Decolonizing Manila-Men and St. Maló, Louisiana

A Queer Postcolonial Asian American Critique

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What is now called “St. Maló” or “Bayou St. Maló” in St. Bernard Parish in the state of Louisiana is part of the ancestral lands and waters of the United Houma Nation. (See Figure 10.1.) Approximately seventeen thousand tribal citizens reside within their territory located along the southeastern coast of Louisiana. According to the Houma Nation, “Within this area, distinct tribal communities are situated among the interwoven bayous and canals where Houmas traditionally earned a living.” Because the US federal government (including the Bureau of Indian Affairs) does not recognize the Houma nation as a sovereign indigenous nation, the Houma are denied expanded political and cultural sovereignty. From an anticolonial and antiracist perspective, it is clear that the bayous and lands in and around St. Maló are first and foremost indigenous territories currently inhabited by indigenous Houma.2

Louisiana can also be read as a part of the “Black Atlantic”3 or the “Black Queer Atlantic,”4 part of a queer and/or African diasporic and oceanic world, connected through spaces, places, and cities of the historic Atlantic and Caribbean slave trade and plantation system. In this geography St. Maló was a site of African diasporic resistance and decolonization. The bayou area is named after Juan St. Maló or Jean St. Maló, an African man who escaped plantation slavery to lead a group of former enslaved Africans in an armed struggle against colonial-settler Spaniards in the early 1780s.5 St. Maló (the man) used Lake Borgne and connected bayous as waterways from which to strike against colonial slave owners. Spanish authorities executed St. Maló by hanging in 1784.6
St. Maló waters are also connected to the Pacific Ocean and Philippine seas, as St. Maló is also the site of one of the first Indio/Malay villages in the Americas. As a result of community-based historian Marina Espina's *Filipinos in Louisiana,* St. Maló (the site) became a better-known and at times heralded location in Asian American and Filipino/a American Studies. By historicizing Indios/Filipinos in Louisiana, Espina’s scholarship helped to map an alternative geographic arrival point or temporal moment of mobility and settlement for Asians in the Americas; that is, as an alternative to the California or West Coast models of Asian American Studies. St. Maló, however, is not simply a novel geography through which to promote a particular kind of ethnic/racial/nationalist identity politics; for example, focusing narrowly on the fact that Filipinos were the “first Asians in the Americas,” a point that...
lar, Louisiana, are also regional and local coordinates where US colonial knowledge production related to Indios from Las Filipinas also developed. To illustrate this, I show how Lafcadio Hearn's well-known essay, “St. Maló: A Lacustrine Village in Louisiana” is a prime example of US orientalist, primitivist, and gothic knowledge-production written and published prior to the Spanish-American-Cuban-American-Philippine-American Wars and the US occupation of the Philippines in 1898. While Asian Americanists may be more familiar with orientalist and primitivist images of indigenous peoples from the Philippines through spectacles such as the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair (where Filipinos were displayed in a zoo-like setting), Hearn's St. Maló essay illustrates a slightly earlier, geographically and thematically connected narrative of US American orientalism and primitivism targeting Filipinos. Hearn's travel or ethnographic vignette also attempts to discursively naturalize what I call a "colonial/orientalist/ethnographic/gothic optic" (and at some narrative moments: erotica) where Hearn's vision and writing as a developing orientalist (he later expanded his orientalist and primitivist writings by writing about East Asian and Caribbean locations) contain homoerotic and homosocial interest, attraction, and repulsion to and from the Malay sailors and fishermen who lived in St. Maló at the time of journey. In this chapter, I closely read Hearn's travel account and the accompanying magazine sketches, and I pay special attention to tropes of geography, race, and gender.

In December 2008, I traveled to St. Maló (by air) from Minneapolis, Minnesota, (where I currently live) to New Orleans and reached YCloskey, a present-day village in St. Bernard Parish geographically situated closest to historical St. Maló by automobile. During this first field trip, my goal was to conduct preliminary research by (re)tracing Lafcadio Hearn's journey as best as I could by car, in order to develop a sense of the lay of the land and water. In January 2010, I again flew to New Orleans, but this time, I also chartered a fishing-boat based in YCloskey. My objective in 2010 was to (re)examine Hearn's "voyage," this time via water, in order to improve my understanding of Hearn's optics and narrative in his St. Maló essay. In 2010, I talked further with contemporary residents in YCloskey, to learn about local knowledge regarding historical St. Maló; relevant hydro-spaces such as Lake Borgne and the Gulf; and contemporary issues affecting the area (for example, community building efforts post-Hurricane Katrina that devastated the area in 2005). In 2010, I also conducted archival and historical research at the Historical New Orleans Collection at the Williams Research Center in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

