The Father, the Son, and the Aswang: Uncolonial Ontologies in Philippine Literature

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Abstract

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This paper proposes the "uncolonial" as an alternative Philippine ontology to the traditionally dualistic terrain of coloniality often associated with the archipelago. While much traditional research has provided insight into the ways in which colonial governance, bolstered by Catholicism introduced by the Spanish upon their arrival on the islands, outlines a stark material contrast between the colonial and noncolonial, this paper articulates a theorization of immateriality and hybridity of uncolonial literature and cultural practices. By offering a triptych framework through which to articulate the uncolonial—an apt metaphor for the immense impact Abrahamic religion and the spiritual have had on the Philippines—this paper argues that the heterogeneity of a Philippine colonial, pre/postcolonial, and uncolonial structure enables an analysis of the historical trajectory of the Philippines without strictly reducing it to a totalizing

nationalism. Utilizing Philippine folk creatures and monsters as vehicles through which to articulate an uncolonial indifference to colonial governance, this paper envisions a radical alterity of Philippine cultural and knowledge production, intentionally or not, unintelligible to the archipelago's historical colonizers. Under the umbrella of the aswang, a cultural figuration of different forms of supernatural creatures, as well as the more conventional spiritual manifestation of the ghost, the construction of an uncolonial Philippine ontology renders Philippine cultural production as something that cannot, and perhaps should not, be totally and completely understood.

INTRODUCTION

Conventional scholarship on the history of the Philippines often grounds itself in an analytic framework that, in the contemporary era of the nation-state as the most prevalent form of sovereignty, proposes a dualistic division. This division typically concerns itself with the colonial schism—that is, Philippine periods of self-determinant sovereignty interrupted or split by a rather long period of colonization. While *three* distinct historical periods appear to emerge in this case, those of the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial, I argue that, for the purposes of this paper, there is a nominal schism that can be understood simply as that which concerns itself with colonization and that which does not. In other words, these periods of Philippine history can be understood philosophically as the colonial and the pre/postcolonial—or noncolonial. I suggest, then, that a conventional understanding of Philippine history exists along this division, and in this paper I propose a third avenue through which to observe Philippine history and ontologies.

In fitting metaphor to the history of Catholicism in the Philippines, this triptych framework for reading a Philippine alterity positions the division between colonial and noncolonial neither as diametrically opposed forces completely incompatible with one another nor as two sides of the same coin, opposite but equal. Rather, the introduction of what I term the *uncolonial* as the third, central piece of the triptych relief of Philippine history suggests that the cultural and knowledge production we observe from the Philippines and its diaspora—and, more generally, Philippine experiences with modernity—exist on a less straightforward scale. The uncolonial is neither wholly colonial nor wholly noncolonial. It is an ontology that, even if aspects of it are derivative of colonial imports, is not reducible to colonialism. Both material and immaterial forces that exceed or, at the very least, are indifferent to the colonial comprise the uncolonial. As we shall observe throughout this paper, in the fictional stories, folktales. and

beliefs that fall somewhere in between purely fiction and "fact," a straightforward delineation between the colonial and noncolonial often overlooks (or, again, is indifferent to) the workings of empire and sovereignty in the Philippines that are not wholly the result of colonialism one way or the other.

As an initial and broad example, the aswang as viscera-sucker in the Philippines does bear *some* resemblance to the vampire as described in European folklore, and indeed does have many similarities. One such specific class of aswang in this case, the manananggal, is a viscera-sucker that often, but not always, takes the form of a woman who, at nightfall, separates the top half of her body from the bottom half, at which point she gains the ability to fly and travel to other villages to consume the internal organs or "to feed on the voided phlegm of the sick."[1] The European vampire, by comparison, is a creature that resembles a human, is *also* primarily nocturnal, and feeds on the blood of unsuspecting people. Both the vampire and the manananggal share an association with wings and flying: while the manananggal does not transform, she detaches her upper body from her lower body and flies; the vampire, as often rendered in European and American fiction, can transform into a bat and fly. The similarities do not stop there. Maximo D. Ramos writes:

> Some viscera suckers are said to live in the jungle by day. *They throw their arms over a branch, drape their hair over their faces, and sleep all day.* Other viscera suckers dwell in lonely huts deep in the woods, but like vampires most of them reside in human communities with the men they have married.[2]

[1] Ramos, Maximo D. *The Aswang Complex in Philippine Folklore* (Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House, 1990[1998]), xviii. As a general note throughout this paper, the term "aswang" is used to broadly refer to creatures of Philippine folklore, as an umbrella term for understanding the various manifestations of supernatural beings that manifest physically in the communities of the Philippines.
[2] Ibid., xix-xx. Italics mine.

The diurnal slumber of the manananggal, hanging from a branch draped in its own hair, is reminiscent of the sleeping habits of the bat—which sleeps hanging from tree branches wrapped in its own wings—and, by extension, the vampire.

There are several definitions which might encompass what we understand as the vampire, not the least of which is "a reanimated corpse that rises from the grave to suck the blood of living people and thus retain a semblance of life."[3] This generic definition of the vampire offers us a starting point off of which to explore the variations on the vampiric myth and the ways in which it manifests across global cultures. J. Gordon Melton continues:

> While the subject of vampires almost always leads to a discussion of death, all vampires are not resuscitated corpses. Numerous vampires are disembodied demonic spirits. In this vein are the numerous vampires and vampire-like demons of Indian mythology and the *lamiai* of Greece. Vampires can also appear as the disembodied spirit of a dead person that retains a substantial existence […] Likewise, in the modern secular literary context, vampires sometimes emerge as a different species of intelligent life (possibly from outer space or the product of genetic mutation) or to otherwise normal human beings who have an unusual habit (such as blood-drinking) or an odd power (such as the ability to drain people emotionally).[4]

Despite casting a wide net as far as definitions are concerned for the ways in which a vampire operates, Melton ultimately falls short of addressing the specific viscera-sucking character of the manananggal. He insists that a vampiric creature is either a reanimated human corpse or demonflesh, that there is a hard and fast dependence on human blood for sustenance, and there is very little, if any, concrete mention of the visceral separation of the top and bottom halves of the body we observe in stories relating to the manananggal. Therefore, while they do bear some resemblance to one another, it would be a disservice to both the vampire and the manananggal to draw some sort of equivalence between the two. Very rarely does a *viscera-sucker* appear in

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[3] Melton, J. Gordon, and Hornick, Alysa. *The Vampire in Folklore, History, Literature, Film and Television: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015), 3.
[4] Ibid.

European folklore, that is, a creature which takes the form of a human and extracts from its victims, through a needlelike tongue, internal organs and phlegm. Similar creatures, with similar names, appear across Southeast Asia, in Malaysia and Indonesia for instance, where they exhibit the same properties of casting off parts of the body to achieve the power of flight. Tales of the manananggal occur in what is now the Philippines long before the invasion of the Spanish in the 16th century, so how might we explain the similarities?

First, there are certainly bats present in the Philippines. It is entirely possible that the association of manananggal with bats emerges from the frequency of bats throughout the archipelago. The Philippines is home to two of the largest species of megabat in the world, *Acerodon jubatus* and *Pteropus vampyrus*, which can reach wingspans of nearly six feet.[5] While these megabats may not grow to the size of or physically resemble an attractive woman, their vast wingspans and the common associative imagery of bats consuming, quite viscerally, their food may serve as referent for the figuration of the manananggal.[6] The purpose of this comparison, however, is not to overly concern ourselves with the "scientific" or objective origins of folk creatures, but rather to simply observe the ways in which different cultural figurations of the *nonhuman* exhibit similarities that cannot simply and wholly be reduced to colonial interaction. What is more critical in this sense than tracing the origin of the manananggal, or the origin of the aswang in general, is that in the observation of these phenomena we understand the fungibility of supernatural creatures. In so many words, perhaps the question is not whether or not we have the discursive ability to successfully render the origins and figurations of these

[5] Heaney, Lawrence R. and Heideman, Paul D. "Philippine Fruit Bats: Endangered and Extinct," *BATS Magazine* 5, no. 1 (1987); 3-5.

[6] Despite cultural association of bats subsisting on a diet composed primarily of blood, only three species of bat in the world actually have a diet that involves the blood of other animals. The majority of bats are frugivorous, consuming mostly fruits and vegetables. Perhaps this makes the association of bats and viscera-suckers with the consumption of human blood and flesh even more curious, as none of the species of bat endemic to the Philippines have blood in their diets.

supernatural creatures and tales of folklore, but whether we can simply entertain the discomfort and unknowability they engender.

One of the terms which I have used to describe the reader's interaction with the phenomena of the aswang in the Philippines, an interaction which later in this paper will also extend to the treatment of ghosts, is to "observe." In contrast to interference or interjection, the act of observing aswang and ghosts at work is itself a critical part of the uncolonial ontological framework. Unlike the work of Ramos cited above, uncoloniality is not interested in a taxonomy of the different creatures of Philippine mythologies. The spirit world, by its very existence, is resistant to domestication, a phenomenon we see arise throughout historical literature and folktales. Yet that very indeterminacy incites a desire in a people to categorize the spirits and the supernatural, in essence to contain that which they cannot know or understand. Perhaps, in other words, it might be appropriate to refer to the taxonomizing of aswang as *colonial*. For Ramos, this call to colonize or domesticate the unknown beckons toward a national discourse, of creating a typology of mythological creatures around which to form the basis of a shared cultural or national background. The etiological myth of the aswang for Ramos, then, is an attempt to render the aswang as a complex of supernatural stories akin to the folklore of Europe, to draw an equivalence or similarity between the worlds of the Philippines and Western modernity. It is, in essence, a call to legibility of the fundamentally illegible. In Ramos' case, his attempts to taxonomize the aswang fall short of either a noncolonial or uncolonial national goal, evidenced by his need to frame the aswang as categories of creatures with distinct European counterparts.

> The aswang concept is most usefully understood as a congeries of beliefs about five types of mythical beings *identifiable with certain creatures of the European tradition:* (1) the blood-sucking vampire, (2) the self-segmenting viscera sucker, (3) the man-eating weredog [or werewolf], (4) the vindictive or evil-eye witch, and (5) the carrion-eating ghoul […] *By relating, if he can, the physical traits and functions of each creature with those of the lower mythical beings of European*

> *folklore*, he can help future students do further research on the subject in relation to studies in that better ordered tradition.[7]

It is central in Ramos' work that, supposedly for the benefit of future research, the European equivalences for Philippine mythical creatures be the focal point around which a discourse of aswang revolves. His insistence on the characterization of aswang through the lens of European analogies, and indeed his desire in the first place to create a comprehensive taxonomy of the different creatures in Philippine folk mythology, is reminiscent of colonial desires to control both the already held knowledge and knowledge production of colonized subjects. This is not to argue that Ramos is guilty of colonizing the Philippines himself—without his work, there would be few and far between instances of Philippine folk mythology collected by Filipinos.[8]

However, rather than embrace these methods of categorization, I argue that what is more interesting is allowing otherworldliness—the spiritual, the supernatural, the uncolonial—to permeate throughout our observations of Philippine storytelling. Creatures come in and out of existence: their place in the physical world is impermanent, inconsistent, both everlasting and ephemeral. Aswang can appear and disappear at will, it seems, depending on the context in which they arrive. Whether or not they physically exist in a scientifically explicable way, they exist discursively, and therein lies their potential as the manifestations of radically othered ontologies to the colonial/noncolonial binary. As Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez writes of the enigmatic Filipino American actress Isabel Rosario Cooper and the archive she left behind, "these moments of creation and absence point to how alternative possibilities and imaginations emerge when we are willing to reexamine what has acquired the patina of truth."[9] A

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[7] Ramos, *Aswang Complex*, xvi. Italics mine.
[8] For additional collections of Philippine folklore, see (for example) Zapanta-Manlapaz's *Kapampangan Literature* or De los Reyes' *El Folk-lore Filipino*.
[9] Gonzalez, Vernadette Vicuña. *Empire's Mistress, Starring Isabel Rosario Cooper* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 11.

methodology Gonzalez employs, and which I follow with respect to folk literature, is to consider "how empire operates from the perspective of those not in power; of how intangible elements like emotions, rumor, and fantasy are embedded in and crucial to imperial success."[10] Not only do I attempt to treat the Philippine stories throughout this paper with reverence, but I attempt to construct a somewhat comprehensible framework for discussing the asymmetrical power relationship existing between, on one hand, Filipinos and their colonizers and, on the other, Filipinos and the otherworldly beings they encounter and engage with. In so doing, one of my objectives in this paper is not to *conquer* the language and worlds of spirits, ghosts, and aswang, but rather to join them, entertain them, and resist with them.

Before delving headfirst into what we might consider an analysis, or rather an entertainment, of the uncolonial, it is useful to discuss some definitions of the terms that appear throughout this paper, and to attempt to explain my rationale for using or not using these strict definitions. As a particular point of note, I am less interested in proposing strict definitions of any of the following terms, but it is nonetheless helpful in discerning what exactly is meant by uncolonial if we first examine the rationalizing logics of other works of scholarship. In particular, I am paying attention to the ways in which terms such as "magic," "religion," "spirit," "soul," "folklore," "ghost," and "specter" (among other terms and phrases) appear in anthropological, sociological, and literary contexts, and constructing a determination on the usefulness of the formulations of these concepts.

W.H.R. Rivers offers a dualistic definition of magic as it relates to religion. He writes:

> When I speak of magic, I shall mean *a group of processes in which man uses rites which depend for their efficacy on his own power, or on powers believed to be inherent in, or the attributes of, certain objects and processes which are used in these rites*. Religion, on the other hand, *will comprise a group of processes, the efficacy of which depends on the will of some higher power, some power whose*

[10] Ibid., 12.

