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# Unframing Empire

Anticolonial Film Practices and Public Discourse in  
Spain and the Philippines

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To  
*Kidlat and my dear Nanay*



## Abstract

*Unframing Empire* is a study towards anticolonial film curation. It examines how moving-image practices negotiate and unsettle colonial worldviews. Drawing inspiration from anticolonial thinkers who identify culture as a site of imperial domination and resistance, it investigates the moving-image as both an archival object and pedagogical tool for unlearning imperialism.

The project addresses a gap in scholarship on Spanish-Philippine colonial histories. While textual archives have been extensively studied, little attention has been given to how public spaces might function as sites of decolonial encounter. Beginning with a return to the moving-image archives of Spain and the Philippines, the research asks: *how have Spanish and Filipino films represented this shared colonial history?* This inquiry resulted in a newly defined corpus of moving-image works across a range of genres. Read collectively, they reveal the structuring fictions underpinning these respective countries' national cinemas. These lists were activated through public screenings rather than simply catalogued, an exercise in instilling an irreverence to the archive as a hallowed space of knowledge.

Methodologically, this project contributes an innovative approach by synthesising multiple epistemologies –archival theory, anticolonial and decolonial thought, curatorial studies, and film programming– into a method of anticolonial curation and screening practice. Archival research was combined with collaboratively curated screenings and post screening workshops in Spain and the Philippines. Drawing on anticolonial pedagogies and decolonial methodologies, these events were designed towards dialogue, privileging situated knowledge and collective interpretation. These workshops were documented through video and sound, culminating in a film that reflects on these situated dialogues.

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*Unframing Empire* attempts an advance in debates on anticolonial curatorial practice by conceptualising the screening space as a site of negotiation between colonial pasts and lived presents. It offers a replicable, practice-based methodology for interrogating imperial inheritances through critical dialogue, producing new affective and epistemic spaces across diverse contexts.

## Research Questions, Aims & Objectives

### Research questions:

1. In what ways do materials in the moving-image archives of Spain and the Philippines articulate their shared colonial history?
2. How can one create spaces of dialogue attuned to the specific relationships and experiences audiences have towards these histories?
3. What opportunities does this approach present to challenging or reconfiguring their attitudes to these histories?

### Aims:

- To shed light on attitudes to coloniality in Spain and the Philippines, current and past, through the moving-image.
- To disrupt the colonial narratives existing in these archives.
- To formulate an approach to film curation that is anticolonial, collaborative and rooted in dialogue.

### Objectives:

- Search the cinematic archives of these respective countries for representations of this shared colonial period, producing a new corpus of films.
- To propose a dialectic between these films by defining context-specific programmes for public exhibition through collaborative processes.
- Bring these narratives into the sphere of public scrutiny through post screening discussions.
- Document and synthesize the discussions and their findings through film.

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## Preface

At the time of the conceptualisation of this project in 2021, I was in a context wherein the term, realities and legacy of colonial history seemed far more distant than it does now. While in Spain during the early phase of my research, I was often met with expressions of commendation or confused bewilderment when I would explain my project's aim of challenging Spanish attitudes towards their colonial relationship with the Philippines. With either reaction, they shared the premise that this was a facet of history far gone, relegated to a past that supposedly has little relevance to the present. Why the Philippines? Why now? Why in this way, through film? During my time in Spain, the fact that I had to preface most introductions to this project with a general history of Spanish colonization of the Philippines to Spaniards I met felt like proof enough of the necessity of this work. With every such introduction, I was dumbfounded by how 300 years of Spanish presence on the archipelago could vanish from these people's minds. More than once, I had to educate a Spaniard on the namesake of my home country, Felipe II of Spain. Amnesia –a common malady across the spectrum of colonial experience. It is of particular potency, the kind that allows you to forget even as you pronounce its name.

It is -I admit- a lofty ambition: to attempt to force Spanish people to engage with their colonial history in the Philippines. It is a thankless task that required an endless amount of contextualization, justification, words that felt redundant. Now, after years of thinking and conceptualising, attempting a practice that interrogates the legacies of colonialism; as I sit down to make sense of this and write my dissertation, Israel has been waging a horrific genocide against Palestine. With this war, they are continuing their claim over Palestinian land and lives. Since October 7 we have been witnessing a process of death and displacement, a systematic take-over enacted by Israel onto Palestine, of their territory and history. Supported with an arsenal and media coverage by the US and UK, we have been witnessing a colonial take-over in real time. With Gaza, we are inundated with images of the dehumanization of Palestinians: from being forced out of their homes to live in tents, to the remnants of those tents after an Israeli bomb-

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shelling, to the mass graves and sites of torture –we do not lack for visual proof of the atrocities of Israel’s settler-colonial project nor for the hi-jacking or obfuscation of these images by western media outlets and governments to twist this narrative to their own agendas. We have reached a point of critical mass with these images of colonial conquest and horror. And yet –what do we do with them? The images do not aid us in our sight. We do not see the forest for the trees. For all the value of thousands of words, these images fall short; we do not produce the right words. We do not call the genocide what it is.

What images remain? Some it seems, are more real than others: the claim that Hamas were committing atrocities with babies<sup>1</sup>, for example –these words painted potent images in the mind’s eye. So potent were they that they were used to validate Israeli violence. Images of these acts did not exist –and yet...

In 2022, seated on my cousin’s couch back home in Baguio City, Philippines, we watched on television as our country elected BongBong Marcos Jr. (BBM) to the presidency. The son of ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos, the election of BBM consolidated the return to power of the Marcos clan despite a history of graft and atrocious violence<sup>2</sup> toward the Filipino people, and multiple International Court Cases still active against them (Lazaro, 2022; Cabico, 2020).

BBM’s Presidential campaign employed a strategy of re-writing the history of the Marcos family as misunderstood heroes and of constructing a public image of BBM as a ‘regular guy’ through targeted video campaigns<sup>3</sup> (Bagayaua-Mendoza, 2019b). A nation that has been identified as the most online country in the world<sup>4</sup>, the Marcos campaign’s strategic use of meticulously crafted video content and mis-information farms<sup>5</sup> were perfectly designed to mislead the Filipino people.

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<sup>1</sup> See MP David Lammy’s appearance on Sky News where he makes these claims: (Israel-Gaza war: Forcing Gazans south must be done ‘according to international law’ - David Lammy, 2023)

<sup>2</sup> See ‘Dark Legacy: Human Rights under the Marcos Regime’ by Alfred W. McCoy; Amnesty International’s public statement, ‘Philippines: Restore Respect For Human Rights On 46th Anniversary Of Martial Law’ (McCoy, 1999; Amnesty, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> See Rappler’s three-part report, *Networked Propaganda* (2019), (Bagayaua-Mendoza, 2019a)

<sup>4</sup> See ‘Pinoy remain #1 Internet users globally, says Digital 2025 report’ (Ayeng, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> See articles: ‘Marcos insists he has no trolls, says fake news ‘dangerous’’ (2022) ; ‘Filipinos fall for fake history’ (2022) (Buan, 2022; France-Presse, 2022).

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Watching the ballot count climb to obscene, unrealistic numbers<sup>6</sup> in favour of BBM, I read the message implicitly communicated from the Marcoses: power rests in the hands of those who have the means to control and fabricate the historical narrative.

I write this to illustrate the relevance of my study to our situation today: that colonial greed and interests are still at play in our world and our ignorance and amnesia (wilful or not) will not save us. I have come to understand my research as a poetic reflection on these exigencies of empire, and our place in trying to answer to it.

This is an exercise. At one level, my work considers the role the moving-image has played and continues to play in our (in)ability to identify the colonial in our everyday. On another more personal level, in the background of this process, I am reckoning with my place in the fall-out of these histories. It is, in a way, a rumination on my own existence as shaped by colonial legacies, a parsing of my own hyphenated inheritance.

I complete this study in London, where I have come to spend the majority of my adult years. I reflect on the circumstances that have lead me to live in the belly of another colonial beast, to be working and writing in a language that has –for better or worse– become mine; this, thanks to the colonial systems that regulate the reach and validity of specific forms of education and demand assimilation into an employment structure that recognizes certain achievements over others.

Now, having lived the majority of my life in Europe, it does not cease to astound me how the histories of colonialism continue to be relegated to peoples and places far off, as though the very foundations of European identity –not to speak of its material reality– were not constituted by this very paradigm. A walk along Madrid’s streets can confirm this to you; just consider its buildings. London likewise does not lack for these very same visual reminders that colonialism happened *right here*.

I write this also to draw very clear limitations to the efficacy of my study. This project does not identify itself as equivalent to projects of direct action who function in and against the literal violence of empire. Decolonization is not a metaphor. Watching films

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<sup>6</sup> The official vote count in favour of BBM was 31,104,175. More than double of his vote count from the previous election, where he ran for Vice-President, and double that of his opponent, Leni Robredo (Bongbong Marcos Results | Eleksyon 2022 | GMA News Online, 2022).

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and writing a PhD about it does not *actually* dismantle empires. But perhaps, in the folds of this gesture, there lie traces of what we can do, how we can engage in ways of thinking that bring us beyond the image, to a place of words *and* action.

May every empire fall.

London, United Kingdom.

March 2025

## Introduction

At the time of this project's inception in 2020, Spain was commemorating the Quincentenary of Magellan and Elcano's circumnavigation of the globe –a three-year state backed celebration (2019–2021) marking the departure and return of the expedition that would lead to the colonization of vast parts of the world. While internationally positioned as a celebration of maritime exploration, the commemorations largely reproduced a triumphalist narrative of empire (Española, 2019). Framed uncritically, they served to affirm Spain's former status as a global power without addressing the colonial violence entailed in that history. That these festivities echoed the unreflective commemorations of the 1992 Columbian quincentenary suggests that Spanish cultural and political institutions remain resistant to the influence of decolonial thought (Smith, 2009).

Taking the celebration as the point of departure, this project aims to interrogate the enduring gaps in Spanish critical perspectives on colonial history –particularly in relation to the Philippines. Although the archipelago was a Spanish colony for over three centuries, even taking its name from King Felipe II, the Philippines has been almost entirely erased from Spain's post-colonial imaginary. Concepts such as *hispanismo*<sup>7</sup> – which continues to structure Spain's cultural and ideological relationship with Latin America<sup>8</sup> –exclude the Philippines altogether. That the Philippines remains marginal to this imaginary reveals the extent to which Spain has disavowed this colonial entanglement.

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<sup>7</sup> *Hispanismo* articulates a hierarchical system of cultural belonging between Spain and its Spanish-speaking former colonies, with Spanish language and culture at its apex. This has shaped both national identity and foreign policy, especially during the Franco regime. See Mark J. van Aken, *Pan-Hispanism: Its Origin and Development to 866* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, "After Empire, AfterFranco: A Dialogue with Josep M. Fradera on Spanish Colonial Historiography" in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (2003) Duke University Press. (Schmidt-Nowara, 2003)

<sup>8</sup> See *Ideologies of Hispanism*. Ed. Moraña, Mabel, Vanderbilt University Press, 2005. (Moraña, 2005)

By contrast, the Philippines remains deeply shaped by its colonial pasts. Colonised successively by Spain and the United States, the legacies of Spanish rule are manifest in everyday aspects of language, law, naming conventions, and religious practice.

Filipino film historian Nick Deocampo has described cinema as “perhaps the last major cultural legacy the Philippines derived from its former coloniser, Spain” (Deocampo, 2017). The arrival of the cinematograph at the end of the 19th century –coinciding with the collapse of the Spanish Empire– positioned cinema at the intersection of colonial handover, as the United States entered the global Imperial stage. The technology of cinema, introduced under Spanish rule and consolidated during the American period, bore with it the aesthetics and ideological formations of its European antecedents (Deocampo, 2003).

As Marta García Carrión argues:

*“...los inicios del cine coincidieron con el momento álgido del imperialismo europeo, y que el desarrollo de la industria cinematográfica y del lenguaje fílmico en Europa fue de la mano de la creación de una mirada orientalista hacia los territorios coloniales.”*(García Carrión, 2016)

“[] the beginnings of cinema coincided with the height of European imperialism, and the development of the film industry and film language in Europe went hand in hand with the creation of an Orientalist gaze towards colonial territories.”  
(García Carrión, 2016) (DeepL translation)

Cinema thus emerged not as a neutral record of history but as a visual apparatus deeply implicated in colonial modes of knowledge production. Following Ariella Azoulay, we might understand the camera shutter not merely as a metaphor for imperial power, but as a materialisation of it –what she calls “an imperial technology” (Azoulay, 2019:40). The visual field constructed by cinema served to stabilise hierarchies between coloniser and colonised, rendering colonial violence legible and repeatable. “Cinema”, as Ella Shohat contends, “has operated as an epistemological

mediator between two spaces: that of the Western spectator and that of the culture represented on the screen” (Shohat, 1991a:42–43).

If cinema functioned historically to mediate, extend, and aestheticise colonial power, this project asks whether it can also be a site through which to investigate contemporary attitudes toward coloniality. Can the medium that once functioned to entrench imperial logics now offer a space for reckoning with their afterlives? This research addresses such questions through a dialogic and archival methodology that examines the moving-image traditions of Spain and the Philippines, paying attention to their respective filmic representations of their shared colonial history. It considers the moving-image not only as an historical artefact but as a mnemonic device, asking how contemporary audiences in both contexts engage with these films and what those engagements reveal about the persistence –or erasure– of colonial memory. By documenting these engagements through video and sound this research also uses filmmaking as a creative method to analyse and synthesize its findings.

This project's methodology charts its beginnings considering trends in decolonial scholarly and artistic praxes, then rooting itself firmly in anticolonial praxis. Drawing on a lineage of thinkers and practitioners this project considers the work of Ariella Azoulay, Onyeka Igwe, Filipa César, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Paolo Freire to name a few to develop an anticolonial methodology that privileges non-hierarchical and collaborative ways of working. Recognising that the task of confronting colonial legacies must be borne by both former colonisers<sup>9</sup> and colonised, this project aims to bring forth these perspectives through dialogue (Nandy, 1983). At the same time, it remains critically aware of the structural limitations of the academic institution –particularly the extractivist tendencies of Global North researchers conducting field work in the Global South (Leinius, 2020).

In response, the project takes care to resist extractive modes of research by embedding collaborative ethics throughout its process. This includes foregrounding the

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<sup>9</sup> An indelible link Aimé Césaire has characterised as working to “decivilize the coloniser, to brutalise him in the truest sense of the word”; what Franz Fanon has identified as a relationship of dependence, where the coloniser’s identity and position are defined and maintained by their subjugation of the colonised (Césaire, 1955:35; Fanon, 1963).

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contributions of local practitioners, valuing situated knowledge, and relinquishing the authority of the researcher as sole interpreter. Drawing from Linda T. Smith's critique of the university as a colonial institution that claims epistemic dominance, I approach this work as one possible intervention in redistributing the power to define, represent, and historicise (2021b).

These commitments, while sincerely held, have also revealed their own limitations. This project is necessarily incomplete, imperfect, and subject to the very contradictions it seeks to challenge. As such, part of its task has been to acknowledge the failures and compromises encountered in the research process –whether relational, institutional, or epistemic– and to reflect critically on what they might teach us about the constraints and possibilities of anticolonial practice. By holding space for these failures alongside its more generative moments, this project hopes to contribute to a more honest and accountable discourse around anticolonial research.

## Chapter 1

# The Dust and the Light

## -On Archives, and the Politics of Seeing

### Overview

Set against the popularity of intellectual and creative practices that return to the archive –particularly in relation to histories of colonialism– this chapter outlines the initial phase of this research project, which likewise begins from this location. It introduces key conceptual frameworks that have informed my thinking around the archive as a privileged site of learning and explores how these ideas shaped the development of my methodology, expanded on in the following chapters. Focusing on my encounters with the archive, this chapter traces a shift in orientation: from fascination and reverence toward a more sceptical and interrogative stance. This progression echoes what Onyeka Igwe and Ariella Azoulay describe as the necessary “unlearn(ing) [of] reverence for archives”, a gesture toward displacing the archive’s primacy as a site of historical truth (Presse, 2020). The chapter also outlines the practical steps I undertook during this phase of research in identifying where the archives are located and how they were accessed. It concludes with the formation of a new corpus of films; the first concrete outcome of the project<sup>10</sup>.

This research began with a straightforward question: How do Spain and the Philippines represent their shared colonial history through their respective moving-image traditions? The formulation arose from a curiosity about the archive’s potential to reveal patterns of representation –of how histories are constructed and whose perspectives are made visible. The turn to the archive, as both a method and a site, emerges from its identification as a locus of power and the structure of knowledge

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<sup>10</sup> This can be found in the Appendix on p. 131.

production (Mbembe, 2002; Foucault, 1972). Nevertheless, this understanding was soon complicated by Azoulay's framing of the archive not simply as a repository, but as *a technology*; a structured apparatus that produces and maintains dominant narratives, often at the expense of other epistemologies and life worlds (Azoulay, cited in, *Unlearning Imperial Violence*, 2023).

Azoulay's notion of *unlearning imperialism* became increasingly significant in this context. To unlearn the archive, as she articulates it, is not merely to revise the content of historical narratives. It is to interrogate the conditions under which knowledge is produced, circulated, and legitimised (Azoulay, 2019). What then, does it mean to begin from the archive? Is it possible to do so while remaining attentive to its structuring violence? What are we complicit in when we engage its forms and categories uncritically? And crucially, how might alternative ways of seeing and relating be rehearsed through the moving-image?

What is meant by 'archive' in the context of this research? Here, I adopt a broad and necessarily elastic definition. I understand the archive as the accumulation of disparate materials organised into categories, which –through processes of inclusion and exclusion– come to define the contours of a collective memory or historical understanding. For the purposes of this study, the archive is constituted by the body of moving-image productions<sup>11</sup> made in Spain and the Philippines, with a particular focus on works that explicitly or implicitly engage in their shared colonial history. These materials were sourced from both public and private archival institutions, as well as through conversations, memories, and digital traces; labour of the imagination that emerged as unexpectedly generative.

Between these sites –the material and ephemeral– I propose the existence of an archive of Spanish and Philippine moving-image traditions. This is not a single, centralised collection, nor is it readily identifiable in the way 'the colonial archive' is often

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<sup>11</sup> I use the term 'moving-image productions' or 'moving-image works' to allow for the inclusion of all screen-based moving-image pieces. The term 'cinema', for example, alludes to a specific tradition in moving-image work. In Film Studies, this refers to moving-image work made for the cinema space and according to specific time and form. This category of scholarly study tends not to include in this definition work created for the gallery space (artists' -moving-image). My use of 'moving-image works' is thus purposefully broad, to include non-linear work, documentaries, short-form films, home-movies and broadcast reels.

## Chapter 1

conceived. Rather, it is a dispersed and contingent formation, invoked through the idea of the 'national' –a term that, while fraught, holds a galvanizing power. The archive exists simultaneously in institutional holdings and in the memory of those who have seen and engaged with these works. Indeed, the formulation of the research question itself helped to bring this archive into being.

Despite this expansive conceptualisation, my inquiry yielded a relatively narrow list of titles. These lists are not definitive. Instead, they function as 'living' records –starting points for identifying patterns or 'regimes of representation' within their respective cinematic traditions (Hall, 1989). As new titles are added over time, they offer a way to track how histories are told, repeated, or obscured. In this way, the archive becomes not a static container, but the generative space for examining how colonial histories are visualised and re-encoded through the moving-image. These questions of representation are ultimately questions about power –about who has the authority to narrate the past, and to what ends.

As my research progressed, conceptual concerns around the archive began to trouble the very rationale of beginning here. Azoulay's provocation, "Why do we project onto the archive a coherence it never had, only to then critique it in the present?", offered a pointed critique of the idea of an 'alternative' archive (2019:86). I found myself asking: If the exclusions and limitations of the archive are already understood, why insist on it as a point of departure? This chapter traces that evolving reflection, including the productive disorientation it occasioned.

What emerged was a reformulation of the research question. Rather than asking only what exists in the archive, the project began to ask: what should be done with these materials? How can we meaningfully confront shared colonial histories? If the moving image offers possibilities for reckoning, what are they? And if they prove inadequate – what then?

Framed through Azoulay's call for unlearning, this study takes up the practice of film programming and workshopping as a form of rehearsal space –a provisional, collective exercise in unlearning imperial ways of knowing and relating. Drawing also on Stewart Hall's notion of the 'living archive', I came to view the act of publicly screening and

discussing these films as a critical intervention (2001). It is this impulse –to shift the archive from a static repository to a dynamic site of anticolonial encounter– that animates the next stage of this project.

## Against a history and practices in the archive

### *The archive speaks – Foucault, archive and discourse.*

The profusion of artistic and intellectual projects that return to the archive to negotiate and examine it underscores the enduring entanglement between archival practices and the exercise of power. This tendency reflects an urgent recognition: the archive is not a neutral repository of the past but the site where authority is constructed and legitimised. As Foucault famously declared, the archive is the space from which *power speaks*: “The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events” (1972:129).

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault interrogates the historical formation of western disciplines –particularly history– and the systems of thought that dictate how knowledge is structured and legitimised. He identifies recurring patterns that shape disciplinary boundaries: the push toward either order or disruption, continuity or rupture. His project is not to correct these systems, but to expose their contingent construction –that is, the rules by which knowledge becomes intelligible.

At the heart of this critique is what Foucault calls ‘systems of enunciation’: the underlying conditions that determine what is possible and authoritative. In other words, the archive is not merely a collection of documents but the mechanism that selects, arranges, and relates information according to specific logics. As he writes:

“[...] the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass... but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities.” (Foucault, 1972:129)

As Foucault clarifies, there is a logic to the archive. This is predetermined and contingent on a moment in time. These logics produce discourse which in turn, enacts power by defining what can be known, by whom, and to what effect. Discourse formulates what he terms ‘regimes of truth’: systems that determine what is accepted as truth at any given moment (Foucault, 1972).

When I began my research into theories about the archive, Foucault’s seminal text proved foundational as it introduced me to the archive as a dynamic site of epistemic production and control: an architecture of rules, categories and thresholds that structure not only what is preserved but what is *thinkable*. A foundational theorist on the relation between power and knowledge, Foucault's focus on disruptions, omissions, and silences in the archive reveals how it both reflects and reinforces the boundaries of language and thought. The archive, then, is not simply the repository of knowledge –it is its condition, its limit, and its weapon.

### *Necromancing the archive - Achille Mbembe and the colonial condition.*

While Foucault locates the archive's power in systems of enunciation, Achille Mbembe deepens this analysis by anchoring his in a post-colonial context. In Mbembe’s formulation, the archive functions as an ‘instituting imaginary’, formalising fictions such as statehood or national history (Mbembe, 2002:22). It functions to produce authority through symbolic, and material means. The archive thus isn't just a reflection of power, but an active participant in producing institutional legitimacy and epistemological authority. Mbembe ties these theorisations specifically to the ways the state formulates its legitimacy and insists on its authority, definitively stating, “there is no state without archives” (2002:23).

Crucially, inclusion in or exclusion from the archive is not a passive process. It is the result of a process of discrimination, what Mbembe terms as a “trade with death” (Mbembe, 2002:22). More than the literal end or absence of life, ‘death’ is the symbolic severance of the document (the archivable item) from its creator or origin (an event or point in time). The archived item is uprooted from its living context, from the voices, communities, and temporalities that produced it. The potency of its memories is expunged. ‘Death’ is the “architectural event” of the archive according to Mbembe; it is what makes archiving possible (2002:21). It transforms documents into ‘relics’ –

indicators of lives lived and histories frozen without the affective and potentially explosive qualities of the memories they refer to, rendering them safe for institutional handling. In this formulation, the archive does not simply resist oblivion; it *tames* memory, sanitizes the unruly, and disciplines the past. Mbembe points out that the conviction that “the dead should be formally prohibited from stirring up disorder in the present” underpins this formulation; artefacts contain the potential to disrupt our present and the archive, in this characterisation, ensures procedures of containment and inoculation (Mbembe, 2002:22). As artefacts are severed from their contexts, the archive organises them to serve institutional logics: state legitimacy, historical continuity, national identity. The archive is thus cast not merely as a guardian of the past but as a disciplinary technology that anticipates and neutralises disruption.

The combined elements of the fictive dimensions of the archive and its claims to authority and truth lends it an uneasy credibility- one that warrants sustained interrogation. This is not a neutral space; Mbembe clarifies this when he points to the validity of the state as resting on its possession of an archive (2002:23). Yet this relationship of the state to its archive is essentially one of paradox. No state can claim of a valid existence without its archive, even as the archive poses a constant, veritable threat to it:

“More than on its ability to recall, the power of the state rests on its ability to consume time, that is, to abolish the archive and anaesthetise the past.”  
(Mbembe, 2002:23)

This trade with death enables the archive's secondary function: the construction of a relation to time (Mbembe, 2002:23). This “chronophagy” as Mbembe terms it –this consumption of time– can otherwise be understood as claiming absolute authority over history (2002:23). The archive keeps the score, accounting for a multiplicity of narratives or potential narratives that the state cannot wield complete control over. The state's engagement with the archive is therefore never innocent or without ulterior motive as it functions to “anesthetise the past” by escaping accountability for its actions (Mbembe, 2002). Thus, the archive functions not simply to mark the passage of time; it is used to control the terms on which the past is allowed to enter the present.

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It does so by transforming documents into historical objects –‘talismans’ as Mbembe refers to them- offering these up for collective engagement under conditions it sets (2002:24). The archive thus lays the foundation for auxiliary institutions –museums, commemorations, heritage industries– that stimulate encounters with history while carefully regulating their affective and political risks:

“In giving those who carry it (in this case those who consume it) a feeling of being protected or of being co-owner of a time or co-actor in an event , even if in the past, the talisman softens the anger, shame, guilt, or resentment which the archive tends, if not to incite, then at least to maintain, because of its function of recall.”(Mbembe, 2002:24)

The past becomes ‘co-owned’ –that is, the people are allowed to identify themselves as a part of it, that this past is *theirs*– only in so far as it is rendered legible, inert, and manageable by these institutions. Processes such as commemorations, Mbembe claims, serve forgetting rather than remembering by taking distance from the initial event being commemorated, a declaration that this action/event should never be repeated (2002:24).

To examine the past is thus to identify how the mechanisms of order, discrimination and control define our understanding of the past and its mediations with our present. Both Foucault and Mbembe identify the archive as the location of and structuring hand in formations of power, particularly in the production of historical knowledge and state legitimacy. Both point to their fictive dimensions, a result of processes of careful selection by archivists/historians of artefacts in the archive, strung together to create the illusion of a (linear) whole. Likewise, both question the production of knowledge, though they differ on a fundamental level: Foucault writes within a context of Western epistemology and interrogates the foundational assumptions of its disciplines, focusing on the production of discourse and the boundaries of thought and language; Mbembe, meanwhile, writes from and to the post/colonial condition, his critique anchored in the political dimensions of the archive’s role in shaping colonial histories and neocolonial presents. For Mbembe, the archive is not simply a site of preservation but one of

disavowal. For him, it is a place where the violence of colonial histories is buried or distorted to serve the interests of the state.

Mbembe articulates a complex process involving 'death', *chronophagy*, 'the talisman' and 'remembering in order to forget', concepts that in their interplay characterize the state's relation to the archive. The archive is the site where state power is forged, refined and masked through this complex mechanism that tames the subversive elements of the archive. Foucault shares in identifying the archive as the locus of power, but limits his assessments to discourse, the result of careful compositions of elements of the archive. Mbembe develops this point further by exposing the archive's role in servicing the interests of the state: its desire to sever accountability to historical violence through the management of memory.

In the postcolonial context from which Mbembe writes, his identification of the power of the archive has implications, extending this analysis beyond the consideration of western disciplines of knowledge to questioning the very foundations on which these disciplines base themselves. To Mbembe, the production of knowledge through the archive is fundamentally a process of the imagination. This is in the service of the state's ideological project. His critique compels a reassessment of both the construction of colonial histories and our reliance on archival institutions in projects aimed at decolonial recovery, highlighting the risk of reproducing the logics we seek to dismantle.

### Ariella Azoulay and the Archive as Technology

Building on these critiques of the archive's role in the consolidation of state power and the production of sanctioned historical narratives, Algerian-Israeli scholar and thinker Ariella Azoulay offers a further provocation: to view the archive not simply as a site of control, but as a technology<sup>12</sup>. That is, as a structured apparatus that governs not only what is remembered but how perception itself is formed. Where Mbembe foregrounds the archive's entanglement with death, authority, and erasure, Azoulay directs our

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<sup>12</sup> This conceptualisation has crucially likewise been developed by Ann Laura Stoler, who ties the archive to the machinations of state power. See *Colonial Archives and The Arts of Governance* (Stoler, 2002).

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attention to the contemporary, active processes through which the archive shapes subjectivity, constructs categories, and re-inscribes imperial violence in the present. Her work challenges not only what we inherit from the archive, but how we encounter and engage with it, and what such engagements demand of us ethically and politically.

What does one do with technology? One uses it towards a purpose, setting off its carefully designed components developed to accomplish a specific task. To Azoulay, engagement with the archive is to trigger a technology designed “to supersede people's place in a world previously shared with others” (Azoulay, 2019:279). To illustrate this, she cites her research in the archives of the National Red Cross in Geneva, specifically her encounter with a photo of a Palestinian man taken in 1949 by a French photographer working for the Red Cross (Azoulay, cited in, *Unlearning Imperial Violence*, 2023). I summarise below her description of the photo, in the interest of demonstrating this technology at work.

The photo<sup>13</sup> shows the man crouched, surrounded by men. The Palestinian man is vehemently holding his cane in the ground, a gesture of adamant resistance, as the Israeli soldiers/men are trying to remove him from his land. Around him the men loom threateningly, pointing to some other place, out of frame. Azoulay states that the location where this photo is kept- the archives of the national Red Cross in Geneva- and the language of its organization and exhibition<sup>14</sup>, shape the way we imbibe it and *how* we come to view the Palestinian man and his gesture (and those of the Israeli men, for that matter).

Labelled a ‘prisoner of war’, the caption contextualizing the photo obfuscates the Palestinian man's gesture of resistance and reassigns him another political identity. Here, we are attending to “the moment when a Palestinian is being forced to become a refugee” (Azoulay, cited in, *Unlearning Imperial Violence*, 2023). The caption instils a reality wherein an Israeli state is an accepted given, a reality that denies the Palestinian state and thus the validity of Palestinian resistance. Crucially it admits the violence of the Israeli state. With this photo Azoulay states:

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<sup>13</sup> Fig 3.1 in Areilla Azoulay's *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019:76).

<sup>14</sup> She was told by the archive that she would not be allowed to exhibit the photo without the accompanying caption, approved by the archive (*Unlearning Imperial Violence*, 2023).

“We are attending a very critical moment when this Palestinian is refusing to become the embodiment of the archival category that will turn him into a refugee and will turn him into an infiltrator once he will try to return to Palestine from where he is now.” (Unlearning Imperial Violence, 2023)

*This* is the violence of the archive that Azoulay identifies as a technology. It is a mechanism, an engagement not just with its contents, but with the organization, logic and language of the archive that makes us complicit in the violence of colonialism *in the present*. Azoulay states that the technology of the archive –in this case, relating specifically to photographs<sup>15</sup>– compels us to believe that:

“We are actually coming after the event, which means that we have to accept the way the event has been not only described, but shaped with these kinds of international legal categories that made of him (the Palestinian man in the photograph) a refugee rather than an expellee” (Unlearning Imperial Violence, 2023).

To Azoulay, the archive is not a repository of traces to be joined and signified. It does not engage with the past. Rather it is a technology that is triggered *in real-time*, repeated with each encounter with the archive that accepts its logic and forms of representation. She clarifies:

“Rather than a delineated institution with a threshold through which we are invited to believe we enter and exit, the archive *is a regime of coordinated thresholds* –what I have called imperial shutters– that underwrite the shared world.” (Azoulay, 2019:77) (My emphasis)

Thus –if we are to continue with Azoulay’s example– reading the accompanying caption while viewing this photo has us utilise this “regime of coordinated thresholds” in denying the context of his gesture and ascribing him another political identity (2019:77). It subjects him to archival categories that strip him of his way-of-being in the world wherein the Israeli state and its violence are the threat, “[...]a category that made them

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<sup>15</sup> Azoulay writes further about the entrapments of photography and the image in her book *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008), in many ways a precursor to her 2019 *Unlearning Imperialism*. (Azoulay, 2008)

who they are, rather than a category that accounts for the violence that made them expelled” (Azoulay, cited in, *Unlearning Imperial Violence*, 2023). It is a violence that affirms an imperial world order, deceiving us into believing that this is an engagement with the past and not a process that is re-affirmed, re-inscribed each time this formulation is met without critique (Azoulay, 2019:77).

Azoulay grounds her investigation of the archive firmly in the context of the liberation of Palestine and the ongoing genocide against its people. Thus, when she states that the encounter with the archive is not an encounter with the past, this is understood in its most direct sense in relation to events in Gaza. The profusion of photographs of events in Gaza continue to populate an ever growing archive of images of Palestine and Palestinians that are categorised and regulated by a predetermined set of rules, a language that in the (re)encounter with these images perpetuate the transformation of the political identity of Palestinians into refugees and into infiltrators when they attempt to return to their homeland (*Unlearning Imperial Violence*, 2023).

Azoulay’s conception of the archive as technology is illustrated here through the extreme case of Palestine, a context of political violence whose un-abstract nature I do not wish to mistakenly identify with the archive and history of my study. This genocide is not abstract.