Based in New York and published by Harper and Brothers (1857-1916), Harper's Weekly ("A Journal of Civilization") was a publication that featured domestic and international news, fiction, essays, and humor. Harper's Weekly published Hearn's St. Maló essay in 1883. Lafcadio Hearn is the author of this essay, but his name does not appear as a byline. Additionally, although this influential essay is used but not directly cited in community-based historian Marina Espina's book, Filipinos in Louisiana, published in 1988, I read Hearn's account as a significant piece of evidence that partially enables Espina to argue that indigenous sailors from Las Filipinas jumped ship in Acapulco, Mexico, later migrating to and settling in New Orleans (then a Spanish port city) in the 1700s. Espina uses the specific date of 1763 to mark the migration and settlement, but this is a contested date.¹⁴

Distributed on March 31, 1883, Hearn's St. Maló essay was the second featured in the Harper's Weekly on that date. According to Hearn, his main purpose for taking a boat to St. Maló was so that he could learn more about the "oriental settlement" and its curious inhabitants, and afterward write a journalistic or quasi-ethnographic report. The other purpose was to give the Harper's Weekly artist, J. O. Davidson, a "novel subject [for] artistic study."¹⁵ In this spirit, The Times-Democrat (a newspaper in New Orleans) chartered an Italian lugger (a type of sailboat) for their "strange voyage" to the "unexplored region of Lake Borgne." They cast off and begin their lacustrine journey at the "Spanish Fort," sailing northeastwardly across Lake Pontchartrain (of Hurricane Katrina fame, which overflowed with Gulf waters and eventually flooded New Orleans and nearby parishes) to find "a certain strange settlement of Malay fishermen—Tagalas from the Philippine Islands."¹⁶ which Hearn says has been there for almost fifty years. Emphasizing St. Maló's remoteness, Hearn writes that "the place of their lacustrine village is not precisely mentioned upon maps,"¹⁷ and until recently, "the world ignored... their amphibious existence."¹⁸ Pressing this point, Hearn writes that the US mail service "has never found its way thither."¹⁹ Through a trope that intertwines deviancy ("strange-ness"), geographic distance, and cultural
and economic marginality, Hearn suggests that he and Davidson, like other European "explorers" before them, are on a masculinist colonial big lake adventure, sailing away from known (European) civilization into unchartered and yet-to-be-discovered waters.

Through the term "amphibious," Hearn also introduces the supposed primitive racial embodiment of the Malay sailors and fishermen in a time where evolutionary biology and racist anthropology reigned supreme. In an intertextually connected novel entitled, Chita: A Memory of Last Island,\(^{20}\) published in 1889, six years after Hearn’s St. Malo essay, a story about a French Creole child found and saved during the terrible hurricane of August 10, 1857, and who was later adopted by a Spanish couple living on a Gulf Island off of the Louisiana coast, Hearn writes of the primitive natural environment of this area:

There are regions of Louisiana coast whose aspect seems not of the present, but of the inmemorial past of that epoch when low flat reaches to primordial continent first arose into form above a Silurian Sea... [T]he general appearance of [the] marsh verdure is vague enough, as it ranges away towards the sand, to convey the idea of amphibious vegetation,—a primitive flora as yet undecided whether to retain marine habits and forms, or to assume terrestrial ones...\(^{31}\)

Here, Hearn writes of Louisiana as an ultra-anachronistic place, evoking a prehistoric past where lands and waters shifted. Louisiana here is temporally-frontier, strange and paradoxical, literally submerged in or by the past. The amphibian flora’s hybridity and in-between-ness also echoes Hearn’s earlier writing about the so-called wild and amphibious St. Malo Malays who sustained themselves through a half-land, half-aquatic livelihood of fishing, which Hearn suggests is a primitive human condition.