> *intervention is sought by rites of supplication and propitiation*. Religion differs from magic in that it involves the belief in some power in the universe greater than that of man himself.[11]

The primary distinction Rivers presents with regard to magic and religion, then, is that magic refers to the personal or the inanimate whereas religion always appeals to "the will of some higher power." This distinction is useful for a rudimentary understanding of the ways in which, for instance, western monotheistic religions function: in Catholicism, for instance, there is a commonplace understanding of the higher power that is the Lord Himself (though this distinction is often muddled when we consider the tripling of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). Even within Catholicism, however, objects and idols are imbued with spiritual and religious significance. Would this, for Rivers, constitute a contradiction in his distinction between magic and religion? When, for example, one performs the ritual of the Sacrament, taking in communion with the body and blood of Christ, is this considered magic or religion when the objects themselves are imbued with the power of the Lord? In the second place, perhaps the differences cannot be so firmly written or defined. With certain forms of ritual in the Philippines, which I will describe later in the paper, a medium's ability to perform healing or commune with the dead is informed by a combination of both what Rivers would consider magic and religion. The spirit medium has a level of spiritual talent or ability themselves, but they are also aided by a supernatural force or entity. In several cases, as we will see, this even manifests in the medium feeling compelled by the spirit to perform healing rituals through their own power, or even by the possession of the medium by the spirit. The muddling of magic and religion, therefore, contributes to a complex role of healing and community within particular sites in the Philippines.

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[11] Rivers, W.H.R. *Medicine, Magic, and Religion* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1924), 3.

In his anthropological study of the Azande in Central Northern Africa, E.E. Evans-Pritchard provides us with a more holistic, less deterministic definition of witchcraft (which we may consider to be analogous to, or in the very least related to, the formulation of "magic" as experienced by Rivers). His work is still plagued by the classical anthropological desire to rationalize that which he observes, where he writes:

> The Zande notion of witchcraft is incompatible with our ways of thought […] In truth Azande experience *feelings* about witchcraft rather than *ideas*, for their intellectual concepts of it are weak and they know better what to do when attacked by it than how to explain it. Their response is action and not analysis.[12]

Throughout his study, Evans-Pritchard refers to the Azande as "primitive peoples" and wonders whether they have the intellectual capability to understand the "difference between the happenings which we […] class as natural and the happenings which we class as mystical."[13] The matter-of-factness with which he approaches his experiences of witchcraft as he observes them through his study of the Azande emphasizes the incommensurability of nonwestern, nonmodern conceptualizations of other-than-human realities with the painfully necessary rationalizing logic of the modern state. He begins his second chapter with the frank statement, "Witches, as the Azande conceive them, clearly cannot exist."[14] Immediately discounting the physical reality of witches or the supernatural, Evans-Pritchard is foreclosing the possibility of a *discursive* and *generative* reality of the Azande relationship with their surroundings and communities. Nevertheless, Evans-Pritchard entertains the idea of the witch in his study in Africa. Evans-Pritchard seems quite stubborn in his insistence in ascribing a linear logic of causation to the experiences of the Azande attributed to witchcraft, determined to either draw

[12] Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Magic, and Oracles Among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976 [1937]), 31.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 18.

distinction between the "civilized" and "primitive" peoples as he understood them, or else to demonstrate further the inability of the European to understand the logics of the supernatural.

> We accept scientific explanations of the causes of disease, and even the causes of insanity, but we deny them in crime and sin because here they militate against law and morals which are axiomatic. The Zande accepts a mystical explanation of the causes of misfortune, sickness, and death, but he does not allow this explanation if it conflicts with social exigencies expressed in law and morals.[15]

For Evans-Pritchard, it is simply impossible to comprehend a confluence between a rational logic of scientific or scientistic inquiry and the profoundly unexplainable logics or unlogics of the supernatural.

Leonardo N. Mercado offers his readers an extensive catalogue of different Philippine terms for what we commonly understand in a western context as the "soul." He explains that "anthropological data [of the Philippines] may be considered as variations of a single theme," going on to describe the various terms used in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindoro by different regional and ethnic groups in the archipelago.[16] Concluding that "all these terms point to the concept of the soul as a double entity" in his initial analysis, Mercado then goes on to describe different "western" and "eastern" philosophies of the soul.[17] He acknowledges many of the ways in which the similarities between the duality of souls observed in the Philippines align with yin and yang in China, chi or ki in Japan, and various Southeast Asian countries, writing that "it is my contention that all Filipinos share basically the same core values and the way of thinking."[18] While I found his study of the different terms and particularities of Philippine terms for "soul" or "spirit" an interesting perspective, I find the conclusion that this is a particularly unifying

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[15] Ibid., 27.
[16] Mercado, Leonardo N. "Soul and Spirit in Filipino Thought" (In *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 1991), 288.
[17] Ibid., 289.
[18] Ibid., 292.

philosophical point for an archipelago as vastly diverse as the Philippines inadequate for the purposes of this paper.

It seems to be a logical conclusion at which to arrive, that based on the sample size available all Filipinos would share a core value. However, let us consider that rather than the conclusion of the study following that "Filipino thought on the matter of the soul-spirit is quite oriental," we might understand that a Filipino philosophy or ontology of spirituality exists outside of the purview of a specifically scientific or anthropological rationalizing logic. Like Evans-Pritchard experiences with the Azande, Mercado seems determined to figure Philippine ontologies of otherworldliness specifically through the lens of western modernity and orientalist discourse. Perhaps the solution is rather to allow the contradictions of Philippine ontologies to constitute the fragmented and ephemeral experiences of social life instead of attempting to articulate them through the language of western modernity.

One broad definition of a term that I find is useful in the context of this paper, due in part to the fact that it does not ascribe specific authorship to a storyteller or one who shares in the belief and reproduction of supernatural presence, is Paolo Miguel Vicerra and Jem R. Javier's explanation of folklore. They write:

> Folklore consists of *narratives which are common to a community and are retold between members.* Often, through word of mouth, these narratives are *passed on* from one storyteller to a listener, *who later on becomes the new storyteller*. One theme of folklore are narratives of the supernatural, tales in which the plot typically includes human beings interacting with those from the other-world.[19]

Emphasized here is the decentralized nature of folklore: it is not a process by which an individual's story is told over and over, as in the case of the *Pasyon* or any number of Catholic rituals performed in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial period. Rather, what is important

[19] Vicerra, Paolo Miguel, and Javier, Jem R. "*Tabi-Tabi Po*: Situating the Narrative of Supernatural in the Context of the Philippines Community Development" (In *Manusya: Journal of Humanities*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2013), 2.

in the definition of folklore is specifically that it cannot be attributed to any one specific author. Even the "father of Philippine folklore," Isabelo de los Reyes, cannot be said to be the originator of any of the stories he collected during his working years. A particularly fascinating point Vicerra and Javier mention as well is the question of "authenticity" of folkloric stories among the various groups of the Philippines. It is a rather ghostly quality for something to be rendered as both inherently part of a community yet somehow its authenticity is in jeopardy. However, Vicerra and Javier argue that "the question of a story's authenticity as 'folklore' and not having been simply 'written' by a writer […] is arguably an effective means of relaying horror narratives."[20] In suspending the disbelief in a singular origin of a horror narrative, or in a supernatural or spiritual narrative, the process of authorship is perpetually delayed. We cannot hope to pinpoint the exact point of origin of these stories, just as we cannot pinpoint the point of origin of their subjects, namely ghosts and mythical creatures. The creatures of lower Philippine mythology, to borrow the phrase from Ramos, exist specifically in a liminal space where they are both inside and outside of context. Throughout that permeable space is where the discursive power of the uncolonial becomes evident.

Just like authorship, the physical reality of these supernatural creatures is perpetually deferred by the process of folkloring. If we cannot traffic in the language of the physical world, or if we cannot understand the physical planes on which these creatures interact with humans, then we *must* entertain them on their own plane. In embracing this otherworldliness, we enter into a mode of discursive productivity that allows us to separate ourselves from colonial-noncolonial dualisms.

[20] Ibid.

The following sections of this paper engage in myriad ways with the supernatural resistance to domestication. The uncanny, the unknowable, the abstract, and the uncolonial all manifest in ways that are, at first glance, disturbing. They specifically render the familiar *unfamiliar*, obscuring that with which we feel comfortable, generating a sense of anxiety, over which we cannot hope to exercise even a modicum of control.[21]

The first section provides a general survey of colonialism and governance in the Philippines, under both the Spanish and American empires, establishing conversation within the field of history of the archipelago and introducing primary and secondary sources on Philippine history that facilitate what we might call a productive derailment from the physical to the immaterial. Along the trail from colonialism, to governance, to haunting, and then to aswang, we encounter the heterogeneous ways histories in and of the Philippines are being told. The aim of the first section is to trouble the overly dualistic colonial terrain of the Philippines by embracing and joining with that heterogeneity, and, in turn, proposing the triptych framework of the colonial/uncolonial/noncolonial outlined briefly above. Rather than simply retelling Philippine history, the first section attempts to reimagine that history as it relates to and *through* the multiple spirit worlds in the archipelago, the existences of which conjure anxieties and insecurities in colonial governance, and which offer unknowable alternative ontologies to the curated typology of colonialism.

The second section explores, both in terms of literary analysis and ontological formation, Filipino folk creatures, figures, and monsters—that is, the traffic of the spiritual and supernatural with respect to coloniality, and how this exceeds universalization and reduction to the national. In other words, how does a Philippine uncolonial ontology embrace the uncanny and inherent

[21] Freud, Sigmund. “The Uncanny.” 1919.

contradictions of modernity in ways that it initially seems to reject? This section also treks into the conversation of the sublime—or, rather, the absence of such a sublimity in the Philippines. In the Western world, nature is sublime: it is beautiful, something to be looked upon with awe. There is no notion of the sublime in the Philippines, nor in many other parts of Southeast Asia, even today. Instead, the sublime is replaced by the spiritual in the Philippines, and deference to the spirits and creatures in the forest, who control that domain and can bring with them both prosperity and death, informs the experience of nature. And, in this acknowledgment of the spiritual, we also encounter the ghost as something which speaks to us and for us, but which we fail to understand. The invocation of the ghost and of the spirits has the power to engender a fleeting elation, and the second section attempts to explore that feeling and think about radical notions of otherness that completely escape the colonial binary, that cannot be wholly colonized.

The third and final section will attempt to bring these questions into a broader conversation of coloniality outside of the Philippines, and perhaps to extend this uncolonial discourse to other Southeast Asian nations. What does it mean that we see images of the manananggal, for instance, throughout Southeast Asia? How does the figure of the manananggal or other aswang, other mythical creatures, defy and specifically resist taxonomizing? Additionally, the conclusion hopes to offer a brief reading of contemporary Filipino and Filipino American fiction in addition to what is discussed throughout the paper in an attempt to demonstrate a literary and theoretical application of uncoloniality without the burden of active theorization.

SECTION ONE

The Hauntings of Colonization and the Philippine Identity

The presence of the United States in the Philippines and its continued effects on the peoples living on those islands[22] is based in the United States' histories of imperialism and expansion, in avenues of both continental North America and throughout the Pacific region. Not only were American military forces employed in the Philippines, but at the conclusion of the Spanish American War in 1898 the United States also purchased from Spain—without the consent of the people over whose land they were taking charge—the territories of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Guam. The Treaty of Paris in 1898 signaled the beginning of a newly colonial presence in the Philippines: no longer were the missionaries of Spain those who were forcefully converting islanders to Catholicism, but a new body of American imperial expansion was determined to craft the Philippines into a new venture into the "east" in pursuit of capital. The image of the Philippines as a gateway to the "east" is embodied in one of the historical, romantic names often attributed to the archipelago by the Spanish, Perla de Oriente.[23] As the "Pearl of the Orient," the Philippines was regarded as a treasure not only by its longtime Spanish colonizers, who, until the end of the 19th century established large churches, displaced Indigenous peoples, and required by law Catholic conversion, but also by outside political bodies such as the United States. The United States' animus for including the Philippines in the Treaty of Paris in 1898 may very well then have been influenced by the Philippines' strategic positioning in the Pacific Ocean close to burgeoning markets in China. By noting here briefly the history of the Philippines

[22] I choose the phrase "the peoples living on those islands" as a gesture to recognize the communities of Indigenous peoples whose homes are in the Philippine islands but who do not necessarily consider themselves to be part of the Philippine national body.

[23] The Philippines was, among other names, known as "perla de oriente" or "perla del mar de oriente" by the Spanish over the course of the nearly four centuries of their presence on the archipelago. This directly translates to "pearl of the orient," the name which most casual scholars of the Philippines will be familiar. I choose here to use the Spanish name to provide more direct reference to its origin.

as a coveted strategic and economic location, it is no surprise that following American colonization of the Philippines the archipelagic nation continues to harbor some of that capitalistic fervor and governmental structure.

By positioning the United States as the model up to which the newly formed federal body of the Philippines must look, there exists a dynamic wherein the Philippines is necessarily "inferior to" or accepting of the United States' "superior" forms of governance. This is evident in the structure of the Philippine government, from the writing of its constitution to the organization of its governing bodies. Like the United States, the Philippines has three distinct and interdependent branches: the legislative, judicial, and executive branches. The Philippine legislative branch, for instance, is organized much in the same way as the United States, with a bicameral legislature consisting of a House of Representatives and a Senate; the judicial branch operates similarly with a Supreme Court with various lower collegiate courts; and the executive branch is composed mainly of the President, Vice President, and their cabinet members. There is vested within the governmental structure of the Philippines, then, what may be understood as a deep-rooted desire—conscious or not—to replicate that which is used as the model of the colonizing force. The Philippines is always seen as a gateway or as a place where its inhabitants are perpetually in transit—there is constant movement within and through the Philippines, influenced partly by a series of outward migrations of Filipinos globally to pursue work overseas as well as the initial motivation for colonization by the United States as politically, militarily, and economically advantageous positioning. We might even consider this a shadow of the original form American colonization takes: a leftover or left-behind manifestation of the traumas of coloniality. A scar, even.

