berlinartlink.com/2021/01/19/extraction-and-exploitation-an-interview-with-cian-dayrit/>

⁷⁸ Cian Dayrit, Ma. Simeona M. Martinez, Arnisson Andre C. Ortega, and Kristian Karlo C. Saguin, "Counter-Mapping for Resistance and Solidarity in the Philippines." In *This Is Not An Atlas*, kolektiv orangotango (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2019), 47.

⁷⁹ Dayrit, Simeona, Amisson, Ortega, and Saguin, "Counter-Mapping," 145.

⁸⁰ Recinto, "Subversive." Accessed 21 May 2023.

place visible, “chartable and measurable... but to re-imagine and re-present land itself as useful colonial apparatuses.”⁸¹ To that end, territorial representations also capture the tensions to “carve a space” in which identities are clearly defined.⁸² Mapping practices demarcate areas and regions for control by the state, the church, and other institutions of power and significance. As Tuhiwai Smith writes, three concepts constitute colonialism’s spatial vocabulary:

The line, (2), the center, and (3) the outside. The ‘line’ is important because it was used to map territory, to survey land, to establish boundaries and to mark the limits of colonial power. The ‘center’ is important because orientation to the center was an orientation to the system of power. The ‘outside’ is important because it positioned territory and people in an oppositional relation to the colonial center.⁸³

Western cartographic imagery abstracts land and therefore the viewer’s perception of it. Through this process of abstraction, maps deliver territorial representations subjective to the gaze of its creators and audience grounded on its alleged precision. Nelson also adds that vision is implicated in this process as it is equated with “surveillance and reconnaissance...” from the rendering of geography on paper and canvas with the absolute intention to be seen.⁸⁴ As a result, cartography itself facilitated a narrative of a colonial empire and its subjects.⁸⁵

Dayrit’s textiles unsettle this dynamic by fusing imagery, narrative, and thread to contest historical depictions of land and territories. He threads the eclipsed stories of the oppressed into handsewn-maps, occasionally super-imposed upon images such as in *Neocolonial Landscape* (Fig. 10). Fringed with black feathers, the background consists of a

⁸¹ Charmaine Nelson, “Colonialism and art.” In *Slavery, Geography, and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica* (London: Routledge, 2016), 41-58.

⁸² Walter Mignolo, “Colonial Situations, Geographical Discourses and Territorial Representations: Toward a Diatopical Understanding of Colonial Semiosis,” *Dispositio* vol. 14 no. 36/38 (1989), 94.

⁸³ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 55.

⁸⁴ Nelson, “Colonialism and art,” 42. Nelson also mentions the viewer’s participation within this visual exchange; because the individual can read the code and distinguish the visual elements of the cardinal directions, the foreground and background, they are provided access to the artist or cartographer’s intended vision of the space.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 45.

photo taken by Dean Worcester of an Aeta circle dance.⁸⁶ A public official during American occupation of the archipelago, Worcester's published photographs cultivated an image of Philippine exoticism in the American public sphere during the early 20th century. He also became infamous for his staunch opposition to Filipino independence from the United States. Framed by Worcester's colonial gaze and captured by the superiority of the camera's technology, this image of an indigenous ritual is overlaid by red embroidery thread by a topography informed by the displacement of the Aeta community from their ancestral lands in Luzon today.⁸⁷ A long path runs through this imaginary, embroidered terrain that bisects rivers and hills. Inscribed across the fabric is text related to "beautiful cars", settlements, machinery such as vehicles and radio towers, and an area marked off as 'new development' that appears to encroach upon a sacred mountain.⁸⁸

Dayrit's approach to visualizing this territory intervenes in conventional understandings of space. Within the context of *Neocolonial Landscape*, the work not only exposes neocolonial "visual unconsciousness", but it also confronts issues of land dispossession and displacement of the landless.⁸⁹ If Villanueva's *Archetypes* represents environmental sustainability through indigenous and community-based practices, Dayrit's *Neocolonial Landscape* critically examines the repercussions of territorial exploitation on the land and its caretakers. Betasamosake Simpson argues that the "largest attack on Indigenous Knowledge systems... is land dispossession" and explains that Nishnaabeg intelligence is anchored specifically in consensual relationships and community, including connections to land.⁹⁰ However, when this relationship is built on land dispossession, erasure, surveillance,

⁸⁶ Also spelled 'Agta', the Aeta peoples are an ethnolinguistic group indigenous to central Luzon and are related to the Negrito ethnic group.

⁸⁷ Louis Ho, *Threads and Tensions* (Singapore: Yeo Workshop, 2021), 26.

⁸⁸ Original text on the piece says "Magandang sasakyan."

⁸⁹ Dayrit, Simeona, Amisson, Ortega, and Saguin, "Counter-Mapping," 145.

⁹⁰ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 170; *Ibid*, 161.

and land destruction, it results in a loss of cultural knowledge and for displaced communities to be pushed to the periphery. As space that was historically viewed to “be tamed and brought under control,” the contemporary violence inherent within the piece acts as a profound reminder of the corporate and colonial forces behind the displacement of indigenous peoples in the Philippines and the terraforming of ancestral land over the past three centuries.⁹¹

The Aeta people photographed in the map’s background reference not only their visual exploitation within the American empire’s imaginary, but their present-day displacement that disregards their claims to the land. The obstacles indigenous Filipino groups face towards achieving recognition – and, therefore, legitimate claims to their ancestral lands – stem from “simultaneous, contradictory claims” to place, collective identity with one’s tribe, and a degree of historical resistance (or inclusion) since colonization.⁹² However, nomadic groups such as the Aeta struggle to find recognition and claims to their land due to their voluntary “un-mooring” within their territory.⁹³ This paradox inherent within Philippine indigeneity reflects the historical class stratification established by the Spanish and reinforced by the Americans and manifests twofold. First, indigeneity is superseded by a form of cultural governance that cherry-picks its desirable and culturally valuable elements of choice. Second, it forgoes the actual livelihood of indigenous communities, who are only valued by the cultural heritage they embody and can be flaunted internationally.⁹⁴ Western cartographic practices essentially “othered geographies already occupied and lived in by... indigenous peoples”, creating a center-periphery model of reference that echoed Tuhiwai Smith’s aforementioned spatial vocabulary.⁹⁵ Pushed literally

⁹¹ Ibid, 53.

⁹² Casumbal-Salazar, “The Indeterminacy”, 79.

⁹³ Ibid. Full quote reads: “For if indigenous identity can and should be un-moored from territoriality *in specific circumstances, as determined by indigenous peoples themselves*, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) provides no mechanism for this.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 88.

⁹⁵ Nelson, “Introduction,” in *Geography, Slavery, and Empire* (London: Routledge), 8.

to the peripheries of society, indigenous communities like Aeta continue to be exploited over land-grabbing and the exploitation of their ancestral homes and livelihoods.

Another example involves the Bagobo-Klata in the Davao Del Sur province of Mindanao. Historically, their ancestral domain includes the eastern slopes of Mount Apo, neighbored by the Bagobo-Tagabawa. Although they are identified as Indigenous Filipinos, they saw intrusions onto their land such as the development of a mansion by a religious sect and a neighboring banana plantation in the early 2000s.⁹⁶ However, despite these threats to their land and to their traditions and practices, the Bagobo-Klata have managed to adapt using their own traditional knowledge of the forest. The struggles that the Aeta and the Bagobo-Klata peoples face embody the reality of indigenous Filipinos in their pursuit of self-determination and to reclaim their land. Confronted by a literal landscape of large-scale infrastructural and mining projects, Dayrit's tapestry channels the Aeta people's circumstances, rooted in oppressive imperial agendas.