In a move toward the dramatic, Hearn relays a rumor and writes that Italian luggermen (sailors) had heard of a “ghastly ‘Chinese’ colony in the reedy swamps south of Lake Borgne.”\(^{22}\) The Italians heard that “orientals” lived there in “peace and harmony without the presence of a single woman, but finally had managed to import an oblique-eyed beauty from beyond the Yellow Sea.”\(^{23}\) As a result of the “oriental” woman’s presence, for the first time supposedly the St. Malo residents began to quarrel, “provoking much shedding of blood.”\(^{24}\) Seeking peace, wise elders sup-
illustrated by the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami (2004), Hurricane Katrina (2005), the more recent Japanese earthquake and tsunami (2011), among other oceanic disturbances and disasters from around the world. In Freudian psychoanalytical theory, the child (usually male with Freud) does not want to be engulfed by an oceanic femininity or maternity. Instead, he desires bodily integrity and a clear sense of self.

By stressing the “deep moaning” sounds heard in the dark, Hearn’s St. Maló essay also suggests a gothic orientation. That is, waters are simultaneously picturesque and monstrous, lovely, yet menacing... until we learn that the moaning is “only a mighty chorus of frogs, innumerable millions of frogs, chanting in the darkness over unnumbered leagues of swamp and lagoon.” Indeed, having finally reached the eastern side of the Rigolets, the once calm blue waters are explicitly described as a dangerous sea. (Recall Said’s analysis of how “East” and “West” are constructed in orientalist discourse.) Their boat is lost in the danger zone temporarily, but they eventually find the mouth of a bayou that leads to the village of St. Maló.

When Hearn and Davidson arrive at the Malay settlement, Hearn writes of the “odd” boats near a makeshift wharf and the “stilt houses” built in a “Manila style.” The two white men also notice the different colors and numerous animals present, noting: green banks, green water, and green fungi on the wooden houses, and lots of gray mud, “pitted with hoof-prints of hogs... [and] sometimes alligator prints...” (See Figure 10.2.) Hearn writes that a pig is missing and loose and there are pathetic-looking fowls at Saint Maló too. There are also mosquitoes, sand flies, fleas, spiders, woodworms, wood ticks, water hens, plover, snakes, and even possible wildcats, otters, muskrats, minks, raccoons, rabbits, buzzards, and the occasional bald eagle! Hearn’s narrative again reiterates that the two white male “voyagers” are emphatically far-removed from supposedly civilized white US American society, now seeing firsthand a supposedly primitive multicolored and dark frontier, a muddy vortex of a village swirling with strangeness, exotic environmental hazards, and beasts. In Hearn’s arrival scene at St. Maló he describes it in the following way: “We reached Saint Maló upon a leadencolored day, and the scenery its gray ghastliness recalled to us the weird landscape painted with words by Edgar Poe—Silence: a Fragment.” Here, Hearn explicitly reveals his fondness for Edgar Allan Poe’s gothic stories. Hearn chose “The Raven” as his self-styled nickname, after Poe’s famous poem.


To understand Poe’s influence on Hearn, it is necessary to address Poe’s short story here, “A Descent into the Maelström.” as Poe’s short story and Hearn’s novella *Chita* both address the power, beauty, and horrors of the sea. While “A Descent into the Maelström” is about a sea-vortex off of the coast of Norway, Chita is about a destructive hurricane in the Gulf. Hearn and Poe write about landscapes and seascapes in similar ways. For example, writing about the island close to where the Nordic maelstrom unpredictably emerges, Poe writes, “There was visible a small bleak-looking island... About two miles nearer the land, arose another of smaller size, hideously craggy and barren, and encompassed at various intervals by a cluster of dark rocks.” If we read this description next to Hearn’s St. Maló arrival scene, we can see that both authors emphasize the ghastliness and hideousness of unfamiliar land- and seascapes, in order to potentially provoke fear, suspense, or revulsion in the reader, standard gothic narrative maneuvers.

Further developing this trope of geographic marginality and strangeness, Hearn appears to have traveled by boat, in order to perhaps further heighten the imagined primitive time-space of the “strange Malay settle-
ment.” That is, Hearn perhaps chose not to travel part way to St. Bernard Parish by rail, which by this time extended east of New Orleans. Trains and also steamboats were key modes of transportation in Louisiana used to move sugar cane and other valuable commodities. While it is unclear if passengers were allowed on this particular railway, it is historically documented that New Orleans was an industrialized Gulf and Mississippi River city and trains and tracks ran east to St. Bernard Parish in 1885. Rather than discussing industrialization or telling readers of these technological and transportation developments, which he does in his novella Chita, Hearn instead reinforces (at specific points in his essay) the popular trope of touristic travel through the picturesque, a common aesthetic strategy in European-based travelogues of the nineteenth century, which travelers writing about the United States also deployed when describing or promoting new travel destinations in the relatively young, yet continually and problematically expanding settler-colonial nation of the United States. As Thomas Ruys Smith argues when describing the lower Mississippi River, for example, a popular destination in the antebellum South, travelers and writers frequently relied on the trope of the picturesque, even as Mississippi River towns and cities were significantly industrializing.

