

Archipelagic Memory: Reading US Filipino Literature and Visual Art Beside US Imperial Archives

by

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Dedication

To David and Oswald

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Abstract

Archipelagic Memory examines US Filipino cultural productions—including poetry, documentary film, fiction, and museum curation—and narratives of Filipino belonging outside the imperial archive of US-Philippine relations. Through my close-readings of Marlon Fuentes’ film *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995), Aimee Suzara’s poetry in *Souvenir* (2014), Gina Apostol’s novel, *Insurrecto* (2018), and Lysley Tenorio’s short story, “Save the I-Hotel” (2012) I argue that US Filipino literature and visual art undermines dominant narratives of US-Philippine relations and American exceptionalism preserved in the imperial archive by asserting an “archipelagic memory.” My conception of archipelagic memory describes a practice of memory that betrays enduring structures of US state-violence by representing its appearance in the everyday and as a constitutive element of diasporic conviviality. Through aesthetic interventions, diasporic Filipino cultural production expands our understandings of US belonging and history by showing how grief, friendship, care, and family challenge American exceptionalism and suggest alternative modes of political collectivity and community.

Chapter 1 Archipelagic Memory: Reading US Filipino Literature and Visual Art Beside US Imperial Archives



Figure 1 from *White Gaze* (2020)

White Gaze, a 2018 photobook by Filipina American artist and scholar Latipa (née Michelle Dizon), assembles images and text from the *National Geographic* archives to create photos that bring attention to the popular publication's contributions in creating an imperial culture. Photos, like Figure 1, do this by taking pages from the *National Geographic*'s own archive and strategically erasing text and image to create and emphasize the space between both. The text of the photo tells the viewer of Empire's needs (imagination, islands, violence, etc.) and

that these needs fulfill the desire for light/fire to see. The images depict two scenes: one of cattle being shepherded, and the other of a white man showing a camera to a group of, I'm assuming, indigenous African men. What appears to be the center of this latter image is the camera, which two men (the white man, and one black man) appear to grasp at. I assume this because of the look of, what I assume to be, surprise on the man to the left—perhaps he too was trying to reach for the camera. There are several moments of resonance between the text and images arranged in this photo. For example, we might think about the camera, which is a technology that produces images by capturing light on film, as resonating with the text's message, in which case we might also see the image as meeting the needs of Empire. We might also see the ambiguity in the image as the possibility of contesting the image's assertion of its creator's imagination.

While *White Gaze* draws attention to the underlying racist and colonial ideologies bolstering *National Geographic*, it also raises important questions concerning imperial archives, how stories of Filipinos are excluded from them, and how we might use them to understand ourselves and history. In "Worlds, Words—The Afterlives of Images," the accompanying essay and dialogue between Latipa and visual artist and scholar Việt Lê, she asks: where are the diaspora's archives? She continues:

Some of my recent archival work started because I was looking for images of what our hometown in the southern Philippines looked like when my great-great-grandmother was alive. I've been in provincial and metropolitan archives in the Philippines and also in archives in Washington D.C. There's a painful paradox in looking for your history in the colonial archive.

I see the colonial logic of organizing matter within the categories of modernity: infrastructure, flora, fauna, hospitals, education. I see the way that structure of categorization overrides anything that's contained in the images. Even if I did locate some landscapes of when my great-great-grandmother was alive, it was still through the colonizer's eyes. Whatever it is was that I saw, I was going to have to use my imagination to make it be my own. This speaks to the question of what's on the frame

and what's off-frame. The image alone might exist, but it won't tell my great-great-grandmother's story¹

Latipa's observation notes the problems for diasporic Filipinos who have tried to find traces of our history in institutional, Western archives, and the urgency and limitation of imagination in this method: we work with the belongings of white colonizers who saw Filipinos as incapable of self-governance.

Philippine Studies has shown how US-Philippine relations created a particular kind of archive, including collections like those in the Bentley Library at the University of Michigan, which continues to be a central problem in the study of US Filipino subjects, especially as it concerns understanding the historical conditions that US Filipinos navigate and belong. In his 1995 article, "The New Empire's Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens," Oscar V. Campomanes discusses the challenges of naming a proper Filipino American subject and how that is shaped by the history of US colonization of the Philippines, he states:

[w]hat the New Empire and its ideologues immediately created was a massive political and cultural *archive* which de-nationalized Filipinos and deemed them as racialized subjects unfit for self-determination, requiring systematic U.S. tutelage in the art for which the U.S. precisely claimed originary authorship in its own 1776 Revolution against the British Empire²

The inclusion of the Filipino subject as a colonial, racialized subject, rather than a sovereign subject, into the imperial archive complicates our understanding of US Filipino positionality or standpoint: Are Filipinos in the US ethnic subjects? Or racial subjects? Are they subjects of the Philippines, or of the US?

Questions like these were debated by those with vested interests in the American colonial project of establishing a nation-state in the archipelago. The imperial archive provides a

¹ Dizon, *White Gaze*.

² Campomanes, "The New Empire's Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens," 152, 153.

particular perspective that allows us to see the Philippines through the optics of the US nation-state, where the archipelago is perceived as a valuable economic resource, a strategic military ally and outpost in the Pacific against Asia, and as a civilizational project (its people backwards and incapable of self-governance). The colonial epistemology that was central to discrediting Filipino independence at the turn of the 20th century is preserved in the material collections of state officials associated with the imperial mission of the US. These objects include photographs and film, personal ephemera, newspaper clippings detailing the discourse surrounding the World's Fair, ethnographic records of the Philippines and its inhabitants, and various other scientific and cultural artifacts that offered "evidence" of how Filipinos were incapable of self-governance and in need of American tutelage.

Envisioning American imperialism as a liberatory and benevolent project depended upon depictions of imperial subjects, like the Filipino, to be rescued. For Filipino Americans, US-Philippine imperial archives complicate our understandings of national belonging, political community, and kinship, all of which have become the topic of this dissertation. *Archipelagic Memory* examines US Filipino cultural productions—including poetry, documentary film, fiction, and museum curation—and narratives of Filipino belonging and conviviality beside the imperial archive of US-Philippine relations. Through my close-readings of Marlon Fuentes' film *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995), Aimee Suzara's poetry in *Souvenir* (2014), Gina Apostol's novel, *Insurrecto* (2018), and Lysley Tenorio's short story, "Save the I-Hotel" (2012) I argue that US Filipino literature and visual art undermines dominant narratives of US-Philippine relations and American exceptionalism preserved in the imperial archive through, what I describe as, archipelagic memory: a practice that betrays structures of state-violence as a constitutive element of American belonging and privilege, by remembering the archive's persistent and everyday

appearances in the lives of diasporic Filipinos,. Through aesthetic interventions that take representational forms from the archive of US-Philippine relations, diasporic Filipino cultural production expands our understandings of American belonging, history, and politics by showing how grief, friendship, care, and family are shaped by US imperialism while challenging American exceptionalism to suggest alternative modes of political collectivity and community beyond the nation-state form.

Research and Method

The questions driving this project grew out of personal curiosity and location. As a second-generation Filipino American and PhD student at the University of Michigan I felt compelled to study the subject because of the remarkable collection of archival material regarding early-20th-century US imperialism in the Philippines in the University's libraries and museums. I was made aware of this "embarrassment of riches" from graduate students and faculty members in my department. Because my family was part of that cohort of post-1965-Hart-Cellar-Act immigrants with no other family in the continental US and I had never formally learned about US-Philippine history, I thought I would use my location as an opportunity to reflect on my position as a Filipino, born with US citizenship, occupying colonized American territories.

The University of Michigan's archives are a valuable resource for researchers studying the historical relationship between the US and Philippines. Because of the institution's collusion with US imperial expansion, some of the largest collections of material from the US colonial period in the Philippines can be found across campus in several libraries, including: the Bentley Historical Library, the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology (UMMAA), and the William L. Clements Library. Following the Spanish-American war of

1898, the signing of the 1898 Treaty of Paris, and the subsequent acquisition of Spain's colonies in the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea (including Guam, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba), the US enlisted faculty members and students from the University to serve as officials in the colonial government of the Philippines. Notable examples included Dean Worcester who was recruited to serve in the colonial government because of his previous knowledge of the Philippines, which he gathered on zoological expeditions prior to the 1899 war, and Carl Guthe who, in exchange for serving in the colonial government, established and directed the UMMAA with artifacts he looted from gravesites in the archipelago.³

Knowledge of the University's imbrication in US imperialism and, as a result, institutional expansion is not a secret. For example, the Bentley Historical Library, whose mission⁴ is to collect and encourage the study of the state of Michigan and the US, has a subject guide, "American-Philippine Relations,"⁵ which describes this history of the University's involvement in the colonization of the Philippines by the US and acts as a resource for researchers interested in the University's holdings. The subject guide gives a glimpse into a social milieu of colonial officials and those close to them who were empowered by the historical relationship between the US and Philippines. The breadth of the collection includes historical figures ranging in ideological/political leanings and nationality, Filipino and American, all of whom were affiliated with the University in various capacities. One observation noted in the subject guide states:

[t]he documentation of the Filipino view of the American colonial administration is slight. Many Filipinos were educated at the University of Michigan and returned to

³ Mark Rice, *Dean Worcester's Fantasy Islands* and "Carl E. Guthe," University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, accessed August 9, 2021, <https://lsa.umich.edu/ummaa/about-us/history/biographies/carl-e--guthe.html>.

⁴ "The Bentley Historical Library collects the materials for and promotes the study of the histories of two great, intertwined institutions, the state of Michigan and the University of Michigan" "About," University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library, accessed August 9, 2021, bentley.umich.edu/about/.

⁵ "American-Philippine Relations," University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library, accessed August 9, 2021, https://bentley.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/American_Philippine_Relations_Subject_Guide.pdf.

assume administrative positions in the Philippine government. Recent acquisitions have strengthened the Filipino voice in the collections. Of note are the papers of Manuel Quezon, Santiago Artiaga, and Salvador Araneta.⁶

Save for Quezon, Artiaga, and Araneta (all three received their education at the University of Michigan), Filipino voices are noticeably absent from the archive.

Their perspectives are preserved by imperial archives, like the Bentley Historical Library, which Sarita See describes as “a mode of accumulating a special kind of capital— knowledge— and...that this accumulation of knowledge depends on the idea of the racial primitive.”⁷ The Bentley Historical Library participates in this practice through their collections, which privilege individuals like Richard Schneidewind and other Liberal subjects essential to the geo-political construction and expansion of the US and state of Michigan. His collection demonstrates how political understandings of liberal subjectivity were shaped by the discourse of Filipino subjectivity and cultural representations of racial primitivity through the figure of the Igorot. Schneidewind was from Detroit and one of many “Michigan men” who were involved in the US colonization of the Philippines at the-turn-of-the-20th-century. He served in the Spanish-American War of 1898, contracted typhoid, and was discharged in 1899. Afterwards, he married Gabina Dionicio R. y Gabriel, a Filipina native who died while giving birth to their son, Richard, in 1901. In 1904, Schneidewind organized and planned the Philippine exhibit at the 1904 St Louis World’s Fair. Hoping to profit from the wildly popular Igorot display, he, alongside Edmund Felder, formed the Filipino Exhibition Company and took a group of Igorots from St. Louis on tour around the US. Schneidewind and his competitor, Truman K. Hunt, traveled the US for years following 1904 before taking the show to Europe in 1911. While in Belgium, Hunt was arrested and put on trial in 1913 for mistreatment of his Igorot performers. In the aftermath

⁶ Barritt, “American-Philippine Relations,” 3.

⁷ See, *The Filipino Primitive*, 2.

of the incident, the practice of exhibiting Igorots was made illegal by the US colonial government in the Philippines in 1914.⁸ The example of Schneidewind is important because it demonstrates how cultural representations (i.e., the display of Igorots) informed the construction of the colonial political apparatus and understandings of the Filipino subject, however singular that perspective might be.

What originally drew me to Schneidewinde was his collection of photographs, ephemera, and newspaper clippings, which he had amassed over the course of his career. Two objects in the collection caught my attention: a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, and a postcard. The scrapbook collected stories tracing his career as a showman, his public reception, and the depiction of his troupe of Igorots in the popular press. The second object was a single postcard. The image on the postcard was of an Igorot. In the message, the original sender (although I found the signature illegible, it was signed “Igorrotte Physician”) tells Schneidewind the postcard is “a good [picture] of ‘Laidax.’” In closing the correspondence, the sender asks, “[h]ow are my Iggorotte [sic] babies?” I found these historical artifacts to be interesting because of how mundane and personal they were. The sentiments expressed in in this postcard resonated with William Howard Taft’s description of Filipinos as the US’ “little brown brothers.” Here, you

⁸ The Anti-Slavery law of November 28, 1913 was passed by the Philippines commission. Prior to this law there was another instance in which there was mention of slavery in an act passed in 1902, but the 1913 law would explicitly name it in the Philippines. Then, in 1914 the Antislavery Law was amended to ban the exhibition of Filipinos. In 1914, the Philippine commission passed two acts, Act no 2300, which stated:

Bill No. 2300. An act confirming existing legislation prohibiting slavery, involuntary servitude, and peonage in the Philippine Islands, subject to modifications as provided in sections 268, 269, 270, and 271 of the act of the Congress of the United States approved March 4. 1909. entitled "An act to codify, revise, and amend the penal laws of the United States," and adopting measures for preventing violations of said laws.

And Act No. 2399:

An act extending the provisions of Act 2300 to the territory inhabited by Moros or other non-Christian tribes and penalizing the taking away of any uncivilized person or member of any non-Christian tribe for the purpose of exploiting or exhibiting such person as a spectacle, and for other purposes.

Here the language of the law creates a protected class (“Moros or other non-Christian tribes,” “any uncivilized person or member of any non-Christian tribe”) thus recognizing the “uncivilized” person as a subject of the Philippines.

could see how something personal and intimate resonated so clearly with the violent processes of US expansion and democracy.

Sitting with these scraps I thought, how strange that historiography could be determined by the subjective whims of an individual like Schneidewind who, at some point in his life decided to collect evidence of his ever having existed. Or that Schneidewind's pride, meticulous collecting, and practice of self-curation was intimately tied to his participation in committing major historical violence and supporting US expansion across the Pacific and into Asia. While these questions might overstate the role of the archive in historiography (history has ways of living on and being remembered regardless) they highlight a need to critically examine the "self" and the personal as an organizing principle of the imperial archive. The "self" and the individuals which the Bentley Historical library privileged could be described as enlightened liberal subjects whose position was secured by the discursive production and political management of those deemed racial primitives in the archipelago.

These objects also helped answer some of my own, personal questions about understanding oneself in the imperial archive as a Filipino American. Although Filipino voices were silent in Schneidewind's historical record, the Filipino subject was noticeably present. Newspaper clippings from the scrapbooks, for example, told stories about his troupe of Igorots withholding labor from Schneidewind, refusing to build their own exhibition space unless provided with a dog. At other times, essays written by Filipinos appeared protesting these Igorot displays as misrepresentations of "proper" Filipino subjects. Articles like these show a distinction being made between Filipinos advocating for positive representation and self-governance and Igorots working as cultural performers. These objects betrayed Schneidewind

and his own sentiment, revealing discontent with his management, the complexity of US Filipino subjectivity, and the popular discourse surrounding Filipino political representation.

Stepping back from Schneidewind's belongings, I noticed differences in how the archive privileged certain forms of American belonging and memory, which were also shaped by the same historical processes. As a public institution, the Bentley was used by other, "amateur" historians like me who sought evidence of their historical belonging to the US. For example, during my time there, I overheard conversations between archivists and researchers who were looking for genealogical information ("I'm creating a family tree so I can apply for membership to the Daughters of American Revolution"), and photos of family property in Washtenaw county. To them, the archive served as evidence of their personal belonging to the US that were dependent upon being propertied, white, and heteronormative. But to Filipinos in the US, the archive was evidence of a certain mode of belonging that was different. Indeed, if White American belonging and sentiment is at the core of the imperial archive, US Filipino literature and visual art exposes and subverts these yearnings in its enactments of archipelagic memory.

How does the imperial archive help me understand what it means to be Filipino American? As an interdisciplinary project, *Archipelagic Memory* deploys mixed methods: close reading, material and visual analysis, and archival research to make sense of these cultural expressions of national feeling. My methods are emblematic of the political impetus of US Filipino cultural production. Jan Bernabe describes an "archival imperative"⁹ in the work of US Filipino artists who have made interventions in the imperial archive. For example, Bernabe describes Marlon Fuentes' "Archive imperative" or "a critical, creative, and fundamentally political artistic praxis that, at core, troubles the certainties of knowledge production of

⁹ Bernabe, "Queer Reconfigurations," 728.

American empire.”¹⁰ Like Bernabe, I examine the aesthetic interventions made into US-Philippine imperial archives by artists and writers through an examination of archipelagic memory that focuses on articulations of diasporic intimacy and relation. US Filipino literature and visual art undermines the hegemony of American exceptionalism in its depictions of Filipinos in diaspora and their archipelagic memories, which exceed understandings of political community defined by national borders and historical optics by drawing together disparate events, timelines, and historical actors.

Recently, this cultural production and activism has attempted to draw attention to how US Filipino presence and historical experiences have been excluded from public historical and cultural institutions. One example of this approach is Filipino American artist and curator PJ Gubatina Policarpio’s *Pilipinx American Library* (PAL) a pop-up library centering literature, poetry, academic writing, art books, and zines by Filipinos. The *Pilipinx American Library* began as a collaborative project with Emmy Cathedral in Queens, New York City 2016. While the library collection itself is non-circulating, Policarpio and Cathedral state that purpose of the intervention is to facilitate encounters with artists and writers that have been historically marginalized. Policarpio states, “[i]t’s a very personal collection that is made public. What we like is making these moments where people don’t expect to see the books but encounter them; an unexpected encounter with Filipino American books that are still not being published regularly, still very marginalized voices.”¹¹ And in another interview concerning PAL, Cathedral stated, “it’s easy to do a lot of things making sure your community is represented but oftentimes it doesn’t have visibility beyond the community,” and, “[i]t was important because the public nature of the

¹⁰ Ibid, 728.

¹¹ Wilfred Galila, “Pilipinx American Library pops up at SF Asian Art Museum,” last modified August 11, 2018, <https://usa.inquirer.net/14654/pilipinx-american-library-pops-sf-asian-art-museum>.

library is all about creating instances of encountering the unexpected representations of what is, ultimately, an American story.”¹² Two years later in 2018, the library was exhibited at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum, which has been historically criticized for its lack of Filipino representation.¹³ This project and others like it, which I discuss in the dissertation, demonstrate how the cultural politics of Filipino literature and visual art is bound up with archipelagic memory, and its significance to Filipino experience in the US.

I turn to US Filipino cultural production, because as Lisa Lowe argues regarding Asian American cultural production: “Where the political terrain can neither resolve nor suppress inequality, it erupts in culture. Because culture is the contemporary repository of memory, of history, it is through culture, rather than government, that alternative forms of subjectivity, collectivity, and public life are imagined.”¹⁴ And by analyzing cultural production in relationship to the imperial archive, this dissertation follows Sarita See’s call to “focus on representation alongside accumulation” in *The Filipino Primitive*.¹⁵ In her analysis of Filipina American artist Stephanie Syjuco’s work, *RAIDERS*, she states that Syjuco, “invites us to pivot and oscillate between two looks—precious Oriental art or cheap wood cutouts?—that reveal not two perspectives on the same object but the relationship between two phenomena. Beauty and booty: a history of raiding has yielded booty that is belied by its beauty.”¹⁶ By understanding representation in relationship to the historical and social processes of primitive accumulation and imperialism, US Filipino literature and visual art open archives and museums up to discussions regarding subject formation, nationalism, and cultural heritage. This method also challenges the

¹² Stehpany Bai, “Bi-Coastal Pop-up Library,” last modified October 27, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/bi-coastal-pop-library-aims-introduce-readers-filipino-american-literature-n814766>.

¹³ “Pilipinx American Library,” accessed August 2021, <https://balitangamerica.tv/pilipinx-american-library-telling-the-story-of-filipinos-in-the-bay-area/>.

¹⁴ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 22.

¹⁵ See, *Filipino Primitive*, 142.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 163.

authority of US institutional archives and popular national memory by exposing the violence that subtends American belonging and sentiment through culture.

Literature Review: Archipelagic Memory and the Imperial Archive

“Archipelagic memory” is a concept informed by what Oscar Campomanes describes in his introduction to N.V.M. Gonzalez’s *Work on the Mountain*, as “the Archipelagic Poetics of Filipino Postcoloniality.” Discussing the US reception of the author’s work, which characterize it as “seeking ‘roots in a bygone rural Philippines seen from the eyes of a Hemingway or Katherine Anne Porter—a rural space no longer mapped by American anthropologists like Alfred Kroeber or Felix Keesing, but by insurgents,’”¹⁷ Campomanes states that these dismissive critics “share the common guilt of judging Filipino literature and history from a Eurocentric perspective.”¹⁸ He argues, “when Filipinos ‘abroad’ repossess the Philippines in their discourses of nostalgia or their cultural texts, it is usually a Philippines that displays the virtues of the local and the locale,” and that “this localization is probably the most interesting Philippine *historical* contribution to current critiques of nationalism.”¹⁹ Rather than naively trying to recuperate a lost pre-colonial past, these cultural texts attempt to imagine alternative modes of collectivity and social organization beyond the nation-state form imposed by Western colonization. Challenging what Gonzalez names “the Jones Law Syndrome,”²⁰ they imagine “a nation that is not like most nations we see today.”²¹ The “archipelagic poetics” of Filipino writers offer alternative understandings of nationalism and resist the colonial pedagogy at the center of US-Philippine relations and the establishment of a Philippine nation-state by drawing from “the archipelagic

¹⁷ Campomanes, “N.V.M. Gonzalez,” ix.

¹⁸ Ibid, ix.

¹⁹ Ibid, xv-xvi.

²⁰ “The Jones Law of 1916 was a colonial piece of legislation which deferred Philippine decolonization by enforcing a continuing period of American tutelage in liberal democracy and ‘representative government.’” Ibid, xii.

²¹ Ibid, xii.

and ethnolinguistic diversity of the country, its unusual series of colonial incarcerations, and the ultimate (im)possibility of Philippine nation-building given its ever-interrupted histories.”²²

I borrow from Campomanes’ discussion of the “archipelagic poetics” to discuss Filipino subjectivity and its imbrication with US history and the imperial archive through memory. I make the shift from poetics to memory to link diasporic Filipino representational strategies and aesthetics to emerging scholarship on decolonization and archives. In their article, “‘To go beyond’: towards a decolonial archival practice,” J.J. Ghaddar and Michelle Caswell state that archives act as “touchstones of memory and sources for the writing of history; as places of knowledge classification, organization and standardization.”²³ As such, they suggest new directions for a “decolonial archival praxis”²⁴ that include: preserving “those innumerable and intertwined material and immaterial traces left by anti-colonial figures and decolonial movements in the twentieth century,”²⁵ excavating the history of the other within the archival field, and “rethinking our notions of evidence.”²⁶ Similarly, Ricardo Punzalan, in “Archives of the New Possession: Spanish Colonial Records and the American Creation of a ‘National’ Archives for the Philippines,” discusses alternative historical sources like oral history: “in this context, the ‘archives’ exist not as recorded two-dimensional objects that may be stored or preserved in a repository, but as ‘acts’ that occur only within the realm of experience and in the memory of the members of these communities.”²⁷ By examining depictions of archipelagic memory in US Filipino literature and visual art against US imperial archives, we can better understand the ways in which US imperialism and colonialism shape historical institutions and

²² Ibid, xv.

²³ Ghaddar and Caswell, “To go beyond,” 79.

²⁴ Ibid, 79.

²⁵ Ibid, 72.

²⁶ Ibid, 78.

²⁷ Punzalan, “Archives of the New Possession,” 383.

understandings of the everyday experiences of diasporic Filipinos. In their representation of the material traces left by Filipinos in the US not indexed by imperial archives, which include home movies, photo albums, popular culture, and ephemera, the texts I engage with direct us to other, everyday examples of archipelagic memory, which demonstrate what Neferti Tadiar describes in *Things Fall Away* as “the representation of submerged historical experiences.”²⁸ And furthermore, following Martin Joseph Ponce’s conceptual framework in *Beyond the Nation*, I situate these texts within the US Filipino diaspora.

Shifting from “poetics” to “memory” also highlights the affective, non-linguistic and pre-discursive modes of identification and relation I attend to in my readings of diasporic Filipino texts. In her writing on trauma and lesbian public cultures, Ann Cvetkovich states, “In the absence of institutionalized documentation or in opposition to official histories, memory becomes a valuable historical resource, and ephemeral and personal collections of objects stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge” (8). Following Cvetkovich, I treat the writing of diasporic Filipinos as “archives of feelings”²⁹ that leverage archipelagic memories and undermine those national feelings and cultural practices privileged by the Imperial archive. The turn to memory and affect also follows Eve Sedgwick’s work in *Touching Feeling*. In her discussion of the work of Silvan Tomkins, Sedgwick describes “shame,” and “affect” in general, saying, “[i]n the developmental process, shame is now often considered the affect that most defines the space wherein a sense of self will develop.” She elaborates: “Which I take to mean, not at all that it is the place where identity is most securely attached to essences, but rather that it is the place where the *question* of identity

²⁸ Tadiar, *Things Fall Away*.

²⁹ “[A]n exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception.” Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, (7).

arises most originarily and most relationally.”³⁰ Sedgwick’s conceptualization of affect, in this case shame, externalizes it and locates it between subjects, rather than something that exists internally, individually, and privately.

My analysis of US Filipino culture examines diasporic depictions of family, friendship, grief, and intimacy, and contributes to feminist and queer of color scholarship. I demonstrate how US Filipino cultural production refuses “metroimperial intimacies,”³¹ or what Victor Mendoza describes as the modes of racial-sexual governance of early American empire in the Philippines, that constitute the imperial archive. Each of the texts in my study traces the historical endurance of this hegemonic relationship between the US and Philippines to their necropolitical expressions today, by defetishizing the archive and revealing simultaneously the power relations reinforced by archival practices and institutions, and those that are foreclosed and yet possible beside it. The relations engendered by US Filipino archival exclusion articulated by the creative interventions of Filipino artists and writers brings into relief the relations outside the institutional archives of American history.

In doing so, US Filipino cultural production imagines forms of anti-colonial conviviality that resist the US and Philippine nation-state’s systematic administration of violence through modern structures of militarization, policing, and global capital that are obscured by the imperial archive and its preservation of American benevolence and exceptionalism. In *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2004), Paul Gilroy discussed the idea of “conviviality,” which refers to “the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere.”³² Reframing discussions

³⁰ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 37.

³¹ Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacy*, 2015.

³² Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, xv.

of multiculturalism and its failures as the failures of liberal governance, Gilroy suggests that foregrounding conviviality “turns attention toward the always unpredictable mechanisms of identification.”³³ In each chapter, I discuss how the work of diasporic Filipino cultural production defetishizes the imperial archive’s circumscription of violence to the former colony and past as a symptom of American exceptionalism and shows how enduring structures of US colonial violence supported by the ongoing collaboration between the US and Philippine nation-states shapes practices of conviviality. With the global resurgence of right-wing nationalism where both the Philippines and the US find themselves under the sway of murderous populists turned president hell bent on violently cleansing their respective nations of those deemed inessential (drug users, people of color, Muslims, the poor, the working class, the disabled, women, etc. etc.) it becomes even more urgent that we seek out models of conviviality that sustains life despite American imperialism.