Although Worcester's photograph frames the objectification of its subjects under the colonial gaze, Dayrit's threaded topography destabilizes the canon and literally unravels the predominant narrative. The red-colored thread weaving together the landscape references the thousands of indigenous Filipino lives lost to centuries of assimilation, dispossession, and systemic violence, emphasizing its contrast with the monochromatic relic underneath. Red also symbolizes patriotism, courage, and revolution, represented in the Philippine flag. Dayrit negotiates these different meanings critically reflecting the inter/national histories that shape and contradict Philippine national identity.

Tropical Terror Tapestry (Fig. 11) continues Dayrit's explorations within the fault lines of cartography. Divided into three sections, the Philippines is displayed with thumbtacks

⁹⁶ Maria Rowena Beatriz Q. Inzon and Lucille Elna P. de Guzman, "Threatened Land, Threatened Lives: The Bagobo-Klata of the South," OVCRE, 4 March 2016. Accessed 16 September 2023. <https://ovcre.uplb.edu.ph/press/stories-from-the-field/item/122-threatened-land-threatened-lives-the-bagobo-klata-of-the-south>

pressed over various parts of the map. Ferns, leaves, and text frame the archipelago, the latter recounting different military bases and counterinsurgency programs during Duterte's regime against ethno-linguistic groups, workers, and impoverished communities. Images of state-sponsored oppression and militarism, such as red-tagging, forced displacement, and military camps, make up the side panels of the tapestry, once again in red thread (Fig 7). Across the main panel, Dayrit threads talismanic symbols with acronyms of Philippine military command centers in proximity to their region of surveillance.

This cartographic work directly references the visual language and arrangement of the 1734 Murillo Velarde map of the Philippine Islands (Fig. 12). Drafted and drawn during Spanish colonization, the map includes racialized portrayals of the archipelago's ethno-linguistic groups, as well as Chinese, Mughal, and Japanese peoples engaging in "vices or primitive behaviors" within the Spanish regime.⁹⁷ Dayrit refashions the map into a contemporary context, grounded in his "economic, political, and cultural reality" implicated within the narratives of dominance and oppression inherent within the Velarde map and cartography.⁹⁸ To this end, the map represents a social construction that offers a "re-description of the world in terms of relations of power, cultural practices, and priorities."⁹⁹ In an interview with Object Lessons Space, Dayrit explains that the map functioned as a "survey of the colony, and I now use that same format to survey the existing status quo of a semi-colony."¹⁰⁰ For example, a block of text on the tapestry recounts US-Philippine foreign relations, which have remained robust since American colonization:

The US and the Philippines are party to the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951, which states that both parties will protect each other when attacked by an external force.

⁹⁷ Joella Kiu, "In Place of a Map: The Counter-Cartographic as Artistic Intervention and Strategy," *Practice, Research and Tangential Activities (PR&TA)*, no. 1 (2021). Accessed 1 May 2023.

⁹⁸ Object Lessons Space, "Cian Dayrit on Counter-Cartographies, Making Shared Work and Grappling with Incredulous Confutations." *Object Lessons Space*. Accessed 22 May 2023. <https://objectlessons.space/Cian-Dayrit-on-Counter-Cartographies-Making-Shared-Work-and-Grappling>

⁹⁹ Nelson, "Colonialism and Art," 54.

¹⁰⁰ Object Lessons Space, "Cian Dayrit," Accessed 30 November 2023. <https://objectlessons.space/Cian-Dayrit-on-Counter-Cartographies-Making-Shared-Work-and-Grappling>

After many years, it has become clear that it has never been mutually beneficial. In fact, as the top patron of the AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines], the US has maintained dominant influence and indirect control over the military institution. While the US bases were removed from the country after widespread protests, the US has been maintaining continuous presence in the country since 2001, through a base in Zamboanga City. Joint military exercises between the US and the Philippines are regularly held within the framework of the US-RP Visiting Forces Agreement, signed in 1999. The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), signed in 2014, allows the US to enter and exit and maintain military presence in any point in the country.¹⁰¹

A stylized image of a bird with an olive branch above the acronym CENTCOM, the U.S. Central Command, nestled adjacent to the archipelago serves as visual irony to the two countries' relationship (Fig. 13). Dayrit stresses that the state-sanctioned oppression and military campaigns against Filipinx/os can be attributed to a long-term American influence entertained by the sociopolitical, intellectual, and historically subordinated elite. Echavez See attests that “the American Empire not only forgets imperialism... [it] also forgets that it forgets imperialism.”¹⁰² This lends pretense to the continuation of US-Philippine relations on the grounds of an “alliance” that overshadows the harsh reality of neocolonialism on the archipelago. As Wynter writes, the “echo” that the Filipino elite are capable of has trapped themselves in the “prescription of subordination and impoverishment” of the present conditions to which they belong to, including the oppression of their ‘lower-class’ brethren.¹⁰³ In this way, mapping state-sponsored and military violence against marginalized Filipinx communities exposes their history of displacement, surveillance, and vulnerability.

Embroidered within the factual text and the archipelago's flat land mass are target icons and talismans inspired by *anting-anting* (Fig. 14). Also known as *agimat*, *anting-anting* refers to both Filipino amulets and the form of magic that utilizes these talismans. These charms typically take the form of flat, round, or triangular golden pendants engraved with

¹⁰¹ Cian Dayrit, “*Tropical Terror Tapestry*,” 2020. Embroidery on textile (collaboration with Henry Carcese), 200 x 230 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

¹⁰² Echavez See, *The Decolonized Eye*, 45.

¹⁰³ Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling”, 329.

imagery and, during Spanish colonization, Latin inscriptions (Fig. 15). In addition to their spiritual meaning, *anting-anting* became associated with revolution, as they were worn by Filipino *insurrectos*, or rebels, against the Spaniards and Americans in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Dr. Nenita Pambid Domingo writes that the *anting-anting*:

... played a significant role in the Filipino people's motivation and ideation in fighting for freedom and in defending the motherland... the people's use of the *anting-anting* speaks of the richness, power, and resilience of indigenous culture in the face of overwhelming (physical and psychological) assault by colonial powers. Their employment of these amulets bespeaks of their agency.¹⁰⁴

This history was not lost on Dayrit and lent itself a critical lens to the establishment of anti-insurrection campaigns in the Philippines. Tension is sparked between the map and amulet as artifacts imbued with their proper associations. By weaving together the cultural associations between each object, Dayrit fabricates a challenge to (neo)colonial representations of the Philippines from a cartographic and anthropological point of view. As “byproducts of the research and solidarity work” that the artist actively participates in, *Tropical Terror Tapestry* is a testament to the contexts and narratives in which the work is produced.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Nenita Pambid Domingo, “Anting-anting: Why Bathala Hides Inside the Stone.” In *Back from the Crocodile's Belly: Philippine Babaylan Studies and the Struggle for Indigenous Memory*, ed. S. Lily Mendoza and Leny Mendoza Strobel (CreateSpace Independent, 2013), 62.

¹⁰⁵ Kherbek, “Interview with Cian Dayrit.” Accessed 15 May 2023.

