This anthology brings together works from young scholars whose research interests are informed by ecocriticism rooted in the Philippine context. From folk philology to oral narratives, from contemporary horror films to urban fantasy, Látag: Essays on Philippine Literature, Culture, and the Environment aims to contribute to ecocritical scholarship in the Philippines by presenting different patterns of literary thought extant in the archipelago and illustrating the ways they resignify and rework our material understanding of nature and our relationship with it. In a country bursting with multitudes of cultural and imaginative landscapes, Látag hopes to traverse different grounds of knowledge so that we might expand on not only the ways we think, but also the ways we move in the world.

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Christian Jil Benitez, Rina Garcia Chua, Anne Christine Ensomo, Maria Karaan, Isabela Lacuna, Gabriela Lee, Ana Micaela Chua Manansala, Timothy Ong, Regina Regala, Lian Sing, Louise Jashil Sonido, and Catherine Marie Quesada
LÁTAG

Essays on Philippine Literature, Culture, and the Environment
Látag: Essays on Philippine Literature, Culture, and the Environment

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LÁTAG
Essays on Philippine Literature, Culture, and the Environment

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Editor’s Note:
Látag, or, Lay of the Land

BY TIMOTHY ONG

This anthology brings together works from young scholars whose research interests are informed by ecocriticism rooted in the Philippine context. The need for this anthology is warranted because of two main reasons: one, publication, and therefore access, of critical works with an explicit ecocritical bent with the Philippines as its locus remains scant, and second, it is at this critical juncture in global history that environmental degradation is felt at an all-time high, without any signs of slowing down. As such, Látag: Essays on Philippine Literature, Culture, and the Environment hopes to contribute to gaps in ecocritical scholarship in the Philippines as well as to provide measures by which critical theory can be deployed in environmental praxis, especially in a country that is designated as an ecological hotspot given our rich biodiversity and unique geography.

This nascency in ecocritical scholarship is what is being unfurled, as it were, by this anthology. Látag, therefore, is an apt title to describe this event: as “paglaladlad ng bagay na nakabalumbon,”¹ a phenomenon of revealing and spreading out what was previously rolled up and hidden. This anthology aspires to open itself up to existing, but unfortunately scattered, Philippine ecocritical discourses and also opens up possibilities that such conversations are sustained, and even amplified. Inceptions of these kinds of thoughts, admittedly, go through birth pains, and there is still much to be covered in the field of Philippine ecocriticism. But this is met with a curious excitement on the part of all of the contributors in this anthology, who, by providing the lay of the land in the twelve essays collected here, fulfill another meaning of látng: “pagpapahayag ng kurò.”² It is hoped that ecocriticism in the Philippines will be a fertile ground by which ecoconscious theory and practice can be generated by enabling such

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¹ Unibersidad ng Pilipinas Diksiyonaryong Filipino (UPDF), s.v. “látng.”
² UPDF, s.v. “látng.”
expressions, transmissions, and relays of knowledges.

_Látáq: Essays on Philippine Literature, Culture, and the Environment_ is divided into two main clusters: the folk and the contemporary. Certain provisions must be made here: the nominations of these clusters refer to the material by which these essays draw their analysis from. The first half makes use of the archive in folk lexicon, oral tradition, as well as indigenous knowledge in the many ways that ecocritical thought can be surfaced and thematized in the Philippine context. The second half explores the contemporaneity in Philippine ecocritical study, marked by the various objects of study ranging from cinema to comics, as well as a reckoning of contemporary issues such as urbanity and migration, all of which demand radical ways of reexamining our relationships with our lived environment.

Chapter 1 opens with “Tropical Climatology: Erotic and Ecocritical Analysis of _Init_ and _Hilanat_,” a philological unpacking of the tropical atmosphere to understand the givenness of heat in the Visayan tropics as both life-giving and life-threatening. By situating itself in the intersection of erotic and ecocritical thought, the paper argues for a postcolonial reading of ethnographic and lexicographic materials that provide a sketch of the encounter between the temperate subject and tropical spaces. How, then, is tropical heat, and its attendant manifestations on the human body, understood in relation to the human-nature relationship? How can a postcolonial analysis of the archive rework assumptions about nature into more agentic representations in literary studies?

This turn to the archive is similarly done by Isabela Lacuna in her essay entitled “Bagyo, Onos, at Sigua: A Philological Investigation of Storms in the Tagalog Folk Imagination.” By exploring the lexical entries in the Tagalog language that refer to storms, the essay articulates a distinct conception of catastrophe that is rooted in the folk imagination and is momentarily arrested despite its insistence into modernity and even contemporaneity. In this strategic deployment of the philological approach, the limits of the lexicon are exposed in order to allow possibilities for their eventual nuancing, especially because of the almost quotidian experience of storms in the archipelago, a phenomenon that happens all the time.

In the same groove, Christian Jil Benitez’s “Tungo sa Isang Dalumat ng Panahon: Isang Panimulang Tala” playfully yet patiently attends to the multivalent force of the word “panahon,” commonly understood as “time” and “weather,” among others, and establishes connections with similar lexical species as “nahon” as “to rent a plot or piece of land for a determinate period of time” and “taón” as both “coincidence”
and “year.” In these philological perambulations, the essay moves from an abstract and economic nuance of “panahon” and charges it with the urgency of its own materiality towards an ecological framing of the word, precisely as the move from mere sequence of things, as they are, in the temporal and causal sense under the ambit of “panahon” to a conscious recognition of the order of things, their interrelationships with one another, and the ecological call for orderliness, as “kaayusan ng mga kabagayan.”

Aside from the lexical trove in which Philippine ecocriticism can emerge, the anthology also looks at oral tradition, specifically in the Sulu archipelago, to define the contours of otherwise fluid and slippery categories in geographic discourse: the sea and the island. Maria Karaan’s essay entitled “Tandan and Laut: Home, Navigation, and Resistance through the Sama Dilaut Kata-Kata” problematizes habitation and habituation in the kata-kata, oral narratives of the Sama Dilaut people, vis-a-vis the persistent militarization that encroaches on their domiciliary spaces, which, because of the Sama Dilaut’s semi-sea nomadism, become all the more contested in ecocritical discourse. Implied in this analysis would be the feudal and imperial forces that animate anthropogenic crises, especially in terms of capitalistic accumulation and land expansion, which unsettles the notion of “home.” And yet the essay diverges from terrestrial thinking to redefine “dwelling” as navigational in nature, which provides a more accurate understanding of the Sama Dilaut lifeways, as well as their modes of resistance and agency in times of precarity.

Similarly, Anne Ensomo’s “The Island as Performative Enunciation and Phenomenological Reality: An Ecocritical Reading of Sulu Oral Narratives” taps on the wellspring of the folk to distinguish the trope of the island despite its seeming fluidity and motility. The problem, as the essay suggests, is that this constant aestheticization of the trope of the island, or islandness, in western discourse has rendered it immutable and, therefore, depoliticized. By redeploying islandness in a counterhegemonic bent, the essay points towards a performative geopoetics of the island specific to Sulu. In the analysis of folk tales, the island resists designation as mere node to a usually colonial center (the capital), and this colonial-capitalist conceptions of the island would perhaps explain eventual environmental degradation as a result of resource accumulation to the point of exhaustion.

In both essays, the primacy of the sea as dwelling and as a connective agent to islands is foregrounded, and from the same sea emerges a proto-feminine signifier of life itself, as “inang tubig” (mothersea), which becomes the central concern in Lian Sing’s “Reconstructing and Recovering Inang Ba’ian: Towards a Philippine Ecofeminism.” The figure of the mothersea becomes crucial, the essay argues, in providing a cultural
analysis that abates the threat of calamity towards an ecofeminist response to disasters in the country. Here, the historical relationship between women and nature is reevaluated through the symbiosis of indigenous and western knowledge systems to insist that the former is not regressive but rather an alternative to the latter. We are reminded of the urgency of this call primarily because in the case of the Philippines, a developing country and therefore a zone most vulnerable to ecological risk, the struggle for environmental justice cannot be divorced from women’s liberation as both nature and women have been victims of a capitalist patriarchal system. To locate the figure of the “Inang Ba’ian” from its folk origins and deploy it in the age of the Anthropocene, therefore, places the indigenous as an important category in contemporary environmental philosophy.

In Chapter 2, Regina Regala’s “Beyond Promises: Decontextualized Approaches to Filipino Horror Films” extends this ecofeminist approach, but this time in Philippine cinema, to interrogate the figure of the monster and the monstrous, whose location in nature and their imbrication in the natural can be easily gleaned from the folk imagination. By providing us with anomalous and spectral bodies as sources of horror, the essay seeks to provide decontextualized realities being referenced by these films to “denature the natural” that is premised to be monstrous. Such a strategy would shed light on the causes of ecophobia and allow for more productive and discursive conversations with what is not always comprehensible.

The ecocritical lens in analyzing visual language finds resonance in Ana Micaela Chua Manansala’s “Myths of Cleansing and Reclamation: The Politics of Inundation in TRESE: High Tide at Midnight” where a supernatural detective comics series is analyzed to constellate the catastrophic phenomena of the storm and inundation alongside the land reclamation projects done in Manila during the Marcos era as well as the ongoing war on drugs waged by the Duterte regime. By attentive reading to elements specific to the comics, the essay reveals the dual, if not complementary, nature of risk as both biogenic and anthropogenic and the kinds of danger and violence it may effect on society, understood as both real and epistemic.

On a similar note, Louise Jashil Sonido’s “Lives, Matter: Materializing ‘Land’ in an Ecology of Conflict” also analyzes a visual narrative of the life of Louie Jalandoni, a priest-turned-activist from Negros who remains to be one of the most prominent figures in the militant struggle for agrarian reform in the country. In this essay, particular attention is given to the land as a material agent that participates in an “intra-active discursive practice” that is not just defined by human agency, but rather co-constitutive of it. Human labor, specifically that of farmers, and the land are
both imbricated in each other’s life processes, and therefore the radical and subversive work of agrarian reform affirms the ecology of material agencies where the dichotomy between human and nature is dissolved and instead maintains fidelity to “mattering,” the processual becoming of both agents that forms, and is informed by, revolutionary praxis.

Here, the image of the rural in the Philippine ecological imagination resists the romanticization of the idyll, precisely because it continues to be a space of struggle for most of our countrymen. As such, it becomes imperative to bridge the rural and the urban to reconceptualize more robust ecosystems whose constitutive parts mutually reinforce one another. The concept of “urbanature” by Ashton Nichols is the frame of reference which Catherine Quesada develops in “Saving Trees, Saving Cities: Towards an Urbanatural Future with Children’s Fantasy Stories” to provide more tenable ways by which we inhabit and build with nature. With this consciousness, an ecopedagogical approach can be deployed in generating awareness among younger readers of literature in their formative years. The telos of such an awareness, one can only hope, would be to foster a stronger sense of commitment to more sustainable ways of living in and with nature.

World-building, especially in the fantastic mode, becomes a rich source of ecocritical imagination in its subversiveness vis-a-vis the real to glimpse at a utopic vision of the future. This is explored further by Gabriela Lee’s “Imagined Worlds: A Fictocritical Exploration of Ecological Utopias” where, in the fictocritical mode, the role of fiction is revisited in critiquing and addressing pressing ecological problems in the age characterized by dystopia. As a counterpoint, utopia, as a literary genre, provides alternative epistemologies by which the world-at-large can be radically re-imagined in limitless ways to fish out creative solutions to problems caused by the rapid destruction of the biosphere. This ecological utopia refuses a determined trajectory of time that is hurtling towards destruction, a future that closes in on itself, and it is in this refusal that a commitment to ecoconscious praxis can be drawn out.

The anthology closes with Rina Chua’s “Toward a Migrant Ecocriticism,” a vision rooted in our increasingly transnational world and points to a possible direction through which Philippine ecocriticism can be further enriched. Premised on movement, migrancy becomes a phenomenon that challenges ecocriticism’s affinity for lococentricism, such that it asks how the agents involved in migrancy redraw lines and blur the distinctions of here and there in crossing borders to produce a new cartography of the socio-ecological world. In the flurry of dizzying mobility, there is a tendency to see only the “blur of migrant subjects.” The essay
insists, therefore, that species subjected to migration, often seen as ominous signs of anthropogenic and biogenic crises and thus embody vulnerability, are given a physicality, such that their precarious existence, and therefore their claim in the ecosystem, are recognized and given attention in this new environmental culture.

As a way of conclusion, this anthology, in the various ways in which ecocritical thought has been espoused in the essays, hopes to provide the seedbed by which Philippine ecocriticism can continue to germinate. The nuancing of available materials in the archive as well as experimentations in new forms of media amenable to textual analysis remain a productive ground by which we engage with our lived environment, as well as remaining faithful to the activism inherent in ecoconscious theory. It is worth noting that persistent displacement of indigenous peoples, species loss, wide-scale pollution caused by capitalist-sanctioned urbanization, and the militant struggle for agrarian reform are still lived realities that we must confront with urgency, more than ever before. As látag is also “paglalagay sa patag na pook katulad ng sahig, kama, o lupa,”3 we are reminded that home, and all the comfort and stability it brings, must be extended to the land itself, such that we understand dwelling not as dominion, but domiciliary.

Reference:

3 UPDF, s.v. “látag.”
PART ONE:
Ecocriticism and the Folk Imagination
The concept of the tropics has never been fully understood apart from its alterity. Derived from the Greek *tropēin*, which means “to turn,”¹ the term tropics has been used to denote this kind of geographical space that corresponds with the movement of the earth as it turns to the other side in the course of its revolution around the sun. This movement, then, provides an illusory yet convenient way of providing a binary mode of thinking about the earth itself, that is, the temperate and its antipode, the tropical. In the course of history, the tropics has always been the object of much speculation and inquiry primarily because of its alterity. As such, the allure of the tropics is kept eternally alive because of its otherness.

Since Antiquity, the epistemology surrounding the tropical zone has always characterized it as a “torrid zone,” a place of the fantastic and the mysterious. However, it has also been regarded as a space of aberration, one that deviates significantly from the norm. As such, the manner by which the tropics has been apprehended is that of anxious curiosity: on one hand, it offers a vision of Eden, a paradise whose authenticitication is made prominent by virtue of it being unsullied by human presence and therefore transports the imagination into the beginning of time, but equally powerful is the notion of the tropics as a zone of anomaly, wherein this space stands

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, s.v. “tropic.”
for the complete reversal and/or negation of everything that is familiar to the human episteme because of its being “terra incognita.” Because of this anomaly, it is not surprising that, following Said, “tropicality operates similarly [with Orientalism] to construct tropical peoples and the Tropics as ecologically other.”

This paradox inherent in the concept of the tropics has enabled a certain kind of knowing about its very nature. The tropics has found its way into literature as a backdrop by which the European imagination, most specifically during the Age of Exploration, projected its innermost anxiety: fear of the unknown. In the case of literatures of travel, for example, the tropics has been used as a device to highlight the stark contrast between the temperate and the tropical. As such, the mode of knowing the tropics always already renders it accessorial to a temperate agenda. One of the ways in which this agenda is achieved is to romanticize the tropics as a place that fulfills the fantasy of freedom, that is, a place that transcends order. Thus, the tropics is inevitably linked to a sort of romantic vision of otherness: the tropics as exotic.

The binary that splits the Earth into two hemispheres has long been a recurring theme in the global imagination. This antipodean dichotomy between the tropical and temperate zones has been, and remains to be, a powerful way of classifying these spaces. Along with this classification is the production of a certain way of knowing them, that is, a structuring of consciousness that is deemed proper to understand these spaces. The tropics, in particular, has been represented as both “positively (as in fantasies of the tropical sublime) or negatively (as a pathological space of degeneration), [and has] frequently served as a foil to temperate nature, to all that is modest, civilized, cultivated.” Here, the idea of the tropics is informed by a moment of negativity and seeks to be a complement to the temperate zone. The notion that it is a space for degeneration was first elaborated on by Aristotle, in *Meteorologica*:

> There are two inhabitable sections of the earth: one near our upper, or northern pole, the other near the other or southern pole; and their shape is like that of a tambourine. If you draw lines from the centre of the earth they cut out a drum-shaped figure. The lines form two cones; the base of the one is the tropic, of the other the

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ever visible circle, their vertex is at the centre of the earth. These sections alone are habitable. Beyond the tropics no one can live: for there the shade would not fall to the north, whereas the earth is known to be uninhabitable before the sun is in the zenith or the shade is thrown to the south: and the regions below the Bear are uninhabitable because of the cold.4

Aristotle maps the coordinates of the globe into three zones: the frigid, the tropical, and the temperate zones. What is important here is the use of the word “habitable” as a way of classifying these geographical zones. If the Earth is selectively habitable, what are the knowledges that can be produced out of our experiences with these habitable zones, and for those that are uninhabitable, how do we even access it? Such a classification allows us to set the parameters by which this global imagination is configured since Antiquity and also reveals the way that knowledges are organized into neat categories of representations. For Aristotle, the temperate zone is the most amenable zone that renders habitation possible, as it also happens to be the zone in which he resides in. A shift in the balance of the elements, say excess cold in the case of frigid zones or excess heat in the case of the tropics, would inevitably result in the uncertainty of the emergence of life itself. Thus, what is at stake here is the very fiber of existence itself, so much so that the mere physicality of the Earth forces us to confront the most primal concern of humanity: death itself.

It is equally important to note here that the designation for the tropic space is that of torridity, a quality of intense heat and dryness, which was derived from the French torride, from Latin torrere, meaning “parch or scorch.”5 The torridity of the tropical zone is thus caused by the abundance of heat from the sun, a condition that seeks to annihilate life entirely. However, a second look at the word indicates that torrid can also mean “full of passion arising from sexual love.” This paradox in meaning is interesting because it traces the development of the tropical space as an actual physical part of the Earth into a concept that is conferred to physical acts between subjects. Here, the disjuncture of the two meanings of the word “torrid” gives rise to its ambiguity: on one hand, the tropics is a zone of degeneration and death (Thanatos), and, on the other, as a zone of sensuality (Eros).

And what about the temperate, then? A close look at the word itself reveals a lot about its dichotomy with the torridity of the tropics. The key

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5 OED, s.v. “torrid.”
here is temperature: as a zone of habitation, the temperate zone is defined as having “mild temperature” but equally important is the disposition of the temperate subject, that is, as “showing moderation or self-restraint.”

Moderation, then, as espoused by Aristotle, is vital to ensure survival. The word can be traced from its late Middle English usage to indicate “not affected by passion or emotion,” from Latin *temperatus*, which means “mingled or restrained,” from the verb *temperare*. It is not surprising to denote the temperate subject, as one that resides in a Hellenistic conception of the Earth, to be logical, that is to say, rational. All of Greek thought revolves around the notion that humanity must, first and foremost, possess reason, which is the marker of superiority from all the other creatures that roam the Earth. Hence, to be temperate is to be fully human, which is also another way of saying that any other subject does not share the same privilege of this nomination. Any other creature living in the tropical and frigid zones cannot be said to be human and must, therefore, be modified, must be moderated and restrained, to climb the rungs in the ladder of anthropological hierarchy. The tropical subject, therefore, is one that is governed by pure passion and emotion, which, in Plato’s Republic, is someone that must be exiled from the city and denied habitation in a world of order.

This act of tempering the torridity of the tropics can also be gleaned from the verb *temperare*, or “mingle,” from which the word “temper” was conceived by way of its Old English ancestor, *temprian*, which is “to bring something into the required condition by mixing it with something else.” Here, we must also consider its lexical definition, which is, among many others, “a person’s state of mind seen in terms of their being angry or calm” and “act as a neutralizing or counterbalancing force to (something).” It becomes clearer, then, that the act of tempering comes with a certain “mixing” to enable something that is not fully in its right or proper state to achieve the requisite condition by which it can be fully usable, that is, to achieve a correct state of mind, or *temperament*, from late Middle English derived from Latin, *temperamentum*, or “correct mixture.” Thus, the impulse to understand the tropics is fueled by this corrective agenda, to set things in its appropriate order, that is, always in moderation.

The tropics, then, is that which is always in excess, but because excess must be removed, it must be tempered, which is another way of saying

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6 OED, s.v. “temperate.”
8 OED, s.v. “temper.”
9 OED, s.v. “temperament.”
that it must be converted for it to be included in the taxonomy of knowledge with the temperate subject as its locus. The tropics, more than just being torrid, is also unknown; hence, *terra incognita*. The consciousness of the temperate subject is filled with this peculiar curiosity of *that* part of the Earth that needs to be understood, analyzed, and classified according to pre-existing modes of knowing, which I argue to be within the realm of the erotic, and must therefore be interrogated along ecocritical thought. Seen in this light, the ontos of the tropics has long been configured as erotic in the episteme that has sought to temper it, albeit remotely. As such, how does ecocriticism intervene in this formulation, especially when we position this argument in postcolonial discourse?

Following Aristotle’s pronouncement that the torrid zone is that which perils habitation, I turn to a discussion of this atmospheric phenomenon that characterizes the tropics, specifically the Visayan tropics. I am particularly interested in the ways in which colonial encounters have been documented in the Visayan islands, as can be gleaned from lexicographic and ethnographic documents, and propose an erotic and ecocritical analysis of the archive from this region in the Philippines.

Francisco Ignacio Alcina, a Spanish historian and Jesuit priest, wrote in 1668 about tropical heat in the Visayas as sourced from the “dos principios de corrupción” (two principles of corruption): “cálido” (heat) and “húmedo” (humidity). Of note here is the echoing of heat as a thanatotic force that ensures, or is poised towards, the destruction of life force itself, one that is the polar opposite of Eros as life instinct. It is crucial to understand here that the elements that cause this corruption of the land, and, consequently, all the life species that reside in it, are also the same constituents that ensure its sustenance: fire and earth, in the form of heat, and water and air, in the form of humidity. The keyword here is mixture, and, consequently, excess.

As mentioned earlier, the word temper brings to mind a notion of “correct mixture” such that the goal is to make something come into fruition by a balancing act. The sense of temper being referred to here could point to one’s mood, emotion, or in the lens of colonial encounter, the will to control. As such, the corruption that ensues from these life elements is brought about by a sense of being out-of-sync from this balance, of not attaining the “proper” temper needed for one’s conduct. Hence, this

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11 OED, s.v. “temperate.”
deviation is seen as a corruption in the sense of physical atmospheric excess that makes the land uninhabitable by a disproportionate sense of elemental mixture, but of more importance is one’s corporeal gesturality in the sense of *habitus*, as systems of the stylization of the body that are “durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structure.” As such, the concept of tropical habitation has a two-fold meaning: to refer to one’s dwelling, of being in the tropics, and one’s gesture towards it, of being with the tropics.

When this habitation is threatened by excess, its symptoms are borne by the body that comes into contact with the tropics. The most immediate would be “bahulay” as “sudor pegajoso,” which is not just any other kind of sweat but is characterized by a tropical move towards the metaphoric: sticky sweat. Sweating in the tropics, because of excess heat and humidity, is not the same as sweating elsewhere.

On a more grave sense, Alcina notes the bodily malaise that comes with life in the tropics: “los tabardillos” (typhoid fever), “cañas” (dysentery), “beriberes” (beriberi), “bubas” (syphilitic tumors), “mal de San Lazaro” (leprosy), “y otro ejército de ellos” (and numerous other maladies). However, all these affect only the temperate body that comes into contact with the tropical land, one that is not yet to be intimated with its fertility. As such, the climactic energy from heat to humidity is transformed into corporeal heat in the form of these illnesses.

These bodily maladies can be thought of as the announcement of the temperate body’s immiscibility with tropic spaces. Here we have a seeming instance of disruption, physiologically rendered as “hilanat” (fever) in temperate bodies, in Alcina’s ethnography of Spaniards in the Visayan tropics. It is in *hilanat* where the disjunction between the perception and the experience of the tropics manifests itself.

It is perhaps instructive to trace this disruption as a metaphorical way of exposing the thrust of the colonial agenda. This piercing, this penetration, is indicative of a certain sense of ravishment where the tropic spaces are feminized in relation to the masculine thrust of exploration. These spaces serve as the orifice that is impregnated by a foreign body. As such, the Western desire of territorial ownership powers the act of tropical

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13 *Diccionario de la lengua Bisaya–Hiligüeyna y Haría de las islas de Panay y Sugbu*, s.v. “bahulay.” From here on out, *Diccionario* will be used to refer to this work.
14 Alcina, 173.
15 *Diccionario*, s.v. “hilanat.”
tempering. Anne McClintock describes this impregnation of the tropical as characterized by “the male penetration and exposure of a veiled, female interior; and the aggressive conversion of its ‘secrets’ into a visible, male science of the surface.”\textsuperscript{16} It is this “violent containment”\textsuperscript{17} that constitutes the \textit{porno-tropic} tradition in the Western imaginary.

The entire colonial project in the tropics is premised on this porno-tropic tradition, that is, the antipodes of the West have become “a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden desires and fears.”\textsuperscript{18} The thrust of exploration and aggressive reclamation of tropical lands is met by a disruption not only in its geographic sense as a perimetric expansion of the Empire, but by a physiological condition that reminds the temperate body of its own habitude. Penetrating the “unknown” land gives rise to corporeal degeneracy that renders the body impotent, and, in extreme cases, promises the certainty of death. The governing logic here is the threat of sterility, that is, the act of temperance rendered unproductive.

However, these bodily maladies cannot be fully attributed to the land itself, for despite “el calor tanto” (the great heat), the climate can be “templadas” (temperate) and gives birth to a region that is “la fertilidad primera” (most fertile).\textsuperscript{19} Alcina notes:

\[\ldots\] a la verdad no tiene toda la culpa ella (aunque no está muy libre) sino ellos por su poca providencia y atención; con que vienen a dar en pocos años y aun meses, fin a su vida.

\[\ldots\] the land is not altogether at fault (although it is not free from all the blame), but the Spaniards, through their lack of foresight and cautiousness bring about an end to their lives in a few years or months.\textsuperscript{20}

Thus, even if the tropical has always been figured as perilous, it also characterized by excess, as “lands of great abundance, alive with luxuriant vegetation and exotic birds and animals,”\textsuperscript{21} whose “every inch of the soil is of

\textsuperscript{16} Anne McClintock, \textit{Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest} (New York: Routledge, 1995), 23.
\textsuperscript{17} McClintock, 24.
\textsuperscript{18} McClintock, 22
\textsuperscript{19} Alcina, 165.
\textsuperscript{20} Alcina, 173.
the most exuberant fertility.” The abundance of “palm trees both good and bad” hints at the eternal repetition of the tropical space; a sense of “going deeper and deeper into a limitless world.” Here, the tropical space seems to resist the tempering brought about by the colonial, and anthropocentric, expansion. The agentic response of the tropics is repetition as articulation: that which “folds back on and inspects itself, makes a noise and leaves a mark when it rereads itself.”

Moreover, Bachelard offers a helpful conjecture in describing the “intense immensity” of tropic spaces. He notes: “One feels that there is something else to be expressed besides what is offered for objective expression. What should be expressed is hidden grandeur, depth.” Thus, despite the temperate ethnographer’s attempt to “speak for” the tropics, to simultaneously encode and decode the secrets of nature, there is always something that slips away from the human in such an encounter. There is always something else that resides outside the realm of human consciousness and therefore of language that rebuffs this anthropocentrism. The tropics is capable of speech, but in a language that is proper to it, and it reverberates in the immensity of its presence.

This impossibility to articulate this immensity results in a recourse of the temperate to make sense of the encounter. The explorer confronts the tropics with an insatiable thirst for what is “hidden.” It is the enigma of the yet-to-be mapped terrain that fuels the attempt to go beyond what was already seen. Therefore, the act of conquest as perimetric expansion can be understood as a means by which something “out there” becomes appropriated and covered within the scope of the known. For Bachelard, “the dialectics of here and there has been promoted to the rank of an absolutism according to which these unfortunate adverbs of place are endowed with unsupervised powers of ontological determination.” In short, the abundance of the tropical becomes reduced to mere systems of classification for the possibility of comprehension to emerge. As such, the reductivist attitude of the temperate explorer becomes the very means by which the tropical becomes a fixed category that renders inquiry to its

22 Arnold, 8
26 Bachelard, 186.
27 Bachelard, 212.
mystery possible. Thus, this depth is essentially what is not immediately seen in the thrust of exploration and is, at the same time, the one that is desired. Alcina notes this at length:

Y, aunque de la dicha altura y grande vecindad de la línea o zona tórrida se colige lo mucho que participarán todas ellas de su calor (y que algunos de los antiguos juzgaron tan insufrible que las tuvieron por inhabitables) con todo la experiencia muestra que lo son, y más templadas, pues (como después veremos más en particular) no es el calor tanto que impida su habitación; antes, en algunas partes es muy templado, y como de una continu a primavera; porque es tanta la abundancia de lluvias (además de los muchos ríos y fuentes y lagunas de que abundan en gran cantidad estas estas islas y las dan la calidad de muy húmedas) que templan mucho el calor; ayudando también la variedad de los vientos que las bañan, y corren la marea o vientos del mar que suelen levantarse poco más tarde que el sol para entibiar el calor, que de otra manera es cierto fuera grande, como lo es cuando no hay viento

Despite the latitude and the great proximity of the equator or the torrid zone, it might be inferred that all these islands would share its heat (which some of the ancients believed to be so unbearable as to consider them uninhabitable); nonetheless, all our experience shows that they are suitable for settlement and even temperate. For as we shall see later in detail, the heat is not so intense that it prevents habitation. On the other hand, in some places the climate is very mild, and like a perpetual springtime. There is a great amount of rain (in addition to the many rivers, waterfalls, lakes which abound in great numbers in these islands thereby making them greatly humid) which temper the heat to a great extent. Then too, there is a variety of winds which refresh and gently blow over them. And when all these seem to be lacking, which seldom happens, the breeze and the winds which come from the sea after sunrise, greatly contribute to modify the heat. Otherwise, this would be unbearable, as it happens when there are no winds. (emphasis mine)\(^28\)

There is a paradox at play here. Earlier, climactic heat (“init”) gives rise to

\(^{28}\) Alcina, 171.
corporeal heat ("hilanat"), but the same cannot be completely true for those who are native to the land. In such cases, the “calenturas malignas” (tropical fever) is attributed to “de la fogosidad española” (Spanish ardor) and “cuidan poco de dar resguardo a sus afectos” (to take little care of controlling one’s passion). Heat here is troped metaphorically into something else: the fiery image of enthusiasm. Of what, particularly, one cannot help but conjecture the desire to be with the tropics, to temper its excess, to tame it, as it were, so that the land reveals itself up with all of its secrets and mysteries of fecundity. The image here is reminiscent of Vespucci and the naked America, a poignant reminder of the thrust of claiming what is not owned. As such, corporeal heat as a symptom of bodily degeneracy is transformed into a moral destitution: one misapprehends and miscalibrates one’s own spiritual temper in the tropics. Hence, sickness. Hence, death. In short, one cannot surpass the land that is always characterized by “la fecundidad grande” (great fecundity) and that which essentially has “verdor continuo” (never-ending verdure).

Consider also this abundance in the tropics at the other side of the world, Brazil:

It is out of this green that hostile Indians, wild animals, insects and diseases emerge. It is this green which prevents the eye from finding easy riches to plunder. It is this green which fills the site reserved for the sugar-cane plantation. It is this green which hides and protects that population whose fate it is to serve. Relief comes in the form of a red signal: fire in the forest, to open up the horizon as far as the eye can see, and when it gets there fire again.

Similar to its Visayan analogue, the Brazilian tropicality described here is punctuated by colorimetric excess. However, what is peculiar is that this green is the color that hides rather than reveals. Green is the symbol for immensity that must be removed to reveal the “true essence of the tropics,” such that the color that announces the tropics must be erased to show its true hue. The never-ending verdure even finds its way beyond the terrestrial domain that permits the growth of vegetation, as Alcina noticed, where

... es cosa maravillar que aun las peñas que estan en medio del mar

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29 Alcina, 173.
30 Alcina, 171.
As paradoxical as this seems, this passage hints at a certain illusory character of the tropics that must be overcome by the observer so that the tropics is forced to expose its secret. The only recourse provided here is its complementary color: red. This counterpoint provides a way to overcome the frustration encountered in the tropics' immense character. Red becomes the color that allows for comprehension to happen, that is, explication by contrast. Red, metaphorically configured as heat, is troped into the green of verdure and vegetation, and even of something inanimate, of rocks.

However, if one happens to disregard this facticity, the fertile land renders itself uninhabitable to anyone, eventually becoming “tierra como fatal sepulcro de los españoles y como red barredera de la muerte” (the fatal burial place of Spaniards and a sweeping dragnet of death) as opposed to the boundless fertility that it holds both in its potency to sustain life but also in the actuality of life itself by way of botanical species announcing the tropics’ character of being in “perpetual springtime,” which is but a metonym of the temperate climactic norm.

One such example is rice, rendered as “morisqueta” in Spanish, whose etymology can be traced from “Moro” and which means “boiled rice without salt.” However, this was coined only in the Spanish’s cognition of this botanical species in this tropical part of the earth, and the vernacular term is “kan-un,” which Mentrida equates with the Spanish morisqueta but also “comida” (to eat). The botanical index here is metonymically troped by way of a metathetical maneuver into the act of consumption whose sole purpose is nourishment. There seems to be a circuit that follows the troping here, not just of the etymology but also the cyclical transformation of tropical energy: the climactic “init,” which is the source of both peril (thanatos) and fertility (eros), is troped into geological heat that allows for the transformation of crops from “hilao” (raw) to “luto” (ripe), as if
Nature itself is predisposed to the culinary act of elevating botanical species to their maximum potency (and palatability) for nutrition (as opposed to the Tagalog word for ripe, “hinog”), that is, the transformation of “bugas,” described by Mentrida as “arroz limpio” (clean rice, primarily because the husk has already been removed), which finds no exact equivalence in English and is merely qualified as “uncooked rice,” to “kan-un.” Finally, the heat that allows for this conversion is then reconfigured as corporeal heat, one that is not “hilanat” anymore, but something that is stored as energy, the necessary constituent that allows for the survival in the land. This traversal, as well as conservation, of energy can only be intuited as the movement of life force that sustains the tropics. As such, this force that fuels the circuitry of energy that is ultimately conserved, from climactic heat to culinary heat to corporeal heat to bring about life, is what I propose to be Eros: the energy of the tropics and the energy that resides within it, the grandeur, the depth, that something else that is apprehended but remains elusive.

This paper concerns itself with a colonial discourse that assumes that the tropical is essentially erotic, with its fascination with the strangeness of the exotic, and therefore suffuses the tropical lexicon with an erotic charge in its translations of words to describe tropical climatology. This colonial encounter is marked by a mode of voyeurism on the part of the homo temperatus, by way of the lexicographer and the ethnographer, which is then problematized as that which negates the tropicality of eroticism in the archive precisely because of the givenness of the organic unity between the tropics and Eros as fermented and later on calcified in the temperate imaginary.

Thus, the recourse provided by this paper is to turn again to the vernacularity of the colonial encounter, and to limn in the cusps between the grapheme and the speech act, meaning and translation, the tropical and the temperate. This chapter intervenes in these breaks to reveal moments of tropisms of the Visayan bios: that particular torridity, that harsh climatology, which eventually causes the land to trope itself into a space of excess, as “perpetual springtime,” a paradox made possible by the erotic force of this heat to populate the land with the abundance of life itself. This tropical heat, as erotic energy, is metabolized by tropical corporeality that simultaneously challenges the Aristotelian notion of habitability as well as retaining the agentic representation of Nature.

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37 *Diccionario*, s.v. “bugas.”
References


Bagyo, Onos, at Sigua:
A Philological Investigation of Storms in the Tagalog Folk Imagination

by Isabela Lacuna

The slow round of the engraver’s lathe gains but the breadth of a hair, but the difference is distributed back over the whole curve, never an instant true, ever not quite.

— William James, *The Will to Believe*

There is no scarcity of talk regarding storms, but there are few attempts to historicize the relationship between the weather, the people it affects, and the narratives that are born in the space between them. Situated at the mouth of a monsoon trough, geography suggests that storms have always been an inveterate reality for the people on the rim of the Pacific, and yet the lexicon of our comprehension is mostly modern and mostly Western. This is problematic on many fronts, first because while meteorology dominates our understanding of the atmosphere, in an era of rapidly changing climates, there is only growing certainty that our understanding of science is not enough to influence our understanding of approaching disaster.\(^1\) If a discipline which has always claimed to have the most concrete

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\(^1\) The most peculiar thing about the discourse on climate change is how polarized opinions remain even when there is overwhelming scientific evidence that not only is the climate changing, but that it has been caused by contemporary human activity. When an agency as eminent as NASA proclaims that climate is warming due to human life and consumption, and yet we still have world leaders who strongly proclaim otherwise, then there is a grand and strange denialism occurring, one so large that it threatens our very existence on earth. See “Scientific consensus: Earth’s climate is warming” NASA: Global Climate Change, accessed November 14, 2018. [https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/](https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/) for more on the scientific consensus; see Christopher Joyce, “Climate Report Warns of Extreme Weather, Displacement of Millions Without Action,” National Public Radio, Inc. last modified October 8, 2018. [https://www.npr.org/2018/10/08/655360909/grim-forecast-from-u-n-on-global-climate-change](https://www.npr.org/2018/10/08/655360909/grim-forecast-from-u-n-on-global-climate-change), for a brief summary of projected effects of rising global temperatures within the next decade, and the
hold on reality is unable to steer the course of human action, then this only reinforces the post-modern argument that there is more to living in the world than the “objective” and “factual” principles of science. Moreover, this says nothing of how science is a Western paradigm, a knowledge produced in temperate places, and must grapple with the ways in which it is not only incompatible with tropical and Pacific reality, but deeply embedded in a history of violent colonial erasures and impositions.

In brief, I can say that many of my arguments lie in the belief that even with the help of satellites, barometers, storm trackers, and computer simulations, we still largely miss the object we are purportedly talking about, because there is more to the experience of weather than the socio-economic and the scientific. Before meteorology, before technology, before empire and the empirical, there was already an existing awareness of the nature of violent weather, and this knowledge from the past resurfaces in a multitude of surprising ways, because it is figurative, maybe emblematic, of a kind of pre-colonial identity that endures because it cannot be denied. Therefore, if the object of my study is not only the autochthonous conceptions of storms, but the earliest iterations of it, then logic proposes that I begin my exploration in the pre-Hispanic Tagalog folk imagination and analyze the ways in which indigenous ideas were formed and deformed during the earliest moments of the Spanish occupation. To synthesize the interrogation even further, let us then pose this single specific question: What is the storm in the Tagalog folk imagination, and how has it been made to move during the early centuries of the Spanish occupation? On the level of the Tagalog word, we can explore three particular propositions: the ones suggested by the bagyo, the sigua, and the onos.

The Endless Question, The Paradox, and the Colla

The earliest philological endeavors pay a great deal of attention to the trope’s force and its particular temporal tenses. In San Antonio’s *Vocabulario Tagalo* (1624), which some say is arguably the oldest dictionary in manuscript form, there are four entries that directly reference the storm: “bagyo” (“tempestad de agua y de todos los vientos,” or a wind and water tempest), “balac-lauót” (“viento que viene enfrente del norte,” or a wind crossing northward), “sigua” (“tempestad de recio tiempo,” or a
tempest of severe speed), and “onos” (“arreciamento de viento,” or raging wind). In Scott’s study, there are four words specifically used to refer to tempestuous weather in sixteenth-century Tagalog culture: “dayaday” (a stormy wind), “bagyo” (typhoon), “sigwa” (a heavy rainstorm), and “hangin” (a squall at sea). Summarily, all these define the storm as elemental violence, particularly of wind and water. In the Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala (1860), force is still a definitional anchor, but nuanced more with a direction, destination, temporal range, and/or captivated subjectivity. This time, only the three words provide a point of comparison (“balac-lauót” disappears from this particular dictionary), which I shall discuss one by one.


“Bagyo” is first: Tempestad, uracan (a great storm, a terrible wind) but to add the suffix –*han* refocuses the term to mean a person experiencing the phenomena. To be “binagyohan” is to refer to a collective group undergoing the same event, for one never encounters a storm alone. This thought is turned into a verb by the prefixes *magpa-* or the longer *pag-* *hin*, which transforms the state of being stormed into a passive action. “Magpabagyo” and “pagbagyohin” can be roughly translated into “staying over” and/or “staying put” while the storm is passing overhead, in the hopes of weathering the strong and damaging wind encompassed in the root word (as demonstrated by the phrases “hayaang lumipas ang bag-yo” and “pabagyohin natin”).

In another combination, a temporal sense is created when one adds the prefix *mag-* (as in, “magbagyo”) to turn the root word into a season (“correr tal tiempo”). This season is forecasted by the more complicated *pagba-*, *maba-*, and *ba-* prefixes alongside a doubling of the root word, as shown by the words “pagbabagyo,” “mababagyo-bagyo,” and the phrase “babagyo bag-yo na.” Noceda and Sanlucar illustrate the use of these

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6 Vocabulario Tagalo, s.v. “onos.”
7 According to the author, all these terms are situated in the South China Sea rather than on land. A short description can be found in William Henry Scott, “Tagalog Culture and Technology” in Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994), 189-190.
8 Vocabulario de la lengua tagala, s.v. “bagyo.”
words in the phrase “Parece que ya quiere correr la tempestad,” which when translated means “it seems like a storm is coming.” This heralds a more active understanding of weather- and storm-watching in the Tagalog figuration. If “magpabagyo” suggests the idea that people are held captive by a storm’s arrival, then “babagyo na” and its ilk forward that anticipation and preparation allow for a sort of agency one might wield when faced of the atmospheric event. One cannot stop it from arriving, definitely, but one can prepare for its arrival and dampen its effects to a certain extent.