Despite the liberation of the Philippine archipelago from US control in 1946, literary and visual representations of Filipinos and the archipelago continue to reveal state-violence (i.e., war, militarization, national borders, and policing) as a constitutive element of American freedom and self-governance both in the Philippines and the US. In the context of the Philippines, state violence reveals itself as 1) the primary exercise of sovereignty and 2) the means of US-Philippine collaboration. Following the end of WWII, reconstruction in the Philippines was shaped by its colonial relationship to the US. The terms of our benevolent assimilation into the global order of Western power are exemplified by the Bell Trade Act of 1946, the Mutual Bases Agreement, and the Treaty Respecting General Relations, and Parity Rights, which have given US corporations and elites full access to the resources of the Philippines. The Philippine state

³³ Ibid, (xv).

was installed by US colonists and managed by land owning mestizos whose proximity to the colonial government allowed them access to a certain level of privilege. In a time of increasing global authoritarianism and violent nationalism, it is even more urgent that we develop ways of seeing and being political and in solidarity.

Reading US Filipino literature and visual art in this context demonstrates the political urgency of an archipelagic memory and its practice of envisioning what Lisa Lowe has suggested as the “political, sexual, and intellectual connections and relations among slaves, peoples of indigenous descent, and colonized laborers as an emergent ‘intimacies of four continents’” (19, 20). My examination of Suzara’s engagement with the history of the St Louis 1904 and the encounters between colonial subjects, for example, follows Danika Medak-Saltzman whose work also “seeks to provide a theoretical space where explorations of transnational Indigenous encounters can be undertaken to illuminate their significances and to highlight the intellectual possibilities opened up in the process.”³⁴ US Filipino cultural production pushes back against the imperial grammar of museums, archives, and anthropology, to show how, as Denise da Silva has argued, the sciences (here, archival and ethnological) produce knowledge about the human.

Chapter Layout

This dissertation examines four primary sources of US Filipino literature and visual art that depict US imperialism and its enduring structures of colonial governance, militarization, and policing and its hold on the diasporic Filipino experience in the US. The violent history of US colonialism in the Philippines, which is obscured by narratives of US exceptionalism, is animated in the work of US Filipino writers and artists through memories that draw together seemingly disparate events, places, and historical subjects to reveal the continuity of processes of

³⁴ Medak-Saltzman, “Transnational Indigenous Exchange,” 592.

Western imperialism from the early-20th-century onwards as the foundations of life in the imperial metropole. Analyzing depictions of archipelagic memory in the work of Marlon Fuentes, Aimee Suzara, Gina Apostol, Lesley Tenorio, and others, I show how early-20th-century US imperialism in the Philippine archipelago continues to shed light on diasporic Filipino experiences under modern US-Philippine relations as it is experienced in the US and Philippines. These representations of Filipinos living in the US and their everyday, intimate relationships not only show how the bilateral relations between two nation-states continue to inform practices of diasporic conviviality, which are shaped by historical structures and technologies of race, gender, and sexuality, but also suggest ways we might think and act reparatively³⁵ as it concerns the persistent traces of this past in the present.

Chapter 2: “they do not have to forget what they have never known”: Historical Distance and the Family Story at 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival and *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995)

In this chapter I discuss several essays published in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival’s 1998 program addressing that year’s collaboration between the US and Philippines and comparatively analyze it against the family story of Marlon Fuentes’ film *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995). To begin, I examine several essays written by Marion Pastor Roces, Richard Kennedy, and Ricardo Trimillos for the 1998 SFF printed program, which outline the historical conditions in which the SFF is responding to, how that problem was addressed in 1998, and its significance to Filipino

³⁵ “to read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did.” Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 146.

American youth today. These essays argue that through self-representation, cultural nationalism, and multiculturalism, modern Filipinos have responded to the harmful representations and displays of Filipinos that took place at the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904. In my analysis, I discuss the limits of a Liberal politics of self-representation and multiculturalism as it concerns representations of the Filipino subject in the US.

Following this discussion, I show how, rather than placing distance between itself and the past, *Bontoc Eulogy* insists on a kind of intimacy with historical forms of US imperial violence. I examine how the Filipino American children in the film encounter US imperial violence through the formal arrangement of archival material including film, photographs, home video, and scenes of the narrator researching the archive. In the film, the narrator tells the story of his immigration to the US from the Philippines, and his search for his grandfather, Markod, a Bontoc Igorot who was on display at St. Louis World's Fair of 1904, in US archives. I argue that the family story of *Bontoc Eulogy* is compromised by the imperial archive whose exclusion of the Filipino subject undergirds the film. As many have already commented, Markod, it turns out, is a fictional character and a figurative lacuna of the archive. But what this chapter does differently is examine the ways in which the film undermines heteronormative assumptions of assimilation by placing home videos of his American born Filipino children alongside the same early-20th-century colonial media. The depiction of the narrator's American born Filipino children show how the intimacy of domestic space is shaped by its relationship to the past, thus informing our understandings of family as it is informed by discourses of culture and national belonging.

Chapter 3: “we, living specimens”: The Anticolonial Poetics of Aimee Suzara’s *Souvenir* (2014) and Fred Wilson’s *So Much Trouble in The World—Believe It or Not!* (2005)

Aimee Suzara's poetry in her book, *Souvenir* (2014), undermines the imperial relations institutionalized in US museums. *Souvenir's* poems reflect on the influence of the 1904 St Louis World's Fair and the present through the speaker's encounters with the past. Across several poems, the speaker explores a museum and brings into relief a Filipino subject abandoned in the past and marginalized in the gallery space of the museum. Through appropriation, the poems take modes of museum description (wall labels, guides to the collection, etc.) and display to represent the relationship between the Filipina speaker, historical subjects, and museum publics. In my reading of Suzara's epistolary poem, "Dear, Ota Benga," I show how the encounters in the imperial museum contain potential for the speaker to form postcolonial collectivities. The speaker of this poem addresses a letter to Ota Benga, an Mbuti man who was also on display at St Louis in 1904. "Dear Ota Benga," reimagines friendship within the historical conditions of US imperialism to challenge characterizations of US-Philippine relations as a "friendly" military alliance. Instead, Suzara uses the grammar of the Missouri History Museum to speak to surreptitious historical subjects in the collections as she articulates an anticolonial poetics of relation between "we, living specimens."

Chapter 4: "Difference produces perspective": Stereographic Form, Grief, and the Insurrectionary Filipina Visuality in Gina Apostol's *Insurrecto* (2018)

In this chapter I discuss the stereoscopic narrative in Gina Apostol's novel *Insurrecto* (2018). *Insurrecto* follows Magsalin, a cosmopolitan Filipina translator and writer, as she escorts the American filmmaker Chiara around the Philippines and translates her movie script on the massacre at Balangiga, a deadly confrontation between US troops and Filipinos in Samar following the Philippine-American War of 1899. Weaving together three stories (a movie script, a translation of that script, and Magsalin and Chiara's road trip to Samar, Philippines) the second half of the novel tells a stereoscopic narrative of the massacre at Balangiga alongside a familiar

scene of Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte's drug war. *Insurrecto*'s stereoscopic narrative creates a sense of intimacy and subverts the imperial archive and photography through its own technologies. By holding historical scenes of state violence, like the Balangiga Massacre of 1901, in tension with more recent ones, like Duterte's drug war, *Insurrecto* brings attention to systems of necropolitical violence that are symptomatic of historical US-Philippine relations and expressions of diasporic grief.

Beginning with a discussion of Alexander Chee's concept of the "stereoscopic narrative," which is "the same story from two or more points of view,"³⁶ I describe *Insurrecto* as a text that, through an act of translation, provides two perspectives of the Balangiga massacre. Weaving together Chiara's script, Magsalin's translation of it, and the road trip the pair take to Samar, the second half of the novel brings into relief the imperial violence co-constitutive of modern US-Philippine relations and the cosmopolitan, diasporic Filipino subject's location within it.

The three stories alternate between each other, creating several timelines that intersect at their own scenes of violence spread out across the 20th and 21st century. In the case of the protagonists', Magsalin and Chiara bear witness to the murder of a father and daughter who are shot dead by two men driving by on a motorcycle. Reviews of the novel highlight the cinematic language of Apostol's writing, which is appropriate given the premise of the novel's plot. And because the visual is a major theme in the novel, my close reading attends to *Insurrecto*'s engagement with the stereograph as an archival problem and form of encounter at the site of state violence. I argue that *Insurrecto*'s stereoscopic narrative challenges the imperial archive's concealment of state violence to the past, through its depiction of diasporic grief, where the loss experienced by Magsalin, the cosmopolitan Filipina subject, is entangled with necropolitical

³⁶ Chee, *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel: Essays*, (222).

state violence in the archipelago, both past and present. To conclude, I will discuss the political stakes of this aesthetic practice as it concerns Rodrigo Duterte's drug war in the Philippines.

Chapter 5: “necessary gestures of everyday life”: The Politics of Queer Care in Lysley Tenorio’s “Save the I-Hotel” (2012)

In this chapter I read two short stories: Lesley Tenorio's “Save the I Hotel” (2012) and Mia Alvar's “Esmeralda” (2015). In the historical context of labor exportation in the Philippines, and the passage of the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 that allowed for family reunification, privileged skilled labor migrants, and new quotas for immigration, I discuss how contemporary literary representations of Filipino historical experience challenge neoliberal assumptions which center the relationship between individual subject and the nation-state. Literary depictions of relationships formed by diasporic subjects illustrate the appearance of neoliberal governance in everyday life through forms of state violence and neglect. In US Filipino cultural production, care is depicted as a reparative practice of diasporic conviviality that mitigates the routine harm administered by the nation-state. In “Save the I Hotel” and “Esmeralda,” I show how migrant Filipino subjects betray the violence of the US and Philippine modern nation-states through an archipelagic memory, which alternates between the US Filipino subject's present in the US and past in the Philippines. In each of the short stories, I examine queer desires that disrupt forms of heteronormativity institutionalized by modern nation-states through labor relations. Lysley Tenorio's short story, “Save the I Hotel,” follows Fortunado's relationship to Vicenete. Both Fortunado and Vicente are Filipino tenants of the International Hotel—a residential hotel in San Francisco's historic Manilatown, which housed mostly Filipino laborers starting the mid-20th century. This short story alternates between Fortunado's memory of coming to the Bay Area as a migrant worker from the Philippines in 1934³⁷ and his eviction from the I Hotel in 1977 with

³⁷ 1934 also marks the year the Tydings-McDuffie act passes, which legally makes Filipinos in the US aliens.

Vicente who now lives with memory loss in his old age. Set against the backdrop of a rapidly developing San Francisco and the emergence of an Asian and Filipino American political identity, this last chapter examines the subjectivities abandoned by the historical recognition of an Asian American political identity.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

To conclude the dissertation, I examine two Filipino American projects within the discourse of policing and community in Anchorage, Alaska, and the history of US expansion across the Pacific. These two projects, Theresa Bucholdt's photobook *Filipinos in Alaska: 1788-1958* and Nez Danguilan's tv show *Fil-Am Showtime* were produced by Filipino Americans in Alaska in the late 80s and early 90s. By reading them in this context, I show how Filipinos in Alaska contested discourses of policing by advancing a politics of respectability.

This dissertation centers literary and visual depictions of archipelagic memory in US Filipino cultural production in order to illuminate how the violence of Western imperialism and global capitalism structure the social lives of Filipinos the US and their relational practices, and how writers and artists push back against this. Through my discussion of Marlon Fuentes' film *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995), Aimee Suzara's poetry in *Souvenir* (2014), Gina Apostol's novel, *Insurrecto* (2018), and Lysley Tenorio's short story, "Save the I-Hotel" (2012), I show how US Filipino cultural production represents the Filipino subject's relationship to the historical past in ways that betray enduring structures of imperial violence. US Filipino writers and artists do this by exploiting the representational technologies, forms, and practices that were central in establishing a relationship between the US and Philippines. Many of the artifacts and technologies contained in the imperial archive, such as film, photography, and stereoscopes appear in US Filipino literature and visual art. By taking objects from the imperial archive, artists

and writers depict the foundational, imperial violence of US Filipino belonging and show how understandings of kinship and intimacy are shaped by it. I argue that this archival praxis roots their depictions of archipelagic memory to questions about national belonging and sentiment, state violence, and modern US-Philippine relations that are otherwise excluded from the imperial archive. These depictions of archipelagic memory challenge ideologies of American exceptionalism and liberal multiculturalism by articulating the historical and political structures shaping US Filipino subjectivity.

Chapter 2 “they do not have to forget what they have never known”: Historical Distance and the Family Story at 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival and *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995)



Figure 2 Scene from Bontoc Eulogy

In a scene from Marlon Fuentes’ film *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995), the Filipino American narrator shares his reflections on his American born children over what appears to be a home movie of them playing on a porch in a fenced-off backyard (Figure 2). He wonders whether they might be “fortunate because they do not have to forget what they have never known,” because, “this is the only life they know.” The mise-en-scène gives the viewer visual evidence to suggest that indeed they are fortunate: they are on private property and belong to an American family.

This domestic scene is full of promise for the Filipino, American-born children of *Bontoc Eulogy*, a promise predicated on an unknowing constituted by historical distance and spatial boundaries. The narrator's children, who are second-generation Americans, are fortunate because they are assumed to be a tabula rasa having never had to know the violence of American imperialism or its aftermath. And furthermore, these children are presumed to have access to an innocent childhood in America. Forgetting, and in this case "not knowing," is how the narrator's second generation Filipino American children are afforded the privilege and safety of citizenship and American belonging.

Bontoc Eulogy complicates this privileged second-generation scene of naive innocence by splicing together archival footage and visuals of early 20th century American imperialism in the Philippines to scenes of the Filipino American everyday captured in the home movie. The intimacy of the domestic scene depicting the narrator's children is compromised by the materiality of the film's composition and form, which use archival film and photography that also betrays the narrator's words. While the narrator describes his search for his grandfather, Markod, in the archive, the film situates the visual artifacts of Markod's archival presence beside vernacular documents of his children. As a vernacular mode of documentation, the home movie enabled people to record their daily, intimate lives and relations. It is primarily through the genre of the home movie that the Filipino American children come into historical contact with depictions of the Igorot that circulated in the early 20th century, thus suggesting the creative act of articulating family within American imperialism. This intimacy between scenes of the Filipino American family story and the imperial archive undermines any presumption of the children's American privilege that seem to dominate immigrant narratives and the pursuit of the good life. *Bontoc Eulogy* reveals how the imperial archive compromises such efforts for US Filipino

subjects whose attempts at national belonging and inclusion are complicated by the archive's foundation on racist colonial epistemes and expropriation.

This tension is at the heart of what I call *Bontoc Eulogy*'s family story. What makes the narrator's self-reflections on the imperial archive in relationship to his family especially effective is its deceit: at the end of the movie, it is revealed that Markod was entirely fictional. This irony places pressure on the borders of the imperial archive—affecting both what it contains and excludes—challenging our assumptions of what constitutes official historical evidence and documentation. The boundary between the imperial archive and the Filipino American everyday is troubled by *Bontoc Eulogy*'s family story and becomes porous by showing how both the historical and the everyday engender each other. The formal arrangement and splicing of vernacular imagery with fin-de-siecle imperial representations of the Philippines threatens the presumed safety and security of the Filipino American children by showing how historical distance, evidenced by visual ephemera and narrative strategies, are unable to resolve material problems like the imperial archive. That despite the promise of teleological history and neoliberal American empire, the Filipino American subject's conditions of belonging is betrayed by their relationship to the lived and ruinous materiality of war. In this chapter, I make the case for thinking about the problem of the archive and belonging under American neoliberal empire in terms of archipelagic memory. In this chapter, I discuss the imperial archive's relationship to the articulation of family stories in contemporary US Filipino cultural production, the discourse regarding US-Philippine relations, culture, and national belonging, and the need for material analysis and theory of the archive in its everyday appearances.

The cultural politics enacted by *Bontoc Eulogy* reveal a US Filipino subject at odds with nationalism and assimilation. This differs greatly from national articulations of US-Philippine

relations in the 1990s and the location of the Filipino American who is seemingly torn between the two. I situate my close reading of *Bontoc Eulogy* within this discourse through discussion of the 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival (SFF) to look at the stakes of articulating a national culture separate from the history of imperial violence, and the significance of Philippine participation at the 1998 SFF. The 1998 SFF printed program provides insight into the historical framing and political significance of Philippine collaboration. Reading the essays by Marion Pastor Roces, Richard Kennedy, and Ricardo Trimillos in the SFF's program, I outline several strategies of creating historical distance. Through bracketing, teleology, and immigrant temporal logics of generations the Festival organizers create historical distance between the SFF and popular American representations of its imperial subjects, colonial epistemes, and war. Furthermore, in the case of Trimillos, these narrative devices are used to locate the Filipino American subject in relationship to the US, Philippines, and national culture.

Comparing the SFF's 1998 printed program and the film brings into relief the cultural politics surrounding the Filipino American child within discourses of multicultural inclusion and national belonging. I show how the structure of the Filipino American family narrative is imbricated with the imperial archive and how this condition gives shape to the figure of the Filipino American child. Unlike the 1998 SFF, *Bontoc Eulogy* closes the distance between domestic scenes of the Filipino American everyday and imperial representations of the early 20th century through Fuentes' splicing. By playing home movies alongside historical visuals, Fuentes defetishizes the imperial archive to simultaneously reveal the power relations it conceals and mines it for its anticolonial possibilities.

Self-Representation Within Liberal Empire: Nation, Family, and Culture at the 1998 Smithsonian Folklife Festival

For every year since 1967, the Smithsonian has hosted the Folklife Festival (SFF) on the National Mall in Washington D.C. The SFF provides two weeks of programming that showcases a nation, region, or state and serves as an international exposition of living cultural heritage. In their Mission Statement, the Festival describes itself as an “exercise in cultural democracy” that allows “cultural practitioners to speak for themselves, with each other, and to the public.” By providing a national platform to display local, regional, and national cultural practices, the SFF fits into a Liberal cultural politics of diversity and multicultural inclusion emblematic of the 1990s that claimed minoritized difference as its own to bolster its authority as a cultural institution.

That year’s programming highlighted the cultures from the US state of Wisconsin, the Rio Grande, Baltic Nations, and the Philippines. The collaboration between the Philippines and the SFF in 1998 tested the political stakes of the Festival as revealed in the discursive maneuvers and tensions in framing the Philippine programming. Titled “Pahiyas: a Philippine Harvest,” the program demonstrated a shared national Filipino culture by displaying Filipino foodways, cultural practices, song, dance, and crafts on the National Mall in DC, *and* addressed the harmful legacy of the 1904 St Louis World’s Fair. Several articles published in the 1998 SFF Program Book discuss the cultural politics surrounding representations of the Filipino American subject within the US and how this is at odds with Liberal politics of self-representation and multiculturalism. Examining the articles written by Marion Pastor Roces and Richard Kennedy, I outline the historical conditions to which the SFF is responding (namely the 1904 World’s Fair), and how that problem is addressed in 1998. I’m attentive, especially, to the rhetorical space created in articulations of Filipino and American cultural identity and national belonging, and how American imperialism structures the discourse surrounding these cultural politics. Their

essays highlight the historical problem of the St Louis World's Fair of 1904 facing the US, Philippines, and US Filipino subject in regard to the Liberal politics of self-representation and multicultural inclusion. In each of the essays I close read, I show how time and distance are used to separate Filipino Americans from early 20th century imperial representations.

In her essay, "Rethinking Categories: The Making of the Pahiyas," Manilla based art critic, curator, and writer, Marion Pastor Roces discussed the Cultural Center of the Philippines' (CCP) collaboration with the Smithsonian and situates the Philippine program for the SFF in the context of "the 1998 century-mark of the declaration of Philippine Independence."³⁸ By focusing attention on the 1898 declaration of Filipino Independence, which declared the archipelago free from several centuries of Spanish colonialism, Roces avoids any explicit mention of American colonialism in the archipelago. The historical irony of the celebration in 1998, of course, is that less than several months following Philippine Independence from Western subjugation would be several years of genocidal war until 1902 which marked the beginning of several decades of American colonialism and state crafting on the islands. Following the Spanish-American war, the Philippines was ceded to America through the Treaty of Paris. This acquisition was thought of as a form of "benevolent assimilation" by those who supported American Imperialism.

Although we might characterize Roces' bracketing of the Philippine-American war and US colonization as an act of erasure, reading her text beside the imperial archive reveals moments of tension in the essay that resist ideologies of American Exceptionalism. In the postponement of American Imperial aggression and colonization in her essay's historical set-up, Roces reveals the conditions shaping this act of self-representation through her discussion of "categories" and critique of Philippine cultural display in the US. While the historical parameters

³⁸ Roces, "Rethinking Categories," 38.

of her essay preempts the Philippine-American War of 1899, the vestiges of American empire and colonialism appear in Roces' discussion of "categories":

For instance, separate historical experiences have heretofore justified the now-standard division of Philippine peoples into lowland Christians, Muslims, and highland 'pagan' or "tribal" groups. These categories, however, are not useful in understanding the cultural forms shared across contiguous areas of the Philippines.³⁹

"[S]eparate historical experiences," alludes to the episodic history of colonization in the Philippines by Spain and the US. The divisions that Roces writes about here are the enduring colonial and ethnological categories produced by colonial officials and administrators that produced the racializing discourse of the Philippines' racial and ethnic regime. The "now-standard division of Philippine peoples" mentioned by Roces, should be understood through the work of early 20th century American colonial ethnologists, like Dean C. Worcester and his report, *The Philippine Islands and Their People* (1899) and the project of American imperialism that used racial and ethnic regimes of difference to make sense of the archipelago and its subjects the core of US imperial statecraft in the Philippines. Worcester was a member of the First and Second US Colonial Commission in the Philippines. During his tenure as a colonial official, Worcester conducted ethnological research that constructed racial and ethnic distinctions, which described and ranked the groups of the Philippines from civilized to primitive.

The very divisions that Roces' mentions find their roots in this aspect of the colonial project. The ethnological divisions of the archipelago however, according to Roces, had been overcome through the formation of "Filipino-ness," or a national culture and identity of the Philippines. Roces states, "[o]ur nation is built on a fundamental...Filipino-ness."⁴⁰ Roces takes the 1998 Folklife Festival as an opportunity to represent a shared national identity and to,

³⁹ Ibid, 39.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 38.

“[s]ignal our arrival at a juncture in history where we can enjoy a complex understanding of the deepest sources of cultural pride.”⁴¹ Roces states that the 80 artists who shared their cultural practices at the 1998 Festival, “have in common a strength of character that has enabled them to meet the challenge of modernity by accepting and reworking certain aspects of it...Individually and as a group they lay to rest the weary stereotypes of the primitive or the abject rural peasant.”⁴² Philippine participation in the SFF provided an opportunity for the Philippines to perform and demonstrate its modernity by articulating a national cultural identity. The presentation of distinct regional and ethnic cultural practices through “Filipino-ness” to American audiences is accomplished through a narrative of developmental progress. My point here is to bring attention to the conflict between Roces’ “postcolonial fantasy” and neoliberal empire’s assimilation of Philippine acts of self-representation.

I also want to pause and acknowledge the historical complexity of the articulation of “Filipino-ness” as cultural nationalism. As Victor Mendoza argues in *Metroimperial Intimacies* at the turn 20th-century, the pensionados “indexed the very *emergence* of such biopolitical expression within the metropole at the turn of the century,” or rather the state and social prohibitions that constrained their intimate lives.⁴³ In regards to the traveling Igorot shows, Mendoza shows how the Pensionados used print culture to: 1.) counteract the representations of the Philippines circulating with the Igorot in the US, and 2.) set “themselves apart from those who were, they claimed, racially inferior”⁴⁴ including African-Americans, American Indians, and the Igorot. “Filipino-ness,” and I would extend this argument more broadly to a critique of cultural nationalism, absorbs the ethnological and colonial categories of pre-modern “primitive”

⁴¹ Ibid, 38.

⁴² Ibid, 40.

⁴³ Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies*, 171.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 171.

and “abject rural peasant,” under the rubric of the nation in order to demonstrate the arrival of a modern nation-state and Filipino subject within the US. As a strategy of American imperial statecraft in the Philippines and the index of modernity, the unification of the islands and its people became a standard of liberation, which in the Philippine context, Vicente Rafael describes as “the fundamental irony of Filipino nationalism. It has engendered militant resistance and remarkable acts of sacrifice and courage, just as it has provided an alibi for self-serving collaboration with new regimes and the systematic repression of those opposed to them.”⁴⁵ Similarly, I would also say that we see the postponement of American empire as co-constitutive of a Philippine cultural nationalism. The articulation of a national Philippine culture, or “Filipino-ness,” generates an image of a modern Filipino nation-state and subject free from the violence of American empire and its depictions of Filipino primitivity. Roces’ discussion of “categories” strategically tracks its formation as a colonial idea through its material production and circulation and responds to the conditions in which the organizers of the 1998 SFF were acting within.

Roces’ discussion is even more relevant to Philippine participation at the 1998 SFF if we remember the enduring history of human display and spectacle, which in Filipino / American Studies has typically been emblemized in the St Louis World’s Fair of 1904. Often described as a watershed moment in the representation of the Philippines and its autochthonous subjects to an American public, St. Louis drew large crowds to participate in the imperial spectacle of the indigenous, “primitive,” and “non-Christian” little brown brothers: the newly acquired subjects of an emergent American empire. While several ethnic groups from the Philippines were presented at St. Louis, the Igorot became synonymous with the imperial project in the

⁴⁵ Vicente Rafael, *White Love*, 13.

Philippines. Fair organizers described the Igorot as “head-hunters” and “dog-eaters” and promoted them as the Philippine exhibit’s main attraction. The Igorot, an ethnic group from the mountains of Luzon, performed their indigeneity and were managed by colonial officials alongside other ethnic groups from the archipelago and indigenous people from around the world. Those on display were often made to perform their cultural practices for American audiences, including song, dance, and food, much like the programming at the Folklife Festival.

Richard Kennedy’s essay, “Rethinking the Philippine Exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair,” frames the 1998 SFF within this “watershed moment” and the history of early 20th century American imperialism when he describes the 1890s, where “a spirit of adventure spurred economic and military interests to expand U.S. territory for the first time beyond its borders.”⁴⁶ Kennedy does this to acknowledge how the 1998 SFF programming would be sensitive to the Fair of 1904 and not “present these artists as representatives of stages of civilization.”⁴⁷ That is to say this mode of representation would not repeat the violence of 1904, nor have the same imperial motivations. Attributing this shift to the cultural landscape of the 90s, the SFF, and the collaboration between the US and the Philippines rather than the colonial motivations of the early 20th century, Kennedy envisions the Festival as a space for the Philippines to “be proud of the traditions of all its people and to let them speak for themselves.”⁴⁸ Kennedy’s gesture of liberal multiculturalism and inclusion, here, works to repair the imperial tension between the US and the Philippines through self-representation and is symptomatic of the US’s promise of Liberal Imperial violence. Philippine participation and organizing at the SFF is seen as an ameliorative to the racist foundations of US-Philippine relations and representation,

⁴⁶ Kennedy, “Rethinking the Philippine Exhibit,” 41.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 42.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 44.

finally allowing America to be forgiven of its historical wrongs. Imperial Liberalism redemption, here, operates transnationally and trans-historically in its rearticulation of the past and erasure of colonial harm in the present.