In Hearn’s orientalist colonial ethnographic and gothic cartography, the Rigolets (the narrow passageway that Hearn and Davidson traveled on before arriving on Lake Borgne) represent the dividing line that separates the West from the East, the space that marks the differences between white civility and social calmness (for example, waters were calm on one side) and colorful brown incivility and chaos (a “turbulent sea” and a subtropical jungle scene on the other side). This narrative repeats the binary between the “West” and “East” and the West’s supposed superiority as postcolonial literary critic Edward Said theorized. As Hearn moves eastward, away from New Orleans, toward St. Maló, the racial and cultural gaps grow wider for the crew and passengers, as well as for the white bourgeois reading public who may have chosen to identify with or were discursively interpellated. Now in St. Maló, Hearn continues to explicitly articulate the connection between the strange geography, strange race, and strange gender that exist among the residents of St. Maló. He writes, “Such is the land: its human inhabitants are not less strange, wild, picturesque.” Below, I quote Hearn at length to document and reveal how he imagines “prime

five race” through bodily difference—skin color, facial features, and hair types of Malays from the Philippines, Hearn writes:

Most of them are cinnamon-colored men; a few are glossily yellow. . . . [T] heir features are irregular without being repulsive; some have the cheekbones very prominent, and the eyes of several are set slightly askant. The hair is generally intensely black and straight, but with some individuals it is curly and brown. In Manila there are several varieties of the Malay race, and these Louisiana settlers represents more than one type. None of them appeared tall; the greater number were undersized, but all well knit and supple as freshwater eels. Their hands and feet were small; their movements quick and easy, but sailormen likewise, as of men accustomed to walk up on rocking decks in rough weather.

In this narrative unit, Hearn signals an ethnographic and homoerotic curiosity with and/or attraction to the “strange, wild, and picturesque” Malay sailors and fishermen. “Well knit and supple as freshwater eels” suggests a physical admiration of the Manila-men as Hearn’s optics zooms in on the masculinity and softness of Malay bodies, and notably, through a phallic symbol—eels. Indeed, it is almost as if Hearn himself touched or stroked these attractive watermen in order to satisfy his ethnographic and erotic curiosity, expressing what postcolonial feminist scholar Anne McClintock calls “porno-tropics” in Imperial Leather. McClintock theorizes that porno-tropics are sexualized tropes of European colonialism that eroticize and seek to sexually and politically conquer natives, while simultaneously inscribing tropical geographies as similarly exotic and hypersexual.

Hearn’s eroticized ethnographic admiration in his St. Maló essay contradicts a later, yet absolutely connected, description of Malay men in Hearn’s story, Chita (1888). Describing the aftermath of the flood resulting from a hurricane, Hearn writes about two Malay men named Valentino and Juan who Hearn imagines discovering a drowned white woman of high society, a victim of a destructive hurricane and flood in 1856. Hearn writes, “Over her heart you will find it, Valentino—the locket held by that fine Swiss chain of woven hair—Caya manan! [sic]. And it is not your quadroon bondmaid, sweet lady, who now disrobes you so roughly; those Malay hands are less deft than hers,—but she slumbers
very far away from you, and man not be aroused from her sleep, 'No quita mo! Dalagal—na quita maganda!'... Juan, the fastenings of those diamond ear-drops are much too complicated for your peon fingers; tear them out!—Dispense, chulita!" (Emphasis mine.)

In this passage, the white woman is dead and still delicate, defenseless against brown Malay men and their wandering hands. The white lady's female quadroon servant is not there to protect her from brown savages. Malay men are inscribed as racially, sexually, and socially obscene—looters and buzzards who steal money and jewelry from corpses, inappropriately touching victims, including fine white southern belles. Hearn writes of the Malay men as bayou and Gulf pirates who steal, loot, and perhaps even suffer from necrophilia, as Hearn imagines the Malay men expressing sexual desires for the dead. The racialized and classed gender and sexuality of Malay men in Chita foreshadows later discourses of Filipino migrant men in the early twentieth century who many white US Americans believed were hypersexual, socially inappropriate and even disgusting. Hearn's contradictory, yet complementary, narratives about Malay men can, therefore, be read as part of his orientalist colonial ethnocentric and gothic optics where desire, attraction, intrigue, repulsion, and grotesquity interweave.