The “bagyo” entry closes with a remonstration that leaps from this particular proposition on readiness. “Di magsuhay condi bagyohin,” can be translated to mean that one prepares because one has already been stormed before. Though the emotional mood of the phrase is exasperated, the very nature of the reprimand is hinged on the premise that there is a better way of doing things. On one hand, you have put off your preparations and I am berating you for your procrastination, but on the other hand, I only say this because I believe that if you follow my advice, the very suffering brought about by bagyohin might be avoided, and you shall find yourself in a less precarious position. Herein, reproach is couched by hopeful modernity.

On another tangent, a curious grouping of undefined words in the “bagyo” entry provides another strand of inquiry that can be followed in a different direction: “balibag-yo,” “malabag-yo,” and “tila bag-yo.” To say that something “like a storm” is coming is to announce that there are other motions or other subjects that share a resemblance to the phenomenon, that this motion is not unique to the proper sense that is being proposed. Though Noceda and Sanlucar do not forward an interpretation for this grouping as they did with the previous prepositions (an irregularity not apparent in the other entries of the Vocabulario), mala- and tila in contemporary Tagalog function like the preposition “like,” and thus we can read this section as a kind metaphoric maneuver terminated prematurely. One asks: what are those other things that are “like” the storm, or which move similar to it that this definition is referring to? This question is left unanswered, and this silence might be construed as a moment wherein the authors hastily retreated from a gap they had unwittingly created in their own work. Such a maneuver then becomes reminiscent of an incomplete and half-hearted concealment, one that is usually enacted upon the discovery of something deemed too precious to remain unannounced and yet incomprehensible enough to resist any kind of explanation. It proposes the sentiment: we cannot explain it, what these things which are “like storms” actually are, and yet in spite of this lack of knowledge, we cannot disregard them, we cannot help but include this group in this entry anyway. And so along with Noceda and Sanlucar, we find ourselves
gripping the inevitable product of such a conundrum: we end up with a question (no matter that it conceals its punctuation, its mark), a question without a conclusive answer, a question without an end and without hope for an end. “What is like a storm?” The answer is the lack of answer, the question itself.

“Onos” provides us another counterpoint to examine the object in question. Whereas “bagyo” is mainly an aerial phenomenon, “onos” in contrast, asserts that it is also aquatic. In the entry, it is “turbión de agua y viento,” or a strong surge of water and wind. Adding the prefix mag- once more brings to the fore anticipation (“magonos”), while the longer pag—an denotes geographical location. In contrast, the fifth section of the entry appends an elemental reversal that overturns everything else that has been said before it. “También calor que causa la grande calma” proposes that heat is as much a part of the storm as cloudbursts and howling gales. To be caught in the middle of the “onos” is not only to be buffeted by wind and water, but to also suffer from its exact opposite, a kind of oppressive heat and a lack of moving air. The word foregrounds the merging of polarities, so much so that the concept of seasonality begins to empty itself out in uncertainty, for the storm is present whether in “tag-init” or “tag-ulan,” and the whole year then simply becomes a gradation from one extreme to the other, endlessly without pause, without difference.

The storm is thus always already happening. “Walang ‘sang taong bag-yo,” says the Tagalog proverb. True enough, for what is a year compared to a state of being?

And if the storm is always present, then one wonders how this might affect the anticipation—presentation paradigm presented in the “babag-yo na” discourse. In that previous moment, preparation is representative of agency; it provides for the possibility that choice might still exist even when faced with an event that renders the subject powerless in its presence. Again, if the “bagyo” can be imagined to come, then I might imagine for myself a future wherein I might forestall its oncoming grief because of the change in

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9 Vocabulario Tagalo, s.v. “onos.”
10 My translation. An immense heat that causes a swelteringly calm atmosphere.
the weather. However in “onos,” the progression of the seasons which might make preparation possible (I can prepare for stormy weather in and because of calm weather) is dissolved and the subject finds himself relentlessly stormed at any point in time. Preparation then seems like a vaguely insufficient and impossible concept, for how does one begin to prepare for a state of being, one that is always-already? The storm exists in the wet and dry sense, the present and the absent sense, the direct and the inverted sense. Contracting this thought even further, we might even say that its proper sense is its contradictory sense. What then is the “onos,” the second moment of the storm, but an aporia, that inverted space and moment where all antipodes are folded and fused together, that oxymoronic amalgamation that is consequent to the very project of differentiation and definition itself?12

This leaves us with an understanding of the storm that must anchor itself not in sensorial signification but in sameness, or rather, we must define the phenomena based on those things which remain the same even when the ends of an earthly thought are brought together in an impossible moment. In this case, what remains constant is the presence of suffering: the pain of heat, the pain of water, and the pain of paradox. And this suffering is infectious; it refuses the very limits of the entry that houses it in the same way that it refuses the distinctions of the seasons. It actually subsumes and begins the whole vocabulario itself:

... me causaba también no pequeño rubor, temiendo no correspondería la obra á tan grandes ansias, y muchas veces, llevado de este temor verdaderamente humano, había determinado suplicar á mi Superior me eximiese de esta carga.13

... subalit sa kabilang bahagi nagdadala rin ito sa akin ng takot na hindi ko matugunan ang kanilang mga inaasahan na maging karapat dapat ang obrang aking ginagawa. Sa katunayan, dahil sa takot na ito, na tunay namang natural sa tao, maraming beses na ako nakiusap sa Superyor ng aking Kongregasyon na alisin nalamang sa aking balikat ang responsibilidad na ito ... 14

... I feel no small amount of flushed embarrassment, for fear that

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13 Juan de Noceda and Pedro de Sanlucar, Prólogo to the Vocabulario de la lengua tagala, (Manila: Imprenta Ramirez y Giraudier, 1860), 17.
This work does not correspond to the greatness of my task, and many times, I have carried this naturally human anxiety with me and entreated my Superior to exempt me from this burden.15

This all-consuming pain reverses the traditional flow of power in the work: the author is overwhelmed by his text, and the text is overwhelmed by a word it contains. This reversal causes the modern man to flush in embarrassment and to appeal for freedom from his task, for what was supposed to be his obra maestra instead reveals his own human frailty. “Onos” then perhaps transforms and becomes this moment of painful recognition; it is not only be oppressed by an external elemental force, but it is to become riddled with the torment of paradox, to be eaten quietly through by the wood worm of doubt.16

As a final contrapuntal point, the entry for “sigua” (“Temporal recio, como colla, diferente de Goot. Vm, soplar así el viento. Nagsiguahan, á quien cogió el viento,”17 emphasis mine) consolidates the elemental ontology that has been stated in the previous entries, but its most interesting feature is its attempts to bridge the gap that arises between Spanish and Tagalog phenomenological experiences and their counterparts. While ontologically, the “sigua” is still a strong aerial and aquatic weather phenomena characterized by its sudden passage (“temporal recio”), Noceda and Sanlucar resort to a supplementary definition by hailing a comparative framework. Two other words are used to demonstrate what a storm is and what it is not: colla and goot, respectively. The stormy colla seems to have disappeared through time; contemporary use defines it as a piece of armor, fishing gear, a leash, a gang of port laborers, the last section of cloth to be crimped, or a group of people living in the Andean highlands, but nothing meteorological can be found in any of the contemporary Spanish dictionaries.18 We only have one definitional clue that it is even connected at all to the storm, and that is Almario et al’s annotation that it is “[ang] tawag ng mga Espanyol sa bagyo sa Filipinas.”19 “Goot,” in contrast, refers to a “nube prieta de agua” or “a dark rain cloud,” giving more the sense of the threat of rain without the actualization of it.20 This threat finds culmination

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15 My translation.
16 Vocabulario de la lengua tagala, s.v. “onos.” Aside from storm, the word “onos” is also used to refer to a kind of wood worm, though the stresses are located in a different place.
17 Vocabulario de la lengua tagala, s.v. “sigua.”
18 Diccionario de la lengua española, s.v. “colla,” by the Real Academia Española, accessed September 19, 2016 http://dle.rae.es/?id=9nsQrZA|9ntoww3|9nvOp91|9nwg1LI
19 Virgilio S. Almario, Elvin R. Ebreo, Anna Maria M. Yglopaz, eds., Vocabulario de la lengua tagala (Manila: Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, 2013), 481.
20 Vocabulario de la lengua tagala, s.v. “goot.”
at the end of Noceda and Sanlucar's entry, for when the root word “sigua” is combined with the prefix and suffix *nag—ban*, the product is a word that can be translated to mean a person who is seized or attacked by wind (“a quien cogio el viento”). The promise of violence is fulfilled and becomes *malice*; a sigua does not dispassionately fall from the sky or blow any which way, it chases, itseizes, it surprises, and it attacks people as if it were sentient and holding a grudge. “Sigua” is the moment when the storm becomes a personal enemy instead of a social catastrophe; it is committed to making life miserable for whomever it chooses to pursue.

The “sigua” entry also proposes another way to problematize the very nature of the *Vocabulario* entries. Herein, the storm is supposedly made clear by its entrapment between two other words, and yet time has allowed for *colla* to become estranged from its original purpose; it cannot anymore provide a likeness that clarifies the entry, for it has been voided by time. The original meaning has been effaced, and we can only trust that the phenomenological anchor that we are looking for was once there because of its contextual trace and Almario’s annotation. What then becomes of a definition that is bordered on one side by dissimilarity, and on the other side, by the shadow of a word? Is it still even properly a definition at this point? More than any of the other words I have mentioned, “sigua” has the least contribution to the telos of the language; the entry has an actual hole in it that I do not even have to construct by way oppositions (as with the “onos” entry) or continuous inquiry (as with the “bagyo” entry). *Colla* is another cause for Noceda and Sanlucar to flush in embarrassment; it literally does the opposite of what it was intended for.

Each definition I have deconstructed has produced its own particular logical aporias. My inquiry begins thrice and stutters thrice, and the consistency of these stumbles proposes that definitional queries are as much dependent on the precarities of their limits as they are on the sureties they encompass. Whether these aporias of logic take on the form of the endless question (as discussed in “bagyo”), the paradox (as forwarded by “onos”), the temporal effacement of the *colla* (as in the analysis of the word “sigua”), or quite possibly other forms entirely outside of the scope of the storm, it does not matter as much as their potential to point towards something more, something else, the something past what Jacobo calls *the mores of never*. All three aporias I have mentioned represent the limits of

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limits, those numerous places and moments where a border inevitably fails and implodes upon itself, feeding on the very material that strengthens it on another front. An aporia is present when Noceda and Sanlucar are overcome by their very own creation. An aporia exists when at the end of the day, one still cannot decide if the storm is properly wind or water, if it is a season that divides time or the very progression of time itself, if it is a great malicious violence or a looming sweltering calm, or an opportunity for human agency or an instance of anthropocentric impotence. There is an aporia when three supposedly synonymous words are brought together and create a succession of synonyms that spiral further and further away from univocality and end up in stranger and stranger places, answering with less precision the question that pushed them into motion in the first place. What is a storm? It is that inverted space and time that allows violent weather to become the wood worm, and for the woodworm to become an ouroboric question, that hungry thing that swells endlessly no matter the multitude of signifiers that are fed into it.

**The Spanish Modalities**

We might surmise that the aforementioned aporias embedded within the *Vocabulario* are not simply functions of the limits of discourse but are also products of the imperial Spain’s general tropological habits. The logic of empire is inevitably embedded in all the texts it produces, and the mediation of the Spanish gaze with regard to Tagalog storm tropes allows us to examine the ways in which the Iberian empire constructed its relation to the tropical community, and how these constructions developed in different ways during colonial occupation.

In the case of the storm in the *Vocabulario*, the plainest example of metaphoric figuration is apparent in the concept of translation. That Noceda and Sanlucar assume that the storm in Spain is the same thing as the storm in the Philippines is a conflation recurrent not just in the two dictionaries I have discussed, but even in the San Buenaventura and the de los Santos’ *vocabularios*. Bagyo is tempestad is huracan is temporal.

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23 In Pedro de San Buenaventura’s and Domingo de los Santos’ *vocabularios*, there are no storm words in the main body of the text, though some are present in the appendices. See Pedro de San Buenaventura, *Vocabulario de Lengua Tagala: El Romance Castellano Puesto Primero* (Impreso en la noble Villa de Pila, 1613) and Domingo de los Santos, *Vocabulario de la lengua tagala primera y segunda parte* (Manila: Imp. de N.S. de Loreto del Pueblo de Sampaloc, 1794).

24 One of the ways we can prove the dissimilarity between storms is through the interaction of particular geographies and their consequent effects on climate. Because of the Philippines’ particular location, it is part of the Asian monsoon region, which Harry Robinson, quoting Russell and Kniffen, defines as those places where “monsoon influences either dominate climates or are rather strongly felt.” The motion, direction, and intensity of wind is affected by
When one believes that one is exactly same as the other, that all similarities take on the character of exact reflection instead of distortion, then a very basic conception of metaphor is produced. This is the moment wherein one can propose that “there is no distinction between the container and the contained,” or if you like, when the connection between signifier and signified is taken as solidly homogeneous.

Viewed from the larger project of colonial discourse, this metaphoric transference might take the form of the spirit that formed text, or as I have previously called it, the hopeful modernity that undergirds not just the creation of the *vocabularios* themselves, but the various beliefs that might have spurred the engines of Spain’s Age of Exploration. We know that Spain’s colonization of the tropics was carried under the justification of divine mandate, but this kind of intention is only possible if one makes no distinction between the will of God and the will of the King and the will of Spain, and then consequently, because of the metaphoric sameness of everything with everything else, the will of the Spaniard as the will of the non-Spaniard. We see this in each and every instance that Philip, Isabella, or Charles are hailed in the beginning of a text, or when a Religious Congregation or a Higher Being is praised for granting permission for one action or another, or when a Spaniard feels he has the right to talk for and about what is good for the native, or at the start of every printed book, pamphlet, building inscription, or artifact that solidifies the greatness of the White Man’s *dei* and his own affiliated theism. No moment is this more evident when the Spanish Empire crowns itself with the Sun after staking claim on the Philippines; the Empire’s ego was so engorged at this point that it declared it was not simply an ordinary heliotrope, but was more importantly, the Helios that never set, a Sun whose light was so pervasive that it never ceased to shine regardless of its position in the world: “The crown and sceptre of Spain has come to extend itself over all that the sun looks on, from its rising to its setting.” In a less poetic light, this theism rears its head in utterances like the following: “To Spain belongs the glory of having raised to a relatively high grade of civilization, improving greatly their condition, a people which she found on a lower stage of culture.
distracted by petty wars and despotic rule.” Spain is the god of a tropics they themselves had first imagined, and then rendered godless. Spain is everywhere that its brightness is cast and might desire to be. It is the center of metaphoric sameness that radiates endlessly outward.

Extending ourselves from this logic, we then arrive at a moment when the Tagalog storm must be considered an extended refraction of Spain’s right to sovereignty. If everything is Spain in the metaphoric configuration, then the storm must necessarily be included in this conflation. To an extent, this particular modality reaches its limits when confronted with a phenomenon that runs contrary to its will, though there are some half-hearted examples that attempt to subsume the storm under European anthropocentric control. However, in the long run, while Spain might attempt to articulate a narrative of whiteness in the tropical setting, records show that stormy weather was more likely to undercut his struggle for godhood than encourage it. In Selga’s *Catalogue of Philippine Storms*, every narrative wherein the bagyo is miraculously survived is surrounded by about ten more where the ships are wrecked, the gold is lost, and the lives of the men onboard are doomed to death. This disparity in the initial metaphoric figuration, this difference between temperate aspiration and tropical reality, compels Spanish consciousness to progress towards the next modality in order for understanding to serve under the banner of desire in another, supposedly more comprehensive, way.

Based on the simplicity of the earlier metaphoric premise, the metonymic modality can then be considered a development because it introduces the concept of difference. “This storm that I speak of is not the same as any other thing I might be able to speak of because it is made up of distinct parts.” Concept A is combination of Elements B and C, and is therefore not the same as Concept D, which is composed of Elements E and F. In terms of the *Vocabulario*, one finds this illustrated in the separation of the entries. “Bagyo” is not the same as the words that come before and after

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28 Antonio de Morga, “Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas,” 7. In the beginning of the Sucesos, de Morga makes the tropic link between suffering and valuation. “Their discovery, conquest and conversion was not accomplished without much expenditure, labour and Spanish blood, with varied events and critical moments, which make the work more illustrious, and furnish a spacious field, over which historians may extend themselves, for such is their office, and the matter is not scanty.” If a storm is thus a manner by which the Spanish colonizer suffers because of the direct thwarting of his theism, then another tropic maneuver is deployed in order to justify the suffering and turn it from roadblock to an element of his romantic development. See also Leslie Wylie, “Tropical Nature and Landscape Aesthetics,” in Colonial Tropes and Postcolonial Tricks (London: Liverpool University Press, 201), 50.

it ("bag-uis" or "baha") because the first word refers to the motion of the wind in the atmosphere, the second the tip of a bird’s wing, and the third the flooding of river water. One ceases to conflate and begins to commit to the dissimilarity of one thing from all others, because people must be allowed to rearrange concepts from the primordial soup of sameness to construct some sort of order. To return to the narrative of the Sword and the Cross, metonymic differentiation becomes an extension of the metaphoric modality by giving justification to the Spaniard’s dominion on the tropical subject. In the Spanish metaphoric moment, this conception of essential authority is not possible, for it presupposes the universality of the Spanish subject and therefore creates a problematic equality. If Spain nominates itself as the Imperio del Sol, then no other Sun must exist that might contest its place in the world; it cannot endure as merely another actor, it must exceed “any of the other princes of the earth.”

Hulme observes that this is a common discursive maneuver in most colonial discourses: “One of the strengths of certain sorts of colonialism is the way they bypass the need for complex forms of hegemonisation by their tendency to exterminate potential sources of counter-ideologies.”

The justifications that deploy essentialism take many varied forms, but are most visible in moments when binaries are inserted into discourse; civility versus savagery, divinity versus barbarity, developed versus undeveloped, and so on and so forth, in order to construct a supposedly natural system of governance. All texts that attempt to justify the Spanish occupation fall under this mode; an example of a fairly old one is Antonio de Morga’s Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas while Edward Gaylord Bourne’s introduction to the The Philippine Islands is an example of a fairly recently specimen.

Now, after one has amassed a sizable collection of metonymic differences and justifications, the third tropic modality begins to

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30 Morga, 6.
32 Hulme, 5. “Moreover, by the valour of their indomitable hearts, and at the expense of their revenues and property, with Spanish fleets and men, they have furrowed the seas, and discovered and conquered vast kingdoms in the most remote and unknown parts of the world, leading their inhabitants to a knowledge of the true God, and to the fold of the Christian church, in which they now live, governed in civil and political matters with peace and justice, under the shelter and protection of the royal arm and power which was wanting to them: weighed down as they were by blind tyrannies and barbarous cruelties, with which the enemy of the human race had for so long afflicted them and brought them up for himself.”
33 Edward Gaylord Bourne, Introduction to The Philippine Islands 1493-1803, 23. “The aim of the Introduction is rather to give the discovery and conquest of the Philippines their setting in the history of geographical discovery, to review the unparalleled achievements of the early conquerors and missionaries . . .”
materialize when the subject begins to consolidate for itself all the small separate moments of difference and combines them into a larger, more seamless enterprise. In White’s articulation, it is “the classification of all the classifications or the seriation of all the seriations.”

Synecdoche as the third modality of construal introduces the concepts of structure and efficiency, wherein the goal is to produce comprehensions of a certain kind in a faster manner, across more fields, and to penetrate more classifications of order. In another utterance, synecdoche is the application of metonymic logic across total systems in different paradigms and fields. One begins to group differences together to better deploy a series of coordinated motions that eventually create total systems of meaning with less effort than before. The *vocabulario* as a synecdochic mode exemplifies this in its very structure; entries are grouped based on the logic of the alphabet in a multi-storied hierarchy of degrees. Position is determined based on the placement of the first, second, third, fourth letters, and so on and so forth, and in the rare cases when all the letters are exactly the same (as in the case of “onós” as storm and “ónos” as wood worm) then the placement of the stress becomes final arbiter. And supposing that all known words have finally been housed in this larger structure, the *vocabulario* is then made to serve the purpose of an even larger system, that of human language, which in turn is then co-opted by systems of government and or systems of religion, escalating higher and higher until one ends up in a dominant hegemony. In the colonial narrative, this moment is reflective of the imposed racial stratification of the islands, the large-scale religious conversion of the natives, the restructuring of towns, and the educational system implemented by the friars. Though all these institutions purport to follow different short-term objectives, any production of knowledge that might ensue is always in the service of the Sun King in Spain, for what is at stake is “the establishment and consolidation of a particular discursive formation,” a formation that must always elevate the Spaniard at each and every turn.

Finally, the fourth modality, that of irony. Unlike the first three moments, when White gives a particular range of ages when they are most likely to occur, irony is left to float around unanchored in the expanse of eventuality. We know that in theory, it should happen, but we are not assured of it and do not know when we might expect it. Irony in a simpler iteration is self-consciousness, “the capacity not only to say things about the world but also to say things about it in alternative ways.” In one sense,
it is the understanding that the game of meaning-making is rigged so that particular insights are able to surface more quickly than others; in another sense it is the recognition of the paradox of comprehension, that we labor to create it for most of our lives and arrive at a point when we realize that the product of our labors is inherently flawed no matter the complexity of our synecdochic constructions, the multitude of our metonymic differentiations, or the force of our metaphoric convictions.

In the vocabulario, one might say that this is best exemplified by Noceda and Sanlucar’s back-and-forth motion between the “flush of embarrassment” and the “burden of responsibility.” As I have said before, he begins the prologo of the vocabulario with an admittance of insufficiency, and yet this admittance was only arrived at once all the work had been finished. Noceda and Sanlucar do not begin with doubt, but they definitely end in it. They progressed through all the modalities in order to arrive at a comprehension of the Tagalog language, and yet these modes do not assure them of the truth of their venture, or the clarifying light of their heliotropic correctness. It assures them of a certain degree of understanding (the majority of the vocabulario is not wrong), but not of its completeness.

. . . él parece imposible el no cometer mil yerros con solo el beneficio del arte de esta lengua . . . porque sus reglas tienen tales excepciones y contraexcepciones, que casi ninguna viene á ser general en órden á los juegos de las raices . . .

. . . hindi maiiwasan magkaroon ng mga pagkakamali . . . dahil napakaraming mga eksepsiyon at kontreksepsiyon na pumipigil upang sa bandang huli ay magkaroon ng pangkalahatang batas na magsisilbing gabay para sa paggamit ng lahat ng mga salitâng-ugat.

. . . it seems impossible not to commit a thousand mistakes with only the benefit of this single artful language . . . because their rules possess so many exceptions and counter-exceptions, that almost no general rule can be used to order the play of the root [words].

One might say that the authors of the text have arrived at least at a moment of irony regarding their work, yet attaining the fourth modality seems to

37 Juan de Noceda and Pedro de Sanlucar, Prólogo to the Vocabulario de la lengua tagala, (Manila: Imprenta Ramirez y Giraudier, 1860), 17.
39 My translation.
have a smaller impact than the achievement of the second or third; the total systems of thought created in the previous figurations are not affected by this instance of self-reflexivity and its effects remain contained within the text. Regret or irony were not significant emotions in Spain’s total systems in the Philippines; even with the eventual success of Bonifacio’s revolution and the Declaration of Independence in 1898, Spain still believed that it had the right to sell a country which, for all intents and purposes, it had already lost. It is only decades later, with the emergence of post-colonial studies, that Spain’s larger systems achieved self-reflexivity regarding the colonial enterprise, but this particular lag only goes to show that White’s fourth modality is not as quick to occur as its predecessors. Irony is not a kind of destiny, not in the same way that metonymy and synecdoche have shown themselves to be.

Thus we might surmise that self-consciousness is perpetually emergent, and it is the responsibility of the tropical subject to summon its other invisible fragments from the realm of possibility. Previously, I have call this ironic moment an aporia, the storm which disrupts the beating heart of the heliotrope’s total system; the hunger of the question without a concrete answer. Yet, locating aporias is not the critic’s only responsibility; it is not enough that a thing might be proven flawed and its façade torn down. An aporia must also have a creative capacity; it must be able to suggest an alternative framework when it dislocates the Sun in the current ideological sky. And this creative motion, this metalogical maneuver, is proposed to us by the figure of the ouroboric storm. If the metaphor of the sun has been historically constructed as the metaphor for the singular universal answer, then the metaphor of the storm must necessarily be its reverse image; it is the question that grows larger with every and any answer that it is fed into it.

This analysis of the Tagalog storm as aporia, or the aporia as a storm, illustrates the kind of productivities that might flourish in post-colonial and post-structural critiques. The survey not only shows that folk Tagalog history, language, and reality are just as complex, just as filled with intellectual promise, as any other counterpart they might have in the modern world, but that it is possible to recalibrate the discourse without the naïve inclination to affix an “essence” to the phenomenon, the essentializing maneuver which provoked this whole analysis in the first place. Tagalog culture is without comparison, but it does not aspire to replace the Western helios. What this analysis can only provide, what it only desires to provide, is the articulation of exceptional Tagalog conceptions in an intellectual sky filled with other just as exceptional, just as valid conceptions, in the hopes that it might consequently expose alternatives in a world whose possibilities are slowly growing more catastrophically limited by the day. In a time where the very span of futurity is growing smaller and smaller by the
year, narrowing down to a select few, seemingly apocalyptic scenarios, the
injunction that must be embraced is that one must imagine differently, in as
many ways as one can, if one hopes to exist continuously. History shows that
at least, this is something we innately know how to do, if only we choose to
remember.

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Tungo sa Isang Dalumat ng Panahon:
Ilang Panimulang Tala'
by Christian Jil Benitez

I.


¹ Nirebisa mula sa unang kabanata ng “Isang Dalumat ng Panahon” (Ateneo de Manila University, MA tesis, 2017).
² Vocabulario de la lengua tagala (VLT), s.v. “Panahón.”
Panahon, sa ganang  pinahahalagahan din nila ito bilang causa o sanhi (at kung gayon, para sa isang kahihinatnan): nagaganap ang kahulugan ng panahon sa pangyayaring pagkaloob ng dalumat na ito.

Panahon ang panahon samakatwid hangga’t ito ang panahon para sa isang para sa o ang pagkakaloob nito; sa ganang ito nadadalumat ang panahon bilang isang pangyayari.³ Mula sa halos pawang paikot na pangangatwiran, nagiging makatuturan ang kahulugan ng panahon sa pagtulos sa kilos ng pagkaloob sapagkat isinasangkot nito ang nasabing salita sa isang buong kalakaran ng pagkilos ng mga bagay, na isinasakongkreto ng pang-ukol na “para sa ka hit anong bagay.”

II.

Ang kritikalidad ng pagkaloob sa pakahulugan sa panahon ang nagpapahiwaga sa dalumat na ito: sapagkat habang may kaabalahan ito sa kakailanan ng isang pangyayari (tiempo), may pagtutuon din ito sa kaanuhan (cosa) nito. Natuturol ang mga alinsabay na kaabalahan na kaabalahang ito sa karaniwang pananalita:

**panahón** n. Bk. Hlg. Mgd. Sb. SL. Tg. time, period of time, season, syn. tiempo; cf. araw, oras; climate, weather, syn. klima. – Kpm. panaún; Ilk. panawén, battaway; Ilk. Png. panaón; Ind. Mal. Ar. musim; Mar. matei.⁴

Ang panahon ay hindi lamang kung kailan nangyayari ang tiyak na klima, panaun, panawen, battaway,...; sa halip, ang panahon na nga rin ang mismong mga kategoryang ito. Madadalumat ang ganitong pagsasalikop ng kakailanan at kaanuhan ng panahon sa higit pang pagpapakahulugan dito:

**pa-nahón** png. 1: ang sistema ng mga pagkakasunod-sunod

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⁴ Diksiyonario-Tesauro Pilipino Ingles (DTPI), s.v., “panahón.”
ng relasyon ng anumang bagay o pangyayari sa iba, gaya ng nakaraan, pangkasalukuyan, at panghinaharap; ang habà o tagal na ipinalalagay na kasáma ng kasalukuyang búhay, gaya ng kaibahan ng búhay mula sa dáratìng at sa búhay na walang-hanggan: BATTÀWAY, CYCLE, EDAD, MÁTEY, MÚSIM, ORAS, PANÀWÉN, PERIOD, PERYÓDO 2: isa sa apat na panahon ng taon na nagsisimula sa equinox o solstice batay sa astronomiya, ngunit nagsisimula naman sa magkaibang petsa sa magkaibang klima batay sa heograpiya: PERIOD, PERYÓDO 3: ang malaking interval ng oras na napakahalaga sa búhay ng tao: MÁSA, SEASON 4: a ang kalagayan ng atmospera na may kaugnayan sa hangin, presyur, at iba pa b malakas na hangin o bagyo o magkasáming malakas na hangin at bagyo: WEATHER 5: a bahagi ng taon na inilalarawan ng partikular na kondisyon ng panahon, temperature, at iba pa b panahon ng kasaganaan: SEASON 6


III.

Mula hiwagang ito ng panahon, nagiging maaari ang rangkang maupuhap ang pinaglalaanang "kahit anong bagay" sa pakahulugan ng salita. At sa pamamagitan ng masinsing pagbaybay sa naunang siniping lagom mula sa UPDF, na kritikal bilang kinatawagang teksto ng kontemporanyo, maaring malirip ang isang katwirang naglalatag ng isang pagtataya sa panahon. Sa unang pakahulugan, nagbubukas ang pagpapakahulugan sa panahon mula sa isang metaporikong antas:

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5 Unibersidad ng Pilipinas Diksiyonaryong Filipino (UPDF), s.v. "panahón."
6 Pinakahulugan ng VLT ang hiwaga bilang “diferencia de sentidos y significaciones” (“pagkakaiba ng diwa at ng kahulugan”); tingnan sa VLT, s.v. “Hiuága.”
**pa-na-hón png. 1:** ang sistema ng mga pagkakasunod-sunod ng relasyon ng anumang bagay o pangyayari sa iba, gaya ng nakaraan, pangkasalukuyan, at panghinaharap; ang habà o tagal na ipinalalagay na kasáma ng kasalukuyang búhay, gaya ng kaibahan ng búhay mula sa dárating at sa búhay na walang-hanggan: **battáway, cycle, edad, mátey, músim, oras, panawén, period, peryódo.**

Mula sa abstraksiyon (“ang sistema ng mga pagkakasunod-sunod ng relasyon...”, “ang habà o tagal na ipinalalagay...”), tumutuloy ang pakahulugan sa pagpapaliwanag sa pamamagitan ng paghalimbawa, na isa ring pagtutulad: ang **panahon** ay isang sistema ng mga pagkakasunod-sunod at habà o tagal na ipinalalagay, gaya ng: nakaraan, pangkasalukuyan, panghinaharap, kaibahan ng búhay mula sa dárating at sa búhay na walang-hanggan. Sa paglilistang ito ng mga matuturalan ng panahon sa pagiging sunuran at katagalan, tinatangka samakatwid na mailabas ang pakahulugan sa sirkularidad ng abstraksiyon.

Tumutungo ang pagtutulad na ito sa pagtatangkang pagsasakatawan ng pagiging sistema ng **panahon** sa kaliksan:

**pa-na-hón png. 2:** isa sa apat na panahon ng taon na nagsisimula sa equinox o solstice batay sa astronomiya, ngunit nagsisimula naman sa magkaibang petsa sa magkaibang klima batay sa heograpiya; **period, peryódo.**

Ang **panahon** samakatwid ay ang sunuran at katagalan sa katawang likas, alinsunod sa abstraktong agham. Tinitiyak ang panahon sa pagsasabahagi nito sa **taon**, na pinakakahulugan bilang “habà ng panahong binubuo ng 365 araw, 5 oras, 48 minuto, at 45.51 segundo; tagal ng isang ganap na pag-ikot ng mundo sa araw.” Sa patitiyak na ito ng panahon, kritikal ang astronomiko at heograpiko: nakabatay ang pag-unawa sa mga itinutumbas na equinox, solstice, at klima sa pagkakalunan ng daigdig (at kung gayon, ng mga pook sa daigdig) kaugnay sa araw.

Sa ganang ito, dinadalumat ang panahon sa isang planetaryong kaantasan, kung saan arow ang nakagitnang bagay na nakaliliwanag. Kung gayon, maaaring mapahalagahan ang pagbaling na ito mula sa abstraksiyon.

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7 UPDF, s.v. “panahón.”
8 UPDF, s.v. “panahón.”
9 UPDF, s.v. “taón.”
ng pakahulugan bilang heliotropo, sa paraang ipinababaling ang panahon gaya ng daigidig palibot sa araw, na bagaman hindi tuwirang nabanggit ay pinaliligiran, bagaman hindi tuwiran ding nakapagpapaliwanang.  

Ang hindi pa rin tuwirang pagtulos sa panahon ang maaaring nakapagdudulot ng kakatwang paglibis ng pakahulugan mula sa masidhing planetaryong kaantasan ng metapora tungo sa isa pang masidhing metapora: sa isang humanistikong pihit, ipinaaalala ng pakahulugan na ang daigidig na tinutukoy sa naunang pakahulugan, ang daigidig na itong umiinog sa araw, ay maaari ding ang parehong tâong “ako.” 

Napakakahulugan sa ganitong baling ang pagiging sunuran at katagalan ng panahon alinsunod sa antropomorpong bûhay:

**pa-na-hón**  **png. 3:** ang malaking interval ng oras na napakahalaga sa bûhay ng tao: MÁSA, SEASON


Ang kalipunang ito ang nakapauugnay sa ikalawang kasingkahulugan ng panahon: matururol ang season bilang sandali ng paglilipon ng mga bagay, na tinutulos bilang napakahalaga para sa bûhay ng tao.

Tinatangkang maipaliwanag ang masang panahon sa pagbaling sa himpapawid:

**panahón**  **png. 4:** a ang kalagayan ng atmospera na may kaugnayan sa hangin, presyur, at iba pa b malakas na hangin o bagyo o magkasâmang malakas na hangin at bagyo: WEATHER

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11 “Ako ang daigidig,” ang giit ni Alejandro G. badilla na tulang may parehong pamagat, na kritikal na nagpasinaya ng panibagong yugto sa panulaang Filipino; tingnan sa kanyang Ako ang Daigidig at Iba Pang Tula (Maynila: Silangan Publishing House, 1995), 4-5.  

12 UPDF, s.v. “panahón.”  
13 UPDF, s.v. “mása.”  
14 UPDF, s.v. “mass.”  
15 UPDF, s.v. “panahón.”

Ang pagtatagpo ng pagkasakatawan at hindi panahon ang nakapagtanggap pang pakahulugan dito:

**panahón** *png. 5*: a bahagi ng taon na inilalarawan ng partikular na kondisyon ng panahon, temperature, at iba pa b panahon ng kasaganaan: SEASON


Sa pagturol sa kasidhian, maaapuhap muli ang mga naunang pakahulugan sa panahon: ang pag-inog ng daigdig sa araw, ang pagkamahalaga nito sa buhay ng tao, ang kalagayan ng kalikasan alinsunod sa mga iba’t ibang salik. Gayunpaman, sa nasabing kasidhian ng huling pakahulugan ng salita, sa halip na ipagpatuloy ito sa pamamagitan ng paghahalimbawa at pagtutulad (tulad ng sa pinakaunang pakahulugan), winawakasan ang pagpapakahulugan sa panahon — na isa ring anyo ng pagbaling mula sa pananib ng sirkularidad sa pangangatwiran. Sapagkat kung hindi, paano nga bang mangyayaring mabigyang-kaulugan ang kasidhian ng panahon.

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16 UPDF, s.v. “panahón.”
17 UPDF, s.v. “kondisyon.”
18 UPDF, s.v. “katayuan.”
19 UPDF, s.v. “katayuan.”
20 UPDF, s.v. “saganà.”
IV.

Sa pagbaling muli sa mga pakahulugan nina Noceda at Sanlucar sa *panahon*, umaalagwa ang pagpapakahulugan mula sa halos pawang pag-uulit sa pagtuon sa isang tiyak na kilos na pinagkakalooban ng panahon:


**PANAHON.** *pp. Hosepedarse en casa de otro con toda su hacienda, para que le ampare. P. in M. Donde,* *An. Hospedar,* *Magpa. Á quien,* *papanahonin.*


Tulad sa naunang pakahulugan, nakabaling ang panahon sa kalupaan, bagaman sa pagkakataong ito, hindi alinsunod sa pagkalinga sa lupa ayon sa

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22 VLT, s.v. “Panahón.” Maihahambing ang pakahulugang ito sa Bikolanong *pananaohon,* na mapakahuhulugan bilang “el huesped” (“ang panauhin”) o “hospedar á los forasteros, á trabajadores” (“pananauhin ang mga dayo, o manggagawa”) (sariling salin); tingnan sa *Vocabulario de la lengua Bicol,* s.v. “pananaohon.”
pagtatanim, kung hindi sa pagiging mapagkalinga ng lupa bilang tahanan.23 Sa ganang ito nadadalumat ang *panahon* bilang matalik sa *panahan*, bilang alinsabay na magkatulad at magkaiba: sapagkat habang habang kapwa nila kinahuhulugan ang pangyayaring “tumigil, huminto,” kritikal na naiiba mula sa kalinga ng *panahon* ang *panahan* sa pangangailangan nito para “kumuha ng salapi upang mangontrata.”24

Sa mga pakahulugang ito nina Noceda at Sanlucar, naipapabaling ang pakahulugan sa *panahon* sa kalupaan, at sa ganitong patuon, natutulos ang hindi tiyak na “kahit anong bagay” na pinagkakalooban ng panahon. Sa isang kritikal na sandali, maitutulad kung gayon ang tuon ng mga pakahulugan sa pangungulatula bilang pagtatanim at pagkalinga sa mismong kilos ng pagpapakahulugan: ang pagbibigay-kahulugan samakatwid ay ang kilos din ng pangangalaga para sa pangyayaring mapakahulugan ang *panahon*. Napasasaysayan sa ganitong paraan ang halos sirkularidad ng mga naunang pagpakahulugan sa *panahon*, sapagkat tulad ng isang taniman kung saan sinusuyo ang lupa upang sa gayon ay maayos itong matatamnan, gayon din ang sa mga pakahulugan para mapakahulugan ang *panahon*.

V.

Alinsunod sa tuon sa kalupaan ng mga sinunang naitalang pakahulugan ng *panahon*, higit pa sa pagbalin ng mga ito sa daigdig, kritikal dito ang pagiging pangyayari ng mga kilos, at bilang gayon, ang pagiging sandali rin ng mga ito. Sa ganang ito, malapanuto ang pagdalamat ni Resil Mojares sa *panahon* sa pagbalin sa Bisaya:

> The word *panahon* may have derived from the verb *nabon*, which means “to rent a plot or piece of land for a determinate period of time” (the 1711 Visayan dictionary of Mateo Sanchez, S.J., cites the example of a tuba-gatherer who contracts a coconut grove for a season of wine-tapping); “to hire oneself out for service to a person for an agreed span of time;” or “to migrate to another place in order to work for a period of time.”25

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24 VLT, s.v. “Tahán.”
Maaaring naghulugan ang salitang panahon sa pandiwang nahon, na nangangahulugang “pag-upa ng isang pitak o piraso ng lupa sa loob ng isang tiyak na panahon” (tinatalâ ng diksyonaryong Bisaya ni Mateo Sanchez, S.J., na inilimbag noong 1711 ang halimbawa ng isang manunubáng umuupa ng isang niyugan sa panahon ng pangangalap ng tubâ); “pagpa-upa ng sarili bilang trabaho para sa isang tao sa loob ng isang napagkasunduang saklaw ng panahon;” o “pagtungo sa ibang lugar upang magtrabaho sa loob ng isang panahon.” (sariling salin)

Sa pagbaling sa itinalang pakahulugan ni Mojares mula kay Sanchez, higit na tinitiyak ang pagpapakahulugan sa panahon bilang kaugnay sa pagkamatalik ng gawain at ng sandali, sa pagtuon muli sa kalupaan:

**Nahon.** up. F. an. Alquilarse por una sementera, o por algun tiempo largo como el mananguete hasta que cumpla un pelo, o loque se conciertan, otra cosa es namoo. Y otra lihog, y otra abang, de todos. Vid. suis locis. Nanahon aco can coan sin pagbuhat sa iya balay cun sa oma &c. Estoy concertado, o alquilado consulano, panahonan, es aquel con quien trabajan, cuya obra hacen. Ymo aco panahonan sa acun yma.26


Sa pakahulugan sa nahon sa Diccionario Bisaya-Espanol, na inihanda ni Juan Felix de la Encarnacion noong 1883, bagaman kaiba na mula sa pakahulugan ni Sanchez sa hindi nito tuwirang pagtuon sa kalupaan, kritikal pa rin para sa nasabing salita ang pagiging isang sandali ng kilos:

**NAHON.** Ir alguno á trabajar, por una temporada, á otro pueblo distinto del de su naturaleza, el herrero, platero, etc. * Ajustarse

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26 Vocabulario de la lengua Bisaya, s.v. “Nahon.”
alguno, para servir á otro, por un año, un mes, una semana, etc.27

NAHON. Magtrungo ang isa para magtrabaho, sa isang panahon, sa bayang iba sa pinanggalingan, bilang panday, platero, atbp. * Ayusin ang isa, para magsilbi sa iba, sa isang taon, isang buwan, isang linggo, atbp. (sariling salin)

Higit pa sa tuon sa kalupaan samakatwid, tuon ng nahon ang kasandalian ng gawain, na nagtuturo ng kahalagahan ng pagbaling ng mga pakahulugan nito sa pangungupahan at kasunduan: sapagkat ang mga ito ang nagdiriin sa pagiging tiyak ng pangyayari ng mga kilos. Sa ganang ito, kritikal na maturol ang panahon hindi bilang pawang pangungupahan o paninilbihan, kung hindi ang pangungupahan o paninilbihan nang may lubos na pagsasalalay sa tiyak na sandali lamang. Alinsunod sa tiyak pagsasalalay na ito ng kilos, naiba kung gayon ang panahon sa karaniwang pangungupahan o paninilbihan na maaaring mangyari kahit at hanggang kailanpaman.