Kennedy's link to 1904 puts ethnic and racial categories at the center of the 1998 SFF-Philippine collaboration, which also circulated in the US through the cultural practice of live human display, a form of representation that turned colonial and ethnological discourse into spectacle and popular entertainment. Roces' essay also addresses to the 1904 World's fair when she discusses the presentation of the Filipino artists at the SFF: "[f]raming the artists in physical structures that inevitably are simulacra of fragments of home and perhaps in conceptual categories that do not resonate with the way the artists understand their own experience also leads to compromise."⁴⁹ Her comment on the interpretative design of the SFF Philippine "pavilion" is attentive to the historical conditions that give shape to self-representations of "Filipino-ness" in the form of the cultural display. Her critique subtly hints at the 1904 St Louis World's Fair without naming it. Her critique recognizes that unlike the early 20th century human displays, Philippine participation was organized by Filipinos themselves, which allowed for some creative control and agency under different historical conditions.

Roces' comment recognizes how the history of human spectacle shapes the interpretive design and meaning of the artists' participation and performance at the 1998 SFF and brings attention to its entanglement with American empire even in its narrative absence. The performance of "Filipino-ness" and her concern regarding its display are subject to the same imperial conditions which constrained the performances of Philippine subjects at early World Fairs. Rather than the distinct ethnic groups of the 1904 St Louis World's Fair, the Filipinos

⁴⁹ Roces, "Rethinking Categories," 40.

performing “Filipino-ness” at the SFF represented a modern Filipino cultural and national identity that somehow developed regardless of the country’s relation to the US. This tension betrays the conceit of Philippine Independence and her concept of “Filipino-ness,” a postcolonial, modern, and national identity unburdened by American empire by showing how it continues to be framed by the history. The traces of American empire and colonial influence in Roces’ essay troubles assumptions of a teleological narrative timeline from independence to nationhood.

While her archaeology of “categories” seemingly absents American empire in order to recognize Philippine independence from Spain, we might think of this omission as a curatorial strategy that leaves the knowing reader and audience to question it. Her attention to the Filipino SFF organizers design of the display leverages a critique against the enduring legacy of 1904. In addressing the practice of live human display and ethnographic spectacle, Roces curatorial critique shows: 1. How material practices (such as interpretative design) respond to historical problems in the present, 2. How those historical conditions materialize in the present (display), and 3. How self-representation enables those experiencing that legacy to address it.

Understanding the historical conditions Filipino Americans contend with (i.e., “categories”) and how those terms are shaped by the archive and endure, threatens all narrative attempts at articulating a postcolonial Philippines, even in 1998. The articulation of national identity through national culture at the 1998 depends on discrete notions of nationhood (i.e., the Philippines as one freed from American Imperial influence, and the US as no longer an empire) which any acknowledgement of American imperialism contradicts. In different ways, the authors frame the SFF’s Philippine program through an elision of empire and its violence as a condition to understand modern Filipino representation and the formation of a Filipino American subject:

one, by postponement in the case of Roces' contribution, and two, by the progressive narrative of multicultural inclusion and self-representation underlying Kennedy's. The significance of the 1998 SFF and Philippine participation tells us something about understandings of national belonging and culture as a site to contest history. Both authors suggest that Culture is the sphere in which historical and political tensions can be resolved through self-representation. For Roces this is accomplished through the bracketing of American empire to articulate a modern Philippine nation-state, and for Kennedy it is through the acknowledgement of the historical conditions shaping "Pahiyas" and (re)claiming of Filipino self-representation which redeems the US.

"Filipinicity," Assimilation, and the problem of the Archive at the 1998 SFF

Although the strategies of Roces and Kennedy differ, they both address a similar problem: the enduring cultural representations that shape understandings of national belonging, modernity, and the nation-state. The promise of forgetting alleviates the imperial subjects, such as the Filipino, of historical burdens. In the case of the Filipino subject, forgetting operates as the means by which American imperial violence becomes benevolent (i.e. war and colonialism are the means by which the Philippines becomes independent and free), and the Filipino subject is freed from harmful historical representations of the primitivity. Reading Roces and Kennedy's essays beside each other restages the historical problem of St Louis 1904 and the history of American Imperialism at the 1998 SFF. "Pahiyas" provided a national platform for the Philippines and US to reenact the display of Filipino cultural practices, but under the rubric of multicultural inclusion and self-representation.

Similarly, but on a different scale, Ricardo Trimillos' essay in the catalog, "Filipino-American Youth Performing Filipinicity," discussed the subject of the Filipino American child

and family and the relevance of the 1998 SFF. Trimillos states that the significance of “Pahiyas” to Filipino American youth was that it provided “resonant moments of encouragement and self-recognition,”⁵⁰ thus bringing the national framing of the SFF to focus on the family and Filipino American youth. By providing an opportunity for Filipino American youth to identify with positive displays of Philippine national culture, the 1998 SFF allowed for their family to facilitate the exchange. Rather than national culture and display resolving the historical problem of imperial representation, Trimillos shows how the family is tasked with the responsibility of assimilating the child into American national culture.

Trimillos’ essay outlines the relationship between immigration, the family, national belonging and culture through the discourse of assimilation. He states that, “[a]lthough the early migrants were mostly male, they were eventually followed by couples and entire families.”⁵¹ This statement refers to the legal apparatus of immigration law that developed in the 19th century to limit and prevent the migration and settlement of Asian people into the US. As a gendered discourse, immigration law also restricted the immigration of Asian women. For example, the 1875 Page Act restricted Chinese women from immigrating to the US who were seen as “undesirable” by the law. Immigration law, then, has always been a legal apparatus that was simultaneously a racial, gendered, and sexual mode of subjectification and exclusion that established national borders. Trimillos’ statement echoes this history in the narrative progression from Filipino male migrants, bachelor societies, couples, and families, which supplies a heteronormative telos paralleling the national narrative of modernity outlined by Roces and Kennedy. Rather than articulating national relations, Trimillos formulation shows how the move from imperial abjection to multicultural celebration coincides with the heteronormative

⁵⁰ Trimillos, “Filipino American Youth,” 56.

⁵¹ Ibid, 53.

disciplining of the Filipino American subject, where assimilation into the US is narrated through a logic of sexual development.

Freed from the legal burdens that barred the formation of a normative nuclear family structure, the Filipino American family of the 1998 SFF is depicted as a modern development. Because of this, the Filipino American family of the essay functions as an institution for passing on a reclaimed national cultural heritage as ethnic authenticity to identify as American citizens. In “Filipino-American Youth Performing Filipinicity,” the function of the Filipino American family is to facilitate the reclamation of imperial culture for Filipino American youth who are figured as a problem. Like the other authors, Trimillos sees the historical context of the 1998 SFF as breaking from early 20th century imperial culture by providing Filipino American youth the opportunity to identify with positive representations:

Strategies for identity formation in America have been both proactive and defensive, the former arising from pride in cultural achievement and the latter from anxiety about cultural loss through assimilation. Instrumental to both strategies, folk dance is the oldest and most widespread focus for Filipino identity. Organized by adults for their children, the dance represents a community-based grassroots effort to maintain identity. Filipino youth come together (under watchful parents, of course!), participate in cultural learning, and garner positive recognition from non-Filipinos through public performance.⁵²

What Trimillos outlines here is a Filipino American politics of cultural nationalism through which Filipino American youth are assimilated into the US by identifying with Filipino national culture. The family, specifically the Filipino American family, acts as a mediator for Filipino American youth to transmit authentic ethnic national culture to resolve the tensions created between the encounter with the US and the Philippines. For Trimillos the Filipino American family serves a disciplinary function, taking on the tutelary position of early-20th-century colonists to produce proper US liberal subjects. Cultural transmission through the family is

⁵² Ibid, 54.

means through which the Filipino American subject is assimilated by identifying with Filipino culture to “garner positive recognition from non-Filipinos.” This formulation of cultural identity, heritage, and politics represents the Filipino American subject as split between choosing either Filipino culture and authenticity, or assimilation into American culture and citizenship. For Filipino American youth, he states, “[a]ssimilation looms large. Among early immigrants its pull was very strong. Its forces had already been at work in the homeland: an American-based public education system, a U.S. style democracy and a high degree of English fluency.”⁵³ Recognizing the American influence of imperial education in the formation of the Filipino subject, Trimillos sees the recovery and adoption of “authentic” Filipino culture as decolonial practice.

Trimillos develops the concept of “Filipinicity” to describe the subject position of Filipinos and Filipino Americans in diaspora. He states:

The Centennial celebration itself problematizes identity for Filipino-American youth. It raises issues about the two relevant countries—one, the source of ethnic heritage, the other, the place of citizenship. U.S. intervention in the Philippines a century ago interrupted the development of an independent Asian nation. However, that intervention enabled today's youth and their forbears to become part of American life. Fil-Am identity emerges directly from the complex commingling of these two national and cultural streams. We hope that Filipino-American youth will find in our Festival program, Pahiyas: A Philippine Harvest, resonant moments of encouragement and self-recognition.⁵⁴

“Filipinicity” describes a diasporic dilemma in which the Filipino American subject is split between the Philippines and the US. Between the Philippines, the source of national cultural heritage, and the US, the grantor of citizenship, the Filipino American subject is rendered as culturally detached from the Philippines, and alien to his country of citizenship. For Trimillos, the significance of the 1998 SFF is that it offered a vision of Filipino reclamation of an ethnic representation for Filipino American youth and allowed for a space to facilitate cultural

⁵³ Ibid, 56.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 54.

transmission to assimilate the Filipino American child. Assimilation of the Filipino American subject, as I've demonstrated in my discussion of Roces and Kennedy, is dependent on erasures of her historical conditions of emergence. In Trimillos' writing, that same strategy is brought into intimate contact with the Filipino American family who repairs the damaging imperial representations of Filipinos from the early-20th-century.

The 1998 SFF printed program demonstrates, if anything, the persistence of US imperial representations that inform our understandings of cultural identity, its formation, and national belonging for Filipino and Filipino American subjects. Trimillos and the other authors envisioned the 1998 SFF as an opportunity to rename the historical relationship between the US and the Philippines through Filipino-ness and Filipinicity, both of which. What is curious about Trimillos' closing statement is the description of the Spanish-American War as an "intervention" that enabled Filipino American youth to "become a part of American life."⁵⁵ Ambivalent sentiments like this, I worry, normalize and accepts the violence (i.e., militarization, policing, environmental destruction) that secures the privilege of American life.

Trimillos' hopes resonate with the narrator's reflections in *Bontoc Eulogy* regarding his second-generation Filipino American children who might be "fortunate because they do not have to forget what they have never known," because, "this is the only life they know."⁵⁶ One crucial difference between the two, however, are their depictions of the family. Where Trimillos depends on a logic of heterosexual development and immigration, *Bontoc Eulogy* draws its resources from the history of early 20th century representation to show how the material conditions of American imperialism and violence was and continues to be abetted by cultural representations that shape understandings of the family. In his search for his Igorot grandfather

⁵⁵ Ibid, 56.

⁵⁶ Fuentes, *Bontoc Eulogy*.

in the archives, the narrator reveals the impossibility of recuperating his family genealogy from the imperial archive, except through creative means. The incomplete family genealogy and deceit of the film renders the Filipino American family as an aspirational, imperial fiction.

Whereas the authors of the 1998 SFF printed program imagined the Filipino and Filipino American subject moving away from the past, *Bontoc Eulogy* demonstrates its hold on the Filipino American family story. In *Bontoc Eulogy*, Liberal understandings of representation, cultural identity, and national belonging are problematized by the film's formal strategies of archipelagic memory. The distinction between "Culture" and "Archive" is troubled by the film's autoethnography of the archive, wherein which the narrator documents and reflects on the living culture of the imperial archive and his own family. What the film shows is not a contained past, but one that is ever present in the depictions of the diasporic US Filipino subject today. *Bontoc Eulogy* is significant because it shows us how to use the materiality of the Filipino American everyday to: 1.) understand the enduring conditions of American empire and 2.) show strategies of engaging with the imperial archive.

***Bontoc Eulogy* and the Betrayal of the Family Story**

Marlon Fuentes was born and raised in the Philippines. He is a visual artist who works with film and photography. In the US, his work has been shown in the Smithsonian and the National Museum of Art. *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995) is his most well-known film and has been shown at festivals, exhibits and theaters in North America and the Philippines. Piecing together recollections of his childhood, home movies of his children, alongside historical footage, the narrator tells a family story of war and immigration. The film takes the audience from the 1898 Philippine-American war and the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair as the narrator attempts to find evidence of his grandfather, Markod, a Bontoc Igorot who was on display at the Fair, in US

archives and museums. Near the end of the film, viewers watch as the narrator wanders around the Mutter Museum of Medical History and the Smithsonian archives. In a scene that alternates between images of head hunting and bodily remains on display in the museum, the film entangles the narrator within this story of spectacle, anthropological study, and imperial violence preserved by US cultural institutions.

By the end of the film, the audience also becomes aware of the film's deceit: *Bontoc Eulogy* and the narrator's grandfather are all fictional. *Bontoc Eulogy* is a film that was celebrated as an experimental documentary, blurring the lines between fiction and authenticity. In an interview published in *Amerasia Journal* titled "*Bontoc Eulogy*, History, and the Craft of Memory: An Extended Conversation with Marlon E. Fuentes," Mia Blumentritt asked Fuentes about his approach to the archive as an artist when creating the film. Fuentes responds by saying, "I wasn't working as a scholar, but as an artist. Therefore my own definition of authenticity was somewhat flexible. There were realistic economic and time constraints to my fetishism for historical accuracy."⁵⁷ Fuentes here, confirms that his artistic approach to the historical record relies on a creative non-fiction. Also, this interview deploys Fuente's representational strategy: Blumentritt, the interviewer whose bio is provided in the published interview, was completely fabricated by Fuentes, much like Markod.

It is also possible/likely, that the name "Mia Blumentritt" is a reference to Ferdinand Blumentritt, a friend of José Rizal. According to Paul Kramer, Blumentritt maintained correspondence with Rizal when he returned to the Philippines. What's also interesting about Blumentritt is that he wrote about the Philippines while never visiting the country. This deceit

⁵⁷ Blumentritt, "Bontoc Eulogy," 127, 128.

leads the reader to question the authoritative voice of the interview genre and perhaps the reliability of its speakers.

Writing about the cultural politics surrounding the history of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair and *Bontoc Eulogy*, Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns warns that "[e]ven as 'family,' 'individual,' and 'travel' become analytics that counter the logic of muted Filipinos-as-objects on display, one must equally navigate between positing the World's Fair as a personal experience and erasing the historical condition of colonialism that made '*nikimaliká*' possible."⁵⁸ Burns describes *Bontoc Eulogy* as, "a fictive/experimental documentary that explores the search for identity, the blurred line among fiction, history, and authenticity (represented in the film as 'ethnographic materials'—film, photos, memories), and exposes the tension between narrative and facts."⁵⁹ Cautioning against the redemptive use of the family to retell the history of St Louis 1904 as anything other than a violent prop for American imperial racism, she discusses how *Bontoc Eulogy* treads the line between sentimentality and revealing the imperial structure of Filipino American representation.

In my reading of the film, I discuss its use of the imperial archive to undermine the very sentimentality Burns warns against. The film's family story betrays itself as fiction (i.e. Markod's existence) and undermines white, heteronormative understandings of family by centering the US-Philippine imperial archive in the narrator's articulation of his immigration, children, and grandfather. Lured in by the sentimentality and intimacy surrounding his family story, viewers are brought into contact with the imperial archive. In blurring the distinctions between undermine its authority and the authenticity of its evidence. In doing so, *Bontoc Eulogy*

⁵⁸ Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte*, 33.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 33.

shows how these feelings are not singular or private experiences, but socially and historically contingent upon US state violence and political exclusion.

Through the imperial archive of US-Philippine relations, *Bontoc Eulogy* reconstructs the genealogy of a Filipino American subject born from American imperial war and ideology. In the opening scenes, for example, the audience sees a sequence wherein Marlon Fuentes sits in front of a gramophone, listening to ethnographic recordings of indigenous music and interviews from the archipelago. Centering the relationship between the imperial historical record and the filmmaker, *Bontoc Eulogy* explores the material traces and memories excluded from the imperial archive.

One of those stories is the complicated immigrant story of *Bontoc Eulogy*. The beginning of the film opens with scenes of the narrator's children alternating between family photos of the narrator in the Philippines. Voiced over this sequence is the narrator, who tells the audience that it has been 20 years since he has left the Philippines without ever having returned. He also introduces the audience to his children by telling us that, "[t]hey were born here in America. It is their home, and the only life they know. Perhaps they're fortunate because they do not have to forget what they have never known." This optimism is central to the immigrant narrative crafted by the narrator. He goes on, stating: "In the beginning, I lived in two worlds. The sights and sounds of my new life and then the flickering after images of the place I once called home." These tropes of the immigrant family story (i.e. the better life, being torn between "two worlds" etc.) are soon complicated by "flickering after images," which the narrator speaks over as he recounts memories from his childhood.

As archival ethnographic film plays on the screen, intermingling the personal with historical images of the Philippines from the early-20th-century, the narrator states, "home is

what you try to remember, not what you try to forget,” and follows by asking “what is the source of this talent of forgetting?” The irony of the narrator’s lines becomes apparent in these opening scenes through the imperial archive, which figures here through the inclusion of US produced ethnographic films. As an institution that is so often characterized as obscuring or concealing the Filipino subject, the imperial archive appears here as constitutive of Filipino subjectivity, memory, and belonging in the US. Playing over a scene of Catholic Filipinos inflicting ritualistic self-flagellation for Holy Week, the narrator states, “[w]e Filipinos wear this cloak of silence, to render us invisible from one another, yet it is the very thing that makes us recognize each other. After all, in this act of hiding we are united, we are invisible, except to one another.” The narrator’s hopeful personal story of immigration, which is rooted in the imperial archive, is soon undone by the material facts of Western colonization.

While some of *Bontoc Eulogy* does use archival footage, it also uses “home footage” and memories in the film, thus troubling the epistemological authority of ethnography and the imperial archive by putting it in direct conversation with the narrator’s life story. Highlighting the tension between documentary evidence of everyday intimacy and early-20th-century visual ephemera of American imperialism raises questions about the authenticity and authority of the ethnographer, documenter, or witness. Furthermore, bringing attention to the shared historical conditions of US Filipinos in diaspora, *Bontoc Eulogy*’s auto/ethnography also limns the invisible and spectral “I” of ethnography, whose absence is constitutive of the method’s objectivity and truth-effect. The narrator states, “[t]o survive in this new land, we had to forget” and declares the urgency of remembering: “One day I will be gone and these memories will be lost.” These stories of contact, arrival, and belonging are important to the narrator because of the home he has provided for his children in America. He asks: “Why did we leave our home? Why

have we come to America? Why have we chosen to stay? What are the stories that define us as people?” Following this series of questions, the narrator tells a mythological story about a moon woman who accidentally cuts off the head of a sun god’s son. The sun god then resurrects the son and tells the moon woman that because of her mistake, humans will be forced to cut off each other’s heads until the end of time. As the narrator tells this story, the audience watches a scene of the narrator’s two children dressed up as magician and assistant, performing a magic trick, and pulling a white rabbit out of a hat. It is unclear where this mythological origin story of headhunting and conflict comes from, but what this sequence demonstrates are the limits and importance of memory and storytelling as a critical creative practice and intervention in the imperial archive.

The story at the center of *Bontoc Eulogy* follows one of the narrator’s grandfathers, Markod, a Bontoc Igorot who was on display at the St. Louis World’s Fair of 1904. His story is told alongside the narrator’s research on the live display of Igorots in the U.S. Rather than redeeming negative early-20th-century representations of indigenous subjects from the archipelago, the film uses archival footage in order to tell his Filipino American family story. This strategy, as I’ve been suggesting, brings attention to the historical conditions that engender Filipino American family stories and relations.

Bontoc Eulogy’s family story leverages the imperial archive to trouble normative understandings of the family and home through its depiction of the narrator’s Filipino American children while also challenging the authority of the archive and its materials. Fuentes’s duplicitous family story shows the Filipino American family is both racialized by histories of empire and excluded from the normative family structure and its claims to national belonging. The narrator’s failed attempt to reconstruct a genealogy through the archive of early 20th century

imperial representation troubles politics of inclusion, assimilation, and visibility by revealing the ways in which Filipino recognition is imbricated within imperial visual culture. *Bontoc Eulogy* engages with American archives and cultural history of imperialism to exploit their gaps and reveal American power in its various articulations of the Filipino American subject. By centering and tracking Markod through national archives, museums, and the St. Louis World's Fair, *Bontoc Eulogy* betrays the family story thus problematizing assimilationist projects that seek to include the Filipino American within the history and fabric of American life in its erasure of the Igorot. At odds with the inclusive framings of Philippine participation at the SFF, the film instead shows us the multiple relations and subject positions constituted by the archive: the narrator, the grandfather, and the children are all bound to the archive, which acts as a narrative anchor.

The incomplete Filipino American family genealogy renders the Filipina American child in a state of arrested development through the figure of Markod, who comes to represent her primitive past as one of America's imperial others. Rather than operate within the framework of Liberal, white, heteronormative representational politics of inclusion and assimilation, the narrator's family story shows how these political values are secured American imperialism and racism. By producing gaps in the Filipino American subject's family tree, the lacuna, represented in the character of Markod, serves as a lost object at the heart of the Filipino American family story. There is something to be said about the ways in which the Igorot, figured through Markod is problematically claimed through Filipino American framings of the St. Louis World's Fair as a point of identification. The display of Igorot practices, particularly dog eating and headhunting, were perceived to be negative by elite Filipinos whose commitment to national self-determination meant colluding with the colonial project of producing a primitive in need of saving. In *Bontoc Eulogy*, the narrator says he knew some of his family were Igorot, but only

ever learned about them from history and pictures. The film itself assembles some of the visual representations from the American colonial period in the Philippines, including vernacular and popular genres of visual culture, ethnographic film and photos.

On Archival Inclusion

When the narrator reflects on his American born children, saying, “perhaps they are fortunate because they do not have to forget what they have never known,”⁶⁰ he speculates on the possibility of his children being unburdened by history, however impossible this might be. As I’ve shown, this fantasy is compromised by the very archives the narrator uses to find his grandfather, and the history and violence those archives preserve through ethnographic visual artifacts. The placement of early-20th-century ethnographic film and photography in *Bontoc Eulogy* frames the documentary’s family story, thus showing how imperial violence gives shape to Filipino subjectivity and relationality. *Bontoc Eulogy*’s weaving of American empire’s visual repertoire with, for example, footage of Filipino children playing, the narrator searching in museums, and dramatized reenactments of Markod at the 1904 World’s Fair is the material practice of taking the narrator’s intimate relationships and embedding them in this history.

Scenes depicting the two children isolate them to what appears to be a fenced off backyard. These scenes all appear to be home movies. There are several of these domestic scenes woven throughout *Bontoc Eulogy* that show the children playing together in the yard on a swing set, putting on a magic show, and looking through viewfinders. The sentimentality of these scenes of wonder and naivete, as I’ve been suggesting, are haunted by the traces of Markod and the archive. By placing home movies next to fin-de-siecle imperial representations of the Philippines, Fuentes stages an encounter between the imperial archive and *Bontoc Eulogy*’s

⁶⁰ Fuentes, *Bontoc Eulogy*.

Filipino American family for the viewer. In these scenes, the Filipino American subject's relationship to the archive undermines the narrator's presumptions of his children's ignorance and innocence by showing their imbrication with the early-20th-century ethnographic footage.



Figure 3 scene from Bontoc Eulogy

Analyzing the figure of the Filipino American child in *Bontoc Eulogy* finds commonality with the queer children of Zamora Linmark's *Rolling the R's*. Finding resonance between fin-de-siècle anti-imperialist humor with that in *Rolling the R's*, Victor Bascara reveals the contradictions of American empire theorizes what he calls "our present's queer modernity, a



Figure 4 scene from *Bontoc Eulogy*

discontented stasis that may have outlived its usefulness”⁶¹ through the novella’s depiction of the Filipino American children. He states, “[q]ueer modernity...is an American formation, or more precisely, it is in the service of the maintenance of the American superpower.”⁶² Building off of that, Eric Estuar Reyes looks at “how these writings imagine possibilities outside the teleology of American developmentalism that binds Filipinos in America under a ‘strategy of containment.’”⁶³ Reyes states, “Linmark’s text is not a typical *bildungsroman* that portrays the linear development of dissonant youth into assimilated and civilized adulthood. Rather, it features a group of youth endowed with all the seemingly ‘adult’ powers of self-awareness, insight into social and institutional power, and ability to critique and rearticulate those forces.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Victor Bascara, *Model Minority Imperialism*, 118.

⁶² *Ibid*, 118.

⁶³ Eric Estuar Reyes, “American Developmentalism,” 119.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 120.

Bontoc Eulogy shows how the American ideology of benevolent assimilation is coextensive with the narrator's hope for his children's life in the US through the film's representation of the family story. For example, when the narrator reflects on his childhood and learning of the Igorot in class, the film weaves together a scene of archival footage of indigenous subjects from the Philippine archipelago coming out of a nipa hut (Figure 3) with the young girl crawling out of a large dollhouse (Figure 4). Alternating between historical ethnographic film and home movies of his children, the narrator entangles the history of ethnographic representation with this domestic scene.

What is striking about this sequence is its depiction of artifice. The young girl appears in a dark room, moving in and out of a large dollhouse. The dollhouse itself appears to be merely a frame of a house or simply an incomplete prop. What's more is that the young girl is too big for the dollhouse, giving the viewer somewhat of a surreal, Alice-in-Wonderland-like impression. This depiction of the young girl alerts the viewer to the film's fiction, while also suggesting the creative direction surrounding the ethnographic film featured in *Bontoc*. We can see historical examples of this in *Bontoc Eulogy*'s use of footage produced by Edison Films depicting the Battle of Manila Bay, which were themselves recreations of a navy battle. The historical footage featured in this sequence appears almost comical and barely rehearsed in relation to the "home movie" as we watch Filipino after Filipino coming out of the nipa hut, and a child just barely struggling to come out of a dollhouse.

In seeing the imperial frame of the Filipina American child of *Bontoc Eulogy*, we might find new ways to relate to the historical materiality of early-20th-century American imperialism by framing them with our stories. Through the Filipina American child in *Bontoc Eulogy*, we can also see how this is addressed not through the redemption of the imperial archive, but by seeing

life beside it. This sequence ends with the young girl getting out of the house and exiting the frame. What new perspectives does the Filipina American child offer by wandering away from the archive. What does the peripatetic subject take from her encounters with the imperial archive? Though her playing in a dollhouse might have visual/formal resonance with the archival footage, it is the material placement of both visuals beside each other that undoes the borders between the archive and the everyday.

Conclusion



Figure 5 scene from Bontoc Eulogy

Bontoc Eulogy's intervention does not attempt to repair the violence constitutive of the imperial archive and Filipino American national subjectivity, but rather allows us to see ways of living that have been allowed to take place beside it. The family narrative brings attention to the (irredeemable) problem of the imperial archive for the US Filipino subject. The limits of

narrating American belonging through the family within a (neo)liberal multicultural politics of assimilation are revealed by placing the family story beside the imperial archives of American violence. *Bontoc Eulogy*'s family story shows how the imperial archive frames the everyday, and troubles understandings of the US Filipino subject's national belonging, home, intimacy, and kinship. Articulating this location beside the archive allows the narrator a critical position to attend to his concerns for his children's future. Being beside the archive also shows how through efforts to contain the archive or redeem it, like at the SFF, we are unable to see how US state-violence and its attendant ideologies continue to give shape to the Filipino American experience, culture, and family. Rather than detaching or separating from the archive, *Bontoc Eulogy* shows us multiple Filipino American subjects and their encounter with the imperial archive. Filipino Americans/imperial subjects participate in shaping those understandings as well by bringing attention to the problems of the archive through practices such as Fuentes' ~~auto~~ethnography of the archive.

