

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

“Coal is NOT the Answer. Renewable Energy for the People NOW!”:

The Struggle for Climate Justice in the Philippines

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology

by

Bradley Cardozo

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“Coal is NOT the Answer. Renewable Energy for the People NOW!”:

The Struggle for Climate Justice in the Philippines

by

Bradley Cardozo

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

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The climate crisis has been severe in the Philippines, which has been experiencing historically unprecedented super typhoons, worsening floods and droughts, coral-reef destruction from oceanic acidification, and sea-level rise that threatens to submerge islands and coastal regions throughout the archipelagic country. In response, Philippine climate-justice activists have been waging an increasingly powerful struggle to transform the economy of the Philippines to be sustainable, economically just, and powered by 100% clean and renewable energy. Using ethnographic methods, this dissertation investigates the political struggle being waged by the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), the largest and most prominent voice for climate-justice activism in the Philippines. The dissertation analyzes the postcoloniality of Philippine climate justice, calls for “climate reparations” from the Global North to the Global South, a movement of “insurgent ecological citizenship” in a coal-affected community in the province of Bataan, efforts for energy democracy and energy decolonization in the push for 100% renewable energy, and the terrible role

of authoritarian political violence against environmental advocates in the Philippines. The dissertation contends that Philippine climate-justice futurity is fundamentally based on political-economic and cultural decolonization. Philippine climate justice seeks to create a clean-energy and sustainable future that is also based on egalitarian social relations free from oligarchic inequality, authoritarianism and violent impunity, and foreign imperial interventions.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

With intensifying super typhoons, erratic tropical-storm paths, severing flooding and droughts, rising sea levels, oceanic acidification, and unprecedented coral reef bleaching, the Philippines has been designated as among the most vulnerable countries on Earth to the effects of the global climate crisis. This was most intensely felt in the country on November 8, 2013 when Super Typhoon Yolanda (known as Typhoon Haiyan in the international media) struck the islands of Samar and Leyte in the central Philippines, killing over 7,000 people, displacing millions more, and wrecking the regional capital of Tacloban City. With wind speeds up to 315 kilometers per hour (195 miles per hour) and gusts up to 380 km/h (235 mph), Yolanda became the strongest tropical storm to hit landfall in recorded human history. News of the devastation circulated throughout the global media, and millions of dollars in international aid poured into the country. In response to the disaster, climate scientists and environmentalists worldwide asserted the profound role of anthropogenic global heating in triggering increasingly frequent and intense tropical cyclones as well as altering typhoon and hurricane paths in regions worldwide, from Southeast Asia to the Gulf of Mexico. On November 11, a mere three days after Yolanda struck, the United Nations (UN) convened for a climate summit in Warsaw, Poland, where Naderev “Yeb” Saño—the lead negotiator of the Philippine government’s Commission on Climate Change (CCC)—gained worldwide attention for his powerful and emotional speech and a 2-week fast imploring the international community to agree to a binding deal to drastically cut global greenhouse gas emissions. 300 other delegates to the climate talks joined Saño’s fast. In the wake of both Yolanda and the Warsaw summit, the Philippines became an epicenter of the global climate crisis that has been instigating extreme weather events and radically altering ecosystems around the world.

While much attention has been importantly focused on the destructive aftermath of the extreme weather phenomena connected to climate change, this ethnographic project seeks to investigate the “productive” repercussions of events like Super Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, including new directions for politics, economics, and activism. Though powerful unilinear and universalist narratives of global industrial “development” have captivated minds and determined policy directions worldwide, the contemporary climate crisis has placed serious doubt into the sustainability of contemporary fossil fuel-based industrialization. In this context, the practices and possibilities in so-called “developing” countries that have not fully industrialized to the same extent as nations in the Global North take on increased salience and relevance. Indeed, in these times of economic and climatic crisis, we are witnessing the expansion of the economic and ecological imaginations and new experiments in economy and ecology. In the Philippines, a dynamic array of sustainability initiatives now operates across the archipelago, from coastal villages in Palawan island where *nipa* (thatched) homes receive electricity from solar panels, to renewable micro-hydro power projects in the Cordillera mountains that help to maintain the sustainable socio-ecological practices of the Ifugao Indigenous peoples, including their UNESCO-recognized rice terraces (Acabado and Martin 2020). In the Philippine capital of Manila, Filipino climate-justice activists have been calling on the industrialized nations of the Global North to drastically cut their greenhouse gas emissions while pressuring the Philippine government to halt its expansion of coal-fired and gas-fired power plants in the country.

This array of sustainability initiatives and activism demonstrates how climatic calamities like Super Typhoon Yolanda have triggered socio-environmental destruction and despair while also precipitating human resolve and determination to analyze the anthropogenic roots of these crises, generate resistance struggles against the political-economic forces causing them, and create new, as well as build upon already existing, alternative socio-economic and socio-ecological formations. This

dissertation explores these new opportunities for both activism and a re-imagining of prevailing fossil fuel-based economic and ecological systems, lifeways, and worldviews in the Philippines primarily through an ethnographic investigation of the work of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), a national grassroots coalition with its headquarters in Metropolitan Manila and with branches and coalition partners across the country. Since its founding in 2009, PMCJ has become one of the most prominent voices for climate activism in the country. In calling for “climate justice” in the Philippines and worldwide, PMCJ often uses the slogan “System Change, Not Climate Change” in order to call attention to the need to not only promote sustainable forms of energy and economy, but also to transform the prevailing system of fossil fuel-based industrial capitalism that has caused massive ecological degradation, toxic pollution, and, now, the climate crisis which threatens our species and others on an unprecedented scale. At the international level, PMCJ has been sending representatives to UN climate summits to demand that the global community drastically cut the world’s greenhouse-gas emissions by comprehensively abandoning fossil fuels, and for rich industrialized countries to pay “climate reparations” (or “climate finance”) to developing countries to help them transition to 100% clean energy-powered economies and to adapt to a more hostile climate.

Within the Philippines, meanwhile, PMCJ has been waging a relentless campaign to halt the construction of all new coal-fired and gas-fired power plants and end the mining, storage, and burning of coal and gas. PMCJ also has campaigns to: promote renewable-energy projects in a socially just and equitable manner, build resilient and prepared communities in the face of the “new normal” of extreme weather and climatic disasters, ensure the socioeconomically just use of climate finance, and to rehabilitate peasant, Indigenous, and urban-poor communities suffering from the harmful health and environmental impacts of coal and gas projects and destructive large-scale mining operations. PMCJ has been doing this through: digital and social media work, conferences

and popular educational (“pop ed”) campaigns, marches and rallies, the traditional work of grassroots organizing at the local and regional levels, press releases and networking with news media personnel, and engagement with government officials, the business and cooperative sectors, Catholic and other religious groups, and other civil-society organizations.

This dissertation, moreover, situates PMCJ within a larger history of activism and social struggle in the Philippines in the face of the forces of foreign colonialism, domestic dictatorship, extreme inequality and oligarchy, and large-scale political and genocidal violence. PMCJ has distinctly used the framework of “climate justice” in a way that connects its own organizing strategies with the international climate-justice movement while also being rooted in the strong tradition of people’s movements and activism in the Philippines based on issues of workers’ rights and labor-union organizing, peasant and farmworker movements, gender equality, Indigenous people’s sovereignty, and environmental causes. Indeed, the Philippines has been known for having one of, if not the, strongest tradition of social activism in Asia, with a vibrant and dynamic civil-society sector that wields considerable power in Philippine society and government. Philippine civil-society representatives also play important roles in regional civil-society and social-movement efforts in Southeast and East Asia and in international climate-justice networks. PMCJ was generated from these Philippine people’s movements, and the coalition has struggled for climate justice within its strategic location at the nexus between Philippine environmentalism, leftist and progressive traditions in the country more broadly, and climate activism at the level of international civil society. At the same time, Philippine climate-justice advocates have also been contending with a terrible tradition of political violence in the country, inherited from centuries of foreign colonial rule—particularly under the Spanish, American, and Japanese empires—and continued by postcolonial authoritarian governments, including that of the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s and

80s. Significantly, several of the founders and current members of PMCJ were veterans of the struggle against the Marcos Dictatorship.

In this dissertation, I provide a sociopolitical profile of PMCJ, and I analyze the cultural politics of the climate crisis and climate-justice movement in the Philippines. I answer the following ethnographic research questions: What is climate justice for PMCJ, and how have they been mobilizing this concept in the Philippines and on the international stage? What are the group's organizing and political strategies, and what impacts have these tactics and actions had at the level of government policy, media portrayals, public opinion, and the personal and economic behavior of everyday Filipinos? What are the backgrounds of the activists themselves, and what are the social and philosophical inspirations for their work? More broadly, this ethnographic project asks what we can learn from people experimenting with new techniques, technologies, and modes of living in the face of the climate crisis in a country frequently viewed as "behind" in the race to capitalist modernity. To explore this larger motivating problem, I ask: What are the possibilities, as well as the limits to possibility, of activism and alternative socio-ecological formations in response to contemporary climate change in the Philippines? To address this, I explore the cultural politics of climate change and climate justice in the Philippines. Specifically, I investigate the ways that the biophysical and social effects of the extreme weather and other facets of the climate crisis in the Philippines are culturally perceived by activists, government officials, media, and the Philippine public. What are the ways that the Philippines' violent colonial history, governmental and political culture, Catholic and other religious traditions, gender ideologies, and Indigenous politics impact Philippine people's understandings of both climate change and climate-justice activism in the country? In light of the dire and increasingly apocalyptic implications of climate change for island nations like the Philippines and for our world more generally, this project offers an ethnographic

exploration of ecological, political-economic, and imaginative life in the Philippines in the contemporary Anthropocene.

Literature Review

This project builds on literature in environmental anthropology, political ecology, and other critical perspectives from the environmental social sciences and humanities. It specifically draws on: (1) theories of environmental justice and the “environmentalism of the poor,” (2) the cultural politics of nature, (3) and the anthropology of climate change.

(1) Environmental Justice / Environmentalism of the Poor: Theorists and proponents of environmental justice have challenged the conception of environmentalism as a pastime exclusively for elites and an unrealistic luxury for socioeconomically disadvantaged, underdeveloped, and marginalized communities. Environmental justice (and, more recently, climate justice) advocates have insisted on the crucial importance of socioeconomic justice and equity, sociocultural recognition and rights, and participatory democracy to issues of environmental sustainability, ecological resilience, biodiversity conservation, and climate-change mitigation (B. Bryant 1995; Checker 2005; Cole and Foster 2000; Harvey 1996; Johnston 1994; Pulido 1996; Westra and Lawson 2001). Moreover, Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martínez-Alier (1997) have analyzed the historical emergence and expansion of environmentalist movements throughout Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, and Latin America in the latter half of the 20th century. The notion of specifically “Third World” or Global South environmentalisms has highlighted how, more often than not, socioeconomic justice and equity have been at the forefront of environmentalist movements throughout the Global South since their origins (Guha 1999; Slovic, Rangarajan, and Sarveswaran 2015).

This is not to say, however, that elitist or neocolonial forms of environmentalism have not existed in the Global South. Anthropologists and other social scientists have investigated both “cosmetic environmentalism” among elites as well as neoliberal and neocolonial conservation schemes to seize the lands of Indigenous peoples and peasants or justify oppressive landowning patterns (Peluso 1993; P. West and Brockington 2006; Igoe and Brockington 2007). Nonetheless, as the literatures on “popular environmentalism” and the “environmentalism of the poor” (Martinez-Alier 2002; Nixon 2013) have demonstrated, socioeconomically disadvantaged, peasant, and Indigenous communities have often been leading proponents for, and initiators of, environmental conservation and protection, not for the sake of a romanticized appreciation for a supposed “untouched” nature, but in order to sustain the plant, animal, and microbial forms of life and cosmologies that they depend on for their very survival and livelihoods (Goldoftas 2005; Hindery 2013; Ulloa 2010). Indeed, in the Philippines, environmental movements have been centrally concerned with issues of equity and economic redistribution, land reform, Christian ecological theology and environmental stewardship, Indigenous people’s assertions of their right to their state-recognized ancestral domains, and increased respect for and recognition of traditional ecological knowledge (Goldoftas 2005; Broad and Cavanagh 1994; R. Bryant and Lawrence 2005a). I have also analyzed what these priorities have revealed about Philippine forms of “ecological citizenship” (Christoff 1996; Dobson 2000; Valencia Sáiz 2005), and, more specifically, the notion of “insurgent” ecological citizenship which views environmental justice advocates as “nature’s insurgent citizens” (Latta 2007; Holston 2009a).

(2) The Cultural Politics of Nature: In theorizing the “cultural politics” of both race and nature, Donald Moore, Anand Pandian, and Jake Kosek (2003) emphasize how “culture” is a “site of political struggle” that is “simultaneously material and symbolic” (2). The “cultural politics” frame recognizes how seemingly stable and “common sense” concepts like race and nature have actually

been historically constructed in tandem with one another through social and political struggles over cultural meaning. Thus, rather than representing unchanging essences, “race” and “nature” have been historically constructed in tandem with one another, continue to be altered and adapted through social struggle, and produce political outcomes and effects. The perspectives of “postcolonial ecology” and “postcolonial ecocriticism” particularly recognize the connections between the historical processes of colonialism, imperialism, racism, and materialism on the one hand, and environmental degradation (and now climate change) on the other (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011; Huggan and Tiffin 2010; Vital 2005; Nixon 2013; Mukherjee 2010). Critical perspectives on the rise of environmentalism in North America since the 19th century, moreover, have noted how environmental protection and conservation had often occurred historically through the removal of Indigenous communities, erasure of Indigenous socio-ecological histories, and subsequent discursive construction of “pristine” and “untouched” natural environments, national parks, and biodiversity conservation zones (Cattelino 2010; 2011; Simpson 2014; Moore, Pandian, and Kosek 2003). These settler-colonial frameworks for conservation developed in the United States came to directly impact the governance of both the environment and Indigenous and rural peoples in the Philippines as an outcome of the US invasion of the Philippines (1899-1913) and subsequent establishment of an American colonial apparatus in the archipelago until 1946 (Goldoftas 2005; Broad and Cavanagh 1994; R. Bryant and Lawrence 2005a; Kramer 2006b).

In the latter half of the 20th century, such paradigms of biodiversity conservation developed in North America have been (unevenly) disseminated worldwide by states and NGOs, and conceptions of “nature” in such paradigms often continue to be ahistorically constructed as pristine, with a concomitant prioritization of conservation zones “free” from human presence and activities (Peluso 1993; P. West 2006; P. West and Brockington 2006; Igoe and Brockington 2007). Susanna Hecht, Kathleen Morrison, and Christine Padoch (2014) explain, in their conception of the “social

lives of forests,” however, how forests, though often imagined as “pristine,” actually have centuries- or even millennia-long histories of human habitation and usage. Ivette Perfecto, John Vandermeer, and Angus Wright (2009) further demonstrate, in their theorization of a “matrix” model of biodiversity conservation, how the romanticization of “pristine” nature by many large conservation schemes eclipses the way that small-scale farmers often engage in sustainable agro-ecological methods that promote both biodiversity conservation and food sovereignty for rural communities. Other studies describe how multi-crop, mixed-use, organic, and other sustainable farming practices can maintain healthy soils as “carbon sinks,” sequestering carbon in the earth and thus mitigating (or potentially reversing) climate change (Tschakert 2004; Schahczenski and Hill 2009; Fairlie 2010; Rodale Institute 2014; Donlon 2014; UNCTAD 2013; Gerber et al. 2013). In the Philippines, I have analyzed the differing cultural constructions of nature among climate-justice advocates, government officials, corporate representatives, members of the media, and the Philippine public more broadly. I have paid particular attention to processes of environmental governance (P. West 2006), environmental governmentality (or “environmentality”) (Agrawal 2005), and postcolonial agrarianism (Gupta 1998; Pandian 2009).

(3) The Anthropology of Climate Change: Anthropology has produced numerous studies on human-environment interactions since the mid-20th century, from Julian Steward’s (1955) theorization of “cultural ecology” to Moore, Pandian, and Kosek’s (2003) conceptualization of the cultural politics of race and nature. The anthropology of climate change has emerged more recently, alongside the rise of scientific, policy, and public discourses and concerns with anthropogenic climate change (Batterbury 2008; Crate and Nuttall 2009; Magistro and Roncoli 2001; Rayner and Malone 1998; Strauss and Orlove 2003; Callison 2014; Vaughn 2012). Anthropological studies of climate change emphasize the cultural dimensions to how individuals, communities, institutions, societies, states, and climatological and other scientists conceptualize, address, and react to

anthropogenic global heating. Anthropologists have ethnographically investigated, for example, how local and Indigenous communities have observed climatic shifts in their environments—with regards to droughts, flooding, or regional temperature heating, for example—and what their responses have been (Dove 2001; Cruikshank 2005; Boko et al. 2007; Vogel et al. 2007; Ellis 2003, 200; Strauss and Orlove 2003; Puri 2007). Donald Nelson, Colin West, and Timothy Finan (2009) explore the importance of anthropological conceptualizations of societal “adaptation” to climate change and the crucial role of culture in formulating this. Importantly, anthropological studies of climate change have demonstrated how knowledge of the climate and the human-caused climate crisis require both scientific and cultural understandings (Orlove, Chiang, and Cane 2002; Callison 2014; Strauss 2003; Colin Thor West and Vásquez-León 2003; C. T. West, Roncoli, and Ouattara 2008). Susan Crate and Mark Nuttall (2009) contend that climate change is fundamentally about, and interrelated with, human culture, and anthropology occupies a “privileged position to investigate that relationship” (21). Bruno Latour (2014) also argues for a prominent role for the discipline of anthropology in contending with what some earth scientists (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000) have termed the Anthropocene, the current geological epoch following the Holocene which recognizes how the activities of humanity (*anthropos*), rather than “impersonal” geological forces, have been responsible for dramatically altering the Earth’s atmosphere and climate on a global scale. With the advent of the Anthropocene, long-held anthropological and postcolonial concerns with human agency, morality, and politics come to the fore (Latour 2014; Chakrabarty 2012).

This dissertation builds on growing anthropological and other studies that examine the disparate vulnerabilities of differently positioned cultural, ethno-racial, and socioeconomic groups in the face of anthropogenic climate change and ecological disasters, both natural and human-caused (Crate and Nuttall 2009). Marcela Vásquez-León (2009), for example, investigates how Hispanic farmers and farmworkers in the US Southwest reduce their climatic vulnerability to long-term

drought through the maintenance of informal social networks. Nelson and Finan (2009) examine how government emergency relief programs dealing with drought in northeast Brazil provide short-term relief for farmers yet neglect longer-term adaptation strategies that would promote overall ecological resilience. In the Philippines, I have analyzed Philippine responses to the threat of super typhoons, sea-level rise, and other ecological crises through ethnographic research among climate-justice activists, local universities, and local and provincial governments.

The dissertation also takes the anthropology of climate change in a new direction, by paying attention to the emergent economic and ecological imaginations in the aftermath of climate change-related disasters [See Appel (2014) on the economic imagination in the wake of the 2007-8 financial crisis]. Despite the enduring power and allure of teleological Western-style “development,” there have been increasingly powerful calls for “alternative” development that simultaneously promotes ecological resilience, economic wellbeing, and technological innovation. In this sense, I explored Philippine initiatives analogous to “*Buen Vivir*” in Latin America (Gudynas 2011; Ruttenberg 2013) as well as the innovations emerging within and amidst the productive “frictions” (Tsing 2005) between the various realms of: environmental community organizing; state projects for biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and disaster management; environmentalist NGOs and people’s organizations (POs); environmentalism within religious, particularly Catholic, communities; and eco-conscious businesses, sustainable farming cooperatives, and other economic enterprises and banks. I specifically engage with Philippine efforts and initiatives for creating a 100% renewable-energy economy and ecology based on the principles of energy justice, energy democracy, and energy decolonization (LaDuke and Cowen 2020; Lennon 2017; Jenkins et al. 2016; Szulecki 2018; van Veelen and van der Horst 2018; Endres and Johnson 2021). In investigating the Philippine energy-democracy movement, I am informed by the literature in the anthropology of energy, which has taken a more holistic approach to understanding the power relations, forms of exchange, and

symbolic and cultural interpretations involved in how human beings generate, transmit, distribute, and use and consume electricity and other forms of energy (Smith and High 2017; Loloum, Abram, and Ortar 2021; Gupta 2015; Lennon 2017; Howe 2014; Boyer 2014).

Methodology

From August of 2016 to December of 2018, I conducted ethnographic field research with the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice. For the first several months of my fieldwork, I worked for PMCJ's national secretariat in Metropolitan Manila, the Philippine capital. I then spent several months conducting ethnographic research with PMCJ's branches and partner organizations in other provinces of the country, including in Bataan, Cebu, Leyte, Palawan, Batangas, and Negros. PMCJ's national secretariat is based in Quezon City, the largest city in the National Capital Region (NCR) of Metropolitan Manila. There were eight people who regularly came to the office Monday through Friday, including PMCJ's national coordinator Mr. Ian Rivera ("Sir Ian"), the administrative and financial officers Ms. Oyette Zacate ("*Ate* Oyette") and Ms. Mai Pedrosa ("*Ate* Mai"), the Luzon island area coordinator Mr. Valentino de Guzman ("*Kuya* Val"), the energy campaign officer Mr. Glenn Ymata ("*Kuya* Glenn"), the policy research officer Ms. Mikhai Rosales, the adaptation campaign officer Mr. Khevin Yu, and media and communications officer Ms. Zaira Baniaga.¹

Atty. Aaron Pedrosa, the group's legal consultant (and also the secretary-general of the mass democratic-socialist organization SANLAKAS, which is a member of PMCJ's coalition), often came

¹ I did my best to be respectful to the members of PMCJ by using formal or familial titles when addressing the members who were older than me, and addressing the other members who were my age or younger by their first names, as is customary to do in the Philippines. I mainly observed and followed how PMCJ's younger members (in their early 20s) referred to the members who were older than them. I referred to PMCJ's national coordinator as Sir Ian (the English titles "sir" and "ma'am" are more often used in colloquial conversations than "*ginoong*" and "*ginaang*," the traditional Tagalog titles to formally address men and women, respectively), the administrative officers as *Ate* Oyette and *Ate* Mai ("*ate*" means "older sister" in Tagalog), the energy campaign officer and the Luzon coordinator as *Kuya* Val and *Kuya* Glenn ("*kuya*" means "older brother" in Tagalog), and I referred to the adaptation campaign officer, the policy research officer, the media officer, and the legal consultant by their first names Khevin, Mikhai, Zaira, and Aaron, as they were all either around my age or younger.

to the office, and other members and allies of PMCJ would regularly visit the office. The office of PMCJ's national secretariat is located in a district of Quezon City known as "Teacher's Village," a residential and commercial district known (among other things) for being the hub of Philippine civil society, as the location of several of the offices of NGOs, people's organizations (POs), and other civil-society organizations are located in this district. Teacher's Village is also located at the outskirts of the University of the Philippines – Diliman (UP-Diliman, the premier public university of the Philippines). I commuted to the office, Monday through Friday, by either riding *jeepneys* (jeeps left over by the US military after World War II that became a ubiquitous form of Philippine public transportation, known for being blanketed in colorful mural art), motorized pedicabs, or Uber or Grab car rides.

Some of the activities of PMCJ's members included: conducting research on climate change-related issues in the Philippines; formulating strategies for their campaigns against the expansion of coal power and fossil gas; holding meetings and workshops; and generally socializing. The members of PMCJ include people of diverse genders and sexual orientations, and they come from various ethnolinguistic backgrounds, including Tagalog, Cebuano, Bikolnon, Waray, Chinese-Filipino, and others. The members divide their labor by having each member focus on different priorities for their organization, including policy research and policy prescriptions, public relations, maintenance of the group's website and social-media accounts, maintaining and taking care of the office space, and liaising and collaborating with international researchers and contacts (including myself). Importantly, PMCJ maintains linkages with other Philippine NGOs, POs, and grassroots coalitions fighting for economic justice, Indigenous sovereignty over their Ancestral Domains, peasants, urban workers, women's rights, LGBT equality, and other issues. The offices of several of those organizations are neighbors to PMCJ. The group also sends some of their members to international climate summits and other events for global climate justice. Often, the various duties of the members could overlap.

While holding a participant-observation position with PMCJ in order to conduct my ethnographic research, I also worked as a volunteer researcher for the climate-justice group. In doing so, I was informed by anthropological models of collaborative research, participatory action research, and activist ethnography (Greenwood and Levin 2007; Lassiter 2008; Austin 2004; Wali 2006; Button and Peterson 2009; Juris and Khasnabish 2013). Julie Hemment (2007) describes participatory action research in the following manner:

Variously described as a method, a style, or a philosophy, participatory action research emerged as a direct challenge both to the logic of conventional social science and top-down development initiatives. Rather than assuming that the right and expertise to design and conduct research reside with the expert researcher, PAR recasts research as a collaborative endeavor between outside researcher and community group. In an ideal typical PAR project, the community group invites a researcher to work with them on a project that meets local needs (303).

With regards to collaborative research, Alaka Wali (2006) contends that the “underlying spirit is that of working, learning, and moving toward positive social change together.”

Though I was conducting ethnographic research with PMCJ in order to learn about the Philippines’ climate-justice movement for the purposes of writing my dissertation, in the spirit of collaborative and participatory-action research, I also sought to contribute needed and worthwhile research to PMCJ by working as a volunteer researcher. After consulting with PMCJ’s members before conducting my research in the Philippines, and upon formally beginning my research work with PMCJ in August of 2016, I gained the consent of PMCJ to conduct ethnographic research with the organization while also working for PMCJ. My work for PMCJ’s national secretariat in the group’s Quezon City office consisted of researching and writing reports and informative compilations of information on the usage of different sources of energy in the Philippines, on the practices of coal corporations, on building sustainable and resilient communities in the face of the climate crisis, and so forth. I also drafted some press releases, and I wrote blogs and social-media posts on my experiences working with PMCJ, including an essay that was published on the website

of 350.org.² Thus, rather than solely extracting ethnographic data from my experiences with PMCJ, I was aiming to create a reciprocal relationship by contributing research and labor in a way that was valuable and worthwhile for the group's goals of advancing climate justice in the country.

In learning about the work of this climate-justice group, I was also informed and inspired by the literature in activist anthropology. In his work on the anti-corporate globalization (or alter-globalization) movements in Europe, Jeffrey Juris engaged in what he termed “militant ethnography”:

Throughout my career, I have developed and implemented a model of politically engaged participant observation I call militant ethnography. Such an approach is meant to challenge the divide between researcher and activist, using my dual position as an organizer and anthropologist to not only gain access to movement networks, but also to generate deeper knowledge and more innovative theoretical insights about movement practices, experiences, emotions, and internal political struggles and debates than would otherwise be possible. I have also learned that it is important to maintain sufficient analytic distance in order to generate knowledge that is critical and useful for academics, members of the public, and activists themselves. Some of the challenges of such an approach include publishing in forums that are accessible to movements, negotiating heated internal conflicts, and finding a balance between political commitment and critical distance.³

While conducting my ethnographic work with PMCJ, I sought, as best as I could, to both “bridge the divide” between researcher and activist while also maintaining “sufficient analytic distance” so as to produce research and perspectives that could be useful and worthwhile for Philippine climate-justice advocates, other scholars and researchers, and the public more broadly. I view myself as an anthropologist who researches, and is personally supportive of and committed to, environmental justice movements like that of PMCJ. I support the overall goals, and deeply admire the work, of PMCJ's members, while I also sought, in my ethnographic work, to maintain a certain analytic distance that would allow me to evaluate the movement from a critical perspective as well.

² Cardozo, Bradley. “Coal in the Philippines: A Filipino American's Perspective.” *350.org East Asia*. (<https://world.350.org/east-asia/coal-in-the-philippines-a-filipino-americans-perspective/>, accessed July 28, 2022)

³ Juris, Jeffrey. “Research Interests.” *JeffreyJuris.com* (<http://www.jeffreyjuris.com/research/militant-ethnography-political-engagement-and-social-movements-research>, accessed on September 17, 2022)

I kept these insights from activist anthropology in mind as I observed PMCJ's meetings and daily work life, observed actions that the group held in protest of coal projects in the country and their international financiers, and attended meetings with government officials from the Philippine government's Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). These activities helped me gain an understanding of how Philippine climate-justice advocacy has had real impacts on environmental policymaking, the conduct of Philippine government officials and international financial institutions, Philippine public perceptions of the climate crisis, and on advancing socioeconomic justice within Philippine environmentalist movements. At the same time, I also witnessed how these Philippine climate-justice activists contended with and responded to conditions of rising authoritarianism and violent impunity under the regime of President Rodrigo Duterte, who assumed the presidency in July of 2016, at the start of my fieldwork.

Furthermore, I was also informed by methods of multi-sited ethnography. In recognizing that the "field site" of PMCJ was not a static or bounded entity (Geertz 1973; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1995), I followed "connections, associations, and putative relationships" which are "at the very heart of designing multi-sited ethnographic research" (Marcus 1995:97). PMCJ is connected to a dynamic and vibrant network of progressive NGOs and POs, including *Alyansa Tigil Mina* (ATM, the Alliance Against Mining), Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), SANLAKAS, the women's rights group ORIANG, the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED), and the Metro Manila Vendors Association (MMVA). I thus paid attention to the sociopolitical networking, cross communication, flows of information, and institutional changes and processes that were occurring among PMCJ and its partner organizations. As necessary and feasible, I accompanied PMCJ members to workshops or other events taking place in partnership with other organizations to analyze how climate-change activism interacted with anti-poverty initiatives, rural

development processes, debt restructuring, advocacy for informal workers, movements against the extra-judicial killings of Pres. Duterte's drug war, and so forth.

Throughout my time conducting ethnographic work with PMCJ, I also engaged in a combination of informal, semi-structured, and more formally structured interviews (Rubin and Rubin 2012; Lofland 1995; Kvale 1996). This range of interview techniques differentiated by levels of structuration (Spradley 1979) expanded my engagement with key interlocutors. When opportunities for discussion, socialization, and “free time” arose during my work with PMCJ, I asked questions and engaged in interesting and enjoyable conversations that allowed me to better learn about the fascinating and often extraordinary personal backgrounds and experiences of PMCJ's members, who include long-time social advocates who, through their participation in “underground” organizing work, had helped to topple the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. Using the information gleaned from these informal interviews, I moved into a series of structured and semi-structured, qualitative interviews, designed to be “flexible, iterative, and continuous” (Rubin and Rubin 2012:43). Thus, as my project progressed, I was constantly rethinking and redesigning my questions (see Briggs 1986; Lofland and Lofland 2005; Glaser and Strauss 1999).

For the remainder of this introductory chapter, I will provide further discussion on my use of these methodological tools for conducting activist ethnography and for analyzing a complexly organized social movement with a vast network of local and global connections. I specifically elaborate upon anthropological perspectives on the cultural politics of activism and militant movements in reaction to financial and other forms of inequality in an age of neoliberal corporate globalization. I will also further discuss my own participant-observation and volunteer-researcher positions with PMCJ, and I will use that as basis to elucidate the kind of activist culture of solidarity that I observed among the members of PMCJ. Finally, I will provide a specific ethnographic example of a protest action held in opposition to plans by the Philippine government, aided by the

international nuclear industry, to open what would be the first nuclear power plant in the archipelagic country.

Activist Ethnography, Corporate Globalization, and the Cultural Politics of Philippine Climate-Justice Advocacy

How does one ethnographically investigate a social movement that, while based in a particular nation in the tropical Global South, is nonetheless working toward the systemic transformation of an entire political-economic system that is the ultimate root cause of the global climate crisis? In addition to analyzing the institutional and organizational structure, resource capacities, personal biographies, and political and other ideologies of a social movement, anthropological studies of social movements, activism, and social change pay particular attention to the “framing processes” and “cultural politics” of the prevalent ideas, salient symbols, and strategic forms of action taken by the social movement (Benford and Snow 2000). Struggles over meaning and meaning-making are of particular concern for understanding which ideas or set of ideas become prominent within the social movement and, from there, which gain broader currency in the wider society.

In turn, the ideas and meanings that become more prevalent, if not predominant, in society have important political and material consequences for both the social movement in question and for society as a whole. As Jessica Cattelino (2015) has noted, emphasizing cultural politics “means attending to cultural practices like making meaning of nature, classifying it, and representing it, while also tracing how these cultural practices distribute resources among human groups and individuals” (238). When considering the cultural politics of nature and, more specifically, of ecological resources like coal and other energy sources in the Philippines, the cultural struggles taking place—between and among Philippine climate-justice activists, energy corporations, landlord families, the Philippine state, the media, and the public more broadly—over the meaning and connotations of coal, fossil

gas, solar energy, geothermal power, wind power, and so forth are of critical importance for the socio-material future of the Philippines' energy system and environment and climate more broadly. On this front, the Philippine climate-justice struggle has relied on a wide range of imagery and rhetorical devices—including geo-scientific, environmentalist, religious, economic, and moral and ethical frameworks—in calling for an end to fossil fuels and a new era of 100% clean and renewable energy.

In addition to analyzing the cultural politics and framing processes involved in social movements, ethnographers, in this current era of globalized travel and internet communication, have also been paying attention to the more dispersed and “networked” forms in which activism has increasingly been undertaken. Being attuned to the more diffuse and tech-savvy character of much 21st-century activism is critical for effectively tracing the trajectories, tactics, and impacts of some of the most prominent movements of our time, including the anti-corporate globalization (or alter-globalization) movement (and its related or “offshoot” movements, including Occupy Wall Street). Jeffrey Juris (2008) has theorized this more “networked” form of activism in his ethnographic study of, and personal involvement in, resistance movements against neoliberal corporate globalization. Specifically, Juris anchored his research among anti-corporate globalization groups in Barcelona, Spain, including the *Movimiento para la Resistencia Global* (MRG, Movement for Global Resistance) and *Red Ciudadana para Abolir la Deuda Externa* (RCADE, Citizens' Network to Abolish the Foreign Debt).⁴ However, in recognizing the dispersed, transient, and often transformative and constantly morphing character of many of these organizations and networks, he also followed groups and

⁴ Juris also studied and personally partook in the anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle in 1999 while he was a graduate student. Moreover, for his dissertation fieldwork, he conducted ethnographic research on other actions against financial and corporate greed—in Barcelona, Prague, and in other European locations—including the meetings of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) as well as gatherings of representatives of powerful geopolitical associations like the G8.

individuals to different actions and meetings and traced the sociopolitical networking, connections, disruptions, and transformations that occurred among these groups.

In my ethnographic work, I quickly learned just how diffuse the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice truly is, as the coalition is made up of around one hundred civil-society organizations, activist networks, and people's organizations. Some of PMCJ's coalition members are themselves widely dispersed coalitions with national networks of their own, such as *Abyansa Tigil Mina* (ATM, the Alliance Against Mining), a broad coalition of groups around the Philippines that are opposed to destructive mining practices and instead in favor of "alternative minerals management." PMCJ itself is also a member organization of other national environmental and social-justice coalitions, such as the Green Thumb Coalition (GTC), a network of several green and environmental justice groups in the country. Finally, PMCJ members regularly attend and support actions of groups whose work is not ostensibly or obviously environmentalist, like the Metro Manila Vendors Association, which advocates for the rights of street vendors whose business activities are considered illegal by state authorities for being conducted in unauthorized zones in Metro Manila. Whenever PMCJ's friends who were fighting for labor rights, vendors' rights, justice for victims of Duterte's drug war, gender justice, and so forth needed solidarity and reinforcements for their own actions, PMCJ would show up. Initially, it was a bit of a challenge for me to keep track of this vast web of activist networks ensconced within other activist and NGO clusters, but I quickly got accustomed to the constant networking, forging of connections, disruptions, and organizational changes and transformations that were taking place.

Tracking such dynamic networking practices among activists is important for sociological, institutional, and interpersonal reasons, but Juris notes how such "networking logics" have also given rise to a "new way of doing politics" (2008, 14). He refers to this as the "cultural logic of networking" (11). This has been directly related to the sweeping material, economic, and social

changes related to the global spread of computerized and digitized infrastructures in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Profoundly influenced by the socio-material dynamics of the internet, computers, smartphones, other digital and information technologies, and the information economy, activists have internalized many of these socio-technological and ideational forms and adjusted their practice of politics and activism accordingly. By applying networking logics to their activism, anti-corporate globalization activists have tended to build horizontal relationships with each other, freely and openly exchange information, and coordinate and collaborate with each other based on decentralized forms of decision-making through consensus-building. In this conception, the “network” simultaneously refers to computer-based digital technology, a form of social organization, a political model to be actualized through activist praxis, and a cultural ideal to be aspired to by activists seeking to achieve more directly democratic political and cultural practices (Juris 2008, 11).⁵

From his observations of and participation in these networking logics, Juris engaged in a critical analysis of “the cultural politics of networking” (15) which included cultural struggles among activists over ideology, strategy, tactics, organizational form, and decision-making.⁶ Importantly, Juris not only provides ethnographic descriptions of (sometimes tense) debates and deliberations over strategy and ideology at activist meetings as well as descriptions of momentous protests and other actions, but he also discusses the ways that physically participating in demonstrations has ideational, physiological, and affective impacts for many activists in ways that profoundly contribute

⁵ Juris further states: “While the command-oriented logic of traditional parties and unions involves recruiting new members, developing unified strategies, pursuing political hegemony, and organizing through representative structures, network politics revolve around the creation of broad umbrella spaces, where diverse collectivities, organizations, and networks converge around a few common principles while preserving their autonomy and identity-based specificity” (2008, 14).

⁶ He also mapped out the different sectors in the anti-corporate globalization movement in Barcelona, which includes what he refers to as the institutional sectors (such as NGOs and political parties), critical sectors (e.g., leftist sectors of unions), network-based movements (including the groups with whom he primarily bases his ethnographic work and personal political involvement, the MRG and RCADE), and militant anti-capitalists (including squatters, anti-militarists, anarchists, and radical Catalan nationalists) (2008, 71).

to the formation of their subjectivities as activists, resisters, and radicals.⁷ I found all of this to be highly resonant with my ethnographic work with PMCJ. While I would go to PMCJ's office Monday through Friday to do my volunteer research work for the organization while also conducting my own ethnographic research, and while I would accompany PMCJ members to actions, workshops, and other events held by the group, I also found that we were also constantly interacting with each other virtually through social media, text messaging, and other digital, electronic, and telecommunicative forms. This, indeed, facilitated the horizontal, free, open, and relatively decentralized exchange of information, discussion, and debate.

Moreover, the act of collectively, collaboratively, physically, and affectively preparing for, traveling to, and attending actions in Manila and elsewhere—in opposition to corporate polluters and their financial backers, for example—allowed for the emergence or strengthening of bonds of camaraderie between activists, as well as the development of a collective sense of purpose. While the notion of developing stronger affective bonds among activists through the creation of shared memories from collective acts of protest could be viewed as palpable and obvious enough, I feel that it's worth reiterating the importance of the physicality, affectivity, and ritualism involved in acts of protest and demonstrations, and how this could not only promote greater ties of solidarity but also potentially help to sustain movements that faced difficult, sometimes daunting, odds. In the face of an opponent as well-funded and ruthless as the fossil-fuel industry, effective climate-justice activism requires great focus, patience, and sustained momentum over the *longue durée*; accordingly,

⁷ Juris contends that the genre of ethnographic writing as well as the methods of anthropology can be productively synchronized with activist praxis. He advocates for an engaged, “militant ethnography” that recognizes the relationship between ethnography and political action and that makes “our work relevant to those (with whom) we study... I believe it is possible to produce ethnographic accounts that are rigorous and useful for activists. I also believe transnational networking and ethnographic practice are complementary” (2008, 19). In doing activist anthropology, Juris believes in the need to break down the divide between researcher and “object,” and he insists that our research be both politically engaged and collaborative. Good activist anthropology can contribute to bridging divides between the academy and local communities as well as contributing positively to the dialogue and praxis among activist networks themselves, of which the anthropologist may be a part.

the collective labor expended and the difficulties, thrills, frustrations, and joys experienced from participating in acts of protest remain highly significant in contributing to the sustainability of the movement.



October 10, 2016 — Philippine climate justice protesters gather around the Mendiola Bridge, demanding the national shutdown of coal power and a new era of “renewable energy for the people.” (Photo by the author)

Alex Khasnabish (2013) has also contributed to the theorization of activist anthropology and ethnography in his work with the *Zapatista* movement in Chiapas, Mexico as well as with activist collectives in North America which have been directly inspired by what has been called *Zapatismo*, the political praxis and philosophy of the Zapatistas.⁸ Khasnabish, who is committed to an engaged and politically committed ethnographic praxis, has examined the promises and pitfalls of how *Zapatismo* has been taken up in different contexts. He has explored, for example, how Canadian

⁸ The armed insurgency launched by the *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional* (EZLN, the Zapatista National Liberation Army) on January 1, 1994 against the Mexican state in protest against the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), led to a stand-off with the Mexican military and the establishment of a powerful autonomous space for Indigenous rural communities in Chiapas to attempt to build their vision of a more horizontally structured democratic political structure, sustainable agro-ecological systems, and gender equality. The Zapatista uprising also ultimately triggered the globalized, transnational “movement of movements” against neoliberal corporate globalization, with alter-globalization activists directly inspired by the Zapatistas launching actions against neoliberal policy worldwide, including the anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle in 1999.

and U.S. American activist collectives, filmmakers, food-justice activists, “hacktivists,” and others came to be inspired by Zapatismo through either direct trips to Chiapas or exposure to the transnationally flowing media that are part of what Khasnabish calls the “Zapatista rhizome.” On the one hand, there have been negative and damaging impacts from romanticism and movement fetishization from some Northern activists who visited the region expecting a utopia but then became “surprised to find that the Zapatistas are a people who are struggling to create the society they talk about and want” (2013, 76). On the other hand, Khasnabish has traced how other Canadians have been profoundly inspired by Zapatismo while also taking a more realistic view of “the power structures in which people desire and dream” (74).⁹ Thus, for many, “the transnationalized political imagination of Zapatismo allowed a new dream of radical social change to flourish. More than this, it also shattered the illusion of defeat of political possibility carefully cultivated by neoliberal elites at ‘the end of history’” (79).

Khasnabish believes in the continued importance of academic research for social movements and social change:

Academic research can play a role in highlighting and helping to collect and circulate this socially transformative knowledge, but only when movements are taken seriously as living laboratories of struggle and transformation rather than studied like specimens under a microscope. Engaged and critical ethnographic research carried out in the spirit of affinity with struggles for social justice can also play a vital role in cultivating spaces and processes that facilitate critical and committed dialogue and debate among activists about issues that activists and organizers rarely have the opportunity to take up in the course of their day-to-day work (2013, 69).

⁹ For example, the radical filmmaking collective Big Noise Tactical was inspired by and learned from the political philosophy and strategies of the Zapatistas. Without originally having any experience with video recording or filmmaking, they purchased cameras and recorders and filmed the documentary *Zapatista* which documented the Mayan peasant insurgency and included interviews with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos as well as narration by Mumia Abu-Jamal. Khasnabish has also collaborated with the Center for Story-based Strategy which, inspired by the Zapatistas’ use of “the power of poetry” and “incredibly powerful poetic critiques” (85), has been training and collaborating with thousands of activists and social change organizations to effectively communicate their messages for social, economic, gender, ecological, and climate justice based on the center’s strategies for mobilizing the power of narrative and storytelling into digital technologies and internet-based platforms.

In my own ethnographic work with PMCJ, I came to see and appreciate PMCJ's movement as a "living laboratory of struggle and transformation." I, moreover, sought to carry out my research "in the spirit of affinity with struggles for social justice"—in this case, climate justice for the people of the Philippines. I observed how PMCJ members were simultaneously constrained by, actively negotiating with, and struggling against, the prevailing power structures in Philippine society—including the forces of oligarchy, corporate greed and terror, far-right authoritarian populism, leftist factionalism, and international imperialism. One could easily become overwhelmed by the thoroughly unequal nature of Philippine society and the atmosphere of violent impunity and devaluing of human life, especially of the poor, as manifested by the Philippines' horrifically deadly "war on drugs" under Pres. Duterte. Moreover, the visceral, daily struggle of living, working, and even breathing in Metro Manila—a Global South megacity with daunting traffic, oppressive pollution, and drastic socioeconomic disparities—can be viewed as further confounding the movement for climate justice in the Philippines. While I profoundly admire my colleagues and friends that I made while conducting my ethnographic research with PMCJ, I also do not seek to romanticize or fetishize the real and enduring struggles that they face in attempting to create the kind of society and world that they envision.

Nonetheless, despite being constrained by the prevailing power structures in, and thoroughly unequal nature of, Philippine society and government, I also saw how these Philippine climate-justice advocates were doing their best to build and sustain relationships with each other in a way that worked toward creating something of the kind of society that they wished to see and realize throughout the country. More specifically, I saw an activist culture that included camaraderie, constant joking and laughing, a strong work ethic, the sharing of stories and jokes while having meals and feasting together, singing karaoke songs during holiday parties and after-hours social gatherings, and mutual respect for others who also held egalitarian and ecologically sustainable

values and visions for the country and world. In the face of some daunting odds and heavy sociopolitical constraints, PMCJ has nonetheless developed important conceptual tools and techniques of activist praxis to preserve and nurture their vision for a just, sustainable, and habitable future for the Philippines.

An Activist Culture of Camaraderie, Feasting, Joking, and Hard Work

Through my participant-observation and volunteer-researcher positions with the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, I quickly became accustomed to the rhythm of a typical workweek for the members of PMCJ's National Secretariat. I went to the office Monday through Friday, and I would occasionally join PMCJ members on weekend trips to places outside of Manila. PMCJ's office had the feel of both an office and a home. It was essentially a narrow townhouse with two stories. On the first floor was a room with office tables where PMCJ's members would sit with their laptops, and there was one desk with a computer that Ms. Mai Pedrosa (*Ate* Mai—*áte* [pronounced ah-teh] means "older sister" in Tagalog), one of the administrative officers, would use. Upon climbing a slightly winding narrow staircase, the second floor was accessible, where there were two rooms. The room on the right was used for meetings, and some PMCJ officers would also use it for general office space when no meetings were taking place. The room on the left was used by Ms. Oyette Zacate (*Ate* Oyette), the other administrative officer, and Sir Ian Rivera, PMCJ's national coordinator. I only occasionally went up to the second floor, as I would mainly work on my laptop on the first floor with the other PMCJ officers.

I enjoyed going to the office, and being a volunteer-intern more generally, for PMCJ. They would assign me various tasks, such as doing research on matters ranging from energy policies to disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) (in the face of the "new normal" of extreme

weather and other manifestations of the climate crisis in the Philippines),¹⁰ drafting a few of PMCJ’s press releases that PMCJ would send to members of the Philippine national media,¹¹ writing blog posts,¹² being a notetaker during meetings and then sending the meeting minutes to PMCJ’s email listserv, and other activities. I found office life at PMCJ to be both enjoyable and meaningful. I liked doing research on topics related to climate justice in the Philippines, and it also felt satisfying to know that the research that we were doing was being used directly for campaigns and actions contemporarily being held by PMCJ. Moreover, there was a pleasant, familial-like culture of camaraderie, joking, and lightheartedness among the PMCJ officers. They would often joke with each other, and for some officers like *Kuya* Val and *Kuya* Glenn Ymata (the Energy Program officer), it seemed like every other thing that they would say would be a joke—to the point that I was sometimes unsure if they were being serious or joking about certain topics being discussed or plans being made. For lunch, I often walked with the Millennial officers—Ms. Zaira Baniaga (officer of Media, Information, & Communications), Ms. Mikhai Rosales (officer of Policy Research, Advocacy, & Networking), and Mr. Khevin Yu (officer of the Adaptation Campaign)—to a nearby canteen that sold inexpensive and delicious Filipino and Chinese food. Often, PMCJ officers or friends and comrades from other allied groups would bring food to or cook delicious Filipino dishes at the office, and I enjoyed eating and chatting with them.

Moreover, friends and comrade activists from other organizations would often visit PMCJ’s office or even use PMCJ’s office space to do their own work at times, including members of SANLAKAS (a democratic-socialist mass organization of which several of the officers and other

¹⁰ Energy Fact Sheet on Relevant Laws & Government Plans for Adaptation, Disaster Preparedness, & Resilience

¹¹ Khevin (the adaptation campaign officer) told me that PMCJ had cultivated relationships with members of the Philippine media over the years, to the point that they had developed several contacts with journalists and reporters working for Manila-based newspapers and television stations with national audiences.

¹² Cardozo, Bradley. “Coal in the Philippines: A Filipino American’s Perspective.” *350.org East Asia*. (<https://world.350.org/east-asia/coal-in-the-philippines-a-filipino-americans-perspective/>, accessed July 28, 2022)

members of PMCJ are also a part), 350.org Pilipinas, the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities (ICSC), *Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino* (BMP, the Solidarity of Filipino Workers, a prominent labor organization affiliated with the umbrella group SANLAKAS), and Greenpeace Philippines, among others. It was always interesting for me to learn more about what the members of the other organizations were doing, what campaigns they were focused on, and so forth. It was also always enjoyable when members of these allied organizations would bring to PMCJ's office Filipino dishes like *pansit* (noodle dishes) and chicken *adobo*, as well as desserts like *ube* (sweet purple yam), *puto* (steamed rice cakes), and cakes and pies (especially if someone was having a birthday party). During birthday celebrations or holidays (especially during the Christmas season), parties would be held at the offices of the different organizations (most of which were either within walking distance or a short tricycle ride away), and the parties would be filled with food, laughter, raffles, karaoke singing, and dancing (including line dancing). The parties reminded me of the kind of gatherings that I experienced growing up with my Filipinx American extended family in the Bay Area of California and with my Philippine extended family members in Bikol, Manila, and Davao.

They also reminded me of the utmost importance of community, care, and the maintenance and strengthening of bonds of solidarity for members of activist groupings and social movements. While large crowds of protesters at actions, creative protest art, chanting, giving speeches, banging protest drums, and other ways of claiming public space and getting the attention of state officials, corporate representatives, and members of the public at large are all important and critical parts of activist work, so too are the affective forms of labor and the efforts made to cultivate caring, mutually supportive spaces and networks that not only sustain the movement but, most importantly, that look after, tend to, uplift, and nurture the wellbeing of each of the members. As Jennifer Chun (2022) has stated, "Affect, not ideology, is the catalytic force of solidarity, strengthening affinities

and interdependencies that are based, not primarily in universal values or shared feelings, but in the everyday practices of providing care for one other in times of need” (116).

The Fight for Clean, Renewable, and *Safe* Energy

When accompanying PMCJ on rallies and protests, press conferences, workshops and other “pop ed” activities, and other events that they held or attended in different parts of Metro Manila, I would heavily document the actions by taking photos and videos, and I would send them to Zaira, the media and communications officer. I also drafted press releases (in English) for some of these actions, and a PMCJ officer would then edit it and send the finalized copy to their media contacts. Some of the educational and exposure trips that I joined included: a couple of visits to a community in the city of Manila’s Tondo district (known for being the site of several urban-poor communities) where a coal stockpiling facility was built (and causing a host of health problems for the people); a trip to Palawan island where PMCJ has been working with local groups to combat the spread of coal power plants in the island; and the aforementioned trip to Isla Verde. Some of the major protests and actions that PMCJ held in Metropolitan Manila during my time with PMCJ’s national secretariat included: a protest against the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which was holding a meeting in Manila in attempts to encourage the Philippine government to open the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant, the Philippines’ sole nuclear power plant which has, thus far, never been operationalized; the national day of action on Oct. 10, 2016 for PMCJ’s “Coal is NOT the Answer” campaign; and two protests against two international financiers of Philippine coal projects held outside of their Metro Manila corporate offices—namely, the World Bank and the Export-Import Bank of Korea.

The anti-nuclear protest was significant and instructive, both for the general importance of waging public opposition in the Philippines’ capital city against the ominous moves by the

government toward activating the sole (dormant) nuclear power plant in the country, but also for how it demonstrated the importance of conducting these kinds of protest actions, no matter how large-scale or small-scale they may be. On Tuesday, August 30, 2016, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice was scheduled to join at least three other activist groups at the protest in Manila. The action was scheduled on the day that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which promotes the use of nuclear energy worldwide, convened in Manila for a meeting with Philippine business leaders and government officials, particularly from the Department of Energy (DoE), to discuss their attempt to operationalize the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP). The BNPP was originally built in the province of Bataan (about a three-hour drive from Manila) during the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in 1983, but the project was mothballed after intense opposition from anti-nuclear activists, and it, thus far, has not been operational. If the BNPP were to be activated, it would be the only functioning nuclear power plant in the Philippines.

After riding in a van earlier that morning through Metro Manila's intense traffic, we arrived outside the Diamond Hotel, the site of the Philippine government's meeting with the IAEA. A group of activists from the *Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng Maralita ng Lungsod* (KPML, United Congress of the Urban Poor) arrived in a *jeepney*. Two other groups were expected to be at the rally, but, for logistical reasons, were unable to make it that day, so PMCJ's officers ended up leading the action impromptu.¹³ Thus, shortly after arriving outside of the Diamond Hotel near Roxas Boulevard adjacent to Manila Bay, the relatively small contingent of about twenty protesters from PMCJ and KPML started marching toward the Diamond Hotel. Immediately, a larger police brigade appeared; they began barricading the street with their police shields. As the Philippines' DoE officials were

¹³ Both the Nuclear-Free Bataan Movement (NFBM) and the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) had played historically crucial roles in the struggle against the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant in the 1980s. The Nuclear-Free Bataan Movement, which recently merged with the Coal-Free Bataan Movement to become the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement, continues to do greatly important work in the province of Bataan (see Chapter 5 of this dissertation).

meeting with the representatives of eighteen of the member countries of the IAEA inside the Diamond Hotel, the Manila police had been prepared for any potential protests against the high-level international meeting.¹⁴

As the police barricade had emerged quite swiftly, I remember experiencing a brief moment of nervousness and apprehension, as the police formation clearly outnumbered our own. Nonetheless, the PMCJ and KPML members faced the barricade head-on, forming two rows and hoisting up several white umbrellas with a word painted in red on each, creating a message that stated, “NO TO ANOTHER FUKUSHIMA” and “NO TO NUKES.” Mr. Khevin Yu and Mr. Glenn Ymata of PMCJ, and Mr. Anthony Barnedo of KPML, gave speeches on a bullhorn denouncing any attempt to operationalize the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant. Khevin asserted:

Tayo po ay nagpoprotesta para tutulan ang nuclear energy na ngayon ay pinag-uusapan...ng Department of Energy at International Atomic Energy Agency. Nandito tayo para itulak ang nuclear energy sa ating bansa, at sa ating rehiyon, na kung saan, alam natin, ang nukleyar ay isa sa pinakadelikadong anyo ng enerhiya sa ating mundo ngayon.

(We are protesting to resist nuclear energy which is being discussed right now by the Department of Energy and the International Atomic Energy Agency. We are here to reject nuclear energy in our country, and in our [Southeast Asian] region, where, as we know, nuclear is one of the most dangerous forms of energy in our world today).

Kuya Glenn and Sir Anthony also noted the great danger of any nuclear accident occurring in the Philippines, which is located atop five earthquake fault lines as well as the Pacific Ring of Fire, making the archipelagic country susceptible to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, typhoons, and tsunamis. They brought up the fear of a Fukushima-style disaster potentially occurring in the Philippines and how that would impact human health and local ecologies in Bataan province, and they also discussed the unsolved problem of storing nuclear waste.

¹⁴ The eighteen IAEA member countries that were represented at the meeting in Manila included Bangladesh, Canada, Finland, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, Vietnam and the Philippines. The conference had been organized by both the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the International Framework for Nuclear Energy Cooperation (IFNEC) (Sabillo 2016)



August 30, 2016 — The Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) and the *Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng Maralita ng Lungsod* (KPML, United Congress of the Urban Poor) denounce plans by the Philippine government to operationalize the long-dormant Bataan Nuclear Power Plant outside of the meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the Diamond Hotel in Manila.

Despite the small-scale nature of the protest, particularly in contrast to the dozens more police officers present, the rally generated attention from the national and international press, with newspaper and television reporters covering the action and interviewing members of PMCJ and KPML. After the event, footage of the protest was shown in national television news channels, and the anti-nuclear viewpoints of PMCJ were published in newspaper articles the following day. I was designated to provide PMCJ’s press release—which was prepared by Ms. Zaira Baniaga, the media and communications officer—to members of the press, so I handed out copies of the press release to reporters who had exited the Diamond Hotel in order to cover the protest. Anti-nuclear statements by PMCJ officers were included in articles published by *Reuters* and the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. PMCJ’s energy officer Glenn Ymata, for example, was quoted in the *Inquirer*: “Why are we desperately trying to have a nuclear (plant) that is so expensive and dangerous when cheap, clean, and safe renewable energy is vast and readily available in the Philippines? They are actually becoming more and more cheap than any other kind of energy sources” (Sabillo 2016). Zaira was quoted in

the *Reuters* article: “‘We need to move away from fossil fuels like coal, but nuclear energy is not safe and will also harm the people and environment,’ said Zaira Patricia Baniaga of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice in a statement issued before the conference” (*Reuters* 2016).

In fact, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice was the sole group in opposition to nuclear energy that was mentioned in virtually any of the major media coverage of the IAEA’s August 2016 meeting in Manila. Perhaps the newspapers and television news programs that covered the IAEA meeting might not have even included an anti-nuclear perspective in their coverage of the international conference—or, at least, a perspective as forcefully in opposition to the opening of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant as was given by PMCJ and KPML that day—had the two activist groups not shown up at all. This protest by PMCJ and KPML reminded me of how any protest action, no matter how large or small, can have an impact by garnering media publicity and thus spreading the message of the protest. They can also influence passersby and even the police present at the protest. Though the Manila police had stood wordlessly with their shields in front of the small protest gathering, they were listening to the message. After the protest ended, one policewoman affirmed to the activists, “*Tama kayo! Dapat R.E.!*” (“You are right! It should be R.E. [i.e., We should be using renewable energy]!”)

Though the IAEA and the Philippine government’s DoE were attempting, through their use of technocratic language, to reassure the public of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant’s viability and the supposed unlikelihood of it being susceptible to a nuclear meltdown, fears and apprehensions endure in Philippine society regarding the potential existence of nuclear energy in the country—with the 2011 nuclear disaster in Fukushima playing a prominent role in informing these public anxieties. PMCJ has taken a firm stance in favor of clean, renewable, and *safe* energy, thus unequivocally ruling out nuclear energy, despite it not being a fossil fuel, for the great danger that it would pose to the people and ecologies of the Philippines in an event of a nuclear disaster, and for the unresolved

problem of the storage of nuclear waste. After the Manila conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency concluded, the issue of nuclear energy in the Philippines temporarily faded from the national purview, though groups like PMCJ, the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement, and KILUSAN (*Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya*, the Movement for National Democracy) remained on alert for signs of any plans and designs of the “International Nuclear Mafia” in Bataan province.¹⁵

Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 2, “Historical Precursors: Colonial and Post-Colonial Political Violence, Rise of Philippine Environmentalism, and the Global Climate Crisis,” I connect the Philippines’ traumatic history of colonial and post-colonial political violence with the country’s environmentalist and climate-justice movements. I provide a historical discussion of the colonial origins—particularly from the US colonial period—of many of the postcolonial Philippine state’s methods of political violence and repression against political dissidents and activists, including environmentalists. I then provide historical background on the rise of the modern environmentalist movement in the Philippines, with a particular focus on the environmentalist advocacy that arose in opposition to the Marcos Dictatorship in the 1970s and 80s. Importantly, Catholic-based discourses of environmental stewardship played key roles in the development of Philippine environmentalism. Finally, I discuss the rise of the global discourses of the climate crisis and climate justice, and I demonstrate how the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice emerged, and operates, at the intersection between

¹⁵ Six years later, in 2022, the new presidential administration of Bongbong Marcos signaled its interest in the South Korean government’s offer to invest in the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant. PMCJ, the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement, Greenpeace Philippines, and other environmental groups remain staunchly opposed to the Philippine government’s plans to potentially put thousands of Bataños at risk of contamination from nuclear radiation in the event of a nuclear meltdown.

postcolonial political violence, anti-authoritarian environmental activism, and a heightened awareness of the global climate crisis in the Philippines.

Chapter 3, “‘END COALIGARCHY’: The National Cultural Politics of the Climate Justice Movement in the Philippines,” analyzes PMCJ’s deployment of the concept of “coaligarchy” to spotlight and critique the fundamental role of the Philippines’ oligarchy of super-rich families in expanding coal power across the country in the first couple of decades of the 21st century. I describe the ominous increase in the construction of coal-fired power plants across the country, and how PMCJ has been waging local, regional, and national struggles to phase out all coal plants, cancel all proposed ones, and end all mining and burning of coal. The chapter particularly focuses on PMCJ’s national campaign called “Coal is NOT the Answer,” which included a mobilization of 10,000 people during a “National Day of Action” on Oct. 10, 2016. I also analyze PMCJ’s campaigns targeting both Philippine and international banks and financial institutions that have funded coal power in the country. This chapter aims to demonstrate the specifically postcolonial character of the Philippine climate-justice movement, and how this postcolonial climate-justice advocacy is centrally concerned with ultimately toppling both the Philippine oligarchy and the global “oligarchic-corporate” system.

In Chapter 4, “Climate Justice, Environmental Futures, and the Postcolonial State: Lessons from Gina Lopez’s 10-Month Tenure as the Philippines’ Secretary of the Environment,” I examine how climate-justice advocacy operates in the postcolonial state through an analysis of the brief yet extraordinary tenure of Gina Lopez as Pres. Rodrigo Duterte’s secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Though the presidential administration of Rodrigo Duterte became internationally notorious for its fascist authoritarianism (W. Bello 2017a), violent, genocidal impunity, and for Duterte’s own violently misogynistic and offensive language, Sec. Gina Lopez was nonetheless able to take powerful, concrete measures to counteract the extreme

ecological damage, pollution, and human-rights violations of the Philippines' mining and fossil-fuels industries. I analyze how the Philippines' postcolonial political culture—marked by a tradition of extreme state violence with colonial origins, oligarchy and extreme social inequality, and a powerful social tradition of leftist, Indigenous, and church-based activism against authoritarianism and corporate plunder—allowed for the emergence of a spiritually-inspired eco-warrior Environment secretary like Gina Lopez. I note the complicated ways that PMCJ sought to advocate for climate justice at the level of national policymaking through their alliance with Sec. Lopez, while also launching critiques against the authoritarianism and genocidal violence of the Duterte government. I argue that the Philippine climate-justice movement's alliance with Secretary Gina Lopez simultaneously reproduced and undermined the country's oligarchic political-economic system. I also discuss how Lopez's secretaryship provided the Philippines with a "glimpse" of a climate-justice future.

Chapter 5, "The Philippines' Insurgent Ecological Citizens: The Fight against 'Demon' Coal Plants and the 'Nuclear Mafia' in Bataan Province," analyzes the struggle against both coal and nuclear power in the province of Bataan through the rubric of "insurgent ecological citizenship." Since the first coal-fired power plant was established in the village of Lamao in the town of Limay, the citizens of Lamao village have endured demolitions of and evictions from their homes, terrible pollution and concomitant health problems, a decline in fish supplies, and corporate-state terror from the coal industry when they have resisted coal power. Though the Philippine state and coal corporations have delegitimized Lamao's citizens for not holding legal title to their lands, and thus designating them as illegal "squatters," the villagers of Lamao have waged a movement of unabashed citizenship claims for their human rights to housing, healthcare compensation, and basic dignity. Lamao's "insurgent citizens" (Holston 2009) have simultaneously connected their struggle to the global movement for climate justice, calling for an end to coal power in Bataan province, not only

on behalf of themselves (in defense of their own health and livelihoods), but also on behalf of the future wellbeing of their children, humanity in general, and all biological life on Earth. I examine how Bataan province's own history of powerful activism against nuclear power during the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1980s played a strong role in informing and inspiring the current anti-coal (and enduring anti-nuclear) activism in the province. I also discuss how the people of Lamao continue to wage their movement of insurgent ecological citizenship in the face of the corporate-state terrorism of the Philippines' coal industry.

In Chapter 6, “Renewable Energy for the People, NOW!': Climate Justice, Energy Democracy, and the Ecological Imagination in the Philippines,” I explore the movement toward 100% renewable energy in the Philippines through a perspective informed by energy democracy, energy decolonization, and what I am calling the ecological imagination. Despite the Philippine state's authorization, over the past couple of decades, of the mass-scale expansion of fossil fuel-fired power plants, particularly coal- and gas-fired plants, renewable-energy technologies and infrastructures (including solar, wind, biofuel, hydroelectric, and geothermal power) have expanded throughout the archipelagic country, most notably in the island of Negros. At the same time, the oligarchic structure of the Philippine economy has promoted large-scale corporate renewable-energy projects that have disenfranchised and evicted rural and Indigenous peoples from their lands, reinforced unsustainable and destructive mining practices, and increased profits for the country's same oligarchic corporations that have also benefited from fossil-fuel pollution, destructive mining, unsustainable logging, and other forms of environmental poisoning and plunder. To push back against the corporate and state forces that continue to characterize as unrealistic both the 100% renewable-energy transition and the establishment of renewable infrastructures in a just, democratized, and decolonized manner, I argue that Philippine climate-justice advocates have been devising concepts, policy prescriptions (including public ownership over the power sector), and

projects for small-scale distributed renewable energy (DRE) in a way that has been effecting an unleashing and expansion of the Philippine ecological imagination.

Finally, in the concluding chapter (Chapter 7), I reflect on the role that climate-justice advocacy in the tropical Southeast Asian and Global South nation of the Philippines has had for both the people of the Philippines and the world. On the one hand, Philippine climate-justice activists are continuing to forge ahead in their struggle to shut down the coal, oil, gas, and nuclear industries, and to enact a transition to 100% renewable energy in a way that achieves energy democracy and energy decolonization by combatting and ultimately dismantling the oligarchic-corporate system in the Philippines (and worldwide). On the other hand, the Philippines is continuing to experience already catastrophic—yet ever-worsening—super typhoons, severe flooding and drought spells, oceanic acidification and coral-reef destruction, and sea-level rise. Meanwhile, the global climate crisis continues to wreak havoc and cause irreversible damage worldwide. I consider the importance of enduring movements for Philippine and global climate justice in the face of the dire and apocalyptic implications of the climate crisis for all of humanity and other biological life in the contemporary Anthropocene.

CHAPTER 2

Historical Precursors: Colonial and Post-Colonial Political Violence, the Rise of Philippine Environmentalism, and the Global Climate Crisis

On Friday, November 18, 2016, the corpse of Ferdinand Marcos, the president-turned-dictator of the Philippines from 1965 to 1986, was suddenly (and sneakily) buried in the Heroes' Cemetery (*Libingan ng mga Bayani*) by the Philippine government under then-President Rodrigo Duterte.¹⁶ Since his death in 1989, the Marcos family, particularly former first lady Imelda Marcos, had unsuccessfully attempted to have the former dictator buried in the national cemetery alongside others considered to be heroes and patriots of the Philippines, including past Philippine presidents, national artists and scientists, and veterans of the Philippine Revolution against Spain (1896-98), the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), and World War II (1941-45). Unlike other burials at the Heroes' Cemetery, the interment of Ferdinand Marcos was done rashly and with little fanfare, with the Philippine press and public given barely an hour's notice before the burial took place.

Outraged by the Duterte government's sudden and furtive burial of the country's former dictator, thousands of people took to the streets of Manila and cities across the country in protest. With signs showing slogans like "Marcos Not a Hero" (Tagalog: "*Marcos Hindi Bayani*"), "No Hero's Burial for a Criminal," "#BlockMarcos," and "Never Again To Martial Law," the protesters

¹⁶ The *Libingan ng mga Bayani* (or Heroes' Cemetery) was established by the Philippine government in 1947 as "a national pantheon for presidents of the Philippines, national heroes, and patriots of the country." As stipulated by Republic Act 289, the Heroes' Cemetery is meant to honor national heroes of the country "for the inspiration and emulation of this generation and of generations still unborn." However, according to the regulations of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP, the Philippine military), which oversees and manages the cemetery, there are some who are prohibited from being buried there, including "those who have been dishonorably discharged from service or personnel convicted of an offense involving moral turpitude" (Tantoco 2016). The Supreme Court (*Kataas-taasang Hukuman* or *Korte Suprema*), after several delays, issued a 9-5 ruling on November 8, 2016, finally authorizing the burial of Marcos in the Heroes' Cemetery. The Marcos family, particularly former first lady Imelda Marcos, had been unsuccessfully seeking to have Marcos buried in the Heroes' Cemetery for decades. In July of 1998, former president Joseph Estrada tried to have Marcos buried in the Heroes' Cemetery, but he cancelled the burial plans in response to protests and public backlash.



November 30, 2016 – On Bonifacio Day (*Araw ni Bonifacio*), the national holiday commemorating national hero Andres Bonifacio who, in August of 1896, launched the Philippine Revolution to free the Philippines from over three hundred years of Spanish colonial rule), thousands of Filipinos chose to honor the memory of Andres Bonifacio by protesting against the Duterte government’s decision to bury former dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the Heroes’ Cemetery (*Libangan ng mga Bayani*). Protesters held signs stating, “#BLOCKMARCOS,” “MARCOS ‘DI BAYANI: LABAN KABATAAN! ‘DI PA TAPOS ANG KASAYSAYAN?” (“MARCOS IS NO HERO: YOUTH, FIGHT! HISTORY ISN’T OVER YET!”), and “NASAAN ANG PAGBABAGO? IPAGLABAN ANG KABUHAYAN, KARAPATAN, AT KASARINLAN!” (“WHERE IS THE CHANGE? LET’S FIGHT FOR OUR LIVELIHOODS, RIGHTS, AND SELF-DETERMINATION!”). They also created an effigy of Ferdinand Marcos’ corpse in a coffin with a ribbon marking Marcos as a “DIKTADOR” (“DICTATOR”). (Photos by the author)

expressed their indignation and disgust at the very notion of Ferdinand Marcos being considered a national “hero.” One major protest site included the People Power Monument in Quezon City, which was built in honor of the Philippines’ 1986 “People Power” Revolution that overthrew Marcos’ brutal and corrupt two-decade dictatorship that tortured, “disappeared,” assassinated, and incarcerated (with no due process) tens of thousands of people.