Sa ganang ito, nadadalumat ang kritikal na tuon ng nahon: para kay Mojares:

What is intriguing about the notion of nahon, or panahon, is that it conveys not just the idea of duration or interval but of opportunity—of making time for life-sustaining activity, of carving out space for work and living. This sense is preserved, if somewhat degraded, in such derived contemporary usages as tiyempohay or panayming (from tiempo and time) which, all too often, means simple opportunism.28

Ang katakata-taka tungkol sa palagay ng nahon, o panahon, ay pinakahulugan nito hindi lamang ang kaisipan ng katagalang o pagitan ngunit maging ng pagkakataon—ng paglikha ng panahon para sa gawaing panawid-búhay, ng paglilok ng lunan para sa paggawa at pamumuhay. Napananatili ang diwang ito, kung hindi papaanumang naipasamâ, sa mga hiram na kontemporanyong gamit tulad sa tiyempohay o panayming (mula sa tiempo at time) na, higit na madalas, nangangahulugan ng payak na pananamantala. (sariling salin)

27 Diccionario Bisaya-Español, s.v. “Nahon.”
Sa pag-uugat ni Mojares sa *panahon* mula sa *nahon*, samakatwid ang una bilang *pa+nahon*, nadadalumat ang idiniriing diwa sa pagkakataon. Sapagkat sa pagsasalalay sa unlaping *pa*- bilang alinsabay na mapakahulugan ng pumapakahulugan para sa pag-utos o pagtungo,29 alinsabay na *panahon* bilang sa isang banda, ang pautos o pakiusap ng pagnanahon; at sa kabilang banda, ang pagtungo sa kalagayan ng pagkakanahon. Samakatwid, *panahon* ang alinsabay na pangyayari na at ang pagpapangyari pa lamang ng *nahon*, at sa ganang ito, ang *panahon* din kung gayon ang alinsabay na pagkakataon (ang *tiempo at time*) at pagtataon (ang *tiyempohay at panayming*) na tinutulos ni Mojares.

VI.

Sa pagpapakahulugan sa Diksiyunaryo-Tesauro Pilipino-Ingles, ikinakawing ang *panahon* sa salitang *tahun* ng Bahasa Indonesia at Malayo, na maisasalin bilang *taon*.30 Sa ganang ito, madadalumat ang salitang *panahon* bilang *pang+taon*,31 isang palagay na makapagpapasisidhi sa pag-uugat ni Mojares sa salita sa *nahon*, sapagkat higit pa sa pakahulugan sa *taon* bilang katagalang sinusukat ng labindalawang buwan, bumabaling din ito bilang ugar ng salitang *pagkakataon*:


29 UPDF, s.v. “pa-.” Bagaman tiyak na pinakahulugan ng UPDF ang pagiging pagtungo ng nasabing unlapi bilang “pambuo ng pandiwa, nagasaad ng pagpatungo sa isang pook, hal parini, pariyán,” pinapalawig ang kaisipan ng pook bilang kalagayan, at kung gayon, ang pagturing sa “pagtungo sa pagkakanahon” bilang pag-unawa sa *pa+nahon*.

30 DTPI, s.v. “panahón.”


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taón, pagkakataón n. coincidence; chance, opportunity. Syn. koinsidensya, tsansa, oportunidad. — Kpm. pamikatagun; Hlg. Sb. kahigayonan; Ilk. gasat, talibagok; Ind. Mal. Ar. untung, nasib; Mar. palapelad, sarakan; Sb. atól.33

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ta-ón png 3: a pagkaganap nang magkasabay sa isang pook o panahon, gaya sa “nagkataon” Cf COINCIDENCE b posibilidad ng gayong pangyayari34

Bilang matalik sa pangyayari ng pagtatapo, idiniriin ng taon ang kritikalidad ng kasandalian ng mga gawain sa nahan, sa ganang diwa nitong nakapagpapahalaga sa panahon bilang hindi pawang pangungupahan o paninilbihan kailanman kung hindi kilos na marii ng isinasalalay na mataunan ang mga tiyak na kalagayan ng mga bagay.35 Mauunawaan sa ganitong paran ang halimbawa sa pakahulugan ni Sanchez bilang pangyayari ng mga pagpapanahon: ang kilos ng pagtutuba ay itinataon sa

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32 VLT, s.v. “Taón.”
33 DTPi, s.v. “taón.”
34 UPDF, ika-4 na ed., s.v. “taón.”
pamumunga ng mga niyog, na nakapagkakaloob ng panuto sa pagtataon din ng pangungupahan ng isang niyugan.

Sa tuon ng *taon* sa pagtatagpo ng mga bagay, kritikal nitong ipinababaling ang pagdalumat ng panahon tungo sa kabagayan, sa materyalidad ng mga ito—ang pamumunga ng mga niyog, halimbawa, o ang gutom ng tao, na nakapagтурulak sa kanya upang gumawa. Taliwas kung gayon sa mapaghiwalay na dalumat ng panahon bilang nasa labas o nasa loob ng sangkabagayan, idiniriin ng halagahang mapagtaon ang pakikipagtragpo ng mga bagay sa isa't isa na naipangyayari lamang alinsunod sa kani-kanilang mga pagkabagay: ang pagkaniyog ng mga niyog, ang pagkatao ng mga tao.

**VIII.**

Malilirip ang kritikalidad ng kataunan sa iba’t ibang pagdalumat ng panahon, sapagkat sa pamamagitan ng mga natatalaáng bagay sa kanyang paligid, napagkakalooban ang tao ng wikaang makatutukoy ng mga tiyak na pagkabagay: ang pagkaniyog ng mga niyog, ang pagkatao ng mga tao.

Los momentos del día las distribúían así: *pagsikat na* ng tálang *baquero*, como las tres y media de la mañana; *pagsikat na* ng tálang *batúgan*, al salir del lucero; *maraling áraw*, el amanecer; *pagliwayway*, *kung bukangliway* aw, al romper el alba; *pagbabá na* ng *manok*, al bajar los gallos, estando ya bastante claro, pero aun sin sol; *namímitak na* ng *áraw* kunng *umááraw na*, la salida del sol; áraw na kunng umaga na, ya es de día; *hampás tikíng an* ng *áraw*, como las siete de la mañana, que es cuando dicen estar el

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36 Inuuri ng mga Griyego ang panahon bilang *phasis*, and panlabas, at nomos, ang panloob; gayunpaman, hindi ganap na maalihiwalay ang dalawa mula sa isa’t isa: “In Aristotlee’s physics the external time of objects is ‘the number of motion,’ but motion must be marked first by our senses, and by the inner experience of time. Thus Aristotle conceived external time only through and as an extension of the inner time of bodily action.” (“Sa pisika ni Aristoteles, ang panlabas na panahon ng mga bagay ay ‘ang bilang ng kilos,’ bagaman naitatalâ muna ang kilos ng ating mga pandama, at sa pamamagitan ng panloob na karanasan ng panahon. Samakatwid, dinadalumat ni Aristoteles ang panlabas na panahon sa pamamagitan lamang at bilang kadugtong ng panloob na panahon ng mga kilos pangkatawan.”) (sariling salin; tingnan kay Dušan I. Bjelić, *Galileo’s Pendulum: Science, sexuality, and the body-instrument link*, paunang salita ni Micháel Lynch (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 24.

The moments of the day are divided in the following manner:

- **pagsíkat nanğ tálang baquero**, around 3:30 in the morning;
- **pagsíkat nanğ tálang batúgan**, when the light comes out;
- **madaling áraw**, the dawn;
- **pagliwayway, kung bukangliwayway**, when dawn breaks;
- **pagbaba nang manok**, when the cocks come down, already a clear sky but still without the sun;
- **namímitak na anğ áraw kung umááraw na** the appearance of the sun;
- **áraw na kung umaga na**, it is already day;
- **hampás tikin anğ áraw**, around seven in the morning, when they say that the sun is within the grasp of one tikin; **máaga pa**, it is still early, around seven thirty or eight in the morning;
- **mataas na anğ áraw**, the sun is already night, around ten until twelve;
- **tanbali, katanbalián**, midday;
- **tanhálìng tapat, tanhálìng tìrik, saulo angh áraw**, high-noon, because the sun, having reached its height, now projects the light directly above the head;
- **likid na, kung kiling nìg**, twelve-thirty or one;
- **lipás na**, two o’clock;
- **mababa na**, when the sun starts to go down, around four o’clock;
- **lúlúnod na**, when the sun starts to disappear;
- **nalúnod na**, when the sun already has set.

Hinahati ang mga sandali ng araw sa mga sumusunod na paraan:

- **pagsíkat nanğ tálang baquero**, bandang alas tres-y-media ng umaga;
- **pagsíkat nanğ tálang batúgan**, sa pagsíkat ng talà;
- **maraling áraw**, sa liwayway;
- **pagliwayway, kung bukangliwayway**, sa pamímitak ng araw;
- **pagbabà nang manok**, sa pagbaba ng mga tandang, maalawlas nang kalangitan bagaman wala pa ring araw;
- **namímitak na angh áraw kung umááraw na**, sa pagsíkat ng araw;

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áng áraw, bandang alas siete ng umaga, kapag sinasabi nilang naabot na ng araw ang isang tikín; maaga pa, maaga pa rin ito, bandang alas siete-y-media o alas otso ng umaaga; mataás na ang áraw, mataas na ang araw, bandang alas dies ng umaga hanggang alas dose ng tanghali; katanhalían, gitnang-araw; tanháling tapat, tanháling tirkí, saulo ang áraw, tanghaling tapat, sapagkat naabot na ng araw ang tugatog ay pumupukol na ang liwanag nito sa ulo; likid na, kungh kiling ng, alas dose-y-media o ala una; lipás na, alas dos; mababá na, kapag nagsimula nang bumababa na ang araw, bandang alas kuwatro; lúlúnod na, kapag nagsimula nang mawala ang araw; nalúúnod na, kapag lumubog na ang araw. (sariling salin)

Samantala, sa pawang dilim ng gabi, higit na kakaunti ang kanilang mga natataláng sandali, at samakatwid, ang kauntian din ng mga napapangalanang hati:

A la noche llaman gabi. Y sus momentos las reparten así: silim na kungh sumísilim na, va oscureciendo; takipsilim, entre dos luces; malálim na ang gabi, muy avanzada la noche como a las diez o las once; hatinggabi, media noche.40

The night is called gabi. And it is divided in the following manner: silim na kungh sumísilim na, when it is getting dark; takipsilim, between two lights; malálim na ang gabi, when the night is already very advanced, like ten or eleven in the evening; hatinggabi, midnight.41

Tinatawag na gabi ang gabi. At hinahati ito sa sumusunod na paraan: silim na kungh sumísilim na, kapag dumílím na; takipsilim, sa pagitan ng dalawang liwanag; malálim na ang gabi, kapag labis nang malalim ang gabi, bandang alas dies o alas onse ng gabi; hatinggabi, hatinggabi. (sariling salin)

Sa kaibhang ito ng dami ng mga naitataláng sandali tuwing araw at gabi, kritikal ang liwanag ng araw sapagkat sa gana nito naaari ang pagtataláng mga katiyakan.42 Halimbawa, sa pagbaling muli sa halimbawa ni

40 Serrano Laktaw, 361.
41 Manapat, 309.
42 Ang pagbaling na ito ng liwanag tungo sa katiyakan ang idiniriing pagkakaiba nito
Sanchez sa kanyang pakahulugan sa *nahon*, ang liwanag ng araw ang nagpapahintulot sa pamumungga ng niyog, at pagtalâ ng tao sa sandali ng nasabing pamumunga. Kung gayon, sa pagkakataong ito ng liwanag para maitalâ ang mga katiyakan sa iba't ibang bagay na nakaligid sa tao, naaari ang pagkakataong maatunan ang mga pagkakataon, at sa ganitong paraan naipangyayari ang isang pagdalumat ng panahon.

Ang kamalayang ito para sa pagtataon sa mga pagkakataon ang nagkakaloob sa tao ng pangangailangan para sa makipagtragpo sa kapaligiran. Para sa mga Dulangan Manobo, halimbawa, sa bisa ng liwanag na nakapagpapahintulot sa pagtalâ at pag-unawa sa mga panahon ng mga bagay sa kanilang kapaligiran, nagiging maaari para sa kanila ang isang mapagtaong pamumuhay:

Sa kanilang pananaw-mundo, maaaring iuri ang halaman sa dalawa: ang halamang makakain at halamang di-makain. Ang unang uri ay mga halamang esensiyal sa kanilang buhay: halamang inaani (palay at mais), hinuhukay (kamote, ube, gabi), at pinipitas (*bangas* o *rambutan*, *mampawa* o *mangga*, at *tugop* o *marang*).


Ang isang taon ay nahahati ayon sa iba’t ibang gawain sa sistema ng pagkakaingin. Hinahati-hati ang isang taon ayon sa panahon ng bawat gawain sa pagsasaka: ang paghawan ng gubat, pagtanim, pagbunot ng damo, pag-an. Ang panahon ng paghihintay sa tag-an ay panahon ng iba pang gawain, tulad

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ng pangayam (pangangaso) o pangeti (pangingisda). Ito ang panahong lubos na may pakinabang ang katupid (panilo ng unggoy) at tukob (panilo ng daga). Sa gayon, maaaring ituring ang panahong ibinukod para sa mga gawaing ito bilang panahong hindi pa maaaring kainin ang halamang itinanim.

Hindi natatanging ang pagdalumat sa panahon ng mga Dulangan Manobo, sa paraang malilirip din ang ganitong pakikipangkopo sa kalapigiran ang ibang mga kasanayan. Halimbawa, para sa mga matandang Bisaya, nakaayon ang kanilang pagdalumat ng tuig o taon sa pagsasalalay sa pamumulaklak at pamumunga ng mga puno at halaman, habang para naman sa mga taga-Mountain Province, nakaayon ito sa pagpapakita ng mga tiyak na uri ng ibon. Mula sa mga halimbawang ito, malilirip ang kritikalidad ng mga tiyak na pakikipagtagpo ng tao sa kalapigiran para kanyang maaihit ang mga sandali ng katawan. Sa ganan ito napakahalagahan ang pagpapahalaga rin sa taon ni Juan Francisco de San Antonio bilang “ang pagtutipon ng marami” (sariling salin), hindi lamang sa antas na metaporiko (tulad ng kanyang puna dito), kung hindi maging sa mismong materyalidad ng mga bagay, sa kanilang pagtatagpo-tagpo.

IX.

Hindi abstrakto o absoluto kung gayon ang dalumat ng panahon, kung saan “pumapaloob” ang mga bagay-bagay: hindi ito ang isang hiwalay na “panlabas” na dimensyon na nagtatakda sa mga pangyayari ng, sibilin, isang puno. Sa halip, ang dalumat ng panahon ang mga pagkakataong nailalahad (o, maari pa, inilalahad) ng mismong materyal na kalagayan ng sangkabagayan. Ang panahon ay panahon para sa pangungupahan, pagtutuba, pagtatanim, pag-aani,... at ang kahit anong

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bagay, na nangyayaring maging maaari sapagkat nababagay sa isang sandali. Kung gayon, ang panahon ay hindi pawang dalumat na nagasisaayos ng mga pangyayaring nagaganap sa sangkabagayang kalikasan,51 kung hindi ang mga pangyayari na ngang ito, na alinsunod sa materyal na pagkabagay ng mga bagay sa mga tiyak na sandali. Sa ganang ito, ano kung gayon ang panahon kung hindi rin ang kalagayan, o pagkakalagay, ng sangkabagayan, na hindi rin ba ang isang lugar sa isang pagkakataon.52

X.

Sapagkat nadadalumat ang panahon sa materyal na pagkakataon ng sangkabagayan, ang anumang tangkang taunan ang isang tiyak na sandali ay ang taunan din ang mga tiyak na materyalidad na nagkakaloob ng pagkakataon para maipangyari ang tinututulos na kalagayan. Sa pagbaling sa pakahulugan ni Sanchez, halimbawa, para maisakatuparan ang sandali ng kasaganahan sa pagtutubad, kritikal na taunan ang pangungupahan ng isang niyugan sa panahong pinakamabanggaan na. Ang panahon, sa ganang ito, ay hindi pawang nagkakataon, kung hindi ang isang kilos din na sinasadyang pangyarihin ng isang bagay—na, sa halimbawa ni Sanchez, ay ang tao, na kumikilos para isagawa ang pangungupahan at pagtutubad.

Tinututulos ng panahon, sa maikling salita, ang kakayanan ng isang bagay na makipagtrageto sa tiyak na materyalidad ng ibang bagay.53 Kung gayon, sa tangkang maataunan ang isang sandali, ang kritikal na tinitiyak din ay ang kalagayan ng mga bagay. Sa ganang ito, bumabaling ang tangkang mapangasiwaan ang panahon tungo sa pangangasiwa rin ng sangkabagayan. Naipapaliwanag sa ganitong paraan kung paanong

53 Isang pagpapalawig sa pagturol ni Norbert Elias hinggil sa panahon, na nakahiling lamang sa tao: “Timing thus is based on people’s capacity for connecting with each other two or more sequences of continuous changes, one of which serves as a timing standard for the other (or others)” (“Nagmumula kung gayon ang panahon sa kakayanan ng tao para mapag-uunayan sa isn’t isa ang dalawa o higit pang sunuran ng mga tuluyang pagbabago, kung saan ang isa ay nag sisilbing batayang panahunan para sa iba (o sa mga iba)” (sariling salin); tingnan kay Elias, Time: An Essay, salin ni E. F. N. Jephcott (Oxford at Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 72.
karaniwang napakahuhulugan ang rangkang pagdalumat sa panahon bilang pawang “pagsukat” nito: sapagkat sa pangangasiwa sa sangkabagayang nakapapangyaring mga panahon, ang nilalayon ay ang matiyak at masukat ang mga bagay upang sa gayon, matiyak at masukat din ang mga tinutulos na pagkakataon.


Ang kaayusang ito na, madalas kaysa hindi, nakabaling muli at muli sa tao. Hindi kung gayon nakapagtataka kung bakit sa naunang pagpapakahulugan sa panahon at mga kakawing nitong salita, nakabaling


57 Mapakahalagahan sa ganitong paraan kung bakit madalas ang pagdalumat sa panahon bilang partikular na nakatali sa kakayanan ng makataong isipan. Sa pangungsap ni Elias: “[T]he word ‘time’ is a symbol of a relationship that a human group of beings biologically endowed with the capacity for memory and synthesis, establishes between two or more continua of changes...” (“Sagisag ang salitang ‘panahon’ para sa isang ugnayan ang isang katipunan taong mga nilalang biyolohikong pinagkalooban ng kakayanan para sa laala at paglagagom ang lumikha sa pagitan ng dalawa o higit pang tuluyan ng mga pagbabago”) (sariling salin); tingnan kay Elias, 46.
ang mga pakahulugan sa kilos ng tao, o ayon sa mga batayang panukat na kritikal sa pagtatalâ ng kanyang mga magiging kilos. Sa isang metakritikal na sandali samakatwid, hindi lamang naipangyayari ang ekonomikong pangangasiwa ng sangkabagayan sa mga kilos na kahulugan ng panahon; sa halip, nangyayari din ang nasabing materyal pangangasiwa maging sa antas ng mismong mga pagpapakahulugan.

Kritikal ang kapangasiwaan sa salitang panahon, sapagkat ito ang nagtatalâ sa mismong kadalumatan ng panahon. Kung gayon, kung itatalâ lamang ang panahon alinsunod sa karaniwang pagpapakahulugan dito bilang pagkakasunod-sunod ng mga pangyayari at katagalan o haba ng mga ito, hindi maaaring ang panganib na pawang mauwi ang pagdalumat dito sa nasabing uri ng abstraksyon. Sa parehong panganib, hindi rin maitatanggiling nasabing puwang na maalehan sa pakikipag-ugnayan ng tao sa iba pang bagay, na kanyang tinatangkang pangasiwaan sa kanyang tinatangkang pangangasiwa rin sa panahon.\textsuperscript{58} Mula sa mga panganib na ito, gayunpaman, naipapakalipat ang isang ring panahon: para sa pagbaling tungo sa isang tangkang wikang higit na makapagsasalalay sa ekolohiko (sa halip na tanging ekonomiko) sa dalumat ng panahon.

\textbf{Mga Sanggunian}


In 2015, I attended the 1st Sama Dilaut (Philippine Badjao) International Conference held at the Mindanao State University-Tawi-Tawi, which had the theme “Sea-Bound and Cross-Borders: Maritime Commerce and Sea-faring Lifeways of the Sama Dilaut in Tawi-Tawi Philippine Waters and Southeast Asian Seas.” The conference aimed to focus the academic and political lens toward the Sama Dilaut, who are often neglected in scholarship and development planning. It was purposefully interdisciplinary as a way of promoting exchange: scholars and officers from various fields were given the opportunity to speak, and members from Sama Dilaut communities around the area were invited to attend. Given the diverse interests represented by the speakers, the presentations included cultural problematics, linguistic studies, policy issues, and scientific findings. One of these presentations was on the state of the coral reefs in the area, which are part of the Coral Triangle that has the highest biodiversity of corals and fish in the world. The scientist advocated for the protection of the coral reefs, a call that he felt necessitated preservation through regulation of fishing activities in the area. Although the presentation was well-received by the scholars and officers in the room, it instigated a heated exchange between the scientist and a member of the Sama Dilaut contingent, who passionately argued that the regulation of their fishing spaces would have a negative impact on their
livelihood and whose reaction garnered cheers from the rest of the Sama Dilaut community.

This stark difference in perspective between the scientist and the community exemplifies the ongoing debates between environmentalism and environmental justice. Climate change has spurred a global environmental turn that has pushed stakeholders from various fields to reevaluate man's relationship with the earth. However, the goals of those whose advocacy is primarily geared toward environmentalism has been criticized as limited due to the failure to consider the intersections of race and class within environmental issues. This becomes even more pervasive in locations considered marginal from the Western world as well as among indigenous groups, who are often at the center of ecological upheaval. In seeking to respond to the challenges wrought by environmental neglect, there has been a push toward preservation, which entails the prohibition of human activities—even presence—in particular areas such as in the case of the Sama Dilaut and the coral reefs.

This perspective unwittingly repeats the tropes of purity and *terra incognita* that were perpetuated as strategies for the colonization and militarization of indigenous spaces—what Patrick Wolfe calls “the logic of elimination,” where prior inhabitants must metaphorically and physically be removed that colonizers may obtain access to the territory. In a sense, the scientist’s advocacy for regulation in Tawi-Tawi is also an ecocolonial call for the disappearance of the Sama Dilaut from their dwelling space as a way of establishing environmental control over an imagined uninhabited space. In spite of all the good intentions that the scientist may have, what is forgotten in the conversation is the entanglement of these environmental issues with the pervasive commercialization and militarization of the region, all of which heavily affect the Sama Dilaut communities.

Sama scholar Mucha-Shim Quiling Arquiza portrays this entanglement as she describes how the “the intermittent and protracted war is aggravated by [the] equally devastating and disastrous impact of climatic changes where most of the mooring areas have experience bouts of sudden surges of high tides and prolonged low tides.” Due to the

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interplay of militarization as dictated by the national government’s counter-insurgency activities, the establishment and growth of commercial fishing, and the effects of climate change, the Sama Dilaut have been “periodically hamletted into labat hangkut (i.e., forcibly evacuated or relocated en masse) causing massive displacements and sever disintegration of many ethnically-formed kampongs (traditional villages and clan-based communities).”

The stake of the Sama Dilaut in the environment of their spaces of inhabitation therefore entails their participation in not just environmental discourse but in policy. However, they are seldom consulted due to their position in the region’s hierarchy as well as the belief that knowledge is rooted in traditional and often West-oriented scientific and economic discourses. The environmental justice movement, however, shifts and broadens the very constitution of knowledge by highlighting the inextricable ties to the social justice issues that underlie environmental inequality and by considering the epistemological importance of storytelling as a necessary part of the discussion on the environment.

“Narrative,” according to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “is the intermediary by virtue of which these environmental meshworks, mangles and networks are articulated, documented, vitalized.” The way in which humans relate to the environment is necessarily mediated through the retelling the patterns that constitute how the environment—non-human matter—moves around, with, and through them: “The elements are matter’s kinetic syllabary.” Elementality then becomes an assemblage of movements that allow the environment to be perceptible, and it is also that which allows humans not only to be part of ecology but to relate to, with, and about it. Cohen explain, “These human/nonhuman entanglements could also be called elemental relations […] Smaller than gods and larger than atoms, the elements offer a human-scale entry into nonhuman relations.”

As such, I look into how the kata-kata, a sacred song of healing sung by the wali-djinn (roughly translated as shaman) of the Sama Dilaut, becomes a response against the ongoing militarism in Tawi-Tawi. By accessing the material of the sea, arguably the traditional locus of inhabitation of the Sama Dilaut, and by relying upon elemental relations against techno-scientific vehicles of war, the kata-kata becomes an instrument of ecological affiliation and resists the call of militarism.

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4 Arquiza.
6 Cohen, 8.
7 Cohen, 55.
Zamboanga was our gateway to the rest of the Sulu archipelago, echoing—by another elemental form—the mythical entry point and first mooring place of the Sama Dilaut: the first Samboangan. However, we did not dwell in the littoral as they did, but within the island’s mountainous area, where the Marines, the amphibious unit of the Philippine Navy, resided.

A friend, the de facto leader of our small group of three, was our ticket into the battalion thanks to her friendship with their Commander. We were invited to dine at his residence, and while his men prepared our dinner of curacha and alupihan, she brought up an argument that they had regarding the displacement of the Sama Dilaut in Zamboanga, a project headed in part by the very man hosting us. Knowing my stake in the subject, she directed the topic to me, and I felt the strange welling of a battle about to commence. The commander asked, “Diba sea nomads, sila? Ano ba ang ibig sabihin ng nomadic? [Aren’t they sea nomads? What does nomadic mean anyway?]”

My mind reeled as I attempted to formulate an answer. I could see where he was going with that seemingly innocuous query, but I had to respond despite my foreboding that there was no way for me to triumph against him, in his house, amidst other men under his command, upon an island at the horizon of war. He awaited my answer with the patience of a man who knew that he had already won. Finally, I replied, “to constantly travel, to have one’s home in movement, the opposite of the sedentary—the nomadic.”

The smug smile he threw at my friend was telling. “So, nomadic, ibig sabibin wala silang lugar na pagmamayari. Paano sila magiging displaced kung ganun? [So, nomadic, which means they don’t own a place. In that case, how can they be displaced?]”

I tried to argue, to explain that simply because they are determined to be nomadic does not mean that they call no place home. But it was difficult to argue with this man who has resided in Zamboanga as the commanding officer for years, who knows more about the situation better than I, a young scholar from Manila whose work aims to question and undermine his. The stubborn set of his jaw told me that there was nothing I could say in that brief moment that our paths crossed that would convince him.

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8 The samboang is the pole used by the Sama Dilaut to steer their boats on shallow waters and as an anchor in a moorage, which is called samboangan. One of the origin myths of the Sama Dilaut relates how they were brought to Zamboanga from Johor with the help of a stingray sent by Tuhan. H. Arlo Nimmo, Magohasa: An Ethnography of the Tawi-Tawi Sama Dilaut (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2001), 23.
The nomadism ascribed to the Sama Dilaut, which creates an illusion regarding their movements: the romantic notion of a people who roam freely upon the seas. In contemporary scholarship, a new and arguably more accurate perspective is semi-nomadism, the cyclical inhabitation of sea and land depending on necessity, that is, the search for sustenance or livelihood. In fact, Nimmo’s ethnographic work on the Sama Dilaut in Tawi-Tawi is entitled *Magobasa*, which is derived from the Sinama “usaha,” a noun and a verb that describes a kind of occupation through which one can make a living. However, he claims that the nuance of the word can be further expanded: “it can be defined as wanderlust conditioned by a lifetime of travel, as well as a very real necessity to continuously search the seas for sustenance.”

In Nimmo’s writing, *magosaha* becomes a sort of descriptive category for determining a particular mode of navigation through language-use. Yet, *magosaha* is heavily inflected with economic necessity and indicates a type of movement governed specifically by the material need for sustenance—it cannot fully encompass other types of traversals driven by other desires.

According to the SILP-CSED, *usaha*, the root word, can either be a noun or a verb that signifies “an occupation from which a living is made.” In its variations, it is usually verbalized through the addition of affixes as in the case of *magusaha*. *Niusaha*, for example, indicates the necessity for an ongoing activity of working. *Usaha* can also be transformed into *pagusaha’an*, a nominalizaton of *usaha* that metonymizes it into the means used for *usaha* such as the boat. Thus, Nimmo’s use of *magusaha* as “a kind of wanderlust” becomes problematic since *usaha*, far from wanderlust, is a general descriptor for the activity of making a living. A more accurate term perhaps for what Nimmo wishes to portray is *usaha dilaut*, a kind of undertaking that is specifically performed upon the sea and by the people who dwell upon it not only to make a living but also to live.

The kata-kata *Usaha Dilaut* sung by Panglima Isnang Jorolan reveals a pursuit for life and livelihood that is particular to the Sama Dilaut—one marked by lack and struggle. Unlike most kata-kata, these

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9 Nimmo, 1.
11 Since Jorolan is a panglima, a leader of the group, and not a wali-djinn, it is unclear if this is a kata-kata in the strictest sense, that is, a sacred song of healing. This ambiguity is made even more problematic by the constant references to Nicole Revel, who is revealed to have requested for the performance.
12 The kata-kata also highlights the types of *pagusaha’an* that the Sama Dilaut use in their *usaha*. Most prevalent, of course, are the various types of boats used in fishing. Fishing gear are also mentioned: *bubu*, “a fish trap made from woven bamboo,” and *bira-bira*, “a fishing handline with multiple hooks.” These *pagusaha’an* reveal the type of *usaha* that the Sama
narratives are spread inconsistently throughout the song in a fluid-like manner as if his memories of these tales were waves that ebbed and flowed with the telling of the tale. Beyond recounting struggles in fishing, Jorolan also relates the difficulties in finding a lover as well as indications that the he has traveled and yet has returned. However, every narrative seems to end in failure; he catches neither fish nor lover. Even his chanting seems fraught with inadequacy: he has no gimbal, someone to accompany him in singing as a way of shoring up his own voice, and he is unable to access the past easily such that he feels as though he were sailing against the current.

Jorolon seems to conflate the activities of usaha with the kata-kata due to fluidity of the chant such that it is unclear where one tale ends and the other begins since all of the narratives are rife with difficulty. There seems to be a contemporaneity in all of his tales. This becomes even more evident at the end of the kata-kata where he seems to show an allegiance to a livelihood and a life that is of the sea despite its trials. For Jorolan, the kata-kata must refer to awal-jaman, the mythic time that bestows an originary identity, in order to be sung as a manner of resistance against militarism, a force that perpetuates state power by encroaching upon civilian spaces. Thus, he creates a trope: the kata-kata form is usaha, a livelihood and a lifeway, and it is a form of resistance, a flight away from and around the forces that seek to destroy it.

98.
Daq . . . a ba a “sir” maghaman-haman . . . iq
Bang kata-kata ni batabatan
Subay patannaq awal jaman iq . . . o . . oy
(Oy, oy, oy, oy . . . oy) . . . iq

Dilaut usually perform. Upon a sea that is teeming with life due to the coral triangle, the most immediate form of livelihood is to fish.

13 Rachel Woodward, Military Geographies (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 3. To ensure that the military can proceed unhindered in protecting the interest of the state, military forces may enforce strict control of the spaces that the populace inhabits for purposes of surveillance and dominance becomes necessary. For Rachel Woodward, “militarism and the control it exerts is essentially geographical, in that it is expressed in and constitutive of space, place and landscape . . . Militarism’s geographies are about the control of space, about creating the necessary preconditions for military activities.”

14 During the Spanish colonial period, one of the methods for native control in the Philippines was called the Reducción, an act of resettlement that was first established in Latin America before being implemented in the Philippines. By collecting the scattered natives into more organized and compact barangays, administrative and religious regulation became more effective. While most natives were resistant to the idea of reduccion due to their subsistence economy that necessitated living close to the land that they tilled, they succumbed to the relocation, believing that the friars, who organized the reduccion, would be able to protect them from the oppression of encomenderos and soldiers. Renato Constantino, A History of the Philippines: From the Spanish Colonization to the Second World War (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 58.
99.
Sabab bang taqabut na waktu
Na palangnan na aku
Na ni bangsa sundalu . . .
(Oy, oy, oy, oy . . oy) . . iq

98.
Do not take it for granted sir
If the story is being told
The beginning of time must be referred to

99.
Because if this comes to an end
For I have to go
To work for the soldiers

Yet despite the difficulties of this way of life, the Sama Dilaut persist in *usaha dilaut*. Although it is the only time it is explicitly mentioned in the kata-kata, military force is disclosed to be the primary reason that the Sama Dilaut persists in their traditional lifeways. They refuse to succumb to the structures and violence of such forces. By accessing the mythic past and relating the tale of their *usaha*, the kata-kata becomes their mode resistance against the currents of the present instead of succumbing to its waves. It is a way of navigating around obstructions rather than facing them head on.

Similarly, *Tandanan*, a kata-kata sung by Jimsu Sarali, narrates the manner through which Mattooqa Tandanan addresses the various needs of his people while navigating through the hazards of a life upon the seas of the Tawi-Tawi archipelago. As the eponymous hero of the kata-kata, he is given acclaim due to his possession of a mystical power that bestows upon him the capacity to resist the violence brought about by the presence of military forces in the islands. In such a resistance, he is also able to home in toward his dwelling place, his *maglahat*, Belatan.

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87.
Amassa na ya heq
Iban kaki palkataqan
Anduq halam du atoggol
Try patannaq na baliyu
Nan Satan

88.
Halam atoggol-toggol
Patannaq na baliyu Satan
Anduq dayang
Patakal lamak
Pinadikiqan.

89.
Saga seheq nan
Brother animbang
Anduq pabaq paqin
Kaki saga ma olangan.
Pabaq paqin sa brother
Saga nan olangan

87.
Cousin, he recited
a magic spell
Oh, in a moment
the wind blew
It is Satan

88.
In a moment
wind from Satan blew
Oh, (my) dear
the sail could not
be folded

89.
Brother, our companions
have to balance the boat
Oh! cousin, the wind became fair
In the high sea
Brother, it became fair
in the high sea.18

At first, Tandanan’s power seems to be that of the wind or *baliyu*, an element given primacy by the Sama Dilaut due its necessity in the process of navigation as that which exposes the possibility of elsewhere. It is therefore through accessing the wind that Tandanan reveals his spiritual potency and is acclaimed by his fellow Sama Dilaut. As he calls upon Satan, the southwest wind, he fills their sails and calms the high seas, creating for the Sama Dilaut the ideal environment through which they can traverse the aquatic with ease. There is also the provision of motion for the Sama Dilaut’s bodily extension: the boat.

Specifically, the wind increases the movement of the boat, reaching speeds that could outrun a PCF naval boat,19 which driven by motor, a technology that exceeds the limit typically set by nature. The speed that Tandanan’s boat attains in fact rivals more than just the naval boat but a jet plane, the flight of which is unhindered by the viscosity of the sea. This reference to flight also becomes of interest due to Szanton’s claim that the Sama Dilaut see themselves as “birds in flight.”20 Here, the boundary of sea and sky is blurred so much so that the same kinds of speed that can be attained through flight can also be achieved through sailing.

164.
*Anduq hakaqan ta kaw*
*Lepa saliq du jet*
*Maka nabal*
*Saliq du saynan ba*
*Jet dayang paragan.*

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19 The Patrol Craft, Fast/Inshore (PCF) or “swift boat” is a type of water vehicle designed specifically for use during the Vietnam War as a counterinsurgency move. Specific requirements for the kind of combat that the topography necessitated were given by the Naval Advisory Group in 1964. An offshore oilrig service boat design used was deemed suitable, and it was modified for combat. The altered design, designated PCF Mk 1, was 15m in length, and could reach speeds of up to 32 knots or 59 km/h. Among the first four models built, PCF-3 and PCF-4 were sent to Subic Bay, Philippines to be readied for Vietnam. See Gordon L. Rottman, *Vietnam Riverine Craft, 1962-75* (Oxford: Osprey, 2006), 15-17.
164.
Oh, I have to tell you
The lepa was as fast as a jet plane
or a naval boat.
It ran as fast as
a jet plane.\(^2\)

However, Tandan’s power is not purely elemental in nature but that of motion. When he was captured by the military, he ensured that they were stranded in the high sea using a stone, now an element of land, to anchor the naval boat in place. It is only when the military promises his safe return home, Belatan, that he once again uses magic to resume the journey. Though he can call upon the winds to instigate movement, he can also stopper the flow of movement by utilizing the stone of the earth.

55.
\textit{Amassa na iya palkataqan}
\textit{Dakayuq du batu na}
\textit{Limbaw alaqan}
\textit{Anduq ma timbang}
\textit{Na sallang malangngan}

57.
\textit{Kita ilu min timbang}
\textit{Embal na makalaqan}
\textit{Aduq eq na rangan}
\textit{Siq ni Mattoqa palangngan}

61.
\textit{Hakaqan ta ka}
\textit{Min tullu rum aka tabik}
\textit{Sinabulakan}
\textit{Na balik saw kaki alaqan.}

55.
He recited a magic spell
only one stone

\(^2\) Sarali, 22.
was removed
Oh, they already took to
the high sea

57.
“We are in the high sea,
we cannot move.”
Oh, one of them, walked to
the old man.

61.
I will tell you.
He only splashed three times
with sea water,
the stone was removed.22

Moreover, his powers still originate from the matter of the sea. Like the
wali-djinn, he accesses the originary creative power of the primordial sea. To
call the wind, to set the stone, he splashes seawater back unto the sea from
the stern of his boat. Seawater thus becomes the alchemical agent, the energy
source and initial material form. It evaporates into wind in one instance,
creating a kinetic force that allows the boat to move, and then solidifies into
stone, creating a gravitational force that impedes movement. Seawater, in this
way, passes through three phases of matter, providing Tandanan with power
over both force and motion. In its fluidity, seawater emerges as a protean
substance that is capable of bending and shaping Newtonic laws. Therefore,
Tandanan is glorified not because of the sheer presence of power but how
this power affects motion. Movement becomes the virtue that is celebrated
in the kata-kata, the ability to blow forward and to stopper. The ritual
return to the elemental, the material, refuses the anthropocentric mandate
of militarism in the control of space and the environment. By accessing
the non-human, Tandanan emphasizes an ecological affinity outside the
measures of the PCF and the jet plane.

Of particular note here is the way modernity has entered the world
of the kata-kata, the world of mythic time. By including military forces as
the primary adversary and the use of the PCF naval boat and jet plane as
tropes of comparison, the temporality of the kata-kata expands to and melds
past, present, and future—time becomes contemporaneous. In being able

22 Sarali, 8-9.
to place all of these components of linear time into one song, Sarali creates a time out of time in the same way that the boat is a “place out of place” — heterochronicity amidst the heterotopic. It becomes a critique of the way that time is considered upon the sea, contradicting Bottignolo’s claim that the Sama Dilaut live in a now that is ever-present.

But what is the destiny/destination of such a power?

We are given a clue by way of his name. Tandanan is the nominal form — by way of -an as a suffix — of the word tandan, a verb that the SILP-CSED generally refers to as a shoreward movement: “to reach the shore from out at sea,” “to convey something shorewards, and “to reach an objective by making landfall.” It is the last definition that proves most enlightening due to its expanded implication of reaching shore: to reach shore is to achieve an intent. There is a drive to reach katandanan, another nominalization of the term that means “the place where landfall is made” through the addition of the affixes ka- and -an. Katandanan reveals that there is a particular shore to be reached. This is echoed by the term tanda’, “a sign or symbol” or “the evidence of identity,” and paltanda’an, “a sign or portent” or “the evidence of an event.” The character of Tandanan becomes a trope that resembles all of these ideas: a movement shoreward because it is a marker for something — the objective: home.

165.
Pattuaq kabatuahan
Halam minsan kasanglaran
Ay saku ilu na
ma Tong Bangkaw, Belatan
Angan na Mattoqa
Maglahat pinaqan
Pinaghalliqan.

165.
Rocks are pointing out
It did not run aground
suddenly, it landed

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25 SIL Philippines Central Sinama-English Dictionary, s.v. “katandanan.”
26 SIL Philippines Central Sinama-English Dictionary, s.v. “tanda’.”
27 SIL Philippines Central Sinama-English Dictionary, s.v. “paltanda’an.”
in Tong Bangkaw, Belatan
That is why, the Old Man
dwelled in that place
well respected (by them)\(^{28}\)

The shore is thus the *katandanan* of Tandanan, both initial and final points in his journey. He arrives where he sets off, a circular movement that seems tautological, and that becomes significant in the kata-kata. Specifically, he arrives at particular place, Tong Bangkaw, Belatan, which is called *maglahat*, a verb that means “to reside in a place.”\(^{29}\) However, the SILP-CSED supplies another definition for the root word, *lahat*, as a noun: “homeland.”\(^{30}\) The kata-kata depicts that the movement shorewards is also a movement homewards. Magusaha is necessary, a livelihood and a life, at sea, but the destiny is littorality, where they can find a dwelling, a *maglahat*.

The prevalence of military force in both kata-kata reflects the very real threat of militarism present in the lives of the Sama Dilaut in Tawi-Tawi. In Usaha Dilaut, it is the threat that awaits if the way of life, the magosaha, becomes inadequate, if the song ends and temporality is foreclosed to the present. In Tandanan, the military emerges as the foe to be defeated in order to return home, to the maglahat, or their dwelling place oriented toward the islands. As such, these ways of movement and navigation reveal a certain type of resistance that the kata-kata as a song of healing enables—an elemental resistance through movement from sea to shore, from shore to sea, laut and tandan.