As *Bontoc Eulogy* ends, the narrator ominously states, “[p]erhaps my children, or my children’s children will” find Markod, while the audience watches the children looking through a camera towards the viewer.⁶⁵

I would not characterize *Bontoc Eulogy* as a form of self-representation, because the “self” curiously falls away, I think it does bring attention to the problem of representation and authenticity by showing how visual documents (imperial film, photography, home movies) are themselves creative works of meaning making. For America’s racialized others, the act of reclaiming damaging or negative representations is complicated by the liberal imperative of representation itself. Through my close reading of the narrative and material practices I show the

⁶⁵ More in-depth discussion of the stereographic form in Filipinx American aesthetics see my fourth chapter.

persistent materiality of American imperialism and its archives and how this complicates postcolonial projects of self-representation and national belonging. What the film does instead is reveal the archive as the cultural heritage of the Filipino American child who is beside it. The Filipino American subject's entanglement with the historical structure of American Imperialism demands new optics for reading and creative strategies for depicting the Filipina American subject. I've outlined how a material reading strategy that is attentive to the archive's power to shape our understandings of subjectivity in relation to the racialized heteronormativity, undermines projects of imperial nationalism and challenges Liberal logics of visibility.⁶⁶

The Filipina American subject offers a different relationship to St Louis 1904 and the imperial archive. I argue that the Filipina American subject affords us strategies beyond an inclusion/exclusion binary, which I explore in the next chapter, “‘we, living specimens’: The Decolonial Poetics and Museum Collectivities of Aimee Suzara's *Souvenir* (2014),” through my close reading of Suzara's poetry in *Souvenir* and Fred Wilson's art installation, *So Much Trouble in the World—Believe it or not!* I continue my thinking around the Filipina American subject and archipelagic relationality in Suzara's *Souvenir* where I investigate the spatial and material poetics of the museum, the Filipina American subject's experiment with form, and modes of anti-colonial relationality.

⁶⁶ “I am describing not just a mode of critique that discloses the heteronormative logics that govern the production of racial and cultural difference, justify the imposition of colonial rule, found patriarchal nationalisms, or pave the road to smooth assimilation, but a practice of connectivity, of seeking out relationalities that form beyond the strictures of normative social boundaries.” Martin Joseph Poncé, *Beyond the Nation*, 232.

Chapter 3 “we, living specimens”: The Anticolonial Poetics of Aimee Suzara’s *Souvenir* (2014) and Fred Wilson’s *So Much Trouble in The World—Believe It or Not!* (2005)

At the 1904 St Louis World’s Fair, subjects of the Philippine archipelago were put on display for American audiences who were eager to see those whom the US had recently acquired, following the Spanish-American War of 1898. Organized by ethnological categories under the Philippine pavilion at the Fair, they came to represent the some of the ethnic subjects in need of American political tutelage and discipline. With significant financial support from the Smithsonian and US Federal Government, the Philippine pavilion at the World’s Fair was the largest exhibit on the pike that year.

In this chapter, I discuss the Missouri History Museum’s (MHM) 2004 exhibit, “The 1904 World’s Fair: Looking Back at Looking Forward.” The MHM was founded by the Missouri Historical Society (MHS) in St Louis in 1866. The purpose of the Museum was, to quote the founder of the MHS, Elihu Shepard, to save “from oblivion the early history of the city and state, but more particularly that of the city.”⁶⁷ The MHM and its collections would later be housed in the Jefferson Memorial Building, which was built in 1913 and funded through the revenue generated by the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. The Jefferson Memorial Building became the permanent home for the MHM and its collection of Missourian history and, later in 1925, materials related to the Louisiana Purchase and westward expansion.

⁶⁷ Missouri Historical Society, “History of the Missouri Historical Society,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://mohistory.org/society/missouri-historical-society-history>.

The institutional foundations of the MHM and its collecting practices are imbricated within the project of early-20th-century US expansionism. In this chapter, I analyze the MHM's mission statement and 2004 exhibit, "The 1904 World's Fair: Looking Back at Looking Forward." Discussing the Museum's representation and narrative framing of the 1904 World's Fair, I show how the language of the exhibit privileged the perspectives of white, American subjects as their audience, thus making it coterminous with the aspirations of Fair organizers at the turn of the 20th-century. I discuss how the exhibit represents the Fair's vision of the future as the contemporary audience's historical present by disentangling white American futurity and subjectivity from global and historical processes of imperialism. My intent is to show not how museums simply reify imperial ideologies, but rather how museums exhibit their collections in ways that obscure the imperial provenance and historical context. Putting the MHM exhibit in conversation with contemporary US Filipino literature and visual art, I explore creative practices that challenge the institutional foundations of imperial museums by highlighting "primitive proximities."⁶⁸

In the second part of the chapter, I discuss the poetic appropriations and subversions of Filipina American poet, Aimee Suzara, which challenge the imperial museum's "visions of the future." I show how Suzara's poetry book, *Souvenir* (2014), depicts the Filipina American subject's disorienting museum encounters to bring attention to immanent anticolonial social relations within the imperial museum by appropriating its textual forms of description (i.e., wall text, labels, collection guides, archive records, etc.). In doing so, Suzara's poems reveal a tension between the hegemonic relations established by imperial museums through their exhibits, and how those relations are exhibited and displayed for the public. Her experiments with poetic

⁶⁸ Sarita See, *The Filipino Primitive*.

forms occasion an opportunity to envision anticolonial relations within the imperial museum that depart from the Museum's foundations in white settler-colonialism. By way of conclusion, I will situate my reading of *Souvenir* beside artist curator Fred Wilson's installation, *So Much Trouble in the World*. In doing so, I explore an aesthetic point of convergence between poetry and visual art that intervenes in museum collections. I discuss how Wilson also plays with museum relationalities and imagines anticolonial collectivity through existing museum collections. Through the curation and display of busts created by Caspar Meyer at the 1904 St Louis World's Fair, Wilson's intervention demonstrates an aesthetic of anticolonial curation that exposes the relationships between viewers and historical subjects that structure whiteness in the museum.

Missouri History Museum - Mission Statement and the 1904 St Louis World's Fair

A museum's operative framework can be found in their mission statement. According to the American Alliance of Museums, a museum's mission statement is a core document that "articulates [their] educational focus, purpose, and role, as well as its responsibilities to the public and its collections." Furthermore, a mission statement "drives everything the museum does; vision, policy-making, planning, and operations."⁶⁹ The Missouri Historical Society (MHS) and MHM's mission statement reads: "The [MHS] serves as the confluence of historical perspectives and contemporary issues to inspire and engage audiences in the St. Louis region and beyond."⁷⁰ Their mission statement is also followed by several core values: foster community engagement, lead education and exploration, strive for excellence and expertise, commit to stewardship and sustainability, honor inclusivity and collaboration. The MHM's mission statement and stated core values articulate a commitment to prioritizing historical approaches to

⁶⁹ American Alliance of Museums, "Developing a Mission Statement," accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/developing-a-mission-statement-final.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Missouri Historical Society, "History of the Missouri Historical Society," accessed August 9, 2021, <https://mohistory.org/society/missouri-historical-society-history>.

displaying its collections to understand current events and remain relevant to both local audiences and those beyond. This can be seen in past exhibits, such as “Lost Buildings of St. Louis,” “The Louisiana Purchase,” and more recently “#1 in Civil Rights,” an exhibit displaying the city’s rich history of civil rights activism, presumably, as a direct response to the 2014 protests in Ferguson regarding the murder of Michael Brown by racist police officer Darren Wilson, and the national presence of Black Lives Matter.

Reading the MHM’s mission statement in relationship to its historical foundations and collections (i.e., the 1904 St Louis World’s Fair and westward expansion) reveals a tension within the museum’s contemporary goals of celebrating diversity, inclusion and community engagement. Although the mission statement and core values prioritize their relationship to the surrounding St Louis community, this raises problems for members of the community who are or have been excluded from the history and cultural imaginary of St Louis and the US. An example of this can be seen in the MHM’s 2004 exhibit, “The 1904 World’s Fair: Looking Back at Looking Forward.”⁷¹ The accompanying text of the exhibit states fairly clearly who is centered in this historical narrative: “an exploration of the aspirations and visions of the future held by the men, women, and children of 1904.” The exhibit opened on the centennial anniversary of the Fair in 2004, and was described as, “[f]ar more than a nostalgic journey” and examined the planning, organizing and promotion of the Fair through discussions of visual culture, technological advancements, and industrialization.

Underlying America’s technological and industrial growth at the turn of the 20th century was a colonial project of westward expansion and imperial war, which the exhibit minimized. In doing so, the Filipinos brought to St. Louis as part of America’s mission of “benevolent

⁷¹ Missouri History Society, “The 1904 World’s Fair,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3jTi4dy>.

assimilation” had been effectively excluded from the exhibit’s “visions of the future.” This narrative exclusion was also exemplified in the exhibit’s design where the colonial/imperial others were displayed on the periphery of the exhibit. Where the exhibit does address the display of Filipinos, it suggests it would be anachronistic to describe the human displays at the Fair as racist. The exhibit website states, “[a]lthough understood today as an expression of the Fair organizers’ blatant racism, at the time the Anthropology Department’s ‘living displays’ reaffirmed the basic belief in the superiority of industrial civilization, which lay at the core of the Exposition’s appeal.” Rather than viewing racism as integral to the development of industrial civilization and global capitalism, the Museum’s description of the Fair brackets this conversation altogether by using ethnological display and spectacle as an example rather than a constitutive element of modernity and the progress of civilization. To position ethnological spectacle and imperialism as a symptom of the organizers’ own biases, rather than a systematic effect of the spectacularization of colonial knowledge extraction and violence, places distance between the viewer of the exhibit who inhabits a nation founded on and bolstered by colonization and imperial war.

The historical narrative articulated by the exhibit cleaves the Fair from projects of national expansion and war while also marginalizing those who were displayed as ethnographic spectacle. The MHM’s exhibit on St Louis reproduces the Fair’s “vision of the future” by failing to consider how that project was supported by American expansion, imperialism, and war. What is surprising about the exhibit is the lack of critique regarding the Fair that scholars of 1904 St Louis have, at the very least, been reiterating since the 1984 publication of Robert Rydell’s *All the World’s a Fair*. It’s not a secret or difficult to see how exactly the Fair was a racist spectacle that propped up the expansion of America’s burgeoning empire, but then again, the exhibit

design might have been shaped by the beginning of the US Iraq War in 2003 and the resurgence of American imperial national pride or the often-used excuse of “pleasing donors,” which museums never cease to tire of. Whatever the case may be, the exhibit seemed to have missed the opportunity to fulfill the institution’s own mission: to serve “as the confluence of historical perspectives and contemporary issues.”

Recent scholarship in Asian American studies examines the continuing relevance of US museums in shaping the experiences of Asian America as a site of power in the institutional and cultural landscape of the US.⁷² As Sarita Echavez See has shown, the imperial museum has proven to be an under theorized, and unexamined institution when considering the cultural history of American empire. See argues that the imperial archive operates as a mode of knowledge accumulation dependent on notions of the racial primitive.⁷³ See’s critique of the Museum as an imperial institution situates museums and their collections within the context of American history. Similarly, Lisa Lowe asserts in her review of *Made in the Americas: The New World discovers Asia* (2015), curated by Dennis Carr at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, “museums are not static repositories or collections. Much like archives assembled by national libraries, historical societies, or colonial states, museums are cultural institutions that mediate shifting local and national interests and powers.”⁷⁴ Conceptualizing museums in this way allows for a reexamination of the museum’s many functions and epistemological authority. Furthermore, doing so raises questions concerning the provenance of the collections and the relations of power between colonizer and colonized, which they are symptomatic of. For example, Lowe states:

⁷² See also the work of Jack (John Kuo Wei) Tchen, Lisa Yoneyama’s *Cold War Ruins*, and Scott Laderman’s, *Tours of Vietnam*.

⁷³ Sarita See, *The Filipino Primitive*, 2.

⁷⁴Lowe, 418.

In the museum, an asymmetrical relationship between the collector and the collected, the viewer and the viewed, is at work; objects are taken out of time and history, placed in glass cases and staged to be viewed within a tableau of new meanings. Museums naturalize the authority of the sponsoring culture through normative standards of classification, selection, and display, and they solicit the public as viewers of the objects collected. In this sense, museums are a material pedagogy that positions not only subject and object but also defines the past and present, the living and the dead⁷⁵

Lowe brings museums' "material pedagogy" under scrutiny, arguing that museological practices and exhibitions orient viewers to objects in a way that is also about the construction of an historical narrative. Museums in this sense become institutions of accumulated relations authorized to produce historical narratives.

Aimee Suzara and the Imperial Museum: The Filipino American Subject

In an essay titled "This is American History," Filipina American poet Aimee Suzara reflects on Filipino American History Month. Speaking to the question of the Filipino American subject in American History, she asks: "[w]hy am I still expected to represent 'my' people? Shouldn't YOU be reciting these histories, too? This goes not only to my white friends, but to my fellow Pinoys and other people of color, whose histories all intertwine with my own." Suzara begins the essay with an anecdote from her high school World History class and the privileging of Western Europe to the exclusion of Asia, Africa, Central and Southern America. Reflecting on that experience leads her to the observation: "We do not include Filipino American History in American History." The erasure of Filipinos from American history ignores American imperialism in the archipelago, and Filipino American resistance to American hegemony and power. For Suzara, American history should be understood as one that is not bound to the borders of North America. Instead, she invites us to think critically about the borders of American history by discussions of centering settler-colonialism, empire, and power.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 419.

Suzara's poetry provides an opportunity to consider alternative historical subjects and relations marginalized by the MHM to envision latent anticolonial relations within the museum. Unlike the MHM and the 2004 centennial exhibit celebrating the 1904 World's Fair, the subjects Suzara foregrounds are the colonial others on display in 1904, and the speaking subject's encounter with them. Instead of distancing herself from the past, the speaker of Suzara's poems articulates an unsettling intimacy with it that is facilitated through her encounters in the museum. The speaker's encounters are represented through the appropriation of museological forms of description (like the label, the guide, the list, etc.) and experimenting with alternative modes of description (dreams, field notes, ekphrastic writing, etc.), thus bridging the personal with the museum, and situating herself within it. These encounters take place in the "contact zones"⁷⁶ of the imperial museum, which take shape through the research and curatorial functions of the institution.

Using a kind of ethnographic style, the poems' speaker documents and guides the reader through the imperial museum, collections, and Suzara's own personal biography as a Filipina immigrant in America. While charting the speaking subject's itinerary and encounters with the early-20th-century in the Missouri History Museum and research library, Suzara also brings the reader through her own westward migration from the East Coast of the United States with her family as a child. Her story of migration mirrors that of Westward Expansion and Manifest Destiny, exemplifying Suzara's poetic strategy of flipping, wherein the speaker of her poems uneasily follows the path of American history, and also complicates her own positionality as an imperial subject on colonized land. As a Filipina living and settling in the US, her poems raise

⁷⁶ Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone" offers a theory of transculturation and cultural exchange. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

questions about the limits of imagining decolonial relations on colonized land through the framework of national belonging and history.

Suzara's opening poem, titled "Objects and Artifacts," questions the MHM's dominant narrative and relations through the entanglement of the personal with the historical and within the museum and gallery space. In the poem, the speaker describes her experience in a museum gallery of early 20th century imperial ephemera. The first stanza of "Objects and Artifacts" places the speaker of the poem among "a maze of glass cases" with "a lace-up dress stretched over a headless bust" and her "ruddy face reflected/in the glass." The disorientation of the speaker lost in this "maze," is emphasized by the question "[a]nd which is the ghost: this colonial woman, / headless, eyeless in her eyelet dress, or me, gazing back?" In this moment of alienation from her reflection, the speaker asks in the final quatrain: "If I were there:/1904, a souvenir:/Which suit would I become? /Which number?" Here, the use of the lyrical "I" entangles the speaking, Filipina American subject with the historical traces of imperial culture in the gallery space of the museum. The encounter with inert, historical remnants allows for a confrontation between the colonial woman of the early 20th century and the Filipina American subject who questions her relationship to her reflection and the colonial woman in the display. What unsettles the speaking Filipina American subject is her proximity to colonial femininity and her appearance as the colonial woman. "Objects and Artifacts" renders this encounter and relation as both alienating within the space, and defamiliarizing for the poem's speaker. The museum and gallery space facilitates an encounter between the past and present for the speaker who questions her own "ruddy reflection" and the colonial woman as ghosts. This "haunting"⁷⁷

⁷⁷ In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon notes that "If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition in one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or

becomes a transformative moment for the speaker who becomes alienated at the sight of the colonial woman and herself as an imperfect reflection--in this display, the speaker has a hard time seeing herself. Rather than envisioning the museum as a site of identification and subject formation, the speaker of this poem experiences an unsettling moment in the gallery space that troubles her understanding of self.

“Objects and Artifacts” stages a series of relations between a colonial woman, reflection, and self to reveal how the museum’s curation of objects and subjects assert and reify particular historical narratives and relations. The speaker’s ambivalence indexes her discomfort at the possibility of interpellation as a colonial woman herself. In this sense, American belonging for the Filipina subject is met with ambivalence. Suzara’s poem deviates or offers another perspective and experience than that designed in the MHM’s permanent exhibit “The 1904 World’s Fair: Looking Back at Looking Forward.” In an exhibit meant to speak to white visitors and St. Louis, the speaker of the poem is not interpellated by this display as much as she is disturbed by it. This unsettling feeling allows space for the speaker, however, to question her relationship to colonial femininity. This poem raises questions about the privileged relations and viewpoints in the museum space and authorized historical narrations about the 1904 World’s Fair through the experience of temporal collapse for the Filipina American subject who feels the past haunting the present she is lost in.

Poetic subversion: Flipping Accumulation and Transparency

If “Objects and Artifacts” depicts the Filipina American subject’s encounters in the galleries of the imperial museum, Suzara’s poem “Catalog of Objects” turns to its collections and

apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.” Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.

library, or rather the research functions of the museum, to explore the museum as a site of knowledge production. In the poem, “Catalog of Objects,” Suzara plays with the tensions between race and collections in the museum. The poem provides two lists of the MHM’s collection, a description of the space, and a description of a dream. The structure of the poem alternates between list, description, and dream, to create a sense of symmetry or a reflection between the first half of the poem and the second. This mirroring effect of the poem also blurs distinctions between the museum and the outside, object and imperial other, reality and dream.

Catalog of Objects

- 1 Bahag
- 1 Skirt
- 1 Beaded bag
- 2 Beaded necklaces
- 3 Carved statues of the rice god
- 1 Set of Filipino playing cards

You walk into the Missouri History Museum. You see white everywhere: alabaster casts of women in Victorian dresses, plaster infused with “staff” from the Philippines. Lion heads and the columns of the Palace of Fine Arts. Victorian men and women sit atop elephants, smiling in tall black hats and mustaches and finely pressed jacket, brown men on either side. The placard marked “Labor” shows Africans and Asians bent over to build, to clean, to make the Fair grand.

You dream that night: statues a creepy feel swimming in dark waters I touch warm flesh underwater underfoot find out they’re dead recently dead lots and lots of stairs two six-year-old boys they want me to follow them the bus is waiting I’m lagging like I don’t want to go the bus is parked above lots of steps it’s really hot moving slow there’s a woman who likes me slippers on slippers off I can’t find mine now a movie theater and behind the theater a shopping market

- 2 Bontoc Head Hunters
- 1 Visayan Girl
- 1 Geisha Girl
- 1 Esquimaux Family
- 1 Hoochie Coochie Girl

You see the daguerreotypes of Filipinos, Native Americans, Eskimos, Arabs, and Japanese, assembled in one cluster on the wall. Nearby, you see playing cards of

Filipinos and a beaded Bagobo dress behind the glass case. You see your face reflected in the glass

In the first half of the poem, the reader encounters a list of material objects followed by an account of the museum. This first description remarks on the whiteness of the museum: alabaster, Victorian dresses, lion heads, columns, and Victorian men and women. These white objects make up the museum's structure and core audience. From the Western classical architecture, the mannequins modeling clothing, and the "Victorian men and women," this description brings attention to the various ways whiteness is displayed throughout the museum.

Juxtaposed to the whiteness of the museum are the peripheral objects and racial others. The first description ends with "brown men on either side" of the people riding elephants, and "Africans and Asians" who built the fair. From here, the poem transitions from the idyllic MHM to a nightmare as material reality. In this nightmare, the poem's subject finds herself among dead bodies floating just beneath the water. This move suggests something beneath the surface of the Museum's facade and outward appearance: the containment of bodies from history.

Much like recollecting a dream, the description leaps from scene to scene without any rhyme or reason until we are confronted, again, with another list. This list is an inventory of ethnological types, which is followed with a description of several daguerreotypes and objects on display. The last description of the poem, the speaker documents the assemblage of daguerreotypes depicting Filipinos, Native Americans, Eskimos, Arabs, and Japanese, and again her own reflection. Here, the poem's subject sees her own reflection among those represented in the daguerreotypes and collected by the museum, thus positioning herself among the marginalized subjects of the MHM's gallery space.

The juxtaposition of the first half of the poem with the second reveals critical parallels drawn by Suzara that highlight the MHM's objectifying structures. These lists demonstrate

Suzara’s use of the poetic device of appropriation and accumulation in a way that undermines the museum’s “primitive accumulation.”⁷⁸ Reviews of *Souvenir* comment on the poetic strategies used by Suzara, as well, including Caribbean Fragoza’s in the LA Review of Books that states, “[i]n her book of poetry, *Souvenir*, Aimee Suzara unapologetically reclaims these relics — the stuff of museums, libraries, and archives — and reassembles them to break old historical narratives and sing life into new ones.”⁷⁹ Reclaiming and reassembling the remnants of early 20th century American material and visual culture, Suzara’s poetry re-articulates dominant historical narratives and, more compellingly, imagines the possibility for new ones. In her confrontations with the institutions that collect, preserve, and display this history (i.e., museums, libraries, and archives), she interrogates dominant historical narratives that center American power and the uneven global relations it produced and relies upon. Her strategy of reclaiming and reassembling also reveals the power relations within institutions of public history and their unquestioned status through experiences of alienation and defamiliarization. By articulating a tension between the personal and the historical, Suzara’s deviation from historical conventions and her use of an archival methodology allows her work to undermine the hegemony of scientific racism and its vestigial claims on the Missouri History Museum and research library to “make a case against history and its makers.”⁸⁰

Other poems, like “IN THE LABORATORY OF THE ST. LOUIS WORLD’S FAIR,” list names and ages of people on display interrupted with measurements and vital categories. Commenting on the poem, “The Laboratory of the St. Louis World’s Fair,” Fragoza states, “[r]ejecting such popular scientific pretense, Suzara empties out the numerical data and fills in

⁷⁸ Sarita See, *Filipino Primitive*.

⁷⁹ Caribbean Fragoza, “Imperial Mashup,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/imperial-mashup-aimee-suzaras-souvenir/#!>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

the blanks with the names and ages of individuals. She pronounces their names like incantations, attempts to re-flesh the bones, reanimating the silenced.” This poem appropriates the methods and epistemology of early 20th century scientific racism, specifically ethnology, and challenges its logic and authority. A consistent theme in *Souvenir*, the production of scientific racism and its circulation in popular American culture at the turn of the century is questioned in several poems. Suzara’s disruption of ethnological data and anatomical information is also a disruption of the imperial museum itself as the two histories are intertwined. Poems like this and “Catalog of Objects” appropriate the museum’s inventory to reveal the parallels made between material objects and human subjects within the imperial museum, and in doing so expose the racist and objectifying function of human display.

The other critical effect of Suzara’s appropriation is opacity. The subject of “Catalog of Objects” referred to through the second person “you,” obscures the boundaries of subject and object, and speaker and reader, through descriptions of the museum and her dreams. The poem describes two scenes: 1. The whiteness of the museum (alabaster, plaster, columns) and 2. The darkness of a dream (night, dark waters, being lost). The juxtaposition of these descriptions creates a sense of tension and disorder, between waking life and dream, white and black. And, being placed between the two lists emphasizes the poems obfuscation of the poetic subject discussed earlier. Her disruption of the museum catalog with a dream creates a sense of opacity that undermines the imperial archive’s claims of transparency and objectivity. When considering the two descriptions together, we see an articulation of the museum in relation to the history of live human display. Upon entering the Museum, the speaker states “*You see white everywhere.*” Alabaster casts of women wearing Victorian dresses, columns and statues of lions, men and

women riding elephants. The whiteness of the MHM is juxtaposed with the accrual of its racialized, imperial others, in which the speaker sees herself.

Digging through the archives and collections, the assumed objectivity of the museum is taken to task in Suzara's poetry. Commenting on this, Janice Sapigao's review of *Souvenir* in TAYO Literary Magazine states, "[t]he notes seem to call for transparency from curators and archivists, but it may not always make intentions clear or okay. The speaker investigates and researches for transparency against the displays, acts, dances, rituals, and the overall production, against those who authored Filipino-ness. Transparency troubles and is not performativity; what is performed is not true, nor real."⁸¹ Speaking to *Souvenir*'s poem, titled "Museum Notes," Sapigao comments on Suzara's attention to this question of "transparency" in research and practices of knowledge production. I would extend Sapigao's observation to Suzara's critical representations of ethnology and the museum. *Souvenir*'s poems demonstrate transparency's entanglement with power as an epistemological technique central to American empire's production of its subjugated others. The opacity of Suzara's poetic subject resists the imperial project of producing a knowable Filipino subject and a cultural politics of visibility and representation. Suzara creates a disruptive aesthetic to reveal the violence of the imperial museum and archive that blurs the boundaries between object and subject, between the past and present, and unsettle the museum's primitive accumulation.

"There is a common residence in the destroyed body": Reading Relationalities and "On Solidarity After Ferguson: A Filipino-American Perspective"

"Catalog of Objects" also lays the ground for exploring the relations between those displayed within American imperial spectacle. In the first description of the poem one line reads:

⁸¹ "Aimee Suzara's *Souvenir*," accessed August 1, 2019, <http://www.tayoliterarymag.com/reviews-2/2014/12/14/aimee-suzaras-souvenir-by-janice-sapigao>.

“The placard marked ‘Labor’/shows Africans and Asians bent over to build, to clean, to make the Fair grand.” This line in the poem suggests that the very conditions which have produced the imperial subject, also produce the conditions for relation. Suzara’s poetic representations of museum relations intervene in the imperial museum’s display of the colonizer - colonized dyad implicated in the history of American empire by articulating relations between colonized subjects engendered by the history of American imperial spectacle.⁸² Suzara’s engagement with the imperial museum explores modes of articulating the Filipino American subject within the conditions of the imperial museum, and through its relation to others caught in the imperial gaze.

In her essay, “On Solidarity After Ferguson: A Filipino-American Perspective,” Suzara reflects on her relationship to the writings of Black American authors, like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Maya Angelou. Commenting on the resonances between Black experiences in America and the peculiar position of the Filipino on the color line at the turn of the 20th century Suzara states, “[i]n these histories I discovered how the machine of racism functioned; it recycled old tropes and racist language in the ever-pursuit of dehumanization” (284). What Suzara identifies in the shared history of racial subjugation are the system and mechanisms of racism. Suzara states:

[b]ut here is the connector: in the common experience of a system that would exploit the possibility of power over another, would reduce a human to an object or an animal or machine to produce its food, run its machinery, raise its children. *There is a common residence in the destroyed body.* I know that there is a machine to all of this violence. There is a language and abuse of power that subjects brown and black bodies to literal and figurative death—in the American imagination and in fact.⁸³

⁸² See Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* and Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* for a similar discussion from a postcolonial, French Caribbean context.