It might be helpful to understand the Philippines as, of course, a conglomeration of influences from outside actors (aptly, Spain and the United States), as is the common ideological construction of the archipelago, but perhaps it is also useful to think about the formation of the Philippines as a series of relationships and schisms, and by extension, deaths, rebirths, and the ghosts they leave behind. If, for instance, we are to take the body of the Philippines as a single entity, then we might be able to say that even the different forms the republic of the Philippines has taken are a series of splits, deaths, and reincarnations. By a conservative account, we might expect to understand at least eight major restructurings of the federal government[24], not accounting for the long period of American colonization formally referred to as the insular government of the Philippines. Each of these periods of major transition leave a scar on the national body, if we are to continue with a discourse of national identity, but perhaps more saliently they are riddled with afterimages of the eras prior. These institutional afterimages, ghosts of the previous administrations and the stories contained therein, manifest in ways that are not always evident upon initial observation: it is not uncommon, let us say, for one to repeat actions they may have done in the past both out of habit but also out of some supernatural or unconscious memory, a process which Freud understands to be uncanny. One of the primary identifiers Freud gives the reader for recognizing the uncanny, or *unheimlich* (that is, literally, un-homelike), is "an involuntary return to the same situation."[25] Though the organization of the Philippine government was certainly not an unconscious process of abstracted memory, the ways

[24] For demonstrative purposes, these include the following: the First Republic (or the Malolos Republic, from January 1899 to March 1901); the Commonwealth of the Philippines (from 1935 to 1942, and then from 1945 to 1946); the Second Republic (from October 14, 1943 to August 17, 1945); the Third Republic (from July 4, 1946 to January 17, 1973); the Marcos dictatorship (beginning formally on September 21, 1972 and ending with Marcos' exile from the Philippines on February 24, 1986); the formation of the New Society Movement (formally a coalitional government from 1978 to 1986); the short-lived Fourth Republic (from 1981 to 1986, ending with the EDSA Revolution that forced Marcos into his exile); and currently the Fifth Republic (since 1986).
[25] Freud, "Uncanny," 11.

in which the memory of colonization functions are evident in the nation's desire to structure its government in a way that resembles that with which they have familiarity. It would have been impossible, in 1946 and even today, to attempt to construct a singular, cohesive nation using the many disparate and potentially contradictory forms of governance among Indigenous groups in the archipelago.

To understand the usefulness of employing an analytic of the uncolonial in articulating alternative Philippine ontologies and historiographies with respect to Spanish and American narrativization of the archipelago, it is crucial to undertake a reading of the Philippines from these colonial perspectives. Upon a (brief) interrogation into the logics of the colonizing bodies onto the colonized peoples, we open our conversation to critique, refutation, and subversion of the constructed authority of the colonial archives and thus assert a more holistic, less rigid history of the Philippines and (re)activate avenues of resistance against "objective"—that is to say, purportedly empirical, non-biased—narrativizations of Philippine subjectivities by our colonizers. This is not to suggest that a non-deterministic, ghostly, or uncolonial reading of Philippine history is incommensurable with the published accounts from the perspectives of the Spanish and Americans, but rather to invite the reader to consider that the authoritative dramatization of the colonization of the Philippines by these actors is one tinged with necessarily fictionalized or hyperbolic retellings of events such that they valorize, immortalize, and perhaps even deify the colonizers. In asserting a non-deterministic—or, to use the phrase coined by Sylvia Wynter and expanded upon by many Black scholars (namely, Katherine McKittrick), "demonic"—reading of Philippine historiography, we observe disruptions of empiricism in the narratives of Philippine revolutionaries, novelists, and folklorists, which in turn enables a pronouncement of the Philippine supernatural and spiritual as lines of inquiry that engage in fluid

uncolonial ontologies of worldliness, place, and embodiment. I employ the overarching terms spectral and uncolonial throughout the course of this work to encompass a number of concepts, all of which I consider closely related in arguing for a demonic methodology of reading Philippine literature and history: among them, I count supernatural, spiritual, ghostly, mythical, mystical, magical, folk, and spectral.

One of the aims of this intervention into colonial dramatizations of the colonization of the Philippines is the concern of disrupting and demystifying the façade of indomitable colonial authority in the archipelago of the Spanish and Americans over natives. Rafael explains that "Christianity set the rules of the colonial enterprise while maintaining a position above those rules," and we can extend this positionality outside of the jurisdiction of the rules of colonial enterprise not simply to Christianity as a socioreligious ordering body, but to the governmental bodies of the Spaniards in the archipelago themselves—that is, the Catholic Church functions as a *stand-in* for more general Spanish coloniality.[26] Widespread conversion of native Filipinos to Catholicism provided the Spanish with efficient and bureaucratic benefits alongside a blanket assertion of authority.

Rafael details several avenues through which conversion was useful in exercising colonial power, which also distinguished the project of Philippine colonization from the settler colonial process in the Americas. First, the lack of pure numbers of Spanish settlers in the Philippines meant that coercion through sheer manpower would be impractical. Given the geographic location of the Philippines with respect to the main body of empire in Spain, as well as a collection of islands that did not provide the vast material resources as were available in the mines and fields of the Americas, fewer Spaniards settled among the natives in the Philippines.

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[26] Rafael, Vicente L. *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 5.

What this meant was that those who *were* present in the archipelago resorted to considerably different means than what had been "successful" among the Indigenous populations in the Americas.

Second, Spanish church figures constituted tangible connections to the imperial body on the European mainland that were not present due to a lack of Spanish settlers, thus encouraging the promotion of Catholic conversion as a primary means of colonial governance. In conjunction with the first point, the priests of the various churches scattered throughout the Philippines were at once settlers *and* representatives of the *imperio* of Spain. This meant they had both the authority of asserting racial superiority—their quality of Spanishness—as well as their connection to the Catholic church in order to enforce colonial governance.

And third, articulating a kind of code of colonial empire through the terminology of the church, transplanted into the many hundreds of local languages in the archipelago, circumvented the issue of a perceived "lack" of historical empire in the region that would have resulted in one or two widely spoken languages. Unlike in the Americas, for instance, where the empires of the Maya and Aztec spread lingua franca across much of the central regions of the continent, the Philippines remained for the Spanish composed of large swaths of often small, mutually unintelligible ethnolinguistic communities. It was perhaps simply more convenient, then, to articulate colonial governance through the language—quite literally, as we see the implementation of Spanish religious terms directly into Philippine languages for lack of translation—of the church, rather than attempt to unify the many natives under a single spoken tongue. Where in the Americas the language of colonial governance was Nahuatl or Quechua, in the Philippines the word of rule was the Word of God.

That we can have this conversation regarding the possibility of community reorganization, or national reorganization, around both colonial and noncolonial modes of governance, then, suggests that there must and indeed does exist some form of *uncolonial* community self-determination. The question becomes, then, what do these forms of community sovereignty and governance that emerge outside of the colonial body take up? In what ways are we understanding the formation of Philippine forms of governance and resistance such that they participate in an uncolonial ontology of self-making?

The Specter of Uncoloniality, Colonial Hauntings, and the Philippine Imaginary

> A specter is haunting the United States—the specter of uncoloniality. All the powers of the United States had entered into an alliance to exorcise this specter: state-sanctioned violence, displacement of established communities, and full-out war.

The preceding is modified from Karl Marx and Frederick Engels' *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, initially published in 1848. 1848. Marx writes: "A spectre [sic] is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies."[27] I choose this excerpt from Marx with which to begin articulating the specter of uncoloniality because it is this first sentence of the *Manifesto* which is the primary focus of Jacques Derrida's seminal lecture and subsequent book, *Specters of Marx*. Derrida first delivered this reading of Marx at the University of California, Riverside at a 1993 conference titled, "Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective." It is with this critical understanding of the situation that produced Derrida's lecture and writing—that is, a convening of scholars on the turbulence of a global contemporary scene and in the entertainment of

[27] Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. *Marx/Engels Selected Works.* Vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress, 1969), 15.

Marxism as a possible alternative form of governance to capitalist expansionism—that we begin to formulate the specter of uncoloniality and the ways in which it is helpful to reject and eventually work both within and outside the scope of coloniality. Derrida's enormous influence on spectrality studies also coincides with many of the intersections between specters, spirits, and ghostliness alongside forms of governance and state determination. It seems only fitting that when speaking about the ethereality of Philippine imaginaries, much of which are influenced by the comings and goings of nonhuman—that is, non-living-human—entities, that we begin with Derrida. Ghosts themselves, as material manifestations, are present in Philippine and Filipino American literature throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, and the later sections of this paper will attempt to read these literatures through these lenses of uncoloniality.

Early in his address, Derrida explains:

> In proposing this title, *Specters of Marx*, I was initially thinking of all the forms of a certain haunting obsession that seems to me to organize the *dominant* influence n discourse today. At a time when a new world disorder is attempting to install its neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism, no disavowal has managed to rid itself of all of Marx's ghosts. Hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony […] In an apparently different sense, Marx-Engels spoke there already, in 1847-48, of a specter and more precisely of the "specter of communism" (das Gespenst des Kommunismus). A terrifying specter for all the powers of old Europe (alle Mächte des alten Europa), but a specter of a communism then *to come* […] The specter was there. But that of which it was a specter, communism, was itself not there, by definition. It was dreaded as a communism to come.[28]

The "haunting" of the specter of communism signals its eventual coming, and the mobilization of forces against communism (as Marx cites in his opening line) are organizing in opposition to something that both does not currently exist but is perpetually looming. It is this concept of *forthcomingness*, and of *haunting*, that makes these specters especially powerful: in their

[28] Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 37-8.

absence, they are present in ways that force the action of their opposition. Analogous to the powers of old Europe terrified by the specter of communism, the powers of the colonial United States are terrified by the specter of uncoloniality in the Philippines and other sites of American colonialism and settler colonialism. The specter itself is not necessarily a physical manifestation—that is, something that can materially be accessed and physically touched—of uncoloniality, though that is certainly a way through which we can understand the political workings of decolonization. What is perhaps more interesting in a theoretical sense are the methods through which we can learn from Philippine and Filipino American literature the specific refutations through close reading of the materialization or lack thereof of ghosts and spirits. We might be able to think about the supernatural, then, in the context of Philippine and Filipino American literature, as vehicles through which we are both transported throughout time and throughout systems of community organization and governance.

In framing the supernatural as vehicle, we can also begin to think about its inverse: the physical body as vehicle for delivering the supernatural and things contradictory. In thinking about the embodiment of the Philippine and Filipino American in literature—that is, literally the use of these characters and subjects in novels written by Filipinos and Filipino Americans—the very presence of a subject whose identities lie at the intersections of colonizer and colonized itself is reminiscent of a haunting. Just as the spectral doubly occupies different spaces in time, presence, and visibility, the Filipino and specifically the Filipino American doubly occupies colonialism, embodiment, and revolution. Filipinos are no strangers to revolution, struggle, and resisting coloniality, and it is through a shared history of struggle that Filipinos come to occupy a uniquely doubled—or even triptych—position within the context of American empire. This manifests, for instance, in the multiple languages commonly spoken in the Philippines (English,

Spanish, and Filipino)[29] and in the deeply interwoven relationships between Filipinos and United States military service. This doubleness, this ghostliness or spectrality—a liminality—allows Filipinos to navigate both the places of the colonized and the colonizer and necessarily inform themselves of methods of uncoloniality that are not specifically reducible to either one of these histories.

Otherworldliness, Spirits, and Ritual

The task of tracing a genealogy of Philippine history and of collecting the folktales of different peoples across the Philippines is one that has largely been the objective of early Philippine scholars. Early ethnographic and anthropological work, such as Thomas Gibson's *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands* and Tage U.H. Ellinger's *Friend of the Brave*, as well as more recent research including Fenella Cannell's *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines*, have both directly and indirectly documented some of the beliefs of different religious and ethnic groups in the archipelago. Resil B. Mojares and Edna Zapanta-Manlapaz have collected contemporary folktales from across the Philippines, the former taking inspiration from and paying homage to Isabelo de los Reyes, whom he dubs the "father of Philippine folklore." And, of course, as mentioned in the previous section, Maximo D. Ramos has done extensive compilation and classification of different aswang. The aim of this section is not to produce or reproduce a genealogy of Philippine mythology, but rather to interrogate the ways that desire to catalogue extensively manifests as colonial desire and colonial anxiety.

[29] Although the Philippines is home to nearly two hundred languages, many of which cannot be understood across one another, the majority of speakers in positions of authority in the Philippines speak at least one of these three languages. Filipino is technically one of two official languages of the Philippines (the other being English), with its linguistic base being Tagalog. This presents some issues for those in the Philippines who do not speak Tagalog or Filipino as their native language, for instance those who are raised speaking Kapampangan, Ilokano, or Cebuano.

This section takes inspiration from Ann Laura Stoler's *Along the Archival Grain*, preferring to focus on "archiving-as-process rather than archives-as-things."[30] Stoler insists that, through her framework, understanding "archives as condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources" allows us to interrogate their permeation into the social order.[31] A conventional understanding of the colonial archive is that it exists as a demonstration of the powers of colonial governance; that is, that the archivist determines what is considered "important" or worth keeping about colonized societies.[32]

> Reading along the archival grain draws out sensibilities to the archive's granular rather than seamless texture, to the rough surface that mottles its hue and shapes its form. Working along the grain is not to follow a frictionless course but to entire a field of force and will to power, to attend to both the sound and sense therein and their rival and reciprocal energies. It calls on us to understand how unintelligibilities are sustained and why empires remain so uneasily invested in them.[33]

Alongside the aforementioned typical definition of the archive, composed of the confidence of colonial administrations in determining what cultural production and local knowledges, if any, are valuable, Stoler also emphasizes that which is leftover from the failures of governance: delusions, distrust, and anxieties. A perverse anxiety about the loss of control of the colonial social and political space permeates throughout every archive, as though the radically other colonial subject is haunting the archive's files. It is this anxiety about the control of what constitutes the social space that also informs the act of even Filipino archivists collecting their people's own stories. As we will observe in section three, the project of modernity is expressly concerned with quelling these anxieties of the archive—manifest as the supernatural, in the case

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[30] Stoler, Ann Laura. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 20.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 21.
[33] Ibid., 53.

of the Philippines and for the purposes of this paper—by attempting to render the illegible knowable through scientific rationality.

It is not only the colonial governing body that is concerned about the unknowable, and the anxieties surrounding what cannot be rendered legible in the physical world. Unlike the colonial archive, however, we observe that communities in the Philippines—while they *do* fear aswang, for the ways they can cause harm to their villages and families—do not always attempt to wrest control over the spiritual world. Rather, there exists an implicit understanding that those who inhabit a world outside of, or slightly out of sync with, the world of humans are generally noncombative unless provoked. Among Bicolanos, for instance, Cannell documents an acknowledgment of tawo na dai ta nahihiling, "the people we cannot see," or simply the tawo for short.