Members of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) were among the thousands of protesters who gathered in opposition to the Marcos burial. Earlier that Friday morning, I arrived at PMCJ’s office like I normally did for my volunteer-researcher position with the climate-justice group. Like the rest of the Philippines, PMCJ members heard about the planned burial barely an hour before it was scheduled to occur. Friends, comrades, and family members began texting one another about the impending interment of Marcos at the Heroes’ Cemetery, and it was a foregone conclusion that PMCJ members would immediately join protests that were being hastily prepared across the National Capital Region (NCR) of Metropolitan Manila, including at Rizal Park (named after national Filipino hero Jose Rizal),¹⁷ the People Power Monument, and more

¹⁷ Jose Rizal was the most prominent figure in the development, in the late 19th century, of Filipino nationalism, which sought to unify the diverse ethno-linguistic groups of the Philippine Archipelago under a common Filipino national identity in order to advocate for greater political rights and representation for the peoples of the islands, which had been under Spanish colonial rule since the 16th century (Abinales and Amoroso 2005; Guerrero 1961; Anderson 1998). Rizal also sought for greater industrial and technological development in the islands, which he criticized as being neglected, exploited, and abused under the Spanish colonial regime. His 1887 novel *Noli Me Tangere* (Latin: “Touch Me Not”), written in Spanish, served as a scathing critique of the injustices faced by Filipinos under Spanish colonialism, particularly from the Spanish friars, who were portrayed as corrupt, abusive theocrats who exploited and oppressed the Filipinos and stifled the political and technological progress of the colony due to their stubbornly backward and chauvinistic mentalities. Rizal belonged to the elite class of men from the archipelago known as *Ilustrados* (“Illustrious Ones”), whose families possessed enough wealth to send their sons to top educational institutions both in the Philippines and abroad, including in Spain, other countries in Europe, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. The *Ilustrados* primarily advocated for a reformist agenda that would allow the Philippines to become a province of Spain with as equal representation in the Spanish *Cortes* (the parliament of Spain) as the Spanish provinces in the Iberian Peninsula. More than any other text, *Noli Me Tangere* resonated deeply with many of the peoples of the islands living under Spanish colonial rule, and it helped to inspire the more revolutionary anti-colonial nationalism of the *Katipunan*, a primarily working-class secret society formed by Andres Bonifacio that rejected the reformism of Rizal. The *Katipunan* would eventually launch a rebellion against the Spanish colonial government in Manila, subsequently spreading to provinces throughout the colony and culminating in the Philippine Revolution against Spain in 1896-98. Rizal, though he made statements in opposition to the radical anti-colonial nationalism of the *Katipunan*, was nonetheless blamed by the colonial authorities for the rebellion, and he was executed by the regime in December of 1896.

than a dozen other sites. At the office, we began creating protest signs and then took group selfies and posted them on social media.

We then got into a van and joined a protest organized by PMCJ's partner organizations SANLAKAS¹⁸ and *Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino* (BMP, the Solidarity of Filipino Workers) outside of the building of the GMA Network (one of the Philippines' largest media conglomerates) in the Timog district of Quezon City. Through their protest signs and public speeches, PMCJ's members lambasted the brutal legacy of the Marcos Dictatorship; they criticized the Duterte government for greenlighting Marcos' burial in the Heroes' Cemetery while warning against Duterte's own authoritarian and violent practices; and they reminded the public of the harmful environmental policies and projects of the Marcos regime, including the Chico River Dam Project and the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP), both of which were suspended and shelved due to widespread public opposition (I discuss the anti-Chico River Dam activism later in this chapter; see Chapter 5 of this dissertation for a discussion of the anti-nuclear activism surrounding the BNPP).

Later that evening (and continuing well into the night), we joined a large protest gathering at the People Power Monument, where thousands of people expressed their anger at the hero's burial for Marcos.¹⁹ It was during that evening protest at the People Power Monument that the raw

¹⁸ "SANLAKAS is a nationwide multi-sectoral organization established to protect and advance the rights and welfare of the Filipino masses through their involvement in the mass movement" (<https://www.facebook.com/Sanlakas>, accessed July 5, 2022). SANLAKAS (an amalgamation of the words *isang lakas*, meaning "One Force" or "One Strength") is the lead organization of a national network of leftist and socialist groups, including BMP ("Solidarity of Filipino Workers"), *Partido Lakas ng Masa* (PLM, the "Party of the Strength of the Masses" [or also referred to in English as the "Party of the Laboring Masses"]), Oriang (a women's rights organization named after Gregoria "Oriang" de Jesus, the founder of the women's wing of the revolutionary Katipunan society, and whose husband was Andres Bonifacio), and *Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng Maralita ng Lungsod* (KPML, the United Congress of the Urban Poor).

¹⁹ There was a notably strong presence of students at the protest, particularly from the University of the Philippines – Diliman (UP-Diliman) and Ateneo de Manila University—two of the top universities in the country. UP-Diliman is considered the flagship campus of the University of the Philippines (U.P.), which was established by the US colonial government in 1908. Modeled after the University of Michigan and University of California systems, the University of the Philippines has campuses throughout the country. UP-Diliman is considered the top public university in the Philippines, and particularly since the 1960s and 70s, the campus has been a bastion of progressive and radical leftist scholarship and activism. In the first three months of 1970 known as the "First Quarter Storm" (FQS), massive rallies and demonstrations, particularly led by student activists, broke out in Manila and across the country in opposition to electoral fraud, corruption, and IMF structural adjustment policies enacted by the administration of President Ferdinand

emotions of frustration, pain, and apprehension felt by my PMCJ colleagues and friends, and by many of the protesters in general, became most apparent to me. The brutality of the Marcos regime—including its frequent use of brutal physical and psychological methods of torture against dissidents—was fresh on the minds of many of the protesters, some of whom included victims and survivors of Marcos’ human-rights violations. The act of providing the brutal dictator with a hero’s burial was viewed simultaneously as absurd, painfully offensive, and egregiously (in fact, monstrously) inappropriate.



Protesters gather around the People Power Monument in Quezon City on the evening of November 18, 2016, the day in which the Philippine government swiftly and suddenly buried the country’s former dictator Ferdinand Marcos at the Heroes’ Cemetery (*Libingan ng mga Bayani*). One sign states, “*MARCOS KAWATAN!*” (MARCOS THE THIEF!). The People Power Monument was built to commemorate the Philippines’ internationally renowned 1986 People Power Revolution, which peacefully brought about the end of the two-decade Marcos Dictatorship and swept President Corazon Aquino into power, paving the way for the ratification of the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines (*Saligang Batas ng Pilipinas*) which restored Philippine democracy. (Photos by the author)

Marcos, and UP-Diliman became the epicenter of the country’s student activism. The following year in February 1971, UP-Diliman students barricaded their campus and created the “Diliman Commune” (Alcarde et al. 2022; Scalice 2018). Student activists from UP-Diliman continued to play key roles in the movement to topple the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, which was established after Marcos declared martial law in 1972. Several of PMCJ’s elder members had become student activists (both at UP-Diliman and other universities) against the Marcos dictatorship, and UP-Diliman continues to serve as both a source of recruitment for PMCJ’s membership as well as a site for workshops, conferences, and discussions held by PMCJ on issues related to climate justice and human rights.

Moreover, as it had barely been four and a half months since the beginning of the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte—a leader whose own authoritarianism and easy recourse to extrajudicial violence was already notoriously known since his days as mayor of Davao City—there was also a palpable sense in the air, encapsulated in the slogan “Never Again To Martial Law,” that another brutal dictatorial regime was in the process of being consolidated. Indeed, by the end of 2016, thousands had already become victims of extra-judicial killings that were part of President Duterte’s War on Drugs—which activists denounced as a de facto “war on the poor,” and with one scholar identifying it as a genocide (Simangan 2018). In November of 2021, the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened an investigation into Duterte’s government for crimes against humanity. The protests continued for weeks after Marcos’ burial at the Heroes’ Cemetery, including major demonstrations on Bonifacio Day (*Araw ni Bonifacio*), a national holiday on November 30th which commemorates national hero Andres Bonifacio, who had launched the Philippine Revolution in 1896 to rid the island country of over three hundred years of Spanish colonial rule.²⁰

The fact that the climate-justice activists in PMCJ immediately, unquestioningly, and matter-of-factly joined the anti-Marcos burial protests speaks to the centrality of the legacy of the anti-

²⁰ In public memories of the Philippine Revolution, Andres Bonifacio is considered to be both a national and working-class hero (Abinales and Amoroso 2005; Iletto 1979; Agoncillo 1956). Coming from a lower-middle class family, Bonifacio, as a youth, supported his family financially by taking on odd jobs, eventually working as a clerk-messenger. Though he did not finish formal schooling, he continued to educate himself by widely reading books in Spanish about the French Revolution, the American Revolution, Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserables*, and Jose Rizal’s novels *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891). He was also a theater actor in local Tagalog plays, and he was known for his eloquent and poetic recitations in the Tagalog language; he also wrote beautiful essays and poems in Tagalog. He became a Freemason, and his experience with Freemasonry profoundly influenced the development of the Katipunan, the secret revolutionary society founded by Bonifacio that would launch the Philippine Revolution against Spain. (“Katipunan” is short for *Kataas-taasan, Kagalang-galangan Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* [KKK, “The Highest and Most Exalted Society of the Children of the Country”]). Today, perhaps more than any other person in Philippine history, Andres Bonifacio serves as an ancestral figure for the tradition of working-class radicalism and revolutionary anti-colonial nationalism in the country, particularly in progressive and leftist activist spaces. When I first began my participant-observation position with PMCJ in August of 2016, I met with PMCJ’s members during their annual general assembly, which took place at the University of the Philippines – Diliman that year, and after dinner, some of PMCJ’s members engaged in a kind of “poetry battle” in which they debated with and playfully taunted each other by coming up with poetic rhyming verses in Tagalog on the cuff—a tradition of debating in verse in Tagalog that was practiced by Bonifacio and other contemporary Tagalog poets, playwrights, and writers (The practice was given the name *balagtasan* since the early 20th century, named after the preeminent 19th century Tagalog writer of epic poetry Francisco Balagtas, but it has ancient roots in Tagalog and other Philippine oral poetic traditions).

Marcos Dictatorship movement—and of anti-authoritarianism and grassroots democracy more generally—to the philosophy, organizing strategies, and personal and institutional histories of PMCJ and its membership. It also alludes to the intimate connection between environmental activism and political violence in the Philippines, which was ranked in 2018 by the environmental NGO Global Witness as the deadliest country on Earth for environmental activists (Watts 2019). In this chapter, I analyze this nexus between Philippine environmental activism, authoritarian political violence, and the country’s ever-worsening ecological and climatic crisis. How and why have Philippine environmental movements been met with such terrible violence, how do the activists respond to the violence, and why is it so dangerous to be an environmental activist in the Philippines in the first place? Why, moreover, does the phrase “Never Again To Martial Law” resonate so strongly with Philippine environmental justice advocates, and what does this say about the character of environmental movements in the Philippines and elsewhere in the Global South?

In order to effectively understand the Philippine climate-justice movement, it is important to not only understand the history of the Philippines’ explicitly environmental organizations and movements as well as the sources of the country’s major problems of ecological degradation and climatic crisis (as important as these histories and processes are). I contend that it is also crucial to understand the Philippines’ history of struggle against the political violence and repression that has accompanied the country’s centuries-long experience of foreign colonialism and domestic dictatorship. Indeed, the Philippine climate-justice movement, though profoundly influenced by and connected to globally circulating discourses on climatological science and environmental justice, also emerged within a specifically Philippine historical and ecological context that, in turn, has been shaped by the country’s traumatic experience of political violence. Both the ecological crisis in the Philippines and the character of the country’s social-movement activism have been informed by the Philippines’ historical experience of centuries of foreign colonial rule, plantation agriculture and

capitalist extractivism, and enduring legacies of colonial and post-colonial authoritarianism, dictatorship, and violence.

I will begin by situating Philippine climate justice within the Philippines' broader history of foreign colonialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and continued anti-imperialist struggle. I will then describe the building of modern environmentalist movements in the Philippines, particularly from the Marcos Dictatorship era to the present. I seek to provide a brief overview of the historical colonial roots of both the contemporary ecological crisis in the Philippines as well as the popular resistance struggles against the political-economic forces that have been causing ecological degradation in the archipelagic country. I am informed by studies on the "environmentalism of the poor" (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997; Nixon 2013) which have historically identified as "environmentalist" the struggles of socioeconomically marginalized people, peasants, and Indigenous people worldwide, particularly in the Global South, to defend their lands and environments from environmentally damaging and polluting state and corporate extraction projects. Though many of these defenders of the integrity of the land, water, forests, and air hadn't necessarily called themselves "environmentalists," Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier have identified their actions as examples of environmentalism. This conception of environmentalism has been meant to diverge from and challenge elitist forms of "cosmetic environmentalism" and Western-originated "fortress conservation" schemes which have promoted colonial forms of environmental protection and conservation by dispossessing peasants and Indigenous peoples from their lands in order to "protect" nature imagined as "pristine" (Peluso 1993; Igoe and Brockington 2007; P. West and Brockington 2006).

I then review two important historical events that contributed to the formation of environmentalist consciousness in the Philippines, specifically the successful resistance movements to the Chico River Dam Project in the Cordillera region of the northern Philippine island of Luzon

and to logging corporations in the San Fernando Valley of Bukidnon province in the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. I then examine the development of environmentalist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) in the country. I also specifically address the role that the Catholic Church and Protestant churches, Catholic liberation theology, and Christian-influenced concepts like environmental stewardship have played in the rise of Philippine ecological resistance movements. I will conclude with a reflection on how these Philippine environmentalist movements rooted in the broader popular democratic struggle have been merging with Philippine and global environmentalist concerns with the effects of the global climate crisis in a way that has produced the contemporary Philippine climate-justice movement.

Colonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance: Historical Influences on the Development of the Philippine Climate-Justice Movement

As a Southeast Asian island country that has endured centuries of foreign colonial rule under the Spanish, American, and Japanese empires, respectively, the Philippines has had a particular experience with foreign colonialism that has shaped the strategies, framing processes (Benford and Snow 2000), and cultural politics of its contemporary activism, including in its climate-justice movement. The fact that a call for the removal of the US military presence in the Philippines, and a denunciation of US imperialism more broadly, form important parts of the vision of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) for an ecologically sound, economically just, and sovereign country free from foreign imperialist meddling and intervention—whether from the United States, China, or any other foreign power—speaks to the importance of this colonial history for Philippine climate justice and other forms of activism in the country. Moreover, foreign colonialism—and the period of US colonial rule, in particular—has left enduring legacies of state surveillance, authoritarianism, political repression against dissidents, and genocidal violence, with which all Filipino activists have had to contend.



November 17, 2017 — Members of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) and partner organization SANLAKAS protest against a visit to the Philippines by US President Donald Trump. PMCJ held a sign stating, “DONALD TRUMP: COAL SUPPORTER, CLIMATE DENIER, ENVIRONMENT PLUNDERER,” while SANLAKAS used Trump’s visit to denounce the US military presence in the Philippines with a sign stating, “U.S. TROOPS, OUT OF PH!” Anti-imperialism and anti-militarism form important parts of PMCJ’s vision for climate justice. (Photo by Miguel de Guzman of *The Philippine STAR*)

Philippine nationalism developed in the late 19th century as an anti-colonial movement aimed at unifying diverse ethnolinguistic groups across over seven thousand islands under one Filipino nationality in order to rid the country of over three hundred years of Spanish colonialism. The Philippine Revolution (1896-98) and the short-lived Constitutional Republic of the Philippines, however, were crushed by the United States during the brutal Philippine-American War of 1899-1902 (with battles and massacres continuing until 1913). Relying on scorched-earth and genocidal tactics for colonial conquest—including massacres, widespread torture (including the so-called “water cure”), and “reconcentration camps”—the US Army defeated the revolutionary Filipino army while brutally quashing civilian support for the Filipino revolutionaries. This mass-scale US slaughter across the Philippines was justified by explicitly white-supremacist and patriarchal ideologies (Kramer 2006; Hoganson 1998; Rodriguez 2009). Paul Kramer (2006) has described the Philippine-

American War as having descended into a “war of racial exterminism,” and Dylan Rodriguez (2009) has identified the US conquest of the Philippines as a genocide.²¹ As Sarita See (2017) notes, the Philippine-American War was “a brutal and brutally forgotten war that scholars recently have described as genocidal according to even the most conservative definitions of genocide” (50).

The United States then established a colonial government that utilized new technologies developed as a part of America’s “Information Revolution” at the turn of the 20th century that were applied toward colonial efforts to destroy enduring movements for Philippine independence. This radical Filipino nationalism aiming for immediate independence from the United States was subjected to intense forms of political repression, surveillance, state infiltration and espionage, disinformation campaigns, blackmail, and corruption by the US colonial government, leading to the

²¹ Rodriguez’s discussion of US genocide in the Philippines is part of the growing body of scholarship in critical genocide studies which has been expanding the conceptual scope, analytical usefulness, and political possibilities of the concept of genocide. Originally coined by Jewish-Polish lawyer Rafael Lemkin, the definition of genocide as codified into international law via the 1948 UN Genocide Convention ultimately took on a more limited and circumscribed scope, with little to no legal “teeth” to prosecute perpetrators of genocide. The more limited definition of which victim groups could be legally considered victims of genocide, and the insertion of an intentionality clause in the UN’s definition of genocide (which compels prosecutors to prove the more subjective notion that perpetrators “had intent” to destroy, “in whole or in part,” a racial, ethnic, national, or religious group), effectively diluted and defanged the legal power of the concept of genocide. A major reason for this “defanged” legal conception of genocide was that the representatives of the great powers (particularly the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely the United States, Britain, France, Russia, and China) actively sought to limit the definition of the victim groups of genocide (to the exclusion of political groups, for example), insert the intentionality clause, and remove cultural genocide from the UN’s definition. One repercussion of this diluted definition of genocide (and its intentionality clause) was to muddy the waters enough to get lawyers and activists to endlessly debate whether or not a case of mass killings or other genocidal policies indeed amounted to a “genocide.” Though some activists and scholars effectively abandoned the concept of genocide as analytically and politically useless, in recent years, scholarship in critical genocide studies has rejuvenated the conception of genocide; such scholarship has learned from social movement activism in the 20th century that pushed for recognition of historical genocides, such as the Holocaust recognition movement as well as the movement for recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Native Americans have made genocide claims against the US government, as have African Americans (in reference, for example, to the mass killings of Black people in the US during the age of Jim Crow legalized discrimination and anti-Black racist terror, including the 1921 Tulsa Genocide). In May of 2021, Germany officially recognized the Namibian Genocide perpetrated by the German colonial army against the San, Herero, and Nama ethnic groups in 1904, and in October of 2021, the president of Algeria officially accused France of committing genocide in the North African country during the brutal French conquest of the 1830s and in relation to France’s exterminatory anti-Algerian policies in 1945 and 1961. Rodriguez (2009) has discerned parallels in the US Army’s exterminatory policies in the Philippines from 1899 to 1913, and he contends that the legacy of US genocide in the Philippines—though having been profoundly suppressed and censored by the US colonial regime and in educational curricula in both the United States and the Philippines to this day—is inextricably intertwined with modern Filipino identity. Concomitantly, the suppression of the memory of the Philippine Genocide at the hands of the US military has had profound deleterious political, social, and psychological repercussions for Filipinx people worldwide.

movement crumbling from within and without. Alfred McCoy argues that the US colonial regime in the Philippines comprised the “world’s first modern surveillance state” (McCoy 2009), as it was in the US colonial Philippines that fully modern methods and technologies of state surveillance and spying powers were first implemented anywhere in the world, decades before the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency in 1947.

This surveillance state established by the US colonial authorities in the Philippines was, as McCoy notes, achieved in ways that had previously been impossible in the municipal, state, and federal policing agencies in the mainland United States due to the influence of the US constitution and courts, the relatively strong tradition of civil-liberties protections (albeit considerably circumscribed and tainted by prevailing ideologies of racism, patriarchy, and classism in the US policing system), and municipal and other local government resistance to the power of the federal government. In the context of the US-occupied Philippines, however, US colonial authorities were effectively unhindered by the constraints of the US constitution and US courts, and they were thus able to implement unconstitutional, undemocratic, authoritarian, and violent policing and surveillance methods against Filipino nationalists, trade unionists, peasant activists, Indigenous peoples, and millenarian religious movements.

The subsequent and also highly brutal occupation of the Philippines by the Empire of Japan during World War II included violently atrocious conduct by the soldiers of the Japanese imperial army against Filipino civilians, an infamous “death march” imposed on Filipino and American soldiers in the province of Bataan, and the establishment of a heinous system of sexual slavery and institutionalized rape called the “comfort women” system (Murphy 2011; K. R. Mendoza 2003). This was followed by a reinvasion by the United States in 1944-45, with the fighting between the two imperial powers leaving the Philippines in ruins—particularly the capital city of Manila, which

became the second-most devastated Allied city in the world in the aftermath of World War II after Warsaw, Poland (Scott 2019).

In 1946, the United States granted the Philippines nominal independence, but with a reality of continued US “neo-colonial” intervention in the country’s politics, economics, and military affairs (Schirmer and Shalom 1999; Constantino 1978). The US government effectively bullied the new Republic of the Philippines into accepting exceedingly unfair trade terms between the two countries via the Bell Trade Act of 1946, and the Philippines was also compelled to host the two largest overseas US military bases in the world, as stipulated by the Military Bases Agreement of 1947. During the *realpolitik* of the Cold War, the US government regularly intervened in Philippine political and military affairs, including through the CIA’s counter-insurgency operations against the communist Huk Rebellion in the 1950s, and through the US Navy’s deployment of an aircraft carrier (with a destroyer escort) into Manila Bay during the 1953 presidential elections in order to intimidate the Philippines, with a threat of force, into electing Ramon Magsaysay, the preferred candidate of the US government, rather than the incumbent President Elpidio Quirino (McCoy 2009, 382-3). The corrupt and brutal dictatorship of Ferdinand-Imelda Marcos (1965-86),²² moreover, was financially, militarily, and politically supported and propped up by the US government throughout its nearly two-decade reign.

²² Several scholars and observers have noted the immense power wielded by former first lady Imelda Marcos throughout the candidacy, presidency, and dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Ferdinand Marcos had once referred to Imelda Marcos as his “secret weapon,” as her charismatic appeal played a critical role in helping Ferdinand win the presidency in 1965 and reelection in 1969. During the dictatorship, Imelda Marcos was appointed governor of Metropolitan Manila, Minister of Human Settlements, and a member of the National Legislature (*Batasang Pambansa*), and she was frequently sent by Ferdinand abroad on diplomatic missions, including to Libya, Iraq, Cuba, and the United States. The term “Imeldific” emerged as a reference to the lavish spending and massive corruption of Imelda Marcos who, along with her husband and both of their closest family members and cronies, plundered the Philippines’ public resources for their own personal gain; this became most infamously exemplified by Imelda’s collection of over three thousand pairs of shoes. Primitivo Mijares (2016) has referred to the Marcos regime as the “conjugal dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos.”

Having been democratically elected in 1965 and reelected in 1969 (albeit tainted with allegations of massive vote-buying and electoral fraud), Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law (*Batas Militar*) in 1972, shutting down the Philippine Congress and Senate and creating one unicameral legislature packed with pro-Marcos representatives (while primarily ruling the government through presidential decrees), firing the existing Supreme Court members and replacing them with his own allies, shutting down media outlets critical of the government while allowing pro-Marcos media to continue operating, appointing his closest family members and cronies to head top government agencies and private banks and corporations, and having military personnel take over other normally civilian government positions (Abinales and Amoroso 2005, 205-7). Marcos also had tens of thousands of people arrested and detained with no due process, including rival politicians, lawyers, businesspersons, journalists, labor leaders, activists, and students; by 1975, over 30,000 people had been arrested. Ferdinand Marcos specifically built on the authoritarian policing agencies that had been established by the US colonial government a few decades prior, including the Philippine Constabulary (which had been a federal agency of the US government) and the Manila Metropolitan Police Force (Metropol), in order to violently entrench and maintain his dictatorial rule (McCoy 2009).

It was also during the Marcos Dictatorship that a notably strong tradition of activism developed in the country, explicitly in opposition to both Marcos' fascism and US imperialism. Much of the leftist and progressive organizing to topple the dictatorship was "underground," as the Marcos regime outlawed political dissent, engaged in widespread censorship, imposed strict curfews, and restructured the government away from its prior democratic foundations and, instead, toward authoritarianism centered around the president, the first lady, and their closest family members and cronies. Marcos' policing forces—which, as mentioned, had been built on and elaborated upon the US colonial policing agencies established a few decades prior—became notorious for their

widespread use of torture, extra-judicial killings, arbitrary detainment, and mass incarceration of political dissidents. The Marcos regime became even more notorious for a gruesome practice that came to be called “salvaging,” in which the remains of corpses that had been mutilated and tortured to death by the Marcos secret police would be displayed in public spaces, with the intention of effectively terrorizing the entire society and intimidating all who opposed the dictatorship. The Muslim-majority ethnic groups in the Philippines—collectively called *Moro* or *Bangsa Moro* (Moro Nation), primarily based in western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago—were particularly subjected to campaigns of state terrorism, settler colonialism, and genocidal violence by the Marcos Dictatorship (C. J. Chanco 2017). The infamous Jabidah Massacre of 1969 (which was followed by dozens of other anti-Moro massacres by Marcos’ military forces, including the horrific 1971 Manili Massacre) played a particular role in igniting the Moro separatist rebellions waged by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and subsequently, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).²³

Despite such chilling, disturbing, and gruesome methods of torture and political violence at the hands of the Marcos regime, liberal, leftist, and Indigenous activists continued to fight against the dictatorship. As journalist Boying Pimentel has recalled, “After all, we grew up under a dictatorship so brutal and with so little respect for life that many of us from the martial law generation believed that if we wanted to help end it, we had to give up a lot for the fight—including our lives” (Pimentel 2022). Liberal and progressive politicians, human-rights attorneys, and civil-society members vociferously condemned the state terror of the Marcos regime, particularly in the

²³ For the presidential election of May 2022, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) endorsed Leni Robredo for president while also vociferously condemning the dictatorial legacy of the father of Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr., who would ultimately win the presidency—an astounding comeback for the Marcos family, which had been exiled out of the country in disgrace in 1986 following the People Power Revolution. A group of MILF commanders released a manifesto in April of 2022 which called on Bongbong to be truthful regarding the violent legacy of his father’s dictatorship, particularly for Muslim communities of the Philippines: “The Marcos years were bloody and brutal to the Muslims and Indigenous peoples of Mindanao, as Marcos Jr.’s father waged a merciless war of genocide against our people, killing thousands... The sins of the father are not the sins of the son. But the son who does not see wrong in what the father did eventually copies and becomes what the father was” (Rosauro 2022).

international media, while also engaging in forms of legal struggle in the courts. Filipinos based in the United States and Filipino American activists, moreover, played critical roles in garnering international media publicity that exposed the human-rights abuses taking place in the Philippines at the time, while they also worked to shed light on the critical role played by US military and economic aid in sustaining the dictatorship (M. Bello and Reyes 1986; Sales 2019). Meanwhile, it was the underground movement organizing centered around the Maoist-inspired Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), that posed the greatest existential threat to the dictatorship (Tadiar 2009).

The real threat of a communist takeover of the Philippines was used as a bargaining chip by the Marcos government to extract hundreds of millions of dollars in annual US military and economic aid and loans, which were consistently granted, despite the Marcoses' notorious international reputation for lavish corruption, plundering of Philippine public resources for their personal and familial gain,²⁴ and use of brutal methods of torture and political repression to sustain the dictatorship. The human-rights situation became so severe that, by 1975, Amnesty International issued a report stating that the Philippines had been “transformed from a country with a remarkable constitutional tradition to a system where star chamber methods have been used on so wide a scale as to literally torture evidence into existence” (Amnesty International 1975). McCoy (2009) notes the role of the CIA in having trained police forces in fascist regimes worldwide throughout the Cold War, from Latin American countries to the Philippines, in methods of physical and psychological torture (407).

Ferdinand Marcos also skillfully threatened to shut down Clark Air Field and Subic Bay Naval Station—the two largest overseas US military bases in the world—whenever the American

²⁴ In 1986, the *Guinness Book of World Records* identified Ferdinand Marcos as the biggest thief in history, having committed “the greatest robbery of a government” by plundering up to \$10 billion from the Philippines' public coffers.

government questioned his atrocious human-rights record. It was decided that maintaining these two US military bases in the Philippines, along with the threat of a Maoist victory in the country, took precedence over the pleas of Filipino human-rights activists to end US government support for the Marcos Dictatorship. US ambassador Stephen Bosworth later admitted, “We could have just cut off our aid to the Philippines, but that might have resulted in our being thrown out of our bases by Marcos. It was very difficult to do anything incisive” (quoted in Mendoza 2013, 130). In addition to the US military bases being viewed as a violation of Philippine sovereignty, the bases and the US troop presence have also been implicated in both human-rights violations and environmental degradation and contamination.²⁵ The Marcoses continued their kleptocratic corruption and state terrorism until the People Power Revolution of 1986 swept President Corazon Aquino into power, restoring liberal democracy to the Philippines and forcing the Marcos family into exile in Hawai‘i, where they were given political asylum by the United States.

From Anti-Dictatorship Activism to the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice

Several of the founders and current members of PMCJ were veterans of the struggle against the Marcos Dictatorship. Many of them were university students in the 1970s and 80s when they joined street demonstrations against the corruption and violence of the Marcos regime, legal struggles against the dictatorship in the courts, and the underground organizing movement against the dictatorship, US imperialism, and the system of extreme inequality, oligarchy, and corruption prevailing in Philippine society and government. Ms. Lidy Nacpil, for example, is a prominent

²⁵ Not only did the existence of the US military bases on Philippine soil offend, disturb, and anger the sensibilities of Filipinos who viewed the bases as a violation of Philippine sovereignty, but the bases and the US troop presence have also been implicated in both local human rights violations and environmental degradation. A sex trafficking industry emerged in the cities and towns around the US military bases, and several high-profile cases of US soldiers behaving badly (including in cases of sexual assault, rape, and murder), and not properly facing justice for their crimes, have caused great anger among the Philippine public. The US military has also been criticized for irresponsibly dumping toxic waste into the environments surrounding the military bases, causing environmental degradation and negative (and even deadly) health repercussions for local communities (Regencia 2014).

member of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice as well as chairperson of SANLAKAS. As the Coordinator of the Asian People’s Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD),²⁶ she is also an internationally recognized voice for climate justice, human rights, and economic justice, particularly among inter-Asian civil-society networks. Nacpil was a leading student activist at the University of the Philippines – Diliman (UP-Diliman) during the Marcos Dictatorship, which was a time when she learned to keep pushing the limits of what was politically possible, despite the constant threats to her and her comrades’ lives. In 1984, she became one of the founding members of the leftist women’s organization GABRIELA (named after the legendary Filipina revolutionary general Gabriela Silang);²⁷ to this day, GABRIELA remains one of the most prominent mass women’s movements in the Philippines. (In 2016, Nacpil was also a co-founder of the women’s movement ORIANG, for which she currently serves as chairperson.)²⁸ Tragically, her husband, the legendary anti-dictatorship activist Lean Alejandro, was assassinated by masked gunmen in 1987.

²⁶ “The Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD) is a regional alliance of peoples’ movements, community organizations, coalitions, NGOs, and networks.” Some of its programs include: Global Finance and Public Finance (Transforming the International Financial System, Freedom from Debt Campaign [illegitimate and unsustainable debt]), Ecological Debt, Environmental Justice, Climate Change (Reparations for Climate Debt, Addressing the roots of the Climate Crisis, Preventing catastrophic climate change), and Gender and Women’s Program (Gender dimensions and women’s issues within the other program areas, Economic Empowerment of Women). (<https://www.apmdd.org/about-us>, accessed on August 26, 2022)

²⁷ In the 1760s, a major rebellion against the Spanish colonial government in the Ilocos region of northern Luzon island erupted, led by the revolutionary leader Diego Silang, who sought to take advantage of the brief British occupation of the Philippines during the Seven Years’ War by allying with the British in an effort to gain independence for Ilocos. After Diego’s assassination, his widow Gabriela Silang continued the insurgency, leading her revolutionary army in battles against the Spanish colonial forces until she was captured and executed in 1763 (Veneracion 2019).

²⁸ “ORIANG is the name of a new movement of women that we launched on March 8, 2016, International Women’s Day. We celebrate the growth and achievements of women’s organizations and movements in the Philippines, fighting for women’s rights and for gender justice alongside calls for a better world for their families and children. ORIANG is a contribution to this fight—a movement of women from urban and rural communities, factories, schools and universities, giving voice to the demands and aspirations of women. ORIANG is the name of a Filipino woman revolutionary—Gregoria de Jesus [founder of the women’s wing of the *Katipunan*, the secret revolutionary society that ultimately launched the Philippine Revolution against Spain in 1896]. We take her name to honor her, to hold her up as a shining example of women going beyond the boundaries of tradition, women of courage and daring, women giving their lives for the liberation of country and their people. We take her name to send a message that the task of revolutionary transformation has not been completed, that this task is now more urgent than ever. Together we will forge and implement a program and strategy for organizing and mobilizing women to fight for reproductive justice, freedom from discrimination and violence against women, environmental and ecological integrity, social and economic emancipation, and political empowerment.” (<https://www.facebook.com/OriangLumalaban/>, accessed on July 14, 2022)

Recalling her days taking on the Marcos regime, Nacpil has offered the following words of advice for the current struggle against violent authoritarian rule in the Philippines and worldwide:

Those of us who lived through dictatorships, who fought under dictatorships and successfully brought dictatorships down, I think there are a lot of lessons we can share. You cannot let the government of a dictator or an authoritarian regime beat you back because the moment you surrender to what they're trying to do, they'll just keep spreading it. And I think that's the greatest lesson that we had when we were fighting against a dictatorship: We just refused to be defeated. I can't say we refused to be afraid; courage is not a lack of fear—courage is just continuing to act even if there's fear, right? Because fear makes you wise, it reminds you about the care that you also have to use when you plan your actions.²⁹



October 7, 2016 — Lidy Nacpil speaks to a reporter from CNN-Philippines, denouncing the World Bank's funding of coal projects in the Philippines. (Photo by the author)

²⁹ Scheinman, Ted. "Women Saving the Planet: Lidy Nacpil of the Philippines." *Pacific Standard*. September 23, 2018. (<https://psmag.com/magazine/women-saving-the-planet-lidy-nacpil-of-the-philippines>, accessed on August 26, 2022)

Mr. Sonny Melencio, a labor leader and the chairperson of PMCJ-aligned *Partido Lakas ng Masa* (Party of the Strength of the Masses), survived a harrowing experience of torture by the Marcos secret police, which he recounted in a testimonial published in *TIBAK RISING: Activism in the Days of Martial Law* (2012), a book compilation of stories and first-person accounts of activists who fought against and survived the Marcos Dictatorship. One of Melencio's torturers was the notorious Col. Rodolfo Aguinaldo of the Fifth Constabulary Security Unit (an agency known for committing some of the most horrific forms of torture by the Marcos regime). Melencio was subjected to constant beatings while blindfolded, sleep deprivation and starvation, the "water cure," periodic medical examinations to ensure that his body could continue enduring more torture, and twisted forms of psychological manipulation. Despite his horrendous ordeal, Melencio nonetheless asserted that "other comrades before me had undergone much worse torture," including electric shocks and burning of genitals, and the fact that they "never cooperated with the military steered my resolve to remain steadfast" (59-60). Melencio was resolute in his unwillingness to surrender any incriminating information to his torturers. He referred to his experience of torture as "a period in my life when I yearned for human kindness, yet I found not even a hint of it during my captivity" (Melencio 2012, 61). During a break from his torture sessions, he achieved a practically miraculous escape from the torture facility, after which he received help from strangers in the streets of Quezon City, eventually finding his way home. He then continued his activism against the dictatorship.

After surviving the torment that he endured, Melencio reflected:

All this time after my escape, the humanity that I longed for during my captivity showed its face—the kindness and caring of those who took care of me whether they knew what really happened to me or not. I saw it again in my comrades' dedication to the struggles, and the continuing fight of more and more people for a better deal, a better life, and a better future for humankind (63).

Several other members of PMCJ and its allied organizations came of age during the Philippines' experience of Martial Law under Marcos. They saw first-hand the corruption and



Sonny Melencio is a labor leader and the chairperson of *Partido Lakas ng Masa* (Party of the Strength of the Masses), a political party in the Philippine Congress' party-list system. Melencio survived a harrowing experience of torture at the hands of the Marcos dictatorship. (Photos by *Green Left*) (<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/sonny-melencio-0>)

brutality of the regime, and they knew the foreign imperial power that was propping up and sustaining the dictatorship that tormented them and their comrades and families. After the People Power Revolution and the fall of the dictatorship in 1986, they continued their activism for a more just society. Some of these veterans of the anti-dictatorship movement worked to establish the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) in 1988. FDC called for the cancellation of the massive national debt of the Philippines, much of which had been accrued by the Marcos regime which took out numerous loans from international lending agencies (with the Marcoses personally pocketing a great amount of the funding). Indeed, when Marcos became president in 1965, the Philippines' national debt stood at \$600 million; by the time the Marcoses were forced to flee to Hawai'i in 1986, the country's debt had soared to \$26 billion (Tadem 2016).

As “the world’s oldest debt-watch monitor,” the Freedom from Debt Coalition has been at the forefront of the critique of neoliberal structural adjustment policies, and particularly the ways in which international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund had historically used and manipulated national debts in order to restructure developing countries’

economies along neoliberal lines by privatizing essential services and deregulating the economy and financial sector.³⁰ FDC expanded its focus to promote economic and financial justice in the Philippines, including through its proposal for a People’s Economy based on feminist and progressive economic principles. In 2009, FDC created a program for climate justice; this program then eventually grew into its own organization, calling itself the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ).



November 30, 2016 — On Bonifacio Day, members of the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) joined the large protests against the burial of Ferdinand Marcos in the Heroes’ Cemetery. (Photo by the author)

Ecological Crisis, Indigenous and Peasant Resistance, and the Rise of Philippine Environmentalism

The economic mismanagement, debt restructuring, financial plundering, corruption, and other facets of the “crony capitalism” of the Marcos regime have had wide-ranging and profoundly negative repercussions for the Philippine economy to this day. The country is still forced to make debt-servicing payments for illegitimate debts accrued during the Marcos Dictatorship, and much of

³⁰ “Who We Are and What We Do – Freedom from Debt Coalition.” (<https://fdcpills.org/about/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/>, accessed on July 7, 2022)

the billions of dollars stolen by the Marcoses (much of which were stashed in foreign bank accounts, from the United States to Switzerland) have not yet been recovered—financial resources that could otherwise go toward economic programs, development projects, and ecological restoration initiatives.³¹ Moreover, Marcos’ crony capitalism and corruption didn’t only negatively impact the Philippines economically; the Marcos regime also left a damaging ecological legacy for the country. The Marcoses’ plundering of the country’s economic resources went hand-in-hand with their and their cronies’ degradation of significant swaths of the country’s extraordinary natural environments through unsustainable forms of logging, mining, dam-building, and other extractive practices (Ross 2001; R. Bryant and Lawrence 2005b).

In tandem with the activist movements against the political and financial corruption and political violence of the Marcos regime was the extraordinary growth of environmental activism during the same period. The modern Philippine environmental justice movement has been heavily rooted in the practices, organizing strategies, ideologies, and theologies that emerged in opposition to the authoritarian Marcos regime. It has also been influenced by the post-1986 movement (which ended, in many ways, in 2016) toward legal-constitutional, political, and cultural democratization and decentralization in the country that bolstered subaltern Philippine people’s assertions to their lands and natural resources. Moreover, in some of the most prominent local ecological justice movements in the Philippines, Indigenous peoples have been at the forefront of resistance to the socially and environmentally destructive practices of corporate and state elites, landlords, and political warlords

³¹ In 1986 after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, President Corazon Aquino established the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) with a mandate to recover the billions of dollars in ill-gotten wealth of the Marcoses. The PCGG continues to search the world to recover the money stolen by the Marcoses, but now that Bongbong Marcos is president, it is unclear what the future of the PCGG will be. As explained by Nick Davies in an article in *The Guardian*, “Marcos stole, then stole more. The Japanese paid reparations for the second world war; he skimmed it and put the profit into his Swiss accounts. He stole international aid money, gold from the Central Bank, loans from international banks and military aid from the US. He decreed that more than a million impoverished coconut farmers must pay a levy, supposedly to improve the industry, amounting to \$216m. He had already issued decrees to gift most of the coconut trade to one of his own companies; now he stole great chunks of the levy fund, all the while taking kickbacks on government contracts” (Davies 2016).

and their private armies. In this sense, Guha and Martínez-Alier's (1997) framework of the environmentalism of the poor strongly resonates in the Philippine context.

One seminal event that has had a lasting impact on Philippine environmentalism and Indigenous people's activism was the successful effort of Cordillera Indigenous peoples in preventing the building of the Chico River Dam Project by the Marcos government (Magno 1993, 9-10; Gray 1996, 114-5). In the 1970s during the period of Martial Law, the Philippine government's National Power Corporation (Napocor), with World Bank funding, began building four dams in the Chico River of the Cordillera Mountains of northern Luzon island that would have flooded the lands of up to 100,000 Indigenous Kalinga and Bontoc people. Numerous Indigenous leaders signed the "Bodong Peace Pact" that united Cordillera Indigenous peoples in vehemently denouncing the construction of the dam, and the Indigenous groups began militantly defending their ancestral lands. By 1976, the entire area became militarized, with clashes occurring between the Philippine military and the Indigenous peoples; the communist New People's Army (NPA) became involved by supporting the Indigenous insurgents.

Like the experience of many other Indigenous and peasant resisters to corporate and state land grabs in other parts of the Philippines, the Cordillera peoples of the Chico River valley experienced brutal state repression and human-rights violations at the hands of the Philippine Constabulary and Marcos' secret police. By the early 1980s, the area had become an effective war zone. The Cordillera peoples began forming alliances with Indigenous peoples in other parts of the Philippines and worldwide, and the insurgency against the World Bank-funded Chico River Dam Project garnered international attention on both the specific situation of the Cordillera Indigenous peoples and the socially and ecologically destructive consequences of the large hydroelectric projects that the World Bank was fond of initiating. Worldwide sympathy for the Cordillera Indigenous

peoples fighting for their lands and way of life gained momentum, and the Marcos government eventually abandoned the project.

The victory for the Kalinga and Bontoc peoples became a major source of inspiration for Indigenous assertions of their right to their ancestral domains throughout the Philippines, and the World Bank itself, due to the failure of the Chico River Dam Project and other setbacks worldwide, was compelled to hire environmental advisors to assess the ecological impacts of the development projects they sponsored (Magno 1993, 10). Currently, the Kaliwa Dam Project, initiated by the Duterte government, is expected to be built by 2025; it has been met with vociferous opposition by the Dumagat-Remontado Indigenous people, who will be threatened with displacement if the project is completed. The Dumagat-Remontado people, Philippine climate-justice advocates, and church groups have invoked Marcos' failed Chico River Dam Project in their condemnations of the current Kaliwa Dam Project.



On the International Day of Indigenous Peoples on August 9, 2019, members of the Dumagat-Remontado tribe held a protest outside of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) against the Kaliwa Dam Project, which is threatening the Indigenous group with displacement. The Philippine Movement for Climate Justice and other allied groups joined the rally in solidarity. (Photo by PMCJ)

Another important moment for the Philippine environmental movement occurred in the San Fernando Valley of Bukidnon province in the northern part of Mindanao island in the 1980s when Lumad peoples (the Indigenous peoples of Mindanao), peasant migrants from the Catholic-majority ethnic groups from Luzon island and the Visayas (the cluster of islands in the central Philippines), and Christian groups and church leaders joined together to oppose the activities of logging corporations that were destroying their forests (Goldoftas 2005, 32-7; Porio and Taylor 1995, 148-53). The movement against deforestation grew out of organizations that had fought against the Marcos-era plan by the National Power Corporation to construct a dam in the Pulangi River that would have flooded 90 percent of the land area of the municipality of San Fernando and displaced more than 30,000 people. Bolstered by the victory of the Cordillera Indigenous peoples against the Chico River Dam Project, the Lumads, migrant peasants, and Christian communities successfully prevented the dam from being built. The main organization which resisted the Pulangi River dam project was the environmental group *Pagbugtaw sa Kamatuoran* (PSK, “To Be Awakened to the Truth”) which was formed by several Basic Christian Communities (BBCs) in the area. After the fall of the Marcoses’ regime, the people began organizing against the environmentally unsustainable practices of two remaining logging corporations in the area: Caridad C. Almendras Logging Enterprises (CCALE) and El Labrador Lumber Company, both of which were owned by Marcos cronies.

During the post-Marcos period, PSK evolved into *Kapunungan sa Pagpanalipod ng Pagpalambo sa Kinaiyahan* (KPPSK, “Organization for the Protection and Development of the Environment”). KPPSK sought, as much as possible, to work with the Philippine government in their fight against the deforestation caused by logging corporations that were literally threatening the survival of the peoples of the San Fernando Valley who depended on the forests for their livelihood and sustenance. Deforestation had been threatening their supply of food and building materials for their

homes, and it severely reduced agricultural production by stripping the soil of most of its nutrients. This, in turn, exacerbated the impacts of tropical storms and typhoons by causing devastating mudslides and flash floods that would otherwise have been heavily mitigated, or even avoided altogether, had a stable amount of trees remained to stabilize the soil. Finally, deforestation contributed to water shortages and droughts due to the disruption of the natural water cycle that relied on the transpiration of the trees (Goldoftas 2006, 27-9).

Awareness of the destructive impacts of deforestation and other ecologically unsustainable practices had been growing throughout the 1970s and 80s in the Philippines, and many of these environmentalist ideas gained particular currency in the wake of the People Power Revolution. In the new government of President Corazon Aquino, several veterans of the democratic people's struggles against the Marcos regime were appointed to key governmental posts, and environmentalist issues (among others) were enshrined in the new 1987 Constitution of the Philippines (*Saligang Batas ng Pilipinas*). The anti-martial law and human-rights advocate Fulgencio "Jun" Factoran, Jr., for example, was appointed Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) (Bryant and Lawrence 2005, 119). In 1987, a year after the People Power Revolution, KPPSK petitioned DENR Secretary Jun Factoran to ban logging companies from operating in the San Fernando Valley. After receiving no response, the people launched several protests and militant actions, including road blockades preventing logging-company trucks from hauling timber out of the San Fernando forests (Goldoftas 2006, 35). Despite being attacked by local Philippine military forces that were aligned with the logging corporations, the activists maintained their human barricade for weeks, forcing the DENR to step in and temporarily suspend the logging licenses of the corporate loggers. A year later in 1988, KPPSK members traveled to Manila, some of whom had never been to the Philippine capital city before, and held a hunger strike entitled, "A Fast For Our Forest" in front of the DENR office in Quezon City for several days until Sec. Factoran,

with President Aquino's backing, signed a 25-year logging ban in the San Fernando Valley and issued funding for reforestation projects in the region (Goldoftas 2006, 36-7; Porio & Taylor 1995, 151-2). The Lumads' and migrant-peasants' struggle against logging interests in the San Fernando Valley of Bukidnon gained national attention and inspired anti-logging movements across the country.

Philippine Environmentalist NGOs and Biodiversity Conservation

The growth of environmentalist non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Philippines has been intertwined with Indigenous and peasant ecological resistance movements and progressive Christian theologies and practices. Philippine environmentalist NGOs have often explicitly supported the rights of Indigenous groups to their ancestral domains and the maintenance of sustainable Indigenous ecological practices. Many of these environmental NGOs expanded in the 1970s and 80s during the Martial Law era as they provided alternative spaces outside of the authoritarian government for participatory and deliberative practices and anti-authoritarian democratic resistance (Magno 1993, 12). Several of these groups were instrumental in launching national and international critiques of many of the ecologically destructive and socially unjust development projects sponsored by the Marcos regime and funded by international donors. Many of these Philippine environmentalist organizations, moreover, had been crucially concerned with issues of socioeconomic justice from the beginning.

Large umbrella coalitions representing numerous local environmental organizations have been important in the development of Philippine environmentalism. In 1979, the first Philippine Environmental Congress was convened, and the Philippine Federation for Environmental Concerns (PFEC) emerged from that meeting. PFEC was centrally concerned with tackling the socioeconomic and political systems premised on greed and exploitation that had facilitated the environmental devastation occurring throughout the archipelago. Another coalition, the Philippine Environmental

Action Network (PEAN), was formed in April 1990 in conjunction with Earth Day which has been held annually worldwide on April 22nd. PEAN has been explicitly advocating for the fisherfolk, peasants, and others marginalized and harmed by pollution, coal power plants, oil spills, and destructive mining practices (Broad and Cavanagh 1994, 136).

Another major environmental group is the Haribon Foundation, which actually began as a bird-watching club in 1972, but by 1983, it evolved into a formal foundation for biodiversity conservation, environmental protection, and environmentalist advocacy (Magno 1993, 13).³² The Haribon Foundation has also incorporated Third World critiques of “distorted” development practices that have exacerbated wealth inequalities and produced grave ecological crises. Haribon members have furthermore critiqued prominent elite (and elitist/classist) discourses that have blamed the poor and Indigenous peoples for the ecological crises in the archipelago. In response to prevalent elite scapegoating of swidden (*kaingin*) agriculturalists as well as small-scale illegal loggers for the deforestation crisis in the country, Haribon members have reminded Philippine society that logging corporations and the state not only initiated the problem but have also been responsible for most of the clear-cutting (Goldoftas 2006, 54-5). The Haribon Foundation has also been a crucial player in the establishment of biodiversity conservation zones and marine sanctuaries throughout the country. Finally, in 1989, Haribon also spearheaded the creation of the Green Forum – Philippines which became a major political force for espousing environmentalist platforms in Philippine elections (Magno 1993, 14; Broad & Cavanagh 1993, 136). The Green Forum, for example, initiated the Earthvote Philippines Project in 1991, which disseminated a *Voter’s Guide to*

³² “Hatched in 1972, the Haribon Foundation and the individuals it trained and nurtured were instrumental in the formation of other environmental organizations in the country. The niche of Haribon—developed over 45 years of scientific excellence and adopting an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach—is biodiversity conservation. The Foundation’s natural and social scientists continue to work with people from all levels of governance to develop sustainable resource management strategies. The name Haribon was coined from *Haring Ibon* [King of Birds] or the Philippine Eagle. It was so named because the existence of the king of birds is a perfect barometer of the state of our forests.” “About Us.” *Haribon Foundation*. (<https://haribon.org.ph/about-us/>, accessed on September 24, 2022)

Sustainable Development leading up to the 1992 national elections, in which candidates were ranked and evaluated according to their commitment or hostility to environmentalist concerns.

In 1997, the *Kalikasan* People’s Network for the Environment (Kalikasan-PNE) was established by activists affiliated with the major leftist political coalition known as BAYAN (*Bagong Alyansang Makabayan*, the New Patriotic Alliance),³³ which consists of a national (and transnational) network of leftist organizations and political parties struggling “for national and social liberation against imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism. It envisions a just society, free from foreign domination.”³⁴ And as mentioned, in 2009, the Freedom from Debt Coalition created a climate-justice program, which eventually turned into its own organization, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ).³⁵ PMCJ regularly works with other environmentalist groups, including *Ahyansa Tigil Mina* (Alliance Against Mining), the Institute for Climate and Sustainable

³³ The term *bayan* can be translated as “people,” “community,” or “nation.” The BAYAN coalition was established in 1985 by legendary anti-dictatorship activist Leandro “Lean” Alejandro (the husband of PMCJ activist Lidy Nacpil) and Lorenzo Tañada, a senator of the Philippines from 1947 to 1971 who, though having just retired, chose to return to the political and activist scene after Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972, representing clients who were victims of Marcos’ human rights abuses and co-founding the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG) which fought against the Marcos dictatorship in the courts. BAYAN’s ideology is based on Marxist-Leninist-Maoist-inspired national democracy.

³⁴ BAYAN – Bagong Alyansang Makabayan. Facebook page. (https://web.facebook.com/BAYANPhilippines/?_rdc=1&_rdr, accessed on July 7, 2022)

³⁵ In 1991 and 1992, a major split occurred in the Philippine Left when many members of the Maoist-inspired Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) left the party to form their own political parties, labor unions, and activist organizations. The people who remained with the CPP, its armed wing the New People’s Army (NPA, which has been waging the longest communist insurgency in the world in the Philippine countryside), and allied organizations and movements are referred to as “Reaffirmists” (R.A. people)—those who reaffirmed the commitment to Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought in the Philippine Marxist tradition, and who continue to support the strategy of a protracted people’s war in the countryside. The “Rejectionists” (R.J. people) came to have ideological and strategic differences with the CPP-NPA, and they chose to leave the party. This ideological and political split in the CPP in the early 1990s between the R.A. and R.J. factions has left a rift in the Philippine Left that continues to inform the behaviors, relations between, and strategies of progressive and leftist activist organizations to this day. Leftist activists recognize, for example, which neighborhoods and unions are under the influence of the BAYAN-affiliated (R.A.) coalition on the one hand, and those, on the other, which are led by R.J. political blocs, such as SANLAKAS, AKBAYAN, KILUSAN (*Kilusang para sa Pambansang Demokrasya*, the Movement for National Democracy), and others. PMCJ’s coalition includes several of these R.J. groups, with SANLAKAS being the most prominent in PMCJ’s national coalition, but with KILUSAN heavily represented in the province of Bataan and neighboring provinces in Luzon island. Despite the ideological and strategic differences between these different political blocs, I also noticed a phenomenon in which there was a kind of distribution of responsibilities and labor in political organizing; on the issue of anti-coal activism for the purposes of climate justice, for example, different groups (aligned with either BAYAN, SANLAKAS, KILUSAN, or others) would take the lead in particular neighborhoods, provinces, or regions in leading the fight to shut down a coal plant or prevent a coal plant from being built. All of these folks are expert political organizers, many of them with decades of experience since the days of Marcos’ Martial Law dictatorship.

Cities (ICSC), the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED), the EcoWaste Coalition (which is working toward a “Zero Waste” society in the Philippines), and the ABS-CBN Foundation (the non-profit group of the large media conglomerate ABS-CBN, which is owned by the wealthy and prominent Lopez clan). All of these Philippine environmentalist organizations are part of the Green Thumb Coalition, which, since its founding in February of 2016, has put forth a green platform that it has encouraged and pressured presidential and other political candidates to embrace, while also evaluating different political candidates based on how well (or not) their policies align with the green agenda. A host of international environmentalist organizations also have offices in Metropolitan Manila, including Greenpeace – Philippines, 350.org Pilipinas, World Wide Fund for Nature – Philippines (WWF-Philippines), Conservation International – Philippines, and The Climate Reality Project – Philippines (the Philippine branch of former US vice president and environmentalist Al Gore’s group).

Eco-Theology and Environmental Stewardship

The role of the Catholic Church, Protestant churches, Islamic communities, and other religious groups in the Philippines in promoting the rise of an environmental consciousness in the country cannot be underestimated. With a Roman Catholic majority and large Protestant and Muslim minorities, the Philippines is a deeply religious country. In addition to providing moral, ethical, and theological frameworks that inform many Filipinos’ daily lives and choices in life, religious leaders and institutions have a powerful influence over the country’s politics and social movements. More than any other religious institution, the Catholic Church’s influence and power permeates throughout the national culture and politics of the Philippines, and this power extends to the ways that the country’s environmentalist movements have been articulated, represented, and strategically operated.

A major source of strength and inspiration for the environmental activism in the San Fernando Valley in Bukidnon, for example, came from Christian ecological theology and Catholic liberation theology. Similar to the *comunidades eclesiales de base* of Latin America, the Philippines has experienced the growth of a grassroots Catholic social movement known as Basic Christian Communities (BBCs) throughout the country since the 1960s (Magno 1993, 16; Goldoftas 2006, 32; Porio & Taylor 1995, 149-50). The BBCs have been strongly influenced by Catholic liberation theology which has emphasized people's rights to be liberated from poverty, economic exploitation, social oppression, and ecological degradation. In San Fernando, Bukidnon, the BBCs in the area organized the environmental group Pagbugtaw sa Kamatuoran (PSK, "To Be Awakened to the Truth") which successfully opposed the Pulangi River dam project. PSK was heavily informed by Christian-inspired discourses of environmental stewardship—that Christians should be stewards of God's Earth and resist practices that are ecologically destructive of God's rivers, lakes, forests, and coral reefs.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), the most powerful national voice for the Catholic Church in the country, also helped spur the growth of Philippine environmentalism. Though the CBCP has been rather reactionary and ultra-conservative in its staunch stance against issues like the Reproductive Health Bill or the accreditation of the LGBT party-list organization *Ladlad* in the Philippine party-list system, the Bishops' Conference helped promote environmental sustainability and supported peasant and Indigenous ecological resistance movements in a "pastoral letter" entitled "What Is Happening to Our Beautiful Land" that it disseminated in 1988, encouraging Filipinos to organize against ecologically destructive practices sustained by the forces of greed and plunder in the country (Magno 1993, 15). The bishops also voiced support for the Indigenous and peasant activists fighting against logging companies in Bukidnon in the late 1980s. The National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), the

network of Philippine Protestant churches, for their part, initiated a Comprehensive Ecology and Environmental Protection Program which promoted environmental conservation and sustainability. Individual local priests have also been important leaders in environmental justice movements throughout the country, including Fathers Kaloy Gervais and Patrick Kelly, in the San Fernando anti-logging struggle (Goldoftas 2006, 34-5).

In the 21st century, support for environmental and climate justice from religious communities remains crucial in the Philippines, where over 80 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. In June of 2015, Pope Francis released a papal encyclical entitled *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* in which he implored Catholics worldwide to take action on the global climate crisis (Pope Francis 2015). The pope critiqued rampant consumerism, overconsumption and overextraction of resources, ecological degradation, and the fossil-fuel pollution fueling the climate crisis. He called for an end to fossil-fuel burning and a steady transition to renewable-energy technologies. Pope Francis' encyclical reverberated among Catholic communities across the Philippines, fueling a Filipino Catholic movement for climate justice. One Catholic priest in Batangas province, Fr. Dakila Ramos, referred to Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* as "our bible for the environment" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2015).

Pope Francis' encyclical had been published in June of 2015, a few months after the pope conducted a major visit to the Philippines in January of 2015. The pope made a particular (and emotional) trip to Tacloban City, the capital of the island province of Leyte which had been devastated by Super Typhoon Yolanda in November of 2013. Typhoon Yolanda (known internationally as Typhoon Haiyan) became the strongest tropical storm to hit landfall in recorded human history, with wind speeds up to 315 km/h (195 mph) and gusts up to 380 km/h (235 mph), killing over 7,000 people and devastating Tacloban City. From Tacloban, the pope went to Manila and held an outdoor mass in Rizal Park where over six million people were in attendance—the

largest papal gathering in history (*BBC News* 2015). After his visit to the Philippines, it was reported in international media that Pope Francis would issue a rare encyclical on climate change and the environment; the *Laudato Si'* was then published in June. That same year, the Global Catholic Climate Movement was established; it later changed its name to the Laudato Si' Movement. The Laudato Si' Movement – Pilipinas, the Philippines' branch of the global Catholic movement, advocates for climate-justice policies based on a Catholic framework, with the pope's encyclical serving as its main inspiration.

Another religious group, the Ecological Justice Interfaith Movement, also emerged in 2015 in the Philippines. The group seeks to bring together people of faith from various religious traditions in the Philippines to advocate for ecological justice policies and principles. On the Ecological Justice Interfaith Movement's Facebook page, the group cites the legacy of 2013's devastating Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in necessitating a strong response from the Philippines' religious communities toward the global climate crisis: "The gravity and urgency of climate change, part of a larger ecological crisis and experienced most vividly in super storms like Yolanda, is crystal clear in the Philippines. It is multiplying the sufferings of people already burdened by the injustices of hunger, dispossession, and violations of human rights."³⁶ Importantly, there is a recognition of the need for an *interfaith* response to the climate crisis, with Catholic and Protestant priests and other religious leaders joining together to call for an end to fossil-fuel burning. In May of 2016, for example, a major rally against coal power was held in the majority-Catholic province of Batangas by *Piglas Pilipinas!* (Break Free Philippines!), a campaign calling on the Philippines to "break free" from fossil fuels, particularly coal.³⁷ During the event, Imam Abdul Karim, a Muslim cleric from Batangas

³⁶ Ecological Justice Interfaith Movement. Facebook page. (https://web.facebook.com/ecohymn/about/?ref=page_internal, accessed on July 8, 2022)

³⁷ This was part of the global campaign to "Break Free From Fossil Fuels," with tens of thousands of people mobilized across six continents worldwide, calling on their countries to keep fossil fuels in the ground. Actions were held in Brazil,

City, expressed his support for the Piglas Pilipinas! campaign based on principles of Islamic environmentalism: “Protect Mother Nature. Nature is the source of life. That’s what we are taught as Muslims” (Romero 2016).

The Emergence of the Philippine Climate Justice Movement

As mentioned, the ecological crisis in the Philippines severely worsened during the era of the Marcos Dictatorship, when logging, mining, dynamite fishing, and other extractive industries—particularly those owned by Marcos cronies—were given free rein by the Marcos government to unsustainably extract the natural resources of the country while poisoning local ecosystems and harming the health of communities. Deforestation due to overlogging reached its peak during the Marcos Dictatorship, when Marcos granted numerous concessions to his cronies to unsustainably log forests across the country, with a great amount of the Philippines’ timber exported to Japan and the United States. Meanwhile, air pollution in Metropolitan Manila and other highly urbanized parts of the country reached severe levels. Overfishing, particularly from dynamite fishing practices, has weakened and destroyed coral-reef ecosystems in marine regions around the Philippines. And destructive forms of mining, particularly those using poisonous chemicals like cyanide to extract minerals deep in the Earth’s crust, have left rivers and lands contaminated and poisoned, causing major health and livelihood problems for communities in the vicinity.

By the early 21st century, it became even more apparent that the effects of the global climate crisis, caused by the mass-scale burning of fossil fuels, was compounding the already alarming ecological crisis in the Philippines. Flooding and droughts caused or exacerbated by ecologically degrading practices, for example, became even worse when compounded by the more extreme

Wales, Nigeria, New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, Canada, Indonesia, Turkey, South Africa, Germany, the United States, and the Philippines. (<https://350.org/break-free-so-far/>, accessed on August 11, 2022)

weather that has accompanied climate change. Oceanic acidification has exacerbated the problem of coral-reef bleaching, and oceanic heating has contributed to the formation of much more severe, destructive, and frequent tropical storms. The Philippines, in particular, has been devastated by the surge in “super typhoons” in the Pacific Ocean over the past couple of decades, while sea-level rise threatens to sink numerous islands and inundate coastal cities and regions throughout the country, including the megacity of Metropolitan Manila. All in all, the Philippines stands out as one of the most vulnerable countries on Earth to the effects of the global climate crisis.

The devastating impacts of the climate crisis in the Philippines weren't only being noticed by Philippine environmentalists. Communities throughout the Philippines started regularly talking about “climate change” (*pagbabago ng klima*) and the “climate crisis” (*krisis pangklima* or *krisis ng klima*), especially in the aftermath of each monstrous super typhoon that would devastate the country, such as Typhoon Ondoy in 2009 and Typhoon Yolanda in 2013. The Philippines' unique vulnerability to the climate crisis became virtually undeniable, and activism on the climate crisis took on a greater urgency and receptivity among the Philippine public. There was a major opening for climate-justice activism, and the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) emerged at this key moment in history—perhaps the last moment in history in which our species can take action in a way that could avert the worst and most apocalyptic scenarios for the climate crisis.

PMCJ is uniquely positioned as a climate-justice organization in several ways. As mentioned, PMCJ emerged from a climate-justice program of the Freedom from Debt Coalition, which itself was founded by veterans of the movement against the Marcos Dictatorship. Many of these anti-dictatorship movement veterans themselves had experience in the Philippines' socialist and communist movements which worked to improve the lives of the working-class and peasant majority of the country. They organized labor unions in Manila and other Philippine cities, and they created peasant and farmworker organizations agitating for equitable land reform. Some joined the

underground movement and engaged in armed struggle in the countryside. They also held general assemblies, workshops and meetings, and educational programs. This social-movement tradition carried over into the tactics, strategies, and organizational structure of PMCJ.

PMCJ consists of a coalition of dozens of local and national groups fighting for climate and environmental justice; some of PMCJ's member organizations are themselves coalitions of numerous groups. Thus, based on its own organizational structure, PMCJ is ensconced within a web of leftist and progressive movements, which themselves are intertwined with PMCJ's own coalition of organizations. Meanwhile, PMCJ has branches in specific provinces around the country. These local and provincial PMCJ branches, as well as local allied organizations and movements, though informed by the decisions and directions taken by PMCJ's National Secretariat based in Metropolitan Manila, nonetheless retain a local autonomy to carry out actions and formulate strategies to fight against coal power and destructive mining, among other practices harmful to the climate and ecology.

PMCJ's philosophy, organizational structure, strategic decision-making practices, and its own institutional history have all allowed PMCJ to form a multi-pronged and multi-dimensional social and political movement for climate justice, anti-coal activism, anti-destructive mining, and the expansion of renewable energy and sustainable forms of agriculture and minerals management.³⁸ With campaigns at the local, provincial, national, and global levels, PMCJ has strategically formed alliances with local organizations, local politicians, religious leaders, members of the business community, media organizations, other activist networks, agencies in the national Philippine government, and transnational civil society. At the same time, PMCJ remains vigilant and prepared for the reality of political violence in the Philippines, and specifically the dangers of being an

³⁸ A significant part of PMCJ's funding, meanwhile, has come from the European Climate Fund (ECF) and 11.11.11. PMCJ also receives grants for specific research and other projects, and it receives donations from individuals and organizations.

environmental activist in the country. Global Witness ranked the Philippines in 2018 as the most dangerous country on Earth for environmentalists, based on the numbers of killings of environmental defenders in the country. In 2021, the Philippines was ranked as the third-most dangerous country, behind Colombia and Mexico. For at least eight years in a row, the Philippines has consistently been ranked as the deadliest country for environmental defenders in Asia.

PMCJ is well aware of the dangers of conducting climate-justice advocacy in the Philippines, a country with a deep history of violent impunity under colonial and post-colonial authoritarian regimes. On July 1st, 2016, Gloria Capitan—a grandmother and fish vendor who became a powerful force against coal power in Bataan province, galvanizing her community to fight together to rid their province of coal-power projects and promote renewable energy instead—was tragically and horrifically gunned down and murdered by masked gunmen in front of her own grandchildren outside of her humble home by the main highway. Capitan was a member of the Coal-Free Bataan Movement, a provincial-wide movement that is aligned with PMCJ. Moreover, on December 3, 2017, *Datu* Victor Danyan, a chieftan of the T’boli-Manobo Indigenous tribe from Lake Sebu in Mindanao island, along with two of his sons, his son-in-law, and four other tribal members, were murdered by the Philippine military.³⁹ Datu Victor had taken a strong stance to defend the T’boli-Manobo Indigenous people’s ancestral domain and to protect his people’s lands from corporate land grabbing by coffee plantations and logging interests (owned by DMCI Holdings, Inc., the corporate conglomerate of the oligarchic Consunji family), and a coal-mining exploration project (of San Miguel Corp.) (*MindaNews* 2017). PMCJ is a part of the Task Force TAMASCO which is fighting for justice for the eight tribal members slain by the 27th and 33rd Philippine Army Infantry Battalions.

³⁹ The Philippine military claimed that the killings occurred during an encounter with insurgents of the New People’s Army (NPA). The T’boli-Manobo, however, vociferously condemned the Philippine military for its murder of the eight tribal members; they formed a group called T’boli-Manobo S’daf Claimants Organisation (TAMASCO) to fight for justice for the “TAMASCO 8,” strongly refuting the insinuations of the Philippine military that Datu Victor Danyan and the other tribal members were NPA rebels or that they were simply caught in the crossfire.



Left: Gloria Capitan, a powerful voice for climate justice and foe of the coal industry in Bataan province, was murdered on July 1st, 2016. (Photo by Derek Cabe of the Coal-Free Bataan Movement) Right: Datu Victor Danyan, chieftan of the T'boli-Manobo tribe and strong advocate for Indigenous land rights against the encroachment of corporate coffee plantation, coal mining, and logging interests, was murdered on December 3, 2017. The Philippines has been ranked as one of the most dangerous countries on Earth for environmental defenders. (Photo by Keith Bacongco)

Conclusion

The Philippine Movement for Climate Justice emerged at a historical moment in which the dire realities of the global climate crisis became increasingly and undeniably evident in the Philippines. It also arose in a country with both a deep history of political violence and authoritarianism as well as a strong tradition of social-movement activism in opposition to the authoritarian violence and the system of oligarchic inequality prevalent in Philippine society. The character of the Philippines' social-movement activism surrounding issues of climate change and the environment has been shaped by the historical and contemporary reality of authoritarian violence and foreign imperialist intervention, as much as it has by the ecological crisis caused and exacerbated by both local environmentally harmful and unsustainable industrial and extractive practices as well as the global climate crisis, primarily caused by the massive increase in greenhouse-gas emissions that have accumulated since the Industrial Revolution over two centuries ago. Socialists and communists, liberals and progressives, Indigenous peoples, and religious environmentalists have all played critical roles in the rise of ecological and climate-justice movements across the archipelagic country, particularly since the violent and oppressive days of the Marcos Dictatorship.

Environmental protection, ecological sustainability and resilience, and “sustainable development” have become mainstreamed green values in the Philippines (and worldwide). In the Philippines, the struggles for economic justice and land reform, Indigenous peoples’ rights, and Christian (and, increasingly, Islamic) eco-theological principles have been central to the formation of Philippine environmentalist consciousness, discourses, and practices. The climate-justice movement in the Philippines, in which the national coalition of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) has played a key and crucial part, emerged from the complex and dynamic social and ecological struggles of the broader ecological justice and popular democratic movements in the country. In many ways, Philippine climate justice has been pushing for the environmental justice platforms espoused by many of the progressive environmentalist non-governmental and people’s organizations and movements throughout the country calling for agrarian reform and an equitable redistribution of land, wealth, and resources in the country, respect for Indigenous people’s ancestral domains and sustainable traditional ecological knowledge systems and practices, and the promotion of sustainable agriculture and sustainable alternatives to destructive mining and dynamite fishing practices. In the contemporary era of anthropogenic climate change, the Philippine climate-justice movement has incorporated these environmental justice concerns within a framework that accounts for the climatological science that has documented the dire impacts of increased greenhouse-gas emissions from the mass-scale burning of fossil fuels on the atmosphere and ecosystems worldwide.

Despite the dangers of engaging in climate-justice activism in the Philippines, and regardless of the increasingly violent and authoritarian character of the Philippine government and political system, PMCJ members continue to push forward. Like other Philippine activists, they derive inspiration and energy from the centuries-long struggle of Philippine warriors and revolutionaries against foreign colonial oppression—from *Datu* Lapulapu’s slaying of *conquistador* Ferdinand Magellan in the 16th century to Diego and Gabriela Silang’s 18th-century rebellion against the Spanish

regime in Ilocos, and from the heroes of the Philippine Revolution and Philippine-American War to the Huk resistance against the occupation of the Empire of Japan. Moreover, the PMCJ members who are also veterans of the anti-Marcos Dictatorship struggle have a wealth of experience in taking on a brutal, corrupt, and rotten regime and in persevering and continuing the struggle, regardless of whether the odds aren't in their favor or if things seem utterly hopeless in the moment.

As Ms. Manjette Lopez, president of the mass leftist movement SANLAKAS and veteran of the struggle to topple the Marcos Dictatorship, has stated, “the democratic struggle to end the tyrannical regime of former President Ferdinand Marcos” was “but a culmination of decades of sacrifice—in sweat, tears, and blood—of the Filipino working class.” Manjette Lopez further maintains that “victories are not won overnight, and it is through smaller collective actions that we build political revolutions. It is through smaller struggles that we set the conditions for quantum leaps in the movement for the advancement of our democratic rights” (M. Lopez 2013). Though Ferdinand Marcos thought he was invincible, and though it seemed as such to many of his



November 29, 2016 — Manjette Lopez, president of SANLAKAS and member of the *Partido Lakas ng Masa* (Party of the Strength of the Masses), speaks at the Manila Socialism Conference at UP Solair on the campus of the University of the Philippines – Diliman (UP-Diliman). (Photo by the author)

supporters and enemies alike, his regime crumbled, he was exiled in disgrace, and his abuses and massive theft were exposed to the world (notwithstanding the current historical revisionism of the Marcos family to whitewash his crimes). For the past six years, the Philippines was under the violent regime of Rodrigo Duterte, and a new regime under Bongbong Marcos will now be in power for another six years (and perhaps to be followed by six more years under Sarah Duterte). Nonetheless, the seemingly invincible reign of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos lasted for two decades, but their dictatorship was defeated by People Power.