⁸³ Suzara, “On Solidarity,” 284.

Suzara observes how the racial formation of blackness and the grammar of anti-blackness was grafted onto the American imperial project in the Pacific, which is an idea she also takes up in *Souvenir*. Poems like “With Compliments” reread archival objects for the “strange affinities”⁸⁴ between the primitive Philippine subject of American empire and black subjects. The poem references the cover art of the June 11th, 1898 issue of *Judge* magazine (fig. 1), which portrays a concerned caricature of Uncle Sam holding a crying, black/dark skinned child in native costume in the foreground. The child, kicking and screaming, is tagged with a label that reads “Philippines: with compliments of Dewey.” And in the background of the image, we can see naval ships bearing American flags. Below the image, the caption reads, “INFORMATION WANTED: Uncle Sam - “Now that I’ve got it, what am I going to do with it?”

With Compliments

*Written to the image in Judge, June 11, 1898 entitled:
“Now that I’ve got it, what am I going to do with it?”*

Uncle Sam’s
angular hands
curve round
black bum

ankle bracelets of bronze
jangle
to the rhythm of kicks and sobs
lipstick lips outline

black open mouth;
viscous tears
snake over ebony cheeks
over garland of broken shells

over poor Philippine baby
kinky hair and bulbous head
rocking, rocking
paper flapping

⁸⁴ Hong and Ferguson, *Strange affinities*.

on a thread
like a flag or
A morgue tag:
“Philippines

with compliments of Dewey⁸⁵

Suzara’s “With Compliments” animates the visual grammar of the image with sound and movement and resists the racist representation of the Philippines. The first stanza guides the reader around “Uncle Sam’s/angular hands/curve round/black bum.” The contrast between Uncle Sam’s angular hands against the “round/black bum” create a dissonance between the first two lines and the last two of the stanzas. “[B]racelets of bronze/jangle” with consonant rhyme of “bracelets of bronze” that “jangle/to the rhythm of kicks and sobs.” This poem gives life to a subject marked dead-on-arrival. The musicality of the poem animates the Philippine caricature, transforming him from a crying child to one resisting Uncle Sam’s groping hands “to the rhythm of kicks and sobs.” Suzara’s animation of this imperial image “reads” the racist visual culture of the early 20th century through a decolonial ekphrasis that transforms the cover art from static history, into one open to interpretation and creative intervention. Suzara reads the caricature of the Philippines as a point of convergence between the visual grammar of anti-blackness and the Philippine caricature to envision a resistant colonial subject.

⁸⁵ Suzara, *Souvenir*.

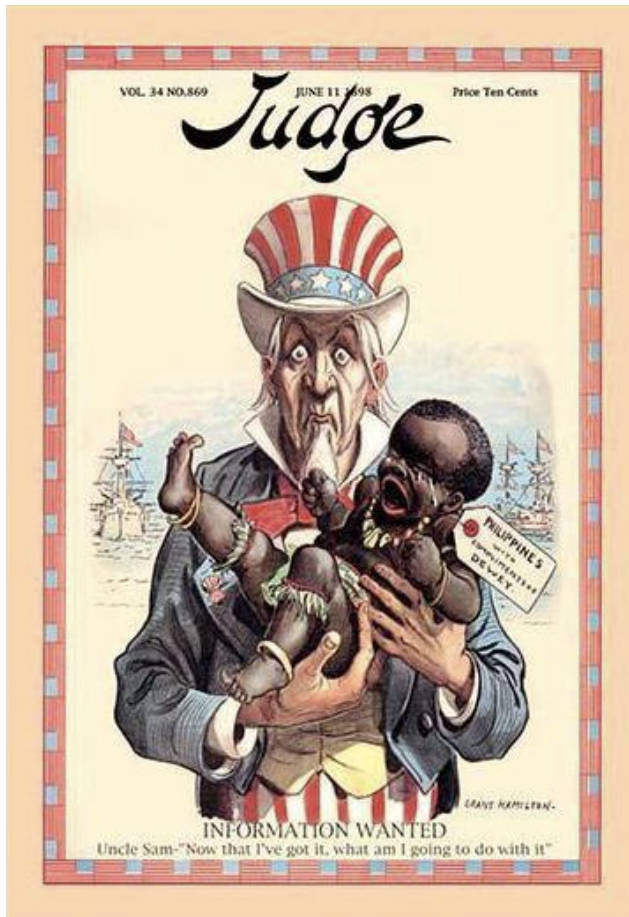


Figure 6 Cover Art of the June 11th, 1898 Issue of Judge Magazine

In her review of *Souvenir Sapigao* asks, “[i]f Filipinas/os could ‘talk back’ to history, that is, if Filipinas/os learning their history became appalled at what they were learning, what would they say about what they see? What mistreatment and slow heartbreak would they witness by doing research, visiting museums in the Midwest, looking at exhibits through glass, and finding some semblance of themselves in library archives?” Her questions are a response to Suzara’s idiosyncratic creative process and approach to writing history. And while Suzara’s poetry explores these questions regarding “Filipinas/os,” I would argue that it does so beyond the position of “Filipinas/os learning their history.” As Kenji Liu’s review of *Souvenir* at The Rumpus states, “[i]n all, *Souvenir* is an exhibit that talks back, one that admits its own tenuous

hold on authority by offering up multiple viewpoints.”⁸⁶ By imagining the multiple subjugated positions inhabited by America’s colonial others, the polyvocality and “multiple viewpoints” that *Souvenir* articulates gives it its critical force. With a cast including the speaker of the poems, Antero, Ota Benga, and other figures of early 20th century American empire, *Souvenir* explores the historical figures and relations foreclosed or silenced by the archive. Suzara’s complex treatment of her subjects is not always transparent or ideologically pure, especially in her poems about Antero. For example, in the LARB review, Fragoza states, “[h]istories of empire are full of complex figures like Antero. They are the translators, straddlers, negotiators, and bridgers between worlds. They are guides who take people from both sides down trails they carve as they go.” *Souvenir*’s ambivalence towards historical figures, such as Antero, is indicative of the complex negotiations of power and the intricacies of US Filipino historical experience.

In her epistolary poem, “Dear Ota Benga,” Suzara writes a letter to the title’s namesake that explores the complicated relationship between colonial subjects. Benga was an Mbuti man from the Congo who was on display at the St. Louis World’s Fair of 1904. After the Fair, he was held at the Bronx Zoo where he shared a pen with an orangutan. Depicted as a primitive, racial other, his sharpened teeth, and half-naked body drew in spectators at the fair and zoo. “Dear Ota Benga” addresses the cruelty and dehumanizing machinery of global white supremacy, while also attempting to speak across difference. The letter addressed to Benga spans “a century and this country.” The speaker of the poem recognizes both the distance and shared unfamiliarity with Benga, which is in opposition to the letter, an intimate form, a tension that is further emphasized by the letter’s signature from an unnamed writer.

Dear Ota Benga,

I am writing you across a century and this country

⁸⁶ <http://therumpus.net/2014/09/souvenir-by-aimee-suzara/>

where we are both strangers. Why am I disinterring you
to put you in a book next to Antero and El Captain
and the many unnamed subjects made to dance and fight
and craft and speak, show off your teeth, befriend
the very ones who mocked you? Measured each day
to demonstrate that you were the link
between humans and apes.

The skull, nose, cheekbones, shoulders, sternum,
the breadth of your hips, the length of your legs,
your height, your wide and muscled feet,
all of your physique, like ours, taken apart
under the glass, we, living specimens. And the joy the scientists
must have felt to discover “proof” of their superiority! But you
kept faith that even in the most devilish men there was still
something human. Your captor, dubbed savior, who took you

from the Congo, was supposedly a friend. It’s not much different
now, Ota, or should I call you Sir, what they likely never granted
as they locked you up with the monkeys. Today
we’re still measured, mocked. The pictures impossible
to become, unless we should stop eating, peel away our skin,
inject ourselves with whitening drugs, put plastic over our eyes
in unnatural hues; set scalpel to our curves, pump botox into fissures,
we are told to aspire to nothing less than figures of wax,

airbrushed and retouched. We sing American pop songs, always
we can sing and dance. In your later accounts, you fall into depression.
Who wouldn’t? Though the photos only show your rows of sharpened
teeth glinting in a Cheshire grin. You hoped to return one day to the Congo.
I imagine how you must have felt. You could never go home,
and preferred to die instead. Who would do otherwise, in your position?
Humiliated in the press, infantilized, demoted to animal by the crowds,
poked and prodded by mustached men in laboratory coats.

But you went down in history:
refusing to continue the life of an animal
trapped far away from home
in a cage
in a Zoo.

Sincerely, xxx⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Suzara, *Souvenir*.

The speaker of the epistolary poem asks: “Why am I disinterring you/to put you in a book next to Antero and El Captain.” In these opening lines, the speaker questions the appearance of Benga in *Souvenir* to stage a relationship between strangers and acquaintances: the speaker and Benga; Benga, Antero, and El Captain.⁸⁸ As the poem continues, the reader finds the speaker’s question to remain unresolved. Instead, the question marks the opening of an unnamed relationship beyond the constraints of the archive and museum collection. With the poem’s radical departure from the conventional demands of History, this question also signals a hesitancy. A hesitancy towards putting a destroyed body back on display, or more generally a hesitancy about imagining outside of the constraints of imperial representation.

From this uncertainty, “Dear Ota Benga” progresses and attempts to envision a collective “we” within the racializing grammar of ethnology and the possibility of decolonial relations therein. The speaker of the poem questions the ethnological method of dissecting the body and its application on Benga.

The skull, nose, cheekbones, shoulders, sternum,
the breadth of your hips, the length of your legs,
your height, your wide and muscled feet,
all of your physique, like ours, taken apart
under the glass, we, living specimens.

In these lines, the speaker moves from the measurements of Benga (i.e., “the breadth of your hips”) and his physique, to “we” via simile: “all of your physique, like ours, taken apart.” What emerges from this disassembled body is a collective “we” through a likeness produced by the categorizing violence of ethnology. As a western mode of racial classification, ethnology produced knowledge about the colonial others of Western science and empires. In “Dear Ota

⁸⁸ Antero was a Igorot who acted as a translator for Truman Hunt and El Capitan was a Negrito on display at St. Louis. Benedict, “International Exhibitions and National Identity” and Afable, “Journeys from Bontoc to the western fairs, 1904-1915: the” *Nikimalika*” and their interpreters.”

Benga,” the speaker uses this shared history rather than its ethnic categories to envision a decolonial relationality.

The collective of “living specimens” and Benga are juxtaposed to a certain “they” in the poem. “Dear Ota Benga” describes the “they” as such: “Your captor, dubbed savior, who took you/from the Congo, was supposedly a friend.” The speaker of the poem questions the friendship (“supposedly a friend”) between Benga and his captors, which, in this context, stands in for an uneven power relation between “captor” and imperial other. This kind of friendship is representative of US-Philippine relations, where friendship describes the foreign relations and policies between the two countries and the Philippine independence, which is also known as Philippine-US Friendship day. Under American empire, friendship masks histories of domination. In “Dear Ota Benga,” friendship describes a relationship of exploitation and betrayal between “living specimen” and the white men who captured, studied, and displayed them. Imperial systems of racial difference and western regimes of scientific thought and practice are the foundation of this relational form.

The poem ends by describing the superficial and cosmetic aspirations for whiteness, mirroring the racial metrics of ethnology of the first part of the poem. The speaker of the poem draws a parallel with the ethnological measurements and science to practices of bodily modification that aspire to whiteness. This parallel history of the body emerges from a relation to whiteness. Both are about constructing whiteness. If the racial system of ethnology was about producing an uncivilized body for study, and implicitly a white one against which others are measured, then the second part of the poem comments on the bodily modification of people of color to appear white. The point here is that the racial difference is still used to devalue bodies of

color even in their aspirational movements toward whiteness. This second half of the poem problematizes aesthetics and the racism of “beauty.”

“Dear Ota Benga” interrogates the forms of relation under American empire to envision an oppositional collective “we” that emerges within the confines of human display and imperial subjugation. The poem ends by discussing Benga’s hopes to return home, the speaker’s recognition and affirmation of Benga’s refusal and suicide, and is signed, “Sincerely, xxx.” The incongruity of sincerity and the impersonality of “xxx” is itself a tension. If the epistolary form is about intimacy, then the anonymity reveals a kind of hesitancy, or an opened relation, or one that is in opposition to the forced “friendship” between Benga, scientists, and captor. The difference here is that it is a relation that is not about coercion, but instead one left open and possible because of a condensed temporality and ambivalent speaker. “Dear Ota Benga” captures the experience of feeling intimacy across history and its ironies and import. Within the enclosures of early 20th century race science and spectacle Suzara imagines a relation, otherwise foreclosed, through an epistolary poem that bridges the speaker’s historical present to the poetic subject’s past. This epistolary poem speaks to the potential for a kind of decolonial relationality but also its limits. “Dear Ota Benga” triangulates Ota Benga with the poem’s speaking “I” and an unmarked “they.” What “Dear Ota Benga” attempts, however, is to articulate an ethical grammar of relation to the dehumanized and destroyed bodies of history by bringing to attention to a collective “we.”

Fred Wilson “So Much Trouble in the World—*Believe It or Not*”

Suzara’s poetry in *Souvenir* appropriates museological forms of description, display, and cataloguing to undermine the imperial museum’s primary function of “primitive accumulation” by generating counter-knowledge from the institution’s own collections and displays. Suzara’s

poetics expose and wield the knowledge structures and publics of the imperial museum against itself to reveal the imperial relations that are both foundational to and structured by museum encounters and practices, and the decolonial collectivities that are possible therein. Suzara's depiction of the imperial museum and its collections uses the language and structures of collecting, cataloguing, and exhibition to uncover and imagine modes of anticolonial collectivity. Her poems, like "Dear Ota Benga," reimagine early 20th century racism and the imperial museum as the conditions for thinking collectively.

Artists, like Fred Wilson, have also questioned museum relationalities as they are constituted through practices of display. Wilson is a contemporary African American artist curator whose site-specific art practice examines museums and their practices of display and collecting. In a statement for the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial of 1993, Wilson said:

In general, the designed environment of museums is a formalist system of display rooted in the socio-cultural eras of the past; as such these spaces embody the politics, the pain, the suffering and the separateness characteristic of the times when the collections were formed. This is only reinforced by its determined amnesias of those times. I attempt to give new meanings to information and environments that are familiar and seductive. I also supplement information left out of museums. I am interested in bringing historical information to the aesthetic experience in order to reveal the imperialist reality of how museums obtain or interpret the objects they display. I believe doing so makes clear the complexity of the things on display.⁸⁹

Here, Wilson describes his art and aesthetic strategies as a response to the museum's attempt to bracket off its "formalist system of display" from its historical and cultural contexts. Wilson's framing of museums and their practices of display and collecting is attentive to the willful forgetting and amnesia of the museum regarding the provenance of its objects and the stories

⁸⁹ Fred Wilson, statement for the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial, 1993 (taken from *The Museum: Mixed Metaphors*).

they tell. Instead, Wilson uses historical context and display to interrogate the imperial provenance of museum collections and their entanglement and investment in power.



Figure 7 “Metalwork, 1793-1880,” from *Mining the Museum*

Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* (1992, 1993) epitomizes his strategy of resignification and redisplay. In this installation, Wilson “mined” the Maryland Historical Society’s collection and reorganized and recontextualized the museum’s permanent exhibit. For example, in the installation, “Metalwork 1793-1880,” Wilson paired silver pitchers, chalices, and cups with iron slave shackles. “Metalwork” confronts the viewer with a critically capacious category to include everyday implements of enslavement and domesticity as contemporaries. This curatorial decision provokes the audience to question categories of organization and display in the arts and crafts (i.e., metalwork) and to also challenge the museum’s previous exhibitionary narrative which excluded discussions of slavery. Wilson’s curatorial interventions place objects from the collection into exhibitions to challenge the narratives constructed by museums that obscure the institution’s “imperialist reality.”



Figure 8 "Ota Benga," Fred Wilson (2008)

Wilson's practice of "mining" the museum shares many characteristics with Suzara's poetry and its use of appropriation and accumulation within the museum. And like Suzara's poetry, Wilson's museum excavations also renegotiate museum relationalities to imagine different modes of decolonial collectivity. In 2005, Wilson's *So Much Trouble in the World — Believe It or Not!* was exhibited at the Stanford University Hood Museum from October 4 to December 11, 2005. *So Much Trouble* continues Wilson's practice of mining with the Hood Museum's permanent collection. One part of Wilson's installation appropriates busts created by anthropologist, Caspar Mayer at the St Louis World's Fair of 1904. Among these busts is one of Ota Benga. Wilson's sculpture/appropriation, "Ota Benga" (2008), is a bust of Ota Benga created by ethnologist Mayer at the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904. The original bust simply read "pygmy," but Wilson tied a white scarf around the bust and placed it on top a wooden pedestal that reads, instead, "I'm the one who left and didn't come back." The bust stands at Ota Benga's height.

Ota Benga's bust is placed alongside other busts created by Caspar Meyer at the 1904 World's Fair. The busts are placed around a platform displaying the plaster hands of famous white men: Mark Twain, Thomas Jefferson, etc. Wilson's arrangement takes the busts of ethnological subjects to stare back at disembodied remnants of white men. Through this curatorial decision, viewers are called to question where they belong in the visual matrix: who gazes at who? And the interpretive design of the arrangement problematizes the position of the viewer and their relationship to the objects on display. Like Suzara, Wilson works within the museum to display its ideological maneuvers of erasure and narrative. Through a poetic and artistic engagement with museum text, logics, and the material collections, Suzara and Wilson reveal the continued centrality of American imperialism to the museum space and the ways it is bracketed off from the gallery and the generative potential in engaging with it.

Conclusion

Suzara's *Souvenir* uses the grammar of the imperial museum and archive to reveal the operations of the imperial museum, racial difference, and relationality. Through the poetic devices of accumulation and appropriation her poetry finds common ground with artists and practitioners such as Fred Wilson, whose statue "Ota Benga" similarly deploys appropriation to reveal and undermine the often-concealed histories of American imperialism in the museum. This strategy of appropriation allows artists and writers to undermine the institutional production of knowledge in the museum and decentering the normative white audience of the gallery space. Appropriation method of approaching the archive and strategically poaching from it. This strategy reveals: how institutions like the archive and museum produce knowledge about their objects through text and space. My reading of *Souvenir* demonstrates how an attention to poetics

might guide us to alternate imaginings and relations to better approach the cultural vestiges of colonialism and empire in the public space of museums.

Chapter 4 “Difference produces perspective”: Stereographic Form, Grief, and Gina Apostol’s *Insurrecto* (2018)

Gina Apostol is a Filipina American novelist, born in the Philippines and based in the US. She is the recipient of the Pen Open Book Award for *Gun Dealers’ Daughter*, and a two-time winner of the National Book Award in the Philippines for her novels, *Biblioepsy* and *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata*. Her 2018 novel, *Insurrecto*, follows Magsalin, a Filipina translator and writer, and Chiara, an American filmmaker. While translating her movie script on the massacre at Balangiga, a deadly confrontation between US troops and Filipinos in Samar during the Philippine-American War of 1899, Magsalin escorts Chiara on her trip to the historic site in the south of the Philippine archipelago. The narrative takes on a stereoscopic form as it is mediated through several perspectives: Magsalin’s translation, Chiara’s script, and the pair’s trip to Samar. At the Balangiga Massacre, Filipino revolutionaries, dressed as women, attacked American soldiers stationed in Samar. The attack killed 48 Americans, left 22 wounded, and 4 MIA. Led by Jacob H. Smith, American soldiers retaliated, murdering, as the narrator states, “close to thirty thousand Filipinos, men, women, and children.”⁹⁰

In this chapter I discuss the stereoscopic narrative of *Insurrecto* and its interventions in the imperial archive. Beginning with a discussion of Alexander Chee’s concept of the “stereoscopic narrative,” which is “the same story from two or more points of view,”⁹¹ I describe *Insurrecto* as a text that, through an act of translation, provides several perspectives of

⁹⁰ Apostol, *Insurrecto*, 35.

⁹¹ Chee, *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel*, 122.

the Balangiga massacre. Weaving together Chiara's script, Magsalin's translation of it, and the road trip the pair take to Samar, the second half of the novel brings into relief the imperial violence co-constitutive of modern US-Philippine relations and the cosmopolitan, diasporic Filipino subject's location within it.

The three stories alternate between each other, creating several timelines that intersect at their own scenes of violence. In the case of the protagonists', Magsalin and Chiara bear witness to the murder of a father and daughter who are shot dead by two men driving by on a motorcycle. Reviews of the novel highlight the cinematic language of Apostol's writing, which is appropriate given the premise of the novel's plot. And because the visual is a major theme in the novel, my close reading attends to *Insurrecto*'s engagement with the stereograph as a mode of encounter with the structures of state violence that undergird US-Philippine relations. I argue that *Insurrecto*'s stereoscopic narrative challenges the imperial archive's concealment of state violence to the past, through its depiction of diasporic grief, where the loss experienced by Magsalin, the cosmopolitan Filipina subject, is entangled with necropolitical state violence in the archipelago, both past and present. To conclude, I will discuss the political stakes of this aesthetic practice as it concerns Rodrigo Duterte's drug war in the Philippines.

The Imperial Archive, Stereoscopic Narrative and Representing Historical Experience

In his essay, "The Guardians," queer Korean American writer Alexander Chee describes teaching the stereoscopic narrative to his writing students. Formally, the stereoscopic narrative is 2 (or more) stories told by one or more subjects—it is the sum of its parts. To explain the "dual narrative," he uses the example of a typical *Batman* story:

There is a mysterious crime, then Batman's attempt to apprehend the criminal. Typically, the criminal, at one point or another, captures Batman and tells him the entire story from his own point of view, and the crime is made knowable, the criminal also. During the

monologue, Batman manages to escape and bring the criminal to justice, explaining his methods, and the reader then has the complete story.⁹²

Batman's attempts to solve crimes are made up of two stories: one, the detective work itself, and two, the crime, which is revealed by the criminal. Unlike his criminological example, Chee's essay on the stereoscopic narrative is itself one that holds the complexities of his own lived experience as a survivor of sexual abuse in his adolescence, alongside his return to Wesleyan as a faculty member/alum and the ambiguities of his relationship with a former student in his adult life. In his reflections on sexual trauma, attempts at self-articulation, and queer relations he states: "We are not what we think we are. The stories we tell of ourselves are like thin trails across something that is more like the ocean. A mask afloat on the open sea."⁹³ As an example of the complicated and contingent ways in which subjects make sense of their lived experiences, however barely, "The Guardians" gives readers the opportunity to approach the unequal relation of power between Chee's student and himself with empathy and to complicate how we apprehend harm, even beyond carceral logics.

The form of the stereoscopic narrative corresponds with that of the stereoscope, a nineteenth-century technology invented by Charles Wheatstone, which made binocular vision observable. When viewing a stereograph (two photographs, taken simultaneously, side-by-side) through a stereoscope, the viewer's mind would synthesize the two images and produce a singular, three-dimensional image. As Jonathan Crary states in *Techniques of the Observer*, the stereoscope showed seeing because it represented "the anatomical structure of the observer's body,"⁹⁴ thus demonstrating binocular vision. The scientific discovery of the formal relationship between the observer and the image was itself a novel articulation of a binocular subject.

⁹² Chee, 223.

⁹³ Ibid, 226.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 87.

The stereograph offered a visual experience that was embodied and immersive. This distinctive aspect of the stereograph set it apart from earlier forms of photography. For example, in three essays published in *The Atlantic*, physician and poet Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote about the promises offered of the stereoscopic image. In “The Stereoscope and Stereograph” (1859), he described the haptic nature of the stereoscopic experience saying, “[b]y means of these two different views of an object, the mind as it were, *feels round it* and gets an idea of its solidity.”⁹⁵ The three-dimensional simulation of the scene produced by the stereograph had the effect of transporting the viewer to the world of the image itself, creating for viewers an immersive experience. Through the stereoscope, theoretically, viewers could enter the moment captured in the stereograph.

Beyond its scientific life, the stereoscope became a consumer good and leisurely activity. Popularized in the mid-nineteenth century, stereographs were mass-produced well into the early-20th-century. U.S. based companies such as Keystone View Company, Underwood & Underwood, B.W. Kilburn, and several others, manufactured thousands of stereographs a day. For example, Underwood & Underwood produced as many as 25,000 stereographs a day in 1901. The circulation of imperial imagery at the turn of the 20th century reached broad audiences.

As a commodity, stereographs were often sold in sets organized around specific subjects or genres. For example, the 1899 Philippine-American War was documented by the stereoscope. Stereoscopic images had many uses, which suggests the banality of imperial violence in the everyday lives of Americans as it defines the borders of the nation. The stereoscope created a safe space for Americans to view and consume the war.

⁹⁵ Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” 142.

By depicting the material realities of the war, the mass production and circulation of stereographs representing the war participated in a public discourse concerning a burgeoning American empire. Situating the stereograph within the “American imperial photography complex,”⁹⁶ Nerissa Balce discusses how photography was instrumentalized in the project of empire-building. In *Body Parts of Empire*, she states, “Photography took on the ideological work of representing the pleasures of empire-building through *necropolitics*, a rhetoric of imperial abjection.”⁹⁷

Balce points out how this photography documents necropolitical violence in the archipelago in its most extreme *and* mundane forms.⁹⁸ This violence pervaded the everyday both in the colony and the metropole, albeit in different ways. In the US metropole, photographic images of dead Filipinos circulated through American visual culture: “The Filipino cadaver, rebel or civilian, becomes a sign of American nationhood and victory, an emblem of the *American imperial sublime*.”⁹⁹

Imperial photography’s necropolitical function persists in the archive as factual evidence of American imperialism. One way the trace of necropolitical violence is collected in imperial archives is through the artifact of photography. The stereographic documentation of this violence preserves a distinct experience for the viewer. As an immersive medium, viewers can encounter the scenes of US state violence and its subject through the stereoscope: dead Filipinos, but with depth. This binocular experience produces for the viewer a scene of imperial encounter, a problem which Filipino cultural production and critique has engaged with. Rather than

⁹⁶ “Philippine colonial photographs from the turn of the twentieth century...that helped shape the reception of events and ideas associated with U.S. imperial expansion,” Balce, *Body Parts of Empire*, 56.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 55.

