

THE RACE TO INDIGENEITY:

Three Vexations in Filipinx Diasporic Politics

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AS MEMBERS OF the Filipinx Canadian community on x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) territories, we are committed to proliferating conversations about the place of Filipinx in Indigenous lands. We have each variously organized or participated in community gatherings that seek to complicate multicultural belonging or racial exclusion as dominant frames for understanding Filipinx-ness in the Canadian context. At these events, the main question explicitly becomes what it means to be Filipinx in so-called Canada in the context of Indigenous sovereignty and ongoing settler colonialism, rather than what it means to be Filipinx Canadian as such. A couple such events that we took part in, sometime in 2017, came in the form of community potluck dinners held in an East Vancouver home. Over long tables decked out with banana leaves, on which we shared Filipinx foods and ate with our hands, participants shared stories of why certain dishes, flavours, and smells were important to us. The manner of eating that we engaged in is called kamayan, from the Tagalog word *kamay*, which names the practice of using one's hands as the sole set of "utensils" during a meal. Performing ethno-racial migrant community into being through communal eating and the embodied practice of eating with one's hands, we in the gathering also used the space for storytelling, sharing experiences of growing up in the Philippines or in Canada among Filipinx family and friends. At times, a film screening or an impromptu sung performance accompanied the gatherings, diversifying the forms of media through which we shared stories. Inviting reflections on home, place, belonging, and identity through these media, the gatherings held space for community dialogue broadly around the place of Filipinx Canadians on unceded Coast Salish territories, the roots and routes that brought us here through different modalities of global circulation, and our responsibility as visitors, settlers, or newcomers to this land. As such, the gatherings sought to bring Filipinx communities together in ways that critically engage and even possibly exceed the racial logics

of celebratory Canadian multiculturalism. They placed at the centre our complex relations to the Indigenous geographies within which we find ourselves entangled.

To further complicate conversations about Filipinx-ness in Canada in relation to Indigeneity here, one topic that has also been brought up at several of these events is our relationships, as diasporic Filipinxs, to Indigenous communities and struggles in the Philippines. In several cases, this topic opened productive lines of conversation about ongoing displacement and violence directed at Indigenous people “back home,” including by Canadian companies that extract resources from Indigenous lands (see MiningWatch Canada 2021; Achacoso 2023). Other strands of dialogue that this topic opens are the possibilities *and* limitations of the nationally scaled framework of “Filipino” for understanding our identities in diasporic locations. In one gathering, a participant brought up the possibility of accessing local spaces and services dedicated to Indigenous Peoples if we, or at least some of us, choose to identify as “global Indigenous” from the Philippines. While we are cognizant that Indigenous people in the Philippines also participate in global circuits of migration and are present in Canada, we caution against sudden claims to Indigeneity that are unmoored from ongoing ethical, land-based, and kin relations with Indigenous communities both in the Philippines and in the diaspora. In other words, we caution against the sudden impulse to “become” Indigenous, particularly but not solely as a means to gain material benefits and symbolic capital.

Our caution comes from our observation, gleaned over the course of our participation in community gatherings, of very public performances and proclamations of “Filipinx Indigeneity,” particularly for public audiences beyond Filipinx diaspora communities. One memorable and recurring example of such public display came in the form of a specific T-shirt, which we have seen worn at several gatherings not only in Vancouver but also in other places. The T-shirt in question had the words “Decolonize. Indigenize” in text printed on the chest area, with the second *o* in *Decolonize* styled with a baybayin symbol, a pre-colonial “Filipino” script. Upon further research, we found that the shirt used to be available for purchase on a website called mysreadshop.com, and was designed and sold by a user whose account was called “prefilipino,” a name that signifies an approach to decolonization that desires a turn to a time before Filipino-ness, which is to say before Spanish colonialism and its spatial consolidation of the archipelago into a singular unit called the Philippines, named after King Philip of Spain.