CHAPTER 3

“END COALIGARCHY”:

The National Cultural Politics of the Climate Justice Movement in the Philippines

On Monday, October 10, 2016, over 10,000 people in Manila and other cities and provinces across the Philippines waged simultaneous actions calling for the national shutdown of the country’s coal industry. In a nationwide campaign called “Coal is NOT the Answer,” organized by the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), these Filipino anti-coal advocates held marches, protests, and speeches demanding that the Philippine government: cancel all proposed contracts for coal mines, coal stockpiles, and coal-fired power plants (CFPPs); shut down each and every currently existing coal plant, stockpile, and mine; financially compensate all communities that have suffered from damages to their health, livelihoods, and ecologies due to having to endure living next to a coal project; and drastically, imminently transition away from fossil fuels and usher in the era of 100% clean, renewable, and safe energy technologies.

In the Philippine capital of Manila, the march began outside of the University of Santo Tomas (the oldest university in Asia, established in 1611), continuing through to Recto Avenue (named after famed Philippine senator Claro M. Recto of the US Commonwealth period [1935-42, 1945-6], who had agitated against the US military presence in the Philippines), and ending at the Mendiola Bridge. The Mendiola Bridge is located on Mendiola Street, which is just a few blocks away from the part of the Pasig River which borders Malacañang Palace, the official workplace and residence of the President (*Pangulo*) of the Republic of the Philippines (*Republika ng Pilipinas*). Due to its proximity to, and being within viewing distance of, Malacañang Palace, the Mendiola Bridge has, for decades, been the site of numerous protests directed at the president and national government of the Philippines. On January 30, 1970, for example, it was the site of what has been called the “Battle

of Mendiola Bridge,” in which the Philippine military opened fire on a massive demonstration of university students who were protesting against the government of Ferdinand Marcos, leaving four students killed and over one hundred injured.⁴⁰ After the fall of the Marcos Dictatorship, it became the site of the terrible Mendiola Massacre on January 22, 1987, in which over 10,000 unarmed peasants calling for a genuine implementation of equitable land reform were fired upon by the Philippine military and police under Pres. Corazon Aquino, with dozens wounded and killed.

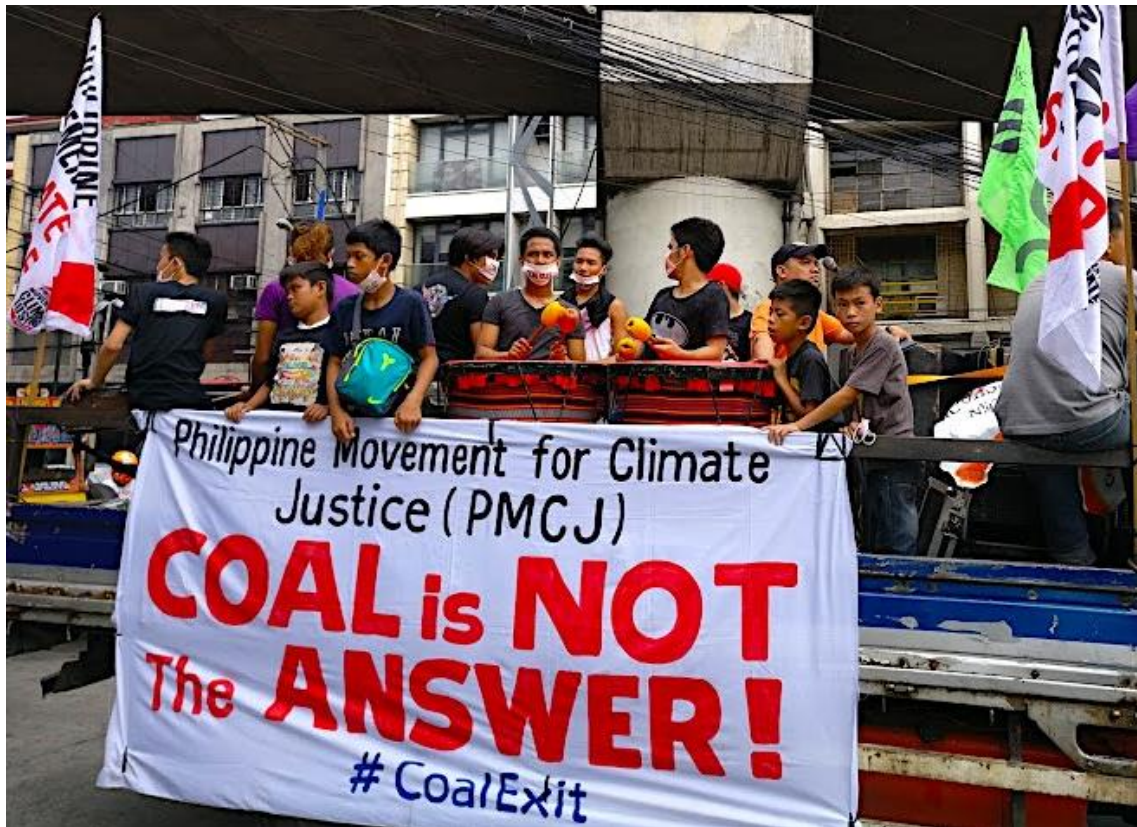


October 10, 2016 — Members of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) demand the national shutdown of the Philippine coal industry. Gerry Arances, Executive Director of the Center for Energy, Ecology and Development (CEED) (far left), Kristine Balmes, Deputy Executive Director of the Philippine Commission on Women and former member of the Batangas City Council (second from left), Flora Santos, prominent leader of SANLAKAS (center), Ian Rivera, National Coordinator of PMCJ (far right). (Photo by the author)

Earlier that morning, I had arrived at PMCJ’s headquarters in Quezon City. From there, I joined members of PMCJ’s National Secretariat on a van ride to the city of Manila where the march would begin on España Boulevard outside of the University of Santo Tomas at nine o’clock. It was

⁴⁰ This was part of the student-led upheaval against the government of Ferdinand Marcos during the first three months of the year 1970, memorialized as the “First Quarter Storm” (FQS). Massive demonstrations constantly took place in Manila and elsewhere in the country, with students on the front lines.

slightly humid but still relatively cool in the morning, as the weather would get hotter and more humid as it got closer to noon under the tropical sun. I felt a sense of excitement and anticipation in the air, as hundreds of people had already assembled, preparing signs, banners, masks, costumes, protest drums, and other protest art for the mass rally calling for climate justice and an end to the age of coal. A group of young men were posting a huge banner with the printed slogans, “COAL is NOT the ANSWER” and “#CoalExit” onto a large open-air truck, onto which they placed their protest drums. As the march proceeded, they would bang the drums loudly, drawing attention from passersby to the messages of the anti-coal protesters. Meanwhile, reporters and camera crews of major Philippine media companies began arriving and documenting the action, including CNN Philippines, ABS-CBN News, and the GMA Network, with some of the demonstrators being interviewed on television and for newspapers.



A group of youth bang large protest drums on top of an open-air truck, calling attention to the anti-coal climate justice march (Photo by the author)

Meanwhile, a dazzling array of protest signs, banners, and other protest art were displayed by members of the march. A group of several women standing outside of the gates of the University of Santo Tomas held identical signs stating, “NO TO COAL” and containing an illustrated drawing of coal power-plant smokestacks being crossed out with red lightning bolts. Several children wore face masks covered by the printed words, “No to Coal,” “#CoalExit,” and “Coal Kills.” A group of women and children held signs stating, “COAL KILLS COMMUNITIES IN SEMIRARA,” referring to the open-pit coal mine in the central Philippine island of Semirara—the largest open-pit mine and largest coal mine in the Philippines, owned by a subsidiary of DMCI Holdings, Inc., which itself is owned by the oligarchic Consunji family.⁴¹ In July of 2015, nine mine workers tragically died after being buried when the DMCI-owned open-pit coal mine collapsed amidst heavy monsoon rains.

One youth held a sign stating, “CLEAN COAL IS A DIRTY LIE!” and another youth next to them held a sign stating, “ADB: NO MORE COAL AND DIRTY ENERGY FINANCING!!”—referring to coal projects funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), a Philippine-headquartered regional Asian bank modeled after the World Bank. A group of PMCJ interns held signs stating, “COAL AUDIT NOW!” and “COAL FUELS CLIMATE CHANGE,” referring, respectively, to PMCJ’s call for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to audit all coal projects in the Philippines and the role of coal burning in fueling the climate crisis. Another man held a sign stating, “COAL KILLS! JUSTICE FOR GLORIA CAPITAN!”—in reference to the horrific murder, just three months prior on July 1, 2016, of 57-year-old grandmother and fish vendor Gloria Capitan, who had been galvanizing her community in the

⁴¹ DMCI stands for David M. Consunji Incorporated, named after the company’s founder David Mendoza Consunji. Isidro Consunji, the eldest son of David M. Consunji, is the current chairperson and president of the multi-billion dollar DMCI Holdings, Inc. Isidro and his siblings Josefa, Jorge, Luz, Maria Cristina, and Maria Edwina inherited DMCI Holdings, Inc. from their father, David M. Consunji, upon his death in 2017 (*Forbes* 2022).

province of Bataan against coal power. Meanwhile, another woman's sign stated, "COAL GRABBED THE LANDS OF IPs," expressing her indignation at the lands of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) being usurped by coal interests, such as the T'boli-Manobo people's lands being seized for the coal mining operations of subsidiaries owned by both San Miguel Corporation and DMCI Holdings, Inc.—with T'boli chieftan *Datu* Victor Danyan, a fierce fighter against mining and agribusiness corporations' practices in his people's lands, murdered by the Philippine military in December of 2017. A group of PMCJ members also held two large banners stating, respectively, "NO TO COAL-FIRED POWER PLANTS!" and "RENEWABLE ENERGY FOR THE PEOPLE NOW!"



A group of women standing outside of the gates of the University of Santo Tomas in Manila call for the national shutdown of coal power in the Philippines. (Photo by the author)

Finally, a group of five men, standing side-by-side throughout the march, each wore a mask depicting a werewolf, a monster, or the Grim Reaper. They also each wore a sign dangling from their necks that read, respectively, "DMCI," "ABOITIZ," "AYALA," "MERALCO," and "SAN MIGUEL." These five names and acronyms are in reference to five of the largest, richest, and most powerful corporations in the Philippines: (1) DMCI Holdings, Inc., (2) Aboitiz Equity Ventures (AEV), (3) Ayala Corporation, (4) Manila Electric Company (Meralco), and (5) San Miguel Corporation. These Philippine corporate conglomerates also happen to be owned by some of the

wealthiest and most powerful families in the Philippines, including the Consunji family (DMCI Holdings, Inc.), the Aboitiz family (Aboitiz Equity Ventures), and the Ayala family (Ayala Corp.). Meralco, the largest electricity distributor in the Philippines, is jointly owned by the Hong Kong-based investment corporation First Pacific Company Limited—which was co-founded by Chinese-Indonesian business tycoon Sudono Salim and Philippine tycoon Manny Pangilinan, a member of the Pangilinan clan and the company’s CEO—as well as JG Summit Holdings, Inc.—which, itself, is owned by the Gokongwei family.⁴² Finally, the president and CEO of San Miguel Corporation is Philippine billionaire Ramon Ang.



Five men wearing masks of monsters, werewolves, and the Grim Reaper hold up signs in reference to five of the largest and most powerful corporations in the Philippines, which have also been the main drivers of the expansion of coal power in the country: DMCI Holdings, Inc., Aboitiz Equity Ventures, Ayala Corporation, Manila Electric Company (Meralco), and San Miguel Corporation. (Photo by the author)

⁴² The Manila Electric Company (Meralco) is the largest power distributor in the Philippines, providing electricity for 23 million people in “Mega Manila,” the region encompassing Metro Manila and several surrounding provinces connected to Metro Manila. It had once been owned by the Lopez clan, was then nationalized by the government of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s, and was then re-privatized following legislation in 2001 which neoliberalized the country’s power sector.

Together, these five corporations—with critical financing from international financial institutions and domestic Philippine banks (some of which themselves are owned by the previously mentioned family-owned corporations)—have been the primary agents responsible for the rapid, unrelenting spread of coal power in the Philippines over the past couple of decades. As the climate-justice activists say, these family-owned and oligarch-controlled corporations comprise the country’s “coal-igarchy.” They are the Philippines’ “coal-priests.” And, as signified by the beastly and ghostly masks worn by the men, these five Philippine corporations are also viewed by the climate activists as monstrous juggernauts, devouring lands, poisoning and polluting ecosystems, damaging the health of local communities, and mercilessly terrorizing or annihilating anyone who stands in their way.

This chapter examines the national and international cultural politics of the Philippines’ climate-justice movement, with a particular focus on the anti-coal activism that has taken place in the National Capital Region (NCR) of Metropolitan Manila and nearby provinces. At the international level, much of these Philippine climate-justice advocates’ work has been focused on pressuring the industrialized Global North to: decarbonize their energy systems; end their global financing of coal, oil, and fossil gas; and pay their “climate debt” to the Global South. Domestically, their activism has, in particular, been strategically focused on, and targeted against, the force that has long dominated the country’s politics, economics, and popular culture—the Philippine oligarchy. This does not preclude other critical domestic educational and organizing work of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, including: campaigns to spread awareness on the dire public health and global climatic crises caused by fossil-fuel burning, the ecological necessity and techno-economic feasibility of the renewable-energy transition, and the importance of building ecologically resilient communities in the face of the “new normal” of extreme weather events and other increasingly apocalyptic manifestations of the global climate crisis. Nevertheless, PMCJ and allied groups have placed a razor-sharp focus on the country’s oligarchy of families which have ruthlessly

ruled the country's politics and economics since the Philippines' formal independence from US colonial rule in 1946. The Philippine oligarchy, in turn, emerged and developed under the foreign colonial regimes of the Spanish, American, and Japanese empires.

Thus, in order to take on the Philippines' multi-billion dollar, internationally financed, and ruthlessly violent coal industry, these Filipino climate-justice activists have fused Philippine and global geo-scientific and environmentalist knowledge with a political-economic and cultural analysis of both the Philippines' oligarchic political system as well as the global forces of industrial capitalism and imperialism. I will first address the relatively recent historical introduction of coal-fired power plants to the Philippines, which experienced a rapid expansion in the first couple of decades of the 21st century—a stark departure for a country that had been primarily powered by renewable energy, particularly by hydroelectric and geothermal power, in the late 20th century. I then analyze the historical emergence of the Philippines' current ruling class—its oligarchy of political dynasties—and how this oligarchy of families is key to understanding both how coal experienced such a sustained expansion in the Philippines in the 21st century as well as the character of the anti-coal activism of the Philippine climate-justice movement, which has been specifically targeting the country's “coaligarchy.”

I then relate this to my own ethnographic investigation of the multi-pronged and multi-sited movement for Philippine climate justice, from the local to the national and global scales. I particularly focus on a discussion of the cultural politics involved in the movement's use of “pop ed” (popular education) programs, press conferences, social media campaigns, engagements (both cooperative and oppositional) with the government, and strategic targeting of the domestic and international sources of the financing of coal power in the Philippines. Ultimately, I seek to demonstrate how the national and international cultural politics of the Philippine climate-justice movement have been shaped by activist imperatives to transform and dismantle the country's “post-

colonial” condition of domestic oligarchic entrenchment and neo-colonial subordination to an international system that has divided the world between the industrialized, former colonial powers of the Global North and the “developing,” former colonies of the Global South. Postcolonial climate justice in the Philippines is fundamentally about recognizing how global empire-building, particularly through racial capitalism, has transformed and imperiled the world’s ecosystems and the planet’s climate, and that dismantling these imperial and oligarchic structures is key to ending the era of fossil fuels and preserving the habitability of the planet.

Coal in the Philippines

While the mining and exploration of coal had been taking place in the Philippines since the 19th century under Spanish colonial rule, with a greater intensity in coal mining occurring during the US colonial era (1899-1946) (Camba 2015; Delina 2021), the country’s reliance on obtaining electricity from the burning of coal didn’t begin until the turn of the 21st century. In 1984, the first unit (300 megawatts) of the Calaca Power Station, a coal-fired power plant in Batangas province in Luzon island (about a three-hour drive from Manila), was established. Five more coal plants were built in the Philippines in the 1990s. Then, in the first two decades of the 21st century, more than 50 coal-fired power plants were established across the country. In 2003, energy generated from coal burning in the Philippines represented 28 percent of the country’s energy mix; in 2021, coal power represented 57 percent of the Philippines’ energy mix, becoming—by far—the country’s largest source of energy (Reynolds 2021b).

The current domination of fossil fuels, and particularly coal, in the Philippines’ energy mix was not always the case. In fact, during the 1980s, half of the Philippines’ energy supply came from renewable energy sources, particularly from hydroelectric dams and geothermal power plants. This was due to the Philippine government’s efforts, in reaction to the global oil crisis in the 1970s, to

aggressively promote indigenous energy sources in order to reduce the country’s reliance on imported petroleum, with several large hydropower projects and geothermal power plants built (Marquardt 2017, 8). With a steady increase in the use of coal power and fossil gas in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the percentage of renewable energy used by the Philippines decreased to 44 percent by the year 1999, and falling even further to 21 percent by 2021 (with coal at 57 percent and fossil gas at 19 percent) (Reynolds 2021b).



October 10, 2016 — A girl lambasts the corporate claim of “clean coal” as a “dirty lie!” Other youth around her denounce the Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) funding of coal projects throughout the Philippines.

Despite the Philippine Congress’ passage in 2008 of the Renewable Energy Act—meant to facilitate an aggressive push toward the development of renewable-energy projects throughout the country—there has been, thus far, a failure by the Philippine state to fully implement the law, thus hampering what could have been a much more intense and comprehensive transition to renewables in the country (Marquardt 2017). This state failure to effectively implement the Renewable Energy Act—and, more broadly, to halt the spread of fossil fuels in the Philippines—falls on the shoulders of President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III. Having been a congressman since 1998 and a senator since 2007, Noynoy Aquino was the son of former Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., who had

been assassinated by the Marcos Dictatorship in 1983, and former President Corazon Aquino, who was swept into power following the People Power Revolution of 1986. In August of 2009, Corazon Aquino—also known as the Philippines’ “Mother of Democracy” and as “*Tita* Cory” (Auntie Cory), as she was more intimately referred to by her millions of supporters—passed away from cancer. A great outpour of mourning occurred across the country, with hundreds of thousands of Filipinos joining the funeral procession in Manila, and with messages of sympathy being shared by political and religious leaders worldwide. Though first-term Senator Noynoy Aquino had not been considered a contender—much less a major contender—for the Philippine presidency for the May 2010 elections, after his mother’s death in August of 2009, a great groundswell of support for Noynoy’s presidential candidacy emerged, and he heeded the call and ran for president.

Noynoy Aquino’s candidacy came at a time when the nine-year presidency (2001-2010) of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was coming to a close. After nearly a decade of the neoliberal-authoritarian, politically violent, and corrupt presidency of Arroyo—who had abysmally low approval ratings in the wake of her “Hello Garci” electoral fraud scandal of 2005 as well as the spike in extra-judicial killings and targeted assassinations that took place under her regime (Petras and Eastman-Abaya 2006)—many Filipinos were largely yearning for honesty and transparency in government, economic growth with poverty reduction, an end to violent impunity, and political change overall. The death of former Pres. Cory Aquino had provided an opportunity for millions of Filipinos to express their indignation at and profound displeasure with Pres. Arroyo, who had been a staunch ally of US Pres. George W. Bush who, along with Arroyo, declared the Philippines to be the “second front in the global war on terror.”⁴³

⁴³ Enlisting the Philippines in the United States’ global war on terror provided Pres. Arroyo with hundreds of millions of dollars in US military aid and weapons deals. It also allowed for the decisive return of US military forces on Philippine soil, particularly since 1992, when the Philippine Senate had terminated the US military bases in Subic Bay and Clark Airfield. Anti-imperialist activists have described how the military agreements between the US and Philippine governments in the context of the global war on terror have effectively turned the entire Philippines into a US military

Noynoy Aquino of the Liberal Party (LP) was thus swept into power on a campaign of anti-corruption and good governance. Aquino had also promised to “shift towards clean, green technologies and energy sources,” fully implement the Renewable Energy Act, tackle the climate crisis, and phase out coal-fired power plants (Burgonio 2012). In his 2014 speech at the United Nations’ Climate Summit in New York, Pres. Aquino stated that the Philippines was “treading a climate-smart development pathway. The Philippines is not waiting. We are addressing climate change to the maximum with our limited resources” (Alvarez 2015). As it turned out, Noynoy Aquino’s environmental legacy was one of profound disappointment, tainted by the polluting, toxic smokestacks of coal plants that his administration authorized to be built throughout the country—as well as the economic greed and deadly corporate terror that has accompanied the spread of coal power in the Philippines. Green groups like PMCJ were exceedingly disappointed and appalled by the Noynoy Aquino administration’s approval for the construction of 59 coal-fired power plants—an act of sustained expansion which has locked the Philippines into decades of dependence on the dirty fossil fuel which, as the activists have noted, has been implicated in terrible health and ecological consequences for coal-affected neighborhoods, deadly corporate terrorization of communities attempting to resist the polluting advance of coal power, and exacerbation of the impacts of the global climate crisis.

Noynoy Aquino is remembered by the climate-justice movement in the Philippines as a “climate hypocrite”—a smooth-talking (neo-)liberal politician who sings music into the ears of environmentalists and other progressive groups to get elected, but once in power, demonstrates his true and permanent loyalty to the giant multinational corporations, foreign imperial powers, and

base (Lutz 2006, 602). The “war on terror” also provided a pretext for the creation of a climate of violent impunity across the Philippines, as Arroyo’s military and policing forces, as well as paramilitary and vigilante groups, targeted up to a thousand people in political killings, including peasants calling for land reform, Indigenous environmental and land defenders, members of the Muslim-majority *Bangsa Moro* (Moro Nation) ethnic groups, journalists, and human rights attorneys (Petras and Eastman-Abaya 2006).

ruthless domestic oligarchy to which he and his family were beholden and from which they stemmed. At the end of Aquino’s presidency, Filipinos again chose the path of political change—back toward violent authoritarianism. After the profound environmental disappointment of the Noyonoy Aquino presidency, and with the looming rise of the new presidency of Rodrigo Duterte following the May elections of 2016, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice forcefully declared that “Coal is NOT the Answer” to the country’s quest for economic development, energy self-sufficiency, and climate resilience.

Despite Pres. Duterte’s selection of environmentalist Gina Lopez to head the powerful Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Duterte also appointed pro-coal technocrat Alfonso Cusi as secretary of the Department of Energy. Though Sec. Lopez took strong stances against the damaging and polluting practices of the mining and fossil-fuel industries, she was removed from her position as secretary of the DENR—after having only served for a total of ten months—by the Philippine Congress’ Commission on Appointments (which was filled with politicians with direct familial ties to the mining and coal industries). With Lopez out of the way, Energy Secretary Cusi and the new DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu were, together, able to facilitate the approval of several coal-fired power plants and coal-mining operations under the Duterte presidency (see Chapter 4 of this dissertation for more on the legacy of Gina Lopez’s secretaryship).⁴⁴

The Philippine Oligarchy

⁴⁴ Under the violent dictatorial regime of Pres. Duterte, marked by a genocidal “war on drugs” and flagrant violations of the rule of law, the Philippines also, paradoxically, got a glimpse of a climate-justice future through the tenure of Gina Lopez, secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for the first year of Duterte’s presidency (see Chapter 4 of this dissertation).

The Noynoy Aquino presidential administration (2010-2016) didn't only fail to decisively accelerate the expansion of renewable energy in the Philippines and halt the spread of coal and other fossil fuels. It also failed to meaningfully tackle other key structural problems in Philippine society, including the country's severe poverty—despite having achieved sustained annual economic growth rates during the six years of Noynoy's presidency—as well as the Philippines' drastic inequalities in landownership across the countryside, which could have been meaningfully addressed by genuinely and comprehensively implementing the government's agrarian reform program (IBON Foundation 2016).⁴⁵ A major, if not determining, reason for these structural failures is the enduring existence of the Philippine oligarchy, to which Noynoy Aquino and virtually all Philippine presidents have belonged—not to mention refused to confront, discipline, or rein in. Noynoy Aquino's parents, Corazon Cojuangco Aquino and Benigno Aquino, Jr., each belonged to highly wealthy and prominent oligarchic families of the Philippines. On the paternal side of Noynoy Aquino's family is the Aquino clan—an elite political dynasty for over a century from the central Luzon province of Tarlac. On Noynoy's maternal family side, meanwhile, is the (also Tarlac-based) Cojuangco clan—an oligarchic family of sugar and banking interests, and historical owners of the massive sugar plantation known as Hacienda Luisita—site of the 2004 Hacienda Luisita Massacre, in which Philippine military and policing authorities opened fire on a thousand farmer-protesters calling for the genuine implementation of land reform in the plantation by redistributing the lands to the

⁴⁵ Economists and international development specialists have noted how the genuine and comprehensive implementation of land reform programs in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan played key roles in the remarkable rise of these “tiger economies” after World War II. According to Joe Studwell and Chris Jochnick (2016), “land reform programs in Taiwan, South Korea and Japan redistributed vast swaths of land to poor tenant farmers and agricultural laborers. The efforts helped end extreme poverty and hunger—changing the course of these countries' histories. Land reform was referred to as the ‘secret sauce’ that sparked sustained and broad-based economic growth.” Unlike in the Philippines, the agrarian landlord classes of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan were effectively disciplined by their governments, allowing for a relatively more egalitarian distribution of land, wealth, and resources in the countryside and thus the defusing of tensions and movements toward rural insurgency (W. Bello et al. 2006). The Philippine oligarchy has not only resisted genuine agrarian reform by the state, but the largest landlord families themselves have largely ruled the Philippine state through their (often violent and corrupt) domination of local and provincial elections. Meanwhile, the longest-running communist insurgency in the world endures in the Philippine countryside, as the New People's Army has effective control over certain swaths of mountainous and other rural areas.

farmworker tenants. In 2010, Pres. Noynoy Aquino's government dismissed the charges against the state security forces who had killed seven of the peasants who were protesting at Noynoy's maternal family's *hacienda* estate (Simbol 2016).

Scholars of Philippine politics have identified the prevailing political-economic structure of the Philippines to be an oligarchy—rule by the few, and specifically in the Philippine case, rule by a few ultra-wealthy and all-powerful families. Whether analyzed in terms of “patron-client relations,” the “patrimonial oligarchic state,” “patrimonial authoritarianism,” “bossism” and “warlordism,” and/or “elite democracy,” the highly unequal and oligarchic structure of the Philippine state and wider society has been highlighted by scholars who have found it unavoidable to substantively discuss Philippine politics, economics, and popular culture without also coming to terms with the drastically unequal distribution of resources and power in Philippine society—and the few families among which the country's wealth and resources are primarily concentrated (Quimpo 2005; Hutchcroft 1998; Sidel 1997; Franco 2016; Davis and Hollnsteiner 1969).

Thus, instead of the benefits of economic and technological development equitably percolating throughout Philippine society, they have largely remained in the hands of the few. This is despite a certain level of distribution of capital and technological advancements to certain sectors in the Philippine middle class during the past couple of decades due to the growth of the business-process outsourcing (BPO) industry as well as the multi-billion dollar economy of remittances collectively sent back to the Philippines from Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and other overseas Filipinx diasporic communities (Padios 2018; San Juan 2009; Raquiza 2015). Though the Philippine state provides a certain amount of educational, health, economic, and environmental services to its citizens, much of this infrastructural and social investment by the government remains profoundly inadequate in comparison to the financial resources that the country has. Those financial and economic resources remain overwhelmingly dominated by the elite few (Keenan 2013; B. Chanco

2022). It should also be mentioned that the Philippines remains highly indebted to international financial institutions which have loaned the country billions of dollars for various infrastructural, energy, and other development projects (often in exchange for the restructuring of the country's economy along neoliberal lines). These debt-servicing obligations of the Philippine state also hinder greater investments in public services and infrastructures (Ariate, Jr. and Molmisa 2009).

Thus, despite certain economic gains made by some people in the Philippine middle class, allowing for a certain increase in consumption and personal and household investments (again, largely due to BPO opportunities and capital inflows from OFW and overseas Filipino diasporic remittances), opportunities for economic advancement remain highly curtailed due to enduring rampant nepotism and favoritism—in favor of the members of the same ultra-elite families—within key Philippine corporate, banking, and state agencies and firms. Meanwhile, the Philippine state's regulatory mechanisms, which might otherwise prevent or curtail corruption and favoritism among businesses and government agencies, have remained highly weak in the face of the power of the oligarchic families, many of which themselves are also political dynasties. In such dynastic political families, several members of the family are also politicians and state bureaucrats who legislate and “regulate” in a way that preserves the oligarchic status quo and thus the privileged, highly elite status of their families. Commonly, these same families also possess what are, in effect, their own private armies or, in extreme cases, death squads. They frequently hire private security services or deploy state and/or paramilitary policing forces both to secure their property and, often, to intimidate, silence, or murder political opponents or anyone else critical of their policies and practices, including journalists, human-rights attorneys, and activists (Kreuzer 2009; McCoy 2009; Sidel 1997).⁴⁶

Alfred McCoy (1993) has referred to this political system in the Philippines as “an anarchy of

⁴⁶ In 2021, the Philippines was ranked by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) as the 7th most dangerous country in the world for journalists (Dunham 2021).



In the Philippines, virtually all provinces are dominated by a family or set of families which effectively rule the government through political dynasties, despite the existence of ostensibly democratic elections. (Photo by thelordofthenerds.wordpress.com)

families.” The historical roots of this oligarchy of families can be found in the country’s long experience of foreign colonial rule. During the mid-to-late 19th century, an economically prosperous class of elite *Indio* (Catholicized and Hispanicized Native Philippine people) and *Mestizo* (racially mixed people of Native and either Chinese, Spanish, or other European descent) families arose. These elite *Indio* and *Mestizo* families took advantage of the increased opportunities in export-based plantation agriculture, mining, and banking services that burgeoned in the increasingly capitalistic economy of the Spanish colonial Philippines, just as the international Manila Galleon trade was coming to a close in 1815 (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). They began calling themselves “Filipinos” (a term previously exclusively meant for people of Spanish descent born in the Philippines) and waged a moderate nationalist movement, agitating for reforms and greater political opportunities for Filipinos in the colonial government and Catholic priest hierarchy. This reformist agenda was met with violent political repression by the Spanish colonial regime. Eventually, a radical nationalist

movement emerged, primarily powered by the working-class and peasant majority of the colony, culminating in the Philippine Revolution against Spain (1896-98).⁴⁷

In the aftermath of the Philippine Revolution and amidst the Philippine-American War (1899-1902) and beyond, the US colonial government found it necessary to provide these wealthy and propertied Filipino elites with opportunities to accrue substantive economic and political power within the new US colonial regime. The US colonial authorities needed the collaboration of the Filipino elites in order to crush the Filipino nationalist movement which had fought for independence from Spain and had been continuing the fight against the US Army in an attempt to maintain Philippine independence. The Filipino elite collaborators (several of whom deserted the movement for Philippine independence) worked for the US colonial system, and in turn, were rewarded with control over lucrative economic enterprises in the country—alongside a host of American-owned corporate interests, from banana plantations (owned by Dole corporation, for example) to gold-mining companies. US mining companies also began substantively extracting coal reserves in Albay province in the Bicol region of Luzon and in Cebu island (Camba 2015).

The US colonial state also began holding elections exclusively for Spanish- and English-speaking Filipino men with a minimum set of property qualifications (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). These elite, propertied Filipino men were the only people in the colony who were allowed to vote and run for office for local, provincial, and colony-wide government positions. This elitist and

⁴⁷ In 1815, the Spanish imperial Manila-Acapulco Galleon Trade ended, and the economy of the Spanish colonial Philippines was thus compelled to open up to global capitalist trade and markets dominated by the British and French empires (along with the rise of the US, Japanese, and German empires) (Abinales and Amoroso 2005). Many of these wealthy *Indio* and *Mestizo* elite families, now armed with their own sources of wealth independent of the Spanish friars' own feudalistic estates and plantations, became increasingly dissatisfied with the ethno-racial inequalities and discrimination in the Spanish colonial racial caste system, and some of them began calling themselves "Filipinos"—a term previously meant exclusively for "pure-blooded" Spaniard *Criollos* who were born in the Philippines. After appropriating the "Filipino" nationality for themselves, several of these elite *Indio* and *Mestizo* people began agitating for reforms and greater political representation in the Spanish colonial Philippines, but they faced heavy and violent Spanish repression. Eventually, a more radical Filipino nationalism was born, and this radical nationalism became increasingly attractive to the working-class and peasant majority of the country, culminating in the creation of the secret revolutionary *Katipunan* society which launched the Philippine Revolution against Spain (1896-98).

patriarchal electoral system (reformed by the removal of property qualifications in 1935 and the granting of female suffrage in 1937), in turn, fostered the Filipino oligarchic and US corporate domination of the economy and political system of the Philippine Islands. Meanwhile, movements for trade unionism and labor and peasant rights (which might have promoted a more egalitarian economic system, had they succeeded), along with the radical nationalist movement demanding immediate independence from the United States, were quashed by the US colonial regime through a combination of brutal political violence, authoritarian policing and surveillance practices, and tactics in psychological warfare.⁴⁸



October 10, 2016 — A group of youth collectively call for an end to the age of coal in the Philippines through face masks stating, “#CoalExit,” “Coal Kills!,” and “No to Coal!”

⁴⁸ McCoy (2009) notes how the US colonial government created the “world’s first modern surveillance state” in the Philippines at the beginning of the 20th century in order to crush the movement for Philippine independence, relying on both American and Filipino police, paramilitary forces, and spies to infiltrate the Filipino nationalist and labor movements and target them with surveillance, disinformation, psychological warfare, blackmail and other threats, and violence (including genocidal violence during the first decade of the 20th century for the purposes of colonial conquest and “pacification”). These colonial-era methods of surveillance and political violence were inherited by the post-colonial Philippine state.

The period of US colonial rule—despite the democratic veneer of colonial elections and claims by US presidents of “benevolent assimilation” and “benevolent imperialism” in their Philippine colony—had thus served as an incubator for oligarchic familial power over elections and domestic government, corporate economic dominance, authoritarian policing and surveillance, and brutal, including genocidal, forms of political violence at the hands of the state and paramilitary forces. By the time the Philippines was granted official independence from the US government in 1946, the domestic political-economic dominance of the Philippine oligarchy had been entrenched. At the same time, the Philippines remained under the “neo-colonial” domination of the United States, particularly via the Bell Trade Act of 1946—which subjected the Philippines to exceedingly unfair trade terms with the US as well as US control over Philippine monetary and exchange policy—and the Military Bases Agreement of 1947—which compelled the Philippines to host the Subic Bay Naval Station and Clark Air Field, the two largest overseas US military bases in the world (Constantino 1975; Abinales and Amoroso 2005, 170-1).

The Philippines, moreover, was but one of numerous countries throughout the “Third World” that had gained or been granted official independence from its former colonial ruler. Despite formal independence for the Global South, profound economic and political inequalities between the Global North and South endured, with innumerable Global South nations subjected to a global political economy that has long subjected them to exploitative and lopsided economic relations with the Global North in ways that have often resembled the international relations of the era of formal colonialism. These exploitative global economic relations have gone hand-in-hand with the spread of ecologically degrading practices of corporations and states worldwide. As perspectives in “postcolonial ecology” have elucidated, many of the major and dire forms of ecological degradation that are manifested across the Global South—including deforestation, severe air pollution, poisoning of landscapes and waterscapes, and the global climate crisis itself—have origins

in the history of European, American, and Japanese colonialism and imperialism and their violent spread of the system of racial capitalism based largely on the mass-scale burning of fossil fuels (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011; Chakrabarty 2012; Nixon 2013; Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997). As stated by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley (2011), “to deny colonial and environmental histories as mutually constitutive misses the central role the exploitation of natural resources plays in any imperial project” (10).

The Philippine oligarchy remains ensconced within this international system of fossil fuel-based corporate capitalism, as it facilitates the plundering of their country’s ecological resources and poisoning of its environments by multinational corporations as well as by Philippine oligarchic-dominated domestic corporations and banks. Furthermore, the Philippine oligarchy is but one of numerous national oligarchies worldwide. In fact, the entire contemporary international system itself can be viewed as dominated by oligarchic-corporate forces. As Bruce Kapferer, in his discussion of the emergence of the “oligarchic-corporate state,” contends, “contemporary globalization...is a feature of oligarchic processes coming into new internal and external relations with the political-bureaucratic machinery of nation-states” (2005, 287). The United States, in particular, with its “McDonaldization” and “Disneyfication,” is “an oligarchic state par excellence” (289).⁴⁹ Thus, in confronting the “coaligarchy” which had facilitated the rapid expansion of coal power in the Philippines in the early 21st century, Philippine climate-justice activists have been waging a struggle not only against the corporations and banks owned by the Philippines’ oligarchy of families, but, more broadly, against the entire system of oligarchic-corporate capitalism, which itself is upheld by the violent international forces of imperialism and militarism, facilitating the voracious and

⁴⁹ As US Senator Bernie Sanders commonly thundered against in speeches he gave during his two runs for the presidency, the Walton family, America’s richest family and owners of Walmart Inc., own more wealth than the 130 million poorest Americans combined (Greenwell 2016).

unsustainably endless accumulation of the world's mineral, agricultural, and energy resources, despite the dire ecological and climatic impacts.

PMCJ's "Pop Ed" in the "The Center of the Center of the World's Marine Biodiversity"

About a month prior to PMCJ's October 10, 2016 National Day of Action against coal power, PMCJ held a "pop ed" (popular education) event in Isla Verde ("Green Island"), an island off the coast of Batangas province in the main northern island of Luzon, on Thursday, August 25, 2016. This was one of numerous workshops, conferences, and other educational events that PMCJ had been holding in different locations around the country to spread greater awareness on the health, ecological, and climatic perils of coal power as part of its national campaign, "Coal is NOT the Answer." Throughout 2016, PMCJ had been conducting educational events, press conferences, rallies and demonstrations, and other forms of political advocacy directed at the Philippine national government to phase out all existing coal projects in the country, cancel all proposed coal power plants and coal mines, and transition to 100% renewable energy. This particular "pop ed" activity would take place in an elementary and high school on the island of Isla Verde. PMCJ's task was to spread awareness regarding the dangers to human health and the local ecology of an already existing coal-fired power plant (owned by the Consunji family's DMCI Holdings, Inc.)⁵⁰ as well as proposals for both a new coal plant (of the Gokongwei family's JG Summit Holdings, Inc.) and a gold-mining project (of Canadian corporation Mindoro Resources Ltd. [MRL], through its subsidiary Egerton Gold Phils, Inc.) that would be built in Batangas province on Luzon island just across the Isla Verde Passage. The Isla Verde Passage—the strait that separates Isla Verde from Luzon island—is a body of water that is held in high significance by marine biologists worldwide, as it contains the Earth's

⁵⁰ This was actually the first coal-fired power plant to be built in the Philippines—the Calaca Power Station, which became operational in 1984.

greatest amount of marine biodiversity. In June of 2016, the Batangas City Council had voted to approve both the coal plant and the gold mine.

I had actually just begun my participant-observation and volunteer-researcher position with PMCJ in Quezon City in Metro Manila a few days prior to the trip to Isla Verde; nonetheless, PMCJ had me prepare a presentation in the Tagalog language that I would provide to the elementary school students and the faculty and other school employees on the threats that coal power and gold mining would have on human health and the extraordinary marine biodiversity of the region. After having been informed of my task, I spent the next couple of days researching the Isla Verde Passage, the proposed coal-power and gold-mining projects in Batangas province, and the importance of the region's marine biodiversity.⁵¹ I learned how the Isla Verde Passage (also called "Verde Island Passage") has been designated by international marine biologists as the "center of the center of the world's marine biodiversity," as more marine species live in Philippine waters than anywhere else in the world, and the largest concentration of the Philippines' marine biodiversity is located in the Isla Verde Passage.⁵²

I quickly created a PowerPoint presentation and a script of what I would say. I then arrived at PMCJ's office in Quezon City at two o'clock in the morning on Thursday, August 25, and at three o'clock before dawn, our group got in a van and took a three-hour drive from Metro Manila

⁵¹ The San Francisco-based California Academy of Sciences, which has a "Philippine Coral Reef" exhibit, sent a team of scientists to the Isla Verde Passage in 2015 to conduct an intensive study of "the most biologically diverse marine ecosystem on the planet." ("2015 Philippine Biodiversity Expedition" n.d.). As Terry Gosliner of the California Academy of Sciences stated, "The Philippines is jam-packed with diverse and threatened species. It's one of the most astounding regions of biodiversity on Earth. Despite this richness, the region's biodiversity has been relatively unknown. The species lists and distribution maps that we've created during our years surveying the country's land and sea will help to inform future conservation decisions and ensure that this incredible biodiversity is afforded the best possible chance of survival... It's thrilling to return to such an incredibly diverse region year after year. Whether we're finding new species or adding to our understanding of previously known creatures and habitats, these expeditions help us pinpoint how and where to focus protection efforts" (Suarez 2015).

⁵² The Philippines has been considered a "mega-biodiverse" country: "The Philippines is one of 18 mega-biodiverse countries of the world, containing two-thirds of the earth's biodiversity and between 70% and 80% of the world's plant and animal species" ("Philippines – Main Details." *Convention on Biological Diversity*, <https://www.cbd.int/countries/profile/?country=ph#:~:text=The%20Philippines%20is%20one%20of%25%20of%20the%20world's%20flora>, accessed August 11, 2022).

southwards to Batangas province. In Batangas City, the provincial capital, we picked up Councilor Kristine Balmes, who was a member of the Batangas City Council at the time. (Ms. Balmes was later appointed Deputy Executive Director of the Philippine Commission on Women in 2017.) Councilor Balmes was one of the minority city council members who voted against the city’s authorization of both the new coal plant and gold mine. We then rode on a boat (a motorized *bangka*) for an hour across the beautiful blue waters of the Isla Verde Passage. Upon arriving at the island of Isla Verde, we then walked up hundreds of stone steps through a mountainous and forested terrain, stopping a few times to catch our breath before continuing on our journey. After the strenuous trek, we finally arrived at San Antonio National High School at the top of the hill.



A view from the island of Isla Verde of the Isla Verde Passage—dubbed the “center of the center of the world’s marine biodiversity” by international marine scientists. (Photo by the author)

In my presentation (given in Tagalog), I talked about the threat that toxic chemicals from the burning of coal (including mercury, lead, and arsenic) as well as from mining operations (including cyanide) would have on marine life and human health in the area. I mentioned that the proponents of the gold-mining project alarmingly admitted that they would be using cyanide—one of the most toxic chemicals to human health and the environment, and which has been banned for use in mining

in several countries—in their operations. I also discussed how pollutants from the Consunji family-owned coal plant in Batangas province have already been killing off many of the fish and other marine life in the area, which has been very harmful to the fisherfolk of Batangas. Since many of the children’s families rely on fishing for their livelihoods, I stressed how dangerous coal power and large-scale mining would be for fisherfolks’ livelihoods. I also discussed how international scientists consider their region to be highly important in terms of global marine biodiversity. Finally, I talked about the importance of clean and renewable-energy technologies as an alternative to coal power, and I particularly mentioned the unique ability for solar-power technologies to provide electrification in “off-grid” areas like Isla Verde.

After I presented, Mr. Ian Rivera and Atty. Aaron Pedrosa, discussed local and national political issues regarding coal, the environment, and the climate. They emphasized how “the rich” (*ang mayayaman*) and the “giant corporations” (*mga dambubalang korporasyon*) were the ones who would benefit from the proposed coal and gold-mining operations in Batangas province, and that people like the fisherfolk of Isla Verde and other parts of Batangas would be the ones who would suffer. Councilor Kristine Balmes then explained her reasoning as to why she voted against both of the proposals in the Batangas City Council, as she was adamant about protecting the health and environment of her people, and that she supported renewable energy and “non-destructive” (*dinakapanira*) forms of development.

After our presentations, the students then gave a series of their own group presentations.

One group collectively chanted:

*Ang pagkasira ng kalikasan dahil sa pagmimina, global warming, at pagbabago ng klima.
Pagbabago ng klima!
Pagbabago ng klima!
Pagbabago ng klima!
Coal power plant—Isara! Isara! Isara!
Tama na, sobra na, sobrang sobra na!
Umiiyak ang mundo!
Oras na para kumilos! Kayang-kaya mo. Pag-asa ka ng buong mundo. Gising, kabataan!*

We support the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice!

(The destruction of the environment because of mining, global warming, and climate change.

Climate change!

Climate change!

Climate change!

Coal power plants—shut them down! Shut them down! Shut them down!

It's enough. It's too much. It's way too much!

The world is weeping. [The students started “crying,” as they were imitating how the world was crying].

It's time to act. You can do it. You are the hope of the world. Wake up, youth!

We support the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice!)

In the end, we took a group picture with the students in which they held up signs stating, “Coal Is Not The Answer” and “#CoalExit.”



August 25, 2022 — Youth from the island of Isla Verde hold up signs stating, “COAL IS NOT THE ANSWER” and “#CoalExit” after a set of presentations provided by the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice. (Photo by the author)

That night, our group stayed in the humble home of a peasants' family in the lushly thicketed mountain. They graciously cooked a delicious meal for us consisting of *sinigang* (tamarind soup), chicken *adobo*, vegetables, and rice. The elder woman of the house apologized for the “inadequacy” of the food and accommodation, stating, “*Pasensya sa kakulangan ng pagkain namin*” (I’m so sorry for the inadequacy of our food) and “*Pasensya sa bahay namin*” (I apologize for the inadequacy of our home). We assured her, however, that the food was very delicious, and that we were very grateful to be able to stay in her home. (Although Mr. Valentino de Guzman [*Kuya* (“Older Brother”) Val], PMCJ’s coordinator of its operations throughout the main northern Philippine island of Luzon, who has a jokester personality, told her, “*Basta libre, masarap sa akin*” [Whenever food is free, it’s always delicious to me.]). Before sleeping, we told each other ghost stories, and then we slept on mats on the floor that were spread out across the *sala* (front room or living room). The next day, we hiked down the mountain and took a boat to cross the Isla Verde Passage and arrived back in Batangas province in Luzon island. We took a van to the town of Balayan to meet with both a priest in the region who had been a powerful force in the local struggle against coal power, as well as a fisherman who was also a former *barangay* official (A *barangay* [village] is the smallest Local Government Unit [LGU] in the Philippine government). The fisherman discussed (in Tagalog) how, ever since the coal plant was erected, the air and water quality of the region has suffered, and the once abundant fish supply has decreased, which has had negative economic impacts on him and other fisherfolk.

A few months prior in May of 2016, Batangas province had actually become the epicenter of the anti-coal movement in the Philippines, with 10,000 Batangueños rallying on May 4th against coal power in their province—particularly, the proposed coal plant by the Gokongwei family’s JG Summit Holdings, Inc. The rally was part of *Piglas Pilipinas!* (Break Free Philippines!), the Philippine branch of the global movement to “Break Free From Fossil Fuels,” with tens of thousands of people mobilizing in May of 2016 across six continents worldwide to “break” our energy systems



May 4th, 2016 — 10,000 people in the Philippines rally in the province of Batangas against coal power, joining tens of thousands more people across six continents worldwide as part of the global “Break Free From Fossil Fuels” campaign. (Photo by Greenpeace)

“free” from dirty energy and keep all fossil fuels in the ground.⁵³ Batangas province, moreover, is actually home to the first coal-fired power plant in the Philippines—the Calaca Power Station, built by the Philippine government’s National Power Corporation (Napocor) in 1984 and later purchased by the Consunji family’s DMCI Holdings, Inc. in 2009. Since it first became operational in 1984, dozens of people in the vicinity of the Calaca Power Station have become ill and died from lung cancer, pulmonary tuberculosis, and other respiratory illnesses (Danao 2002). Several environmental groups—including 350.org Pilipinas, Greenpeace Philippines, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), *Kalikasan* (Nature) People’s Network for the Environment (Kalikasan PNE), and

⁵³ According to the website of the global “Break Free” campaign, “In the midst of the hottest year in recorded history, tens of thousands of people on 6 continents did something that politicians have not: they took bold, courageous action to keep fossil fuels in the ground. Each action was unique: from the coal fields of Germany, to the oil wells of Nigeria, to defiant actions against new coal power plant in Indonesia and the Philippines — and many places beyond. But the purpose was the same: keep fossil fuels in the ground. Build a just transition to a new kind of 100% renewable economy. Do it now. During Break Free, people tried new things, pushing the boundaries of what movements had done before. Or they did old things bigger than ever, putting more people in the streets (or in the way of the industry) to show that the time for action is now. There has never been a better time than now to break free from fossil fuels. Coal, oil and gas companies are in a financial crisis, the planet is overheating, and — thanks to you, a global resistance is growing to confront the industry wherever they turn.” (<https://breakfree2016.org/>, accessed August 11, 2022)

Bukluran para sa Inang Kalikasan – Batangas (BUKAL, Solidarity for Mother Nature – Batangas)⁵⁴— have all done important organizing work in Batangas to rid the province of coal power. A critical component of the anti-coal movement in Batangas has been the role played by local Catholic Church authorities, including Archbishop Ramon Arguelles, in forcefully denouncing the expansion of coal power in both Batangas and the Philippines more broadly.

We finished our interviews in the late afternoon, and we then rode in a van back toward Manila. In the evening before arriving in Manila, we stopped in the cool, hilly lakeside town of Tagaytay (located adjacent to Taal Lake, a crater lake which fills Taal Volcano) to eat some delicious *bulalo* (a stew made of beef shank and bone marrow), for which Tagaytay is famous. We ate the deliciously warm soup in a *kubo* (hut) in an outdoor restaurant under the moon-lit sky amidst a cool, evening breeze. Afterwards, we returned to the van and headed back toward Metro Manila. Later that year in December of 2016, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), under the leadership of Secretary Gina Lopez, denied the application for an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) by the Canadian-owned MRL-Egerton Gold Phils, Inc. to set up its proposed gold-mining operation in the town of Lobo, Batangas. Sec. Lopez, in her department’s rejection notice to the company, referred to the project as “out of the question,” citing the threat of the company’s use of cyanide as a threat to the biodiversity of the region: “In our note to the company, it says that the operation is incompatible with the biodiversity conservation status of the Verde Island Passage, which is the global center of marine biodiversity” (Geronimo 2016c). The coal-fired power plant of the Gokongwei family’s company JG Summit, Inc. had appeared to be

⁵⁴ “BUKAL is a network which leads environmental campaigns, education and actions against large scale mining projects and coal-fired power plants and for the conservation and protection of the natural resources, ecology and communities in the province of Batangas. The network is comprised of organizations and individuals from various sectors such as the church, academe, scientists, fisherfolks, peasants, youth, and environmental advocates.” (<https://www.cccphils.org/bayani-ng-kalikasan-bukluran-para-sa-inang-kalikasan-bukal-batangas/>, accessed August 11, 2022)

proceeding ahead, particularly after the Philippine Congress removed Gina Lopez as secretary of the DENR in May of 2017; however, by 2020, no further progress was made, and the coal plant's further construction and operation was cancelled.

Dismantling the Philippines' "Coaligarchy"

Meanwhile, PMCJ's national fight against coal power continued to burgeon. A critical part of PMCJ's struggle to shut down coal power in the Philippines was through its strategic targeting of not only the corporations building and operating coal-fired power plants in the country, but of the banks and other financial institutions that were financing the Philippines' coal boom. Despite how coal plants have been increasingly decommissioned and shut down in various countries and regions worldwide, in the early 21st century, the international coal industry found that one world region in which it could still gain a substantial foothold was Southeast Asia. Despite the global prices of wind and solar power now being cheaper than fossil fuels (Chrobak 2021) as well as the increasing recognition of the dire environmental, climatic, and health impacts of fossil fuel-burning, rising Southeast Asian economies—including Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Myanmar—began massively increasing their consumption and use of coal power in the early 21st century.

As the Philippine climate-justice advocates have contended, this will have debilitating, and ultimately apocalyptic, impacts on the people of the Philippines, which is one of the most vulnerable countries on earth to the impacts of the global climate crisis. The Philippines has already been experiencing a greater frequency and intensity of monstrous "super typhoons" and more severe flooding and drought spells, and—along with damaging effects of this extreme weather that has accompanied the climate crisis—the archipelagic nation faces a looming mass-migration crisis, as sea-level rise—caused by global heating due to continued ballooning emissions of greenhouse gases

in the atmosphere—threatens to inundate numerous islands and coastal regions across the country. Southeast Asia alone could see over 100 million climate refugees in the coming decades. As environmental justice proponents have also noted, the health impacts from the burning of coal are deleterious for communities living in the vicinity of coal-fired power plants, coal mines, and coal storage facilities.

Critical financing for the Philippines’ coal boom has come from: international financial institutions; banks based in the United States, Japan, Britain, South Korea, and Singapore; and financial institutions within the Philippines. Two of the key international financial institutions promoting coal power in the Philippines are the World Bank (through its International Finance Corporation [IFC], headquartered in Washington, D.C.) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which is headquartered in Metro Manila. The largest shareholders of the World Bank’s IFC are the governments of the United States, Japan, Germany, France, and Britain. The largest shareholders of the Asian Development Bank are Japan, the United States, China, India, and Australia. As asserted in a report by environmental and human rights NGO Global Witness (2019) entitled *Defending the Philippines*, these world-power governments that have been funding international lending institutions like the World Bank and ADB “should be asking serious questions about why their money is backing the Philippines’ coal boom,” particularly in light of the harassment, violence, murder, human-rights violations, and terror that has accompanied the coal industry’s spread across the Philippines—particularly when faced with local communities that have opposed the burning, mining, and storage of coal. The British firm Standard Chartered and Japanese-owned Mizuho Bank (which itself is the world’s top coal-financing bank) have both provided critical financing for coal power in the Philippines as well. So too has the Korean Export-Import Bank (KEXIM Bank) and Singaporean firm DBS Bank. Finally, the Philippine banks that have been funding coal-fired power

plants and coal-mining operations in the country are owned by the same highly elite families that comprise the Philippines' oligarchy.

On October 4, 2016, representatives of six Philippine anti-coal organizations held a press conference in Max's Restaurant located in the Quezon Memorial Circle, a large urban park located in Quezon City. The theme of the press conference was "END COALIGARCHY!" The six organizations present included the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), SANLAKAS, the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED), the Asian People's Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD), and the urban-poor movement *Samahan ng Mamamayan – Zone One Tondo Organization* (SM-ZOTO, the Citizens' Association–ZOTO).⁵⁵ The representatives of each of the civil-society organizations spoke to members of the Philippine press, imploring Philippine society to rise up against the expansion of coal power in the country. They specifically condemned the Philippine oligarchy for leading the country's coal boom, and nine prominent Philippine families were named as the country's "coaligarchs" and "coalprits": the Aboitiz, Consunji, Ayala, Cojuangco, Ang, Sy, Gokongwei, Yuchengco, and Alcantara families.

Major coal corporations in the Philippines have included: (1) AboitizPower of the Aboitiz family, (2) the Consunji family's DMCI Holdings Inc., (3) Ayala Corporation, owned by the Ayala family (who are also the owners of the luxury Ayala malls across the country), (4) San Miguel Corporation (whose chairman was, until 2020, Eduardo M. Cojuangco, Jr. [cousin and uncle of

⁵⁵ "Zone One Tondo Organisation (ZOTO), also known as *Samahan ng Mamamayan-ZOTO*, is a federation of urban poor community groups based in relocation sites and areas for demolition. Established in 1970, ZOTO is the oldest urban poor organisation in the Philippines. Its goals include: 1) organize and strengthen the citizenry in 28 urban poor communities; 2) raise awareness on gender equality; 3) continue education and training of leaders and members of the community and the organisation, and 4) improve the economic condition of its members and ultimately all citizens. Its programmes include Children and Young People's Programmes; Disaster Risk Reduction Programme; Gender Equality Programme; Primary Health and Reproductive Health Programme; Sustainability; and Training and Organisation Programmes." (<https://empowerweb.org/global-reach/country/philippines/zone-one-tondo-zoto>, accessed August 13, 2022)

former presidents Corazon Aquino and Noynoy Aquino, respectively], and whose current CEO and president is Ramon Ang), (5) SM Development Corporation (SMDC) of the Sy family (which also owns the massive SM mall chain in the Philippines), (6) JG Summit Holdings, Inc., owned by the Gokongwei family, and (7) the Alcantara family's Alsons Consolidated Resources, Inc. (ACR). Four prominent Philippine banks which have played major roles in financing the expansion of coal power in the country include: the Yuchengo family's Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC), of which the World Bank's International Finance Corporation is a prominent shareholder, (2) Banco de Oro (BDO) of the Sy family, (3) Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI), which is also owned by the mega-rich Ayala family, and (4) Philippine National Bank (PNB), owned by LT Group, Inc., the company of Philippine billionaire tycoon Lucio Tan. Mr. Sammy Gamboa of the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) also asserted that while 40 families control 80 percent of the Philippines' wealth, 95 percent of the Philippine population is forced to share the remaining 20 percent of what's left of the country's wealth.⁵⁶

The Philippine Movement for Climate Justice and the other groups represented called out the nine mega-rich and all-powerful families comprising the Philippines' "coaligarchy" to end their financing and construction of coal-fired power plants in the Philippines. They cited a Greenpeace report, with research conducted by scholars and scientists at Harvard University, which revealed that over 2,400 Filipinos would die of premature deaths annually due to the expansion of coal power in the country—around 50,000 people over the next two decades (*Greenpeace Southeast Asia* 2015). Mr. Gerry Arances, the executive director of the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED), asserted that coal power was "dirty, deadly, and costly"—that it was a dirty source of energy fueling the climate crisis (to which the Philippines is acutely vulnerable), that it was killing

⁵⁶ Karl Wilson of the Asian Center for Journalism has also corroborated, "Statistics show 40 families own almost 80 percent of the wealth" in the Philippines (Hunt 2016).

thousands of Filipinos prematurely, and that, despite claims of the “cheapness” of coal, such claims didn’t take into account the dire external costs on human health and the environment. He mentioned, moreover, how environmental economists have asserted that coal-fired power plants will become “stranded assets” in the near future. According to the financial think tank Carbon Tracker, “New renewable energy is now cheaper than new coal plants virtually everywhere, even before considering coal’s dire health, climate, and environmental impacts. The cost of renewables has fallen so far that it is already cheaper to build new renewable energy capacity, including battery storage, than to continue operating 39 percent of the world’s existing coal capacity.”⁵⁷



October 4, 2016 — PMCJ, SANLAKAS, and allied groups hold a press conference calling for an end to the Philippines’ “coalgarchy.” (Photo by SANLAKAS)

At the end of the press conference, they had me and one other man wear business blazers and monstrous werewolf masks, with printed-out signs taped onto our attire indicating the names

⁵⁷ “How to Retire Early: Making accelerated coal phaseout feasible and just.” June 30, 2020. (<https://carbontracker.org/reports/how-to-retire-early/>, accessed August 13, 2022)

and corporate logos of the Philippines’ “coaligarch” corporations and banks. These included: Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI), DMCI Holdings, Inc., SM Development Corporation (SMDC), JG Summit Holdings, Inc., and the giant power distribution utility Manila Electric Corporation (Meralco). Our hands were “chained” together, with Ms. Flora Santos (*Tita* Flor, a prominent leader of SANLAKAS) and Atty. Aaron Pedrosa (PMCJ’s legal consultant and secretary-general of SANLAKAS) holding onto the chains, representing the act of Philippine civil society holding the Philippines’ criminal “coalprits” and “coaligarchs” responsible for the pollution and human-rights violations that have accompanied coal power’s expansion across the country. Sir Gerry and *Kuya* Val held signs stating, “END COALIGARCHY!,” “STOP COAL EXPANSION!,” and “COAL KILLS.” The press conference received national media publicity, including from an article by Ted Cordero (2016) of *GMA News* entitled, “Civil society group urges Duterte admin to end ‘coaligarchy.’”

Targeting the Coal Financiers

Within a week of the “END COALIGARCHY” press conference, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice held two “flash mob” protests outside of the Metro Manila offices of two key international financiers of coal power in the Philippines: the World Bank and the Export-Import Bank of Korea. On Friday, October 7, 2016, dozens of protesters from PMCJ, 350.org Pilipinas, APMDD, FDC, and SANLAKAS gathered outside of a building called One Global Place, the site of the Metro Manila office of the World Bank located in the ultra-modern Bonifacio Global City (BGC) district of Taguig City. Located on Fifth Avenue at the corner of 25th Street, the 26-storey One Global Place building’s “prestigious roster of tenants [includes the] World Bank, International

Finance Corporation, Qatar Airways, Roche Philippines Inc., and Perfetti Van Melle.”⁵⁸ Upon arrival outside of One Global Place, the group of Philippine climate-justice protesters precipitously disrupted the posh, tranquil corporate environment, taking the corporate employees and security guards by surprise.

They immediately began holding up their protest signs, unfurling and waving banners of their activist logos in the air, and delivering forceful speeches on a bullhorn condemning the financial practices of one of the building’s “prestigious” tenants—namely, the World Bank and its International Finance Corporation which had financed at least 19 coal projects in the Philippines since 2013—the same year that the World Bank had publicly pledged to cut its coal investments worldwide (*Al Jazeera* 2016). The World Bank was able to indirectly fund coal projects globally by effectively exploiting a loophole which allowed it to funnel billions of dollars into intermediary banks like the Yuchengco family-owned Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC), one of the largest banks in the Philippines and a major financier of coal projects in the country.

Four of the protesters wore monstrous, ghostly masks, and one of them held a scythe in his arm, representing the Grim Reaper, as well as two bags marked with “\$\$\$ FOSSIL FUEL FINANCING” and “\$\$\$ COAL INVESTMENT \$\$\$.” They held signs demanding that the World Bank stop financing coal-fired power plants in the Philippines and elsewhere in the world. Another protester held a sign denouncing the World Bank as a “CLIMATE COALPRIT,” in reference to the role that the World Bank’s funding decisions have played in exacerbating the global climate crisis.

Ms. Lidy Nacpil of PMCJ and the Asian People’s Movement on Debt and Development was

⁵⁸ “One Global Place combines striking architecture and interiors with a high-level of functionality. Steel, glass, granite and marble combine to create a refined, modern design. The building is equipped with 5 high-speed elevators, 100% back-up power, and VRV/VRF air-conditioning for energy efficiency. The building’s prestigious roster of tenants including World Bank, International Finance Corporation, Qatar Airways, Roche Philippines Inc., and Perfetti Van Melle. Located along 5th Avenue, the building is walking distance to major office and residential buildings, hotels and restaurants.” (<https://daiichiproperties.com/one-global-place/>, accessed August 14, 2022)

interviewed by television reporters from CNN Philippines, and she implored the World Bank to stop funding fossil-fuel projects. Though the World Bank’s Manila office—as well as the other corporate tenants in the sleek, high-modern financial district of Bonifacio Global City—were not accustomed to such disruption and specific targeting by activists, the Philippine climate-justice protesters made it clear that they were ready to return as long as the World Bank continued to fund coal and other fossil-fuel projects in the Philippines.



October 7, 2016 — Philippine climate-justice activists gather outside of the World Bank’s corporate office in Metro Manila, denouncing the international bank’s financing of coal projects throughout the Philippines.

A few days later on Tuesday, October 11th, another contingent of Philippine climate-justice activists targeted the Metro Manila office of the Export-Import Bank of Korea (also known as the Korea Eximbank or KEXIM Bank). The state-owned Korea Eximbank has been denounced by international climate-justice activists for its provisioning of billions of dollars for coal projects worldwide. For months, the Asian People’s Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD) had been working with climate-justice activists in South Korea, the Philippines, and elsewhere in Asia to

not only denounce the KEXIM Bank for its financing of coal projects throughout Asia—including a 206-megawatt coal-fired power plant in Naga, Cebu island, which was also jointly owned and operated by the state-owned Korea Electric Power Company (KEPCO)—but also for the KEXIM Bank’s attempt to obtain funding from the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The GCF is a financial mechanism established by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to assist developing countries with climate-change adaptation and mitigation.⁵⁹ The Philippine climate-justice activists, after shaming the World Bank during the previous week, then set themselves on shaming the KEXIM Bank—a bankroller of dirty coal projects in the Philippines and worldwide—for attempting to be accredited by, and receive funding from, the Green Climate Fund.

The KEXIM Bank’s Philippine office is located in the Philippines’ financial capital of Makati City in the 29-storey Pacific Star building, “one of the most prestigious office buildings in the Philippines,”⁶⁰ on Sen. Gil Puyat Avenue at the corner of Makati Avenue. On the morning of October 11, 2016, the contingent of climate-justice activists congregated outside of the Pacific Star building, demanding that the KEXIM Bank withdraw its application to the Green Climate Fund. One protest sign stated, “GREEN CLIMATE FUND: NO TO FUNDERS OF FOSSIL FUELS.” A man wearing a gas mask brandished the sign, “KEXIM BANK, CLIMATE CHANGE COALPRIT!” The protesters made it clear that any bank or financial institution that sought funding from the Green Climate Fund should not be tainted by “dirty financing” practices, especially of fossil-fuel projects. PMCJ National Coordinator Ian Rivera stated:

⁵⁹ “The Green Climate Fund (GCF)—a critical element of the historic Paris Agreement—is the world’s largest climate fund, mandated to support developing countries raise and realize their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) ambitions towards low-emissions, climate-resilient pathways.” (<https://www.greenclimate.fund/about>, accessed on August 14, 2022).

⁶⁰ “The Pacific Star building is considered as one of the most prestigious office buildings in the Philippines... The Pacific Star consists of an imposing 29-storey high-rise structure with a 6-storey low-rise building built around a semicircular driveway and fountain. The building dominates the Makati Skyline with magnificent views of greater Metro Manila... Commercial shops found in the building include among others: Federal Express, Tea Republic and Starbucks, Foodcourt, Fashion and retail store, Rever Salon, Foreign Exchange and Equitable PCI and BPI Banks.” (<https://kmcgroup.com/building/Pacific-Star-Building/>, accessed on August 14, 2022)

Ang Korean Eximbank ang Number Five sa buong mundo ng nagpopondo ng mga coal-fired power plants... Nananawagan kami na itigil na ang pagpopondo ng mga coal-fired power plant... Hindi ito nakakatulong para lutasin ang problema ng ating klima. Tapos lalong pinalala ang sitwasyon ng krisis ng kung titingnan natin ay ang mga Pilipino ang unang pinaka-apektado dahil sa matinding bagyo, matinding tagtuyot, at dahil tayo ay nasa malapit ng Pacific Ocean, tayo ang unang tinatamaan ng mga malalakas na bagyo.

(The Korean Eximbank is Number Five in the entire world for funding coal-fired power plants. We are demanding that it stop funding coal-fired power plants. This isn't helping to solve the problem of our climate; it's worsening the situation of the crisis of which, if we look at it, Filipinos are the most-impacted because of the severe typhoons [and] severe droughts, and since we are near the Pacific Ocean, we are the first to be hit by the ever-strengthening storms.)



October 11, 2016 — Philippine climate-justice activists protest outside of the Metro Manila office of the Export-Import Bank of Korea (KEXIM Bank), calling on the Green Climate Fund to reject the KEXIM Bank's application for funding in light of the bank's financing of coal projects in the Philippines and other countries.

Ms. Lynie Olimpo of the Freedom from Debt Coalition reminded the crowd of the negative health impacts of coal-burning for local communities: “*Nakakasira sa ating kalikasan ang coal plant.*”

Nakakamoy na ito ng maruming hangin. Nakakaapekto ang mga komunidad sa mga kabataan na nagkakaroon ng iba'ibang sakit, allergies sa mga balat... (“Coal plants destroy our environment. They emit foul-smelling emissions. Communities are negatively impacted, including children who acquire various illnesses, [such as] skin allergies”). She then elucidated that she isn’t opposed to energy development, but that communities, particularly women, have been resisting coal plants due to the harmful impacts they have had on their children and families:

Hindi masama ang...pagpondo o pagmakalikha ng kuryente o enerhiya, subalit kung ito po ay nangangasira ng kalikasan at nangangapagdulot ng mga sakit sa komunidad, eto po ay tinututulan ng mga kababaihan ng komunidad na kung saan pangunahing nagiging suliranin para sa kanilang mga anak. Sa huli po, maraming salamat sa mga nakikinig at nasa paligid... At mga security na sana ay maunawaan at suportahan n’yo ang aming panawagan na tutulan ang patuloy na pagpopondo sa maruming enerhiya sa ating bansa. Magandang umaga po sa ating lahat.

(Financing and generating electricity or energy isn’t bad, however, if it damages the environment and causes illnesses in the community, then the women of the community will resist [such projects], as it will primarily be a problem for their children. Thank you to those around us who are listening, and hopefully the security guards too will understand and support our demand to resist the continued funding of dirty energy in our country. Good morning to us all.)

Mr. Erwin Puhawan of both FDC and PMCJ warned the Korea Eximbank that the climate-justice activists would return, and he also reminded the crowd that giant corporations and banks are the true beneficiaries of the coal projects which have been causing harm to the health and environments of people in the Philippines:

Mga kasama, hindi lang po ito ang una at huli ng ating pagkilos. Sa mga darating na panahon...tayo po ay babalik sa ating mga komunidad, sa ating mga pamantasan, upang ipaunawa ang ating panawagan, hindi lang sa Korean Eximbank, ay kundi sa gobyerno ng Pilipinas [na dapat itigil] ang mga proyektong nakakasira at unti-unting pumapatay sa ating taumbayan, at ang nakikinabang ay malalaki at dambuhalang korporasyon at mga bangko katulad ng Korean Eximbank. Mabuhay tayong mga kasama, at muli tayo’y babalik, mas marami, at hindi natin titigilan hanggang ang kabuli-hulihang coal power plant sa Pilipinas ay napasara at napahinto na. Korean Eximbank! [Stop funding coal x2]”

(Comrades, this was neither the beginning nor is it the end of our movement. In the coming days, we will be returning to our communities, to our universities, in order to make our demands understood by not only the Korean Eximbank but also by the government of the Philippines, which must end all projects that are harming and slowly killing our people and our country. And the ones who are actually benefiting are the giant corporations and banks,

just like the Korean Eximbank. Cheers to us, comrades, and when we return again, there will be a lot more of us, and we won't stop until the very last coal power plant in the Philippines is shut down and terminated. Korean Eximbank! [The crowd shouts back: "Stop funding coal!"] Korean Eximbank! ["Stop funding coal!"]).

The Export-Import Bank of Korea, though a highly significant source of funding for various energy, infrastructural, and other development programs in the Philippines, hasn't yet had as widespread name recognition domestically in the Philippines as other international lending institutions, like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, or USAID, have had. When mentioned by the Philippine news media, the KEXIM Bank usually appears in stories about technical and financial assistance for development projects, but the bank's name and brand hasn't yet registered as strongly as others. However, as a representative and financial lending source of the South Korean government, the Korea Eximbank's activities, and its own reputation, have great importance for the relationship between South Korea and the Philippines. More broadly, the bank has a critical role in expanding South Korea's financial and economic power, as well as cultural influence, worldwide. The Philippine climate-justice activists knew that, by targeting this relatively obscurely known bank (in the eyes of most in the Philippine public), they were also sending a larger message to the South Korean state. More specifically, the government of South Korea faced being tarnished as a state that, in its quest to expand its already extraordinary rise in economic and cultural might worldwide, was promoting its own prosperity and prestige at the expense of the people and environments of developing countries like the Philippines as well as of the global climate.