> The tawo are the counterpart of "people like us"; "it seems that there are as many of them as there are of us", I was told. Like ordinary people, they are male and female, adults and children, and most importantly, as people frequently repeat: "the tawo are just like us; some are understanding (maboot) and some are aggressive (maisog)". *Their world is co-existent with the visible world, but is also misaligned to it or is an inversion of the world we see*. What we see as ricefields may be a road for the tawo, and they may have their houses (which are often said to be palatial) where we have our water-pumps or pigsties; sometimes a house and the tawo's houses partly overlap […] Gradually, people get to know the unseen geography of the area, but it is still wise to say makiagi po ("may I pass among you, sir") when in doubt.[34]

The figuration of a world that is slightly misaligned, askew from the "visible world," gestures toward both an understanding of a social order with spirits but also of a relationship that cannot be wholly comprehensible. It begs the question of us, what is the relationship between the social and the spiritual? When a community asks for permission to move throughout their own villages despite knowing the geography of that invisible spirit world, can we parse out *why* that might be?

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[34] Cannell, Fenella. *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 84-85. Italics mine.

Or, perhaps, while the spiritual and the social are certainly entangled, we might understand them as necessarily radically disconnected. Key in this understanding is the highlighted phrase in the quotation above, that the world of the Bicolanos is not the "real world" and the world of the tawo a fiction, but rather that the physical world is the "visible world." Not only is the world of the tawo *real*, but it cannot simply be reduced to the supernatural. It is everyday, mundane. In other words, Bicolanos find themselves getting used to their misalignment with the world of the tawo, who are envisioned as perhaps more easily provoked and certainly as more wealthy or powerful than humans. It is not, for Bicolanos, a matter of wholly and comprehensively *knowing* the tawo, but rather understanding that there is something there that we cannot know, and inviting it rather than attempting to control it, in strict, material terms.

The Buid, an indigenous group to the island of Mindoro located southwest of the island of Luzon, have similar spiritual-social relationships. Thomas Gibson explains that:

> The *andagaw* are engaged in a process of balanced reciprocity with humans. They offer their animals to human on condition either that they receive appropriate compensation or *that they are enabled to recruit the recipients into their own society*. Humans try to limit their contact with the *andagaw* through the use of rational discussion and the negotiation of compensation. Humans are able to talk to the *andagaw* because they *stand at the same level of the food hierarchy* and they are able to converse as equals because *neither is dependent on the other for food*.[35]

Unlike the Bicolano tawo, the andagaw do not inhabit the same, but slightly misaligned, space as the Buid, but rather they exist deeper into the island among the mountains. The andagaw themselves are invisible, much like the tawo, and engage in a much more seemingly equal relationship with the Buid. However, like we observe throughout the Philippines and indeed throughout many cultures where there exists a relationship with a spirit world, there exists always a fear that the human may give up control of themselves unto the spirits. If the Buid do

[35] Gibson, Thomas. *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands: Religion and Society among the Buid of Mindoro* (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), 181. Italics (aside from "andagaw") mine.

not provide the andagaw with sufficient compensation for their trades—which, in the context of Gibson's ethnographic work, usually takes the form of wild boar wandering into Buid settlements, which are then killed and eaten by the inhabitants—there is always the threat of being "recruited" into andagaw society. This would mean leaving the community of the Buid, becoming a spirit, living in the mountain, and being part of a society that (apart from the language of compensation) is largely unknown to the Buid.

The Buid relationship with the andagaw is distinct from a relationship they cultivate with ghosts. Apart from burial rituals, ghosts are perceived either antagonistically or as an annoyance, according to Gibson. They do not cultivate a transactional relationship with the Buid, but rather one of dependency. Often, Gibson notes, rituals to appease ghostly visitors among the Buid involve offering meat to the dead, who inhabit a world (similar to the tawo) that operates much like the world of the living, but in which there are no wild or domestic animals to slaughter for meat. This leads ghosts to enter into the fabric of Buid society as rather needy, demanding spirits, unlike the andagaw who are seen as essentially yet another community with whom the Buid must interact. The ghost, however, must be expelled from the social group, since it does not contribute to the general welfare of the community in addition to its figuration as a bad omen: "[In] Buid society mortuary practices are wholly directed toward the exclusion, first of the corpse, then of the ghost, from the social group. To the extent that ghosts try to exert a continuing influence on the affairs of the living, they are evil and the carriers of further misfortune."[36] Ghosts represent something wholly foreign to the Buid, something which cannot and should not be allowed to integrate into the social fabric of the community. This is in stark contrast to the andagaw, frequently rendered as "equal but distant."[37] They engage in balanced

[36] Ibid., 188.
[37] Ibid., 161.

exchange, but are careful not to upset or become too close to them. Similar to the tawo in Bicol, the andagaw "happen to be invisible" and "belong to a parallel society which normally avoids contact with human society."[38]

All of the interactions with the spirit world are facilitated in Mindoro and in Bicol through spirit mediums. The idea of the spirit medium—a mediator, befitting as the term is, between the human world and other worlds—exists globally, and serves a similar function in the Philippines to that it serves in other parts of the world. Mediums not only communicate with the dead—with ghosts—but they are able to speak with spirits, and sometimes those who inhabit those worlds slightly misaligned with our own. Key to this process of communication is the séance, the ritual through which communication is established.

Séance, for the purposes of this paper, serves as a gateway for understanding the process of *ritual* among human and nonhuman worlds. Why does the ritual figure so prominently in relation to ghosts and spirits? Rather than simply accepting the ritual as that which allows us to communicate, what does it say about the anxieties of the unknown that provoke people to construct a series of actions to try to know the unknowable? In the first place, much like the work of archiving as we see in Stoler, the act of ritual is a means of control: it allows, primarily, the spirit medium to exhibit some control over the vastness that is an infinite spirit world. In invoking the spirits and giving them a vehicle through which to speak, the spirit medium is able to curate the language of otherworldliness to those who are involved in a séance.

So, aside from the specific actions taken during one, what does ritual entail? It is a process of mediation, communication, and access. The ability to mediate among worlds, among different versions of a single world to establish a somewhat coherent narrative is perhaps one of

[38] Ibid., 160.

the most valuable aspects of ritual. It opens up lines of communication to the spirit world, allowing us to speak to it and for it to speak back to us. Like the archive of Isabel Rosario Cooper, which speaks for itself in enigmatic ways, spirit mediumship allows the otherworldly to persist. In the process of persistence, ritual allows for access to all that is embroiled within the language of spirituality. The asymmetrical power relationship of spirits and humans—the former often perceived as hostile, volatile, and violent; and the latter existing in many ways as subservient or subject to the whims of those they cannot see—is torn open during ritual and séance. During ritual, the medium has access not only to the spirit world but to the *power* the spirit world represents. However partial it may be, the invocation of a spirit imbues within the medium some sense of the infinite, boundless arena of power of the supernatural.

What are we meant to do with the seeming irreconcilability of simultaneously acknowledging a sense of equality with spirits, but also in the understanding of them as more powerful than humans and something that demands—on the part of the spirit medium—control? Is this to say that a relationship with the spirit world is itself colonial? How are the manifestations of spirits and aswang in the Philippines not examples of coloniality at work, but of something radically other, something radically unknowable to the colonial governance of the archipelago, such that it produces a series of anxieties among the islands' colonizers?

Colonial and Noncolonial Spiritual Anxieties

There is a wealth of literature documenting the experiences of Filipinos in the archipelago during the period of Spanish colonization. The centralizing force of colonization for the Spanish was, of course, religious conversion from the animistic, pagan religions and spiritual practices of the islanders to Catholicism. But, in the colonial desire to exert control over its subjects, Vicente Rafael notes, "Catholicism […] also furnished the natives with a language for

conceptualizing the limits of colonial and class domination."[39] Because of a relative scarcity of Spanish colonizers in the archipelago, Rafael continues, those who were present were forced to "depend on evangelization to establish and validate their power."[40] Throughout the Philippines, there was an understanding that the Spanish needed, then, to render the creatures of Philippine folk legend legible within a framework of Christianity. As stated before, the desire to typologize is inseparable from the desire to colonize. The Spanish wanted to categorize and, in so doing, colonize the characters and creatures of Philippine myth and legend by rewriting them in relation to the recognized figures of Catholic scripture and, by extension, characters of European myth. We can observe, then, why the logic of Ramos in collecting and taxonomizing the aswang of the Philippines bears resemblance to that colonial act. In the process of forming a national discourse, Ramos is engaging in similar practices that were used to broadly wrest control of the different communities of the Philippines by the Spanish.

In the Spanish case, it is the work of ordering saints to create legibility where there is none, to make readable that which we cannot understand. In the Philippine case, there has been, in some modern scholarship, a similar desire to engage in the coloniality of particularity and control. A desire to domesticate the *wild*, then, persists among the colonial and the noncolonial. One of the principal arguments of Stoler's work is to move past the retrograde reading of the archive-as-thing, as something transparent, towards something that is a repository of power that must be deconstructed. In revealing the anxieties of colonial archives, Stoler argues that a practice of secrecy "[creates] the categories [the archives] purport only to describe."[41] Along this line of logic, how does the process of attempting to squash or silence the spirit worlds of the

[39] Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, 7.
[40] Ibid., 18.
[41] Stoler, *Archival Grain*, 27.

Philippines in fact do the opposite, instead being generative and prompting a kind of revitalization of these creatures often thought to simply exist on the margins?

Ramos tells us that, in many cases, aswang lived peacefully among the communities of which they were a part and ventured to other villages to feed in the night. There are exceptions to this, of course, but the source of harm is almost always perceived as coming from outside the bubble of the social order. Aswang are historically a kind of marginalia of Philippine societies: their homes are "lonely" and look "as if nobody lived there."[42] Their homes vary, of course, depending on who is telling the story and where they come from, but they always exist somehow on the margins or outskirts of the community when they do not live directly inside it (and, as mentioned before, when that is the case they are rarely the perpetrators of harm in that community). They will live in the forest, or will emerge from it, in order to cause the harm they do to villages.[43] It is only when these spaces are intruded upon and the proper respects are unpaid that the aswang become violent. If the aswang are given the space to live their lives, they do not necessarily become violent towards the people of the neighboring villages.

Perhaps one of the strange aspects of these relationships with aswang is the way aswang are responded to when they are found out. Before a person in a community is known as aswang, nobody in the community seems to have problems with them. They are welcomed, unquestioning, into that social order, and participate in all of the cultural and practical dealings around the village. But when rumor spreads, or when information is revealed that a person is, in fact, aswang, it does not matter what the relationships one has with that person are: they are aswang and then present a threat. The indeterminacy of aswang presents them as something perpetually liminal, and as something inherently self-contradictory. The unknown is allowed to

[42] Ramos, *Aswang Complex*, 116.
[43] Ibid., 39, 97.

exist so long as it remains unknown, but once it is revealed that the unknown or unknowable moves among the community, it must be controlled, removed, domesticated, or destroyed. In other words, the aswang are allowed to exist precisely because until they are revealed to be, they are harmless. It is safe to say, then, that aswang are part of the community, and in that sense they are no longer the ambiguous, marginal creatures they appear to be at first glance. If aswang live in your community, you are not in danger of being attacked—it only harms others, not you.

But that protection is never guaranteed. And, in this sense, the aswang also becomes a source of terror because it cannot be readily seen or understood. There is no way to determine if your neighbor is an aswang, unless of course you see them physically ripping their body in half and flying into the night. But the combination of that ambiguity and terror is what makes the aswang such an intriguing figure as far as Philippine spirit worlds are concerned. Until the aswang reveals itself to you, you feel no urge to domesticate, colonize, control it. But the instant one learns of a potential threat, they feel an immediate desire to make it knowable, readable, understandable. To *possess* it.

Possession, Coloniality, and Governance

A negative valence surrounds the notion of possession insofar as it relates to ghosts, spirits, and specters. In quotidian terms, we might understand possession in the sense of owning something—I am in possession of my belongings, I own them. But when we traverse into the world of the spirits and aswang, possession takes on another meaning entirely. Ghostly and spiritual possession are not about the human or the physical exerting control over inanimate objects they can hoard and use at will. On the contrary, possession in this sense is to give oneself up—willingly or not—to the control of the supernatural. This naturally raises the question, then,

of why would one give themselves up to be controlled by a ghost? Why entertain spirits or ghosts in the first place if there is always the possibility of losing oneself to them?

What is the association, to continue, of possession with madness? Surely, one must be mad, insane, unstable if they think to give up control of their own body, possession of their own life, to a spirit. Ghosts do not simply exist in an "other" world, radically inaccessible to the people of the Philippines in ways that we might observe in other cultures. Ghosts infuse, they come into the lives and bodies of people—by their very definition, ghosts cross boundaries. They are the liminal space between the living and the dead, and as such can access both of those worlds. It is important to note here that, in the Philippines, not every person who dies becomes a ghost. This distinction, that only certain deaths generate ghosts, or that only certain people become ghosts, serves to solidify the distinction between a living world and a world of the death. Because ghosts cross boundaries by their very nature, they are able to occupy both the world of the living and the world of the dead. They are able to possess things in both of those worlds. But what exactly does possession look like?

In the Philippines, it is a common understanding that possession presupposes illness. Madness means to be sick, it is an unwelcome state of being like possession that inspires terror. To be possessed, then, is to be contaminated—you are contaminated, unpure, unclean, by the very thing that possesses you. The ghost is fearsome, and it is terrifying not only because it is a visual referent, a stark reminder of the consequences of death, but they also threaten to alienate the individual from the social order. When one traffics in ghosts and invites them into their body—again, willingly or not—they enter into a transactional relationship wherein the ghost turns them into something they are not. They are no longer themselves because they do not possess themselves; the ghost does. To allow a ghost to possess oneself is to necessarily turn

oneself away from the social order, to render oneself unfamiliar, and to be irreducible to one's former association with their community.

This logic applies both to the notion of ghostly possession but also of *colonial* possession. A Bicolano or a Tagalog, once converted to Catholicism, ceases to be wholly Bicolano or Tagalog, but instead traffics in the hybridity that encapsulates "Filipino." That is to say, Filipinoness, by its very nature, is a heterogeneous state of being. Broadly, to be Filipino is to contain multitudes. The Spanish colonization of the Philippines simultaneously does the work of eradicating and creating the very categories of being which it hopes to document. In the sense that early friars were interested in documenting the spiritual practices of indigenous islanders, and then, through the process of religious conversion, saw those very practices shrink away into obscurity, colonial possession causes here the perceived loss of indigenous practice.