Additionally, Hearn's emphasis on the Malay's "sailorly" demeanor (in the long quote from his St. Malo essay) can also be read as narrative strategy to further mark Indio/Malay strangeness vis-à-vis what I would call "terrestrial normativity." Maritime studies scholars such as Allan Sekula and Marcus Rediker make a similar point in their analyses of working-class (usually white or black) sailors. Social observers and commentators in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries historically constructed these sailors as deviant and marginal because of their different or socially queer maritime ways of living, working, speaking, moving, and dressing. Recall too that Rediker and Sekula's sailors were usually on all-male or majority male ships.

Toward the end of his report, Hearn discusses at great length the gambling at the Malay settlement. Although mentioning that the St. Malo men are polite (they always say "Buenas Noches") and they don't drink alcohol while gambling, Hearn sums up the social scene at St. Malo as "grotesque" (See Figure 10.3, bottom gambling scene.) In this sketch Donaldson depicts the brown Malay fishermen and sailors in a large group, an all-male pack dangerously lurking in the shadows, participating in unproductive games of chance (that is, unproductive in that gambling is not part of capitalist production and profit). The Malay men's brown-ness is accentuated by the time of the gambling (evening), which makes the men appear darker. This point is evident if the Malay men gambling sketch is compared to the sketches
of two white men (top of Figure 10.3). While these figures are sketched individually, presumably in daylight, where their whiteness becomes more apparent, in contrast, Donaldson draws the Malay men as in anonymous shadows (especially the Malay men in the back of the sketch), a silhouetted brown “horde” suggesting their supposed collective racial primitiveness, indistinguishability, and danger.66

In the contemporary art world, African American feminist artist Kara Walker provocatively (re)engages shadows and silhouettes of African Americans in the context of racist nineteenth-century media (such as Harper’s Weekly) and institutionalized white supremacy and plantation slavery more broadly in the US American South. Like Malay fishermen and sailors, white writers and artists often depicted African Americans in the US South as socially indistinguishable and primitive, more silhouette or cartoon, not fully human or fully man or woman. Walker’s artwork reanimates black silhouettes and shadows (often silhouettes of black females, but black males too) through large “cut outs” that rehistoricizes slavery, the plantation, race, white supremacy, desire, and shame. In telling a different history or story through the cut-outs, Walker suggests that her art “ha[s] to do with exchanges of power, attempts to steal power away from others.”67 Walker’s understanding of shadows, silhouettes, and race and racism in the nineteenth-century US American South inform my interpretation of Malay gambling in Hearn’s narrative and Malay shadows and silhouettes in Donaldson’s sketch.

Moreover, Hearn and Donaldson’s focus on degenerate, lazy, and unproductive Asian male gambling is broadly connected to how puntists and writers depicted “frontiersmen” more generally, especially those living or working on the Mississippi River and in the bayous.68 Donaldson’s sketch also echoes and reinforces notions of Yellow or Brown Peril, as Hearn describes the scene as “grotesque” and the Chinese Exclusion Act became law in 1882, one year before Harper’s Weekly published Hearn’s St. Maló essay. This sketch is, therefore, not simply about the figure of the unproductive or socially deviant frontiersman or waterman, but rather, when more fully contextualized, the sketch is symbolic of orientalism and anti-Asian sentiments that were prevalent in dominant white societies in the United States during the nineteenth century.

To close his St. Maló essay, Hearn relays additional information about the settlement and its residents, briefly discussing the few mestizos who live in the village; how justice is handled when disputes arise; and the fact that no furniture exists in the village. Hearn and Davidson stay long enough to watch a gorgeous Lake Borgne sunset and then return to New Orleans by boat.