The day after the October 11 protest, on October 12, 2016, the Export-Import Bank of Korea officially withdrew its application for accreditation with the Green Climate Fund. The Philippine and other Asian activist organizations—including PMCJ, 350.org East Asia, APMDD, and FDC—immediately declared victory in their months-long campaign to exert pressure on the KEXIM Bank to withdraw its application to the GCF, and to shame the bank for its fossil-fuel funding practices. However, they also noted that the fight was long from over. Mr. Chuck Baclagon,

a Filipino campaigner for 350.org East Asia, stated, “People from the Philippines have shown that it is possible to stop the world’s biggest bankrollers of climate change. But our work is not finished yet. We will continue to challenge governments and businesses to immediately stop further investments in fossil fuels and transition towards renewable energy.”⁶¹

A year later, on October 12, 2017, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice took action, yet again, against the World Bank, but this time, in Washington, D.C. at the headquarters of the International Finance Corporation (IFC). Founded in 1956, the IFC is considered the “private sector arm” of the World Bank; its role has consisted of “encouraging the growth of the private sector in developing countries.”⁶² PMCJ launched what international observers have called a “historic” and “landmark” official complaint against the World Bank’s IFC through the IFC’s own internal independent watchdog organization, the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO). Atty. Aaron Pedrosa, co-chair of PMCJ’s Energy Working Group and the secretary-general of the mass leftist coalition SANLAKAS, traveled to Washington, D.C., and—on behalf of the over 100 civil-society and people’s organizations of PMCJ’s coalition as well as 19 communities directly harmed by World Bank-funded coal-fired power plants in the Philippines—delivered to the CAO the first-ever climate change-related official complaint against the IFC.⁶³ PMCJ accused the IFC of violating its own

⁶¹ “Anti-coal protest in the Philippines forces Korea Eximbank to withdraw from Green Climate Fund.” *350.org*. (<https://world.350.org/blog/anti-coal-protest-in-the-philippines-forces-korea-eximbank-to-withdraw-from-green-climate-fund/>, accessed on August 15, 2022)

⁶² “A strong and engaged private sector is indispensable to ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. That’s where IFC comes in—we have more than 60 years of experience in unlocking private investment, creating markets and opportunities where they’re needed most. Since 1956, IFC has invested more than \$321 billion in emerging markets and developing economies.” (https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/corp_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/home, accessed on August 15, 2022)

⁶³ According to the IFC’s Compliance Advisor Ombudsman, “In October 2017, the national NGO Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), in collaboration with Inclusive Development International (IDI) and Bank Information Center Europe (BIC Europe), submitted a complaint on behalf of several communities living in the proximity of 19 active or proposed coal-fired power plants, located in different parts of the country. The complaint alleges that RCBC has provided financial support to the plants, either directly or through companies that own or operate them. The complaint raises several concerns related to the development and operation of the plants in the form of localized environmental and social issues, such as impacts on biodiversity, health harms caused by air pollution, inadequate compensation for physical displacement, loss of livelihoods, and violation of indigenous peoples’ rights.

Environment and Social Performance Standards as well as its own self-proclaimed commitments to mitigating the climate crisis.⁶⁴



October 12, 2017 — Atty. Aaron Pedrosa, on behalf of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice and 19 coal-affected communities in the Philippines, travels to Washington, D.C. to deliver an official complaint against the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group for its coal-financing practices in the Philippines. PMCJ's landmark legal action made history by becoming the first ever climate change-related complaint against the IFC.

Since 2013, the World Bank's IFC channeled hundreds of millions of dollars into an intermediary Philippine bank, the Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC) of the Yuchengco

Further, the complaint raises issues about climate change impacts on the Philippines and its residents, including the complaint signatories, as well as issues related to RCBC's environmental and social risk management system, lack of consultation and information about the projects and their impacts, and absence of grievance mechanisms for the affected communities. Finally, the complaint raises issues about IFC, asserting a lack of transparency regarding IFC's financial intermediary portfolio and IFC's monitoring and supervision of RCBC's environmental and social performance." "Philippines: Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC)-01." (<https://www.cao-ombudsman.org/cases/philippines-rizal-commercial-banking-corporation-rcbc-01>, accessed on August 15, 2022)

⁶⁴ "Landmark climate-change complaint against IFC lodged in Philippines." *Bretton Woods Project*. (<https://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/2017/12/landmark-climate-change-complaint-ifc-lodged-philippines/>, accessed on August 15, 2022)

family, which then financed the construction of 19 coal-fired power plants in the Philippines. This financing from the IFC, according to PMCJ, violated the World Bank's own policies and climate commitments, contributed to the exacerbation of the impacts of the global climate crisis which have been particularly severe in the Philippines, and effectively funded the pollution and corporate terror that has accompanied the stampede of the Philippines' "coaligarchy" across the island country. As Atty. Pedrosa stated:

Our complaint is an indictment of the IFC's complicity in putting our country and communities at certain risk at a time when addressing climate change impacts is the order of the day. By providing funds to intermediaries that are bankrolling a new generation of coal plants, the IFC is lending its imprimatur to the deaths and destruction caused by coal plant operations. The IFC is in effect issuing a license to kill. It should be held to account.⁶⁵

Due to PMCJ's official complaint in October of 2017, the IFC's Compliance Advisor Ombudsman was prompted to launch an investigation into the World Bank's coal-funding practices in the Philippines, specifically with regards to its Philippine intermediary bank RCBC. In April of 2022, the CAO affirmatively determined that the International Finance Corporation violated its own social and environmental performance standards, and it called on the IFC to remedy its "significant adverse social, environmental, and climate impacts of its investments, and to reform its financial intermediary lending practices to prevent future harm" (Fernandez 2022). PMCJ has been demanding that the World Bank and RCBC pay reparations to the communities that have suffered from the pollution and human-rights violations that have accompanied the spread of World Bank-funded coal-fired power plants in the Philippines.

This call for reparations from the World Bank is consistent with PMCJ's overall vision for postcolonial (and decolonial) climate justice. As stated in the website of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice:

⁶⁵ *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. "World Bank fueling climate change, groups claim in historic complaint." October 24, 2017. (<https://business.inquirer.net/239183/world-bank-fueling-climate-change-groups-claim-historic-complaint>, accessed on August 26, 2022)

A fundamental starting point for understanding climate justice is the recognition of ecological debt and climate debt. Developed countries' economies have consumed natural resources and destroyed the physical environment at an unmanageable rate at the expense of developing countries (ecological debt). At the same time, developed countries have had the largest and historical contribution to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, yet developing countries, which have a relatively low share of global emissions, continue to become the most vulnerable to climate change impacts, and the least capable to cope with it (climate debt). Demanding reparations and restitution from those historically responsible for the climate crisis is viewed as a fundamental requirement of ecological and climate justice.⁶⁶

The idea to launch an official complaint against the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank Group for social, environmental, and climate change-related damages wrought by the IFC's funding practices was not only about following the money and tracing the ultimate source of the financing for numerous coal-fired power plants in the Philippines back to one of the most powerful banks, and the largest development institution, in the world (as important as that was). It had also stemmed from PMCJ's larger postcolonial perspective on climate justice, which, in turn, has been informed by and nurtured in a Global South, working-class, and anti-imperialist social-movement tradition. Attaining climate *justice* for PMCJ is fundamentally about toppling both the domestic Philippine oligarchy and the global system of oligarchic-corporate capitalism that continues to subjugate the working classes and despoil the ecologies of both the Global South and North.

As both a pivotal institution and potent symbol of the international oligarchic-corporate system, the World Bank has long been targeted by Philippine and other Global South economic justice movements for its role in the neoliberal restructuring of their economies and entrapping many countries of the Global South—the formerly officially colonized world—into neocolonial relations through enduring forms of “debt colonialism” (Morton 2018). In the year 2021, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic—during which the Philippines had one of the longest and harshest lockdowns in the world under the Duterte government (Hapal 2021)—the Philippines was also the World Bank's top borrower country, as it took out \$3.07 billion in loans from the institution.

⁶⁶ Philippine Movement for Climate Justice. “About.” (<https://climatejustice.ph/about>, accessed June 24, 2019)

Meanwhile, the Philippines' overall national debt, as of February 2022, has stood at 11.7 trillion pesos (\$229 billion), leaving the country with a debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio of 60.5 percent (Rivas 2022; *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2021b). As PMCJ's allied organization, the Freedom from Debt Coalition, has insisted, an understanding of "the human dimension of the debt problem" reveals the "Social Debt" owed to the people of the Philippines and other Global South nations, particularly "after decades of automatic debt service for 'Illegitimate Debts'—loans contracted through fraudulent and corrupt means."⁶⁷ Thus, PMCJ's postcolonial vision for climate justice aims to upend the international system of debt- and finance colonialism by forcefully demanding the recognition of the "climate debt" and "climate reparations" owed to countries like the Philippines by international financial institutions like the World Bank.

Coal Moratorium, Fossil-Gas Boom, and the Struggle for 100% Renewable Energy

On October 27, 2020, Pres. Duterte's Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi declared that the Philippine government was issuing a moratorium on all new coal-fired power plants, while it reassessed the country's energy system. Sec. Cusi said that the Philippines was shifting from a "technology-neutral policy" to a new policy that would allow for the country's power-supply mix to become "flexible enough to accommodate the entry of new, cleaner, and indigenous technological innovations" (Chavez 2020). This was a stark departure for Sec. Cusi who, since 2016, had been staunchly in favor of coal power, authorizing its expansion across the Philippines. The moratorium only applied to new coal plants, so the coal projects that had already been authorized by Duterte's Energy Department continued to be built, thus further locking the Philippines into decades of dependence on coal burning to sustain the country's energy requirements (Chandran 2022; IBON

⁶⁷ "Economic Justice." *Freedom from Debt Coalition*. (<https://fdcpil.org/campaigns/economic-justice/>, accessed on August 16, 2022)

Foundation 2020). Moreover, as Lidy Nacpil warned, a “moratorium” refers to a “temporary” suspension or pause in operations, not a termination of a policy; Nacpil has thus called for the Philippine government to enact a definite policy that would permanently cancel all new coal projects (*CNN Philippines* 2021).

Nonetheless, many Philippine environmentalists and church groups celebrated the coal moratorium as an important symbolic victory and indication that what they had long been arguing—that continued investments in coal power didn’t make sense economically in the long term, nor in terms of the dirty and deadly consequences for human health, the environment, the global climate, and for human rights—was finally being acknowledged and understood among those in the higher echelons of government and the business community (CEED 2020). Sec. Cusi’s announcement, moreover, came a month after the International Finance Corporation itself declared that—though it had spent years financing coal projects worldwide through billions of dollars in investments—it would no longer fund banks that themselves didn’t have concrete plans to divest from coal (Green 2020). The IFC’s new policy on no longer funding banks that finance coal projects, in turn, was released three years after the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice launched its landmark official complaint against the IFC.

A month after Sec. Cusi’s announcement of the Philippines’ coal moratorium, and two months after the International Finance Corporation’s own announcement on withholding funding to banks without a plan for exiting from coal power, the Yuchengco family’s Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation—an IFC intermediary and one of the largest Philippine banks—became the first bank in the Philippines to publicly announce that it would end its financing of coal projects, albeit by 2031. The following year in April of 2021, the Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI), owned by the Ayala Corporation (of the Ayala family), also announced that it would end its financing of coal plants in the Philippines by 2033. Both RCBC and BPI, however—along with Banco de Oro

(BDO) of the Sy family and the Philippine National Bank (PNB) of billionaire Lucio Tan—continue to provide critical financing for the already-existing coal plants and coal projects approved prior to the October 2020 moratorium (Kritz 2022). Nevertheless, the Philippine climate activists had looked forward to the beginning of the end of the age of coal in their country, and this only seemed to be further strengthened by the announcement from Indonesia, the world’s largest coal exporter, in January of 2022 that it would halt all its exports of coal due to a need to prioritize its own energy needs; Sec. Cusi of the Philippine Department of Energy and other countries dependent on Indonesian coal imports effectively begged Indonesia to continue exporting coal. Though Indonesia lifted its ban by the end of the month, climate-justice activists pointed to the need for the Philippines to rely on its own indigenous sources of clean and renewable energy so as to remove its dependence on foreign sources of energy like Indonesian and Australian coal supplies (*Greenpeace Philippines* 2022).

Unfortunately, soon after these same oligarch-controlled Philippine banks began announcing their eventual phasing-out of their financing for new coal projects, the “new carbon bomb” arrived in the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia—fossil gas (Arances 2022). Dozens of fossil gas-fired power plants and 118 liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals are being planned across the Philippines, accounting for over \$33 billion in proposed investments. This includes eight fossil gas-fired power plants and seven LNG terminals which are scheduled to be constructed in and around the waters of the Isla Verde Passage—the “center of the center of the world’s marine biodiversity”—thus creating a new threat to the health, livelihoods, and ecologies of people in the province of Batangas and the island of Isla Verde, and to the globally unparalleled marine biodiversity of the Isla Verde Passage (Wagas and Andres 2022; Cabico et al. 2022).

The same Philippine family-owned banks and corporations that comprise the country’s “coaligarchy” are now leading the Philippines’ fossil-gas expansion. And just as with the Philippine

coal-power industry, international financial institutions are playing key roles in financing this latest “carbon bomb” from the LNG industry. Heavy financing is coming from the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM), and the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) (Nacpil and Pascual 2022). Much of the impetus for the fossil-gas expansion in the Philippines has been specifically originating from the fossil-gas industry of the United States, which, in 2022, became the world’s largest exporter of liquefied natural gas. After China and India, Southeast Asia is viewed as the top global destination for LNG exports—particularly from the United States, Qatar, and Australia, the world’s three largest LNG exporters (Disavino 2021; Reynolds 2021a).

As Mr. Gerry Arances, the executive director of the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED), has stressed, “Although couched in the language of transition, this clearly is not a case of fossil gas being a bridge fuel; rather, it is another path away from renewable energy. This is a major challenge for the climate vulnerable region given the very small window we collectively have in avoiding runaway climate change in this decade” (Arances 2022). Accordingly, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice prioritized a series of mobilizations in 2022 against the new threat of a massive expansion in fossil gas, arguing that the world will not be able to keep the global temperature below 1.5 degrees Celsius if governments, banks, and corporations continue to rely on and widely expand fossil-fuel infrastructures like fossil gas. Indeed, recent studies have indicated that the methane emissions released from fossil gas and other fossil-fuel projects have been severely underestimated (McSweeney 2020). Methane, moreover, is an even more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, and, as analyzed by Sara Wylie (2018), fossil-gas operations—including through methods of hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”)—have had severe and even fatal impacts on the health of communities located near drilling wells, pipelines, and other fossil-gas infrastructures.



July 24, 2022 — PMCJ protests outside of the main office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Quezon City, demanding that the new presidential administration of Bongbong Marcos break free from all fossil fuels, including fossil gas. They unfurled a banner stating, “KILOS KLIMA: ILIGTAS ANG BAYAN SA KRISIS NG KLIMA” (CLIMATE MOVEMENT: SAVE THE NATION FROM THE CLIMATE CRISIS). Other signs state, “NATURAL GAS IS FOSSIL GAS” and “Break Free, Pilipinas! Break Free From Fossil Gas!” They also displayed a mock tombstone stating, “RIP: 1.5 degrees Celsius Is Dead — In Loving Memory of Life on Earth,” along with black plastic bags representing dead bodies next to signs stating, “DECLARE CLIMATE EMERGENCY NOW!”

The framework and vision for postcolonial climate justice in the Philippines—in an era of coal’s waning (yet still persistent) dominance in the country’s energy system and the rise of fossil gas (also being referred to as “methane gas”)—continues to inform and motivate the work of Philippine climate activists who continue to trudge ahead in the struggle for a fair and equitable economy, a clean-energy system, and a livable planet. Their dissection of the Philippines’ “coaligarchy” remains vital to the new threat of the fossil-gas expansion, as their analysis of the key financial, corporate, and oligarchic players in the coal industry remains highly relevant to the fight against the fossil-gas industry (as well as to the rise of oligarchic-corporate renewable-energy projects [See Chapter 6 of this dissertation]). And in PMCJ’s invocation of the need for the world to attain “net-zero” emissions and to keep global average temperatures below 1.5 degrees Celsius, I am reminded of the

significance that their work has, not only for the Philippines, but for the global ecology and climate, and for humanity and other biological life on Earth.

CHAPTER 4

Climate Justice, Environmental Futures, and the Postcolonial State: Lessons from Gina

Lopez's 10-Month Tenure as the Philippines' Secretary of the Environment

“Sir, you better tell him to behave *na* (already). They’ve been mining this for 20 years and the mountain was really big, and the mountain got small, small, and that’s not legal at all... Tell your brother that he totally killed the mountain.”

– Former Philippine Environment Secretary Gina Lopez to Congressman Ronaldo Zamora

On March 8, 2017, Gina Lopez, the then-Secretary of the Philippine government’s Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), with a smile on her face and even giggling at times, looked into the eyes of Rep. Ronaldo Zamora, the co-chair of the Commission on Appointments (CA), the 25-member congressional body that would determine whether or not Lopez would be re-confirmed as the Philippines’ Environment Secretary. In a maternal manner, Lopez told Ronaldo Zamora that his brother, Manuel Zamora—the chairperson of Nickel Asia Corporation, the Philippines’ largest nickel producer—needed to “behave” and account for his company’s open-pit mining practices in Hinatuan Island in the southern Philippines. Based on her department’s extensive study and documentation of the practices of the Hinatuan Mining Corp. (a subsidiary of Nickel Asia) and a personal visit to the mine on helicopter, Sec. Lopez ordered the mine to be shut down the previous month in February of 2017. This was one of 23 mining operations throughout the country that she ordered shut down since August of 2016, representing half of the country’s mines. She also cancelled 75 proposed mining contracts. Lopez’s blitzkrieg against the Philippines’ mining industry had even led to a global rise in nickel prices, as the Philippines is the world’s top producer of nickel ore (Mukherji 2016).

During her confirmation hearing, Lopez provided a PowerPoint presentation explaining her closure of Nickel Asia’s mine on Hinatuan Island while defending the work that she and the DENR

had done more generally over the past nine months. When she arrived at the slide explaining the massive environmental degradation caused by Manuel Zamora’s mine on Hinatuan Island, she informed Rep. Ronaldo Zamora that his elder brother “totally killed the mountain” there, and that this was “not legal at all.” After Lopez made those statements, there was some laughter in the meeting room located in the *Batasang Pambansa* Complex (“National Legislature” Complex), the building that hosts the Philippines’ House of Representatives (*Kapulungan ng mga Kinatawan*). This included laughter from professional boxer and Senator Manny Pacquiao, who was also a member of the Commission on Appointments (CA). Seated next to Sen. Pacquiao was Rep. Zamora, who expressed a brief moment of nervous laughter. Yet despite Lopez’s friendly and funny demeanor and her slap-on-the-wrist order for Rep. Zamora’s brother to “behave,” this was no laughing matter for the Philippines’ powerful mining industry, which had been both horrified and furious with Lopez for her extensive crackdown on what her department concluded was the industry’s grossly irresponsible, massively destructive, and illegal practices that have left mountains destroyed, rivers and farmlands poisoned, ecosystems damaged, and the livelihoods and health of numerous farmers and fishing communities in jeopardy.

To environmentalists and climate-justice advocates in the Philippines, however, Gina Lopez was the eco-warrior that they had long been waiting for to lead the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). For decades, the DENR has been the source of immense anger, grief, and frustration for many environmentalists, Indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, and rural communities that have condemned the department for protecting the interests of the country’s mineral-extractive and fossil-fuels industries, despite the environmental and social damages wrought by their practices. Philippine environmental groups have long called on their government to end destructive mining practices and to transition away from fossil fuels—especially coal power—and promote “alternative minerals management” and clean and renewable energy generation instead. For decades, these



March 8, 2017 — Gina Lopez (center), secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), orders Rep. Ronaldo Zamora (right) to tell his brother Manuel Zamora to “behave” during a hearing for her re-confirmation as the Philippine government’s secretary of the DENR. Manuel Zamora is the chairperson of Nickel Asia Corp., which has been implicated in illegal open-pit mining practices in Hinatuan Island. Senator Manny Pacquiao (left) is seated next to Rep. Zamora. (Photo by Cesar Tomambo)

groups had grown accustomed to the government paying lip service to tackling the climate and ecological crisis in the country while continuing to greenlight destructive mining as well as promote and expand the use of fossil fuels. In 2014, for example, former President Benigno Aquino III of the Liberal Party (LP) gave a speech at the United Nations (UN) Climate Summit in New York, claiming that the Philippines was “treading a climate-smart development pathway. The Philippines is not waiting. We are addressing climate change to the maximum with our limited resources” (Alvarez 2015). In response, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) and other environmental and church groups denounced Pres. Aquino as a “climate hypocrite,” noting that his administration had given approval for the construction of 59 coal-fired power plants and the issuance of 118 coal-mining permits (Torres 2015). When the new president, Rodrigo Duterte, came to power in May of 2016, environmental groups were cautiously optimistic that a new chapter could be arising in the government’s policies on climate change and the environment when Duterte appointed environmentalist Gina Lopez as Environment Secretary.

For ten months, from July of 2016 to May of 2017, many of the long-held hopes and goals of the Philippine environmental movement were starting to be fulfilled, as Sec. Lopez took strong stances against corporate violators of the Philippines' laws and regulations meant to protect the environment. She shut down numerous destructive mines, cancelled permits for proposed coal-fired power plants, played the most pivotal role in getting Pres. Duterte to have the Philippines sign the Paris Climate Accord, and used her political power to encourage the country's shift toward renewable-energy technologies. Climate justice and other environmental groups had also gained more power and influence on the country's environmental governance and policymaking than ever before, as the DENR secretary established strong working relationships with representatives from several environmental civil-society groups, particularly with the member-organizations of the Green Thumb Coalition—a political and electoral coalition of environmental organizations that played a key role in getting Pres. Duterte to appoint Lopez as Environment Secretary.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the great optimism that Philippine environmental groups experienced during Lopez's tenure ended in May of 2017, when the Philippine government's Commission on Appointments (CA) rejected Lopez's re-confirmation as the DENR's secretary in an unprecedentedly secretive, closed-door

⁶⁸ According to the Green Thumb Coalition's Facebook page, the coalition "aims to elevate the issues of: 1) biodiversity and ecosystem integrity; 2) natural resources and land use management and governance; 3) human rights and integrity of creation; 4) climate justice; 5) mining, extractives and mineral resource management; 6) energy transformation and democracy; 7) sustainable food sovereignty; 8) people-centered sustainable development; and 9) waste management." The member-organizations of the Green Thumb Coalition include: ABS-CBN Lingkod Kapamilya Foundation, Inc. (ALKFI), Aksyon Klima, Alternative Law Groups (ALG), Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), AMEN, Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP-JPIC), Bantay Kalikasan Foundation (BK), Bantay Kita, Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP), Bulig Visayas, CBCP-NASSA, Center for Energy, Ecology and Development (CEED), Climate Reality, Dakila, Ecological Justice Interfaith Movement (ECOJIM), Ecowaste Coalition, FOCUS, Foundation for the Philippine Environment (FPE), Foundation for a Sustainable Society Inc. (FSSI), Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), Global Anti Incinerator Alliance (GAIA), Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), Green Convergence, Greenpeace Southeast Asia, Haribon, Oceana, PADER, Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan (PKKK), Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), Prelate of Infanta Community, Pugad Lawin Pilipinas Inc. (PLPI), Purple Action for Women's Rights (Lilak), Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), SANLAKAS, Save Sierra Madre, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Youth for Rights (Y4R) and 350.org. (https://www.facebook.com/GreenThumbCoalition/about/?ref=page_internal)

vote.⁶⁹ Lopez was replaced with Roy Cimatu, a former general in the Philippine Army with a much more amenable relationship to the country's mining and coal industries.

This chapter examines the dramatic 10-month secretaryship of Gina Lopez and the lessons that can be gleaned from her tenure for the climate-justice movement in the Philippines and, more broadly, for climate-justice advocacy in the postcolonial state. What does Lopez's appointment and tenure indicate for the conditions of possibility for the climate-justice movement in both the Philippines and the Global South more broadly? What aspects of Philippine political culture allowed for the rise of an environmentalist like Gina Lopez into the highest levels of the Philippine government's environmental decision-making? What is the role of the individual in the climate-justice movement, particularly in a postcolonial political context marked by personalistic politics, patron-client relations, widespread corruption, oligarchy, authoritarianism, and enduring legacies of Western imperialism? How and where does climate justice "fit" in such a postcolonial governmental context?

Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate that, while Gina Lopez was certainly a unique figure in many respects, important elements of the Philippines' political culture nonetheless allowed for the political rise of an eco-warrior like Lopez to launch a forceful and, for a brief few months, highly effective struggle against some of the country's most powerful and ruthless industries—and, more broadly, against the prevailing system of endless capitalist extraction, neoliberal austerity, and extreme social inequality and oligarchy. Though the prevailing Philippine political system has consistently upheld the privilege of the country's richest and most powerful families and multinational corporations at the expense of the socioeconomically disadvantaged, peasant, and

⁶⁹ The identities of the senators and congressmembers in the CA who voted for and against Gina Lopez were later revealed. Rep. Zamora voted against Lopez's reconfirmation, while Sen. Pacquiao was said to have voted in favor of Lopez. Lopez later openly accused one senator who had voted against her reconfirmation, Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano, of having been influenced by the campaign donations that he received from the Zamora brothers and their family's mining companies (*GMA News Online* 2017).

working-class majority, the country also has powerful traditions of resistance to colonialism and imperialism, the legacy of the decades-long struggle against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos (1965-86), and a tradition of social justice and environmental stewardship among certain sectors of the Catholic Church community and other religious groups. Lopez—with her moral conviction, eclectic personality, and elite familial connections—achieved a brief yet extraordinary rise to national political prominence. At the same time, the Philippines’ climate-justice movement strategically formed an alliance with Lopez in a way that simultaneously reinforced and undermined the country’s elitist and oligarchic political system.

Climate Justice in the Postcolonial State

Anthropological studies of the state focus on how the state—though comprised of numerous agencies and individuals that are highly dispersed both geographically and institutionally (and often with agendas and priorities that are in conflict with each other)—is nonetheless often conceived as a singular object (Sharma and Gupta 2006). To be imbued with such singularity, there is a great amount of cultural work necessary to discursively construct and “imagine” the state as such. Anthropologists pay particular attention to the everyday practices and behaviors of state agencies as well as to the ways that the state is culturally represented in popular media, social movements, everyday language, and by state bureaucratic institutions themselves. This allows for a greater understanding of the considerable amount of cultural work that must continually be done in order to provide the state with the powerful sense of coherence and singularity that is often attributed to it. By focusing on how everyday bureaucratic practices and cultural representations of the state operate in a way that reproduces state power (and inequalities), we can also better discern the limits of state power as well as moments of incoherence and rupture (Gupta and Sharma 2006). In order to understand how and to what extent policies, including climate-justice policies, can be

implemented by the state, it is necessary to understand the heterogeneity, institutional diversity and competition, diverse images and other representational forms, and moments of rupture that collectively inform the workings of states and state power.

Post-colonial states like that of the Philippines have been faced with the particular challenges of: overcoming traumatic histories of conquest and colonization; undergoing the process of formal decolonization; and crafting and promoting policies, programs, and services that provide (enough) stability and prosperity for society. The legitimacy of the postcolonial state often rests on its ability to provide such development and technological progress and prosperity for its population. This is not only because of the structural economic challenges (if not crises) that have often accompanied formal decolonization for postcolonial states, but also because postcolonial states have been both externally and self-represented as “underdeveloped,” with the concomitant assumptions that formerly colonized states across the Global South are “backward” and need to “catch up” with the “developed” world. This “postcolonial condition” of “underdevelopment” as not only a political-economic structural location, but also a cultural identity, of postcolonial states has had profound implications for the behaviors of and expectations for postcolonial states (Gupta 1998). In the Philippines, the widespread assumption of being (economically, politically, technologically, and culturally) “behind” the West as well as the “tiger economies” of East Asia has strongly informed the expectations of the Philippine public with regards to the conduct, capacities, and legitimacy (or lack thereof) of the Philippine state. It should also be mentioned that, in addition to this challenge of overcoming the “baggage” of a history of colonial occupation and exploitation, as well as the related condition of economic underdevelopment and assumed “backwardness,” several “post-colonial” states are often faced with the continued reality of “neo-colonialism.” The Philippines continued to experience interference in its politics and economics by its former colonial ruler, the United States,

despite receiving formal independence from the US government in 1946 (Constantino 1978; Schirmer and Shalom 1999; Pomeroy 1974).

Moreover, with greater awareness worldwide of the contemporary climatic and ecological crises, there has been an increasing focus on the simultaneous need for postcolonial states to provide not only development but also environmental protection—and, as signified in paradigms like “sustainable development” and “green economics,” both economic development and environmental sustainability would ideally be fused together. The rise of environmental social movements and environmental consciousness has, furthermore, altered the practices, beliefs, policies, and even identities and subjectivities of both state and non-state actors in a way that has entrenched forms of governance meant to promote environmental protection and sustainability. Such modes of environmental governmentality (or “environmentality” [Agrawal 2005]) have become ubiquitous worldwide. The Philippines has been a site for a considerable concentration of programs designed for biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and other forms of environmental governance (Dressler 2011; Goldoftas 2005; R. Bryant and Lawrence 2005a; Crease, Parsons, and Fisher 2018). National forestry management, including a system of national parks, was first established during the US colonial era during the first half of the 20th century, and the post-1946 Philippine state has built upon these colonial-era schemas for environmental management. Similar to other cases of colonial and settler-colonial environmental management, the cordoning off of certain zones for environmental conservation in the Philippines has often been accompanied by the resettlement and eviction of Indigenous and other rural and peasant communities.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Scholars like Christopher John Chanco (2017) and Yen Lê Espiritu and J.A. Ruanto-Ramirez (2020) have identified the Philippine state as a “postcolonial settler state”—referring to how the Philippine state, the successor to the US colonial regime in the Philippines, continued many of the settler-colonial policies of its colonial predecessor state, such as the large-scale state-administered migration of members of the Catholic-majority Philippine ethnic groups from Luzon and the Visayas into Mindanao (thus displacing and eroding what was once a majority of *Moro* [Philippine Muslim] and *Lumad* [other Indigenous people of Mindanao] peoples in the large southern Philippine island). Indigenous Aeta people in the northern Philippine island of Luzon have also been subjected to displacement from their lands at the hands of the Philippine state, private corporations, and members of the Catholic-majority Lowlander ethnic groups.

Meanwhile, outside of such protected areas, economic practices that aren't considered environmentally sustainable, if not environmentally and socially disastrous, continue, including destructive forms of mining, coal-burning, unsustainable logging, and dynamite fishing. The goal of merging sustainability with development in the Philippines has, thus far, been largely elusive. Instead, the Philippines has been comprised of a patchwork of zones of: environmental protection (sometimes with violent histories of displacement); export-oriented agribusiness enterprises (which are frequently highly unequal and exploitative), including sugar, coffee, banana, and coconut plantations; mining operations (which are often greatly damaging and poisonous for human health and the environment, especially open-pit mining), including of nickel, gold, copper, and coal; an expanding array of highly-polluting coal-fired and gas-fired power plants and other fossil-fuel operations; particular sites for sustainable and organic forms of agriculture, aquaculture, and agroforestry, including those based on Indigenous ecological knowledge; and a certain amount of renewable-energy projects, including solar and wind farms, geothermal power plants, and micro-hydro power plants.

Meanwhile, the oligarchic structure of the Philippine state and economy facilitates a political-economic system in which a few highly wealthy families control much of the country's lucrative agricultural, aquacultural, extractive, and other economic enterprises as well as the prime arable lands and marine economic zones in the Philippines, while also capturing much of the Philippine state

While much of this displacement has been done in the name of environmentally unsustainable "development," the settler-colonial dispossession of Philippine Indigenous peoples from their lands has also been done in the name of environmental conservation and protection. One example of an Indigenous nation that has successfully opposed such a settler-colonial biodiversity and natural resource conservation scheme is the Tagbanwa people from the northern part of Palawan island (Ferrari and de Vera 2003). Despite attempts by the Philippine state to designate their island of Coron (one of the Calamian Islands of North Palawan) as one of eight National Integrated Protected Areas (NIPAs), the Tagbanwa Indigenous people—who weren't even consulted when the national government sought to include their ancestral lands into the protected area system—successfully resisted inclusion in the conservation scheme. Instead, in 2001, the Philippine state officially recognized the sovereignty of the Tagbanwa people over the island of Coron, which was officially designated as falling under the jurisdiction of the Tagbanwa people's Ancestral Domain. The Tagbanwa people subsequently gained official authority over the eco-tourism industry of the island of Coron (recognized as one of the most majestic island tourist destinations in the world), and their environmental management has left Coron Island's forest cover intact (de Vera 2007).

itself through a host of political dynasties that effectively rule the country at the local, provincial, and national levels (Quimpo 2005; McCoy 1993; Franco 2016; Hutchcroft 1991; Sidel 1997). Since obtaining official independence from the United States in 1946, the Philippines’ governors, senators, congressmembers, and mayors—often from the same select assortment of prominent and wealthy families—have effectively ruled politics at the local and provincial levels through their domination of elections, often with violence or the threat of violence by their own private armies and other paramilitary forces. Political violence at the hands of these de facto warlords consistently escalates during election time, with assassinations of political opponents unfortunately not being uncommon occurrences in these modern political fiefdoms. These same political clans, meanwhile, are also the owners of the Philippines’ top business and financial interests. Thus, for example, members of the Zamora family are able to own the country’s largest nickel-producing mine (Manuel Zamora) while also being able to enact laws on and “regulate” their own family’s mining interests at the level of the national Philippine legislature (Rep. Ronaldo Zamora). The “traditional politicians” (*tra-pos*) that belong to these political dynasties are often derisively called *trapos*—derived from the Filipino word *trapo*, meaning “dirty old rag”—by political and social-activist critics. Despite attempts by some members of the Philippine Congress and Senate to pass an anti-political dynasty law which would ideally put an end to such *trapo* politics, such a law has yet to pass in the *trapo*-dominated national Philippine legislature.⁷¹

Given the oligarchic, corrupt, and politically violent realities of the postcolonial Philippine state, how can climate-justice policies even begin to stand a chance? As Aradhana Sharma and Akhil

⁷¹ The current Constitution of the Philippines (*Saligang Batas ng Pilipinas*), ratified by a national public referendum in 1987 in the aftermath of the fall of the Marcos Dictatorship via the 1986 People Power Revolution, explicitly prohibits political dynasties. However, the wording of the constitutional provision relies on the Philippine national legislature to enact a law that would enforce the prohibition of political dynasties. According to Article II, Section 26 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, “The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law.”

Gupta (2006) remind us, the state is not monolithic and singular, despite often being represented as such, and the Philippine state is no exception. Though political offices at all levels of the Philippine government—from the *barangay* (literally “village,” the most basic unit of government) to the municipality, province, and national legislature, judiciary, and presidency—have clearly been dominated by an oligarchy of political dynasties, the Philippine state also consists of numerous agencies in a vast government bureaucracy with their own programs and priorities that can, at times, diverge from the agendas of the oligarchy. While the Philippine president appoints the members of their presidential cabinet, the cabinet secretaries themselves do not always agree on policy. This was most visibly apparent during the first year of the government of President Rodrigo Duterte, who appointed an ideologically inconsistent and contradictory cabinet of right-wing neoliberal technocrats; fascist-authoritarian and violent policing and military authorities; and liberal, progressive, and leftist social activists. During the first year of Duterte’s government, the usual neoliberal policies were fused with both highly progressive environmental and social welfare programs as well as a genocidal “war on drugs” (Simangan 2018). Meanwhile, the policies, regulations, and overall direction taken by an agency like the powerful Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), though highly dependent on the secretary chosen by the president, can also be heterogeneous and divergent, depending on the priorities of and actions taken by staff and personnel in the national DENR office located in Quezon City as well as the regional and provincial DENR offices throughout the country.

Enter: Gina Lopez. Unlike any other DENR secretary in the Philippines’ history, Gina Lopez, for a solid ten months, truly shook things up. Though a member of the economically and politically prominent Lopez clan—and thus, in many ways, a member of the country’s oligarchy—Gina Lopez had nonetheless taken an eclectic and unconventional lifepath that ultimately placed her on a collision course with several of her fellow oligarchs. As a genuine environmental activist and

leader, Lopez held a firm commitment to environmental and social-justice principles, and she applied these principles to her role as the country's Environment secretary. Thus far, Lopez's performance as the Secretary of the DENR has been the greatest historical attempt to implement climate and environmental justice policies in the Philippine state at the national level.

A Violent Dictatorial Regime: The Duterte Era

To many outside (and inside) observers, the appointment of Gina Lopez as DENR secretary by Pres. Rodrigo Duterte in July of 2016 was viewed as a surprising choice for the newly elected president and former mayor of Davao City more known for his strongman image, offensive and misogynistic language, and, most notoriously, for his vocal support for death squads in his city in the Southern Philippines that killed over a thousand petty criminals, thieves, and alleged sellers and users of illegal drugs. On the other hand, Duterte was also known for "cleaning up" Davao City of rampant crime and promoting the city's economic development and stable business environment. He had also brokered deals with both Muslim separatists and Maoist rebels in and around his city, located in the country's southern island of Mindanao; when he ran for president in 2016, he received considerable support from members of the *Bangsa Moro* community (Philippine Muslims) and from members and supporters of the country's Maoist movement. After being lobbied by environmental groups, including the political and electoral environmental coalition known as the Green Thumb Coalition (of which PMCJ is a member-organization), Duterte met with Gina Lopez in Davao City in May of 2016 after winning the presidency, and he asked her to become the Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Environmentalists weren't the only progressive groups that expressed cautious optimism toward certain policies that could potentially be enacted by the new Duterte government. Some labor-rights organizations praised Duterte's promise to end the common business practice of

“contractualization” which routinely denies job security for workers, while some anti-imperialist groups lauded his purported effort to forge a foreign policy more independent of the United States (the Philippines’ former colonizer). Human rights groups, however, denounced the extra-judicial killings that occurred in Davao City while Duterte was mayor, with over a thousand petty criminals, alleged drug users, and street children killed by the “Davao Death Squad” (DDS) operating in the city, ostensibly with Duterte’s blessing. As a presidential candidate, moreover, Duterte made ominous authoritarian statements claiming that he would abolish the Philippine Congress and create a “revolutionary government” (with many unsure if he was joking or serious at the time), and women’s rights groups lambasted Duterte’s gruesome rape “jokes” and other misogynistic language. Overall, the election of Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 was met with a mix of confusion, dismay, cautious optimism, and horror by various groups and individuals across the political spectrum in the country.

As it turned out, Duterte’s promises for policies promoting economic and environmental justice largely crumbled, while his pledge for a War on Drugs horrifyingly materialized, with up to 29,000 people dead and up to 32,000 children orphaned from the “war” (Tostevin and Morales 2019; Pangilinan et al. 2021; David and Mendoza 2018). A climate of violent impunity took hold across the country, yet Duterte consistently held majority approval in the polls. From the beginning of his presidency, it was evident that the prospects for enduring policies promoting economic justice, social welfare, and environmental sustainability would be extremely difficult to attain, as Duterte assembled a highly contradictory and ideologically polarized presidential cabinet. To head government agencies that plan the country’s macro-economic and energy policies, Duterte appointed right-wing neoliberal technocrats, while leftists and progressives—including some affiliated with the Philippine Maoist movement—were appointed to head the departments of the environment, social welfare, and labor. Meanwhile, Duterte promoted Ronald “Bato” (“Rock”) dela Rosa, his chief of police of Davao City from his days as mayor, to become the chief of the

Philippine National Police (PNP); dela Rosa effectively scaled up his and Duterte's campaigns of extra-judicial violence and death squads in Davao City to the national level, overseeing Duterte's horrifying war on drugs, which the International Criminal Court (ICC), since 2021, has been investigating for crimes against humanity (with the possibility of arrest warrants issued by the ICC for dela Rosa, Duterte, and other architects of the genocidal drug war). Within this contradictory administration, environmentalist Gina Lopez attempted to fight for policies and projects that promoted environmental protection and rehabilitation. Within a year, however, by the summer of 2017, all of the progressive and leftist members of Duterte's cabinet were removed by the Philippine Congress' Commission on Appointments (CA), including Lopez.

Following the removal of the progressive members of Duterte's administration, the Philippine government fell even deeper into a dictatorial abyss, with Duterte's government creating an "Anti-Terrorism Council" (ATC) in 2020 with the power to order mass arrests, without warrants or due process, of people claimed to be terrorists by the ATC. Filipino human-rights advocates, as well as international observers in the UN Human Rights Council and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), have condemned the Anti-Terrorism Council as a "de facto junta" and the law that produced the ATC as a "stealth declaration of martial law" (Gavilan 2020; *International Commission of Jurists* 2022). The ATC has already engaged in the "red-tagging" (labeling as communist rebels, without any substantive proof or any unlawful behavior committed) of activists, journalists, human-rights attorneys, labor-union leaders, and opposition politicians, several of whom have already been injured or murdered by unknown assailants. With the end of Rodrigo Duterte's presidency in 2022, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr.—the son of Ferdinand Marcos, the Philippines' massively corrupt and violent dictator from 1965 to 1986—won the presidency in May of 2022. During his campaign, Bongbong Marcos and the Marcos family engaged in outrageous historical revisionism. Specifically, he: whitewashed the horrific human-rights abuses of his father's dictatorship (during

which tens of thousands of people were arrested with no due process, tortured, assassinated, mutilated to death with their bodies displayed in public, and “disappeared”), swept under the rug his parents’ notorious corruption and massive theft and plundering of Philippine public funds (leading the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 1986 to declare Ferdinand Marcos the biggest thief in history for having committed the “greatest robbery of a government”), and redefined the period of the brutal and economically and ecologically disastrous dictatorship as a “golden era.”

To say the least, the prospects for climate justice—not to mention democracy, human rights, and social welfare—within such a contemporary political context look very bleak. Nonetheless, I contend that there are important social and political insights, as well as lessons regarding future forms of environmental governance, that could be gained from analyzing Gina Lopez’s 10-month tenure as the Philippines’ Environment Secretary. During those ten months, Lopez suspended the operations of numerous environmentally destructive mines across the country, and she vowed not to approve the construction of any new coal-fired power plants while launching audits of dozens of existing coal plants. She also engaged in environmental restoration projects with an aim of reducing poverty, and she had begun devising a plan to expand and transform the DENR’s role from being primarily preoccupied with regulation of the environment to becoming an active initiator and planner of sustainable economic development. Lopez also advocated for Indigenous peoples’ rights and instructed provincial branches of the DENR to consult directly with Indigenous groups. She even established a hotline in which ordinary Filipinos could call and report environmental violations being committed by mining, coal, and other companies. Finally, Lopez played what was probably the most decisive role in getting Pres. Duterte to have the Philippines sign the Paris Climate Accord in February 2017. Indeed, for the first 10 months of Duterte’s presidency, amidst a horrifying drug war and conditions of rising authoritarianism, the Philippines also got a glimpse of what their

environment and society might look like if they had a government fighting for climate and environmental justice.



February 3, 2017 — *ABS-CBN News*, the news broadcasting arm of the ABS-CBN Corporation, the largest media conglomerate in the Philippines (and owned by the prominent Lopez clan, of which Gina Lopez is a member) announces Gina Lopez's crackdown on illegal and destructive forms of mining in the Philippines. (Photo by *ABS-CBN News*)

The Makings of a Filipina Eco-Warrior

Regina Paz “Gina” Lopez had been known in the Philippines as the renegade daughter of the prominent Lopez clan, which owns the ABS-CBN network, the country’s largest media conglomerate (whose television channel was shut down in May of 2020 by the Duterte government).⁷² Born in 1953, Gina Lopez grew up in Forbes Park, a gated community (sometimes

⁷² The ABS-CBN channel was shut down by the National Telecommunications Commission, in a move reminiscent of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos’ closure of ABS-CBN following his declaration of martial law in 1972. The media

referred to as the “Beverly Hills of Manila”) that is home to some of the richest families in the Philippines, along with foreign diplomats and businesspersons.⁷³ After attending private Catholic elementary and high schools as well as college in Manila and then in the United States, she decided to give up her privileged life as a member of one of the country’s wealthiest and most famous families, instead spending two decades of her life abroad as a yoga missionary in India, Zambia, Portugal, and other countries in Africa and Europe. Under the auspices of the international spiritual and social organization *Ananda Marga* (“Path of Bliss”)—which was founded in the state of Bihar in India in 1955, but with branches subsequently established worldwide—Lopez lived an extremely austere lifestyle, teaching yoga and doing community service for the poor. Reflecting on her time with the spiritual and social welfare organization, Lopez stated, “When I look at it now, I think what happened is the experience of the divine took over me. At the end of the day, I left home and spent the next 20 years of my life in Ananda Marga” (Sicam 2019).

Though Lopez had initially vowed to remain a yoga nun for the rest of her life, she ended up falling in love with her guru Sona Roy, and the two decided to relocate to the Philippines, got married, and had two children. Lopez’s return to the Philippines was a surprise to her own family; according to her brother Ernie Lopez, they “did not know whether she was dead or alive for 20 years” (Placido 2019). Nonetheless, after a challenging process of reverse culture shock, Gina was able to rekindle her relationships with her family and reestablish a life for herself, her husband, and her children in Metro Manila. She later got a master’s degree in development management from the Asian Institute of Management in Makati City, and then she became the director of the ABS-CBN

network, however, remains very popular, having migrated to other channels like The Filipino Channel (TFC, a global channel viewable worldwide through subscription) and online media platforms. The majority (75%) of Filipinos were polled by the Social Weather Stations in July of 2020 as having wanted the ABS-CBN television channel in the Philippines re-instated (Yap 2020).

⁷³ The exclusive community of Forbes Park was named after William Cameron Forbes, an American banker and former governor-general of the Philippines in the 1910s during the US colonial period.

Foundation during which she founded *Bantay Kalikasan* (Nature Watch), which became the environmental arm of the foundation. It was during her time as head of the ABS-CBN Foundation that Gina Lopez gained both national and international acclaim as an effective environmental leader. Lopez said that her work with her family’s non-profit foundation awakened the eco-fighter within her: “The warrior me emerged” (Sicam 2019). She led several key environmental restoration projects in Metropolitan Manila, including the reforestation of the La Mesa Watershed and the rehabilitation of the Pasig River.

The magnitude of Lopez’s ecological rehabilitation initiatives should not be underestimated. Metro Manila is one of the most polluted urban regions in the world; both the Pasig River and its mouth, Manila Bay, are two of the most polluted bodies of water on Earth, and Manila also has some of the worst air quality in Asia and the world. Due to uncontrolled overdevelopment and massive urban sprawl in the National Capital Region (NCR) of Manila—with a population of almost 15 million people across 16 cities (including the capital of Manila, the financial powerhouse of Makati, and Quezon City, the country’s most populous city), not to mention the combined population of over 20 million people in the “Greater Manila” region, which includes highly urbanized provincial regions just outside of the NCR of Manila—the megacity is overwhelmed by staggering traffic, severe air pollution, and overcrowded districts, including gated communities and informal urban settlements. Metro Manila also has a serious “garbage crisis,” manifested through an overflow of plastic trash, contaminated and hazardous waste, and other garbage into the urban region’s already overloaded landfills, streets, and waterways and, ultimately, into the world’s oceans (with thousands of tons of trash actually having been exported to the Philippines from developed and industrialized countries, including the United States, Canada, South Korea, and Australia).⁷⁴ This

⁷⁴ Many environmental activists, scholars, and politicians have noted how the global trade and movement of the world’s plastic garbage, hazardous waste, and other forms of trash have patterned onto historical geo-colonial relations between the Global North and South. Such “toxic/waste colonialism” (Kitt 1994; Pratt 2010; Stoett and Omrow 2021) has

daunting ecological situation has often produced a debilitating effect on many Manileños and visitors to Metro Manila. The daily experience of navigating severely polluted rivers, an overflow of garbage, and heavy, oppressive air pollution has led some environmentalists and environmentally-inclined citizens to effectively “give up” on trying to ecologically rehabilitate Manila and to, instead, focus on environmental issues in the rural and provincial areas across the extraordinarily biodiverse and mineral-rich island country. Gina Lopez, however, refused to “give up” on either Manila or anywhere else in the Philippines.⁷⁵

Lopez’s large-scale rehabilitation of the La Mesa Watershed has left a vital, enduring legacy, as the watershed provides drinking water for over 12 million people in the Metropolitan Manila region. The areas surrounding the watershed had faced major deforestation in prior decades, thus threatening the region with flooding crises, mudslides, and water pollution. Lopez led the planting of over one million trees, and she also established the beautiful La Mesa Dam Ecopark in Quezon City, which has helped to fortify the La Mesa Watershed’s status as a nature reserve and thus preserve the water supply for millions of Manileños, while also reminding Filipinos of the beautiful nature that

turned several Southeast Asian countries, including Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines, into “dumping grounds” for the trash of the Global North. The European Union is the largest exporter of plastic trash, and the United States is the largest single-country exporter (Leung 2019). In 2019, the Philippine government sent 69 containers of trash (that had been exported and falsely labeled by Canadian company Chronic Plastics, Inc. as recyclable plastics) back to British Columbia (after Pres. Duterte threatened to go to war with Canada if the trash did not leave Philippine soil). In 2020, moreover, the Philippines sent 80 containers of contaminated waste back to South Korea. Despite such moves to stand up to the waste colonialism of the developed world, the Philippines remains a major destination for industrialized countries’ trash, with, for example, over 1 million kilograms of plastic waste imported from the United States in 2020. The PMCJ-aligned organizations EcoWaste Coalition and Greenpeace Philippines have been at the forefront in calling for the Philippine government to declare an absolute ban on all imported waste, and for the Philippines to transition into a “Zero Waste Society.” Marian Ledesma of Greenpeace Philippines has stated, “The fact that we continue to be a dumping ground of countries like the US shows that the government has not been doing enough to stop waste imports: the sad reality is that we don’t have strong policies in place to prevent it” (*Greenpeace Philippines* 2020).

⁷⁵ In important ways, Gina Lopez didn’t succumb to a certain cultural politics of nature and the environment that pits “nature” against human “culture,” “society,” and “civilization.” In mega-urbanized Manila, it has become commonplace to speak of “nature” as existing in basically the rest of the Philippines; the tourist industry touts the “beautiful nature” that one can discover throughout the country’s lush tropical rain forests, clean, flowing rivers, cool mountainous landscapes, and majestic white-sand beaches. Lopez’s vision, however, did not even consider “giving up” on Manila; she saw Metro Manila as being full of nature and biodiversity, but that it took the combined efforts of civil society and the government to rehabilitate the ecological life of Manila. In another presentation that she gave on her vision for sustainable development that she called the Area Development Approach, Lopez stated, “Ecology is not just land, air, and water; it’s land, air, water, and people” (Ctanj 2016).

exists in heavily urbanized Quezon City, the largest city in Metropolitan Manila.⁷⁶ Later, from 2010 to 2016, Lopez served as the chairperson of the Philippine government’s Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission, during which Lopez led numerous restoration initiatives, through her program *Kapit Bisig Para sa Ilog Pasig* (KBPIP, “Linking Arms Together for the Pasig River”), to revive and clean up the notoriously dirty Pasig River, which was declared biologically dead in the 1990s. Though large swaths of the Pasig River remain heavily polluted, significant portions of the river were dramatically cleaned up and rehabilitated under Lopez’s leadership, with aquatic, bird, and plant life returning and the river itself flowing again. In 2018, the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission was internationally recognized as the winner of the Asia Riverprize award, and hundreds of “River Warriors” (a group of river clean-up volunteers formed by Lopez in 2010) continue to clean up portions of the Pasig River to this day (Portugal and Blaza 2021).

“The angels from heaven cannot come to Metro Manila because it’s too polluted”: Religion, Entertainment, and Politics in the Philippines

Gina Lopez’s 20-year experience of doing community service, performing spiritual exercises, and providing yoga instruction during her time with Ananda Marga left a profound imprint on her worldview and environmental advocacy. With regards to her time with Ananda Marga, she stated, “It was more like character formation, a cocooning. Now I feel I have a mission. In esoteric terms, it is bringing the word of light and love in this country, and doing this in service of the light” (Sicam 2019). Though she chose to leave her life as a yoga nun, Lopez continued, into her days as the Philippines’ powerful Secretary of the Environment, to promote a message of spirituality based on her belief in God’s grace and unconditional love. In an interview with broadcast journalist Tina Monzon-Palma, Lopez stated, “God exists. He does... And if you can go into the quiet of your

⁷⁶ Members of the Quezon City Council have advocated to rename the La Mesa Dam Ecopark after Gina Lopez (*ABS-CBN News* 2019).

heart, you will feel that love is with you every micro-second of the day. It's there for you unconditionally. And may it continue to hold us. And may it continue to nurture us and propel us into creating a piece of heaven in this country" (Caluag 2019). She would meditate every morning and do yoga, and she constantly spoke of the need to spread God's light and love in the world. She would also not infrequently break out into song or lead people in prayer during meetings and interviews, whether in the DENR building, when on official trips to different provinces of the country, or even during press conferences. In certain important ways, Gina Lopez was a spiritual leader, as much as she was an environmental warrior and national political player, and this spirituality resonated deeply with millions of Filipinos (albeit in complicated ways). At the same time, Gina Lopez wasn't just any spiritual guru who was preaching a message of love, light, and care for the environment; she was also a member of the wealthy and powerful Lopez clan. Combined, Lopez's strongly spiritual background as well as her membership in one of the Philippines' most elite families played pivotal roles in both her rise to national political prominence and her determined and fearless style of governance. This style of governance, however, both enhanced Lopez's power in the eyes and hearts of many in the Philippine public as much as it exposed her to attacks from the Philippines' ruthless, multi-billion dollar mineral-extractive and fossil-fuels industries.

Lopez's governing style, and her general persona, were a striking departure from the more technocratic approach to governing and public relations that is typical of many Philippine presidential cabinet secretaries. Lopez's critics in the mining industry would often make statements about how they felt that she expressed a strong "passion" on the issues but questioned or outright denied her credentials and capabilities to do the job.⁷⁷ In spite of this dismissiveness, condescension,

⁷⁷ Ronald Recidoro, vice president for legal and policy of the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) stated, "We want to be clear: the issue here today is not the mining industry. The issue is whether or not Secretary-designate Lopez is the right person to head the DENR. We ask: Is she competent to lead the DENR? Does she have the experience, education, impartiality, and temperament to accomplish the Department's objectives? To all these questions, we say no, no, and no" (Talabong 2022). Senator Panfilo Lacson (who has accepted campaign donations from mining companies,

and undertones of sexism from the mining industry, Lopez proved to be fully capable of defending her record with her strong technical and ecological knowledge of the impacts of open-pit mining and other polluting industries on the environment and natural resources of the country. The breadth of her knowledge on mining in the Philippines impressed members of Congress (including some with ties to the mining industry), staff within the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), other members of Duterte’s government (including former Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo, who has referred to Lopez’s environmental legacy as “unparalleled”), and millions of Filipino citizens who supported, if not closely monitored and avidly cheered on, Gina Lopez’s every move as DENR secretary.⁷⁸ Moreover, Lopez’s membership in one of the country’s most elite families allowed her to take on the mining elite and “coal-igarchy”⁷⁹ in a direct, personal, and quasi-familial way by framing her criticisms of individual corporate executives and politicians for their irresponsible and illegal environmental practices as “bad behavior” or as morally “disappointing” actions. In many ways, Lopez offered a refreshingly honest and candid style of governance as the Environment Secretary, impelled by an overarching sense of moral and spiritual duty to fight for the people and the environment. This religio-spiritual mission of Lopez

and who was also a member, back in the 1970s and 80s, of the Military Intelligence Security Group [MISG], one of the most notorious perpetrating agencies of torture during the Marcos Dictatorship) voted against the confirmation of Gina Lopez as Environment secretary, stating that “passion and enthusiasm do not automatically translate into fitness and qualification” (Ocampo 2017).

⁷⁸ Though the mining industry attempted to portray Lopez as an unqualified amateur during her reconfirmation process, Gina Lopez ended up giving a very different impression during her hearings for the Commission on Appointments in 2017. In a column for the Philippine news media company *Rappler* (which was under attack by the Philippine government throughout Duterte’s presidency), Walden Bello—an internationally renowned Filipino sociologist and scholar of globalization studies, as well as a former member of the Philippine Congress and a former candidate for Vice President—relayed how certain insiders in the Philippine government were impressed with the extensive range and scope of Lopez’s knowledge on the impacts of mining in the country. According to Bello, one member of Congress who is “close to the mining industry” said, “Her powerpoint presentation was very professional. I was impressed.” Moreover, a “DENR insider” said that “Sec. Lopez has seen more mines than most, if not all, of the past DENR Secretaries. The only DENR Secretary that may have seen more mines was Sec. Horacio Ramos, but this is because he is a mining engineer.” Bello also emphasized, “While she might not have a PhD in geology, it is difficult not to acknowledge that Lopez has done her homework” (W. Bello 2017b).

⁷⁹ The term “coal-igarchy” was developed by activists in the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice who have critiqued the oligarchy of political dynasties that control the Philippines’ coal industry (as well as Philippine politics and economics more generally).

crucially influenced both her conduct as the Environment Secretary and the widespread support she received.

Scholarship in Philippine Studies has long noted the intricate nexus between religion and politics in the Catholic-majority country with large Protestant and Muslim minorities. Though the Philippine constitution and the system of governance more broadly is ostensibly based on secular political principles, it is also undeniable that religious institutions and figures, particularly from the Roman Catholic Church, play a tremendous role in the country's politics. As one example from the end of the two-decade Marcos Dictatorship era, once Ferdinand Marcos lost critical support from Cardinal Jaime Sin, and with images of hundreds of veiled Catholic nuns protesting in the streets of Manila being broadcasted in media networks in the Philippines and worldwide against the excesses and political violence of the Marcos regime, it was only a matter of time before the People Power Revolution would sweep Marcos from power and restore democracy to the Philippines in 1986. The nonviolent People Power Revolution has also been referred to as a "Marian miracle" (Achutegui and Loyola School of Theology 1987). There is also a decades-long tradition of Christian-based environmentalism in the Philippines. Influenced by "liberation theology" teachings from Latin America, many "Basic Christian Communities" (BCCs) had formed in the Philippines beginning in the 1960s with teachings that promoted social justice and environmental principles that encouraged Filipinos to be good stewards of God's mountains, forests, lakes, rivers, and oceans. Thus, the notion that Filipino Catholics and other Christians should be responsible environmental stewards who take care of the Earth against over-extraction, destructive and poisonous mining practices, deforestation, and pollution has been deeply embedded in the moral and religious values of many Filipinos, despite the enduring power of the ideology of many in the country's business elite which prioritizes endless profit-making, over-extraction, and rampant use of harmful toxins which continue to decimate many of the country's forests, mountains, rivers, and lakes.

Furthermore, there has been a deep historical tradition in the Philippines of spiritual devotion to female religious figures, as well as respect for the powers of intercession and mediation of female and feminine religious practitioners. Deirdre de la Cruz, for example, has noted the “undue supremacy of Mary among Filipino Catholics” (2009, 460). This has roots in the pre-Hispanic period in the Philippines, as, at the time of the Hispano-Catholic conquest of the Philippine Archipelago in the 16th century, the figure of Mary, the Mother of God, most closely resembled popular spiritually revered feminine figures and deities throughout the island societies (Brewer 2004). The Spanish colonizers, after their violent conquest of the lowlands of Luzon island and the Visayan islands, found it expedient and effective to replace the divine feminine figures of spiritual adulation and devotion of the Indigenous societies with the Virgin Mary. Today, some of the most popular Catholic festivals in the Philippines are dedicated to Marian figures, such as the Bikol region’s Fiesta for Our Lady of Peñafrancia, the largest annual Marian gathering in Asia, with around a million pilgrims per year. Marian rosary and other devotional groups also abound among Filipino Catholics, both in the Philippines and the global Filipino diaspora.⁸⁰

Moreover, the figure of the *Babaylan* has also experienced a contemporary resurrection in popular appeal and inspiration. In the pre-colonial Philippines, women (including some trans women and feminine men known as *Asog*) were often the leaders of the religious life of many of the island societies, which practiced forms of Animism in which they offered respect and devotion to the spirits of nature and to the ancestors. These women and feminine shamans and healers held the power of mediation between the human and spiritual worlds, and they were highly esteemed in their societies. The patriarchal Spanish colonizers, and specifically the Spanish friars, however, waged a

⁸⁰ The unique power of Catholicism’s Mother of God is often emphasized in these groups, particularly through the New Testament story in which Mary implores Jesus to effect the miraculous provisioning of wine at the Wedding of Cana (de la Cruz 2009, 461-2). Though Jesus Christ performed the miracle, Mary is viewed as the primary force for and cause of the miracle, as it was through Her intervention, intercession, and mediation that Christ provided the wine. Thus, Filipino Marian devotees consistently pray to the Mother of God for Her guidance and merciful intercession.

systematic campaign of degradation and attack against the *Babaylan*, who they viewed as the greatest threat to the success of their coercive campaign of conversion to the colonial religion (Brewer 2004). Despite this historically traumatic and culturally genocidal attack on the women and feminine spiritual leaders of the Animist societies of the Philippines by the Spanish colonial regime, modern-day *Babaylan* practitioners and *Babaylan*-inspired activists and scholars continue to perpetuate the healing and shamanic practices of the ancestors, both among Philippine Indigenous nations and Filipinx social advocates in organizations like the California-based Center for Babaylan Studies⁸¹ and UP Babaylan (an LGBTQ student group at the University of the Philippines – Diliman). The *Babaylan* has also been gaining considerable popularity in Philippine and Filipinx diasporic popular cultures, particularly among members of Generation Z, through discussions and posts on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, and prominent films and television series, including the globally popular Netflix Original anime series *Trese* (2021).⁸²

This entire discussion, of both Filipino Catholic Marian devotion and the enduring and increasingly heightened awareness of the *Babaylan* and practice of *Babaylanismo* in the contemporary era, is meant to give a sense of the religio-spiritual landscape in which Gina Lopez operated. Though

⁸¹ According to the website of the Center for Babaylan Studies, “Philippine indigenous communities recognize a woman (or man) as a Babaylan, someone who has the ability to mediate with the spirit world, has her own spirit guides, and is given gifts of healing, foretelling, and insight. She may also have knowledge of healing therapies such as hilot, arbularyo. She is a ritualist, a chanter, diviner. She has the gift of traveling to the spirit world or non-ordinary states of reality in order to mediate with the spirits. Babaylans are called by other names in the other languages of Philippine indigenous communities: Mombaki, Dawac, Balyan or Balian, Katalonan, Ma-Aram, Mangngallag, Mumbaki, Mambunong... In contemporary contexts, whether in urban Philippines or in Filipino diasporic communities, the Babaylan name is used by those who are inspired by the spirit in which the primary Babaylans carried out their work: the spirit of revolution against colonization, their belief in Sacred Wholeness, their love of mother country, the desire to serve their communities in achieving justice and peace... If we were to take a non-Filipino word to describe the various healers/spiritual practitioners, a ‘shaman’ would be the closest. Some of our members, in their writings for a Western/Westernized audience, sometimes interchange shaman, ‘shaman-priest,’ or ‘priestess’ but our members also strive to use the local term when referring to a specific person, region, or ethnolinguistic group. Otherwise, it IS indeed a challenge to use English terms to describe or explain our Philippine traditions.” (<https://www.centerforbabaylanstudies.org/history>, accessed on July 13, 2022)

⁸² These Gen Z-er Filipinx people who create videos, informative graphics, and other creative media on the *Babaylan*, and then post them on social media platforms like TikTok, often discuss the feminist and queer liberatory potentials of knowledge of the *Babaylan* and of the relatively egalitarian gender and sexual relations of precolonial Philippine cultures more broadly. Many of these social media content creators also use their discussions of the *Babaylan* to promote both Indigenous ecological knowledge and Indigenous spiritual traditions.



Gina Lopez promoted meditation and other spiritual exercises through health and wellness seminars and other events, including this seminar in June of 2018. (Photo by *ABS-CBN News*)

Lopez’s background in yogic missionary activity and other facets of her spiritual praxis could certainly be viewed as an unconventional form of spirituality in the Catholic-majority Philippines, at the same time, there were many aspects of Lopez’s spirituality that resonated deeply in contemporary Philippine culture. Lopez’s constant references to spreading love and light and doing God’s work of caring for the environment reverberated among millions of Filipinos in the Catholic Church and beyond. Moreover, yoga as a practice itself is gaining popularity among Filipinos of different religious backgrounds (Rocamora 2018), and meditation, spiritual exercises, and charismatic religious movements (such as El Shaddai, the largest Philippine Catholic charismatic movement) are increasingly popular among Filipino Catholics. Thus, a woman like Gina Lopez

spreading the message of God’s love and light (by leading Filipinos in prayer and doing God’s work of protecting the environment and taking on the climate crisis) was not anomalous, unprecedented, or incongruent with Philippine religious and spiritual cultures; religio-spiritual figures akin to Gina Lopez are, in fact, ubiquitous in families and communities throughout the Philippines. Whether analogous to a Marian devotee or a modern-day *Babaylan*, Gina Lopez’s spirituality and religiosity, though eclectic, also resonated and, in many ways, “fit” in the Philippine context.⁸³

In addition to the strong intersection between religion and politics in the Philippines, scholars have also noted the great connection between entertainment and politics in the country. Anna Cristina Pertierra argues that, in contemporary Philippine political culture, “policies and processes have been less electorally effective than the glitz of showbusiness and success of personal charisma” (2017, 219). Indeed, with millions of Filipinos hooked on an incredibly popular array of television melodramas (known as *teleserye* in the Philippines, analogous to the *telenovelas* of Latin America or the *sinetron* of Indonesia), it is often noted how Philippine politics resembles a giant national soap opera, with various politicians playing the roles of heroes, villains, action stars, and so forth.⁸⁴ Though Pertierra centers her analysis on Rodrigo Duterte and how his controversial, strongman, and bombastic image proved to be highly effective in the country’s national political melodrama, much of this can also be applied to Gina Lopez. As the renegade daughter of the media-powerhouse Lopez clan—who abandoned her lifestyle of wealth and privilege to pursue an austere

⁸³ Thank you to comments from Laurie Hart, Hannah Appel, Sherry Ortner, and others on a draft of this chapter that I presented at a session of the Culture, Power, and Social Change (CPSC) series held by the sociocultural subfield of UCLA’s Department of Anthropology on November 4, 2021—specifically regarding comments on Gina Lopez, religion, and politics in the Philippines.

⁸⁴ Examples abound of film stars, musicians, and other celebrities becoming politicians, and of politicians with great celebrity power, in the Philippines. The great charismatic celebrity power of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos as a politician-beauty queen power couple played a powerful role in Ferdinand’s successful presidential candidacy and eventual establishment of his brutal dictatorship, and the enduring celebrity power of the Marcos family—including president-elect Bongbong Marcos, his mother Imelda, and his sister Sen. Imee Marcos—helped sweep the Marcoses back into power in 2022. Top Filipina actress Vilma Santos, moreover, has served as governor of Batangas province and is currently a member of the Philippine Congress, and former action film star Joseph Estrada was elected president in 1998 (then deposed through a people power movement in 2001). Professional boxer Manny Pacquiao, meanwhile, was elected into Congress in 2010 and, since 2016, has served in the Senate; he unsuccessfully ran for president in 2022.

life abroad as a yoga missionary and nun, then suddenly re-appeared in the Philippines after two decades with her husband with whom she was pregnant, then became the powerful head of her family's NGO, the ABS-CBN Foundation, leading successful projects for environmental restoration—Gina's own life story was perfect fodder for the country's media and tabloid industries. Before she was even appointed by Duterte to be Environment Secretary, Gina Lopez's dramatic and fascinating life trajectory was already intimately known by millions of Filipinos who watched and observed, with great anticipation, Gina's dramatic transition from environmentalist leader from the elite Lopez clan to head of the country's powerful Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Thus, Lopez's status as an elite political celebrity, as well as her strong moral and spiritual conviction to protect the country's environment, struck a strong chord in Philippine society. Polls showed consistently high approval for both Lopez's performance as the country's Environment Secretary and for her reconfirmation as leader of the DENR, and in the 2018 senatorial elections, national surveys indicated that Gina Lopez could have had a strong chance of being elected into the Philippine Senate (Despite calls for her to run, Lopez chose not to enter the national Senate race in 2018) (*The Bohol Chronicle* 2017; Afinidad-Bernardo 2018; *Alyansa Tigil Mina* 2017). Many admired Lopez's fearless actions against the mining and coal industries, as much as those industries and their supporters feared and despised her. Ultimately, Lopez's moral authority and spiritual and religious affect, along with her elite position in society, all combined to make Lopez a formidable political force. As mentioned, in the Philippine context, Lopez's public display of religiosity and spirituality bolstered her image in the eyes of many Filipinos, and she would constantly reference her spirituality and her calling to do God's work of social justice when interviewed by members of the media. In one government hearing with transportation industry officials on how to reduce pollution in the country, Lopez narrated:

My meditation teacher, who unfortunately passed away last week, when he came to the Philippines and then afterwards, told me: “Regina”—that’s what he called me—“the pollution in Metro Manila does not allow the angels to land.” That’s what he said, you know. “*Yung mga anghel galing sa langit hindi puwedeng pumunta dito sa Metro Manila kasi masyadong polluted!*” (“The angels from heaven cannot come to Metro Manila because it’s too polluted!”).⁸⁵

Gina Lopez and the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice

As mentioned, Gina Lopez was already internationally renowned as an effectual and capable environmentalist leader, as much as she was also already feared and resented by the mining and fossil-fuels industries, by the time she was selected by Pres. Duterte to become the DENR secretary. Though her reputation in both the world of big green NGOs and the mining and extractive industries was already relatively solidified by the beginning of her secretaryship in July of 2016, her relationship with environmental justice, labor, peasant, democratic-socialist, and other organizations that comprise the Philippines’ grassroots progressive, leftist, and more militant activist communities was not necessarily as firmly established. Many of these groups openly supported Duterte’s selection of Lopez as DENR secretary, but, as movements that tend to always have a certain distrust and skepticism of politicians and political celebrities, they were also monitoring and scrutinizing Secretary Lopez’s conduct from the beginning of her secretaryship. When I began my field research with the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) in August of 2016, PMCJ and other environmental justice and allied groups were cautiously optimistic that Sec. Gina Lopez would take bold action on the environment.

In fact, a political-electoral network of environmental groups called the Green Thumb Coalition, of which PMCJ is a member-organization, had played an important role in lobbying for Duterte’s appointment of Lopez as head of the DENR. Nonetheless, PMCJ felt the need to exert

⁸⁵ Pazzibugan, Dona Z. 2016. “Bad Air Won’t Let Angels Land—Gina.” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 21, 2016. (<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/817488/bad-air-wont-let-angels-land-gina>, accessed on July 13, 2022)

pressure on Lopez to fulfill her mandate to turn the DENR into a government agency that promoted environmental and climate justice. Though PMCJ sought a positive and cooperative working relationship with Sec. Lopez, the group retained a certain level of skepticism and hesitation in the first couple of months of her secretaryship. On Tuesday, August 23, 2016, PMCJ and allied groups—including *Abyansa Tigil Mina* (Alliance Against Mining) and SANLAKAS—marched to the national headquarters of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (*Kagawaran ng Kapaligiran at Likas na Yaman*) in Quezon City to both meet with Sec. Lopez and to bring up concerns that PMCJ had that Lopez had decided to retain Undersecretary Leo Jasareno in her administration. During the previous presidential administration of Pres. Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino (2010-16) of the Liberal Party (LP), Jasareno (who had been head of the DENR’s powerful Mines and Geosciences Bureau), and other bureaucrats in the DENR, had been the source of frustration for PMCJ and other environmental groups for failing to enforce regulations that would have prevented mining companies from despoiling environments and violating the rights of rural and Indigenous communities.