⁹⁸ “[A]n aggressive violence *and* a ‘tender violence’ that includes gentle forms of social death such as everyday life under military rule and colonial discipline through education,” *ibid*, 55.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 65.

recirculate images of brutalized Filipino people, Filipino visual art and literature shields the subject of violence from view. Take for example, Melissa Banta's "Photographic Encounters in the Philippines, 1898-1910" and Stephanie Syjuco's photograph, "Block Out the Sun" (2019), which hides the Filipino subjects of early-20th-century imperial photography with the artist's hand (this was included in an exhibit, *Rogue States*, at the contemporary art museum of St Louis). Michelle Dizon and Viet Le's *White Gaze* (2019) similarly uses erasure to create a text that draws from National Geographic. In Sarita See's discussion of Paul Pfeiffer's strategy of erasure in *24 Landscapes* (Pfeiffer, 2000), for example, she argues that his work deploys a "doubled return of the repressed," which betrays "the earlier aesthetic while simultaneously reminding us of the political repressiveness of contemporary art theories of abstraction."¹⁰⁰ When speaking of Pfeiffer's critical reception and failure to fully grasp the nuance of his work in relation to his positionality as a Filipino American, See states, "America's imperial aesthetic is doubly self-effacing. The empire not only forgets imperialism, producing the historiographical amnesia constitutive of Filipino American invisibility. In the realm of the aesthetic, the American empire also forgets that it forgets imperialism."¹⁰¹

Strategies, like erasure, for tending to the remnants of the violated Filipino body in the imperial archive is, as Jan Bernabe states, an "archival imperative" of Filipino cultural production. By appropriating the stereoscopic form and the immersive, embodied viewing experience, the visual art of diasporic Filipina artists represents violence of imperial encounter that Philippine stereographs document as a persistent problem of seeing. For example, Lani Maestro is a Manila-born, Filipino Canadian artist. Her work covers installation, sound, video, book works, and writing. In 2017, she represented the Philippines at the 57th Venice Biennale

¹⁰⁰ See, *Decolonized Eye*, 66.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 45.

alongside Filipino American visual artist, Manuel Ocampo, in an exhibit titled, *The Spectre of Comparison*. The Museum of Contemporary Art and Design in Manila states, “[t]he exhibition proposes ways to rethink, question, and challenge contemporary notions of nationalism and identity.”¹⁰² The exhibit’s title draws its reference from Jose Rizal’s writing in *Nola Me Tángere* (“el demonio de las comparaciones,” *Nola Me Tángere*), and Benedict Anderson’s, *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998).¹⁰³ Lani Maestro’s showing at the 2017 Venice Biennale included her installation *No Pain Like This Body*. Originally made in 2010, Maestro says it was “[f]irst shown in an impoverished part of the city of Vancouver: ‘It easily becomes personalized as one is left with oneself to pose or answer questions.’”¹⁰⁴ The installation is inspired by Harold Sonny Ladoo’s 1972 novel *No Pain Like This Body*. That Maestro finds common resonance with Ladoo is no surprise as both speak to a diasporic experience.

While most of the reporting on the exhibit emphasized the comparison between Maestro and Ocampo’s work (i.e., different mediums, subject matter, etc.), *No Body Like This Pain, No Pain Like This Body* contains its own comparison. The exhibit included Maestro’s installation, *No Body Like This Pain, No Pain Like This Body*. Maestro’s installation pairs two blocks of descending text created out of red fluorescent lights beside each other: “No Body Like This Pain” and “No Pain Like This Body.” Maestro’s *No Pain Like This Body* doubles the image, with slight variation. Pairing the text side-by-side, Maestro’s piece creates a stereographic text. This form allows for multiple interpretations and possible readings, like a contrapuntal poem. To view the image as if through a stereoscope (this can be done by first looking at the image then crossing your eyes—a trick I learned in elementary school to quickly see through magic eye illusions),

¹⁰² Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, “The Spectre of Comparison,” accessed August 9, 2021, <http://www.mcadmanila.org.ph/the-spectre-of-comparison/>.

¹⁰³ E-Flux, “Philippine Pavilion at the Venice Biennale,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/128212/lani-maestro-and-manuel-ocampo-the-spectre-of-comparison/>.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

produces a singular indecipherable image as “pain”- “body” and “body”- “pain” fail to synthesize and come into relief, which is expected from the stereoscopic viewing experience. This visual ambiguity is present in all stereographs as the images were captured by dual-cameras whose exposures were synched, but the perspective was not. *No Body Like This Pain, No Pain Like This Body* shows tensions between visual and textual representations of what Elaine Scarry has called, “the body in pain.” Maestro’s work visually externalizes pain, representing it through fluorescent lighting, thereby raising questions about the body’s *encounter* with it. As viewers, we see this encounter (body/pain, pain/body) and its tensions, which are objectified through stereoscopic failure caused by the inassimilability of body/pain and pain/body.

Insurrecto

Appropriations of the stereograph in US Filipino cultural production raise questions about historical experience through immersive strategies to interrupt the imperial uses of the stereograph. The visual experience of stereoscopic depth and its instrumentalization through US necropolitics facilitated an immersive viewing experience of imperial violence for viewers of scenes. Texts like *Insurrecto* create a sense of stereoscopic depth to lure readers into everyday scenes of state violence imbricated in histories of American imperialism in the archipelago. However, rather than focus on a particular subject of violence, *Insurrecto* represents the relationships historically sustained by US-Philippine relations and the implications this has on the cosmopolitan Filipino subject’s positionality in diaspora. Participating in what Jinah Kim describes in *Postcolonial Grief* as a “kind of transformative politics... enacted when we name the deaths of those considered unworthy of mourning and remembering. Answering this question means finding out which lives count, Fundamentally, then, such mourning is potentially

insurgent, challenging the liberal nation-state's claim to sole right to violence."¹⁰⁵ The imperial archive, Kim states, "is not a disinterested organizing of the past and present; it is a site through which colonialism attempts to gain control over the future of human relations and knowledge production."¹⁰⁶ *Insurrecto*'s representation of necropolitical relationality defetishizes state violence and depicts practices of conviviality, or what Paul Gilroy describes as, "the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multicultural an ordinary feature of social life."¹⁰⁷

Insurrecto's protagonist is Magsalin, a Filipina translator and mystery writer who is returning to the Philippines on a work trip. Through Magsalin, readers are introduced to Chiara Brasi, an American film director who is seeking a translator for her film script about the 1901 Balangiga massacre, and Magsalin's "protagonist."¹⁰⁸ She is the daughter of director Ludo Brasi who filmed *The Unintended*, a war movie about the Vietnam-American war in the Philippines, which alludes to *Apocalypse Now*. Virginie is Chiara's mother, who comes from wealth and lives with diplopia—a sight condition that causes double vision: "This neurological defect draws her husband to her. Her sense that fantasy is never an illusion and that the purpose of art is hypnosis, a form of body snatching, arouses Ludo both tenderness and calculation. She is the ideal viewer for whom he makes his thriller."¹⁰⁹ For Ludo, her husband and Chiara's father, the stereograph appears as source material for his film *The Unintended*: "Ludo keeps the gun on his desk as he researches, poring over maps he has ordered from the Library of Congress. He litters the desk with his doubled cards, sepia tones in disarray. His mute histories on pasteboard."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Jinah Kim, *Postcolonial Grief*, 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid* 19.

¹⁰⁷ Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, *Preface*, xv.

¹⁰⁸ *Insurrecto*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 29.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

Chiara's film is about the massacre at Balangiga during the Philippine-American war of 1899. The narrator states: "The Balangiga incident of 1901 is a true story in two parts, a blip in the Philippine-American War (which is a blip in the Spanish-American war, which is a blip in latter-day outbreaks of imperial hysteria in Southeast Asian wars, which are a blip in the infinite spiral of human aggression in the livid days of this dying planet, and so on)."¹¹¹ The novel recovers this moment through the stereographic form and links it to the *longue durée* of American imperialism. The stereograph, itself a largely forgotten visual medium, was central in depicting the Philippine American.

Chiara is the bait for the trap that Magsalin sets for the reader. She is important for thinking about *Insurrecto*'s act of subversion. In "Chapter 21: The Photographer at the Heart of the Script," the narrator describes Magsalin's thoughts on the script's main protagonist:

Her name, whether classical allusion, cinematic alias, or personal cryptogram, is still forthcoming—Calliope, or Camille, or Cassandra
It is 1901.
She is not alone.¹¹²

The narrator continues to draw parallels between the two:

Chiara's world can be seen as an easy stand-in, in sepia wash, for nineteenth-century Cassandras. The movie's white petticoated protagonist clutches the old brownie camera that is Chiara's prized possession.

The photographer will be one of those creatures beyond her time and yet so clearly of it, beloved of film and epic, with a commanding presence heightened by the backwaters in which she lives, and oblivious of the trap in which she exists, that is, her womanhood

The script, as Magsalin sees it, creates that vexing sense of vertigo in stories within stories within stories that begin too abruptly, *in media res*.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Ibid, 34.

¹¹² Ibid, 87.

¹¹³ Ibid, 91.

Chiara, in her kind of bland generality, is described in relation to other white women of history. One can think of the protagonist of the script as a caricature of Laura Wexler's central subject in *Tender Violence*, a well-meaning liberal white woman with access to a camera.

The stereograph features prominently in the novel. In Chapter "17. The Dossier Magsalin Receives," the narrator describes the protagonist's "impatience" with stereographs given to her by Chiara along with her script. Describing the stereographs of Samar in 1901, which were "ordered from the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division,"¹¹⁴ the narrator states:

Each of the pictures is doubled. Each card is a set of thick, twinned prints, the prints pasted side by side on stiff panels. All are roughly postcard-size.
They are late-nineteenth-century stereo cards.
You look closely at the twin pictures as if presented with one of those optical illusions that should come with the caption, *Find What's Missing!* But there is nothing missing to find: the two pictures on each stereo card are identical.
Only a slight time lapse, undetectable, indicates difference.
Difference produces perspective.¹¹⁵

The temporality of the stereoscopic experience is the apprehension of this difference, of this "slight time lapse." Furthermore, she directs the reader:

On the Library of Congress website, www.loc.gov, search 'Philippine insurrection,' and you come across them. Archived stereo pairs from the years 1899 to 1913, the bleak years of US imperial aggression before the surrender of the last Filipino Forces to American Occupation.¹¹⁶

This hypertextual strategy alerts the reader to the ubiquity and accessibility of these stereographs. Speaking to the accessibility of the stereographs on the Library of Congress website, the narrator states, "history is not fully annotated or adequately contemplated in online archives" (81). The narrator questions archival neutrality by raising questions about the description of the stereographic subjects as "insurgents" and the war as an "insurrection."¹¹⁷ The archive, here,

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 80.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 80, 81.

¹¹⁷ This diminishes the fact that the US colonized the Philippines, which had just gained its independence from Spain, by denying the Filipino people of their sovereignty and autonomy.

perpetuates American exceptionalism through the creation of categorical structures that deny the sovereignty of the Philippines and reinscribe American logics of imperialism. In these images, American imperialism recedes as images of dead and destroyed “insurgents” come into view. For example, she comments on the imperial grammar of the stereographic form including its use of captions, quotations: “words in quotes and not. ‘Insurgents’ are in quotes. Insurrection is not,” passive voice, “[t]he puzzling duplication becomes mere trope, a cliché.”¹¹⁸

The narrator continues to note the relationships preserved in imperial photography and the viewer’s historical encounter with them:

The passivity of a photographic record might be relieved only by the viewer the photographs produce. And even then, not all types of viewers are ideal. Photographs of a captured country shot through the lens of the captor possess layers of ambiguity too confusing to grasp:

there is the eye of the victim, the captured,
who may in turn be belligerent, bystander, blameless, blamed—at the
very least, here, too, there are subtle shifts in pathetic balance;
there is the eye of the colonized viewing their captured history in
the distance created by time;
there is the eye of the captor, the soldier, who has just wounded the
captured;
there is the eye of the captor, in capital letters: the Colonizer who
has captured history’s lens;
there is the eye of the citizens (belligerent, bystander, blame-
less, blamed) whose history has colonized the captured in the
distance created by time;
and there is the eye of the actual photographer: the one who
captured the captured and the captors in his camera’s lens—
what the hell was *he* thinking?¹¹⁹

The narrator makes the reader aware of the relations enlivened by the observer.¹²⁰ Apostol’s articulation of the viewer’s dilemma raises questions about the relationships engendered by

¹¹⁸ Apostol, *Insurrecto*, 81.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹²⁰ Attempts to politically mobilize others through the circulation of images depicting state violence is a practice that has long been problematized by academic fields of critique, like Visual culture. Ariella Azoulay describes the photographic field of relations as constituting a “civil contract” for a “virtual political community” (Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 21). Situating photographs of state violence in the Philippines within the US imperium reveals the necropolitical relations of US imperialism and the modern nation-state.

photographs, but also raises larger questions about the photograph's dead subject (i.e., their inability to speak back, the lack of their voice, etc.).

Stereoscopic Narrative and Diasporic Grief

The stereograph appears in the novel as an artifact and as the novel's narrative form. The second half of the novel alternates between Chiara's script, Magsalin's translation of the script, and the story of the two women traveling to Samar together. One script follows Cassandra Chase, "Photographer in Balangiga, Samar, 1901, and protagonist of film set in 1901." ("Cast of Characters"). The second script follows Caz, "Schoolteacher in film set in film set in 197-." The novel is vague about which script belongs to Magsalin or Chiara. *Part II. Dueling Scripts* is a stereoscopic narrative about the loss that surrounds Samar: the 1901 Balangiga Massacre, those of Magsalin and Chiara, and the murder scene which betrays them.

The stereoscopic narrative gives a sense of Magsalin's diasporic grief as it recalls several violent timelines: Magsalin and Chiara's present (i.e., the reader's), the height of Ferdinand Marcos' martial law in Philippines and regime, and the archipelago at war with the US at the turn of the 20th century. Each of these historical settings are present in the novel and captured by visual technology: the stereoscope, Betamax, and film.¹²¹ The appearance of each of these forms draws the reader's attention to the relations sustained by imperial necropolitics that Magsalin, also, finds herself entangled in.

The Betamax in *Insurrecto* captures a scene of life under martial law. *Part II* opens with Magsalin staying with her Uncles, Nemesio, Exequiel, and Ambrosio, in their house in Punta. In

¹²¹ Each of these were popular forms. By that I mean there was 1.) a market for the consumption of the media these technologies produced and 2.) a market for the technology itself that allowed those with access to produce media themselves. Most of that media of the latter could be described as vernacular: visual representations of the everyday captured by "amateurs." Untrained or unscholarly, primitive, or naive are often terms that art critics might use to describe this category of photography. That is to say, "vernacular" distinguishes most applications of photography from being considered in "art markets."

“1. The Story She Wishes to Tell, an Abaca Weave, a Warp and Weft of Numbers” the narrator states:

The story Magsalin wishes to tell is about loss. Any emblem will do: a French Tunisian with an unfinished manuscript, an American obsessed with an unfinished manuscript, an American obsessed with a Filipino war, a filmmaker’s possible murder, a wife’s sadness. An abaca weave, a warp and weft of numbers, is measured but invisible in the plot. Chapter numbers double up. Puzzle pieces scramble. Points of view multiply. Allusions, ditto. There will be blood, a kidnapping, or a solution to a crime forgotten by history. That is, Magsalin hopes so.¹²²

Her family’s home is:

filled with antiques from the globalization age: Walkmans with Eagles cassettes still in them, a TV with an antenna and no remote, two pre-iPhone Sony videocams, clunky and clunkier. She takes one Betamax tape out from the bottom, a scratched but well-dusted one, the single word *Thrilla* handwritten with care on its spine.¹²³

Now she realizes this tape must be a telecast from decades later, an anniversary presentation. The tape was a simulacrum of the bout she had seen in 1975: she knows who was with them at this later screening, who was watching the bout from the opposite sofa, with the giant spoon and fork on the wall above his curly-haired brow, grainy young, and utterly beautiful. He is revived in the shadows of the frame.¹²⁴

We can think of the intimacy captured in the Betamax recording as an example of conviviality under neoliberal empire as they are the records of her family’s life together under Ferdinand Marcos’ martial law in the Philippines. In this scene, Magsalin is surrounded by her losses: the manila envelope (which we know to contain Chiara’s script and stereographic source materials concerning the Philippine-American War) and those preserved in this Betamax (107). Magsalin watches her family watching a recording of the “Thrilla in Manilla,” her husband and mother appear as shadows in the Betamax recording, their voices and bodies out of the frame but captured in reflections and faint echoes. The narrator recounts Magsalin’s ambivalence and difficult feelings surrounding her return and her mother in this scene.

¹²² *Insurrecto*, 107.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 109.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 111.

This chapter's account of intimate and national belonging amidst the violence of martial law preserved in the Betamax, an "antique from the age of globalization," is also indicative of the global structures that support the "transit of empire," with the Philippines being but one node.¹²⁵ In this Betamax, Magsalin thinks Chiara's parents are present in the televised audience of the fight:

The existential condition of sharing the universe every day with strangers hits her as Magsalin watches Ali in Joe Frazier's soon-to-be blinded vision and Frazier is glimpsed from the frame of Ali's not-yet-Parkinson's arms.

She thinks she sees her—Chiara's mother, Virginie Brasi—updo-ed and uptight, clutching an unlit cigarette in the toxic stadium, so hot in the rising heat that hell would be a relief that morning in Araneta Coliseum. A well-shod woman with a starving look, cigarette in thin hand, staring entranced but also distracted as the camera pans over the tense, fluorescent crowd.

It's a traitorous aspect of empathy, Magsalin notes.

The slightest connection suffices.

She turns off the tape before Joe Frazier goes blind¹²⁶

The mediation of the black body in this scene complicates diasporic grief and its apprehension of state violence. The Thrilla in Manila was aired on September 30th, 1975, and was HBO's first live satellite telecast, another instance in which the tragic history of the Philippines is made global.¹²⁷

The link between these two is their treatment of seeing violence and being diasporic: they both show how the ambivalent movement of diasporic subjects is undergirded by necropolitical violence. Diasporic subjectivity allows the viewer to observe state violence enacted by the Philippines and state violence enacted by the US from an external perspective. For example, Filipina, American-based visual artist Michele Dizon's *Civil Society* includes footage from the

¹²⁵ Robyn Magalit Rodriguez's *Migrants for Exports* discusses "[t]he Philippine state's institutionalization of out-migration through Presidential Decree 442 in 1974" (9) and the establishment of this neoliberal model of labor with the Philippine state.

¹²⁶ Apostol, *Insurrecto*, 111, 112.

¹²⁷ Leddy, Craig. "The fight that helped cable take flight: 'Thrilla in Manila' telecast put HBO, satellite TV on the map." *Multichannel News* 28 Sept. 2015: 8. *Business Insights: Essentials*. Web. 5 Aug. 2020.

1965 Watts Riots, the 1991 Los Angeles Police Department brutally beating Rodney King, and the 2005 revolts in Clichy-sous-Bois, Paris sparked in response to the deaths of 15 year old Bouna Traore and 17-year-old Zyed Benna and systematic policing of the Black, Muslim community. Over these scenes, the narrator in a steady, monotonous tone, discusses “the loss of homeland, family, and language marked by a narrative of second-generation assimilation that comes out of my own life experience” highlighting the deep and crucial ambivalence of articulating oneself in the midst of such immense loss.¹²⁸ Grief, afterall, is the state of having had survived something others did not. That is to say, it is the nature of surviving. This, I believe, describes the historical experience of diasporic grief: bearing witness to the violence of western structures of governance and the gravity of living on with the fact. It is the disillusionment of witnessing the mistreatment of black and indigenous people on native territory settled by a government that claimed to have freed yours a century ago. It describes the ambivalence of being postcolonial in a settler-state. The arrangement of several historical events in *Insurrecto* and *Civil Society* brings attention to the banality of the violence of these events revealing their location on a continuum of imperial power: the conditions of possibility for diasporic life.

While the reader is alerted of Magsalin’s loss of her mother and husband at the opening of the second half of the novel, it is later revealed as a motivation for Magsalin to accompany Chiara: She has travelled with the director to bury her dead husband’s ashes with her mother in Tacloban. *Insurrecto*’s stereoscopic narrative weaves traces of imperial violence documented through popular and vernacular visual technologies: the stereoscope, film, and the Betamax. In doing so, the novel syncs several timelines and draws the reader’s attention to an all too familiar sight. In a final scene where Magsalin and Chiara both bear witness to the murder of a Father and

¹²⁸ Latipa (née Michelle Dizon), “Civil Society,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/22172925>.

daughter by two men riding tandem on a motorcycle, the two are caught in the middle of an extrajudicial killing of Duterte's drug war. This visualization of Philippine state-violence through representations of the everyday and the relations sustained by them holds it in relation to early 20th century modes of US colonial governance. The terms of American liberation and conditions of self-governance is betrayed by the depiction of the police as an institution of imperial violence, which shows how the capacity to wield and obscure the nation-state's necropolitical structures is the measure of Philippine autonomy.

Duterte and Postcolonial Conviviality Under Neoliberal Empire

The Philippine drug war is repeatedly evoked in *Insurrecto* in its settings and characters. For example, early in the novel the narrator references New York Times coverage of the drug war.

Lately, the *New York Times* has been sending items to her inbox three or four times a day. It used to be, reading news items on a place like the Philippines or reviews of novels by actual Vietnamese or Laotians or other such peoples bombed or invaded by America was like finding elves in Central Park—the idea of their centrality in the news was preposterous. But she kept reading flurry of articles as body counts rose in the archipelago, and out of this self-inflicted disaster the old colony gained renown, or was at least the target of an outcry, usually bombastic, in the American periodicals that were incurious about how the current times of one included the past of the other, or vice versa. Magsalin was fascinated by the ways her own knowledge gave her insight that was useless, on one hand, but terribly urgent on the other.¹²⁹

The novel's tableau of imperial imagery interposes upon Rodrigo Duterte's drug war in the Philippines and politicizes the novel's depiction of diasporic grief and relational aesthetic of state violence. The use of photos depicting Filipinos murdered by Duterte's PNP and drug war is a strategy used by photojournalists and Human Rights organizations, which is problematized by the imperial archive documenting violated Filipino bodies in the US at the turn of the 20th century. Images of dead Filipinos produced during the Philippine American war depict an

¹²⁹ Apostol, *Insurrecto*, 116,117.

enduring political problem: the necropolitical, material conditions of imperial relations between nation-states.

Attempts to politically mobilize others through the circulation of images depicting state violence is a practice that has long been problematized by academic fields of critique, like visual culture. Ariella Azoulay describes the photographic field of relations as constituting a “civil contract” for a “virtual political community” (*The Civil Contract of Photography*, 21). Such a claim, at least in the Philippine context, produces tensions to the liberatory promises of civil society and settler-colonial structures of governance. Since the Spanish-American War of 1898, relations between the US and Philippines have been shaped by American imperialism in the archipelago. Philippine independence was deferred in 1899 with the Philippine-American War and granted by the US in 1946 after decades of colonization. This project of “Benevolent Assimilation”¹³⁰ has since defined US-Philippine relations as imperial in both the postcolonial and militaristic sense. Situating photographs of state violence in the Philippines alongside the imperial archive depicts the everyday nature of the necropolitical relations of US imperialism and the modern nation-state.

Conclusion

On December 7, 2016 the New York Times published photojournalist Daniel Berehulak’s story, “They Are Slaughtering Us Like Animals,” which documented extrajudicial killings of President Rodrigo Duterte’s drug war in the Philippines. The article was later awarded a 2017 Pulitzer Prize in Breaking News Photography. The opening image depicts the corpse of Romeo Torres Fontanilla lying face down in a rainy alleyway of Manila, awash in the yellow glow of

¹³⁰ American foreign policy that distinguished its imperial aggression from other forms of western imperialism at the turn of the 20th century as liberatory. Ideologically, this framed US imperialism as benevolent, rather than oppressive, extractive, and genocidal.

streetlamps, alone. Fontanilla was one of “57 homicide victims” photographed by photojournalist Daniel Berehulak “over 35 days.” As the viewer scrolls down, the image fades to black, and the white text of the story appears “You hear a murder scene before you see it: The desperate cries of a new window. The piercing sirens of approaching police cars. The thud, thud, thud of the rain drumming on the pavement of a Manila alleyway—and on the back of Romeo Torres Fontanilla.” Drawing the viewer in through the senses, Berehulak brings you, the witness, to Fontanilla’s corpse. Comparing this to prior experiences in Iraq, Afghanistan, and West Africa’s Ebola zone (“a place gripped by fear and death”) he states, “What I experienced in the Philippines felt like a new level of ruthlessness: police officers; summarily shooting anyone suspected of dealing or even using drugs, vigilantes’ taking seriously Mr. Duterte’s call to ‘slaughter them all.’”

Despite situating the violence of the Philippine National Police (PNP) in relation to several sites of Western imperialism and war, Berehulak characterizes the situation in the Philippines as somehow exceptional. This act of misrecognition is symptomatic of American exceptionalism, which simultaneously positions American imperialism and war as liberatory and distinct from other forms of western imperialism and colonization and, more specifically in this case, denies the ongoing military and economic collaboration between the US and Philippines. In obscuring the material conditions that make this violence possible (i.e., ongoing support of the Philippine state and national security by the US through militarization and financial aid), his article risks isolating structures of state violence from Western involvement.

Ironically enough, where this imperial relationship appears in the article comes in a quote from Duterte who, speaking of a conversation with US President Donald Trump about the drug war in the Philippines, states, “He said that, well, we are doing it as a sovereign nation, the right

way.” This statement should come as no surprise not just for the fact that both leaders propagate a discourse of murderous nationalism, but also because it is by American colonization and tutelage of Filipinos that the Philippines operates as a “sovereign nation.”

When Duterte’s presidency began, the US Department of Defense provided \$152 million in aid to the Philippines in 2016.¹³¹ This was also the year when Obama criticized Duterte for Human Rights abuses.¹³² US foreign aid in the Philippines has supported mutual efforts to antagonize and undermine the autonomy of the Muslim, Moro, and Lumad people in the south of the Philippines. In Mindanao, the Philippine Government and US government’s anti-terrorism efforts and counterinsurgency have sustained a militarized campaign against the indigenous and rural poor of the Philippines.¹³³ When Duterte first took office, the US government threatened to stop foreign aid to the Philippines. However, it quickly turned back on that threat and provided foreign aid (the US Department of Defense, alone, provided \$152 million out of a \$291 million total for 2016) when the specter of China threatened the US and its long time “friendship” with the Philippine state.¹³⁴ As of 2019, the PNP has reported 6,500 people killed by the police, while human rights organizations allege “more than 20,000 other deaths.”¹³⁵

In a 2016 press conference with Filipino reporters, Duterte stated, “The Philippines is not a vassal state. We have long since to be a colony of the United States.”¹³⁶ He continues: “As a matter of fact we inherited this problem from the united states. Why? Because they invaded this

¹³¹ United States Agency for International development, “U.S. Foreign Aid,” accessed August 9, 2021, https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/PHL?fiscal_year=2016&measure=Obligations.

¹³² Agence France-Presse, “US ‘Concerned by violent Philippine war on drugs,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/142401-us-concerned-violent-philippine-war-on-drugs>.

¹³³ The New York Times, Felipe Villamor, “U.S. Halts Aid Package to Philippines,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/15/world/asia/philippines-us.html>.

¹³⁴ Reuters, “Philippines wants United States to provide aid without conditions,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-usa-aid/philippines-wants-united-states-to-provide-aid-without-conditions-idUSKBN14516E>.

¹³⁵ Amnesty International, “Philippines 2020,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/philippines/report-philippines/>.

¹³⁶ Rappler, “Duterte: Who is Obama to ask me about human rights?”, accessed August 9, 2021, <https://youtu.be/HQXEYJlcdYI>.

country and made us their subjugated people...[e]verybody has a terrible record of extrajudicial killing.” Citing the militarization of the US Mexican border, he states, “[I] look at the human rights record of America along that line. The way that they treat the migrants there.” Citing American colonialism in the Philippines, he reminds his audience of reporters about the US pacification campaign against the Moro: “Can they explain the 600,000 Moro murdered in these islands? Do you want to see the pictures? We have a recorded history of that sordid period in our national life”

Duterte’s accusation of the US of its own crimes against humanity might be understood as a deferral of responsibility and point of commonality shared between the Philippine and US nation-states. The recent 2020 Anti-terror bill is a recent example of the continued collusion between the Philippine government and the US.¹³⁷ The proposed \$2 billion arms sale between the US and Philippines, the collaboration between the two nation-states in a perpetual war against “terror” through the bombing of Muslim and Moro communities in the south of the archipelago. I have no academic insights to offer here other than the observation that structures of policing and militarization have been reinforced since the turn of the 20th century. And Duterte recognizes this much when he states, “I am the president of a sovereign state. And we have long since to be a colony. I do not have any master except the Filipino people.”