However, there is an ethereal quality to the supernatural that constantly and perpetually resists that colonization. Try as it might to pronounce governance over the archipelago, a Spanish colonial administration could never quite control the boundlessness of spirits. After all, a Spanish Catholic colonialism is subject to the same whims of spirits, ghosts, and gods that Philippine communities are—it is simply more plainly hierarchical and codified.[44] The Spanish could not ever fully govern a spirit world in the Philippines because it resists discursiveness. In attempting religious conversion, the process of transforming the creatures of Philippine mythology into figures recognizable to the Catholic Church loses something in translation. The Church attempts to speak for the ghosts and fails to understand them. It cannot even begin to understand them, because by their very nature ghosts and spirits resist understanding. We cannot see ghosts, we

[44] See Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*.

cannot speak to them except through the mediation of a spirit medium, but we can acknowledge they are there. We can invoke them.

But the ghost cannot be discursively rendered. For Gonzalez, ghosts "can only be apprehended through ambiguity," making attempts to wholly understand them ultimately disappointing.[45] The prospect of the uncolonial, therefore, is not to constrain ghosts and spirits to force them to fit into some predetermined truth of experience or understanding, but rather to "work with ghosts and the restlessness they conjure."[46] We do not force ourselves into the purely analytical space of trying to push past the limits of discourse, but rather skirt around the margins, much like the aswang live on the outskirts of human settlements. We are not meant to understand ghosts, simply put. As Gonzalez notes so eloquently, "Perhaps the point is that we need not exorcise ghosts but could come to terms instead with their hauntings and their provocations."[47]

[45] Gonzalez, *Empire's Mistress*, 155.
[46] Ibid., 159.
[47] Ibid., 159.

SECTION TWO

Naming Sacrifice

In this paper, I examine several short folk-stories and excerpts from books (novels, biographies, and anthropological and ethnographic studies), and hope to use the uncolonial as a method for working through and sitting with the feelings these texts conjure. In the previous section, I detailed the uncolonial in so many words as a rumination on the fleeting feelings associated with ghostliness, being neither wholly colonial or noncolonial, in the sense that they completely defy, resist, or escape discursiveness. In the spirit of mediation, this section hopes to achieve a similar entertainment of ghosts and the supernatural as it relates to Philippine and Filipino American experiences of colonialism. But first, I am provoked by a series of questions. What does it mean to invoke the spiritual, or to evoke the sacred? Is it possible to even *speak* about the spiritual in ways that render it discursively legible? The spiritual is inherently ethereal, after all, floating in the liminal spaces between the world we observe and the one we cannot see. Can we ever truly domesticate the spiritual, and if we can, *should* we? And what does it mean if we anthropomorphize these spiritual creatures, try to create for ourselves a language of legibility so that we are not so constantly terrified of the things we know nothing about?

Naming the source of terror is one of the first steps towards containing it. As Gina Apostol states in her novel, *Insurrecto*, "Choosing names is the first act of creating."[48] We render the unknowable discursive, turn it into a narrative, because narratives contain the sources of our terror and turn them into places of entertainment. This call of conscience—to bring something to life by naming—, Heidegger argues, "has the character of an *appeal* to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self; and this is done by way of *summoning* it to its ownmost

[48] Apostol, Gina. *Insurrecto* (New York: Soho Press, 2018), 4.

Being-guilty."[49] In other words, calling to attention one's own consciousness, responsiveness is a way of being. In the invocation of the self by the self, in the naming of a creature, we engage in a call-and-response kind of interaction. And in responding to something, or beckoning for a response, we can enter into the conversation of the usefulness of sacrifice and ritual in dealing with spirits.

Why do rituals always involve a discourse of sacrifice? Among the Buid, Gibson notes, there is often a component of every ritual that involves sacrificing an animal, sharing its parts among the community and to the spirits who are invoked during that ritual. And this sacrifice is demonstrated by James Siegel through the language of gift-giving. The gift possesses a certain power of circulation, which is "a social force, an expression of society itself."[50] The gift thus constitutes an obligation to continue its circulation: because it was given with no expectation of something in return, the receiver of the gift is then obligated to continue the circulation of a gift. It is a burden or responsibility placed upon the individual to circulate gifts, and in so doing they sacrifice something they possess or own with no hope of earning something in return. Central to this idea of circulation is the notion of *giving something up*, of relinquishing possession of something (we will return to the idea of giving up possession in a later section). In other words, to transform something into a gift, it must be sacrificed. Embroiled within the act of gift-giving and sacrifice is the feeling of obligation towards continuing the cycle of gift-giving and sacrifice. One is duty-bound, as it were, obligated to contribute to something either higher than, larger than, or *other* than themselves. And the question of obligation is connected to responsibility: that

[49] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time* trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), 314.
[50] Siegel, James. *Naming the Witch* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 6.

one has a duty to respond to something other than oneself. This is what it means, then, to be part of a social order. To be obligated to things outside of oneself.

Ghostly Matters and the Ephemeral Uncolonial

Avery F. Gordon opens her manuscript, *Ghostly Matters*, with a seemingly straightforward and often overlooked statement of fact: "life is complicated."[51] Where she diverges from the banality of this common expression is in her rendering of the phrase as a "profound theoretical statement—perhaps the most important theoretical statement of our time."[52] Gordon reiterates Raymond Williams' theoretical framework for understanding the hauntings, absences, and presences in ghost stories as a *structure of feeling*, arguing that "life is more complicated than those of us who study it have usually granted."[53] Gordon is particularly interested in finding the language to describe and identify hauntings, writing with the ghosts that appear in those haunting stories—for a ghost must always be indicative of a haunting (though not always the other way around)—and for, as I have written in the previous section, entertaining the supernatural in both our literature and in our social realities. Relying on her training as a sociologist and admitting fully the successes and failures that accompany her discipline, Gordon attempts to construct a language around which we can articulate Williams' structure of feeling to visualize and implement the "what is to come" of ghostliness.

Gordon's text concerns itself throughout its chapters with the "empirical evidence […] that tells you a haunting is taking place," that is, that "the ghost is […] a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life."[54] The

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[51] Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 7.
[54] Ibid., 8.

materialist reading of ghostliness, she argues, functions in conjunction and addition to the works of Marx and Engels, who famously write of the specter of communism haunting the old powers of Europe. She encounters the problem of representation, of "how the social world is textually or discursively constructed," and definitively states that "it's not that ghosts don't exist."[55] Rather, her work operates under the assumption that ghosts are, simply put, *there*. They function under complex systems of visibility and unvisibility, presence and absence, but they punctuate our experiences and social lives nonetheless.

And this unvisible presence, this hybrid visibility and absence, is *unsettling*. We might understand it as *uncanny*. As technologies of observation and surveillance become more commonplace—for instance, as the United States carceral system increasingly keeps track of suspected criminals—we live under the impression that everything there is to be seen is and can be seen: all that exists is in front of us in text, screen, or before our very eyes. But there exists a veil of ghostliness that evades the panoptical vision of the surveillance state, and one that eludes modernity in its very essence. The supernatural is something that, for all intents and purposes, *cannot* or *will not* be materially or reproducibly observed by the state. I do not mean in this sense that the neoliberal or modern state is incapable of observing these things, but that buried bodies and stories exist outside the purview of the power of modernity. It is in the state's interest to keep these histories buried, and to keep these cultural figurations on the margins of societal life. This continued repression allows the state to exercise power over communities it renders peripheral to its sustained existence, and in essence the preservation of its domination.

As a colonial empire, the United States has had a heavy hand in ensuring the stories of the colonized subject do not see the light of day. This is evident in the novels and journals of

[55] Ibid., 11-12.

colonial anthropologists in the Philippine archipelago during the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as in the photography of the period that emphasizes the image of the native as constantly *other* or outside the realm of social life. The Indigenous peoples of the Philippines are, in the eyes of United States empire, simply things one must tolerate to extend the hand of American superiority. It is a process of imperial abjection, "a theory of empire that highlights […] violence and situates it in a continuum of genocide, land grab, and slavery, in texts that may or may not represent imperial violence overtly."[56] Nerissa S. Balce explores imperial abjection through "forgotten popular objects—war photographs, newspaper accounts, letters, and essays by African American soldiers, travel writing by white women, and obscure American romance novels and other cultural artifacts," arguing that these texts reconfigure the white American imperial identity. Images of savagery, sexual deviance, indomesticatability, and more generally the *other* are rendered as both negative identifiers and positive reaffirmations of the imperial self-image.[57]

The *heimlich* (German: homelike, private) in itself constitutes imperial propaganda in the context of the colonial Philippines, though it is also at the same time *unheimlich*, and undoes the systems it seems to reify.[58] Contextually situating the private life of Filipino Americans, in a nominally postcolonial setting, their legibility "comes with the return of repressed U.S. national memories regarding the violent occupation and colonial rule of the Philippines by the United States."[59] So how do we reckon with images of the Filipino and of the Philippines, both in the realized social life of the material world and in the immateriality of the ghostly and the

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[56] Balce, Nerissa S. *Body Parts of Empire: Visual Abjection, Filipino Images, and the American Archive* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 12.
[57] Ibid., 9.
[58] Wexler, Laura. *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 21.
[59] Balce, *Body Parts*, 16.

supernatural, as objects and subjects which both create and uncreate the inner workings of American empire?

This paper does not propose a blanket solution to this problem of representation, the formation of identity among those colonized bodies by the United States, or for an extensive or comprehensive methodology for *knowing* the ghost. Unlike Gordon, my aim is not to understand the ghost in the sense that I am attempting to encapsulate its knowledges and fill in the gaps of the archive with my interpretations and assumptions of what it "means" when a text is haunted. Instead, I am interested primarily in the entertainment of ghosts, the act of sitting with them and allowing them to permeate throughout our experience of the fictionalized and perhaps even realized stories of Philippine communities in the archipelago and its diasporas. In the following subsection, I enjoy (though perhaps this is a very liberal use of the word: to say I enjoy the reading of violence is not entirely accurate) the presence of the ghosts, memories, and rememories in Apostol's *Insurrecto*. Rather than concerning myself with "[imputing] a kind of objectivity to ghosts," I suggest that the articulation of the supernatural is not necessarily a realm of textual analysis that *wants* to be fully understood.[60] It is in the ghost's very nature to *resist* meaning and domestication. By virtue of not existing primarily within this physical realm, outside of the materiality we normally associate with social life, the ghost is first and foremost a *liminal* figure. It moves throughout our material world, but there are things with which it can and cannot interact. How might we understand these limitations of the ghost in its interpretability as well as its ability to interact with our surroundings?

The ghost does not "live," per se, on the same plane on which we, as the living humans, experience ourselves. Cannell's ethnography on the Bicolano figuration of the tawo affirms this

[60] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 17.

assumption, at least in that specific case. Their world is slightly eschewed of ours, slightly misaligned, slightly out-of-place. With this out-of-placeness emerges a set of physical limitations both on the part of the ghost and of the human. We cannot see, feel, hear, or taste these parallel (or perhaps, perpendicular?) and intersecting worlds of the ghosts without their consent. We only observe the ghost when it *wants* to be observed, that is, when a haunting occurs. The very dynamic in place here means that the supernatural elude concrete and concise definition: their ephemerality prevents us from wholly understanding the worlds they inhabit. The result of entertaining ghosts is that we do not encounter a neat definition of what it means to interact with them, or what it means when they interrupt a story or enter into one, but it necessarily means that our readings of ghosts and spirits are always troubled, untidy, and messy.

I Think About the Ghosts and the Bones

One of the central moments of Apostol's *Insurrecto* is the journey to the Philippines for the purposes of directing a film by Chiara, a woman whose father several decades before was a famous American filmmaker in the Philippines. Early in the novel, Chiara arranges a meeting with the central character in the novel, Magsalin, a novelist who has recently returned to the Philippines. For Chiara, whose film involves recreating moments leading up to and after the Balangiga Massacre of 1901, "a visit to Samar is necessary for her spiritual journey."[61] Magsalin expresses her discomfort at the notion of a spiritual journey, to which Chiara responds she recently has had a religious conversion online. The chapter continues to detail Chiara's research process for learning about the Balangiga Massacre, the Filipino revolutionaries in Samar during the Philippine American War, and her insistence on becoming *part* of that history. In the process of her explanation, Chiara says:

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[61] Apostol, *Insurrecto*, 44.

> It was as if, Chiara explains to Magsalin, she had entered a portal and become the body of a Filipino farmer disguised as a devout Catholic woman carrying a machete inside his voluminous peasant skirt and hoping to kill a GI.[62]

I think about Magsalin, who has just returned home after learning of a death in her family, who has been contracted by a white American woman attempting to recreate her deceased father's last great unfinished film. I think about the burden of being forced to listen to the "unscholarly search habits" of a young, foreign filmmaker.[63] How frustrating it must be to have your own history narrated to you like it is an art project. But Magsalin is not angry. Not at Chiara, at least. Perhaps she is upset with the woman who gave her information to Chiara so they could work together, Professor Estrella Espejo, but Magsalin is willing to engage in conversation with the young woman.

I think about how often I have been in situations where I have had to explain my people's history to others in the hope that they simply do not say something outright harmful. A kind of obligation I hold, I suppose, to ensuring that my Filipinoness remains intact. Not necessarily a call to legitimize myself or render myself legible in the eyes of the foreign or the colonizer, but an attempt to render myself visible amidst a collection of spirit worlds that so often are purely invisible. How does Magsalin engage in this kind of conversation so casually, to the point where it is Chiara who makes a profound statement about the logic of creation and recreation? Chiara says of her father's film,

> It seems as if *The Unintended* were constructed out of the story of Samar, but the reverse is also true. *The Unintended* also produces, for us, the horror of Balangiga. We enter others' lives through two mediums, words and time, both faulty. And still, one story may unbury another, and the dead, who knows, may be resurrected. At least, that is the hope. Recurrence is only an issue of not knowing how the film should end.[64]

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[62] Ibid., 45.
[63] Ibid., 45.
[64] Ibid., 51.

How concise is it to mention that the call of conscience, in this case, produces a mirror of itself and allows itself to continue to exist? And yet, that reality can never be wholly and authentically reproduced. A statement which, I will be honest, leads me to questions what exactly "authentic" means, which I have briefly covered in my discussion of authorship and folkoring. I think about the ghosts of Samar, the revolutionaries whose lives disappear because of their resistance to colonization and domestication. The ghosts of Samar, who now in the world of the dead resist colonization and domestication by the world of the living.