I turn now to the first set of sketches by Donaldson that depict the indigenous Indio/Filipino houses found at the St. Maló settlement, architectural structures usually called “bahay na nipa” (in English: house made of palm leaves [and bamboo],) or “bahay kubo” (in English: the cube-shaped house [or hut].) Historically, these indigenous Indio/Filipino structures (usually elevated above the ground) were designed to protect indigenous people who lived in the lowlands from streams and rivers, which regularly overflow and also from “the tropical ground, [which] crawls with insects, mosquitoes and rats and exudes heat and dampness.”69 The structure’s slatted bamboo floors and woven bamboo or nipa walls also allow air to circulate freely, an important feature of indigenous Southeast Asian tropical architecture. Before Spanish and US American colonialisms in the archipelago, bahay na nipa were also used as temporary houses, part of the “kaingin” method of rice cultivation where areas of woodland were burned and which created fertile compost for growing rice. Lowland Filipinos built bahay na nipa then typically moved on, allowing the soil to regenerate. In a precocial indigenous agricultural and social context, native peoples saw temporary dwelling such as bahay na nipa as more comfortable and desirable, compared to permanent houses built with materials such as stone or concrete, which were either unavailable (via the landscape or new technology) at this point in time.

With Spanish colonialism in the archipelago beginning in the 16th Century, architecture and gender changed significantly and the bahay kubo lost some of its social desirability. Scholar Cristina Blanc-Stanton notes that in a Spanish colonial context in the Visayas, “a man’s honor and prestige [was] tied to the defense of house, land, and family, which constitute[d] the base of his social standing, in the community.”70 She argues that house, land, and family became increasingly important in the Visayas during the Spanish colonial period because the Spaniards imposed a colonial architecture that they built to strengthen their political authority. According to Blanc-Stanton, “The symbols of authority . . . were the stone churches and houses, a sharp contrast to the indigenous wooden forts and bamboo houses.”71 During the US occupation of the Philippines, US Americans
also imposed a European-based architectural style—one they deemed as "modern"—which they viewed as superior to native Filipino architecture.52 Visually interpreted alongside these European/American colonial devaluations of indigenous Indio/Filipino architecture, David's sketches of St. Maló bayou architecture (although not made of the traditional nipa or bamboo)—in conjunction with Hearn's written report—makes a similar orientalist or primitivist gesture to render Malays as inferior subjects precisely through Eurocentric notions of proper, "modern," or "civilized" architecture and dwelling. (Recall too the emphasis on the light house.)

In the second set of sketches Hearn and Davidson continue to focus on primitive domesticity and dwelling, which is connected to the history of Europeans and white US Americans feminizing Asian men and masculinities. Although as I previously mentioned, sometimes whites described Malays or Filipinos as hypermasculine, precisely through hyper(hetero)sexuality (which I addressed in the novella Chita), in the context of US orientalism, as a general trend, Asians or "orientals" were or are often feminized, so at times, Malays and Filipinos are also included in this kind of gendering. In the middle sketch entitled, "Bits of St. Maló Scenery" (that includes multiple bahay kubo in Figure 10.3), the caption at the bottom reads "vegetable garden" and tattered laundry hangs out to dry. The garden, laundry, and outdoor oven (the latter is located in center in between the two sketches of white men, also in Figure 10.3) seek to highlight St. Maló's primitive queer homosociality (that is, it is in the context of heteronormativity and hetereosexuality, the absence of women signals a profound social abnormality) and the way in which indigenous Manila-men must perhaps unnaturally (or perhaps naturally) do "women's work" in their homosocial, all-male village.

Instead of reading these sketches through this European and white colonial optics, we can instead engage a postcolonial, queer, and Filipino/a rereading by drawing on indigenous psycho-socio concepts such as kapwe (togetherness) and pakikiisa (striving for oneness), first theorized by Virgilio Enríquez as core indigenous Filipino concepts and codes of conduct in his theoretical framework on "Sikolohiyang Filipino" (Filipino/a Psychology).53 The bread oven, laundry, and garden are strongly symbolic of these indigenous psycho-social concepts, as each potentially contribute to the overall well being of the collective or settlement. In other words, these important spaces of everyday practices of Filipino homosocial do-

mesticity—baking, washing clothes, and growing food—are interpretable as signs of social interdependency, solidarity, unity, and homosocial male/masculine caring that are critical to how Filipino/a personhood, including how Filipino masculinities and manhood are partially constructed.