Who are the “Filipino people” Duterte claims allegiance to? For one, they are not his critics. In Tagalog he tells Filipino reporters critical of his anti-drug policy to leave the Philippines and go to America, calling them the “lap dogs” of a former colonizer. They must not be the Moro, Lumad, or rural and urban poor, who have long endured colonial tensions rooted in

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Philippines: New Anti-Terrorism Act Endangers Rights,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/05/philippines-new-anti-terrorism-act-endangers-rights>.

Muslim resistance to western colonization in the south of the archipelago, land reform, and the increasing political disenfranchisement of the working-poor and indigenous.

Duterte's recognition of the necropolitical administration of extrajudicial violence as sovereign right of the modern nation is captured in the photo of Fontanilla and others like it. Imperial logics might isolate that violence to the Philippines and demarcate it within the carceral optics of the "murder scene." However, belying Berehulak's observation is the imperial archive. In *Insurrecto* the images of Filipino's murdered by Duterte's war on drugs and extrajudicial state violence are linked to the images of murdered Filipinos from the American war. *Insurrecto* provides one optic for apprehending state violence. As I've been suggesting, US Filipino literature and visual art's critical engagement with the stereograph and stereoscope in both narrative and visual mediums, represents diasporic practices of empathy and conviviality.

Chapter 5 “necessary gestures of everyday life”: The Politics of Queer Care in Lesley Tenorio’s “Save the I-Hotel” (2012)

In this chapter I read two short stories: Lesley Tenorio’s “Save the I Hotel” (2012) and Mia Alvar’s “Esmeralda” (2015). In the historical context of labor exportation in the Philippines, and the passage of the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 that allowed for family reunification, privileged skilled labor migrants, and new quotas for immigration, I discuss how contemporary literary representations of Filipino historical experience challenge neoliberal assumptions which center the relationship between individual subject and the nation-state. Literary depictions of relationships formed by diasporic subjects illustrate the appearance of neoliberal governance in everyday life through forms of state violence and neglect. In US Filipino cultural production, care is depicted as a reparative practice of diasporic conviviality that mitigates the routine harm administered by the nation-state. In “Save the I Hotel” and “Esmeralda,” I show how migrant Filipino subjects betray the violence of the US and Philippine modern nation-states through an archipelagic memory, which alternates between the US Filipino subject’s present in the US and past in the Philippines. In each of the short stories, I examine queer desires that disrupt forms of heteronormativity institutionalized by modern nation-states through labor relations.

I begin with a discussion of Lesley Tenorio’s short story, “Save the I Hotel.” Tenorio is a Filipino American writer born in the Philippines and based in San Francisco, California. His short stories appear in several publications, including *The Atlantic*. His debut collection, *Monstress* (2012), includes “Save the I Hotel,” a short story that follows Fortunado, a manong being evicted from

the San Francisco International Hotel. In what follows, I discuss the politics of queer care by analyzing the short story's narration of Fortunado's relationship with Vicente. The aesthetic and structural form of the short story alternates between the demonstrations and mass eviction in 1977 and the story of how the two characters met in 1934. Fortunado is a migrant Filipino worker new to the San Francisco Bay Area. Upon his arrival, he meets Vicente, a manong and tenant of the San Francisco International Hotel, and grows close to him. One night while drinking, the two share a kiss. While Vicente moves past that night as if nothing happened, Fortunado becomes attached to it: "it only brightened in his mind, and when months dragged into a year and then another, it was an absolute truth."¹³⁸ Although a desire unfulfilled, Fortunado renegotiates his relationship with Vicente by taking care of him in their old age. For example, in a scene taking place in the present of the short story, an elderly Vicente is preparing to leave the I Hotel by shaving his face. Noticing that he's only shaved half of his face, Fortunado offers to clean up the rest for Vicente:

When he was younger, he had yearned for this closeness, ached for it, and now that Vicente could no longer care for himself, these were the necessary gestures of their everyday lives. And Fortunado welcomed the responsibility, secretly cherished it. Duty fulfilled desire, as best it could.¹³⁹

The labor Fortunado performs affords him a level of intimacy otherwise foreclosed by normative understandings of pleasure which center an individual's sexual identification and orientation rather than mutual aid and communal support. Situating this convivial practice of care within the narrative structure of "Save the I Hotel," I argue, demonstrates an archipelagic memory co-constitutive of Fortunado's queer relationship to Vicente and their precarity as migrant Filipino laborers engendered by neoliberal structures of governance.

¹³⁸ Tenorio, "Save the I Hotel," 174.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

Framing the events of the International Hotel and the position of US Filipinos within this transnational and imperial context post-1946 Philippines further complicates our understanding of the already heterogeneous Filipino subject and pan-ethnic Asian American movement. By beginning with the events at the International Hotel and its centrality in the field of Asian American studies, I argue that the foundational moment of an Asian American political subjectivity fails to apprehend, or account for, the ways in which the Filipino subject experiences American power not by exclusion but by neglect and harm. These material conditions, I argue, are symptomatic of contemporary neocolonial US-Philippine relations.

In these short stories I discuss modes of US Filipino relationality depicted in scenes of care, and the appearance of neoliberal governance in ordinary and everyday settings. While neoliberal policy making and governance is shaped by a small number of global stakeholders with a profound influence on the world and its people, its manifestations in the daily lives of Filipinos is often overshadowed by its structural and systematic promises of economic security and development. These narratives belie the overwhelming poverty, state-violence, and precarious economic conditions exacerbated by global financial institutions such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund in the Philippines, which have only helped to benefit nationalist elites and to solidify the nation-state form through the establishment of a global liberal order at the mid-20th-century. Although some upwardly and globally mobile Filipinos have benefited from US-Philippine relations, what remains clear are the persistent failures of Philippine governance and the ways in which it is continually supported by the US.

I end the chapter with a look at Mia Alvar's short story, "Esmeralda."¹⁴⁰ The story centers around Esmeralda, a Filipina living and working in New York City as a cleaner, sending

¹⁴⁰ A short story originally published in *In the Country* and later published in *Go Home!*, a collection of short stories and essays by Asian American Writers Workshop.

remittances to support her rural family in the Philippines. Like Tenorio's story, "Esmeralda" follows a diasporic Filipina subject whose relationships are revealed to the reader through an archipelagic memory, which recall Pepe, her brother in the Philippines, and John, an office worker and in the World Trade Center where she works, as well. Queer pleasure in "Esmeralda" is represented through the tension between self-sacrifice *and* in the exchanges between Esmeralda and the women in her life. In conclusion, I discuss the queer exigencies of communal care as it relates to the heterosexist conditions of migrant Filipino labor.

"Save the I Hotel": understanding Filipino subjectivity through neoliberalism, migrant labor, and diasporic conviviality

"Save the I Hotel" is set in San Francisco between the years 1934-1977, which mark Fortunado's arrival into the US and his eviction from the International Hotel. The broader historical context shaping Fortunado's itinerary is defined by changing US immigration law restricting Filipino immigration, American imperialism in Asia and the Pacific, and neoliberal development in the US and Philippines. The story begins in 1977 in the final hours before the eviction of the tenants of the International Hotel in San Francisco, California. After hearing protestors' plans to prevent the police from evicting the hotel's tenants, such as himself, Fortunado attends to Vicente. Commenting on the disruption outside the building, Vicente tells Fortunado, "I hate this street," to which Fortunado responds, calling it "[j]ust traffic,"¹⁴¹ despite knowing the urgency of the setting. Taking him for his word, Vicente responds by complaining about the Chinese and "[t]heir parade always clogging the city."¹⁴²

I situate my reading of "Save the I Hotel" in Filipino studies, which insists on the inherent tensions and differences between Filipino and broader, Asian American subjectivities.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 161.

¹⁴² Ibid, 161.

Generally, this tension has been defined by the imperial relationship between the US and the Philippines, where, unlike the East Asian histories of Asian American studies, Filipino subjectivity in relationship to the US has been defined by imperial war and colonization, rather than exclusion and immigration. This tension can also be understood in the historical context of the Yellow power movement, the politicization of Asian America, and the institutionalization of Ethnic studies in the long 1960s in US history, which the I Hotel was a part of.¹⁴³

The San Francisco International Hotel, or I Hotel, was built in 1873 and rebuilt in 1907 after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. The I Hotel served as a home to many tenants in the mid-20th century, who were mostly Filipino field laborers in the US. The I Hotel was the former center of Manilatown, between Chinatown and the SF Financial District, and Southwest of the Embarcadero. At its height, Manilatown was an ethnic enclave, home to more than 39,000 Filipinos. Like most Filipino communities of the early to mid-20th century, San Francisco's Manilatown was a bachelor society—a direct result of exclusionary anti-Asian immigration laws.

This community of Filipinos became known as “manongs”: an Ilocano honorific traditionally used to describe a first-born son of a family or an older male relative. In the American context and history of Filipino immigration, “manong” is used to describe the first generation of migrant labor from the Philippines. Because of the colonial relationship between the US and the Philippines, immigration history between the two countries differed from that of other Asian countries, like China and Japan. For example, Filipinos were granted the status of American nationals as colonial subjects of the US that allowed for greater mobility between the colony and metropole, yet still restricted access to modes of settlement (i.e., property ownership) and barred citizenship and its attendant rights.

¹⁴³ Densho, “Yellow Power,” accessed August 9, 2021, <https://densho.org/asian-american-movement/>.

In 1968, the owners of the I Hotel began the process of evicting the tenants from the building. Milton Meyer & Co were the owners of the building and developers who hoped to profit from processes of urban renewal and gentrification. The redevelopment of Downtown San Francisco was spearheaded by M. Justin Herman, executive director of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, and sought to expand the Financial District. Milton Meyer & Co. proposed to demolish the building to erect a parking garage, hoping to profit from the redevelopment of San Francisco. In its location between Chinatown and the Financial District, Manilatown and the I Hotel stood on ground that could be profited from and was home to a community the city thought they could displace.

The demonstrations at the International Hotel in San Francisco mobilized a pan-ethnic coalition of Asian American activists and community members in the Bay Area. Emerging in the California Bay Area alongside the anti-war student movement on the UC Berkeley campus, and in conjunction with the Third World Liberation Front, the Asian American political subject emerged alongside the US anti-war movement and Civil Rights movement of the 60s. In Asian American history, the I Hotel is remembered and canonized as a watershed moment in the formation of a politicized Asian American subject through the work of a pan-Asian coalition of activists, community orgs, and tenants who resisted the eviction by demanding an extended lease. The Asian American movement, like others involved in the TWLF, articulated a critique of American power that saw racism operating locally, nationally, and abroad. The TWLF acted as a coalitional movement, organizing Black, Chicano, Indian, and Asian Americans to demand radical racial justice.

The activism around the I Hotel was able to postpone the eviction of the Manongs for several years. In 1973, a foreign company based in Thailand bought the I Hotel with similar

plans to replace the building. The I Hotel was eventually demolished in 1977, and as such, its tenants were evicted and displaced. The I Hotel was eventually reconstructed in 2003. The newly constructed I Hotel is home to the International Hotel Manilatown Center. Continuing the political spirit of 1977, the cultural center functions as a community space and has hosted performances, art exhibits, and film screenings, and provides residential housing, and low-income housing for the elderly.

Representations of memory in Asian American cultural production strategically and critically engages with US racializing discourses of modernity and progress. These economic and political stakes are historically rooted in the US's relationship to Asian nation-states and labor. In the case of the International Hotel, representations of the demonstrations participate in an intergenerational dialogue. For example, Chris Eng argues that Karen Tei Yamashita's *I Hotel* (2010), "opens up multiple temporalities within the 'origins' of the Asian American movement."¹⁴⁴ Scholarly writing in Asian American studies on Curtis Choy's documentary, *The Fall of the I Hotel* (1983), Al Robles poetry in *Rappin' with ten thousand carabaos in the dark* (1996) highlights the epistemological and political stakes of remembering and representing the I Hotel, reiterating Lisa Lowe's claim that "[i]t is...in culture that individuals and collectivities struggle and remember and, in that difficult remembering, imagine and practice both subject and community differently."¹⁴⁵

The opening scene of "Save the I Hotel" illustrates Fortunado's network of relationships, which include Vicente, the I Hotel protests, and local Asian American communities. These tensions are represented through an archipelagic memory that alternates between the present and the past and undermines liberal assumptions of political recognition and participation that adhere

¹⁴⁴ Eng, "Queer Genealogies," 362.

¹⁴⁵ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 3.

to the formation of an Asian American subjectivity. These flashbacks are anchored by processes of urban development, white heteronormativity, and immigration that, when read through the history US-Philippine relations, reveals both the conditions of possibility for Fortunado's relationships and the ordinary semblances of imperial power.

This becomes apparent in the short story, for example, when the opening scene transitions with a narrative flashback to September 1934, when Fortunado meets Vicente. Having already lived and worked as a migrant farm worker outside of Stockton for five months, Fortunado makes a trip to San Francisco. While there, he wanders the streets until he recognizes a group of Filipino men smoking outside of a dance hall in the city's historical Manilatown. Stepping inside, Fortunado sees that the room is filled with Filipinos, white women, an elderly man selling dance tickets, and a sagging banner that greets "*Welcome to the Dreamland Saloon.*"¹⁴⁶ The Dreamland Saloon quickly loses its fantasy-like quality as Fortunado witnesses the indifference of the white women towards the Filipino men. For Fortunado, however, "[t]his would be a night of music to enjoy alone, nothing more, and it would be enough."¹⁴⁷ Fortunado's queer solitude is interrupted when he spots Vicente awkwardly stumbling through the crowd and being rejected by a woman. Upon noticing that he is being laughed at, Vicente walks over to question Fortunado, and, in doing so, accidentally spills his beer on him. While Fortunado escapes to the bathroom to clean the mess, he begins to feel out of place and ashamed of his ill-fitting jacket. Vicente follows him and offers both an apology and his jacket. Afterwards, the two leave the Dreamland Saloon to walk around San Francisco. While doing so, they look out from the Embarcadero, and see the Bay Bridge still in construction:

¹⁴⁶ Tenorio, "*Save the I Hotel,*" 163.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

It would be the longest steel structure in the world, eight miles connecting San Francisco to Oakland. For now, it was only a line of towers rising from the black water, half-hidden in fog, and Fortunado wondered when it would be finished, if someday he might travel across it.¹⁴⁸

The construction of the Bay Bridge serves as the background of the story, reminding the reader that modernity, infrastructure, and displacement foreshadows Fortunado and Vicente's eviction, which will bring them across the Bay Bridge.

Historically, in the period between 1934-1977 (i.e., the setting of "Save the I Hotel), US-Philippine relations underwent a dramatic transformation. The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 initiated the process of Filipinization whereby the Philippines would become self-governing, subjected Filipinos to anti-Asian exclusion laws in the US, and classified Filipinos as "aliens" to the US— a change from the previous classification as "nationals." Following WWII, Japanese occupation, and the archipelago's independence from colonial rule in 1946, the Philippines established an economic system of migrant labor serving global capital under the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos in the 70s. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez's *Migrants for Export* (2010) and Catherine Ceniza Choy's *Empire of Care* (2003), describe this as a neocolonial extension of the country's imperial history. Philippine independence and its assimilation into the liberal international order of Western imperialism following post-WWII reconstruction and decolonization emphasized the participation of nation-states in globalization as an indicator of sovereignty. Witnessing the reemergence of right-wing nationalist movements and populist governments in the early 21st century, only highlights how the nation-state form of the 20th century facilitated the concentration of wealth and capital into metropolitan centers benefitting nationalist elites. Inclusion within the imperial metropole and legitimization of the Philippine nation-state imbricated it within global capitalism through neoliberal logics that, during the

¹⁴⁸ Tenorio, "Save the I Hotel," 167.

“postcolonial” period of the mid-century, assumed participation in the global free market as liberatory and the nation-state as collective unit for peoples to enter it.

From this perspective, the liberatory promises of American colonization in the Philippines are manifested in the dispersal of Filipinos into the precarious conditions wrought by Western Imperialism and the global institutionalization of capitalism. Without structural support, the precarity experienced by migrant Filipino labor is an effect of a neglectful Philippine state and policing by host countries. For example, *Paper Dolls* (2006), a documentary by Israeli director, Tomer Heymann, follows the lives of several queer Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) who have taken on jobs as caretakers for elderly Israeli men. In the documentary we see their complex navigation of the Philippine state’s neoliberal model of labor export and the Israeli nation-state’s settler violence towards Palestinians. This documentary complicates our understandings of conviviality by indexing the state structures that shape the lives of displaced and diasporic peoples and their location in metropolitan civil society. The documentary’s subjects, Martin Manalansan writes, develop affective relationships with their clients, who at times resent their Filipino caretakers, and at other times display affection. These affective bonds, however, are entangled with postwar histories of decolonization and economic restructuring. As an ally to the US, the Philippines formed bonds with the emergent Israeli nation-state. Resistance to settler violence is present in the documentary, when the subjects begin to speak about the fear of getting caught in an explosion, or an attack by Palestinians. The subjects of the documentary also live in fear of the Israeli state which seeks to incarcerate and deport them. In the space of the gay club, they also navigate racism.

The US Filipino situation is, however, complicated by immigration law in the US and the neoliberal state. For example, the political exclusions shaping the lives of manongs and Filipinos

in the US changed with the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which removed quotas from US immigration and gave Filipinos the opportunity to settle in the US and gain citizenship. For Filipinos migrating to the US, this meant access to citizenship and its attendant rights, including family reunification and legally recognized marriages. Many of the migrants who gained entrance into the US nation-state were “skilled” migrants and their families. Furthermore, In the years leading up to the I Hotel eviction, the US was also in the middle of the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam-American war, the process of dismantling social welfare programs and initiating its War on Poverty. The 70s in the US saw many of President Johnson’s Great Society initiatives dismantled by President Richard Nixon who valued small government and targeted federal spending on social welfare through the process devolution or rather, a redistribution of responsibility to the states. He did this by shifting the approach of social welfare from structural policy and affordable housing, to putting money directly into the hands of those seeking aid. This shift had the effect of pitting States against one another for these resources, which then allowed for federal funds to be directly funneled into the hands of landlords and business owners.

These conditions demonstrate Victor Bascara’s demand to “make queer *economic* sense of alternative forms of domesticity in historical understandings of pre-1965 waves of Filipino immigrants to the United States.”¹⁴⁹ Asian bachelor societies in the US were subjected to legal exclusions from the means and practices of establishing propertied, normative heterosexual relations in the US, including Anti-Asian exclusion laws limiting the immigration of Asian women, anti-miscegenation laws, and laws prohibiting the acquisition and ownership of private property. In their exclusion from normative heterosexual relations in the US, the manongs were barred from means of settlement in the US through laws that foreclosed certain kinds of relations

¹⁴⁹ Bascara, “Within Each Crack,” 120.

and rights. Through the exclusion from heteronormative institutions, Bascara argues that the sociality of the Manongs was itself a bachelor society which resembled a form of “queer domesticity.” He states, “Queer domesticity for the Manongs can only be understood as a historical relic rather than as something that modernity and liberalism can tolerate or even champion as a manifestation of vaunted diversity.”¹⁵⁰ Underlying this claim, I believe, are several assumptions: that access to US citizenship and settlement allows previously excluded subjects to relish in the privileges of US life, thus discarding previous ways of life that emerged out of precarious laboring conditions; that the precarity of undocumented labor goes away; that undocumented labor goes away; that conditions experienced by the manongs and migrant Filipinos are unique to the US Filipino experience; that periodization is accurate; etc.

We might instead think of queer domesticity and other practices of conviviality as part of the multitudes’ repertoire. Understanding Filipino subjectivity within global capitalism and beyond national terms, such as Hardt and Negri’s “multitude,” or Guy Standing’s concept of “the precariat,” moves away from the liberal teleologies of citizenship, and attends to the imminent and political relationships that take shape in the everyday encounters forged by migrant laborers. “Save I Hotel” expands upon this scholarly conversation by showing how laboring conditions and relations are racialized. For example, the narrator describes Fortunado’s reflections on his status and labor as a migrant farm worker:

He thought of his life in America: the hot, dusty hours in the fields, the muggy nights in the bunkhouses, all the workers who passed the time regretting the new life and lamenting the old. They were new arrivals too, most of them Filipinos, and they never stopped telling him: *Nobody knows you here, just the work you do, just the color of your face.* They called America a mistake, and now the dream was to find a way back home, to the life you knew and the person you were¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 130.

¹⁵¹ Tenorio, “Save the I Hotel,” 165.

Fortunado's experience is defined by his racial labor, which is historically shaped by American colonialism and imperialism in the Philippines. The narrator comments on how returning "home" is idealized. For Fortunado and Vicente, however, arriving "home" doesn't require return: "Manilatown...Our small place in San Francisco. Just like home, eh?" Fortunado shook his head. This was better."¹⁵² For both Fortunado and Vicente, "home" is a collective formation emerging between others enduring similar conditions. Fortunado comments, "It's hard out here, sometimes...you get lonely, you get scared."¹⁵³ What the two share, however, is a shared understanding about the imminent relationship between home and community—that it is a political network of interdependence and mutual aid.

This much is demonstrated through Vicente, who provides Fortunado with a job at the Parkdale and money to settle into the I Hotel. Despite this, the social relations of production between migrant Filipino workers is policed by state and economic structures. For example, in another flashback following Fortunado and Vicente's kiss, the narrator describes the legal conditions that shaped Filipino sexuality and relationships:

No Filipino could bring a wife or fiancée to the States back then and there were no Filipinas here. Marrying white women, even dating them, was illegal, and always dangerous. The same week he arrived in California, a Filipino field worker was beaten to death for swimming in a lake with his white girlfriend.

The law changed in 1967. "I've been alone this long," Vicente had said, "what would I do with a wife?"¹⁵⁴

For both characters, juridical structures of heteronormativity systematically pose obstacles to forming political community and belonging. The narrator comments on anti-Asian immigration laws that barred Asian men from bringing wives or fiancés. It also mentions the laws and

¹⁵² Ibid, 166.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 166.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 168.

discrimination towards interracial relations between white women and Asian men (anti-miscegenation laws were deemed unconstitutional in 1967 through the US Supreme Court case of *Loving v Virginia*). Although these material conditions shaped the formation of kinship networks in immigrant communities and bachelor societies, Vicente remains indifferent to them. He says, “I’ve been alone this long...what would I do with a wife?” The narrator gives us some insight into this comment through Fortunado’s reflections, “Fortunado would watch him, knowing Vicente’s regrets--the years of come-and-go women, the time and money wasted on prostitutes, the better life he might have lived had he been brave enough to try. And Fortunado would think, *I’m sorry*” (169). Fortunado notes the ways Vicente is excluded from heteronormativity, how he aspires to it through sex workers, and feels sympathy for Vicente. Fortunado also thinks that some semblance of “the better life” could have been possible had Vicente only tried. Fortunado’s awareness of laws and violence shaping the sexuality of the manongs highlights the political practice of queer care that safely affords him a prohibited intimacy. In this sense, Filipino immigrants were barred from state recognized forms of white heteronormativity that actively shaped and managed their intimate relationships. These conditions imposed upon immigrants through the legal regulation and prohibition of relationships positioned them as non-normative subjects.

Although Fortunado and Vicente are barred from practices of American belonging, Fortunado imagines and practices a diasporic conviviality with Vicente. The narrator states:

But the best times in the day, those moments when [Fortunado] believed he was where he belonged, were when he passed Vicente in the hallway or on the stairs: Vicente would nod with a quick smile of recognition, and sometimes, when no one was watching, he would reach out and punch Fortunado on the arm, just below his shoulder.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 170, 171.

Fortunado's sense of home and belonging is felt through his relationship with Vicente, specifically through moments of physical contact and recognition. Fortunado feels a sense of belonging through Vicente's recognition of him performed through small gestures. This moment also elaborates on Fortunado's earlier reflections on home and Manilatown.

The everyday gestures of recognition shared between Fortunado and Vicente are soon complicated by his desire for Vicente. One night while drinking, the two are hanging out on a fire escape at the I Hotel. Noticing Vicente shivering, Fortunado reaches over to put his jacket on him. Tucking it under his chin, Fortunado touches Vicente's jaw and then his lip, and the two kiss:

Fortunado had been this close with others before: those few flirtatious men back home, who at some point became willing. But it was never like this...He kissed Vicente and just as he was about to apologize, he felt Vicente kissing him too.¹⁵⁶

After the two kiss, Vicente gets up and retreats to his room, telling Fortunado that it is getting late. Reflecting on the kiss the next day, Fortunado thinks:

He made no mention of the night before, only that his head still buzzed from the Du Kang they shared. Then he hurried down the stairs and Fortunado slowly got up, and when he saw his face in the mirror above the sink, he understood how this would go: as it did back home—with silence and forgetting, the only way he knew.¹⁵⁷

Fortunado's desire is shaped by his experience of home (i.e. in the Philippines, in the US, etc.) and is defined by forgetting. Fortunado develops an attachment to the intimate moment he shared with Vicente that only intensifies:

All that became of their kiss was longing. Fortunado began counting off days and weeks since it happened, believing that enough passing time would blur the night into one that perhaps never happened at all. But it only brightened in his mind, and when months

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 172.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 173.

dragged into a year and then another, it was an absolute truth: once, long ago, they had kissed.¹⁵⁸

Although Fortunado's desire for Vicente remains unfulfilled, he pursues the queer pleasure of their relationship through care.

“The necessary gestures of their everyday lives”: On the Queer Pleasure and Politics of Care

Fortunado's practices of diasporic conviviality and home making are queer in their indifference to modes of heteronormative belonging and settlement authorized by the state. Through a practice of care, Fortunado and Vicente form a queer relationship that is illegible to punitive state structures, allowing them to repair the routine forms of violence authorized by the heteronormative neoliberal state. For Vicente, Fortunado's care provides him with social support. Furthermore, Fortunado's care is protective. In a series of flashbacks, the reader learns that Vicente forms a romantic relationship with Althea, a white woman who has moved to San Francisco and works at the same hotel as the two protagonists. As an interracial couple, their relationship is subject to violence. Fortunado's practice and ethics of care are compromised when he betrays Vicente by alerting the police of the couple one night.

Vicente forms a relationship with Althea, a white woman from Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, who works as a maid in the Parkdale. She describes San Francisco as fast paced in comparison to her hometown. She shares in this experience with Fortunado and Vicente, also, when the story describes how “life dragged too: her boarding house room was stuffy and dim, the walls and single window unable to keep out any noise, barely a comfort after long shifts at the Parkdale.”¹⁵⁹ However, unlike Fortunado and Vicente, her experience of temporal drag is an effect of her femininity and class.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 173.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 177.

Fortunado observes Althea and Vicente and thinks to himself, “[s]he could be any Dreamland girl, but there was a difference: when Vicente looked at her, she looked back at him.”¹⁶⁰ Vicente and Althea both talk about staying awake all night. Fortunado notes how they walk together and stare at each other: in sync and with recognition. As Fortunado is about to leave the two and return to the I Hotel alone, a drunk white man confronts the two for “taking white women and white jobs.”¹⁶¹ In an attempt to stop the confrontation, Fortunado runs to Vicente, who in turn punches the man to stop him from hurting Fortunado. After the three return to the I Hotel, they process the violent encounter: “‘We were just walking,’ [Fortunado] heard Althea say, ‘that’s all.’ But he knew the truth, and saw it reflected in the glass: Vicente and Althea on the edge of the bed, his arm around her shoulder.”¹⁶² In this moment, Althea’s character is naive in her reading of the situation. Although she is surprised by it, she is unable to see her proximity to Vicente as a transgression. Fortunado, looking at Althea and Vicente together, sees the incident from an outside perspective. He observes the violent repercussion of transgressing laws prohibiting interracial relationships, and a foreclosure of his desire for Vicente.