I wish rather to use Azoulay’s conceptualisation of the archive to assist us in thinking differently about the nature of the archive and what it produces. Azoulay sharpens our senses to *how* the archive functions and *to its function*: that is, its capacity to shape and affect perception in-real-time, perceptions that mould the lived experiences of people.

Moreover, she foregrounds the camera as an attendant imperial tool. Describing this process of the camera, she writes that:

“In a split second, the camera’s shutter draws three dividing lines: in time (between a before and an after), in space (between who/what is in front of the camera and who/what is behind it), and in the body politic (between those who possess and operate such devices and appropriate and accumulate their

product and those whose countenance, resources, or labour are extracted).”

(Azoulay, 2019:13)

The camera and its resulting product –images– frame and entrap the world according to a set of predetermined criteria that historically has been utilized to enact and entrench a colonial world order. It is this capacity that spurs Azoulay to identify the camera as the materialization of colonial technology and its shutter as:

“a synecdoche for the operation of the imperial enterprise altogether, on which the invention of photography, as well as other technological media, was modelled.” (Azoulay, 2019:12)

In other words, the camera, the image and other media –of which the moving-image should readily be included– were developed according to imperial interests and thus constitute a tool that in their very formulation attend to reinforcing the colonial world order.

Azoulay’s conception of the archive as technology forms the basis of my study’s focus on the moving-image practices of the respective countries of Spain and the Philippines. It prompts a reconsideration of the research question that guides this initial phase<sup>16</sup>. This investigation is thus not simply an inquiry into records or representations of colonial history, but of tools whose function depends on their design, calibration, and mode of engagement. What do these films do, and for whom? What realities do they enable, obscure, or re inscribe? Their function, as Azoulay warns, is not necessarily innocent.

Framing them through her lens compels us to move beyond a hopeful, but perhaps uncritical, notion of the archive as an open expanse of epistemological possibility. Instead, we are urged to attend to the archive’s design –its structural logic, its imperial residues, and its influences on the imagination. This is where Azoulay meets Mbembe: both foreground how the archive produces not only knowledge, but ways of seeing, being, and remembering. These productions serve political and historical interests. In the context of this study, such a framing becomes essential –not to disavow the

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<sup>16</sup> Detailed in the section ‘Research Questions, Aims & Objectives’.

political or poetic potential of the films, but to remain alert to the conditions under which that potential emerges, and to the risks of reproducing the very structures they may seek to resist.

How might we resist reproducing these structures? Ariella Azoulay's concept of 'unlearning imperialism' offers a critical framework for this study's engagement with the moving-image archive and its afterlives. For Azoulay, unlearning is not a passive revision of historical narratives, but an active and ongoing refusal of the imperial logics that continue to shape contemporary forms of relation, perception, and belonging. It entails dismantling the epistemological and temporal frameworks that empire has naturalized –particularly the ontology of the archive itself. As she writes:

“Unlearning the ontology of the archive as an institution is to make perceptible the violence exercised outside the space that the archive claims as its own, violence that renders obsolete other forms of being-together in the wake of its materialization.”(2019:77)

Thus, to unlearn is to interrogate the conditions under which we live, move, and relate to others –conditions structured by colonial histories and sustained by their archival and institutional legacies. It is to reject the narratives that justify the existence of borders, the designation of certain populations as 'illegal', and the promise of linear progress through the constant pursuit of the 'new'. For Azoulay, the embrace of the 'new' is itself a colonial desire –one that erases the past and devalues alternative modes of coexistence that imperialism has rendered obsolete (2019:11).

Taking inspiration from Azoulay's provocation, this study approaches film programming and workshopping as a practice of unlearning. While Azoulay's conception of unlearning is intentionally open-ended –emphasising orientation over prescription– this project seeks to embody her call through collective and situated encounters with the moving-image. It frames these encounters as rehearsals: iterative, imperfect, and yet necessary acts of non-imperial thinking. As Azoulay notes, “Rehearsals in non-imperial thinking are necessary in order to ask *how* this unstoppable movement storms through citizens” (2019:16). What is this movement, if not the ongoing reproduction of imperial relations through our institutions, media, and everyday gestures?

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In this context, the moving- image becomes both object and method. This project explores how the moving-image has historically participated in the consolidation of colonial narratives –and how, through certain calibrations, it might also help unsettle them. As a medium that shapes perception, temporality, and emotion, the moving-image holds the potential to expose the sedimented forms of violence embedded in the archive and to imagine new forms of relation. In doing so, this work takes up Azoulay’s invitation to unlearn not only what we know, but how we know –and how we might begin to understand things differently.

## Researching the archive

Azoulay's framing of the archive as a technology –one that actively shapes perception and inscribes imperial modes of relation– brought new urgency to my inquiry. If the archive is not simply a container of the past but an active participant in its ongoing formulation, then the question becomes not only *what is found in the archive*, but *what it does* and how we *relate to it*. It was with this in mind that I turned to the moving-image, both as an object of study and as a methodological prompt. Film does not merely record or reflect historical narratives; it participates in their production, mediates how they are remembered, and conditions how they may be reimagined (Grieverson and MacCabe, 2011:254). My choice to approach the archive through the lens of cinema was thus guided by a desire to trace how histories of colonialism continue to live in the aesthetic, narrative, and material forms of national film traditions. Informed by Azoulay's insistence on unlearning imperial ways of seeing, I approached the archive not in search of a truth to be recovered, but to observe what structures and omissions shape what is made visible –and what remains unsaid. This is the orientation that underpins the research phase described below.

The formulation of the initial research question –centred on the representation of the shared colonial history of Spain and the Philippines– provided a broad entry point into the respective moving-image traditions of each country. Rather than imposing fixed criteria such as a time-frame, genre, or auteur, I defined the scope of this inquiry through thematic focus: specifically, the presence of references –explicit or implicit– to the three-century-long colonial relationship between Spain and the Philippines, and its enduring afterlives. For a title to be included in the initial long lists, it needed to register or engage with this colonial history. While this framework was deliberately open-ended, the practical work of locating relevant titles revealed the necessity of maintaining flexibility rather than rigid boundaries. Casting a wide net proved essential. The aim at this stage was not comprehensiveness but to assemble a preliminary corpus of films on which to base the public programmes that constitute the next phase of this research.

Despite the conceptual breadth of this framing, the number of titles meeting the criteria was limited, and unevenly distributed between the two national contexts. As might be expected, the Philippines yielded a significantly higher volume of relevant titles than

Spain. These long-lists<sup>17</sup> are not definitive or exhaustive. Rather, they should be understood as starting points for identifying thematic and formal patterns, as well as for tracking certain regimes of representation that persist within each country's moving-image history. The initial research question thus functioned not as a fixed guide but as an incision into larger 'monoliths' of moving-image history.

### National Cinemas and the Archive: A Provisional Framing

At this juncture, I wish to introduce a set of terms and conceptual frameworks that underpin this phase of research. Central among these is the contested notion of *national cinema*. While fully aware of the substantial scholarly debate<sup>18</sup> surrounding this term –particularly its tendency to homogenise complex cultural formations– I adopt a provisional and deliberately paired back definition of for the purposes of this study. Here, *national cinema* refers to moving-image productions that have been produced or shot within the geopolitical boundaries of Spain and the Philippines. These works form part of each nation's moving-image heritage and, in their accumulation, may be understood to participate in the construction of a shared cultural identity. This usage draws loosely on Benedict Anderson's influential formulation of the nation as an “imagined community”, wherein collective identity is forged through shared modes of communication and cultural production (1990:49).

Anderson locates the emergence of national consciousness partly in the rise of what he terms “print-capitalism” –the technological and economic conditions that enabled mass access to printed media, and in turn, new forms of temporal and social alignment (1990:58). He writes:

“The search was on, so to speak, for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together. Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly

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<sup>17</sup> Included in the Appendix, p. 131

<sup>18</sup> For the varied contestations and considerations about the term ‘national cinemas’, see *Cinema and Nation* (Hjort and MacKenzie, 2005); for a redressing of the term in the Philippine context see Patrick F. Campos’ illuminating book *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* (2016).

growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.” (Anderson, 1990:52)

In other words, Anderson draws a connection between the proliferation of mass media and the production of national affiliation. The ability of a medium to produce and circulate shared representations of the world contributes to the experience of the nation as “fraternal, sovereign, and limited” –the defining characteristics of nationalism in his view (Anderson, 1990:49).

Though Anderson's thesis has been widely critiqued<sup>19</sup> –particularly for its tendency to present the nation as a bounded or coherent entity– I nonetheless invoke it here for its generative potential. The nation remains, despite its contradictions, a powerful organising structure in our current political and cultural moment. It delineates not only geopolitical boundaries but also imaginaries of inclusion and exclusion. It has the capacity to galvanise collective action, though not always toward emancipatory ends. Within the context of moving-image culture, the term ‘national cinema’ continues to circulate with surprising resilience. As Andrew Higson has noted, it is often assumed –if problematically– that national cinema provides “coherent images of the nation”, reinforcing ideological conceptions of identity and offering a space for the exploration and celebration of what is perceived to be a distinctive, indigenous culture (2005:49).

While the assumption of coherence is itself highly contested, what is crucial is that such frameworks continue to be mobilized –by critics, curators, and notably, by states. As Higson argues:

“The concept of national cinema still has some meaning, as governments continue to develop defensive strategies designed to protect and promote both the local cultural formation and the local economy.” (2005:49)

My intention is not to reify the nation as an uncontested analytical category, but to recognize the persistence of its institutional, affective, and representational power. In identifying moving-image works that address the colonial entanglements of Spain and the Philippines, I treat *national cinema* less as a descriptive fact than as a structuring

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<sup>19</sup> Most notably by Partha Chatterjee. See his: *Whose Imagined Community?*(1993) and *The Politics of The Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (2004) (Chatterjee, 2020, 2004).

fiction; one that continues to inform the production, circulation, and reception of colonial narratives.

### Regimes of Representation and the Political Stakes of the Moving Image

In interrogating the respective national cinemas of Spain and the Philippines, the long-lists that emerged through this research reveal not only thematic consistencies but also broader patterns in how shared colonial histories are represented. These patterns can be read through what Stuart Hall terms “regimes of representation”, a concept central to understanding how power operates through forms of cultural production, specifically cinema (Hall, 1989). A regime of representation constitutes a structured system through which specific demographics, events, and histories are made visible, knowable, and relatable. These representational structures are not benign; rather, as Hall asserts, “every regime of representation is a regime of power formed” (1989:71). Their dissemination, endurance –and crucially– their internalisation are often mediated through mass cultural forms such as the moving- image.

In postcolonial contexts, regimes of representation take on heightened political consequence. They not only shape the external perception of formerly colonised peoples and geographies but also intervene in the internal construction of identity<sup>20</sup>. Repetition is key to their efficacy: over time, these representational tropes are naturalised, becoming internalised epistemologies. This is the insidious success of visual culture. It persuades through familiarity, embedding systems of domination within the realm of the everyday. As Hall articulates, the power of such regimes lies not solely in their imposition from above, but in their ability to engender “inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm” (1989:71).

Hall builds this dynamic on the work of Frantz Fanon, who describes the colonised subject’s psychological subjugation through the adoption of colonial cultural values, a phenomenon he describes as being “elevated above their ‘jungle status’” by internalising the coloniser’s worldview (2008:9). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o deepens this

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<sup>20</sup> bell hooks explores this process specifically in relation to the representation of black people within the United States in her book *Black Looks: Race And Representation* (1992).

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analysis with the concept of “the colonisation of the mind”, which names the process by which the language, narratives, and symbolic orders of the coloniser displace the colonised peoples’ own ways of knowing and relating to the world (wa Thiong’o, 1986).

The moving-image is thus a powerful vehicle for this colonising dynamic. Through its capacity to frame and aestheticise, cinema not only reflects dominant ideologies but participates in their propagation. Ella Shohat, in her analysis of Western cinema’s global reach, notes that “notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in the post/colonial world have been both internalised and resisted in relation to these familiar representations” (1991b:42). In this sense, the internalisation of colonial discourse is not limited to formally colonized subjects; it is also embedded in Western representational logics that continue to affirm Eurocentric superiority –often through narrative tropes, casting choices, and aesthetic conventions that render the Global South peripheral or subordinate. Shohat reminds us that:

“Any attempt to articulate questions of cultural identity and to discuss oppositional political discourse in the twentieth century therefore cannot ignore the major role of cinema and television in projecting ‘imagined communities’.” (1991:41)

These forms shape not only national but also transnational imaginaries, extending the reach of dominant regimes of representation and shaping the cultural terrain on which identity, memory, and belonging are negotiated.

Taken together, these critiques foreground the moving image as a politically charged medium –one with the potential both to perpetuate structures of domination and to offer alternative imaginaries. In the context of this research, the archive of these national cinemas become sites where these dual capacities are made visible: a space our colonial logics may be repeated or resisted.

### Reading the Archive: Patterns of Power and Representation

The process of assembling these lists began with two parallel steps: first, identifying the film archives in Spain and the Philippines that I could consult –whether physically or

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remotely; second, initiating contact with the Spanish curator Juan Guardiola. My location in Spain at the time of beginning the project made in person research feasible, and a fortuitous encounter led to a collaboration with Guardiola, whose personal collection of Filipino films became a valuable resource. This early experience proved indicative of the nature of the research as a whole: that identifying and accessing archival materials would be a discontinuous, asynchronous process. Results were often unpredictable and contingent on both availability and human connection. Much of the research unfolded in parallel across both countries, following whatever surfaced at a given moment.

The publicly funded institutions consulted are as follows:

### Spain

- *Filmoteca Española*: A member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), its stated mission is to “recover, investigate, conserve and disseminate the cinematographic heritage” of Spain (Filmoteca Española, 2024).
- *Filmoteca Vasca*: Based in San Sebastián and supported by the Basque Government, this archive collects, preserves, and disseminates moving-image material related to the Basque Country.
- *Filmoteca de Catalunya*: A public institution preserving and cataloguing Catalonia’s audiovisual heritage.

### Philippines

- *FDCP (Film Development Council of the Philippines)*: A government body tasked with archiving and promoting Filipino cinema.
- *Cinemalaya Archives*: A repository of films screened at the Cinemalaya Film Festival since its founding in 2005, housed in Manila.

I consulted these archives via online databases and direct e-mail correspondence. In some cases, I was able to visit in person when it proved fruitful. However, what emerged most significantly from this phase of research was the importance of

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interpersonal networks and memory-based recall. My search criteria relied on content knowledge that often eluded conventional database structures –systems typically organized by director, genre, or date. What was required instead was a kind of visual narrative recall, the kind that lives in people rather than catalogues. In this sense, conversations became an essential methodology: accessing not only titles but also a critical awareness of what was absent from institutional collections.

The following individuals and resources were instrumental:

### **Spain**

- Consultants: Santiago Aguilar, Pablo La Parra Pérez, Carlos Muguero, Juan Guardiola, Sally Gutiérrez
- Online Resources: RTVE Database

### **Philippines**

- Consultants: Nick Deocampo, Richard Bolisay, Adjani Arumpac, Juan Guardiola
- Online Resources: Internet Archive, Letterboxd, BFI Archives, Fukuoka Film Archives, Asian Film Archive, Biblioteca AECD

Guardiola granted access to his personal collection of Filipino films, archived on DVDs, CDs, and VCDs- a legacy of his curatorial work on the 2006 *Filipiniana* exhibition at Casa Asia in Madrid. Engaging with this material was a strangely anachronistic experience. Handling physical media and sourcing a working DVD player to view it underscored the technological obsolescence of a format that is at once materially present and culturally receding. This tactile encounter with digital detritus highlighted the temporal frictions within the archive itself: the tension between technological pasts and digitally networked presents, between memory and materiality.

Searching formal databases with keywords such as “Spain”, “Philippines”, and “colonialism” often returned minimal results –particularly in the case of in Spanish archives. It became clear that little material, filmic or textual, was categorised under these terms. Consequently, I developed a working method: beginning with human

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consultation, outlining the research question in dialogic form, and then using resulting leads –titles, names, keywords– as entry points into databases and catalogues.

My first application of this approach was with Guardiola, who had viewed and curated the entirety of his collection. I asked whether he could recall any films that directly or obliquely addressed the colonial period. This prompted a moment of hesitation, which I soon recognized as a recurring feature of these conversations. Even those deeply embedded in the visual cultures of Spain or the Philippines had not necessarily encountered –or been prompted to consider– films through this particular historical lens. The research criteria itself introduced a new way of entering the archive, one that reframed existing materials and challenged conventional frames of reference. In that sense, the archive, as assembled here, is not only a repository but also a provocation: a call to reorient perception and to imagine how visual histories might be constructed otherwise.

## Stuart Hall: the Archive as a site of cultural struggle

In his seminal essay *Constituting an Archive* (2001), Stuart Hall reflects on what it means to assemble an archive –not in terms of cataloguing technique, but as an inherently political and cultural practice (2001). For Hall, the act of archiving is not neutral: it is shaped by discriminatory practices around what to include, how to classify, and what to leave out (2001). These decisions are not made in a vacuum but reflect the social, ideological, and historical positions of those who engage with the archive (Hall, 2001:92). Crucially, Hall identifies the *social dimension* of the archive's constitution: archivists, researchers, artists, and viewers all play a role in animating its contents (2001:91). These disparate, heterogeneous materials acquire relevance not because they are preserved, but because they are *activated* in relation to the present. Through these encounters, the archive becomes part of a “network of associative meanings” that links past to present and enables the formulation of alternative futures (Hall, 2001:91).

In contrast to Achille Mbembe's characterisation of the archive as a death-bound institution –a space where the state secures its authority through erasure and loss– or Ariella Azoulay's framing of the archive as an imperial technology whose operations reinforced contemporary structures of violence, Hall's account offers a more generative conceptualisation. He casts the archive not as a static repository or a closed system, but as a site of cultural contestation, always “constituted within the lines of force of cultural power and authority”. (Hall, 2001:92). What sets Hall's intervention apart is his insistence on the archive's potential *to be transformed through social engagement*: it is not simply inherited, but *remade* through the labour and critical inquiry of those who work with it (2001:91).

This reframing is vital to my research, which treats the archive not merely as a source of historical record but as a space of relational practice. Hall's thinking was immensely influential in conceiving of staging public interventions on the materials as a form of archival activation –an intervention that repositions the focus of inquiry squarely in the present moment and asks how colonial histories are not only remembered, but how this relation is articulated. The concept of the “living archive” is particularly generative here: it positions the archive as something in flux, constituted through encounter and

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rearticulation, rather than by fixed institutional authority (Hall, 2001:89). This shifts the emphasis from preservation to *recomposition*, and –as with Azoulay– from reverence to critique.

As Hall writes, the archive “always stands in an active, dialogic relation to the questions which the present puts to the past” (2001:92). In this sense, it becomes not simply a place of memory, but a mechanism for questioning dominant histories and opening space for alternative narratives. By tracing the structures through which meaning is produced –and identifying the gaps, silences, and illusions within them– archival work becomes political. And if –as Hall argues– the archive is never complete, always in motion, then the authority that it is often assumed to secure –whether epistemological, cultural, or political –is also contestable. In this, his thinking converges with Mbembe’s critique of the archive as an instrument of state power: if the archive is open to reinterpretation, then so too is the legitimacy of the regimes of representation and sovereignties it has long upheld.

## Practices of Unlearning: Artistic Engagements with the Archive

In the following sections, I examine two exemplary works: *Spell Reel* (2017) by Filipa César and collaborators, and the practice of Onyeka Igwe; these have significantly informed the developments of my own research. These case studies function not merely as precedents but as critical articulations of the conceptual frameworks outlined in the preceding sections. Each engages with the archive as a contested site of memory, power, and possibility, and demonstrates how artistic practice can interrogate and reanimate archival materials. Through their attention to process, form, and participation, these works foreground many of the concerns central to this study: the politics of representation, the materiality of the archive, and the potential for collective modes of unlearning. They offer concrete examples of how theory can be enacted and expanded through creative research, and in doing so, serve as touchstones for my own methodology: both in terms of conceptual orientation and in the practical formulation of public programs that engage with colonial histories through the moving image.

### “...a projectile, in flight...” - *Spell Reel*: Archive as Movement and Encounter

In 2017, Portuguese artist and researcher Filipa César, together with Guinea-Bissauan filmmakers Sana na N’Hada and Flora Gomes, and a network of local and international researchers and archivists, released *Spell Reel*, the filmic outcome of their near decade long engagement with the audiovisual archives of the Instituto Nacional do Cinema e Audiovisual (INCA) in Guinea-Bissau<sup>21</sup> (*Spell Reel*, 2017). The film documents their process of uncovering, digitising, and circulating reels of militant cinema shot during Guinea-Bissau’s liberation struggle against Portuguese colonialism (1963–1974). In addition to preserving the footage –facilitated by Arsenal, Institute for Film and Video

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<sup>21</sup> *Luta ca caba inda: time place matter voice (1967-2017)*, also the name of the resulting publication (Aikins et al., 2017)

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Art in Berlin– the team initiated a series of public screenings across the Bissauan countryside, projecting the digitised films in makeshift cinemas assembled in village squares, fields, and backyards.

What distinguishes this project is its approach to the archive not as a closed or sacred repository, instead regarding the “film materials as contemporary agents” (Aikins *et al.*, 2017:165). As César puts it, “Instead of looking at the material as something precious, we thought of it as a moving body, a projectile that we were able to accompany in its flight”, adding that the archive revealed itself as, “an irrelevant, irreverent force claiming: ‘I am not from yesterday’ ” (Aikins *et al.*, 2017:165, 7). This view rejects the tendency to treat archival fragments as relics or remains and instead positions them as active participants in the present. The films were not approached for their value as historical records per se, but for the kinds of gatherings, questions, and dialogues they could animate. N’Hada, César, and the wider team practiced what might be called a *productive irreverence* –refusing to revere the archive solely for its proximity to history, and instead treating the material as contemporary, as agential.

Central to their project were the screenings themselves. *Spell Reel* (2017) includes scenes of these projections: images beamed across outdoor spaces, illuminating trees, walls, and bodies gathered in anticipation, seated on chairs. The audience, made up of local residents, encountered these images not in silence but in conversation. Because many of the reels had lost their original sound, they were accompanied by live commentary from Gomes and N’Hada, both of whom had shot parts of the footage as young filmmakers trained in Cuba, part of Amílcar Cabral’s revolutionary cultural programme (Aikins *et al.*, 2017:30). Their presence and narration were integral, reanimating the films with historical and personal context. As César explains, “to bring them [the filmmakers] here is to bring the condition of the images’ production and the historical context around them” (Aikins *et al.*, 2017:25).

These screenings were not simply retrospective; they became spaces of memory and critique. In one particularly striking scene, a woman from the village shares recollections of her part in the resistance sparked by the images. At another, a group of young people contrast the ideals of the resistance with their current political disillusionment, pointing to the unfulfilled promises of liberation. These moments make

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clear that the archive, in this context, is not only about recovering a forgotten past, but also about confronting the present.

*Spell Reel* presents the rich and complex potential the archive has in collapsing the proximity of past and present, bringing the context of the militant struggle into the present. It demonstrates how an archive can become a site of activation rather than preservation. As César and her collaborators show, it is not enough to restore our catalogue material –the question is how to engage it. What is provoked? What becomes visible? What kinds of conversations, tensions, or solidarities arise? Researcher Carolina Rito reflects on this dynamic, writing:

“The multiplicity of voices around/nearby these images don’t provide a single history to explain the facts but map a complex installation of affairs and, one could say, affects, which are provoked by being in touch with the images but are not limited to what the visuals portray.” (2017:10)

Here, the image –having “overcome our guardianship”, to use Sana na N’Hada’s phrase– stimulates other connections that are impossible to foretell (Aikins *et al.*, 2017). It becomes a point of contact rather than closure. As Mbembe reminds us, the archive “is always situated outside its own materiality” (2002:21). The value of these films is not exhausted by what they show, but in what they make possible: connections, memories, critiques that cannot be anticipated or controlled.

What is especially instructive for my own research is the project’s openness to the archive’s unruly and generative potential. Rather than seeking to restore the material to some imagined point of origin, *Spell Reel* foregrounds a mode of engagement in which the archive is reanimated through the desires, frustrations, and situated knowledges of those who encounter it. This approach makes room for multiple, and at times conflicting, narratives to emerge –narratives that speak not only to the past but to the urgencies of the present. In this refusal to contain or fix meaning the archive becomes a dynamic site of activation and critical pedagogy rather than a closed repository. For my own research, this offers a compelling model –one that insists on public participation, embraces multi-vocality, and recognises the encounter with the archive as a political and affective event shaped by the conditions of its reception.

## Dancing with Ghosts: Onyeka Igwe and the Colonial Afterimage

Filmmaker and researcher Onyeka Igwe's work offers a compelling example of what it might mean to engage with the colonial archive critically –not as a repository of static truths, but as a contested site of knowledge production, bodily resonance and historical absence. Her practice, particularly in the films *No Dance, No Palaver* (2017–2018) and *a so-called archive* (2020), provides a concrete articulation of the theoretical questions raised in earlier sections of this chapter: namely, Azoulay's conception of the archive as a technology of imperial governance, Mbembe's formulation of the archive as a spatial and sovereign structure of power, and Hall's emphasis on the archive's social and political becoming (a so-called archive, 2020; *No Dance, No Palaver*, 2017).

In her trilogy –*Her Name in My Mouth* (2017), *Sitting on a Man* (2018), and *Specialised Technique* (2018)– Igwe investigates the colonial filmic record of the Aba Women's War of 1929, the first major anticolonial uprising in Nigeria. Mining the archives of the Bristol Empire and Commonwealth Museum and the Nigerian Colonial Film Unit, Igwe identifies what she terms the "dance break": a recurring trope in which sequences of dancing black bodies are inserted into colonial films as a 'morality device' employed to index primitiveness or cultural deficiency (Dyer, 2018:4). Rather than accepting these images at face value, Igwe reclaims them, recognizing them as sites of subversive energy. Her identification with the women on-screen emerges through a bodily recognition; an intuitive, affective response that crosses the temporal and spatial divide. Here, dance becomes a mode of historical relation and critical reclamation, undermining the archive's intended framing and attendant logic.

This intervention resonates strongly with Ariella Azoulay's argument that the archive is not merely a repository of traces, but a technology –a structured apparatus that actively configures subjectivity and regulates perception. By using her own body and sonic interventions, Igwe triggers the archive not as a closed system of meaning but as an opening, a site of generative instability. The movements she identifies and reactivates in her own body resist the colonial scopic regime, challenging the imperial shutter that seeks to fix black life as spectacle. In doing so, she refuses to reproduce what Azoulay

calls the “violence of the archival category”, instead insisting on other ways of being with and through the image by intervening in it (Azoulay, 2019:186).

Equally important is the way Igwe grapples with the material and architectural forms of the archive in her later work. In *a so-called archive* (2020) and its companion film *No Archive Can Restore You* (2020), she shifts her attention from the contents of the colonial archive to its housing: the physical spaces that once served as imperial repositories. These include the now-derelict buildings of the Nigerian Film Unit in Lagos –a colonial outpost the British Colonial Film Unit– and the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol. By documenting these decaying sites, Igwe foregrounds the spatial and institutional infrastructures of the archive, echoing Achille Mbembe’s assertion that the archive “has neither status nor power without an architectural dimension” (2002:19).

These buildings, emptied of their original function, still hold the traces of their colonial purpose: stacks of dusty film reels, obsolete equipment –the faint imprint of bureaucratic order. Yet, Igwe does not seek to restore or rehabilitate them. Instead, she asks what it means to let them rot –to refuse their symbolic centrality and to listen instead, for what haunts their ruins. As she reflects:

“The question that I was kind of ruminating [on] was, what would it mean to empty out and leave these colonial archives? And leave them decaying, leave them decomposing. And leave them, knowing that there’s a presence that we can’t see.” (Igwe and Modisane, 2024:81)

The “presence we can't see” evokes what both Igwe and Mbembe identify as the spectral charge of the archive: its capacity to structure absence as much as presence, and to conceal as much as it reveals. In refusing to reproduce colonial images, Igwe enacts a form of *critical fabulation*<sup>23</sup>: a practice that works against the archive to imagine the lives and resistances erased by it. Her soundscapes, silences, and oblique

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<sup>23</sup> A concept coined by writer and researcher Saidiya Hartman: “advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history.” (2008:11)

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references invite viewers to listen differently –to attend not only to what the archive contains, but to what it excludes or refuses to remember.

In this, Igwe aligns closely with Stuart Hall's conception of the archive as a site of contestation and active meaning-making. Hall insists that the archive is not simply about preservation, but about relation: it is constituted through the questions we bring to it and the communities we build around it. Igwe's work stages precisely such a relational encounter. Her refusal of archival reverence, her use of the body and voice, and her attention to the spatial residues of empire exemplify what it means to “constitute” an archive in Hall's terms: not to fix it in place, but to open it up to new uses, new publics, and new forms of political and affective relation.

For my study, Igwe's work and the work of César, N'Hada and co. documented in *Spell Reel*, provide vital models. They demonstrate that archival work need not rely on restoration or completion, but can instead operate through fragment, resonance, and refusal. Their attention to the conditions under which archival images are encountered –by whom, where, and to what ends– closely mirrors this study's methodological and ethical concerns. In charting an engagement with the archive that is at once critical, embodied, and imaginative, Igwe and *Spell Reel* offer ways of working with moving-images that foregrounds the politics of representation, the materiality of memory, and the possibility of repair. Moreover, they are exemplary methodologies that foreground the moving-image not simply as an object of study but as a terrain of creative and critical intervention.

## Conclusion

This chapter began by situating itself within a trend across artistic and scholarly practices in returning to the archive, particularly as a means of confronting the legacies of colonialism, in order to unsettle dominant historical narratives. In outlining the conceptual ground from which this project departs, I sought not only to clarify how I understand the archive, but also to trace the evolution of my own orientation toward it: from fascination and reverence to one marked by a more critical –even cautious– engagement.

Drawing on the work of theorists and artists such as Hall, Azoulay, César and Igwe, I frame the archive as neither a neutral repository of the past nor simply a metaphor, but as a contested and constructed space –one shaped by the interests of power and animated through the relations we form with and around it. Theoretical interventions by Azoulay and Hall were especially formative. Where Azoulay’s framing of the archive as an imperial technology foregrounds its capacity to inscribe and perpetuate violence in the present, Hall reorients our attention to the social processes that constitute and activate archives: as spaces of transformation and re-signification. Between them, I found a framework that holds the archive accountable while also insisting on its potential –if approached with care– to serve as a space of critical encounter and possibility.

This conceptual terrain was brought into sharper relief through the creative research practices of Filipa César and Onyeka Igwe. Their works exemplify modes of working with the archive that neither disavow its violence nor allow it to be read at face value. Instead, they propose strategies of activation: through public projection, through interventions in sound, gesture, and embodied resonance. They foreground the social life of archival material and its capacity to provoke memory and collective reflection. *Spell Reel* (2017) demonstrated how an archive need not be restored to an imagined wholeness in order to be meaningful; its generative capacity lies not in what it contains, but in what it sets in motion. Likewise, Igwe’s films resist the imperatives to ‘redeem’ archival imagery, choosing instead to explore the spatial, affective, and spectral registers of the archive. These projects, while distinct in form and context, both enact a refusal to isolate the archive from the conditions of its reception.

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This turn –toward the social, the affective, the embodied– is formative in how I have come to understand the role of the moving-image in my own research. Rather than treating film as historical evidence, I approach it as a site of negotiation: a surface through which colonial histories are encoded, repeated, resisted, or re-imagined. My search across archives in Spain and the Philippines –messy, discontinuous, and shaped as much by conversations as by catalogues– has resulted in the formulation of two evolving corpuses of film, presented here as long lists<sup>24</sup>. These lists are not intended as definitive canons, but as open records of what has surfaced, and through which patterns and absences might be traced.

The following chapter elaborates the next phase of this research: a methodological shift from collection to activation. If this chapter has explored the archive as a conceptual and material formation, the next turns to the act of encounter. Through the design and facilitation of public screenings and workshops, I consider how curatorial practice might serve as a form of research –one that is relational and accountable to the histories it seeks to address.

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<sup>24</sup> Appendix pp. 131-141.

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# Unsettling Frames

## -Fanon, Wynter and the Methodological Grounds of Anticolonial Curation

### Overview

The trajectory from Chapter 1 to Chapter 2 follows a shift in emphasis: from the archive as the locus of colonial inscription and resistance, to the methodological frameworks through which I attempt to engage those legacies in practice. Where the first chapter interrogated the logics of collection, preservation, and representation –drawing on the work of Hall, Mbembe, and Igwe to demonstrate how archives are never neutral but function towards designated interests– this chapter asks how such insights can be translated into the field of film curation. In doing so, it charts a movement from theory to method, from the historical weight of colonial residue to the generative possibilities of cultural practice. The question animating this shift is not simply how to read the archive, but how to activate its lessons in the present: how can we devise practices of exhibition that do not replicate the epistemic violence of the colonial archive, but instead open up to potentially transformative encounters?

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical foundations of my project and trace the development of the methodological framework that underpins it. While identifying itself as an anticolonial project, it engages critically with facets of decolonial theory, situating itself within the broader continuum of anti-imperialist and anticolonial thought of which decolonialism forms a later, though related, strand. By grounding its conceptual orientation in the writings of Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter, this chapter seeks to navigate the contested terrain of decolonial theory without becoming mired in its often-polarising debates. From Fanon, I adopt an understanding of decolonisation as a necessarily disorderly, unsettling process that must address both the psycho-affective and material realms of colonial domination. From Wynter, I draw the insistence that

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culture constitutes a critical arena of struggle, forged relationally through dialogue and critique.