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\(^{30}\) *SIL Philippines Central Sinama-English Dictionary*, s.v. “lahat.”


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A trope which is germane to Sulu in conjunction with Southeast Asia, islandness carries a valence which cuts across boundaries and lineations, whether with respect to discourse, literature, or historiography. Its functional role allows it to take on a negative capability, or the capability to specify locationary as well as strategic positions in which dialectical play within and between discursive, ideological, and geopolitical structures could be carried out. The island as a form and figure, as such, serves a diacritic by which the limits of representation, as well as its pre-codified aspect, could be demarcated. As a structural paradigm, the island is able to function or operate only to the extent that it traverses existing delineations so as to veer away from them, to explode them. In doing so, the dynamism of a self-reflexive figure is retained, as it interacts with, and is enriched by, practical and vertical indices. The figure of the island thus performs its shifting, fluid, and liminal properties to the point of exhaustion, to its vanishing-point as it were, before it once again renews and regenerates itself through a topical excavation of the historical real. It is, in other words, a figure which portraits and enacts the process of figuration itself as it does demonstrate the procedures entailed in historicization.¹

¹ Rob Edmond and Vanessa Smith, Islands in Representation and History (USA and
Across the selection drawn from the Tausug oral repertoire included below, the structural and historical conjectures—from the indigenous to the Islamic—embedded in the island trope will be unraveled to reveal the dynamic nature of Tausug figuration. More pertinently, the mode of symbology which is proper to Sulu, which hinges upon the syntactical conjuncture of the animal and human, the nomos of nature and the sphere of politics, as well as the physical and supernatural, will be examined in detail. This symbology holds up a mirror or negative referent to the very process by which historicization works in the Sulu context. In this example, the work of memory entails something akin to the encodation of a referential excess in moving and shifting images, a constant excavation of the metaphoric as it were. The proximity of the signifying elements of nature and culture, human and non-human, as well as the renegotiation of agency across these borders are crucial to the meaning-making process which the trope mediates. In this epistemic re-ordering, it is clear that the aspects of the ecological, cultural, and political, are redeployed in the work of recuperating cultural memory. At the core of this is the unfolding of islandness. Islandness thus tends to aspire for a conceptual articulation of Sulu’s popular and collective history while also constantly being replenished by the material plenitude of historical data. The heteronomy of the historical real supplies the matter of the inexhaustibility of this trope as will be seen in specific examples from orature, both in their fragmentary and accretive forms. Islandness as such is metamorphic quality which characterizes the tension or dialectic between memory and performance.

Refiguring the Island: A Relevant Review

The aestheticization of islandness is consummately maneuvered by subsequent critics, following the lead of Rojo, leading to its desication and de-realization. The island thus begins its career as a transversal trope to add to the conventional repertoire of trite, hackneyed representational devices across various contexts. Additionally, Rojo would also argue for the motility of the island figure across a range of representational systems, such as “music, song, dance, myth, language, dress, food, body expression, etc.”

The island thus acquires the status of an arkhon by which all other modes of signification could be organized and, additionally, operations could be coded or transcoded. By specifying the status of the island in
this manner, Rojo returns or reinscribes islandness back to its textual performance but also, and by the same movement, robs it of its material force or potency. This assertion by Rojo precludes the forms, structures, and modes in which islandness is imbricated, inseparably, but which do not conform to such strictly codified systems as the ones described above. At the core of this difference is the reperformativity which is not merely transtextual but also both phenomenal and processual, requiring a constant recovery or excavation of forms and modes for the staging of preconceptual and figural possibilities. When Rojo, for example, claims that islandness permits “a non-discursive discourse”\(^3\), the sense in which Rojo propounds this idea proves markedly different from the sort of non-representational uses to which the island figure is deployed in the analysis above. While Rojo does relegate islandness to the realm of a non-ideographic and primarily aesthetic form (music, dance, bodily expression), he does so in a manner that does not endorse the viability of existing non-representational forms but rather dismisses or demotes them as illegible, an illegibility which he then mounts as the epitome of difference. This valorization of alterity, which is coded through the pictorial or representational in the strictly narrow sense, is a purely reactive gesture, and is not even effective enough to foreground a different notion of textuality, one which exceeds the norms and bounds of Western representation. It is also unable to evolve a mode of semiotics, that is attuned to a non-representational regime, which could account for the peculiarly performative and actantial character of something like trans-peripheral, postcolonial cultures. If anything, this would have substantiated his case for the mutability of islandness across various postcolonial contexts, and the fact that he is unable to buttress his case already attests to the inherent limits of his core presuppositions. Like Rojo, Bassnett and Stephanidos similarly commit the same glaring omission in their insistence not only on the transmutability of islands but also in their shared assumption regarding the paradigmatic substitutability of islands for the various analogous domains, whether “geographical, spatial, psychological, and mythical”; if in the previous discussion by Bassnett and Stephanidos, islands had previously been made to stand for these domains; presently they have become completely indistinguishable from it. This marks the aestheticization of islandness not only as a mutable signifier but as the site or locale in

\(^3\) Benitez-Rojo, 103.

which the operation transpires. It is at this point or juncture that the aestheticization of islandness is completed, its ontic reality de-realized, dissolved. The most evident feature of this aestheticization would be the reduction of the polyvalence of the island into an ossified polarity, which falls short of dialectical play or progression. Owing to its pliable character as an empty, hollow signifier and as a substitute for localization, the island is made to encode differences which are not properly defined or contextualized. The freezing of difference proceeds from its depoliticized character and its subsequent instrumentalization.

According to Baldacchino, islands are paradoxical spaces which lend themselves to smug subordination via different discourses:

“Islands . . . absolute entities . . . territories, territorial; relational spaces – archipelagos (inter)dependent, identifiable; relative spaces – bounded but porous; isolated, connected, colonized, postcolonial; redolent of the performative imaginary; vulnerable to linguistic, cultural, environmental change; robust and able to absorb and modify; . . . utopian and dystopian, tourist meccas, ecological refugia . . .”

From the level of the trope to the topos and, finally, to the work of self-reflexivity on the level of the metalingual, islands, from this account by Baldacchino, have lent themselves to various disciplines and in the service of different agenda. They have been made to encode meanings and connotations which are often at odds with one another—“isolated, connected;” a discursive effect but also performative “agent;” ecological enclave but also tourist destination⁵—revealing the unmooring of this signifier from its determinate localities and its recent currency in metropolitan contexts as well as in emergent discourses. The instrumentalization of the island, as such, succeeds in fixing or freezing it, divesting it of its force or potency, of its perlocutionary effect as a diacritic. It is made to serve, in this context, as an index which specifies the space of discourse but remains without any evaluative function. The problem with this liability to encryption, with the ascription of multiple and often divergent senses to the island form or figure is that it reverts to a position of neutrality or negative capability, while reducing under the same unchanging sign the legitimacy of human and cultural

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⁶ Baldacchino, 5.
struggles, unmooring them effectively from the immediacy of contextual specification. It is precisely at this juncture that the incipient and inevitable desiccation of the island as form or figure begins to occur.

Baladacchino does not completely dismiss this motility of islandness, however, emphasizing as he does the “synergistic outcome of these two features . . . to propel islands as sites of innovative conceptualizations, whether of nature or human enterprise, whether virtual or real.” The innovatory capacity of islands is emphasized by Baladacchino as potentially counter-discursive and subversive, incapable of being fully assimilated into the overdetermination of mainstream discourses. The same precondition, in other words, behind the cooptation of islands as functional categories is also liable to a restaging for decidedly more political ends. If the trope has been effectively depoliticized owing to its general appropriability, its redeployment for more counter-hegemonic ends could be enabled still by its negative capability and its general neutrality. The condition from which this could be generated, it will be seen and shown, would have to exceed the imaginary fix or freeze of representationalism to make possible the potency of discourse and of performance. It is within this negative space that more productive forms of reinvention could be staged and produced.

**Toward a Performative Geopoetics of the Island as Seen in Sulu Oral Literature**

The particular strategy proposed here approaches a certain mode of performance which is indissociable with place-making, figured variously here in terms of the island and of the surrounding seas as sites for the re-enactment of tradition in and through specific moments of exploration and voyaging. The experience of island dwelling thus assumes the form of a lived performance of that which has been constitutive of cultural and collective life, and is at every instantiation never fully coincident with the act or instance prior to it. This incongruity, which is coded in the oral literature of Sulu in terms of a serial yet metamorphic sequence of episodes in the course of island sojourn, is the sensuous and practical manner by which islandness is played out. In consonance with DeLoughrey’s notion of maritime agency, it is this shifting locus “in a perpetually moving ocean” which “may produce alternative renderings of time-space,” a salient example of the projective dimension supplied

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7 Baldacchino, 4.
by the traveller but also the force and materiality of the encounter which in turn refracts the traveller’s perception or projection against an island or sea scape that is shifting and dynamic. In a sense, Bergson’s notion of the “ideo-motor” as that which is located in the ontology of the sensate image as it unfolds in a given duration, traversing the space between the remembered past and an irruptive futuricity, to usher forth a distinct phenomenology. This phenomenological frame provides a critical alternative to the tautologies of metaphysical thinking, dissolving its boundaries, in order to recuperate the un-alienated relation between action and consciousness, memory and matter. The most conducive space in which this is played out is the island form, given its tendency to limn or exceed any form of enclosure to pave the way for conjunctures which are always in excess or outside of language, ideology, or history. The conjunctural ensemble which it gives rise to is similar to the disassociation by DeLoughrey of the category “meta-physical,” in order to designate the intermediation of nature, culture, and history in a dialectical and recuperable wholeness, which follows the logic or pattern of immanence. The heterotopic is characterized by the co-presence of elements which remain to be real or tangible in cultural memory and are simultaneously encrusted in space. Within this heterotopology, it is the everyday which serves as the locus of proximity, exchange, and transformation. Rather than a mere extension of consciousness, the everyday is tantamount to actual and practiced reality, in which the ontic character of the present constitutes a habitus or mode of dwelling. In this context, the percipient character of being and action is reaffirmed, and the organicity and density which a more rationalized perception of the world lacks is recovered, to pave the way for a new semiotic system: here the interrelationship between the sensate, sensorial, and significant is resumed, and a new mode of knowing and of experience is produced. The realm of the phenomenological which is demarcated by the island form could not have been more fully demonstrated in the case of Sulu oral literature. The provisionality of islandness as it was unravelled in exemplary texts shows its attunement to the practical performance of a lived temporality and of living tradition. From voyaging to coasting, and in instances where the boundaries between the inland and seaward are blurred, time is always construed not simply as relative

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but inseparable from the contingencies of everyday and cultural practice. This embodiment of time thus allows for the actualization of indigenous, subjective, as well as contrapuntal agency against the overdetermination of European empire or of Islamic ideology.

In addition to which, the mode of performativity operative in the text deserves further elaboration as it shows an aesthetic disordering of such formal structures as metaphor or allegory. In the various texts analyzed here, it is apparent that consciousness is imbued with an actantial function, as images and impressions began to dissolve with an equally shifting landscape. Far from simply demonstrating the metalanguage of the symbolic structure of Sulu, this innovation is the means by which a dimension of creativity could be retained in and through orality. Through this innovatory forms, the process of figuration, which tends toward freezing or reification is interrupted in order to acquire and condense through accretion other moments as well as images which could then be recycled and recuperated in the next instance of poetic performance. The ensuing form is necessarily disjunctive, though by no means incoherent, demonstrating as it does the phenomenology of orality and the disintegration of the bounds of textuality. Consequently, the moving topos across oral literature is that which is attuned to a non-representational, non-mimetic form in which it is elocution, with its convocation of a sphere of reception and transmission, which becomes the instantiation of the collective corpus of speech. It is here that each individual enactment, and the voice and agency which is implicit in the enactment, becomes a creative reperformance, within and against the cumulative procession of an evolving tradition. This shifting topography of the poetics proper to Sulu vis-à-vis Southeast Asia is the dispersive islandness which inform and structure each text.

The performative mode peculiar to Southeast Asia entails the dissolution of the tautological boundaries which separate textuality from society, paving the way instead for a more sensate or experiential mode of knowing, which goes beyond conventional signification. In this new semiology, even such sensate surfaces as the body as well as social spaces assume a significant quality, acquiring the capacity to encode script or syntagmata which the boundedness of textuality, as distinct from performance or experimentation, would have excluded. The ascription of a corporeal quality or dimension to these unconventional surfaces is also an analogue to the development of a mode of performance which is qualitatively distinct from the traditional representational modes. For example, such cultural practices as weaving and dance, which partake of a repertoire, but which admit of either modification or, at the very
least, mastery of a given motif or pattern, are not simply mimetic but are symbolic in the sense that they are bound up with the individual and intersubjective task of performance. During this continuous endeavor, the significations which are central to a given society, whether of aesthetics or of the practical and dynamic reproduction of codes and signs, are actualized, contributing to the preservation as well as gradual modification of a given repertoire. As opposed to the notion of tradition as static, here it is portrayed as a sensuous materiality which, although the possibility remains unrealized or imperfectible, allows for and accommodates progress and innovation. Practice is thus inextricable from acts of symbolic reproduction and the further evolution of a given aesthetic regime or repertoire. This active, processual dimension is the very basis for the reproduction of knowledge which is sensorial in as much as it is collectively reproduced, continually extended and enacted.

Form appears to be not a homology but rather a contingency by which the enactment of time and space in their practical aspect could be achieved and facilitated. Form, as such, is a continual mode of performance, and its irreducible density is what constitutes its incompatibility with the formal tautologies of representation. In this structure-as-conjuncture, there is an element of provisionality, incompleteness which also and at the same time demarcates the site in which improvisation and play could take place. From this model, social and signifying production is shown to be inseparable from aesthetic performance, rather than its homologous expression. The mediational, from this illustration, becomes an instance of elocution or localization than the liminal intervention which the likes of such critics as Jameson have made them out to be, given their background in the Western episteme. This aesthetic practice takes space as its ground for the enactment of meaning and production of symbolic value.

**Islandness as a Ground for Relation: Dwelling, Movement, and Encounter**

Now that these variations of a classical island narrative has been dealt with, let us to turn to another illustration which revolves around

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11 Jacques Ranciere, in *Aesthetics of Politics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2000) shows painstakingly the determinate relation between aesthetics and politics, relying implicitly on the perlocutionary effect of the former, particularly in the realm of theater, in intending and effecting certain modes of identification, feeling, and action. The intermediation thus becomes sublated into the aesthetic regime as the socio-spatial conjuncture that marks the point at which political identification and action are realized. This instructive discussion by Ranciere provides an alternative to political representation, by situating the socius in spaces of visibility and by associating it with modes of action and practice.
the trope of islandness in two folk tales. In “The Story of Pugut”\(^\text{12}\) the practical references inscribed in the island form is expressly demonstrated in a manner that is closer and pertinent to the needs and concerns of a given locale. If, in the previous example, the island is simply represented as an abstract, codified symbology, the island below is portrayed as an enactment of the local symbolic substrate as it is articulated to the contingencies of historical events and circumstances. The dialogic structure which is apparent in these samples is crucial to our elaboration of this figure in its imbrication with a contrapuntal excavation, so to speak. In order to be able to recuperate the archive, this paper will unravel and interrogate the multiple layers of topicity in this narrative by coordinating, tracking, and seizing their sudden turns and flashes.

In “The Story of Pugut,” the main character is described as a trigger-fish,\(^\text{13}\) who was born to human parents. Although initially clueless as to what to do with this strange boy, the parents eventually overcame their initial alienation from this non-human child and proceeded to attend to him like any other boy, the mother especially. When the boy finally came of age, he asked his mother to weave a full ensemble, consisting of a pis siyabit, a shirt, and a trouser, for him to wear, as he had been going about with nary a garment on his body. When he receives a full set of clothes from his mother, he begins to embark on a quest, which involved him gaining acceptance to the retinue of king and his men, an opportunity which would not have been possible without the intervention and devotion of his mother. This would mark the beginning of the perambulation of Pugut, along with the king and men, a perambulation which naturally took place at sea, in the course of which they would happen upon fantastic islands rich with minerals and gems.

At the start of their inter-islandic voyage across the Sulu seas, Pugut managed to distinguish himself despite his generally unusual appearance, as he proved to be quite capable of moving and propelling a boat or sapit forward with the aid of his fins. It thus becomes apparent that this boy born with gills and with a fish-like form is perfectly adapted and well suited to the water, deviating in effect from the conventional assumption of sanguinary lineage to show his affinity with the sea. As they sail forward, with Pugut sitting at the rear and paddling the boat forward, they chance upon a mountain that is abundant with natural


\(^{13}\) Trigger-fish refers to a type of fish that has a wide body and a fleshy head.
resources and which naturally caught the attention and interest of the king. After surveying and scoping the place, they then decide to continue on with their journey until they come upon another island, which was filled over with silver, once again luring the datu and his men to explore the said island.14

At every pause and ensuing digression to a given island, the datu and his men set out on a reconnaissance mission, where they gauge the island for its viability for the extraction of resource. In addition to the commercial uses to which islands could be put, the trope of discovery and exploration is motivated by the quest for the expansion and elaboration of power. As the datu never decides to colonize a particular island, though, it is possible to argue that the route or trajectory which is enacted in the course of scoping the seaward reaches of the sultanate may be an archipelagic performance and actualization of practical power and jurisdiction. In other words, power is produced not by the symbolic appropriation or demarcation of territory but through its unravelling as an attenuated extension of a given island polity.

The extractive quality of this topographic survey commissioned and conducted by the datu himself, however, is not necessarily an exploitative one. Rather, it is the exact opposite, which is to say that the circumambulation which is carried out by the group only serves to show or demonstrate the complementarity of the various islands in their interconnectedness within an island economy. As opposed to the autonomized and fetishized view of the island, which is a central feature of colonial capital, the view foregrounded here is one in which the mineral resources as well as natural repositories of the islands are to such abundance it constitutes a level of self-sufficiency. When combined with the productive capacity of the other islands, i.e., islands of iron, gold, and of silver, it comprises an aggregate that form a totality. It is for this reason that the datu and his men search for other islands and explore them as possibly integral units in the organic constitution of the polity.

From a contrapuntal standpoint, this particular detail is significant, as it relativizes and counters the homogenizing impulse of the colonial economic system, whose power rests upon the diminution not only cartographically and discursively but literally by way of the exhaustion of resources. Beyond this violent impulse, there is also a move to insularize these units as nodes within a larger emporium oriented toward a continental center. By fracturing existing inter-islandic units,

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14 Ziegler, 133.
the colonial system is then able to forge a self-contained network, in which the intrinsically complementary or mutually determining status of the different islands is disintegrated. This then is a crucial property of colonial capital when superimposed upon a space which is decidedly islandic or maritime—the islands are reduced or converted into machinic and autonomized units which form an assemblage bound to be so exhaustive, it could only result in the destruction of nature as well as the dissolution of what had formerly been a harmonious, symbiotic man-nature interplay. The techne proper to colonial systems, and the particular nature of its operation, is thus premised on the pillaging of natural resources as much as it is an excision of the agentic function of nature as it obtrudes upon the human and the cultural. What had been an essential aspect of islandic cultures is wrested from it to subserve the interests of hoarding, extraction, and fetishism, and the productive mode which is responsible for it is also wholly to blame for the desacralization of nature and the divestment of the rights of human and cultural groups to it. This constitutes a degree of ecological injustice as never before been experienced prior to the ascendancy of colonialism.

In the subsequent episode, this particular detail is further confirmed when the datu and his men collect gold bars but only in adequate measure and no more, a justifiable extraction which is partly aided by the fact that the voyage had to continue on and the exploration move forward. The just and justifiable harnessing of resources which is exemplified here shows that in a society in which migration and circumambulation are the primary ways of life, the perils of settlement, with its attendant impulse toward the exhaustion and abuse of natural landscapes, in the interest of further supporting the formation of more complex cultural and economic systems, are categorically avoided. It is in the nature of islandic lifeways to form deterritorialized yet mutually confluent human, ecological, and cultural systems which enable a mode of exchange and interaction predicated on individual self-sufficiency. In this ideal model, the impulse to hoard is avoided, as communitarian interests beyond the sanction of one’s immediate family or kin is upheld. It is this dynamic which is effectively preserved in the inter-islandic mode of action and interaction which is recounted in this folk narrative.

In the following scene, Pugut curiously asks the datu if it would be possible for him to be left behind on an unnamed and seemingly nondescript island. Instead of asking to be dropped off at a decidedly

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15 Ziegler, 132-133.
more lucrative island among those which they have already passed or will pass, Pugut determines to strike out on his own and to put himself to work by cultivating a given island.\(^\text{16}\) In a remarkable turn, Pugut begins to take out the palay and tabayag fruit which he had in his possession and to plant them with his own hands. Following this initial act of tending to the island, Pugut decides to hibernate for a period of two weeks by assuming the form of a shell. Emerging out of hibernation after two weeks, Pugut would wake to see his plants already substantially grown.\(^\text{17}\) Shortly after inspecting the state of his plants, Pugut once again fell into hibernation, assuming the form of a shell which served as a protective layer and shelter in which he can be comfortably ensconced. Upon awaking, Pugut notices that the palay is almost ripe and the tabayag tree beginning to burst forth with flowers. Satisfied with this discovery, Pugut once again retreats into his shell and would not shed off his disguise until such time that the palay would be ready for harvesting and the tabayag fruits finally ripe for plucking. It is worth noting at this point that this act of cultivation which Pugut introduces to this island is crucial to our understanding of agriculture as a habituated practice which is coterminous with settlement. Although Pugut does momentarily occupy this island, he would eventually return to his place of origin as soon as the datu and the rest of the men have finished their far-reaching foray, hence disqualifying the naturalized practice of settlement as a normative strategy. Of this more will be said later. For now, it is remarkable to note the transfer and transplantation of flora from one island to another, a process which is enabled in this particular illustration by a human agent. To the previous discussion on the interdependency of islands imbricated in a complex network must be added the role which travel and migration plays in the cultivation and development of the natural landscape, whose most evident example would be the literal uprooting of seedlings and stalks to be transplanted in another island setting. The liminality of transmission is another important aspect of this island economy of individually distinct but also mutually interlocking units.

As Pugut resumes his daily, practical affairs, which begins with him harvesting what he had sown, he is pestered by an entire swarm of rats wreaking havoc on his plants, provoking him to try and exterminate them. When he manages to catch a white rat that turns out to be the sultan of the swarm, he is prevented from killing it when the latter begins to negotiate for his release. He introduces himself as the leader of the rats

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\(^\text{16}\) Ziegler, 133.

\(^\text{17}\) Ziegler, 133.
and induces him to relent by offering to reward him “a boxful of foodstuff of various kinds,” along with “a boxful of raiment, a spear, and kris” for his father. For his mother, on the other hand, the rat mentions being willing to offer “a boxful of dresses of different kinds.” This inducement is enough to persuade Pugut, who finds in this fortuitous encounter an opportunity to incur profit, and a friendship predicated on this agreement is formed between the two.

The insertion of this detail, which is consistent with the elements of fabulation, is important as it shows, figuratively and cognitively, a pre-existing substrate which appeared to be Islamic in nature, an aspect which seems to be already imbricated with indigenous elements. The adoption and imitation of the structure of a contemporaneous and prevailing Islam structure as a mode of organization, albeit in the context of a fable is intended to bring to the fore or surface the very mechanisms, practical as well as ideological, which have become naturalized in the assimilation of the political paradigm introduced by Islam. The offer of presents as a declaration of peace, meanwhile, is also an imitation of the gift-giving economy and society—it should be said that there are manifold uses and signification for this gesture—which characterizes the Sulu archipelago. In this case, it is rendered as an appeasement or negotiation for the release of the white rat.

On another level, however, this incident points to a narrative encodation of the primitivism of the original inhabitants of the island, represented here as parasites despite their natural right to the island. Seen in this light, this episode may be seen as a naturalized depiction of the effective and systematic displacement of the indigenous inhabitants, so to speak, and the domination by another group of what had formerly been an unoccupied space. The conciliation offered is hence done out of coercion, rather than an indication of friendship or an extension of the gift gesture, which is only ever put on the table because of the imaginary relation of power which places Pugut as superior over the lowly rats. In which case, the temporary settlement undertaken by Pugut, accompanied by the cultivation and production which he is able to introduce and implement of the island, may not be colonialist in nature but is nonetheless oppressive, divesting as it does the original dwellers of their right and inheritance.

Lastly, the return of the datu and his men from their exploratory expedition to the island where Pugut had been momentarily stationed

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18 Ziegler, 133.
signals the end of the digression and the final return of the crew back to their island of origin. This note is particularly important, as it demonstrates the impermanent settlement and migration which defines the lifeways of the islanders, as it does confirm the relationality which in the end is vital as a medium for transfer, transmission, and exchange. In a typical manner, the newly acquired riches of Pugut, along with the instrumental role had played at the beginning of their expedition, accorded him a place in the royal courts, which is further reinforced by his auspicious wedding with no less than the sister of the sultan herself.\footnote{Ziegler, 133.}

In this culmination of the episodic plot, the digression simultaneously distends the internal structure of the polity as it does expand, even to the point of attenuating it, the sphere of influence of the island kingdom.

**Phenomenal Interphase as a Constitutive Feature of Islandness**

In this particular set of folktales, the archipelagraphy proper to Sulu is configured in terms of the interphase between island and ocean, an interphase which is mediated by migration not only of people but of objects and animals, hence supplying a historicity to the general phenomenological sphere which surrounds the island. The migration of animals, in particular, is rendered in terms of a fabulation, in which they figure as the agents or characters, as shall be seen in the following illustrations.

The following examples are culled from an undergraduate thesis prepared by May Fatima V. Jalbuna of MSU-Tawi-Tawi,\footnote{The undergraduate thesis is entitled May Fatima V. Jalbuna, “Some Folktales in Tawi-Tawi: A Documentation and Analysis,” which has been placed under safekeeping at the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, Language Department, Mindanao State University Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography. Sanga-Sanga, Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, March 2011. The thesis was accessed by this author in late November of last year during her short stint in MSU-Tawi-Tawi.} a copy of which can only be accessed at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of the MSU Tawi-Tawi College of Technology and Oceanography, and which is valuable for its inclusion of folktales that are otherwise not available in the collections of Nimmo, Rixhon, or Revel. In the following illustration, the hawks and monkeys are seen to be engaged in a battle owing to their competing claim over sovereignty in a given island territory. This fabulatory mode can thus be read in terms of an allegory for the question of island agency and autonomy, although the narratological also yields a rich and fertile interest to the attentive reading, as it deals with the migration of biota from one island to another. By reading this folktale, this paper aims to...
show a phenomenology that is distinctly islandic.

In this narrative, the monkeys on a particular island are migrating en-masse to another island, which was inhabited by the hawks, in search of food, especially since the resources in their place of origin had already been depleted. The description of the voyage to the next island is rather peculiar, as it involves hawks latching onto logs, floating beside them, until they were washed safely ashore. Although the migration has been previously been permitted and in fact facilitated by the eagles by carrying the monkeys with their claws, relations between these two animal groups would turn ultimately sour after the latter are found to dishonor and violate the pact these groups had drawn up prior to the actual migration. In exchange for their help, the monkeys are bound by their agreement with the eagles to respect the rules and laws of the latter’s island territory. The picture is something significant as it is demonstrative of the mode of material and phenomenal encounter and experiences which are accommodated by inter-islandic travel.

However, this particular event would only result in such a full-blown conflict between the monkeys and the eagles, especially after the former consume the resources, particularly the fruits in the next island, a gesture which the hawks took as an affront but which the monkeys heedlessly continued to do. The hawks construed this as an infringement of their sovereignty, expressing their anger in such political terms, namely in terms of the transgression of local rules and laws. As an allegorical narrative, this folk tale is able to dramatize the topogenetic dimension of islandness, the imbrication for example of movement as well as of the interdependency between and among agents across inter-islandic settings.

21 Jalbuna, 67. This particular trope seems to be evident not only in this folktale but also in Darangen [Ed. Maria Delia Coronel, et al, Folklore Division, University Research Center (Marawi City: Mindanao State University, 1986)]. In the introductory chapters of Darangen, for example, there is an account, indicated in the footnote, of a deer swimming across the seas separating Zamboanga and Jolo to escape the clutches of a relentless hunter. This particular device, while certainly able to construed in terms of conventional fabulation, could also be used as a counterpoint to the latter if we treat these accounts as having its own variant or branch of ecological critique. In this account, the prototype for ecological critique is already foregrounded in indigenous discourse. In addition to which, in a conversation with some of our contacts in Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga, they have shared to us how stories percolate pertaining to the migration of babi or wild boar from North Borneo to Sulu, a detail which indexes a great deal of anecdotal reasoning among the Tausug pertaining to the right of ownership or appropriation over a given island setting, and its biota and fauna. In fact, during dinnertime conversations, while I was in Jolo in late January, my hosts would often crack jokes about how even the “manuk” or chicken have migrated as a result of war from Sulu to North Borneo, adding furthermore that this does not in any way detract from the sovereignty rights of the Tausug; rather, it only serves to affirm it. I never really fully understood the significance of those jokes until now that I’ve immersed myself in animal fables from Sulu.

22 Jalbuna, 67.

23 Jalbuna, 68.
as indissociable from its constitution. In addition to which, it shows how, in an inter-islandic context, human-animal interphase is singly mediated by the sea in the course of travel, whether contingent or accidental. The inter-islandic is further articulated to the aerial, as the first instance of recorded or depicted air travel appears in this account, adding another dimension to this mode of travel. The aerial is another common trope or medium in Tausug literature, as it is often used in order to make less overdetermined the spatiality of polity, its nomos, in order to give way to something utopic but also, in certain cases where this escape flight fails or founders, it gives way to its ideological ossification in the form of the synoptic. The tropological turn which is remapped here is crucial to the extent that it shows the sort of figuration and its limits which a projection, flight, and fancy that tends toward the aerial, sets in motion. It also shows the imaginative resources in indigenous literature by which flight is figured, which are drawn from the metaphoricity of the flight of birds as coincident by a vertical paradigm with inter-islandic travel. As this flight is beyond human experience and can only be imaginative configured by other means, it naturally allows for the reinscription of the conceptual but within the domain of the material. The flight of birds supplies then a nomos but also a phenomenological dimension, once removed from human experience, but which is consequently returned to recognizable and practical experience.

The other part which is foregrounded here is the nomos of the political which now becomes intertwined with, at the same time that it is ironically inessential to the island habitus. Here the abuses or excesses of the monkeys are rendered in terms of an invasion by a formerly fugitive group of a space occupied by another animal group. The fugitive status of the monkeys is also another significant dimension, as it provides possibly one of the earliest traces of the history of displacement, attributed in this case not only to natural resources but to the abuse of the environment. If the general recklessness and profligacy of the monkeys are any indication, the depletion of their own island resources must have been also a result of this, which is replicated again in their transfer to another island setting. Not only is the nomos of politics assaulted, so is the topicity of islandness itself, with its own natural order, hence necessitating a form of redress. In what follows, the monkeys are dominated by the hawks after a historic inter-islandic battle, sending the monkeys to the coasts and farther inland, where they now remain in perpetual fear of hawks.

A note should be made about the aerial dimension of the inter-islandic, which I would like to argue adds a significant and constitutive dimension to islandness. Here the turn skyward is also from the
vantage point of the island, whether as fixed or floating, and this is most concretely seen in the following line: “Bubu is a fish trap shaped like a square basket.”

In this particular saying or riddle, the implement for fishing, the strewn or woven bamboo fish trap is turned into a hole-ridden square basket, which is then used as an analogue for the complexly arranged constellations which are strewn across the sky. The relation between the basket and the constellation, which is figured in terms of the latticed pattern of the basket, is also mediated by a more immediate, experiential element—that of fishing—which at night and, in the context of other related activities, as in long sea voyaging, relies on stellar configurations at any given time. The tropological turn from sea to sky is figured in terms of the contingencies of voyaging, with the skyward dimension supplying the points, coordinates, or axes by which the phenomenology and vicissitudes of actual voyaging are then carried out. It is here that the conceptual is regrounded back in a phenomenology which is directly verified and experienced.

**By Way of Conclusion**

Across these exemplary texts, the discursive production of the “pulo,” “pulau,” or “pu’pu” reveals a ground of knowledge which is expansive, encoding as it does transcultural elements, which are gathered up in the openness of interaction, in the finitude of exchange. The figure of the “pulo” carries a certain motility to it in facilitating the suturing together of images, in providing a shifting imaginary field within which the datum of the historical real could be rendered. The production of the site in oral tradition entails the active incorporation of topical references, ranging from indigenous techne, cultural history, to religious allegory, in a signifying chain. The homologous nature of the symbol, proper to conventional poetics, is unsettled here to reveal a figure that has its own historicity and whose continual unfolding is set against the backdrop of encounter and travel. It is this synchronic, particularist element, in its incessant movement, that marks the contingency of the historical. Islandness as a trope constantly exhausts its own referential excess in a system in which the ecological and cultural landscapes are porous, and the signs and objects within them, evocative of intractable routes and temporalities. As a figure, the island is imbricated in its own historical materiality, at every turn exceeding its own apparent enclosure.

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By virtue of its geography and topography, the Philippines is regularly faced with a variety of natural disasters. Of these, tropical storms, with a number of them consistently entering the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) every year, are the most frequent that they may be considered almost commonplace. In 2013, however, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck Bohol only three weeks before Typhoon Yolanda—one of the world’s strongest typhoons and the deadliest Philippine typhoon on record—devastated the islands of Eastern Visayas, with Leyte suffering particularly catastrophic damage. These consecutive occurrences, with their high casualty rates, betray the deficiency of current response systems to address disasters and their aftermath. The need, then, to develop a disaster preparedness and response system that is comprehensive and appropriate is a matter of survival for many in the country. The technocratic aspect of disaster preparedness and response has to be complemented by an understanding, too, of the socio-political and cultural aspects. The former has been the focus of the Philippine government and various other institutions, and understandably so; fundamental, material needs must immediately be addressed before anything else. But beyond this, other aspects must be taken into consideration. The integration of cultural analysis into developing disaster preparedness and response systems encourage not only response but resistance.
Some scholars question the assumed objectivity of these disaster response systems, arguing that these are often, if not always, based on Western and patriarchal paradigms that may not be applicable to the Philippine context. They highlight the cultural contradiction between these systems and the local context, as well as the patriarchal paradigms that render these systems inappropriate, inefficient, and even exploitative. What becomes evident from these arguments, in positing the inadequacy of current frameworks about the environment and disaster response, is the need to consider alternative paradigms with which to perceive the nonhuman nature and our relationship with it.

We are then prompted to inspect not just our disaster response systems, but our relationship with the environment in general, on which these systems are based on in the first place, and this concern is far from an aesthetic one. Rather, this concern for the environment is of survival: we cannot turn away from the fact that there is an inadequacy in our disaster preparedness and response systems. This is proved by the consistently high casualty rates during natural disasters, an alarming fact given that our country, vulnerable to natural disasters, should already have measures in place to prevent or minimize the loss of lives to such disasters. Beyond this, the rapid depletion of the country’s natural resources as well as the widespread pollution, brought about by both the irresponsible behavior of the people and inadequate governmental regulation, compromise the health and cripple the livelihood of many in the country. On a global scale, a recent document from the United Nations’ scientific panel on climate change reports that we may face a crisis—consisting of food shortages, wildfires, and a mass die-off of coral reefs—as soon as the year 2040.1 Unfortunately, poorer, developing countries like the Philippines will suffer the most from climate change,2 so it is imperative for us to take action and initiate change.

What I forward here are not technocratic or scientific solutions, but a cultural paradigm shift: a Philippine ecofeminism based on the indigenous concept of ba’i. An ecofeminism based on the concept of ba’i—as conceptualized by Grace Odal—proposes a reevaluation of the historical relationship between women and nature through a synthesis of indigenous and Western knowledge-systems. By extension, this ecofeminism reconstructs the relationship between the human and the nonhuman in general in its endeavor to move towards more sustainable paradigms.

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for both. In doing so, I aim to: (1) to appropriately situate the Western framework of ecofeminism into the contemporary Philippine setting; (2) to both affirm and problematize indigenous and non-indigenous ideas about women and the environment; and (3) to forward a perspective that is feminist, ecocritical, and postcolonial all at once.

**Ecofeminism: Foundations of the Woman-Nature Association**

A seminal text in the study of ecofeminism is Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva’s *Ecofeminism* which was first published in 1993. In their introduction, Mies and Shiva provide a brief history of the development of the term. They write that “[e]cofeminism, ‘a new term for ancient wisdom’ grew out of various social movements — in the late 1970s and 1980s. Though the term was first used by Francoise D’Eaubonne it became popular only in the context of numerous protests and activities against environmental destruction, sparked-off initially by recurring ecological disasters.”

In other words, perceiving women and nature as intimately related, the foundational idea of ecofeminism, has been prevalent in many societies throughout history, but the coining of the term ecofeminism is a relatively recent development. It is crucial to acknowledge such roots of ecofeminism: that as a term it grew out of and became popular through various social movements, and that its ideas are ‘ancient wisdom.’ It is in ecofeminism’s grassroots and indigenous origins that its subversive potential lies.

At its core, ecofeminism “propounds the need for a new cosmology and new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love.”

It is a radical perspective compared to the principle of endless accumulation and domination propounded by capitalist patriarchy. Instead, ecofeminism forwards a perspective which starts from the fundamental necessities of life; we call this *subsistence perspective*. Our opinion is that women are nearer to this perspective than men—women in the South working and living, fighting for their immediate survival are nearer to it than urban, middle-class women and men in the North. Yet all women and all men have a body which is directly affected by the destructions of the industrial system.

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4 Mies and Shiva, 6.
5 Mies and Shiva, 20, emphasis mine.
Ecofeminism in general acknowledges that women’s oppression and environmental destruction are inseparable consequences of the capitalist patriarchal system, and so the struggle for environmental justice cannot be isolated from women’s liberation. There is a claim to woman-nature connections based on historical, conceptual, symbolic, experiential, epistemological, political, ethical, and theoretical links. This particular strain of ecofeminism forwarded by Mies and Shiva however, coming from this idea of women and nature as intertwined, go further by situating that idea in the material context of women, particularly in the global South where women’s material conditions are heavily dependent on the status of their natural environment. To liberate both women and the environment would then necessitate what they call subsistence perspective. This perspective is essentially critical of the “capitalist patriarchy’s model of unlimited growth of goods and money,” asserting that the way out of such a contradictory system—in that the capitalist principle of unlimited growth cannot be sustained by a limited environment—lies not in catching-up development and technological fixes. Instead, it encourages an economic system that aims not for unlimited profit but for “the creation and re-creation of life”; a perspective of nature as possessing “her own subjectivity”; human relationships premised on “reciprocity, mutuality, solidarity, reliability, sharing and caring”; “a participatory or grassroots democracy”; “a multidimensional or synergic problem-solving approach”; “a new paradigm of science, technology, and knowledge” that integrates older, people-based knowledge with modern knowledge; “a reintegration of culture and work,” and; a resistance to the privatization and commercialization of natural resources.

Such connections have been charged by some scholars as essentialist, and this is an issue that will be tackled on further later in this paper. The objective, at the root of it, is to come up with a perspective that critically examines the woman-nature association in order to come up with a productive and strategic construction of this association that resists the masculine paradigms of differentiation that prior understandings of ecofeminism tend to still be bound to.

Ecofeminism, as a literary theory and political framework, takes the discourse of ecocriticism further by applying feminist concepts.

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7 Mies and Shiva, 297.
8 Mies and Shiva, 300.
9 Mies and Shiva, 319-320.
that reveal the gender aspect of a text that ecocriticism may overlook. In the growing awareness now of environmental crises and the necessity to discuss them, both ecocriticism and ecofeminism—the latter being a subcategory of the former—perform critical inquiries into literature in relation to the environment. Scientific approaches to environmental problems is only one aspect of addressing them: “environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as scientific terms, because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflection.”

In addition, according to Richard Kerrige, ecocriticism “seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crises.” The difference between the two theories lies in how the ‘human’ in the human-nonhuman equation is understood: if ecocriticism is broadly defined as “the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself,” ecofeminism may be considered a more intersectional approach to the same subject matter by further breaking down the concept of ‘human’ by gender, class, and race. As Val Plumwood points out, the use of the term ‘human’ in ecocritical discourse can be problematic because, more of than not, the term refers to the masculine:

[T]he characteristics traditionally associated with dominant masculinism are also those used to define what is distinctively human: for example, rationality (and selected mental characteristics and skills); transcendence and intervention in and domination and control of nature, as opposed to passive immersion in it (consider the characterisation of ‘savages’ as lower orders of humanity on this account); productive labour, sociability, and culture.

Under the guise of the supposed gender-neutral term “human,” ecocritical discourse often obscures the significant role played by gender in the environmental crises. It is this gap in the discourse that ecofeminism, in asserting the association between women and the environment, means to fill.