We are never introduced to a real, material ghost—whatever that might mean, for a liminal figure to have a physical form—in *Insurrecto*. The ghosts always float around the margins and borders of the novel. Whether or not we see a ghost speak to the characters is beside the point. Magsalin understands that she exists in a world where the particularities of her lived experience are of little consequence when it comes to the artistic renditions of the West. She is, after all, a mystery novel writer and understands how to cater her writing to her audience. In a sense, she is the perfect character to take Chiara on her "spiritual journey," if only because Magsalin functions as a spirit medium between the ghosts of Samar and the filmic vision Chiara pursues. We learn later in the novel that Magsalin is fresh from the death of her husband, and throughout the novel she reminisces about family members who have since passed. To have one's relationships with the living cut in so many ways and rendered as relationships with the dead, to exist in that close of a proximity to something that floats between two different worlds, Magsalin is a de facto medium in her own right.

Near the end of the novel, Magsalin reveals that she has been carrying her husband's bones with her throughout the pair's entire journey to Samar, where she hopes to bury him alongside her mother. It is a gesture towards a final farewell, of sorts, for her family: she did not

return to the Philippines when her mother died, but upon the death of her husband something ephemeral has called her back to the islands. I am reminded of the journeys I have made to see loved ones as they lay dying, of the uncertainty and terror that comes with being in such close proximity to envoys, carriers of death. It is a different thing entirely from seeing your loved one in a hospital bed than it is to carry their bones to a final resting place.

And what would happen should Magsalin fail in this regard? If she fails to bury her husband's bones, what then? This is a real possibility within the logic of the novel, where at this moment Chiara was nearly arrested for a staged drug possession charge. But for Magsalin, what are the consequences should the economy of sacrifice—giving up possession of her husband's physical remains, and of her relationship with him in a sense—come to be unsuccessful? There is no way of connecting the spirit with its body, and the ghost of her husband would seem doomed to roam the margins of the novel and the outskirts of Samar until time immemorial. Without contact. A lonely, isolated existence outside of any social order, not just that of the living. I think about the practice of burial rites as a mode of sacrifice, as a ritual to ensure safe passage between worlds. Of burial as liminality.

If Magsalin's husband's ghost can never truly move on should she fail in her burial mission, that invites him to continue to haunt and invade her. This does not manifest in the ways in which we typically imagine ghostly possession in popular media: there is no fantastical scene of a pale figure emerging from the ether and entering into Magsalin's body. Rather, we experience the haunting in a subtler way. Magsalin is plagued with memories of her husband. Every time she passes a bridge, or visits a mall, she is reminded of something having to do with her husband. When she thinks about her mother, she also thinks about her husband. He is

persistent in death as he was in life, she acknowledges. But she cannot connect with him outside of remembering him.

> "Yes," Magsalin says. "This is my husband's body. I left the country when he died.
> "*It was too painful to remember*."
> "Yes."
> "You could not return home even as your mother lay dying."
> "Yes."
> "So you began writing a mystery story instead, parceling out your pain into your characters' lives. Is his name Stéphane, by any chance?"
> "No. His name is Stig. Though it's true—people always ended up calling him Steve. Even my mom. His name was Stig Alyosha Virkelig. He was a writer. He was in the middle of writing a novel when he died. *It is unfinished*."[65]

What does it mean for Magsalin to attempt to reconstruct her feelings about her husband's death, and of her own pain, through her literature? She creates another avenue through which the spirit of her husband can endure, an attempt to render her feelings about his passing as something concrete and legible. Indeed, she is literally trying to write the unwritable into existence. It is notable, to me, that her husband dies in the middle of writing a novel. Regardless of the topic or genre (though we *do* know that Magsalin writes mystery novels), we see that both Magsalin and her late husband trafficked in the business of rendering the discursive. As both writer and spirit medium, Magsalin is attempting to make legible that which we cannot see or understand. But her work, like her husband's, like Chiara's father's, is *unfinished*. And it is unlikely to ever *be* finished, precisely because when we deal in ghosts and spirits, we can never truly make them visible. They will always be ever so slightly misaligned, just a bit askew to the point where we cannot comprehend them.

Magsalin, Continued: Photography, Literary Representation, and the Problem of the Mirror

[65] Apostol, *Insurrecto*, 248. Italics mine.

The aim of *Insurrecto* is not explicitly to define or promote a specific nationalist project, but rather it provides the reader with an avenue through which to observe and codify the ideological inconsistencies, the kinds of logical flaws and contradictions of the colonial machine. To call these inconsistencies into question is to interrogate the ways through which the colonial—and, by extension, the noncolonial—disguises itself: through memory formation, historiography, and, as we observe in *Insurrecto*, the writing of film scripts and photography. Chiara, for example, writes a script that is an example of a logic of memory and forgetting in the Philippines that explicitly positions them as object of study, and in a sense as a fetishized cultural body to which the colonizer assumes ready and available access.

One of the chief vehicles through which the literal and figurative image of the Filipino was circulated globally in the twentieth century was the photograph. We commonly understand the history of the Filipino in the context of what Victor Mendoza terms an "intimate" and "metroimperial" relationship with the United States as one of *institutional invisibility*, that is, that Filipinos have been rendered by the United States imperial project as insignificant, and the events that transpired and continue to occur in the Philippines are coded as nonevents.[66] Oscar V. Campomanes provides a brief history of the ways in which Filipinos are rendered invisible particularly within the context of institutions of higher education. He located academia and university presses as sites where the invisibility of Filipinos are especially salient, noting that he could "only spot an occasional title on the Philippines amidst the dizzying profusion of books/monographs/journals on the holy trinity of China, Japan, and India."[67] His argument is centered on the emergence of the fields of Filipino Studies and Filipino American Studies, where

[66] Mendoza, Victor. *Metroimperial Intimacies: Fantasy, Racial-Sexual Governance, and the Philippines in U.S. Imperialism, 1899-1913* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
[67] Campomanes, Oscar V. "The Institutional Invisibility of American Imperialism, the Philippines, and Filipino Americans" (In *Maganda Magazine*, Vol. 6, 1993), 1.

he is concerned chiefly with the histories of lacking scholarship on the Philippine archipelago, stating that "Filipinists are erratically positioned within East Asian or American-East Asian studies."[68] This institutional invisibility is not located solely in what would be, contemporarily for Campomanes, the lack of depth in scholarship from the fields of Filipino and Filipino American Studies: we can also see these invisibilities extend to the ways in which Filipinos are rendered in fields not necessarily fully encapsulated by area studies. In making the argument that Filipinos have historically been absent from the archives of academia, we can understand Campomanes' essay to also address the positioning of the Philippines and its peoples as objects of study in the novel.

We can also understand the widespread propagation of photographs of the Philippines and its people as a result of the colonial moment, and as something that reproduces rather than overtly masks the existence of the Filipino colonial subject. Rafael explains that "far from rendering Filipinos 'invisible,' colonialism instigated the proliferation of images of Filipino bodies […] photography was crucial in the depiction of a plural society as a target of imperial reform,"[69] or that we can understand the role of photography during and following the colonial period in the Philippines as a generative rather than solely oppressive act. We can then observe the work photographs do in reproducing the power of the colonizing body over the colonized subject. Rather than rendering the Filipino invisible, then, photographs constructed in the eyes of the United States citizenry a kind of hypervisibility. Images of Filipinos abound in the 20th century, we even see instances of these photos of dead Filipinos being used in propaganda campaigns by American organizations such as the American Anti-Imperialist League. Rafael

[68] Ibid.
[69] Rafael, Vicente L. *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 77-78.

calls these "living images of the dead," in contrast to what he terms earlier as "dead images of the living," where he is concerned with photographs of indigenous Filipinos and the ways in which they are categorized as "a diorama of white love, better known as benevolent assimilation."[70]

Normalizing attempts to regularize a particular form of the body or population, such that a certain body is rendered in an acceptable form that takes place in a populations and others that do not fit that form require regularizing, often through discipline or control—individuals are rewarded or punished according to how they conform to these norms. We can very clearly see the ways that normalization becomes a mode through which violence can be executed through the context of eugenics, which Becky Mansfield and Julie Guthman define as "a racial project of securing and 'improving' life: purifying it by eliminating biological abnormalities."[71] While the film Chiara writes is not explicitly eugenic, we can still understand this as an example of her attempting to uncover or present some kind of "pure" or "real" truth about her own familial history in the Philippines. Chiara attempts to normalize the body of the colonizer in the Philippines through her script, while at the same time committing a kind of violence against Filipinos in portraying them as something *other* or *outside* of the norm. Chiara's norm is that her family spent an extensive amount of time in the Philippines, working in a way that reifies the colonial presence in the archipelago and dismissing—or forgetting—the colonized bodies that live on the islands.

There is no questioning that the work of the photograph is inherently a violent act. Whether we consider this in the context of a photographer taking pictures without the consent of

[70] Ibid., 81.
[71] Mansfield, Becky and Guthman, Julie. "Epigenetic life: biological plasticity, abnormality, and new configurations of race and reproduction" (In *Cultural Geographies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2015), 7.

the subject of the photograph or when we think about the implications and uses of photographs that happen after the act of image capture, the photograph itself constitutes a violent form that embeds within it reproductions of structures of power. Rafael writes that photography has a "predatory and cannibalistic quality," that it has an "ability to provide an alibi of objectivity so that a photograph seems only to record what is in front of it while masking intentions, concealing selections, and rendering invisible the various frames that determine what is seen, how it is seen, and by whom."[72] That is, the photograph masks its own violence because of a notion of objectivity often associated with it: when the photograph is regarded as a kind of disposable medium, expressly through its forms of propagation such as newspapers, postcards, and magazines, there is a certain insignificance ascribed to it. It would be easy, then, for one to brush off or dismiss the violence occurring at the site of the photograph, a violence that Ariella Azoulay claims is "due to the instrumentalization of the photographed person to produce the image."[73] When the subject of the photograph is rendered as an object of study, or an object of aesthetic, even, the objectivity—in multiple senses of the word, both as unbiased and non-subjective *and* as object, or the *objecthood*—of the photograph is doubled. In other words, when both the subject of the photograph and the photograph itself are seen as non-subjective, the photograph's ability to be read as an objective reproduction of some truth is clear and simple. It is then therefore disposable and insignificant *because* it is clear and simple, and does not on its surface evoke any prolonged viewing experience.

In writing their scripts, both principal characters in the novel exhibit some bias in their representation of the Philippines and its people. While the reader is never privy to the script, we can see glances of when the characters find discrepancies between one another's work, and

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[72] Rafael, *White Love*, 77.
[73] Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 389.

Chiara often brings this up in their brief conversations. Once again, we can see how the similarities and differences between the two are always at play, even when their works seem to model themselves after each other. There is a certain spectrality—indeed, an uncoloniality—at play in the ways in which the writings of each script are presented in the novel, especially the ways in which we begin to understand how these are reflections of each character's attitude towards the Philippines. Deirdre de la Cruz thinks about the authority of the image in terms of its "biased representation of conversion and the colonial past," particularly around the logics of spiritual apparitions of the Virgin Mary and the power that spirituality plays dictating the personal, professional, and medical lives of Catholic Filipinos.[74] She not only traces the roots of Marian apparitions, but also explores the longstanding intimacies between the peoples in the Philippine islands and the physical manifestation, or representation, of their ancestors, spirits, and religious figures. Magsalin engages in a kind of remembering of her mother and her husband, using the work of writing the script not necessarily to breathe life into or resurrect these family members, but rather to write about the people of the Philippines as a way of processing her own personal traumas alongside the colonial traumas of the nation.

Trauma, Caroline S. Hau explains, is a constantly reproductive and violent mode. For Hau, "writing about trauma is tantamount to writing trauma,"[75] and while it is necessary on the part of the Filipino to produce and reproduce their traumatic histories as a method of coping with, resolving, and eventually *removing* that trauma (which Freud calls a "wound of the mind"), it is less cathartic and more violent to have that trauma reproduced by an outside body. What does it look like, then, when we consider that the production and reproduction of trauma, in order

[74] De la Cruz, Deirdre. *Mother Figured: Marian Apparitions and the making of a Filipino Universal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 25.
[75] Hau, Caroline S. *On the Subject of the Nation: Filipino Writings from the Margins, 1981 to 2004* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2004), 73.

for it to be a therapeutic act, must come from the traumatized themselves? What are we missing when we understand the ways in which we typically render legible the narrations of trauma and ghostliness are not sufficient for the reading of peoples who do not subscribe to lengthy essays, photographs, and films? There is a way in which the chaotic organization of *Insurrecto* can help us understand that writing of trauma, and the seeming scatterbrained nature of the novel's organization allows us to engage with haunting as it relates to a nonlinear temporality.

In *Insurrecto*, there is a seemingly haphazard scattering of chapters throughout the novel. We never see a strict progression of chapters that one would be accustomed to in reading a novel: rather than 1, 2, 3, 4, we see 17, 27, 21, 18. In a few cases we even see the constant repetition of 1, 1, 1. The novel itself takes place, concretely, in three different periods: 2018, the 1970s, and 1901. Of course, these are all significant given the scope of the novel, one that considers the scope of United States colonization in the Philippines. In 2018, we have the meeting of Magsalin and Chiara, where they make their way to Samar and visit for the third time these sites of violence—along the way, Chiara exhibits very exaggeratedly the entitlement to knowledge production often present when in conversation with colonizers and colonized. In the 1970s, the second visit of Ludo Brasi and his making of a film on Samar—the project that Chiara, nearly 50 years later, is looking to complete, revitalize, and refashion. In 1901, perhaps the central moment in this story (though we spend, it seems, the least amount of time here), we have the inciting incident: the Balangiga Massacre, the work of Jacob "Howling Wilderness" Smith, as Apostol so affectionally calls him.