I draw on the work of indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, whose academic intervention *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2021) lays bare the colonial foundations of the academe and its enduring complicity in the regulation of knowledge. Her critique underscores the extractive logics embedded in research practices and calls for a radical reassessment of their epistemic underpinnings. In Smith, I found answers to an anxiety central to my work and that I found impossible to reconcile: the inherent paradox of attempting an anticolonial project within the academe. Her work provides both a warning and a methodological provocation: she affirms the necessity of reflexivity within research that aspires to anticolonial aims and insists on grounding such work in dialogue with the communities and contexts it engages.

Building on this theoretical orientation I turn to the field of film curation. While still an emergent area of academic inquiry, film curation has a long and rich history as a professional practice. I sketch this context by drawing on reflections from programmers and curators, as well as examining the work of contemporary practitioners whose practices have been particularly generative from my own thinking. These examples demonstrate how film curation can operate as more than a technical exercise of selection: they frame it instead as a relational practice of encounter, dialogue, and exchange, capable of generating imaginative and critical engagements that exceed the moment of film viewing.

The chapter then brings in Paulo Freire into conversation with this framework. His seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) resonates strongly with the motivations underlying my own methodology: the insistence on dialogue, reflexivity, and practice as essential components of liberatory work. Freire's conceptualisation of the dialectical relationship between reflection and action echoes my motivation in structuring screenings and workshops as spaces that function in the service of dialogue and rooted in the lived contexts of participants.

Finally, I present the working method developed for this project, drawing together these multiple influences. Positioned at the intersection of anticolonial theory, critical

curatorial practice, and radical pedagogy, my methodology opens film exhibition to a multiplicity of generative encounters. In so doing, it aspires to articulate alternative ways of curating and community-building, and to reflect –through praxis– on what a film curatorial practice oriented toward decolonial ends might look like. This chapter thus establishes the theoretical and methodological foundations for the project, which are tested and expanded through their practical application in the subsequent third chapter.

### Towards a Dialogic Anticolonialism: Insights from Fanon and Wynter

Principally, decolonialism may be understood as a critical orientation that interrogates the political, economic, social, and cultural structures shaped by colonialism, with the aim of dismantling these legacies and fostering modes of thought and being that resist the reproduction of colonial forms of oppression. Historically, the term –and its cognates such as decolonisation and decolonise– has been mobilised in divergent, and at times conflicting, ways by actors with differing political and intellectual investments. Its usages have ranged from the declarations of former colonial powers signalling their withdrawal from imperial territories, to the assertions of political independence by emergent nation-states; from calls to reassess intellectual and cultural practices in order to dislodge their colonial inflections; to radical critiques of foundational constructs such as the nation-state itself or the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples (Banivanua Mar, 2016). Each of these moments has at one time or another occupied a central place in the evolving and increasingly amorphous constellation of meanings that cluster around the term decolonialism (Mendoza, 2021; Bonn, 1938; Mignolo, 2007). As a field of inquiry, it encompasses a wide array of concepts –including coloniality, colonial difference, and subalternity– and is marked by internal contestation. By the time this project entered into its debates, decolonialism had already become a highly disputed, and at times intractably ‘sticky’, term.

Over the past decade, both academic and creative fields have witnessed a marked surge in scholarship and artistic practices aiming to ‘decolonise’ their respective domains –each defining this imperative according to its own frameworks and urgencies.

However, as Onyeka Igwe has observed, the term has increasingly been employed as a catch-all, much like ‘intersectional’ or ‘queer’ once were: invoked broadly as conceptual signifiers that often inaugurate or conclude critical inquiry without sufficient depth or specificity (Igwe, 2021:12). In the course of my research, I have grown increasingly cautious about aligning my work too readily under the banner of the ‘decolonial’, wary of the polarising debates and conceptual ambiguities that surround its usage. These tensions often highlight a gap between the term’s radical intent and its institutional co-optation.

Rather than disavowing the term entirely, however, I position this project within the continuum of anticolonial thinking –of which anticolonialism and decolonialism form interconnected but temporally and theoretically distinct phases. For the purposes of this study, I adopt a Fanonian framework as the basis for defining both decolonialism and decolonisation<sup>25</sup>. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Fanon articulates decolonisation as the active dismantling of the structures –material, epistemic, cultural and psychological– that underpin colonial domination. He famously describes this process as necessarily turbulent, writing: “Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder” (Fanon, 1963, p. 34). Decolonisation, in this view, is not a linear or neatly executed program; it is disorienting, incomplete, and necessarily unsettling. It succeeds as often as it falters. There is no single moment of its arrival; rather, it unfolds in fragmented, overlapping and ongoing ruptures.

Because colonialism structures the very foundations of knowledge, governance, and sociality, decolonisation must operate at those same foundational levels. As Fanon insists, it is only in “the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content” that decolonisation can be rendered intelligible (1963, p. 34). Any decolonial praxis must thus attend to the specificity of the colonial encounter: to the cultural, historical, and political particularities that define a given context. Decolonialism thus, is not a universal programme but a series of situated interventions.

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<sup>25</sup> Fanon’s work is often retroactively classified as “anticolonial” because the term “decolonial” gained prominence later in Latin American theory (e.g., Mignolo, Quijano).

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Crucially, for Fanon, the struggle is not confined to material transformation but also unfolds within the psycho-affective realm. His most enduring insights lay bare the link between colonial domination, racism, and mental trauma. The internalisation of colonial values and resulting psychic injuries suffered by the colonised are central to his analysis. This study takes that psycho-affective terrain seriously, foregrounding the internalisation of colonial logics as a key site of resistance and re-imagining.

Fanon's work has laid the intellectual groundwork for subsequent anticolonial and decolonial theorists, particularly in diagnosing how colonialism distorts not only material and social realities but the very epistemological scaffolding through which the world is known and navigated. By anchoring this project in Fanon's anticolonial thought –which precedes but anticipates many contemporary decolonial frameworks– I am able to delineate a decolonial praxis that resists both academic abstraction and co-optation. His conception of decolonisation as an embodied, disorderly, and praxis-oriented struggle informs both the theoretical and methodological architecture of this research.

In this sense, the practice-based dimension of my study<sup>26</sup> is not merely an illustration of theoretical claims; it constitutes a mode of inquiry and resistance in its own right. Situating this work within the broader continuum of anticolonial traditions affirms a commitment to it as a lived and ongoing practice rather than a fixed or completed state.

I turn to the writings of Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter for guidance in thinking through the work of anticolonial struggle. Best known for her critique of the category of “Man”<sup>27</sup>, Wynter's extensive body of work offers a fundamental challenge to the colonial and humanist categories that underpin dominant epistemologies. Her analysis centres on how the colonial invention of “Man” came to serve as the universal measure of being; defining who qualifies as human, whose lives are valued, and how human relations to each other and the natural world are structured (Wynter, 2003:260). While much of her scholarship is celebrated for its focus on the lived realities of black people as shaped by

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<sup>26</sup> The curatorial work of the screenings and workshops, complemented by the filmic documentation and synthesis of the workshops. This is discussed further in Chapters 3 & 4, and shown in the films linked in the Appendix, p. 130.

<sup>27</sup> See her essay *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation -An Argument* (2003) for her rigorously argued dismantling of the conception of the term (Wynter, 2003).

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these colonial logics, her work also speaks to a broader reconfiguration of the epistemological order itself. In this sense, Wynter's critique resonates with Fanon's call for decolonisation to inaugurate a “new man”; a vision that seeks to explode the foundations of colonial subjectivity and reimagine what it means to be human in the world (Fanon, 1963:198, 316).

For the purposes of this study, I draw on one of Wynter's early essays to develop a more situated understanding of anticolonial struggle: *We Must Learn To Sit Down Together And Talk About A Little Culture: Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism* (1968), hereafter referred to as *Reflections* (Wynter, 2022). In this text, Wynter foregrounds the role of arts and culture as critical arenas in which the colonial order is contested. Analysing Caribbean literary works and their reception, she distinguishes between what she calls the “appeasing arts” –art that offers escapism or consolation– and art that directly confronts the historical and material conditions of the present (Wynter, 2022:91). The latter, she argues, functions as a vital, disruptive force: “a vital and functional element of the dynamics of a society”, which, by engaging the tensions of its time, helps illuminate the structures that shape lived experience, thereby pointing toward their transformation (Wynter, 2022:91).

Crucially, Wynter pairs this conception of art with the practice of criticism. In her account, criticism is not a detached intellectual exercise but a culturally embedded practice of “reinterpreting reality” (2022:90). It is through this reflexive engagement that a society becomes aware of its own “sickness”; particularly in moments when reality is so distorted that it appears “impossible and abnormal” (Wynter, 2022:90). To reinterpret reality, she writes, “is to commit oneself to a constant revolutionary assault against it” (2022:90). In this formulation, criticism forms a necessary counterpart to cultural production –it constitutes the dialogic exchange through which anticolonial struggle is enacted.

Like Fanon, Wynter sees culture as forged in the crucible of resistance to colonial oppression (1963; 2022). It is not a fixed inheritance, but a contested and continually evolving field. Importantly she insists that culture is always relational: it is formed through a dialogic process rather than through discourse alone (2022:139). For both

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thinkers, culture becomes a scene of confrontation where internalised colonial logics are brought to the surface and reconfigured.

For Wynter it is not abstract theorising but the creation of critical, dialogic spaces that enables the transformation of cultural consciousness. She states:

“We need a new awareness of our own paradox, and this awareness should be diffused through our praxis, however inadequate, rather than through our sermons.” (Wynter, 2022:139)

This form of praxis is necessarily situated and relational. It creates spaces that allow for the reassessment of received narratives and the redefinition of identity in relation to others. Such encounters serve as the “enabling precondition of psychic and cultural awareness for all parties of colonial relation” (Edwards, 2001:18). Through this lens, criticism becomes a vital act of disillusionment, disenchanting the “illusory spell” cast by Western cultural authority and exposing the historical and ideological scaffolding that sustains it (Edwards, 2001:20).

My study aligns with this Fanonian-Wynterian conception of anticolonial praxis as a process of radical redress: one that reorders the epistemological and affective frameworks through which the world is perceived and inhabited. It locates culture – specifically the moving image– as a key terrain in which this struggle unfolds. Through film exhibition and programming, the project seeks to enact a dialogic practice between culture and criticism, theory and practice, the colonial ‘metropole’ and its ‘outposts’.

## Working within the Paradox: Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Anticolonial Praxis in the Academe

At this stage, I return to address a persistent anxiety that has accompanied this project: the paradox of pursuing anticolonial aims from within an institution historically complicit in colonial domination. The university and the practice of research have long been central to consolidating imperial power, producing and legitimating colonial ways of knowing.

Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith articulates this with precision in her seminal book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2021), showing through the suppression and dismissal of indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being, the Academy established its authority as universal<sup>28</sup> (Smith, 2021b). She characterises research as a regulatory and generative instrument of colonialism:

“Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realised. It is regulated through the formal rules of individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (including the state). It is realised in the myriad of representations and ideological constructions of the Other in scholarly and ‘popular’ works, and in the principles which help to select and recontextualise those constructions in such things as the media, official histories and school curricula.” (Smith, 2021b:8)

For Smith, genuine ethical engagement –particularly when working with indigenous peoples– demands more than the ritual declaration of positionality. It requires a radical reassessment of the epistemic foundations of Western scholarship: its claims to rationalism, objectivity, linear temporality, and the automatic privileging of White, Western authorities. Such interrogation must reckon with the harm these concepts have historically enacted and actively work to develop alternative methodologies in collaboration with the communities concerned.

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<sup>28</sup> I suggest reading her second chapter ‘Research Through Imperial Eyes’ for her extrapolation on these ideas and how “what counts as Western research draws from an ‘archive’ of knowledge and systems, rules and values which stretch beyond the boundaries of Western science to the system now referred to as the West” (Smith, 2021b:49).

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Smith's interventions are grounded in her own positionality as an indigenous scholar. My own situation differs: though I am Filipino, I am not indigenous to the Cordilleras, the region of the Philippines where I grew up. Nor is my project focused solely on the experiences of the indigenous people who comprise parts of my audience. While I share undoubtedly in the effects colonial histories have had on the shape of my place in the world, I do not claim Cordilleran indigenous identity. I turn to Smith not to transpose her framework wholesale, but because her work exposes with clarity the colonial foundations of the university; understanding the academe and research through indigenous eyes lays bare the mechanism of the university, how it has contributed to “part of the historical processes of imperialism” and “established an essential part of the colonising process” (Smith, 2021b:74). These are foundations that shape my own uneasy positioning.

Smith acknowledges this tension from within her own scholarly practice, offering decolonising methodologies (often drawn from indigenous activism and community projects) as ways of working both within and against the institution. Yet the possibility of reforming the university toward genuinely anti colonial ends remains contested. As Gayatri Spivak has observed, “if one begins to take a whack at shaking the structure up, one sees how much more consolidated the opposition is” (1990:6). Smith's account reframes this impasse:

“Decolonisation is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices.” (Smith, 2021b:22)

Rather than resolve this paradox, I choose to inhabit it consciously. Following Wynter's reminder that we need to be aware of our own paradox, I treat this tension not as a disqualifying flaw but as a condition of work within the Academy. Smith's scholarship has helped me centre reflexivity –towards the contradiction of my location, the epistemic inheritances I carry, and the ways that these might be unsettled through the process of research itself.

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This reflexivity has been enacted collaboratively<sup>29</sup>: with my project partners and audiences, we have asked how colonialism's enduring influence shapes how we conceive of ourselves and others; how the films we present might serve as frames for questioning these conceptions; and how film exhibition might invite audiences into similar acts of self-interrogation. These questions sit at the heart of my practice, and they guide my turn now to the field of film curation itself: the histories, conventions, and exemplary practices that inform my own approach, and the possibilities they opened for a practice of anticolonial education.

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<sup>29</sup> I elaborate on this process in Chapter 3.

## A context of curation

Curation in film occupies a paradoxical position. As a scholarly discipline, it is in its infancy<sup>30</sup>: only in the last decade have universities in the United Kingdom begun to offer courses dedicated to it. Yet as a professional practice, it has a long, rich history, grounded in the accumulated knowledge of programmers, curators, and cinephiles<sup>31</sup>. When these academic courses first emerged, many of my curator friends –already seasoned practitioners– reacted with disbelief. For them, curating films is not something that can be distilled into modules and assessment criteria. It is a practice learned by doing: watching films obsessively, testing ideas in public, and refining approaches through the interplay of logistical problem-solving, intellectual engagement, and the contingencies of the real world.

Academic Laura U. Marks, reflecting on the same issue, notes the widespread assumption that:

“[] there is little theory of how to do curating and programming, as though it should just come naturally, like teaching or sex, from some mysterious internal source of inspiration.” (2004b:37)

While many practitioners are sceptical of curation as an academic discipline, my research takes the scepticism seriously. Rather than replacing practice with theory, I attempt to shape a scholarly approach that remains grounded in practice, situating my work at the intersection of these two modes of knowledge. In this section, I explore some conceptions of this practice to clarify how my research is a contribution to this new field of study. I sketch a context of ideas that conceive of this practice as one that is inherently pedagogical and political, informed by practitioner knowledge and a relation

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<sup>30</sup> The history of art curation is rich in scholarly critique. It might be pertinent to assume that practices and reflections of curation within film stem from this discipline, inflected of course by the specificities of working with the medium and audience of film and the moving-image. It is not within the remit of this study to trace these genealogies specifically, but for a suggested context: For an overview in global developments in art curation since the 1980s see the book *A Companion to Curation* (Buckley and Conomos, 2020). For a history of European and N. American curation see *A Brief History of Curating* (Obrist, 2012). For a perspective on curating art from a South-East Asian context see Patrick Flores' book *Past peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* (Flores, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Examples of scholarly reflections on curating the moving-image in relation to the gallery space include: *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Balsom, 2013), *Curating the Moving Image* (Nash, 2023), and Lis Rhodes' seminal essay *Whose History?* (Rhodes, 2019).

to the world, charted across multiple theoretical models and subject to economic/political forces, and historical shifts.

In her contribution to the symposium *Terms of Address* (2003)<sup>32</sup>, Karyn Sandlos observes the links between curation and pedagogy, stating that they share “the problem of belatedness of acting without fully knowing or being able to articulate what one is doing in advance” (2004:18). For Sandlos, this is not aimless improvisation. It is a process of “learning in public”, in which the contours of practice emerge only through action (Teitelbaum, 1996:40). The work of curation, then, is less a set of rules than a mode of making and thinking in the open, producing the conditions for its own articulation.

Curating according to Marks, can be divided into three broad fields<sup>33</sup> that she summarises as: “Respect the work; Respect the audience; Use argument to respect work and audience” (2004b:37). These models she describes as: the work model, which programs according to what emerges from the works themselves; the audience model, which allows the program to live and transform in relation to its viewers; and the argument model, which builds a program around a clear thesis, ensuring its coherence for the audience (Marks, 2004b:39).

She also distinguishes between the programmer and curator. The programmer, according to her, is often institutionally embedded, curating with a responsibility to reflect “the state of the field” and uphold the interests of the organisation (Marks, 2004b:36). Thus, they have their “own ethics of responsibility to artists and audiences” (Marks, 2004b:36). The curators work, on the other hand, is driven more explicitly by their own subjectivity and thematic vision (2004b:36). She states:

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<sup>32</sup> “The conference “Terms of Address: A Symposium on the Pedagogy of Film and Video Exhibition,” organised by the Centre for Media and Culture in Education of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto and held in Toronto, March 7 and 8, 2003.” - From the publication’s foreword (Marks, 2004a)

<sup>33</sup> These she attributes to three mentors, whom she learned from through her engagement with curatorial practice (Marks, 2004b:37).

“[Curation] is a reflection on the state of the world, in some kind of dialectic between the field of film and video and the curators' ideas. Audiences are attracted by either the theme or the subjectivity of the curator.” (Marks, 2004b:36)

Yet she admits these categories are porous: “objectivity” and “subjectivity” are not fixed traits but positions that can –and should– be interrogated through the arguments a programme makes (Marks, 2004b:36). They exist, in other words, in a relation of dialogue and negotiation with their programmes and the context in which this work unfolds.

Renowned curator Alexander Horwath adds another dimension: the shifting terrain of cinema education. He remarks that curators “active today come from completely different positions in terms of their practical cinephilia”, due to “a ‘knowledge’ received during each individual cinephile socialisation, through multiple moving-image sources other than the actual cinema screening” (Arroba, 2012:19). Today's curators come from diverse signified lineages shaped by ever-evolving technology: the DVD, the internet and, more recently, streaming platforms –pathways that have displaced the cinema as the primary site of film experience. The pandemic has further reshaped avenues to cinema through the curation of online festivals.

For Horwath, these different routes into cinema shape curator sensibilities and the impossibility of a singular, fixed history of curation. “[] There are specific Histories of Cinema connected to specific places, cities, film cultures”, Horwath continues (Arroba, 2012:26). He identifies the duty of the curator, “in thinking about cinema, to become aware of these specific differences” (Arroba, 2012:26). The practice evolves alongside the medium itself, reflecting (and interrogating) its formal, technological, and cultural changes.

The political dimensions of this work are equally inescapable. Alexander Horwath cites the expanded cinema movement in North America as an example. He states how in post-war Fordist society the cinema was “seen as part of an oppressive ideological apparatus which aimed at distraction, at keeping citizens in a state of obedience and passivity”, tied in with a political conception of leisure time “equivalent to the way the

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factory, the workspace, the social state were organised” (Arroba, 2012:24). The expanded cinema movements of the 1960s and 70s sought to disrupt this apparatus, challenging the spatial, sensory, and ideological conventions of projection, spectatorship, and spectacle.

For archivist and curator June Givanni, the political stakes of this practice are more immediate. Citing his keynote address at the symposium, June Giovanni quotes Hamid Naficy who observes that the visibility of films and festival contexts can be influenced by the geopolitical status of their country of origin (Naficy, 2004 cited in Givanni, 2004:74). Givanni's experience programming black British cinema for the BFI in the 1980s and 1990s underscores the racial and economic pressures shaping programming decisions. “Cultural identification became, for the first time, a distinguishing factor and an expedient programming tool”, she states, referring to the influence progressive efforts in production had on broadcast programming in the United Kingdom in the 80s and 90s (Givanni, 2004:62). It was a double-edged sword, however. Cultural identification became a tool for diversifying screens, but also a potential trap, raising the risks of “pigeonholing” or “ghettoising” certain kinds of work (Givanni, 2004:64). Curators faced the complex task of representing the breadth of black British filmmaking while navigating audience expectations and institutional agendas, as well as the realities of the market.

Curating film has changed much. Givanni notes this herself, from her time programming in the 80s and 90s Britain. The growing importance of the market and ensuring a film's longevity severely affected what programmers could present, with “the shift away from the notion of audiences (the cultural influence), [being] one of the big differences between the 1970s to the 1980s and now” (Givanni, 2004:73). Givanni observes the ties of economic and racist influence in the politics of programming black British film in the UK, quoting her colleague Gaylene Gould who identifies “the way in which the industry is fragmented, financially driven, and inherently racist” (Givanni, 2004:74). Gould further cites the “inequitable sense of cultural ‘worth’ that is attached to these different markets by the industry” (Givanni, 2004:74). In Givanni's experience, the context of curation is one that is beholden to economic interests and racist structures inherent in this industry that come to (devalue) certain cinemas over others.

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The context of curation I wish to sketch here –and in which my own work intervenes– is therefore one that is both political and pedagogical. It is an emerging scholarly discipline, but one with long practical histories; it is shaped by technological shifts, cultural conditions, and economic pressures; and it is in constant dialogue with the political realities that structure what can be seen, by whom, and in what context. This history is not linear but multi-origin, unfolding across overlapping and contested sites. To understand curation in film is to attend to these plural genealogies, recognising that, like the medium it serves, it is always in motion. Rather than conceiving of its history as unfolding linearly, perhaps a conception of multi-determined origins of film –of histories of cinema and thus *contexts* of film curation– might produce more nuanced, complex considerations of this medium and its attending practices.

## Inspired Practices, Practices of Inspiration

### Learning from a Practice of Deep Engagement: The Influence of Ricardo Matos Cabo

My early practice in film exhibition was profoundly shaped by the work of independent programmer, researcher, and friend Ricardo Matos Cabo. We met by chance in 2016, just as I had organised the inaugural screening of what would become my film club, *Filikino*<sup>34</sup>. Ricardo, at the time, was programming for Birkbeck's *Essay Film Festival*<sup>35</sup>. My chosen film for that first screening was Kidlat Tahimik's seminal *Perfumed Nightmare* (1974). In a serendipitous alignment, Ricardo had curated a retrospective of Tahimik's later essay films for the festival – scheduled in the very same week as my event. It was in the context of these complimentary screenings that our paths crossed, and from that encounter a collegial friendship emerged.

As my own interest in film exhibition deepened, Ricardo became a key intellectual companion and sounding board, offering both inspiration and critical engagement with my developing practice. His programming career is both extensive and distinguished, encompassing work for institutions and festivals such as DocLisboa, Doc's Kingdom – International Seminar on Documentary Cinema (Portugal), the Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image / Essay Film Festival, the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), and Tate Modern in London, the Courtisane Film Festival in Ghent, and Cinéma du Réel / Galerie du Jeu de Paume in Paris. His curatorial oeuvre includes retrospectives on Peter Nestler, Raymonde Carasco and Régis Hébraud, and Pedro Costa, as well as acclaimed retrospectives dedicated to the German-French filmmaking duo Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, and to the Japanese documentary visionary Ogawa Shinsuke and the Ogawa Pro Collective. Notably, the Straub-Huillet and Ogawa Pro retrospectives, first

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<sup>34</sup> I founded *Filikino* in 2016. As a film club dedicated to bringing classic and contemporary Filipino cinema to London's screens, it forms my first venture into the practice of film exhibition. I have continued this project, programming under *Filikino* in Tabakalera in San Sebastian in 2020 and most recently in my hometown of Baguio City, Philippines, in 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Birkbeck's *Essay Film Festival* ran from 2015-2023, their programmes exploring forms of the essay film (*Essay Film Festival - Birkbeck, University of London, 2023*).

shown in London in 2019 and 2016 respectively, have since been reprogrammed by other institutions –a testament to their curatorial significance.

Ricardo's practice is rooted in meticulous research, political attentiveness, and a deep-seated commitment to the films and filmmakers he champions. From attending his screenings and through our many conversations, I have come to recognise a central tenet of his work: the films are always situated within the political and cultural contexts of their production and reception. His programmes extend beyond the films themselves, inviting audiences to consider them as living cultural texts, alive with resonances in the present. I recall him recounting, with delight, an instance in Paris during the Ogawa Pro retrospective, where the films prompted a post-screening discussion among members of local labour groups, who drew connections between the activism of the Japanese farmers in the films and their own struggles over labour politics. While this moment spoke to the enduring power of the films, it also underscored the significance of Ricardo's framing: the way his curatorial juxtapositions open up space for a localised, politically charged dialogue.

The strength of his programmes lies in their discursive construction. They frequently incorporate archival materials, contextual documents, and critical texts that illuminate the films as products of specific cultural and political milieus. His retrospectives often position films in dialogue with works by other artists, such as in the Ogawa Pro series where films about the collective were screened alongside their own work, complicating and expanding their reception<sup>36</sup>. Equally central is the presence of live interlocutors: critics, theorists, researchers, and other artists are invited to introduce films, lead discussions, or produce new texts in response to the screenings<sup>37</sup>.

Through Ricardo's example I have come to understand film exhibition as a generative practice: one that produces new research, fosters institutional and intellectual collaborations, and stimulates cultural and political debate. His programmes refuse to

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<sup>36</sup> Such as queer feminist filmmaker and artist Barbara Hammer's film *Devotion: A Film About Ogawa Productions* (2000), that attempted to explore the complex hierarchical and gendered relationships that existed in the radical documentary collective.

<sup>37</sup> You can view the programme of the retrospective of Straub and Huillet on [www.straub-huillet.com](http://www.straub-huillet.com) to get a full sense of the research and intertextual relation created around these films through Ricardo's work. (Matos Cabo, 2019)

let films sit as static cultural artefacts; instead, they open them to multiple voices, currents, struggles, and contradictions. This approach treats film with a profound reverence –not in the sense of untouchable veneration, but as a medium whose artistry and politics demand attentive, sensitive, and politically engaged presentation. Ricardo’s work has been formative in shaping my own view of programming as a practice of dialogue-making: creating conditions for the film, its contexts, and its audiences to speak to one another in ways that extend far beyond the screening room.

### Ecologies of Relation: Animistic Ontologies of Cinema and the work of May Adadol Ingawanij

Another significant point of reference for my thinking on film curation is the work of academic and curator May Adadol Ingawanij. Her curatorial project *Animistic Apparatus* (2019) and her co-programming of the Flaherty Seminar in Thailand, *To Commune* (2024), have expanded my conception of curation as a mode of practice that not only mediates films for audiences but also engages cinema as a socially embedded activity, capable of activating localised histories and epistemologies (Ingawanij, 2019) (Ingawanij and Ross, 2024).

Central to Ingawanij’s practice is the centring of Southeast Asian (SEA) filmmakers and historical trajectories. Her scholarship extends the field of SEA experimental cinema, both historicising and aesthetically situating these practices within a broader critical discourse. In *Animistic Apparatus*, she advances an alternative ontology of cinema, one grounded not in the ontological assumptions of the Western canon, but in the animist traditions of Southeast Asia –specifically, Thai animism. As she explains:

“To take part in or to function as a part of the apparatus of ritualistic addressing of spirits is to be entangled in an animistic ecology of communication. To define the communicative praxis of animistic cinema this way is to differentiate the dynamic at play from the question of the suspension of disbelief in the face of an uncanny manifestation, in other words, from the conceptualisation of the fantastic and its attendant issue of the relationship between visualisation and knowing.” (Ingawanij, 2021:93)

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This reframing opens up cinema to an expanded constellation of relations –objects, spaces, beings, and temporalities– through which we are invited to reconceive what cinema is and does. Drawing on a Thai fable as an analogy, Ingawanij asks whether cinema might be imagined not solely as the projection of moving images upon a screen, but rather as “an ecology of relations sustained and changed with sound and image, a ritual of communicative exchange among beings entangled in multiple worlds” (Ingawanij, 2021:43). The notion of an ‘ecology of relations’ positions cinema within the reciprocal exchanges characteristic of SEA animism: offerings, rehearsed gestures, and ceremonial acts that facilitate communication between human and non-human realms.

*Animistic Apparatus* stages an encounter between contemporary SEA moving-image and media art and the genealogies of ritualistic moving-image exhibition in northeastern Thailand (Ingawanij, 2021:90). It engages with a tradition of itinerant outdoor projection that emerged during the Cold War; an incidental outcome of propagandistic film dissemination and the infrastructure connecting geopolitical interests in Laos and Thailand. Today, this tradition continues through projection companies whose technicians construct large-scale outdoor screens and mobile sound systems, travelling to villages and forest clearings to stage screenings and concerts. These practices intersect with local animist customs: *Nang Kae bon* screenings as they are called, are commissioned as offerings to spirits in exchange for blessings –be it agricultural abundance, business prosperity, or other personal requests (Ingawanij, 2021:89).

Ingawanij approaches these ritual projections with deference to their cultural significance and social purpose. Her scholarly attentiveness refuses the scepticism often characteristic of Western accounts of such practices. Her writing remains precise in its theoretical articulation –delineating the roles of the client, the projection team, and the metric of filmic ‘offerings’– yet resists the impulse to rationalise away the animist worldview that underpins them. This position is critical. As she notes:

“The emphasis here concerns human-spirit sociality, an assemblage of process, apparatus, and participatory action, rather than witness and belief.” (Ingawanij, 2021:93)

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Her reconfiguration of cinema's ontology thus does not depend on a literal belief in spirits, but on recognising the function of these rituals as social and energetic exchanges; practices that are culturally embedded and sustained through participation. In this, her conception of an 'ecology of relations' foregrounds cinema's potential to operate as an active participant in a web of reciprocal, multi-world engagements.

Ricardo Matos Cabo and May Adadol Ingawanij each enact a curatorial practice that moves with precision, patience, and a profound faith in the generative powers of cinema. Their work insists that film exhibition is never a neutral act: it is an invitation into a web of relations: between audience and filmmaker, between histories and their afterlives, between the materiality of the moving-image and the worlds it touches (on this plane and others). In Ricardo's programmes, political histories are reframed through attentive research and the careful juxtaposition of works and contexts; in May's, cinema is opened to ontologies that exceed the Western frame, re-imagined as an ecology of relations among the human, the non-human, and the unseen. Both extend cinema beyond the limits of the screen proposing it as a social, intellectual, and at times spiritual practice.

Their approaches embody what Stephanie Schultz Strathaus calls the programmer's guiding principle: "to question continuously their own work, to reflect on the job of creating cinema" (2004:9). This 'job' is not the static work of presenting what already exists, but the restless task of asking –again and again– what cinema is and what it might become. From Bazin's ontological inquiries<sup>38</sup>, to the insurgent declarations of Third Cinema<sup>39</sup>, to contemporary reflections and piracy and circulation<sup>40</sup>, this question has animated both theory and practice since the medium's inception. To include curatorial work in this tradition is to acknowledge that cinema is not only made in production but also in the event of its public encounter.

My own practice is, in this sense, a way of dwelling with this question. To curate a film is to reactivate it, to position it in relation to other works, ideas, and contexts so that new

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<sup>38</sup> See André Bazin's seminal *What is Cinema?* (Bazin et al., 2005).

<sup>39</sup> See Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas' *Toward a Third Cinema* (Getino and Solanas, 1969).

<sup>40</sup> See Jasmine Nadua Trice' *City of Screens* (Trice, 2021).

meanings may emerge. It is to open a space in which cinema is not fixed but in flux, able to engage life in ways that exceed its representative function. Following the example of May and Ricardo, I ask: what can be generated when film exhibition is approached as a mode of world making? And, more urgently, what might an exhibition practice look like if it were to aspire to the decolonial; not as a metaphor, but as a living, disordering process that unsettles the ground on which cinema stands?

### Beyond Convention: Towards an Expanded Practice of Film Curation

Through the course of my own curatorial practice, I have come to recognise certain principles that underpin much of what is considered ‘good practice’ in film exhibition.

These include:

- Exhibiting works in their intended format, working in the interest of preserving the filmmaker’s original vision.
- Centring the work and the artist, for example by inviting the filmmaker to speak or contribute to the event.
- Programming ‘from the work out’, allowing the films themselves to shape the programme rather than imposing an external conceptual frame.

While these principles –largely inherited from Western curatorial traditions<sup>41</sup>– have provided a foundation for my own practice, they are not without their limits. Current collective programming initiatives in London, such as Brixton community cinema<sup>42</sup>, its

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<sup>41</sup> Similar to the principles described by Laura U. Marks on p. 54 of this chapter.