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11 Garrard, 4.
12 Garrard, 5.
Ba’i and the Mothersea as Indigenous Iterations of Ecofeminism

As a way to appropriately apply this ecofeminist framework in the Philippine context, I will make use of the indigenous concept of ba’i. Ba’i, an idea or diwang-binhi forwarded by Grace Odal, roughly refers to the perception of buhay (‘life’ or ‘existence’) as deeply rooted in the sea as mother, and mother as woman.\(^{14}^{15}\) I say roughly because ba’i, as Odal herself describes it, is a diwang-binhi (literally ‘seed idea’), meaning that ba’i itself is not a fully developed concept but rather the roots of one. Her main idea is that the sense of Filipino community often embodied by the term “Inang Bayan” (‘motherland’) can actually be traced to a sense of community initially formed around “Inang Tubig” (‘mothersea’) which in turn stems from the idea of ba’i.\(^{16}^{17}\) This implies that an intimate or familial relationship with nature, as suggested by referring to the sea as mother, is what fostered a sense of community. This is, in a way, unsurprising given that the Philippines is an archipelago where many indigenous groups depended on the sea for their sustenance and livelihood. They drew their food and medicine from the sea, and centered many of their rituals, such as funeral rites, around it. Ba’i thus functions as the root from which grow the other cultural concepts, and while Odal’s study attempts to consider the context of the whole Philippine archipelago, she explicitly admits that it is focused on the Tagalog region. In a thorough, predominantly linguistic examination, she finds that the concept of ba’i is present in many aspects of Filipino culture, including language, geography, and folklore. Odal shows that in its various permutations across Philippine-type and even Austronesian languages, ba’i has several meanings, some of which include ‘effeminate’, ‘woman’, ‘lagoon’, ‘sea’, ‘mother’, ‘grandmother.’\(^{18}\)

That this concept gave birth to words that can mean either woman or nature is significant in that it suggests a cultural mindset that perceives women and nature—in this case, the sea in particular—as intimately related, as being capable of embodying each other. Nature, then, is perceived as feminine, and women are seen as resembling nature in their productive capacity and their ability to provide sustenance.

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\(^{14}\) Odal, Grace P, Inang Tubig: Ang Diwa ng Ba’i sa Kalinangang Bayan (Quezon City: ADHIKA ng Pilipinas, Inc., 1999), 99.

\(^{15}\) “[Ang ba’i] ay kilala sa diwa ng babae sa anyo nitong ina at bahay na naglikha, bumuo, nagsilang at kumakalinga ng buhay.”

\(^{16}\) Odal, 1.

\(^{17}\) “Ang diwa ng Inang Bayan na unang lumabas sa anyo ng ‘Inang Tubig’ at siya rin namang sinaunang ‘Ina’ ng mga kalinangang pantubig sa Pilipinas, ay nagmula sa diwang-binhi ng ba’i batay sa pag-aaral ng ilang piling pook, wika, alamat at kapaniwalaan sa kapuluan.”

\(^{18}\) Odal, 27-29.
From another angle, Marian Pastor-Roces examines the concept of mothersea in various folk literature. This idea of mothersea is based on several folktales that fixated on the deepest part of the sea as a source of solace, healing, miracle, and as woman: “In the numinous wisdom of this allegorical tale—how the bloodthirsty subhuman part that inflicts the best of men cannot be healed without their own desiring and submission to the magically transcendent feminine self that lies hidden at the deepest center of their being—we pick a clue on the relevance of folk wisdom to schizophrenic modern man.” While neither scholars refer to each other in their respective studies, both concepts of mothersea and ba’i appear to be consistent in that they embody the sea as a woman, and vice versa. Pastor-Roces’ mothersea is closer to Odal’s formulation of ba’i rather than its direct translation Inang Tubig in that both mothersea and ba’i are both described as a hidden source of feminine wisdom. Both Pastor-Roces and Odal suggest that there is something to be learned from this folk wisdom, this binhing-diwa; that we in the present might benefit from accessing such indigenous feminine knowledge.

A similar reclamation of an indigenous concept is done by Flaudette May Datuin in “Reclaiming The Healing Arts of The Ancient Priestess: Babaylanism as Site of Southeast Asian “Feminisms.”” In the essay, Datuin presents examples of how various Southeast Asian women artists “articulate and embody the babaylan in their life and their works.” Borrowing the concept from historian Fe Mangahas, she writes that babaylanism is a concept “where the body is construed as an anatomical, spiritual, social and psychic space grounded on fluidity and wholeness, instead of hierarchy and dualities,” with the figure of the babaylan “as a signifier for women’s life-giving, nurturing, and healing powers.” Datuin uses this concept to analyze visual art by women as a way of developing a feminist aesthetic that refuses “to sever the mind and the body, sex and gender, nature and culture; an aesthetic that “embodies not just style,

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20 Odal, 131.
21 “Gigisingin ba natin ang matagal nang humihimlay at natabunang likas na galing at bisa ng bayan—ang mutya ng katubigang Pilipinas na minumutya nating BAIAN?”
22 Flaudette May Datuin “Reclaiming The Healing Arts of The Ancient Priestess: Babaylanism as Site of Southeast Asian “Feminisms,”” in Representations in the Creative Arts of Southeast Asia: Negotiating Meanings and Identities, special issue of Wacani Seni Journal of Arts Discourses 11 (2012): 64.
23 Datuin, 64.
24 Datuin, 85.
but also testimonies of struggle, pain, gains and triumphs.”

Ba’i is used similarly in this study, but using ba’i goes beyond the discourse of the body on which babaylanism—which is based on the figure of the babaylan—is anchored in. Ba’i may overlap with, or even encompass babaylanism given that, as Odal earlier points out, the word babaylan, in the first place, may be traced back to the binhing-diwa of ba’i. These associations establish a strong connection between these two concepts, but ba’i, I argue, is more adaptable to various kinds of discourse, and it is for this reason that this concept was chosen: to develop an approach to, in this case, ecofeminist theory, that forwards holism in lieu of reductionism based on narratives about environment that grapple with issues not just of the (female) body, but of space and identity as well. The implications of ba’i, in calling to mind both woman (or human) and sea (or nonhuman environment) all at once, makes it more appropriate for this ecofeminist endeavor. While I do not use the concept of babaylan or babaylanism per se, I still place my study within the field of babaylan studies: babaylan studies is a growing field focused on indigenously-grounded analyses of Philippine culture and society based on the figure of the babaylan, and, like the scholarship in this field, my study seeks to forward an approach to ecofeminism that is based on the indigenous binhing-diwa of the ba’i.

In applying ba’i to the ecofeminist framework, I borrow Vandana Shiva’s method in Staying Alive. In her book, she brings in the Indian concept of Prakriti, “the feminine principle from which all life arises,” in her theory of ecofeminism. Doing so is an act inspired by women’s struggles for the protection of nature as a condition for human survival, [and Staying Alive] goes beyond a statement of women as special victims of the environmental crisis. It attempts to capture and reconstruct those insights and visions that Indian women provide in their struggles for survival, which perceive development and science from outside the categories of modern western patriarchy.

Shiva writes that many ecologists have drawn inspiration from indigenous cultures because of the acknowledgment that the kind of knowledge they have about the environment is not regressive in comparison to modern

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25 Datuin, 86.
27 Shiva, xvi.
science, but rather alternative to it, and thus indigenous or local knowledge is capable of challenging the existing system that regards the environment merely as a source.\textsuperscript{28} The epistemology of modern science, according to Shiva, is reductionist because it reduces nature to “inert and fragmented matter” that may be taken apart and manipulated.\textsuperscript{29} It transforms pluralistic knowledge into a “superior and universal tradition to be superimposed on all classes, gender and cultures which it helps in controlling and subjugating.”\textsuperscript{30} Indigenous knowledge or ethno-science, on the other hand, is based on “an ontology of the feminine as the living principle, and on an ontological continuity between society and nature—the humanization of nature and the naturalisation of society.”\textsuperscript{31} She supports this assertion by citing the concept of Prakriti in Indian cosmology which is characterized by creativity, activity, diversity, connectedness of all beings, continuity between the human and the non-human, and the sanctity of life in nature.\textsuperscript{32} In applying this to her theory of ecofeminism, she proposes an ontological shift that resists the dualism that allows the environment to be viewed merely as resource. The application of ba’i will be done similarly, as an indigenous concept that, in challenging the originally Western framework of ecofeminism, proposes a new angle with which to understand it.

**Nature as (Female) Self and Other: Resisting Essentialism**

The concepts so far can easily be seen as essentialist: acknowledging now the essentialist trap, I first problematize the reductive division between masculine and feminine by focusing on how feminine traits and values, which, while not inherent to women were certainly associated with or imposed on them, have historically been repressed or deemed less valuable to their masculine counterparts. Feminine values would include physical weakness, emotionality, divinity, and communality, in contrast to the masculine values of strength, rationality, and individuality. The savagery and wildness of nature are also often perceived as feminine and thus subordinate to the superior masculine civilization. Aside from resisting essentialism, the need to emphasize here that this “hidden feminine self” is not innate or intrinsic is important in situating this study as a feminist endeavor: to attempt to recover this hidden feminine self in the contemporary period is a feminist endeavor, because while these traits of

\textsuperscript{28} Shiva, 39.
\textsuperscript{29} Shiva, 21.
\textsuperscript{30} Shiva, 20.
\textsuperscript{31} Shiva, 39.
\textsuperscript{32} Shiva, 39.
Empathy and spirituality are not intrinsically female, they historically have been associated with the female and have been used to oppress them, and by extension, the feminine-designated nature. As Vandana Shiva points out in *Staying Alive*, the “problem with a gender-based response to a gender-based ideology is that it treats ideologically constructed gender categorisation as given by nature.” Instead, she argues for the recovery of the feminine principle which is “a response to multiple dominations and deprivations not just of women, but also of nature and non-western cultures.”³³ Doing so is not a mere reversal because the feminine principle is not exclusively embodied in women, but is the principle of activity and creativity in nature, women and men. One cannot really distinguish the masculine from the feminine, person from nature, Purusha from Prakriti. Though distinct, they remain inseparable in dialectical unity, as two aspects of one being. *The recovery of the feminine principle is thus associated with the non-patriarchal, non-gendered category of creative non-violence.*³⁴

Simply put, the feminine principle stands for inclusiveness, viewing nature as a live organism, women as productive and active, and men life-enhancing rather than life-reducing.³⁵ To unite the struggle for liberation of both women and nature is, as argued, based on the idea that their subjugation and oppression stem from the same thing, which is the capitalist patriarchal system supported by reductionist modern science.³⁶ Hence, the proposed solution of recovering the feminine principle would then prove beneficial to both causes.

This idea of the feminine principle also already addresses the issue that some scholars raise about ecofeminism’s essentialist woman-nature association. Ecofeminism is accused of glossing over material conditions of different groups of women around the world, which becomes counterproductive in that it fails to take into account other factors, such as class or race, that would significantly affect the formulation of the concept. I emphasize that for this particular ecofeminist framework, the woman-nature association is not based on an esoteric or romantic relationship that binds the two, but rather their symbolic and material context within the capitalist patriarchal system. Such association, as Shiva has pointed out, was

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³³ Shiva, 50.
³⁴ Shiva, 50, emphasis mine.
³⁵ Shiva, 51.
³⁶ Shiva, 19-20.
constructed and reinforced by this system—which in turn was supported by reductionist science—in order to conveniently subjugate both on the supposedly objective idea that the feminine and all that is associated with it is subordinate to the masculine. To thus aspire to recover the feminine principle is to resist the masculine, and to reclaim not just what is female, but all the ideas that this system has rendered inferior. Mies and Shiva argue that the material basis for this association is especially true in the context of Third World women where their material conditions are intimitately tied to the condition of their physical environment. They focus “on the everyday lived experience of women in poorer, third-world nations as caregivers of their families, in particular, and their communities, in general, by tending the earth.”

For example, the privatization of land brought about by colonialism left women to fend for themselves, their children, and the aged and infirm, when men migrated or were forced to work elsewhere for the colonizers. In the context of the Philippines, this relationship between the environment and women is highlighted in the underground sexual economy in the Tacloban Astrodome where people sought shelter during Typhoon Yolanda. There, “women and girls were sold for food and scarce aid supplies, or trafficked into forced labor and sex work by recruiters offering jobs and scholarships.” Because the disaster devastated families’ livelihoods, women were pressured to provide for their family because of the expectation of unconditional fulfillment of domestic duties, and this led them to resort to any means to survive, which in this case was prostitution. Social workers in Eastern Visayas thus reported an increase in the number of trafficked women after Yolanda, tripling from 20 to 60 victims in the region. This association between women and nature then, based on the material context particularly of Third World women, can thus be considered nonessentialist when examined within the capitalist patriarchal system it is contained in.

Further problematization of this association is raised by Val Plumwood in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* and Catherine Roach in “Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation.” First, Plumwood points out that “[i]f a simple affirmation faces difficulties, the attempts to bypass affirmation via dissolution and repudiation of gender identity is also problematic.” She pertains to the two opposite
but equally problematic strategies often employed by feminists, which is
to either uncritically reject the feminine in favor of the masculine norm
guised as objective or gender-netural, or to endorse the reversal of the
masculine/feminine dualism “by conceeding the male claim to [qualities
like rationality], and covertly affirming the qualities of subordination”
associated with the feminine. Both methods, Plumwood argues, still fall
“within the dualistic problematic in being too limiting and uncritical of
polarisation and exclusion, in accepting homogenisation through the failure
to envisage women’s identities as plural, and through serving to obscure
major differences in women’s situation and politics.” To Plumwood,
either strategies still only work within the masculine/feminine dualism,
thus continuing to preserve, despite the adaptation albeit of a different
perspective, this very same dualism. She thus proposes that rather than
relying on this false dichotomy of rejection or affirmation, Plumwood
suggests that the “better route to subversion than that of poststructuralism
would treat woman’s identity as an important if problematic tradition which
requires critical reconstruction, a potential source of strength as well as a
problem, and a ground of both continuity and difference with traditional
ideals. [...] [A]n adequate reworking of gender identity must involve both
elements of transcendence and elements of affirmation.”

What she forwards is a theory of mutuality where the nonhuman nature is neither self
nor other, but “a domain where earth others are autonomous or sovereign,
free to work things out according to self-determined patterns, which may
be those of sameness or difference.” It is an ecofeminism that follows this
theory of mutuality, where this woman-nature association is simultaneously
affirmed and problematized by perceiving the nonhuman environment
as both partially self and partially other, that will then be integrated with
ba’i in order to determine how this indigenous concept may be reoriented
accordingly: how does the woman/mother-nature association suggested by
ba’i figure into a Philippine context where the notions of woman, mother,
and nature have been drastically influenced by Western values? How is the
continuity and difference highlighted by Plumwood negotiated in a ba’i
understood in this context?

To address this, the woman/mother-nature association implied
in ba’i has to be reevaluated, and helpful in this evaluation is Catherine

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41 Plumwood, 23.
42 Plumwood, 62.
43 Plumwood, 62.
44 Plumwood, 64, emphasis mine.
45 Plumwood, 163.
Roach’s analysis of the feminization of Earth implied in popular environmentalist posters carrying the slogan “Love Your Mother.” She prompts us to further problematize the woman/mother-nature association, focusing not just on the historical links between women and nature but also on the cultural notions of “mother” that is implied in the concept. She argues that

engendering the Earth as female mother, given the meaning and function traditionally assigned to “mother” and “motherhood” in patriarchal culture, will not achieve the desired aim of making our behavior more environmentally sound, but will instead help to maintain the mutually supportive, exploitative stances we take toward our mothers and toward our environment.  

If, on one hand, scholars like Shiva and Odal have argued for the reclamation of the historically subjugated feminine principle through the appropriation of the woman-nature or female mother-nature associations, Roach points out the need to be critical of the notions of motherhood in the first place. She argues that “if it is difficult for us to love our mothers and to perceive them as fully human, equally problematic is the way we expect our mothers to love us,” referring to how, as children, the mother appears “all-powerful and caring but also capricious and malevolent.” The mother then proves to be difficult to love because of this ambivalence, but also difficult to comprehend as autonomous because she appears also “as a “global, inchoate, all-embracing presence,” as unbounded and amorphous, as the “monolithic representative of nature.” To thus apply this discourse to environmentalism may then prove to be counterproductive to its objective of proposing a sustainable relationship between the human and the nonhuman because, as Roach points out, “[m]other in patriarchal culture is she who provides all of our sustenance and who makes disappear all of our waste products, she who satisfies all of our wants and needs endlessly without any cost to us.” This point, interestingly, is similar to Shiva’s assertion that it is the rendering of nature as an endless, inert source, following what she deems masculine reductionist logic, that results

47 Roach, 49.
48 Roach, 48.
49 Roach, 48.
50 Roach, 49.
in environmental exploitation. In Roach’s perspective, however, it is the rendering of nature as mother, which environmentalists and ecofeminists themselves advocate for, that encourages such exploitative behavior. Perceiving nature as mother, in other words, does not necessarily construct a relationship of equality and mutual respect between the human and the nonhuman environment as is commonly believed. However, it must be noted that the contexts that Roach and I—and Roach and Shiva or Odal, for that matter—are coming from for our studies are significantly different. Evident here is the necessity to first critically examine what it means to be a mother in the Philippines, and what the juxtaposition of such concept onto the nonhuman environment implies. A useful question Roach leaves is this: “How can we rethink or re-vision our understanding of nature and of the historical link between woman and nature in order for these understandings to be healthier, both for women and for the environment?”

To engage in this inquiry, it must then be asked what “patriarchal culture” is, how this is translated to the Philippine context, and whether the notions of the mother constructed by such culture hold true even in the contemporary context of the Philippines.

To trace the development of the figure of the mother in Philippine society necessitates that we begin with precolonial Philippines. It would, however, be difficult to ascertain the figure of the mother in precolonial Philippine society because, first of all, there was no unified “precolonial Philippine society” to begin with; the many ethnolinguistic groups that exist in the archipelago certainly must have different, but perhaps similar, notions of the mother. Documents that would provide insight about this are likewise scant due to the Spaniards’ destruction of local cultural artifacts, but an idea of how the mother was then perceived can be gleaned in Lilia Quindoza-Santiago’s “Roots of Feminist Thought in the Philippines” which traces the role of women in Philippine history. Quindoza-Santiago notes that it is generally agreed upon by historians and sociologists alike that “women in a number of selected ethno-linguistic groups before the coming of the Spaniards held a respected position in the community, one that they could be proud of.”

This assertion is supported by the fact that women in these societies were eligible to become political leaders of their communities, and that their children bore their names. It was also observed by anthropologist Robert Fox that in the chronicles of Spaniards, native families were described as not patricentric, meaning that the women’s

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51 Roach, 52.

lineage were of equal importance to the men’s. That women participated in all kinds of productive labor just as the men did, and that there was no clear division of labor based on gender further proves that women’s standing in many precolonial societies was at par with the men.

Given this context, it would not be a leap to argue that the woman/mother-nature association implied in the indigenous concept of ba’i is unlike the exploitative woman/mother-nature association Roach, who is coming from a Western context, examined in her study. That ba’i draws from indigenous paradigms suggests that the mother implicated in this association is the empowered woman of these precolonial societies capable of actively participating in community affairs as leaders and laborers. In other words, ba’i draws from a conception of the woman-mother that is not rendered as the sacrificial provider described by Roach, but rather as an influential and equally powerful member of the community. Seen this way, ba’i may then be seen as actually forwarding an egalitarian, non-exploitative relationship between the human and the nonhuman as it prompts us to treat the nonhuman environment with the kind of respect and dignity accorded to women in those precolonial Philippine societies. Another problem emerges here, however: I am attempting to situate ba’i in the present-day context where the figure of the mother, now heavily influenced by the values brought by centuries of Spanish and eventually American colonization, has been radically transformed. The implications carried by ba’i have then changed accordingly, and this change warrants examination.

Two studies that provide a background on the notion of the mother in contemporary Philippines are Eileen Gay F. Espina’s “Mother-Child Relationships in the Philippines,” and Rosario Torres-Yu’s “Re-imahinasyon ng Ina sa Panitikan ng Kababaihan: Isang Imbestigasyon sa Ideolohiyang Maternal sa Panitikan.” That “the mother-child relationship, considering its primacy and its pervasive nature, is then viewed to be at the bottom of the entire personality formation process,” and that the “mother-child interaction is two-way,” Espina’s case study of 226 mother-child pairs from the Grade 6 population of St. Mary’s Academy

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53 Quindoza-Santiago, 160.
54 Quindoza-Santiago, 161.
55 While Quindoza-Santiago traces the construction of the woman and not the mother per se—and these figures may overlap but are not identical—it may be inferred that the mother in these societies are constructed similarly. There is certainly room for error in this hasty parallelism should a comprehensive study of the mother, in particular, in precolonial Philippine societies arise, but as it stands, this is partly speculative.
57 Espina, 155.
in Pasay City “aimed to explore the patterns of mother-child relationships by identifying the attitudes of the mothers toward their children and by relating these attitudes to the developing personality characteristics of their children.”

What Espina finds is that, in the attitude profile of the mothers, “overprotection emerged as the most prevalent attitude that mothers exhibit towards their children.” This is supported by the studies by Umali-Razon and Church that she cites in her essay which agree that “overprotection in Philippine culture is a fact,” characterizing it as “one of the most desirable maternal roles in Philippine culture.”

Overprotection is then followed by the attitude of rejection which manifests as neglect, harshness, brutality, and strictness. The combination of these two attitudes supports the claim by Guthrie and Jacobs that “Filipino mothers are strict, demand obedience, and are not reluctant to use punishment when they reject their children’s behavior.” While this study is by no means conclusive, it does echo Roach’s point about mothers being all-powerful and caring, which may be said to manifest as overprotection, but also capricious and malevolent, indicated by rejection.

Likewise consistent with Roach’s notion of the mother, Delia D. Aguilar’s investigation of the sexual politics in the family found that birthing and child-rearing give force to the domestic ideology imposed on Filipina women, and are used to justify their self-sacrifice. It is this self-sacrifice that Roach argues to be prone to being abused or exploited. Thus, in this context, the woman/mother-nature association implied in ba’i as it is currently understood is thereby permeated with the tendency to be constructed as exploitative. Moreover, that this idealization of the mother was established during the Spanish colonization, as Rosario Torres-Yu points out, further affirms the fact that this particular construction of the mother was brought about by the patriarchal ideology carried by the Spanish when they arrived. Ba’i to the indigenous consciousness can then

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58 Espina, 155.
59 Espina, 158.
60 Espina, 159.
61 Espina, 160.
62 Espina, 160.
64 “Gayundin, nabatid niyang bukod sa pagtanggap sa kahirapan bilang malaking paliwanag, ang pag-aanak at pag-aruga sa anak ang siyang taluktok ng domestikong ideolohiya para sa mga Filipina at siyang nagiging salalayan ng pagbibigay, pagsuko, at sakripisyo ng babaen.”
65 Torres-Yu, 335.
be inferred as not bearing the idea of a sacrificial mother, and that this idea only came about upon the arrival of Spanish. How the construction of the mother transformed since this image of the sacrificial mother can be seen in Torres-Yu’s study of the figure of the mother in selected literary texts by women. She finds several figurations that, in some ways, did adhere to the idealized mother, but in some aspects also challenged it. The texts feature mothers that exhibit traditional maternal traits, such as attentiveness, care, and affection, while also rebelling against many expectations, shown by how these women have their own jobs or successfully and positively navigate single mothering. These depictions demonstrate how the construction of the mother as sacrificial and as a giver, based on the patriarchal domestic ideology, is deeply embedded in contemporary Philippine society, but also that there have been significant deviations from this construction. It is this context that this study will be coming from: for ba’i to now draw on this dynamic notion of the mother would be to also consistently negotiate these conflicting perceptions towards a conception of ba’i that neither mystifies nor exploits the mother, but one that regards it as familiar (or familial) but also, more importantly, autonomous.

Finally, borrowing an indigenous concept, as I am doing here, must be done carefully, as John Grim points out. In “Indigenous Traditions and Deep Ecology,” Grim writes about the significance of involving the insights of indigenous cultures—that for so long have been regarded as mere superstition—in the project of developing an environmental ethics (in Grim’s case, deep ecology), and the challenges of doing so. Ecologists, he writes, have acknowledged the value of the insights of indigenous peoples in their studies, but, in the recent years, indigenous scholars have also “objected to an overly facile identification of environmentalism and traditional native life.” Ecologists or environmentalists that appreciate but do not understand the context of the indigenous cultures they are borrowing from risk exploiting and endangering the very people they sought inspiration from in order to help protect. For example, Grim cites a 1988 case in the US between environmentalists and the Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association wherein the former argued for protecting a particular land site based on “wilderness” preservation. The latter, represented by Lakota lawyer and intellectual Vine Deloria, emphasized that the concept of “wilderness” is a complete misunderstanding of the philosophical worldview of American

66 Torres-Yu, 342.
Indians:

This neglect should be a warning to Indians and non-Indians alike that the popular belief prevailing that non-Indians can somehow absorb the philosophical worldview of American Indians and inculcate “reverence” for the land into their intellectual and emotional perspectives is blatantly false. Inherent in the very definition of “wilderness” is contained the gulf between the understandings of the two cultures. Indians do not see the natural world as a wilderness. In contrast, Europeans and Euroamericans see a big difference between lands they have “settled” and lands they have left alone.\(^{68}\)

The case demonstrates an irresponsible appropriation of indigenous, particularly American Indian, philosophy. In looking towards these cultures for “self-realization,” as Grim calls it, the environmentalists often overlook the political implications of doing so, especially given the power relations between these scholars and American Indians. American Indian leaders and scholars have even “criticized such sharing and borrowing as examples of ongoing colonial exploitation that undermines native cultures.”\(^{69}\) With that in mind, this endeavor of formulating an approach to a Philippine ecofeminism by basing it on the indigenous concept of ba’i will have to consistently be reevaluated: this pursuit should, first of all, remain rooted in the material conditions that scaffold the concept so as to not slip into romanticizing the field. In attempting to analyze how texts manifest this concept of ba’i, the milieu must be kept in mind because this would inform how the supposed manifestation of ba’i should be understood. The proposed approach should also serve the people that it draws the idea from and not cause further harm or exploitation. I emphasize here that the significance of incorporating ba’i into environmental philosophies or endeavors lies in its potential to challenge the current ideologies that, as have been acknowledged, are responsible for environmental exploitation as well as the exploitation of minorities like women and indigenous people. The indigenous people who, for the longest time, have regarded their land as sacred or alive, should be acknowledged in the study by ensuring that their knowledge is used only to promote their liberation. In Grim’s words, we must “examine our myth of emergence seriously without ‘becoming

\(^{68}\) Grim, 46.

\(^{69}\) Grim, 47.
This, perhaps, might be the greatest challenge in my study, given my subject position as a researcher: I am merely an observer. As such, the presence of ba’i in these texts should be understood as constructed particularly by my academic exposure and middle class experience, meaning that it is more relatively mediated than a ba’i formulated through direct experience. By direct experience, I refer to how ba’i is a principle that is lived by the indigenous groups the concept stems from, which manifests in how it informs various aspects of their culture rather than simply being a theoretical principle that may be discerned from the texts in this study. On my part as researcher, this attempt to incorporate indigenous knowledge in this academic endeavor must then be very carefully performed in order to avoid the aforementioned exploitative pitfall. The hope that this study may return something to the people it borrows knowledge from may be far-fetched, but it is a hope nonetheless that this study wishes to maintain.

In light of all these, the concept of ba’i that I am forwarding in my study is a synthesis of the concepts forwarded by the aforementioned Philippine and ecofeminist scholars: Odal’s conception of ba’i as the perception of existence as deeply rooted in the sea as mother, and mother as woman; Pastor-Roces’ idea of the mothersea as the source of indigenous feminine wisdom; Mangahas’ babaylanism as a concept of the body premised on fluidity and wholeness rather than on hierarchy and dualities; the Indian concept of Prakriti cited by Shiva as a feminine principle characterized by creativity, activity, diversity, connectedness and continuity; Mies and Shiva’s ecofeminism as a subsistence perspective that essentially promotes sustainable economic activity, reciprocality and care in human relationships, and the integration of folk knowledge with science and technology, and; Torres-Yu’s study on the construction of the mother in contemporary Philippine literature which recognizes certain constructions that deviate from the patriarchal mold of mother as purely sacrificial giver by portraying her as also autonomous. I then forward this synthesis of ba’i as a feminine principle that not only perceives existence as deeply rooted in the sea as mother, and mother as woman, but also mother as active and autonomous; it is likewise a principle characterized by historically feminine traits such as fluidity, wholeness, creativity, connectedness, communality, and sustainability that then provides a perspective that questions the rigidity of the barrier between the human and the nonhuman. In doing so, it asserts not just pure sameness, but recognition of both sameness and

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70 Grim, 53.
difference. The intimate, familial relationship between the human and the nonhuman suggested by this concept of ba’i renders the nonhuman environment as sentient, thus inviting respect. Furthermore, an important aspect of this feminine principle is not the absolute rejection of the masculine. Faithful to the values of fluidity and sustainability, this concept of ba’i accommodates even paradigms considered masculine, such as science and technology, in ways that maintain a dialectic relationship between such masculine paradigms and the values of sustainability, wholeness, and communality. Following Odal’s assertion that it is from this binhing-diwa of ba’i that even the nationalist concept of bayan draws from, to recover then this indigenous, feminine principle of ba’i and appropriately transpose it into the context of contemporary Philippines offers an alternative to the patriarchal capitalist paradigms that promote both the exploitation of the environment and the oppression of women. Perhaps it is the perspective that simultaneously and critically looks back at our indigenous past(s) and examines our postcolonial present that our march towards a more sustainable future must be guided.

Bibliography


PART TWO:
Contemporary Philippine Ecocriticism
A stark contrast arises when we analyze Philippine folklore from the perspective presented by Donna Haraway’s *The Promises of Monsters.* Well known for her *Cyborg Manifesto,* it seems unlikely to find a common space between the futuristic underpinnings of Haraway’s theories and Philippine legends, mythology, and mystical entities—a context more seemingly rooted in nature and history. Of course, the dynamic is more complicated than surface impressions. Central to the very text is a theory on *monsters* as manifested through beasts, aliens, inter-terrestrials, and the science fiction universe; entities that are constant and present amidst the passing of space, tense, and time.

As such, the subject of monsters becomes central to the analysis of this paper. Perspectives, being that they are contingent, are accordingly applied in response to a variety of monsters and monstrous conceptions. We analyze the monsters in *Vampira, Darna vs. The Planet Women, Magandang Gabi sa Inyong Labat,* and *Haplos* using the quadrants

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Haraway had presented in the text. These quadrants pertain to text, namely, Real Space, Outer Space, Inner Space, and Virtual Space, respectively. That being said, an analysis of Philippine monsters ensues first using and ultimately critiquing Haraway’s complex perspective.

**Unstable Monstrosity**

Haraway’s work functions via the seemingly stable assumption that monstrosity manifests itself uniformly; however, definitions are complicated, especially when languages are juxtaposed with each other. Philology suffices to emphasize the inevitably stark differences between certain Western and Filipino conceptions of the term.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, for example, a monster can be either “an animal or plant of abnormal form or structure” or “of strange or terrifying shape—one unusually large for its kind.” In the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), it is “a mythical creature which is part animal and part human or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. [...] any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening.” From these two English definitions, we may come to the conclusion that monstrosity is mainly founded on the form of an entity. However, once this conclusion comes to face that of a more local and Filipino one, gaps suffice and must be traversed.

In the *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* by Juan Noceda and Pedro Sanlucar, the monster or *halimaw* is merely translated into Spanish to mean “lion.” In the *Diksyunaryo Tesauro Filipino-Ingles*, this same term refers either to a “ferocious beast” or the quality of being “ferocious, bestially cruel.” Furthermore, the *UP Diksyunaryong Filipino* relates monstrosity to a “hayop na mabangis at naninil” (a ferocious and predatory animal, translation mine). In contrast then with the English understanding of the monster as built around its form, we come to find that the same entity is

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5 Juan De Noceda and Pedro Sanlucar, *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* (Manila: Ramirez y Giraudier, 1860).
6 *Vocabulario*, s.v. “halimao.”
8 *Diksyunaryo Tesauro*, s.v. “halimaw.”
10 *UP Diksyunaryong Filipino*, 2nd ed., s.v. “halimaw.”
deemed as such due to a particular attitude or attribution—its ferocity and viciousness, its ability to threaten and intimidate, cause horror and, possibly, consume. Given these definitions, we must move forward with an understanding that monstrosity asks audiences to consider not only what is sensed most often as visual but also that which is rarely noticed as affectual at all times.

**Shaky Promises**

Let us clear the air concerning the theoretical text, *The Promises of Monsters*. The text criticizes the initial direction of Feminism towards Ecofeminism. At first, Eco-Feminism—and more generally, Eco-Criticism—may seem to tie in well with the idea that monsters and the monstrous are borne of nature. Generally, Eco-Criticism entails the “study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works.”

Put simply, the approach begs that we read into nature, the nature of organisms, and the natural in a literary text. The same applications are used in Eco-Feminism. It is here, however, in this specific theoretical approach that one finds a more specific and reductionist movement toward taking a “pro-nature” stance with regard to advancing “female” values. The image of Mother Nature and all Her promises of natural and pre-existing solutions persists in the Eco-Feminist’s mind.

Surely, this state is well and good because it furthers female and environmental causes. Sadly, this state also tends toward an easy reductionism. Upon taking on the Eco-Feminist mindset, we may actually say that monsters are one with Mother Nature and, thus, should not be feared as the metaphor insists on Her care and protection. However, if this was so easy a case to solve, how are we to account for the havoc monsters—old, new, fantastic, imaginary, tangible, mental, and/or technological—unleash on our environment, our minds, and our bodies? The Eco-Feminist movement thus discounts a number of important points, most essential of which is this: Eco-Feminism seems to regress to the infallible logic of nature upon encountering the inevitable devastation caused by progress and technology. This is not to say that nature is infallible but rather, that reasoning has to account for the evident and imposing pressures of industrial and technological advancement exhibited in the actual destruction of nature and [human] natures despite Mother Nature’s

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The Promises of Monsters elaborates on the gaps produced by the reductionist thrust of Eco-Feminism. In this text, we are presented with a much clearer and promising statement: that nature is constructed rather than final. This notion, though seemingly not a direct response to the issue at hand, posits that Mother Nature may not provide the solace that Eco-Feminism had so easily propositioned. Indeed, the lack of finality that Haraway proposes coincides then with the entropy actually experienced in nature, but denied in face of the concept of Mother Nature. Put simply, Haraway’s proposition harkens back to Simone de Beauvoir’s “One is not borne, but rather becomes, woman.” While, indeed, this statement underpins most Third Wave Feminist ideas, when taken essentially, it further allows for post-modernist or, as Haraway insists, “amodern” ideas to arise that emphasize the disjunct between the stability of Mother Nature as metaphor and the instability of nature as it truly is.

Haraway uses “artifactualism” to further define the concept of nature’s construction. She says, “[t]echnological decontextualization [...] is not a denaturing but, rather, a particular production of nature.” This statement implies that, rather than approaching decontextualization as a recursive or destructive process, one may actually take it as a discursive production of reality/realities. Decontextualization, in essence, pertains to meaning-making as it is detached from the established human and ideological sign system—a linguistic one that has a penchant for and elevation of particular metaphors. The direction she pursues then strikingly supports the Third Wave Feminist agenda with its preoccupation with pluralism, multiculturalism, co-existence, and post-humanism. We move from stable semiotic and bodied systems toward post-bodied and relational systems of naming and meaning. I mention “naming” and “meaning” separately because these two concepts grow farther and farther apart upon undertaking the journey from the stable, “real,” and earthly end of the spectrum toward the plural, positional, indeterminate, and unfinished.

The concept of artifactualism allows us to traverse beyond previously defined points of reference. Monsters (based on form) and the monstrous (based on affect) become possible upon the realization that

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13 As found in current environmental movements, as found in a preoccupation with increasing product reusability (e.g., metal straws, insulated tumblers, etc.), regulating and monitoring waste disposal (e.g., segregation of biodegradables and non-biodegradables), and decreasing resulting waste (e.g., utilization of biodegradable materials in everyday objects).


15 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 299.

16 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 297.
nature is, in truth, unbound. Otherwise is thus another result of discursive decontextualization. Haraway proposes a quadrant model that details the different directions with which one can travel from here—now to elsewhere via decontextualization. The first quadrant pertains to Real Space, better known as Earth, and its beasts. The second quadrant refers to Outer Space, or the Extraterrestrial Space, and its respective alien inhabitants. The third quadrant deals with Inner Space as exemplified by the Biomedical Body. Lastly, the fourth quadrant focuses on Virtual Space as exemplified by Science and Speculative Fictions. These four quadrants exemplify the different approaches that can be made with regard to Vampira, Darna vs. the Planet Women, Magandang Gabi sa Inyong Lahat, and Haplos, respectively. As such, this paper endeavors to trace the approaches taken towards the construction of decontextualized realities within Haraway’s given framework and within the Filipino context.

**Real Space and Vampira**

Vampira presents us with a monstrous entity seemingly borne from and bound to nature. A vampire’s characteristics are manifest because of the natural occurrence of shifting days and nights. They resource their nourishment from natural sources (i.e., the blood of humans and animals). In addition, they can turn into nature’s creature, a bat, when need be. Somehow, a tinge of the natural permeates these fantastical acts and predispositions. However, the difference between humans—bound in and by Real/Earthly Space definitions—and the vampire remains. This very difference acts as a point of contention that is, according to Haraway, easily resolvable upon understanding the decontextualized/constructed conditions behind human and vampiric semiotic systems. In the end, vampirism is not the central problem but, rather, the human privileging that imposes that it is, in fact, problematic.

Clearly, the divide between what is human and what is not human glares when it comes to the subject of fear. Man has, for the longest time, privileged logic over the imagined (Lacan’s Symbolic over the Imaginary). As such, what is illogical becomes fearful. Man then, in the most essential sense of the word, has verified that “[o]ne set of entities [human] becomes the represented, the other becomes the environment, often threatening, of the represented object.” The statement tends to echo Eco-Feminist views—somehow reductionist while seemingly flattering.

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17 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 305.
18 Vampira, dir. Joey Romero (Regal Films, 1994).
19 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 312.
We notice the implementation of a [p]referential binary in the scene where Cara, the vampiric protagonist of the film played by Maricel Soriano, and Arman, her unknowing husband played by Christopher De Leon, argue on the staircase. She had gone out to feed on animals and he, unfortunately, had witnessed her in the act. He stops her from ascending. She says, “’Di ako masama pero kailangan kong gawin ‘yon e,”’ (I am not wicked but I had to do what I did, translation mine) in reference to the necessity of eating animals. He thus replies, “Ang alin? Ang pumatay ng hayop? Inumin ang kanilang dugo? May tao bang gumagawa niyan? Tama ang hinala ko. Hindi ka pangkaranikan tao. Ano ka ba talaga?” (Do what exactly? Kill animals? Drink their blood? What human does that? I was right. You aren't normal. What are you in truth?, translation mine). To this, Cara closes, “Kahit ipaliwanag ko sa'yo, 'di mo maiintindihan” (Even if I explained it to you, you wouldn't understand, translation mine).

In this particular scene, we find evidence of the perspective we take on as viewers. On one hand, Arman impresses the one-dimensional state of mind man possesses. In asking all his questions in reference to the difference between humanity and animality, he furthers the seemingly obscure binary. On the other hand, Arman allows audiences to ponder the validity of taking on the human perspective. In having Arman act as a medium for us to ask, we unwittingly move toward asking the most essential question: what substantiates humanity or human-ness? Indeed, if Cara does not act human, then she must be inhuman, monstrous. However, if we posit that Cara does act humanely, she must be human, albeit with a preference for blood sucking.

Haraway would posit that the answer to the question is irrelevant. She says that, “[e]arth is a semiotic space where dominants define humans and non-humans.” 20 In other words, dominant semiotic systems actually take on the role of benevolently oppressing non-dominant/obscure/marginal ones. Privileging the human becomes irrational once we return to Haraway’s main argument that everything is a decontextualized construction. Both humanity and inhumanity are malleable concepts. As such, it seems as if earth is just a canvas to paint illusions of humanity and non-humanity on. The fluidity of labels, in truth, allows sentient organisms—fantastical or human—to take up positions. The most ideal position of which is that position that which furthers a thrust of “co-existence” rather than “possession.”

Eco-Feminism resounds with postulates of a binary (i.e., nature

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20 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 313.
vs. humans, monsters vs. victims, those who destroy vs. those who must be saved). Hence, Haraway’s proposition allows us a means of viewing involved parties neutrally, if not positively or relatively, from either perspectives/stances.

**Outer Space and *Darna vs. The Planet Women***

Haraway zooms out of the earthly context and presents us with the second quadrant: Outer Space. Here, we can aptly situate the film, *Darna vs. The Planet Women*. In comparison with Real Space, “the extraterrestrial is coded to be fully general; it is about escape from the bounded globe into an anti-ecosystem called, simply, space. Space is not about ‘man’s’ origins on earth but about ‘his’ future.” The context thus entails a change in the way we approach the new environment and equally new entities. More specifically, in traversing an outer spatial plane, the “earthly semiotic systems” previously implemented may not hold as rigidly as before. It is decontextualized and tweaked according to the requirements of the new realm—toward a “full generality.” As such, we now face a larger entity, Earth, and subject it to the scrutiny of the entire galaxy.

Bodies, human, monstrous, or anything in between, have no role under these conditions because of the concept of decontextualized construction. We had disintegrated the stability and already-existing concept of man’s bodied and “natural” semiotic existence in the previous section. Thus, what remains are networks and positionalities. In Outer Space, we realize the “real” burden of affiliation rather than bodied identification for, as the “original” sign system breaks down, we are left to read connections instead. Such readings are undertaken while keeping the fallibility of the human stance in mind.

*Darna vs. The Planet Women* initially presents a Real Space problem. However, instead of man, the alien race from Arko Eris believes themselves to be at the center of the universe. Planet women arrive on Earth to kidnap its resident geniuses in the hope of having them save their quickly disintegrating and overpopulated planet. Oddly enough, the residents of a planet at the 9th tier of intelligence resort to scientists of a 2nd tier planet. Clearly, this fact makes for a good deal of head scratching. Such tension is resolved upon allowing moral ideologies to seep into an argument/opposition that is largely based on intellect. Darna speaks merely of what is “heroic” in the face of Arko Eris’ leader speaking of the intense overpopulation (resulting in every citizen standing mere meters apart

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in the home planet) that goads her people into destroying earth. Hence, there is a disconnect between the problem identified by the latter and the solution proposed by the former. The hopeful post-bodied condition (where alien and human, earth and space, co-exist) is shattered. The film regresses into using humanity as a means to nullify an alien problem. This resolution does not agree with the necessity of responding to a context with an appropriate and corresponding semiotic system, as posited in quadrant one. Positionalities are, thus, discounted and the humans remain the central reference point for audiences to view the film.