<https://www.berlinartlink.com/2021/01/19/extraction-and-exploitation-an-interview-with-cian-dayrit/>

Mystifying the Diaspora: Club Ate's *Ex Nilalang*

The intracultural and social tensions across the archipelago also extend to overseas. According to Filipino-American scholar E. San Juan Jr., the Filipino diaspora stands out among other diasporic communities because identification with the Philippines is tied to language, region, or local culture, rather than with the nation as a whole¹⁰⁶. Since the establishment of Filipino contract labor in the early 20th century to Hawaiian plantations, Filipino migration has been marked by labor as overseas workers and laborers joined expatriates and refugees. Globalization has further enabled the transcultural exchange of merchandise, services, information, and people. The Filipino diaspora thus situates itself at a nexus of labor, migration, belonging, and fluid definitions of nationality.

Formed by artists Justin Taplacido Shoulder and Bhenji Ra in 2014, the collective Club Ate articulates the diaspora from a queer and community-oriented perspective. Club Ate operates out of Warang/Sydney, Australia, utilizing video and performance with a focus on connecting queer Asia-Pacific communities in Australia and the Philippines alike. Shoulder and Ra's creative relationship began in nightlife and "subcultural" spaces, where discussions of their practices inspired a collaborative dive into their shared Filipinx heritage.¹⁰⁷ From this point of departure they also developed a framework for event organizing and gathering. As suggested by the word *ate*, Tagalog for "big sister", the collective is intergenerational and uplifts their communities. Navigating the intersecting cultural contexts of the Philippine archipelago and the Australian island continent, in addition to their lived realities as queer diasporic Filipinx, the artists stress that identity is mutable and constantly transforming. Herein lies the potential to "collapse heteronormative kinship structures and expressions of gender and sexuality" by exploring alternative representations of relationships and ways of

¹⁰⁶ E. San Juan Jr., "The Filipino Diaspora," *Philippine Studies* vol. 49 no. 2 (Second Quarter 2001), 255.

¹⁰⁷ Kate O'Hara, "Apt8: An Interview with Justin Shoulder and Bhenji Ra." *Peril Magazine* (24 March 2016). Accessed 15 May 2023. <https://peril.com.au/topics/apt8-interview-with-justin-shoulder-and-bhenji-ra/>

being.¹⁰⁸ As scholar Michelle Antoinette writes, Shoulder and Ra’s approach extends beyond queerness as “sexual identification alone” to a rejection of binaries and heteronormativity.¹⁰⁹ Through the queering of ancestral myths and positioning their works within fictional spaces both fantastic and monstrous, Club Ate fabricates a framework that transcends space and time, navigating and threading together the past, present, and future that exists within and beyond nationally defined boundaries. Their multinational collaborations are a testament to the collective’s expanding “cosmos” of relationships and communities that tether their practice.¹¹⁰

Club Ate’s *Ex Nilalang* is a four-part series of “video-based portraits” that draws from Filipino folklore, ancestral history, and queer diasporic identities.¹¹¹ Each video depicts spirits and beings navigating the worlds around them. ‘Nilalang’ is a Tagalog word that carries the hybrid meaning of ‘creature’ and ‘to create’; therefore, the polyvalence inherent within the term invokes the culture’s organic and creative qualities. As a series, *Ex Nilalang* embraces the diverse cultural and gender identities it refers to, recognizing the multiple categories of belonging that diasporic communities inhabit. For Bhenji Ra of Club Ate, *Ex Nilalang* invited reflection “about the future and where we’ve come from.”¹¹²

The first video in this series, *Balud*, takes place on the island setting and community of Leyte. Performed by Tacloban City-based artist Jai Jai, she portrays a *manananggal*.¹¹³ A creature common in Filipino folklore, the *manananggal* impersonates a beautiful woman by

¹⁰⁸ O’Hara, “Apt8,” Accessed 15 May 2023. <https://peril.com.au/topics/apt8-interview-with-justin-shoulder-and-bhenji-ra/>

¹⁰⁹ Michelle Antoinette, “Monstrous Territories, Queer Propositions,” *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas* vol. 3 (2017), 59.

¹¹⁰ Johanna Bear, “Club Ate: Mythologies of Movement,” *Art AsiaPacific* (March 2023). Accessed 1 May 2023. <https://artasiapacific.com/issue/club-ate-mythologies-of-movement>

¹¹¹ Antoinette, “Monstrous”, 61; Bear, “Mythologies of Movement,” *Art AsiaPacific*, accessed 20 May 2023. <https://artasiapacific.com/issue/club-ate-mythologies-of-movement>

¹¹² Antoinette, “Monstrous”, 62; Eugenia Lim, “Bhenji Ra on embodying future forms,” *Assemble Papers* (29 March 2018). Accessed 20 May 2023. <https://assemblepapers.com.au/2018/03/29/embodying-future-forms-bhenji-ra/>

¹¹³ ‘Manananggal’ in Tagalog translates to “the self-separating one”, from the verb ‘tanggap’ meaning “to remove”, hence the creature’s name.

day and transforms into a monster at night by detaching her upper torso from her lower body and growing wings to fly off and search for human prey (Fig. 16). The creature's notable targets include pregnant women, the sick, and adult men. The demonization of *aswang* like the *mananggal* was also maximized by Catholic missionaries during the colonial period. Pre-colonial mythology described *aswang*, such as *manananggal*, as wrathful spirits against those who did not properly perform their rituals. By the Spanish colonial era, the *aswang* narrative had shifted to represent the unbaptized or possessed by sin, through which their only form of redemption was strong faith in Christianity.¹¹⁴ The vilification of the *aswang*, such as *mangkukulam* and *manananggal*, by Spanish Catholic missionaries also reflected their colonial attitudes and treatment towards women and gender non-conforming people.¹¹⁵ One notable example is *babaylan*, cultural and spiritual leaders in precolonial Philippine society. Historically, women and gender non-conforming people, or *asog*, occupied this high-ranking position.¹¹⁶ *Babaylan* therefore threatened the Spanish colonizing and Christianizing mission because of their influence and as the antithesis to their doctrine.

Balud opens in a documentary style to the rolling hills of the village of San Jose and the surrounding sea, which then cuts to a group of local children in a festive performance who turn to face the camera, singing and dancing. The camera then pans to show the ruins of local village homes, alluding to the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, whose arrival on the Philippines in November 2013 left lasting wreckage on the archipelago and especially the island of Leyte.¹¹⁷ The camera shifts to the closeup of a mythical creature, known as the *manananggal*, and whose appearance is both alluring and mysterious (Fig. 16). As the frame

¹¹⁴ Brenda Rodriguez Alegre, "From Asog to Bakla to Transpinay," *Alon: Journal for Filipinx American and Diasporic Studies*, vol. 2 no. 1 (2022), 57.

¹¹⁵ In the Philippines, *mangkukulam* are witches who specialize in curses.

¹¹⁶ Roxas, "Essential But Not Essentialized: An Analysis of Sex and Gender Within Diasporic Filipinx/a/o *Babaylan* Discourse," *On Politics* vol. 14 no. 2 (Spring 2021), 90.

¹¹⁷ The Associated Press, "Super typhoon Haiyan slams into central Philippines." *CBC* (7 November 2013). Accessed 20 May 2023. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/super-typhoon-haiyan-slams-into-central-philippines-1.2417858>

zooms out, more of her features are revealed: beginning with her glittering turquoise skin, long dark hair, jeweled earrings, and her haunting, saddened gaze, to a pair of large wings and an altar upon which her torso is posed. The *manananggal* breaks into song, a traditional Waray-language lament called “Balud” that is indigenous to the Visayas region of the Philippines, particularly the islands Leyte and Samar. The video concludes in silence to show the *manananggal* and her altar at the center of a basketball court. The camera also reveals a crowd of children dispersed around the court, watching her performance raptly.

Contrary to the monstrous reputation of this mythological creature, the *manananggal* that Jai Jai embodies is beautiful and melancholic in her glimmering resplendence. She laments the loss of the other half of herself, now substituted by an altar adorned with candles and flowers (Fig. 17), to an audience of children whose attention emphasizes even further the pathos invoked in Jai Jai’s performance and the contradictions to the *manananggal*’s predatory reputation. As a celebrated performer in her own right in Tacloban City, Jai Jai’s embodied performance emphasizes her connection to the city. Having organized pageants for the local *bakla*/trans-femme community, these events took place in local, public spaces such as basketball courts and exuded an open atmosphere to the community.¹¹⁸ Ra and Shoulder also described that Jai Jai’s pageants attracted local families and children alike, the latter which often approaching the performer with curiosity and questions about the events taking place.¹¹⁹ In addition, the video’s conception two years after Typhoon Haiyan captures a sense of vulnerability and tenderness between the rubble and destruction all over Leyte Island and Jai Jai’s *manananggal* performance. *Balud* transforms local histories and mythologies to celebrate the lives of the present and those to come.

¹¹⁸ Antoinette, “Monstrous”, 66.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Full quote reads: “There is this great openness to the performance/pageant scene that includes families and is open to the community. When we were shooting in Tacloban... with Jai Jai the location in San Jose was a basketball court and the local kids were so interested in what we were doing...”

Balud's reinterpretation of Filipino folklore encapsulates Club Ate and their collaborator's efforts to explore queer identities, histories, and relationships within a space. The video's narrative structure blurs the lines between the visual cues that identify Leyte and the events that take place. For example, the socioeconomic issues Leyte Island has faced since Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, and shown throughout the video, contradict the picture-perfect panoramas and beaches of other popular islands in the Visayas such as Palawan, Boracay, or Siargao. The work also evokes a sense of liminality that disrupts the gender- and sociocultural-essentialism that has previously interpellated Filipino folklore and its contemporary history. From a queer perspective, the Philippines has known a violent tension between cisgender and queer and gender nonconforming Filipinx/a/os since Spanish colonization. Today, queer Filipinx are paradoxically subtle and obvious:

We are known and seen but at the same time unheard. That we are tolerated but not accepted. To date in the Philippines there is no gender recognition law, as there is no equality union law and no anti-discrimination law. There is no divorce law as well and there are no clear protective laws towards sex work... The spotty presence of municipal or city approved anti-discrimination ordinances... are not enough to protect LGBT Filipinos against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions...¹²⁰

These issues stem from the colonial and imperial power structures the country has inherited from its former Spanish and American occupants. Hence the impact of Club Ate's process: they use the legends and folklore historically weaponized against queer Filipinx to reshape them, crafting a new mythos. In the spirit of Betasamosake Simpson's concept of "affirmative refusal," Club Ate actively refuses heteronormativity in a collective, disruptive act against colonial mentalities and hegemony.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Alegre, "Asog," 59.

¹²¹ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 198.

Ex Nilalang's fourth episode, *From Creature ~ From Creation*, opens with a voiceover, asking, "Do you remember when we were stars?"¹²² The futuristic cosmos Club Ate generates throughout this galactic passage uses omnipotent voices to reach out to each other, recounting narratives of *dagat* (sea) and *langit* (Skyworld). As the camera follows the vortex's flow into the darkness, Club Ate's Bhenji Ra emerges within this aquatic space, donned in florals and a choker bedazzled with the word *BAKLA*.¹²³ She dances among submerged objects and fish to a pulsing beat, splitting into a myriad of clones in the process. Across this aquatic journey, a severed arm spawns a cybernetic dancer, played by Justin Shoulder. He generates lightning, Pikachu-themed *tabo* (washing pails), and mechanical limbs before slowly disintegrating (Fig. 18). His head splits into the form of an upturned crab fashioned out of various commodities as his body dissolves. The now-transformed head flows away and runs aground among other similar "heads" and commodity-filled detritus.

As the latest of the four episodes, *From Creature ~ From Creation* visually departs from its predecessors through its entry into the digital sphere. Nevertheless, it calls back to the central figures of its predecessors. The omnipotent voices in the opening sequence speak to and about each other, echoes from the past that transcend time and space. They evoke several figures from Filipino legends infused with queer diasporic imaginaries.¹²⁴ As Ra dances in the aquatic landscape, words such as "bakla" and "sish", among others, swirl in the bubbles (Fig. 19). Referencing language used by Ra and others in the Filipinx queer community, the stylized text also resembles *baybayin* characters (Fig. 20). *Baybayin* was one

¹²² Club Ate (Justin Shoulder and Bhenji Ra), *Ex Nilalang (From Creature~From Creation)*, 2017. Single-channel digital video, colour, surround sound, 14 min. 16 sec. Translation from Tagalog: *Diba te, naalala mo, isa ka lang tala dati?*

¹²³ In Tagalog (*bayot* in Bisaya), *bakla* is a term that mixes sexual identity, orientation, and gender expression. It describes a person who was assigned male at birth and adopted a feminine gender expression. In the Philippines, it is considered a third gender.

¹²⁴ Throughout the opening sequence, the voiceover's text includes words such as "sarimanok," "sirena," and "Bathala". The former two are creatures found in Filipino legends; the *sarimanok* is a legendary bird originating from Mindanao with colorful iconography, while *sirena* are the mermaids of Filipino folklore. *Bathala* is the supreme deity of the Tagalog pantheon, whose name differs across other cultures of the archipelago.

of the precolonial writing systems used by early Tagalogs until it was replaced by the Latin alphabet. As previously addressed in my discussions of the video, the Church utilized Filipino folklore and mythology to demonize queer identity and sexuality. Yet, both practices were commonplace among peoples of the archipelago in precolonial times.¹²⁵ Gender binaries, compulsive heteronormativity, homophobia, and transphobia imposed during and because of the Spanish and American regimes contributed to the oppression and exclusion of trans and non-binary Filipinx in the Philippines. This connection made in the series of video works addresses the long history of Filipinx queer identities in the archipelago obscured by Western institutions, allowing it to exist and thrive across borders, space, and time.

Against the aqueous background, marble-like tears flow down Ra's face as the subtitle reads, "Cries in Ancient Tagalog" (Fig. 21). As she weeps silently, it is unsure whether the subtitles refer to the sounds that the viewer cannot hear – or perhaps are not privy to – or are the manifestations of æons of history concretized in Ra's tears. A distorted voiceover then breaks the silence, calling on Ra with prayers imbued with references to local, popular culture and mythology alike. This amalgamation of references ranges from "split our bamboo and make us babaylan", "... cleanse us with your tabo," and uploading "our consciousness" to the Skyworld and encapsulates the formation of "future folklore" which has informed Club Ate's practice.¹²⁶ ¹²⁷ As described by Ra, future folklore thrives on a collective vision of memories, dreams, and personal and shared histories that generate queer possibilities¹²⁸. The invocation of *babaylan* strengthens this framework. Known by different names among other indigenous Filipino communities, the *babaylan* was a shamanic role occupied by feminine or gender non-conforming people. Like the masculine *mumbaki*, they were responsible for the spiritual

¹²⁵ Q Roxas, "Essential But Not Essentialized," *On Politics* vol. 14 no. 2 (Spring 2021), 91.

¹²⁶ Club Ate (Justin Shoulder and Bhenji Ra), *Ex Nilalang (From Creature~From Creation)*, 2017. Single-channel video, colour, surround sound, 14 min. 16 sec. Collection unknown. 08:37-09:11.

¹²⁷ Bear, "Mythologies of Movement," *Art AsiaPacific*, accessed 20 May 2023.

<https://artasiapacific.com/issue/club-ate-mythologies-of-movement>

¹²⁸ Ibid.

and cultural nourishment of their kin in precolonial society. *From Creature* reclaims the title of *babaylan* and mythologies for the present to reconcile the queer histories left out due to Western bigotry and transphobia. It is by this exercise of world-building that Club Ate rejects the here and now to inhabit open, fantastic spaces of potential.

Throughout *From Creature*, *From Creation*, the Skyworld sets an essential stage for the video's thematic narrative. Different versions of the Skyworld abound across the Philippine archipelago; however, these stories of creation share the similar structure of seven layers of the world, in which the Skyworld occupies the final layer and is home to the supreme deity. According to Shoulder, what had begun as a reference to these creation myths evolved to carve out a "space of possibility" brimming with collective queer joy and decolonial resistance.¹²⁹ Club Ate recognized the transformative potential of Skyworld from a place of diasporic queer belonging and expressed it as the three landscapes within *From Creation*. Beginning with the opening galactic sequence into the aquatic world that Bhenji Ra's avatar calls home, the final rendition of Skyworld constitutes the futuristic cyberscape that is Shoulder's domain (Fig. 22). Nothing is tethered to materiality. Bodies interact and become one with the artificial as witnessed in Shoulder's slow dissolution after his performance. Transforming to the flow of water, the work serves to remind us of the power of rebirth.¹³⁰

From a position of displacement and the diaspora, the *Ex Nilalang* series evokes both artists' personal attachments to the Philippines.¹³¹ For example, the video's references to everyday objects in Filipino culture, integrated within the process of transformation that Ra's and Shoulder's avatars experience exude a sense of longing. Shaped by generational differences and the physical distance inherent in the diaspora, the video embraces the change

¹²⁹ Bear, "Mythologies of Movement," *Art AsiaPacific*, accessed 20 May 2023. <https://artasiapacific.com/issue/club-ate-mythologies-of-movement>

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Antoinette, "Monstrous," 75.

and promise for new relationships beyond the loss felt as diasporic Filipinx. Walter Mignolo highlights the connection between “immigrant consciousness” and “border thinking” as a subversion of the oppressive, heteropatriarchal, and colonial qualities that shape Filipino identity both in the mainland and overseas.¹³² Club Ate carves a path for spaces with multiple orientations, attachments, and references to the Philippines and forges transnational relationships with other queer communities within the archipelago and beyond. By virtue of their consciousness in the realities of the realm they inhabit as queer members of a diaspora, Club Ate and the personages they manifest untether themselves from the constraints of one identity.

Shoulder and Ra’s organic process of tracing and selecting these mythologies – Skyworld, the *manananggal* – also articulate the “differentiated” experiences of identity and belonging that make up Philippine nationalism. *Ex-Nilalang* also uplifts the intricate histories of Australian artists with ties to Asia and the inter-island complexities in Philippine belonging.¹³³ They honor the queer Filipinx communities and their personal histories across the archipelago, echoing Villanueva and Dayrit’s narrative-focused practices.

¹³² Mignolo, “Geopolitics,” 274.

¹³³ Ibid, 78.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined a range of works produced by three Filipinx artists and collectives from the 1970s to the present that center Filipino cultural and national identity. Roberto Villanueva's land installation *Archetypes: Cordilleras Labyrinth*, Cian Dayrit's cartographic tapestries such as *Neocolonial Landscape*, and Club Ate's video series *Ex Nilalang* demonstrate the artists' search to explore and address the diverse histories that shape the Philippine archipelago. At the same time, these artists subvert the colonial narratives and structures that continue to shape Filipino identity.

This thesis revealed the extent to which Filipinx identity has stemmed from a referential schema to the foreigner, i.e., Spain or the United States, which has undermined intrapersonal relations in the Philippines. For example, the divide between the elite and working classes stems from the social and cultural stratification established under the Spanish regime. In turn, the cognitive dissonance brought out by this divide have established a neoliberal, neocolonial state benefiting those in power while oppressing the masses. These factors point to the ever-constant shifting of colonialism as a structure that seeks to synthesize its power and fuel "extractivism," be it through displacement, criminalization, or violence.¹³⁴ Not even the Filipino diaspora is spared as workers contracted by overseas powers generate profit for foreign and national parties alike. In addition, the cultural elite's exploitation of marginalized groups manifest in the 'cherry-picking' of traits that authenticate Filipino culture such as artmaking practices of forms by indigenous peoples of the Philippines. Filipino indigeneity thus becomes aporetic as a condition that prizes traditional cultural production for foreign consumption at the expense of the lived realities of the communities from which these practices originate. By contrast, urbanized elites who participate in this extraction suffer from the need to maintain a 'civilized', Western appearance.

¹³⁴ Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 46.

By analyzing the social, cultural, and political conditions intertwined with the artists' careers, this thesis also reveals how each artist and art collective have used their respective practices to critique Filipino society and culture. As part of a generation critically engaged with decolonization, indigeneity, and the environment, Roberto Villanueva's *Archetypes* united traditional Ifugao knowledge and ecology in urban spaces. He staunchly advocated for a communal approach to artmaking that valorized the archipelago's diverse cultural heritage without profiting off its peoples and landscapes. Cian Dayrit's subversive work is also deeply embedded in this advocacy. Through cartographic interventions such as counter-mapping, he disrupts the workings of institutions such as the state and military. Plotting sites of violence, imperialism, and extraction through oral histories and collaboration with marginalized communities, Dayrit's cartographic tapestries critically engage with the present-day imperial and capitalist discourses that affect the Philippines. Dayrit's practice also prepares the groundwork for envisioning spaces of resistance and liberation. Lastly, queer Filipinx diasporic imaginaries thrive in Club Ate's *Ex Nilalang* series. Within a world that transcends definition, the collective builds spaces that revere marginalized peoples and the knowledge, cultures, and stories they carry while deconstructing heteronormativity. In doing so, they thread a constellation of relationships across borders, waters, and communities.

The artists and scholarship prove that, at its roots, Filipino identity is multifaceted. However, efforts to homogenize the archipelago's cultural makeup have forged institutional links to Western epistemes and have maintained their violent and repressive systems. In response, the artists deconstruct and critique the colonial and imperial paradigms indoctrinated in Filipino society while addressing the intersections between national/urban, diasporic, and indigenous identities. "In every country of the world," writes Fanon, "there are climbers, 'the ones who forget who they are, in contrast to them, and, in contrast to them, 'the

ones who remember where they came from.”¹³⁵ These artists occupy an in-between position within this binary of memory as they uncover, retrieve, and share the portions of culture and knowledge that they have learned. Moving forward, integrating further discussions on ecology, space, and queerness will contribute meaningful lenses to better understanding the nuances in Filipino identity. Doing so would also invite a more inclusive approach to this research as it engages with decolonial, discursive art.