<sup>42</sup> “Brixton Community Cinema is a pop-up cinema, intended to bring affordable international and independent film to a community who, despite immense cultural contributions, face uneven access to arts institutions. The cinema screens a range of films across genre and format which foreground subaltern voices and experiences and showcase the breadth of experimental approaches to using film as a medium of expression and protest. Operating in vacant spaces, on a pay-what-you-can basis, it aims to explore ways to minimise both the financial and non-financial barriers to cinema-going. Brixton Community Cinema was founded by Abiba Coulibaly in Autumn 2022.” (Coulibaly, 2022)

sister-project Atlas Cinema<sup>43</sup>, SineScreen<sup>44</sup>, Majlis Film club<sup>45</sup> (hosted at alternative community film project Other Cinemas<sup>46</sup> studio) demonstrate the radical potential of rethinking exhibition as a form of community-building. These collectives challenge conventional curatorial logics both in focus and in process: they operate largely outside institutional spaces, organised horizontally across their teams, and prioritise the presentation of films by and about BIPOC, marginalised, and Global South communities. Accessibility and what this entails remains central to their work. By situating screenings in community-oriented venues and offering them at low or no cost, they reconfigure film culture as an approachable and participatory engagement, dismantling the financial and institutional barriers that often restrict access to cinematic spaces. These approaches challenge the assumption that the primary goal of curation is representation or the preservation of artistic intent. Instead, they invite us to consider film exhibition as a relational practice, one capable of generating new social and political configurations.

It is in this expanded sense that my own work seeks to operate. I ask: how can curation serve as a means of engaging with colonial histories in ways that are not merely illustrative, but reparative? How might exhibition practice become a form of negotiation between multiple epistemologies, a space for re encounter and reordering? And what would it mean to aspire to an anticolonial mode of curation –one that refuses containment and instead enacts the disorder and the generative potential at the heart of decolonisation?

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<sup>43</sup> “archive for experimental film cooperative in Loughborough Junction” (Atlas, 2025)

<sup>44</sup> “*Sine Screen* is a London-based emerging screening collective dedicated to showcasing independent cinema and moving image works from across East and Southeast Asia. We hope to contribute to more nuanced discussions around East and Southeast Asian cultures and histories through diverse curated programmes.” (Sinescreen, 2024)

<sup>45</sup> “*Majlis* is our regular film club taking place every second Monday of the month. It’s a manifestation of our collective intention to continue our deep dive into films, expand on forms of political education and create a space where our community can gather, sit together, and converse about common issues over a shared meal or drink. The film club is open to all to attend but will prioritise Black and non-white film workers.” (Cinemas, 2024)

<sup>46</sup> “*Other Cinemas* is a Brent-based project established by the filmmaking duo Turab Shah and Arwa Aburawa who saw the need for better and more equitable ways of filmmaking, sharing, and education. Seeing these three strands as inseparable, our work attempts to create a vital and holistic alternative to the industry that addresses its racial and class biases. Our work is rooted in our diverse neighbourhoods in northwest London, some of the most racially diverse in the country but chronically underserved in terms of cultural provisions.” (Cinemas, 2024)

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The methodological approach I developed here responds directly to the tensions within decolonial theory outlined earlier and takes shape through the Fanonian–Wynterian framework that underpins the study. At its core is the question: how can a practice in film exhibition operate within the radically situated and dialogic parameters that both Fanon and Wynter identify as essential to anticolonial struggle, while avoiding the risk of being subsumed into the purely epistemic politics of the ‘decolonial turn’<sup>47</sup>?

From the outset, I have been wary of collapsing the emancipatory ambitions of anticolonial praxis into the act of film viewing alone. To assume that spectatorship itself constitutes political action risks, as Wynter might argue, producing an “appeasing art” that comforts rather than confronts. Yet to dismiss cinema's capacity to generate critical, even transformative awareness would be to overlook its potential as a site of cultural contestation; a terrain in which colonial ways of seeing can be both exposed and reconfigured. Cinema’s historical role in producing the colonial Other and reinforcing the West's image of itself makes it a particularly charged site for intervention<sup>48</sup>.

Following Fanon, I understand culture as a primary field in which the colonised assert their right to exist; it is both a repository of oppression and a crucible for transformation. Decolonisation, in this view, must operate simultaneously at the material, epistemic, cultural, and psycho-affective levels. It is a process of disorder and reordering – fragmented, situated, and necessarily unsettling– that dismantles the epistemologies sustaining colonial power and replaces them with alternative modes of knowing and relating.

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<sup>47</sup> A term signifying the trend in the academe towards a school of decolonial thought shaped largely by academics Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine Walsh. See their seminal book *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* for an example of this school of decolonial thought (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018). Mignolo and co. have been criticised for proposing a version of decolonialism that privileges the episteme over the material and for co-opting work by Latin American scholars, an accusation sharply brought forward by Bolivian academic and activist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui: see pp. 58-64 in her book *Sociología de la imagen: miradas ch'ixi desde la historia andina* (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2015). For further comparisons between schools of decolonial thought, see *Decolonial Theories in Comparison* (Mendoza, 2021).

<sup>48</sup> See Lee Grieveson and Colin McCabe’s *Film and the End of Empire* (Grieveson and McCabe, 2011); chapters 2, 3 & 4 in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (Shohat and Stam, 2014); Noelia V. Saenz’ chapter *Reframing Empire: Mediating Encounters and Resistance in Spanish Transatlantic Cinema since 1992* (Saenz, 2016).

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This is where Wynter's insistence on the dialogic relation between cultural production and criticism becomes methodologically instructive. In *Reflections*, she situates criticism as an act of “reinterpreting reality” and a “constant revolutionary assault” against the distortions of colonial logic (Wynter, 2022). Such criticism is not detached analysis. It is praxis: culturally embedded, relational, and situated in the lived struggles of its time. For my project, film exhibition functions as both a cultural practice and a critical intervention: a space where films are not simply presented but actively placed in dialogue with their political, historical, and epistemic contexts, as well as with the audiences who encounter them.

My method therefore operates at the intersection of these two imperatives: Fanon’s call for a decolonisation that disrupts and reconstitutes the order of the world, and Wynter’s demand for a practice that is both culturally generative and critically reflexive. This entails:

- Recognising the limits of conventional, Western-derived programming principles that prioritise fidelity to the filmmaker's intent or thematic coherence, without interrogating the epistemological structures such curatorial logics may reproduce.
- Designing programs that do not simply represent alternative perspectives but facilitate encounters between multiple epistemologies, inviting frictions, negotiations, and moments of re-encounter.
- Treating the curatorial process as a form of cultural criticism in Wynter’s sense: attuned to the political stakes of selection, arrangement, and contextualisation, and committed to unsettling received narratives.

In this way, the curatorial method becomes a mode of “worldly anticolonialism”, seeking not only to expose the epistemic foundations of colonial domination but to transform them in practice (Temin, 2024). By embedding exhibition within a framework that is simultaneously political, cultural, and psycho-effective, the work resists the abstraction and institutional co-optation that can drain decolonial discourse of its radical force. It aspires instead to be a lived, dialogic, and situated practice; one in

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which the moving-image becomes a catalyst for the kind of disorder, reflection, and reconfiguration that Fanon saw as the essence of decolonisation.

## Paolo Freire: To think action, to action thinking —Praxis, Dialogue, and Situated Liberation

Although my engagement with Paulo Freire’s work came after I had devised my methodology and completed my fieldwork, his writings illuminate and sharpen the motivations that had already guided my practice<sup>49</sup>. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) Freire locates the path to liberation in dialogue: “the encounter between [people], mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (Freire, 1970:88). Contained in this formulation are the essential coordinates of his method: dialogue as a tool for liberation; the shared, non-hierarchical exchange between peers; and the anchoring of such exchange in lived reality, oriented toward transforming that reality.

Freire’s method of *conscientização* –cultivating critical awareness of oneself and of the structures shaping one’s life– takes form in workshops designed by and for the oppressed: peasants, workers, and the Global Majority. These gatherings, rooted in participants’ own socio-political contexts, identify and analyse concrete problems (termed ‘themes’ by Freire) before collectively devising strategies for transformation. Crucially, Freire insists that liberation cannot be bestowed from above:

“The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientização*.” (Freire, 1970:67)

Here, agency is returned to those whose humanity has been systematically denied—a principle that resonates with the Fanonian insistence on the colonised as active subjects of their liberation.

This reciprocal movement between reflection and action is what Freire identifies as *praxis*. It addresses one of the central tensions in decolonial theory; the risk of privileging the epistemic at the expense of the material, or vice versa:

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<sup>49</sup> I draw on Paulo Freire and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* because his work resonates closely with the procedural logic underpinning my own practice. I recognise, however, that Freire represents only one strand within the broader and multifaceted field of liberation pedagogy, from which I borrow selectively to ground part of the theoretical orientation of this project. It is important to emphasise that my research should be understood primarily as a curatorial endeavour –one that mobilises multiple theoretical frameworks in order to expand and reconfigure the practice of film curation.

“This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis.” (Freire, 1970:65)

In the Freirean sense, praxis is not a static synthesis of thought and action but an iterative and situated process of transformation. This aligns with Temin’s notion of “worldly anticolonialism”, in which change is effected by exposing and reconfiguring the epistemologies that naturalise colonial power relations (Temin, 2024).

I emphasise that my recognition of dialogue as a methodological cornerstone did not originate in Freire’s writings. My years of film exhibition work –particularly the often-fraught space of the post-screening Q&A– had already attuned me to both the transformative potential and the pitfalls of such encounters. From experience, I knew that discussions on vast subjects such as colonialism were most generative when grounded in the familiar and the personal, and could potentially prove alienating if referred to in abstract, theoretical terms. Freire’s work affirmed these insights, articulating with clarity the political and pedagogical stakes of structuring dialogue in ways that centre participants’ own situated knowledge.

Growing up in the Philippines further reinforced for me the necessity for a collaborative, contextually embedded approach. This project could not be undertaken alone; not simply for practical reasons, but because my own positionality carried inevitable blind spots. A methodology aspiring to decolonial aims demanded that it be shaped with, not merely for, the local context. In this sense, my method mirrors Freire’s refusal of the “banking model of education”<sup>50</sup>; it seeks instead to create a space where knowledge is co-produced, where reflection and action move together, and where film exhibition becomes a practice of collective naming and re-naming of the world (1970:72).

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<sup>50</sup> Coined by Freire, this is a model of education where the student and teacher exist in hierarchical relation to each other, with the teacher as the superior. It maintains teaching and learning as passive processes on both parts. “Education thus becomes an act of depositing”, states Freire, “in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (1970:72). This passivity does not allow for dialogue and communication and is thus not a true path to liberation.

## Conclusion

The decision to work collaboratively emerged from both pragmatic and political considerations. I created a team of local collaborators—not only to assist with logistics but to participate in shaping the theoretical and thematic architecture of the screenings and workshops. This grounded the exercise in the historical, political, and social specificities of each locale.

Key elements of the process included:

- Formation of a local team: Selecting collaborators with relevant skills and strong ties to the venue, community, or thematic area, ensuring the programming process was informed by diverse, situated perspectives.
- Venue selection: Prioritising spaces whose availability, interest, and community positioning would shape and diversify the audience composition.
- Programme creation: Working in close consultation with the team to design juxtapositions between archival and contemporary works that spoke to the political, cultural, and historical contexts of the audience, fostering dialogue not only between films but between films and viewers.
- Workshop formulation: Designing post-screening sessions that anticipated audience dynamics—identifying possible resonances, silences, and resistances—and creating conditions conducive to open, reflexive conversation.

Throughout, our focus remained on dialogue as both the method and the goal: to use the films not simply as aesthetic objects, but as provocations for audiences to interrogate colonial legacies, articulate their own positions, and encounter alternative epistemologies.

By embedding the curatorial process within a Freirean praxis—where reflection and action are inseparable—this project positions film exhibition as a practice of collective naming and re-naming of the world, a dialogic encounter as much concerned with the audience’s capacity to speak as with the films themselves. In doing so, the methodology builds directly on Fanon’s insistence that decolonisation is a disorderly, embodied process of reconstituting the order of the world; Wynter’s call for a culturally

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embedded criticism that reinterprets reality through dialogic engagement; and Smith's imperative for constant reflexivity toward the colonial assumptions that structure research within the academe. These theoretical currents converge with insights drawn from the curatorial field—particularly the critique of conventional, Western-derived programming logics—to produce a method that is at once political, cultural, and psycho-affective. It seeks not merely to represent alternative narratives, but to actively stage encounters between epistemologies, facilitating frictions, negotiations, and possibilities for re-ordering. It is through this process that the moving-image becomes a site where anticolonial theory is not only illustrated but enacted: a situated, collaborative and reflexive praxis of cultural resistance.

## Chapter 3

# To Practice Unlearning

## - A Collective Method for Reframing Colonial Histories

### Overview

This chapter offers a narrative account of the process of organising and facilitating the screening events and post-screening workshops conducted in both the Philippines and Spain. Through this account, I aim to elucidate the methodological approach of this research, while also demonstrating how the theoretical frameworks articulated in the preceding chapters informed the development of this methodology. Elements of the conceptual groundwork laid earlier – such as those concerning anticolonial thought, exhibition practices, and collaborative modes of cultural production– are revisited here in applied form.

The approach described in this chapter was co-developed with my collaborating partners and represents an attempt to engage practically with the question of what constitutes an anticolonial practice within the field of film. How might film exhibition –a practice often structured around the valorisation of the artist and their work— be reoriented toward anticolonial aims? How can such a reconfiguration serve to expose and interrogate the forms of colonial domination and epistemic violence that have been naturalised in the everyday?

Involving a range of decisions, this approach proved dynamic: from collaborative working processes –how teams were formed and how roles and responsibilities were distributed– to the selection and contextualisation of the audiovisual materials curated for each event. Creating dialogic relationships between the moving-image works themselves, and between those works and the audiences who encountered them, remained central to this methodology. This was understood as foundational to the project’s anticolonial orientation.

Here, the comparative and translocal nature of the research is reflected. Each section first addresses a key methodological or thematic aspect as it was manifested in the Philippine context, followed by a discussion of its counterpart in Spain. Each section concludes with a comparative reflection that highlights the insights generated through this binational configuration.

### Laying the groundwork: Teams, Venue & Context

Engagement with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's seminal work in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2021) was instrumental in shaping the methodological orientation of this study, particularly regarding the nature of collaboration and positionality within the research process. Smith critically problematises the hierarchical structures that typify traditional academic research, where the researcher assumes an authoritative position over the study, while the community or research participants are positioned as passive subjects (Smith, 2021b). Smith argues that such a structure perpetuates a colonial dynamic, with the researcher functioning as the primary custodian of knowledge, that reproduces relations of epistemic domination and exploitation (2021b:63). This critique compelled me to rethink the foundational relational dynamics of my own research. I was inspired towards creating horizontal, collaborative engagements with my partners.

It is necessary, however, to consider the specificity of this methodological decision in relation to the distinct contexts Smith addresses and the focus of my own research. Smith's scholarship emerges from her identity as an Indigenous scholar and is primarily concerned with Indigenous communities, whose experiences of colonial dispossession and epistemic violence bear particular historical and political significances. My research, by contrast, interrogates the positionalities of those who inherit complex legacies as both descendants of colonised and colonising histories. While there are shared experiential elements with Indigenous contexts, the distinctiveness of these lived realities, including access to land, resources, and forms of racialised oppression, necessitates a nuanced and context-sensitive approach. Recognising the spectrum of colonial experiences is crucial to avoiding the uncritical transplantation of Indigenous theoretical frameworks onto other contexts and instead demands a calibrated

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understanding of the convergences and divergences in colonial histories and their contemporary manifestations.

Smith's work, nonetheless, provided a vital conceptual lens through which to interrogate the paradoxes inherent in conducting anti colonial research within the institutional confines of academia. Her articulation of the academe as a colonial apparatus resonated with the tensions I encountered in pursuing anticolonial aims through a doctoral project, an endeavour embedded within a colonial epistemic system. I found myself grappling with the question of how to meaningfully engage in anticolonial practices without reproducing the very structures I sought to critique.

In response, Smith's call to “understand what you're trying to decolonise and what you need to do to build a decolonising approach in your work” became a guiding methodological principle (2021a). It necessitates a critical examination of the colonial genealogies that shape the disciplines within which one operates, and a sustained commitment to disrupting and reconfiguring colonial epistemologies. For example, as explored in the first chapter, the archive as a colonial instrument functions to regulate the relationship between the past and present, often inoculating historical narratives against alternative, potentially subversive interpretations, as Achille Mbembe contends. Ariella Azoulay further illustrates how archival practices shape political identities through prescriptive modes of representation, entrenching colonial power relations.

This recognition prompted methodological questions: how might one engage with archival materials –so deeply implicated in colonial modes of knowledge production– without capitulating to their epistemic authority? The resolution lies in a strategic reorientation of the locus of signification. Rather than centring the archive as the primary site of knowledge production, this research seeks to shift focus toward the public sphere as a dynamic and dialogic space. Reorienting the conventional reverence usually afforded the archive, produced a methodology that privileges contestation and community engagement as sites where knowledge is actively co-produced.

Through this methodological stance, this research aspires to enact an anticolonial practice that is both critically reflexive and practically engaged, acknowledging the

limitations and possibilities of working within and against colonial structures of knowledge.

Building upon this critical interrogation of archives and their colonial legacies, it is important to take into account the role of cultural practitioners who intervene in the meanings and uses of archival materials. Stuart Hall highlights the significance of actors beyond archivists –artists, thinkers, and researchers– who actively mediate the archive’s relevance by situating its contents within contemporary contexts (2001). These actors “embed the work itself in a network of associative meanings and interpretations” through the complex interplay of their respective practices, social relations and their contexts (Hall, 2001:91). These artefacts are brought into a dialogic relation to the present through the expertise and lived relation of the people who engage with the work. Thus, the contemporary relevance of these moving-image works emerge not from the artefacts alone, but from the interpretive, social processes enacted by those who engage with them.

### *‘You’re only as good as your people.’ – Introducing my collaborating partners*

In the interest of lending the reader an understanding of the context this project embedded the artefacts in, I include a description of the people I had the great pleasure of working with. In Baguio city, Philippines, my collaborative ambitions with this project were realised with the participation of:

- **Mervine Aquino**, a filmmaker based in Baguio whose body of work comprises experimental documentaries that engage critically with issues of land and spatial politics. His practice is marked by a strong political commitment, extending beyond cinema into social advocacy. Aquino is a member of the May Day collective, a Manila-based labour-rights advocacy group, comprised of film practitioners. For this project, Merv collaborated with me in the planning and execution of the documentation strategy for the session. His experience working in the sensitive spaces of political filmmaking proved essential in determining how best to record the workshop without disrupting its participatory flow.

Together, we devised a filming setup structured around the comfort of participants, while still capturing the dynamics of the conversation and the affective textures of the room. Our discussions reflected a shared commitment to ensuring that the act of filming itself would not intrude on the atmosphere of the session.

- **Summer Bastian**, also a Baguio-based filmmaker, works with a local NGO on research initiatives and educational campaigns aimed at raising awareness among the Igorot (Cordilleran indigenous) population regarding political issues relevant to them. Her filmmaking focuses on the lived experiences of the Igorot peoples, drawing upon her own positionality as a self-described ‘displaced Igorot’ from Bontoc, Mountain Province. Summer provided key support and advice in planning both the logistical aspects of the screenings and in discussing the cultural nuances relevant to developing this project.
- **Faye Olayo** is a writer, poet, and community organiser. As a founding member of Northern Luzon Pride –Baguio’s queer advocacy organisation– she has been instrumental in organising the city’s queer events over the last four years. Their events cultivate spaces of safety, education, and celebration for the local LGBTQ+ community. Through her literary work, Olayo interrogates issues surrounding the body and its politicisation. Faye’s fluency in the local languages (English, Tagalog, Ilocano and Kankana-ey) and her general recognisability amongst Baguio’s youth due to her work in local organising, made her the perfect mediator for these sessions.

These people comprised my Baguio team. We collaborated on organising the preparatory screenings, and the two screenings and post screening workshops that comprise this study, at the Balanghai ni Ikeng Independent Cinema, located in the Ilikha Artists’ Wateringhole in Baguio City, Philippines.

A point of critical reflection arose at this stage of the project regarding the ethical dimensions of my commitment to non-hierarchical, collaborative modes of working. I

encountered the challenge of negotiating equitable rates of pay across contexts marked by stark material disparities, between collaborators based in the Global South and those in the Global North.

While my intention had been to cultivate a sense of co-authorship in the project, I quickly recognised that such ideals required concrete material grounding –particularly when collaboration was also a form of employment. Fair compensation needed to avoid reproducing structural inequalities through disparate rates of pay.

To address this, I initiated transparent discussions with each collaborator regarding appropriate remuneration. Together, we arrived at a rate that acknowledged their contributions while maintaining parity across geographical contexts. We established a standard respectful of local economic conditions but also consistent, ensuring that collaborators in Europe were not compensated more generously than those in the Philippines for work of comparable scope and nature. This was integral to my broader ethical commitments, as it underscores the necessity of answering political commitments with material practice.

In Spain, the events were split across two different regions and venues: in Artium, Museum of Contemporary Art in the city of Vitoria-Gasteiz in the Basque Country, the other at NUMAX Co-operative cinema, in the city of Santiago de Compostela, in Galicia.

At Artium Museum of Contemporary Art, I had the pleasure of working with:

- **Arantza Santesteban Pérez** is a filmmaker, curator, and scholar whose work lies at the intersection of political engagement, historical memory, and artistic intervention. At the time of our collaboration, she was the coordinator of public programmes at Artium Museum. I came to know Arantza's work through her film *918 Gau* (2022) (918 Nights, 2022). The film's approach to issues on memory and state repression signalled to me an intuitive alignment with the critical ambitions of my project. Moreover, Arantza's singular perspective is shaped by her direct involvement in both grassroots activism and institutional politics within the

Basque Country. Her capacity to mediate between macro-political structures and the affective, interpersonal dimensions of political subjectivity proved invaluable in shaping our approach to the session in Artium.

- **Catalina Lozano Moreno**, chief curator at Artium Museum, is an art historian and researcher whose curatorial practice is grounded in critical pedagogies and transnational dialogue. Prior to her appointment at Artium, Catalina worked extensively as an independent curator across a range of institutions in Europe and Latin America. Her arrival at Artium signalled a reorientation toward more socially engaged programming, with an emphasis on situating contemporary art within broader cultural and historical discourses specific to the region. Originally from Colombia, Catalina responded with great openness to the anticolonial objectives of this project. She recognised the urgency of advancing critical reflection on colonial legacies within the Basque context. Her intellectual generosity and commitment to decolonial praxis were instrumental in facilitating institutional support for the project.
- **Ricardo del Conde** is a filmmaker, producer, and artist whose practice traverses the political and the poetic. Originally from Mexico, he has lived and worked in the Basque Country for over a decade. Ricardo's work ranges from documentary to experimental film. His early filmic engagements documented the work of grassroots and NGOs in Mexico, while his current project examines the largest squatted community in Europe, located on the periphery of Vitoria-Gasteiz. His positionality as a long-term resident and politically engaged artist within the Basque Country brought his situated perspective to our discussions, especially regarding questions of displacement, autonomy, and resistance.

At NUMAX cinema and distribution cooperative, I collaborated with:

- **Xan Gómez Viñas** is a film programmer and staff member at NUMAX, where he curates the cinema's audiovisual programming. His scholarly and curatorial work is grounded in a sustained engagement with Galician film history, with a particular focus on the militant cinema of the 1970s. Xan's research has

contributed to reviving and reframing Galician cinematic output from the final years of Franco's dictatorship. He has been a member of the *Compostela Cineclube*, one of the region's key independent film exhibition platforms. As my primary collaborator and point of contact at NUMAX, Xan played an instrumental role in shaping the contours of the event. Our collaboration was marked by open and thoughtful exchanges, with Xan offering both logistical support and critical insight into the particularities of the Galician context.

- **Marta Pérez Pereiro** is a professor in Department of Communication Sciences at the University of Santiago de Compostela, where she holds a permanent teaching position in the field of audio-visual communication and advertising. Her research engages film theory and feminist critique bringing these into conversation with broader questions of cultural production, visibility, and marginality. Her sensitivity to questions of language, representation, and regional identity made her an astute and generous interlocutor for our session at NUMAX, where she served as mediator and facilitated dialogue with the audience.
- **Juan Meseguer** is a documentary filmmaker and freelance cinematographer. His filmography reflects a sustained interest in issues of collective memory, marginalised communities, and structural inequality. They have been featured at a range of international festivals, including the Malaga Film Festival and Locarno, among others.

I include these collaborator profiles to elucidate how their personal trajectories and professional practices, as well as their place-based affiliations informed the development of the methodological framework of this research. A guiding principle of this project's design was the prioritisation of locally embedded knowledge. In seeking collaborators, I deliberately focused on individuals whose creative and political engagements were situated within, and responsive to, the socio-cultural dynamics of the region. The emphasis on the local was not merely practical. It was epistemological, reflecting a commitment to collaborative, context-sensitive forms of knowledge production.

Engaging with these practitioners was a privilege as well as a methodological asset. Their insights, networks, and advocacy work enriched the project at multiple levels. Through their involvement, I gained access to a wider network of regional artists, students, and cultural workers—an important resource for identifying a relevant audience for the screening programme and for assessing the cultural and political relevance of its content. These collaborations extended beyond logistical support; they functioned as dialogic encounters that shaped the research process itself, contributing to the reflexive and situated nature of the project’s methodological orientation.

To further elucidate the methodological framework of this study –and to highlight the relationship between the collaborators, the geographical context, and the objectives of this study– it is necessary to provide a detailed account of the venues that hosted this project’s events. These spaces functioned as active sites of meaning-making, contributing materially and symbolically to the resulting discussions of the workshops.

### Space & Place: Our Venues and Locations

#### A Ship Full of Dreams – *Balanghai ni Ikeng* Independent cinema, Baguio City, Philippines.

Nestled in the heart of Baguio City, along Session Road is *Ili-likha Artists’ Watering Hole*, a community-focused art space. Envisioned as a continuously evolving project, it brings together local artists, craft-makers, and food vendors in an effort to cultivate spaces for creative expression and engagement. The space functions not only as a commercial venue but also as a locus for artistic experimentation and reflection.

Part of this complex is *Balanghai ni Ikeng* (Ikeng’s Galleon) Independent Cinema, a small screening venue that is both architecturally striking and symbolically resonant. The cinema takes its name from *Ikeng*, a Filipinised version of Enrique de Malacca –the Malay slave of Ferdinand Magellan– who, in alternative historical accounts, is believed to have been the first person to circumnavigate the globe. This re-framing of history underpins the space’s conceptual foundation. Designed by the acclaimed Baguio artist and filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik, the cinema takes the form of a wooden galleon, a

symbolic referent to both the country's colonial past and cinema's capacity as a vessel. Adorned with intricate carvings of human figures, spirits, and other fantastical creations, *Balanghai ni Ikeng* was created in collaboration with the local artisans who have long contributed to Tahimik's projects. The cinema holds an almost palpable sense of reverence. A quietness reminiscent of sacred spaces, though without the institutional weight or rigidity. It is a place that invites presence and imagination.

Although *Balanghai ni Ikeng* has existed since before the COVID-19 pandemic, it has remained largely dormant. Occasional screenings have been held, but for the most part, the space has served more as a visual curiosity –a photogenic backdrop for visitors to *Ili-likha* posting on social media– than as an active cultural venue. This was the context in which I encountered the cinema. Having spent the past several years in Europe, I had followed its development online and heard about the difficulties faced in sustaining a consistent programme of events or screenings.

When I began the search for a venue to host the screenings and workshops central to this research, *Balanghai ni Ikeng* immediately presented itself as both a promising and complicated option. Its central location and availability made it a practical choice. However, its availability was telling of its current marginal status within Baguio's cultural landscape. What emerged was not only a logistical question, but a curatorial and methodological one. Could this under-used space be activated through this project in ways that would resonate with local audiences?

Choosing *Balanghai ni Ikeng* thus became part of the broader methodology of this research: not simply as a venue, but as a site whose potential significance could be co-produced with others. Engaging the space meant acknowledging its layered history and symbolic charge, while also contributing –however provisionally– to a conversation about its future role in the city's cultural ecology.

### Artium Museum of Contemporary Art, Vitoria-Gasteiz, The Basque Country, Spain.

Artium Museum strikes an imposing presence in the urban landscape of Vitoria-Gasteiz, the capital of the Basque Country. Its monolithic, avant-garde architecture makes it a prominent cultural landmark in the region and signals the institution's commitment to exhibiting contemporary art.

In my search for potential venues to host the screenings and workshops in Spain, I was guided by two interrelated criteria: the type of audience I wished to engage, and the mediator who could make such meaningful engagement possible. These two factors – the audience and the interlocutor– were inextricably linked, each shaping the potential of the other. Being familiar with her work and having seen her film, I sought out Arantza specifically because I felt the natural affinity between the inflections of her work and this study's anticolonial intentions. Moreover, her involvement in various politically minded organisations, at both a grass-roots and regional level, indicated her embeddedness in the Basque political and cultural landscape.

At the time of our correspondence, Arantza had accepted a new role as coordinator of public programmes at Artium. Upon learning about the aims of this study, she brought it to the attention of the museum's head curator, Catalina Lozano. Both expressed strong interest in its anticolonial aims, recognising the urgency of the intervention. In particular, they acknowledged the paucity of critical discourse around the Basque Country's historical and cultural entanglement with Spanish colonialism—an absence the project sought to begin addressing.

In taking on the project, both Arantza and Catalina noted that this would constitute a novel undertaking for the museum. While Artium had hosted film screenings in the past, it had not previously facilitated workshops organised around an anticolonial framework or structured with explicit pedagogical aims. As such, there was an understandable degree of uncertainty regarding the composition and receptivity of the prospective audience. One shared concern was whether the museum would be able to draw participants who were not only interested in the topic but also willing to engage with it critically and reflectively in a dialogic setting.

### NUMAX Independent Cinema and Distribution Cooperative, Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Spain.

Santiago de Compostela, the capital of Galicia, is perhaps best known for its historical and religious significance as the destination of the Camino de Santiago, a pilgrimage that traverses national borders and spiritual landscapes alike. Located within the contours of this tranquil, medieval city lies NUMAX, a co-operative cinema and distribution company. Over the course of its relatively short existence<sup>51</sup>, NUMAX has carved out a distinct cultural presence. In many ways, it has become a destination in its own right, what some cineastes might describe as a pilgrimage site for film enthusiasts across the Iberian Peninsula.

Established in 2014, NUMAX emerged as a collaborative initiative among film programmers, cultural workers, and media practitioners from the region. As articulated on their website, the cooperative was founded in order to “do together what [we] were already doing separately” (NUMAX, 2014). This ethos of shared labour and collective vision is reflected in the project’s structural foundations: NUMAX operates as a co-operative, a model deeply rooted in Galicia’s long-standing traditions of co-operative enterprise. Against the challenging backdrop of contemporary film distribution and exhibition, NUMAX has become a notable example of how alternative, non-commercial models of cultural production can gain both stability and acclaim.

NUMAX’s activities are diverse yet cohesive. Alongside distributing a range of both domestic and international titles, the cooperative oversees its own programming, balancing commercial cinema with independent and art-house works. In addition, the space houses a bookshop with a notable focus on the moving-image and critical film publications. Their bookshop is a beloved hub for their intellectually engaged, cinephilic community.

My own introduction to NUMAX occurred during my time as a postgraduate student at the Elias Querejeta Zine Eskola (EQZE), where one of NUMAX’s members delivered a guest lecture. The presentation provided not only an overview of the co-operative’s aims and operational structure, but also an insight into the cultural and political interests

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<sup>51</sup>NUMAX celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2024.

that underpin its work. Thus, when I began considering potential venues for a second round of screenings in Spain –and in this case, found myself without a clearly identifiable local interlocutor– NUMAX surfaced in my mind as a site that could offer both contextual relevance and the possibility of engaging a receptive audience. Its embeddedness in the local cultural infrastructure coupled with its pedagogical ethos, made it a compelling choice for furthering the dialogic ambitions of this research.

### Activating the space

The process of activating the selected venues –*Balanghai ni Ikeng* in Baguio, Artium Museum in Vitoria-Gasteiz, and NUMAX in Santiago de Compostela– was not uniform. Together with my collaborating partners, I sought to maximise the existing strengths and networks of each space, while remaining responsive to the particular challenges that each context presented. This required a flexible yet situated methodology, one attentive to both institutional dynamics and local audience behaviours.

In Baguio, at *Balanghai ni Ikeng*, the activation strategy began with a series of preliminary events that I termed "warm-up screenings"<sup>52</sup>. These were intended to draw attention to the cinema—largely dormant since its creation—and to reintroduce it as a viable and vibrant space for film culture among local visitors, students, artists, and cultural workers.

The 'warm-up' programme consisted of four weekly screenings scheduled across the month. These events were un-ticketed and intentionally informal in order to encourage participation. While I initially held reservations about audience turnout, I was reassured by *Ili-likha's* manager, Val Edralin, who described a recurring pattern in attendees of

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<sup>52</sup> These screenings were programmed under the banner of *Filikino*, a film curation initiative I founded in London in 2016, which has since developed into an integral aspect of my broader film practice. *Filikino's* curatorial focus has consistently centred on Philippine cinema in its many forms, initially as a response to the limited visibility of such works in the UK and later in Spain, where I pursued my postgraduate studies.