The shirt and its message certainly resonate with and participate in larger, ongoing community conversations about what it means to be Filipinx who live and work on the unceded and ancestral territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səlilwətaʔ, where Vancouver is located, and thus, more broadly, how to understand ethically the relationship between immigration, transnationalism, and settler colonialism. We do worry, however, about the intention and spirit of the call to “Decolonize. Indigenize” as addressed by fellow Filipinos to broad Filipinx communities, especially those of us without kin ties to Indigenous communities in the Philippines. As strong exhortations to an audience, the two verbs as juxtaposed and sequenced suggests that the former is the road to the latter. Intentionally or not, the wearing of the shirt to community gatherings interpellates those gathered as the audience to whom these words are addressed, inviting them to take up indigenization as part of decolonization.

Understanding the shirt and its message as an example of broader expressions of indigenization-as-decolonization specifically among diasporic Filipinx communities, in this paper, we examine the ethics and politics of such a decolonizing framework. In particular, we ask the following questions:

- What work do diasporic Filipinx desires to decolonize and indigenize do as articulations of our place in locations where, by virtue of migration, we are not Indigenous to these lands?
- How does the turn to decolonization and indigenization among diasporic Filipinx subjects fit into larger intersectional reworkings of gender, race, sexuality, and diaspora?
- What other, more socially just frameworks are available for diasporic Filipinxs seeking to decolonize?

We ask these questions as Filipinx in the diaspora who do not come from Indigenous lineage or ancestry in the so-called Philippines, but who are, nevertheless, committed to decolonizing approaches to Filipinx-ness, including in the diaspora. We arrived at these questions as Filipinx Canadians from immigrant families: JP as a first-generation immigrant of Pangasinense descent and a queer person from a working-class family who now works as a faculty member at the University of British Columbia, and May as someone who was born on x^wməθk^wəyəm territory to first-generation Ilokano immigrant parents from Zambales who now works as a faculty member at Simon Fraser University. We ask these questions not just as academics who work in Filipinx Canadian

studies, but also as members of Filipinx Canadian communities in Greater Vancouver who work and/or interface directly with community members through our organizing and research practice. As we recounted in the introduction, it is in huge part through our embeddedness in these local community spaces that we came to bear witness to the kinds of discomfiting mobilizations of “Filipinx Indigeneity” that we are critical of in this paper. The questions we ask and the reflections we offer below constitute our effort to articulate the political analysis that is constitutive of our critique and discomfort.

We see our reflections to be in conversation with critiques being made by Indigenous scholars from the Philippines in particular. In their own ways, these scholars are theorizing the different ways that diasporic politics rely on the invisibilization and appropriation of Indigenous Peoples and knowledges from the Philippines and point to the violence enabled by the romanticization of ahistorical discourses of tradition and premodernity as an effect of the turn to Indigeneity among diasporic Filipinxs. Oona Paredes (2022) argues that material cultures (e.g., clothing, headdresses) and practices (e.g., songs, dances, rituals) that “register as tribal” (38) are particularly common modes through which diasporic Filipinxs publicly articulate an “‘authentic’ decolonized identity” (37). For Paredes, these public-facing performances reproduce a form of “nostalgic Indigeneity” through “readily recognizable and ultimately commodifiable, if somewhat dubious, artefacts of Indigeneity” (37). For his part, J.A. Ruanto-Ramirez (2022) rightfully argues that the homogenization of the category “Filipinx” as mobilized in diasporic politics functions to subsume Indigenous Peoples from the so-called Philippines and thus to subject them to a diasporic nationalism that contributes to their ongoing colonization. Adrian de Leon (2022) extends this point by noting the symbolic and material profitability of the turn to Indigeneity and how the desire for “the reconnection to a Philippine Indigeneity has become a business.” For de Leon, extraction names the political ethos of turning to Indigeneity as a means to make sense of Filipinx identity and the search for a relationship to “home lands” in the diaspora. We pose our questions above in the spirit of critiques offered by Paredes, Ruanto-Ramirez, and de Leon, who point respectively to the ways that Indigeneity poses vexations for both Filipinx diasporic politics and for Filipinx diaspora studies as a scholarly project. From our situatedness in Coast Salish territories, we examine what we call the “race to Indigeneity” – the practice of centring Indigeneity in migrant decolonial politics – among diasporic Filipinxs not only to understand

what motivates this practice, but also to caution against the violences that proceed from its use as a form of diasporic politics. Along the way, we begin to trace the transnational traffics in the desire to indigenize and also articulate possibilities for accountable and ethical approaches that turn away from the desire to become Indigenous. Importantly, we also examine how seemingly critical approaches to racialized gender and sexuality can participate in the uncritical consumption of Indigenous difference in order to advance their political critiques and projects.