Despite the risks of visibility, Vicente continues to pursue a relationship with Althea. Their relationship navigates private and public spaces, but ultimately, is subjected to surveillance regardless. One night, Althea takes Vicente to the Berlin Deluxe, “[t]he hotel’s grandest suite.”¹⁶³ The couple regularly stays in the suite: “One night a week in the Berlin Deluxe became two, sometimes three, and Vicente and Althea remained undetected.”¹⁶⁴ Fortunado grows wary and critical of their relationship as he observes the kinds of attention it draws. For example,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 178.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 178.

¹⁶² Ibid, 179.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 174.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 184.

while out in public together, a white man witnesses Vicente and Althea kiss and turns to Fortunado asking him, “you’re not foolish enough to try something like that, are you, boy?”¹⁶⁵

Fortunado remembers his kiss with Vicente and:

how it happened in darkness, in silence. And he thought of Vicente and Althea’s kiss on the sidewalk, so reckless and unhidden, which perhaps was the point: Fortunado understood how difficult love could be, how its possibility hinged on a delicate balance between complete anonymity and the undeniable need to be known.¹⁶⁶

This moment is ambivalent for Fortunado who knows the violent repercussions of recognition and the desire for it as a queer subject.

Eventually, Fortunado betrays Vicente and Althea by anonymously reporting their use of the Berlin Deluxe to hotel security and the police. The narrator states, “[t]here were rules in this world; why should Fortunado be the only one to suffer them?”¹⁶⁷ After a couple of days of not hearing from Vicente, Fortunado discovers that he was arrested and beaten by the police after getting caught. When Vicente and he reunite, Fortunado reflects: “But now, all he heard was loneliness, Vicente’s and his own. For this, Fortunado stayed awake through the night, and wept for them both.”¹⁶⁸ This scene illustrates the imperative of care, but also the limitations of the state. Here, Fortunado’s betrayal of Vicente to authorities leads him to question the ways in which the neoliberal state provides aid through state violence.

“Save the I Hotel” depicts a queer relationship through Fortunado's unrequited desire for Vicente, the affective bonds between them, the work of living together under American imperialism. Through flashbacks, the reader sees how practices of care allows Fortunado to experience pleasure and to form crucial relationships. The necessity of care becomes apparent

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 187.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 187.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 188.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 192.

through Fortunado and Vicente's encounter with the neoliberal state that is exemplified through state violence and police brutality, but also abandonment to the flows of capital and forward movement of modernity. While the protests at the I Hotel postponed the evictions, it could not prevent them. When the story ends, we are left with Fortunado separating from Vicente amid the scuffle of the eviction. As Vicente crosses the Bay Bridge on a bus to Oakland, Fortunado stays at the site of the I Hotel, staring ambivalently at his window from outside.

Tenorio's short story problematizes liberal politics of visibility by depicting the queer pleasures secured through illegibility and secrecy. In one scene at the Bay Bridge and Embarcadero, we learn that Fortunado participates in forms of queer sociality through cruising. In the shadows of the Bay Bridge, Fortunado meets an anonymous man at the Embarcadero cruising. The two leave:

The warmth he felt inside this stranger was unquestionable and necessary, and each time it happened was meant to be the last. Now, Fortunado feared a lifetime of this and little more, and he wondered how long such a life could be.¹⁶⁹

In this brief and casual encounter, the narrator describes the necessity of pleasure, its availability, but also the unsustainability of certain ways of securing it (here being cruising). Despite the forms of legal and economic structures that regulate and affect the relationships of Fortunado and Vicente, their non-normative desires demonstrate forms of conviviality that allow for them to experience pleasure and signal the possibility of life against the neo-liberal nation state.

The queer pleasures of "Save the I Hotel" are secured through practices of diasporic conviviality that undermine the violent biopolitical management of life under the neoliberal nation-state. In the short story, the violence of the neoliberal nation-state is defined by Fortunado and Vicente's encounters with its presence and absence depicted through scenes of violent

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 189.

discrimination, displacement, economic precarity, lack of affordable housing, etc. Despite the ubiquity of the neoliberal nation-state, the desires of migrant Filipino laborers, like Fortunado and Vicente, lead them to form political community in their pursuit of queer pleasure. These pleasures are marked as queer in their deviance from white heteronormativity authorized, privileged, and protected by the state. The characters' navigation of visibility and recognition, I argue, problematize liberal identity politics by showing how the field of representation and subjectification in the US are embedded within global, and imperial processes.

“Esmeralda”

Mia Alvar “Esmeralda” is a short story about Esmeralda, a Filipina working in New York City on September 11, 2001. The story alternates between glimpses of her life in NYC and her rural community in the Philippines as she makes her way into the city on the day of the attacks on the World Trade Center. To evade police checkpoints and get into the city, Esmeralda poses as a nurse.¹⁷⁰ Esmeralda strategically uses anonymity and misrecognition to navigate the multiple police checkpoints and barricades. While doing so, the story's flashbacks give the reader insight into her relationships with her brother Pepe, John, and Doris. Revealing her personal history in this way gives a sense of both her diasporic situation and her queer desires. Although her relationship to Pepe and John makes up the bulk of the story, Esmeralda's relationship to Doris figures as a vital relationship that provides her with the conditions to pursue her pleasure. In what follows, I discuss the politics of in/visibility in depictions of diasporic conviviality and migrant labor by looking at the ways in which subjects avoid state surveillance.

¹⁷⁰ Alvar, “Esmeralda,” 171.

The reader learns about Esmeralda's personal history as she recalls them navigating the barriers preventing her entrance into the city. Early in the story, we learn that she was, at one point, living undocumented in the US: "[Mrs. Guzman] handed you a one-way ticket back to Manila and the number of a good family there who needed a maid. You found a way to stay then, and you will now."¹⁷¹ After being brought to the US by the Guzman family, Esmeralda was given a plane ticket to return to the Philippines. Rather than fly back, Esmeralda finds a way to stay when she meets Doris, who allows Esmeralda to rent her son's room. To support herself and her brother Pepe and family back in the Philippines, Esmeralda works as a janitor in NYC at the World Trade Center. There she meets John, a white businessman whose wife is terminally ill.

While the story draws many comparisons between John and Pepe, the common characteristic shared between the two is the toxic and abusive relationship they each maintain with Esmeralda. Esmeralda, whose devotional relationship to her troubled brother and sympathetic relationship to John, finds herself used by both in their selfish pursuit of pleasure and patronizing entitlement to it. For example, one night while cleaning John's office, she stumbles upon his diary on his computer. Reading through his log, she takes note of his patronizing tone and self-centered view of his situation calling her name "ridiculous,"¹⁷² taking "pity on her"¹⁷³ for "[t]he village that's been leaching off her," and justifying his thought of sleeping with Esmeralda while his wife is dying in a hospital. Rather than completely removing him from her life or discussing it with John, reading his entry only complicates her feelings for him. The narrator states:

Confusion, like an illness, tied you up inside. You vowed never to come near the lip of his desk again. Seeing your name, yourself in his words, as he saw you—*froufrou, dirt floor, cleaning lady, of all people*—you winced. And yet, these words too: *happy, air and*

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 166.

¹⁷² Ibid, 172.

¹⁷³ Ibid 173.

light, the best part of the day. For weeks you couldn't clean his office without flushing at the cheeks, feeling a mist above your lip. What kind of schoolgirl silliness was this?¹⁷⁴

Her body betrays her affection for John. Esmeralda's self-abnegation brings into relief the tensions between the self and the collective, or more generally speaking, modes of sociality.

Although her relationships with her brother and John subject her to precarious conditions and self-abnegation, the relationships she forms with women in the short story prove to be more affirming and supportive. Again, these seemingly peripheral relationships come to provide the necessary conditions for her to pursue her pleasures. This is exemplified in a scene where Doris helps Esmeralda in pursuing citizenship:

Doris told you of an amnesty five years before, signed by the President. And though you feared it was a hoax, a way to smoke illegals from their hiding holes., she helped you fill out the forms and get your card. REGISTERED ALIEN. Five years later, you rolled all ten of your fingers through black ink and filled ten squares with your ten prints. The lines that cut across the rings told you how many years had passed since you arrived from Manila with the Guzmans. The oath itself took five minutes. Your mind, so trained by prayer, has held on to every word:

*I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance
and fidelity to any foreign prince.
I will support and defend the Constitution.
I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same.*¹⁷⁵

At the courthouse, Esmeralda is registered to vote and meets a newly wedded bride and groom who invite Esmeralda and Doris to celebrate her "citizenship," and their marriage.¹⁷⁶ As the couple take their leave, Doris turns to Esmeralda saying, "You know they think we are a *we*, don't you?" (178). And, after realizing the implication, Esmeralda blushes and kisses Doris "on the lips, just long enough to smell the powdery perfume."¹⁷⁷ Unlike Fortunado, Esmeralda does not attach meaning to this kiss, and instead revels in the ecstasy of the moment. In this small

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 175.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 176.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 177.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid 178.

gesture, we are alerted a kind of unnamed relationship between Esmeralda and Doris that exists outside of institutionalized forms of relation, like marriage, that provide forms of support otherwise unavailable to precarious subjects, such as undocumented people in the US.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the queer temporalities, affects, and relationality in “Save the I Hotel” and Mia Alvar’s “Esmeralda.” My close reading of “Save the I Hotel” and its depiction of a queer Manong shows how queerness might expand our notions of political subjectification and the cultural politics surrounding the I Hotel for Asian America. Care is convivial labor that goes unrecognized by liberal understandings of political participation and recognition. As a queer reparative practice independent of heteronormative necropolitical structures of the nation-state, care and mutual aid attends to the mundane and routine forms of state violence that minoritized subjects simultaneously endure and are expected to participate in.

At the beginning of the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic, some 36,000 overseas Filipino workers were made to return to the Philippines. Upon their arrival, they were quarantined off the shores of the Philippines aboard cruise ships and on land in hotels. Meanwhile, the Philippine state’s COVID-19 response for the archipelago’s local inhabitants was increased policing and militarization. The precarious conditions of OFWs and the neglect of local Filipinos is indicative of the Philippine state’s biopolitical management of death in both its distribution of state violence and containment of the virus. This neoliberal technique of governmentality is the product of an exceptional ideology that expects individuals to shoulder the burden of a global pandemic without proper support from the nation-state.

These short stories show the urgency of imagining alternative modes of political collectivity and community that undermine and, should, ultimately lead to dismantling the

neoliberal nation-state. “Save the I Hotel” and “Esmerelda,” depict Filipinos in diaspora whose queer subjectivities trouble US and Philippine biopolitics from the mid-century onwards in their rejection of neoliberal optics through everyday acts of care. The traces of these practices of conviviality are complicated for diasporic Filipino subjects whose global movement is shaped by histories of Western Imperialism, globalization, and neoliberalism. Through an archipelagic memory, I argue, US Filipino cultural production articulates the anti-colonial exigencies of diasporic conviviality. By revealing the ordinary and ubiquitous nature of power, these short stories disabuse American exceptionalism and its promises of freedom.

While Filipino migrants find themselves subject to Philippine laws and those enforced by their host countries, they also find themselves without the support of social welfare and the target of discrimination by racist settlers. These precarious conditions defined by neglect and harm are the effects of neoliberal policies developed and advanced by Filipino elites which empower them to accumulate capital at the expense of the Filipino people and autochthonous indigenous subjects, who have been engaged in resistance against Spanish, American, and Japanese colonial forces since contact and now are being antagonized by the Philippine state who have been supported in their efforts from the Cold war on.

With this increasing tension in mind, it becomes all the more urgent for US Filipino studies to embrace a decolonial critique in opposition to the nation-state form whose techniques of governance which continue to be administered on vulnerable Filipino subjects (i.e., the urban and rural poor, farmers, indigenous people, leftists and critics of whatever fascist administration has taken control of the state, etc.). US Filipino cultural politics which attempt to recuperate an authentic cultural identity in transit between the US and Philippines does nothing to alleviate the

archipelago of its burden as a US military base, as an economic port, and as a strategic Pacific post in a perpetual state of war.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

In this dissertation I've discussed Filipino cultural production and its archival interventions represented in the archipelagic memories of diasporic Filipino subjects in literature, visual art, and film. By situating these texts beside the imperial archive of US-Philippine relations, I have explored how Filipino encounters with US imperialism (the St. Louis World's Fair, the Philippine-American war, and the I-Hotel) can challenge understandings of national belonging, cultural heritage, and political identity/collectivity dependent upon state-violence. The texts I've engaged highlight the persistent problem of US involvement in the Philippines and the violent conditions of American belonging by questioning the centrality of the imperial archive in documenting the lived experiences of Filipinos in the US and by telling our stories. Through archipelagic memory, Filipino writers and visual artists use narrative and formal strategies that engage with artifacts of the American colonial project in the archipelago to question American exceptionalism and how Philippine sovereignty and Filipino subjectivity is articulated.

Through these creative, material practices that challenge dominant epistemologies of the imperial archive, and advance new understandings of political ontology beyond the territorial US, Filipino cultural production tells stories that are beyond the scope of the imperial archive which, when read against it, reveal not just the gaps and lacuna of the archive, but also different stories that challenge how we know history. Thus, the representational strategies of contemporary Filipino American literature and visual art reworks the material remains of fin-de-siecle American imperialism to advance an anti-colonial cultural politics and praxis that asks

what other kinds of sources might help us understand history and liberation beyond the archive. Filipino literature and visual art draw from many sources devalued or irrelevant to the imperial archive: vernacular visual culture, such as the home movies of *Bontoc Eulogy* and *Insurrecto*, embodied and lived epistemologies, like those portrayed in *Souvenir* and “Save the I Hotel.” The texts I engage with challenge representational forms (the diorama, the stereograph, photography, film, etc.) and the politics of inclusion and assimilation that shaped discourses of cultural and national belonging in the U.S. and the Philippines.

These texts hold the imperial archive to account by revealing the cruelty of American freedom and governance and how Filipinos in the US have responded to it. By returning to the American colonial project and its promise of civil uplift as it is preserved in the imperial archive, US Filipino cultural production shows how the liberatory promises of American life are secured through the violent extraction of capital and people of color from their homelands and the accumulation of that wealth in certain institutions of the US metropole. By viewing the past from the perspective of the present, US Filipino writers and visual artists disabuse American exceptionalism of its promises of freedom and liberation revealing the depressing reality of 100+ years of American tutelage and friendship. The exercise of sovereignty in the Philippines through the administration of state violence onto local populations, such as the urban and rural poor, indigenous peoples, Muslims, and leftist insurgents forces us into a position to question the political system and mode of governance forced upon the archipelago by the US.

Lastly, US Filipino literature challenges readings of Filipino cultural production in Asian American studies. In his essay, “In Search of Filipino Writing: Reclaiming Whose ‘America,’” E San Juan Jr. writes about “Filipinos as subjects-in-revolt,” who have “refused to conform to the totalizing logic of white supremacy and the knowledge of ‘the Filipino’ constructed by the

orientalizing methods of American scholarship.” Exploring in Bulosan’s work how “U.S. conquest exacerbated feudal injustice in the Philippines and accomplished on a global scale [a] division of international labor that transformed the United States into a metropolis of industrial modernity and the Philippines into an underdeveloped dependency: a source of cheap raw materials and manual/mental labor with minimal exchange-value” (217), San Juan’s reading of Bulosan reveals tensions between the materialist politics driving the author’s creative output and the institutional aims of Asian American studies. Filipino self-representation, San Juan insists, must attend to Filipino histories of decolonial insurrection that complicate Filipino affiliation with “the wake of Third World conscientization movements that swept the whole country,” as evidenced in the contributions of Filipino American writers in *Aiiieeeee!* who, “contend that [Bienvenido] Santos and Bulosan, because of birth, carry ‘Filipino-oriented minds’ whereas ‘the Filipino born and reared American writes from an American perspective.’” Texts like Lysley Tenorio’s “Save the I Hotel” challenges such misconceptions by showing how the violent relations between the US and Philippines troubles any clear distinction between “Filipino-oriented minds” and “American perspectives.”

The history of US imperialism in the Philippines complicates our understandings of the movement and settlement of Filipinos from the archipelago across the world. We can see this tension in another art installation by Filipina, American-based visual artist Latipa. Her installation, *Civil Society*, includes footage from the 1965 Watts Riots, the 1991 beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles Police Department, and the 2005 revolts in Clichy-sous-Bois, Paris, in response to the deaths of 15-year-old Bouna Traoré and 17-year-old Zyed Benna and the systematic policing of the Black, Muslim community. Over these scenes, the narrator in a steady, monotonous tone, discusses “the loss of homeland, family, and language marked by a narrative

of second-generation assimilation that comes out of my own life experience” highlighting the deep and crucial ambivalence of articulating oneself in-the-midst of systematic policing and structural dispossession of black and brown people in the West. To hear the diasporic Filipina narrator’s expressions of grief alongside scenes of exemplary, yet everyday state-violence allows the viewer several perspectives. The arrangement of several historical events in *Civil Society* brings attention to the banality of the violence of these events revealing their location on a continuum of imperial power: the conditions of possibility for diasporic life, while also exposing us to a cultural tradition of insurgent aesthetics.¹⁷⁸

In researching and writing this dissertation I have tried, for myself, to understand the how Filipino Americans reconcile this simple, yet difficult fact: the privileges of US life are dependent upon and secured through systematic state violence and collaboration between the US and Philippines. The privilege of being a Filipino in the US, a Filipino with US citizenship, is secured through the neocolonial conditions of the Philippine archipelago imposed by the US and the bolstering of local systems of US policing in North America. It is to see the conditions of the Philippines as entirely separated from the US. However, the work of this dissertation also introduced to what Luis Taruc, a leader of the Hukbalahap Rebellion in the Philippines, called “our proudest heritage”:

The most significant fact about the Filipino people is the strong tide of revolution that runs through our history. It has broken above the surface in over 200 recorded uprisings and revolts against tyranny. Sometimes they were against a foreign oppressor, sometimes against tyrants of our own. The masses of our people have never been submissive. The revolutionary spirit is our proudest heritage.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ See, *The Filipino Primitive*.

¹⁷⁹ Taruc, *Born of the People*, 55.

As a Filipino that grew up in the US, however, this was not always explicitly communicated to me. It was something, strangely enough, I encountered through the work of Filipino writers, artists, and the imperial archive.

Filipinos in Alaska and Fil-Am Showtime: Filipino Cultural Activism and Respectability

To conclude this project, I will reflect on memories of my childhood in Alaska and how Filipinos in Alaska negotiated this dilemma. Filipinos in Alaska were visible in the early 90s through the optics of capitalism and trade in the Pacific, State and criminal law, and the logics of gang activity. The Filipino Alaskan community used forms of visual culture (television, photography, etc) to contest policing practices and optics through positive representations of Filipinos. In the following conclusion, I will briefly discuss two Filipino American projects within the discourse of policing, the economy, and labor in Anchorage, Alaska and the history of US expansion across the Pacific. These two projects, Theresa Bucholdt's photobook *Filipinos in Alaska: 1788-1958* and Nez Danguilan's tv show *Fil-Am Showtime* were produced by Filipino Americans in Alaska in the late 80s and early 90s. By reading them in this context, I show how Filipinos in Alaska contested discourses of policing by advancing a politics of respectability. In these examples, memory appears as a collective endeavor that challenges official knowledges and a tool to contest discourses of criminality, however limited.

I was born in Anchorage, AK in 1987, only a year before my family immigrated to Anchorage, AK. My parents were both born in the 1960s in José Panganiban, Camarines Norte, in the Bicol region of Luzon, in the Philippines. My parents came of age when fascist, President Ferdinand Marcos issued Proclamation No. 1081 declaring martial law for the Philippines in 1972, till he was later ousted by the EDSA People Power Revolution in 1986. During this time my father was a university student in Baguio, a city in the Cordilleras, north of Manilla, where he

remembers Marcos' martial law as being "not that bad." My mother's side of the family lived some of her formative years on the island of O'ahu, Hawai'i in Wahiawa (situated between the Dole Plantation, and Wheeler Army Airfield) before moving to Anchorage.

While Anchorage had experienced a dramatic growth in the economy and population in years prior, at the time of my parents' arrival Alaska was in an economic recession. A 1988 article published in the Anchorage Daily News reported on the "booming minority populations"¹⁸⁰ that had grown despite rapid population decline since 1985 because of the recession. Citing a demographic report published by the Municipality of Anchorage, Elizabeth Pulliam, the author article stated, "whites have declined from 86.7 percent of the population in 1984 to 81.6 percent this year. Blacks, Natives, Asians and Pacific Islanders posted an increase, both in numbers and in percent of the population." In the article she discusses the shifts towards diversity in public schools and the ways different communities of color have been impacted by the recession. Asians and Pacific Islanders, she states, "seem less affected by the recession" and, "that community has grown almost 50 percent in four years, from 3.1 percent of the population in 1984 to 4.6 percent this year." She goes on to state, "Asians, especially those emigrating from other countries, found economic opportunities even while the state was losing thousands of high paying construction and oil jobs." In the same article, Aurora Hovland, Filipina and executive director of the former Asian Alaskan Cultural Center in Anchorage, is quoted saying, "[j]ust take a look at your (help wanted) ads...[t]hese are of course menial jobs, but even the people who have degrees don't mind any job, as long as there's an income."

¹⁸⁰ Anchorage Daily News, "Nov 22, 1988," accessed August 9, 2021, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/apps/news/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info%3AAsid/infoweb.newsbank.com&svc_dat=WORLDNEWS&req_dat=0D1A2AB84F2D3D40&rft_val_format=info%3Aofi/fmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Actx&rft_dat=document_id%3Anews%252F0F78DD48C5C861CF.

While white people and high paying jobs were leaving the state, Americans of color and immigrants began to enter the workforce. My family found work in Alaska's tourist and hospitality industries, alongside other Filipinos and Asian immigrants: my mother a customer service agent for Delta Air and Alaska Air Cargo, and my father as cook and manager in and out of different kitchens throughout my lifetime. When my family moved to Anchorage, we became part of a local Filipino community that had long since established itself before our arrival. My early memories of the Filipino Anchorage community were defined by the Catholic Church (Sunday mass and school were early exercises in disassociation), and the Filipino Basketball League (again). For example, I remember throwing a fit in a barong as a child because I was made to escort a young Filipina woman for a public procession of Santacruzán, a Filipino Catholic tradition and pageant celebrated in May.

As Thelma Bucholdt's photobook and project, *Filipinos in Alaska: 1788-1958*, published by the Asian Alaskan Cultural Center, documents, Filipinos have shaped the history of Alaska since the 18th century through their cultural practices, labor, and settlement.¹⁸¹ Bucholdt states:

[t]his report reveals the early history of Filipinos in Alaska, and Filipino Life in Alaska before statehood. It focuses attention upon the recorded instances of contact between Filipinos and Alaska Native people, and upon the history and historicity of Filipino post-contact integration into Alaska's social and economic development from 1788 to 1958¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Alaska was purchased by the US from the Russian empire, which had established merchant and fur trappers who settled in Alaska since 1732. The Alaska Purchase in October 18, 1867 was the result of 1867 Treaty of Cession, signed between US Secretary of State William H. Seward and Russian envoy Varon Edouard de Stoeckl. And soon thereafter, the US went to war with Spain and gained control of their territories in the Pacific and Caribbean. Seward in March 1848: "*Our population is destined to roll resistless waves to the ice barriers of the north, and to encounter oriental civilization on the shores of the Pacific.*" William L. Iggiagruk Hensley, "There Are Two Versions," accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-russia-gave-alaska-americas-gateway-arctic-180962714/>.

¹⁸² Bucholdt, *Filipinos in Alaska*.

While Bucholdt's framing envisions the project as an opportunity to recover exchanges between subjects of the Philippine archipelago and Alaska Natives, the sentiments expressed in the foreword extend 19th and early 20th century logics of westward expansion that saw the Pacific and its surrounding territories as a crucial military and economic asset to US power. The foreword, written by Ramona Barnes, State Representative in the Alaskan State Legislature, states:

As Chair of the House World Trade and State/Federal Relations Committee, I have become aware of the importance of Southeast Asia. And because I once lived in the Philippines as a military wife, I am perhaps more aware than the average Alaskan of the importance of the Philippines and of the Filipino community in Alaska. We all must recognize the community's cultural importance and value to Alaska as we integrate into the dynamic Pacific Rim economy¹⁸³

What is interesting to me about this project is the way both Bucholdt's and Barnes' framings of the project can coexist without any explicit acknowledgement of US imperialism, which reveal how multicultural politics celebrating ethnic diversity are inadequate for addressing the systematic violence of empire at home and abroad.

Another example comes from Nez Danguilan, a Filipino in Alaska who produced *Fil-Am Showtime*, which was a show that featured Filipino American news in Alaska and aired on public access-tv. In an article published by the Philippine Daily Inquirer, the author states, "[b]arely three years after Nez Danguilan first arrived in Anchorage, Alaska, in 1991, a 14-year-old Filipino teenager was killed in a ruthless gang war here, involving young Mexican and Asian gang members." Danguilan is quoted saying: "[t]hat deadly gang incident did not help, either," he said, "Filipinos were depicted, particularly in the media, as a liability." He explains, "[w]e thought, 'it's time for us to focus on the positive side of our community,'" he said, "[a]nd coming up with a Filipino program on television was the best thing we could think of."

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Although I was only 4 years-old at the time, I don't remember a "ruthless gang war" ever taking place, but there were multiple instances in which city officials and police applied these optics on immigrants and people of color. In a 1995 LA Times article concerning the killing of Chansy Phiachantharath, the author states, "Asians now make up 4.8% of Anchorage's population, compared to 6.4% for blacks. Until recent years, the population had been mainly native tribal people and white immigrants." Quoting an officer from the Anchorage Police Department, the article states, "[i]t is the newer immigrants of all colors who largely have been responsible for introducing gang habits in Anchorage, police say. 'We get some of these kids that have already been exposed to the gang and crime problems outside, and basically they come up here, and they're right at home all over again,' Grimes said."¹⁸⁴ These memories and Filipino responses to discourses of criminality reveal to me the complex and limited ways in which Filipinos in Alaska attempted to distance themselves from harmful representations by aligning themselves with state and economic discourses.

Conclusion

My graduate school training and the writing of this dissertation occurred during the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, which began in response to the killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in 2013. Since then, we have witnessed numerous instances of police brutality and state violence directed at Black Americans. The names of victims include Michael Brown, Eric Garner, George Floyd, Akai Gurley, Tamir Rice, Renisha McBride, Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many more. What is significant about BLM is how it exposes the systematic violence experienced by black people in the US and how this is supported by policing and the prison industrial complex.

¹⁸⁴ Kim Murphy, "COLUMN ONE: A violent dead end," accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-09-22-mn-48682-story.html>.

From the perspective of today, I view my childhood memories and the US Filipino cultural politics they were embedded in with ambivalence. However, US Filipino cultural production and archipelagic memory have also taught me that other pasts and thus futures are possible. *Archipelagic Memory* shows how learning your history is a creative process of unbecoming, nurturing radical community, through solidarity and resistance.

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