As mentioned, for decades, the DENR has been the source of tremendous anger and frustration for environmentalists, Indigenous peoples, and other civil-society organizations for effectively greenlighting over-extraction, ecological degradation, and human-rights violations committed by mining, logging, and coal companies against Indigenous and rural communities throughout the Philippines. Activist groups have held demonstrations against the DENR for decades, with the marches often ending at the front gates outside of the DENR’s office in Quezon City, without an opportunity to speak with the Secretary (*Kalibim*) or other officials in the DENR. This time, however, the security guards opened the gates, and dozens of PMCJ members and allies marched into the office building. PMCJ members held signs in English and Filipino calling for the protection of the environment, respect for the rights of rural and Indigenous communities,

rehabilitation and compensation for mining-affected and coal-affected communities, and major structural reforms and resetting of priorities of the DENR.

They also placed photos of the faces of DENR bureaucrats, including Jasareno's, on the floor of the entrance to the building next to a blue barrel labeled "*nabubulok*" (decomposable or compostable), signifying the activists' desire for those DENR officials to be "thrown away" or removed from their posts. Once inside the building, we were invited to go up to the second floor to a conference hall where we waited for the Secretary to arrive. After a few minutes, Sec. Lopez entered, along with some of her assistants. As is customary with many members of the Filipino elite, she primarily spoke in English (with a few Tagalog phrases here and there), while the activists spoke in either Tagalog or "Taglish" (Tagalog mixed with English).⁸⁶ These socio-linguistic dynamics, along with Gina Lopez's established position as a Lopez and as a presidential cabinet secretary, worked to place Sec. Lopez in a hierarchical position above the activists. Though such a situation of hierarchy and elitism was certainly not unexpected in the Philippine context, these activists (many of

⁸⁶ The US colonial government (1899-1946) created a public education system in the Philippines with English as the language of instruction. Despite calls from some Filipinos for the colonial education system to also include instruction in Philippine vernacular languages, the US colonial authorities banned the teaching of indigenous languages and promoted American English instead. In 1935, when the Philippines became a US commonwealth, Tagalog was selected as the national language of the Philippines by Pres. Manuel Quezon, to the dismay and anger of members of other ethnolinguistic groups, including Cebuanos (whose language [also called *Bisaya*] was the most widely spoken in the islands at the time), Ilocanos, and others. In the 1970s, the dictator Ferdinand Marcos renamed the national language from Tagalog to "Pilipino." Then, in 1987, the new Philippine constitution, created after the fall of the Marcos Dictatorship, declared the national language to be Filipino. Filipino is based on Tagalog, but the national language has been meant to include words and phrases from the over 160 other languages in the islands. However, though the national language is Filipino, English also remains an official language in the Philippines, with many activities in business, government, and media conducted in English (or mixed between English and Filipino), and with Filipino students across the country provided with a bilingual education in which STEM courses are taught in English and history and literature courses in Filipino. The phenomenon of "Taglish" (Tagalog heavily mixed with English) has emerged in Manila and among many university-educated Filipinos (as well as other linguistic variants in which Philippine languages are heavily mixed with English). Another linguistic variant, often called "Engalog" (or Englog), is essentially English with a few words or phrases of Tagalog thrown in. The most wealthy and elite Filipinos are known for often primarily speaking in English or Engalog. Some Filipino linguistic nationalists and anti-imperialists decry the culturally violent legacy of American English, one of the Philippines' former colonial languages (along with Spanish and Japanese), while seeking the teaching of foreign languages more generally in the country (with English as one among several foreign languages), rather than solely prioritizing the teaching of English. The BPO processing and call centers industries, and the export of millions of Filipinos abroad as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who then collectively send billions of dollars in annual remittances back to the Philippines, among other things, however, have gone against the favor of these linguistic nationalists' goals (Tupas 2016; 2004; Abinales and Amoroso 2005).

whom were veterans of the progressive and radical underground opposition to the brutal dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos) came from progressive, socialist, and/or communist traditions, many of which favor more radical forms of democracy and democratic interpersonal dynamics. Immediately, the activists began calibrating how they would need to interact with Sec. Lopez.



August 23, 2016 — The Philippine Movement for Climate Justice and allied activist groups march into the Quezon city office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, right before their meeting with the new Secretary of the DENR Gina Lopez. (Photo by the author)

I myself wasn't sure of what to expect of Gina Lopez at first. I had learned of some of the *tsismis* (gossip) surrounding Lopez, her life history, and her famous and powerful clan, but it was my first time encountering her in person. At first, I almost felt like I was in the audience of the former ABS-CBN comedy and variety show *Wowowee*, as Sec. Lopez, like a talk-show or game-show host, with a big smile on her face, boisterously asked the crowd, "How are you feeling!? Are we good!?"

She asked some folks in the front row of the DENR meeting hall, “*Mga magsasaka ba kayo?* (Are you farmers?) Are you from the mining areas? I heard that you are mad.” Several of the people were indeed from mining- and coal-affected communities, and there were also activists and organizers and politicized members of people’s organizations (POs). She then had all of us engage in a prayerful moment of silence: “Let’s calm down, close our eyes, and feel the presence of God.” Many people closed their eyes and faced downwards during the moment of silence, and I followed suit. She then started spontaneously sharing a PowerPoint presentation about the success of certain eco-tourist initiatives that she had done, and she talked about how she had suspended the contracts of several large-scale mines that were in violation of the DENR’s regulations and Philippine law—which was indeed an impressive feat, as it hadn’t even been two full months since Lopez assumed the DENR secretaryship. Based on those audits that she began launching on her first day in office on July 1st, 2016, Lopez would go on to shut down 26 mines altogether.

It soon became clear, however, that the activists would need to deal with Sec. Lopez in a particular, highly personal way. When challenged by Mr. Gerry Arances (the former national coordinator of PMCJ and currently the head of the Center for Energy, Ecology, & Development [CEED]) on the issue of retaining Undersecretary Jasareno in her administration, she seemed to take it very personally, stating, “Do you trust me? Do you love me? Then you must trust my judgement!” I was honestly taken aback with how personally she was reacting to the understandable problems that the activists had with Jasareno. It seemed like she was trying to talk as much as she could about her eco-tourism initiatives and mining-suspension orders so as to avoid discussing the issues with which the groups had a problem, namely, her retention of Jasareno and others in her administration. Atty. Aaron Pedrosa, a member of PMCJ and the secretary-general of SANLAKAS, then stood up and also asked her why she included Jasareno. Mr. Val Vibal, a campaign officer of *Ahansa Tigil Mina* (Alliance Against Mining) and a member of *Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino* (BMP, the

Solidarity of Filipino Workers), also expressed disappointment with the DENR officials in question for not answering for the negative things that had happened to mining-affected communities during the previous administration.



August 23, 2016 — Atty. Aaron Pedrosa, co-chair of PMCJ’s Energy Working Group and Secretary-General of SANLAKAS, questions why DENR Sec. Gina Lopez retained certain DENR officials deemed to have problematic performances in the previous presidential administration. (Photo by the author)

Due to the activists’ opposition to the retention of the officials, the situation felt uncomfortable and somewhat tense. Lopez implored the activists to accept her judgment on retaining the officials: “Jasareno is a good man. He is not corrupt. Let me do my job. I have the right to appoint who I want. He has helped me close down several mines already.” (As it turned out, Undersecretary Jasareno did perform in ways that were deemed satisfactory by many of the activists as the months went on, despite their considerable dissatisfaction with his performance under the previous administration. Jasareno also later ended up being targeted with the wrath of the mining industry for his role in effectively carrying out Sec. Lopez’s crackdown on illegal mining practices, with representatives of the industry essentially lashing out at him during Lopez’s reconfirmation hearings in May of 2017 [Bello 2017]).

Later on, Sec. Lopez was presented with a *pasalubong* (gift) of a woven cloth from an Indigenous group. The entire meeting, however, seemed to have ended a bit awkwardly because of

the rather tense exchanges that occurred earlier when the activists challenged Lopez about her retention of the prior DENR officials. Afterwards, some of the activists expressed their disappointment that Lopez retained Jasareno, but they also felt somewhat satisfied that their opposition to his retention was at least voiced. I was, overall, perplexed by my first in-person observation of Sec. Lopez. She seemed unnecessarily defensive toward the activists' bringing up their issue with the retention of the DENR officials; the way she seemed to have taken it as practically a personal attack made me question how she would deal with multiple different constituencies, including those who she purported to represent and with whom she was most in consonance, in the future. On the other hand, I also found her candidness and honesty to be refreshing, in certain ways; she seemed like a genuine person who wore her heart on her sleeve, and she did not perform her role as the DENR secretary with the remote managerial and technocratic style of other secretaries. I had the sense that she was an authentic person who truly cared about people and the environment, and that her heart was in the right place, but I remained uncertain as to how the climate and environmental justice activists' relations with her would develop.

The Philippines' "Eco-Warrior" Secretary of the Environment

As it turned out, over the next 10 months, Sec. Gina Lopez ended up becoming an extraordinarily powerful force fighting for environmental and social justice through her actions against the mining and coal industries and her attempts to support sustainable livelihoods and to fight poverty in the country. During her 10-month tenure as the Environment secretary (July 2016 to May 2017), Lopez shut down 26 of the country's 41 mines for failing to pass environmental audits (by causing environmental damage to and the poisoning of watersheds, coastal waters, and farmlands), and she canceled 75 proposed mining contracts. Highly significantly, she implemented an absolute ban on open-pit mining, which is considered to be the most destructive form of mining;

this was one of Lopez's greatest legacies for national environmental governance in the Philippines. Moreover, Lopez launched audits of the Philippines' existing coal-fired power plants, and she vowed not to approve Environmental Compliance Certificates (ECCs) for any new coal plants, which placed her on a collision course with Sec. Alfonso Cusi, Duterte's appointment for the Secretary of the Department of Energy (DoE), who favored coal-power expansion. While Sec. Cusi was in charge of the country's energy policy and had the power to develop and promote coal-power projects, Sec. Lopez had the authority to nullify, suspend, and/or audit energy projects deemed in violation of the country's environmental regulations, and she regularly used her authority to attack coal power and promote clean and renewable energy instead.

It became commonplace for PMCJ to regularly laud the Environment Secretary for her strong action in favor of the environment while launching protests against the Energy Secretary for his pro-coal policies, along with condemnations of the coal and mining industries more generally. On September 30, 2016, for example, PMCJ staged a "flash mob" outside of the building of the Department of Energy in the Metro Manila city of Taguig (home to a highly modernized district called Bonifacio Global City), catching the security guards off-guard as the activists held banners and protest signs and used a bullhorn to make speeches calling on the DoE to end its promotion of coal plants and coal mining in the Philippines. PMCJ also consistently defended Sec. Lopez from attacks from the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP). On September 30, the same day as the flash mob action outside of the DoE headquarters, PMCJ released a press release condemning the "hostile reaction" of the COMP to the decision of the DENR, three days earlier on September 27, to recommend for suspension the mining permits of 20 mining firms for noncompliance with environmental standards (in addition to 10 other mining firms already suspended by Lopez). The 20 companies were given seven days to answer for their noncompliance. Ronald R.S. Recidoro, COMP's Vice President for Legal & Policy, accused the DENR of "suddenly chang[ing] the rules of

the game” and “setting a trap for suspension,” but PMCJ’s National Coordinator Mr. Ian Rivera fired back at the Chamber of Mines:

The DENR, under new leadership with Secretary Gina Lopez, is merely enforcing already existing laws and guidelines on responsible mining. These big mining oligarchs have been skirting the law for years under previous administrations, and now they are finally being told to follow the policies that have long been in place. Big miners need to obey the law or be shut down.

PMCJ members also emphasized the calls from groups like *Alyansa Tigil Mina* (Alliance Against Mining) to repeal the neoliberal and environmentally damaging Mining Act of 1995 and, instead, promote the passage of the Alternative Minerals Management Bill (AMMB) in the Philippine legislature.⁸⁷



September 30, 2016 — PMCJ holds a “flash mob” outside of the office of the Philippine Department of Energy (DoE) in Taguig City, Metro Manila, calling on DoE Sec. Alfonso Cusi to end his expansion of coal power in the country, and to solely promote renewable-energy generation instead. PMCJ National Coordinator Ian Rivera speaks with a bullhorn. (Photo by the author)

⁸⁷ The policy and practice of “alternative minerals management” is meant to be a sustainable and democratic alternative to destructive forms of mining. It would allow for the management of the Philippines’ mineral wealth to be done in an environmentally sustainable, democratically managed, and equitable manner, with revenues from the local use and management of mineral resources being shared for the benefit of all in the community, rather than large mining firms and foreign corporations despoiling the environments from which they extract minerals, seizing the profits, then abandoning local communities to the now-contaminated and poisoned rivers and landscapes.

Under Gina Lopez's secretaryship, environmental and civil-society groups like PMCJ found that they had gained unprecedented access to the DENR and to the Secretary herself. PMCJ and other member-organizations of the Green Thumb Coalition came to regularly communicate with Sec. Lopez and other DENR officials, and they were able to get assurances from her that the DENR would prohibit the environmentally damaging practices of particular companies. In a December 2016 meeting with the Green Thumb Coalition, for example, Mr. Teodorico "Teody" Navea, the Coordinator of PMCJ's chapter in Cebu province, said to Sec. Lopez that, with regards to a coal-fired power plant being proposed by the Ludo Power Corp. in Cebu, "I am asking for assurance that they won't get an ECC [Environmental Compliance Certificate]." Gina Lopez stated, "They can do what they want, but they're not gonna get it. I don't like coal. It's dirty energy where the people suffer. The price of solar is going down. The moment you set up coal, you're stuck with it for 25 years. The moment you say yes, you can't let RE [renewable energy] in, 'cause it's taking up space [i.e., financial-material resources and literal geographic space are being squandered on coal power, whereas they should be supporting renewable-energy infrastructures instead]." In that same meeting, when Green Thumb Coalition members expressed concerns about "fake NGOs" and problematic local and provincial DENR officials, Lopez answered, "If you know any DENR official that is corrupt, let us know... Money is the root of all evil." PMCJ members, moreover, were able to have direct influence over the crafting of official DENR regulations on the environment. During one meeting with officials of the DENR's Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) on October 4, 2016, PMCJ members actively participated in the drafting of a memorandum order calling for a policy review of coal-fired power plants in the Philippines. PMCJ's Energy Campaigner Mr. Glenn Ymata and Atty. Aaron Pedrosa pushed for a moratorium on all coal-fired power plants in the country, and they were able to change the phrasing of some of the language in the memorandum order in an effort to prevent the coal companies from "taking advantage of the wording."

Finally, in February of 2017, Gina Lopez played a critical role in getting the Philippines to sign onto the Paris Climate Accord. For several months since the beginning of his presidency, Pres. Duterte had wavered on whether he would sign the climate pact. In July of 2016, he had indicated in speeches that he would not sign it, claiming that it would hurt the Philippines' path toward industrialization. In his State of the Nation (SONA) speech, Duterte said, "Addressing global warming shall be our top priority, but upon a fair and equitable equation. It must not stymie our industrialization" (Geronimo 2016a). Though acknowledging the problem of global heating, he claimed that it was not fair to hold a country like the Philippines, which has been responsible for less than 0.5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, to stringent climate standards, and that developed countries should be the ones to make the necessary sacrifices. In another speech, he specifically addressed the industrialized nations of the Global North: "You who have reached your peak and along with it spewed a lot of contaminants, emissions... Good for you. We are here; we have not reached the age of industrialization. We are on our way to it" (King 2016). Over the months, however, Duterte had made statements indicating that he might change his mind and that he needed to study the issue more, but no one really knew what he was ultimately going to decide.

Then in November of 2016, the United Nations was scheduled to have a climate-change conference in Marrakech, Morocco, and Duterte sent Gina Lopez to represent the Philippine government. Before her departure, Malacañang Palace released a statement saying, "Secretary Gina Lopez will attend the climate change meeting in Marrakech and will report back to the President, in order for him to have a better informed view regarding the Agreement" (Geronimo 2016b). Duterte himself stated, "I will follow what my advisers tell me. If Gina Lopez would tell me...it's good, and if the legal advisers say that [I'll sign the Paris climate agreement]" (Corrales 2016). In Marrakech, Lopez gave a speech at the UN climate summit, saying, "Should the change in the planet's temperature escalate to more than 1.5 degrees, we stand to lose whatever economic gains we make.

The planet simply cannot afford an indecisive ambiguity about what needs to be done. The situation is clear—anything more than 1.5 degrees will destroy possibilities for quality of life” (R. J. Karunungan 2016). She also specified, “We do not need to give up economic growth—from clean energy to sustainable transportation, to all facets of life. We need to have the courage to change the way we do things. We cannot and must not build an economy based on suffering.” Lopez also called coal power “archaic.”

By the time Lopez had returned to the Philippines, President Duterte had indicated that he would sign the Paris Climate Accord, which he officially did on February 28, 2017. It was then sent to the Philippine Senate which unanimously approved it. The Paris Climate Accord committed the Philippines to a 70-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, while also obligating developed and industrialized countries to commit \$100 billion annually through the Green Climate Fund to help developing countries like the Philippines transition to renewable-energy technologies (Ranada 2017). Philippine climate-justice advocates praised the Philippine government’s ratification of the Paris Climate Accord, but they have also criticized the Accord itself for not containing language that legally obligates states to comply with its terms—as well as punitive measures against states for noncompliance. Though the Paris Agreement has had significant symbolic—and some material—impacts, it remains legally nonbinding. Importantly, activists, civil-society organizations, and environmentalist politicians have been placing pressure on local, regional, and national governments worldwide to enact their own laws to enforce provisions of the Paris Climate Accord (Darby 2020).

Gina Lopez Uncovers the DENR’s Latent Power: The “Area Development Approach” and the DENR’s Constitutional Mandate for Sustainable Development

By October of 2016, PMCJ and other activist groups had seen enough evidence that Lopez was sincere and courageously taking on the Philippines’ mining and fossil-fuels industries. The

doubts and hesitation that several of the activists had of Lopez a couple months prior seemed to have evaporated, and by the time of the Green Thumb Coalition’s meeting with Lopez on December 21, 2016 in the office of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) in Quezon City, Lopez, upon arriving in the conference room to address the coalition, was greeted with a resolute standing ovation from the activist members of the coalition.⁸⁸ Lopez spoke of the accomplishments that the DENR had carried out over the previous six months, many of which the Coalition’s members had already intimately known. She then discussed how she had recently met with officials in the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), which was in the process of drafting the *Philippine Economic Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022*—the roadmap for the Philippines’ socio-economic growth and development for the next six years. Sec. Lopez indicated that NEDA gave her and the DENR “three pages” to contribute to the *Philippine Development Plan*, and that her goal was to inject the values of social justice and ecological integrity into the Philippine government’s vision for national economic development. She stated:

They always talk about money, GDP, etc., but the heart and soul of the Philippine Constitution is social justice and human development... Where the country should go can’t just be about the money; it has to be social justice. The performance indicators of social

⁸⁸ The discussion among the representatives of the Green Thumb Coalition member-organizations prior to Sec. Lopez’s arrival, however, was not without controversy. Though no one doubted the sincerity and integrity of Gina Lopez in fighting for social and environmental justice—as everyone, by that time, had been deeply impressed by the transformative policies that she had been implementing—the death toll of Pres. Rodrigo Duterte’s war on drugs had been getting staggeringly and disturbingly higher, with up to six thousand killings having taken place by December of 2016. PMCJ member and president of SANLAKAS, Manjette Lopez (unrelated to Gina Lopez’s family), expressed her shock, horror, and outrage at Duterte’s genocidal drug war (which she and other activists have denounced as a “war on the poor” and a “national policy to kill the undesired”), and she implored the Green Thumb Coalition to take a stance against the extra-judicial killings. Some members of the Coalition concurred that the drug war was horrifying, and that the groups should applaud the environmental justice policies enacted by the DENR while also clearly condemning the police and vigilante killings. Manjette Lopez, however, questioned whether the Coalition should be calling on Gina Lopez to resign as Secretary of the DENR so as to not enable the “greenwashing” of the human rights abuses of the Duterte regime. She also wondered how many more killings they could tolerate, pondering how they would react if the death toll reached 10,000 or even 50,000. While no one in the meeting room agreed with the drug war killings, it seemed that there was a largely unspoken consensus that Gina Lopez’s occupying of the DENR secretaryship was a chance of a lifetime for environmental justice policies to be implemented in the Philippines at the national level, and that, given the historically dismal state of affairs and potentials for the country’s environmental movement to have any influence in the national government, this chance could not be squandered. Nonetheless, I felt that Manjette Lopez’s powerful intervention, though unresolved, had an impact, as it poignantly questioned the ethics of working with a violent, fascistic, and authoritarian regime—even as positive transformational policies were being enacted by Sec. Lopez at the same time.

justice are happiness, health, economy, and environment—clean air, clean water. The indicator of social justice is the wellbeing of our people, [with] significant interest to the marginalized. The way to social justice is ecological integrity. You can't have social justice if you kill the air, the water, [and] the land of the country. The number one principle of social justice is ecological integrity.

Lopez then explained what she specifically proposed to NEDA and the rest of Duterte's presidential cabinet—namely, the Area Development Approach. Lopez stated:

You can't eradicate poverty if you don't develop the areas. We're 7,000 islands with biodiversity; we're not Singapore. In the Area Development Approach, if you wanna bring on social justice, you must develop each area of the country, [but you must] make sure that whatever is done there, the people are out of poverty.

She went on to specify the “Six Principles” in her Area Development Approach: (1) Ecological Integrity, (2) Protect and Build on our Biodiversity,⁸⁹ (3) Reef to Ridge (referring to the planting of mangroves and bamboo trees to maintain soil health near bodies of water), (4) Civil Society Partnerships, (5) Community Empowerment, and (6) Social Entrepreneurship. More broadly, Lopez's Area Development Approach sought to bring together, in 17 particular “Convergence Areas” in the country, the DENR and other government agencies, members of civil society, scholars and academics, the business community, Indigenous people, and other local community members to promote sustainable development in the Philippines based on organic agriculture and agroforestry, environmental protection tourism (eco-tourism), reforestation and other ecological restoration

⁸⁹ In emphasizing her plan to protect and build on the Philippines' extraordinary biodiversity, Lopez discussed various examples that she had encountered in the country of certain plants, fungi, and other organisms that scientists have recently been studying for their medicinal qualities. She mentioned how “we have a snail that emits a tool to catch fish, [and] the venom is better than morphine in removing pain without the side effects” (referring to a Philippine sea snail species whose venom could potentially be a painkiller for human beings with fewer side effects than morphine and opioids [*ScienceDaily* 2022]). Lopez also mentioned Philippine “shells and sponges that are effective in addressing cancer” (in reference to studies on the medicinal potential of some Philippine sponges that might inhibit the development of cancerous cell growths [Kelly et al. 2005]). She then touted the medicinal benefits of plants, vegetables, and fruits that are widely grown and used in the Philippines, including *malunggay* (moringa), *luyang dilaw* (turmeric), *tanglad* (lemongrass), and *kalamansi* (Philippine lime). Finally, she warned of the threat of biopiracy of the Philippines' biodiversity: “Some foreigner patented our *ilang-ilang* and our *sampaguital*! This is not good. We should preserve this” (referring to the French luxury fashion company Yves Saint Laurent's patenting of a perfume formula based on the extraction of the Philippine ylang-ylang flower that it had previously imported from the Philippines but subsequently farmed and extracted itself from its plantations in Africa [Zainol et al. 2011; *GRAIN* 1998]).

projects, and clean and renewable energy technology development. Lopez specifically stated that “the people with knowledge and experience from Green Thumb” should be involved.

Green Thumb Coalition members then expressed concerns to Sec. Lopez about strengthening the role of civil society in the Convergence Areas. Mr. Glenn Ymata of PMCJ, based on his observation of the planning of a Convergence Area in Batangas province, brought up his concern that the “participation of the civil society amounted just to proposing activities. [It was] limited to only those already within the program of the DENR and not what the CSOs [civil-society organizations] wanted to happen. They have many proposals, but only those within the budget of DENR will be implemented.” Mr. Gerry Arances of PMCJ and CEED also explained, “If we talk to you, it’s clear. But we’ve observed many barriers, like the River Basin Office; they’re not fully integrated with the whole process.” In response to these concerns from the activists, Sec. Lopez assured them of her commitment to a genuine inclusion of civil-society organizations (CSOs) in her Area Development Approach, but she also acknowledged that it would be a process, and that she wanted continued input and participation from the Green Thumb Coalition. She elaborated:

The DENR, for decades, has been a regulatory agency. *Ang buo ng isip nila ay* [Their entire way of thinking was] regulatory, and now I’m changing it to development. The reality is, I don’t have the staff. So we wanna take on partnerships with civil society. Call me up, [and tell me] ‘I wanna do Area Development here.’... *Kasama ang* Green Thumb [The Green Thumb Coalition is included]. I can’t change the organizations overnight; the way we do it is through partnerships. The ideal thing is if I had my own people...but with 20,000 employees, I can’t change everyone. Let go of the ones who are not good, and raise the level [of participation] of civil society.

Gina Lopez’s Area Development Approach isn’t just significant for revealing more about her vision for sustainable development in the Philippines. Significantly, it revealed the extent to which Lopez was pushing the limits of the assumptions of what a DENR secretary could or should be able to do, and it also spoke to the rising national political power of Gina Lopez herself. The mandate of the country’s Department of Environment and Natural Resources, as stipulated by the 1987 Philippine Constitution, is to take the lead on the “conservation, management, development,

and proper use of the country’s environment and natural resources.”⁹⁰ For decades, the DENR has ostensibly been focused on the protection, conservation, and management of the Philippines’ natural resources (though, as mentioned, it has so often allowed corporate polluters and despoilers of the environment to basically get away with their destructive, unsustainable, and polluting activities). Gina Lopez was reimagining and expanding the authority of the DENR by transforming the agency into not just a regulator of the environment, but as a prime active shaper of the economic development of the country.

Rather than simply waiting to see what businesses proposed and then approve, deny, or amend the proposals based on the DENR’s assessment of the potential impacts on the environment and communities—as well as waiting for NEDA and other state economic planning agencies to provide their vision for the economic development of the country—Sec. Lopez was forging a path that would have allowed her to lead the Philippines into a future of sustainable development. This was by virtue of the DENR’s constitutional mandate as the primary government agency responsible for the “conservation, management, *development*, and proper use” (emphasis added) of the Philippines’ natural resources. Had Gina Lopez—the most high-profile member of Duterte’s administration for the first year of his presidency (other than Ronald “Bato” dela Rosa, chief of the Philippine National Police and architect of Duterte’s horrific drug war)—managed to have been reconfirmed as the country’s DENR secretary beyond the 10 months that she had served, her national power could very well have rivaled that of President Rodrigo Duterte himself, even though she was serving under his administration.

⁹⁰ “The Department is the primary agency responsible for the conservation, management, development, and proper use of the country’s environment and natural resources, specifically forest and grazing lands, mineral resources, including those in reservation and watershed areas, and lands of the public domain, as well as the licensing and regulation of all natural resources as may be provided for by law in order to ensure equitable sharing of the benefits derived therefrom for the welfare of the present and future generations of Filipinos.” (“DENR Mandate, Vision & Mission” n.d.)

However, having even greater significance for the future of Philippine environmental governance, beyond Lopez's own extraordinarily increasing national power, was Lopez's revealing of the latent power of the DENR and the DENR secretary. Regardless of who the president is, any future Philippine Secretary of the Environment could attempt, should they decide, to direct the vast financial and bureaucratic resources of the DENR toward an active agenda of sustainable development—and not only environmental regulation (as important as that is). Lopez's Area Development Approach, or another version of it, could possibly be implemented in the future by the DENR. Philippine environmental activism, moreover, could potentially be directed at pressuring any future DENR secretary (again, regardless of who the president is) to fulfill the DENR's constitutional mandate for sustainable development.

The “Mining Oligarchs” and “Coaligarchy” Strike Back

In response to Lopez's swift and extensive actions against destructive mining and coal power, and to her overall plan to promote sustainable economic development in the Philippines that wouldn't rely on large-scale and open-pit mining or fossil fuel-burning, the Philippine mining and coal industries launched a fierce campaign against her. The “mining oligarchs” and “coal-igarchy” started flexing their power in the Philippine Congress (*Kongreso*) as well as in Duterte's presidential administration. Significantly, other prominent secretaries and members of Duterte's cabinet, along with powerful senators and congressmembers (like Rep. Ronaldo Zamora), have ties to the country's \$2-billion mining industry. In a secret, closed-door 16-8 vote, the 25-member Commission on Appointments (composed of members of both the Senate [*Senado*] and House of Representatives [*Kapulungan ng mga Kinatawan*]) rejected her continued appointment as Secretary of the DENR.

Lopez did not leave without biting back against the CA. In a press conference right after learning of her rejection by the CA, Lopez stated:

Hmmf! It is the constitutional right of every Filipino to a clean and healthy environment. It is our right in the constitution. And that is premier above all! And it is the duty—the duty!—of government to grant our people this right. And when people make choices influenced and based on business interests—transgressing the right of every Filipino to what God has given them—it is wrong. It is wrong. And I applaud the senators and the congressmen that have voted according to their conscience. What can I say about the ones...[that did not]? This was not my dream. It was a dream and a promise that we had for the country. And it's unfortunate that business interests have, in fact, run the day. Because that's really what it is. That's really what it is.

Later in her impromptu speech, Lopez further emphasized:

Who suffers if you kill the environment? It's the poor! And whose duty is it to protect our people? It's the government! And when you make decisions based on business interests, you have shirked your responsibility! You have lost the moral ascendancy to rule the government because, to you, business and money is more important than the welfare of our people!

At the end of her powerful and passionate speech, Gina Lopez started leading the reporters and others in the room in song, with Lopez reciting “I Believe I Can Fly” and having the crowd sing each verse after her (with several people willingly joining in the singing). After her dismissal from the DENR, Lopez returned to the ABS-CBN Foundation and hosted a popular show called *G Diaries* which promoted environmental conservation across the country. After a battle with cancer, she tragically passed away in August of 2019.

Lopez's Legacy: A Glimpse of a Climate Justice Future

During Gina Lopez's 10-month tenure as the Philippines' Environment Secretary, Philippine climate-justice activists, and the Philippine public more generally, got a glimpse of what a more sustainable and just future of the Philippines could look like, free from destructive mining practices and free from fossil fuels, while investing in development based on clean energy, sustainable farming, alternative minerals management, and ecological restoration. Despite portrayals by the mining and fossil-fuels industries of Lopez as an authoritarian leader who overstepped her bounds in shutting down dozens of the country's mines and rejecting numerous proposed coal power plant contracts, Lopez consistently and credibly pointed to the Philippine Constitution and existing laws



and regulations passed by the Philippine Congress as the ultimate source of her legal authority.

Lopez argued that she was simply following the law and fulfilling her mandate as DENR secretary to protect the environment and social welfare by properly regulating businesses' environmental practices.

Despite the hopes of the Philippines' powerful mining and fossil-fuels industries that Gina Lopez's tenure as the country's Environment secretary would remain an anomaly in the history of the Philippines' environmental governance, Lopez's example has left an important legacy for the Philippine environmentalist movement and for Philippine society and environment more broadly. Lopez demonstrated that, if the country's DENR secretary simply enforced the nation's existing environmental laws and regulations, destructive mines and coal operations can indeed be shut down, thus paving the way for environmental rehabilitation and development in favor of a green and renewable-energy economy. At the same time, the fact that she was removed from her position as

DENR secretary also points to the difficulty of sustaining climate-justice policies in the Philippine government; climate justice in the postcolonial Philippine state has clearly been difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, Gina Lopez's tenure and trajectory showed a certain path forward, but this needed to be in conjunction with the continuing social-movement organizing and work of groups like the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice.

Just as importantly, Lopez's legacy dealt a powerful blow to the prevailing logic, among the technocratic and business elite of the country, based on endless capitalist accumulation despite the social and environmental costs. The environmentalist and climate-justice movements in the country had made strategic alliances with Lopez in order to advance their agenda of transitioning the Philippines to 100% renewable energy and a sustainable and equitable pathway for development. Though this alliance, in many ways, bolstered the prevailing political system in the Philippines, which has long been based on elite power and privilege, the alliance also unprecedentedly allowed for the profound infusion, albeit briefly, of alternative values and ethical worldviews based on social justice, equity, and sustainability into the mindset of the Philippine government and national politics. Though Lopez made many bitter enemies in the nation's political and economic elite, she also gained the profound admiration of millions of people in all sectors and classes of Philippine society.

CHAPTER 5

The Philippines' Insurgent Ecological Citizens:

The Fight against “Demon” Coal Plants and the “Nuclear Mafia” in Bataan Province

On November 20, 2018, a public hearing was conducted in the *barangay* (village)⁹¹ of Biaan—located in the municipality of Mariveles in the Philippine province of Bataan—on whether the Philippine government’s Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) should authorize the construction of yet another coal-fired power plant in the province. There are already six functioning coal plants in Bataan province, with at least four more coal plants in the pipeline, and this would be the second coal plant in Mariveles municipality. Representatives of SMC Global Power, a subsidiary of San Miguel Corporation, made their case for the construction of the coal plant in the province which is already saturated with toxic emissions from coal burning, and “regulators” from the Philippine government’s Environment department asserted that the proposed coal plant deserved to be granted an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) because it allegedly passed the standards of the Philippine government’s Clean Air and Clean Water acts. After these presentations from the corporate and state representatives, members of communities living next to existing coal plants in other parts of Bataan province waged a powerful opposition against the proposed coal plant.

Members of Lamao Concerned Citizens, Inc. (LICCI), a group set up by the Tagalog and other Lowlander people⁹² of Lamao village (in the nearby municipality of Limay) where two San

⁹¹ The term *barangay* literally means village or district. It is also the smallest local government unit (LGU) in the Philippines.

⁹² During the 333 years of Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines, Hispano-Catholic colonial society was firmly established in the lowlands of the northern Philippine island of Luzon and the central Visayan islands. The Spaniards were never able to directly conquer or subdue the Indigenous peoples of the highlands of northern Luzon in the Cordillera mountain range or the Muslim-majority *Bangsa Moro* (Moro Nation) ethnic groups and other indigenous *Lumad* peoples in the southern island of Mindanao. During the US colonial period (1899-1946), the American colonial authorities, including the ethnographer Dean C. Worcester, built on the Spanish colonial ethno-religious categories for

Miguel Corp. coal plants are already operating, lambasted the proposed coal plant in Biaan village, Mariveles municipality. (LICCI is a member organization of the provincial-wide Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement, which itself is affiliated with both the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice [PMCJ] and the mass leftist coalition KILUSAN [*Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya* [Movement for National Democracy]). They shared stories of their own experiences living next to the SMC Global Power-owned coal-fired power plant in their *barangay* which started operating in 2017, as well as another coal plant that had been owned by Petron (another subsidiary of San Miguel Corp.) since 2013. They spoke about having to breathe in terribly toxic air on a daily basis, informing the crowd that it hurts to breathe (“*masakit huminga*”), that it’s painful in the nose and in the chest (“*masakit sa ilong*,” “*masakit sa dibdib*”), and that ever since the coal plant started emitting massive amounts of toxic fumes, their community (especially young children and elderly people) have been experiencing asthma attacks, difficulty breathing, dizziness, and terrible rashes. Members also testified that a baby grandchild of a fisher died while coughing, and elders are suffering from debilitating lung diseases, including lung cancer.

Meanwhile, fisher folk also reported that the fishing resources near the coal plant (where they had been fishing for decades) have drastically declined, and the fish that remain are poisoned (Studies on the health and ecological effects of coal burning have noted that the by-products released from the burning of coal—including arsenic, lead, and mercury—are among the most toxic substances in the world for human health). They also testified that there had once been abundant sources of clean water available—24 hours a day, 7 days a week—from the nearby stream, but now

describing human diversity in the Philippines and created “racial” classifications that defined the Lowlander Catholic-majority ethnic groups as more “civilized” than the Highlander Indigenous Cordilleran peoples, the Bangsa Moro peoples, and the Lumad peoples. Today, the Catholic-majority ethnic groups (Tagalog, Visayan, Ilocano, Bikolano, etc.) are considered the “cultural majority” of the Philippines, while the cultural minorities (or Indigenous peoples) include the Aeta, Cordilleran, Moro, and Lumad peoples. The Highlander-Lowlander dichotomy continues to inform ethno-racial, religious, and cultural relations (and tensions) to this day.

they have to obtain water rations and purchase expensive bottled mineral water because the coal plant has been devouring up the water supply. Meanwhile, people near the coal plant face demolition and displacement, large parts of the financial compensation that some families should have been given were swindled away, and they have said that only about 10 percent of the current work force in the coal plant are from the area, with the vast majority from other provinces. One woman, a fierce advocate against coal in her community and an officer of LICCI, referred to the coal plant in Limay municipality as a “*demonyo*”—a demon.



November 20, 2018 — A member of Lamao Concerned Citizens, Inc. (LICCI), a group affiliated with the Coal-Free Bataan Movement and the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), denounces the approval of a San Miguel Corp.-owned coal-fired power plant during a public hearing in *barangay* Biaan, Mariveles municipality.

After the hearing in the *barangay* of Biaan, the members of the people’s organization LICCI, who had provided effective and powerful testimonies against the proposed coal plant in Biaan village, returned to their own *barangay* of Lamao in Limay municipality. A few days later, they started being subjected to surveillance, intimidation, and subtle threats. Strange vehicles, including SUVs

with tinted windows, started coming to their homes, with unknown persons recording videos and taking photos of them, their family members, and their neighborhood. Unknown individuals also began asking their family members about their whereabouts and their daily schedules. This intimidation and surveillance left a chilling effect on the community, with the horrifying assassination (still tragically fresh in people’s minds and hearts) of the beloved Gloria Capitan in July of 2016—a fish vendor and grandmother who had galvanized her community in Bataan province against coal power for two years before she was killed by masked gunmen on motorcycle outside of her own home. Unfortunately, Gloria Capitan is only one of dozens of environmental advocates who have been murdered in the Philippines annually for decades. The environmental non-profit Global Witness ranked the Philippines as the deadliest country for environmental defenders in 2018, and the Philippines has consistently ranked as the most dangerous country for environmentalists in Asia in the NGO’s rankings since 2012. However, despite this intimidation and corporate terrorism against their community, these Bataan environmental defenders have continued their struggle to free their province of all the evils that the coal industry has brought, including toxic pollution, land grabbing and displacement, and deadly political violence and terror. They have continued to share their stories and stand up to the brazenly deceptive and violent corporate polluters of the Philippines’ coal industry.

This chapter evaluates the advocacy and organizing strategies of this primarily fisher folk and farming community in Bataan province within the rubric of “insurgent ecological citizenship.” Though this coal-affected community in Lamao village primarily consists of informal settlers who have been delegitimized by both the coal companies and representatives of the Philippine state for not holding title to their lands and for their socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, they have nonetheless waged a determined political struggle with unabashed citizenship claims to their rights to basic sustenance, land and shelter, healthcare, and clean air and clean water. I first discuss

the concept of “insurgent citizenship” and the movements of those who have been defined by the state and the powerful in society as illegal “squatters” (or other kinds of “illegal” residents or somehow non- or lesser citizens) to demand their right to live in dignity and obtain adequate housing, educational and economic opportunities, and so forth. I also argue for a more expansive conception of insurgent citizenship (in terms of both geographic scope and politico-legal situations). I then relate this to the literature on “ecological citizenship” and the notion that human beings have rights to a healthy, clean, and life-sustaining environment—and that the Earth itself has rights.

I combine these two discussions of citizenship by identifying the environmental and climate justice advocates of Bataan province as “insurgent ecological citizens.” These Bataeño insurgent eco-citizens, in turn, are situated within the geo-historical context of a province that has endured the trauma of large-scale political violence from colonial occupations and war (especially during World War II), the Marcos Dictatorship, and both historical and ongoing forms of corporate-state terror facilitated by the country’s fossil-fuels and extractive industries and their allies in the Philippine state, paramilitary forces, and the criminal underworld. At the same time, Bataeños can boast a powerful historical tradition of environmental, labor, and anti-authoritarian activism that played a key role in both preventing the only attempt (thus far) at establishing a nuclear power plant in the Philippines and in bringing down the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. In the contemporary era of the global climate crisis amidst the geological epoch of the Anthropocene, Bataan’s insurgent ecological citizens have derived power and inspiration from their province’s historical heritage of activism and resistance, as well as from their own claims to equal citizenship and human rights, as they face the forces of ecological injustice and corporate-state terrorism.

Insurgent Citizenship

A plethora of studies in anthropology, urban studies, and other fields have examined the sociocultural and other dimensions of “citizenship” beyond its mere formal governmental designations and purposes. Scholars have advanced theories of citizenship that account for the cultural and political practices of social movements and community groups that make rights claims and assertions of state responsibilities that have diverged from traditional understandings of what rights citizens have, what obligations states have to them, and the concomitant claims that citizens can make of the state. Critically, these “alternative” citizenship claims are based on the recognition of the often inequitable, if not fundamentally oppressive, nature of modern formal citizenship, despite its ostensibly democratic promise. Historically, civil-rights movements emerged to fight for formal equality within legal-constitutional systems that had officially entrenched forms of discrimination and bias into the law; however, even after obtaining formal equality, entire groups and categories of people were still unable to exercise their full participation in the nation-state to which they belonged. Indeed, regardless of officially possessing membership in a particular nation-state, a citizen of that nation-state is not guaranteed equal access to full membership in society. As Arjun Appadurai and James Holston (1998) remind us, “poor citizens who have formal membership in the state” are nonetheless “excluded in fact or law from enjoying the rights of citizenship and participating effectively in its organization” (4). Other people—including ethno-racial minorities, members of particular religious communities, women, and LGBTQ people—have also faced this issue of “differentiated citizenship.”

Thus, new citizenship claims have been made by members of these groups that have demanded their ability to fully exercise their rights and membership in the nation-state. In the process of asserting their equal rights like other citizens, they have often transformed both cultural and legal understandings of citizenship. Two theories of these kinds of “alternative” ways of understanding citizenship—insurgent citizenship and ecological citizenship—elucidate the practices

of socioeconomically disadvantaged residents of informal settlements and defenders of the environment, respectively, in the rights claims that they make with regards to the state. This chapter aims to demonstrate how a combined understanding of these conceptions of citizenship works to illuminate the environmental and climate-justice advocacy of Bataan province's insurgent ecological citizens.

In his conception of insurgent citizenship, James Holston (2009) has examined the phenomenon that developed during the latter part of the 20th century and beyond of the emergence of social movements—produced by residents of peripheral zones in urban areas (such as in São Paulo, Brazil where he conducted his ethnographic research) who have been marked as illegal “squatters” or other kinds of informal settlers—that have made claims on the state for their rights to adequate housing, education, livable wages, humane working conditions, healthcare, and dignity of life. Despite lacking official land titles, residents of these urban peripheries have nonetheless disregarded state assertions of their supposed illegality in land settlement and residence and demanded that state representatives refrain from any attempts at evicting them—and, on the contrary, that the state provide them with basic services that they are entitled to like other citizens. In making these demands, these citizens of the urban peripheries were aware that they were essentially being victimized by an unjust system that exploited and benefited from their labor, poverty, marginality, and precarious status, and that it was due to that system that they were pushed into the margins in the first place.

These insurgent citizens have expanded and reimagined the possibilities for democratic engagement in a system that has forcibly segregated them into peripheral regions while benefiting from their services and labor, only to subject them to eviction, demolition, and other modes of disposal. Holston primarily locates his discussion of insurgent citizenship in the cities of the Global South akin to São Paulo, and other scholars have also located forms of insurgent citizenship across

the urban Global South, including in Nairobi (Butcher and Apsan Frediani 2014), Cairo (Ismail 2014), and Mumbai (Knudsen 2007). In the Philippine context, movements of insurgent citizenship have emerged among informal workers and residents in urban regions across the country, from the cities of Metropolitan Manila to Cebu City. In 2017 in Bulacan province (considered part of the “Greater Manila” urban region of around 20 million people), members of the urban poor movement KADAMAY formed “Occupy Bulacan,” occupying 5,300 idle socialized housing units. Though denounced as an illegal action by Philippine government representatives, by the following year, the Philippine Congress passed a resolution recognizing the occupiers as the legal owners of the homes, possibly constituting “the largest organized takeover of public housing in the global South” (Dizon 2019, 106). Meanwhile, the Cebu City government has come to tolerate certain street vending practices, despite anti-peddling ordinances, due to political organizing by the Cebu City United Vendors’ Association (Etemadi 2004).

This phenomenon of “illegal” people who lack official legal status and/or who are living in “illegal” settlements, but who are nonetheless demanding equal rights, is ubiquitous in our world, both in the Global South and the Global North. In the United States, so-called “tent cities” and other encampments for unhoused people have been expanding across the country, as the economic crisis and rising inequality have systematically pushed people into public parks, sidewalks, and other urban areas deemed illegal for residence by the state, as well as rural and suburban encampments and mobile-housing areas. Across the country, urban-poor movements have emerged demanding respect and rights to basic services. In St. Petersburg, Florida in 2006, for example, a group of unhoused people formed a tent community called “Operation Coming Up,” and they demanded:

that bathrooms that are public be opened 24/7, that more safe places be created for homeless to sleep, that homeless that are arrested for public trespassing, public sleeping, and other life-sustaining needs cease [sic], and that at least 75 new beds be opened in St. Petersburg within 6 months, with the goal of more affordable housing. And, that the city of St. Petersburg adhere to the economic and human rights of all [its] citizens, especially the

poor and homeless. Especially, understanding that this movement must be led by and informed by the poor and homeless (Hunter et al. 2014, 44-5).

This has taken place alongside significant undocumented migration to the United States—which has been structurally produced by global neoliberal economic policies, US wars and military interventions, other forms of political violence and violent organized crime, and the global ecological crisis (producing “ecological refugees” and “climate refugees”). Combined, these policies and crises have dislocated and uprooted millions of people from their homes and livelihoods across the Global South, necessitating their mass-scale migration to the former colonial metropolises of the industrialized Global North. Rights movements in the United States for both unhoused people and undocumented migrants continue to grow increasingly powerful, and these insurgent citizens are demanding that the state respect and provide for their rights to housing, healthcare, education, living wages, and dignity—regardless of their lack of “official” legality in status and/or residence (while far-right reactionary forces and neo-fascist police [enabled by both liberal and conservative politicians] have also risen to counter them).

Moreover, such insurgent-citizenship movements haven’t only taken place in the urban peripheries; they have also occurred in rural and provincial areas of the world as well. Regarding Black-led rural insurgent-citizenship movements in Colombia, Bettina Ng’weno has argued, “Because rural Afro-Colombian social movements have also struggled for recognition as citizens, territory, and autonomous governance of their territories, insurgent citizenship has taken place in rural areas as well” (Ng’weno 2014, 160). Afro-Colombian communities, whose ancestors had been forcibly brought to Colombia as enslaved peoples, have been making claims to particular territorial areas in Colombia on the basis of having lived and worked on the lands, of having moved into the lands after being displaced by other state or corporate projects, and other reasons. These land claims have particularly been made since the 1990s, aided by both the Colombian Constitution of 1991 and Law 70 (the “Black Rights Law”) enacted in 1993, which has provided for official state recognition

of Afro-Colombian ethnic identity and territorial claims.⁹³ Susanna Hecht (2011) has also discussed rural insurgent citizenship in the context of the Brazilian Amazon. Historically, most Brazilians were excluded from property ownership, thus making “‘illegality’ the norm, and this illegality denied most poorer Amazonians political rights” (207). With the Brazilian state denying property rights to the majority of its people, many Amazonian peoples, even in the face of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship (1964-85), fought for their lands and livelihoods. As Hecht explains, people were transformed from being classified as “squatters” into being recognized as “citizens” once they began to “articulate a politics of history of place more powerful than the strategies of simple fraudulent land grabs that had become so characteristic of Amazonian occupation” (207).⁹⁴ Finally, Elisabeth Olivius (2019) has noted the applicability of the concept of insurgent citizenship to certain political practices of refugees and exiles—in this case, exiled Burmese women activists in the Thai-Myanmar borderlands—whose own political status parallels, in certain ways, the situation of the urban poor in informal settlements. Olivius contends, “Like the urban poor, refugees and exiles are excluded from the dominant orders of power and governance that supposedly provide access to citizenship rights” (763-4).⁹⁵

⁹³ Afro-Colombian movements continue to wage insurgent citizenship movements for their lands and livelihoods. As environmental defender and Colombia’s first Black vice president Francia Márquez stated in 2016 (six years before her electoral victory as vice president in April of 2022) in response to a Colombian government peace commissioner who had asserted that it wasn’t necessary for the Afro-Colombian community to directly participate in the peace agreement negotiations between the Colombian state and the guerrilla insurgent group FARC (as Márquez had been advocating for): “He forgets that we live mostly in areas that are rural and that within the last years most of the black people have been displaced to the cities because their territories have been taken over and they have been invaded by the government projects. Those territories have basically been infiltrated by armed individuals... The government has oppressed us over and over again, historically for years. Today, we are raising our voices to say that we are defenders of life, of our territories, and defenders of the environment. And we as women, in a very specific way, have come into this life, have brought our children into this life, and we will continue to struggle to bring peace and liberty for our people” (Albaladejo 2016).

⁹⁴ Hecht elaborates: “Thus, ‘territorialization’ in the Amazon land debates often required insurgent citizenship, resurgent identities...and arguments about forest stewardship...and over what constitutes a forest...in order to counter competing land claims. The new possibilities of citizenship through the struggles over landscapes and territory almost by definition required the assertion of forest cultures and identities, and moved inhabitants of Brazil’s most peripheral universes into legitimated political contests with national and international powers” (207-8).

⁹⁵ A related concept is “insurgent peace.” Nerve Macaspac (2019) has examined practices of “insurgent peace” in the municipality of Sagada in Mountain Province in the Cordillera region of northern Luzon island in the Philippines, in

In the Philippines, there is a long history of both rural insurgency and radical peasant occupations of lands that officially belonged to wealthy landlord families and/or agribusiness, mining, and fossil-fuel corporations. In the context of major inequalities in landownership and wealth, and in the absence of meaningful land reform, Filipino peasant groups have occupied lands technically belonging to absentee landlords and corporate interests, farming and working the lands and effectively demanding recognition from the state and the landlords of their new ownership of the land (Ocaya 2019; Kerkvliet 1993; Lindio-McGovern 1997). Though these peasant groups have often been removed by force by the state or paramilitary groups, there have been some successful cases in which the Philippine state came to recognize their land claims, such as the 2007 recognition by the Philippine government of the lands of farmers from Sumilao (in the province of Bukidnon in Mindanao island) whose lands had been priorly seized by a landowner who sold the lands to San Miguel Corp. (Niemelä 2010).⁹⁶

At the same time, in any discussion of insurgent citizenship movements, it is always important to recognize the particular status and claims of Indigenous peoples worldwide, specifically in the context of global settler colonialism. In North America, the Indigenous and First Nations peoples of Canada, the United States, and Mexico have had a particularly traumatic experience with

which Indigenous communities have turned Sagada into a relatively autonomous “peace zone” by regulating the activities of both the Philippine military and the New People’s Army (NPA).

⁹⁶ In the case of the Sumilao land occupation, the farmers, who belonged to the Higaonon tribe, had claims to the land based on both the Philippines’ constitutional mandate for comprehensive agrarian reform and the state’s recognition of the ancestral domains of the country’s Indigenous peoples. Often, landless peasants use tactics of insurgent citizenship in order to ensure that the Philippines’ Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) operates as it should—by redistributing lands in the countryside, especially the very large land holdings of (often absentee) landlord families, to the tenants and their families, many of whom have worked and lived on the lands for decades (if not longer). Some Indigenous groups have also used more radical tactics of insurgent citizenship in order to ensure that the state recognizes their ancestral domain claims. Just as in Brazil (and in many other historical contexts worldwide), the Philippine state historically lacked respect for communal forms of land guardianship, which facilitated state and corporate seizures of Indigenous and traditional people’s lands. The 1997 Indigenous People’s Rights Act (IPRA) facilitated the Philippine state’s official recognition of Indigenous communities’ Ancestral Domains, through which more Indigenous peoples have been able to enact their sovereignty. Thus, many beneficiaries of both the Agrarian Reform program and the Philippine state’s legal recognition of Indigenous people’s Ancestral Domains have also benefited from their own use of tactics of insurgent citizenship to ensure that existing Philippine laws and programs operate as they should.

Anglo-Saxon and Spanish settler colonialism and genocide (Cattelino 2011; Simpson 2014; Sepulveda 2018; Speed 2007; Charleston 2015). Thus, land claims and other rights claims made by insurgent citizenship movements must also contend with movements for Indigenous sovereignty and resistance to settler-colonial genocide. Increasingly, social movements throughout North America—from housing rights advocacy to climate-justice activism—have been centering the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous and First Nations communities. In the Philippines, state-initiated processes of settler colonialism have taken place in both formal colonial and “post-colonial” contexts (C. J. Chanco 2017).⁹⁷ In Bataan province, Indigenous Aeta peoples have faced state-sponsored settler-colonial displacement and corporate encroachments onto their lands (Espiritu and Ruanto-Ramirez 2020). Importantly, Tagalog and other Lowlander climate-justice advocates in Bataan have incorporated analyses of Indigenous sovereignty into their activist strategizing, and alliance building has been emerging between Tagalog and other Lowlander residents of informal settlements in parts of Bataan province on the one hand, and, on the other, members of the Aeta Magbukun nation who live in and enact sovereignty over their state-recognized Ancestral Domain.

Ecological Citizenship

In the current era of ecological and climatic crisis, we are also seeing rights claims and citizenship movements specifically grounded in ideas, values, practices, and lifestyles marked as environmentally sustainable. Diverse notions of ecological citizenship have been theorized by scholars and have begun to be deployed in the rhetoric, policies, and practices of governments,

⁹⁷ The US colonial state initiated a “Homestead” program which facilitated the mass-scale migration of members of Catholic-majority ethnic groups from Luzon and the Visayas into Muslim- and Lumad-majority Mindanao—thus displacing the Bangsa Moro and Lumad Indigenous peoples and turning them into minorities in their Mindanao homelands. The post-colonial Philippine state continued this process in Mindanao, while also facilitating other kinds of corporate land grabs and displacement of Indigenous peoples in Luzon and the Visayas.

social movements, and the media. There has not been a single agreed-upon definition for ecological citizenship, and various scholars have argued for distinctive and differentiated meanings for “ecological,” “environmental,” “sustainable,” and “green” citizenships. As Valencia Sáiz (2005) has stated, ecological citizenship remains “under construction” (164). In this chapter, I primarily use the term “ecological citizenship”—while recognizing the differences in how different authors have approached the concept.

One of the common themes in the intellectual effort to apply ecological principles to citizenship is the application of the language of “rights,” “responsibilities,” and “obligations” not only to individual humans, but to humanity more generally, all biological life on Earth, and future generations of humans and other species—particularly in reaction to the adverse ecological conditions produced by the spread of capitalist industrialization. We can see how degraded, toxic, and deteriorating environments—largely caused by the unsustainable and polluting practices associated with fossil fuel-based industrialization—have triggered the emergence of “ecological citizens.” As Peter Christoff (1996) has stated, “To become ecological rather than narrowly anthropocentric citizens, existing humans must assume responsibility for future humans and other species, and ‘represent’ their rights and potential choices according to the duties of environmental stewardship” (156). Christoff further argues that while formal and legalistic definitions of citizenship determined by nation-states remain significant, ecological challenges have forced citizens to expand their “political community” beyond the nation-state to include “alternative transnational allegiances ranging from the bio-regional to the global, as well as to other species and the survival of ecosystems” (156). The “ecological loyalties” (157) of citizens both coexist with citizens’ other public loyalties and transcends local and nation-state boundaries by recognizing the ecological concerns, priorities, and wellbeing of the lands, waters, and atmospheres associated with citizens’ local and national communities as well as their bio-regional and global environments. Meanwhile,

Anna Bullen and Mark Whitehead (2005), in their conception of “sustainable citizenship” as “a paradigm of post-industrial living” (500), assert that:

...citizenship (understood as a community of rights and responsibilities and duties and virtues) has always been an emergent feature of socio-ecological negotiation—a struggle in and through the human and non-human world... To recognize this not only exposes the citizenly relations which exist between the human and non-human world (understood as both the living and non-living), but also reveals the agency of nature within any community of citizens (507).

Andrew Dobson (2000) has further elaborated upon the concept of ecological citizenship through his contention that it “disrupts” standard liberal notions of citizenship. Dobson argues that ecological citizenship effectively transcends the assumed binary oppositions between “rights and duties, public and private spheres, active and passive citizenship, and ‘territorialised’ and ‘deterritorialised’ conceptions of citizenship” (1). For Dobson, “The ecological citizen’s principal duty is to act with care and compassion towards distant strangers, human and non-human, in space and time” (8). Dobson acknowledges feminist influences in his contention that ecological citizenship is premised upon the virtues of “care and compassion” which shouldn’t be considered only “private” virtues but “public” ones as well (9-10). Moreover, ecological citizenship disrupts the liberal notion that citizens possess rights on condition that they fulfill their duties and obligations to the state which, in turn, grants them their rights, thus forming a reciprocal and contractual relationship between citizen and state. In ecological citizenship, a “non-reciprocal sense of justice, or of compassion” emerges in which ecological citizens “can expect nothing in return from future generations and other species for discharging their responsibilities toward them” (6).⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Dobson views ecological citizenship as connected with the contemporary “re-moralization of politics” which questions and troubles exclusively “procedural” ways of dealing with social and political problems and challenges: “Ecological citizenship contains a political rather than a procedural view of the social world, in the sense that it harbours a view of the ‘good life’ for individuals. The liberal state, on the other hand, is supposedly impartial as to views of the good life, and is therefore inimical to the agonistic style of debate required by ecological citizenship” (2000, 24). In a certain sense, Dobson’s argument is reminiscent of calls from theorists on the “post-political” and “post-democratic” moment for the re-politicization and radical democratization of the problems and challenges we are facing which have been de-politicized as procedural matters to be dealt with exclusively through technocratic managerialism without agonistic debate (Ranciere 2006; Mouffe 2005; Wilson and Swyngedouw 2015).

Moreover, in response to the dominant neoliberal and “post-political” framings of the global climate crisis, Sherilyn MacGregor (2014) advocates for a project of “feminist ecological citizenship.” MacGregor critiques both the masculinist framing of the climate crisis and the elite Western male domination of the field of climate science itself. She specifically states that she is not advocating for the denial of anthropogenic climate change, but she problematizes the difficulties and impediments faced by grassroots citizens to question the dominant framing of the climate crisis (626). MacGregor furthermore problematizes prevailing portrayals of both humanity and nature in versions of climatological science which cast nature as the nemesis of, and out-of-control threat to, the survival of humanity. MacGregor states:

Traditionally, some kind of solidarity between “women” and “nature” has been the ethical foundation of ecofeminist philosophical approaches, which take a normative stance toward the nonhuman natural world that gives it value beyond its instrumental use for humans. The dominant climate narrative now implies that radical action is needed because environmental change is threatening human life, not because human actions are changing an intrinsically valuable nature (628).

According to MacGregor, de-politicized and masculinist climate science threatens to undo the life-giving, life-supporting, nurturing, harmonizing, and empowering visions of nature in ecofeminist philosophy that have been a key factor in advancing women’s participation in environmental politics and the politicization of women through this (626).⁹⁹

MacGregor calls for resistance against the tendencies of neoliberalization and depoliticization operating in the dominant climate-change narrative through an amalgamation of ecofeminism, radical democracy, and citizenship. Following other more expanded conceptions of

⁹⁹ Relatedly, MacGregor warns against the submergence and marginalization of other environmental justice causes in which women have been highly represented as organizers, grassroots mobilizers, and leaders, including biodiversity protection initiatives and campaigns against nuclear radiation and pesticide use (2014, 623). Finally, MacGregor advocates for an understanding of the gendered dimensions of climate change, as the dominant climate science discourse tends to ignore or distort issues of power, hierarchy, and disparity. She notes the studies of feminist activists and researchers that have demonstrated how women, especially poor women, have been economically and physiologically hurt more than men by dire ecological conditions brought about by climate change-related events. Too often, an undifferentiated “humanity” is cast as the main cause of contemporary global climate change, while “ecofeminists point out that it has not been made by all humans equally” (627).

citizenship that go beyond narrow state-centric and territorialized conceptions, MacGregor views citizenship as “a practice driven by commitment to the ethico-political values of democracy, publicity, equality, and liberty” (2014, 630). Influenced by Chantal Mouffe (2005), MacGregor believes we must act in local public political spaces as “agonal citizens”:

A properly political ecofeminism is therefore about choosing the language of citizenship, with its assumptions of human uniqueness and the primacy of the public realm for political life, over rhetorics rooted in fixed and private feminized identities that are themselves depoliticized (for example, maternalism) (2014, 630).

MacGregor also addresses women’s organizing around “climate justice,” and she lauds both feminist activists’ roles in advancing the cause of climate justice and women’s organizations’ achievement in getting “gender” to be recognized in climate negotiations and policy circles (624). However, she warns against moves to coopt these groups into advancing post-political “consensual” and “negotiated” policy prescriptions.

Insurgent Ecological Citizenship

To what extent, however, has “citizenship” been effectively used to mobilize individuals and communities around socio-ecological issues? Generally speaking, “environmental justice” has, thus far, been more widely employed as a conceptual tool for both grassroots activists and state representatives for the purposes of community mobilization and governmental policymaking on ecological issues. Proponents of “environmental justice” (and, more recently, “climate justice”) have been inserting the crucial importance of socioeconomic justice and equity, sociocultural recognition and rights, and participatory democracy into the issues of environmental sustainability, ecological resilience, and climate change (Harvey 1996; Pulido 1996). Environmental justice advocates have noted that, in the context of the United States, for example, the burdens of environmentally hazardous, degrading, and polluting practices of corporations and state agencies have been disproportionately borne by socioeconomically disadvantaged communities as well as Black,

Indigenous, and other peoples of color (BIPOC). Analyses of “environmental racism” and “environmental classism” have been formulated to come to terms with these ethno-racial and class-based disparities, and grassroots organizers around the United States and in other contexts worldwide have been building movements based on environmental justice.¹⁰⁰

This has led to the question: Is the deployment of “justice” and “equity” in relation to ecological challenges and crises a more effective conceptual tool than “citizenship?” Does a focus on ecological citizenship place too much emphasis on the individual self-cultivation of practices, behaviors, and values without providing effective inspirations for collective and communal courses of action? Should we be utilizing “citizenship” to fight for socio-environmental causes at all? Julian Agyeman and Bob Evans (2005) express “severe reservations” (200) on the use of environmental citizenship outside of the educational sphere for the purposes of inculcating values and responsibilities toward sustainable practices and behaviors. Instead, “we wish to assert that the emergence of environmental justice as both a *vocabulary for political opportunity, mobilization, and action* and a *policy principle* gives cause to see this as a more powerful tool for securing change than the concept of environmental citizenship” (186). Though Agyeman and Evans acknowledge that the scholarship and theorizing on ecological and environmental citizenship is “both vigorous and erudite” (185) and do not seek to eliminate the notion, they nonetheless doubt the utility and effectiveness of “citizenship” discourses in sustainability activism, politics, and policymaking, unless such discourses are “broadly linked to environmental justice, and set within the wider context of, first, the sustainability discourse and, second, the current debates on governance” (185).

¹⁰⁰ Governmental agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have also taken up the rhetoric of environmental justice in order to address ethno-racial and socioeconomic disparities in the experience of environmental degradation, toxicity, and health hazards. The United Nations and other international governmental, financial, and non-profit agencies have been using the rhetoric of environmental and climate justice as well. Moreover, increasingly widespread talk of both a Green New Deal in the United States and of a Global Green New Deal worldwide—which specifically takes into account the “climate debt” owed by wealthy industrialized countries of the Global North to the formerly colonized developing countries of the Global South—has further solidified discussion of environmental and climate justice in countries around the world.

I concur with the notion that any discussion of ecological citizenship in the realms of environmental politics and policymaking should be tied to environmental justice, as the concept of ecological (or sustainable, green, or environmental) citizenship can easily be absorbed or coopted into a depoliticized or overly individualized project for environmental action. At the same time, however, concepts like environmental justice and climate justice—like anything else—can also be coopted by problematic elite or dominant sociopolitical forces, leading to watered-down or ineffective environmental justice policies (Harrison 2015). Just as theorists and proponents of environmental justice must remain vigilant regarding the ways that environmental justice rhetoric is used by states, NGOs, and activist movements, we should also be careful regarding any use or propagation of notions of ecological citizenship. With this in mind, I agree with scholars who see the powerful conceptual potential of an ecological citizenship that is tied to environmental and climate-justice advocacy. Alex Latta (2007) advances an optimistic view on the prospects of a fruitful synergy between environmental justice and ecological citizenship. He, in fact, believes that “environmental justice can be read in terms of a politics of citizenship” (386). Latta discerns a strong “democratic element that is immanent in the concept of ecological citizenship” (378), however, he critiques the overarching preoccupation in most of the ecological citizenship literature with “the instrumentalisation of citizenship for the achievement of sustainable development or some other notion of green ends” (385)—at the expense of a genuine and fundamental commitment to democratic processes. Latta further critiques perspectives on ecological citizenship that fail to account for “*existing* contexts of extensive injustice, hierarchy, and exclusion (along such lines as North–South, gender, race, class, and sexuality)” (383).¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Latta (2007) elaborates, “The economically (and ecologically) powerful are the political agents of Dobson’s ecological citizenship, while those on the other side of unequal material relations remain passive counterparts, objects of an imperative for ecological redistribution instead of active citizens in the reconfiguration of global futures” (384). In such limited understandings of ecological citizenship, the main (or perhaps sole) agents exercising ecological citizenship are

On the contrary, Latta calls for examinations into subaltern eco-citizen mobilizations. Latta asks, “how might nature be actively politicised as part of political struggles for more democratic citizenship?” (2007, 385). His answer is that we can empirically locate much of this activity within the politics and activism surrounding environmental justice, which “occur at a range of scales and entail a diverse array of political projects, from grassroots organising for healthy inner cities, to indigenous land claims, resistance against corporate agribusiness, and North–South solidarity movements” (391). Drawing from James Holston (2009), Latta locates “insurgent citizenships” in the mobilizations of environmental justice. He explicates:

We might even say that the activists of environmental justice are nature’s insurgent citizens. As the human elements most closely connected to the demise of the earth’s ecosystems, their voices demand a kind of listening that would perceive social justice as embedded in a dense array of more-than-social relationships—which encompass local and regional environments (2006, 11).

Latta’s contention that democratic citizenship is embedded within environmental justice activism, and his further application of Holston’s conception of “insurgent citizenship” to environmental justice mobilizations, is congruent with Agyeman and Evans’s (2005) contention that environmental citizenship should not be applied outside of educational institutions unless thoroughly linked to and informed by environmental justice.¹⁰²

In fact, many climate-justice proponents have actively been advocating for a recognition of the rights to clean water, clean air, and life itself for current and future generations of human beings—and for the rights of all biological life on Earth. The language of rights and citizenship has been actively applied by climate-justice movements to human and nonhuman communities that are

middle- and upper-class elites with large ecological footprints that need to learn how to reduce, reuse, recycle, and generally live more simply and sustainably.

¹⁰² Latta (2007) locates “citizenship” within environmental justice struggles: “What such mobilisations share is an active linking of environmental concerns to the cause of social justice. These practices of linking bring nature into the sphere of citizenship, where livelihoods, identity, dignity, and political voice become tied to the physical, emotional, and spiritual investments that people make in the ecological spaces where they dwell and work. As such, the political nexus engaged by environmental justice has immediate repercussions for citizenship, not only in terms of its formal structures, but more crucially in the way that it is embodied, experienced, and performed” (391).

exposed to environmental toxins from fossil-fuel burning, poisonous mining, and other forms of industrial pollution. The rights to a clean and healthy ecology, and to a habitable planet, are also being applied to unborn generations of humans, other animals, plants, and microbial life forms. In 2011, Bolivia became the world's first country to recognize the rights of nature as equal to the rights of human beings through its Law of Mother Earth (Tola 2018). In July of 2022, moreover, Chile held a Constitutional Convention which drafted a new constitution that, had it been passed by a subsequent voter referendum, would have also constitutionally enshrined the rights of nature through Article 9: "Persons and peoples are interdependent with nature and form, with it, an inseparable whole. Nature has rights. The State and society have the duty to protect and respect them. The State must adopt an ecologically responsible administration and promote environmental and scientific education through permanent training and learning processes" (Hendrickson 2022). Finally, in June of 2021, a group of international legal scholars called for the United Nation's inclusion of the crime of "ecocide" alongside the other "core crimes" recognized in international law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and the crime of aggression. If successfully codified, it would allow the International Criminal Court to prosecute perpetrators of ecocide worldwide, including corporate CEOs and top state officials (Losh 2021).

There are many reasons to see how such a promulgation of the combined rights of human beings, other animals and plants, and of nature more broadly—and of the codification into law of these rights—can promote a shift in consciousness that, in turn, can help to stimulate action toward preserving the habitability of the planet for current and future generations. It is also not difficult to see how such examples of eco-citizenship are in consonance with, and, in fact, stemmed from, the principles of and movements for environmental and climate justice. Finally, there are important insights to be gained from thinking about how such articulations for environmental justice as well as for the rights of nature itself can help to expand our understanding of insurgent forms of

citizenship. Thus, it is important to make this more general philosophical case for thinking about environmental justice proponents as “nature’s insurgent citizens”—in that they have brought nature into the realm of citizenship, and have thus destabilized liberal citizenship itself by, among other things, forcing us to reconsider the “legality” of existing unsustainable, polluting, and ecocidal state-sanctioned practices and policies that are, in fact, detrimental to the rights of present and future generations to a habitable, clean, and healthy environment and planet.

At the same time, I contend that it is also important to specifically highlight the more literal ways that insurgent citizens—referring to subaltern peoples who have been defined by contemporary states as having “illegal” political status and/or “illegal” residence—are simultaneously enacting ecological citizenship. When thinking about the insurgent citizens of São Paulo, Brazil’s informal settlements—some of whom gained state recognition, land titles, and increased access to government services after decades of advocacy and struggle based on their need for and right to shelter, residence, and everyday resources (Holston 2009)—it is also important to consider how many of these Brazilian and other socioeconomically disadvantaged people worldwide who have been forced to live in informal, irregular, or somehow “illegal” housing or shelter also tend to live in areas of profound environmental neglect or outright contamination. The connections between environmental injustice, environmental racism, and environmental classism on the one hand, and the forces of socioeconomic disadvantage and discrimination that push people into informal housing or inadequate shelter, on the other, are profound. The situation of “differentiated citizenship” between elites and the poor is intimately intertwined with the geographies of environmental injustice that exist within and between nation-states. It is thus important for us to also specifically analyze movements for ecological and climate justice that are being initiated and carried out by the insurgent citizens of both socioeconomically disadvantaged and ecologically

contaminated informal settlements of both urban and rural peripheries. As Susanna Hecht (2011) contends, with regards to the insurgent citizens of Brazil's Amazonia:

The role of rural socio-environmental movements in the struggles for democratic opening, their links to national labor movements, and casting environmental concerns as a defense of livelihood, has given Amazonians an unusual symbolic role and significance as a practical model in Brazilian land politics. More notably, social movements have helped cast the ideas of environmental justice well beyond the frameworks of exposure to pollution, or differential access to environmental amenities, or expressions of race-based privilege, to assert that struggles over natural resources are simultaneously struggles for social justice and nature (209).