Paradoxically, despite the geographical proximity of the screenings to the films' national origin, the rationale for *Filikino* remained compelling. In the Philippine context, cinema exhibition is increasingly dominated by corporate mall chains whose programming favours high-grossing commercial fare, predominantly either U.S. blockbusters or mainstream Manila-produced titles. Independent micro-cinemas—many of which had emerged from grassroots partnerships among local film practitioners—suffered significantly during the pandemic, with a large number closing permanently. In this environment, opportunities for diverse cinematic experiences have diminished, further entrenching a reductive view of cinema as a commercial rather than cultural practice. Against this backdrop, *Filikino's* intervention aimed not only to screen films but to reintroduce film viewing as an occasion for reflection and dialogue.

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artistic events at the venue of being “hungry for different forms of film”. Her observations proved accurate. Each of the warm-up screenings attracted a consistent and diverse audience composed of students, artists, and educators. What became immediately apparent was that spectators were not only willing to engage with the films themselves but were also eager to discuss them. From the very first screening, audiences lingered after the credits rolled –waiting, it seemed, for the opportunity to converse.

Beyond raising awareness about *Balanghai ni Ikeng*, these warm-up screenings served multiple purposes. They familiarised the local community with this cultural venue and provided critical insights into audience behaviour expectations –knowledge that would prove invaluable in shaping the main program. The events also offered a practical opportunity to assemble and test a working team, helping to build trust, distribute responsibilities, and clarify roles in preparation for the for the more intensive PhD-related screenings and workshops to come.

The activation strategies employed for the Spanish venues –Artium in Vitoria-Gasteiz and NUMAX in Santiago de Compostela– unfolded differently from the approach employed in Baguio City. Both Artium and NUMAX were established cultural institutions with developed programming structures and dedicated audiences at the time of our collaboration. As such, the process of collaboration was necessarily embedded within their existing operational frameworks, timelines, and institutional logics. While the aims of this research were met with enthusiasm and support by my collaborators, their integration into these venues required careful negotiation –not only in terms of scheduling but also in positioning the project within these spaces already recognised publicly as cultural authorities. Our first concern was how to ensure an audience willing to engage in the study’s reflexive positioning on colonial history and comfortable with being filmed.

At Artium, both Arantza and Catalina acknowledged that this initiative marked a departure from the museum’s regular programming. Although Artium had hosted film screenings in the past, it had not previously engaged in events with a thematic and pedagogical structure explicitly grounded in anticolonial discourse. This novelty raised several concerns, particularly regarding audience composition. There was uncertainty

as to who might attend and whether they would be open to participating in reflective dialogue—especially given that the sessions included filmed discussions. To address this, Arantza proposed inviting selected individuals from within the Basque artistic, academic, and activist communities—people already engaged in critical discourse and with experience in publicly voicing their opinions (and having them recorded).

A further motivation for the selective curatorial approach at Artium related to the complex political and historical terrain of the Basque Country itself—particularly its fraught relationship to the language and framing of colonial history<sup>53</sup>. Arantza expressed concern that the event could inadvertently attract individuals affiliated with the Basque nationalist far-right, for whom the concept of colonialism is often reinterpreted through the lens of regional oppression by the Spanish state. While this demographic might arguably present an opportunity for critical confrontation, Arantza advised caution. In her view, the presence of such participants risked diverting the conversation toward ideologically entrenched positions, potentially undermining the reflective and dialogic atmosphere we sought to cultivate. Our objective was to create a space for open, personal engagements with the legacies and implications of coloniality. As such a certain degree of intentionality in the selection of participants would be necessary. Her suggestion to extend targeted invitations to artists, scholars, and activists familiar with these questions was thus both a political and methodological choice—one that foregrounded the conditions required for meaningful exchange.

A different set of challenges emerged in relation to the screening and workshop at NUMAX. Xan expressed reservations early in the planning process regarding audience turnout. The thematic focus of the event—the interrogation of Spanish colonial history in the Philippines—represented a significant departure from NUMAX’s usual programming. Although he agreed on the urgency and relevance of the topic, Xan noted that such subject matter had rarely, if ever, been addressed in the cinema’s past events. The additional layer of documentation—the filming of the post-screening discussion—added another level of complexity. Xan characterised NUMAX’s audience as shy and was not certain they would be willing to be filmed. Given these conditions, Xan was unable to

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<sup>53</sup> I discuss this in more detail in the following section, *Audiences*.

guarantee that the event would attract an audience comparable to their typical programming, despite NUMAX's well-established and loyal following.

This issue of guaranteeing an audience, participants for our exercise, was one shared across all iterations of this event in both Spain and the Philippines. I relied on my local contacts to assist me in identifying which demographic of people we should aim to contact for our purposes and how best to get in touch with them. In Baguio City, we decided to target the local population of higher-education students. Summer pinpointed several local universities and their deans of studies. Together we visited the campuses to put up posters and to meet with faculty to discuss the project and aims of the exercise. Similarly, I relied on the connections of my local interlocutors in Spain: Arantza drew on her extensive contacts within the artistic, academic and activist circles in the Basque Country. Xan advised we target the local universities in Santiago and to tap NUMAX's established followers via their mailing list. In all three locations, we sent letters of invitation, introducing myself, the aims of the project and disclosing that the sessions were to be filmed. The letters also included the programme and an outline of the workshop. I include samples of these in the Appendix, to illustrate the programme for each screening and the framing of each session. I will discuss these in detail in the following section, after elucidating a little on the composition of our respective audiences.

## Audiences

### Baguio City, Philippines

The following paragraphs detail a contextual overview of Baguio City. This is crucial for understanding the socio-cultural environment in which the events at *Balanghais Ni Ikeng* cinema were staged, the demographic composition of their audiences and how these inform audience responses to the films.

Baguio City, situated in the Cordillera Mountain range of northern Luzon, functions as the metropolitan and economic centre of this highland region. Established in 1909 during the early years of American colonial rule, Baguio was conceived as a colonial hill station –part of a broader imperial strategy common across the British and American

empires (Reed, 1976). Its design mirrored other elevated enclaves of leisure, intended to serve colonial administrators and military personnel by offering respite from the tropical heat of the lowlands (Reed, 1976). For much of the 20th century, the city was also home to the United States air base at Camp John Hay, a forested military reserve which simultaneously operated as a private recreational site for U.S. personnel—a potent reminder of the city’s embeddedness in imperial infrastructures.

Since its foundation, Baguio has retained a central role in the socio-economic life of the Cordilleras. Historically, it functioned as a node connecting the highland trade routes of northern Luzon with commercial and political networks anchored in the southern lowlands, specifically those radiating outward from Metro Manila. From the early 1990s onwards, the city further consolidated its identity as a domestic tourist destination, branding itself as the “summer capital of the Philippines” (Subido, 2009). As Grace T. Subido notes, contemporary narratives of Baguio as a sight of leisure and rejuvenation are in-keeping with earlier colonial imaginaries that frame the city as an exotic highland retreat, referring to motifs such as pine forests, strawberries (introduced through US forestry projects), and cold temperatures (2009). This enduring appeal is not merely aesthetic; it constitutes a nostalgia that subtly reinforces a colonial worldview.

The layered histories of imperial planning, regional trade, and tourism have produced Baguio’s contemporary social fabric. Today, the city is home to diverse populations, including members of the various indigenous groups of the Cordilleras (collectively referred to as Igorot), internal migrants from other Philippine regions, and international students from across Southeast Asia. It is also a major educational hub, with several universities drawing students from across the archipelago and beyond. English is widely spoken, a legacy of the American colonial education system, while Tagalog and Ilocano operate as lingua franca alongside the indigenous languages spoken by Igorot communities. The city’s multilingual and multicultural makeup lends it a distinct cosmopolitanism, one grounded in a complex colonial past.

Baguio is also widely recognised as a centre for artistic production. Since the 1980s, it has cultivated a reputation as a haven for artists, largely attributed to the emergence of the Baguio Arts Guild (BAG), a collective of local artists seeking to decentralise cultural production away from Metro Manila (De Guia *et al.*, 2022). This movement laid the

groundwork for what would become a thriving independent art scene, a trajectory formally acknowledged with the city's designation as a UNESCO Creative City in 2017 (Dumlao, 2017). Baguio City's long-standing identity as a city committed to artistic independence and cultural expression thus offered an apt setting for the workshops and screenings of this research.

Much of the audience at the Baguio screenings were students from the local universities within Baguio City but also from La Trinidad, a neighbouring city and the provincial capital. Invitations were extended to several local universities, resulting in a majority-student audience, supplemented by faculty members and public walk-ins. Based on participants' verbal introductions, it became evident that students represented a broad spectrum of academic disciplines –including Geography, Mass Communications, History, and Agriculture. While most attendees were Filipino, there was also visible diversity in terms of ethnicity and nationality: participants included both Indigenous students from the Cordilleras and Filipinos from other regions, as well as students from ASEAN countries present through academic exchange programmes. The sessions were thus characterised by a heterogeneous audience whose varied positionalities enriched the dialogic aims of the project.

### Artium, Basque Country and NUMAX, Galicia, Spain.

The audience at Artium presented a markedly different context. As noted earlier, a degree of curatorial decision-making was required in shaping its composition, given the Basque Country's particular political history of resistance to the Spanish state and the ways in which local understandings of colonialism are filtered through this lens. As Arantza explained in our preparatory correspondence:

“The idea that The Basque Country is a nation denied by the Spanish state, means that the Basque identity has been built in opposition to the Spanish one and in defence of an own and differentiated state. Therefore, in many of the positions of Basque independentism, the category ‘colonisation’ has been used historically to speak of the domination of the Spanish state (legislatively, symbolically, territorially) with respect to the Basque Country. This is important

to know, since there have been hardly any theorisations that problematise colonialism in its historical condition and the binomial ‘Spain = colonial state’ has been reinforced, but always in reference to the Basque Country.” (Santesteban, 2024)

In discussing the Basque far-right appropriations of the term, she added:

“In the Basque context EVERYTHING is to be done regarding a proper reading of the idea of colonialism. [] This scarcity of critical reflection [] makes its use here [in this project] confusing. In recent months perhaps the most important figure that can symbolise what I am saying is Juan Sebastian Elkano, who as you know was a coloniser from Gipuzkoa. Last year his anniversary was commemorated and there was some ‘controversy’ in the context of Basque culture. There are people in the Basque sphere who say that the image of Elkano should be disputed (contrary to what the oppressive Spaniards say) and vindicate his adventurous character. There are several people from the field of Basque culture who claim this<sup>54</sup>.” (Santesteban, 2024)

Within this context, the project faced the challenge of situating colonialism as a historical and conceptual category that had been not only under-theorised but also strategically avoided. At the time of this project’s entry into Artium, the quincentennial of Magellan’s circumnavigation had recently been celebrated, with the Basque Country elevating Elkano as a symbol of Basque ingenuity and maritime prowess<sup>55</sup>. Substantial

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<sup>54</sup> For an example of a prominent voice in Basque revisionist history see Ekai Txapartegi’s essay *Elkanotar Juan Sebastian, Pizkundeko humanista utopikoa?: Juan Sebastian of Elkano: An utopian humanist of the Renaissance?* (Txapartegi, 2020). Another example would be the highly disputed exhibition about Basque medieval transperson and explorer Catalina de Erauso (a project supported by prominent trans academic Paul B. Preciado) presented in this article: *The surprising case of Catalina de Erauso: The first trans portrait in history finds its voice 400 years later* (López, 2022). For more critical views within Basque political circles on this revisionist history see Axier Lopez’ article *Juan Sebastián Elkano: ¿Qué tenemos que celebrar? ¿qué quieren esconder?/ What have we got to celebrate? What have they got to hide?* (Lopez, 2018) & the *Feminist Encounters of 2018* (The V Feminist Conference of Euskal Herria held in Durango in 2020), a video documenting the roundtable discussion of feminist circles in the Basque Country (Salda Badago Pilpilean, 2020). The issue of Basque historical complicity in the Spanish colonial project was brought up notably by Basque members of Latin American and African origin.

<sup>55</sup> See the Introduction of this dissertation, where this was first discussed.

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state funding<sup>56</sup> had been directed toward cultural and research initiatives that reinforced this revisionist narrative, lending further sensitivity to the subject.

This climate compelled Arantza, Catalina and I to reflect carefully on how to compose the audience. We recognised both the risks and the potential of including participants whose perspectives diverged from the orientation of this project. Rather than constructing an echo chamber of like-minded voices, our selective invitations aimed to create a space of open and critical debate, where ideological difference could be productively negotiated, rather than a limiting factor. The eventual composition of the audience thus emerged through a process of careful curatorial calibration –shaped both by institutional constraints and by our commitment to fostering a space of thoughtful, situated engagement.

It was within this complex landscape of contested narratives surrounding Basque involvement in colonial history –and amidst a broader political climate often characterised by strongly articulated discourses of Basque resistance– that the audience for the Artium session was assembled. Informed by Arantza’s experience in the Basque political scene, participants were carefully invited from across a spectrum of disciplines, including the visual arts, film, literature, academic research, and grassroots activism. The group comprised individuals with diverse positionalities: both Basque nationals and Latin American residents who had been living and working in the Basque Country for several years.

In contrast to the earlier sessions held in the Philippines –wherein many participants’ understandings of colonialism were grounded in their direct or inherited lived experience– this particular audience was composed of individuals whose experiences of colonality were primarily mediated through the discursive tools of scholarship, either through their research, creative practice or activism. The resulting discussions reflected this difference, foregrounding analytical approaches and artistic interpretations of

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<sup>56</sup> See *Ayudas para la realización de proyectos vinculados a la conmemoración del V Centenario de la expedición de la primera vuelta al mundo de Fernando de Magallanes y Juan Sebastián Elcano* (Anon., 2022) and *200.000 euros en ayudas para proyectos vinculados al V Centenario* (200.000 euros en ayudas para proyectos vinculados al V Centenario, 2022) on the official Quincentennial website *VCentenario*.

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colonial histories and their afterlives, rather than the more personal, affective reflections that characterised those of the Philippine workshops.

In contrast to the other workshops, the audience at NUMAX was the least deliberately curated. Participants were drawn primarily through public calls disseminated via local universities and the NUMAX mailing list. As a result, the audience consisted predominantly of Galicians: university students, academics, and regular attendees of the cinema's programming.

The particularities of Spain's regional identities –and the political and cultural tensions that sustain their opposition to a dominant, Madrid-centred 'Spanishness'– surfaced once again during this leg of the project. Galician identity has long been mediated through romanticised and paternalistic tropes of rurality, often associated with backwardness, passivity, and excessive sentimentality (Miguélez-Carballeira, 2014:5). These traits are implicitly gendered: rural softness and sentimentality are constructed in contrast to the supposed 'masculine' character of the Spanish national identity (Miguélez-Carballeira, 2014:6). Galicia is thus positioned as both internally peripheral and culturally subordinate to the Spanish nation-state, a result of this discursive emasculation.

Unlike their northern regional counterparts of the Basque Country and Catalunya, Galicia has historically lacked a strong industrial base and a locally embedded bourgeoisie capable of driving economic and cultural self-determination (Miguélez-Carballeira, 2014:2). As scholar Helena Miguélez-Carballeira observes, the "absence of local bourgeoisie in Galicia invested in the country's economic progress" has contributed to its "most profoundly mediated" position within the "dynamics of political, economic, and cultural inequities over the centuries" (Miguélez-Carballeira, 2014:2). These structural conditions have left a lasting imprint on how Galician identity is constructed both internally and externally, often through stereotypes connoting rural simplicity and a propensity to over-emotionality.

As was explained to me by my Galician collaborators Xan and Marta, these historical stereotypes continue to shape both Spanish perceptions of Galicians and Galician's

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own relationship to Spanish national identity and history. Much like the Basques, Galicians have been historically positioned as subaltern to a Madrid-centred Spanish identity, a position that “arises from the colonial setting of Spanish-Galician relations” (Miguélez-Carballeira, 2014:3). This positionality significantly conditioned how the workshop’s central aims –connecting Spain’s colonial past in the Philippines to contemporary understandings of coloniality– were received.

From a Galician perspective, the region was historically marginalised from Spanish colonialism, as it did not enjoy its direct benefits, akin to its northern counterparts. Its perceived historical peripheral participation –if not exclusion–tempered our attempts at constructing a programme and workshop that could meaningfully connect the Galician audiences to the history and afterlives of Spanish-Philippine colonial relations. As evidenced by the session at NUMAX, narratives of empire do not resonate equally across Spanish regions, highlighting the importance of regional positionality in shaping the reception of colonial histories.

## Programmes & Workshops

As part of a conscious effort to de-centre my own authority as the principal researcher and to foster more horizontal modes of collaboration, I made a decision to open up the project's curatorial and methodological direction to the wider team. This involved sharing the full extent of the materials I had gathered during the earlier phases of archival research: preliminary longlists of films, screening copies, and an initial draft of the proposed programme. I was careful to emphasise that this draft was provisional rather than prescriptive; its purpose was not to dictate content, but rather to offer a concrete point of departure for collective reflection. It was intended to articulate the curatorial logic underpinning the project's proposed juxtapositions and to provoke critical engagement with the direction the screenings might take.

In inviting my collaborators to expand upon these lists, I sought to cultivate a shared curatorial process; one attentive to local knowledge, differences in viewing cultures, and the ethical imperatives of anticolonial research. As we engaged with the materials, a set of shared priorities emerged in relation to the screenings, which helped shape our subsequent decisions<sup>57</sup>:

- **Programme Content:** Drawing from the archival long-lists, we selected films based on thematic relevance and with careful attention to form. We discussed how these details –its pacing, aesthetic strategies, or use of cinematic language– might mediate or hinder our audience's engagement with its content. We were particularly alert to the risk of alienating audiences through overly experimental or unfamiliar filmic forms, given the specificity of local film culture and viewing habits. Here we negotiated one of the objectives of this project: to propose a dialectic between the researched titles that could be read through and against the local context. What conversations could be proposed through our programme that would resonate with what we understood (informed by the

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<sup>57</sup> The materials produced for the events –invites for each screening, the programme description and schedule, and event posters are presented in the Appendix p. 143. These have been included to help illustrate the dialectics we were proposing through our programming and framing of each screening for each respective audience. I expand on these more in the following chapters.

situated knowledge of my collaborators) to be the local experience of coloniality?

- **Structure and Timing:** Practical considerations also informed our decisions regarding the length and sequence of each programme. We asked: what time of day and week would maximise accessibility and attendance? What duration would sustain viewer attention through the screenings and leave space—both cognitively and emotionally—for meaningful participation in the post-screening workshops? We were intent on avoiding exhaustion, recognising that prolonged screenings might diminish the willingness or ability of participants to contribute actively to subsequent discussions.
- **Workshop Design:** Central to the workshop design was the ambition to create a space that was simultaneously generative and non-coercive. We aimed to encourage open, critical reflection while avoiding overly structured formats that might inhibit spontaneous dialogue. Drawing on Smith’s challenge, we asked ourselves, “How do [we] create a context in which our people will talk and are relaxed in the mostly natural way?” (2021a). This question guided our design in creating an environment in which participants felt comfortable voicing their thoughts, especially when navigating complex or potentially sensitive material. Answering to this was the key decision to have a local mediator for the sessions. This was partly a practical decision (as I intended to man one of the cameras) but more importantly because we wanted to allow for conversation to take place in the language most comfortable for our audience. The mediator in each instance was therefore fluent in the local languages and familiar to the local community. It was through this careful design that another of this project’s objectives was met: of disrupting and dislocating reverence from the archives to the public space, to lived experience. Here, pathways to the epistemological interests of this project —of uncovering attitudes to coloniality as mediated through these moving-image pieces— were collectively theorised and implemented.
- **Filming and Spatial Set-Up:** Finally, the logistics of documenting these sessions required careful ethical and aesthetic consideration. Since part of our objective was to create a space that felt informal and dialogic rather than surveilled, we

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discussed how best to position the recording equipment so as to minimise its intrusiveness. The spatial arrangement was thus tailored not only for visual clarity but to support the psychological openness of the discussions. The filming set-ups were decided together with my local team and cameraperson. All documentation was disclosed to our participants beforehand and release forms were distributed to and signed by our participants.

## Account of the screenings and workshop structure: Baguio City, Philippines.

Our decision to present four short films across two weekend sessions emerged as a strategic curatorial choice, both in terms of content and structure. Dividing the programme into two pairs allowed each screening to remain under one hour in duration, leaving ample space within a 90-minute session to transition into the post-screening discussions. This timing was logistically beneficial—not only for the technical crew responsible for lighting, sound, and camera work, but also for our intended audience: primarily students from local universities. In anticipation of these sessions, we contacted the relevant academic institutions in advance, requesting their assistance in publicising the events to both faculty and student bodies. This outreach was intended to ensure a level of engagement that was both targeted and contextually rooted.

The first session was organised thematically, pairing two documentary films that each engaged with the figure of the national hero<sup>58</sup>. One was set in Manila, the other in Madrid. Despite their differing formal approaches, both films presented the opportunity to examine the socio-political construction of heroism. Central to our rationale for selecting this theme was the inclusion of the figure of José Rizal, the Philippines' most well-known national hero. His presence offered a culturally recognisable point of reference from which participants could begin to explore broader questions: What defines a hero? Who confers such status? To what political or ideological ends? These were questions that we hoped would not only resonate across cultural contexts but also remain accessible to participants unfamiliar with academic discourse on representation or historiography. Given the prevalence of heroic archetypes – particularly of the 'strongman' variety – in Philippine popular and political culture, we felt that this topic could serve as an invitation into more critical modes of reflection, without alienating or provoking defensiveness. Its perceived neutrality, or at least its cultural familiarity, offered a productive entry point for dialogue.

The second session, however, posed more complex curatorial challenges. Among the archival materials I had encountered during my research was a collection of home

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<sup>58</sup> In this context, pertaining to historical figures used by the state to articulate ideas of nationhood and exemplary acts of loyalty towards national identity.

movies from the Ynchausti family<sup>59</sup>, a prominent Basque-Filipino mercantile clan domiciled in the Philippines at the turn of the 19th century. These films, shot by Manuel and Antonio Ynchausti in the 1920s and 1930s, captured scenes of their family life in the Philippines, including rare footage of colonial-era Baguio. Despite the historical value of these materials, I initially hesitated to include them in the program. My concern lay in the possibility that these images –depicting leisure, privilege, and wealth– might be read by the audience as merely mundane or uncritical documentation of colonial elite life. Without appropriate framing, I feared their inclusion could seem incongruous or even alienating, especially to an audience for whom the legacies of colonial power remain a lived reality.

Furthermore, I was cautious about employing overtly theoretical language to mediate the viewing experience, particularly given that the anticipated audience consisted largely of students from non-film related disciplines. Yet upon discussing the reels with my collaborators, the consensus was clear: these films merited inclusion, precisely because of their rarity and representational imbalance. As Filipino artist and activist Kiri Dalena astutely noted in a conversation about the footage, “It is seldom that we encounter such intimate portrayals of the private lives of the elite”<sup>60</sup>. In contrast, it is often the lives of the marginalised –the poor, the vulnerable, and within colonial visual regimes, the Indigenous– that are routinely exposed to the camera’s gaze; the *imperial shutter*<sup>61</sup>, to refer back to Ariella Azoulay’s term. The presence of these home movies thus offered a potent reversal: a rare, unmediated glimpse into a privileged world typically shielded from public view.

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<sup>59</sup> The Ynchausti reels, produced as home movies, emerged from the private interests of patriarch Manuel Ynchausti in documenting the quotidian. They reveal the domestic, inner life of a family who, across generations, established the Philippines’ first and largest conglomerate, with transnational operations spanning Manila, Shanghai, Gipuzkoa, and New York, trading in commodities, finance, and real estate. Through strategic business alliances and intermarriage with other rising clans, the Ynchaustis embedded themselves within both economic and social elites. Though their name faded from common recognition in the archipelago after their departure following the Second World War, the families into which they married remain influential. Whether or not the Ynchaustis can be called ‘Filipino’ in a national sense, their centrality to the financial and economic development of the Philippines is indisputable.

<sup>60</sup> In conversation. Dalena, whose own research practice in film also centres around archives and colonial legacy, provided much needed clarity in thinking about the use of these colonial reels.

<sup>61</sup> Referred to in Chapter 1, page 21.

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This insight was the basis for our collective decision to juxtapose the Ynchausti home movies with *Un Verano en Madrid* (2017), a Spanish documentary short addressing the 1887 Madrid Exposition and the Filipinos exhibited therein<sup>62</sup>. By placing the unseen leisure of the colonial elite alongside the spectacle of Filipino bodies put on display for European audiences, this pairing was intentionally dialogic. We aimed to provoke reflection on the asymmetrical mechanisms of visibility, agency, and historical memory that persist across colonial and postcolonial visual cultures. As my collaborators Summer and Faye astutely observed:

“The archival images featured in *Un Verano* hold particular historical resonance for our Baguio audience: many of the Filipinos brought to Madrid for the 1887 Exposition were from the nearby region of Bontoc in Mountain Province.”<sup>63</sup>

The legacies of this exhibition continue to reverberate locally, both within community memory and in the work of scholars and artists concerned with the politics of ethnographic display and historical trauma<sup>64</sup>. In this sense, the pairing was not simply thematic but deeply rooted in local history.

Another key curatorial decision for this second session involved the inclusion of a short contextual lecture on the *Ynchausti* reels. Given the nature of these materials as colonial-era home movies, it was clear to me that some form of framing was required to support a critical reception. Here, the guidance of Kiri Dalena was especially helpful. She recommended focusing on empirical detail –information about the family and the materiality of the footage itself– as a way of grounding interpretation. Thus, I began with foundational questions: Who were the *Ynchaustis*? What kind of camera did Manuel Ynchausti use? What might access to such cutting-edge technology in the 1920s and 30s reveal about the family's position within colonial society?

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<sup>62</sup> See *Un imperio en la vitrina: el colonialismo español en el Pacífico y la exposición de Filipinas de 1887/An empire on display: Spanish colonialism in the Pacific and the 1887 Philippine exhibition* (2003) for Spanish scholarship on this event and facet of their colonial history (Sánchez Gómez, 2003).

<sup>63</sup> From our email correspondence.

<sup>64</sup> See the recent work of filmmaker and artist Kidlat Tahimik, whose exhibition *Magellan, Marilyn, Mickey & Fr. Dámaso. 500 Years of Conquistador RockStars* (2021) in the Palacio Cristal was a direct response to the Exposition (Tahimik, 2021).

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Inspired by Veena Hariharan's reading of the Hyde Collection –a British colonial officer's home movies from the Raj– I adopted a similar interpretive lens that considered these visual records as both shaped by and complicit in the discursive production of colonial subjectivity (Hariharan, 2014:59). Following Hariharan's technique, my research into the Ynchausti family traced their entrenchment in the economic and social elite of the Philippines<sup>65</sup>.

The structure of the screening session was likewise designed to guide the audience's interpretive journey. We opened<sup>66</sup> with *Un Verano*, establishing a critical lens on colonial exhibition practices, before presenting three selected *Ynchausti* reels. This sequence was followed by the contextual lecture. To close, we screened one of the reels again –an invitation for the audience to re-view the material in light of the historical and critical framing that had just been offered. This structure aimed to cultivate an awareness of the archival image not as neutral documentation, but as an artefact embedded in complex systems of power and representation.

In parallel with these curatorial choices, the workshops were also carefully devised. Continuing my methodological commitment to decentring the authority of the researcher, I had invited Faye to act as moderator. Her background in community organising offered valuable insights into creating a participatory and safe dialogic environment. Her presence in Baguio's artistic and queer circles lent her a public familiarity that I lacked, bridging the space between institutional inquiry and lived, local experience. Moreover, Faye's fluency in multiple regional languages was equally important in ensuring that participants could speak in whichever language they felt most comfortable –a crucial consideration in such a linguistically stratified context as Baguio.

Aware of the cultural norms that might inhibit open expression, Faye and I spent considerable time reflecting on how best to structure the discussions in order to mitigate these. Filipino audiences, we noted, are often hesitant to speak critically in public, particularly when this involves direct confrontation or naming institutional

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<sup>65</sup> This was detailed previously, in footnote #59, p. 98.

<sup>66</sup> This running order was a last-minute change, reversing the order depicted on the event poster.

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actors<sup>67</sup>. To address this, we adopted a two-tiered model: beginning with smaller breakout groups guided by a set of open-ended questions which we provided, we allowed participants to formulate their responses in a more intimate setting before reconvening for a larger discussion. This model aimed at building trust and openness without forcing participants' vulnerability. The following chapter focuses more explicitly on the results of these post-screening workshops.

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<sup>67</sup> An example of this occurs in *Baguio\_DAY 2* video @ 00:25:03:17, when one of the participants is encouraged to name an organization during the discussion. There is much laughter, and the participant bashfully concedes to the challenge.



## Account of the screening & workshop structure: Artium, Vitoria-Gasteiz, the Basque Country, Spain.

I had just concluded the sessions in Baguio when I began correspondence with Arantza and Catalina at Artium. The shift from working in a grassroots context to operating within the structures of a formal institution introduced new constraints. Institutional timelines, professional obligations, and administrative protocols shaped the extent to which my collaborators could participate in the curatorial process. Unlike in Baguio, where the preparatory work unfolded gradually, the institutional setting of Artium required a more streamlined, pragmatic approach.

Given these constraints, I took the initiative to propose a set of pre-formulated programme options, developed from earlier conversations with Arantza and Catalina and in keeping with the larger thematic and conceptual goals of the project. While the collaborative ethos of my methodology remained central, it was adapted to accommodate the logistical realities of institutions. What remained consistent, however, was the underlying methodological principle: to build the programme from the cultural and political particularities of the local context. This entailed not only recognising the specificities of Basque historical narratives and their entanglements with colonial history but also attending to the institutional culture of Artium and its existing modes of audience engagement.

In this spirit, I proposed presenting the same programme developed for the second session in Baguio: juxtaposing *Un Verano en Madrid* (2017), a short documentary produced at ECAM, with selected reels from the *Ynchausti* family's colonial-era home movies. This pairing offered a unique opportunity to present archival materials of Basque origin –the *Ynchausti* reels– in a Basque institutional setting, where they had not previously been publicly discussed or critically examined. One of the reels, which depicts the *Ynchausti* family vacationing in Baguio, provided a direct visual and historical link between the Basque Country and the Philippines, and more specifically, between Vitoria-Gasteiz and Baguio City.

This translocal connection added another layer to the curatorial logic of the pairing. By screening these materials in both sites, the project opened a comparative framework through which different audiences –each shaped by their own proximities to colonial

history– could view and reflect upon the same images. In doing so, the programme invited participants to consider not only the content of the films but also their own positionality as viewers.

As with the sessions held in the Philippines, I worked in close collaboration with the session’s mediator, Arantza, to shape both the framing of the programme and the formulation of the post-screening workshop. Our planning was grounded in the specific political and historical sensibilities of the Basque context, particularly in relation to the concept of colonialism. The Basque Country has historically been understood –by many within and beyond the region– as Spain’s ‘first colony’, a framing that positions the Basque people as subjects, rather than agents, of colonial oppression. Our aim for this session, while not seeking to refute this narrative outright, was to expand and complicate this understanding by foregrounding the historical involvement of Basque individuals and families –such as the Ynchaustis– in the Spanish imperial enterprise. The Philippines, as one such site of colonial activity, provided a compelling example to examine these entanglements.

This ambition –to dislocate colonialism from a singularly received framework– necessitated a careful approach to the session’s framing. Without reducing the conversation to ideological binaries, we wanted to invite discussion on the layered and often uncomfortable complexities of Basque participation in colonialism. Our working hypothesis was that directing conversation towards the moving-image pieces themselves, with their visual and narrative provocations, could mediate these difficult conversations effectively. The framing of the session –how the films were introduced and how the audience was invited to engage– was thus treated as a crucial methodological consideration.

To this end, we agreed that a short verbal introduction would be helpful in establishing the aims of the session and providing a point of entry for the audience<sup>68</sup>. In order to present myself as part of the unfolding exercise, I delivered this introduction myself prior to the screening. This served both as a gesture of presence and as a means of setting the discursive tone. The introduction outlined the broader aims of the research

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<sup>68</sup> Appendix, p. 156.

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project, the rationale for the selection of the films, and the anticolonial intentions of the work. Selected quotes embedded within the text were included to orient the audience's viewing, encouraging them to consider how films mediate historical consciousness and shape our understandings of colonial legacies.

Here, as in Baguio, language was a key consideration in our planning. While I delivered the spoken introduction in English<sup>69</sup>, printed translations in both Spanish and Basque were distributed to all participants, a small but deliberate gesture to encourage collective engagement across linguistic difference. Our letter of invitation had also been translated to ensure inclusivity from the outset. We agreed that Spanish would serve as the primary language of discussion during the workshop in order to accommodate non-Euskera<sup>70</sup> speakers, while creating space for Basque-language contributions with immediate translation into Spanish to maintain the coherence of the group dialogue.

As an additional resource, we included a small selection of theoretical quotations in the printed programme –extracts that had informed the conceptual development of the project. These were chosen for their capacity to provoke reflection on the politics of looking, the work of decolonisation, and the radical possibilities of anti-colonial pedagogy. Though these quotes ultimately went unused during the discussion itself, they had been prepared at Arantza's suggestion as a supportive tool, in case the conversation required prompting. As with the rest of the materials, they were made available in both Spanish and Basque.

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<sup>69</sup> Copies of this can be found in the Appendix, on pages 148-157. Versions in all three languages – Euskera, Spanish and English– were published.

<sup>70</sup> Basque term for the Basque language.