The film was close to achieving an ideal ending where binaries are not reinforced and entities co-exist. Instead, a *deus ex machina* mechanism is employed and we end up where we began. We traverse, not toward *elsewhere*, but back to Real Space. The movie, at least in the beginning, was actually hopeful in "relocate[ing], []diffract[ing] embodied meaning as crucial work to be done in gestating a new world[...]. The task [was] to build more powerful collectives in dangerously unpromising times." Clearly, the task pertained to was left unfulfilled. As such, we uneasily depart from a discussion of quadrant two.

**Inner Space and *Magandang Gabi sa Inyong Lahat***

We now return to earth and zoom in on bodies. Surely, I had said that bodies were obliterated in the first few sections. However, that obliteration pertains to the shattering of the body as we commonly know it. More specifically, we pertain to the body in those instances as semiotic systems and/or ideological constructs. Now, we present the body as an *elsewhere* already formed in Western and Filipino minds.

The Biomedical Body is foreign to the Filipino context as the understanding and eventual treatment of the body were conceived indigenously prior to the entrance of Western biomedical impositions. Such a circumstance has led us to the current context, where foreign methods are employed in reading and treating a body all too distant from the language utilized in approaching it.

In viewing bodies, one can say that, on the one hand, they are familiar. Cuts cause wounds. Wounds cause blood to spill. Spilt blood then produces scabs. Bodies react in a seemingly simple manner, where cause and effect seem to define their inner workings. On the other hand, bodies are as equally monstrous in their extraterrestriality. The medical intricacies

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of wounding, bloodletting, and scab formation are quite foreign to the general Filipino population but not to Western medicine. If one is fortunate enough to receive an education, some light may be shed on these scientific matters. However, the Filipino context and the Filipino people have not had a long enough history with the Biomedical Body. We have, as of yet, barely scratched the surface of Inner Space, Haraway’s third quadrant.

In truth, more than the Biomedical Body, we have a breadth of experience with the Anomalous Body. Where the former refers to something “unfamiliar,” the latter refers to something that has “deviated from the familiar.” These two bodied constructions are not synonymous. More simply, the anomalous allows audiences a glimpse of the common while experiencing a persistent uneasiness borne of an unidentifiable threat of consumption. Something will always be off about anomalous bodies. As such, individuals feel anxiety in a state of perpetual doubt. The Anomalous Body is already a construct that deviates from normal body conceptions. It is elsewhere manifest. The anomalous then provides us with a grey and indeterminate area which, coincidentally, allows for some other elsewhere contexts to be constructed into existence.

With regard to the Western conception of Inner Space, Haraway posits that, “the inner spaces of the biomedical body are central zones of technoscientific constestation.” She furthers, “[s]ince sickness and mortality are at the heart of immunology, it is hardly surprising that conditions of battle prevail. Dying is not an easy matter crying out for ‘friendly’ visualization.” As such, we obtain the central idea of Western perspectives of the body—that it is, again, the opposite end of a binary. Man thus works towards taming and calcifying the body. When a cold takes hold of a person, he/she overdoses on vitamin C to boost his immunity. When cancer strikes, doctors attack cancer cells with life-threatening medicines. Diseases sometimes even call for invasion when biopsies are performed or tumors are extracted. As such, the diseased individual reinforces the walls of his/her body to combat disease. Indeed, violence factors into the Biomedical Body.

By contrast, the Anomalous Body requires supernatural remedies. Appropriately enough, the supernatural exists in a similarly grey area as the anomalous. Both states entail experiences of the familiar and the alien all at the same time. As such, and in line with what was posited with regard to the second quadrant, supernatural remedies are rightly appropriate for anomalous maladies. In a sense, Anomalous Body remedies factor into how

25 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 321.
26 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 322.
“battle is not the only way to figure the process of mortal living [...] Persons coping with the life-threatening consequences of infection [...] insisted that they are living [with the disease].”

Somehow, the body is supernatural because it manages to resolve several internal issues without the need for intervention. Wounds heal and skin regenerates. The voice can disappear and return. In this sense, the body lives with itself. This complies with Haraway’s ideal proposition where, “[t]he network theory differs from other immunological thinking because it endows the immune system with the ability to regulate itself using only itself.”

We refer to *Magandang Gabi sa Inyong Lahat* to explain the special Filipino experience of Inner Space. Here, we approach Anna’s (played by Nora Aunor) sister, Sarah (played by Imelda Ilanan), a ghost, as the bodied manifestation of Anna’s anomalous space. She presents the viewer with access to the inner workings of Anna’s mind while maintaining a bodied existence—albeit, a vague and lesser iteration of the familiar and tangible one. Anna does not react with fear towards her sister for most of the film because of a sense of familiarity with her. However, her pale color and somehow monotonous demeanor give her deadness away. It is only in the end when she is faced with Sarah’s actual corpse that fear descends. Her sister’s body, as it blends in with the backdrop of the dense forest while still maintaining the shape and posture of a human so familiar to her, is jarring. Indeed, this moment allows Anna to face both the familiar and the alien at the same time, for a tension persists in the mind when faced with an ideologically imposed construct (that of the human body) and a self-constructed one (that of the ghostly/monstrous body). Where the former, which is supposedly the more familiar of the two constructs, faces her in the utterly unfamiliar condition of death, the ghostly option seems more sisterly. Anna is shocked by the tension. As such, instead of adhering to the option presented by Sarah’s more sisterly ghostly manifestation, she leaves for America, never to return.

**Virtual Space and Haplos**

In the fourth section of the essay, which refers to the fourth quadrant, Science or Speculative Fiction, Haraway further and more clearly elaborates on the flimsiness of language, semiotic systems, and ideologies. She says

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29 *Haplos*, dir. Antonio Jose Perez (Mirick Films, 1982).
Articulation is not a simple matter. Language is the effect of articulation, and so are bodies [...] The articulate are cobbled together [...] Nature may be speechless, without language, in the human sense; but nature is highly articulate. Discourse is only one process of articulation. An articulated world has an undecidable number of modes and sites where connections can be made.  

We can thus structure our arguments around Language as ideology, construct, or semiotic system. The concept of articulation only furthers what was already proposed by way of decontextualized construction. Put simply, upon entering this quadrant, anything is possible. Hence, we once again move away from already constructed bodies (the human in Real Space, the alien in Outer Space, and the Anomalous Body in Inner Space) toward a further conception of plurality. Haraway says, “[t]o articulate is to signify. It is to put things together, scary things, risky things, contingent things [...] We articulate, therefore, we are.” As such, Haraway invites us to actively make up elsewheres beyond those already established “realities.” We too must make bodies after the bodied—construct the post-body. Virtual space and cyberspace present us with a means to participate in such construction. With regard to the former, she says, “[v]irtual space seems to be the negation of real space, the domains of SF seem the negation of earthly regions. But perhaps this negation is the real illusion.” In this sense, even the canvas to paint languages on is non-existent. More specifically, the canvas only exists because it is constructed upon and against an equally flimsy, but “taken to be true,” construction. With regard to the latter, Haraway says, “[c]yberspace seems to be the consensual hallucination of too much complexity, too much articulation. It is the virtual reality of paranoia.” We take these statements one after the other and realize that virtuality predisposes the cyber condition. One has to first realize that the virtual can exist before articulation can take place. Thereafter, when articulation brims with multiplicities, networks, relations, and blurs, only then can cyberspace become. Here, we find the epitome of the post-body, of the cyborg instead of the human, alien, or Anomalous Body in saying that:

The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of

30 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 324.
31 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 325.
32 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 325.
33 Haraway, Promises of Monsters, 325.
historical transformation. In the traditions of ‘Western’ science and politics—the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other—the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination.  

In essence, the cyborg is a hybrid of every possibility that is based on the fallibility of “reality”—where the contradictions brought about by simultaneous existence serve the function of accentuating the silhouette of the aforementioned post-body further. How then do these concepts (articulation, virtual space, cyberspace, and the cyborg) play into an analysis of *Haplos*? The film may only have bare traces of these elements. However, the Filipino experience might allow us to make connections, as we had earlier done with regard to the Biomedical Body. Surely, our experiences are not in direct relation with cyborgs or virtuality. However, we do possess our very own articulated sense of reality. This is manifest in Filipino culture, where relations, both literal and figurative, overwhelm bodies.

The sense of individuality, so common in Western individuals, is but superficial and recent to a culture rooted in the communal, feminine, supernatural, subjective, and transgressive. As such, both the Filipino and the Filipino experience are caught in a tension between presently fixed “truths” (as impressed by significantly Western influences) and presently repressed ones (i.e., those of our past, those which refer to the “true” and original construction of the Filipino by the Filipino). Clearly, privileging Western conceptions of humanity and individuality becomes a problem once more. In turn, a person is caught in between two “realities,” fidgets, and doubts.

In *Haplos*, Christopher De Leon plays Al, a young man who has come home from Saudi to visit his mother’s grave. He meets the docile yet alluring Auring, played by Rio Locsin, and the two fall in love. However, as the film progresses, we discover that Auring is, in fact, a ghost. Al comes to his senses at the climax of the film. We first assume that he runs to her home to confront her but, instead, they make love. Only after this incident does he learn to privilege the known reality. He returns to the village center to look for his initial companion played by Vilma Santos, Cristy. Unfortunately,

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34 Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto*, 149.
Cristy has gone to seek Auring in her forest home. After confrontation, Al arrives and they part from Auring’s home. They separate along the way. Al hears Auring scream, he follows her back into the forest and, in a blurring of now and then, witnesses Auring’s rape and death at the hands of Japanese soldiers. Her house burns down and he goes mad. Only in the last scene, where Cristy returns to Auring’s house—miraculously present once more—and dons Auring’s clothes, does Al regain his senses.

Let us note that, in comparison with Sarah’s ghost being borne as extension of her once-living body in *Magandang Gabi sa Inyong Lahat*, Auring is neither a manifestation nor an extension of either Al’s or Cristy’s bodies. In fact, Auring is an entirely separate entity without a bodied existence. I say this because, in contrast with *Magandang Gabi sa Inyong Lahat*, we are never shown an actual body in *Haplos*. Rather, we as audiences merely rely on the flimsy assumption that Auring’s body as it is able to play the piano and make love to Al is already pre-existing when, in truth, it is an illusion—a construct made tangible. Her body is a hybrid, caught between multiple tensions of time (the present vs. the period of Japanese Occupation), space (the present landscape vs. the previous one), and loves (Al vs. Mang Ilo, played by Eddie Infante, Auring’s original suitor). Her body is not a body, but a means to view time and space, notions and truths, pasts and presents, all at the same time. This is most evident when Al witnesses her death. In a space separate from the actual event, she manages to call out to Al, an entity from beyond her then reality. Al manages to cry out to her from his present reality as well.

Indeed, Auring, as a cyborg entity, obliterates oppositionality and allows all possibilities and contradictions to arise. Hence, it is only reasonable that, in the end, her house appears once more. Cristy takes up the only possibility of Auring’s body becoming humanly manifest (Is she possessed? Or does she do this of her own will?). In Auring’s clothes, she takes Al into Auring’s home. In this way, both Al and Cristy traverse above and beyond Real Space. They grapple with the iterations of reality they have come to know while in her house—the canvas that negates reality, the virtual space. In this space (once inhabited by a cyborg entity), they can thus rewrite realities. How I wish that the movie ended then and there because “[t]his is the kind of ‘symbolic action’ [the film makes] legible. S/he is not finished.”

Through this paper, one is to find that, indeed, what is comprehensibly natural can so easily be denatured and, thus, productive.

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and discursive. Humanity, for one, can so easily be manipulated into a manifestation of monstrosity, as evidenced especially in *Vampira’s* Cara not taking on an entirely new form, but surely becoming predatory and threatening. Similarly, *elsewheres* of humanity are explored speculatively in *Darna vs. The Planet Women*, where entire other planets are referred to and aliens, so identical to the human form yet so palpably threatening, are present. Moreover, the monstrous can be further denatured and re-articulated into another form, as in *Magandang Gabi sa Inyong Lahat*, and into another entity altogether, as in *Haplos*. Such works therefore serve the function of demonstrating how effective Haraway’s four quadrants are in moving farther and farther away from the natural in order to greater accentuate its core as grounded on relationships rather than [whole] bodies and entities.

All in all, Donna Haraway’s work is an appropriate and remarkable jumping off point for exploring how Eco-Criticism may be pushed further, beyond the bounds set by conventional biology and, thus, its eventual but equally conventional monsters. If, indeed, as posited earlier, the Eco-Critic’s agenda is one directed toward “the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works,” then it becomes easy to surmise that at the core of both biology and literature is the existence of and possibly stability of systems that hold bodies and cultures, respectively, in place. Still, such an endeavor is not as simple as set out.

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**Bibliography**


<sup>36</sup> Meeker, 9.


*Filmography*


Myths of Cleansing and Reclamation: The Politics of Inundation in TRESE: High Tide at Midnight

by Ana Micaela Chua Manansala

To inundate—to flood, to overwhelm—is to demarcate and traverse a limit: to mark a boundary by the act of crossing it. It is trespass or takeover: possibly one that is hostile. When water reclaims land as flood, it appears to encroach on terrestrial life. In the context of the Philippines, where flooding is a common occurrence, this sort of encroachment was, according to Greg Bankoff, unexceptional enough to be excluded in historical documentation unless it brings about damage of unprecedented scale. Bankoff points out that, historically, while “earthquake, volcanic eruption and even typhoons inspired an almost divine awe at the majesty and power of nature (or even of some higher authority), flood and drought, though no less destructive or infrequent, were not so spectacular and belonged more to the commonplace order of daily existence in the archipelago.” Nonetheless, as an epiphenomenon to typhoons, floods do contribute to immense losses of life and property. The frequency of flooding normalizes it. It is accepted as part of everyday life until it becomes—or is marked—as a threat to the

2 Bankoff, 165.
3 Bankoff, 157.
The mythic motif of the deluge, as in the tales of Deucalion or Noah, is often premised on the necessity of living on earth, so much so that the “rediscovery” of habitable land marks a second creation, a new terrestrial beginning for a new society, formed after and out of the great disaster. Modern “developed” lifestyles continue this tradition of living despite nature and arguably, in spite of nature, as may be illustrated by the practice of urban reclamation or artificial shoreline expansion, wherein land is claimed where it did not originally exist. Such projects are often driven by economic development, ballooning populations, and the push towards urbanization that both changes imply. Reclamation itself may boost real estate industries, increasing spaces for urban settlement, but it also raises many concerns, including how it affects the environment and whether such constructions are sustainable.

Though frequent, floods are temporary compared to land reclamation. The latter, anthropogenic practice reinforces the anthropocentric function of flood myths, inasmuch myth-making itself can be a carving out of space for the human within a world perceived to be, at least initially, inhospitable to human life. Even where water is central to life, as in a tropical archipelago like the Philippines, this seemingly clichéd conflict of Man against Nature resurfaces in discourses of resilience as much as that of disaster. The relation with nature as a conflict to be resolved may be an ideological narrative worth revisiting, both in applied fields as in popular idiom. This conflict is easily foregrounded when Nature is anthropomorphic, whether as a whole—as in the figure of Mother Nature, Gaia—or divided into its elements, a gesture harking back to an animistic and possibly infinite division of the world into myriad spirits “representing” as much as “inhabiting” and, at times, even “commanding” nature. From there, Man versus Nature may be substituted with formulae of a different order: Man versus Man, Man versus God/the Gods, or even Man versus Society. Nature personified lends itself easily to stories of class conflict; questions of risk and resilience transform into questions of agency and power for both sides of the equation. Issues of territoriality and control become more clearly a matter of one party’s interests pit against another’s and, indeed, a matter of social hierarchy. This conversion also brings to surface the processes by which danger is culturally framed, how blame...
is assigned, and how social order is constructed around communal fears and values. A review of the cultural theories of risk, such as that provided by Tansey and O’Riordan, is thus quite useful in demystifying the “subtle process of taking for granted the link between hazard identification and the normative choices that follow.” Just as some typhoons make a name for themselves in history and legend, while lesser storms are relegated to seasonal routine, cultural theories around risk explain why some issues “become politicized and hence embroiled over the allocation of blame and the distribution of power, while others appear to be tolerated within norms of social values and trust.”

The phenomenon of flooding and the project of reclamation are both employed in Filipino popular political rhetoric and remain to this day relevant metaphors for cultural myth-making. Although it is not the cause of conflict, flooding is the motif that comes to represent—visually and metaphorically—even more powerful natural events and, more importantly, parallel social struggles. This study examines, in *TRESE: High Tide at Midnight,* how the motifs of storm and deluge are linked with the rhetoric and historic project of land reclamation in order to deploy a political commentary. I explore the anthropomorphic depictions of nature in relation, too, to the forensic use of myth—particularly in assigning blame and imagining justice—particularly in relation to the fascist rhetoric of social cleansing. Furthermore, I propose that comics, as a graphic and narrative medium, visually emphasize the separation between character and setting. In relation to Nature: the medium can make explicit on the page the bifurcation between, on the one hand, *anthropomorphized powers,* which are often constructed as *characters* and thus belong to a primary level of signification in the narrative, and on the other, *nature* or *natural elements* constructed as *setting,* a secondary and often symbolic level of signification. The visual text exposes the roles that each aspect plays in narrative, so that the degree of this bifurcation may be read as a commentary on traditional formulation of conflicts. The conflict Man versus Nature is thus reiterated as social and anthropogenic conflict—that is, that it more accurately describes the antagonism and power struggles among humans than any real conflict with nature. More importantly, the text at hand exposes this as an arbitrary dichotomy that is harmful to the understanding of both human

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7 Tansey and O’Riordan, 72.
society and nature.

This analysis is premised on the argument that comics, as a medium, engage social and ecological discourses in specific ways. Of course, such strategies need not be construed as unique to comics in particular, but nonetheless the modes of engagement encountered here are as narratologically complex as the social paradigms that they attempt to represent. As literary text, comics resist simplistic and reductive interpretations of social discourses: they require us to pay attention to their own nuances. As popular texts, they constitute a resistance to the official paradigms that would simplify and reduce our lives to mere existence: they question our myths by making of it their own.

*TRESE*, as a supernatural detective comics series, is particularly invested in myth-making. It restores supernatural elements to urban quotidian life by imagining the supernatural as Metro Manila’s underworld. Along with the adaptation of cultural narratives—folklore and urban legends combined—the series allows for the personification and re-mystification of natural elements and phenomena, but it seldom suggests that the underworld is the source of the crime. Rather, *TRESE* epistemologically “recasts” living in Metro Manila as a shared experience of the fantastic and the mundane, distributing criminality and justice simultaneously across both the natural and supernatural worlds. As such it explores alternative ways of understanding our complex Philippine realities and speaks to our need to constantly renegotiate not just our place in the world, but how that world constructs us and our relationships with others. These negotiations are always informed by the discourse of power. In comics as in anything else, they are always, already political.

*High Tide at Midnight* is the sixth volume in the *TRESE* series. It takes on at least two cultural and historical intertexts. On one hand, the flooding of Manila is a common enough contemporary experience. There is always some fresh experience of it in the minds of its local audiences. On the other, the casting of the Madame as the lead character’s nemesis is a thinly veiled reference to both past and present tyranny—what Primitivo Mojares dubbed “the conjugal dictatorship”[10]—of the Marcoses. The storyline is itself a dredging up of the relations between the Marcos regime and land reclamation projects undertaken to expand Manila bay, as well as other housing and relocation projects that served to “beautify” and bring order

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to the city of Manila. A third historical intertext is possible: the volume, published in 2014, now seems prophetic of the events of Rodrigo Duterte’s Drug War and de facto dictatorship, with its promise to eliminate drug pushers and addicts alike through *Oplan Tokhang*. This has allowed police not only to deny due process to accused citizens, but even to execute them summarily wherever they may be found, whether on the streets or within their own homes. *High Tide at Midnight* becomes a lens through which to view what was then the future: the vision of the Philippines as a narco-state, a Drug War that is, in practice, a war on the poor, and which has so far claimed the lives of tens of thousands of humans.

*High Tide at Midnight* features the literal flooding of Manila, the figurative outpouring of the supernatural criminal underground onto human reality, and the ideological concept of social cleansing. As such, inundation can be understood (1) as simultaneously an immersion and a bringing to surface; (2) as violent incursion, a threat that needs to be “contained”; and (3) a reclamation of land from what supposedly pollutes it, and thus a “cleansing.” In the following sections I explore these three deployments of the metaphor, presenting each in the sequence of their revelation in the plot, analyzing relevant pages and panels as well as braided motifs, and finally reiterating the ideological significance of each narrative turn.

The literal flood is caused by the yearly ordeal that is the monsoon. In the opening pages of the volume one finds panel after panel of dark water obscuring the landscape. These dark, relatively still waters obscure the borders between spaces, blurring their functions: a street becomes a canal, a swimming pool, a river; people climb onto boards as bridges, tables and rooftops become floors. But the water is also the same color as the gutters of the page, and functions similarly to the borders of the comic panels: characters are often half-concealed in thigh-high waters, but they are just as often cut by the framing device that is the panel. Later it becomes clear that these waters conceal more than the human legs that trudge through them; and characters fall and disappear into the gutters of the story.

In terms of plot, the comic opens with JanJan, a student who must make her way back home after classes are suspended. The narration follows her thoughts, in which the concept of trash and vermin is metaphorically extended twice over to humans: first as the sort of people who take

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12 I have provided a more thorough analysis of the formal signification in TRESET in a previous work, the concluding section of which leads directly to, and is expanded in, this present essay. See “Communal Homes and Heterotopic Contagion in TRESET” Between 8, no.15 (2018).
advantage of such crises, and a second time—through the juxtaposition of image and captions—to a trio of boys who dive into the water and there disappear without trace. The captions, which narrate in the third person, provide a double commentary: once as Janjan’s thoughts, and once again as commentary on what is happening around her. Judging which is more relevant is generally left to the reader, but the hierarchy of visual signification suggests that we consider JanJan’s indirect discourse first, and then the environment second. That is, we look at JanJan first, as she is our point of orientation, the human face that draws our attention; then we read the caption, ascribe it to JanJan, before searching the rest of the panel for proof of its truth. Indeed, the streets are now canals; indeed, we can spot bits of trash in the dark water. But when the panel presents multiple points of attention—take for instance, panel 3 (Fig. 1)—alternative modes of direction begin to inform interpretation.

Who is trash; who is vermin? In panel 3 there is a pointed finger indicating a possible relation, but the caption suggests it is the man—here depersonalized, decapitated by the panel—being referred to as “those people,” since taking advantage of the situation is easily understood as monetary gain. Yet the boys, too, are taking advantage of the situation: they are making use of the makeshift bridge, we assume, without paying the opportunistic toll; also, they are taking advantage of the flood for their swimming.

*Mise en scène and mise en page*—or the arrangements of images within each panel, and then of each panel on the page—propose that we stay on to witness what JanJan leaves without noticing. As JanJan moves from left to right, the caption is placed increasingly to the left, until it aligns with the boys, who move down the page, into the dark water, which “swallows them.”

JanJan, distracted by her mundane concerns—getting home, finishing college—turns away from such “everyday” occurrences because, arguably, there is nothing to take notice of. This is the nature of disappearance. It is marked negatively, by absence. The comic page, by virtue of its temporal simultaneity and thus its illusion of movement, teaches us to mark these disappearances.

But JanJan’s confrontation with what lies beneath the water’s surface is explicit enough. With the flood arrive aquatic monsters who have come to invade Manila. These creatures murder and consume hapless citizens indiscriminately. JanJan almost falls victim, too, but she is saved by one of the heroes before she could be reduced to fish food. The monsters are *Taga-dagat*—risen from the sea—who are, we later learn, supplied with a dangerous drug called “shift” which allows them to shapeshift, to metamorphize into more powerful creatures.
AFTER LESS THAN THIRTY MINUTES OF RAINFALL, THE STREETS NEAR HER UNIVERSITY ARE TRANSFORMED INTO CANALS.

THE RAIN AND FLOOD BRING TO THE SURFACE THE TRASH WHICH WE THOUGHT WE HAD ALREADY THROWN AWAY.

THE RAIN AND FLOOD ALSO BRING OUT THOSE PEOPLE WHO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION.

THE RATS COME SCAMPERING OUT, DESPERATELY SWIMMING FOR THEIR SURVIVAL.

WE IGNORE THE RATS AND NEVER NOTICE HOW THEY SLIP UNDERWATER AND NEVER RESURFACE.

SWALLOWED BY THE DARK WATERS OF THE CITY.

Fig. 1
Their shifting does not begin with the drug: the first transformation is from concealment to revelation, an almost evolutionary rising out of dark waters. As the precarity of the situation becomes clear, so too do the panels tilt and slide, as if making it more difficult to stay on safe surfaces. The table (Fig. 2) and even the door—flimsy barriers against rising waters—are rendered in high contrast to the surrounding gloom in which the enemy is initially concealed.

The flooding has allowed the Taga-dagat to take over terrestrial Manila, feeding on people in their own homes or wherever the rising water gives access. They are a worse threat than looters. They become the ultimate enemy. They must be defeated.

This is the initial impetus of the story. Here I must be allowed a digression.

To place the name Taga-dagat within the historical intertext of the Marcos Regime may bring to mind beautification projects meant to reclaim land occupied by the urban poor—such examples are the Tondo Foreshore and Dagat-dagatan urban development projects. In reviewing the effectivity of such development projects, Poppelwell recounted the history of the 185.75 hectares known as the Tondo Foreshore, parts of which was reclaimed land on Manila Bay. Her synopsis of these historical events is worth repeating at length:

In response to pressures exerted by developers seeking to demolish structures to make way for high end commercial and residential buildings, the government relocated slum residents to sites located on the periphery of the city far from employment opportunities. With limited options for work, settlers often returned to Metro Manila choosing to squat and gain employment, even if this meant giving up any property rights on the land to which they had been previously transferred. When it became obvious that these schemes were not effective, President Marcos implemented Presidential Decree 772 which effectively criminalized the act of squatting while serving to legalize evictions and demolitions.

In 1974, the First Lady, Imelda R. Marcos took on the title of

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15 Poppelwell, 5.
Fig. 2
Minister of the newly formed Ministry of Human Settlements. Given the sheer magnitude of the slum, the politics of the post, and ardent community activism, the Tondo Foreshore was chosen as a pilot area for the community upgrading project in conjunction with a ‘site and services’ project in neighbouring Dagat-Dagatan as a population spill over site. Together these two separate approaches would form the basis of the urban development program on human settlements for replication nation-wide.16

While *High Tide at Midnight* is not explicitly located on these same shores, preferring the fictional but just as loaded “Barangay Pacifica”, the *Tagadagat* carry with them an amalgamation of civil nightmares: a backwash of the poor and unemployed into the city, a surge of informal settlers, and the myriad fears of what is carried in by this tide—lack of sanitation, children on the streets, general criminality, and an increased market for illegal drugs.

In this, *TRESE* recapitulates the mainstream argument, the bourgeois fears of home invasion and filthy streets. It rehearses these fears through JanJan, through the families overwhelmed by both floodwaters and the monstrosities within. But it does not stop there.

The forensic model of danger, theorized by Mary Douglas,17 describes the processes by which blame is assigned in relation to risks of hazard events, including personal misfortune and climatological disaster. Though the actual stories are diverse, misfortunes are generally, in both tribal and industrial societies, narrativized consistently within social groups. Discussing anthropological observations rather than mythic conflicts, Douglas lists at least three examples of the “fixed repertoire of possible causes” and their attendant obligatory actions: one type is moralistic and returns blame to the victim, and is followed by expiatory actions of purification “to avoid the same fate the community is exhorted to obey the laws.”18 A second type attributes blame to individual adversaries, yet these adversaries are not morally liable, as everyone is expected to promote their own interests, this is followed by a call for compensation or vengeance, following the logic of individual competition; while a third assigns blame to an outside enemy, and necessitates punishment of the foe and compensation.19 Such classification of formulaic responses to danger is

16 Poppelwell, 47.

17 Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in cultural theory* (London: Routledge, 1992). Quite relevant to this discussion is the evolution of Douglas’ model from her early cultural study of pollution, dirt, and taboo—*Purity and Danger*—reviewed in Tansey and O’Riordan, 74.

18 Douglas, 5.

19 Douglas, 5-6.
WE ARE NOW REPORTING TO YOU LIVE AT BARRANGAY PACIFICA WHERE IN THE PAST THREE DAYS, THE NON-STOP RAIN HAS CAUSED MASSIVE FLOODING IN THIS AREA.

THE INFORMAL SETTLERS OF PACIFICA GOT A SURPRISE VISIT FROM THE MADAME, WHO LED THE ACTUAL RELIEF OPERATIONS HERE. SHE DISTRIBUTED RELIEF GOODS AND PLEADED THAT THEY EVALUATE THE AREA BEFORE THE FLOODWATER'S RISE ANY HIGHER.

PLEASE COME WITH ME. WE OFFER YOU A DRY PLACE AND WARM FOOD. WE'VE GOT NEARBY SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES THAT ARE OPEN TO WELCOME YOU INTO THEIR FACILITIES. I JUST WANT ALL OF YOU TO BE SAFE.

THE RAINS WILL STOP SOON. WE DON'T NEED TO GO AND WE HAVE TO WAIT FOR OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO COME BACK. SOME OF THEM ARE STILL MISSING.

WE WOULDN'T BE HERE IF YOU AND YOUR FAMILY WEREN'T STOLEN FROM OUR GOVERNMENT FOR ALL THOSE YEARS. GO AWAY! WE DON'T NEED YOUR HELP NOW!
accompanied by the reminder that these “three types of blaming influence the system of justice. Or rather, the influence goes both ways, the blaming and the system of justice together are symptoms of the way the society is organized.”

This elaboration on conflict seems apt to the kind of myth-making *High Tide at Midnight* engages in; *TRESE*, after all, is a detective series whose business involves discovering alternative—in this case, supernatural—origins and motivations behind both natural and anthropogenic phenomena. As a detective, Alexandra’s primary calling is to confirm how responsibility for a crime is allocated; this leads her to mediate between diverse social groups, to enable dialogue across usually exclusive social strata—between social classes, between tribes or gangs or corporations, between the living and the dead—and sometimes, even before final judgement is made, to intervene by meeting violence with violence. In *High Tide at Midnight*, the action-packed continuity across “cases,” rather than their episodic division, builds up to a great battle before a clear investigation of motives is even possible. Revelations are limited and scattered across all over Metro Manila, picked up by different agents in their investigations of smaller, epiphenomenal crimes—a slaying here, a raid there—as they engage in rescue missions and heroic combat. The risk of further loss of human life is too great for the heroes, of which Alexandra is only one, not to address the enormous, obvious problem.

Of course, the mysteries and myths in *TRESE*, inasmuch as they serve both as critiques of and alternative resolutions to Philippine social realities, are seldom uncomplicated. At first glance, the conflict in *High Tide at Midnight* seems to be that the underworld has been allowed to overflow onto Manila as a drug-induced blight, and we are met with a city whose streets are literally inundated with the blood of the innocent.

As the story progresses, splash pages mark the points where the narrative of violent incursion becomes clear. The magnitude of the disaster, as flood and as monster, escalates: the *Taga-Dagat* are everywhere, and what is worse, they coalesce. The drug-induced massacre culminates in a shifting “up” of all the *Taga-Dagat* into a Kaiju-like monster—Datu Rakuda—who rises, like a Hesiodic Typhoios, from the sea that was once Manila. As such it embodies the total enemy, simple and unified into one goliath that must be defeated in order to restore order.

It seems that this is no longer the task for the detective but the superhero, and around Alexandra Trese a team of such heroes assemble.

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20 Douglas, 6.
Fig. 4
If I do not go into these characters here it is not to say that they are not important, only that their struggles are generally directed towards a common goal: to prevent further loss of human life, which in this case involves taking down Datu Rakuda. In a feat of cooperation, they do defeat Datu Rakuda. Still, all is not right in the world.

In the climax of the story, Bagyon Yente reveals to Alexandra Trese and her team of heroes that all the criminal Taga-dagat, who had offered her 365 human lives so that she would pour rain and raise the tide in their favor, have actually been offered to her as ritual sacrifice—the worth of each Taga-dagat life multiplied by the lives they have taken as they pillaged the living world of Manila. All these lives, from land and sea, are exchanged for a year without typhoons. All this was made as an official offer to Bagyon Yente by the Madame, Ambassador of Manila.

Bagyon Yente is a member of the Lightning clans or Typhoon Lords whose commercial interests are meant to parallel the oligarchy and their monopoly of public services. The allusion is to Meralco, the chief provider of electricity; indeed, Yente is derived from kuryente, and in earlier volumes readers have also been introduced to Bagyon Lektro and Bagyon Kulimlim. Yente, paradoxically, perceives all life as equal. Over all she looks down with the same eye towards profit.

Yet it is not Bagyon Yente, but the Madame who creates the enemy and then destroys it in a masterstroke of “divine” sacrifice, simultaneously providing her beloved city a year without storms, but at the expense of the lives of its people. Unlike Yente, who will take one life for the other indiscriminately, the Madame is convinced that some lives as more valuable than others. I must make it explicit that neither paradigms are socially tenable. Though the heroes are the ones engaged in literal combat, the logic behind the trade-off between Yente and the Madame is a fantastic literalization of what Ortega calls attention to in his study on gentrification of Manila: that is, “how capitalistic impulsions are negotiated with/or against other social and cultural forces and expose spatial encounters, situated tensions, and struggles over built environment involving distinct segments of capital [...exposing] the contingent spatialities of capital and the colonial legacies of property rights, state-market relations, development regimes, and elite power.”

Returning to Douglas’ typology of conflict, blame, and justice, the plot of High Tide at Midnight develops at least two possibilities—

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rehearsing initially, but quickly abandoning, the first type of blame around the discourse of JanJan. Do the residents of Barangay Pacifica deserve what’s coming to them? The story suggests otherwise, despite its opening commentary. The narrative then presents the third conflict several times over: the Taga-Dagat are the enemy. The Typhoon Lords are the enemy. The Madame is the enemy. By the time we arrive at this final revelation, however, it is untenable to slip back to a simple logic of an individual enemy, for though both Bagyon Yente and the Madame enter the story as individuals, at least one of them is a personification of a larger, mythic system. One of them—like the legendary storms vis-à-vis the commonplace one—carries in her image the charge of history.

The Madame is Trese’s most formidable nemesis to date, as can only be expected of a thinly veiled reference to Imelda Romualdez Marcos. In the story she is the mastermind: while Bagyon Yente allows the waters to pour on to enable the massacre, it is the Madame’s cronies that supply the drugs to the Taga-dagat. While Yente is a fantastic construction of the text, a metonym and amalgamation of natural forces and corporate interests, the mythic construction of the Madame lies outside the mythicizing project of the text. She may well still be head of the Ministry of Human Settlements, for the entire debacle is her reclamation project. It is thus that High Tide at Midnight reimagines the reclamation of Manila, the city, the bay, and the people, in terms of reversal—where flooding and human sacrifice are enacted to carve a space for a new society or, rather, the New Society envisioned by the Marcoses. A tragic reversal at that, where the heroes only recognize the true situation after they have done the dirty work for the enemy. Historically speaking, Trese is not the first hero—and will not be the last—to be used this way by the powers that be.

The narrative of the Marcos regime is itself surrounded by many myths, most of which were constructed and propagated by the regime itself. One enduring legacy is that the regime has benefited the nation through building infrastructure, the grandest manifestation of which is the Cultural Center of the Philippines or CCP complex, built on reclaimed land along the Manila Bay area. Gerard Lico, in his landmark study Edifice Complex: Power, Myth, and Marcos State Architecture, foregrounds the discourse of power that was at play in the construction of such spaces:

The initial reclamation of 28 hectares from the sea (which permanently altered the physiology of the coastal urban landscape) is in itself symbolic not only of the subversion of nature but of the regime’s dictatorial power over the social, political, economic, cultural, and ecological sphere of the period. […] These buildings
I PROCLAIM MYSELF DATU BANUDA — LORD OF THIS UNDERCITY ONCE CALLED MANILA!
[within the CCP complex] were meant to reinforce the mythology of a progressive national collective, a unanimous identity. The grand architecture of the CCP Complex stresses totality and collectivity in which architectural framing of practices, spatial events, and spatial programming define and support authority.\textsuperscript{22}

The narrative of us versus them, of collective agreement and unproblematic identification, is thus superimposed on the conflict of Man versus Nature. In the history of the Martial Law years, the myths surrounding the enemy—the malcontents, the degenerates, the communists—and the violence waged against them may seem distant from the monumental buildings of the CCP complex, from the supposedly “apolitical” patronage of culture and the arts; but even a summary view of the arts industry from a critical perspective can easily demonstrate that they are not so distant in reality. In the text at hand, massacre is tantamount—or more appropriately, it is reduced—to landscape maintenance, to an anti-pollution campaign. The Madame’s discourse is pervasive, reflected even in the self-serving thoughts of the innocent JanJan. Even Douglas, with critical cynicism, acknowledges the persuasive power of this logic:

\begin{quote}
Danger is defined to protect the public good and the incidence of blame is a by-product of arrangements for persuading fellow members to contribute to it. Pollution seen from this point of view is a powerful forensic resource. There is nothing like it for bringing their duties home to members of the community. A common danger gives them a handle to manipulate, the threat of a community-wide pollution is a weapon for mutual coercion. Who can resist using it who cares for the survival of the community?\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

The fantastic storyline compresses these discourses and allows us to problematize the sort of duplicity concealed by the term “cleansing.” \textit{TRESE} does this by a simple enough inversion: the narrative is not one of reclaiming land from sea, but of water reclaiming land. It is a story of humans losing their place due to the decisions and the influence of those in power—the personified and deified both—to enact projects that are supposedly for “for the greater good,” while in the same breath divesting the majority of their basic rights.

\textsuperscript{22} Lico, 6. Italics in original.  
\textsuperscript{23} Douglas, 9-10.
ON THE CONTRARY
I HAD PERMISSION FROM
THE CROWN OF THE TAGA-
RAYAT AND THE AMBASSADOR
OF YOUR OWN CITY. ALL MY
ACTIONS ARE WITHIN THE
CONFINES OF THE MISTEE-
KANTS. YOU CANNOT
SANCTION ME.

I’LL KEEP IT. IF
YOU DON’T MIND, AS
A REPLACEMENT FOR
MY WATCH THAT
YOU DAMAGED.

YOU AND YOUR
FAMILY MIGHT BE
THE SELF-PROCLAIMED
PROTECTORS OF THIS
CITY, BUT DON’T THINK
YOU HAVE ANY AUTHORITY
TO RUN IT. SEE YOU
SOON, ALEXANDRA.

BY THE
WAY, DOES THIS
WATCH BELONG TO YOU?

MAKE SURE
YOU PAY YOUR
ELECTRIC
BILLS ON
TIME.

KRAK!

THE
AMBASSADOR?

STUPID! STUPID!
STUPID! THIS WAS
ALL PART OF
HER PLAN!

Fig. 6
Fig. 7

ROXAS BOULEVARD

THE NEXT DAY.

AHH, I WILL NEVER GET TIRED OF THIS VIEW.

WE HAVE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SUNSET IN THE WORLD.

MADAME, I CAME HERE BECAUSE...
*TRESE* reflects the process of narrativizing the struggle “to clean up” society as a rhetoric fraught with blind spots. The Madame’s vision willingly submits to common destruction and death both the “natural” and “supernatural” citizens of Manila, at the behest of both human and deified capitalist interests. There is no doubt that this “urban warfare against informality, manifested through demolitions and relocation, deeply shapes the metropolitan landscape and serves as a key ingredient for urban renewal,” but as in Ortega’s key argument this is accumulation by dispossession, wherein the creation of “world-class” spaces of wealth, production, and consumption in Manila rests upon the dispossession of the urban poor.” It is telling that the “hazards” cleansed in the story are the dispossessed themselves: the ones from whom territory is supposedly being reclaimed, and the great equalizer of the flood is deployed to create further wealth for the wealthy. In this case, the absence of conflict is not peace—after all, the First Quarter Storm was not just the bloodiest part of Martial Law, it also described the height of the struggle of a people against forces that clearly sought to divest it of its liberties, before the silence fell and the official mythologizing began. After the storm is the false calm where the complicit come out to enjoy a golden sunset, where the Madame basks in the “clean air” of a “reclaimed” Manila Bay, claiming that the ends justified the means.

In the face of this betrayal, even Trese is, at the height of her heroics, reduced—for in this case she detects too little, too late: or is it that she has only now awakened to the need to organize?

Similarly, the “residents of the Foreshore began to organize during the highly politicized era of the late 1960s and early 1972 in response to a growing awareness of their underprivileged economic and political status [...] With more than 40,000 members, the government most likely tolerated [organized political groups in Tondo] based on its fear of the outbreak of social unrest.” It is not the first time in the world of *TRESE* that the ghosts of class struggle have come to haunt the narrative, but it may well be the first time that Alexandra Trese explicitly expresses her unwillingness to stand aside and let things play out.

To return to a more general view of cultural theory of risk: *High Tide at Midnight* as a text reiterates an egalitarian view of conflict as danger, wherein

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24 Ortega, 37.
25 Ortega, 48.
26 Ruland quoted in Poppelwell, 120.
risks are perceived as being embedded within a much deeper set of social anxieties, and the current mode of risk management and communication in society is seen as inflaming rather than dispersing these anxieties. Only structural change in society can bring about change in the ways risks are dealt with, and the evolution of democratic processes and public participation was seen as part of this change.  