¹³⁵ Fanon, “*Peau noire*,” 34. Original quote: “Dans tous les pays du monde, il y a des arrivistes : « ceux qui ne se sentent plus », et il y a, en face d’eux, « ceux qui gardent la notion de leur origine. »

Figures

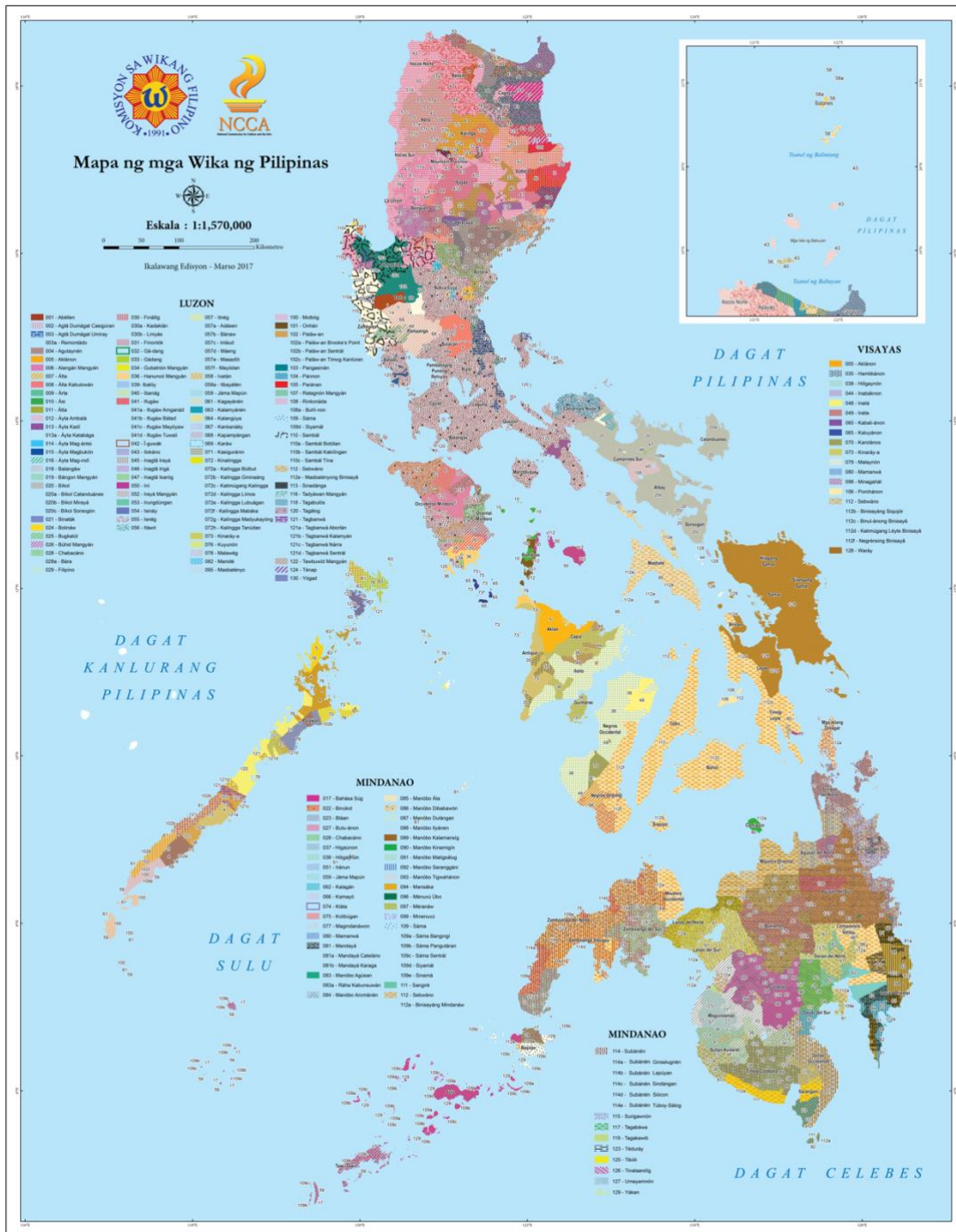


Fig. 1. Map depicting the spread and overlap of languages spoken throughout the Philippines.

Komisyon Sa Wikang Filipino, 28 January 2015.



Fig. 2. Photographer unknown, Filipino *ilustrados* in Madrid, Spain, c. 1890.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/74/Ilustrados_1890.jpg

PHILIPPINES
Sunday Express
VOLUME 1, NO. 141 SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 1972 18 PAGES

FM DECLARES MARTIAL LAW

The nat'l situation in brief

- This is not a military takeover. Civilian government still functions. The officials and employees of the national and local governments continue to discharge their duties as before within the limits of the situation.
- All executive departments, bureaus, offices, agencies and instrumentalities of the government, as well as government-owned or controlled corporations, government of provinces, cities, municipalities and barrios continue to function under the present officers and employees in accordance with existing laws.
- The judiciary shall continue to function under the present organization and personnel and try and decide all criminal and civil cases with certain exceptions.
- All schools will be closed for one week beginning this Monday for all levels.
- Carrying of firearms outside the residence even if covered by license but without permission of the armed forces is prohibited.
- Curfew will be imposed from 12 midnight to 4 o'clock in the morning.
- Departure of Filipinos for abroad is temporarily suspended except for official missions.

(Please turn to Page 3)



But civilian gov't still functions; no military takeover

President Marcos announced last night that he had placed the entire country under martial law to prevent violent overthrow of the government by a foreign-backed Communist insurgency.

The Chief Executive said he signed the martial law decree (Proclamation No. 1081) last Sept. 21, 1972, and authorized its implementation by the military at 9 p.m. Friday.

"I am signing the proclamation of martial law," he said, "for one purpose alone: to save the Republic and reform society."

•To save the Republic and form a new society•

In imposing martial law, Mr. Marcos said he would likewise wield the emergency power to establish for the country a "New Society" devoid of the evils of corruption and ineptitude in government.

The President stressed the imposition of martial law does not mean a military takeover. The government of the Republic continues, he declared, adding that the officials and employees of the government will continue to discharge their functions as before within the limits of the situation.

(Please turn to Page 2)

Nation is calm; business, life go on normally

The nation has taken President Marcos' declaration of martial law calmly.

There was no amount of spontaneous in the day, closed by the absence of the usual morning papers in the streets, the silence of mass radio and television, and the reports of domestic travelers who had gone to the airport and discovered that all flights had been suspended indefinitely.

As the day went on, however, this apprehension seemed to have dissolved into the day's chores. The principal reason must have been the conspicuous scarcity of soldiers in the city's main thoroughfares, where traffic continued to be directed by a handful of Manila policemen. During the day, traffic was in usual, unobscured. It would peak later in the afternoon, as people hurried home to listen to the presidential proclamation, and subsided early in the evening, when shopping centers which saw normal business during the day, started to close up.

There was heavy buying in some supermarkets. But that is usual on Saturdays. Banco Filipino, one of the few savings banks which open on Saturdays, posted today at 10 o'clock in the morning that it was suspending operations on account of the "uncertain situation." It said and large, however, the people seem to have adapted themselves readily to the situation. This much the Aljines gathered after a day-long survey of the Greater Manila area.

In front of ABS-CBN on Babal Avenue, Quezon City, a few girls swarmed in front of the gate, why asking the natives in command what seemed to be the matter, for Saturdays in ABS-CBN are usually alive beyond belief. They were politely informed that the station had been closed.

Nearly a few executives of the network laddered, analyzing the situation. They said that the plan was called at two o'clock the previous evening. They felt surprised, but they said that they were watching television series *Sampaguita*.

(Please turn to Page 2)

Fig. 3. Image of the *Philippine Sunday Express*' headline on September 24, 1972 following Ferdinand Marcos' declaration of martial law.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20161022011722/http://www.gov.ph/featured/declaration-of-martial-law/>



Fig. 4. Photographer unknown, people march during the EDSA People Power Revolution, 1986. Image courtesy of *The Official Gazette*.



Fig. 5. Roberto Villanueva, *Archetypes: Cordillera's Labyrinth*, 1989, runo reeds, stone, and wood, 4,572 x 60,960 cm. Image courtesy of Eva Corazon-Abundo-Villanueva and Napoleon A. Villanueva.