As I explain in this chapter, the insurgent ecological citizens of Bataan province in the Philippines are simultaneously fighting for their rights to shelter and adequate housing, healthcare, fair employment with living wages, and a clean and healthy environment for themselves, their families, and for the nature around them—regardless of what Philippine corporate and state representatives have to say about the supposed legality of their residence and rights claims.

“No Nukes!”

During my time conducting ethnographic research in Metropolitan Manila with the National Secretariat of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ), I met the extraordinary Ms. Veronica “Derek” Cabe, the coordinator of both the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement and KILUSAN-Bataan (Bataan province’s branch of *Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya* [Movement for National Democracy]). I was invited by *Ate* Derek (*áte* [pronounced ah-teh] means “older sister” in Tagalog) to go to Bataan in order to learn more about the anti-coal, anti-nuclear, pro-renewable energy, and overall climate-justice advocacy taking place in the province. Since my childhood, I had heard about Bataan due to the province being the location of the infamous Bataan Death March during World War II. In April of 1942, over 60,000 Filipino soldiers and 10,000 American soldiers—after having been defeated by the Empire of Japan in the three-month Battle of Bataan—were “death-marched” for 106 kilometers (66 miles) by the Japanese Imperial Army from Mariveles

municipality in the southern tip of the Bataan peninsula northward to Camp O'Donnell in the nearby province of Tarlac (Murphy 2011). The defeated soldiers were subjected to severe physical abuse, starvation, and exposure to scorching tropical sunlight, and up to 18,000 died along the way to Camp O'Donnell. Many Bataeños who attempted to provide food or other forms of help to the Filipino and American soldiers (who became deathly thin as the march proceeded) were beaten, tortured, and/or killed by soldiers of Japan's Imperial Army.

Traumatic memories and “post-memories” (Hirsch 2008; Fırat et al. 2017)¹⁰³ of the brutality of the Japanese imperial soldiers' actions during the death march (and throughout the Empire of Japan's three-year occupation of the Philippines) remain strong for many Bataeños and other Filipinos, both in the Philippines and throughout the global Filipinx diaspora. When *Ate* Derek invited me to Bataan, I couldn't help but think about the province being the site of this traumatic wartime atrocity from World War II. Bataan province—along with the nearby island of Corregidor—remains a destination for visitors and tourists interested in the history of World War II in the Philippines and the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁰⁴ When I first went to Mariveles municipality, *Ate* Derek pointed out the KM 0 monument (the “Zero Kilometer” monument) commemorating the “*Pinagsimulan ng* Death March” (the Starting Point of the Bataan Death March).

¹⁰³ Marianne Hirsch, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, coined the term “postmemory” in order to elucidate the phenomenon in which members of generations born after mass-scale traumatic events, such as the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide, seem to “inherit”—in particularly visceral, embodied ways—many of the traumatic memories of their parents and grandparents. According to Hirsch (2008), “Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. This is, I believe, the experience of postmemory and the process of its generation” (106-7).

¹⁰⁴ Corregidor island was the site of the final surrender of the US military and Philippine Commonwealth forces to the Japanese Imperial Army in 1942. The island was also the site of the 1969 Jabidah Massacre committed by the government of Ferdinand Marcos against *Bangsa Moro* (Philippine Muslim) army recruits.

Bataan was also the site of a major struggle during the Marcos Dictatorship era (1965-86) against the construction of the Philippines' sole nuclear power plant. The great *Welgang Bayan* (People's Strike) of 1985 mobilized 30,000 Filipinos against the construction of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP), which has been referred to as the "single largest fraudulent loan and project" of the Marcos Dictatorship (Orejas 2021). Though the initial bid for the nuclear power plant was \$500 million, the construction costs ultimately came to \$2.3 billion—with allegations of massive overpricing by the American nuclear-power corporation Westinghouse (which had hired and highly paid a golf crony of Ferdinand Marcos to lobby the president to award Westinghouse with the contract), and of the Marcoses personally pocketing tens of millions of dollars from the nuclear-energy project. The majority of the costs were debt-financed by the US Export-Import Bank, and the people of the Philippines continue to bear the burden for its payment, along with the rest of the \$26 billion in debt racked up by the Marcos regime (R. U. Mendoza, Bertulfo, and Cruz 2018). The National Union of Scientists, moreover, "found more than 4,000 technical defects" in the nuclear power plant's construction and design (Orejas 2021). The combination of the massive corruption surrounding the BNPP project as well as fears of its faulty design spurred a burgeoning anti-nuclear power movement in the Philippines. Also playing a role in the anti-nuclear movement was the widespread assumption that the US military was holding nuclear weapons in one of its military bases in the Philippines—in violation of the Philippine constitutional prohibition against nuclear weapons on Philippine soil—despite the US military declining to comment on whether nuclear weapons were being stored in its Subic Bay Naval Station (Reid 1991).

By the time of the completion of the BNPP's construction in 1984, many in the Philippines had grown increasingly fed up with hearing about each new outlandish case of corruption and cronyism, as well as brutal political violence, of the Marcos regime—which had just assassinated opposition leader Ninoy Aquino the year before in 1983, igniting massive anti-Marcos protests

across the country that year. Anger at the Marcos government's corruption and violence, along with fears stemming from high-profile nuclear accidents in other countries as well as of the assumed existence of US-owned nuclear weapons on Philippine soil, resolutely pushed Bataeño and Philippine public opinion against the BNPP. Tens of thousands of Filipinos in Bataan province, as well as supporters from Metro Manila and other regions, joined street demonstrations in the province, paralyzing Bataan's transportation system. Despite threats of violence from Marcos' military forces, thousands of protesters surrounded military tanks that were sent by the Marcos regime to quell the protests. Ultimately, the Marcos government relented, and the nuclear power plant was mothballed and never became operational.

The decisive success of Bataan province's People's Strike of June of 1985 emboldened more collective resistance struggles against the Marcos regime over the next year, powerfully paving the way for the People Power Revolution of 1986, in which millions of Filipinos poured into the streets of Manila and across the country, demanding that the dictator Ferdinand Marcos step down. The Marcos family was forced into exile in disgrace in Hawai'i, where they were given political asylum by the United States. Today, veterans of the protest groups involved in the *Welgang Bayan* of 1985 (including the Nuclear-Free Bataan Movement, which recently merged with the Coal-Free Bataan Movement to form the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement) are now waging a provincial movement against the expansion of coal power in Bataan province, and they are also continuing to hold actions and events in opposition to plans by the Philippine government to activate the long dormant Bataan Nuclear Power Plant. The Duterte government had started exploring plans to operationalize the nuclear plant, and in May of 2022, president-elect Bongbong Marcos—the son of the dictator—began negotiations with the government of South Korea to finance the activation of the BNPP.

In November of 2018, Derek Cabe informed me that an international group of anti-nuclear activists were holding a summit in the Philippines in both Metro Manila and Bataan province, and her anti-nuclear group, which is a part of the international network, was hosting the event. I had actually been meaning to visit *Ate* Derek in Bataan during prior months to learn more about the important anti-coal organizing taking place in the province, but I soon learned how the struggle against coal power in Bataan has been intimately intertwined with the struggle against nuclear power. Coincidentally, the annual meeting of the No Nukes Asia Forum (NNAF) was taking place in the Philippines from November 12 to 15. The NNAF was formed in 1992 to oppose the expansion of nuclear energy in Asia, with a major role in the Forum's founding played by Ogiso Shigeko, owner of an organic food restaurant in the Japanese city of Toyohashi. Shigeko became an activist against nuclear energy after learning of the negative health impacts from nuclear radiation which, she had learned, had reached Japan in 1986 (being detected in the breastmilk of Japanese mothers) from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster over 7,000 kilometers away (Hirota 2020). Since its first meeting in Japan in 1992, the NNAF has been held annually in different Asian countries, and the international anti-nuclear network met in the Philippines in 2018.

The first two days of the Forum were held in Metro Manila (on the campus of the University of the Philippines – Diliman), and the second two days in Bataan province. The theme of the NNAF's 2018 meeting was, "Strengthening People-to-People Solidarity towards a Nuclear-Free Future," and delegates representing anti-nuclear activist organizations from Japan, Taiwan, India, Turkey, South Korea, and Vietnam met with their counterparts in the Philippines to discuss strategies to end the use of nuclear power in Asia. As mentioned, the delegates arrived in the Philippines at a time when the Philippine government was considering, yet again, to make an attempt to operationalize the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP). On the morning of November 12, I arrived at the *Balay Kalinaw* (Visayan for "House of Peace") building at the University of the

Philippines. I met with *Ate* Derek and then introduced myself to some of the Asian anti-nuclear activists before listening to the various workshops and strategizing sessions held by the No Nukes Asia Forum.

Country presentations on the state of nuclear power and anti-nuclear activism in the Asian countries represented at the Forum were also provided, and this gave us a chance to learn more about the specific situations being faced in each of the countries. They also provided insights on how to stop the spread of and eliminate this hazardous energy technology from Asia and the world. A farmer, whose home is seven kilometers away from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, testified that she was tending to her fields when the Tōhoku earthquake, concomitant tsunami, and subsequent nuclear meltdown occurred in 2011. She spoke about the health and environmental problems that spiked in her community due to nuclear contamination, including a rise in thyroid cancer among children, and she shared about her and her community's inspiring efforts to shut down nuclear energy in Japan—the only country to have, thus far, suffered from the horrors of a nuclear attack.¹⁰⁵

A theme that kept reemerging from the presentations was that, despite high-profile nuclear disasters worldwide over the past several decades—including in Three Mile Island in the United States in 1979, Chernobyl in the former Soviet Union in 1986, and in Fukushima, Japan in 2011—nuclear power has continued to spread. According to the activists, the “International Nuclear Mafia” (specifically, the nuclear power industries of the United States, France, Japan, China, Russia, South Korea, and Canada, among others) continues to pour billions of dollars into this dangerous energy

¹⁰⁵ In February of 2017, a group of women and men who were diagnosed with thyroid cancer as children in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster waged a lawsuit against the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) in pursuit of compensation for their health complications as a result of exposure to toxic radiation from the nuclear meltdown (Siripala 2022). The victims who were blanketed with nuclear radiation have said that they are frustrated with government representatives and “expert panels” who are dismissive of their experiences with the long-term health and ecological problems that the nuclear disaster caused. In an article for *The Nation*, Lisa Torio (2021) has condemned the “gaslighting of evacuees from Fukushima, especially women who continue to voice concerns over health effects and demand accurate information from the government.”

technology that has been susceptible to nuclear meltdowns that contaminate environments with toxic radioactive material, threatening the health of human beings and other biological life.¹⁰⁶ We were also given a very informative presentation on the techno-economic feasibility and ecological necessity of clean, renewable, and *safe* energy technologies by Engr. Roberto Verzola of the Center for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technology (CREST). Mr. Wilson Fortaleza of the Center for Power Issues and Initiatives (CPII) then discussed the struggle for 100% renewable energy in the Philippines based on the principle of “energy democracy” (See Chapter 6 of this dissertation). The second day of the Forum in the University of the Philippines’ *Balay Kalinaw* building beautifully ended with a spontaneous burst into song and dance, led by Dr. Vaishali Patel of the anti-nuclear power movement in India—where she has been fighting against the construction of the Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant in Maharashtra state, which would be the largest nuclear power plant in the world—while members of *Teatrong Bayan* (People’s Theater – Philippines) performed.

The following morning, we took a bus from Quezon City to Bataan province. After a brief visit to a coal-affected community in Limay municipality living in the vicinity of two coal plants (the insurgent eco-citizens of Limay), the members of the No Nukes Asia Forum 2018 returned to the bus and arrived in Morong municipality, which is where the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP) is located. We heard testimonies from veterans of the great People’s Strike (*Welgang Bayan*) of 1985

¹⁰⁶ From the presentations, I learned that, though Japan had lived successfully without nuclear power for the four years after the 2011 Fukushima disaster (as all 54 of Japan’s nuclear reactors were shut down), the Japanese government revived some of its reactors in 2015 and sought to expand nuclear power once again, including through exporting its technology to countries like Turkey. South Korea’s government, meanwhile, halted the expansion of nuclear power in the country, yet it has been exporting nuclear technology to other countries. Taiwan’s anti-nuclear movement was able to prevent the opening of a fourth nuclear power plant in the country, yet on Nov. 24th, 2018, a nationwide referendum gave pro-nuclear forces a victory. In the state of Maharashtra in India, anti-nuclear forces—under distressing conditions of state repression under the current authoritarian government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi—attempted to prevent the construction of the Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant, which would be the largest nuclear power plant in the world. And in Turkey, where the United States has already located dozens of nuclear missiles as part of NATO’s “nuclear sharing arrangements,” anti-nuclear forces—also under conditions of authoritarian state repression under the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—are trying to prevent the construction of nuclear power plants. In a more hopeful state of affairs, anti-nuclear forces prevailed in 2016 in Vietnam, with the government abandoning plans to construct nuclear power plants.

who spoke of their experiences joining over 30,000 other Bataños and Filipinos who formed a human barricade to prevent the operation of the BNPP, despite violent intimidation and threats from the dictator Ferdinand Marcos' state-terrorist police forces. The veterans of the anti-BNPP struggle lamented that the “bad idea that keeps coming back” is still hovering over the Philippines, with the Duterte (and now Bongbong Marcos) government attempting to open the still-dormant nuclear power plant. Derek Cabe, the Coordinator of the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement and of KILUSAN-Bataan, stated at the Forum, “If we can't even properly handle problems like flooding disasters and terrible traffic, how could our government handle a nuclear disaster?” (Meanwhile, news reports have revealed that the Chinese government plans to build “floating nuclear power plants” amidst islands claimed by the Philippines, and other islands claimed by Vietnam, in the South China Sea—which was officially renamed as the West Philippine Sea by the Philippine government, and as the Southeast Asia Sea by the Vietnamese government [Nguyen 2018]. The United States and Russia are the world's two other countries with floating nuclear power plants).

The 2018 meeting in the Philippines of the No Nukes Asia Forum (NNAF) ended with a determined resolution to continue with “people power” in the face of the ominous continued spread of nuclear power, particularly in the context of the rising tide worldwide of authoritarian regimes and heads of state with dictatorial powers who have been subjecting anti-nuclear activists to intimidation, threats, and violence—from Turkey to India, the Philippines, the United States, and Brazil. The NNAF members vowed to continue promoting great international solidarity to stop the International Nuclear Mafia from spreading this “unnecessary and hazardous form of energy,” and to promote *safe* renewable energy instead. Professor Roland Simbulan of the University of the Philippines—and author of *NUCLEAR-FREE NATION: The Power of the People VS. Nuclear Power in the Philippines* (Simbulan 2021)—also reminded us, “The power of People is stronger than the people in power.”



November 14, 2018 — Members of the No Nukes Asia Forum visit Mount Samat National Shrine (dedicated to the Filipino and American veterans of World War II in the Philippines) in Bataan province. (Photo by the author)

A Coal-Contaminated Landscape: Life in Limay Municipality

When riding the bus with the folks from the No Nukes Asia Forum from Metro Manila to Bataan, I remember being struck by the lush tropical beauty of the province, as we passed forested hills and mountains, verdant rice fields, and white-sand beaches. The beautiful bus ride, however, came to an immediate halt as we found ourselves immersed in the foul-smelling toxic fumes of a fossil fuel-contaminated industrial landscape. Bataan’s Limay municipality is home to a 600-megawatt (MW) coal-fired power plant, an oil refinery, another 140-MW coal- and petroleum coke-fired power plant which provides electricity for the oil refinery, a processing plant for petrochemical

products, and a coal ash pond—all owned by subsidiaries of San Miguel Corporation (the Philippines’ largest supplier of electricity and Southeast Asia’s largest food and beverage conglomerate, most famously known for its line of beers). The members of the No Nukes Asia Forum, before continuing the discussion on nuclear power in the Philippines and elsewhere in Asia, left the bus to gaze at and take pictures of the two gigantic coal plants in Bataan’s Limay municipality. We also briefly met with residents of the informal settlements located next to the San Miguel Corporation coal plants and oil refinery complex. (Some of them provided more formal presentations later that day for the Asian anti-nuclear activists regarding their difficult experiences living in proximity to the fumes and other toxic byproducts coming from the nearby coal and petroleum facilities.) I also realized that that had been my first time directly smelling the emissions from a coal-fired power plant, and I was utterly appalled by not only the severely foul smell, but how painful it felt to even breathe at times.

At this point, I couldn’t help but recall a controversy that erupted in December of 2016 when a “rain pour” of coal ash from the San Miguel Corp.-owned industrial site in Limay municipality overflowed onto the homes and environments of around 200 families in the nearby neighborhoods, leading to immediate health problems for the community, such as asthma attacks and eye infections (due to which one man couldn’t work for two weeks). This was on top of the “slow violence” (Nixon 2013) that they had already been enduring due to years of environmental contamination from coal and oil—including constant exposure to relatively smaller amounts of coal ash and other byproducts from coal burning. After years of exposure, these smaller amounts have collectively accumulated into more dangerous and even lethal levels, leading to skin rashes, lung problems, cancers, neurological complications, and other ailments, not to mention damage to their crops. The December 2016 coal ash spill also led to the first “Notice of Violation” being given to the Petron Bataan Refinery (Petron is a subsidiary of San Miguel Corp.) by the Environmental

Management Bureau (EMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), which, at the time, was under the leadership of DENR Secretary Gina Lopez (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2017). Sec. Lopez also issued a “Cease and Desist Order” to the San Miguel Corp.-owned coal plants in January of 2017, and she stated, “I’m going to insist that they take care of all the medical bills.” At the time, I was conducting ethnographic research with the National Secretariat of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) in Metro Manila, and PMCJ immediately held actions in protest of San Miguel Corp. (and its subsidiaries Petron Corp. and SMC Global Power), and in solidarity with the people of Limay municipality in Bataan whose homes, environments, and bodies had literally been covered in coal ash.



January 23, 2017 — Members of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, KILUSAN (Movement for National Democracy), 350.org Pilipinas, SANLAKAS, the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement, and other groups hold a demonstration outside of the office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Quezon City in protest against San Miguel Corporation subsidiaries Petron and SMC Global Power for their irresponsible practices which led to a “rain pour” of coal ash onto nearby communities in Lamao village, Limay municipality, Bataan province. The protesters are holding bottles of San Miguel Beer filled with ash while they display their “ash-covered” hands. (Photo by the author)

After the No Nukes Asia Forum event was over, I remained in Bataan for about a month where I was able to learn more about both the long-standing anti-nuclear movement as well as the rising anti-coal movement in the province. The office of both the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement (NFBM) and the Bataan chapter of the national mass leftist organization KILUSAN¹⁰⁷ is located in a relatively narrow two-story townhouse near the main public market of Balanga, the provincial capital of Bataan. The building somewhat reminded me of the townhouse-office of PMCJ's headquarters in Metro Manila, where I had conducted ethnographic research over the previous year. There were tables, chairs, and benches along with a kitchen area on the first floor, and there were two rooms on the second floor, one of which was used by *Ate* Derek and the other by the wonderful Mr. Jhewoung Capatoy—also a member of NFBM and KILUSAN-Bataan as well as the Coordinator of the Young BEANs (Young Batañenos Environmental Advocacy Network).¹⁰⁸

After following *Ate* Derek and Jhewoung around Bataan, I learned about their determined movement to free their province from coal power. I also learned how profoundly connected their anti-coal and anti-nuclear movement is to the struggles of workers in the Freeport Area of Bataan (FAB), the first “special economic zone” (SEZ) established in the Philippines (in 1972) which employs tens of thousands of factory (sweatshop) workers, some of whom have been facing intimidation, retaliation, and threats from their corporate bosses for their efforts to unionize and obtain better wages and employment conditions. Finally, I learned how the struggle against coal

¹⁰⁷ *Kilusan para sa Pambansang Demokrasya* (KILUSAN, the Movement for National Democracy) strives for: “A sovereign nation free from foreign domination; A dynamic people’s democracy that upholds and protects the interests of the masses and vigorously rejects patronage politics; A progressive and sovereign economy with vital industries at the core and modernized agriculture at the base; ensuring jobs, other income opportunities, and food security for the people and encouraging private businesses, scientists and other professionals to contribute to further economic and social development; A nationalist, scientific, and liberating education system and culture; Genuine respect for the right to self-determination of national minorities even as they are encouraged to be part of the mainstream society; Liberation of women from national, class, and gender oppression; [and] A strong international solidarity front against imperialism and oppression of nations.” (<https://www.kilusanpilipinas.org/about-us/>, accessed on July 21, 2022)

¹⁰⁸ “Young BEAN is a province-wide network of young people advocating and campaigning for environmental protection and climate justice. We believe that the youth voice matters in shaping a climate friendly and fossil-free future” (<https://www.facebook.com/youngbean2k17>, accessed on July 21, 2022)

power in Bataan also intersects with the efforts of the Aeta Magbukun Indigenous people to preserve their sovereignty over their Ancestral Domain, located in the mountains amidst Mariveles municipality.

Since 2013, six coal-fired power plants have been erected in Bataan province—two in Mariveles municipality and four in Limay municipality. At least four more coal plants are “in the pipeline” to be constructed (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2021a). There are also two open coal-storage facilities in the coastally-located Mariveles municipality, where coal is stored after having been transported from ships that carry loads of the dirty fossil fuel from Indonesia, Australia, the Philippine island of Semirara, and other locations. Meanwhile, the Petron petroleum complex in Limay municipality includes both an oil refinery and a factory for petroleum products like gasoline, jet fuel, diesel fuel, and kerosene. There is also a diesel-fired power plant, and a fossil gas-fired plant is currently being built. The owners of the coal and petroleum enterprises include the Ayala, Aboitiz, and Ang families (three super-rich oligarchic families who form a part of the Philippines’ “Coaligarchy”) as well as the American energy corporation Sithe Global Power (which itself is owned by the New York-based banking firm Blackstone Group). Key financing for coal power in Bataan has come from the World Bank (through its International Finance Corporation), British financial firm Standard Chartered, Japanese-owned Mizuho Bank, Singaporean firm DBS Bank, Philippine banks Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC) and Banco de Oro (BDO), and the China Banking Corporation.

To put it simply: Bataan has one of the highest concentrations of coal-, oil-, and gas-fired power plants in the Philippines; the province is literally saturated with pollution from the dirty energy sources; even more coal and gas plants are currently under construction; and all of this has been made possible through critical financing from an array of international and domestic banks. There is also one solar farm in the province: the 18-megawatt (MW) Mariveles-Bataan Solar Power

Project, operated by Citicore Solar Bataan, Inc. (CS Bataan).¹⁰⁹ A 20-MW solar power plant is being built by PAVI Green Renewable Energy, Inc. in Orion municipality, and plans have been announced for the construction of another 50-MW solar farm in Mariveles.¹¹⁰ (Since the 1970s, a part of Lamao village in Limay municipality has also been the location of the Philippine Department of Defense’s Government Arsenal [GA], a manufacturing facility for ammunition and basic weapons that are provided to the Armed Forces of the Philippines [AFP] and the Philippine National Police [PNP].)

The climate-justice activists of the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement are determined to promote the current expansion of solar power in Bataan province (as well as the continued expansion of renewable-energy sources across the Philippines), and they are unwavering in their mission to both halt the spread of coal power and to shut down each and every one of the coal plants and coal stockpiles in Bataan. More broadly, they fight for a host of progressive causes in their province. *Ate* Derek and Jhewoung regularly travel around the province—riding buses, *jeepneys*, motorized tricycles, and pedicabs—to attend or host meetings, conduct workshops, give presentations, and hold actions in support of: fighting against plans for the activation of the Philippines’ sole nuclear power plant, assisting the labor-rights movement in the Freeport Area of Bataan, and supporting women’s reproductive rights and family planning at the local *barangay* level. They also assist efforts of Bataan’s LGBTQ community (particularly through the progressive LGBTQ organization True Colors Coalition – Pilipinas) for the passage of local anti-discrimination ordinances and other pro-LGBT measures.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ “Our Businesses.” *Citicore Power, Inc.*

(<https://citicorepower.com.ph/our-businesses/power/generation/solar/solar/bataan>, accessed on July 21, 2022)

¹¹⁰ In February of 2020, “the Provincial Government of Bataan (PGB), the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), and Athena Energy Holdings (Athena) signed a trilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on mutual cooperation for development of 50MW Solar PV Plant in Mariveles.” (<https://gggi.org/province-of-bataan-gggi-and-athena-energy-holdings-join-forces-toward-philippines-renewable-energy-transition/>, accessed on July 21, 2022)

¹¹¹ Of both provincial-wide and national (and international) concern is the movement to obtain justice for Jennifer Laude—a trans Filipina who was murdered by US marine Joseph Scott Pemberton in 2014 in Olongapo City, just north



Posters on the wall of the office of the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement and KILUSAN-Bataan. (Photo by the author)

Of vital concern is their effort to do whatever they can to support their dear friends and comrades living in the neighborhoods that are most directly and continuously contaminated by the severely foul-smelling emissions, airborne coal ash and coal dust, and terrible noise pollution from the “demon” coal plants and coal stockpiles in the province. This includes the people of the *barangay* of Lamao in Limay municipality—a valiant group of insurgent citizens who have been fighting for their rights to a healthy and clean environment, housing, just employment, and compensation for the damages that the coal projects have brought to their health and livelihoods.

A Philippine “Sacrifice Zone”: Lamao Village and the Rise of Citizens’ Resistance

of Bataan. Pemberton was pardoned by Pres. Duterte in 2020, which triggered widespread outrage among LGBT communities across the Philippines. The case also ignited protests in the Philippines and the United States, with calls from demonstrators to terminate the US-Philippine annual military exercises known as *Balikatan* (“Shoulder-to-Shoulder”).

In the 1970s, the Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) was created by the dictatorial government of Ferdinand Marcos. This government-owned oil corporation proceeded to take over the lands of Lamao village in Limay municipality.¹¹² However, people were already living there, including farmers and fisherfolk. Today, many of their descendants claim that their lands in Lamao were actually granted to them in the 1950s through presidential proclamation by Ramon Magsaysay; after Pres. Magsaysay's land grants, there was a great migration of people to the area (R. J. Karunungan 2015). Regardless, the Philippine state during the Marcos Dictatorship declared the *barangay* of Lamao to be an industrial zone and granted the lands to the Philippine National Oil Company. Also in the 1970s, PNOC acquired Petron Corporation, which had been operating an oil refinery (the Bataan Refinery) in Lamao since the 1960s.

Petron was re-privatized in the 1990s during the neoliberal presidency of Fidel Ramos, which had begun privatizing PNOC, the National Power Corporation (Napocor), and other state-owned energy companies. By the 21st century, meanwhile, San Miguel Corporation, the largest food and beverage firm in Southeast Asia, was transforming from a primarily food and beer-brewing company into a diversified conglomerate with stakes in the real-estate, oil-refining, mining, and energy-production sectors (including coal, petroleum, fossil-gas, hydroelectric, and solar power), especially under the leadership of Philippine billionaire tycoon Ramon Ang, the corporation's current president and CEO (Burgos 2022). In 2009, San Miguel Corporation took control over Petron Corp., including Petron's oil refinery. The Petron coal plant was built in 2013, and the 600-MW coal plant of SMC Global Power (another subsidiary of San Miguel Corporation) became operational in 2017. These are just a couple of the corporation's numerous coal projects across the Philippines; San Miguel Corp. has been a pivotal, behemoth force in the Philippines' "coaligarchy"

¹¹² The *barangay* of Lamao is also the site where, on April 9, 1942, Gen. Edward P. King of the US Army surrendered to Colonel Moto Nakayama of the Imperial Japanese Army. The terrible war crime known as the Bataan Death March was conducted by the Japanese imperial forces following the US-Philippine surrender.

which has facilitated the expansion of coal power throughout the island country (see Chapter 3 of this dissertation).

While all of these official state-sanctioned ownership changes and corporate takeovers in the lands of the *barangay* of Lamao were taking place, the citizens of Lamao themselves continued living their lives, growing vegetable gardens, planting and harvesting mango and other fruit-bearing trees, and fishing in the coastal waters. Some of them have worked for local retail businesses, health clinics, and the local *barangay* government, and their children have attended local schools. Then, beginning in the 2010s, construction began for the 140-MW coal-fired power plant that would power Petron’s oil refinery. Unfortunately for the citizens of Lamao, this is when many of their severe housing, health, and environmental problems began. It is also when they started being subjected to the corporate terrorism of the Philippines’ coal industry.



A San Miguel Corporation coal-fired power plant in Lamao village, Limay municipality. Members of Lamao Concerned Citizens, Inc. (LICCI) refer to it as a “demon” and “monster.” (Photo by the author)

I first learned of the complicated situation in Lamao regarding land titling—and the specific land dispute between the insurgent citizens of Lamao and the Philippine National Oil Company—

during the meeting between the No Nukes Asia Forum and Lamao Concerned Citizens, Inc. (LICCI), assisted by the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement, on November 14, 2018. Dr. Rory Perez, a member of the *Sangguniang Barangay* (Village Council) of Lamao—and one of the few local or provincial government officials advocating for the citizens of Lamao, who have been suffering from the pollution and terror that has accompanied the expansion of coal power in Bataan—explained how Pres. Ramon Magsaysay had granted a certain amount of land to the public in the 1950s, spurring a migration to the *barangay* of families from other parts of Bataan and other Philippine provinces. She then described how the dictator Ferdinand Marcos created the Philippine National Oil Company in the 1970s and granted PNOC vast lands in *barangay* Lamao, despite how communities of farmers and fisherfolk were already living there. At this point, to the members of the No Nukes Asia Forum, Councilwoman Perez passionately and resolutely declared that, though PNOC and the Philippine government have been denying land rights to these citizens of Lamao, “this is a violation of human rights. The situation is so sad. Who will help the people here?”

A few weeks later, members of LICCI shared more specific details of the injustices, trauma, and human-rights violations that they have been subjected to by the internationally financed Philippine coal industry and the Philippine state during a “Solidarity Tour” of labor advocates from Canada. On December 5, 2018, members of the Vancouver & District Labour Council (VDLC)¹¹³ arrived in Bataan province, where they were hosted by KILUSAN-Bataan, the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement, and *Ahansa ng mga Manggagawa sa Bataan* – Bataan Labor Alliance (AMBA-BALA). The Canadian labor-rights leaders from Vancouver met with the Bataeño labor leaders and

¹¹³ “The VDLC represents 60,000 workers from over 100 affiliated unions in our community. Labour council members work at food stores, on the docks, in public services, construction and much more. The labour council brings these members together every month for regular meetings, and carries out events and activities between meetings... We are a chartered body of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), representing 3.5 million unionized Canadians. The VDLC was founded in 1889 as the ‘Vancouver Trades and Labour Council,’ making it one of the oldest labour organizations in the country.” (<https://vdlc.ca/who-we-are/>, accessed July 23, 2022)

members of AMBA-BALA, many of whom had been facing retaliation and termination of employment due to their attempts to form a union.¹¹⁴ The following day, the folks from VDLC took a van to Lamao village to meet with the citizens of LICCI. In an outdoor communal gathering space (which was partly covered by a wooden roof), LICCI members shared their stories about life in Lamao under the shadow of the San Miguel coal plants.

A strong leader of LICCI, Ms. Daisy Pedranza, shared how she and her family had been living in Lamao since 1979. She said that she had been working as an employee for the local *barangay* government in the 2010s, and she witnessed the beginning of the construction of the Petron coal plant. She also explained how Lamao Concerned Citizens, Inc. was formed, and how families were subjected to forced relocations and demolitions of their homes:

Nakakalungkot. Hindi nagpatawag sa community para magkaroon ng public consultation ang LGU na ipapatayo ang CFPP. Walang nakakaalam na ipapatayo iyon dito. Bumuo kami ng grupo para labanan ang planta na iyan ng San Miguel noong 2010. Nag-umpisa kami ng laban hanggang ngayon—mga rallies, mga panawagan. Na-demolish 15 houses. Walang ibinigay na relocation. Ang ibinigay lang, may 20 thousand o 30 thousand. Nakakalungkot.”

(It was so sad. The LGU [Local Government Unit] didn’t summon the community to hold a public consultation on constructing the CFPP [coal-fired power plant]. No one here was informed that it would be built here. We established this group to fight against that plant of San Miguel back in 2010. We began our fight which continues to this day—[holding] rallies, [making] pleas [to the government]. Fifty houses were demolished. No relocation was given to them. The only thing that was given was twenty thousand [pesos] [about \$350] or thirty thousand [pesos] [about \$530]. It was so tragic.)

¹¹⁴ Dozens of foreign and multinational corporations have manufacturing facilities in the Freeport Area of Bataan (FAB), the first Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the Philippines, established in 1972. The workers at FAB manufacture handbags, tennis balls, T-shirts and other clothing items, shoes, yachts, and dozens of other items that are then exported to markets worldwide. Workers have testified that they’ve been subjected to a lack of job security due to contractualization practices of manpower agencies, forced overtime work (they get paid, but it’s still coerced), “subhuman” working conditions (lack of adequate ventilation in often very hot and humid factories, roof leakages, lack of ability to use the restroom when necessary due to bathroom pass systems, only five days off (for both vacation days and sick days, and no benefits for non-regular workers), and gender-based discrimination against women and LGBT employees, some of whom have been subjected to sexual harassment and physical abuse. AMBA-BALA has been advocating for the rights of workers in the Freeport Area of Bataan and assisting them in their struggle to form a union. The corporations, meanwhile, enjoy tax holidays and other economic benefits.

San Miguel Corporation claims that 56 families whose homes and dwellings were demolished by the corporation were provided with compensation, but, as *Ate Daisy* and other citizens of Lamao Concerned Citizens, Inc. have said, only half of those families were compensated, and the compensation given was measly (*Global Witness* 2019). Effectively, hundreds of Lamao’s citizens were rendered homeless by rich and powerful state and corporate forces, and they were barely provided any monetary help, if at all, to re-build their lives. *Ate Daisy* also described what happened to some large trees during the demolitions: “*Parang umiiyak ‘yung malalaking puno na na-de-demolish*” (“It was as if the large trees were weeping as they were being demolished”). She then described the fight waged by her and her fellow insurgent ecological citizens of Lamao village:

Ano ang laban namin sa gobyerno namin? Sulat—formal request letter sa munisipyo. Wala kaming kakampi dito kundi ‘yung mga mamamayan. Mga pulis? Kakampi ng LGU. Sino ang inyong proteksyunan? ‘Yung mayayamang may-ari ng planta. Papaano kaming mga maralitang mamamayan? Pero hindi kami tumitigil sa laban. Marami akong death threat. Ang buhay ko sinuko kay Lord. Nagkaroon ng asthma. Hindi kami tutol sa pag-unlad ng bansa. Sana gobyerno ituring kaming tao—hindi hayop. Talagang monster ang kalaban namin dito. Halos labat sakit. Ash dump is very big—araw/gabi. ‘Yung dump truck—umuusok pa, walang takip. Nakakalungkot...

(How did we fight against our government? [First] a letter—a formal letter request to the municipality. We had no allies here except for us citizens¹¹⁵ [i.e., except for each other—the citizens of Lamao]. The police? They were allies of the LGU [Local Government Unit]. Who are you [the government] protecting? The rich owners of the [coal] plant. What about us impoverished citizens? But we aren’t stopping our fight. I’ve had a lot of death threats. I’ve surrendered my life to the Lord. I developed asthma. We aren’t against the development of the country. Hopefully the government would consider us to be human beings—not animals. Our enemy here is really a monster. Almost everyone is getting sick. The ash dumps are very big—day and night. The dump trucks are still emitting [coal particles]; they have no covers. It’s so sad.)

In 2016, LICCI members filed a petition of injunction to the Supreme Court of the Philippines against both SMC Global Power and Albert S. Garcia, the governor of Bataan at the time and current member of the Philippine House of Representatives. The petition alleged that the San Miguel Corp.-controlled SMC Global Power: failed to properly consult with the community

¹¹⁵ The term *mamamayan* can be translated as a “citizen,” a “resident” (of a city, town, or village), or a “national.”

members whose homes they went on to demolish, failed to even provide them with a notice that their homes would be demolished, coerced the residents into signing undisclosed documents, and failed to take measures to prevent toxic emissions and other harms to the residents' health and environment (*Global Witness* 2019, 46). In 2017, moreover, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, under Sec. Gina Lopez's leadership, issued a "Notice of Violation" to the Petron Bataan Refinery, and a "Cease and Desist Order" to both the Petron and SMC Global Power coal plants, after a "rain pour" of coal ash blanketed the homes, gardens, and bodies of the citizens of Lamao village.



April 12, 2022 — Members of the Coal-Free Bataan Movement hold a protest calling for the closure of the two coal-fired power plants in the town of Limay in Bataan province. One protester carries a large wooden cross with the words “*Kalibaryo ng Kalikasan*” (Suffering of Nature). The term *kalibaryo* (suffering) is derived from Calvary, the site of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion. A sign reads, “*Pasakit, Pabirap, Salot ang Coal!*” (Coal is Pain, Torment, a Plague!). (Photo by ABS-CBN News)

An elder man, Mr. Nestor Castro, testified that tactics of deception were used while the coal plant was being constructed:

Noong una, hindi ako myembro ng LICCI, pero nakita ko maraming dapat gawin. Violence ang plantang ito sa tao. Kailangang ipaglaban ang karapatang pantao, at kalusugan. Noong itinayo, nagkaroon ng panlilinlang. Hindi sinabi sa amin na coal-fired plant. Sabi nila na planta ng pagkain ng baboy at manok. Hindi namin pinansin kasi akala namin ‘yun. Pero nakita namin na coal plant ipinatayo.

Inaagawan nila yung tira namin. Wala kaming titulo. Bawal mag-ayos ng bahay. Kaya nagbuo kami ng grupo para labanan.

(I wasn't a member of LICCI at first, but then I realized that so much needed to be done. This [coal] plant is violence against human beings. It is necessary to fight for human rights, and [for] health. When it was being constructed, deception occurred. It wasn't said to us that it was a coal-fired plant. They said it was a "plant" for pig and poultry feeds. We didn't notice anything because that's what we thought. But then we saw that it was a coal plant that was built. They stole our lands. We had no land titles. We were prohibited from fixing our homes. So we created this group to fight back.)

Ka Nestor¹¹⁶ had been suffering from asthma and heart problems, and he tragically passed away in November of 2021. He played a major role in organizing the citizens of Lamao against the health and environmental abuses the community faced. He also joined the petition of injunction against SMC Global Power,¹¹⁷ and he is remembered as a tireless advocate for climate and social justice.



December 5, 2018 — Members of the Vancouver & District Labour Council (VDLC) visit Lamao village in Bataan province and meet with the insurgent eco-citizens of Lamao Concerned Citizens, Inc. (LICCI) and KILUSAN (*Kilusang para sa Pambansang Demokrasya*, the Movement for National Democracy). (Photo by the author)

¹¹⁶ Ka is short for *kasama*, meaning “companion” or “comrade.” Ate Derek had introduced him as “Ka Nestor.” She had also introduced Ms. Daisy Pedranza as “Ate Daisy.”

¹¹⁷ Mr. Nestor Castro also joined the “landmark” petition of complaint against the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation (IFC) that was submitted by the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice in 2017.

Another citizen, Ms. Inday, compared how life was before the construction of the coal plant and after, in terms of the health, economic wellbeing, and ecology of her community:

Noon, noong walang planta, maraming puno dito. Yung kapit-babay namin—nangunguba ng gulay. Pwedeng gawin pang-araw-araw na kita nila. Panggatong naman—manguba ng kaboy, hindi kailangan bumili ng gasol. Tapos yung tubig, bago na-divert yung tubig sa ilog—may deep well diyan. Hindi kailangang bumili ng tubig katulad ngayon. Pwedeng kunin ang pang-ulam sa ilog—isda. Noong nasira na, yung mga puno, konti lang ang bunga sa sinantala ng abo. Sa ngayon, 2018, halos wala akong na-harvest sa palibot ko. Mula 2015 hanggang ngayon, wala kaming natitikman na bunga na matamis. Dito nagtatanim kami ng gulay, halos araw-araw. Kabit pataba, the gulay doesn't get healthier. Acidic yung soil—heavy metals. Pag lumakas ang ulan, ang waste disposal ng planta—nagpupunta sa dagat. Nagkakaroon ng fish kill. Sa nakaraang taon, three times nangyari ang fish kill dito sa Limay. Before, wala pa yung planta, may 60 well springs, noong naitayo yung San Miguel, unti-unting natutuyo, nawawala. Hindi na kailangang bumili ng iniinom na tubig, pero sa ngayon, kailangan naming bumili ng mineral water. Kabit yung mga magsasaka, noon, madami ang harvest, kumonti ngayon. Dati, sagana sa tubig. Ngayon maraming nagrereklamo—kailangang gumamit ng pump para iakyat ang tubig. Napakalaking pinsala sa aming bayan.

(Before, when there was no [coal] plant, there were so many trees here. Our neighbors would gather vegetables, [and] they could use them as their daily source of income. For fuel, we could just gather firewood, [and] we didn't need to buy a gas stove. Furthermore, before they diverted the water from the river [for the coal plant], we had deep wells there. We didn't need to buy water like we do now. We could easily get a main dish (*ulam*) for our meals—fish. When the situation deteriorated [due to the coal plant], the trees bore much less fruit, as they were contaminated by the [coal] ash. As of now, in 2018, I can barely harvest anything around me. Since 2015 until now, we don't taste fruits that are sweet anymore. We plant vegetables here, almost everyday. Even with fertilizer, the vegetables don't get any healthier. The soil is acidic—[filled with] heavy metals. When it rains hard, the [toxic] waste from the [coal] plant goes to the sea, leading to fish kills. In the last year, fish kills have occurred three times here in Limay. Before, when that [coal] plant wasn't here, there were 60 well springs, [but] when San Miguel [the San Miguel Corp.-owned coal plant] was built, the water gradually dried up and disappeared. We didn't need to buy drinking water, but now, we have to buy mineral water. Even the farmers, before, had large harvests, [but] now their harvests have decreased. Before, there was an abundance of water. Now so many are complaining that we need to use a pump to get water. [The coal plant] has been a disaster for our community.)

Derek Cabe (of the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement) also testified regarding the story of another resident of Lamao, a woman who was a single mother of three children. Her first child passed away, her second child was born as a “special child,” and her third child was diagnosed with leukemia. The latter child, who was nine years old, was also being treated for pneumonia, and his doctor had told the mother that she needed to get him out of Lamao village because “he won't die

of leukemia; he'll die of pneumonia.” The mother, who had previously worked for several years in Japan, saving as much money as possible before returning to the Philippines, said that she couldn't move out because “this is the only house I could put up.” *Ate* Derek said that the woman's son had just passed away in September of 2018.

In addition to these tragic health and ecological hardships that the Lamao citizens have had to face due to the fumes, ash, and dust from the San Miguel coal operations, the people have also had to endure terrible noise pollution from the “monster” coal plants. One evening, I visited the home of Mr. Fred dela Cruz, an elder fisher from Lamao. I had gone to visit *Tatay* Fred (“Daddy Fred”)¹¹⁸ in order to learn more about how the coal-fired power plants had impacted his and his family's livelihood in fishing (and other impacts on their lives). While walking to his family's home through a narrow dirt path under the night sky, I began hearing extremely loud, thunderous, and prolonged rumbling sounds. I looked up and around me, and I saw the gargantuan San Miguel coal plant, with its massively thick puffs of fumes billowing out from its towering smoke stacks. As I kept walking amidst the terrible noise as well as the painfully foul smells of the emissions that saturated the air, and with the ominously gigantic coal-fired power plant with its blood-orange lights and thick puffs of smoke hovering over the village, I suddenly, viscerally understood why the citizens of Lamao often referred to the coal plant as a *demonyo* (demon) or a monster. Adding to the dystopian quality of the scene was the fact that the coal plant is located right next to the local cemetery. *Ate* Derek had even referred to the situation as the “Bataan Death-from-Coal March.”

Once I arrived at *Tatay* Fred's home, I met his lovely family and was able to speak more with him about life in Lamao. Like other fisherfolk in the village, he lamented how he would be able to catch an abundance of fish prior to the construction of the coal plants, but now his fish catches have dwindled, and he's also concerned about the contamination of the fish that remain from mercury

¹¹⁸ *Tatay* means “dad” or “father” in Tagalog.

poisoning and exposure to other toxic chemicals. He also said that it's difficult to sleep with the loud, continuous noises coming from the coal plant throughout the night. He wished that coal power had never come to Bataan, and that it was a solar power plant standing there instead. A year later, I happened to see a Twitter post from Greenpeace Philippines showing a touching photo of Fred dela Cruz protesting outside of Shell Corporation's Philippine headquarters in Manila, holding a sign saying "#ClimateJustice" and a wooden canoe paddle with the written message: "*Nawawalan kami ng kabuhayan habang patuloy ninyong sinusunog ang kinabukasan ng aming mga anak*" ("We are losing our livelihoods while you continue to burn away the future of our children").



September 17, 2019 — Fred dela Cruz, a fisher from Lamao village, Limay municipality, Bataan province protests in favor of climate justice outside of Shell corporation's Philippine office in Manila (Photo by Greenpeace Philippines)

As they had narrated in their testimonies, the people of Lamao village have been subjected to terrible pollution, enforced displacements, bulldozing of their homes without consultations or even a warning, damage to their crops, diminished fish catches, a drastically reduced (and contaminated) water supply, and a host of preventable respiratory and other illnesses that have had enormously injurious, debilitating, and, in some cases, lethal, impacts on their health, particularly for the children and the elderly. In the environmental justice literature, the term “sacrifice zones” has been used to describe communities that have been forced to live in areas amidst or adjacent to toxic industrial zones that other, more affluent, communities are able to avoid (Lerner 2010). The communities that have been suffering the most from heavy exposure to the emissions and byproducts of toxic industrial zones—including power plants that burn coal, petroleum, diesel, and/or fossil gas; oil refineries; petrochemical processing facilities; large-scale (especially open-pit) mines; and military bases—are also communities that have long suffered from social marginalization and discrimination in society, including socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, ethno-racial and religious minorities, and Indigenous nations. These communities have been forced to “make sacrifices”—on their own health, ecologies, livelihoods, and personal and familial safety—that other communities haven’t had to make. At the same time, wealthy and powerful corporations, with their allies in government, have actively “sacrificed” the health, wellbeing, and ecological integrity of these same communities, while reaping enormous profits in the process.

In May of 2022, David Boyd, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, released a report that was presented to the UN Human Rights Council in which he expanded on the notion of a sacrifice zone: “The climate crisis is creating a new category of sacrifice zones as a result of unabated greenhouse gas emissions, as communities have become, and are becoming, uninhabitable because of extreme weather events or slow-onset disasters, including drought and rising sea levels” (Boyd 2022, 7). As Fred dela Cruz’s protest outside of Shell’s Manila

headquarters attests, the insurgent ecological citizens of Lamao are decrying how the government and giant fossil-fuel corporations like Shell and San Miguel are sacrificing the health and livelihoods of communities like theirs as well as the future (and the possibility of a future) for their children. Despite how these fossil-fuel companies are treating communities like Lamao village as sacrifice zones for the debilitating immediate impacts of their polluting activities—as well as sacrifice zones for the disastrous, potentially apocalyptic, effects of the climate crisis, which have been manifesting across the highly climate-vulnerable Philippines—Lamao’s insurgent eco-citizens are continuing to wage their (dangerous) resistance struggle against the demon of coal power.

Bataan’s Insurgent Eco-Citizens: The Fight against San Miguel Corporation’s Coal Plant

As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, a public hearing was held in the *barangay* of Biaan in the municipality of Mariveles on the morning of November 20, 2018, with regards to San Miguel Corporation’s proposed coal plant in the village. As people who had been directly harmed, traumatized, and terrorized by the San Miguel coal plants in their own *barangay*, leaders of Lamao Concerned Citizens, Inc.—along with members of the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement, KILUSAN-Bataan, Greenpeace Philippines, and the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ)—traveled to the village of Biaan in Mariveles municipality to speak out against the health, ecological, and climatic damages wrought by San Miguel Corporation’s coal-fired power plants in Limay municipality. (The Greenpeace and PMCJ members had traveled from Metro Manila—about a three-hour drive away). The hearing was conducted in *barangay* Biaan’s outdoor Multi-Purpose Court, located in a cemented square in the center of the village, with a couple of open white tents donated by E-FARE Investment Holdings, Inc. (a subsidiary of San Miguel Corp.) to provide shade from the hot tropical sun. Green plastic chairs were spread out for those in attendance, and dozens of residents of Biaan village and nearby municipalities sat down to watch the presentations. Dozens

of more people were standing toward the edge of the Multi-Purpose Court next to some buildings which offered some shade.

Representatives of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) explained why they were granting the proposed 600-MW coal plant an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC), and corporate representatives of San Miguel touted the supposed economic benefits of the projects while defending the environmental impacts. The San Miguel Corp. representatives claimed that the coal plant would bring revenues to the local governments of Biaan village and Mariveles municipality, and that the technologies they put in place would lessen the environmental impacts of coal burning. The DENR, meanwhile, had actually outsourced the preparation and execution of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to a private consulting firm called GEOSPHERE Technologies, Inc.,¹¹⁹ whose managing director is Engr. Leticia T. dela Cruz. Engr. dela Cruz asserted that the coal-plant project passed the standards of the Philippine government's Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act—both of which, it should be mentioned, have been criticized for having overly lenient standards; the international group Clean Air Asia has criticized the Philippines for having some of the “most lenient sulfur oxides and nitrogen oxides emission standards” (Enano 2020). A report by Greenpeace Southeast Asia, based on research from Harvard University, moreover, has critiqued the “insufficiency of the current regulatory framework in terms of mitigating coal use” in the Philippine government, as “these laws sanction the emission or discharge of effluents and pollutants and the generation of hazardous waste” (2015, 32). In any

¹¹⁹ According to their Facebook page, “GEOSPHERE Technologies, Inc. is a domestic private company established in 1994 to provide management, technical and investment advice for industrial, commercial, manufacturing and other kinds of enterprises, government agencies, persons, firms, associations, corporations, partnerships and other entities... Specific services of GEOSPHERE include: management consulting; environmental assessment and planning...environmental resources management; fishery resources assessment...[and] training and public communications... The people behind GEOSPHERE have provided technical and professional services to the government and other private sectors both local and foreign. They have worked closely with clients from various sectors such as, agriculture, forestry, industry, energy exploration and development, mining, transportation, commercial and industrial estates.” (<https://www.facebook.com/GEOSPHERE-Technologies-Inc-298568260156724/>, accessed July 25, 2022)

case, as it turned out, Engr. dela Cruz found that her role, during the Question-and-Answer section of the hearing, was to assure and convince the citizens of Biaan village and other parts of Bataan that the San Miguel coal plant wouldn't threaten their health and livelihoods.

When a woman asked a question about the “bad smell” (*masamang amoy*) that came from the coal plants in Lamao village as well as potential illnesses that can result from living near a coal plant, Engr. dela Cruz gave a vague answer that implied that bad smells shouldn't come from coal plants if properly designed:

Uh, una po yung amoy kasi, uh, meron po iyong pinanggagalingan. Ano po ba yung pinanggagalingan ng babo? Normally po, ito po 'yung mga, halimbawa mga nabubulok, ganyan. So, meron ho bang nabubulok na bagay sa isang planta? So kailangan po alam din natin kung saan po nanggagaling ano po 'yung pinanggagalingan ng amoy at kung ito po ba ay proseso o parte ng planta? Uhh, kung ito po ay parte ng planta, hindi po ito dapat, uhh, mangyari kasi yung mga tao mismo sa loob ng planta ay maaapektuhan din ng amoy na masama. Sooo, uh, hindi po natin masagot direktso sa experience ng (taga-Lamao daw po kasi ito) kung saan po nanggagaling yung Lamao—ay—yung amoy.

(Uh, first, you see, the smell, uh, it would have a source. What was the source of the bad smell? Normally, it would be, for example, something rotting, like that. So, was there something rotting in the plant? So we would need to know where it came from, where the source of the bad smell was, and was it a process or part of the plant? Uhh, if it was a part of the plant, this shouldn't be happening, uhh, because the people inside the plant themselves would also be affected by the bad smell. So, uh, we can't directly answer to the experience of [the people from] Lamao village (since we're talking about people from Lamao here) where the...bad smell came from.)

Rather than directly explaining that coal plants inherently cause “bad smells” (that are, in fact, so foul smelling that it's often painful to breathe), Engr. dela Cruz seemed to be implying that something was “rotting” or “decaying” (*nabubulok*) inside the plant, and that that might have been the reason for the bad smell. Her answer to the question about the illnesses that can arise from living next to a coal plant further revealed her tactics of distortion:

Ano po ba yung nakukubang sakit sa planta? Uh, sabi po, ito pong planta ay...naglalabas ng arsenic, ng lead, ng mercury. Uh, kailangan po lang po sigurong maitindihan natin ang proseso ng planta. Ang planta po kasi, kagaya ng in-e-explain po kanina ni Sir Richard—ginagamit po nila ang coal sa panggatong. Hinabaluan nila ito ng limestone. Wala po tayong dinadagdag na arsenic, wala tayong dinadagdag na lead, wala tayong dinadagdag na mercury. Nasaan po pa ito nanggagaling ang coal? Sinabi din po kanina sa ating presentasyon na ang coal po ay uling, galing po siya sa puno na naibaon po ng mga million years sa lupa hanggang ito po ay nainitan na sunog nagiging abo at ito po ay minimina

para ito po yung gagamiting panggatong. So yung level po ng sinasabi nating lead, arsenic, at saka mercury, ito po ay background level. Wala pong ini-introduce na mga chemicals doon sa proseso dahil ginagamit lamang natin ang coal na panggatong. So, uh, sinasabi po n'yo baka matakot po kayo kasi lead, arsenic na sinasabi pampatay ng daga at saka ng mercury, uh, kailangan po nating maintindihan kung ano po ang proseso at... may totoo po ba ito may...lumalabas ba ng ganito?... Ano po ba ang level ng ganitong mga metals sa ating coal? So, hindi po siya mataas, dahil background nga po, dahil ito po ay galing lamang sa tanim na naibaon sa lupa nang matagal at nagiging abo. Ito po yung ating panggatong. So ano po ba ang sakit na nakukuha sa planta? Uhhh, ang sakit po kasi, maraming pinanggagalingan. Minsan depende rin po sa ating pag-aalaga ng ating katawan. Pero doon po sa planta, ano po ba yung pollution? Ang sinabi natin kanina is yung alikabok. So yung alikabok, kapag malanghap natin, yung po yung nakakasama sa ating pag-ubo o paghinga. Pero may mga solusyon. Sinabi rin natin na parang, halimbawa ngayon, maraming alikabok, so pag ganito dapat, kailangang basain lang natin. So yung po yung napag-usapan natin kanina, wala pong direktso kung ano ba talaga ang sakit na nakukuha sa planta. Kasi marami pong factors po iyon. Pero kailangan lang po ang planta, bago po sila gumawa at saka mag-operate ng planta, kailangan po nilang sundin labat ng batas, kasi pag nasumod nila po yung batas na iyon, compliant na po sila, kasama po yung health ng tao.

(What illnesses can one get from a coal plant? Uh, it was said that this plant emits arsenic, lead, [and] mercury. Uh, we should perhaps understand the process of the plant. The plant, you see, as explained by Sir Richard, it uses coal for fuel. They mix it with limestone. We don't add any extra arsenic, we don't add any extra lead, [and] we don't add any extra mercury. Where does this come from in coal? It was said earlier in our presentation that coal is *uling* (charcoal), which comes from trees that were buried in the earth for millions of years until they were heated [i.e., subjected to high temperatures], becoming ash, and [today] this is mined in order to be used as fuel. So the level of what we've been saying regarding lead, arsenic, and mercury, this is the background level. There are no [new] chemicals that are introduced in the process because we only use coal as fuel. So, uh, you've been saying that you, perhaps, are scared because of the lead, the arsenic that is said to be a rat killer, and the mercury—Uh, we need to understand what the process is and if there is truth [to the idea] that stuff like this is emitted [from the coal plant]? What is the level of these kinds of metals in our coal? So, it's not high [i.e., it's not a high level of mercury, arsenic, or lead] because it's "background" because it comes from plants that were buried in the earth for a long time and became ash. That's what our fuel is. So what illnesses can one get from the plant? Uhh, illnesses, you know, have many sources. Sometimes it also depends on how we take care of our bodies. But in the plant, what's the pollution? What we said, earlier, is the dust. So, dust [i.e., coal dust], when we inhale it, that's what accompanies our cough or breathing. But there are solutions. We also said that, it's like, for example right now, there's a lot of dust, so when it's like this, we should, we need to wet it. So what we were discussing earlier, there's nothing directly [that can be said] regarding what illnesses one can really get from the plant. Because that has many factors. But what the plant just needs—before they build and operate the plant—they need to follow all the laws, because if they follow those laws, they will be compliant, including with regards to human health.)

Instead of directly addressing the serious health concerns that inherently develop from living in the vicinity of coal plants, Engr. dela Cruz spoke about the long process, over millions of years, for how coal is formed. She also deceptively used the Tagalog word *uling* to refer to coal. The term *uling* is

actually translated as charcoal. Though she correctly referred to the long process in which coal is formed in the earth, she falsely equated the term “charcoal” with the term “coal” by using the familiar Tagalog term “*uling*.”¹²⁰ She also claimed that the coal plant wasn’t adding any new arsenic, lead, or mercury to the process of burning coal, and that, therefore, the levels of emissions of those chemicals wouldn’t be high because there would merely be a “background level” of those chemicals. No one, however, was saying or implying anything about adding arsenic, mercury, or lead to the process; rather, people were bringing up the fact that those highly toxic chemicals for human health would inevitably be emitted by the coal-burning process taking place inside the San Miguel coal plant, and that people would be exposed to them—leading to a greater risk for disease. Engr. dela Cruz admitted that the coal plant would release pollution in the form of coal dust, but she implied that “wetting it” (i.e., spraying the coal dust with water or getting it wet in some other way) would solve the problem of contamination from coal dust. Finally, she reassured the people that, as long as San Miguel properly followed the laws (the same laws that have been criticized for being overly lenient and insufficient), then it would be “compliant,” with the implication that it would not be a threat to human health.

¹²⁰ From my interactions and observations, most people in the Philippines that I encountered, outside of coal-impacted communities, tended not to be immediately familiar with the English term “coal.” When I would use the Filipino translation of “*karbon*,” there would often be more familiarity, but still, confusion, over the terms. My use of the term *karbon* often induced some kind of perceptual connection to machinery, electronics, chemistry, and/or fuel. I found that discussing coal would often be an interesting discursive and representational challenge, but after describing “*ang mga malalaking planta ng kuryente na nagbubuga ng makakapal at maruruming usok*” (“huge power plants that emit thick, dirty puffs of smoke”) or after saying “*ang pagsunog ng karbon ay nagbubuga ng marumi at makapal na usok, at ito ay nagdudulot ng pagbabago ng klima*” (“the burning of coal [*karbon*] releases thick, dirty smoke, and this is a cause of the climate crisis”) or something along those lines, people then knew what I was talking about. I found myself getting kind of sad from these conversations; I felt like I was the breaker of very bad news. Most Filipinos haven’t been as aware of coal and coal burning because (among other things) coal power is relatively new to the Philippines, and I wished the dirty energy never came to the country. I understood why people that I met in Bataan living next to coal plants considered the energy source to be a demon, monster, and curse. In any case, *uling* (charcoal) is definitely not the fossil fuel of coal, and these “expert” chemical engineers, geologists, biologists, oceanographers, meteorologists, public health experts, and anthropologists and other social scientists on this team of preparers of the Environmental Impact Assessment, as well as the San Miguel corporate representatives, certainly knew (or should have known) that they were effecting a distortion of (or actively spreading disinformation on) the issue at hand by frequently using the much more familiar term of *uling* instead of “coal” or “*karbon*.”

Both Councilor Rory Perez and Ms. Derek Cabe provided powerful rebuttals.

Councilwoman Perez stated:

Ako po ay taga-Lamao. Kagawad po ng Barangay Lamao. I am a dentist by profession. And I am here to represent the people of Lamao, hindi po ang Barangay ng Lamao. I am here as a concerned citizen... So ang question ko po ay tungkol sa mga nasabi ni Ma'am kanina regarding the social responsibilities of the plant...which I understand is the same owner, you know, San Miguel Corporation. Ang sa akin po, ang gaganda po talaga noong na-present kanina. But the only thing that I can say na totoo ay iyon pong magandang income na nakukuba po ng aming Barangay. Ang aking pong tanong: Bakit po pagdating sa social responsibility, like health—unang una ang health—mayroon po bang health impact assessment ng DENR na sinusunod po ng proponents regarding the health of the people? Of the communities? Pangalawa po—yung po sinasabing...binibigay ng negosyo o hanapbuhay para sa mga tao? Wala po iyan sa amin. Pagdating po sa health, wala rin pong nakukuhang suporta ang mga tao. Bagkus, wala po kaming malapitan sa San Miguel. Lagi po kaming rejected. At hindi ko lang po alam kung bakit sa pamunuan ng Barangay ng Lamao, at ng municipality of Limay, ay nangyayari ang ganitong sistema. Now we have to realize na ang labat ng bubay dito sa mundo was given and created by God, and we have the task...na tayo ang dapat na maging tagapamahala ng labat ng nilikha ng Diyos... Iyon pong marinig kong mga salita kanina ay napakagaganda kung ito po ay magiging totoo.

(I am from Lamao. [I am] a councilor in the *Barangay* government [the village government]. I am a dentist by profession. And I am here to represent the people of Lamao, not the *Barangay* of Lamao [i.e., the *barangay* government of Lamao]. I am here as a concerned citizen. So, my question is about what Ma'am [Engr. Leticia dela Cruz] said earlier regarding the social responsibilities of the plant, which I understand [has] the same owner, you know, San Miguel Corporation. In my view, what they presented earlier looked very lovely. But the only thing that I can say that was true [about the presentation] was the lovely income that the *Barangay* [government] will receive. My question is: ...when it comes to social responsibility like health—first and foremost, health—was there a health impact assessment of the DENR that was adhered to by the proponents [of the coal plant] regarding the health of the people? Of the communities? Secondly, [will there be] a provision of economic opportunities for the people? There was none for us [in Lamao]. When it comes to health, the people also did not receive any support. On the contrary, there was no one from San Miguel that we were able to approach. We were always rejected. And I also do not know why the leadership of the *Barangay* of Lamao, and the Municipality of Limay, allowed this kind of system. Now we have to realize that all life here on Earth was given and created by God, and we have the task in which we must be caretakers of all that God has created. Those words that I heard earlier would really have been so lovely, if they were true.)

Councilor Dr. Rory Perez then compared the ecological and health situation in *barangay* Lamao before and after the arrival of the coal plants:

So the public should know—the public should be really informed—regarding the good...and the bad. *Ngayon, sa Lamao po wala nang tubig. Before, ang Lamao po ay mayroong pinakamaganda at pinakamalinis na water supply, probably in the whole province of Bataan. Hindi po kami namimili ng drinking water. Wala pong refilling station sa aming lugar, but now,*

mag-ikot po kayo sa buong barangay, nag-mushroom na ang mga water refilling station, and we have to be connected with the Limay water system para po kami magkaroon ng tubig. So baka po ito ay hindi alam ng pamunuan ng San Miguel. I just wanted you to be informed na ito ay napakalaking problema para sa amin. Totoo po ang laki-laki ng income namin but the disadvantages that we are receiving because of the plant ay hindi po equal doon sa tinatanggap na income ng Barangay, especially regarding the health and the social impacts. So iyong pong nangyayari sa Lamao, ayoko na pong mangyari dito sa Biaan. (palakpakan) ...Kayong mga taga-Mariveles, pumunta kayo sa Lamao, at nang makita ninyo kung ano ang katotohanan. Thank you. (palakpakan)

(So the public should know—the public should be really informed—regarding the good...and the bad. Today, in Lamao, there isn't any more water. Before, Lamao had the best and cleanest water supply [from the Alangan River], probably in the whole province of Bataan. We never had to shop for drinking water. There were no refilling stations in our village, but now—go around our whole *barangay*—[and you will find that] water refilling stations have mushroomed all over, and we have to be connected with the Limay [municipal] water system in order for us to obtain drinking water. So perhaps this isn't known by the leadership of San Miguel. I just wanted you to be informed that this is a huge problem for us. It's true that the income [from the coal plant] was huge, but the disadvantages that we are receiving because of the plant aren't equal to the income received by the *Barangay* [government], especially regarding the health and the social impacts. So what is happening in Lamao, I don't want this to happen here in Biaan. [applause from the crowd]. You who are from Mariveles [municipality], come to Lamao, and see for yourselves what is the truth. Thank you. [applause from the crowd].)

Councilor Perez's warning at the public hearing regarding the harms that the coal plants in the *barangay* of Lamao in Limay municipality have caused to the water supply and health of the people struck a chord with those present in the audience—which included people who were from the local *barangay* of Biaan, Mariveles, as well as people from Lamao and other parts of Bataan—all of whom applauded the councilor.

Derek Cabe of KILUSAN-Bataan and the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement also answered back to Engr. dela Cruz's distortive assertion that the coal plant didn't add any extra arsenic, lead, or mercury to its operations (even though the point of the health advocates was, obviously, that coal burning in and of itself releases those harmful toxins into the environment):

Sabi po ni Madame kanina, wala daw pong inibabalong arsenic, pero meron po kasi kaming nakuhang report mula po sa DOH. Department of Health Memorandum 2010-0184, na ang usok at abo, coal at dust o ash na ibinubuga ng coal-fired power plant ay kontaminado ng lasong kemikal gaya ng mercury, lead, arsenic, sulfur oxide, nitrogen oxide, at iba pang kemikal na carcinogenic at mapanganib sa kalusugan. Ito po ay galing sa DOH. At isa rin pong experience na naranasan namin ay iyon sa Naga. Iyong isa po naming kaibigang na si Doctor Quijano, isa po siyang na toxicologist na

nag-aral kaugnay po sa dust at sa ash na ibinubuga ng coal, ay sinasabi na may malaking epekto na tinitingnan sa kalusugan ng mga tao.

(Madame said earlier that there was no [extra] arsenic mixed into [the coal-burning process], however we have a report that we obtained from the DOH—Department of Health Memorandum 2010-0184, which states that smoke, ash, and dust from coal that is emitted from coal-fired power plants are contaminated by poisonous chemicals like mercury, lead, arsenic, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and other chemicals that are carcinogenic and dangerous for one’s health. This [information] is from the DOH. And another experience that we’ve had to endure occurred in Naga [the city of Naga in the island of Cebu, where a coal-fired power plant is located]. One of our friends, Doctor Quijano, who is a toxicologist who has conducted studies regarding the dust and ash emitted by coal [burning], has said that it [coal burning] has a huge effect that can be observed on human health.)

After countering Engr. dela Cruz’s distortions with “civic science” (Fortun and Fortun 2005; Wylie 2018), Derek Cabe then called out San Miguel Corporation for their irresponsible and reckless corporate practices both before and after the December 2016 incident in which a “rain pour” of coal ash dowsed the homes, gardens, and bodies of the citizens of Lamao village:

Kamakailan, noong January 2017, at December 2016, nangyari po iyong coal ash pollution sa Lamao. San Miguel din po iyong kabarap namin noon. Bakit po? Kasi, ang San Miguel, nag-operate po sila nang wala silang ash pond. Nabuli po iyong pag tatapunan nila ng ash, kaya po noong—dabil wala po silang consideration sa...wala pa iyong ash pond nila—itinapon lang nila iyong ash nila na amounting to two hundred twenty tons per day na gi-ne-generate. Saan po nila itinapon? Malapit po sa community. Kaya noong humangin, tumapon po iyong ash sa labat ng mga bahay sa community. At noong nag-survey kami, dabil sinasabi po na wala pong impact sa health, nagbahay-bahay po iyong aming mga kasama, nakakuba po kami sa ilang mga kabahayan na higit sa isa hanggang dalawa sa myembro ng pamilya ay maysakit. Ang sakit po ay nag-re-range mula sa ubo, lagnat, sipon, pneumonia, galis sa balat o “skin rashes”—sabi nga po ni Ramon Ang “galis aso.” Iyon po iyong mga nakuha naming mga sakit at hanggang ngayon, paulit-ulit iyong ganoong klase. Nangako po kayo sa mga taga-Lamao, iyong San Miguel, na magkakaroon po tayo ng health study, pero until now, isang taon na pong mahigpit ang nakalilipas, iyong pangako n’yo pong magkakaroon ng pag-aaral sa impact ng inyong operasyon ng planta para sa kalusugan ng mga tao sa taga-Lamay, ay hindi pa po nangyayari. Meron pong pondo ito—kahit nga...gusto n’yo ring tanungin sa DENR at EMB—kasi isang libong-mahigit sulat na po ang ipinadadala namin sa inyo, wala pa rin po kayong sagot. Kaugnay doon sa agreement na natin. Ito po ay agreement na natin, na maglalabas kayo ng health impact study at epidemiological study, katulong ang Department of Health, para po sa kapakanan ng mga taong naninirahan sa paligid ng inyong planta. Nagbigay-pangako kayo sa Environmental Guarantee Fund ng four million pesos, para po sa panggastos dito, pero bakit kahit hanggang ngayon, wala pa po iyon?

(Not too long ago, last January of 2017 and December of 2016, the [incident of] coal ash pollution in Lamao occurred. San Miguel was also the one that we were up against at that time. Why? Because San Miguel operated without an ash pond. They were late in [the process of] discarding their ash, so at that time—since they had no consideration to make sure that they had an ash pond—they just dumped their ash, amounting to two hundred

twenty tons per day, that was generated. Where did they dump it? Near the community. Therefore, when it got windy, the ash fell on all of the homes of the community. And when we conducted a survey, since they [San Miguel representatives] were saying that there wasn't any impact on health [from the ash spill], our comrades went from house to house, [and] we found out from the homes [that we visited] that one to two members of each family were sick. The sicknesses ranged from coughing [to] fever, colds, pneumonia, and *galis sa balat* or "skin rashes"—which Ramon Ang [the CEO of San Miguel] [erroneously] said was "*galis aso*" [scabies (literally, "dog rash")]. Those were the diseases that we got, and until now, those kinds [of diseases] have been recurring. You promised to the people of Lamao—you, from San Miguel—that we would get a health study, but until now, over a year has passed, [and] your promise to conduct a study on the impacts of your operations of the plant on the health of the people from Limay still hasn't been fulfilled. There are funds for this—you could also just ask the DENR and EMB [Department of Environment and Natural Resources and Environmental Management Bureau]—[and even though] a petition with over a thousand signatures has been sent by us to you, you still haven't answered. This was part of our agreement. This was our agreement—that you would release a health impact study and an epidemiological study, with assistance from the Department of Health, for the wellbeing of the people living around your plant. You entrusted to the Environmental Guarantee Fund four million pesos, to spend on this [the health study], so why, until now, has there been nothing?)

After calling out San Miguel Corporation for both their irresponsible disposal of their coal ash—and thus treating the citizens of Lamao as a disposable repository for their coal-burning byproducts—and their failure to conduct a proper health study, *Ate Derek* then reminded the DENR of their constitutional duties to protect the welfare and health of the Philippine people. She also reminded the well-paid corporate and government technocrats about the grossly disproportionate environmental risks and unjust burdens that are borne by people who are forced to live next to a coal plant, 24 hours a day:

Kami po, kung gusto n'yo po ng "prevention," mas lalo po kami kasi iyong mga tao po rito, ang makakaranas ng mga problemang ito, kasi sila po iyong twenty-four hours na nakatira rito. Ang problema po namin, may hirap na nga iyong mga tao, iyong iba walang sakit, pero posibleng magkasakit, iyong iba, maysakit na, pero palalalain ang sakit. Iyon po iyong isang danger at risk na sinasabi namin, kaya po, siguro, kaya kami nakikipag-usap sa inyo ngayon, kasi gusto namin na iyong totoo lamang ang pag-usapan natin. Pangalawa, iyong... marami po nang sinabi, labat ng po iyan, ng mga binabanggit po namin sa ngayon, gusto namin kunin ang commitment ng kompanya at maging ng DENR at siguro po ng local government, na nakikinig dito. Kasi meron po tayong tinatawag ng mga sections sa ating Konstitusyon na nasa primary concern ang kalusugan at kapakanan ng ating mga mamamayan at ng ating balansyadong kalikasan. Saan po ba tayo doon? Para kanino po ba tayo? Para po ba tayo sa benefit ng kompanya at sa tutubuin nito, o alin po ba ang mas matimbang sa atin—ang kalusugan at ang kalikasan natin? Hindi po namin alam. So maraming pong salamat. (palakpakan)

(For us, if you [are saying] that you want “prevention,” this is even more [the case] for us because the people here are the ones who will have to endure these problems because they are the ones who reside here twenty-four hours [a day]. Our problem here is that the people are suffering—for some, they aren’t sick now but it’s possible that they will get sick; for others, they are already sick, but their illnesses will worsen. That’s one of the dangers and risks that we are talking about. [As] we are communicating with you right now, we just want what we are talking about to be based on what’s true. Secondly, a lot has already been said, [but] of all that has been mentioned up till now, we want to get commitment from the company, as well as the DENR and perhaps the local government, that you will listen [to what’s been said] here. Because we also have what has been stated to be of primary concern, in sections of our Constitution, [namely], the health and wellbeing of our citizens and the [ecological] balance of our environment. Where are we with regards to this? For who are we here? Are we here for the benefit of the company and its profits, or does our people’s health and our environment weigh more? We don’t know. So thank you very much. [applause from the audience])

I also couldn’t help but think, throughout the public hearing, about the enormous difference in experience between living next to a coal plant and, simply, not living next to a coal plant (or oil refinery, open-pit mine, petrochemical processing plant, or military base). To be one of those well-paid technocratic consultants, corporate representatives, or state “regulators,” and to be able to look into the eyes of the people who had already been, or would be, living in the vicinity of a coal-fired power plant, and diminish, or even deny altogether, their painful experiences regarding their health, livelihoods, and ecologies—I found it astounding.

A San Miguel engineer then decided to make an argument in favor of the coal plant while displaying a page of a report with a pie graph comparing the annual greenhouse-gas emissions of the Philippines with those of other countries:

Nangunguna na po ang China, sumusunod ang Amerika, Russia, India, Japan, at iba pa, na twenty percent sila ng total countries in the world. Ngayon, ‘yung rest of the world, nandito po tayong nabibilang, otsenta porsyento po ng mga bayan ang nandito sa nag-ko-contribute dito sa twenty percent. Sa iyon po iyon ano, ‘yung disparity. Wala pa pong one percent ang ating contribution ng ating carbon dioxide emission. So iyon po iyong nais naming ipahatid sa inyo.

(China is leading [i.e., the top annual emitter], followed by America, Russia, India, Japan, and so forth, [and] they are twenty percent of the total countries in the world. As of now, the rest of the world—we [the Philippines] are counted here—eighty percent of the countries here, contribute to the twenty percent [of greenhouse-gas emissions]. So that there is the disparity. Our contribution to carbon dioxide emissions isn’t even one percent. So that [information] there is what we wish to deliver to you.)

The engineer wasn't disputing the facticity of the climate crisis; rather, he was pointing out how the Philippines' contribution to carbon dioxide and other global greenhouse-gas emissions is less than one percent of the world's total emissions, with the implication being that countries like the Philippines were justified in expanding their generation of energy from dirty, polluting, and climate crisis-exacerbating fossil-fuel resources. In response, Mr. Khevin Yu, the excellent climate and energy campaigner of Greenpeace Philippines (Khevin had actually worked for PMCJ for several years before accepting a position with Greenpeace Philippines), critiqued the earlier presentations by the technocrats for not properly discussing the issue of the climate crisis, for propagating the idea of "clean coal" (which climate activists have denounced as a "dirty lie"), and for not including a discussion of the alternative energy sources that could be developed instead of coal power:

Tila baga parang kulang po 'yung presentation. Dabil po hindi po 'pinapakita nang maigi kung ano ang relasyon ng paggamit ng coal sa climate change. Kanina po sinabi...na ang coal—"malinis" po ito. Mali po iyon. Kasi ang coal po, eto po ang pinakamaruming source ng energy sa buong mundo, at iyon po 'yung problema dito. Kaya pag gagamit po tayo ng ganitong enerhiya, hindi lang po iyon 'yung option, at iyon po iyong isa pong gusto ko pong i-raise, kasi sa Pilipinas po, napakarami po nating options... Hindi po napakita kanina—ano ang mga alternatibo? Ano ang mga ibang paraan ng paggawa ng enerhiya dito sa Bataan? Ang tingin namin, na merong ibang paraan. Meron ditong araw, meron ditong hangin, meron ditong karagatan, na pwede nating gamitin.

(It seems that the presentation [earlier] was lacking because it didn't adequately demonstrate the relationship between the use of coal and climate change. Earlier, it was stated that coal is "clean." That is false. Because coal is the dirtiest source of energy in the entire world, and that's the problem here. [Even if] we use this kind of energy, it's not the only option, and this is something that I would like to raise [here], because in the Philippines, we have so many [other] options. It wasn't shown earlier—what are the alternatives? What are the other ways of using energy here in Bataan? In our view, there are other ways. Sunlight is here, wind is here, the sea is here—[all of] which we can use.)

After reminding the crowd of the alternatives to constructing a coal plant in Bataan village—namely, solar farms, wind turbines, and ocean power (wave, tidal, or ocean thermal)—Khevin Yu argued against the notion that the Philippines could or should be adding to the world's pollution and to the atmosphere's greenhouse-gas emissions through his invocation of the latest Intergovernmental Panel

on Climate Change (IPCC) report and the need for all countries, including the Philippines, to mitigate the climate crisis:

At sinasabi po ng siyensya ngayon—hindi po ng Greenpeace, kung hindi po ng Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Ano po iyon? Grupo po ng mga siyensya sa buong mundo. Nang sinasabi nila sa usapin po ng climate change... Ang problema natin na idinidiin dito ay ang pag-init ng mundo. At ang problema nito, kailangan po nating siyang i-mitigate. At para ho i-mitigate po ang climate change, kailangan po nating bawasan or pigilan na po ang paggamit ng coal sa buong mundo. At ang problema po dito, kabiti maliit po ang kontribusyon ng Pilipinas—kasi totoo po iyon, Engineer, tama po iyon, less than one percent po ang Pilipinas—pero ang problema po dito, meron po tayong ni-re-reach na target para maprotektahan po ang ating bayan sa epekto ng pagbabago ng klima. At ito po 'yung sinasabing threshold. So kung sa climate change po—para malinaw lang po sa labat—ito po 'yung pag-init ng temperatura. Pag uminit po ang temperatura, 'no, lalala po ang epekto ng climate change. At sinasabi po ng siyensyang, ang IPCC, kailangan po natin na malimit ng one point five degrees ang pag-init ng mundo. Para maabot iyon...kailangan pong pigilan ang paggamit ng coal sa buong mundo. Sa mga susunod na mga taon, dahil po hindi po natin gagawin iyon, lalo pong lalala ang epekto ng climate change, at ang Pilipinas po, tayo pong...humaharap sa epekto ng climate change. Kaya hindi lamang po itong usapin ng source ng, ano, ng ating kabuhayan, usapin po ito ng kaligtasan natin. At ang sinasabi po namin, meron pa bong ibang paraan para umunlad ang barangay dito. Marami pong mas malinis, mas murang paraan. At sasabihin ko lang po, siguro po, alam na rin po ng San Miguel, na ang industriya ng coal ay unti-unti na pong nakikita natin na nagiging mahal. So advice ko po, uh, Colonel, ang coal po ngayon, hindi na po siya ang pinakamura na option for energy. Actually, solar na po iyon. Kasi, pag in the long run, hindi rin po nasabi kanina kung gaano katagal ang proyektong ito. Gaano po ba ito katagal? Twenty, thirty years? Ilan po ba? So iyon po 'yung tanong ko.

(And what's being said by science—not by Greenpeace, mind you, but by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change. What's that? A group of scientists from around the world. [In] discussing the issue of climate change, the problem that is being emphasized here is global heating. And the problem here is that we need to mitigate this. And in order to mitigate climate change, we need to decrease or cease our use of coal all over the world. And the problem here [also] is that, even though the contribution of the Philippines is small—which is true, Engineer, that's correct, the Philippines [emits] less than one percent [of global greenhouse emissions]—but the problem here is that we have a target that we must reach in order to protect our country from the effects of climate change. And this is what is called a threshold. So with regards to climate change—so that everyone is clear on this—this is the heating of the [global] temperature. As the temperature gets hotter, the effects of climate change will get more severe. And as the science of the IPCC is saying, we need to limit the heating of the Earth to one point five degrees [Celsius]. In order to meet that [goal], we need to cease the use of coal everywhere in the world. In the coming years, if we aren't able to do that, the effects of climate change will get even more severe, and the Philippines—we—are on the frontlines of the effects of climate change. So this isn't just about the source of our livelihoods; it's a matter of our survival. And what we've been saying [is that] we still have other ways for the *barangay* to develop here. There are several cleaner, cheaper ways. And I'll just say—perhaps San Miguel already knows this—that we are seeing the coal industry gradually getting more costly. So my advice, Colonel—coal, right now, is no longer the cheapest option for energy. Actually, now it's solar. Because, in the long run, it wasn't said

earlier how long this [coal] project would be. How long would it be? Twenty, thirty years? How many? So that's my question.)

Khevin Yu countered the assertion that countries like the Philippines should be able to continue developing dirty energy projects like coal power by insisting that mitigating the climate crisis is an existential necessity, and that this mitigation must be a truly global effort which requires all countries on Earth, including the Philippines, to cease generating energy from coal burning. Khevin also effectively reminded the crowd that, with the ever-falling prices of solar panels and other renewable energy sources—with solar, and not coal, now being the cheapest form of energy globally—coal plants will become uneconomical “stranded assets.” In this view, it, thus, makes sense economically to invest heavily in renewable energy instead of coal-fired power plants, which will become financial liabilities in the near future.

What was perhaps the most ominous part of the public hearing occurred when retired colonel of the Philippine Marine Corps, Ariel Querubin, gave a speech in front of the crowd. During his days as a military officer in the 1980s, Col. Querubin played a major role in neutralizing leaders of both the Maoist insurgency and the Moro separatist rebellions. In 2010, he ran an unsuccessful campaign for a seat in the Philippine Senate, and after his failed senate run, he was hired by San Miguel Corporation as an “internal security consultant” (T. Lopez 2022). His skill set in “internal security” would certainly have impressed San Miguel Corporation, which has faced widespread opposition to its construction of coal-fired power plants across the Philippines. Querubin began his speech at the Biaan hearing by introducing himself to the crowd (with the assumption that he was already a well-known public figure) and then boasting of being jailed twice (and twice being given amnesty) for his participation in multiple military coup attempts:¹²¹

¹²¹ Querubin participated in two military coup attempts against Pres. Corazon Aquino in the late 1980s, the most serious of which was in 1989, for which he and the other military coup plotters were imprisoned. He was granted amnesty by Pres. Fidel Ramos in the 1990s. Querubin was also implicated in an alleged military coup attempt against Pres. Gloria

Ako po si Colonel Ariel Querubin. Uh, kung alam ho ninyo, dalawang beses po ako nakulong. Dalawang beses din po ako binigyan ng amnesty. Ako po, malapit sa mga nangangailangan po ng tulong, na gaya ninyo. Galing din po ako ng Dabaw Occidental. Ganito rin po iyong problema. Galing doon ho si Secretary Cimatú. Nakita niya ho iyong power plant, circulating fluidized bed. Eto po 'yung bagong technology, tatawagin nila “clean coal.” Medyo expensive lang ho iyan. Twice uh, na mas mahal po doon sa mga nauna na coal-fired power plant. Ngayon po, pinagtataka ko lang, problema ho kasi, ah, itong project para ho sa Biaán, Mariveles. Ang naririnig ko, kasi, na nagsasalita—hindi ho taga-rito. Bakít hindi natin pakínggan 'yung mga nandito naman po, para malaman lang natin, sila ho ang makikínabang dito sa proyekto na itatayo ng San Miguel?

(I am Colonel Ariel Querubin. Uh, in case you might know, two times I've been imprisoned. Two times I've also been given amnesty. I am well-acquainted with those who are in need of help, like yourselves. I just came from [the province of] Davao Occidental. The problem there is just like here [i.e., controversy over a proposed San Miguel coal plant]. Secretary Cimatú [the pro-coal secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources who replaced Gina Lopez in 2017] came from there [as well]. He saw the [coal-fired] power plant, [with its] circulating fluidized bed. This is the new technology that they call “clean coal.” It's just that it's kind of expensive—two times more expensive than the older coal-fired power plants. Now, I've been wondering about [this] problem—this project for Biaán, Mariveles. What I've been hearing [i.e., observing or noticing], you see, the people who have been speaking [out]—they aren't from here. Why don't we listen to the people who are here [i.e., the official residents of Biaán village]—so that we can learn from them, as they are the ones who will benefit here from this project that will be constructed by San Miguel?)

Col. Querubin, though now older than he was in his days as a marine officer in the 1980s and 90s, spoke to the crowd with a commanding presence. With confident posture, he attempted to impress upon the people the technocratic notion that San Miguel was using “new,” “more expensive” “circulating fluidized bed” technology—so-called “clean coal” technology (which has been criticized by environmentalists for its Orwellian distortion of what remains a highly dirty source of energy that may actually be worse for human health). Querubin then sought to drive a wedge between the people of Biaán village and the people from other nearby villages and municipalities—particularly the people from Lamao who had testified to their own painful and traumatic experiences living next to San Miguel's coal plant in their village—by claiming that Biaán villagers were the ones who would “benefit” (*makikínabang*) from the coal plant, and, by extension,

Macapagal Arroyo in 2006, for which he was detained and faced mutiny charges. In 2010, Pres. Noynoy Aquino granted him amnesty.



November 28, 2018 — Ariel Querubin, internal security consultant for San Miguel Corporation and former officer in the Philippine Marines Corps, speaks at a public hearing in Biaan village, Mariveles municipality, Bataan province on his company's proposed coal-fired power plant. He is flanked by corporate and state representatives of San Miguel Corp., the Department of Environment and Nature Resources, and consulting firm GEOSPHERE Technologies Inc. Engr. Leticia dela Cruz (left) watches him speak while seated. (Photo by the author)

not the Bataños from Lamao village or Morong municipality. He then portrayed San Miguel as a uniquely powerful corporation—the corporate trailblazer that would lead the Philippines into national industrialization:

Ako po—nagulat po ako—'yung bago bong national security strategy ng gobyerno ho natin ay magtayo ho ng mga industrial park all over the country. Ang San Miguel lang po ang nakakapagpatayo ng ganyan. Nagtatayo po kami ng industrial park sa Malita sa Davao Occidental. Meron din po kami sa Pagbilao, sa Sariaya, meron kami sa Santiago, San Fabian. Dito ngayon sa Mariveles—magtatayo rin po kami. Tulong ho iyan kasi 'yung kompanya ho, nasabi ko nga, namatay na po ako; nasa morge na po ako.

(I myself—I've been amazed—[with] the new national security strategy of our government to establish industrial parks all over the country. San Miguel is the only one that can

accomplish something like this. We are constructing industrial parks in Malita [municipality] in Davao Occidental. We also have some in Pagbilao [municipality in Quezon province], in Sariaya [municipality, also in Quezon], we have some in Santiago [municipality in Ilocos Sur], in San Fabian [municipality in Pangasinan province]. Here in Mariveles—we will also establish one here. This is help [for the community] because this company, as I said, I already died; I was in the morgue already [In the latter part of the sentence, he seemed to be making an unintentionally abrupt transition into a prideful recalling of his surviving from nearly lethal clashes with pro-government forces during his participation in a military coup attempt in 1989].)

For the rest of his speech in Biaan village (a version of a speech he had probably given throughout the Philippines in all of the other areas where San Miguel faced opposition to its coal plants), Querubin interspersed examples of his military prowess with reassurances that San Miguel Corporation had both the technical know-how and concern for the people to successfully carry out this project:

So, very consistent *po ako na* military reformist. *Alam ko ang problema ng aking mga kababayan. Tumakbo rin po ako na senador, naalala ninyo? Muntik din po akong nanalo, nakakulong lang po ako. So kung sasabihin ho ninyo, ang swerte ko talaga, nasa San Miguel ako, kasi eto ho 'yung kompanya na nagmamalasakit sa taong-bayan. Yung naririnig ko kanina, nasabi namamatay ang mga isda, pumunta ho kayo sa Limay. 'Yung mangingisda doon mismo sa tapat ng Petron, ang lalaki ng mga isda. Kung napapanood ninyo sa TV na pinapalabas, ganoon ho. Hindi ho pwedeng magiging hindi—ano—hindi compliant ang San Miguel kasi napakalaking kompanya ho. Hindi ho kami nag-vi-violate. Konti lang na sabihin ninyo na mali kami, binabago ho namin iyan, inaadres ho namin yung problema. Wala ho kaming ano kundi: Tulungan ho kami, tulu-tulungan namin kayo. Alam ho ninyo 'yung problema kasi, eto, veterano po ako, kung titingnan ninyo, i-Google ho ninyo ako, at nakalagay ho doon, ako lang ho siguro in the history of the Armed Forces, 'no, I am probably one of few, if not the only one, who has fought all the armed groups in the Philippines. 1981 nandito po ako. Ako po nakadali kay Jessie Rafael sa likod ng Abucay Municipality. Ako rin po nakadali kay Abu Sabaya, kung matandaan ninyo. So napakaswerte ko lang po na napunta ako sa San Miguel kasi yung adbokasiya ko na makatulong sa tao, sa taumbayan, ngayon po nangyayari. Hindi ho namin kayo pababayaang. Ganoon ho ang kompanya ng San Miguel, nagmamalasakit po.*

(So, as a military reformist, I've been very consistent. I know the problems of my compatriots. I ran for senator—you remember that? I almost won too, [even though] I had just gotten out of jail. So you could say that I'm really lucky that I'm with San Miguel [now] because this is a company that cares for the people. [Regarding] what I was hearing earlier, that the fish are dying—go to Limay. The fishers right there in front of Petron itself—[they are finding that] the fish are so big. If you watch what is being released on TV, it's also like that. It's not possible for San Miguel to be non-compliant because it's a huge company. We don't violate. If you say that we've done something even a little wrong, we'll fix it, we'll address the problem. We have nothing else to say other than: If you help us, we'll help you. You know what the problem is, well, I'm a veteran; if you look it up yourself, if you Google me, you'll find that I am perhaps the only one in the history of the Armed Forces—I am

probably one of few, if not the only one, who has fought all the armed groups in the Philippines. 1981—I was here [in Bataan province]. I’m the one who caught [Maoist rebel leader] Jessie Rafael in Abucay Municipality. I’m also the one who caught [Abu Sayyaf leader] Abu Sabaya, if you remember. So I’m really fortunate that I was able to join San Miguel because of the advocacy that I’ve been able to do to help people, [to help] the country—it’s only now that I’ve been able to do this. We will not abandon you. That’s the kind of company that San Miguel is—it cares.)

The Corporate-State Terrorism of the Philippine Coal Industry

A few days after the public hearing on San Miguel Corporation’s proposed coal-fired power plant in Biaan village in Mariveles municipality, members of Lamao Concerned Citizens, Inc. (LICCI) in Limay municipality reported being subjected to surveillance, intimidation, and subtle threats. LICCI members recounted how window-tinted SUVs and other strange vehicles began arriving at or near their homes, with unknown persons stepping out from the vehicles then proceeding to take photos and record videos of the LICCI members as well as their family members, their friends, and their homes and neighborhoods. If the LICCI members were not around, the unknown individuals would ask their family members and neighbors where they were, when they were coming home, what they did with their time during the day, where they worked, and so forth.

Ms. Daisy Pedranza said, “*Hindi ko alam kung saan o hanggang kailan ako pwedeng makipaglaban. May harassment sa amin, surveillance sa bahay namin. Tinanong ang anak ko, ‘Ilang tao sa bahay? Ilang exit ang bahay? Ano’ng oras ako umaalis? Ano’ng oras ako dumarating?’ Ilang sasakyang ‘di-kilala dumating sa bahay namin.*” (“I don’t know where or until when I can still keep fighting. They’ve harassed us at our place, [and] they’ve surveilled our home. They asked my child, ‘How many people live in this house? How many exits does this house have? What time does [she] leave that house? What time does [she] arrive?’ Some vehicles that we don’t recognize have come to our home.” Another man stated, “*Sa ngayon, nararansan na sinu-surveillance nila kami last week, this week. Hindi kami nakakatulog nang maayos. Syempre, any time, mapapasukan kami*” (“As of now, it’s been happening that they’ve been

surveilling us [since] last week [and continuing into] this week. We haven't been able to sleep well. Of course, anytime, our homes could be broken into").

The timing of this surveillance, harassment, and terrorization of the community was particularly sinister, as it had been barely two years since the horrific and devastating murder of Gloria Capitan on July 1, 2016. Gloria Capitan had been a powerful figure in the Coal-Free Bataan Movement, particularly in her own *barangay* of Lucanin in the municipality of Mariveles—the same municipality in which *barangay* Biaan is located. Capitan was a fish vendor, an owner of a small convenience store, and a mother and grandmother. She was 57 years old. *Nanay* Gloria (“Mommy Gloria”), as many had known her, was beloved in her community and by the eco-citizens of other villages in Bataan province, like Lamao, who had been fighting their own battles against coal power. Her neighbors and friends spoke of her warm and generous personality. For years, she would buy fish from fisherfolk by the coast, and she would walk around the neighborhood carrying a basket of fish, selling the fish to the people living in her village. Gloria Capitan’s fight against the coal industry began in 2014 when she opened a convenience store along the main highway near her home. Not too long after, the Sanitation Inspector of the Municipal Health Office of Mariveles ordered her shop closed after determining that it was contaminated by toxic coal dust and therefore a health hazard (Kaiman 2017). Capitan herself had noticed the gradual buildup of coal dust on the table counters and floor of her small convenience store.

Also that year, the local company Seafront Shipyard and Port Terminal Services established a coal stockpile in Capitan’s *barangay* of Lucanin. The stockpile receives shipments of coal arriving from Indonesia, Australia, and other islands in the Philippines, and the coal is then transported onto trucks and delivered to the various coal-fired power plants in Bataan. Capitan galvanized 1,000 of her neighbors to sign a petition calling for the coal stockpile to be shut down. She also founded the people’s organization *Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Mamamayan ng Lucanin* (SNML, Lucanin United

Citizens Association) to fight to free her village and municipality from coal power—including from Seafront’s coal stockpile and from the GNPower Mariveles Coal-Fired Power Plant (which has been variously owned by US energy corporation Sithe Global Power, AC Energy [owned by the Ayala family], and AboitizPower [owned by the Aboitiz family]). Capitan found that many of her neighbors were also complaining about increasing health and environmental problems ever since the coal stockpile was established; just as in Limay municipality, people, including Capitan’s own grandchildren, were increasingly developing asthma, coughing more frequently, and getting skin rashes, and some of their fruit-bearing trees and garden crops started wilting after being increasingly saturated with coal dust.

Capitan was instrumental in the expanding power of the anti-coal movement throughout the province of Bataan. As her power grew, so did the danger of her advocacy work. Members of her family and her association have testified that Capitan told them that some of Seafront’s staff members offered her family bribes to stop her advocacy, while others relayed ominous messages to her about her home being surveilled (*Global Witness* 2019, 43). Carlo Ignacio, co-owner of Seafront along with his father Virgilio Ignacio, was even said to have slammed a table while telling Gloria Capitan to stop her anti-coal advocacy during a meeting with her (Kaiman 2017). Nonetheless, Capitan didn’t stop her work to free her province from coal; she became bolder and joined forces with both the provincial-wide Coal-Free Bataan Movement and national groups like KILUSAN and the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice. She began expanding her advocacy outside of her own town of Mariveles to other parts of Bataan, including through her vocal opposition to the construction of the San Miguel Corp.-owned and internationally-financed coal plant in Limay municipality—the “demon” coal plant that has been a plague on the lives of the insurgent eco-citizens of Lamao village.

As the geographic scale of Gloria Capitan’s anti-coal advocacy expanded, so too did the



November 29, 2015 — Gloria Capitan and her friend Derek Cabe join thousands of Filipinos in the March for Climate Justice in Manila. (Photo by Derek Cabe of the Coal-Free Bataan Movement)

political and ecological focus of her work. In November of 2015, Capitan went to Manila, joining thousands of other Filipinos, who, in turn, were joining hundreds of thousands of people in over 170 countries worldwide in a global March for Climate Justice ahead of the COP21 talks in Paris, France, which would eventually lead to the Paris Climate Accord (Phipps, Vaughan, and Milman 2015; A. Karunungan 2015). After learning more about the connection between the mass-scale burning of coal and the greenhouse-gas effect, global heating, and the global climate crisis, Capitan was overcome with emotion, feeling a connection with and commitment to the larger global effort to preserve the habitability of the planet. Derek Cabe of the Nuclear/Coal-Free Bataan Movement, who was with Capitan at the November 2015 climate-justice march in Manila, said, “She was crying

beside me in the march—weeping. She said she didn't know this thing was so big, so huge, compared to [her] problem, which [she said] is so little. She was inspired” (Kaiman 2017).

On Friday, July 1, 2016, two masked men on motorcycle arrived outside of Gloria Capitan's small karaoke bar. One of them took out his gun and shot her three times, killing her in front of her grandson. Her family and community were devastated. Gloria Capitan's murder was unfortunately one of dozens of murders annually against defenders of the environment in the Philippines. Going against the financial interests of the Philippines' multi-billion-dollar fossil-fuels, mineral-extractive, and mega-hydropower industries has been a dangerous, deadly struggle, and for decades, these industries—with their deep connections to the Philippine state, paramilitary forces, and hired goons from the criminal underworld—have been able to threaten, intimidate, silence, and/or kill those who oppose their destructive and polluting practices. The wealthy and powerful interests who orchestrated Gloria Capitan's murder did something that has, unfortunately, not been an uncommon practice among the Philippines' coal, mining, and agribusiness industries—hiring a killer to silence a vocal opposer of industry practices, with the intended aim of terrorizing entire communities into submission. What the orchestrators of Gloria Capitan's assassination might not have expected, however, was the extent to which the public outcry following Capitan's horrific killing reverberated throughout the Philippines and worldwide, striking a chord into the rising global consciousness of and compassion for environmental defenders and climate-justice advocates—and their human rights.

News of what happened to Gloria Capitan and her struggle against coal power in Bataan spread far and wide, through media (including social media) in the Philippines and globally, reaching environmental organizations and news media groups worldwide. In December of 2017, a year and a half after Capitan's murder, the *Los Angeles Times* published an investigative report by Jonathan Kaiman on Gloria Capitan's case entitled, “A Philippines grandmother fought to get a toxic coal

stockpile out of her neighborhood. Three bullets stopped her.” Global Witness, an international environmental NGO which documents environmental violence and killings worldwide, ranked the Philippines as the deadliest country on Earth for environmental defenders in 2018. They published a report in 2019 entitled, *Defending the Philippines*, which included a section that substantively discussed Gloria Capitan and the wider anti-coal movement in Bataan province, including the struggle of the citizens of the *barangay* of Lamao and the surveillance and intimidation to which they have been subjected.

Too often, in cases of murder of environmental defenders in the Philippines, little to no police action is taken in terms of going after the killers—much less the orchestrators of the killings—and it looked like it would be no different in the case of Capitan’s killing in 2016. In July of 2019, however, three years after Gloria Capitan was horrifically murdered outside of her home in front of her grandchildren, her suspected killer, Norman Llanda—a man who already had a criminal record for being a hired gunman—was arrested and charged with her murder. The person or people who hired Llanda and ordered him to kill Capitan, however, have not yet been arrested or charged. As the Global Witness (2019) report stated, “The details of this case suggest there may have been potential police and political collusion in threats and violence against communities and activists like Gloria” (44-5).

Philippine Insurgent Ecological Citizenship in the Anthropocene

On October 27, 2020, Alfonso Cusi, the secretary of the Philippines’ Department of Energy under Pres. Rodrigo Duterte, announced that the Philippine government would no longer approve any new proposals for coal-fired power plants. The ban on new coal plants, however, did not apply retroactively to the 22 coal plants priorly approved and which are still scheduled to be built, and Duterte’s government also continued to allow the mining of coal in the Philippines. The moratorium

on new coal projects could also be revoked by a future presidential administration. Nonetheless, the announcement of the ban on new coal projects has had an important symbolic impact, sending a message to the coal industry and its international financiers that a shift away from coal power is taking place in terms of how, generally speaking, the Philippine government and society envision what the future of the country's energy generation should look like. Without doubt, the fierce, passionate, and widespread opposition to coal-fired power plants waged by local communities and national activist and church networks played a powerful role in building cultural and political momentum away from the dirty source of energy and in favor of alternatives like solar, wind, and geothermal power—all of which are expanding across the country.

The resolute work of the insurgent ecological citizens of Lamao village and elsewhere in Bataan province has been a critical part of this ongoing national struggle against coal power in the Philippines. The Lamao citizens, however, still remain living under the toxic shadow of the San Miguel coal plants, and their fight for environmental justice—as well as their insurgent-citizenship movement for housing, healthcare, and basic dignity and respect—continues. Their unabashed claiming of their rights to security in housing, healthcare compensation, and clean air and clean water—despite the Philippine state's denial of their land rights and official land titles—is a forceful assertion of insurgent citizenship. Moreover, their advocacy for their own, their children's, and future generation's rights to a clean and healthy environment—and to a habitable planet—can also be viewed as a vigorous display of ecological citizenship in the contemporary Anthropocene.

Their organizing and political strategies, and the directions that their movement has taken, have been critically influenced and shaped by national and global discourses and movements for human rights, climate justice, and Bataan province's own history of resistance to the massively corrupt nuclear-power project of their country's violent dictator of the 1970s and 80s. Despite being denied official land rights by the Philippine state, the insurgent ecological citizens of Lamao village

know and maintain that their human rights supersede the machinations of the fossil-fuel industry and its collaborators in the Philippine state. They are also aware of the Philippine coal industry's violations of their human and ecological rights in its acts of land grabbing and home demolitions, local ecological poisoning, ruining of livelihoods, terrorizing of citizens, and in its role in exacerbating the global climate crisis and, thus, in imperiling the futures of their children and the integrity of ecosystems worldwide. They fused insurgent and ecological forms of citizenship, thus forming a powerful, though personally risky, provincial-wide anti-coal movement.

One man from Lamao village expressed his own disdain and anger at the Philippine coal industry, and specifically the San Miguel Corporation coal plant in his village, in the following manner:

Sabi ko, bilin sa mga kasamahan ko: Pag ako ang nadali nila, sabi ko, doon ako iburul sa harap. Kung hindi payag, sipain ako sa loob ng planta! Yung katawan ko makapagsalbo para sa Lamao! Iyon ang bilin ko sa kanila.

(I said, this is my request to my comrades: If I am the next one to be taken out [i.e., to be targeted and killed]—I said—have my coffin displayed in front [of the coal plant]. If they don't allow it, then kick me inside of the plant [i.e., throw my corpse inside of the coal plant]! My body will be Lamao's salvation! That's my request to them.)

CHAPTER 6

“Renewable Energy for the People, NOW!”:

Climate Justice, Energy Democracy, and the Ecological Imagination in the Philippines

A “green revolution” has been taking place in the island of Negros, the fourth largest island in the Philippines, located in the Visayan region in the center of the archipelagic country. With a population of over 4.6 million people, Negros could be poised to become entirely powered by clean and renewable energy by the year 2030. As stated at the Negros Renewable Energy Summit in 2017 by Jose Layug, the chairperson of the National Renewable Energy Board (NREB) of the Philippine Department of Energy (DoE), “People in Negros should be happy and proud that they are in an island that can really be 100 percent renewable. It’s a model region which ensures that climate change is addressed by utilizing renewable energy” (Nicavera 2017). With five solar farms, two solar-powered universities, four geothermal power plants, a bio-ethanol power plant, and several more solar, hydro-electric, wind, and bio-fuel power projects on the way, Negros Island generates hundreds of megawatts of electricity from renewable-energy sources.

Several of the cities and municipalities of Negros, moreover, are increasingly being known as green and sustainable “destinations,” attracting visitors based on their combination of eco-tourist sites—including places for trekking and diving as well as nature sanctuaries and reserves—and their vast array of clean, renewable energy sources. San Carlos City, located in the province of Negros Occidental, was recognized by Green Destinations, a Netherlands-based environmental non-profit organization, as one of the Top 100 Sustainable Destinations in the world for 2018. The city currently has four renewable-energy facilities, including two solar farms and two biofuel power plants (specifically, a bioethanol power plant and a biomass plant). More solar farms are being constructed. The 45-megawatt San Carlos Solar Power Plant, owned by San Carlos Solar Energy,

Inc. (SaCaSol), became the first utility-scale solar farm in the Philippines when it became operational in 2014. In 2020, San Carlos City was named by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as an “ASEAN Clean Tourist City.” Another city of Negros, Dumaguete City, located in the southern part of the island in the province of Negros Oriental, is home to two solar-powered universities: Foundation University and Silliman University. Both universities have been saving millions of pesos annually and cut their electricity bills in half, ever since installing dozens of solar panels on the rooftops of some of their campus buildings. The solar power station at Silliman University is currently the largest solar project of a university in Southeast Asia, and the university has also sponsored a project to install rooftop solar panels in almost a thousand households in more remotely located *barangay* (villages).¹²² Meanwhile, Foundation University announced in December of 2018 that 75 more solar panels would be added to campus buildings.



Rooftop solar panels on top of buildings in the campus of Foundation University in Dumaguete City, Negros Island. (Photo by the author)

¹²² “Silliman Goes Solar; FSO: ‘Largest Solar Project for a University in Southeast Asia.’” *Silliman University*. December 23, 2015. (<https://su.edu.ph/1949-silliman-goes-solar-fso-largest-solar-project-for-a-university-in-southeast-asia/#top>, accessed on August 18, 2022)

Cadiz City in the province of Negros Occidental is home to a massive 132.5-megawatt solar power plant. When it had opened in March of 2016, it was the largest solar farm in Southeast Asia. With solar farms in Cadiz City, San Carlos City, and Bais City, and with solar power stations in two universities in Dumaguete City, Negros Island has been called the “solar power capital” of both the Philippines and Southeast Asia (Espina 2016). Meanwhile, geothermal power plants located in Negros have been supplying the region with electricity for over 45 years, including the Southern Negros Geothermal Project, which supplies 222.5 megawatts to the regional Visayan power grid. (Philippine geothermal power plants are also located in Leyte island, Albay province in the Bicol region, Batangas and Laguna provinces in Luzon island, Mindoro island, and throughout Mindanao island.) In the nearby island of Guimaras (the “mango capital” of the Philippines), a beautiful 54-megawatt wind farm generates electricity for the regional Visayan energy grid. The San Lorenzo Wind Farm is one of the largest wind farms in Southeast Asia, and it has allowed Guimaras to become energy self-sufficient, as the island’s electricity requirement is 7 megawatts, whereas its wind farm generates 54 megawatts of electricity (Mayuga 2018). The wind farm’s turbines are located throughout the lushly green island.

In many ways, the people of Negros, and of adjacent island Guimaras, have been leading the way for the rest of the Philippines in demonstrating the technical feasibility of, and the great economic opportunities that can be gleaned from, generating electricity from entirely clean and renewable energy sources. Philippine environmentalists at the national level often point to the island of Negros as an example for the possibilities of 100% renewable energy in all *barangay* (villages), *bayan* (municipalities), *lalawigan* (provinces), and *lungsod* (cities) across the Philippines. The verdant lushness of Negros, moreover—with its emerald rice fields, green hills, vast green parks, mountainous forests, and nature reserves—enhances the appeal of the island as an exceptionally green and sustainable destination. In December of 2018, I took a trip to Negros to learn more about

this internationally recognized “sustainable destination,” and, upon taking bus rides across the island, I was admittedly mesmerized by its lushness and beauty. Seeing how the island was sprinkled with solar farms and other renewable infrastructures only enhanced my sense of being in a clean and green space. I saw numerous solar farms and geothermal power plants all over Negros, and, after a two-hour ferry ride from Bacolod City in Negros Occidental province to the nearby island of Guimaras, I was also able to view the wind turbines of the San Lorenzo Wind Farm, which dot the landscape of the entire island. (Later in the month, I visited a geothermal power plant in the Bikol region of Luzon island—specifically, the 275-megawatt Tiwi Geothermal Power Plant in Albay province.)



Wind turbines of the San Lorenzo Wind Farm in Guimaras island in the Western Visayan Islands region. (Photo by the author)

Experiencing the cleanness and greenness of Negros also provided me with a visceral sense of “relief” (for lack of a better term), along with a combination of sadness and hopefulness. I had

arrived in Negros right after conducting ethnographic research in coal-contaminated parts of Bataan province, in the northern island of Luzon, where anti-coal resisters were being faced with both terrible health consequences and corporate-state terror from the Philippine coal industry. With fresh memories of the political injustices and environmental poisoning faced by the “insurgent ecological citizens” of Bataan (see Chapter 5 of this dissertation), I couldn’t help but imagine—while being surrounded by solar panels and breathing Negros’ fresh air, which was the utter opposite of the painfully foul-smelling emissions from Bataan’s coal-fired power plants—what it would be like for my Bataeño friends and colleagues if the renewable-energy landscape of Negros Island were transplanted to the province of Bataan.

Soon enough, however, I would learn about the more complicated reality surrounding Negros’ clean-energy revolution. While the cleanness of Negros was certainly a major leap forward in comparison to the coal-, gas-, and petroleum-polluted landscapes elsewhere in the country, there has also been a disturbing underbelly to some aspects of the renewable-energy expansion currently underway in the Philippines. From a perspective based on climate justice and energy democracy, not all renewable-energy projects can be viewed positively or favorably, based on their social and environmental impacts. This pertains, for example, to a solar-power project in Victorias City in the province of Negros Occidental, where a 30-megawatt solar farm is being constructed by French solar firm *UrbaSolar* and Philippine solar company *SunAsia Energy, Inc. (SAE)*. The land being used to build the solar power plant is located in *Barangay 12 (Village 12)* of Victorias City.

There were, however, people who were already living on the land. Historically, the land had belonged to the Hacienda Teodoro estate, a large sugar plantation owned by a wealthy landlord family, with hundreds of farmer-tenants farming and tending to the land. Such an unequal feudalistic socioeconomic arrangement—in which one wealthy family owns vast tracts of land in a *hacienda* plantation estate, while hundreds or even thousands of farmworker-tenants remain financially

indebted to and dependent upon the landlord family for shelter, sustenance, and wages—is ubiquitous throughout the Philippine countryside. Such a highly unequal landowning pattern was inherited from the Spanish and US colonial eras. Negros Island, in particular, has been the site of numerous historical and contemporary conflicts, including some terrible massacres, over the issue of unfair labor practices and inequalities in land ownership, especially in relation to Negros’ famed (or infamous) sugar industry (Navarro 2019; Aguilar, Jr. 1998).

Based on the 1987 Philippine constitution’s stipulation for the need for land reform throughout the Philippine countryside, the government’s Department of Agrarian Reform issued a notice in 2014 to the Hacienda Teodoro estate that the land would be redistributed to the farmer-tenants who had been working the land for generations. By 2015, however, the landlord family had sold the land—despite it already being designated for redistribution to the peasant beneficiaries of the state-led agrarian reform program—to UrbaSolar, with the farmers of Barangay 12 faced with eviction from their own homes and farmlands. In a documentary by the Third World Studies Center (2018) of the University of the Philippines – Diliman (UP-Diliman) about the loss of the farmers’ land to the corporate solar project, one of the farmers stated, “*Okay lang naman sana sa amin ‘yung solar, kaso lang, sabi nila, na tanggalin kaming labat dito. ‘Yun nga hindi kami pumayag.*” (“The solar project would have been okay with us. However, we were told that we would all be removed from here. That’s why we opposed it.”).¹²³

Such acts of corporate land-grabbing by large-scale energy projects have unfortunately not been uncommon in the Philippines. Not only have numerous coal- and gas-fired power plants been built by displacing socioeconomically disenfranchised rural and Indigenous peoples from their lands, but corporate renewable-energy projects—including large solar farms and wind farms, geothermal

¹²³ *Pagbaylo: Losing the Land to Solar Farms*. Third World Studies Center (TWSC). University of the Philippines – Diliman (UP-Diliman). (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qP8c2Zfp1VY>, accessed on August 21, 2022).

power plants, and hydroelectric mega-dams—have also resorted to tactics of land-grabbing and violent evictions (Alejo 2000; Ba, Beeson, and Simpson 2018; Delina 2020). Indeed, similar situations to what happened to the farmers of Hacienda Teodoro in Negros Occidental have occurred elsewhere in the Philippines, such as in Hacienda Luisita in Tarlac province of Luzon island, in which would-be farmer beneficiaries of land reform in the *hacienda* were faced with eviction in 2015 by the Tarlac Solar Power Project, built by the mega German solar firm Conergy Group (Mayuga 2015). Faced with the Philippine government’s constitutional imperative for agrarian reform, several large landowning families across the Philippines have scrambled for ways to either hold onto lands designated for agrarian reform or sell them to various energy, real-estate, or other commercial interests. They have resorted to such tactics instead of accepting that the Philippine government, based on its own constitutional obligations, should be redistributing the lands to the farmer-tenants who have been meant to be the beneficiaries of land reform. In these instances, building a solar, wind, geothermal, or hydropower project has been a way to “greenwash” the evictions of rural and Indigenous peoples from their lands.

This chapter evaluates the movement for 100% clean, renewable, and safe energy in the Philippines based on the principles of energy justice, energy democracy, and what I am calling the ecological imagination. On the one hand, groups like the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) and the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED) have long been calling for: the national shutdown of all coal, oil, and gas operations in the country; the prevention of the attempt to open a nuclear power plant in Bataan province; and a comprehensive transition to 100% clean and renewable energy. On the other hand, however, a *just* transition requires that the rise of the renewable-energy economy should be achieved in ways that situate and prioritize justice and just solutions. These Philippine climate-justice groups contend that, while our species needs to collectively exert global efforts in this Anthropocene epoch toward 100% renewable energy and to

keep all fossil fuels in the ground, we also need to transition to renewable-energy technologies in a way that prioritizes economic, social, and gender justice.



An advertisement for San Carlos BioPower, a 20-megawatt biomass-fired power plant currently under construction in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental. The power plant will primarily rely on bagasse (sugarcane waste) for fuel. (Photo by the author)

It is, thus, significant that corporate renewable-energy projects that have been established in ways that have unjustly displaced rural and Indigenous communities have been condemned by climate-justice and energy-justice groups. These groups have also condemned the acquisition, through destructive mining operations, of minerals and metals that are needed for the manufacturing of renewable-energy technologies—including copper, silicon, cadmium, and tellurium (for solar panels); iron ore, aluminum, and glass fiber (for wind turbines); and lithium, cobalt, and nickel ore (for electric vehicles). They have, instead, called for “alternative minerals management.” At the heart of the call for “climate justice” is a “just” solution to the climate crisis, and this requires a sober recognition of how projects that are marked as “clean,” “green,” “sustainable,” and “resilient” might also be unjust, exploitative, and even ecologically damaging when they are enacted without taking

into account the human rights, wellbeing, and dignity of local communities and the integrity of local ecosystems.

At the same time, Philippine climate-justice organizations have also had to deal with constant attempts by the fossil-fuel and nuclear-power industries to undermine, place doubts in, or even taunt the feasibility of making a transition to 100% renewable energy. Representatives of Philippine coal corporations, for example, have made statements about the unreliability and intermittency of renewable-energy sources, such as the notion that a reliance on solar power for electricity would only be possible during daylight hours—thus ignoring the ever-improving battery-storage technologies for solar power. These characterizations also ignore the existence of flexible energy sourcing arrangements for communities that can simultaneously (or at different times of the day) obtain a portion of their electricity from solar photovoltaic cells, another portion from micro-hydro power plants, and other parts of their energy mix from other safe renewable sources. There have also been important environmentalist and workers' rights movements calling for both the recycling of materials from used solar panels and used wind turbines as well as the enforcement of occupational and safety regulations that protect the health and safety of workers involved in the manufacturing of renewable technologies (Mulvaney 2019). Enduring assumptions about the unrealistic impracticality of renewable-energy technologies—even as they continue to burgeon in scale of use and technologically advance with each passing day—continue to be spread in Philippine society by fossil-fuel corporations and government representatives.

In this sense, the struggle for a just transition to 100% renewable-energy technologies goes hand-in-hand with the cultural and ideological struggles taking place over the meaning and value of, and practical assumptions about, energy sources in the country. At the heart of this cultural politics of energy in the Philippines is the struggle to fully unleash what I am referring to as the ecological imagination. Assumptions continue to circulate in Philippine society of the supposed unfeasibility of

a total reliance on renewable energy on the one hand, and, on the other, of the implied inability to implement renewable-energy projects in a way that is fair and just for communities—and, more broadly, in a way that is free from the forces of oligarchic-corporate capitalism both in the Philippines and worldwide. Philippine climate-justice proponents continue to battle all the various forces of cynicism, distractions in favor of false solutions, and forms of outright deception and distortion that continue to block the path toward a future of full sustainability, climate justice, and energy democracy.



A view of the 45-megawatt San Carlos Solar Power Plant, the first utility-scale solar farm in the Philippines. (Photo by the author)

I will first discuss how Philippine advocates for 100% renewable energy are strategically spotlighting both already-existing renewable-energy infrastructures in the country, as well as the enormous techno-ecological potentials for further expansion, in order to fend off the looming threat of the latest “carbon bomb” (and “methane bomb”) in the country—fossil-gas power. I then analyze the cultural politics of renewable energy in the Philippines by attending to the technical, economic, environmental, and religio-moral forms of reasoning employed by advocates of energy democracy in Negros and elsewhere in the country with regards to their argumentation in favor of a

comprehensive shift to clean energy. Taking a step back, I then provide a broader discussion of the anthropology of energy and the concepts of energy justice, energy democracy, and energy decolonization, and I relate this to the struggle for climate justice in the Philippines. I then analyze the battle over the ecological imagination in the Philippines by connecting this to Hannah Appel's (2014) argument regarding the "economic imagination" and possibilities for radically rethinking finance and banking in the wake of the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on expanding efforts and sites for energy democracy in the Philippines, and how these contribute to the continued expansion of the Philippine ecological imagination.



A wind turbine of the San Lorenzo Wind Farm in Guimaras Island, surrounded by verdant rice fields and farmlands. (Photo by the author)

Resisting Fossil Fuels in the Philippines’ “Renewable Energy Capital”

The Philippine Movement for Climate Justice and other environmental groups have been calling for a Philippines that is totally free from coal, petroleum, fossil gas, and nuclear energy. The

Philippines, they argue, is blessed with such an abundance of natural resources and dynamic natural cycles—from equatorial solar energy to monsoon winds, and from flowing rivers and ocean waves to geothermal heat from the Pacific Ring of Fire—to the point that the country doesn't need a gram of energy from fossil fuels or nuclear radiation. It can, instead, rely entirely for its electricity on solar farms and home-based solar panels, wind turbine farms, micro-hydropower plants, biofuel power plants, and geothermal power plants. As stated by Jans Marquardt (2017), “As a tropical archipelago with high solar, wind, and geothermal potential, the Philippines has outstanding geographical conditions for developing renewable energy” (4).

As mentioned, Negros Island has been particularly touted as a concrete example for both the currently existing realities of, and future possibilities for, the ever-burgeoning growth of clean and renewable energy-generating technologies and infrastructures in the Philippines. Many of the citizens of Negros, moreover, have displayed a great amount of unity and powerful conviction in resisting all attempts by corporations to build fossil fuel-fired power plants in the island. With regards to Negros' provincial and local governments, several Negrosanon elected politicians in the island's two provinces—consisting of Negros Oriental in the eastern part of the island, and Negros Occidental in the western part—have been taking strong stances against coal power and fossil gas. Roel R. Degamo, the governor of Negros Oriental, for example, signed Executive Order 9 in March of 2018, declaring the entire province coal-free and prohibiting the issuance of any permits for coal-fired power plants. The same decree mandated that all municipalities and cities in the province use renewable energy. Governor Degamo responded to the coal industry's assertion that coal power is “cheap” by stating, “Their argument is true and simple: Coal-fired [power] is cheap. My answer is truer and simpler: Environmental destruction is so expensive. It is never negotiable” (*SunStar* 2018).

A year later in March of 2019, Alfredo Marañon, Jr., the governor of Negros Occidental, also issued an executive order banning coal-fired power plants from being constructed in his

province (Nicavera 2019). This came a few months after members of the *Sangguniang Panlungsod* (City Council) of Bacolod City, the provincial capital, sought to pass a city-wide coal-free ordinance in November of 2018, as apprehension grew regarding the plans of San Miguel Corporation to construct a coal-fired power plant in the province (Singuay 2018). (Other Philippine provinces that have issued ordinances banning coal include Sorsogon and Ilocos Norte in Luzon, and Guimaras in the Visayas.) In June of 2019, Bacolod also became the first city in the Philippines to declare a “climate emergency.” Catholic Church authorities in Negros Island have also taken a strong anti-coal stance, with Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of the Diocese of San Carlos leading 5,000 parishioners in a caravan in December of 2018, calling for strongly opposing the coal-fired power plant proposed by San Miguel Corporation in San Carlos City (*Panay News* 2018). After being met with such vociferous opposition from local environmental and church groups, San Miguel Corp. announced in 2021 that it was withdrawing its plans to build a coal plant in the city.



The Catholic Diocese of San Carlos City in the province of Negros Occidental has taken strong stances against any attempts to build either coal-fired or gas-fired power plants in the city. Bishop Gerardo Alminaza has been a key figure in the local movement against the introduction of fossil fuel power plants in San Carlos City and Negros Island. A poster reads, “BAROGANAN SA KINAIYAHAN (Visayan for “STAND FOR THE ENVIRONMENT”): NO TO COAL.” (Photo by the author)

The following year in March of 2022, however, San Miguel Corporation returned to announce its plans to build a 300-megawatt liquefied natural gas (LNG) combined-cycle power plant in the San Carlos City EcoZone. This announcement was made amidst more widespread plans by the largest corporate conglomerates in the Philippines for a massive expansion across the country in methane-emitting LNG power plants. Environmental and climate-justice activists in Negros have been taking strong stances opposed to any fossil-fuel projects in the island, including of fossil gas. Many of the same climate, environmental, and church groups that determinedly and successfully opposed San Miguel's coal-fired power plant began mobilizing against the corporation's plans for a fossil gas-fired power plant in San Carlos City.

This included a protest on Earth Day, April 22nd, 2022, in Bacolod City, the capital of Negros Occidental province. Bianca Montilla of Youth for Climate Hope (Y4CH) emphatically stated, "SMC seems to think it is doing us a favor by shifting from coal to gas, when the reality is it is merely switching lanes while driving us down the same road to climate destruction" (Baldonado 2022). Bishop Gerry Alminaza of the Diocese of San Carlos also emphasized:

I'd like to understand why we are seeking to add a fossil fuel-powered plant here in an island that is teeming with renewable power. Existing renewable energy facilities today are not even fully maximized by Negrosanons, and yet we would be adding 300 megawatts more of new capacity. By using fossil gas, this plant goes against the hope of Negros becoming 100% renewable energy-powered.¹²⁴

Unfortunately for the city's environmental movement, the current mayor of the city, Renato Gustilo, has announced his support for the proposed LNG power plant, believing that it would help to position San Carlos City as an economic "powerhub." Both the Catholic Diocese of San Carlos and the climate and environmental activists in the city have been waging protests against both the proposed San Miguel Corp. gas plant and their mayor who is in support of it.

¹²⁴ Nicavera, Erwin P. "San Carlos bishop, concerned groups air worries over LNG project." *SunStar*. (<https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1923855/bacolod/local-news/san-carlosbishop-concerned-groups-air-worries-over-lng-project>, accessed on August 27, 2022)



April 22, 2022 — On Earth Day 2022 in Bacolod City, the provincial capital of Negros Occidental, Youth for Climate Hope (Y4CH), REpower Negros, Power for People Coalition (P4P), the Catholic Diocese of San Carlos, and other environmental and church groups protest against a 300-megawatt liquid natural gas (LNG) power plant proposed by San Miguel Corporation (SMC). They held signs stating, “LNG is still a dirty fossil fuel,” “SMC: Invest in Solar!” and “PROTEKTAHAN ANG KINAIYAHAN (Visayan for “PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT”): FOSSIL-FREE NEGROS.” (Photo by Joey Baldonado of *Rappler*)

Mayor Gustilo of San Carlos City, however, has been more of the exception among Negros Island’s politicians than the norm, as city, town, and provincial governments across Negros have been fighting, through legislative and executive means, against the current mass expansion of fossil gas underway throughout the Philippines—just as they had done with regards to coal power. In January of 2022, Governor Roel Degamo signed into law the Philippines’ first Renewable Energy Code, passed by the *Sangguniang Panlalawigan* (Provincial Legislature) of Negros Oriental, banning all fossil-fuel power plants—whether powered by fossil gas, coal, or oil—from the province, unless approved by a voter referendum (Espina-Varona 2022). In April of 2022 in Negros Occidental (the province in which San Carlos City is located), the town of Amlan became the first municipal government in the Philippines to enact a Renewable Energy Code, passed by the *Sangguniang Bayan* (Municipal Council) and signed by Mayor Manuel Jose Sycip (*SunStar* 2022).

What has particularly distinguished the anti-fossil fuel activism of Negrosanons, in comparison to that of other Filipinos, is that it has been waged from the Philippines' "renewable energy capital." The staunchly anti-coal and anti-gas positions taken by elected politicians throughout Negros Island's two provinces stands in stark contrast to local and provincial politicians in the rest of the Philippines who are often easily swayed (or allegedly bribed) by "coaligarchs" and fossil-gas corporations (in the cases that those politicians aren't themselves oligarchs of the coal and gas industries) to authorize and assist in the expansion of fossil-fuel infrastructures. Environmental advocates in other provinces in the Philippines, such as in Bataan, are often confronted by callously indifferent or even openly hostile government officials who are hellbent on fast-tracking coal or gas projects, dismissing the concerns of those who are opposed to fossil fuels. Coal-impacted communities are forced to endure the terrible pollution emitted from coal-plant smokestacks, with their health deteriorating and futures bleak, without any help or even concern from most of their own government officials. In Negros, however, anti-fossil fuel activists speak and act with a different kind of confidence based on their residence in an island that is already "teeming with renewable power."

The Cultural Politics of Renewable Energy in the Philippines

Negrosanon climate activists aren't merely speaking, in theory, of the need and ability of the Philippines to transition to renewables; they are speaking from experience. As citizens of an island that is saturated with power plants producing electricity from clean-energy sources, Negros' environmentalists generally (though with some exceptions) aren't making arguments in which they must plead with their local government officials and fellow citizens to understand both the role of fossil-fuel burning in creating problems for human health and the climate as well as the actual, concrete prospects for a techno-ecological transition to comprehensive renewable power. At the

same time, the uniqueness of Negros in being both nearly free from fossil fuels as well as the site of such a high concentration of clean-energy facilities does not translate into the island being a technological anomaly or wholly isolated case in the Philippines with regards to renewable power. In fact, renewable-energy technologies have been expanding across the Philippines for the past several decades, even if the percentage of renewables in the Philippines' overall energy mix has decreased, from half of the country's energy in the 1980s to 44 percent in 1999, 32 percent in 2012, and 21 percent by the year 2021 (Marquardt 2017). The overall percentage of the country's renewable-energy use has decreased due to a massive rise in coal power in the first couple of decades of the 21st century, facilitated by the Philippines' "coaligarchy" (see Chapter 3 of this dissertation), but renewable-energy projects have, nonetheless, continued to be built throughout the archipelago. While most of the renewable energy in the Philippines continues to be sourced from geothermal and hydroelectric power, electricity sourced from solar, wind, and biofuel power plants continues to increase as well.



A sign outside of the Tiwi Geothermal Power Plant in Albay province in the Bicol region of southeastern Luzon island. (Photo by the author)

In the cultural struggle for a 100% renewable-energy economy in the Philippines, climate justice advocates, church leaders, environmentalist politicians, and ecologically minded engineers and architects have relied on a combination of technical, environmental-climatic, economic, moral, and religious arguments. With regards to religio-moral arguments in favor of renewable energy, Philippine Catholic Church representatives have emphasized the moral duty that Catholics have to generate electricity in ways that are neither damaging to the environment nor exacerbating the climate crisis. Bishop Alminaza, during the 2018 anti-coal caravan in Negros Occidental, invoked the ethical and spiritual responsibility for Catholics to be good stewards of God's creations: "Protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, is what the Book of Genesis tells us and Saint Francis of Assisi showed us. Whenever human beings fail to live up to this responsibility, whenever we fail to care for creation and for our brothers and sisters, the way is opened to destruction and hearts are hardened" (*Panay News* 2018).

In February of 2022, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBPC), the highest body of the Catholic Church in the country, issued a pastoral letter calling on all Catholic institutions in the country to divest, by 2025, from any institution that finances fossil fuels. The Archbishop of Manila, for example, is one of the largest shareholders of the Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI), owned by the Ayala Corporation of the oligarchic Ayala family. BPI has been a major financier of coal power in the Philippines. The pastoral letter also stated that the Philippine Catholic Church would not accept any donations from fossil-fuel, mining, or logging corporations. The letter specifically stated:

We are now all the more aware that many of the financial institutions in whom we place our trust have been instrumental in the rise of fossil fuels, as well as other destructive and exploitative industries like mining and logging. It is unacceptable that finances so graciously provided to us are used for such industries. Financial resources must be used solely for the Common Good, Integrity of Creation, and the Glory of our Creator (Roewe 2022).

The letter also called on local Catholic institutions throughout the country to use renewable energy and sustainable practices in their own facilities and infrastructures.

It is of high significance in the Catholic-majority Philippines that the country's Catholic Church establishment has been becoming even more insistent and forceful in both its public pronouncements and own actions with regards to mitigating the climate crisis. Not only has the Philippine Catholic Church been contributing its moral authority toward promoting a cultural shift away from fossil-fuel pollution—and in favor of caring for the integrity of God's creations, including the harmony and sustainability of the Earth's atmospheric and other ecological cycles—it has now been taking more concrete and politically confrontational actions against the country's fossil-fuel industry and the politicians that support it (or are ensconced within it). Significantly, the church has even been taking a critical look at its own finances, calling for the financial divestment of all its parishes and archbishoprics from any financial or corporate entity that not only operates but also finances fossil-fuel projects. Philosophically, ethically, and spiritually, the shift to comprehensive renewable-energy infrastructures is viewed as both an environmental necessity and a moral obligation.

Environmentalists in both the government and civil society have also been making environmental and techno-scientific arguments in favor of the renewable-energy transition. One strain of these arguments is with regards to the scientific necessity of weaning off fossil fuels for the sake of the habitability of the climate-vulnerable Philippines and elsewhere in the planet. In Makati City, the financial powerhouse of the Philippines, Mayor Abigail Binay officially declared a Climate Emergency in August of 2022:

As temperatures and sea levels continue to rise, low-lying coastal areas in cities like Makati have become more vulnerable to strong typhoons that bring floods and landslides. This will result not only in the disruption of public services but also the displacement of families and even entire communities... We heard the data. We understood the science, and we are feeling its impact. Now is a crucial time to act, and we need to act fast. We need thinkers, doers, and movers (Noriega 2022).

Mayor Binay acquired a whole fleet of electric buses to establish a “smart” public transit system in Makati City, with financing from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (J. E. Mendoza 2022). She is also having solar panels installed on the buildings of her city’s public schools and government offices: “This is part of our city-wide initiatives to reduce our carbon footprint and leave a greener and healthier environment for the next generation of Makatizens” (Pinlac 2022).

Other climate-justice activists have expanded on this theme of the threat of more extreme weather being caused by the climate crisis by disseminating even more specific techno-scientific forms of reasoning. One such argument regards the dangers of surpassing 350 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere—as is being popularized by the global climate advocacy organization 350.org, founded by US environmentalist Bill McKibben. At a rally against coal power in October of 2016, Mr. Chuck Baclagon, the finance campaigner of 350.org-East Asia and coordinator of 350.org-Pilipinas (the East Asian and Philippine branches of 350.org), spoke about the scientific significance of passing the threshold of 350 parts of carbon dioxide per million parts of air in our world’s atmosphere: “*Eto po ang ligtas na dami ng carbon dioxide sa ating atmospera para mabuhay daw po ang iba’t ibang nilalang sa mundo at mabuhay din po nang may dignidad ang sangkatauhan*” (“This is the safe amount of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere that allows for diverse creatures on Earth to live, and for humanity to live with dignity.”)

Chuck was relaying the message from climate scientists who have noted how 350 ppm is considered the safe limit of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, and that passing that threshold is climatically dangerous for human civilization and for other biological life on Earth. (In 2013, for the first time in the history of our human species, we passed 400 ppm.) Chuck continued:

Nakakalungkot po doon na sa sinabi nila kanina kung lampas na tayo sa four hundred fifty parts per million. Pwede raw pong permanenteng ito, pero naniniwala kami na meron tayong magagawa kung ang sambayanan ay kikilos at sama-sama at mananawagan, at pigilan na ang mga uri ng industriyalisasyon na galing sa pagsusunog ng fossil fuels tulad ng coal.

(It would be tragic if...we were to surpass four hundred fifty parts per million. This could be permanent, but we believe that we can still do something about this if our society works together to take action and call for ending all forms of industrialization that are based on the burning of fossil fuels like coal.)

As Chuck Baclagon alluded to, we are on track to surpassing both 450 ppm and the Paris Climate Accord's threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius of global heating within a decade if the world's levels of fossil-fuel burning and consumption continue at their current rates. As Chuck explained, the results would be "tragic" (*nakakalungkot*).

In May of 2022, carbon-dioxide levels in the Earth's atmosphere peaked at 421 ppm,¹²⁵ and the global average temperature increase (above preindustrial levels) for the year 2021 was 1.21 degrees Celsius.¹²⁶ Climate scientists have invoked catastrophic, doomsday scenarios of irreversible changes to the global climate if the thresholds of 450 ppm and 1.5 degrees Celsius are surpassed (Hagedorn et al. 2019). (Peter Kalmus, an American climatologist from the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA], during an April 2022 protest in which he and three other scientists chained themselves to the doors of the Downtown Los Angeles building of JPMorgan Chase—the world's largest funder of new fossil-fuel projects—passionately stated [before being arrested], "We're heading towards a fucking catastrophe! We're gonna lose everything, and we're not joking. We're not lying. We're not exaggerating.")¹²⁷ In connecting the Philippines' own industrial development to global scientific discussions about the already-dire present-day, and even grimmer near-future, scenarios of irreversible and catastrophic impacts from the climate crisis, Philippine climate activists have been making a strong environmental case for the Philippines and neighboring

¹²⁵ "Carbon dioxide now more than 50% higher than pre-industrial levels." *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*. June 3, 2022. (<http://www.noaa.gov/news-release/carbon-dioxide-now-more-than-50-higher-than-pre-industrial-levels>, accessed on August 24, 2022).

¹²⁶ "Global Temperature Report for 2021." *Berkeley Earth*. January 12, 2022. (<http://berkeleyearth.org/global-temperature-report-for-2021/>, accessed on August 24, 2022)

¹²⁷ Hirsh, Sophie. 2022. "Who Is Peter Kalmus? The NASA Climate Scientist's Emotional Speech Has Gone Viral." *Green Matters*, April 11, 2022. (<https://www.greenmatters.com/p/peter-kalmus-nasa-scientist>, accessed on September 12, 2022)

economies to utterly halt their expansion of the coal, petroleum, and fossil-gas industries in the Southeast Asian region in this current epoch of the Anthropocene.

As the Philippines' climate and environmental activism has recently been shifting toward the threat of the fossil-gas expansion in the country, there has been a corresponding shift in activists' use of scientific and molecular discourses from a formerly nearly total focus on carbon dioxide to also include methane. Bishop Gerardo Alminaza, in his denunciation of San Miguel Corporation's proposed liquified natural gas (LNG) power plant in his city of San Carlos in Negros Occidental, has particularly invoked the specter of methane emissions. He noted that, though burning fossil gas produces relatively less carbon dioxide in comparison to coal, "it will instead release large amounts of methane in the atmosphere which can trap heat at a much greater capacity for a period of time. It makes no sense for Negros Occidental to turn to fossil gas when we have overflowing renewables that are more than enough to meet our power needs" (Adiong 2022). Bishop Alminaza was reminding his constituents of the threat of methane—which is considered by climatologists to be a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide in contributing to global heating—while he also reasoned to the people of Negros Occidental that renewable-energy technologies already have the capacity to meet the electricity requirements of all Negrosanons.



Bishop Gerardo Alminaza has been a key figure in the movement against fossil fuel power and a transition to 100% renewable energy in the island of Negros. (Photo by *Bulatlat*)

In addition to these climatological arguments regarding the absolute necessity of transitioning away from fossil fuels for the sake of the habitability of the planet, Philippine climate advocates have also been spreading awareness on the already-existing technological capabilities of renewable energy. They have, moreover, been making economic arguments on the techno-economic feasibility of transitioning away from fossil fuels. Many of these arguments have been meant, in part, to address lingering doubts on the efficacy of renewables to power the energy needs of the people of the Philippines. On this front, important roles have been played by technical proponents of a combination of green engineering, sustainable architecture, and renewable technologies. Such environmentalist engineers and architects have rebutted notions of the technical impracticability of renewables and have, on the contrary, argued for the technical feasibility, and the coming economic inevitability, of clean-energy technologies.¹²⁸

In November of 2018, I attended the annual summit of the No Nukes Asia Forum (NNAF), an inter-Asian activist network opposed to nuclear-energy projects across Asia.¹²⁹ In addition to holding several strategy sessions on how to prevent the expansion of the nuclear-power industry throughout Asia, they also held presentations on the need for, and great possibilities of, promoting clean and *safe* forms of renewable energy. Engr. Roberto Verzola of the Center for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technology (CREST) gave a compelling presentation on the technological feasibility, environmental necessity, and economic inevitability of the coming dominance of clean

¹²⁸ This includes an NGO called Green Architecture Advocacy Philippines (Green AP). According to the group's Facebook page, Green AP "is a civic non-profit organization that is concerned about the environment and takes action by promoting sustainable development of the built environment. It promotes Sustainability for ALL!" (https://www.facebook.com/GreenArchitectureAdvocacyPhilippines/?ref=page_internal, accessed on September 12, 2022)

¹²⁹ That year, the international meeting was held in the Philippines, with the first two days in Metro Manila and the second two days in Bataan province, where the Philippine government, with assistance from the International Atomic Energy Agency, is making plans to activate the country's sole (yet dormant and, thus far, never operational) nuclear power plant. In Metro Manila, the NNAF 2018 summit was held on the campus of the University of the Philippines – Diliman in the Balay Kalinaw (Visayan for "House of Peace") building. (See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for more on the No Nukes Asia Forum 2018.)

and safe energy technologies.¹³⁰ He particularly focused on the solar-power industry, noting how the price of rooftop solar installations will continue to dramatically decline in the Philippines and worldwide, particularly as more and more consumers realize the great advantage of obtaining free electricity from the sun.

According to Engr. Verzola, though purchasing home-based solar panels is currently limited to those who can afford to pay the upfront installation costs, after making that initial investment, they would soon experience financial benefits from saving in their electricity costs in the long term. In other words, though solar and wind technologies require relatively hefty costs in terms of initial capital investments, the operating costs of these flexible renewable sources are extremely low. Once rooftop solar installations, to a truly ubiquitous extent, spread to homes and buildings all over the country (and world), the price of solar energy will dramatically decrease even further and become much more affordable for a much wider swath of the population. This would consequently drastically reduce, and eventually eliminate, the need for dirty and unsafe energy from “baseload” coal-fired, gas-fired, and nuclear power plants (Verzola 2018).

Engr. Verzola also discussed how renewable-energy projects generate a great abundance of employment at all stages of production. In this sense, he was echoing a plethora of economic studies that have elucidated how investments in renewable power like solar and wind technologies generate exponentially more jobs than continued investments in fossil fuels. The World Resources Institute (WRI), a global think tank based in Washington, D.C., has argued that “investing in solar-photovoltaic equipment manufacturing creates 1.5 times as many jobs as the same amount spent on

¹³⁰ “CREST is a not-for-profit organization working to advance policies and programs on climate and green energy. We provide technical support to various stakeholders on renewable energy training, design and engineering, and access to green finance. We assist cities/municipalities, institutions, industries, and community-based organizations to develop programs that promote renewable energy, resource efficiency, and climate actions. We provide skills training and provide technical support on technology assessment, sustainable system design, energy management, and green finance.” (<https://www.facebook.com/microrenewables/>, accessed on September 14, 2022)

fossil fuel production, while for wind power the figure is 1.2 times” (Srivastava 2021). Another international think tank, the Ohio-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), has estimated that the Philippines’ renewable-energy industries will collectively generate over 350,000 jobs by 2030 (Fernandez 2021).

RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCES IN THE PHILIPPINES	
Biomass (bagasse)	Potential: 4,449.54
Geothermal	1,200 MW
Solar	Average potential: 5kWh/m ² /day
Hydro	10,500 MW
Ocean	170,000 MW
Wind	76,600 MW
Source: Jose Layug, National Renewable Energy Board	

Thus, what Engr. Verzola and other participants of the No Nukes Asia Forum referred to as the “International Nuclear Mafia” and “International Coal Mafia” are wasting the people’s financial resources on power plants that will become “stranded assets” and financial liabilities in the future, once renewable energy takes over. The International Energy Agency (IEA) defines stranded assets as “those investments which have already been made but which, at some time prior to the end of their economic life (as assumed at the investment decision point), are no longer able to earn an economic return, as a result of changes in the market and regulatory environment brought about by climate policy” (2013, 98). Both greater market demands (and public pressure) for, as well as dramatically lowered costs of, renewable-energy technologies would play key roles in causing both coal and LNG projects to become stranded assets in the near future. Indeed, according to Thomas Auger et al. (2021), “As the cost of renewable electricity generation and storage continues to fall, the

economic case for building coal power stations is weakening, and in many cases, it is now even cheaper to build new renewable energy plants than it is to continue operating the existing coal power stations” (1463). Sam Reynolds (2021) of the IEEFA has also warned of a “high risk” for LNG projects in the Philippines becoming stranded assets due to a host of political, regulatory, and market hurdles as well as the fact that “levelized costs for solar photovoltaic and wind power have plummeted 90% and 70%, respectively, far outpacing cost declines in thermal technologies such as coal and natural gas” (31).

Another speaker at the No Nukes Asia Forum 2018, Mr. Wilson Fortaleza of the Center for Power Issues and Initiatives (CPII),¹³¹ also discussed the importance of “energy democracy.” In this conception, people and communities should have the right to control their energy future, and the energy system should be based on bottom-up power planning and democratized cooperatives. The shift to 100% renewable energy, then, would be accompanied by a shift to complete public ownership over the power sector. These calls for energy democracy have also been made by both the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) and its partner organization, the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED). CEED has, in particular, been sponsoring projects for renewable energy under the principles of energy justice, energy democracy, and energy decolonization.¹³²

¹³¹ “The Center for Power Issues and Initiatives (CPII) is a resource center that focuses on the Philippine Electric Power Industry within the framework of sustainable energy and energy democracy. Our advocacy and campaigns are primarily designed towards the promotion and achievement of sustainable development in this important area of the economy, while learning from global perspectives, analyses, and practice. The founders of CPII have had extensive experience in community and political organizing, research and advocacy, legal and meta-legal intervention, networking, and participating in legitimate forums to call power utilities and other players to account for their actions and to comply with their obligations to consumers.” (<https://www.facebook.com/CenterForPower/>, accessed on September 14, 2022)

¹³² “In contesting potential and ongoing environmentally-destructive and life-threatening projects, interfaith organizations, impacted communities, and other concerned organizations across the country have stood side by side. This increasing consciousness of the Filipino public about the realities of worsening weather disturbances, the changing climate, energy practices and policy decisions has brought about the need for more research endeavors focusing on such issues and how they interrelate. The Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED), in realizing the growing movement of affected communities and concerned sectors against dirty, harmful, and profit-oriented energy policies proceeds to take up the challenge of providing independent, scientific research and people-oriented analysis of issues

Democratizing and Decolonizing Energy

Thus, the Philippine climate-justice movement has been doing a double move. On the one hand, Philippine climate advocates have been emphasizing the technological feasibility, economic inevitability, ecological necessity, and spiritual-moral obligation of transitioning to 100% clean and renewable energy. On the other hand, they also emphasize the importance of renewable-energy projects being designed and implemented according to the principles of climate and environmental justice, which critically includes justice in the energy sector. In this regard, Philippine climate-justice advocates join global energy-justice movements in calling for a just transition to economies based on 100% renewable energy and climate resilience.

As activists and scholars worldwide have been noting, corporate renewable-energy projects can easily be integrated into the same oligarchic-capitalist, neocolonial, and imperialist systems and networks that have sustained and expanded the polluting fossil-fuels industries (Strauss, Rupp, and Love 2013; Loloum, Abram, and Ortar 2021; Healy and Barry 2017). Unjust renewable-energy projects have ranged from a neocolonial concentrated solar power (CSP) plant in southern Morocco (Rignall 2016) to neoliberal wind parks in Oaxaca, Mexico (Howe and Boyer 2016). As Karen Rignall has noted:

On the one hand, renewable energy may be seen as oppositional, with decentralized models of generation and distribution that could broaden access, refigure consumption practices, and challenge hierarchies of power in energy markets. On the other hand, renewable energy developed on a large scale and based on centralized generation models that plug into existing infrastructure may serve to perpetuate the inequalities and environmental damage associated with incumbent energy regimes (542).

Rignall conducted research in southern Morocco, elucidating how the postcolonial Moroccan state relied on governance structures established by the French colonial state in the early 1900s in a way that has effectively disenfranchised many members of the Ait Oukroun Toundout ethnic community

pertaining to energy, integrity of ecosystems, and the general development path pursued by the country.” *Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED)*. (<https://ceedphilippines.com/history/>, accessed on September 7, 2022).

in the process of constructing the 510-megawatt Ouarzazate Solar Power Station, the largest concentrated solar power (CSP) plant in the world. This was part of the Kingdom of Morocco's ten-year Solar Plan, launched in 2009, to make Morocco a worldwide leader in solar power generation. Most local people (many of them pastoralists and oasis farmers) were not consulted in the building of the solar plant, and they were also effectively shut out from directly economically benefiting from either the profits derived, or the electricity generated, from the plant—much of which is meant to supply the electricity requirements of European Union (EU) countries (Rignall 2016).



October 10, 2016 — Activists from the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice call for renewable-energy projects designed “for the people.” (Photo by the author)

In the Philippines, as mentioned, there have also been corporate renewable-energy projects—from large-scale solar farms to hydropower mega-dams—that have been built by relying on the same political-economic and cultural systems that have sustained the country's fossil-fuel economy, oligarchic political structure, extreme social inequality in both wealth and land ownership, and neocolonial subordination to both foreign militarist-imperialist interests and debt-based dependencies on international financial institutions. A central imperative for the Philippine climate-

justice movement is to transition the Philippines to 100% renewable energy, but in a way that simultaneously dismantles these oligarchic-capitalist and imperial structures. In other words, both energy democracy and energy decolonization are vital to Philippine climate justice. Democratizing and decolonizing electricity and other forms of energy in the Philippines, in turn, requires a rethinking of not only the prevailing energy system and predominant forms of energy consumption in the country (and the world), but also of the entire project of “development” and industrialization.

At the heart of these Philippine cultural politics of renewable energy is the cultural struggle over the meaning and purpose of energy itself—something that the anthropology of energy has been investigating for decades (White 1943; Nader 1980; Boyer 2014). Anthropological analyses of energy examine the place of energy in human life, and more specifically, how human beings “make sense of the ways in which we produce, distribute, use, and dispose of” energy, and how “such actions relate to what we consider to be right or good” (Smith and High 2017, 1). As stated by the Energy Anthropology Network (EAN),¹³³ energy-focused anthropologists around the world “are asking how energy is generated and used, how energy is conceptualised, the role of energy in shaping and articulating states and societies, and diverse relationships characterised as markets, households, families, companies, and corporations.” From the household to the macroeconomic level, anthropologists are interested in humans’ use of energy comprehensively, including humans’: use of fire, electricity, or gas for cooking; harnessing the power of the sun for growing crops; driving motorized vehicles by charging them with electricity or burning petroleum; operating and riding electric-powered bullet trains; generation of electricity from power plants; and even individual human bodies’ employing kinetic energy for the purposes of walking, running, climbing, or other

¹³³ “The network was founded in summer 2016 with the purpose of bringing together anthropologists concerned with energy research, to coordinate and consolidate debates about energies, and to support new anthropological approaches to energy questions.” *European Association of Social Anthropologists*. (<https://www.easaonline.org/networks/eana/>, accessed on September 7, 2022)

kinds of movement. Moreover, rather than relegating energy to the realm of the purely technical and abstract, anthropological perspectives centrally incorporate the cultural, philosophical, and cosmological worldviews undergirding human communities' harnessing and use of energy from the earth and the sun.

Nonetheless, technical-abstract conceptions of energy remain important in our world, and they often exist alongside other, alternative conceptions of energy. As Myles Lennon (2017) states, "Scholars often contend that social groups conceptualize energy as either: a mechanized, quantifiable phenomenon generated by and capable of being deployed anywhere with industrial technology; or a context-specific force of life, embedded in relations between different beings and attuned to all living matter" (2). In this regard, Larry Lohmann (2013) has provided a useful distinction between "Big-E" Energy and "little-e" energies. Big-E Energy refers to the more abstract conception of energy commonly used by corporate, state, and scientific representatives of large-scale industrial energy projects, including fossil-fuel infrastructures and nuclear power plants. Big-E Energy, which "has largely been a creation of fossil-fueled industrial capitalism," has allowed for energy to be "accumulated and deployed in unprecedented quantities anywhere regardless of the particularities of the local environment" (26).

Big-E Energy, alienated and severed from human cultures and local ecologies, can be generated, transported, and used and consumed anywhere in the world, even if such Energy deployments have deleterious impacts on the human and ecological communities surrounding such sites of Energy generation, transmission, and consumption. Since Big-E Energy is conceptualized as abstract and solely governed by the laws of physics and thermodynamics, generators and consumers of Big-E Energy are often concomitantly conditioned to not think about the social and environmental costs, impacts, and other "externalities" of such Energy projects. Big-E Energy can be quantified in statistics indicating a country's overall electricity usage and projected electricity

“requirements.” It is often “hidden” in electric wires, cables, and power lines that are installed behind walls, under streets, and in submarine environments (Gupta 2015, 557). It allows for the commoditization and consumption of electricity, petroleum fuel, and gas in a way that is severed from the conditions of their generation and their ultimate impacts on the global climate.

Little-e energies, on the other hand, are “much older, multiple, vernacular, mutually-incommensurable ‘energies’ associated with various subsistence purposes, together with indigenous conceptions of energy flows that bear little resemblance to the kilojoule-quantified interchanges of Energy” (Lohmann 2013, 26). Lohmann further explains:

Lower case “energies” remain entangled with particular times—seasons, the daily cycle of light, the months it takes to grow crops or the years it takes to grow trees—and particular places—rivers where mills can be built, forests from which wood can be cut, latitudes where trade winds blow. Nor can they be transported in as large quantities or over as long distances as coal and oil (26).

In this conception, energy—rather than being abstracted and detached from its socio-ecological points of generation, transmission, and consumption—is understood as being inherently intertwined with human sociocultural and political practices, values, and symbolic categories (Lennon 2017; Strauss, Rupp, and Love 2013). Human beings use energy to move and breathe, cook food and power our homes, grow crops, transport ourselves and other things, and electrify large buildings and other infrastructures. The way we use energy, moreover, is impacted by the time of day and the season of the year. Rather than being severed from human culture, energy is conceptualized as embedded within existing human systems and practices of meaning-making, forms of exchange, and power relations.

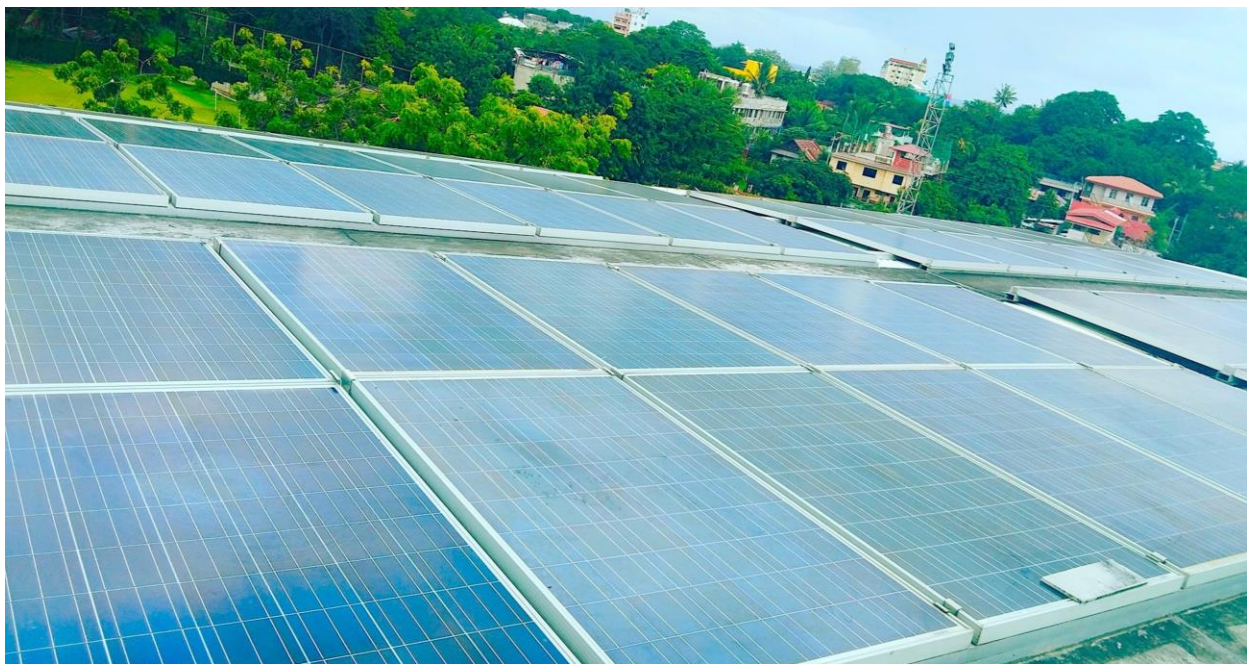
Ethnographic approaches have been useful in the more holistic effort of tracing both the sourcing, transmission, and consumption of energy by human communities as well as human cultural understandings of energy itself, which can encompass the techno-scientific, sociocultural,

and spiritual and religious realms. As Sarah Strauss, Stephanie Rupp, and Thomas Love (2013)

contend:

Anthropology's qualitative methods enable research to span registers from individuals to communities, regions, nations, and the planet; to straddle borders that demarcate interests and identities; and to consider power relations in economic, political, and occult spheres. Anthropological perspectives offer the chance to view energy holistically in particular and comparative contexts, to analyze the scope of energy's impact in our communities, and to explore the implications of the limits of energy resources (30).

A qualitative and multi-sited ethnographic approach can allow us to understand energy systems in a way that transcends local and global geo-political borders, considers the diverse ways that energy is sourced and used, and appreciates the fundamental role played by human ethical and philosophical beliefs in shaping energy regimes. In the Philippines, energy-democracy advocates have been working to transform the country's current energy regime by (re-)integrating electricity and other energy into the economic, ethical, and cultural lifeways of local communities throughout the islands.



Solar panels atop a building on the campus of Foundation University in Dumaguete City, Negros Island. (Photo by the author)

Rather than sourcing bulk loads of electricity from fossil-fuel, nuclear, and oligarchic-corporate renewable-energy projects that despoil environments, harm and disenfranchise local

communities, and/or exacerbate the climate crisis, advocates for climate justice and energy democracy are seeking to ensure that local communities throughout the Philippines are empowered to take a proactive stance in deciding where and how their energy is sourced and for what purposes. Rather than surrendering the issue of energy provision to the giant corporations and banks of both the domestic Philippine oligarchy and the international oligarchic-corporate system, Philippine energy-democracy advocates seek to place the entire process of energy generation, transport, and consumption under popular democratic control, including through public ownership over the power sector. Philippine energy-justice advocates are not forfeiting energy generation and distribution to “Big-E” Energy technocrats; they are, instead, aiming to re-embed the country’s energy system into local Philippine communities’ own economic and cultural frameworks in a way that equitably provides for their electricity and other energy needs.

In order to transform the Philippines’ current energy order, Philippine activists have been disseminating concepts, policy prescriptions, and strategies based on the interrelated principles of energy justice, energy democracy, and energy decolonization—principles that are being enacted by climate-justice movements worldwide. According to the Initiative for Energy Justice:

Energy justice refers to the goal of achieving equity in both the social and economic participation in the energy system, while also remediating social, economic, and health burdens on those disproportionately harmed by the energy system. Energy justice explicitly centers the concerns of communities at the frontline of pollution and climate change (“frontline communities”), working class people, indigenous communities, and those historically disenfranchised by racial and social inequity. Energy justice aims to make energy accessible, affordable, clean, and democratically managed for all communities.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ “The Initiative for Energy Justice was founded in 2018 by three lawyers of color entrenched in the debates concerning the nation’s transition away from fossil fuels and an extractive economy towards an equitable and renewable energy future. The co-founders brought together their direct connections to communities working for a just transition, and their experiences in three jurisdictions at the front edge of the energy transition—Hawaii, California, and New York. Our core values are voice, inclusion, and equity. The unique voices of frontline communities and communities of color must be included in the transition away from fossil fuels to clean energy. Equity must form the core of this transition, given the burdens borne by frontline communities under the energy system. These values form the fabric of the Initiative for Energy Justice. They are why we do this work. They inform our approach to the work and support our mission to provide energy policy tools rooted in equity to the leaders and communities who need them most.” *Initiative for Energy Justice*. (<https://iejusa.org/about/>, accessed on September 10, 2022).

The Climate Justice Alliance (CJA), moreover, defines energy democracy as “a shift from the corporate, centralized fossil fuel economy to one that is governed by communities, is designed on the principle of no harm to the environment, supports local economies, and contributes to the health and well-being for all peoples.”¹³⁵ Philippine *energy justice* seeks to ensure that energy-generating processes are enacted in a way that avoids harm on local communities in the vicinity, and that energy-distribution systems provide for an equitable dissemination of energy supplies, rather than allowing some communities (especially the oligarchy) to disproportionately consume the country’s energy, while everyone else is left with exorbitant bills (the highest in Southeast Asia) from a system plagued with subpar electricity provision and periodic power outages. To attain such a system, *energy democracy* is necessary to ensure that an empowered citizenry is involved in all stages of energy generation, transmission, and distribution. And in order to implement energy democracy in the country, Philippine climate-justice advocates have been targeting their country’s oligarchy of families, which itself is upheld by and enmeshed within the global political-economic system dominated by neocolonial and oligarchic-corporate forces. Democratizing energy goes hand-in-hand with decolonizing energy.

The Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED) has been at the forefront for energy justice, energy democracy, and energy decolonization in the Philippines. CEED’s executive director is Mr. Gerry Arances, who was also formerly the National Coordinator of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ). CEED specifically believes in “people-centered development”:

¹³⁵ “Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) formed in 2013 to create a new center of gravity in the climate movement by uniting frontline communities and organizations into a formidable force. Our translocal organizing strategy and mobilizing capacity is building a Just Transition away from extractive systems of production, consumption and political oppression, and towards resilient, regenerative and equitable economies. We believe that the process of transition must place race, gender and class at the center of the solutions equation in order to make it a truly Just Transition.” *Climate Justice Alliance*. (<https://climatejusticealliance.org/about/>, accessed on September 10, 2022).

The organization holds that sustainable and realistic alternatives to energy, industry, and governance are centered on a people-centered development path which prioritizes an industrialization built on enriching the lives of all Filipinos and indigenous communities; enjoins and invites inclusive, participatory governance over industry; and is free from external influence of profit and hegemony, while maintaining competitiveness and sustainability.¹³⁶

CEED does not reject development or industrialization; rather, they envision a form of “people-centered” industrialization that provides electricity and other energy to all peoples of the Philippines in a way that is sustainable and equitable, without reliance on fossil fuels or exploitative oligarchic-corporate practices. CEED has been prolific as a think tank, producing research and policy papers, and it has also promoted projects for distributed renewable energy (DRE) generation and transmission systems that are designed to be collectively controlled and managed by local communities and not reliant on the transport of oil, gas, coal, or any other fuel.

The wonderful Mr. Odjie Javinal, CEED’s Community EmPOWERment Campaigner, for example, has traveled to different locations around the Philippines promoting distributed solar energy, which is particularly beneficial in areas of the island country that are not connected to one of the country’s three main regional power grids,¹³⁷ as well as for all parts of the country in the aftermath of a climate crisis-induced disaster or any other calamity that disrupts the electricity supply (Apanada and Kaldjian 2021). After a devastating earthquake hit the central Philippine island of Leyte, *Kuya* Odjie (*kuya* means “older brother” in Tagalog) led a team of volunteers to distribute solar tech packs (*tekpak*) to residents of Lake Danao, who had lost their homes and were sheltering

¹³⁶ “Guiding Principles.” *Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development*. (<https://ceedphilippines.com/principles/>, accessed on September 10, 2022)

¹³⁷ The Philippines is geopolitically administered according to three main regions: Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao. This corresponds to the main northern island of Luzon (and nearby smaller islands), the central Visayan islands, and the main southern island of Mindanao (and nearby smaller islands). The Philippines’ three main electrical grids correspond to the country’s three main geo-political regions, but there have been calls to connect all three regional grids into one national electrical grid.

in a relocation area, while the entire region itself faced an electricity blackout from the earthquake.¹³⁸

Kuya Odjie provided a training session for members of the Lake Danao community in how to operate the solar tech packs. He has conducted several such trainings for operating small-scale solar technologies in communities across the Philippines, particularly for communities in “off-grid” and climate crisis-battered areas.



August 2, 2017 — Odjie Javinal of the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED), in conjunction with the Eastern Visayas chapter of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) and SANLAKAS, conducts a training on and distribution of solar tech packs among residents of Lake Danao, who were hit by a devastating earthquake in July of 2017.

The Ecological Imagination

Groups like the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED), the Center for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technology (CREST), the Center for Power Issues and Initiatives (CPII), and the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities (ICSC)¹³⁹ have been producing

¹³⁸ “Lake Danao: Responding To Urgent Needs Through Renewable energy.” August 2, 2017. *Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development*. (<https://ceedphilippines.com/lake-danao-responding-to-urgent-needs-through-renewable-energy/>, accessed on September 10, 2022)

¹³⁹ “The Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities (ICSC) is an international non-government group advancing fair climate policy and low carbon, climate-resilient development. Based in the Philippines, it is engaged with the wider international climate and energy policy arena, particularly in Asia. It is recognized for its role in helping advance effective global climate action and the Paris climate agreement. Formerly known as Green Renewable Independent Power Producer, a sustainable energy solutions initiative first formed in 1998, the organization was renamed to reflect its

research and conducting pilot programs for distributed renewable energy (DRE) systems in the Philippines based on the principles of energy democracy and energy justice. However, the Philippine state and economy remain dominated by oligarchic-corporate forces that are hellbent on maintaining both the dominance of fossil fuels in the Philippines' energy system and the neoliberal-capitalist structure of the country's energy system itself. The prevailing energy regime in the Philippines has, thus far, been unable and unwilling to consider either a 100% renewable-energy economy or an economy and society free from oligarchy, inequality, and neocolonialism. A fundamental imperative of the work of Philippine climate-justice advocates, therefore, has been to convince the broader Philippine public that such an economy, society, and ecology is both possible and ecologically necessary, despite the moves by many government and corporate representatives to maintain the status quo.

In his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) on July 24, 2022, newly elected President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr. explained his vision for energy development in the Philippines: “In the move to lowering our carbon footprint caused by energy production, our advancement to renewables will have a lead time. In the interim, natural gas will hold the key.” Marcos thus echoed characterizations of fossil gas as a “bridge fuel” that would allow the Philippines to continue generating electricity from the fossil fuel while the renewable-energy sector continued to burgeon ever larger. He further stated that he plans to foster the expansion of the Philippines' fossil-gas industry “in a bid to strengthen Philippine energy security by diversifying the country's primary sources of energy and promoting the role of natural gas as a complementary fuel to variable renewable energy.”

broader agenda, covering climate policy, low carbon resilience, climate finance, communications, and diplomacy in international, national, and local arenas.” *Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities (ICSC)*. (<https://icsc.ngo/about-icsc/>, accessed on September 14, 2022)

By characterizing renewable energy as “variable,” Marcos fostered assumptions of renewable energy as unreliable and unstable, and fossil fuels as providing reliable energy supplies. This is despite the vast amounts of baseload power that can be provided by renewable sources like geothermal and hydroelectric power plants, not to mention the climatically catastrophic consequences of continued fossil-fuel burning. A further unspoken assumption was with regards to the Philippines’ “postcolonial predicament” (Gupta 1998; 2015) of being assumed to be economically and technologically “backward” and in need of “catching up” with the “developed” Global North—which had industrialized through mass-scale fossil-fuel burning, natural-resource extractivism, slavery and indentured servitude, and the violent, often genocidal, creation of global colonial empires. To enter the ranks of modern, industrialized, and fully developed countries, the Philippines would need vast amounts of electricity generated from baseload power sources like coal-fired power plants, fossil gas-fired power plants, and nuclear power plants—without a consideration for either the ecological costs or the social implications of industrialization through racial capitalism.

It was thus unsurprising when Marcos, later in his speech, further advocated for activating the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP)—the Philippines’ sole nuclear power plant, built by the administration of his father, former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, in the 1980s. The BNPP had never been operational due to widespread resistance in Bataan province. A mass People’s Strike (*Welgang Bayan*) in 1985 paralyzed transportation in the province, and the dictator Marcos eventually relented, with the nuclear plant mothballed and left dormant for decades. Nonetheless, Bongbong Marcos argued:

I believe that it is time also to re-examine our strategy towards building nuclear power plants in the Philippines. We will comply, of course, with the International Atomic Energy Agency regulations for nuclear power plants, as they have been strengthened after Fukushima. In the area of nuclear power, there have been new technologies developed that allow smaller-scale modular nuclear plants and other derivations thereof.

Ignoring the widespread fears, both in Bataan province and elsewhere in the Philippines, of a nuclear meltdown—particularly in the event of an earthquake, volcanic eruption, typhoon, or other natural disaster to which the tropical island country is prone—Bongbong Marcos used the language of technocracy in his attempt to assure the public that there was no cause for alarm. He reiterated the technocratic arguments of the nuclear industry, which has attempted to convince people in the province of Bataan into accepting that there would be no chance of a nuclear disaster, based on the notion of new and “strengthened” regulations. Philippine environmental activists have denounced such arguments, premised on a technocratic faith in infallible human technical ingenuity in the face of the forces of nature, as overconfident and hubristic. Nonetheless, according to Marcos’ reasoning, these understandable fears of a nuclear meltdown must be downplayed and ignored if the Philippines is to develop, industrialize, and truly achieve hi-tech modernity. To do so, the country will need to continue to rely on bulk loads of electricity from the country’s vast array of coal-fired power plants, a massive expansion in fossil gas-fired power plants, and the inauguration of nuclear power in the country.

Five years before Pres. Bongbong Marcos’ SONA speech pushing for both an expansion in fossil gas and the activation of nuclear energy in the Philippines, former Pres. Rodrigo Duterte gave a speech during the opening of a coal-fired power plant (owned by the Alsons Consolidated Resources Corporation of the oligarchic Alcantara family) in Sarangani province in Mindanao island:

At this time, whoever is the president of the Philippines would always contend with coal. There’s so much coal still that can be utilized by civilization for the next 50 to 70 years. And to be worrying about pollution—well, we just have to come to terms with that in our time, in our generation, it is really what it is. There is nothing you can do about it” (Flores 2017).

Duterte’s discussion of the inevitability of a reliance on coal-burning for the country’s energy needs echoed the assumption that the Philippines needed to “develop” and industrialize in a way that followed the polluting path toward industrialization of the Global North. Christine Danao, an official from the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) under Duterte’s government,

also stated, “We need a continuous and stable supply of electricity, and coal is the most stable source of energy” (Torralba 2018). According to the Duterte administration, concerns for human health and the apocalyptic impacts of the climate crisis needed to make way for bulk loads of electricity from coal-fired power plants. (Three years later in October of 2020, however, the government of Pres. Duterte issued a moratorium on all new coal-fired power plants in the Philippines, effectively placing a halt on plans for further expansion from the giant family-owned corporations comprising the Philippines’ “coaligarchy.” Duterte’s Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi stated that the Philippine government was “pushing for the transition from fossil fuel-based technology utilization to cleaner energy sources” [Chavez 2020].)



A large wind turbine of the San Lorenzo Wind Farm in Guimaras Island looms above trees, rice fields, and a youth riding their bicycle on the road. (Photo by the author)

Both the former government of Rodrigo Duterte and the current administration of Bongbong Marcos have shared a set of assumptions about the Philippines’ pathway toward development and industrialization—and the need for such a pathway. The Philippines needs to

develop and industrialize, and this can only happen if the country has a stable, reliable supply of vast amounts of baseload electricity. This baseload energy supply, it is assumed, can only come from fossil fuel-burning as well as the generation of electricity from nuclear radiation, whereas renewable-energy supplies—though undergoing technological advancements by the day—are nonetheless “variable” and need to be complemented, not with other renewable sources, but, rather, with fossil fuels and nuclear power. To advocate that the Philippines should solely prioritize a massive expansion in renewable-energy technologies would be unrealistic, or even silly, as opposed to the chosen direction of the Bongbong Marcos government toward fostering a massive expansion in fossil-gas development and the introduction of nuclear power (while continuing to rely on the already existing vast supply of electricity from coal-fired power plants).

The assumption that the Philippines needs to undergo a massive expansion in fossil gas right after having undergone two decades of a mass expansion in coal-fired power plants, even while renewable-energy sources continue to burgeon, speaks to a restricted and curtailed “ecological imagination” in the Philippine government, business community, and public. A good life, it is assumed, is a modern, industrialized life; such a modern life is unfathomable without fossil fuel-burning and nuclear radiation; and to think or imagine otherwise is unrealistic, unserious, or even silly. Such a restricted ecological imagination parallels the efforts to restrict or taunt an expanded “economic imagination.” In her article, “Occupy Wall Street and the Economic Imagination,” Hannah Appel (2014) discusses how the Occupy Wall Street protests, which swept the United States and the world in 2011, provided people from many walks of life the chance to voice their anger at the systemic corruption, stock-market gambling, and predatory finance rampant on Wall Street by rhetorically and physically targeting the Wall Street firms whose recklessness placed the entire national economy of the United States on the brink. Beyond the chance to critique and physically take over space, however, the Occupy movement also provided an invaluable moment for

participants to articulate their ideas and visions for alternative banking and finance, including post office banks and other forms of public banking, mass strategic debt defaults, alternative credit ratings, and other economic possibilities (616-17).

Appel notes how participants in Occupy Wall Street were taunted by opponents of the movement who attacked the supposed hypocrisy of the participants' possession and use of smartphones, digital notepads, and other such hi-tech gadgets—with an assumption of the impossibility “of producing useful commodities or technological innovation without predatory finance” (602). Appel notes how such derision echoed historical “cynicisms directed at abolitionists: *But you wear cotton clothing; you put sugar in your tea.*” Just as justifiers of US slavery disparaged abolitionists for believing that cotton and sugar could be produced without enslavement, those taunting the Occupy Wall Street participants assumed that the creation and use of modern technologies necessitated the system of predatory capitalism. “The taunts, then, are directed at what we might call our economic imaginations; they aim to shape the possibilities and alternatives, foreclosures, and deferrals through which we have come, unevenly, to understand capitalism in the present moment” (602-3).

I view the fossil-fuel and nuclear-power industries, and their supporters in government, as engaging in a parallel act of taunting or discouraging our ecological imaginations. They continue to operate on the assumption that the only way to achieve industrialization, development, and modernity is through dirty forms of energy that harm human health, poison environments, and produce globally apocalyptic climatic conditions. Moreover, the fact that the largest corporate conglomerates in the Philippines—variously owned by the country's oligarchy of ultra-wealthy and all-powerful families—include among their energy holdings both behemoth fossil-fuel power plants as well as large-scale renewable-energy projects speaks to the convenience, for the Philippine oligarchy, of such cultural assumptions about the unreliability of renewable energy. By fostering this

unreliable and intermittent characterization of renewables, these oligarchic Philippine conglomerates are able to continue profiting from their existing coal-fired power plants and expanding fossil gas-fired power plants, as well as from their considerable and expanding investments in renewable-energy infrastructures. Though the Philippine oligarchy and international energy investors are well-aware of the technological capabilities (and profitability) of clean and safe renewable energy, there remain enormous profits to be derived from electricity generated from gas, coal, petroleum, and nuclear radiation. Conveniently, they can continue profiting from polluting fossil fuels and dangerous nuclear radiation, while also profiting from renewable energy, despite the simultaneous characterization of renewables as unreliable.

Groups like the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development and the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice have been working to break the stranglehold of oligarchic-corporate and state representatives over not only the Philippines' economy and energy system, but also over the ways that energy—and renewable energy, in particular—are conceptualized and understood. Philippine climate-justice advocates have been spotlighting existing renewable-energy infrastructures in the island country, thus providing more and more Filipinos with concrete, visceral evidence of the current realities of and future possibilities for renewable power. They have also been championing the cause of energy justice, pointing out how Filipinos pay the most exorbitant electricity bills in Southeast Asia for unreliable and insufficient power, while oligarchic electricity-distribution corporations, most notably Meralco (Manila Electric Company), have been engaging in disingenuous, corrupt, and illegal practices that have been both exacerbating the climate crisis and forcing electric consumers to finance the company's economic and ecological liabilities. Philippine energy-democracy advocates have waged social-movement campaigns and legal-political challenges against Meralco, while calling for a transformation of the entire Philippine energy system by both repealing the neoliberal Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA) of 2001 and placing the

power sector under public ownership. Finally, they have been promoting renewable-energy projects that are equitable, fair, and under collective community control.



This T-shirt design by the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice envisions wind power and other renewable-energy technologies being devised and implemented according to the principles of climate justice and energy democracy. (Photo by the author)

“Renewable Energy for the People NOW!”

Importantly, Philippine climate-justice activists have placed their focus on the Philippines’ entire energy system, from the generation of energy to its transmission to different parts of the country and consumption by consumers. Not only have they been targeting fossil-fuel corporations for generating unsustainable and polluting forms of energy, but they have also been waging struggles against electric-distribution utilities for continuing to source power from dirty fossil fuels and for engaging in “shady” practices that leave Philippine electricity consumers with expensive bills for inadequate power supplies. The principal target of these Philippine energy-democracy advocates, in terms of electricity distribution, has been the Manila Electric Company (MERALCO). Founded in

1903 by American entrepreneur Charles M. Swift during the US colonial period, Meralco is currently jointly owned by the Hong Kong-based First Pacific Company Limited (whose CEO is Philippine tycoon Manny Pangilinan of the oligarchic Pangilinan clan) and JG Summit Holdings, Inc. (of the oligarchic Gokongwei family). Meralco is, by far, the largest power distributor in the Philippines, supplying electricity for 23 million people in the “Mega Manila” region. Philippine energy-justice advocates have targeted Meralco for its illegal and corrupt practices which have caused unnecessary suffering for Philippine electric consumers.

In 2017, for example, Meralco signed Power Supply Agreements (PSAs) with seven of its own subsidiaries and affiliated energy-generation corporations, all of which rely on coal burning for generating electricity, without conducting a competitive public-bidding process, as required by Philippine law (*CEED* 2017). Significantly, Meralco didn’t even consider the offer of a solar company to provide 5 gigawatts of electricity at rates that would be cheaper (3 pesos per kilowatt/hour) than those of the coal companies (who were charging between 3.5 and 3.85 pesos per kw/h). By locking Meralco into coal power for the next two decades, moreover, Meralco’s electricity consumers wouldn’t be able to benefit from the more cost-effective prices from renewable-energy sources like solar and wind power—the global prices of which are now cheaper than fossil fuels. In response to Meralco’s corrupt and illegal “midnight contracts” with the seven coal-fired power plants, the Power for People Coalition (P4P Coalition)—a national network, of which both PMCJ and CEED are a part, advocating for affordable, reliable, and renewable-sourced electricity for Filipino electric consumers—launched a campaign called “*Nagmamahal, Meralco*” (Love, Meralco).

The “Love, Meralco” campaign condemned Meralco’s “incestuous” and corrupt “sweetheart” deals with coal companies of which Meralco itself has leading ownership stakes, despite the requirement of the Philippine government for a competitive selection process (CSP) that

would ideally guarantee the most inexpensive and economical pricing arrangements for Philippine electricity consumers. The Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, P4P Coalition, and *Piglas Pilipinas!* (Break Free Philippines!) have held demonstrations against Meralco, including one on Valentine’s Day in February of 2020, calling for both Meralco and the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) to “break up” with coal power and “show love” to renewable energy instead. One member of both PMCJ and *Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino* (BMP, Solidarity of Filipino Workers), Mr. Gregorio V. Bituin, Jr., who is also a prolific writer and poet in the Tagalog language, wrote a poem entitled *Kalbaryo ng Pagmamahal* (Calvary of Love and Expenses [or, “Suffering from Rising Expenses”])¹⁴⁰:

*mahal na araw, mahal na kuryente, pagmamahal
 ng pangunahing bilihin, talagang nagmamahal
 tila ba bulsa’t sikmura ng masa’y binubuntal
 ng matinding dagok ng kapitalistang garapal
 ah, patuloy ang kalbaryong ito ng maralita,
 ng konsyumer, ng mababang sabod na manggagawa
 pagmamahalang ito’y di maipagkakaila
 sa bawat konsyumer ng kuryente’y kasumpa-sumpa
 doon sa tapat ng Meralco’y kayraming lumahok
 sa Kalbaryo ng mga Konsyumer, kaytinding dagok
 na pasan-pasan na talagang nakapagpalugmok
 sa bubay ng masang ang ginhawa’y di na maarok
 O, Meralco, hanggang kailan mo pahibibirapan
 sa mahal mong kuryente ang kawawang mamamayan
 O, mamamayan, magkapitbisig tayo’t labanan
 ang gan itong kasakiman sa tubo ng ülan¹⁴¹*

(blessed and expensive day, blessed and expensive electricity, love and rising expenses
 for this staple commodity, it’s getting more and more costly
 it seems like the pockets and stomachs of the masses are being beaten
 by the heavy blow of capitalist exploitation
 ah, this continues, this suffering [calvary] of the poor,
 of the consumers, of the low-wage workers

¹⁴⁰ In this poem, Gregorio V. Bituin, Jr. is playing with the Tagalog root word *mahal*, which can be translated as both “love” and “expensive.” The verb *magmahal* can be translated as both “to love” and “to become expensive,” and the gerund *pagmamahal* can be translated as “loving” and “becoming expensive” or “rising [costs].” The term *Kalbaryo* literally translates to Calvary, the site of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, but it also came to take on the meaning of “suffering.”

¹⁴¹ Bituin, Jr., Gregorio V. 2022. *Kalbaryo ng pagmamahal*. February 14, 2022.

(<https://himpapalis.blogspot.com/2022/04/kalbaryo-ng-pagmamahal.html>, accessed on September 22, 2022)

these expenses are undeniable
for each consumer of electricity is cursed
there, across from Meralco [the Meralco building], so many participated
in the Calvary [Suffering] of the Consumers, it's been a heavy blow
a heavy burden that has really brought down
the lives of the masses for whom comfort is unfathomable
O, Meralco, until when will you place such hardships
on the poor from your expensive electricity
O, citizens, let's stand together, comrades-in-arms, and fight against
(This greed for the profits of a few)



February 14, 2020 — The Power for People Coalition holds a Valentine's Day protest against Meralco, calling on the electric distribution utility to “break up” with coal power and, instead, “show love” for “R.E.” (renewable energy). (Photo by P4P Coalition)

In 2019, the *Alyansa para sa Bagong Pilipinas* (Alliance for a New Philippines) launched a lawsuit against the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) for failing to enforce a competitive bidding process for Meralco's “sweetheart” deals, culminating in a landmark decision by the Philippine Supreme Court (*Kataastaasang Hukuman* or *Korte Suprema*) to nullify all seven of Meralco's Power Supply Agreements with its own coal-generating subsidiaries and corporate affiliates as well as all other PSAs executed (by Meralco and other electric distributors) after June of 2015. Meralco and other power-distribution utilities were thus legally compelled to hold competitive selection

processes (CSPs) that would have to consider bids from all energy-generating companies—including those providing electricity from renewable-power sources—that offered more affordable rates (De Torres and Andres 2021; Buan 2019). Government officials in the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) who accommodated the illegal PSAs, moreover, were “suspended for graft” (Mallari, Jr. 2019).

Meralco’s illegal act of not conducting a competitive bidding process for the seven coal-fired power plants, all of which Meralco itself held ownership stakes, was just one symptom of a much larger problem with the Philippines’ system of power generation, transmission, and provision. From the perspective of Philippine climate-justice and energy-democracy advocates, the source of many of these problems in the Philippines’ system of power provision stems from the Electric Power Industry Reform Act (EPIRA), signed into law by neoliberal-authoritarian President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2001. The neoliberal EPIRA law compelled the Philippine government to privatize and deregulate the country’s electricity sector, with the government resultingly largely abdicating its responsibility to ensure affordability and reliability in power provision to its citizens. Government-owned energy-generating and power-transmission companies, including those owned by the government’s Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) and National Power Corporation (Napocor), began being privatized throughout the country. In theory, the privatization of the Philippines’ government-owned companies that were generating, transmitting, and distributing energy was meant to promote healthy competition in the power sector, thus driving costs down and promoting greater efficiency in power provision.

In reality, however, electricity prices in the Philippines remain the highest in Southeast Asia, and they have not reached pre-EPIRA levels, while power outages and subpar electricity provision remain rampant in the island country, along with corruption, inefficiency, and mismanagement. By privatizing the country’s energy sector, the responsibility for power provision was transferred from

the oligarchic-dominated Philippine government to the Philippine oligarchy itself, with the country's largest family-owned corporate conglomerates taking control over the generation, transmission, and distribution of the country's electricity. Though the country's oligarchic corporations and banks have reaped enormous profits from their control of the country's energy sector, problems abound for ordinary Philippine power consumers. In 2014, over a decade after the passage of the EPIRA law, Ms. Flora Santos ("Tita Flor" [Auntie Flor]), a prominent leader of SANLAKAS, called for the repeal of EPIRA and the placement of the Philippines' power sector under public ownership:

The energy crisis is the result of EPIRA, a law that, after over ten years of existence, has proven to have failed in ensuring power supply and affordable electricity for the people, especially the masses. If Congress should act to resolve the crisis, it should... throw out EPIRA and pass a new law that gives back the control of the power industry to government.¹⁴²



October 10, 2016 — Flora Santos ("Tita Flor" [Auntie Flor]), the National Vice President of SANLAKAS, gives a speech during PMCJ's National Day of Action against coal power—part of its national campaign, "Coal is NOT the Answer." (Photo by the author)

¹⁴² "EPIRA repeal, not emergency powers, needed to solve energy crisis—groups." *GMA News Online*. September 15, 2014. (<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/money/economy/379297/epira-repeal-not-emergency-powers-needed-to-solve-energy-crisis-groups/story/>, accessed on September 16, 2022)

In addition to the repeal of EPIRA and reversal of the neoliberalization of the Philippines' energy sector (and wider economy), Philippine energy-democracy advocates have also called for the full implementation of the Renewable Energy Act of 2008, which has included provisions and mechanisms used by governments worldwide to encourage the growth of the renewables industries, including net metering, renewable portfolio standards (RPS), and feed-in tariffs (FIT)—the implementations of which, thus far, have largely been “dismal” (Verzola 2018, 9). One important component of the Renewable Energy Act is the Green Energy Option Program (GEOP), which allows for energy consumers to actively decide to obtain power from a host of approved Renewable Energy Suppliers, rather than from dirty fossil-fuel power projects. For over a decade, the GEOP remained unimplemented by the Philippine government (specifically, the Energy Regulatory Commission); after pressure from environmentalist, climate-justice, and energy-consumer advocates, the Green Energy Option Program was finally implemented in December of 2021.

Nonetheless, Philippine climate-justice activists contend that fully implementing the Renewable Energy Act—as important as that is—remains insufficient in the face of the country's oligarchic-dominated political-economic system. The Renewable Energy Act promotes market-based mechanisms that, in the Philippine context, largely benefit the family-owned corporate conglomerates that already dominate the country's economy and politics. In addition to encouraging the growth and eventual dominance of renewable energy in the country's energy system, Philippine energy-democracy advocates continue to push for 100% public ownership over the power sector in the Philippines. At the same time, returning power provision to the government is also meant to be accompanied by a democratized and empowered citizenry—including people's organizations, activist networks, and other community advocates—overseeing, monitoring, and being involved in the entire process of the generation and distribution of electricity and other energy in the country. In other words, if the Philippine government remains dominated by the country's oligarchy of super-

rich families, then restoring control of the energy sector away from the oligarchy's private corporations and, instead, to companies owned by the oligarchic-dominated government won't automatically establish energy democracy in the country. After all, the dictatorial-fascist government of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s and 80s had nationalized key sectors of the Philippine energy system, but this ultimately largely benefited the Marcos family and their closest relatives and business cronies. Philippine energy democracy would be established, instead, through a combination of: public ownership over the power sector, the creation of "mini-grids" or "micro-grids" in areas of the country not connected to one of the three main power grids, 100% renewable-energy generation, and the dismantling of the oligarchic and neocolonial structure of the Philippine economy.

The Philippine energy-democracy movement has also expanded into the Philippines' unique party-list system. As stipulated by the Philippine Constitution of 1987, the Philippine government was obligated to establish a party-list system in which 20 percent of the seats in the Philippine House of Representatives (*Kapulungan ng mga Kinatawan*) would be reserved for political parties representing "marginalized" and "underrepresented" sectors in Philippine society. Since 1998, congressmembers have been elected from party-list groups representing workers, peasants, women, Indigenous peoples, environmentalists, and other sectors. Philippine energy-justice advocates decided to engage with the Philippine party-list system by running for congressional seats in 2019 through a political party called *Murang Kuryente* (the "Cheap Electricity" party), which emerged from Philippine climate-justice advocacy groups. In its campaign messaging, Murang Kuryente Partylist (MKP) has further popularized climate justice, energy democracy, and affordable, reliable, and cleanly-sourced electricity for Filipino consumers.¹⁴³

Finally, Philippine energy-democracy advocates have been building and initiating a host of

¹⁴³ "Murang Kuryente Party-List is a movement of advocates for affordable, reliable, and quality electric service in the Philippines." (<https://www.facebook.com/MurangKuryentePartylist>, accessed on September 15, 2022)



May 11, 2019 — Gerry Arances, executive director of CEED and first nominee of Murang Kuryente Partylist, speaks at a campaign rally in the town of Talavera in the province of Nueva Ecija in Luzon island. (Photo by Murang Kuryente Partylist)

distributed renewable energy (DRE) projects across the Philippines. For example, with assistance from civil-society organizations (including CEED, SANLAKAS, and KONSYUMER), a farming community—located in the outskirts of the city of Bacolod in the province of Negros Occidental—which is not connected to the regional Visayan power grid, decided to establish their own local solar-power system in February of 2022 (*CEED* 2022). The decision to establish the 1.6-kilowatt (kW) solar photovoltaic (PV) system among the members of the Association of Small Farmers of *Purok*¹⁴⁴ Ilaya (ASFa-PI) was made in the aftermath of the devastation of Super Typhoon Odette (known internationally as Typhoon Rai) a couple of months earlier in December of 2021. Super Typhoon Odette caused power outages, infrastructural damage, disruptions to telecommunications services, and hundreds of deaths in the central and southern Philippines.

¹⁴⁴ A *purok* is a division or district of a *barangay* (the smallest government unit in the Philippines) located in an urban area. By contrast, a *sitio* is a district of a *barangay* in a rural area.

As stated by Mr. Grid Alila, the coordinator of the Negros Island branch of Konsyumer, a national movement advocating for the rights of electric consumers:

Devastating as it was, Odette triggered great awareness on the reliability of sustainable energy systems, even at a time of disaster. This is thanks to small-scale renewable energy donation and deployment drives in areas on power outage—showing that renewables really can do what traditional, centralized, and polluting energy systems, like coal and gas, cannot. In the context of the climate crisis, it’s clear that there is an urgency for climate action, and we are initiating this with RE-empowerment starting from the grassroots (*CEED* 2022).

Mr. Grid Alila’s contention that distributed renewable energy (DRE) systems provide for “reliability” in power provision, even and especially in times of climate change-induced disasters, directly contrasts with corporate-state representations of fossil fuels as providing reliability in the country’s power supply. The existing system of energy distribution in the Visayas—reliant as it has been on coal burning—has, thus far, failed to incorporate communities like the village district of Ilaya into the regional energy grid. Since February of 2022, however, the small farmers association of the Ilaya village district, consisting of 60 families, now has a common charging station for lighting devices, cell phones, and other communication gadgets. The solar-power system also powers the farmers’ collectively owned greenhouse for their vegetables and other crops. The association’s chairperson, Ms. Ludy Rivera, stated:

Now, with our own solar-power system, we not only get to have our own electricity; we also become a testimony to how clean energy can benefit communities like us that are often marginalized. We are thankful since this project will directly aid our members who do not have access to electricity. We can also use the solar-power system to establish a hydroponics system in our association’s greenhouse (*CEED* 2022).

The creation of the small-scale solar power system was also used to shame the city of Bacolod’s main electricity distributor, the Central Negros Electric Cooperative (CENECO), for both failing to electrify the village district (or *purok*) of Ilaya and for continuing to source electricity from coal-fired power plants located outside of the island of Negros. Mr. Jun Año, a member of the Negros Island chapter of SANLAKAS, noted how the small farmers of ASFa-PI had:

...remained unelectrified right under the nose of CENECO. We recommend that CENECO take this project as an opportunity to re-evaluate the services they offer to consumers and the sources from which they get energy. They should stop insisting [on] unreliable and costly electricity especially from fossil-fuel plants outside of Negros, and instead focus on ensuring their customers get to enjoy clean energy, especially locally available RE (CEED 2022).

Negros Island—which is filled with renewable energy sources, from solar farms to geothermal power plants—has more than enough electricity from clean-energy sources to power Negrosanons' energy needs, thus lacking any real need for importing electricity from fossil fuel-fired power plants located in other islands in the Visayan region. Mr. Año further touted the importance of energy systems under collective community control, like the 1.6-kW solar PV system of ASFa-PI: “It is community-owned and community-managed, which is what energy democracy is about” (CEED 2022).

Meanwhile, in the northern Philippine island of Luzon in the province of Rizal (to the east of Manila), Indigenous people of the Dumagat-Remontado tribe have been experiencing transformations in their experiences of electricity and energy since 2014, when a member of the community returned to his *sitio* (village district) of Manggahan in the municipality of Tanay after a trip to Manila, bringing solar photovoltaic technology with him (Subingsubing and Ramos 2021). The Manggahan village district is located in an “off-grid” area of the Sierra Madre mountain range, and the Dumagat-Remontado people are largely semisedentary people, whose livelihoods have been based on hunting, fishing, gathering of forest products (including honey), and farming. Mr. Octavio Pranada, a farmer and *papu* (tribal leader), learned about solar power while listening to the radio. He then traveled to Manila's Quiapo district (known for its enormous public marketplace where electronics, among many other items, are sold), and purchased a solar panel and battery, which cost 6,000 pesos (about \$100) and 7,000 pesos (about \$120), respectively. Upon returning to his home in Manggahan village district in Tanay, Rizal province, Mr. Pranada found that his solar panel, which has a voltage 1,000 watts, “could power 10 light bulbs, a portable TV set, and a radio for at least

three days before requiring a recharge” (Subingsubing and Ramos 2021). Several of Mr. Pranada’s neighbors then began purchasing their own solar panels, allowing them to electrify and light up their homes without relying on gasoline lamps (which, they say, have been a fire hazard to their *nipa* [thatched] homes) or flashlights (powered by batteries).

Philanthropic donors, church groups, and environmental NGOs—including the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities (ICSC) and 350.org Pilipinas— took notice, and they began contributing financing and technical assistance to further spread solar power among the Remontado-Dumagat people of Tanay, Rizal. Within a few years, practically all the 150 households in the *sitio* of Manggahan became electrified by solar power. The solar electrification of these Dumagat-Remontado Indigenous people’s village district, however, comes during a time of a major threat of submersion of their ancestral lands by the Kaliwa Dam project, which was approved by the Duterte government in 2019 and expected to provide 600 million liters of water per day to Metropolitan Manila. The dam has been fiercely opposed by Dumagat-Remontado people and by climate-justice groups like PMCJ and the Save Sierra Madre Network Alliance (SSMNA).¹⁴⁵ Tribal leader Octavio Pranada stated, “Even if I am the only one left standing, I will oppose the project. Our forefathers bequeathed this land to us. I will not let it become water” (Subingsubing and Ramos 2021).

Conclusion

¹⁴⁵ “We, the members of Save Sierra Madre Network Alliance, Inc. (SSMNA), who envision a community of stewards and co-Creators of a loving Creator to all of creation, in particular to Sierra Madre and commit ourselves to the present and future generations that we will: (1) Co-exist harmoniously with all creatures, living things, and elements of nature; (2) Care and protect our natural environment particularly within Sierra Madre; (3) Awaken the consciousness among local communities and all Sierra Madre stakeholders of our being stewards and co-Creators of a loving Creator; and (4) Strengthen the commitment of local communities and all Sierra Madre stakeholders in maintaining the balance of nature, strongly oppose all destructive development projects, especially the construction of new mega-dams, within the Sierra Madre.” “SSMNA’s Position Paper on the Construction of Mega-Dams in Sierra Madre.” 2014. *Save Sierra Madre Network Alliance Inc.* (<https://savesierramadre.page.tl/SSMNA-h-s-Position-Paper-on-the-Construction-of-Mega-Dams-in-Sierra-Madre.htm>, accessed on September 16, 2022)

Philippine climate-justice advocates' clean-energy initiatives, social-movement campaigns, and legal-political struggles have collectively been expanding the Philippine ecological imagination. As more Filipinos not only see concrete evidence of renewable-energy infrastructures but also directly benefit from affordable and cleanly-sourced electricity, assumptions about renewable energy as “unrealistic” or “unreliable” erode. The spread of distributed renewable (particularly solar) power to off-grid areas, as well as communities experiencing electricity blackouts due to climate calamities, further demonstrates the benefits of a flexible supply of renewable-energy sources. Moreover, both renewable-energy projects and projects for “alternative minerals management” enacted in an equitable and fair manner convey to the Philippines' working-class, peasant, and Indigenous communities that the 100% renewable-energy transition can be achieved in a way that is just, sustainable, and respectful to local communities' lifeways, philosophies, and wellbeing.

Philippine energy-democracy advocates' legal-political work has also been influencing the Philippine public to imagine a different, better scenario for energy in the country. Rather than being plagued by subpar and expensive power provision, Filipinos might be able to experience affordable and reliable electricity—and a clean and healthy climate and ecology—if the Philippines' power sector were placed under public ownership, and if the Philippine government took a much more proactive stance in promoting the renewable-energy expansion by, firstly, fully implementing the Renewable Energy Act of 2008. If the wellbeing of communities, human health, and the climate and environment were prioritized above the profits of Philippine and global oligarchic-corporate investors, then the country might experience a healthier, happier, and more meaningful way of not only using and distributing energy and energy-related technologies in the Philippines, but also of, simply, living lives as human beings in the 21st century and beyond. The advent of the Anthropocene requires the generation and consumption of electricity in a way that neither burns fossil fuels nor unsustainably despoils local ecologies to procure the metals and minerals required to construct

renewable-energy infrastructures and technologies. In these Philippine advocates' holistic conception of climate justice, the renewable-energy transition shouldn't be envisioned as separate from other environmentalist priorities, which include ending all unsustainable forms of endless extractivism, overconsumption, and the continuous creation of plastic and other non-biodegradable waste. The 100% renewable-energy economy, in other words, must be accompanied by an economic system free from oligarchy, neocolonialism, and endless, unsustainable capitalist extractivism.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

On November 8, 2013, Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) struck the central Philippine islands of Samar and Leyte with sustained wind speeds of up to 315 kilometers per hour, making it the strongest tropical cyclone to hit landfall in recorded human history. Torrential rains poured across the islands, while ferocious gusts of wind howled across mountains, valleys, farms, rice fields, and human settlements. People living in Yolanda's destructive pathway were terrified, as the seemingly supernatural strength of the super typhoon's winds toppled powerlines and bulldozed once-towering trees. The most damaging—and traumatizing—aspect of Super Typhoon Yolanda, however, were the gigantic walls of seawater—up to 7.5 meters high—that thrashed and hammered against coastal villages, towns, and cities. These “storm surges” caused terrible devastation across the central Philippines, with over 7,000 lives lost by the time the super typhoon had run its course. In Leyte island, the provincial capital of Tacloban City was ravaged, with buildings, homes, and other infrastructures demolished across the city. Millions of people across the region were displaced, and the country was left with over \$2 billion in infrastructural damage. A social climate of suffering, desperation, and despair took hold across the region. Climate scientists connected the monstrous storm to the global climate crisis—and particularly, how global heating, due to excess greenhouse-gas emissions in the atmosphere from the mass-scale burning of fossil fuels, is concomitantly causing oceanic heating which, in turn, is causing more frequent and monstrous tropical storms.

The dreaded and harrowing storm surges that accompanied Yolanda continue to haunt women, men, and youth in Tacloban City who survived the 2013 super typhoon.¹⁴⁶ On November 8,

¹⁴⁶ A poem by Merlie Alunan, professor emeritus of creative writing at the University of the Philippines – Visayas, Tacloban, chillingly encapsulates the trauma and devastation of Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) for the people of the

2018, five years after Super *Bagyong* Yolanda’s destruction,¹⁴⁷ residents of Tacloban City commemorated the tragic event by honoring the memories of their dear family members and friends who were victims of the super typhoon. Virtually everyone in Tacloban City and surrounding areas has relatives and friends who lost their lives in the aftermath of Yolanda’s arrival in the Philippines. Parks in the city center were filled with makeshift crosses that symbolized the innumerable deaths from the typhoon, and at nightfall, the streets and sidewalks of Tacloban were lit up with candles that people had placed across the city. Commemorative ceremonies were held at different sites in the city, including in the city center and on the campus of the University of the Philippines – Visayas Tacloban College. The Taclobanon people have commemorated the tragedy of Yolanda annually since the super typhoon struck in 2013.



November 8, 2018 — Wooden crosses next to candles in paper bags are placed throughout the city center of Tacloban, commemorating the victims of Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013. (Photo by the author)

I had traveled to Tacloban City in November of 2018 to meet with climate-justice advocates from the city who were members of the local branch of the Philippine Movement for Climate

Eastern Visayas. The poem is entitled, “*An mga naanaw ban Haiyan*” (“The Haiyan dead”). (<https://abliterature-philippines.com/the-haiyan-dead/>, accessed on September 19, 2022)

¹⁴⁷ The Filipino term *bagyo* translates to typhoon, cyclone, or storm.

Justice—namely, the PMCJ-Eastern Visayas chapter (the island of Leyte is located in the eastern part of the Visayan region). I was told that there would be activities taking place to commemorate *Bagyong* Yolanda, and I was immediately affected by the atmosphere of somber emotions and contemplative reflection across the provincial city, particularly around the city memorials, crosses and candles, and mass graves. At the same time, I also encountered a sense of resoluteness and determination from the city’s activist community, who had been fighting for a society free from corporate ecological plunder, fossil-fuel burning, oligarchic inequality, and authoritarian violence for decades. The climate-justice activists of Tacloban City and the Eastern Visayan region had all experienced devastating losses due to Super Typhoon Yolanda, including family members and friends who died from the typhoon’s wreckage, as well as damage to their own homes and neighborhoods.

Nonetheless, they remained firm and resolute in demanding justice since the super typhoon struck. Though they also commemorated the tragedy of Yolanda along with the rest of their city, they decried the continued injustices that the victims and survivors of Yolanda have had to endure. The main question that they were asking (in the local Waray language) was, “*Lima ka tuig ban Yolanda, bain na an hustisya?*” (“Five years since Yolanda, where is the justice?”). Tacloban City’s climate-justice activists have noted the inadequate rehabilitation efforts, corporate land grabs, and other acts of “disaster capitalism” (Klein 2008) that have plagued communities affected by the typhoon. PMCJ-Eastern Visayas, SANLAKAS, the women’s group ORIANG, the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), and *Partido Lakas ng Masa* (PLM, the Party of the Strength of the Masses) held a *jeepney* caravan around the city, visiting sites that were badly impacted by the mega storm. The climate-justice activists called for “people-centered” rehabilitation and climate resiliency, adequate housing, and justice for victims. They also made a direct link to the global climate crisis by noting the hollowness in the government, with corporate sponsors, holding official commemoration activities of Yolanda without also making concrete changes in the practices of the Philippine state

and corporate sector away from a prioritization of fossil fuels. Tacloban climate activists called for a shift to 100% clean and renewable energy and the elimination of fossil fuels, and they also called for climate reparations from Global North countries to Global South nations like the Philippines.



November 8, 2018 — Climate-justice activists in Tacloban City gather at a site where mass deaths occurred due to Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013, calling for “people-centered” rehabilitation and condemning corporate land grabs and other facets of disaster capitalism in the wake of the super typhoon. (Photo by the author)

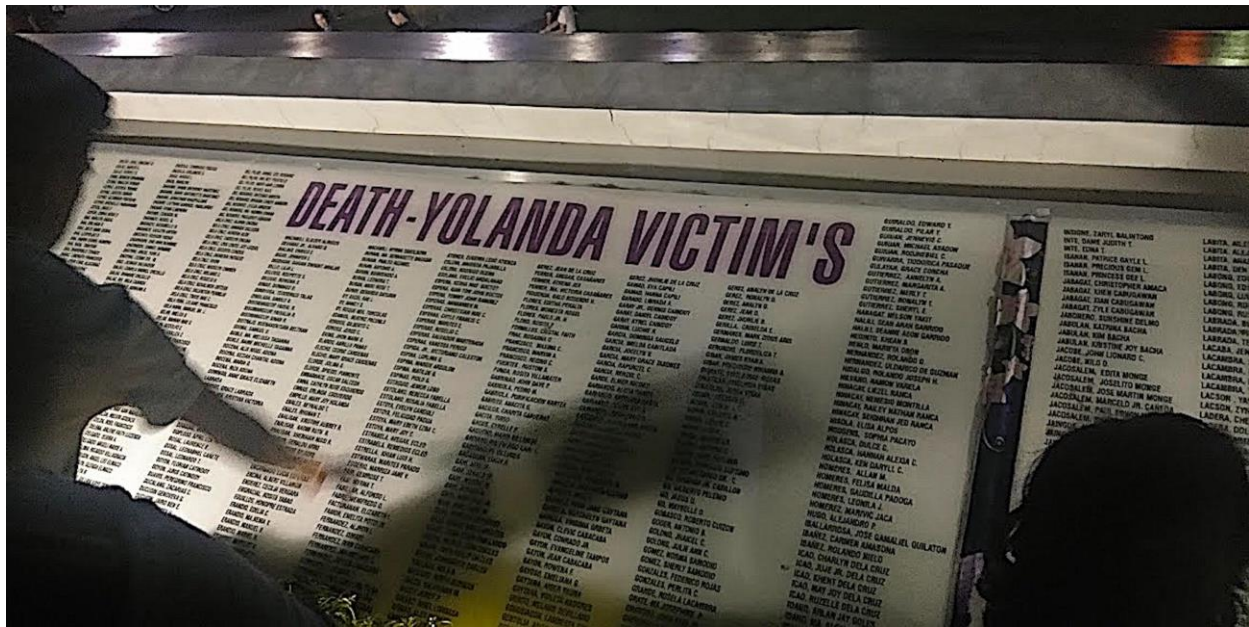
In this dissertation, I have documented and analyzed the struggle for climate justice in the Philippines. I have aimed to show how, despite the destructive aftermath of climate crisis-exacerbated super typhoons, catastrophic floods, and other climate disasters—and despite the ominous trajectory toward a mass exodus of tens (or hundreds) of millions of “climate refugees” from the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, due to sea-level rise and concomitant sinking of islands and inundation of coastal regions—the Philippines’ climate-justice community has continued to develop activist discourses, policy prescriptions, forms of protest, and visions of a future in which peoples of the Philippines could live in a habitable, healthy, and just economy and society in their island country. In the face of terrible climate calamities—as well as an oligarchic political-economic system that frequently resorts to extrajudicial violence and

terror against the country's environmentalists (and other activists, human-rights attorneys, and political dissidents)—Philippine climate-justice advocates push onward and continue their work, producing innovative ideas and strategies in order to take on one of the most ruthless and powerful industries in the world. They do so, moreover, while also maintaining a familial culture of camaraderie, joking, feasting, singing, socializing, and supporting each other. I deeply admire them and their work, and I am grateful and humbled to have been able to learn from them and their advocacy. I have aimed to demonstrate the great global importance of their advocacy in this dissertation.

When thinking about climate calamities like Super Typhoon Yolanda, however, I am reminded of the need for a sober recognition of the dire and calamitous situation that the entire world already is in, even though we haven't even reached the threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius of increased global heating that the world must not surpass, as stipulated by the Paris Climate Accord. Yet, as current trends indicate, we *will* surpass 1.5 degrees Celsius because the governments of the largest greenhouse gas-emitting countries are not, as of yet, imminently and swiftly taking decisive, concrete steps toward reigning in and terminating the fossil-fuels industries. Because of this catastrophic political failure, the climate catastrophe is certain to occur, as we are already witnessing the manifestations of it. What will life be like when we surpass 2 degrees Celsius, or 5 degrees Celsius, of increased global average temperatures? As important as it is to unleash our ecological imaginations by envisioning what a climate-justice and energy-democracy future might look like, a major caveat to these visions is the need to keep in mind the parallel situation of increasingly frequent and severe climate-related calamities, and to plan accordingly.

I write this at a time, in the year 2022, when a third of Pakistan and the entire island of Puerto Rico are being devastated by catastrophic flooding, China is suffering from its worst heat wave in recorded history, Europe is enduring its worst heat wave since the Renaissance period, and

megafires are raging across the western coast of North America, from California to British Columbia (where the city of Vancouver was experiencing the worst air quality in the world for a weekend due to the wildfires). The global climate calamity has already been manifesting in countries and regions across the world, and it will continue to get worse. Adapting to the climate crisis by preparing for catastrophic weather events that are, for certain, to occur and recur—as well as for the calamitous effects of longer-term processes like sea-level rise and prolonged and more extreme heat waves—is now a necessity worldwide. For over a decade, the Philippine government has been attempting to adapt to the climate crisis through, as one example, the creation of a bureaucracy to coordinate state-led activities in reducing risk to climate disasters as well as providing relief and aid to evacuees of such calamities. Such Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Councils have been established at the local, provincial, and national levels of government.



A plaque in the city center of Tacloban includes lists of hundreds of names of victims whose lives were taken by Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013. (Photo by the author)

This “new normal” of constantly expecting and needing to prepare for cataclysmic weather and climatic events—amidst the other “new normal” of mask-wearing, social distancing, getting vaccinated and boosted (for countries and regions that have access to such vaccines), resistance to

such efforts from some sectors of society, and mass deaths from complications related to COVID-19—has, for many of us, been difficult to deal with psychologically and emotionally. I am inspired by social movements like that of the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice and its allied and connected organizations that, in the face of daunting odds against reforming and transforming very difficult political and ecological conditions, nonetheless continue the fight. During the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines, which also underwent one of the longest and strictest lockdowns in the world, movements for radical care emerged in different parts of the country, in which activist and community groups formed pantries to distribute free food to those who needed it, transportation networks to provide free rides to workers who needed to continue working outside the home in order to have sustenance for themselves and their families, and other activities that, the activists say, should have been provided by the government (which was overemphasizing punitive measures against violators of curfews and other social guidelines). Members of the socioeconomically disadvantaged and working classes in Philippine society continued to support each other as best they could during the pandemic, as they have long done in the absence of meaningful services and programs from the state to end poverty and promote social equity.

Meanwhile, the Philippines' climate-justice advocates continue to forge ahead in fighting for the reforms and transformations necessary to avoid a climate apocalypse. However, I am reminded of one of the key tenets of *global* climate justice—that the countries and communities that have contributed the absolute least to the global, mass-scale crisis of the climate have, too often, been suffering the most from its effects. I can't help but think about how these Philippine climate-justice activists are envisioning and taking concrete measures toward realizing a society, economy, and national infrastructural system built on the principles of energy democracy and energy justice, even though large parts of their island country on which they are building this climate-justice future could be inundated with ocean water from sea-level rise—after having been further battered by more

devastating super typhoons and more destruction of its coral reefs—in the coming years. As Philippine, Bolivian, Mozambican, Pakistani, and other Global South climate-justice advocates have all contended, while they are doing the best they can to reform their own governments to free their societies from fossil fuels, they, nonetheless, remain at the mercy of the highest-emitting countries to take imminent and drastic action to shut down all fossil-fuel operations. This is after these Global South nations have also had to endure centuries of plunder and genocidal violence by the Western capitalist-colonial powers.

It's difficult for me not to think about the maddening injustice of the situation, in which centuries of colonial trauma and plunder are being compounded by the trauma and devastation of the climate crisis. Nevertheless, rather than being immobilized by these realizations, I'm inspired by the power of social movements to continue being relentless in fighting for change. As Ms. Lidy Nacpil explained, with regards to fighting against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1980s, the “greatest lesson” for her and her comrades was that they “just refused to be defeated. I can't say we refused to be afraid; courage is not a lack of fear—courage is just continuing to act even if there's fear, right? Because fear makes you wise; it reminds you about the care that you also have to use when you plan your actions.”¹⁴⁸ In the present moment, fighting—and dreaming—remain crucial for resisting impulses toward immobilization and debilitation in the face of the enormity of the crisis at hand. I view there to be a human need, and even impulse, for dreaming and imagining. As human beings, our imaginations, dreams, and hopes give meaning to our lives and help us make sense of the world around us, and, as scholars like Robin Kelley have contended, social movements have played a key and vital role in incubating and disseminating such “dreams.”

¹⁴⁸ Scheinman, Ted. “Women Saving the Planet: Lidy Nacpil of the Philippines.” *Pacific Standard*. September 23, 2018. (<https://psmag.com/magazine/women-saving-the-planet-lidy-nacpil-of-the-philippines>, accessed on August 26, 2022)

In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Robin Kelley (2002) reminds us that, while it is important to have a critical mindset toward any utopian vision, our critical and analytical thinking skills should not erase our propensity to dream. Kelley encourages us to continue dreaming of freedom and imagining a better world, even if we're accused of being unrealistically utopian. He also challenges conventional intellectual practice: "Freedom and love may be the most revolutionary ideas available to us, and yet as intellectuals we have failed miserably to grapple with their political and analytical importance" (11-12). Kelley, furthermore, believes that "revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge" (8). A key type of knowledge for Kelley is what he calls "poetic knowledge": "In the poetics of struggle and lived experience, in the utterances of ordinary folk, in the cultural products of social movements, in the reflections of activists, we discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of the world not yet born" (9-10).

It is in the spirit of poetic knowledge that Kelley provides a critical historical overview of different visions, projects, forms of activism, struggles, and the intellectual and revolutionary work of radical Black movements in America, including Afrotopia and Afrofuturity movements, Black involvement in (and tensions with) the American Left and international Left, and Black musical traditions, including jazz. He offers a particularly illuminating perspective on the case for reparations for descendants of US slavery:

The demand for reparations was about social justice, reconciliation, reconstructing the internal life of black America, and eliminating institutional racism. This is why reparations proposals from black radical movements focus less on individual payments than on securing funds to build autonomous black institutions, improving community life, and in some cases establishing a homeland that will enable African Americans to develop a political economy geared more toward collective needs than toward accumulation (114).

Ultimately, Kelley, in discussing the intersections between Surrealism and the Black tradition, calls for a "revolution of the mind," which is "not merely a refusal of victim status. I am talking about an unleashing of the mind's most creative capacities, catalyzed by participation in struggles for change"

(191). Revolutionizing the mind is ultimately related to poetic knowledge: “Poetry, therefore, is not what we simply recognize as the formal ‘poem,’ but a revolt: a scream in the night, an emancipation of language and old ways of thinking” (9).



November 8, 2018 — Candles are placed along sidewalks and street edges across Tacloban City, in commemoration of the thousands of lives lost from the devastation of Super Typhoon Yolanda on November 8, 2013. (Photo by the author)

I have sought, in this dissertation, to share some of the ways that the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice has served as an incubator for new knowledge and visions that are helping to emancipate language and old ways of thinking when it comes to the existential crisis of the climate. The Philippine climate-justice movement has been critically involved in cultural struggles over meaning—the meaning of the climate crisis itself, of sustainable energy and sustainable development, of what it means to be a “developing” country, and of what it means to be a Philippine person and a human being in the Anthropocene. PMCJ’s struggles at all levels of

society—from local movements to shut down coal- and gas-fired power plants, to advocacy at the level of the national government (especially the Environment and Energy departments), to their climate-justice advocacy on the global stage—are all providing Philippine society with glimpses of what a more sustainable and just future of the Philippines could look like if the country were structured according to the principles of climate justice and energy democracy. As the climate crisis continues to worsen, social-movement activists continue to fight for concrete measures and policies, while also continuing to dream.

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