The summary quoted here is a response made to the question of whether “a risk is less acceptable if knowledge is withheld from the people who are exposed to it.” It applies as much to the role of Alexandra as detective and the political maturation of her perspectives regarding her duties to her community, as much as speaks of the mode of social critique that *TRESE*, as a cultural text, engages in when it allows, at least as of this volume, the powers that be to prevail over its own heroes.

What *TRESE* also does, by making this episode coincide with a superhero-team-style recruitment, is to reiterate that those who wish to fight need not do so alone. While the battle is neither easy, nor over after the giant is defeated, that heroes *will* come out of hiding—out of their private stories and disparate lives—to face the adversary together. In relation to the Tondo foreshore development project, Poppelwell comments that “given that the project was both designed and implemented under martial law [...] any remnants of political organizing, enlightenment or empowerment which have persisted have occurred *not because of the project, but in spite of it.*” The floodwater flushes everyone out of their safe spaces and, we imagine, they will resurface again when they are needed.

The concept and visualization of inundation can describe how we imagine coming to terms with—or being cast adrift in—contemporary politics, particularly that of class struggle. The sinking and rising of land/cities/civilizations or of persons/gods/monsters out of water are not only presented as arresting visual spectacle, but depict conflict as a territorial struggle between water, land, and human life. But these divisions are not as clear-cut as they may first seem. The text argues for reclamation not
of land from water, for the relation between them were not meant to be antagonistic; the point is not to restore ownership or even custodianship, but to claim a sense of belonging within a world where man-made gods turn against both nature and common man. These treacherous gods, mortal or immortal, historical or ideological, purport to turn nature and humankind against each other, to distract from the actual state of power relations. Through the fluidity of water, illustrated through flooding, arbitrary boundaries are exposed as precarious divisions; as are the borders of a panel. But once characters are cast into the same discursive space, the text opens up to the re-examination of all sorts of interpersonal (and perhaps, natural) relations. Such fluidity reminds us of the capacity of artistic representation to conceal while exposing—to inundate, but also bring to surface—but also how lost territorial/terrestrial footing can bring people together in more important ways than providing a universalized “common ground,” which can prove a dangerous space from which to direct blame on a mythicized other. It may be a matter of both frustration and hope that TRESE, that the literature, much like historical reality, is not quite done telling its story.

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Lives, Matter:  
Materializing “Land” in an Ecology of Conflict  
by Louise Jashil R. Sonido

Matter and meaning are not separate elements. They are inextricably fused together, and no event, no matter how energetic, can tear them asunder.

— Karen Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning

An Ecology of Agencies  
On October 20, 2018, nine farmers were gunned down in a sugarcane hacienda in Sagay, Negros Occidental. Their crime was to cultivate idle lands to plant subsistence crops outside of the acres of sugarcane they tended for the accumulation of their landlords’ wealth. The annual “bungkalan” (literally, “digging”; metonymically, “cultivation”), while readily comprehensible as the necessary production of a fundamental life-process, is construed in the context of a semi-feudal economic system as a militant occupation of privately owned property. Framed in the historical struggle for genuine land reform in the Philippines, the controversy was quick to generate conflicting accounts in media reports, personal statements, and bureaucratic press releases, and the materiality of the Sagay Massacre — a corporeal moment in which military bullets broke flesh, blood soaked contested soil, and bodies, each with an articulated identity and a lifetime of history, were burned into ash — vanished rapidly in the treacherous surfeit of semantics.

The phenomenon demonstrates succinctly the crisis of truth that has since emerged from the postmodern disposition toward and, certainly, suspicion of language as consisting primarily of perpetually inadequate representations of perpetually delayed meanings. In the intellectual
ferment coming from the linguistic and cultural turns in literary studies, representationalist modes of critique have tended to dominate critical practice, investing heavily in policing representations to arrest ideological chimera — intolerance and bigotry, erasure and misrepresentation, epistemic violence, et cetera — or to articulate ruptures and disjunctions as opportunities for subversion. Yet in this glut of representationalist critique, Karen Barad plaintively observes how “Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that doesn’t seem to matter anymore is matter.”

In an effort re-materialize matters that matter, and matter that matters, this paper revisits the imagining and “mattering” of land in *Louie Jalandoni: Revolutionary* (2015), the life in images of one of the most prominent and controversial figures in the protracted revolutionary movement in the Philippines. Luis “Louie” Jalandoni was a Catholic priest who had been born into a prominent *haciendero* family in Negros yet who later became a Communist revolutionary taking part in the militant struggle for agrarian reform. From 1994 to 2016, he was the chief negotiator for the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), the political wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), during peace negotiations with the Government of the Philippines (GPH). In the course of the biographical account, the book materializes, through textual and visual rhetoric, various imaginings of land: as viable resource, as lifeblood, as private property, as state territory — as agentic force entangled in “intra-actions” with material lives that produce the agrarian dispute as an ecology of agencies.

Ecocriticism lends itself readily to the project of examining the materializing of “land” in and by the illustrated biography. But while early iterations of ecocritical thought have tended toward ecological or biocentric readings of the environment, such a frame would be ill-fitting in the context of farming communities for whom the “pastoral” and “idyllic” countryside, as traditional ecocriticism has tended to construe rural spaces, are sites of oppression and exploitation.

Anthropologist David Harvey has pointed eloquently to the problematic raised by the preoccupation of early environmental scholarship in “revaluing nature” to the point of falling into essentialist romanticizing of the “integrity, stability, and beauty” of pristine ecosystems before the encroachment of dastardly “human activity.” He writes,

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We have loaded upon nature, often without knowing it, in our science as in our poetry, much of the alternative desire for value to that implied by money. But the choice of values lies within us and not in nature. We see, in short, only those values which our value-loaded metaphors allow us to see in our studies of the natural world. Harmony and equilibrium; beauty, integrity and stability; cooperation and mutual aid; ugliness and violence; hierarchy and order; competition and the struggle for existence; turbulence and unpredictable dynamic change; atomistic causation; dialectics and principles of complementarity; chaos and disorder; fractals and strange attractors; all of them can be identified as “natural values” not because they are arbitrarily assigned to nature, but because no matter how ruthless, pristine and rigorously “objective” our method of enquiry may be, the framework of interpretation is given in the metaphor rather than in the evidence...²

In more recent ecocritical scholarship, this seemingly unbridgeable gap between metaphor and evidence, between objective nature and subjective frameworks for its interpretation, has been even more rigorously questioned. *Louie Jalandoni: Revolutionary* is a text that participates in this questioning in its own materialization, or “mattering,” of land. The book is divided into ten (10) chapters, illustrated by seven (7) visual artists, detailing Jalandoni’s political and geospatial movements from his privileged childhood as the son of a *haciendero* in the sugar farms of Negros Occidental; to the urban spaces of Bacolod where he became embroiled in political skirmishes as a priest and social worker; to the rural countryside where he retreated as an underground revolutionary; to the military camps of Manila where he was imprisoned during the Marcos Dictatorship; and to lands beyond the boundaries of the nation — Hong Kong, Italy, Netherlands, Algeria, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, New Delhi, New Zealand, Australia — where he eventually traveled to conduct international work for the NDFP, establishing and developing relations with other liberation movements, trade unions, and peoples’ organizations, and engaging with political parties and government institutions in various conferences and symposia.

While the text has much to question of how Jalandoni’s geospatial mobility complicates notions of “rootedness” and “emplacement” (concepts

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central to environmentalist strands of ecocriticism such as deep ecology), the particular interest of the current study is to examine the ecology of material agencies implicated in the subversive, even revolutionary, work of struggling for agrarian reform as shown in Jalandoni’s biography. Two parts illustrate this agential ecology most clearly: (1) the poem of an anonymous revolutionary cadre, “If the land could speak,” which Jalandoni often recites to articulate his land ethic; and (2) the third chapter on Jalandoni’s years as “An Activist Priest,” which marks the turning point in his transition from humanist social worker to militant activist, and the particular materialization of this period in the illustrations of Enrico Maniago.

The poem, “If the land could speak,” written by an anonymous revolutionary cadre and often recited by Jalandoni in his various speaking engagements as NDFP negotiator, presents an important question to ecocritical thinking of human relations with nature:

If the land could speak,
It would speak for us,
It would say, like us, that the years
Have forged the bond of life that ties us together.
It was our labor that made the land what she is;
And it was her yielding that gave us life,
We and the land are one!
But who would listen?
Will they listen,
Those invisible,
Who, from an unfeeling distance, claim
The land is theirs?
Because pieces of paper say so?
Because the pieces of paper are backed by men
Who speak threatening words;
Men who have power to shoot and to kill,
Men who have power to take our men and our sons away?
If the land could speak
It would speak for us!
For the land is us!

The invocation “We and the land are one!” presents a unique ontological reconfiguration of being vis-a-vis land, whereby human labor enriches land and land possesses will to “yield” and render equivalent labor in turn to “give life” to humans. The equivalence here of the agencies of the people and the land, of the human and the nonhuman, is not merely poetic; the metaphor
is material in the context of the peasants' struggles for land reform: land recognizes its exploitation and bears arms against it. This ontological shift poses important questions for ecocritical thought, as it transgresses, even *erases*, the assumption of a nature/culture divide which has underscored much of earlier ecological discourse.

To further an investigation of what emerges in the poem as an ecology of human and nonhuman agencies, this analysis anchors on a *material*, rather than biocentric or ecological, ecocriticism, which “examines matter both *in* texts and *as* a text, trying to shed light on the way bodily natures and discursive forces *express* their interaction whether in representations or in their concrete reality.” While earlier environmental scholarship have tended to render nature as, by default, a passive victim of human action and modernization, a material approach to ecocriticism explores the corporeal materiality of human agency and, dialectically, the agentic propensity of nonhuman matter. This has the effect of “reduce[ing] or nullify[ing] the distance between the experiencing body and experienced environment” and of configuring phenomena as “a material ‘mesh’ of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and nonhuman players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces.”

In this view, matter is imbued with agency and agency with materiality, and the ways in which they produce each other, beyond *interaction*, becomes a process of *intra-action*, as “‘things’ don’t preexist [but]...are agentially enacted”; they are thus not external to each other but mutually imbricated in each other's life-process.

Agency assumes many forms, all of which are characterized by an important feature: they are *material*, and the meanings they produce influence in various ways the existence of both human and nonhuman natures. Agency, therefore, is not to be necessarily and exclusively associated with human beings and with human intentionality, but it is a pervasive and inbuilt property of matter, as part and parcel of its generative dynamism. From this dynamism, reality emerges as an intertwined flux of material and discursive forces, rather than as complex of hierarchically organized

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5 Iovinno and Oppermann, 2.
6 Barad, 150.
individual players.\textsuperscript{7}

The life-processes of both human and nonhuman matter are thus equally understood as material-discursive practices: reality is not objective but agentially enacted, inasmuch as human action and sociocultural production are simultaneously semantic and ontic: “Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; rather, the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity” (emphasis in the original).\textsuperscript{8}

This ecological view of the interlocking agencies of people and land, landlords and property documents, militiamen and guns in \textit{Louie Jalandoni: Revolutionary} places the land dispute within a “material-semiotic reality”: here, “the emanating point of the narrative is no longer the human self, but the human-nonhuman complex of interrelated agencies.”\textsuperscript{9} Here, all matter, human and nonhuman, in the course of producing their own existence, affect and reshape each other’s, through material signifying practices. Here, political/revolutionary work is ecological practice, and exploitation and oppression are tantamount to ecological phobia — an important point I will return to later in this discussion.

Significantly, the poem that articulates Jalandoni’s land ethic opens with the matter of language: “If the land could speak / It would speak for us...” These lines articulate the impossibility of “speaking with” land in the human sense of verbally articulated discourse; yet, also, they preclude the impossibility of nevertheless knowing what land desires for itself: life. And “life” in this ontological assertion is not a pre-given or preexisting thing but a \textit{bond} between land and its tillers that “the years / Have forged...” Despite the lack of a mutually comprehensible language, the agency of land in its own becoming is known to its tillers through their wilful exchange of labor across time: “It was our labor that made the land what she is; / And it was her yielding that gave us life, / We and the land are one!”

These lines construe the dialectical relations between land and its tillers as “a conversation between human and manifold nonhuman beings, which act together and ‘exchange properties’”\textsuperscript{10} — labor for sustenance and vice versa. In this mode, “[k]nowing is a matter of intra-acting,” in which the long-lived practice of cultivating the soil is the process by which the land and its tillers express and perform their “differential responsiveness

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\textsuperscript{7} Iovinno and Oppermann, 3.
\textsuperscript{8} Barad, 151-52.
\textsuperscript{9} Iovinno and Oppermann, 2, 9.
\textsuperscript{10} Iovinno and Oppermann, 4.
and accountability”\textsuperscript{11} to each other. Such a view extends beyond mere personification of land, or metaphorical thinking of land as a mythopoetic construct of at the heart of a militant nationalist ethos. Far from the “undue metaphorization, moralization, or spiritualization of scientific concepts”\textsuperscript{12} for which environmental scientists have castigated ecocritical scholars, the poem articulates the \textit{material} co-production of human and nonhuman agencies in their enactments of their life-processes: the way the soil yields crops when cultivated; the way tillers die when they cannot cultivate land. It is in this mutually beneficial intra-activity that one might best understand how “[d]iscourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said.”\textsuperscript{13}

Yet intra-activity is implicated in a still greater ecology of active agencies. In subsequent lines, the poem narrates how “invisible” forces “from an unfeeling distance” stake their claims on the land through “pieces of paper...backed by men / Who speak threatening words; / Men who have power to shoot and to kill...” The threat of death here embodies, literally, how the plight of farm workers in feudal society is materially expressed in how they are directly, physically affected by contesting agencies of the land’s productive fertility and the violence of property ownership.

In Negros, the \textit{hacienda} system, emplaced to ensure sufficient quality and quantity of cash crops for export, construes land as a resource to be maximized for profit rather than a domain of life-production by which people might sustain themselves. The contradiction of agencies in this case enact what Barad calls an \textit{agential cut}, which “produce[s] determinate boundaries and properties within phenomena, where ‘phenomena’ are the ontological inseparability of agentially intra-acting components.”\textsuperscript{14} In other words, the phenomenon of land dispute is characterized by “differentiating patterns of mattering,”\textsuperscript{15} or contradictory enactments of agency, in the feudal relations between landlord and tenant.

Itself a material-discursive enactment of agency, the poem equates the “invisibility” of landlords from the material production of the land to the consequent \textit{immateriality} of their claims. Because discourse in the agential realist sense is implicated, not only in the political force of utterances but in the material-semiotic enactment of agency, the landlords’ claims, which come “from an unfeeling distance,” cannot count

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\textsuperscript{11} Barad, 149.  \\
\textsuperscript{12} Heise, 510.  \\
\textsuperscript{13} Barad, 146.  \\
\textsuperscript{14} Barad, 148.  \\
\textsuperscript{15} Barad, 138.
\end{flushright}
as meaningful statements, or, in the realist sense, cannot materialize. In the configuration of the world as an agential reality consisting of agentic matter, “[t]he primary semantic units are not ‘words’ but material-discursive practices.” Documents merely have representational value; mutual labor enacted in spacetime is material and therefore comes more readily to matter in all senses of the word.

For the persona of the poem, agency mattered through labor necessarily forecloses agency matters through pieces of paper. The material trumps the representational. This view aligns with that which is articulated in Barad’s material ecocriticism: that we cannot simply put our faith in representations instead of matter... To embrace representationalism and its geometry or geometrical optics of externality is not merely to make a justifiable approximation that can be fixed by adding further factors or perturbations at some later stage, but rather to start with the wrong optics, the wrong ground state, the wrong set of epistemological and ontological assumptions.

Thus, read through a material ecocritical lens, the poem presents itself as a particular material-discursive performance of the world that strives to reconfigure it according to the agential possibilities of a land ethic construed as revolutionary precisely for its mattering of the equivalent agency of land and its tillers: the land is its tillers; the land and its tillers are one. And when “men who have the power to shoot and to kill” threaten to sunder this inextricable fusion of matter and meaning in land-tiller intra-activity, the only scientific consequence is revolution.

**Humans Who (Are) Matter**

In 1970, two old women were bludgeoned to death by four drunken men in a ramshackle hut in Hiyang Hiyang, Cadiz. The “robbery,” as the murder was framed in the media, happened in the wake of a radio broadcast of a letter they had written to Louie Jalandoni, then the director of the Bacolod diocese’s Social Action Office (SAO). Days earlier, Jalandoni had been collecting data from peasant settlers in Hiyang Hiyang to help them build a legal case of land-grabbing against the notorious warlord and congressman Armando Gustilo. Gustilo had gifted their lands to the mayor of Cadiz as a reward for helping in his electoral campaign, and the

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16 Barad, 141.
17 Barad, 379-81.
farmers were being literally bulldozed out of their lands to stake the claim. The two old women had written to Jalandoni to report that members of the Philippine Constabulary had arrived in Hiyang Hiyang and were questioning residents about him and about the peasant leaders who resisted Congressman Gustilo and Mayor Villacin’s acquisition of their lands. After the murder, their bodies were buried in the same Sagay, Negros Occidental where, almost 50 years later, the Sagay Massacre would take place.

This story materializes in Chapter 3 of Louie Jalandoni: Revolutionary, “An Activist Priest.” Covering the period of Jalandoni’s life from 1968 to 1972, the chapter traces the transformation of Jalandoni’s ethics from humanist social worker to militant activist during a time when farm workers’ strikes were breaking out all over Negros due to the intensity of oppression and exploitation in the region’s vast sugar plantations. While the church by then was already doing a lot of political and social work among impoverished rural communities, Jalandoni’s involvement in the Cadiz Land-Grabbing Case was his first major participation in a high-profile issue. Going up against prominent landlords and bureaucrats dragged him quickly into the limelight, and he soon learned the extent of abuse, corruption, and brutality that people of power were capable of.

In this chapter, Enrico Maniago’s pencil illustrations literalize the entanglements of the human and nonhuman in land disputes through visual medleys of peasants intertwined with the various agentic objects comprising their nonhuman environment: the animals, farmhouses, and crops of agricultural production; the placards, streamers, and paraphernalia of their political struggle (see Fig. 1); the guns, cigarette smoke, and uniforms of police and military forces; and the broken huts, locked mansion gates, and cartographic maps that embody contesting notions of “land” in the struggle they are embroiled in (see Fig. 2). In these sketches, boundaries between bodies and objects are not fixed, and images impinge freely upon each other’s space, as if to depict how “matter” — i.e., the people’s struggles, the landlords’ abuses, the process of being of the land itself — “emerges out of, and includes as part of its being, the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries.”

Amid an otherwise straightforward narrative of an individual’s political awakening, the story of the two old women of Hiyang Hiyang comes out as particularly moving in its affirmation of the reciprocal ontology of land and its tillers. During a bout of hard rains while Louie and his students are conducting their investigations in Hiyang Hiyang, the two old women invite them into their ramshackle hut to take shelter.

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18 Barad, 151.
Unable to fight against Gustilo alongside the other peasants because of their frail strength and old age, they instead take it upon themselves to provide *baon*, or food provisions, for Louie and his students in support of the cause. They offer the team boiled eggs: “Do you want 50 counts or 25 counts?” At Jalandoni’s request for clarification, they explain: “50 counts, that means
hard-boiled eggs; 25 means soft-boiled.”

The use of “counts” to measure cooking time is again illustrative of how the peasants live with and live in their environment. To categorize the state of food, not according to their finished form, but according to their processual becoming within time acknowledges the agency of nonhuman environmental matter in producing the world. Rather than simply impose upon nature and extract what they want from it, this ontological reframing of the process of food production sees it as an intra-action and negotiation of the differential boundaries between cook, cooked, and cooking as a process itself. In this configuration, human agency is not the locus of power;

Fig. 2
humans, too, yield to nonhuman labor — what an egg becomes when subjected to certain configurations of matter: under heat, across time. According to Simon Estok,

Positing the notion of agency in matter, material ecocriticisms challenge human exceptionalism and unseat humanity from its self-appointed onto-epistemological throne, its imagined singular embodiment of agency, subjectivity, and ethical entitlements.¹⁹

Within this view, it should be no surprise that the tillers’ valuation for land and its agency, and the decentering of human agency as locus of power, is deemed a threat by feudal lords and bureaucrat-capitalists, who draw their power precisely from asserting the centrality and ascendancy of their agency in the world. Among the multitudes of nameless and dispossessed peasants, the two old women of Hiyang Hiyang embody the antithetical land ethic they deem so threatening: living-with the land and conceding to its agency in their own process of mattering.

In this sense, the landlords and bureaucrats’ forceful rejection of the peasants’ land ethic is tantamount to ecophobia, when they perceive these peasant struggles (in another manner of speaking, struggles of the land itself) “as environmental threats and...a menacing alienness.”²⁰ Farmers who assert their rights are unheard of, just as land that belongs to its tillers — at least insofar as “belonging” is a process of “being one with” another — propounds a revolutionary reconfiguration of the social order.

In the absence of a vigorous examination of the ontological issues, the locus of knowledge is presumed to be never too far removed from the human, and so the democratizing move is to invite nonhuman entities into our sociality.²¹

Spurning such democratization, the impunity of feudal-capitalist agencies denies fervently that “[t]hings that are not us have agencies that determine us” and, in precluding any invocation to recognize their “embeddedness in materials of interacting agencies,” refuses “an ethical rethinking of... behaviors.”²²

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²⁰ Estok, 130.
²¹ Barad, 378.
²² Estok, 137.
Conversely, in Maniago’s illustration of how Jalandoni remembers the two old women in Hiyang Hiyang, Jalandoni himself is interwoven in the images of the two women, seen carrying their chickens and basket of eggs and smiling widely despite their impoverishment. The image powerfully materializes how the women were one with the land during their lifetime; how they are one with the land in their deaths; and, having interacted with Jalandoni in the way that they have, how they would henceforth remain imbricated in the way he continues to live (see Fig. 3).

In later parts of the chapter, sugarcane peasants in Bais, Negros Oriental stage a strike to demand higher wages of their landlords. They had been receiving only 2.50 pesos per day, whereas the daily minimum wage was 4.75. Fuelled by the success of a nine-day peasants’ barricade at the gates of the Hacienda Medalla Milagrosa, farm workers in other haciendas all over Bais intensify their struggle. Eventually, the tensions come to a head and another warlord-bureaucrat, the congressman of Cebu, dispatches Cebu’s “insular police” (in function, his private army) to the aid of the Bais hacienderos. They open fire on the picket lines, and Jalandoni at last recognizes how the material conditions of life itself necessitate the continuance of militant struggle — if justice is to be achieved, or if the tillers of the soil are to continue living at all.

The narrative of Jalandoni’s progression into activist/revolutionary
work due to his increased immersion in peasant matters is an account of the ontological shift in his relations with the land and its tillers. These changes to the ways he began to know and be in the world reconfigured his sense of ethical and moral responsibility, which previously had anchored mainly on the theologically guided ontology of priesthood. In one particular spread of panels, Jalandoni in his clergyman’s habit receives a man who refuses to attend mass or take communion from him because of his involvement in the Cadiz Land-Grabbing Case. The environment of their conversation is the church, dominated by the carved figure of Christ on the cross. Significantly, as the conversation progresses, this image evolves: as the man turns away from Jalandoni, the figure morphs into the scene of scourge, with Jesus flanked by menacing guards and wearing a crown of thorns; when Jalandoni relents to the man’s decision, it goes back further to Jesus in shackles, praying in prison before the crucifixion (see Fig. 4).

This visual treatment again casts the environment as alive
and agentic. Far from construing Jalandoni as a Christ-like figure, it reestablishes the equivalence of the church with the body of Christ, and materializes, by recalling the physical abuses to Jesus’ body during the scourge and crucifixion, the continuing struggle of the church — also as agentic matter — to enact its moral agency in the face of rampant exploitation and injustices.

Within the current study’s ecocritical framework, Maniago’s social realist style merges with the agential realist conception of human-nonhuman practices and intra-actions. In depicting the “objective conditions of social reality,” which the narrative portrays on the impulse of political propaganda, “‘objectivity’ is not preexistence (in the ontological sense) or the preexistent made manifest to the cognitive mind (in the epistemological sense). Objectivity is a matter of accountability for what materializes, for what comes to be.”23 Likewise, the agentic portrayal of the Christ figure vis-a-vis Jalandoni’s transforming land ethic, and all the strain this exerts on his life, literalizes the non-immutability of this objectivity. Indeed, the “objectivity” of matter, human and nonhuman, is only determinate in the context of its implication in subjective relations of accountability, responsibility, and justice.

In this view, “[s]ubjectivity is not a matter of individuality but a relation of responsibility to the other... [T]he ethical subject is not the disembodied rational subject of traditional ethics but rather an embodied sensibility...”24 Jalandoni’s land ethic cannot but reconfigure his moral-religious ethic, and the ontological shift this triggers in his relations with other people is a direct consequence of the shift in his ontological relations with the land. The effect is a renewed “dynamics of matter and meaning, body and identity, being and knowing, nature and culture, bios and society,” and it can only be understood, “not in isolation from each other, but through one another, matter being an ongoing process of embodiment that involves and mutually determines cognitions, social constructions, scientific practices, and ethical attitudes.”25

To live is to intra-act in an agential reality that transforms us as we transform it in our own processes of performing the world. Mattering in the world means being “[accountable] for and to not only specific patterns of marks on bodies...but also the exclusions that we participate in enacting...”26 For Jalandoni, the ethical choice was to participate in the people’s struggles,

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23 Barad, 361.
24 Barad, 391.
25 Iovinno and Oppermann, 5.
26 Barad, 394.
to matter the nameless and the dispossessed and solidify the materiality of their cause. This choice moves the question of land beyond rhetoric and, in reinforcing how both human and nonhuman matter intra-actively express their life-processes, enjoins active participation in the propulsion of phenomena in the world: toward oppression or liberation, toward capitulation or revolution.

Certainly, *Louie Jalandoni: Revolutionary* is itself an act of “mattering” and “presencing.” In recounting the historical struggles of peasants in Negros, it simultaneously emphasizes the need, at present, to be aware of how we partake of the people’s continuing struggle — because by virtue of being in the world, we do: “There is no getting away from ethics — mattering is an integral part of the ontology of the world in its dynamic presencing. Not even a moment exists on its own.”27

By exhuming the two old women from the recesses of pretermission, *Louie Jalandoni: Revolutionary* activates memory and history to allow the nameless dead — even those whose deaths reaped no monuments or commemorations — to come to matter. The agential quality of spacetime is tapped to re-materialize crucial moments that have passed yet do not simply belong in the past, as they continue to affect and transform the present. The deaths of the two women in Hiyang Hiyang, the deaths of those killed at the picket lines in Bais, the deaths of those strafed during the *bungkalan* in Sagay are not external to each other.

Memory does not reside in the folds of individual brains; rather, memory is the enfoldings of space-time-matter written into the universe, or better, the enfolded articulations of the universe in its mattering. Memory is not a record of a fixed past that can ever be fully or simply erased, written over, or recovered (that is, taken away or taken back into one’s possession, as if it were a thing that can be owned). And remembering is not a replay of a string of moments, but an enlivening and reconfiguring of past and future that is larger than any individual. Remembering and recognizing do not take care of, or satisfy, or in any other way reduce one’s responsibilities; rather, like all intra-actions, they extend the entanglements and responsibilities of which one is a part. The past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package, or a scrapbook, or an acknowledgment; we never leave it and it never leaves us behind.28

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27 Barad, 396.
28 Barad, x.
Proceeding from this, we continue to intra-act with the world and to meet it halfway: its manifold material-discursive constructions, its ethical challenges, its contradictory enactments of truths, its struggles and wars that are no longer just human conflicts but ecologies of differential agencies. In this configuration of the world, the pursuit of justice is “the ongoing practice of being open and alive to...each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly.” It is through our ethical commitments, and how we recognize our accountability to the world, that we come into meaning and come to be as humans.

Because, certainly, we cannot simply exist; we can only matter, and in mattering hopefully materialize a world that will be kind to those who live, have lived, and will live in it.

References


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29 Barad, x.
Finding a connection to nature in the city is something a lot of people struggle with. Commodification and exploitation result in the dichotomy of urban and nature, with one constantly destroying the other. In effect, those of us who live in the urban areas end up viewing nature as its own separate entity because it does not blend well with the built spaces. What we need is something that recognizes and explores the coexistence of urban and nature—of urbanature. This is a concept that was introduced by Ashton Nichols, an American scholar of ecocriticism. His belief is that urbanatural roosting is inhabiting the environment without harming it (the same way a bird would roost upon a tree branch). People can live in a space in the same virtue as a bird by building for the benefit of both humans and nonhumans. Not exploiting, but building with nature.

A way to explore that idea is, of course, through literature. And it becomes even more significant if such literature is directed towards children. We cannot deny that it is crucial for them to be more aware of their relationship with the environment at such an early age. They can harness what they learn through the years of their lives and then, when they eventually grow up, they will be the ones who can create concrete projects for better environmental change. They will address the issues in the urban landscape and subvert the notion that the city is built by humans for the
benefit of humans alone. We can aim for a manifestation of an urbanatural world in literature for children. Through that, we will begin to understand children’s deeper connection to nature—something that is evident in the long-standing tradition of ecocritical children’s literature, especially in fantasy stories where writers take full advantage of world-building.

Urbanature is a concept introduced in the book, *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism: Toward Urbanatural Roosting*. Published in 2011, it is a record of the author, Ashton Nichols’, year of trying out urbanatural roosting. By his definition, urbanature “suggests that all human and nonhuman lives, as well as animate and inanimate objects around those lives, are linked in a complex web of interdependent interrelatedness.”

To understand this, we go back to the most basic definition of ecocriticism that was introduced by Cheryll Glotfelty: that it is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. While the environment has been the subject of literature that dates back hundreds of years ago, the formal research on ecocriticism is quite young—significantly studied in the 1990s. Prior to that period, the Romantic perspective on nature, in which nature is the cost of human intervention and modernity, prevailed. However, it is crucial to understand that nature is not necessarily the opposite of human intervention—of culture itself, even. If it is not exploitive and destructive, the relationship between humans and the environment would be based on inter-relatedness. They would become “genuine intermingling of the parts of the ecosystem.”

The same could be said for Philippine ecocriticism. Across all genres of Philippine literature, the environment has always been a subject. Beyond the creative works, there are many critical works as well that promote a relationship with the environment that is based on indigenous traditions and practices. This is no surprise because the variety and richness of our indigenous culture is reflective of our archipelagic country, and we are very proud of that cultural heterogeneity. However, we cannot deny that there is a scarcity of critical texts that explicitly talk about nature in the urban area. We also have to remember that living in an urban area should not hinder us from forming a relationship with nature. Urban citizens may experience it not in the same way as indigenous people do, but the

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experience is still there. Because of the various environmental issues in a city, one can argue that there is an urgency to examine that relationship. This is where the concept of urbanature may come in.

Nichols reminds us that nature can be interwoven with built spaces. It’s just in the way we build and treat nature. He said:

Imagine urban, suburban, small town, and rural places in which the water and the air are clear, in which the food is fresh, local, and preservative-free, in which the energy is used but also used wisely—reused, not wasted—in which human spaces are built with an eye to nonhuman needs and built to blend the inner world (of human consciousness) with the outer world (of nonhuman nature): minds and weather, emotions and plants, health and animals, vegetables and computers. Imagine human spaces in which plants are pervasive and always generously included: buildings full of trees, and plants, and vines, and useful gardens everywhere. Imagine buildings oriented always towards the sun and the forces that will help to improve human and other organic life within those porous walls.4

In his book, he chronicles his year of living in urbanatural roost. As mentioned earlier, urbanatural roosting is basically living lightly and harmoniously with nature and valuing both our own needs and the needs of the nonhuman. Admittedly, this idea came from a Western experience of the environment. It can be seen in the way Nichols has chaptered the book into each season, emphasizing the differences of experience when it is either spring, summer, fall or winter. It is also evident in the fact that the United States, where Nichols tried out urbanatural roosting, has significantly more urban centers than the Philippines. And so, we have to identify where the Philippine environment diverges from Nichols’ urbanature in order to understand how it can appropriated for our children’s literature.

The most significant divergence is where Nichols emphasizes that urban spaces need more attention because they are the lived spaces, even going as far as saying that the preservation of the wilderness is nothing more than to aesthetically please “white, upper-middle-class, nature-lovers.”5 Such a thought is questionable if it is applied to the Philippines because here, the rural areas are still quite prevalent. And they are not “unpopulated wild

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4 Nichols, 35.
5 Nichols, 202.
lands” as Nichols has put it. They are less populated, yes, but some of such spaces are ancestral lands of indigenous groups who have their own cultures that value their relationship with nature.

On that note, it must be emphasized that the purpose of aiming for an urbanatural future is to promote that the urban environment is also worth saving, not that it is the priority. The very idea of inter-relatedness is negated if we prioritize one thing over the other. Unfortunately, that image of an urbanatural future would be impossible if we do not address certain issues in our own urban areas such as Metro Manila.

Geographer Philip Hirsch has pointed out that “an increasing number of the six hundred million population [of Southeast Asia] approach the environment as a source of enjoyment, aesthetic pleasure and conservation values.” This is especially prevalent in urban populations such as Metro Manila’s. It emphasizes that the dichotomy of the urban (where their homes and work are) and nature (their source of paid recreation). Admittedly, it is not far off from what Nichols has talked about, that the wilderness has become a source of enjoyment for the privileged. But we have to understand that our view of nature should not be like this. Immersion in nature should not be a form of an expensive vacation. Unfortunately, we also cannot deny that this is not the case at all, especially for the urban lower class.

In Metro Manila, there are, of course, green and properly maintained open spaces. But they mostly exist in private subdivisions, schools, mall areas and private company lots. There are some spaces that are open to the public—a couple of parks and nature reserves—but unless we live near them, we still must shell out some money to go to those places, especially with today’s constant increase of public transportation fees. And even with the small number of existing and accessible green open spaces, they are still threatened by—most often profit-oriented—construction projects.

Environmental concerns also often become a low priority for the working class because they have to deal with more urgent problems such as food and shelter before thinking about the needs of the environment, all the while being more affected by its deterioration by living in poor conditions. At the same time, they are also blamed for such deterioration because their

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6 Nichols, 202.
financial situation forces them to overexploit and buy products that produce extra waste. No matter how you look at it, it is a perpetual cycle and it needs to be addressed soon.

On the government’s side, there are various efforts for rehabilitation. One of the more recent ones is the assistance program called “Green, Green, Green.” It is a component of the current administration’s infrastructure agenda, “Build, Build, Build.” According to the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), “[Green, Green, Green] aims to make the country’s 145 cities more livable and sustainable through the development of public open spaces.”

The project also aims to address disaster risk management by funding projects such as flood control. The DBM Assistance to Cities Program Manager, Julia Nebrija, said that they also plan to recover open spaces in Metro Manila. She said, “[t]here are many utilized spaces we can repurpose. In New York and other congested cities, they were able to find ways to establish open areas.”

It is an ambitious project and is clearly beneficial for the future of the city. Although we must consider how such a program is funded. It will still be the burden of the people, especially the lower class. While “Green, Green, Green” aims to create spaces that are open to everyone in the community, it will still be at the cost of people’s money. It corresponds to what Nichols said so himself: “[c]ities and wilderness areas are in need of a new ethic that will unite the upper-middle-class environmentalists with those people who first need a regular income, nourishing food, and secure places to live before they can begin to worry about the [nonhuman].”

The environmental issues presented, and countless others, have various twists and turns. But one of the ways we can address such issues is through stories—particularly fantasy stories.

Ursula K. Le Guin has talked about how the green country that is prevalent in fantasy stories shows us a time when “the fields and forests, the villages and byroads, once did belong to us, when we belonged to them. That is the truth of the non-industrial setting of so much fantasy. It reminds

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11 Nichols, 82.
us of what we have denied, what we have exiled ourselves from.”\textsuperscript{12} This is a clear disjunction from the urban, a space that we have built for ourselves. But it does not necessarily have to be that way. It is not necessary for nature in fantasy to be, as Le Guin put it, "nostalgic comfort."\textsuperscript{13} By creating a world where urban and nature grow together and not at the expense of one over the other, we can see an alternate world that challenges our usual perceptions of our real world. This is how urbanature can be manifested in a fantasy story. Chris Brawley said that

> for [fantasy] authors, their works are meant to be subversive, both in the sense of disturbing or unsettling the reader, and in the sense of engaging the imagination in the created secondary world, so that the ‘real’ world can be transformed as the result of the re-vision initiated in the encounter with the fantasy world.\textsuperscript{14} 

This subversive mode builds up to what Brawley calls mythopoeic fantasy, which he describes as “attempting to recreate (\textit{mythos} = story; \textit{poenin} = recreate) a new mythology in order to infuse readers with the sense of the transcendent.”\textsuperscript{15} Although this fits quite well with the notion of a return to a more environmental past that Le Guin has talked about, it can still be applied to an urban setting. To have the urban environment as the subject does not invalidate the nostalgic urge in most ecocritical fantasy. Rather, urbanature can be interpreted as a negotiation with it. Through stories, we can aim for an urbanatural world that bridges the past and the future. And then the idea of an urbanatural future becomes even more significant when it is shown to child readers—the ones who will fill that future.

Fantasy’s subversiveness shows how child characters can approach, understand, and form a relationship with nature. In turn, it enhances the experience for child readers by defamiliarizing elements from the real world and presenting them new ways in which they can gain a firm grasp of their agency and create a significant difference. In most works of ecocritical children’s literature, some of the common tropes are anthropomorphized plants and animals and/or children who uncover a special, hidden outdoor place that immerses them in nature. In Philippine children’s literature, most


\textsuperscript{13} Le Guin, 87.


\textsuperscript{15} Brawley, 9.
of the time, nonhuman characters draw from folktales, fables, and trickster
tales to transmit values and concepts to children—contemporary or not.\textsuperscript{16} Unfortunately, just like critical works, there are not much ecocritical stories
for children that portray an explicitly urban setting.

One of such rare stories is Cyan Abad-Jugo’s \textit{Letters from Crispin},\textsuperscript{17} which was published in 2016 as part of a set of her ecocritical fantasy books. It is set in Caloocan City in 1986, on the brink of the
EDSA Revolution. Alice, the protagonist, finds letters from the old
sampiloc tree in her great-grandmother’s house. The letters are written by
Crispin, a boy from the year 1896, which is, in turn, during the Philippine
Revolution. Her curiosity with Crispin grows and through that, she gains
a deeper understanding of how nature is connected to time, memory and
national identity. As you can probably imagine, the representation of the
environment is not as explicit here and it tends to lean towards a more
socialist level. But there are parts where nature plays a subtle but significant
role in Alice’s adventures in her great-grandmother’s garden and the
abandoned house beside them, where she believes Crispin is. When she and
her new friend, Jason, are in the said house, this happens:

Right across from them was the open window, and right under
it was a puddle and rotting wood. Outside, the trees swayed in a
sudden breeze, and the clouds moved to let the sun shine through,
directly through the window and onto the puddle.

Alice and Jason blinked. Suddenly, there were people
around them, children running in some sort of game, young men
and women dancing, older ones standing around the room talking
or watching others.\textsuperscript{18}

With the way the clothes are described later on, these people who have
suddenly appeared are evidently from 1896. This scene shows how nature
enters the space of the home—which is one of the small but significant ways
we can understand it in an urban place. One could also interpret this scene
as nature being the one that can hold such memories through the years. It
implies that no matter how much change can occur in one place—in this
case, the eventually urbanized Caloocan—nature has its way of retaining

\textsuperscript{16} Chryssa Celestino, “Shattering Silence: Tracing Speciesism in Philippine Children’s

\textsuperscript{17} Cyan Abad-Jugo, \textit{Letters from Crispin}, illustrated by JC Galag (Manila: Anvil

such memories. Such an idea is also supported by the sampaloc tree that is mentioned earlier. It is more than a hundred years old and it is what Crispin uses as a portal of sorts for his letters.

*Letters from Crispin* is very specific in its urban setting, and it does raise—albeit subtly—an idea about nature’s role in such a space. But, ultimately, it does not interrogate that role on a communal level. The fact that the sampaloc tree is in her family’s garden and that Crispin’s old house is within the same village or district show the exclusivity of such spaces. For a story that moves towards a sense of national identity, its rendering of nature’s role is a bit of a missed opportunity. Alice’s connection to nature builds up to that sense of national identity, but it is also still inherently personal. As raised earlier, this is an issue that needs to be addressed in order to encourage people into building green public spaces that promote an inclusive relationship with the environment.

Another of Abad-Jugo’s book from the same set, *The Looking-Glass Tree*, shows a different issue that was raised earlier about the urban environment. Although the book is not set in an urban area, it features characters from there. Enrico, the protagonist, is on vacation at a beach resort with Tita Henrietta. One day, he, his aunt, a local man, and a male bodyguard take a boat and sail to an area full of mangrove trees. Tita Henrietta takes one of the trees, saying that it will be for a client whose home she’s decorating. This cruel act hurts and angers Aninipot, the spirit of the tree.

Tita Henrietta’s actions reflect how some urban upper-middle-class people may view nature—that it is for recreation, aesthetic pleasure and profit. The mere fact that Tita Henrietta transports Aninipot’s mangrove in a pot and places it inside their hotel room shows an act of caging nature instead of letting it grow freely. Unlike *Letters from Crispin*, where we see nature entering our personal spaces and influencing our internal selves, *The Looking-Glass Tree* shows humans’ manipulation of nature by literally uprooting it and putting it in a cage—even if Tita Henrietta’s ultimate plan is to replant it in her client’s garden. It must be emphasized that there is a difference between planting new trees in your garden, and uprooting one from its home to transfer into yours.

But again, unlike *Letters from Crispin*, this book subverts its urban environmental issue when Enrico grows concerned for Aninipot and guilty for his aunt’s actions. He works with Aninipot and the other creatures from the mangrove reserve to return the tree and rescue his aunt, who is back at

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the mangrove reserve to steal more trees because she got caught in a storm manipulated by Aninipot. This turn of events shows how humans and the nonhumans can work together to keep a community that benefits the both of them.