Conclusion

Like the Philippines, many waters, histories, and literatures flow in and through Louisiana's complex system of hydrologies. Bayous, lakes, and rivers, plus the oceanic space of the Gulf of Mexico hold submerged or submarine histories.54 Listing "[the] great enemies of our [Philippine or Filipino] textual heritage," Gina Apostol in her recent novel, The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata (2009), includes, "Fires, Insects, and Worms, plus Wars and Typhoons,"55 after "kleptos" [who steal books and materials from libraries and archives] as the primary perpetrators (emphasis by italics are Apostol's; emphasis through underlining is mine). As Apostol's novel addresses, many Philippine texts have been destroyed, fragmented, flooded, liquidated, stolen, and/or relocated to colonial archives, and many are also lost further in layers of linguistic and cultural translations. In Louisiana, a parallel historical and present reality exists in terms of how water and weather can affect or damage texts and histories, as well as how multiple regimes of colonial power/knowledge (French, Spanish, and US American) palimpsestically linger in and haunt Louisiana (in a similar way that the Philippines is haunted.) Although completely forgotten or metaphorically washed away in official histories of Louisiana, presented, for example, at the French Quarter Visitor Center,56 part of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, under US National Park Service, or ethnographically distorted or misunderstood in essays like Hearn's, historical evidence documents that Indios from the present-day Philippines undoubtedly lived and worked in St. Maló, Louisiana before the US occupation of the Philippines in 1898, a key historical flashpoint in Philippine/Filipino/a American Studies.

When "Captain Billy" (a pseudonym for the local Canary Islander American fishing guide who took me to St. Maló by boat in 2010) and I finally approach St. Maló after a few hours of checking out Lake Borgne, he gives me a friendly warning, seemingly not wanting me to be disappointed upon arrival. "There's nothing there," Captain Billy says. (See Figure 10.4.) At first glance I see what looks to be a small island with
bushes, weeds, small trees, and a little beach. St. Maló is perhaps lonesome, but not ghastly. After quietly looking at the site longer, a village of watermen emerges.

Morenos, a few mestizos, and an African man (noted in Hearn's essay) maneuver boats and bangkas (canoes) tending nets, much like fishermen still do in some parts of the present-day Philippines and Louisiana gulf, despite the encroachment of industrial fishing, typhoons, hurricanes, and oil spills. At one of the bigger houses close to shore, I hear fishermen and boatmen talking, arguing, and laughing in their wabi-sabi, elegantly weathered wooden home. In the distance, a fisherman paddles his bangka, alone with his thoughts. At another house, outside: a man looks after his chickens; while inside, his companion looks at an old family photograph. A man sitting under a tree, having just finished a letter to his sweetheart in Manila, begins to compose a poem for his lover in New Orleans. And in a boat stored in a shady spot, two brothers take a siesta because they rose early that morning before dawn, to help in the baking of bread for their kuyas, and amigos (older brothers, uncles, and friends).

Captain Billy was half right. On that sunny January day in 2010, the Indio/Malay fishing village at St. Maló was long gone. Yet, there was something there. If as Apostol writes our textual and, hence, linguistic, historical, cultural heritages are important to engage, but also in peril, and if as I have attempted to show here the colonial archive is profoundly limited, but nevertheless useful in illustrating the cultural politics of colonial knowledge, and secondly, if the colonial archive is consistently distorted and indeed racist, then sometimes we must literally revisit and rewrite sites and spaces of “nothingness,” or loss, not for the grand project of recreating or naturalizing a utopic indigenous past, but to participate in the powerful act of imagining or reimagining alternative realities and world-views. This is our intellectual and creative challenge: to produce alternative tropes and narratives, humbly, yet persistently striving to contribute to Philippine and/or Filipino/a diasporic textual and cultural heritages.37

Notes
6. Ibid.
11. For discussions of how Manila-men helped to forge multiple transeccentric connections around the world, see for example, Evelyn Hu-DeHar, "Latin America in Asia-Pacific Perspective," in What’s in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific


16. Ibid., 730.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 731.
19. Ibid., 731.
21. Ibid., 98.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 732.
28. Ibid.
51. Ibid., 363.
56. I examined the Louisiana historical exhibit at the French Quarter Visitor Center during my ethnographic field trip to New Orleans in 2008.
57. On the idea of revisiting or traveling to important cultural sites and rewriting or reimagining histories, see Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 25, 12.2 (June 2008): 1–14; *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007); and Omisâêke Natasha Tinsley, *Water, Shoulders, Into the Black Pacific* (forthcoming), a queer black historical novel that reimagines the queer histories of female shipbuilders of color in Richmond, California, during World War II.