To follow these questions, this paper is organized around three vexations of Indigeneity: (1) Indigeneity as a “homing device”; (2) Indigeneity as an ideological technology; and (3) Indigeneity as a means towards accountability. In each of these cases, we argue that the “race to Indigeneity” constitutes a critical practice through which diasporic subjects both localize themselves on lands that are not theirs and transnationalize themselves as subjects with ancestral, emotional, migratory, or other kinds of connections to other places of origins. As we note below, such practice enables diasporic subjects to articulate particular visions of diasporic futurity by enabling them to tap into Indigeneity as a resource for organizing their world and their world views differently, particularly in diasporic contexts where their ongoing racialization severely affects their sense of place and experiences of belonging. However, as a tactic for negotiating diasporic subjectivity in white settler Canadian society, the race to Indigeneity requires participation in multiculturalist demands for difference and in consumptive practices that treat Indigeneity as a commodity to be put on and sold.

Ultimately, we argue that the race to Indigeneity indexes the limits and possibilities of engaging in a decolonial politics as diasporic subjects through the prism of Indigeneity. We make this argument by unpacking how we see Indigeneity apprehended and articulated in diasporic political communities that we participate in as Filipinx people in *x^wməθk^wəyəm*, *Skwxwú7mesh*, and *səlilwətał* territories. Along with drawing on examples from our own research and organizing work in the community, we engage with scholarly work on the Philippine diaspora, including work from Indigenous scholars in the diaspora, work in critical Indigenous studies from so-called North America, and work on Asian settler colonialism, to make sense of how diasporic Filipinx politics mobilize Indigeneity in ways that might ultimately contradict their decolonial aspirations. In particular, we show that the diaspora’s “race to Indigeneity” relies on the conflation and collapsing of Indigenous Peoples and legal orders, both in the Philippines and in so-called North

America, in ways that can reproduce colonial logics and enact colonial violence.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, in the section “Indigeneity as ‘Homing Device,’” we theorize how non-Indigenous Filipinx in so-called North America turn to Philippine-based Indigeneity to orient themselves to home and “home land.” We demonstrate that turning to Indigeneity “over there,” in the Philippines, can reduce Indigeneity to an object of consumption, rather than a set of vibrant political and ethical relationships to land, community, ancestry, and knowledges. Second, in “Indigeneity as an Ideological Technology,” we examine how non-Indigenous Filipinx fall back onto notions of Indigeneity in their struggles with white supremacy in the settler nations of Canada and the United States. We point to the ways that, in their processes of disidentifying from the normalizing logics of whiteness, Filipinx’s anticolonial aspirations become messy and muddled when notions of Indigeneity are mobilized as antiracist resource in nevertheless colonially consumptive ways. Finally, in “Indigeneity as a Means Towards Accountability in the Diaspora,” we reflect on how Filipinx diaspora communities have engaged with Indigeneity in ways that may offer us a way to think about a politics of accountability. In particular, we emphasize the need to move away from a politics preoccupied with representation within the terms of settler colonial liberal multiculturalism towards one that reckons with our place and responsibilities in the Indigenous territories and lands we are living on.

As we move through and reflect on these three vexations of Indigeneity, we are mindful of the discomfort we are navigating. We recognize the difficult, deeply personal, emotional, and sometimes antagonistic conversations presently taking place in different Filipinx spaces in the diaspora over these questions. We offer our analysis in this paper as a place to mark where we collectively are in these conversations and where we can continue to wrestle with these complicated and difficult questions.

INDIGENEITY AS “HOMING DEVICE”

Our participation in community conversations about diasporic Filipinxness in settler colonial Vancouver makes clear to us that there is a strong desire to connect or reconnect with either the Philippines as a whole or to specific places and communities in the country. This is not the least bit surprising, as processes of migration and displacement are often accompanied by a proverbial search for home. For Filipinxs in Canada,

the search for home indexes a search for belonging; as racialized migrants, