

## Aquapelagic Malolos

### *Island-Water Imaginaries in Coastal Bulacan, Philippines*

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A young Pinay (Filipina) wearing a pink short-sleeve t-shirt and grey shorts rides and maneuvers a raft, using a long wooden pole, on an estuary near Pamarawan Island in Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines. She is in the middle of the frame, and our eyes move towards the river slightly as the girl's weight tips the raft towards the right. The pole also directs our eyes towards the water because the girl is pushing off on the starboard side. The empty plastic bottles that resourcefully keep the raft afloat are also visible. This is a place where everything is used and nothing is wasted. The river water is a grey-army-green color on the day that she is photographed. JP Hernandez, a local Maloleno who posts photographs on Instagram and who uses the name *tanogotchi* and the hashtag #Malolos, is the photographer of the Pinay girl rafting (figure 6.1). His photograph and others from his Instagram account significantly expand the visual archive of Malolos, a town-turned-city that has historically and primarily relied on *land-based* imaginaries to promote its importance in dominant Philippine nationalist historiography. Here, I am using Phillip Hayward's theorization of *aquapelagos* as an "assemblage of the marine and land spaces of a group of islands and their adjacent waters (Hayward 2012).<sup>1</sup> This aquapelagic focus on marine, island, and adjacent spaces is highly generative and useful and can be applied in similar locations and contexts where places are not usually associated with or known for marine cultural heritage or the hydrohumanities. Indeed, Malolos is *hegemonically associated* with its more *inland city center* where important colonial, postcolonial, and nationalist architectural structures are located. These structures were important to the Philippine anticolonial nationalist struggle for independence and sovereignty in the nineteenth century. This inland architectural bias can be seen, for example, in the city of Malolos's recent tourism campaign (inaugurated in 2015), which uses the slogan "Vamos a Malolos." In the



FIGURE 6.1. *Sail Away with Me* (Pinay girl rafting, Pamarawan, Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines). Photo used by permission © 2016 Jonathan Hernandez, @tanogotchi on Instagram.

first *o* in the word *Malolos*, the city government's graphic designer uses the arch or curve of a rising yellow sun shining behind the famous Barasoain Church. Barasoain Church was the site of an important political moment and act of resistance for Indigenous Indios, Indias, Tagalogs, and Mistisx in 1898. A new government and nation were born and emerged in Barasoain Church as the First Congress was convened for the new *Republika ng Pilipinas*, the Republic of the Philippines.

Precisely because Hernandez pays attention to Malolos's coasts, islands, seawater, aquamarine, and cross currents spaces, places, and mobilities (Fajardo 2011) — instead of simply focusing on the usual historical landmarks in the city center of Malolos, such as Barasoain Church—he significantly expands our understanding of what constitutes, animates, or enlivens Malolos. He frames and shoots an example of a contemporary Indigenous-precolonial- decolonial island-*and*-water—in other words, an *aquapelagic imaginary* of Malolos, Bulacan. This pivot and return towards aquapelagic challenges the once-established and entrenched nationalist discourse in the Philippines that emerged from the dominant precolonial Philippine historiography. Hernandez's photograph is a perfect example of an aquapelagic imaginary, and can be read closely alongside other aquapelagic imaginaries from Malolos in the contexts of rapid urbanization, megaregionalization, industrialization, and the climate crisis. Hernandez and other like-minded cultural producers invite and urge Filipinx environmentalists, human rights advocates, artists, photographers, writers, academics, organizers, teachers, etc. to focus our attention *now* on Malolos's rivers, estuaries, coasts,

islands, and seas, and on the humans and nonhumans there. Ultimately, the current emergencies resulting from massive urbanization, industrialization, and megaregionalization in Malolos during the climate crisis demand that local and diasporic Malolenyx and their friends and allies now advocate for, protect, and culturally preserve coastal Malolos and coastal Bulacan. Successful advocacy works through various media, such as art/documentary/ethnographic photography/filmmaking and videography, as well as through literature, music, and other arts. A “salvage” anthropological and environmental justice orientation and practice—in the social sciences and the humanities—is now urgently needed, because coastal Malolos is vulnerable to outside national institutions, capitalist structures, and extreme weather and environmental events.

In what follows, I elaborate on how and why aquapelagic narratives and visual imaginaries of Malolos, which highlight rivers, the sea, and island ecologies, peoples, and economies, are significant, given the current situation of hegemonic nationalism, urbanization, and megaregionalization in Central Luzon, along with the present reality of local/global anthropogenic climate crises. Specifically, I am referring to and will address the massive and ongoing real estate and infrastructure “development” projects, including a proposed new Manila international airport in coastal Bulacan (to be discussed later on in this essay); rising seas and extreme storms and weather events that are a part of local/global climate emergencies; as well as the marine ecologies that are important to fisherfolks and the more-than-human: mangrove trees, seagrass, and fish, and how they are currently being threatened. In these contexts, aquapelagic imaginaries and narratives about Malolos, which stress the marine ecologies of Malolos, are critical because they direct Malolenyx, other Filipinx, other local residents, and the various mix of people and stakeholders previously outlined to consider and re/connect Malolos to more regional Manila Bay environmental and climate justice concerns and movements. A persistent and creative re/focus on the aquapelagic ecosystems of Malolos also invites Malolenyx and Filipinx who celebrate Malolos to think and act beyond the Philippine nation-state. It encourages questioning of what constitutes national histories, landmarks, or cultural heritage, and how a narrow and limiting nationalist orientation and cultural politics, with their subsequent nationalist optics, potentially and unproductively disconnect us from other forms of solidarities and social and environmental movements that stress contemporary *regional and global* concerns, and which desire a different kind of future for humans and the more-than-human (Marran 2017; Probyn 2016).

Some brief background here on my positionality and methodology: I was born in Malolos and immigrated to Portland/Gladstone, Oregon, with my family as a young child in the early 1970s. Throughout my life as a child, youth, and adult, I have been regularly traveling and returning to Malolos. Through these opportunities, I was privileged and honored to develop a translocal and transnational relationship to Malolos and also to nearby Metro Manila. In the preface to

my book *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities, and Globalization*, I wrote about personal and familial connections to Malolos's riverine and sea locations (Fajardo 2011). From 2012 to 2015, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Malolos during my summer and winter breaks from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.<sup>2</sup> This research included investigating and learning about cultural heritage and architectural preservation in Malolos. Later, I expanded my research to explore the concept of "marine cultural heritage" by focusing on coastal Malolos sites such as Pamarawan (island), introduced earlier.

#### NATIONALIST IMAGINARIES OF MALOLOS

Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines, is a city situated northwest of Metro Manila. Although it is a city located on Manila Bay, Malolos is *not* usually associated with water—specifically, the bay, the sea, or rivers. The city is also not usually associated with rafts (or other types of boats) such as the raft in Hernandez's Instagram photograph (map 6.1). Most Filipinx associate Malolos with dominant Philippine revolutionary and nationalist histories because at the end of the nineteenth century, Malolos was the "birthplace of the Philippine nation."<sup>3</sup> It is a history repeated through formal education in classrooms across the Philippines. Many Filipinx travel to Malolos on pilgrimages or go on school field trips to honor past Philippine patriots and their nationalist struggles. In contrast, Malolos is not particularly popular with international tourists and travelers. They often prefer to drive though Malolos on their way to Baguio from Metro Manila. Or they simply bypass Central Luzon and go directly to the stunning beaches and islands of the Visayas or to gorgeous Palawan. Through a nationalist historical perspective, Malolos is normatively associated with the Indio (Native) and Mestizo (mixed race) *bayani* (patriots) who convened the Malolos Congress and declared independence from Spain in 1898. This radical political act established the first republic in Asia. The Malolos Congress was established at Barasoain Church.<sup>4</sup> During the Philippine anticolonial and revolutionary war against colonial Spain, Malolos served as the seat of power for the newly created Republika ng Pilipinas (the Republic of the Philippines).

As a Maloleno/Filipino American living in the United States, when describing my birthplace and hometown in the Philippines, I (too) often evoke these nationalist narratives, and I usually explain (to non-Filipinx) that Malolos is similar to Philadelphia or Boston in the United States because all three historical cities have similar revolutionary and nationalist significances to their respective nations. This association between Malolos, historical architecture (the church), and the establishment of the Republic of the Philippines is not only memorialized in Malolos's *Vamos a Malolos* tourism campaign (discussed earlier), but also reinforced in Philippine currency. The old Philippine ten-peso bill features Barasoain Church



MAP 6.1. MAP of Bulacan Province showing the location of the City of Malolos. Wikimedia Commons.

and the Blood Compact on one side, while two important revolutionary patriotic figures and leaders, Andres Bonifacio and Apolinario Mabini, can be found on the other side. This is significant because like other national currencies, paper currencies are reserved for national heroes, landmarks, and important historical events.

I (too) originally understood Malolos in this historically conventional nationalist manner; that is, ultimately and categorically, Malolos is the birthplace of the Philippine Republic, with the correlate being that nothing else about Malolos really matters. My mother was born and raised in Malolos and grew up in Barasoain, where the famous church stands. She grew up in the Chichioco-Conjuangco ancestral *bahay na bato* (stone home), which is located on Paseo del Congreso (Congress Street), a stone's throw away from the Barasoain Church. As a child I was not yet aware of Malolos's place in Philippine history, nor was I aware of the nationalist significance of Barasoain Church. I simply thought that Barasoain Church was my mother and maternal grandmother's church, the church where my mother attended mass every day as a child and teenaged girl because her home was so close.

My father grew up in nearby Sto. Rosario, an adjacent *barangay* (village) across a small river that encompasses the nearby Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and where the first president of the Philippines, Emilio Aguinaldo, maintained his residency in 1898, resulting from the Philippine declaration of independence, the defeat of the Spanish, and the newly established republic. In Spanish colonial urban planning, the cathedral and connected plaza(s) are considered the heart and center of Malolos because Catholicism was central to Spanish colonial governance (1521–1898). The cathedral's central positioning signifies its geographic and political importance. During the Spanish colonial period, wealthy Chinese and Mestizo families usually established their homes near the cathedral and the Malolos town center.

This Spanish colonial, now Philippine postcolonial, urban planning and geography facilitates a dominant nationalist optic of Malolos where the churches function as metonyms. Barasoain Church and the Malolos Cathedral are literally geographically central, and the churches symbolize Philippine nationalist and revolutionary histories and nation-state power, which emerged in Malolos. Contemporary Philippine state officials have continued to evoke Malolos's and Barasoain Church's importance. For example, during the 1998 Philippine Centennial, President Joseph Estrada was inaugurated at Barasoain Church, and on June 12, 2012, President Noynoy Aquino (whose family owns the Chichioco-Conjuangco ancestral home and also has roots in Malolos)<sup>5</sup> attended a "simple and solemn celebration of the 114th Independence Day" at Barasoain Church (Balabo 2012).

Teodoro Agoncillo's historical monograph *Malolos: The Crisis of the Republic* (1960) has also helped to cement Malolos's importance in Philippine historiography. Agoncillo is a founding historian of nationalist Philippine historiography, and his Malolos book significantly details important nationalist and revolutionary politics and related military events that helped to establish the new Philippine nation. Agoncillo writes about the then town of Malolos in this way:

Symbolically, Malolos [was] chosen as the center of the [anti-colonial and nationalist] pattern, for in an age of crisis, it represented for the Filipinos not only their political ideals, but also their poetic dreams. Malolos [is] the symbol of sustained hope. Tagalog poetry has sanctified it as the citadel of freedom and has woven around it the legend of a people fighting for human dignity. (Agoncillo 1960, x)

Here, Agoncillo uses a metaphor of political solemnity and land-based solidity (i.e., a citadel, a fortress) to stress Malolos's foundational geographic and political positioning in the Philippine archipelago. Given the weight of his foundational nationalist historiography, Agoncillo's text discursively settles a very particular perspective on Malolos; that is, again, that it is only/primarily the birthplace of the republic. It is for this particular nationalist history of Malolos that in 2001, the National Historical Commission of the Philippines declared Malolos's town center, which revolves around the two cathedrals and also includes several *bahay na bato* (stone ancestral homes) in Kamistisuhan,<sup>6</sup> a national heritage district.

In 2011, a cultural heritage NGO called *Heritage Conservation Society* based in Manila threatened to remove Malolos from a list of important cultural heritage sites in the Philippines. The newspaper account discussed how the Malolos City government had inadequately preserved important local architecture, specifically, the many *bahay na bato* in the city, which represent an important Spanish-Philippine hybrid architectural style. The NGO argued that there was a lack of proper regulation regarding how to maintain dwellings in Kamistisuhan, located in barangay Sto. Niño, which is adjacent to the Minor Basilica of the Immaculate Concepcion. In Malolos (and other parts of the Philippines), *bahay*

na bato represent an important national architectural style. Moreover, prominent local families usually own them and understand them to be their “ancestral homes” (Zialcita 1980).

#### AQUAPELAGIC IMAGINARIES OF MALOLOS

In contrast to Agoncillo’s nationalist imaginary of Malolos, independent scholar Jaime Veneracion, in *Malolos: A Legacy of Its Past* (2010), provides an alternative local, autochthonous, precolonial, and decolonial water-based understanding of Malolos. Instead of overemphasizing the revolution, Veneracion engages an ecological approach to geography and history and suggests that, to understand Malolos, we need to better grasp the larger geography of Bulacan province. On the second page of his book, he includes a hand-drawn map of rivers and estuaries in Malolos. The veiny nature of the hand-drawn map is similar to the map (map 6.2) of the Pampanga River traversing the provinces of Pampanga, Bulacan, and Nueva Ecija in Central Luzon. Veneracion elaborates on Malolos’s geography, “There are three well defined areas in the provincial topography: uplands [mountains]; lowlands [part of the river delta] and littoral or shorelands . . . Malolos is a town of the delta and the littoral” (Veneracion, 2010, 11). In the seventeenth century, the rivers and bay were the main highways, and the modes of transportation were rafts and boats. For this reason, most of the town centers were located by great river systems. Rivers and place-names are significant to Tagalog people. In precolonial times, instead of colonial Spanish surnames that were assigned to Indios (Natives), locations were often used to identify people. *Tagalog* is an ethno-linguistic term that identifies the native people of central Luzon and their diasporas, as well as the language we speak. It is understood to be a combination of *taga ilog*, which means “from the river.” In beginning with a more localized, indigenous, precolonial, and decolonial *ecological* approach (not a nationalist one), along with understanding Malolos in the context of Bulacan province and its relation to water, rivers, and coasts, Veneracion ultimately reveals an aquapelagic Malolos. This aquapelagic Malolos has been submerged by hegemonic nationalist discourse and imaginaries (Glissant 1999). In this aquapelagic Malolos, the island barangay (village) of Pamarawan (mentioned earlier) holds a prominent position. Veneracion explains:

The prototype shoreline area is Pamarawan which proudly announces its presence to Manila Bay by its tall bell tower and a large settlement of boat people. It has its own talipapa [temporary fish market]. Its very name suggests something ancient. Pamarawan was derived from the pre-Spanish Malayo-Polynesian term for boat (Parau or prahu). It means the “landing for boats,” as in fact is a feature of the place up to now. Of the settlements of the shoreline, it has the largest conglomeration of bangkas [canoes]. (Veneracion 2010, 11)



MAP 6.2. DRAINAGE Map of the Pampanga River. The Pampanga River traverses the provinces of Pampanga, Bulacan, and Nueva Ecija. Map by Felipe Aira, Wikimedia Commons.

Like rivers, boats and canoes—linguistically and culturally—are highly significant for Tagalogs to understanding local Philippine social relations (Fajardo 2011). *Barangay* means village, and it is derived from the word *balanghai*, the word for the ancient indigenous boats that allowed clans to travel. Boats signify this indigenous notion of collectivity and community that forms on both water and land.

Veneracion further reveals an Indigenous, precolonial, and decolonial ecological and social perspective on Pamarawan, and ultimately of Malolos (because Pamarawan is part of Malolos). Subsequently, he invites us to see and appreciate Pamarawan and other river-and-coastal *barangay*, which are oriented toward Manila Bay or the sea and *not* Malolos’s Spanish- and Mestizx-influenced town center. Veneracion’s focus on water ecologies and his alternative local, native, decolonial optics or ways of seeing, imagining, and historicizing, suggest to us a complex aquapelagic island-water-based understanding of what can constitute “cultural heritage” and the importance of water ecologies.

When I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Malolos, I began to see how local Malolenyx shared Veneracion’s ecological awareness. My first example from fieldwork, which suggests a twenty-first-century aquapelagic imaginary of Malolos, comes from the magazine *Biyaheng Malolos* (*Travel Malolos* 2010). I purchased a copy of *Biyaheng Malolos* from an independent t-shirt store in Malolos’s town center near the Minor Basilica of the Immaculate Concepcion in *barangay* Sto. Niño. Imagine a small t-shirt shop filled with different-colored, limited-run t-shirts— not of Ché Gueverra, Frida Kahlo, or Bruce Lee, but of Bulacan revolutionary figure and journalist Marcelo H. del Pilar. Imagine, too, brightly colored t-shirts that say “Bulakenyo” or “Bulakenya,” or t-shirts that say “Bulacan State University” on them. I bought a “Bulakenyo” t-shirt for myself and one for my

proud Bulakenyo father (who along with my mother retired part-time in Malolos [but she probably would not have wanted a t-shirt.]) As I was paying, I noticed a stack of slick glossy magazines on the counter and began to thumb through one. I again bought two copies (one for me, one for my dad). Later, I learned that the young Filipino owner of the shop helped to produce the magazine.

The cover depicts a local Malolos jeepney, a working-class street-level example of Philippine design and popular culture. Jeepneys are an affordable form of local transportation that can be found in Malolos and other parts of the Philippines. They are associated with the *masa* (working class and poor masses in the Philippines). Barasoain Church is on the cover, but it is located in the background, significantly smaller than the jeepney. By receding the historical church, the magazine cover suggests a generational difference in geographic orientation and imagination. That is, I hypothesize that the editors, writers, and photographers of the magazine suggest that their cultural productions will not be traditional like their elders' Malolos, where national patriotism is the primary cultural and historical orientation and commitment. In the upper-left corner, there is a description of the contents/theme of the magazine: "fashion, culture, heritage." *Biyaheng Malolos* is an example of what might also be called "Millennial Malolos." The glossy magazine, which is similar to magazines coming out of Manila and other global cities (and which is something unprecedented for Malolos), was being sold inside an independent t-shirt shop that "represents" Malolos. Here, I use *represent* in the hip-hop sense of the word. The shop and magazine gesture towards a connection to broader local, regional, and/or global youth cultures, which emphasize taking pride in the local. The magazine includes layouts of models wearing t-shirts that say "Probinsiyano" or "Probinsiyana," which conveys pride in being "from the provinces," not from the megalopolis of Manila. Historically, the provincial spaces have been constructed as backward/rural spaces compared to (more) "cosmopolitan Manila." Inside *Biyang Malolos*, the editors and writers feature Barasoain Church, the Kamistisuhan and the heritage district there, but significantly, they go beyond the town center and include coastal Malolos. They also feature Pamarawan (Island)—the landing place of boats, rafts, and canoes.

Written by Josefina Alcaraz, photographs by Cenen Pangilinan and Ian Cruz, design layout by Cenen Pangilinan, the four-page spread that begins on page 56 of *Biyang Malolos* is titled "Unravel the Isle of Pamarawan." The opening photograph extends across the first two pages of the piece and includes a panoramic photograph of indigenous Tagalog *bangka* (canoes), just as Veneracion describes, and they are lined up on the shore with the Port of Pamarawan behind the canoes. To the left are the waters of Manila Bay, to the right, the estuary that connects Pamarawan to Atlag, barangay Panasahan, and inland Malolos. The next two pages include photographs and text that depict daily life in Pamarawan. Alcaraz, Pangilinan, and Cruz also discuss other areas of island locations in coastal Malolos: Namayan, Babatnin, Masile, and Caliligawan.

Alcaraz writes: “Carefully-lined salted and dried fish, parked motored boats, natives having chit-chats with neighbors, children freely running around, a pack of women doing *hayuma*—an indigenous way of stitching nets to produce a larger one, fishermen pulling up their fish nets for the day’s catch, are very typical scenarios that would best describe Pamarawan’s community” (Alcaraz 2010, 56–59). Here, Alcaraz and the editors of *Biyaheng Malolos* emphasize an aquapelagic Malolos, not the hegemonic nationalist imaginary previously described. Fish, boats, fisherpeople, and everyday indigenous (not Spanish) marine/aquatic practices are highlighted, inviting readers, visitors, and travelers (*Biyang Malolos* is a travel magazine, after all) to expand their understanding of Malolos’s heterogeneous cultural heritages and to appreciate Malolos’s aquapelagic spaces and places.

*Biyaheng Malolos*’s attention to Pamarawan and women engaged in *hayuma* (the local practice of stitching nets to produce a larger one) is connected to Hernandez’s photograph, as the rafter is also female. Filipino boys and men usually dominate boats, canoes, and industrial container ships in Philippine maritime representations (Fajardo 2011). The Pinay rafter moves her craft constructed of recycled plastic, signaling thriftiness and ecological awareness through the reuse of the plastic bottles. In a conversation with Hernandez, I asked him about his Pamarawan-based photography, including the Pinay rafter. He explained:

I took the shots during one of our tours to Pamarawan. [My wife] Rheeza is part of a tour operator business and they take tourists to Pamarawan to experience coastal life—what people do there for a living, the food there and how they cope with living on an island. I took pictures as we went along. *Taking note of things you don’t necessarily see on the mainland*. I wanted to convey in my photographs that this is what you’ll see if you go to Pamarawan. Photographing Malolos makes me tell the audience that this is the past, especially the heritage pictures, and I also photograph for posterity. And for others to be aware, so that they will take care of our heritage. (Emphasis added)

Hernandez’s informal artist and mission statement reveals his ecological awareness of Malolos as a city of the river delta, shorelines, and bay, as well as his awareness that aquapelagic life in Pamarawan engages all genders, not just men and boys. He and his wife Rheeza seek to promote small-scale tourism to coastal barangays, where marine culture, fisheries, and Malolenyx cuisine are experienced, usually by visitors from Metro Manila. This marine-based tourist experience is a more recent development, something that did not occur during my childhood, youth, or earlier periods of adulthood when I traveled to Malolos regularly, or even when I first began my fieldwork in Malolos. In his explanation, Hernandez also underscores the necessity to photograph Pamarawan and other coastal and river barangays. He uses the word *posterity*, thus evoking future generations who need to know and remember Pamarawan and other coastal Malolos ecologies. Equally important, he seeks to develop an ethos of care in *all* who see and look at his photos.

In another photograph, Hernandez shoots a dazzling sunset from a bridge looking down on a river in Atlag, a riverine/estuary-based barangay, where waters connect to Pamarawan. The sunset includes layers of oranges, with the deepest at the horizon, with hazy blue skies and clouds near the top. Hernandez, positioned higher up on a bridge, looks down, on to several large and long canoes that transport people between coastal and insular barangays like Pamarawan and mainland Malolos. Hernandez's photograph recalls and dialogues with my earlier autoethnographic imaginary from "Boyhood and Boatmen," the preface to *Filipino Cross-currents* (Fajardo 2011, ix–xiii). In future discussions of imaginaries of Malolos, as a Malolenyo living in the United States and working in solidarity with Malolenyx living in Malolos, I would be honored if some of my work is included in the new Aquapelagic Malolos archive that I have assembled and have been commenting upon, and which I hope other scholars, researchers, artists, and writers will continue to develop further. In "Boyhood and Boatmen," I dialogue and evoke Pablo Neruda's poem "The First Sea," which describes the poet's first encounter with the sea as a boy (Neruda 2004). Inspired by Neruda, I recall an important childhood memory of first encountering the sea and maritime Filipino masculinities in Atlag. Prior to my immigrating to the United States and Portland, Oregon, as a child, my paternal grandfather took me with him to Atlag to visit relatives. (My father's side of the family has roots and routes in Sto. Rosario and Atlag.) I later describe how he took me to the outdoor "wet market" in Atlag and showed me the fish and other seafood being sold there. I speculate that my grandfather did this because he was a proud fisherman.

#### THREATS TO MALOLOS: URBANIZATION AND MEGAREGIONALIZATION

In an ethnography titled *Neoliberalizing Spaces in the Philippines: Suburbanization, Transnational Migration, and Dispossession* (2016), Arnisson Andre Ortega describes the "urbanization revolution" that is happening in the southern part of Manila, now technically categorized as a megacity. (Megacities are cities with populations of ten million or more.) Ortega uses the term *megalopolis* to evoke cities such as Metro Manila, which at the time of Ortega's book's publication (2016) was the fourth most populous megacity in the world.<sup>7</sup> Of the world's megacities, Metro Manila is the densest. Metro Manila's population is approximately thirteen million, but in different accounts Metro Manila's population is sometimes noted as high as twenty-three million. The numbers appear to depend on how demographers understand the megacity's boundaries. "Mega Manila" is sometimes used to refer to Manila and its relationship or encroachment into nearby provinces, so it is more of a transregional designation.

Ortega documents and analyzes the intensified real estate development boom and related population increases in the southern part of the megalopolis where he

is from. In my opinion and based on observations in Malolos and Central Luzon, a similar situation is occurring north of Manila, perhaps even more so, as the Philippine state tries to connect Metro Manila to shipping and naval facilities in Olongopo City and Subic Bay, as well as to cities in the North such as Angeles, where Clark International Airport is located. The state and capital attempts to connect these areas in Central Luzon, in order to develop a megaregion. Ortega emphasizes the rise of gated communities, which he sees as a marker of urbanization, resulting from increased wealth, the presence of Overseas Filipino/as, and transnational capital. In addition to gated communities, the development of malls must also be considered, as they are also markers of urbanization in the Philippines, especially since Manila is considered the “Mall Capital of Asia” (Yao 2010). During fieldwork in Malolos, two Manila-style malls opened—*The Cabanas* and *Robinsons Place Malolos*. Prior to these commercial developments, Malolonyx had to travel about one hour to Quezon City in Metro Manila to go to the nearest large mall. This suggests how Metro Manila continues to creep out into other provinces, expanding into towns and rural areas. In Malolos, gated communities and commercial developments have been built in former rice paddies and fish ponds, which were once green spaces that nourished humans and nonhumans, such as birds and fish.

In addition to the “loss, fragmentation, and the degradation of habitats” (PEMSEA 2012), increased population in the Manila Bay region also creates “overexploitation of resources for livelihoods and commercial purposes” and contributes to more pollution (e.g., “chemical fertilizers and discharge of domestic sewage, but also from toxin such as pesticides and hazardous chemicals”). The national fisherfolk alliance Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya-Pilipinas), for example, cites a 2015 Ocean Conservancy study that reveals that “74% of plastics that ended up in the sea came from previously collected garbage” (Salamat 2019). Pamalakaya-Pilipinas also cites the “failure of [the Philippine] government . . . to provide . . . significant water and solid waste treatment and management,” which contributes to the degradation of communities and habitats.

Rapid urbanization and megaregionalization continue to expand and intensify in Malolos and in other parts of Bulacan. Previous Bulacan governor Wilhelmino Sy-Alvarado has officially stated and proposed that Bulacan follow the Shenzhen model (initiated by late People’s Republic of China leader Deng Xioping). The governor stated in 2013 that his plan has not been finalized but that he is “looking forward to replicating its industrialization and modernization experience” (Balabo 2013). In 1979, Shenzhen was a small fishing village with fertile agrarian land with a population of thirty thousand. As of 2012, Shenzhen, located north of Hong Kong, was a sprawling and high-tech manufacturing and service city. As I finalize this essay, signs of rapid urbanization in Bulacan province continue in disturbing ways. In late 2019, the San Miguel Corporation was scheduled to break ground on the

new Manila International Airport in Bulakan, Bulacan, which is adjacent to Malolos. This airport complex, also referred to as the Aerotropolis, is scheduled to be built in barangay Taliptip, another Manila Bay and Bulacan coastal area, which is adjacent to Pamarawan. The Aerotropolis is supposed to replace highly congested Ninoy Aquino International Airport in Pasay, Metro Manila. When completed, the new airport is supposed to serve one hundred million passengers each year (Macaraeg 2019). The first phase of construction began in October 2020 and is scheduled to open in 2026 (Gonzales 2020).

### THE LOCAL/GLOBAL CLIMATE CRISIS

The Aerotropolis infrastructure development project just introduced is being proposed and planned in the context of the local/global anthropogenic climate crisis. The massive infrastructure project seriously threatens the human and more-than-human communities of coastal Malolos, coastal Bulacan, and broader Manila Bay. It is scheduled to be built on a twenty-five-hundred-hectare area in Taliptip, Bulacan, along Manila Bay, extremely short-sighted planning: the Philippines has already experienced extreme weather, such as Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in 2013, which destroyed Tacloban, while Typhoon Ketsana submerged Manila in 2009, and in 2011, Typhoon Nesat created huge storm surges in Manila Bay (Robles 2013). In 2012, there was also a historic habagat (the humid southwest monsoon winds that regularly blow from June through July), which brought severe rains and flooded Malolos's coastal barangays, as well as more city center villages such as Sto. Rosario and Barasoain, discussed earlier.<sup>8</sup>

Pamalakaya-Pilipinas strongly opposes the Aerotropolis project. Indeed, the activist fisherfolk group calls it “the biggest environmental disaster to hit Manila Bay.” Pamalakaya-Pilipinas Chairperson Fernando Hicap explains, “This project will not only destroy marine ecosystem, but also the livelihood of thousands of fisherfolk who subsist by fishing in the rich fishing hub of Manila Bay.” Seven hundred fishing and coastal families in Taliptip will be displaced. The area is also home to “22 types of mangrove, including *Piapi*, a firm type of mangrove that serves as a natural wave barrier and shelter for fish” (Hicap 2018). When approximately six hundred mangrove trees were cut in Taliptip in 2018, local residents reported that they had “suffered unprecedented flooding and soil erosion” (Salamat 2019). Mangroves protect coastal areas during typhoon season. Without this natural barrier, there are stronger storm surges, increased flooding, and loss of habitat for fish and other animals. The project will also negatively impact salt-making livelihoods that are important to coastal villages in Bulacan.

Hicap explains the role of Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte in the proposed environmental disaster: “President Duterte is on a roll in selling our coastal waters to big-time business magnates; not less than 5 destructive reclamation projects have been approved in Manila Bay since he assumed post as chief executive,

all at the expense of socio-economic rights of hundreds of thousands of fisherfolk and coastal settlers” (Pamalakaya-Pilipinas 2018).

#### CONCLUSION: WATER CONNECTS

While nationalist historiography narrows perspectives on Malolos, emphasizing land, the city center, the built environment, postcolonial architecture, and past revolutionary patriots, my essay seeks to counterbalance nationalist historiographies and imaginaries of Malolos by stressing alternatives—specifically, more aquapelagic and marine-based perspectives, narratives, visual imaginaries, and knowledge. The collective efforts of Hernandez, Veneracion, Alcaraz, Pangilinan, Cruz, Fajardo, and Pamalakaya-Pilipinas stress an aquapelagic Malolos and an aquapelagic Bulacan province, which help to document, bear witness to, and raise awareness about what is being increasingly destroyed or flooded in coastal Malolos and Bulacan areas, and in the larger Manila Bay region in the context of rapid urbanization, megaregionalization, industrialization, and the local/global anthropogenic climate crisis. Indeed, the proposed Aerotropolis project in Bulakan, Bulacan, makes these cultural production and activist efforts even more meaningful, timely, and urgent.

The aforementioned cultural producers and activists remind the Philippine nation, its citizens, and all who visit Malolos and Bulacan that there is more to Malolos than the Spanish colonial churches and colonial/postcolonial stone homes located inland, in mainland Malolos. Their/our cultural productions and activist discourse may not be circulating in large numbers (yet), nor are our visual imaginaries established or hegemonic. However, the aquapelagic Malolos archive that I have assembled and analyzed here reminds us that there are important marine-based coastal ecosystems and communities in Malolos and broader Bulacan that need documentation, advocacy, preservation, and protection. Historic Barasoain Church and other inland architecture where native and local revolutionaries politically decolonized the Philippines and established the first republic in Asia in 1898 are certainly important cultural heritage landmarks, and these structures and histories are important to the city of Malolos and for Malolenyx cultural identities. However, it is imperative that we also engage with and protect lesser-known Pamarawan and other coastal areas, which are geographically and culturally oriented toward the sea, to Manila Bay, and beyond. In this volume, Penelope K. Hardy reminds us that “humans have always interacted with the sea, [but] the ways in which they have imagined and thus defined it have changed significantly over the course of history.” This essay tries to account for how the sea and coastal Malolos and coastal Bulacan ecologies are being newly created, imagined, documented, and assembled. The aquapelagic Malolos tropes used in contemporary historical accounts, ethnography, travel writing, photography, and in activism represent a significant historical, cultural, and political shift in how Malolos and its waters

and islands are being imagined in the Philippines and in the diaspora, especially as increased flooding, rising seas, and more extreme weather are the new normal in the Philippines.

In a 2014 report titled “The City of Malolos: Towards a Local Climate Change Action Plan,” researchers Zoë Greig, Leanna Leib-Milburn, Victor D. Ngo, and Meika S. Taylor state that the challenges Malolos faces include “increased severity and frequency of flooding; water scarcity; sea level rise; salt water intrusion; land subsidence; and low ecosystem and watershed health” (Greig et al, 2014, 46). Aquapelagic narratives about Malolos and marine-based photography of coastal Malolos locations, which stress the river, sea, and island ecologies of Malolos, are important because rapid urbanization, megaregionalization, industrialization, and the local/global anthropogenic climate crisis seriously threaten coastal communities—comprised of humans and the more-than-human—and biologically diverse ecosystems. Aquapelagic imaginaries of Malolos direct Malolenyx, other Filipinx, and other local residents and allies to connect Malolos to other environmental justice struggles in places such as Taliptip in nearby Bulakan, Bulacan, where the destructive Aerotropolis transportation infrastructure is being planned. Just as importantly, a focus on aquapelagic island-water ecologies also remind Malolenyx and other Filipinx who love and celebrate Malolos to think and act *beyond* the Philippine nation-state. Aquapelagic Malolos narratives and visual imaginaries in the context of local/global anthropogenic climate change can potentially mobilize Malolenyx at home and abroad to consider and act in solidarity with other local and national environmental and climate justice movements, but they also compel and direct us to actively participate in global environmental justice and climate justice movements. Attention and care for Malolos’s marine cultural heritage and ecologies also direct us to consider and act in solidarity with humans *and* the more-than-human—that is, oceans, coastlines, mangrove trees, seagrasses, birds, and fish (Marran 2017; Probyn 2016).<sup>9</sup> While the building of the Aerotropolis offers and paves the way for a particular kind of globality and mobility (produced via air travel), local-global movements for environmental and climate justice offer an alternative. Defiantly, fisherfolk advocate and leader Hicap reminds us what is at stake if urbanization and megaregionalization continue in coastal Bulacan without care, protection, and resistance: “24 hectares of fishing reservation areas will be wiped out because of the land reclamation, this also mean [sic] loss of the traditional fish species and fish catch of small fisherfolk in the province of Bulacan.” Pamalakay-Pilpinas “opposes this grand sellout of our traditional fishing waters at all cost. None of the fisherfolk deserves to be ejected from their communities just to pave way for an international airport and metropolis that will only benefit a few developers” (Hicap 2018). In shifting our attention, advocacy, and activism towards coastal Malolos and coastal Bulacan and paying closer attention to the aquapelagic, we are better able to see and imagine a more complex Malolos and Bulacan province, one that emphasizes islands, coasts, estuaries, rivers,

and Manila Bay and the less resourced fisherpeople, as well as other local residents who are sustained by the sea. Equally important, a focus on an aquapelagic Malolos and Bulacan Province reminds us to also consider, take care of, and live well with the fish, birds, and mangroves that are equally important in and to Malolos and Bulacan ecologies, as well as the ecologies of the broader Manila Bay region.

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## NOTES

1. Hayward's notion of the aquapelagic dialogues well with Epeli Hau'ofa's notion of the Pacific Basin and Region as a "Sea of Islands" (1993); Tom Boellstorff *The Gay Archipelago* (2006); May Joseph's *Fluid New York* (2013); the *Archipelagic American Studies* anthology (2017), edited by Brian Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens; as well as my book *Filipino Crosscurrents: Oceanographies of Seafaring, Masculinities and Globalization* (2011) (to give a few important examples of how scholars are thinking through islands, water, and archipelagos). A special thank you to May Joseph, who told me about Hayward's generative essay.

2. My fieldwork was generously funded by a University of Minnesota Grant-in-Aid of Research, Artistry and Scholarship.

3. *Filipinx* is a gender inclusive and non-gender-binary term; it replaces the binary term *Filipino/as*.

4. The church is officially named Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish, but because it is located in barangay (village) Barasoain, it is commonly referred to as Barasoain Church.

5. Note that President Noynoy Aquino's maternal grandfather and my maternal grandmother are first cousins. Due to this extended kinship relation, after the original Chichioco-Conjuangco couple moved and established their family in Tarlac (a landlocked province north of Bulacan), my grandmother became the caretaker of the Chichioco-Conjuangco ancestral home for most of her life; thus, my mother and her siblings and sometimes their children (my cousins) also lived in the large *bahay na bato* (stone) home. The home is technically on Chichioco land (and I am a descendent of the Chichiocos), but due to patriarchy and the Conjuangco family's significant wealth and political power in the Philippines, the dwelling is often seen as primarily Conjuangco property. See Tiongson (2011) for Chichioco-Conjuangco family history.

6. *Kamistisuhan* literally means "where the Mestizo/as are located, where they reside."

7. Note that Tokyo-Yokohama is first, Jakarta second, Delhi third, Metro Manila fourth, and Seoul-Incheon fifth. For the sake of comparison (in North America): New York has a population of about 8.5 million people; LA's population is approximately 13 million people; and Greater Mexico City is recorded as 21.2 million.

8. Malolos, on average, is located at 64 feet above sea level. However, villages in coastal Malolos villages are just above sea level.

9. In a relevant trans-Asian discussion, Marran critiques the use of a narrow Japanese nationalist biotope (e.g., cherry blossoms) and notions of Japanese ethnic homogeneity used by writer Haruki Murakami after "3.11" (the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident disaster that occurred in Japan in 2011). Marran suggests that writer Ishimure Michiko's more planetary and posthumanist orientation and sense of care for a "wounded earth" is ultimately the ethics and aesthetics that are needed in our toxic world. Probyn offers an excellent posthumanist, feminist, queer, and Deleuzian ethnographic account of the global seafood industry where she stresses human-fish entanglements.