Initially, these timelines seem disparate. Other than their geographic similarities, there is nothing strictly temporal linking these three periods together at the outset of the novel. As *Insurrecto* progresses, though, we see these timelines overlap at a site of violence, at a site of

death and colonialism and thievery and memory and mourning, as well as a site of capitalism. In 1901, the looting of these objects and the rendering of Samar as a "howling wilderness" can read as directly translating to the appropriation of resources and the displacement of established peoples, two of the core tenets of a capitalist project. In the 1970s this violence is repeated in the misrepresentation of Filipinos in Ludo's film, in the ways in which his creative project is fueled first and foremost by capital and aesthetic becomes secondary. In 2018, especially, we see this kind of ahistorical lens when Magsalin notes that, on their way to Samar, "The peaked straw hat that the charlatan masseur wears is a costume-design flaw, *Cambodian, not Filipino*, secondhand relics from other movies about a war yet to happen in a different, also misbegotten place."[76]

Firstly, we see "secondhand relics" being a reference to the remnants of an earlier visit to Samar, embedded within it a perpetuity that mimics the pervasiveness of the colonial moment, and also reifies this misattribution and miscategorization that happens when we encounter forms of mass racialization. This "war yet to happen in a different, also misbegotten place" reads for war as a mobilizing factor of colonialism, indeed of capitalism, and we see again the production and reproduction of the colonial machine in this reference to *another war* that has yet to occur.

What, then, is the significance of the constant repetition of first chapters? Throughout the novel, Apostol labels several chapters with "1," and they always seem to be the chapters following Magsalin and Chiara. Each of these chapters can be read as a first chapter in a different kind of temporality in the scope of the novel: the first time Magsalin and Chiara meet; the first time Magsalin returns to the Philippines; the first time Chiara encounters Philippine police. Though we are, throughout these chapters, linearly moving forward through the events that take place in the novel, any one of these chapters could stand as the opening. Whether we begin at Ali

[76] Apostol, *Insurrecto*, 163.

mall, where Magsalin and Chiara meet for the first time and discuss the scriptwriting project that is their initial animus for traveling to Samar, or whether we begin at the scene of the police shooting where Chiara is exposed quite plainly to the forms of authoritative violence present in the Philippines, we can understand this: the focal point of the novel is Samar, is Balangiga. Rather than thinking about the way time functions in the novel as being strictly rooted to a progression of cause to effect, Samar acts as the nexus around which the events in the novel take place. *Insurrecto* is, therefore, situated temporally in *place*. It is *haunted* in Samar, at Balangiga. There are several beginnings, several endings, and an entire array of events that occur in the middling sections, but what is consistent in these tellings is that all of our timelines are rooted in one place.

But what is significant about Samar? It was and continues to be a site of violence. The events in the novel are born out of the deaths of Filipinos at the hands of their colonizers. The literal genociding and figurative erasure of the Filipinos at Samar is, for the purpose of the novel, necessarily the inciting moment for an investigation into the power of memory at play in the narration of a Filipino history. For if "erasure, too, is a blessing,"[77] then we can even possibly read the erasure of the events at Samar—their being classified as insignificant, as a nonevent—as a blessing in itself. At some level we are spared the pain of reliving the trauma of death, but at the same time we are required to relive that trauma through the reading of the novel. And what can we glean as the function of reliving this trauma through the form of the novel?

Nick Deocampo defines the imperial gaze through understanding the primary function of the camera: "to see the world the way the filmmaker wants his audience to see it," paying careful

[77] Ibid., 111.

attention to make unacceptable things seem acceptable.[78] Speaking primarily about war films, Deocampo mentions that the work of the film was to make war legible to American viewers as a method of reifying the imperialist motives of the United States. Clearly within the context of a war film, it is easy to understand the ghostliness of filming or photographing Filipinos in moments of violence. But it is more difficult, however not incorrect, to consider the scripts and films in the novel as moments of violence, and as ghostly themselves. The scripts and the resulting films serve as intrusions into the lives of Filipinos on the part of Chiara: that she assumes access to modes of cultural and knowledge production in order to fulfill her selfish desire, casting the Filipinos as background characters, as insignificant in her work. It is necessary for Chiara to construct such a dichotomy—as we can see in the ways she chastises nearly every interaction she has with Filipinos throughout the novel—in order to reckon with her own forms of loss. This imperial gaze results in a kind of death of the Filipino as it is itself a colonial act: the displacement of the Filipino in order to serve the needs of the colonizer. For Chiara, then, it is necessary for her to exploit and use the physical backdrop of the Philippines and its people to tell her story—to appropriate the land and colonize the people for self-serving purposes. This is an engagement in the construction of a legible history outside of the colonized body, something Audra Simpson claims is an anthropological desire, "a desire for order, for purity, for fixity, and for cultural perfection that at once imagined an imminent disappearance immediately after or just within actual land dispossession."[79] Chiara's use of the Philippines as her site for the film she is attempting to write, which she justifies through numerous internet searches and her relationship with her family, is a desire for making sense of something about which she does not understand

[78] Deocampo, Nick. "Imperialist Fictions: The Filipino in the Imperialist Imaginary" (In *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream*. New York: NYU Press, 2002), 231.
[79] Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 70.

the logic. Perhaps unknowingly, Chiara is performing this Filipino logic of memory and forgetting in a way that serves the needs of the colonizer. She is using the labor of the Philippines to remember her own family and to forget the people exploited by her father and whom she is exploiting in the process. For Magsalin, however, this logic of memory and forgetting is a way of thinking about the future of the Philippines in a post-postcolonial context, in a way that we can hopefully resolve trauma be writing and rewriting it.

It is difficult to articulate the ways in which Filipinos are rendered both hypervisible and invisible throughout the novel: after all, the entire thing takes place in the Philippines and many of the principal characters are Filipino themselves. However, Chiara's foray into the Philippines in pursuit of a creative project is an example of a kind of colonial exploitation that imagines a spiritual makeup of the Filipino within the colonizer. This necessary inculcation of a spiritual makeup of the Filipino with the colonizer, is predicated on the same things the Spanish and American missionaries set out to do when they embarked to the Philippines: extracting resources. In Chiara's case, however, these are not physical resources, not the appropriation of land per se but rather the extraction of knowledge and cultural productions, to assume the right to reproduce these methods of cultural significance and rewrite them so they are legible to the world at large.

The Liminal Aswang on the Borders

Our final exploration of the uncolonial follows a series of short folk tales collected by Ramos in his writing of *The Aswang Complex*. By attending to these stories collected from different communities throughout the Philippines, this subsection hopes to demonstrate the breadth of the unexplainable and uncanny in Philippine folklore. There are a number of techniques employed through many of these stories, which at first may seem disparate. Firstly, many of the texts observed thus far and which will continue to be entertained here participate in

that *deferral* of authorship: they cannot be reduced to a singular point of origin. The absence of authorship while at the same time being able to claim a *communal* authority over the "authenticity" of these stories is precisely one of the critical junctures to which uncoloniality arrives. Some of these folktales may draw similarities to European myths and legends, or creatures of European mythology. Witches may have pet familiars such as cats, which are common in Europe but not so in the Philippines. Shapeshifters take the forms of giant dogs, but not wolves; they can also make themselves disappear at will and replace themselves with tree trunks. Aswang appear to villagers, adult and child alike, out of thin air in the middle of the night. There is an element of magic to all of these apparitions, or perhaps Rivers' understanding of "magic" and "religion" might be useful to distinguish between them here.

What we shall observe in these stories are a few consistencies across those selected for entertainment in this paper: the threat is nearly always *external* or a new arrival into a community. What might this statement of the perpetual *other* indicate about the folk beliefs in aswang in the Philippines? Or, perhaps, can we read the outsideness of the fearmongering aswang as an apt metaphor for the imposition of Spanish and American colonial law in the Philippines? Still, it might be appropriate to understand that through these communities a sense of protection and a fear of the unknown is generated in the stories of the aswang. It is never the individual claiming to be aswang, no. The actual danger is always deferred or mediated through another person: someone in their family, a friend of a friend, something they heard in passing in a neighboring barrio. There is no concrete figure of the aswang, or at least, there is no concrete figure to which the origin of the aswang can be attributed. And this central tenet, that there is no singular origin, there is no genesis of the aswang that can be explained by a western modernity or a rationalizing logic of coloniality, that makes the aswang uncolonial. The aswang perpetually

exists on the borders or margins of communities, if it lives in them at all. Else, the aswang lives in the forests, in the shadows, and only comes out at night. While all of these things contribute handily to the horror narrative of which many folktales take shape, they also gesture towards another understanding of community centrality that is not necessarily wholly explained by the logics of modernity. The folktales that follow will focus on the peripherality and marginality of the aswang, and its liminality in its ability to be present and absent at will.

The first story I will observe provides an excellent example of the fungibility of the aswang, and its resistance to capture and domestication, much like the ghosts and other uncolonial supernatural creatures. Reproduced in its entirety, below is *Banana Trunk for a Corpse*.

> May isang tao sa amin na bigla na lamang nagkasakit. Bawat oras ay tumataas ang kanyang lagnat. Tumawag ang asawa niya ng albularyo. Ngunit ilang saglit bago dumating ang albularyo, ang taong iyon ay namatay. Pagkakita ng albularyo sa bangkay ay kanyang sinabi sa asawa nito na hindi iyon ang kanyang asawa. Ang asawa daw niya ay nasa kamay ng mga aswang. Kaagad silang nagpunta sa pook na sinabi ng albularyo. Ang lalaki ay nadatnan nilang papatayin na ng mga aswang upang kainin. Nang makita ng mga aswang ang mga tao, sila ay tumakas. At hindi na napatay ng mga aswang ang lalaki. Nang sila'y bumalik sa kanilang bahay, isang tinibang saging ang kanilang nakita sa halip na bangkay na kanilang iniwan.
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> There was a man in our place who suddenly sickened. Ever hour his fever rose. His wife called an albularyo. But a few moments before the arrival of the albularyo, the man died. When the albularyo saw the dead man, he told the widow that that was not her husband and that her husband was in the hands of the aswang. They rushed to the place the albularyo indicated and they arrived just in time, when the aswang were about to kill her husband and eat him. The aswang fled when he saw them coming. When they returned to the house of the man, they found a banana trunk in place of the corpse.[80]

Not only is the aswang the shapeshifting or mutable figure here, but he also extends his illegibility to his victims. The aswang in *Banana Trunk* lives in some unspecified, out-of-the-

[80] Ramos, *Aswang Complex*, 7. Copied in full, this story is attributed to "Miguel H. Benedicto, from Pasay City, who collected it from Arsenio E. Benedicto, a retired government employee from Villadolid, Negros Occidental."

way place, such that it requires travel from the spouse and albularyo.[81] Its powers of deception and misdirection lead the woman to believe her husband has died in his own home, but they are not explained in any way in this short tale. The aswang is never apprehended by the albularyo or the spouse, nor is the man who was presumed dead seemingly harmed in any way. In his "corpse's" place is a banana trunk, evidencing the apparent powers of shapeshifting the aswang possess.

If the aswang has the ability to change its shape and the shape of other things at will, why does it need to participate in an exchange of deception with members of its community, or with members of the communities to which it finds itself adjacent? In several other stories, we observe tales of the aswang disguising themselves or hiding their identity from their community members. For instance, in one story, we observe an aswang who preyed on a young child and was unsuccessful who is then invited to the child's birthday party a short time after. She did not suspect the child's parents knew she was an aswang, and they poisoned her food and she died at that moment. What does it mean, then, for aswang-disguised-as-human or for human-disguised-aswang to still participate in the communal exchanges of social reality when they have the ability, it seems, to transform and take people by force?

These stories gesture towards the aswang being an incorporated part of the community and part of a complex network of social interaction, rather than simply an external threat. While they resist domestication in this transformed state, the aswang also occupies a necessarily domestic role in the social sphere. It is only when the aswang is forced to transition between the private and public spheres where they find themselves consistently engaging in processes of

[81] Albularyo is one of many Tagalog or Philippine terms for what we might commonly understand in a western vernacular as a "witch doctor" or "herb doctor." These are typically local community healers who are well-versed in a number of supernatural entities, whether they be aswang, ghosts, or the spirits of the earth.

mediation and transformation. The aswang is never *entirely* outside of the figuration of the community in the Philippines, but rather exists as a marginal member or participant in the community that, under the right circumstances, can find themselves fully incorporated into the social sphere. Below, again reproduced in full, is a short story which serves as an example of this occurrence, titled *Flight on a Wakwak's Back*.

> Dunay usa ka lalaki nga nagpuyo sa balay. Usa ka hapon may wakwak nag-ingun, "Wak-wak-wak." Nitubag ang lalaki sa balay, "Mouban ko." Dayo ta-od ta-od diha na ang dalaga. Ni-ingun nga, "Dali na! Molakaw na ta!" Nanaog sila sa balay, hinsakay ang lalaki sa wakwak, lupad sila. Lay una ka-ayo sila, Nakita sa lalaki na dunay balay nga daghang tawo. Ang mga tawo naghilak sa balay, nagingun ang dalaga, "Ibilin lang ka dinhi sa taas sa lubi." Ni lupad ang wakwak. Niadto sa balay, siging hilak ang mga tawo, mi sulud ang wakwak, guikuha niya ang patay. Ang mga tawo wala mahibalo na ang patay guikuha sa wakwak ug guidala sa wakwak ang patay sa taas sa lubi. Guicarga sa lalaki ang patay sa likod niya ug dayon nisakay ang lalaki sa wakwak ug nilupad sila. Lay una, wala makahibalo, ang lalaki kung asan'g lugar, nakaabot sila sa bahay sa wakwak. Guibutang ang patay sa balay, guitawag sa dalaga ang iyang nanay, "Nay, ani ana kami, nay akong dala." Paggawas sa nanay Nakita ang lalaki. "O, kinsa ang imong kauban?" Nitubag ang dalaga, "Akong migo, Nay." Guipaluto ang patay sa iyang nanay, nahadlok ang lalaki, pero wala lang siya magbanha. Tapos naluto, na mingtawag ang nanay, "Kaon na." Unya wala mukaon ang lalaki, natulog ang lalaki. Pakabuntag, guapo na ang balay sa wakwak. Nilakaw ang lalaki nagpalit ug tambal, guibutang niya ang tambal sa pagkaon. Pagkahuman nagkaun ang dalaga ug ang iyang mama, nagsuka sila. Pulus langam gagmay, naluya sila, dayun naulian di na sila makalupad pagkagabi, kay nigawas na ang langam gagmay, di na sila wakwak. Tapos mag-asawa ang dalaga at ang lalaki.[82]
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> There was a boy who was staying home. One afternoon there was a wakwak who said, "Wak-wak-wak." The boy answered from the house, "I want to go with you." Suddenly a young woman appeared. She said, "Hurry up! Let's go." They went down from the house, the boy rode on the wakwak,[83] and they flew. When they got very far, the boy saw a house with many people. The people were crying, and the wakwak said, "Stay here on top of this coconut tree." Then the wakwak flew away. She went to the house. The people kept on crying inside the house. The wakwak entered the house, took the dead. But the people did not know that the dead had

[82] This story is told and written originally in Cebuano, a Philippine language from the Cebu-Visayas region of the archipelago. As such, there are some similarities with Tagalog, but the two are mutually unintelligible.