Fig. 6. Roberto Villanueva, *dap-ay* from *Archetypes: Cordillera's Labyrinth*, 1989, runo reeds, stone, and wood, 4,572 x 60,960 cm. long. Image courtesy of Eva Corazon-Abundo-Villanueva and Napoleon A. Villanueva.



Fig. 7. Harrison Forman, Ifugao rice terraces in Banaue, Cordilleras region, Philippines, c. 1959-61. Image courtesy of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.



Fig. 8. Michael Heizer, *Double Negative*, 1969-70, earth, 30 x 50 x 1500 ft. Image courtesy of double negative. <http://doublenegative.tarasen.net/double-negative>

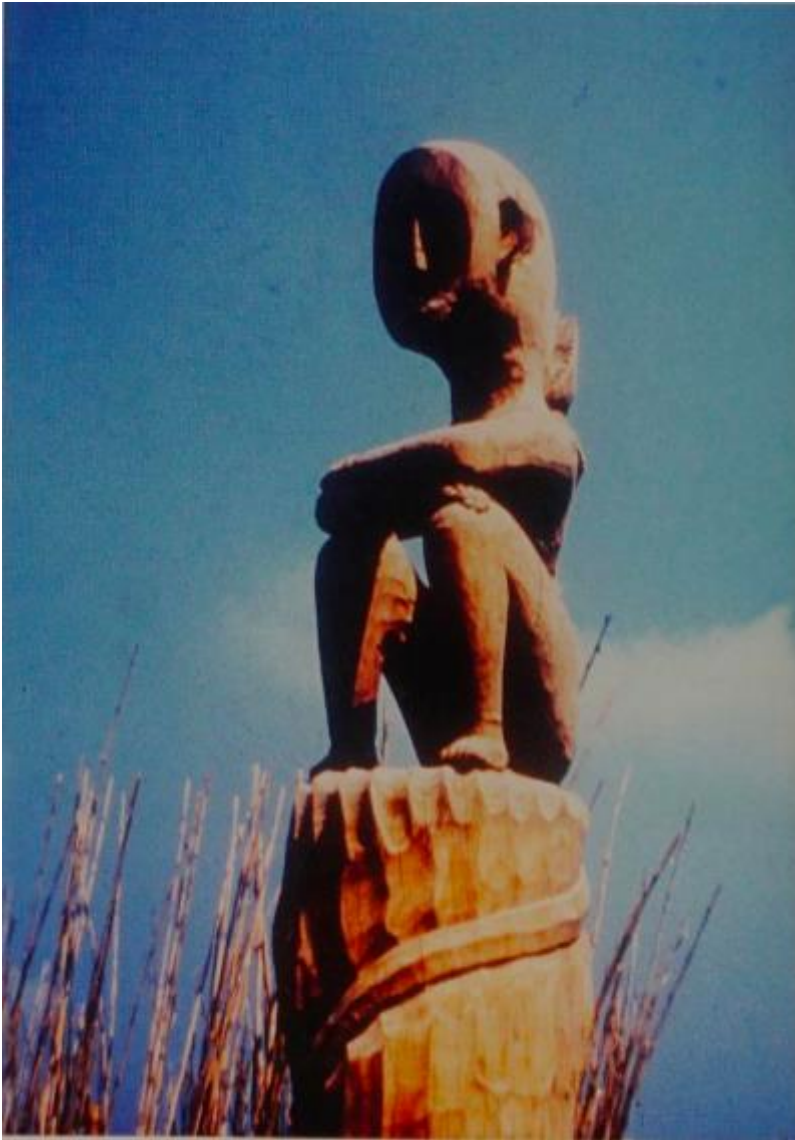


Fig. 8. Roberto Villanueva, *Bulul* figurine detail of *Archetypes*, 1989, dimensions unknown. Ed. Luis H. Francia and Angel Velasco Shaw, *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream 1899-1999* (NY: New York University Press, 2002). Image courtesy of Luis H. Francia and Angel Velasco Shaw.



Fig. 9. Cian Dayrit, *Neocolonial Landscape*, 2020, embroidery on fabric, 155.5 x 125 cm.

Private collection. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 10. Cian Dayrit, *Tropical Terror Tapestry*, (2020), embroidery on textile (collaboration with Henry Cacerese), 200 x 230 cm. Collection Servais. Image courtesy of Billie Clarken.



Fig. 11. Cian Dayrit, detail of *Tropical Terror Tapestry*, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 12. Pedro Murillo Velarde, Nicolás de la Cruz Bagay and Francisco Suarez, *Carta Hydrographica y Chorographica de las Islas Filipinas*, 1734. Library of Congress.

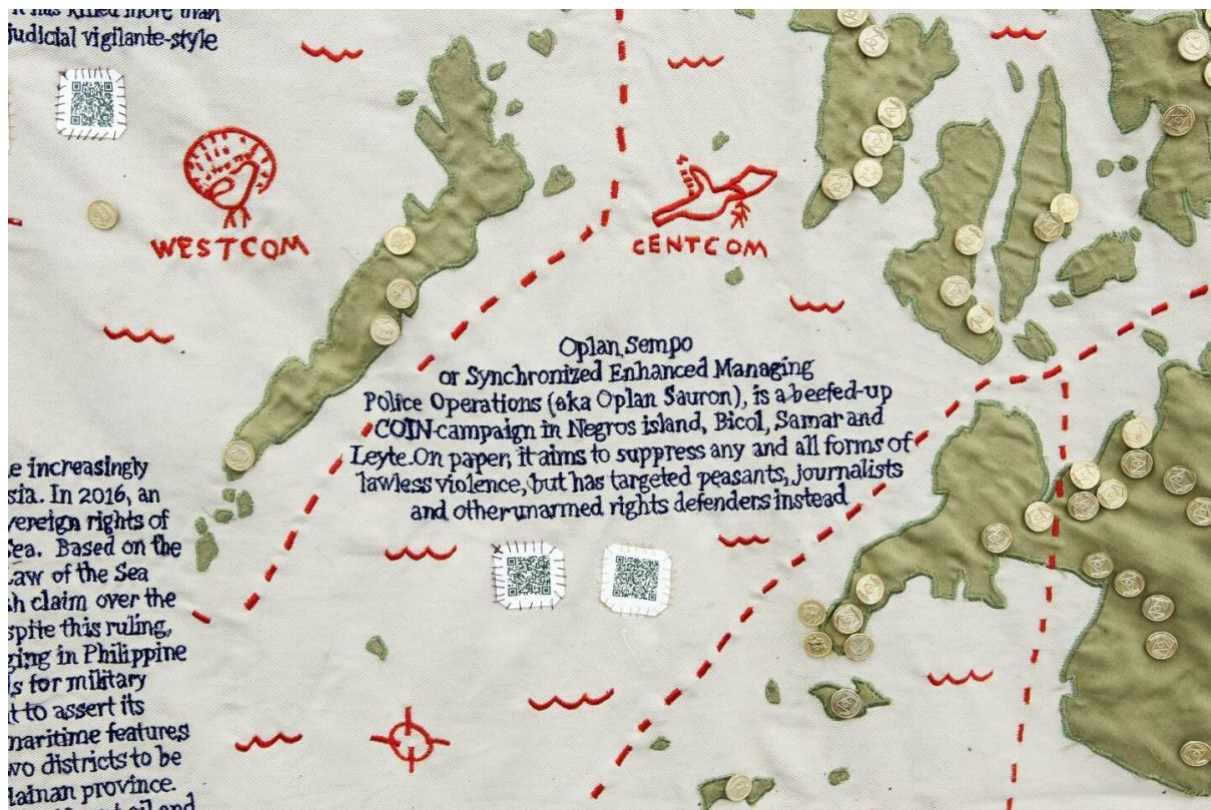


Fig. 13. Cian Dayrit, detail of *Tropical Terror Tapestry*, 2020. Image courtesy of Arthena Foundation.