As said in the introduction, it is important for children to value their relationship with the environment. It is not just about helping children become more aware of the presence of nature. They can also value it in a way that translates into social action. This idea, then, moves towards ecojustice. As Rina Garcia Chua has said, “[t]o gain control through literature is to also gain justice over the situation. […] What happens is a way for literature to give justice to those situations that the general viewpoint or the laws cannot.”

We can have projects like “Green, Green, Green,” but we must also look into other ways to raise awareness in children, and to incite social action from them. Greta Gaard, a scholar of ecocriticism, has provided a set of questions that would help in achieving that goal:

1. Is the human self-identity constructed in relation or in opposition to nature, animals, and diverse human cultures/identities?

2. Are children left alone to solve ecojustice problems originally created by the adults?

3. What kind of agency does the text recognize in nature? Is nature an object to be saved by the child actor?

Keeping these questions in mind will challenge even more the dichotomy of urban and nature, and will show the value of urbanature.

Overall, what we can hope to achieve is a subversion of the dichotomy of urban and nature through a fantasy novel for children. The stories that were presented are already working towards that, but we can push further by really interrogating humans and the urban environment and subverting environmental issues. And through this, children will gain a better sense of nature in the city. They will navigate from nature’s associations with pollution and disasters (most especially the consistent flooding) to sustainable building. They will also begin to understand that

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nature does not have to be exclusive to beaches, forests and mountains, but it is deeply rooted in their own homes and the rest of the community’s built spaces. Then, through fantasy, nature will be defamiliarized and will help them reconsider their view of it.

Building an urbanatural world in stories for children may not present a definite and concrete long-term solution to urban environmental issues, but it will serve to incite reflection of the relationship with nature. Nurturing a balanced relationship with it at an early age will encourage children to be dedicated to building a real urbanatural world in the future.

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**Works Cited**


1.

Imagine a world —

Is it not strange that the first exhortation of any work of fiction is to ask us to recreate a world inside our minds? The demand of a work of fiction is that of world-building, an attempt to “evoke a world that is plausibly, vividly different from ours,”¹ a demand that is made from both the writer and the reader. The writer is asked to create the internal logic that powers the fictional world, like an engine with all the parts exquisitely made and slotted in place in order to provide power that will make the narrative run; the reader is asked to re-create the world that was crafted on the page, using a system of signs that evoke, for instance, the sensation of blades of grass touching bare feet. The ability to evoke a world, to engender entire systems of knowledge and belief, is all based on how the reader re-creates the fictional world as presented by a writer. For a work of fiction to function within the imagination of the reader, one must provide a way for that person

¹ Crawford Kilian, “Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy,” In The Handbook of Creative Writing, ed. Steven Earnshaw (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 139.
to enter that system, which is why “[t]he choice of the point(s) of view from which the story is told is arguably the most important single decision that the novelist has to make, for it fundamentally affects the way readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional characters and their actions.”² The reader needs to find a foothold, a position, within the world of the text, while at the same time maintaining an anchor in the world they live in.

However, by tying ourselves to a particular version of reality — ours — it becomes difficult to imagine what can be done beyond the boundaries of our understanding of what is real and what is fictional. The imagination works easiest with what is present, not what is absent, particularly if that absence was never filled by experience, simply because “we conceptualize the literary work as a constant, recognizable entity shared by all readers, a conception confirmed by common usage.”³ And so, it is easiest to imagine, in various fictional ways, how the world can slide into destruction and annihilation — we have seen it in the ways that nations have fought over territories and resources, colonized lands and seas, claimed them in the name of countries and states, all in the name of an imagined world. Human beings have destroyed each other in the name of abstract ideologies and concrete desires, imagining power and rights over other human beings based on the color of their skin or the presence of different anatomical parts. The world we live in is a tapestry of narratives that have imagined power and glory, exploration and annexation, the binaries of winning and losing. And yet we cannot seem to imagine beyond these systems, and so we begin our slow, inexorable slide towards extinction.

Scientists predict that in less than a century, global temperatures will rise significantly and will have devastating effects for world ecosystems⁴ and converge to a point of no return for the entire planet⁵. We have seen the devastating effects of a rapidly changing climate — from raging forest fires to melting ice caps to destructive typhoons to islands of garbage floating across the ocean — and yet we still see systemic refusal to imagine the consequences of such widespread destruction. As such, we can clearly see the path of destruction, a descent towards dystopia, and yet we refuse

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to imagine an alternative. Robert Tally notes that this “failure to imagine radical alternatives to the present situation... may have more to do with our weak imaginations than with the absolute immutability of the postmodern status quo.”

The intersections of ecocritical and utopic literature may provide a way for a radical re-imagining of the future, as a way to think about solving the problems of our present, and seeks an alternative to the dystopic narratives that seem to proliferate in the 20th and 21st century popular culture. In creating and recasting ecocritical narratives as utopic explorations instead of just dire warning of destruction, it provides both the reader and the writer with methods of grappling with the overwhelming and, quite frankly, disheartening deluge of world-ending news that continuously arrives, like the sun rising over the horizon. The quicksand-like grip of a society in chaos can easily lend itself to dystopic imaginings, which has become “the dominant literary form of the twentieth century.” It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that because of our present neoliberal capitalist societies, we will inevitably end up in scenarios of world-ending destruction, that there is only a singular trajectory in which the narrative arc of the world will inevitably follow, simply because of this “universal belief, not only that this tendency is irreversible, but that the historic alternatives to capitalism have been proven unviable and impossible, and that no other socio-economic system is conceivable, let alone practically available.”

And yet, the world is slowly, continuously being re-imagined: by governments and world leaders, by king-makers and revolutionary leaders, by ordinary people who just wants to have an individual life that’s a little bit better, to gain a little bit more than what they are currently receiving. This reimagination of the world, though happening at a microcosmic level, is already an act of narration: we tell ourselves what we want. Similarly, utopias exist because of its function as “a critical practice and anticipatory desire” which is enacted through imagined narratives. The utopia does not exist in a vacuum; it exists as a response to the present condition, through a desire transmitted from one individual to another, until it becomes a great upswell of voices, responding to an entire community’s imagining of a new world order.

So what, then, is the role of the fiction writer in the intersections

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7 Tally, 4.


9 Tally, 5.
between utopia and the urgency of ecological problems that threaten to 
undermine the very systems we rely on for our survival? The writer becomes 
the weaver of worlds, taking the separate threads of dreams and desires and 
deep, dark fears, and re-creates the world continuously. The necessity of 
literature in this system is to function as intermediary, to spread the utopic 
from one individual to the next, to provide the network wherein stories do 
not “float above the material world... but, rather, [play] a part in a immensely 
complex global system.”¹⁰ This system is that of imagining not just stopgap 
measures to address present environmental concerns, but to radically 
re-imagine entire systems of existence, to “map the cultural, political, and 
social spheres, as well as the spatial terrain”¹¹ of entirely new worlds.

2. 

Imagine a world where life begins as a flicker, not a flame. A spark. 
Your body unfurls from the moment it is conceived. Your mind awakens: 
the world is made up of others like yourself. There is no time to find a name 
or to name the parts of one’s self or to name the place, the time, the agony, 
the ecstasy of awakening. Oh, here is a thing to grasp the vine upon which 
you find your body stretched out, allowing skin to touch air for the very first 
time. How are you to know that there is only fifteen minutes to live? 

In this world, a singular desire is embedded in the very core of the 
body: the need to seek another spark. It is what animates life, propagates 
the continuous need for the species to exist. There is no need for clothing or 
food, mortgage or dreams of the future or fear of old age. You are born as 
the perfect specimen of yourself, and as soon as you blossom into existence, 
you are animated to find a mate. The air is filled with other bodies, other 
scents, all drawn to each other like insects to a flame. You navigate the vines 
that grow around you, watching as bodies copulate and ignite, vanishing 
into the ether at the height of their pleasure. Their remains unveil perfect 
globules of dew emerge from the detritus of these couplings, shimmering 
as they form new beings in an endless cycle of life. But soon, your thoughts 
escape your mind as you follow the inescapable thread of that most delicious 
scent, weaving in and out of other beings that occupy your peripheral vision. 

You find that other spark as the other being moves towards you 
as well, drawn to your scent as you are drawn to theirs. Your bodies 
inscribe a dance that has been danced, moment by moment, by the beings


¹¹ Tally, 5.
around you, by the very instinct that drives you to join your flesh to their flesh, a hunger that can only be sated by that moment of ecstasy. At the back of your mind, you feel yourself ignite, a wick finally catching fire. You gasp your final breath of air as you feel your body dissipate, disappear in total consummation.

Your entire existence was purely for pleasure, for the desire that takes place in the present. What you leave behind will be used for the continuation of life: for the vines that thrive in your absence, for the beings that continuously find purpose in their presence, that brief spark of life that cycles through life and death every fifteen minutes. In this world, you are given a chance to experience a moment of pure joy. You are born, you exist, then you return to the earth to allow another life to begin again.

3.

Imagine a world: the third planet in a solar system, 149.6 million kilometers away from its sun, which is a medium-sized star. It rotates upon its axis and revolves around its sun, with both landmass and water systems that encompass the surface of the world. There are mountain ridges and deep valleys, an oxygen-rich atmosphere that allows for various lifeforms to emerge from the collisions of atoms, forming and re-forming until they arrive at a point where fish-like beings emerge, weak-limbed and frilled, newly-created lungs taking big gulps of air as they rise from the oceans. Fins become legs, scales secrete moisture, and the world is reborn.

In this world, creatures great and small dominate: herds of gigantic dinosaurs roam the land, alongside fast-running reptiles with lean, whip-like bodies. Feathered beasts soar across the skies, developing patterns of flight that harness the invisible currents of air that surround everything. Insects scurry across verdant forests. Some creatures trade their scales for fur, slowly adapting to a variety of climates that spread across the world, determined by both land and sea. The excess genetic material, shed like an unnecessary skin, swirls in the sea, coalescing and mutating until a creature arises from the ocean. There is nothing else that is quite like it.

It slides across the soil, pebbles and dirt absorbed and excreted through its pliable, slime-coated skin. It moves, curious, towards a herd of four-legged, fur-covered creatures with slanted eyes and sharp claws. As one of the creatures touch it with its paw, the slippery skin seems to engulf it. There is a shriek, a cry of alarm, as the furry creature seems to be swallowed whole. Then, the slime slowly stretches out one limb, and then
another, as one end develops a swishing tail and the other end creates a head, then slanted eyes. The skin ripples one last time, and a mimicry of the original furry creature now stands, completed, though the skin is still smooth and shiny, akin to the surface of water. In a certain slant of light, one can still see the creature it has consumed, slowly being broken down into lumps of hair and flesh and muscle inside its form. But the mimicry stretches, purrs, and begins to wander in search of its next prey.

Despite the strangeness of the creatures, no great catastrophe arrives on this world. The inexorable orbit of planets allow for a chance to avoid a particularly destructive meteor shower. Time still marches onward as seasons shift from one to the next, though none of these creatures have ever named the seasons, nor do they understand why, precisely, there is a shift from warmth to cold to thaw. They only understand the need for sleep, the desire for the hunt, the pleasure of the moment. There is a need to survive, perhaps to thrive or to cull. They have calls and grunts and squeaks and roars, but no other sound is articulated better than the other. There is no deeper philosophical understanding of how there may be a bigger underlying pattern beneath the surface of the world. There is only the rumor, in a manner of speaking, of a slime-covered devourer, mimicking other lifeforms as it consumes them. But there is only one of these things, and it is only a rumor, and anyway, none of the creatures could adequately explain the horrific manner of its shapeshifting.

The world does not have its name. It does not need one. There is nobody to name it.

4.

Imagine a world where the secrets of the atom has finally been revealed in its totality. The building blocks of the universe has finally been examined, calculated, tabbed, and weighed. Small machines, the size of your palm, emit waves that can disrupt, re-organize, and even build new matter with just the wave of a hand. Though they are first sold through shops, the inventors gave up their own patents on the invention, eventually allowing everyone to gain access to open-source schematics. Though there are regulations for large-scale use, and nations are strictly prohibited from weaponising this knowledge, people have habitually used it for their daily needs. Water flows from the air and into one’s glass. Cars run on manufactured gasoline, transforming from gas to liquid. Children learn the atomic structures of everyday materials, and it is common for science teachers to reinforce their classrooms in case of accidental explosions. Ex-lovers destroy romantic mementoes with the wave of a hand, sometimes to their regret. Families build their lives
around manifested materials, taking the time to create an extra chair for a last-minute guest, or weaving a new room in anticipation of the arrival of a new child.

Life continues: children are born, lovers are united or split apart by personalities and circumstances. Gardeners delight in the possibilities for their plants: blossoming flowers higher than humans, trees whose branches loop and gnarl and create graceful canopies. There is no longer any need for senseless animal slaughter: atoms form and re-form into ingredients for meals, transformed by a chef’s hands into delectable dishes. Fuel is no longer pumped from beneath the ocean floor, it is simply crafted from different collisions of atoms that are re-formed and injected into a vehicle. Firewood is no longer needed in countries that require heat. Plastic products are intentionally degraded by like-minded individuals and recycled into other products.

More and more shops are shuttered as people opt to create their own material needs rather than exchange for them with pieces of paper. Those who jealously hoarded their riches realize that they no longer need to be bound to unnecessary financial services. Instead of every man for themselves, people have begun to band together to create enclaves that cooperate with each other to provide for their basic needs. A sense of freedom flourishes in the world. After all, if you are no longer dependent on the market for your needs, the market begins to collapse. Factories shutter their doors; they are turned into communes. Banks reduce their staff; world leaders begin trying to forge cooperative alliances instead of mutually-assured destruction.

In this world, trees are given the chance to recover from constant and consistent deforestation. The soil is allowed to breathe again. Endangered species flourish in spaces that were no longer used to feed insatiable human beings. Oceans expel the toxins that permeated its depths. From the brink of destruction, the world is allowed a second chance to breathe again.

5.

Imagine a world. Any world that can exist across the dizzying vastness of the universe. Worlds large and minute, worlds within worlds, worlds that stretch your understanding of life and death and everything in between. Imagine how you have become a being that can survive beyond your planet’s atmosphere: you have become sentient light, traveling across the endless expanse of space. You arc across the vast horizon, illuminating your own path. You see others intersecting with you, a momentary glimmer of recognition at another form that mirrors
yours. But it is only a moment; neither lingers.

You continue moving across the curve of the world, following a trajectory that is dictated by invisible forces beyond your control. You consider, briefly, how strange it is to see the land spread out before you, bright spires reaching beyond the atmosphere, attempting to reach the vastness of space. You see branching filaments covering the world like a net, glimmering as it captures the reflections of beings like yourself. You need to keep on moving.

Your body moves like a perpetual motion machine, though you’ve never seen anything like that before. But you understand that you cannot survive in stillness; that your penchant to move from one place to another is not because of choice, but because of need. To linger is to perish.

More worlds stretch out before you. Here is one with jagged peaks and valleys, rocks forming geometric fingers that grasp one another. Here is another one, woven together with rope and scaffolding and string, allowing its creatures to walk, balanced by limbs and the planet’s gravity. Here is another one with swollen vegetation and creatures as large as boulders, traversing across the land. Here is one with angry oceans raging against a perpetually gray sky, with bright glass biomes dotting the seascape, the last pockets of life in a dying world. You have seen civilizations rise and fall and rise again; you have seen the birth of a dead star. You have visited them all, moving from one place to the next, from one solar system to another, stretching yourself as far as the mind can see, but never really staying still.

You wonder, as you move across the horizon of a world where smoke obscures the distance and you can see the fires that rage across the scorched earth, how any sentient being is able to claim any land as theirs, how they are able to declare it — through borders or titles or trickery — that it belongs to them. After all, the land doesn’t claim any creature as its own. You understand that even though the forms and manifestations might be the same, there is always the inexorable cycle of decay and renewal, that what is destroyed can return in another form. You know that once you find the end of your journey, if you decide to stop moving, then you will simply cease to exist: you will split into small balls of light that will awaken, much like you did at the start of your journey, and begin their own travels throughout the universe. You know that you will still continue on, mapping every horizon, because what comes after you will still contain your imprint. You are comforted to know that you might be able to live forever.
There are, of course, other worlds. Worlds that are too small to fit on this page; too large to be bound by the economies of the printed word. Worlds like ours and worlds in which there is no language to comprehend how it functions. There are various ways in which the world can be re-thought, can be reconsidered as part of the ecocritical imagination. The writer becomes complicit in the act of imagining worlds — the deluge of dystopic narratives can influence how prevailing attitudes about the state of the world and our place in it. Through acts of fictocriticism, as exhibited here, the writer can begin exploring what it means to imagine a world in utopic terms, and how that can radically shift from what might be familiar ground to many readers.

Jameson acknowledges the fact that there is now much thing as a singular utopia that can conceivably answer all of the problems facing humanity. He says that this “is a problem best produced by a comprehensive notion of ideology, in which the inevitability... [of] our inescapable situatedness: situatedness in class, race and gender, in nationality, in history — in short, in all kinds of determinations, which no biological individual can evade”\textsuperscript{12} and that “in terms of representation... there is nothing in the mind which was not already transmitted by the senses... [and so] we are generally inclined to think today that there is nothing in our possible representations which was not somehow already in our own experiences.”\textsuperscript{13} However, by position an interrogation of the utopic fictions alongside the actual fictions, there may be a way in which to find new avenues of discourse that can generate an alternative way of thinking. Fictocriticism, in this respect, is a way to radically re-think our own subject positionality in imagined narratives.

According to Tim Cross, fictocriticism is a result of the “collision between [the] literary, reflexive, sensory and theoretical writings that new forms of knowing and uncertainty emerge”\textsuperscript{14} (1062). Through this kind of writing, Atienza points out that there is the potential for the form to interrogate conventions of scholarly writing; she cites Anna Gibbs and Stephen Muecke when she says that fictocriticism is writing that “uses fictional and poetic strategies to stage theoretical questions’ that ‘makes an argument with storytelling or poetry as its vehicle.’”\textsuperscript{15} In exploring the

\textsuperscript{12} Jameson, 170.
\textsuperscript{13} Jameson, 170.
intersections of fictocriticism and utopias, my interrogation takes places on two levels: that of questioning specific social problems of the world through utopic explorations, and that of questioning the form in which the interrogation of social problems take place. By exploring these intersections, it is my hope that new ways of imagining the world is engendered.

The exhortation, then, of the writer to the reader to imagine a world is not just authorial intent. Within the ecocritical framework, it becomes the thread upon which the writer begins to connect to the reader, to convince the reader to re-imagine the world and re-make it according to the fictional dream. From these dreams, there is hope that a new, better reality might someday spring.

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References


Last January, birders\textsuperscript{1} from all over Canada and the United States flocked to Vancouver Island to catch a glimpse of a rare bird, the redwing (\textit{Turdus iliacus}). It is a species that is highly unusual in North America, for its migratory flyway\textsuperscript{2} is concentrated in Asia and Europe, with its main breeding ground in Iceland. So rare is the sighting of a redwing in Western Canada that only two sightings have been recorded in two years.\textsuperscript{3} During the same time, the Candaba marshes in the northern Philippines also received significant attention from birders for a sighting of the Falcated Duck (\textit{Anas falcata}), which is classified as a “Near Threatened” species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). Its home base is eastern Siberia, Mongolia, and northern Japan, but winters mostly in India and Vietnam along the Mekong River.

\textsuperscript{1} “Birders” is another term for bird-watchers, and are characterized by their passionate zeal to view and photograph rare birds.

\textsuperscript{2} Flyway refers to the route used by migratory birds all over the world. There are three major flyways: Americas flyway, African-Eurasian flyway, and the East Asian-Australasian flyway. Birds rarely diverge from these flyways, but recently, certain factors have affected migratory patterns. More about bird migration can be found here: http://www.birdlife.org/worldwide/programme-additional-info/migratory-birds-and-flyways. Accessed on 17 April 2017.

\textsuperscript{3} Levon Sevunts, “Birders Flock to Vancouver Island to Catch Glimpse of Rare Redwing,” in \textit{Radio Canada International}, 6 Jan. 2016,
Upon my arrival in the Okanagan Valley last September, the first thing I noticed were the migrating geese forming a V in the sky. I was lucky enough to be picked up by UBCO professor and poet Nancy Holmes at the Greyhound Station, and when she noticed me staring at the flying birds in formation, she explained what they were: “They’re Canadian geese,” she said, her gentle voice barely cutting through my hazy jetlagged brain, “we have some migratory birds here in the Okanagan. You’ll see more of them flying away in the fall.” As she drove me into the Mission, I heard the geese overhead honking as they flew low over the open plains.

Movement is a fascinating activity. It is, at the moment, everywhere. Many species are in a constant state of motion from one place to another: one habitat to another, rural to urban areas, one country to the next, and so on. When I set foot in Canada, I had already crossed at least seven thousand miles of the Pacific Ocean. These migratory birds do more; some of them like the sooty shearwater (Ardena grisea) travel forty thousand miles to reach the Arctic waters from their breeding ground in the Falkland islands. These patterns of physical movement from one part of the world to another have brought forth the term used to describe both the birds and me: a migrant.

What then is a migrant? Eliot Dickinson in *Globalization and Migration: a World in Motion* says that the root of the word migrant, *migra*, is Latin and means “to remove, depart, or move from one place to another.” However, it is important to bear in mind the varied differences between migrants and migrations, in the sense that though the movements may at times appear similar, they are not homogenous at all. Migratory birds rely on instincts and genetics to push them toward the movements from one place to another; social migrancy, however, is different in the sense that it is comprised of push and pull factors. Kyaing Kyaing Thet has defined the “push factors” of social migrancy as “factors that compel a person, due to different reasons, to leave that place and go to some other place.” These reasons may be poor economic conditions, lack of opportunities for advancement, natural calamities, and so on. “Pull factors,” meanwhile, are “factors which attract the migrants to an area.” These factors may range from better employment, higher wages, attractive amenities, and even social conditions like marriage or family. Biological migrancy responds

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6 Thet, 3.
to instinctual clues, while social migrancy is complicated by different sets of criteria. Furthermore, biological migrancy has set patterns of flight—there are clear departures, arrivals, and returns (unless there are changes in climate, topography, or weather conditions). Social migrancy is more complex for not only is it combinations of push and pull factors, but also because many of its pattern-less movements are hard to pin down. In the crosscurrents of movements all over the world, how can the social migrant and their migrancy be legible?

To grapple with this question, I return to how the human migrant is defined: The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines the migrant as a noun that can be understood as “any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties to this country.” Later on in the same article, the organization admits that this may perhaps be a narrow definition of the term, for some people may still be considered a migrant despite having been born in the same country of residence. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the word in terms of its temporal restrictions (Long or short distance? Long-term or short-term residence?) has allowed room for an understanding of spatial mobility, but not what it may or may not pertain to or ultimately encompass. In relation to this, the International Organization for Migration defines “migrant” as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual residence regardless of the following: first, the person’s legal status; second, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; third, what the causes for the movement are, and finally, what the length of stay is. It is clear here that the migrant’s space is one that moves, that which Benzi Zhang notes as the “dynamics of constant departures.” Serpil Opperman in “Introducing Migrant Ecologies in an (Un) Bordered World” has stated that

Living species, human groups, things and goods, as well as pathogens, germs, microbes, and viruses are constantly on the move. Some of them are driven by their evolutionary pathways,

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8 Dickinson, 5.
some others by political reasons and economic deprivation; but many of them, especially the human groups, are on the move because of sectarian conflicts, regional wars, and above all, ecological events.\(^{11}\)

As espoused in the previous statement, the reasons for a migrant subject’s arrivals and departures are voluminous, and are not solely anchored on environmental, political, and economic concerns. Moreover, it is crucial to once more stress that I am avoiding the simplistic naturalization of social migrancy—the annual migrations of birds differ in a host of respects from my travel to Canada for study. Yet, while much has been said about the migrant’s routes, arrival, and departures, there has not been ample emphasis on what is created in between: What new cultures arise from all these movements that intersect with one each other? In this age of globalized discourse, how has migrancy remapped the socio-ecological world/s as we know it?

**Tracing the Migrant’s Pathways**

Serpil Oppermann harkens back to the Introduction of *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, where editor Cheryll Glotfelty predicted that the future of ecocritical scholarship would become more interdisciplinary, multicultural, and international\(^{12}\). Within the ever-expanding field of ecocriticism, the transnational has been cited as a method that “does not demonize biotic migration and resettlement as antithetical to a valorized purity;”\(^{13}\) thus, it has been hailed as a progressive way of reading literature through ecocritical lenses for it troubles the pastoral imaginations of western frameworks and instead acknowledges that the present literary landscape is expanding beyond figuratively or literally constructed borders. In the same vein, Mitchell Thomashow espouses that “[t]he local landscape can no longer be understood without reference to the larger patterns of ecosystems, economies, and bureaucracies,”\(^{14}\) which acknowledges that even if there is still the present stress on the locality in texts, that these are expanding beyond their demarcated borders is something that cannot be

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\(^{12}\) Oppermann, 406.


denied anymore. Rob Nixon also reiterates Glotfelty’s previous assertion that the “best” ecocritical and postcolonial scholarship may be one that is interdisciplinary, transnational, and comparative.\textsuperscript{15} Also, a Migrant Ecocriticism may borrow one of its foundations from postcolonial ecocriticism, where Huggan and Tiffin have initially defined by recounting Anthony Vital’s statement in “Toward an African Ecocriticism:” it attempts to dissect the “complex interplay of social history with the natural world, and how language both shapes and reveals such interactions.”\textsuperscript{16}

In this developing project, I am interested to explore the intersections of postcolonial ecocriticism, diaspora studies, and transnationalism to expound on the possibilities of a Migrant Ecocriticism. The third world has been ignored or rendered invisible for far too long because the first world has been the center of most ecocritical analysis; thus, I find the need to insist on the inclusion of third world environmentalisms in future constructions of ecocritical frameworks. In order to do so, I will question how current ecocritical frameworks have marginalized knowledge systems, values, and practices. Rather than developing an authentic Filipinx ecocriticism, I will seek to articulate a mutually constructive relationship between first and third world, Canadian and Filipinx environmentalisms. This project is especially timely given that populist movements across the world (including in the Philippines) seek to strengthen national borders and threaten to stunt the productive contributions of ecocritics beyond the academe. My project goes beyond merely using the third world as a framing device for current environmental destruction and devastation; at the same time, it also goes beyond accepting first world ecocriticism as a compass to solving current environmental issues.

The questions that a Migrant Ecocriticism may scout and identify are these: How is space reimagined by the multiple conceptions of a migrant, social, biological, and socio-ecological? Is it constructed out of a shared consciousness—an alliance with the different cultures encountered within the journeys undertaken? Is it a coping mechanism—defensive or not—created to find one’s self in another foreign space? Or may it be a method that can attempt to transcend borders within and outside cultures?

**Remembering the Arrival**

By the time I arrived in Vancouver—the first time I ever set foot in Canada—back in September 2016, I would have been but one of the

\textsuperscript{15} Cheryll Glotfelty (245) as qtd. in Cilano and Deloughrey, 81.

almost sixty thousand Filipinos entering Canada as a migrant, regardless of whether I am a long-term resident or not. This fact is not surprising, for the Philippines, in recent years, has been the greatest source of immigrants to Canada.\(^{17}\) Within the last five years, immigrants have comprised almost 21% of Canada’s general population, which means that one in five people here is an immigrant.\(^{18}\) Every year, the number keeps on growing and there is little prospect that it will stop any time soon. According to Thet\(^{19}\), migration will persist because of the following: economic factors that is largely the basis for most social migrations; demographic factors that include population increase and/or marriages; socio-cultural factors like quests for independence or improved social facilities like better transportation or housing; political factors like unrest or instability, and other miscellaneous factors like education, cultural diversity, and even individual attitudes.

Dickinson acknowledges the contributions of the migrant to world history by simply enduring their states of constant movement: “Without migrants spreading their various cultures, languages, religions, customs, ideas, and ways of life (not to mention diseases and prejudices), the course of world history most certainly would have evolved differently than it has.”\(^{20}\) He goes further to say that migrants are living bodies that carry their unique stories with them to the spaces they settle down in. The migrant’s life is not lived in isolation, but is shared with the people around them as a social experience of subjectivity. At the same time that I want to believe in the possibility of beneficial hybridization of cultures, I also believe that there is a possibility that a migrant’s individual and personal experiences are lonely - wrought with disasters and triumphs, and magnified by the reality that they may overcome or celebrate these all in detachment or attachment with the new world around them.

The migrant cannot be separated from diaspora, just as diaspora is a fundamental dimension of transnationalism. The experiences of the migrant are largely in relation to diaspora, which Zhang defines as “a process and a relationship [that] suggests an act of constant repositioning in confluent streams that accommodate multiple traditions.”\(^{21}\) Diaspora

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\(^{19}\) Thet, 3-4.

\(^{20}\) Dickinson, 7.

\(^{21}\) Zhang, 2.
as an experience is a process of rehoming the deep dimensions of identities present within the experiences of moving. It is often thought that the beginning of a journey is the departure, but I beg to differ; I think it is when the personhood is molded by whatever factors (social, political, economical, environmental, etc.) are present in one’s home country that the journey truly begins. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist clarify that diaspora and transnationalism both refer to cross-border processes, but diaspora has been used “to denote religious or national groups living outside an (imagined) homeland, whereas transnationalism is often used both more narrowly to refer to migrants’ durable ties across countries and [...] communities.”

In short, diaspora says that the migrant never truly fits in the new culture it finds itself in (thus its popular connotation as a longing for where one comes from), while transnationalism asserts that there are grassroots cultures formed by international migrants where they live as a way to cope with and overcome the intense desire to go back home. These grassroots cultures are those that are spread to the other surrounding cultures, in a way forming an alliance that – perhaps - has not yet been imagined in ecocritical thought.

At this point, it seems imperative to ascertain what “imagination” is being talked about when it comes to the migrant. Bauböck and Faist mention the “construction of shared imagination” in the building of this new alliance in the migrant; it is also mentioned by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in Postcolonial Ecocriticism when they call for an “imaginative literature” as a catalyst for social action in exploring the possibilities of literary analysis, as with Ursula K. Heise in “Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism” when she says that “[t]he spatial imaginary that underwrites these explorations [of linkages and power] tends to see local places as traversed and reshaped by transnational vectors of power.”

What is being said here is that the imagination that the migrant may possess may be a new area of ecocritical thought that must be explored but has yet to be, because of ecocriticism’s persistent affinity for lococentrism. Thomashow defends lococentrism against globalism by saying that the “global economy provides the prospect of constructing a matrix of personal identities which can be chosen form one’s ethnicity, sexuality, gender, expertise, political ideology, among other possibilities.”

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22 Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 9.
23 Bauböck and Faist, 22.
24 Huggan and Tiffin, 12.
26 Thomashow, 125.
but this phenomenon loses the personal identity and begs the question of we can invent ourselves, but where is the center? Contrasting this, Heise in Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: the Environmental Imagination of the Global state that the migrant has moved from the margins to the core of cultural identity – not only that of individuals but of entire societies.”27 The migrant is already reshaping the center, and perhaps has been reshaping the center for centuries beforehand. Unfortunately, the center of ecocriticism has been western, and as a third world citizen, I have witnessed how this center constructs the global south—oftentimes as an exemplar to illustrate the changing climate, a portion of the world that needs saving, or a place to fulfill an altruistic craving. What happens if ecocriticism begins to move away from and deconstruct its center? What can the imagination brought about by migration offer to ecocritical discourse?

Resettling, Evolving

Suffixes are meant to add another dimension to a root word, though that appears to not be the case when it comes to migrant. As it evolves into the word “migration,” still as a noun, the International Organization for Migration defined it as

[ปา][th]e movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification.28

Migration is still characterized (perhaps more largely than migrant) by movement, this time in quantities of bodies. Interestingly enough, Bauböck and Faist have interchanged this word with “dispersal,” recalling that “older notions refer to forced dispersal, and this is rooted in the experience of Jews, but also—more recently—of Palestinians.”29 Also, Dickinson asserts that it literally means “to move from one place to another.”30 These movements undertaken by migration, which is growing more massive by the second as technological advancements in communication and transportation are increasingly democratized, perhaps bring to mind once

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28 “Key Migration Terms.”
29 Bauböck and Faist, 12.
30 Dickinson, 5.
Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of deterritorialization. Heise invokes this concept when she notes that “the increasing connectedness of societies around the globe entails the emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place.” In other words, Heise believes that migration has set forth a new imagination that is not anymore place-based, but imagination-based and deterritorialized.

I pause and return here to the migrant and how it creates multiplicities—if there is the process of continuing to seek and establish connections, of growing these establishments, and discovering/rediscovering those that have been made eons ago, is there a possibility that migration has opened up a culture that may be critical of the new territory’s history despite being foreign to it?

The movement entailed in biological migration is treacherous, so to speak. Over the past thirty years, migratory birds have declined by thirty percent. Threatened by the changing landscape brought about by ecological changes or disasters, and despite the protections sanctioned for 1,500 migratory bird species around the world, ninety-one percent of these birds have inadequate protected areas to complete their annual cycles. Their flyways are dangerous enough, and without places to replenish their strengths for the next thousand miles of flight, some birds are opting to find other routes (like the redwing in Vancouver Island or the Falcated Duck in the Candaba Marshes) or, sadly, not migrate at all.

There are also perils present in social migration: The refugee crises in war-torn parts of the world like Afghanistan and Syria has forced many migrants to take their chances on dangerous modes of transportation just to escape the violence in their homeland. Author Khaleid Hosseini has documented in fiction the crude and tense conditions that many migrants travel in just to escape the Taliban in his famous novel *The Kiterunner*, while thousands of Syrians cross the Mediterranean’s punishing sea just to reach Europe. A lot of them die on the way or upon their arrivals, as with the death of Aylan Kurdi last 2015 on the Turkish beach of Bodrum. Both kinds of migrations are threatened by the changing landscapes and conditions of the world.

It is not only that there are threats to the migrating bodies;

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31 Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, 10.
33 An example is traveling within a fuel-tanker truck. People are jammed in there despite the biting smell of petrol and the chance of being caught (and possibly executed by the Taliban) at border crossing. Oftentimes, many die inside the fuel-tanker trucks and the remaining living passengers must travel with the dead bodies until they reach their destinations.
there are also the threats they are thought to pose in themselves: diseases they might bring (especially with the case of migratory birds or the quick spread of the AH1N1 flu virus from North to South Asia), terrorism (that has arguably reshaped the axis of Western culture as of the moment), and neoliberal oppressions. Movements and violence have been dismantling borders nowadays, but at the same time, borders are also strengthened and bolstered to protect the essentialist center of the west. Furthermore, is there such a thing as an erasure of arrival? After migration, do migrant subjects assimilate neatly to the culture they find themselves in and are grateful for being accepted into the new space? Bauböck and Faist\textsuperscript{34} maintain that assimilation would mean the end of diaspora, for to be completely integrated in the space’s previous histories would mean the erasure of the migrant’s own cultures and histories.

In Migrant Ecocriticism, there has to be an understanding of how migration has either made or broken the migrant, and how migration has either deterritorialized or reterritorialized the space the migrant occupies—for better or worse, to sift through the apprehension. Rob Nixon says that apprehension is a critical concept, for it is a “crossover term that draws together the domains of perception, emotion, and action.”\textsuperscript{35} Here, Nixon’s definition of apprehension may allay the depth of feelings the migrant has to undergo when moving from one space to another. Not acknowledging this lingering apprehension among migrant communities bring about amnesia—one that erases what I have mentioned as the effects of arrival, and the pains of departure. It pretends that migrants are happy where they are and are eternally grateful to the communities that have accepted them (or not), and will work endlessly to earn their keep. Memory is important in migration, just as the migratory birds remember their paths back to their nesting grounds and still return annually, remembering where the migrant comes from, the migrant’s journey, and where the migrant has arrived is imperative in confirming attachments, in finding the feelings of belonging, collective awareness, and self-consciousness.\textsuperscript{36}

The complexity here reveals both good and bad effects of migration—not only in terms of diasporas or deterritorialization, but even through the neoliberal oppressions that are threatening former colonies and some metropoles. Nixon ascertains this, saying that

\textsuperscript{34} Bauböck and Faist, 13.
\textsuperscript{36} Zhang, 6.
the exponential upsurge in indigenous resource rebellions across the globe during the high age of neoliberalism has resulted largely from a clash of temporal perspective between the short-termers who arrive (with their official landscape maps) to extract, despoil, and depart and the long-termers who must live inside the ecological aftermath and must therefore weigh wealth differently in time’s scales.37

Migration, and subsequently transnationalism, has not only allowed the dispersal of cultures, but also the dispersal of resources—indigenous practices are taken advantage of for neoliberal agendas, natural biodiversity (or in the case of the Philippines, megadiversity) is pilfered by other international companies without proper approvals, and bodies are caught in between all these environmental injustices—what Nixon38 expounds as communities that are stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable. A Migrant Ecocriticism may, perhaps, remap the transnational discourse into one that acknowledges, understands, and bravely traverses a new environmental culture through a chiasmic organization of ecopoetry from two different nations.

Im/migrant in New Town

In the Philippines, a migrant who chooses to leave the homeland is often called an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW). It has both positive and negative connotations; unfortunately, mostly negative. OFWs are often known as domestic helpers in other parts of the world, where they sometimes face brutality, rape, illegal employers, violence, and unfair wages. At the same time, OFWs are lauded by the Philippine government as mga bagong bayani ("new heroes"), for their monetary remittances have kept the Philippine economy afloat for the past couple of decades since its collapse after the Marcos regime. When a white foreigner resides in the Philippines, as with my good friend Dale Tanner who now lives with his Filipina wife in Alberta after living in Manila for two years, we call them “expats” (from the word “expatriate”), and they are treated with care and excitement that Dale has once described to me as “strange but fun.” This fun seems beguiling, for many of them choose to stay in my country because their pensions go a long way after the conversion to Philippine pesos, and they get the cultural benefits of an expat—hospitable smiles, beautiful Asian men or women at their disposal, and traveling the best beaches in the world. Life is a constant

37 Nixon, 17.
38 Nixon, 19.
vacation for expats, while OFWs work for the rest of their lives in foreign
countries to keep sending remittances to the families they are supporting
back home.

In Vancouver’s Chinatown, a little bakery/restaurant there called “New Town” serves, according to many Filipino-Canadian Vancouverites, the best siopao\(^{39}\) in Vancouver. It is so good that many people living in Seattle cross the border and stock up two hundred dollars worth of siopao (at two dollars a piece, that is a lot of siopaos) and take it back with them to the States. When we got there, the servers were mostly old Chinese women who were proudly wearing Vancouver Canucks shirts, while the game was playing on an old TV overhead the restaurant. On one end of the area, the elder server conversed in broken English with a Canadian; they laughed heartily as they both agreed that the Canucks is the best team ever. Their glass display of baked goods lit up my eyes, for they had foods that were peculiar to the Philippines and were curiously haunting me when I sleep at night. These foods that I have eaten all my life were being sold by Chinese women in Vancouver Canucks shirts inside a Chinatown that is in the middle of one of the largest Canadian cities. “New Town,” to say the least. There, in New Town, everything is connected—the disorder of the cultures coming together and the order of the space that facilitates a multiplicity of socio-cultural experiences—and, perhaps in Migrant Ecocriticism, this is one of the many that exemplifies a deliberate chiasmic organization of literary texts in order to illustrate contrastive parallels between one text to another. The emerging of these new cultures here in Canada and in the Philippines also relate to the asymmetries of migration that I seek to discover and critique in this project.

A New Environmental Culture

The term “migratory” literally means wandering and nomadic, and Zhang compares diasporas to stranded “migratory birds” – “they are strangers from elsewhere who, without a sense of belonging, never feel at home in a new country yet unable to return to their homeland.”\(^{40}\) The migratory birds are often zealous enough to chart new pathways though for their own reasons, just as migrants brave new spaces because they have or want to. Because of their circumstance of rapid movement, so many of these migrant subjects are but a blur to those who do not care to look and see. I envision that Migrant Ecocriticism will give not only voices to these species

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\(^{39}\) Siopao is the enlarged Filipino version of the Chinese dumpling, filled with either meat balls (bola-bola), chicken (asado), a combination of both, salted duck egg, and vegetables.

\(^{40}\) Zhang, 9.
and subjects, but a physicality too—one that stresses that they do exist; that they are never just there, they are here.

The possibilities, I believe, are endless for a Migrant Ecocriticism and its conception. I am adamant that this is my prefix: the reason why I have chosen to depart my homeland, and my suffix: the reason why I have chosen to continue my studies here in a foreign country. The journey, which I am in the midst of right now, is arduous and insanely difficult, but I am here. I am not there, or anywhere else. I am here.

I had to make a second emergency trip to Vancouver a year and a half ago to renew my passport. For some reason, Google Maps directed me to the old location of the Philippine Consulate in the Pacific Centre. “It’s not here,” one of the guards explained, “It’s in the World Trade Centre, beside Canada Place. Follow the sails and you’ll get there.” As I walked through the streets of busy downtown Van, I remember thinking, how appropriate it is for me to get lost looking for my country.

Upon my return to Kelowna, spring has finally started to materialize. It was a long and harsh winter that has challenged many locals . . . especially a migrant like me who has—all her life—been used to the tropical sun. On another ride through the mountains, inside the near-empty Greyhound bus as I reentered Kelowna, I remembered looking up the Okanagan Lake and seeing that distinct V formation up in the sky above. Winter is over; the birds are flying, departing, again. I asked myself, is it important where they arrive or if they arrive at all? Perhaps it is. Perhaps it is not, either. Perhaps arrival is never the necessity; it is the journey toward the multiplicities of home being made, where the sting of leaving and risk of arriving are carried on the back like an excess luggage that wills one to fly, despite it all.

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