[83] A wakwak is a creature similar to the manananggal in the folk literature of Visayas. Though the Tagalog manananggal draws many similarities to the European vampire, as I mentioned earlier in this paper, the wakwak bears more resemblance to a harpy, taking the form of a woman who can fly with bird's wings (as we observe at the end of the story) rather than bat's wings.

> been taken away by the wakwak and carried to the top of the coconut tree. The boy carried the dead on his back, now he rode on the wakwak. Then they flew away. Far away, nobody knows, even the boy, where it was, they reached the house of the wakwak. The dead they placed inside the house. The young woman called her mother, "Ma! We are here. I brought something." When the mother came out, she saw the boy. "Oh, who is wish you?" The young woman answered, "My friend, Ma." She had her mother cook the dead, the boy was frightened, but he did not mind it. When everything was cooked, the mother called, "Let's eat." Now the boy did not want to eat; he went to sleep. In the morning the house of the wakwak had become very beautiful; the boy took a walk and bought some medicine and placed it on the food. When the young woman and her mother finished eating their food, they vomited. All that came out were small birds, and they were very tired, and they could not fly anymore at night. Because the small birds were out of their body, they were not wakwak any more. Later the boy and the young lady got married.[84]

In this story, the aswang takes the form of the wakwak, a creature similar to the manananggal of Tagalog mythology, but localized to the Visayas region in the Philippines. Once again, we see instances where the aswang is seemingly able to disappear at will, or at the very least appear invisible to the humans surrounding her. The wakwak in this story enters a house full of people who, stricken by grief, do not notice her taking a dead body from under their noses. She flies with this young man, who in turn has a dead person on his back, "far away" so that "nobody knows […] where it was" to her home. In the first place, it must be a feat of supernatural strength to carry both a boy and a corpse on one's back and to fly to such a far away place. But perhaps more critically, the wakwak here lives *outside* the normal scope of the community from which she met the boy.

How can we articulate the wakwak's dwelling so far outside the realm of the social reality? Practically speaking, it might make sense to say that she lives so far out because she does not *really* exist. However, if we are to think about the discursive and communal function of aswang in relation to community complexes of belonging and identity figuration, that this

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[84] Ramos, *Aswang Complex*, 9-10. This story was told to Ramos by "Elizabeth Go, from Zamboanga City, who collected it from Lingling Labisto, of Pagadian, Zamboanga del Sur, who in turn had it from Balit, farmer, of the same town."

character and her mother live on the periphery (however remote) of the social structure points us toward a broader understanding of Philippine communities as a whole. Despite existing outside the established infrastructure of the village or barrio, it is possible in one reading of the previous story for the wakwak to be *incorporated* into that fold of social obligation by way of marriage. The boy, having cured the wakwak of her aswang-like qualities—that is, taking away her ability to fly—marries the young woman.

But I have mentioned earlier that the aswang always exists on the margins of social order, so how can it make sense that the aswang is, in this case, inculcated into the social sphere? Furthermore, the aswang, like many uncolonial and spectral entities, should *resist* domestication. Marriage is, by a traditional understanding, one of the very foundations of domestication. It is the process by which one is made both familiar and *familial*. In this sense, then, we must understand that uncoloniality does not propose pigeonholing the aswang into such strict categories. While it is true that aswang and ghosts by their very nature resist domestication, it would be crass to assume that every instance of these figures' appearances is some wild, chaotic, or indomitable being. That, in its own right, reads more colonially than uncolonial. Perhaps it is that complexity that allows the aswang to navigate between discourses of domesticity and indomitability that renders it a less rigidly definable figure.

The fungibility of supernatural occurrences is no stranger to Philippine ontologies either of place, embodiment, or religion. De la Cruz's exploration of Philippine experiences with the physical structures of churches and Marian apparitions in the archipelago serves as a fascinating example of this kind of mutability. Talking of the appearances of figures of the Virgin Mary, de la Cruz writes, "[T]hese stories of found, disappearing, and reappearing images carry a subtext

that troubles the tabula rasa fantasy;"[85] in other words, the constant transformation of the Virgin Mary has historically changed the way the Philippines has viewed its relationship with Christianity. Smaller, branching churches of Christianity arise through the discussion of Marian apparition. Whether verifiable or not, the *belief* and *discursive power* of claims towards convening with the Virgin are able to effect tangible change throughout different regions of the Philippines. There is no way to determine who has the "correct" interpretation or the "real" apparition of the Virgin, but every one of these appearances import meaning to their communities and complicate their relationships with their colonial overseers.

Additionally, while the origins of these stories given by de la Cruz can find their origins in being told to her and being written in older journals of Castillian friars, we cannot *explicitly* place them within a concrete timeline precisely because they traffic in the language and realm of the supernatural. The specificities of the founding of different churches in rural regions of the Philippines are hazy: we do not have exact dates these apparitions occurred, we do not see the continued presence of the Virgin. We are simply meant to believe or accept that these apparitions did in fact happen, and to base our understanding on the community with that as a foundational tenet. Attempting to arrest the logic of the aswang or the Virgin within a purely analytical framework, that is, one that is concerned with proving the objectivity or physical possibility of an event's occurrence, completely defeats the point of an uncolonial ontology. Instead, in entertaining these disparate and untraceable origin stories, we rather see that the histories of the Philippines are articulated in a much more complicated way that troubles the language of colonial domination by Spain and the United States.

[85] De la Cruz, *Marian Apparitions*, 32.

The aswang defers and even denies authorship and origin. It is a category of figure that moves throughout communities and is well acknowledged among many different regions in the Philippines, but which cannot be contained within a rigid definition or a place of genesis. Similarly, the many variations of Christian worship throughout the Philippines operate on a functionally uncolonial level, with little or confusing attribution as to their origin, relying instead on the members of the community to keep these beliefs alive. The authenticity of these folk stories and apparitions is at once debatable yet also completely attributable to the local knowledges of barrios, villages, towns, and cities in the archipelago. The aswang, then, is made real in part because it is *believed* to be real.

SECTION THREE

Conclusion

In this brief, final section, I will highlight some other instances of the emergence of aswang-like creatures in stories from other parts of Southeast Asia, and end with a broad question of the potentiality of uncoloniality as a method of reading and of entertainment with the immaterial for thinkers from myriad cultures. Because this theorization is in its infancy, it is important to acknowledge for the purposes of this paper my areas in need of further—and stricter—analysis. Firstly, I cannot have possibly read every Filipino or Filipino American novel in which a ghost, an aswang, or a spirit was mentioned: indeed, throughout the diasporas of the Philippines, the mention of spirits of ancestors along with a belief (real or imagined) in the supernatural is heavily prevalent, and to closely read *all* of these texts would prove an enormous feat. That being said, of course, the whole point of this paper is to sit with the kind of vast unknowability of Philippine experiences with specters. Secondly, I am limited in the texts available to me from the Philippines, both in the archipelago's many languages and in English, for a number of reasons. The texts easily available to me are translations of transcriptions of conversations between Ramos and his communities, de los Reyes and his sources, and Zapanta-Manlapaz and hers, and they cannot and do not comprise the whole of Philippine experience (the majority of the stories I have read over the course of researching for this paper come from Luzon, and even more specifically the areas in and surrounding Manila). I am, of course, also limited in my ability to read or listen in many of the Philippines' nearly two hundred different languages outside of Tagalog.

Finally, I believe it must be stated that the advent of a global pandemic that has rendered both travel and in-person socialization nearly impossible (or, at the very least, highly discouraged), has rendered the initial aspirations of this paper, and the larger research of which it

comprises a part, to speak directly with communities in the Philippines and work with primary documents held in various libraries in the United States unfeasible for the time being. It is my hope that I will be able to expand upon this work in later stages of my academic career.

This being said, I am vaguely aware of different instances of creatures resembling the various forms of aswang and manananggal in other parts of Southeast Asia. The Malay ghost myth of the penanggal, for instance, bears a striking resemblance to the manananggal: a woman, practicing some form of witchcraft, who at night detaches her head from her body and preys on pregnant women and children. There is a marked difference here, with the penanggal almost always manifesting as solely a flying head whereas the Philippine manananggal is a woman detached at the waist having grown wings. But the story remains the same. Similar creatures occur throughout Southeast Asia, including in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. How, then, might we read these creatures in other places in Southeast Asia in relation to the Philippines? Or, perhaps, how might we read them in relation to their histories of colonization?

Ramos mentions the different forms the viscera-sucker takes in various parts of Southeast Asia in his footnotes of *Aswang Complex*, stating, "In Cambodia the viscera sucker is called *srei ap* and is said to feed on human excreta. The *srei ap* are described as folows [sic]: 'At night their heads, accompanied only by the alimentary canal, wander about to feed on excrements, in search of which they will even look among the intestines of people who are asleep.'"[86] He also goes on to state that "The Indonesian viscera sucker is said to cast off its entire body from the neck down and, with its hair as a propellant, its head and entrails fly out at night to seek human viscera."[87] Ramos is acutely aware of the instances in other parts of Southeast Asia where these creatures

[86] Ramos, *Aswang Complex*, xviii.
[87] Ibid., xix.

appear, though it seems he leaves the work of making more explicit connections other than linguistic to the reader. Are there colonial anxieties to be unpacked when dealing with viscera-suckers, or manananggal? Is there significance to the figure of the viscera-sucker nearly always being a woman, and is it exceptional that in the case of the Philippines a manananggal can also be a man whereas that does not seem to be true for other countries in Southeast Asia?

A belief in viscera-suckers again becomes a point of explaining certain aspects of Philippine culture for Ramos, where he writes that these beliefs "also help explain why many Filipinos refuse to sleep at the center of a room, preferring the sides instead."[88] Perhaps more interesting than the social justification of superstition Ramos provides here is, once again, in his own footnotes, where he references the similarities between Philippine creatures of legend and those that appear elsewhere. He writes:

> But [they do not sleep] too close to a post, for the posts may harbor a tree-dwelling mythical demon like the *bangungot* or *batibat*. This is a nightmare-inducing, insanity-causing creature resembling the *genii* of the Near East. It is said to have refused to leave its tree when it was felled and stubbornly to have gone on living in a crevice or cavity in the wood, emerging to sit on a tenant's chest and suffocate him by plugging his mouth with its phallus and his nostrils with its testicles.[89]

Ramos is using an outdated plural for genie, or djinn (or any number of spellings), from pre-Islamic and Islamic legend. The exact references he is making, regarding the similarities, are ones that I have not come across in my own research, so I cannot speak to the validity or similarity that he claims. It is worth noting, however, that Ramos is seemingly constantly engaging in a series of comparisons, attempting to create some kind of cohesion between the different creatures of myth, legend, and spirituality across Southeast Asia and even extending into West Asia.

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[88] Ibid., xxi.
[89] Ibid., xxi-xxii.

The demon he mentions also bears a resemblance to a popular creature in European mythologies that is today known more commonly as a "sleep paralysis demon." Images depicting a demon sitting or squatting on a sleeping person's chest emerge in Europe as early as the eighteenth century, with Henry Fuseli producing a series of paintings known as *The Nightmare*. The original painting itself depicts a woman, lying asleep on a bed with her left arm and head hanging off the edge of the frame. Seated on her chest is a squat demon, turned away from the viewer but with its face staring towards them. The demon itself appears not to have any visible horns, but a light coming from outside the frame of the painting casts a shadow on the curtains behind the demon, where its wisps of hair seem to cast shadows that resemble horns. To the left of the demon, there appears a ghostly figure of a horse emerging from the shadows, with pale, pupilless white eyes, watching the scene unfold much like the viewer does. There is a red and gold sheet on the bed that seems to be torn with claw marks, and we can see the demon does indeed have sharp claws on its one visible hand, leading the viewer to believe the demon has been clawing at or attacking the woman.

Fuseli painted a few variations on this original piece, including another dated somewhere between 1790 and 1791 (the original having been painted in 1781) that is a mirrored image of the first. In this image, the demon squatting on the woman's chest is clearly malevolent, with visible horns, claws, and a mischievous smile. The demon's eyes are blacked out, unlike the original image where we can see the whites and pupils of the demon. The horse appears again, this time pale and white unlike the original, where it was black. The woman appears to be visibly distraught in her slumber, a clear grimace indicating pain on her face and both arms sloped off the bed.

Is it possible that images of Fuseli's *The Nightmare* influenced Philippine mythology with the emergence of creatures like the bangungot and the batibat? The word bangungot translates from Tagalog to English as "nightmare," and the same is true of batibat from Ilokano. These Philippine demons, named for the nightmares they induce, draw strong similarities to creatures of European myth and legend, and even continue to seem relevant today rather than be cast away to the annals of precoloniality as more research into the hallucinations induced by sleep paralysis comes to the public. This, to me, seems to be one of these instances in which spiritual creatures in the Philippines cannot solely be reduced to their conversation with colonialism.

What does it mean for the aswang to have so many variations across Southeast Asia, West Asia, and even in Europe and the Americas? Obviously, there are broader statements to be made about the ways in which the supernatural occur through various cultures throughout the world, but how might we understand the similarities across these seemingly disparate cultures? Are we meant to understand the ways in which the same mythical creatures, the same spirits and demons and monsters, occur time and time again in places that, on the surface, seem disconnected? Or, perhaps we should simply let these creatures exist in the ways they always have: on the borders, in liminality, in purgatory and perpetuity. Nonetheless, the desire to taxonomize, categorize, and name these forces is a powerful and colonial one, as stated earlier in this paper. We are compelled to understand that which cannot be understood, to try to put a name and a face to those things which dwell in the shadows that we cannot know, to quell our fears and perhaps find reprieve in the peace and quiet of knowability. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, there is no singular definition for what inhabits the world we cannot see: it is not *only* the tawo or the andagaw, the ghost or the spirit, the manananggal or the aswang. It is that

hybridity and that unknowability, however, that I believe we must embrace, entertain, and sit with if we can hope to reckon with coloniality beyond solely the language of domination and submission.

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