Fig. 14. Unknown artist, *anting-anting* talismans, date unknown. Image courtesy of Bakbakan International.



Fig. 15. *Jai Jai (Balud)*, *Ex-Nilalang*, Club Ate (Justin Shoulder and Bhenji Ra). Production still, 2015. Image courtesy of Gregory Lorenzutti.



Fig. 16. Gian Bernal, *Manananggal*, 2009, unknown medium, unknown dimensions. Image courtesy of the artist. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Manananggal.jpg>



Fig. 17. Club Ate (Justin Shoulder and Bhenji Ra), *Ex Nilalang (Balud)*, 2015. Single-channel digital video, colour, surround sound, 4 min. 22 sec. Collection unknown. Image courtesy of the artists.



Fig. 18. Club Ate, (Justin Shoulder and Bhenji Ra), *Ex Nilalang (From Creature ~ From Creation)*, 2017. Single-channel HD video, 16:9, colour, sound, 14 min. 16 sec.



Fig. 19. Bhenji Ra of Club Ate, *Ex Nilalang (From Creature ~ From Creation)*, 2017. Single-channel HD video, 16:9, colour, sound, 14 min. 16 sec. Image courtesy of the artists.

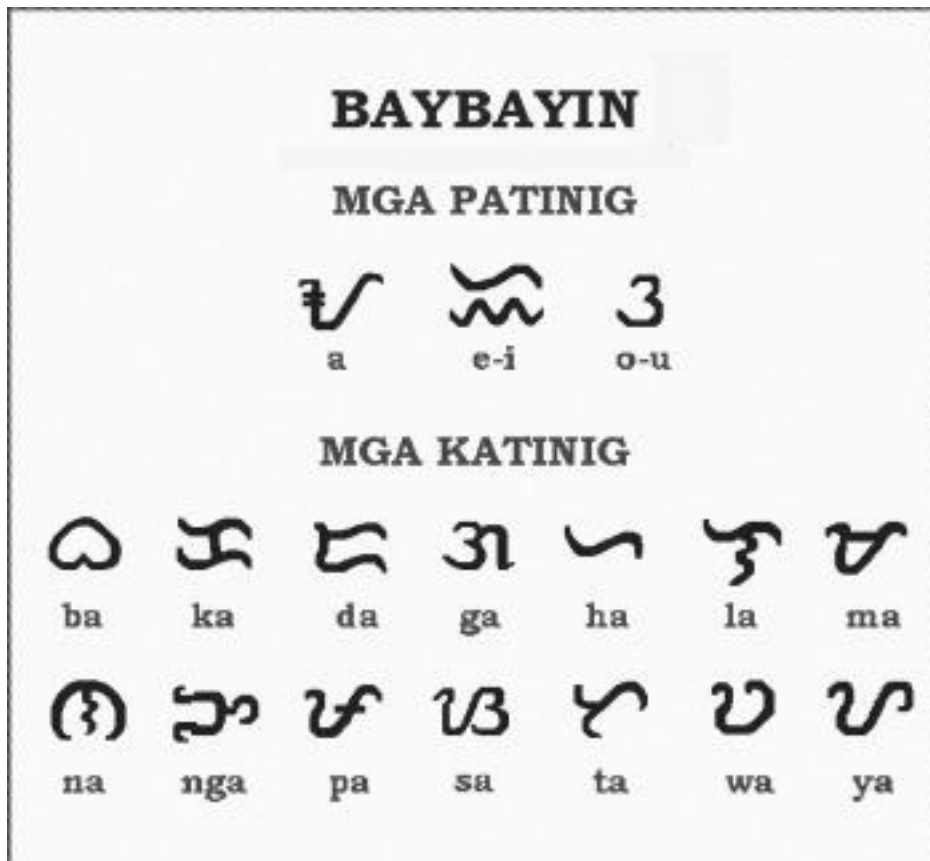


Fig. 20. *Baybayin* chart, date unknown. Image courtesy of Komisyon sa Wikang Pilipino. The curvature present in the majority of the characters is reproduced in *From Creature~From Creation*.



Fig. 21. Club Ate (Justin Shoulder and Bhenji Ra), *Ex Nilalang (From Creature~From Creation)*, 2017. Single-channel HD video, 16:9, colour, sound, 14 min. 16 sec. Image courtesy of the artists.

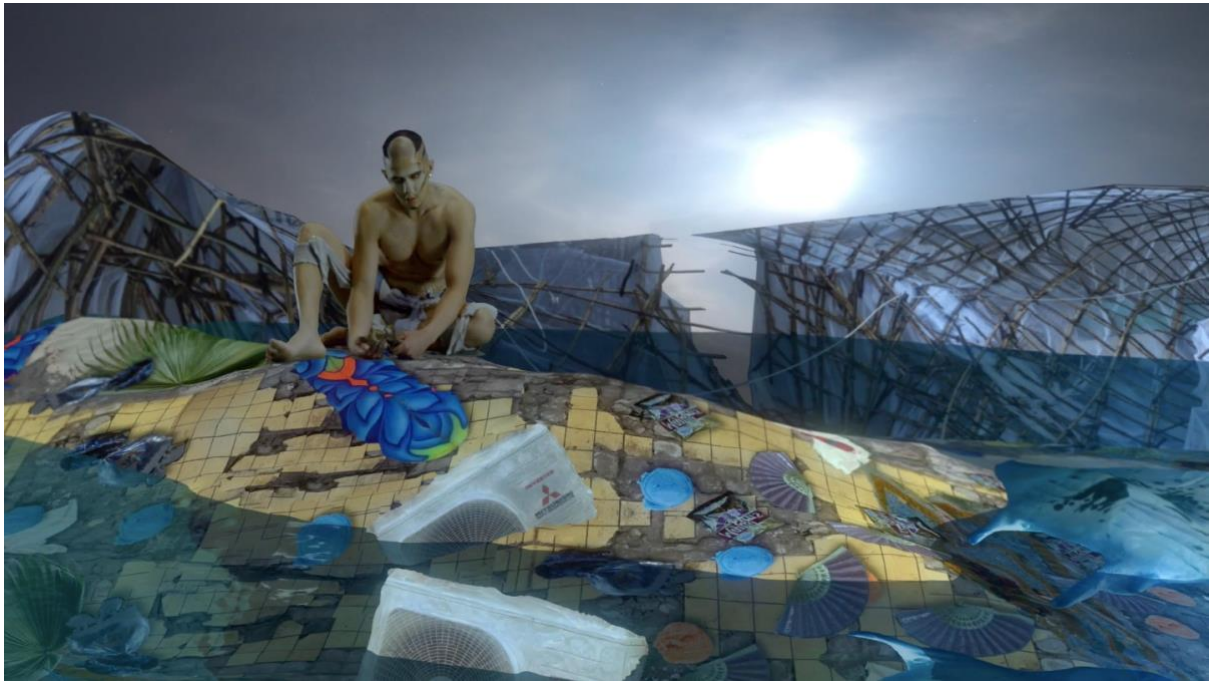


Fig. 22. Justin Shoulder of Club Ate, *Ex Nilalang (From Creature~From Creation)*, 2017.

Single-channel HD video, 16:9, colour, sound, 14 min. 16 sec. Image courtesy of the artists.

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