## Account of the screenings and workshop structure: NUMAX, Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Spain.

Just as with the collaboration at Artium, the planning and execution of the NUMAX session was subject to the structural and temporal limitations of a cultural institution. My collaboration with Xan was shaped by the practical realities of institutional scheduling: our event had to be coordinated around the cinema's regular programming calendar. Moreover, Xan had to balance this project alongside his ongoing commitments. This meant that collaboration with my Galician partners was limited. As had been the case at Artium, I shared relevant materials from my research –a selection of screener links and annotated programme drafts– to begin our dialogue.

Owing in part to our preparatory work done in the previous iterations of this project, the NUMAX collaboration was efficient and focused. Much of the conceptual and logistical groundwork had already been established, allowing us to focus on the specificities of the context of NUMAX. We agreed to schedule the session for September, aligning with the return of university students to Santiago de Compostela after the summer break. In anticipation of this, we disseminated announcements to the local University, posted on the NUMAX website, and sent to subscribers via the cinema's mailing list. It was Xan who brought in Marta Pérez to serve as the session's moderator. Marta's political orientation and research interests aligned closely with the aims of this project. Her involvement added both credibility and depth to the planned discussion.

However, NUMAX also presented a unique set of curatorial challenges. Unlike the situations in Baguio or Artium, the Galician context offered no direct point of anchorage within the research materials I had been working with. While one of the films under consideration –*Los últimos de Filipinas* (1945)– had been directed by Galician filmmaker Antonio Román, Xan and I struggled to find a suitable counterpart film that could be paired with it within the time constraints of the cinema slot. What ensued was a protracted email exchange in which we deliberated various combinations of films and what kinds of conversations their juxtaposition might elicit.

Ultimately, we settled on a programme featuring two works that had previously been included in the Baguio sessions: *Umbilical Cord* (1998) by Filipino-American artist Angel Shaw and *Ta acordaba tu El Filipinas?* (2017) by Spanish filmmaker Sally Gutiérrez

(Umbilical Cord, 1998) (Ta acordaba tu El Filipinas? 2017). This decision was shaped by a number of contextual factors, the most salient of which were articulated by both Xan and Marta in our preparatory correspondence. They expressed concern that the audience might be largely unaware of the Philippines' colonial past under Spain. Indeed, Marta speculated that for many –if not all– attendees, the session would mark their first encounter with this history. They also noted the region's distinct sense of identity as historically peripheral to the Spanish imperial centre<sup>71</sup>.

For these reasons, the NUMAX session presented itself as something of an outlier, a 'wild card' within the broader framework of the project. In contrast to the other sites, where some degree of local entanglement with colonial histories could be traced or assumed, the Galician context required us to initiate a dialogue where we anticipated a lack of prior recognition. The structure of the session was therefore designed to gently scaffold the audience's engagement with unfamiliar historical terrain. As with previous workshops, we provided attendees with printed programme materials including contextual information, relevant quotations, and a set of guiding questions to orient their viewing and help prepare them for the discussion that would follow.

Marta suggested opening discussions in a manner she believed would resonate with the local audience: by referring to Isabel Preysler, a prominent Filipina-Spanish socialite widely known in Spain for her high-profile personal life. I must admit that I found this proposition unsettling; Preysler's fame, rooted in gossip and spectacle, felt far removed from the intentions of the session. But Marta's rationale was pragmatic and illuminating. By drawing attention to the superficial nature of popular knowledge about the Philippines, she aimed to underscore just how little historical education Spanish audiences receive about their country's colonial engagements in Southeast Asia. "In school," she told to me prior to the event, "we are taught a single sentence: that with the defeat of the Armada<sup>72</sup> came the loss of the Philippines and Cuba, framed as the fall of the Spanish Empire".

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<sup>71</sup> As stated previously on pp. 92.

<sup>72</sup> Referring to the Battle of Manila Bay, a naval battle wherein the Spanish Armada fought the U.S. Navy in Manila Bay during the Spanish-American War in 1898. This defeat is often identified as the decisive end of the Spanish Empire (Nofi, 1996).

The underlying challenge of the NUMAX session was to cultivate a sense of relationality in a space where colonial histories had been largely disavowed or forgotten. Our curatorial and pedagogical strategies were designed with this in mind: not to assert historical continuity, but to suggest that even in contexts marked by apparent disconnection, there exist latent links that warrant critical attention.

### Conclusion

This chapter has provided a narrative account of the screenings and workshops conducted in Spain and the Philippines. Its purpose has been to elucidate the methodological strategies that inform the organisation of these events: the identification of venues, the cultivation of audiences, the formation of collaborative teams, and the co-production of programmes and workshops. These elements were not discrete stages but interdependent processes. The potential to convene an audience, for example, was contingent upon the reach and networks of the hosting venue; similarly, the resonance of the curated program and the openness of the workshop environment emerged through collective processes of identifying relevant points of connection between the films, the specificities of each location, and our anticipations of what audiences might recognise (or overlook) in the material presented. By describing these processes in detail, this chapter has set the practices undertaken in different contexts against one another, thereby underscoring the extent to which such exercises must be carefully tailored to the conditions of their enactment.

At this juncture, I invite the reader to pause from this written text and turn to the films that accompany this dissertation. These films<sup>73</sup> are not ancillary but integral components of the dissertation. While the written thesis provides the theoretical framework and methodological reflection, the films extend this inquiry into the realm of practice. These include:

- 4 short films, separate documentation of the workshops in each of the four locations. They have a run-time of 20-25' each.

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<sup>73</sup> Links to these can be found in the Appendix, p. 131.

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- One hour-long film, which functions as a synthesis of the exercises across all for locations.

I invite the reader to watch the hour-long synthesis film before returning to the final chapters of this dissertation.

The four short films function as documentary records of the workshops, capturing their unfolding and preserving the exchanges that took place. The hour-long film, by contrast, attempts a synthesis: it weaves together documentary elements from the shorts with an essayistic approach that pursues two narrative ends. The first is a comparative juxtaposition of dialogues across sites, a structuring through-line that stages a volley between different geographies and audiences. The second is a meta-narrative of my own reflections, presented as intertitles that puncture and destabilise the linear flow of discussion. In this sense, this film constitutes both documentation and interpretation: a first cut of an essay-film that I intend to develop further beyond the parameters of this doctoral project, with the short and long versions also serving as material for future dissemination and funding applications.

As my practice entails both showing and making films, the workshops were documented through moving image and sound. These films serve a dual function: they record the outcomes of the theoretical and methodological procedures described in this study, while simultaneously offering a creative means through which those outcomes might be interpreted. Given that this research revolves around the shifting statuses of film as a medium, the act of filmmaking itself provided a further methodological vector –an additional mode of apprehending and synthesising the exercises undertaken.

Central to this endeavour is my interest in the kinds of spaces dialogue generates, and in the ways such dialogic encounters may be translated into visual form. Filming these workshops made it possible to capture not only spoken exchanges but also the nonverbal registers of communication, the cultural inflections, and the dynamics of collective thought that animated these discussions. My sustained attention to the event of dialogue, and to the act of filming people as they engage in conversation, resonates

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with recent cinematic works<sup>74</sup> that likewise film post-screening discussions, identifying in them the radical potential of these dialogic spaces.

From this vantage point, the dissertation should be understood not as a conclusion but as the opening phase of a continuing practice. The following chapters turn to these workshop films directly, examining how the documentation itself becomes a site of methodological reflection and a space for reimagining what an anticolonial curatorial practice might look like in and through moving-images. The fourth chapter assesses in detail the responses in the workshops, with the fifth chapter concluding the study, assessing its successes, limitations and plans for future developments.

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<sup>74</sup> See *Dahomey* (2024) by Mati Diop and *Coconut Head Generation* (2023) by Alain Kassanda (*Coconut Head Generation*, 2023; *Dahomey*, 2024).

## Chapter 4

# Results, Responses, Reflections

### Overview

Engaging with the recorded workshops –rewatching discussions, editing the footage, and juxtaposing topics, locations, and faces– functioned not merely as documentation but as an extension of the methodological irreverence for the archive that underpins this study. Just as the earlier stages of this research sought to unsettle the authority of archival categorisation by privileging oral knowledge, memory, and lived experience<sup>75</sup>, the editing process similarly resists linearity and closure. Instead, through montage the discussions are teased open: voices and gestures are placed in dialogue across sites and temporalities, producing meanings that exceed the individual sessions.

This approach aligns with theorisations of montage<sup>76</sup> as a mode of critical thought, where significance emerges through juxtaposition. Relationality is privileged over fixed authority. In this context, editing is not a purely technical act but a methodological and political one, reconstituting fragments of dialogue into constellations that foreground both the scope of colonial experience, and the relationality and the frictions of anti-colonial conversation.

The reflections that follow should therefore be read as more than mere outcomes of the workshops. They are insights produced through this methodological act of editing, which –in keeping with the project’s irreverence for the archive– privileges lived and dialogic fragments as generative of new forms of knowledge.

This chapter begins by returning to the results of the different stages of research: first to the archive and the resulting long-lists of titles, then to the workshops. These are discussed both as results and observations produced through the process of editing.

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<sup>75</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>76</sup> As with Trin T. Minh-ha’s oft quoted concept of “speaking nearby” (Chen, 1992).

## The Archive, again.

A turn to the archive inaugurated this study, prompted by questions surrounding the very possibility of Spain's Quincentennial celebrations – questions that, in Hall's formulation, "the present puts to the past" (2001:92). The inquiry began with a deceptively simple question: what exists in the moving-image archives of Spain and the Philippines that Addresses, directly or obliquely, their shared colonial history? The long-lists that emerged in response present an array of moving-image work: documentaries, news-reels, narrative features, short films and some experimental artist films. These titles ranged from popular dramatisations of historical events (Goyo (2018)), historical fiction (*Baler* (2008)), politically charged broadcast pieces (the NO-DOs<sup>77</sup>), productions marked by their entanglement with authoritarian regimes (*Los últimos de Filipinas* (1945); *Raza* (1941)), and contemporary artist films that openly interrogate the legacies of empire (*Empire* (2011); *Réplica* (2014)). Taken together, these lists sketch the structuring fictions of the national cinemas of Spain and the Philippines, particularly as they grapple with the contested terrain of colonial history.

The heterogeneity of these long lists –spanning genres, periods, and political orientations– offered a rich reservoir from which to construct dialogues around the fictions and inheritances of empire. Yet this eclecticism also posed significant curatorial challenges, especially in relation to titles marked by problematic production contexts or overtly offensive content. Of particular concern were Franco-era productions: Antonio Román's *Los últimos de Filipinas* (1945), *Raza* (1941)<sup>78</sup>, and the NO-DO newsreels, produced at various points during the dictatorship. My collaborators and I engaged in sustained debates over the merits and risks of programming at least one of these works<sup>79</sup>. Could their inclusion provoke productive local conversations? How might they be responsibly framed? What dangers might we invite by placing them before contemporary audiences? Ultimately, the decision not to include any of these

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<sup>77</sup> NO-DO's were Franco's newsreels, produced and broadcast over all of Spain during his dictatorship. These are of a propagandistic nature, and highly polemical in their depiction of Spain and other narratives they covered (CASILLAS, 2008; Tranche and Sánchez-Biosca, 2001). Xan and I discussed programming some of these and what sort of significance these reels have in Spain. The session would have turned out to be something considerably different than the one we did end up doing.

<sup>78</sup> written by Franco himself under a pseudonym.

<sup>79</sup> *Raza* was especially delicate given its overtly fascist themes.

titles was not grounded in a desire to avoid their discomfiting legacies, but rather in the difficulty of identifying an adequate pairing –one of comparable thematic and historical weight– that could generate a balanced and meaningful dialogue within the temporal constraints of the program.

The prospect of screening these titles in Spain is compelling precisely because of their political sensitivity. In both Spanish workshops, participants repeatedly invoked the Franco dictatorship as the most immediate and unresolved trauma in the nation's historical memory<sup>80</sup>. In conversations with my collaborators, this history was frequently linked to the shortcomings of historical education in Spain, where what was often described as a pervasive amnesia continues to shape collective understanding. Strikingly, this amnesia appeared to be felt more acutely in relation to the dictatorship than to the longer *durée* of the Spanish empire. Moreover, they appeared to be understood as separate from each other. This prompted us to consider whether foregrounding the Francoist period –particularly its mechanisms of fascist propaganda– might serve as an entry point for illuminating the continuities between dictatorship and imperial formations. Such an approach could render visible the ways in which colonial histories are not simply eclipsed by, but rather transmuted within, the authoritarian legacies of 20th century Spain.

### The Anarchive and the Ynchausti Reels

The archival research phase of this study yielded an unexpected discovery: the home-movie reels of the Ynchausti family. These colonial-era films constitute rare visual documentation of elite life in early 20th century Philippines, as well as offer significant contributions to broader conceptualisations of Philippine cinema.

Philippine film scholars have long lamented the scarcity of archived copies of early cinema (Lim, 2024:2). Framing Philippine cinema as existing in a state of the *anarchive*, scholar Bliss Cua Lim offers a groundbreaking analysis of this condition in her book, *The Archival Afterlives of Philippine Cinema* (2024). By this, she refers to a history constituted not by the survival of complete film prints but by absences, traces, and

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<sup>80</sup> Videos: NUMAX @ 00:07:00:17; Artium @ 00:11:19:22.

transmutations; films that endure for example, only as degraded VHS transfers of projected originals, or whose material supports have long since been lost or destroyed. She states that this is a history that “directly contradicts the fantasy of archival permanence” (Lim, 2024:5).

Print copies of domestically produced films are exceptionally rare. The oldest known nitrate element, a dupe negative of Manuel Conde’s *Ibong Adarna* (1941), was destroyed in 2005 following digitisation, as no archive in the Philippines could safely store such notoriously volatile material (Lim, 2024:2).

The statistics are stark: only five complete films from the U.S. colonial period survive (Lim, 2024:2). The earliest extant Visayan-language film dates only to 1969, despite cinema’s presence in the archipelago since the turn of the twentieth century and the existence of a robust local production and distribution industry (Deocampo, 2003, 2017; Lim, 2024:3). As Lim states unequivocally: “No nitrate elements of a domestically produced Filipino film are known to exist” (2024:3). Most surviving titles persist only in analogue or digital video form (Lim, 2024:3). Of the handful of films predating the Second World War, the earliest is *Brides of Sulu* (1934), itself a re-edit of two earlier silent films, one dating from 1931 (San Diego, 2011 cited in Lim, 2024:278).

Against this bleak archival landscape, the present study introduces a significant new finding: reels from the Ynchausti family collection, shot between 1920 and 1930, constitute the earliest known extant print copies of domestically produced films in the Philippines. Among them, the reel *Casa de Manila* –a nitrate negative currently preserved in the Basque Film Archive— emerges as the earliest known nitrate film shot in the Philippines still in existence<sup>81</sup>. Although undated, I establish the timeframe of *Casa de Manila* as pre–Second World War by identifying the Ynchausti ancestral home featured in the film. Once located along Roxas Boulevard (formerly Dewey Boulevard), the house was destroyed during the U.S. carpet bombing of Manila in 1945 (De Borja, 2005:135).

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<sup>81</sup> To verify the provenance of the reels, there exists an archival log, detailing the acquisition and inventory of the collection as well as its preservation and digitization: *FONDO AUDIOVISUAL YNCHAUSTI | Informe técnico de la primera inspección* (2019) (Ferrer et al., 2019).

There are several points within this claim that remain slippery –and I rely deliberately on this slipperiness, on the elasticity of certain definitions, as a productive space from which to illuminate the argument of this section. This study proceeds with an awareness that, historiographically, ‘Philippine cinema’ has been constructed through a narrow and partial lens, one that fails, as Bliss Cua Lim notes, “to represent a large but unrecognised corpus of non-theatrical, non-industrial, and non-Tagalog films” (2024:11). Institutional preservation efforts have largely privileged auteurist, narrative features belonging to the canon of ‘classic’ Philippine cinema, while consistently eliding non-fictional and experimental films<sup>82</sup> (Lim, 2024:175).

The centennial celebration of Philippine cinema in 2019 illustrates the selective criteria underpinning such definitions. The chosen commemorative start date –12 September 1919– corresponded to the release of José Nepomuceno’s *Dalagang Bukid* (1919), widely regarded as the first “Filipino-produced and directed feature”, a state-sanctioned identification issued in the interest of the Centennial (Proclamation No. 622, s. 2018 | GOVPH, 2018). Yet even here, the metrics for identifying a ‘Filipino film’ were fraught<sup>83</sup>. Nepomuceno, hailed as the “Father of Philippine Cinema”, has been claimed as Filipino less on the basis of identity<sup>84</sup> than on the thematic content of his productions which depicted native folklore, dramatised contemporary political concerns and contributed to the spread of Tagalog language and culture (Tofighian, 2008:78; Deocampo, 2003). His status as *Ilustrado*, belonging to an elite, educated stratum of mixed Spanish–native ancestry, positioned him simultaneously within structures of privilege and in proximity to emergent nationalist discourses (Tofighian, 2008; Deocampo, 2003:215). These complexities demonstrate how definitions of Philippine cinema, of ‘Filipino-ness’ and of the films deemed representative of a national heritage are historically and politically constituted, deployed selectively in alignment with nationalist or ideological projects<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> Lim’s own use of the term ‘film’ in her book refers specifically to “photochemical cinema on filmstrips”, detailing the material focus of the institutions and practice of her study. Interestingly, she does not offer a definition of the term ‘cinema’, which I choose to see as deliberately left open (2024:279).

<sup>83</sup> Teddy Co shared this info with me on the MRT journey, sometime in 2018.

<sup>84</sup> Given the period’s use of the term ‘Filipino’ to designate Spaniards born in the colony, with the majority population referred to as *indios*.

<sup>85</sup> In proposing an alternative answer to the question of the “first Filipino-directed and produced feature film,” Nick Deocampo points to the 1912 production of *La Conquista Filipina* by a group of Chinese mestizos. Deocampo argues that their acceptance as “Filipinos” during this period rested less on ethnic or cultural identity than on socioeconomic criteria: they were established local businessmen who

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This observation does not dismiss the importance of such framings –in postcolonial contexts, they have been vital to identity formation and resistance to colonial dominance– but it does create space to reconsider what the Ynchausti reels might contribute to our understanding of Philippine visual history, and what their material survival signifies.

These scenes of the Ynchausti reels –domestic, mundane, and ordinarily shielded from public view– complicate the narratives of Philippine film history. They render visible a colonial imaginary embedded in the very inception of moving-image culture in the archipelago, underscoring how Philippine film history is inextricably entangled with the privileges and contradictions of colonial modernity.

I recognise the potentially incendiary character of this claim: that material produced by members of the colonial elite should be considered not as external to, but as part of, the contested field of Philippine visual history. What, then, would it mean for our understanding of Philippine cinema –long invested in locating a singular moment when ‘native’ Filipino influence entered the sphere of film production— to include such artefacts? In some respects, this would not be as radical a departure as it may initially appear. Jose Nepomuceno, hailed as the “Father of Philippine Cinema,” was himself a Spanish mestizo and a member of the colonial elite<sup>86</sup>.

At its most basic level, the discovery of the Ynchausti reels unsettles Bliss Cua Lim’s assertion that no nitrate films produced in the Philippines survive. To frame this finding as such is not to fetishise material survivals –indeed, Lim’s work cautions against such archival fetishism– but simply to demonstrate that extant material exists where we previously assumed absence. This is a small but significant revision to the history of Philippine cinema, one that reopens questions about the range of materials that may constitute its visual heritage.

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“earned from their trade, [] paid taxes thus meriting to be considered as Filipinos,” and who spoke Spanish, then the lingua franca of commerce (2003:243). By these same metrics, the Ynchausti family – having lived and traded in the archipelago for generations, and whose business networks spanned both local and international spheres– could likewise be considered Filipino.

<sup>86</sup> As has been argued by Nick Deocampo and Nadi Tofighian, the subject matter of Nepomuceno’s films was geared towards his contemporary native viewers, a distinction that sets it apart from the Ynchausti reels, whose intended audience was private and familial rather than national.

At another level, the very existence of these reels points to an archival condition that stands in stark contrast to the *anarchival state*<sup>87</sup> that defines Philippine cinema (Lim, 2024:5). The Ynchausti collection –comprising home movies, newsreels, still cameras, and projectors– has traversed continents yet survived, carefully preserved across generations before being deposited in the Basque Film Archive. Its survival has been secured not only by the private privilege of an elite family but also by the stability, institutional investment, and financial resources of the Basque state. These conditions ensured the digitisation and restoration of the reels –opportunities largely unavailable to the films of ordinary Filipinos. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that the private collections of colonial elites find their way into national institutions: their social and economic privilege guaranteed their existence in their own time and continues to safeguard them in ours.

The disparity between the existence of elite collections and the anarchival condition of Philippine cinema reflect the “entrenched colonial legacies of underdeveloped and unequal exchange” that continue to operate in our present moment (Sanago, 2022; Perneckzy, 2023). To counter this, any project of restitution in the moving-image sector “must go beyond the repatriation of individual films”, calling instead for a structural transformation of archival practice itself (Perneckzy, 2023:400). This requires not only equity in resources globally, but also a critical rethinking of what ‘access’ truly means. Though often celebrated as a synonym to access, digitisation can in fact obscure the persistence of regimes that continue to privilege Global North institutions. As Perneckzy warns, “the promise of easy access frequently hides the persistence of unequal property relations”, particularly those encoded in copyright law (2023:399). Current legal frameworks tether image property to “a narrow understanding of authorship, which does not recognise filmed subjects as co-creators of the image” (Perneckzy, 2023:399).

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<sup>87</sup> Lim eloquently defines this: “[ ] two meanings of the *anarchive* come into view: first, the anarchive as an event of ruin, of memory institutions emerging as much from destruction as from preservation; second, the anarchive as a virtual archive emerging from a feverish passion, a lovesick yearning for permanence that burns throughout the precarious afterlife of its destruction. Both anarchival impulses underwrite the history of formal and informal archival initiatives in the Philippines: a fervent longing for a lasting audiovisual archive, despite the country’s history of collapsed or endangered collections. Philippine cinema’s archival afterlives, then, continually contend with anarchival temporality. *Anarchival time* is the converse of enduring sustainability, naming the threat of transience and ephemerality that shadows real archives’ aspirations for permanence” (2024:73).

The need to undo the “naturalisations of intellectual property law with its bias against other forms of possession or attribution” is essential if restitution is to have any meaningful impact.

Here lies a central question: what responsibilities do archives such as the Basque Film Archive bear toward the histories they hold? I was granted access to the Ynchausti collection, but under conditions of non-commercial use and tacit discretion. I remain grateful for their support; yet the very terms of this arrangement illustrate the persistence of this asymmetry. If the Global North continues to dictate the terms of accessibility, then a genuinely decolonial archival practice<sup>88</sup> must entail, as Pernecky insists, a “broader transformation of caring relations in archiving globally” (2023:400).

### Curatorial Practice and Dialogic Spaces

One of the central achievements of this project was the creation of dialogic spaces around the moving-image. Across all sites, audiences not only attended but participated actively. The feared ‘silent room’ never materialised –a success attributable not to chance but to the careful, situated planning of myself and my collaborators.

### The Philippine Sessions

In the Philippines, audiences consisted largely of students but also community members, including a serendipitous group of visiting Japanese students and teachers<sup>89</sup>. Discussions were lively, yet the tone shifted markedly during the second session, centred on the Ynchausti reels. The picturesque panoramas of the Ynchausti family’s vacation in Baguio City –an infant city at the time of filming– provoked complex debates around land rights and indigenous dispossession. For some participants, the images served as stark reminders of stolen indigenous land<sup>90</sup>, while others read them against the city’s contemporary condition<sup>91</sup>: the large-scale redevelopment projects that many

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<sup>88</sup> This is also discussed by Giovanna Fossati in her essay *For a Global Approach to Audiovisual Heritage: A Plea for North/South Exchange in Research and Practice* (2021).

<sup>89</sup> One participant asked a question about the appropriateness of a Japanese dance troupe dancing Filipino indigenous dances, an anecdote that presented a layered example of the difficulties in discussing cultural appropriation. *BAGUIO DAY 2 @ 00:16:03:19*.

<sup>90</sup> *BAGUIO DAY 2 @ 00:26:30:15*

<sup>91</sup> *BAGUIO DAY 2 @ 00:24:41:17*

Baguio residents associate with the destruction of the city's historic, colonial-era identity. While such critiques of overdevelopment expressed a widely shared sense of frustration and powerlessness, they also carried a troubling undertone of nostalgia for the supposed 'order' and 'cleanliness' of colonial Baguio.

Anticipating the possibility of such sentiments, Faye and I had discussed in advance how we might respond if they emerged. In the moment, I chose to intervene directly, challenging a comment that framed Camp John Day –the former U.S. military reserve depicted in the reels– through a nostalgic lens. I asked whether the exclusivity of the site, historically reserved for US colonial officials and explicitly off-limits to Filipinos, was part of their understanding when viewing the footage. Another participant<sup>92</sup> recalled how Filipinos were barred from entering Camp John Hay until very recently, emphasising how the racist foundations of this prohibition have been largely effaced in contemporary collective memory.

What emerged in this exchange was the unsettling continuity between colonial land regimes and present-day commercial interests in urban redevelopment. Both rest on logics of exclusion and dispossession, aimed at extending access, profit, and enjoyment to privileged groups while displacing others. The montage of these discussions in the attending films brings these historical and contemporary dynamics into sharp relief, allowing us to register the resonance between colonial exploitation and ongoing urban transformation.

One participant<sup>93</sup>, in articulating a desire for more people to encounter these colonial era images of Baguio within the framework of critical discussion, embodied what Sylvia Wynter identifies as the imperative of critical praxis<sup>94</sup>. By calling for a reassessment of familiar visual tropes of Baguio –images often filtered through the lens of colonial nostalgia– the participant challenged inherited modes of reading that risk naturalising colonial order. This intervention exemplifies the kind of intellectual and affective labour our workshops sought to enable: the active re-interpretation of the current reality through critical engagement. In this moment the participant's response illuminated how

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<sup>92</sup> *BAGUIO DAY 2* @ 00:26:59:21

<sup>93</sup> *BAGUIO DAY 2* @ 00:28:03:02

<sup>94</sup> Discussed in Chapter 2.

such encounters with the colonial archive can unsettle dominant imaginaries and open up possibilities for counter narratives that resist the reproduction of colonial epistemologies.

This second session in Baguio was longer and more demanding than the first. The discussion stretched to three hours and left the programming team emotionally drained. Here, we were presented with a crucial lesson: curators and facilitators are not neutral mediators. We too are implicated in the affective charge of these spaces. Reflexivity in this exercise must therefore extend beyond anticipating audience reactions to include recognition of our own vulnerability and strategies of care.

### The Spanish Sessions

The Spanish sessions reinforced this point, albeit from another angle. Despite collaboration with local interlocutors, I was the only Filipino and the only person of colour in these predominantly white spaces. I was repeatedly positioned as spokesperson for ‘the colony’, asked to confirm or provide context as the racialised other<sup>95</sup>. Two observations followed: First, I had underestimated the risks of inhabiting this position. Even in these well-intentioned spaces, colonial legacies continue to structure the terms of dialogue. Second, the discussions, couched in academic language, often felt abstract and, on occasion, marked a comfortable disassociation from colonial history<sup>96</sup>. This dynamic reinforced the initial frustration that instigated this project: that the burdens of grappling with colonial legacies fall disproportionately on the formerly colonised, while European participants can remain insulated from recognising their own entanglements in this same history.

For those of us inhabiting racialised or colonised positions, the labour of sustaining such discussions is not only intellectual but deeply embodied. Fanon reminds us that confronting colonial histories is necessarily disordering, but such experiences raise the further question: at whose expense should this disordering be sustained? Here I extend Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s call for reflexivity: not only in relation to our positionalities as researchers, but also as *participants* who must account for the toll such work extracts.

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<sup>95</sup> These asides directed at me are not included in the shared films. At the time of editing, I could not find an appropriate way of framing these within the narrative flow of the dialogues.

<sup>96</sup> This was openly expressed by a participant at the NUMAX session, NUMAX @ 00:09:48:24

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Future iterations<sup>97</sup> of this project must build strategies of care: structured debriefings, role-rotation among facilitators, and explicit protocols for collective holding of affective weight.

I would like to acknowledge the openness and willing participation of our Spanish audiences. At both Artium and at NUMAX, the audiences volunteered their time and energy for the exercise. They were eager to engage with the films and the questions my collaborators and I posed to them. We were aware of the challenging nature of the framing of the session, and thus appreciated the vulnerability our audiences were participating in.

At Artium, several openly acknowledged the widespread ignorance in the Basque country regarding its colonial entanglements, admitting that these histories remain excluded from public discourse and education. This willingness to engage was, however, complicated by divergences in positionality between Basque and non-Basque participants. For instance, a Colombian participant pointedly emphasized the starkly unequal scale of dehumanisation wrought by colonialism in the Americas compared to the Basque context<sup>98</sup>. Her statement was met with rejection and visible signs of discomfort from many Basque participants. Arantza responded diplomatically, noting that such statements required a more nuanced discussion on the history of Basque resistance.

The audience's tacit discomfort echoed their earlier rejection of another participant who insisted that the Basque Country should be explicitly named as a coloniser. This blunt formulation resulted from questions around the use of adequate terminology, a subject which quickly emerged as a central point of contention. This participant argued for the need to distinguish carefully between 'colonialism' and 'oppression', stating that such clarity could aid in producing deeper, more incisive criticism on the debate. These

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<sup>97</sup> The timeframe and logistics of this PhD and the institutional time-limitations of did not allow for these de-brief sessions with my Spanish collaborators to take place.

<sup>98</sup> *Artium* @ 00:31:34:15

differing responses and their subsequent reactions highlight the asymmetries of the historical experiences that structured the discussion.

Much of the discussion gravitated toward questions of cinematic language rather than the historical or political implications of the materials<sup>99</sup>. Participants examined the fiction of filmmaking, the apparent objectivity of the panoramic gaze, the directorial instruction for subjects not to look at the camera, and the ways these gestures mask the contrived nature of the image. While these insights were valuable, the larger questions Arantza and I had intended to foreground –regarding opacity, power dynamics, and the asymmetries of documentation suggested by the juxtaposed films– were largely left unaddressed by the audience.

One intervention<sup>100</sup> proved particularly striking: a participant questioned whether the Basques had any ‘right’ to claim the term decolonisation, given that they themselves are products of, and continue to exist within, structures defined by colonial histories. They argued that the term should perhaps be reserved for immigrants or racialised communities within the Basque country, a demographic for whom colonial histories are more explicitly<sup>101</sup> inscribed in lived experience. While I appreciated the analytical precision of this point, I was unsettled by its implicit disavowal. For me, this intervention illustrated precisely the inability to recognize one's own reality as shaped by colonial forces. The necessity of decolonisation, I would argue, arises is not in spite of this embeddedness, but *because of it*. Basque society, no less than the lives of its racialised minorities, is structured by colonial histories, albeit in ways that confer privilege and access to the rewards of those very imbalances.

The Artium session, in comparison the others, stood out for the rhetorical and intellectual sophistication of its participants, many of whom were clearly accustomed to discussing such topics in public. Their interventions were articulate and earnest yet couched in analytical language that sometimes held the speakers at an objective distance. While this mode of engagement reflected the participants’ intellectual rigor, I found myself frustrated at times by its effect of insulating them from the lived realities of

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<sup>99</sup> Artium @ 00:25:50:24

<sup>100</sup> Artium @ 00:13:34:04

<sup>101</sup> The participant does not explicitly state this, but I infer it from his comment.

colonial history. The workshop had been conceived as an experiment, not with the expectation of producing predetermined outcomes, but to see what kinds of conversations the images might provoke. Yet in this setting, where participants' lived realities seemed buffered from colonial legacies, it was particularly challenging to sustain the kind of grounded and affective dialogue I had hoped for.

The Artium responses contrasted sharply with those of the audience in *Spell Reel* (2017), whose interventions felt propelled by their temporal proximity to the histories depicted on screen. Unlike in Artium, these viewers did not require curatorial scaffolding or subtle provocation; their connection to colonial histories was immediate, and their responses correspondingly direct. Nonetheless, moments of clarity did arise at Artium. One participant, for example, drew attention to the numerous Basque explorers who played pivotal roles in establishing Spain's colonial presence in the Philippines<sup>102</sup>. They noted that statues commemorating these figures exist in Basque cities, underscoring that Basques need not look elsewhere to consider colonial history: it is quite literally embedded in their own public spaces.

## Reflexivity, Care, and Mediation

These experiences foreground a crucial question of mediation: to what extent can dialogue remain open, and when must openness give way to objection?

In Baguio, one participant expressed gratitude that the Ynchausti reels included Indigenous people and other Filipinos<sup>103</sup>. My initial reaction was visceral; I could not reconcile gratitude with the violence of the colonial gaze. Later, my collaborator Summer offered a critical perspective: in contexts of visual scarcity, even problematic representations may be valued as evidence of presence. This moment revealed two things. First, that readings of images framed as 'decolonial' within academic discourse cannot be uncritically imposed onto local contexts of reception. If I had openly critiqued this participant's opinion, would I not have been imposing my own academically informed reading over his lived experience? The reflexivity Linda T. Smith calls us to as

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<sup>102</sup> *Artium* @ 00:08:58:15

<sup>103</sup> *Baguio\_DAY 1* @ 00:01:50:09

## Chapter 4

researchers, of questioning the validity of our scholarly approaches, allowed me in this instance some valuable perspective: on the epistemic position I spoke from, and the visual inheritance this participant spoke to. Second, it demonstrated to me the primacy of visuality in constituting histories.

Another moment underscored the delicacy of mediation. A participant referred to the work of Igorot academic Professor June Prill-Brett, who has argued that the tribes displayed at the 1905 St. Louis World's Fair exercised agency, choosing to participate in the display rather than being forced to. In preparation, Faye and I had anticipated such interventions and debated their risks: to trivialise the structural violence of colonial racial dynamics on the one hand, or to silence locally grounded scholarly perspectives on the other. When the comment arose, Faye handled it with remarkable poise, holding the contradiction without foreclosure: "Two things can be true at once", she remarked<sup>104</sup>. Her response preserved the openness of the dialogue while refusing to collapse complexity.

Yet the dilemma remains: at what point does care for dialogue require objection, rather than inclusion? Making such criteria explicit is itself part of the ethical labour of anticolonial curation.

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<sup>104</sup> BAGUIO DAY 2 @ 00:05:35:01

## Chapter 5

# Unframing Empire: Reflections on Method, Practice and Futures

This project has been guided by a methodological stance that treats both the archive and curatorial practice not as neutral vehicles of history but as contested terrains through which colonial pasts are negotiated and reimagined. Rather than approaching the archive as a guarantor of historical truth, I have treated it as both method and objective critique, interrogating the ideological interests that structure its very organisation. Equally, curation has been mobilised not simply as the selection and display of filmic objects, but as a dialogic, collaborative practice capable of generating new epistemic and affective spaces. Drawing on the work of Mbembe, Azoulay, Wynter, and others this study foregrounds the capacity of moving-image practices to reconfigure a historical consciousness through translocal yet situated, collective encounters.

The project began with a return to the moving-image archives of Spain and the Philippines. The resulting long lists encompassed a wide array of material- newsreels, documentaries, narrative features, experimental works –that together traced the structuring fictions of both national cinemas. Yet this archival return was not reverential. If the archive holds only partial histories and if its classificatory systems reproduce narrow worldviews, why return to it at all? My answer was to return irreverently: to unsettle the authority of the archive through methodological invention. This stance was enacted through two strategies.

First, I constructed the corpus socially rather than biographically<sup>105</sup>. Compiling long-lists through conversations with knowledgeable interlocutors, I drew on memory and lived expertise rather than institutional taxonomies. This oral, mnemonic approach surfaced titles that would have remained obscured under the rigid categories of ‘title’, ‘director’, or ‘year of release’. My method of locating titles proved the most productive. At times this bypassed entirely the canonical indexes of formal archives, emphasising how established archival taxonomies can function as mechanisms of both retrieval and obscuration. Instead, human relations are foregrounded as integral to the research process: networks of learned individuals, professionals, and artists became crucial conduits for findings.

This phase resulted in unexpected discoveries, chief among them the Ynchausti family reels. These colonial-era home movies complicate conventional definitions of Philippine cinema, their very existence challenging the assertion that no nitrate films produced in the Philippines survive. They constitute new material evidence of early filmmaking on the islands, foregrounding the role of colonial elites in shaping the archipelago's visual history. In unearthing these reels, this study proposes new angles in debates on Philippine film historiography, expanding the corpus beyond narrative film and state-sanctioned commemorations.

Second, I placed recovered titles into circulation. Following Azoulay and Igwe, who insist that images accrue meaning in encounter, I treated films as prompts –catalysts for situated conversations rather than static objects of preservation. Value lay not in the films themselves but in the questions they provoked and the relations they enabled. A reflection by researcher Carolina Rito during her time researching the INCA Archive<sup>106</sup> resonates here:

“[] It would be interesting to question where the archive lies. Is it the footage, the reels, its intentions, its political claims, its grammar? Or even the new set of events, conversations and materials collected in the last six years? It seems to me that the archive –against the grain of the voices– opens up other memories

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<sup>105</sup> Detailed in Ch. 1 *Researching the Archive*

<sup>106</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, “...a projectile in flight...”.

and contemporary affects beyond what is shown.” - Carolina Rito (Aikins *et al.*, 2017:10)

Restored to spaces of dialogue, these artefacts became conduits for reinterpreting reality in Wynter's sense, enabling audiences to contest and question their relationship to colonial histories. The workshops and screenings in Spain and the Philippines extended this archival work into the realm of practice. These events were deliberately constructed as dialogic spaces where archival images could encounter contemporary audiences in situated ways. Across all sites, the feared ‘silent room’ never materialised –a testament to the careful, context-specific planning with my collaborators.

My original contribution to knowledge lies in this project’s synthesis of multiple epistemologies: of the archive, decolonial and anticolonial thought, curatorial traditions and film programming practices, and filmmaking.

Within archival discourse, this approach aligns with decolonial efforts to interrogate both the politics of access and the epistemic authority of the archive. By foregrounding the Ynchausti reels for example, this research contributes to ongoing debates on Philippine visual culture, expanding the field of what may be considered visual history to include a broad array of moving-image forms –newsreels, documentaries, artist films, and short films– as active agents in shaping and perpetuating colonial relations and world orders.

Within curatorial studies, this project departs from conventional programming models that prioritise the work itself. Instead, it privileges the audience and the dialogic potential of the screening event. Drawing inspiration from the practices of May Adadol Ingawanij and Ricardo Matos-Cabo, it conceptualises curation not only in terms of the image, but also in the generative social and intellectual processes that screenings can instigate in the world. It is through the calibration of these theoretical frameworks and practical experimentation that my study harnesses curation toward anticolonial ends. Crucially, this is not achieved through purely discursive gestures, but through a situated, collaborative practice that remains attuned to the extractive tendencies of academic research. Thus, this process operates on principles of reflexivity and care.

These epistemologies are harnessed alongside the situated knowledge of participants and collaborators, producing a methodology grounded in lived realities and contexts *in order to act within them*. This method –tailoring curatorial and dialogic strategies to the specificities of each location– was one of the project's greatest successes, evidenced by the audiences' willingness to participate and in the fact of their discussions. At every stage, the research underscored the indispensable role of the social and the collective in locating, activating, and producing meaning from archival artifacts. In line with Mbembe's critique of the archives serving forgetting<sup>107</sup>, this project refuses the creation of "talismanic" objects that ossify memory; instead, it sought to mobilise these materials toward acts of remembering and critical engagement.

The rewards of my study have been many. It has generated points of contact between disparate contexts, probed structural imbalances, and critically questioned inherited modes of relation. It is a practice designed to be repeated. Thus, it enacts what Sylvia Wynter describes as a process of "diffusion through praxis", provoking the forms of questioning and agitation that are constitutive of the decolonial condition (2022:139). It uses the social and socialised networks of film viewing and collective dialogue as sites through which to interrogate and reconfigure shared realities. A key objective of this study was to create spaces of dialogue around colonial histories and ongoing coloniality. This objective was achieved: not only were environments conducive to dialogue successfully crafted, but several encounters resulted in moments of Wynterian re-interpretation –instances in which participants actively re-read inherited realities through critical engagement.

The intensity and form of these moments varied across programming contexts, but at their core these exercises disrupted the usual modes of approaching these histories. They also activated –or in some cases reactivated– the spaces in which they were hosted. In Baguio for example, *Balanghai Ni Ikeng* Cinema was revived through this project and has since continued to host screenings and public events. In Spain, NUMAX and Artium had never previously programmed a similar event. The workshops introduced their audiences to materials and perspectives they would not otherwise have encountered. In these discussions, participants negotiated their own

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<sup>107</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, *Necromancing the Archive*.

positionalities, challenging institutional norms and expanding the discursive possibilities of these spaces.

The tensions encountered in this process have proven to be equally as instructive. One key issue concerned the affective and positional toll on organisers and facilitators. Our own relation to the histories under discussion, and positionalities towards the audience, likewise shaped the dynamics of each workshop. The emotional, embodied labour required –particularly for facilitators of colour working in predominantly White spaces– must be accounted for in future iterations of this process. Without such consideration, these exercises risk re-inscribing the very hierarchies they seek to unsettle. For this reason, integrating structured post-workshop debriefing sessions with collaborating partners is an invaluable addition to this process. This would allow for collective reflection to formulate strategies of care for subsequent iterations.

In addition to previously stated successes, my study has resulted in tangible afterlives: in Spain, Basque participant Juan Ibarondo, published *Euskal Herria: ¿colonizadores o colonizados?* (2024) in *El Salto Diario*, reflecting on our workshop debate around Basque colonial complicity (Ibarondo, 2024). In the Philippines, Mervine, Summer and I founded *Kino Kunana*, a collective that has since our time working together on this project, continued to programme films in Baguio. Seeking to sustain the audiences activated through this research, Kino Kunana has continued to programme films for local audiences, forging collaborations with other Philippine collectives<sup>108</sup> and Cordilleran artists<sup>109</sup>. These afterlives affirm that, even where frustrations linger, the work generated discourse and durable infrastructures, carrying forward the project's aims beyond the workshops themselves.

Another key breakthrough of this project lies in how it highlights curators and cultural interlocutors not merely as logistical collaborators but as epistemic agents whose knowledge shapes archival and curatorial processes. Their expertise extends beyond formal curatorial skills to encompass embodied memories, affective intuitions, and contextually situated reflections on materials and histories. Documenting these

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<sup>108</sup> See our collaboration with Davao-based collective PasaLidahay on Kino Kunana Instagram (August 2024) (Kunana, 2024)

<sup>109</sup> See our networking/crit group session *Basta Gumagalaw* (August 2025) aimed at connecting local filmmakers and artists (Kunana, 2025).

exchanges demonstrated that such forms of knowledge –often unvoiced, improvised, or affective– can function as powerful qualitative lenses through which the archive can be reinterpreted. This approach captured a kaleidoscope of reflections, offering insights that conventional bibliographic methodologies would likely have overlooked. Crucially, these breakthroughs illustrate the value of dialogic methodologies. By structuring the research around conversations produced through collective decision-making, the project mobilises these diverse epistemologies to surface materials otherwise obscured, frame them in contextually resonant ways, and open them to critical interpretation. In doing so, it demonstrates curatorial collaboration as not ancillary to archival research but constitutive of its epistemic expansion. This exemplifies how dialogic practices contribute to new, living archives and readjust our sensitivities to historical narratives through collective engagement.

Equally significant is the scope and scale at which this project was realised. Enacted across two continents on opposite sides of the world, it brought together collaborators and audiences in both Spain and the Philippines. Orchestrating screenings and workshops across these geographically, culturally, and linguistically diverse contexts required substantial organisational capacity and adaptive methodology. It demanded resilience in navigating institutional differences, imagination in solving logistical complexities and shifting local dynamics, as well as the ability to communicate across multiple languages and cultural registers. This transnational dimension not only tested the methodological robustness of this project but also revealed its capacity to adaptation while remaining dialogically responsive to different audiences and contexts. In doing so, it demonstrates the methodological flexibility and collaborative strength necessary to sustain anticolonial curatorial practice across uneven and historically entangled terrains.

Looking ahead, this practice offers multiple avenues for further development.

Expanding on the long-lists continues to unfold. There is potential to systematically document the oral research by recording the conversations, thereby producing an alternative archive of film history grounded in social memory. Future curatorial exercises could employ more targeted questioning and sharper provocations, adapting the method for different educational contexts. Screening programs might also be

designed, for example, as longer programmes unfolding across an extended timeframe for film clubs, cultivating sustained communities of critical spectatorship.

Methodologically, integrating post-workshop debriefings with collaborators into the process would strengthen reflexive practice and ensure that care and accountability, as well as adaptability, remain central to future iterations.

Through these exercises, I propose a curatorial practice with a dynamic and repeatable methodology, one that is not meant to function relegated to the academic sphere, but that should be adapted by others across different contexts. It is a practice that positions the screening space as a shared discursive terrain where multiple epistemologies can reverberate. This methodology enables the redistribution of voices through dialogue, situated knowledges, and collective engagement with media objects; audiences and collaborators alike become active participants in the critical re-encounter of colonial histories. In this way, the project offers an alternative to the often-polarised models through which contemporary social issues are contested, privileging instead a sustained, dialogic engagement that acknowledges complexity and situatedness. In proposing this as a living, adaptable method rather than a fixed model, I offer this project as a model; an invitation for others to take it up, reshape it, to use it to contribute to an expanding network of practices that can hopefully assist us in confronting our colonial legacies.

## Appendix

### Links to creative practice (online videos):

- [Baguio - Day 1](#)
- [Baguio – Day 2](#)
- [Artium](#)
- [NUMAX](#)
- [Unframing Empire Final](#)

## Long-list: Philippine titles.

|          | Title   | Director              | Year | Run time | Genre/type                   |
|----------|---|-----------------------|------|----------|------------------------------|
| <b>1</b> | Umbilical Cord  | Angel Shaw            | 1998 | 30'      | documentary short-video.     |
|          | Employing direct address, Shaw interviews Filipina women, from academics, activists, street vendors to her own colleagues, asking them who their hero is. and the role of Filipino women in their own history. Moving through historic spaces in Manila, this essay-film charts a geography of Philippine revolutionary history as well as the absence of women from that history.  |                       |      |          |                              |
| <b>2</b> | Nailed  | Angel Shaw            | 1992 | 50'      | SD video, colour, sound      |
|          | Angel Velasco Shaws' Nailed (1992) is and exploration of the Catholic Church and 400 years of colonialism in the Pacific region; woven in a montage of images, sounds, stories and performances. The film looks at the implications of worship, national, cultural, and personal identity following Lucy Reyes, a Filipino woman who for decades has reenacted the Passion by being nailed to a cross. It is also about the filmmaker's exploration of the Philippines and her own identity as a Filipino American, following the downfall of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1980's. (from ICA's screening)  |                       |      |          |                              |
| <b>3</b> | Empire  | Michelle Dizon/Latipa | 2011 | N/A      | 2-channel video installation |
|          | "Empire (ABS-CBN) comes from Dizon's on-going cycle of works, Empire, in Fragments, which deal with the Philippines' colonial and neo-colonial history in an era of globalization. The videos that comprise the installation include shots of the movie theater at the former US military bases, shots of the walls that enclose the former seat of Spanish colonial power, shots of recently built infrastructure by the US on the southern war-torn island of Mindanao, and shots of the media conglomerate ABS-CBN's broadcast tower during a new year's celebration. All of these fragments weave together a spatial and temporal experience of the question of empire as it continues in the global south in general and in the Philippines in particular. Empire (ABS-CBN) documents the Philippine media conglomerate ABS-CBN's broadcast tower during a New Year's celebration in 2009. The work recalls Warhol's Empire in which Warhol filmed the Empire State building and slowed the film to a duration of eight hours. What is different in Dizon's work is that the "empire" is not the name of the building, but rather, a political history in the context of the Philippine nation state and its colonial and neo-colonial history." - mutualart.com |                       |      |          |                              |
| <b>4</b> | El Pinoy Matador  | Dolphy                | 1970 | 109'     | Narrative feature            |
| <b>5</b> | Aguila  | Eddie Romero          | 1980 | 210'     | Narrative feature            |

Appendix

|           |  |  |      |       |                              |
|-----------|--|--|------|-------|------------------------------|
|           | A melodrama that recounts the life of a burgis Philippine family's patriarch, tracing the history of the formation of the Philippine nation through his life chapters. |  |      |       |                              |
| <b>6</b>  | Ganito Kamo Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?   | Eddie Romero                           | 1976 | 135'  | Narrative feature            |
| <b>7</b>  | Noli me Tangere  | Eduardo de Leon                        | 1961 | 180'  | Narrative feature            |
| <b>8</b>  | Heneral Luna   | Jerold Tarug                           | 2015 | 118'  | Narrative feature            |
| <b>9</b>  | Goyo   | Jerold Tarug                           | 2015 | 150'  | Narrative feature            |
| <b>10</b> | El Filibusterismo  | Jhonaira Shanen Ramos                  | 2017 | 88'   | narrative web series         |
|           | Grade 10 - Andres Bonifacio of Cavite National Highschool (2016-2017)  |  |      |       |                              |
| <b>11</b> | Bakilbayan #1  | Kidlat Tahimik                         | 2015 | 150'  | narrative feature            |
| <b>12</b> | Elegy to the Visitor From the Revolution   | Lav Diaz                               | 2011 | 82'   | Narrative feature            |
| <b>13</b> | Si, Si, Señor!   | Lorenzo P. Tuells                      | 1947 | 90'   | Narrative feature            |
|           | screwball comedy with Carmen Rosales and Oscar Moreno  |  |      |       |                              |
| <b>14</b> | El Presidente  | Mark Meily                             | 2012 | 165'  | Narrative feature            |
| <b>15</b> | Rizal  | Mary-Lou Diaz Abaya                    | 1998 | 178'  | Narrative feature            |
| <b>16</b> | Bayaning 3rd World   | Mike de Leon                           | 2000 | 93'   | mockumentary feature         |
|           | Postmodern deconstruction of Philippine national hero; of the figure and narrative construction of the hero.   |  |      |       |                              |
| <b>17</b> | Liham Para sa Mga Kababaihan (Letter to Women)   | Nancy Pe-Rodrigo and Amelia Rogel-Rara | 1998 | 27'   | documentary short; video     |
| <b>18</b> | Perlas ng Silangan   | Pablo Santiago                         | 1969 | 132'  |                              |
| <b>19</b> | Oro Plata Mata   | Peque Gallaga                          | 1982 |       | narrative feature; melodrama |
|           | The destruction of a Filipino-Spanish upper-class family through the second World War. (The anithesis of Raya Martin's Independencia?)                                 |  |      |       |                              |
| <b>20</b> | Autohystoria   | Raya Martin                            | 2007 | 95'   |                              |
| <b>21</b> | Ars Colonia  | Raya Martin                            | 2011 | 1'12" | experimental short           |

## Appendix

|           |  |             |      |      |                           |
|-----------|--|-------------|------|------|---------------------------|
| <b>22</b> | The Island at the End of the World   | Raya Martin | 2004 |      | essayfilm;<br>documentary |
| <b>23</b> | Independencia  | Raya Martin | 2009 | 77'  | Narrative feature         |
|           | Set at the cusp between the Spanish and American colonial period, this film begins with a mother and her son fleeing their home in a rural Tagalog town. |             |      |      |                           |
| <b>24</b> | Maicling pelicula nang ysang Indio Nacional [A Short Film about the Indio Nacional (or the Prolonged Sorrow of the Filipinos)]                           | Raya Martin | 2005 | 97'  | narrative feature         |
| <b>25</b> | Buenas noches, España  | Raya Martin | 2011 | 70'  | Narrative feature         |
| <b>26</b> | Bayani   | Raymond Red | 1992 | 98'  | Narrative feature         |
|           | Not available for distribution until digital remastering is completed (Reymond Red FB message).  |             |      |      |                           |
| <b>27</b> | Baler  | Mark Meily  | 2008 | 116' | Narrative feature         |

## Long-list: Spanish titles.

| # | Title   | Director      | Year | Run time | Genre/type        |
|---|---|---------------|------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | La cuarta carabela  | Miguel Martín | 1961 | 86'      | Narrative feature |
|   | <p>Students from Hispano-America converge to watch dances of various countries of Spain's former empire, as part of the festival de folclore de hispanoamerica. Amidst these dance troupes, amorous narratives unfold. The main one, between an ascerbic student, unimpressed with their lessons, and his history professor, serves as an overt analogy for the importance of Spain's youth to learn and appreciate the history of Spain's glorious colonial past. The Philippines features as a dance troupe, one of the many performing as part of the larger Festival de Folklorico de Hispanidad ; it is presented within the framework of Hispanidad, that is the imaginary cohesion of a group of countries, based on their shared history of colonialism under Spain. Within this framework of Hispanidad, the Philippines is placed in a hierarchy of relation with Spain and its former colonies, that places Spain in a dominant linguistic and cultural position. Together with the other countries, their dance numbers are presented to the gawking (predominantly) Spanish audience for their pleasure, to revel in nostalgia for the days of the Spanish Empire. The Philippine dance troupe featured is exoticised further Produced during the time of Franco's dictatorship, this film was released at a time when the dictatorship was seeking to change its relations with the rest of the international community. This rather unusual genre choice can be read as part of that change of face, moving from overtly nationalistic, military narratives, to a romantic comedy, whose nostalgic longing for Spain's glory days as a world superpower can be read through the film's analogies (though not requiring much effort).</p> |               |      |          |                   |
| 2 | Los últimos de Filipinas  | Antonio Róman | 1945 | 99'      | Narrative feature |
|   | <p>Franco-era production, released in the early years of the dictatorship. Promoting state loyalty, the film glorifies Spain's imperial past, focusing on the claustrophobic plight of the Spanish soldiers garrisoned in the church during the last days of the Spanish empire in the Philippines. The soldiers are presented as heroes, whose bull-headed defense of the church despite multiple attempts to inform them that their charge had expired (as the Philippines was no longer Spanish territory) is instead framed as an unequivocal (and unequivocating) love for Spain, one that all Spaniards would do well in emulating. Santi (is it Santi?), reads Róman's film as metaphorical of the atmosphere of claustrophobia and control in Spain during these early years in the dictatorship. He sees Róman's careful set-up of the fighting scenes, his framing, and the tight space that the soldiers are in as emblematic of the control of Franco had over the country and his countrymen. Though this reading lends an alternative, subversive spin to this overtly fascist film, it nonetheless foregrounds Spanish subjectivity above and against the bodies of their colonial subjects. The colony is literally and figuratively a place that serves Spanish identity to find and reflect on itself. Here, the Philippines features as the setting for the narrative. Filipinos are</p>   |               |      |          |                   |

|          |  |                            |      |       |                   |
|----------|--|----------------------------|------|-------|-------------------|
|          | represented as the invading savages, who fall in waves as they attempt to storm the church, incessantly shot down by the Spanish soldiers, in the racist character of the tavern owner, secretly colluding with the Filipino revolutionaries, and in the two-dimensional love-interest Tala, who falls in love with a Spanish soldier.   |                            |      |       |                   |
| <b>3</b> | Raza   | José Luis Sáenz De Heredia | 1941 | 101'  | Narrative feature |
|          | Raza focuses on the destruction and then reunification of a Spanish family during the civil war. Written by Franco himself under pseudonym Jaime De Andrade, it is autobiographical, though not without its embellishments and omissions. It functions as an allegory for the plight of Spain during the civil war, a country divided but ultimately uniting under fascism, becoming a 'whole family' again. The Philippines and Spain's relation to it features once: in a conversation between the characters' father, an admiral for Spain's navy and another Spanish naval officer. The conversation is early in the film and serves as the political backdrop and motivation for the political/militaristic narrative of the film. It provides the political explanation for the film's central narrative: the splintering of the protagonist family. The ghost of Spain's imperial past, as referenced by the last colonies of Philippines and Cuba, is invoked, its spectre surrounding the disintegration of the nation of Spain and the central family. |                            |      |       |                   |
| <b>4</b> | España en Filipinas (No- Do #533 A)  |                            | 1953 | 3'03" | Newsreel          |
|          | Propaganda newsreel documenting the state visit of Señor Martín Artajo and his wife to the Philippines during Quirino's presidency (not sure that year this is exactly). The foreign minister (ministro de asuntos exteriores ?) is presented with cultural, technical and military demonstrations. Spain's continued presence in the excolony is assured in the Philippine state's presentation of various facets of Spanish culture (wine, tobacco, catholic religion - all inheritances of Spanish colonialism) as thriving industries in the country, and the formal presentation of a Spanish-language school being instated in Manila.   |                            |      |       |                   |
| <b>5</b> | Mosaico filipino (No-Do. Revista imágenes número 430)  |                            | 1953 | 10'   | Newsreel          |
|          | Newsreel presenting the various industries of the Philippines in the 50's/60's (check which era). Focusing on the country's form of peasant agriculture, it's industries of tobacco and sugar cane, and presenting Hacienda Luisita as an example of this (largely manual labour and employing hundreds of peasant farmers), the newsreel paints a picture of the Philippines as a simple, 10 provincial agrarian country. The methods are simple, but the presentation of the peasants working with their kind-eyed beasts of burden (the carabao) gives the impression of order, control of an uneducated, simple but compliant peasant population, who perform their duties without question. The newsreel then moves on to present a cockfight that takes place in front of a group of foreigners. Here we are invited to revel in a native past time, to enjoy the other, 'savage' forms of entertainment in this   |                            |      |       |                   |

|          |  |  |      |        |          |
|----------|--|--|------|--------|----------|
|          | <p>far-flung exotic country. It then moves on to present images of Manila, specifically of calesas and ruins of churches, the V.O. highlighting that here are the many traces of Spanish influence –i.e. this area, though formally lost, still bears the indelible mark of Spain.</p> <p>It ends with scenes from Manila's Yacht club, showing foreign members (I assume they are Spanish?) enjoying sailing in Manila bay. The film presents the Philippines as an exotic, non-violent place, with enough traces of Spain to validate continued Spanish identification of the country as never having truly left Spanish influence, and as a landscape for bourgeois narratives of rest and relaxation to unfold.</p>  |  |      |        |          |
| <b>6</b> | Viaje a Manila (No-Do. Revista imágenes número 725)  |  | 1958 | 10'    | Newsreel |
|          | <p>Newsreel charting a trip to the Philippines from Spain. It presents the Philippines as an exotic country, whose landscape is for the exploitation and enjoyment of foreign and domestic bourgeois travellers. A relation is drawn between the Spanish conquistadors, referring to the statues of Legazpi and Urdaneta in Manila, and the contemporary travellers, who enjoy the sites and resorts of the islands.</p>   |  |      |        |          |
| <b>7</b> | Filipinas y España (No- Do. Revista imágenes número 2847608)   |  | 1962 | 11'22" | Newsreel |
|          | <p>VISITA OFICIAL DEL PRESIDENTE DE FILIPINAS DIOSDADO MACAPAGAL A ESPAÑA.<br/>         Newsreel documenting the state visit of Philippine President Diosdado Macapagal and his wife Evangelina to Franco's Spain in (what year?). It opens with their arrival on the airplane, greeted on the tarmac by Franco and his generals. A string of formal presentations follow: gifting of Madrid City's keys to the President, presentation of members of the ayuntamiento, a parade through the city streets featuring Madrid's population lining the grand streets, smiling and applauding (note on the soundtrack the addition of thunderous applause and a trumpet fanfare), arrival of the motorcade to the Moncloa Palace, appointment of Franco by Macapagal to the Order of Sikatuna, a visit to the Valley of the Fallen including mass, visit to a monastery, paying religious respects. They are invited to observe and appreciate the ties between Spain and the Philippines, through cultural and religious places, remnants of Spanish colonial past . One scene strikes with particular symbolic weight: the President and his wife lay a wreath of flowers at the foot of the Statue of Felipe II, the Republic's namesake. Their visit, judging by the footage of applauding crowds, grand parades, the accompanying fanfare and applause on the soundtrack, and the numerous visits, presentations and gift giving, was a grand affair. Or at least that is what the video is asserting. I get the sense that the presentation of Spain's cultural and industrial might is not only for the attention of the visiting President but for the Spanish public for whom this newsreel was made, and who watch these on their television sets at home. Models of ships, diagrams of car factories, aeroplanes, even a</p> |  |      |        |          |

|          |   |                        |              |     |                           |
|----------|---|------------------------|--------------|-----|---------------------------|
|          | spaceship (?), feel like an argument for Spains place among the world's leading economies. I wonder what the reality was at the time that the film feels like it is countering....  |                        |              |     |                           |
|          | @2' - I would like to translate this bit of audio: something about the relation of occidental culture and hispanidad. "un comun historia"   |                        |              |     |                           |
| <b>8</b> | Ynchausti collection  | Antonio Mari Ynchausti | 1920s'1930's | –   | Colonial home movie reels |
|          | Collection of home movies of Basque family Ynchausti. Antonio Mari Ynchausti, father and head of the family, shoots most if not all of these films. Part of the collection features the family's life in the Philippines, and their journeys by boat to and from the country (stopping in other Asian countries and in the Americas). There are scenes of the family's large, colonial home in Manila, along Manila Bay. It documents both interior and exterior of the house. The estate and house is large, a testament to the family's wealth and social standing. The camera does a panorama of the interior of the house. Ynchausti directs his wife, who crosses the frame to sit in an arm chair. A servant comes to pour her a drink and leaves. Señora sits and reads a letter. A picture of colonial life. Baguio city. 1930. There are inter-titles in this film, as well as the others, that place us in time and space. Also indicative of some intention on the part of the filmmaker, to exhibit these films (perhaps just to his family, but even so) and at the very least that this documentation is not without intention beyond the instance of filming. The reel shows Baguio in its early years, the city sparse with buildings. The hills roll, clear of trees and houses. Two men on horse back gallop across the open plain of what is Burnham Park. Baguio is young, a city in the making. (I can't help but feel some nostalgia for these scenes -but for very different reasons than Ynchausti might.) A scene in the market interests me in particular: the camera pans across the market, peopled by vendors from the Cordilleras in their tribal clothing. I spot a couple of outfit combos: one cordilleran youth is wearing the barong-tagalog with his bahag. Another wears a western coat over his bare-chest and bahag. Other than the vastly different image of the market - wide and though peopled, sparsely so- I am interested in the way the vendors look directly at the camera, at the cameraman. One older Igorot woman, dressed in a tapis and a coat of the same woven fabric with a snakespine in her hair, seems to contemplate him before gesticulating at him, moving her hand in a swift motion up and down, as if to call him over or perhaps telling him to stop. She looks displeased to me. |                        |              |     |                           |
| <b>9</b> | Aquellas palabras   | Luis Arroyo            | 1949         | 82' | Narrative feature         |
|          | Opening title card introduces us to our character and the morality lesson we are about to be taught. This is not, the card tells us, the story of a great man, but one of humility and purity. So great is his faith that he forsakes the comfort of Spanish soil for the wild, savage terrain of foreign countries. Pious and with a good heart, the protagonist Father Carlos sets off to the Philippines to Christianise the unfortunate pagans.   |                        |              |     |                           |
|          | Setting: Manila 1935. He is Basque. I wonder if his origins are supposed to mean something. It is mentioned only twice in the film, and one of the priests in the retinue who travel to the Philippines responds with the Basque affirmative, 'Bai.'" One character, a  |                        |              |     |                           |

patient at the war-time infirmary, comments, "Tampoco su malo!" when Father Carlos tells him he is Basque. All the pinoy soldiers wear triangular hats (vietnamese style) and seem to emerge literally from the jungle. They all just come walking out from between ferns, their faces peeking from behind palm fronds. Likewise they disappear into the leafy wilderness, as mysteriously as they appear. One scene in particular: they all emerge, a whole host of them, flocking around the make-shift altar Father Carlos creates upon arriving at the village. Pinay who flees her husband is named Tala –same name as that of the Pinay character in Ròman's *Los últimos*.

Priest defends runaway pinay from her murderous husband and his gang of other murderous native men. The allegory is evident: The sanctity and purity of Spain (embodied in this Spanish priest) in its christianising mission protects the virginal Philippines from the ravages of savagery (equivalent to paganism). The elements/nature feature prominently. Whenever the natives are present, palm leaves line the frame.

The priest has come to a fishing village whose catch is lacking. "Yo que lo digo podrás!" - Spanish nurse says to filipino soldier in infirmary --? is this a pep talk, that he should continue living? Tala turns out to be a traitor - or at least it is suggested with her scene colluding with the Japanese soldier, toasting to their victory. This scene comes immediately after the wedding of the Spanish doctor-nurse couple in the prison camp. The comparison is evident. Then Tala helps the priest escape the prison camp. Throughout the film there is this strange eroticism about the women characters whenever they are close to Father Carlos. They all seem to trust and adore him and find in him comfort. The Spanish nurse even speaks about her father and how she longs to be in his arms again, and her eyes lift up longingly to the priest's face when she shares this. Father Carlos himself remains chaste, and nothing erotic seems to cross his mind. But the behaviour of the women, who seem to swoon around him and place all their trust in him, is suggestive. Tala dies as she and the priest flee the prison camp, shot in the back by a Japanese soldier as she crosses the river. With her dying breath she tells the priest that her father was actually Spanish and that he always talked to her about Spain (she says this wistfully). She dies, the priest covers her face with a scarf, and then the Spanish flag fluttering in the wind is superimposed over the image. Spain literally covers the dead body of the Filipina character.

|           |                                |                |      |      |                   |
|-----------|--------------------------------|----------------|------|------|-------------------|
| <b>10</b> | 1898: Los últimos de Filipinas | Salvador Calvo | 2016 | 115' | Narrative feature |
|-----------|--------------------------------|----------------|------|------|-------------------|

Remake of Roman's 1945 classic, partly sponsored by the Spanish government and the Catholic Church-owned TV channel 13TV, entitled *1898: Los Ultimos de Filipinas*, directed by Salvador Calvo. This remake attempts to tow the line between historical accuracy, at least regarding the traumas endured by the Spanish soldiers, and portraying them as heroes despite the seemingly bullheaded and nonsensical decisions of the officers in command. Here, Filipinos are granted more of a palpable presence, if only to serve a single purpose: In one of the final scenes of the film, the Filipino general's decision not to take the Spanish soldiers as prisoners of war, allowing them to leave peacefully, is explained as

|    |  |  |      |     |                   |
|----|--|--|------|-----|-------------------|
|    | a gesture of kindness, the friendly handshake effectively excusing centuries of Spanish colonialism.   |  |      |     |                   |
| 11 | Un viaje mas largo   | Manuel H. Martín                                     | 2020 | 78' | Narrative feature |
| 12 | Los últimos de Filipinas: Regreso a Baler  | Jesús Valbuena                                       | 2018 | 47' | documentary short |
|    | <p>The documentary describes how the siege played out, using CGI animation and drawing on testimonies from the descendants of the surviving soldiers and various Spanish and Filipino officials. It is intent on highlighting the heroism of these men. Despite the descriptions of the gruesome conditions endured by the soldiers and the atrocities committed, including death by malnutrition, attempted mutiny and subsequent summary execution of two soldiers by their own men just days before they culmination of the siege, the film is so insistent on its intent that it glosses over what I found to be a key fact regarding this tragedy, as expressed by one of the interviewed descendants: “Something happened there during that year that they decided not to tell.” The fact that the surviving soldiers were on the whole taciturn regarding this shared event and that none of them ever saw each other again after their return to Spain could be indicative of how they carried this incident, not as a moment of heroism to proudly remember and display, but one of devastating trauma relegated to the silence of history. Jesus Valbuena, the director of the film is himself a grandson of one of the surviving soldiers. He runs a blog dedicated to the siege and has, through his work on this film, become a cultural ambassador of sorts between Spain and the town of Baler. Thanks partly to his efforts, there is now an official holiday honouring the siege: the Philippine-Spanish Friendship Day, celebrated annually on June 30th since 2002.</p> |  |      |     |                   |
| 13 | Elkano y Magallanes: la primera vuelta al mundo  | Ángel Alonso   | 2019 | 90' | animated feature  |
|    | <p>A co-production between Spanish and Basque money, the film was expressly made to kick-off the Quincentennial celebrations and to establish a firm (equally uncritical) Basque claim on this voyage through the character of Elkano. The film exhibits multiple historical inaccuracies and omissions in an effort, no doubt, to inoculate some of the story’s more uncomfortable details to fit the film’s young target audience, and the selected narrative of the celebrations.</p>   |  |      |     |                   |
| 14 | Un verano en Madrid  | Juan Andrés Coéllar, Javier Extremera, Joaquín Hermo | 2017 | 25' | documentary short |

|    |  |   |              |        |  |
|----|--|---|--------------|--------|--|
|    | This is an attempt at looking back to the Madrid exposition, it's focus the exhibition of the Filipino tribes put on display. It opens with a scene at a church mass (presumably in Spain) of a Filipino community, the mass being in Tagalog. It then proceeds to show the various Philippine objects - carvings, castes, models of houses, carved figures (some of them bul-ols) - from this exposition kept in the vaults of the National Anthropology Museum of Madrid. It then intercuts these images - cold, unquestioning looks at the state of conservation and display used by the museum - with texts written about the exposition by various contemporary witnesses, read aloud by Filipino readers, and with scenes from a period play (unnamed) involving Filipinos in the turn of the century. |   |              |        |  |
| 15 | Ta acorda ba tu el Filipinas? [Do You Remember the Philippines?]   | Sally Gutierrez                           | 2017         | 82'    | documentary short  |
| 16 | Camino Rizal   | Sally Gutierrez                           | 2021         | 25'    | documentary short  |
|    | Camino Rizal is a documentary essay and a medium-length film that spotlights the tour by Philippine artist and performer Carlos Celdrán (1972–2019) in Madrid on the life of José Rizal and which, with the collaboration of artists and members of the Philippine community in Spain, brings the debates started by Rizal into the present.   |   |              |        |  |
| 17 | Réplica  | Daniela ortiz                             | 2014<br>2015 | 4'29"  | Vídeo, color, sonido. experimental; installation.  |
|    | In Réplica the artist kneels before the Spaniards gathered at Plaza Cataluña to celebrate the Fiesta Nacional de España (the National Day of Spain) on the 12th of October 2014. She reproduces the position of an indigenous person kneeled before Bernardo Boyl, as depicted in the monument dedicated to Christopher Columbus in Barcelona with the objective of making the Spaniards reflect on their history of colonization and the symbolism found in the monuments that surround us. - from Ortiz' website   |   |              |        |  |
| 18 | Margen de Error  | Sally Gutierrez/<br>declinación magnética | 2013         | 56'13" |  |
| 19 | Pasig Manzanares   | Sally Gutierrez                           | 2013         | 7'03   | Video installation, 3 screens: PASIG – MANZANARES<br>Wall drawings and text<br>Photo-collage |
|    | In PASIG – MANZANARES - following the research and filming process for the non-fiction film Ta Acorda Ba Tu EL Filipinas - Sally Gutiérrez explores a constellation of historical and contemporary nexuses that intertwine Spain and the Philippines. Navigating between   |   |              |        |  |

## Appendix

maps, waterways, constituent texts, questions and tree cuttings, the exhibition poses overlapping echoes and resonances, disarticulating and recombining the simple linearity of time that seems to separate past from present and them from us. The intersecting temporal and political planes connect a continuous present of corruption, state violence and racism already described by José Rizal at the end of the 19th century in his famous novels. From one Bourbon Restoration to another, from the first imperialist liberalism to the neo-liberalism of globalisation, from the Pasig to the Manzanares, from one bank of time to the other, watching the trees of memory and desire pass by in a river that is still ours. (texto en español & English)

## Screening materials: invites, programmes and posters

### Letter of invitation (sent as emails): Baguio screenings

Hello,

February 22, 2024

My name is Anna de Guia-Eriksson. I'm a Baguio girl currently doing my practice-based PhD in film at the University for the Creative Arts in the UK. I'm contacting you as I would like to inquire if you think any of your students might be interested in participating in my study that investigates contemporary attitudes to colonial legacy through film.

This project involves a series of public film screenings coupled with post-screening workshops. It uses films from Spain and the Philippines that deal with/somehow represent the shared colonial period between Spain and the Philippines and sets them in dialogue against each other through screenings. The audience is then invited to critically reflect on the films in guided discussions. These discussions will be in English or Tagalog; whichever language is most comfortable for the participants.

The screenings are free and will take place at Ili-likha Artists' Watering Hole on Assumption Road on Sunday, March 10 and 17, 2024. The workshops will be documented with video and audio. Participants would ideally be ok with being filmed, as this material will later be used as part of my dissertation film.

To contextualise further: the same exercise will be executed with audiences in Spain. The resulting film will investigate the differences/similarities between audience attitudes in both these countries that have shared a long history together but seem (at least initially) to have differing relationships to this same past.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please do get in touch at [aa.deguia@gmail.com](mailto:aa.deguia@gmail.com)! You can also contact my collaborating partner Summer Bastian.

Kind regards,  
Anna de Guia-Eriksson

## Appendix

Session #1

March 10, 2024, 1 pm.

2 –2.5 hours (including breaks)

*Umbilical Cord* (1998) Angel Shaw

Documentary

30', colour, video and sound.

What is a hero? Shot in the centennial year of the Philippine Revolution, Shaw interviews Filipina women, from academics, activists, street vendors to her own colleagues, asking them who their hero is. Moving through historic spaces in Manila, this essay-film charts a geography of Philippine revolutionary history as well as the absence of women from that history.

*Camino Rizal* (2021) Sally Gutiérrez

Documentary

25', colour, video and sound.

Moving through the city of Madrid in the present day, this short documentary follows the lingering presence of Filipino national hero Jose Rizal in the capital city by tracing the steps of Filipino artist and activist Carlos Celdran and his guided, historical tours. The film considers the relationship Spain has had with the Philippines and its enduring attitudes towards its ex-colony.

Total viewing time: 55'

Workshop: 1.5 hours

Participants will be broken up into smaller groups to answer some prompt questions. They will then be invited to share these thoughts to everyone. The questions will revolve around (though they are not limited to) the theme the two films have in common: their consideration of national heroes. Questions will also be particular to each film, asking participant to consider what is communicated in each film, and the devices they use to do so.

## Appendix

Session #2

March 17, 2024. 1 pm.

2.5 - 3 hours (including breaks)

Lecture, 15 mins: A short lecture on the Ynchausti collection will open this session.

*Un Verano En Madrid* (2017) Juan Andrés Coéllar, Javier Extremera & Joaquín Hermo

Documentary

25', colour, sound.

This short is an inquisitive look at the Madrid Exposition of 1886, specifically the display of tribes of Filipinos in mock villages at the Palacio Cristal. Juxtaposing archival letters of the Minister of the Exterior about the project, read aloud by present-day members of Madrid's Filipino community, the film highlights an uncomfortable history and the institutional as well as artistic attempts at preserving these artefacts.

Colonial home movies from the *Ynchausti Collection* (1920s-1930's)

Home movies; non-fiction

25', B&W, no sound.

The colonial home movies from the Basque merchant family's personal collection, featuring their time in the Philippines. The selected reels feature Ynchausti's wife and servants in their home in Manila and their travels in Baguio City, then an infant city.

Total viewing: 60'5"

Workshop 1.5 hours:

Break-out groups will be formed with participants. Participants will be invited to consider the material information around the Ynchausti films and what significance films of this nature have to our consideration of history. Other question will focus on the use of archive, why collections such as the Ynchausti's may/may not be important to us, and how their creative use, such as with the second film, can help us consider events from different perspectives.



## *Umbilical Cord*

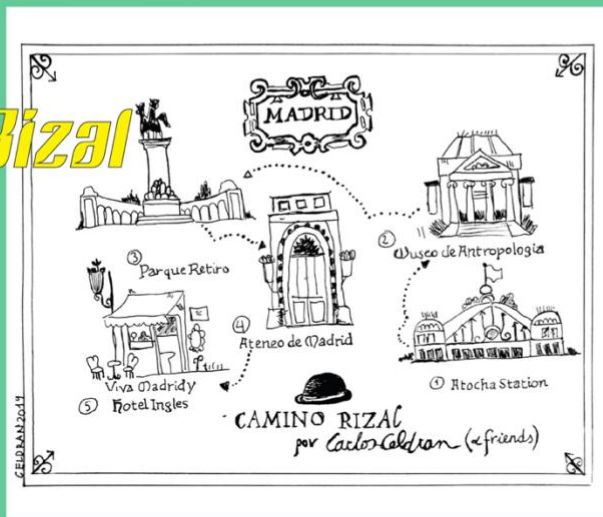
(1998) Angel Shaw, documentary.  
30', colour, video and sound.

What is a hero? Shot in the centennial year of the Philippine Revolution, Shaw interviews Filipina women, from academics, activists, street vendors to her own colleagues, asking them who their hero is. Moving through historic spaces in Manila, this essay-film charts a geography of Philippine revolutionary history, attempting to respond to the absence of Filipina women in that history.

## *Camino Rizal*

(2021) Sally Gutiérrez, documentary.  
25', colour, video and sound.

Moving through the city of Madrid in the present day, this short documentary follows the lingering presence of Filipino national hero Jose Rizal in the capital city by tracing the steps of Filipino artist and activist Carlos Celdran and his guided, historical tours. The film considers the relationship Spain has had with the Philippines and its enduring attitudes towards its ex-colony.



**Sunday, March 10, 2024 at 1 pm**  
Balanghai ni Iking Indie Cinema,  
Ili-likha Artists' Wateringhole



**Free tickets!**

Join us for a special double bill of two short films, one from the Philippines and one from Spain, that take two distinct looks at our shared colonial history. A workshop will take place after the screening to discuss the films and their considerations of the enduring links between Spain and the Philippines.

The post-screening workshop will be documented with video and sound. You can opt out of the workshop and still attend the screening; though we would love it if you would share your thoughts! Come think with us through film!

Appendix


Poster – session 1 at Balanghai Ni Ikeng Cinema, Baguio City.

**NOW SHOWING**

FILIKHA presents

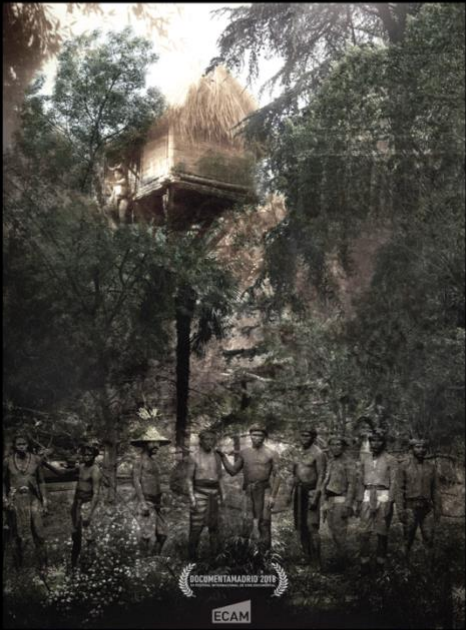
A special film screening

**Ynchausti Family Colonial Home-Movies Collection**



Sunday, March 17, 2024. 1 pm.  
Balanghain ni Ikeng Indie Cinema,  
Ili-likha Artists' WateringHole.  
Free tickets!

**Un Verano En Madrid**  
(A Summer In Madrid)




Colonial home movies from the Ynchausti Collection (1920s-1930's)  
Home movies; non-fiction  
25', B&W, no sound.

A presentation of select reels from the Basque merchant family's personal collection. These feature their life in the Philippines: their home in Manila and their leisure time, some of which was spent in Baguio, then an infant city.

**Un Verano En Madrid (2017)**  
Juan Andrés Coéllar, Javier Extremera & Joaquín Hermo  
Documentary. 25', colour, sound.

This short is an inquisitive look at the Madrid Exposition of 1886, specifically the display of tribes of Filipinos in mock villages at the Palacio Cristal. Juxtaposing archival letters of the Minister of the Exterior about the project, read aloud by present-day members of Madrid's Filipino community, the film highlights an uncomfortable history and the institutional as well as artistic attempts at preserving artefacts from the exposition.



Poster – session 2 at Balanghain Ni Ikeng Cinema, Baguio City.

**AFTERTHOUGHTS: MEMORIA KOLONIALAREN  
INGURUKO LANTEGIA  
ANNA DE GUIA-ERIKSSON-EKIN**



**Saioaren ibilbidea**

**Saioaren sarrera**

(5 minutu)

- Proiektzioen testuinguruaren berri eman eta hau zergatik egiten ari garen azaldu.

**Materialak aurkeztu**

(10 minutu)

- Filmei buruzko informazio orokorra (iraupena, estreinaldia, zuzendariak, etab.) eta testuinguruari buruzko informazioa, filmak ulertzen laguntzeko: gertaera historikoak eta pertsonaiak.

**Proiektzioa**

(60 minutu)

***Un Verano En Madrid*** (2017) Juan Andrés Coéllar, Javier Extremera & Joaquín Hermo  
Dokumentala  
25', koloretan, soinuduna

Film labur honek ikuspegi kritikotik aztertzen du 1886ko Madrilgo Erakusketa; zehazki, Kristalezko Jauregian simulatutako herrixketan filipinar leinuei buruz egindako erakusketa. Filmean, Atzerri Gaietako Ministroak proiektuari buruz izandako gutun-trukea ozen irakurtzen dute Madrilgo filipinar komunitateko gaur egungo kideek, eta, bide horretatik, historia deseroso bat aditzera ematen du, baita artefaktu horiek babestearren egindako saiakera instituzionalak eta artistikoak ere.

**Ynchausti bildumako film kolonial amateurrek** (1920-1930 urteak)

Film amateurrek; ez fikzioa  
25', Z/B, soinurik gabeak

Film kolonial amateurren sorta, euskal merkatarien familia baten bilduma pertsonalekoa, familia hark Filipinetan egindako egonaldiaren berri ematen duena. Aukeratutako bobinetan, Ynchaustiren emaztea eta haren zerbitzariak ikusten dira, Manilako etxean, baita Baguio hirian barrenako joan-etorriak ere.

**Guztirako iraupena: 60'5''**

Saioaren sarrera  
(c.o. Anna)

*«Benetako askapena erdiesteko, beharrezkoa dugu arretaz begiratzea memoria nola transferitzen zaigun».*

- Luba Nomhleka Nkiwane, 'Kusvikirwa: A Decolonial Spirit'

Proiektzioa eta lantegia biltzen dituen saio hau doktoregoko nire ikerketaren praktikan oinarritua da. Zinemagilea eta erakuslea naiz. Nire jardura estu lotuta dago nire nortasunarekin: filipinarra eta suediarra naiz, eta Europa «erdiko» eta Hegoalde Globaleko «periferiako» polo kolonialen artean (termino horiek erabil banitzake) eman dut bizitzaren parte handiena. Hortaz, esperientzia kolonialaz dihardu nire lanak, eta agerian jarri nahi du ondare koloniala denoi dagokigula, antzinako kolonizatuei nahiz antzinako kolonizatzaileei neurri berean, ez bakarrik historia hori partekatzen dugulako, baizik eta historia horrek jarraitzen duelako gaur egun ditugun paradigmen oinarri izaten. Samia Mehrez akademikoak adierazi bezala,

«[...] **(D)ekolonizazioa kolonizatuarentzako nahiz kolonizatzailearentzako arao modura ulertzen da.** Askapen-prozesua behar du izan bi alderdientzat: mendekotasunetiko askapena, kolonizatuaren kasuan, eta pertzepzio, irudikapen eta erakunde inperialista eta arrazistekiko askapena, kolonizatzailearen kasuan, gaur egunean indarrean baitiraute oraindik, zoritxarrez».

(«The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance», 1991, 258. or.)

Zinemagilea naizenez (eginez eta erakutsiz), zinema aukeratu dut «arao» honetarako bitarteko gisa. Hala, inperioaren espektroak bitarteko horren kontra bideratu duen eta bideratzen jarraitzen duen jazarpenari buruzko hausnarketarako gonbita egin nahi dizuet gaur. Nola eragiten du historia eta legatu kolonialeari buruz dugun pertzepzioan? Gailu mnemotekniko gisa, zer ahalmen du iraganarekin ditugun erlazioak egituratzeko? Nola garatu dezakegu begirada kritikoa, espirtu kritikoa, hasierako aipuan azaltzen den erronka geure eginez arretaz begira dezagun memoria transferitzeko moduak benetako askapenerako gure mugimendua ez eragozte?

### Pentsatzeko aipuak

«deskolonizazioa pentsamendu hegemonikoko sistema baten kontrako konfrontazio aktiboa eta, beraz, askapen historiko eta kulturalako prozesu bat izan da eta halaxe izaten jarraitzen du. Hala, forma eta egitura menderatzaile guztiak aurkaratzen ditu deskolonizazioak, izan linguistikoak, diskurtsiboak nahiz ideologikoak. Gainera, **deskolonizazioa kolonizatuarentzako nahiz kolonizatzailearentzako arao modura ulertzen da.** Askapen-prozesua behar du izan bi alderdientzat: mendekotasunetiko askapena, kolonizatuaren kasuan, eta pertzepzio, irudikapen eta erakunde inperialista eta arrazistekiko askapena, kolonizatzailearen kasuan, gaur egunean indarrean baitiraute oraindik, zoritxarrez.»

Samia Mehrez, («The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance», 1991, p. 258)

«**Dena begien bistan jartzera eta erakustera behartzeko biolentzia ukatu egiten da, baldin eta jokoan dagoen eskubidea ikusteko eskubidea soilik bada.** Dena ez erakusteko eskubidea errespetatzen bada, ezin oinarritu daiteke «mundu guztiari» munduan dagoen guztirako sarbide mugagabea ematen dion ikusteko eskubidea.»

Hemendik ateratako pasartea: Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. "Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism." iBooks.

«Ikusteko eskubide unibertsala iruzurra da. Argazkilaritza sortu zenean, ez zen eten besteak eta besteen munduak batzuen mende jartzen zituen espoliazio-prozesu hori; aitzitik, bizkortu egin zuen prozesu hori eta aukera gehiago eman zituen hura aurrera eramateko. Kameraren obturadorea teknologia inperial modura garatu zen.»

Hemendik ateratako pasartea: Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. "Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism." iBooks.

«**Laster ikasi genuen ikaskuntzarako gure joera, adimenaren bizitzarako joera, ekintza kontrahegemoniko bat zela, kolonizazio arrazista zuri orori aurre egiteko funtsezko bitartekoa.** Praktika horiek termino teorikotan definitzen edo artikulatzen ez bazituzten ere, erresistentziako pedagogia iraultzaile bat praktikan jartzen ari ziren nire irakasleak.»  
(hooks, "Teaching to Transgress", 1994, p. 5)

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**AFTERTHOUGHTS: TALLER EN TORNO A  
LA MEMORIA COLONIAL CON  
ANNA DE GUIA-ERIKSSON**



**Itinerario de la sesión**

**Introducción a la sesión**

(5 minutos)

- Introducir el contexto de las proyecciones y por qué estamos haciendo esto. (5 minutos)

**Presentar los materiales**

(10 minutos)

- Información general sobre las películas (duración, estreno, directores, etc.), así como información contextual útil para comprenderlas: los acontecimientos históricos y las personas representadas.

**Proyección**

(60 minutos)

***Un Verano En Madrid*** (2017) Juan Andrés Coéllar, Javier Extremera & Joaquín Hermo

Documental

25', color, sonido

Este corto es una mirada inquisitiva a la Exposición de Madrid de 1886, concretamente a la exhibición de tribus de filipinos en aldeas simuladas en el Palacio Cristal. Mediante la yuxtaposición de cartas de archivo del Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores sobre el proyecto, leídas en voz alta por miembros actuales de la comunidad filipina de Madrid, la película pone de relieve una historia incómoda y los intentos, tanto institucionales como artísticos, de preservar estos artefactos.

**Películas caseras coloniales de la Colección Ynchausti (años 1920-1930)**

Películas caseras; no ficción

25', ByN, sin sonido

Una selección de carretes de películas caseras coloniales de la colección personal de la familia de comerciantes vascos, que muestran su estancia en Filipinas. Las bobinas seleccionadas muestran a la esposa de Ynchausti y a sus sirvientes en su casa de Manila y sus viajes por la ciudad de Baguio.

**Visionado total: 60'5"**

## Introducción a la sesión

(c.o. Anna)

*«Para adquirir una verdadera liberación, es importante que permanezcamos vigilantes sobre cómo se nos transfiere la memoria».*

- Luba Nomhlekazi Nkiwane, 'Kusvikirwa: A Decolonial Spirit'

Esta sesión de proyección y taller constituye la investigación fundamentada en la práctica de mi estudio de doctorado. Soy cineasta y exhibidora. Mi práctica está estrechamente relacionada con mi identidad: Soy filipina y sueca y he pasado la mayor parte de mi vida moviéndome entre los polos coloniales del «centro» europeo y la «periferia» del Sur Global (si se me permite utilizar estos términos). Así pues, mi trabajo se ocupa de la experiencia colonial y de poner de relieve cómo el legado colonial nos concierne a todos, antiguos colonizados y antiguos colonizadores por igual, no sólo porque compartimos esa historia, sino porque esa historia sigue informando los paradigmas bajo los que existimos hoy en día. Como ha afirmado la académica Samia Mehrez

**«[...] la (D)ecolonización llega a entenderse como un acto de exorcismo tanto para el colonizado como para el colonizador.** Para ambas partes debe ser un proceso de liberación: de la dependencia, en el caso del colonizado, y de las percepciones, representaciones e instituciones imperialistas y racistas que, por desgracia, siguen con nosotros hasta nuestros días, en el caso del colonizador».

(«The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance», 1991, p. 258)

Como soy cineasta (haciendo y mostrando), el medio que he elegido para este «exorcismo» es el cine. Hoy les invito a reflexionar sobre el modo en que este medio ha sido y sigue siendo asediado por el espectro del imperio. ¿Cómo influye en nuestra percepción de la historia y el legado coloniales? Como dispositivo mnemotécnico, ¿qué potencial tiene para configurar nuestras relaciones con el pasado? ¿Cómo podemos desarrollar una mirada crítica, un espíritu crítico, para que -como nos desafía la cita inicial- permanezcamos atentos a cómo la transferencia de la memoria puede obstaculizar nuestro movimiento hacia la verdadera liberación?

### Citas para pensar

«La descolonización ha sido, y sigue siendo, una confrontación activa con un sistema de pensamiento hegemónico y, por tanto, un proceso de liberación histórica y cultural. Como tal, la descolonización se convierte en la impugnación de todas las formas y estructuras dominantes, ya sean lingüísticas, discursivas o ideológicas. Además, **la descolonización llega a entenderse como un acto de exorcismo tanto para el colonizado como para el colonizador**. Para ambas partes debe ser un proceso de liberación: de la dependencia, en el caso del colonizado, y de las percepciones, representaciones e instituciones imperialistas y racistas que, por desgracia, siguen con nosotros hasta nuestros días, en el caso del colonizador.»

Samia Mehrez, (“The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance”, 1991, p. 258)

«**La violencia de obligar a que todo sea mostrado y exhibido a la mirada se niega cuando el derecho en cuestión es sólo el derecho a ver**. Si se respeta el derecho a no exhibirlo todo, no puede fundamentarse el derecho a ver que dota a «todo el mundo» de un acceso ilimitado a lo que hay en el mundo.»

Extracto de: Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. “Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism.”  
iBooks.

«La idea de un derecho universal a ver es un fraude. Cuando surgió la fotografía, no detuvo este proceso de expolio que ponía los otros y los mundos de los otros a disposición de algunos, sino que lo aceleró y proporcionó más oportunidades para llevarlo a cabo. De este modo, el obturador de la cámara se desarrolló como una tecnología imperial.»

Extracto de: Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. «Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism.».  
iBooks.

«**Aprendimos pronto que nuestra devoción al aprendizaje, a una vida de la mente, era un acto contrahegemónico, una forma fundamental de resistir a toda estrategia de colonización racista blanca**. Aunque no definían ni articulaban estas prácticas en términos teóricos, mis profesoras estaban poniendo en práctica una pedagogía revolucionaria de resistencia que era profundamente anticolonial.»

hooks, (“Teaching to Transgress”, 1994, p. 5)

## Session itinerary

### Intro to session

- Introduce the context of the screenings and why we are doing this. (5 minutes)

### Introducing the materials. (10 minutes)

- Standard info on the films (run-time, release, directors etc.) as well as contextual info useful in understanding them: the historical events and people depicted.

### Screening (60 minutes)

*Un Verano En Madrid* (2017) Juan Andrés Coéllar, Javier Extremera & Joaquín Hermo

Documentary

25', colour, sound

This short is an inquisitive look at the Madrid Exposition of 1886, specifically the display of tribes of Filipinos in mock villages at the Palacio de Cristal. Juxtaposing archival letters of the Minister of the Exterior about the project, read aloud by present-day members of Madrid's Filipino community, the film highlights an uncomfortable history and the institutional as well as artistic attempts at preserving these artefacts.

Colonial home movies from the Ynchausti Collection (1920s-1930's)

Home movies; non-fiction

25', B&W, no sound.

A selection of reels of the colonial home movies from the Basque merchant family's personal collection, featuring their time in the Philippines. The selected reels feature Ynchausti's wife and servants in their home in Manila and their travels in Baguio City.

Total viewing: 60'5"

## ARTIUM Workshop Itinerary - English p. 1

– My own copy. For the session, copies in Euskera & Spanish were provided.

## Introduction to session

(c.o. Anna)

*"To acquire true liberation, it is important that we remain vigilant on how memory is transferred to us."*

- Luba Nomhleka Nkiwane, 'Kusvikirwa: A Decolonial Spirit'

This screening and workshop session forms the practice-based research of my Doctoral study. I am a filmmaker and exhibitor. My practice is closely connected to my identity: I am Filipino and Swedish and have spent most of my life moving between the colonial poles of European 'centre' and the 'periphery' of the Global South (if I may use those terms). My work thus concerns itself with colonial experience and with highlighting how colonial legacy concerns all of us, formerly colonized and former colonizers alike, not only because we share such a history but because this history continues to inform the paradigms under which we exist today. As academic Samia Mehrez has stated

**"[...] (D)ecolonization comes to be understood as an act of exorcism for both the colonized and the colonizer.** For both parties it must be a process of liberation: from dependency, in the case of the colonized, and from imperialist, racist perceptions, representations, and institutions which, unfortunately, remain with us till this very day, in the case of the colonizer."

("The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance", 1991, p. 258)

As I practice film (making and showing), my chosen arena for this 'exorcism' is the medium of film. Today, I invite you to consider the ways in which this medium has and continues to be haunted by the spectre of empire. How does it inform our perceptions of colonial history, of colonial legacy? As a mnemonic device, what potential does it have in shaping our relations to our past? How can we develop critical eyes, a critical spirit, so we may –as the opening quote challenges us– remain vigilant to how the transfer of memory can hamper our movement to true liberation?

## Quotes for thinking

"Decolonization has been, and continues to be, an active confrontation with a hegemonic system of thought and hence a process of historical and cultural liberation. As such, decolonization becomes the contestation of all dominant forms and structures whether they be linguistic, discursive, or ideological. Moreover, **decolonization comes to be understood as an act of exorcism for both the colonized and the colonizer.** For both parties it must be a process of liberation: from dependency, in the case of the colonized, and from imperialist, racist perceptions, representations, and institutions which, unfortunately, remain with us till this very day, in the case of the colonizer."

Samia Mehrez, ("The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance", 1991, p. 258)

**"The violence of forcing everything to be shown and exhibited to the gaze is denied when the right in question is only the right to see.** If the right not to exhibit everything is respected, the right to see that endows "everybody" with unlimited access to what is in the world cannot be founded."

Excerpt From: Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. "Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism." iBooks.

"The idea of a universal right to see is a fraud. When photography emerged, it didn't halt this process of plunder that made others and others' worlds available to some, but rather accelerated it and provided further opportunities to pursue it. In this way the camera shutter developed as an imperial technology."

Excerpt From: Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. "Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism." iBooks.

**"We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization.** Though they did not define or articulate these practices in theoretical terms, my teachers were enacting a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anticolonial." (hooks, "Teaching to Transgress", 1994, p. 5)

# TALLER MEMORIA COLONIAL

# 1380

Anna de Guia-Eriksson

ESTREA EN NUMAX: 26.09.2024 | V.O.S.E.

“Ta Acorda ba Tu el Filipinas?”  
(Sally Gutiérrez, 2017, 82', VOSE)

Documental que explora as pegadas do colonialismo español en Filipinas, do pasado ao presente. Desde un punto de vista crítico, decolonial e feminista, as sombras do antigo imperio e a actual realidade postcolonial agroman a través da pluralidade da propia linguaxe. Cunha narración non lineal, o proxecto entretrece as vidas, as memorias e os espazos de diferentes comunidades: membros de procedencia española que aínda falan o filipino-español ou falantes de Chabacano de Zamboanga, na illa de Mindanao.

“Umbilical Cord”  
(Angel Shaw, 1998, 30', VOSE)

A través dun estilo de cinema directo, Shaw explora a relación persoal co seu país, Filipinas, a través de enquisas filmadas con xente da rúa sobre o seu concepto do heroe e o papel da muller na historia do seu país. Filmada en espazos históricos de Manila, este filme-ensaio cartografía a historia revolucionaria de Filipinas ao tempo que reflexiona sobre a ausencia de mulleres na súa historia oficial.



NUMAX – Session programme – side A.

## TALLER MEMORIA COLONIAL

Anna de Guia-Eriksson

EUROPA  
CINEMAS  
Creative Europe MEDIA

### A historia colonial a través do cinema

*Por Anna de Guia-Eriksson*

"Para acadar a verdadeira liberación é importante manernos vixiantes sobre como se nos transfire a memoria" (Luba Nomhlekazi Nkiwane, *Kusvikirwa: A Decolonial Spirit*)

Esta proxección e este taller son a parte práctica da miña investigación para a tese de doutoramento. Eu son cineasta e programadora e o meu traballo está fondamente conectado coa miña identidade. Son de orixe filipina e sueca e dediquei a meirande parte da miña vida a moverme entre os dous polos coloniais, do "centro", en Europa, á "periferia", no Sur Global.

O meu traballo céntrase nas experiencias coloniais e como este legado nos atinxe, tanto na nosa condición de antigos colonizadores como de antigos colonizados. Somos descendentes de colonizadores ou de colonizados?

A académica Samia Mehred ten declarado:

"[...] A (d)ecolonización chega á nosa comprensión como un acto de exorcismo tanto para colonizadores como para colonizados. Para ambas partes debe ser un proceso de liberación: desde a dependencia no caso das persoas colonizadas, e desde o imperialismo, as percepcións racistas e as representacións e institucións que, desgrazadamente, fican aínda connosco hoxe en día, no caso do colonizador". (*The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*, 1991, p. 258)

Dado que o meu traballo é crear e amosar filmes, este é será o terreo de xogo para levar a cabo o exorcismo.

Hoxe convídvos a pensar sobre as maneiras en que o cinema ten sido -e segue a ser- influenciado polo imperialismo pasado e presente. De que maneira esta influencia condiciona a maneira en que percibimos a historia colonial e o seu legado? Como pode configurar a nosa relación co pasado? Como podemos desenvolver unha ollada e un espírito crítico de maneira que esteamos máis vixilantes para que esta transferencia de memoria non impida loitar por unha verdadeira liberación?

*A investigadora*

Anna de Guia-Eriksson é unha cineasta de Baguio City, Filipinas. A súa obra investiga o legado colonial e a memoria. Os seus filmes proxectáronse en Cinema Rehiyon (Filipinas) e Punto de Vista (España). Tras completar os seus estudos de máster na Elías Querejeta Zine Eskola de Donostia, actualmente cursa estudos de doutoramento na University for the Creative Arts do Reino Unido.

**NUMAX**  
numax.org

NUMAX – Session programme – side B.

This is the same introduction as used in the ARTIUM session.

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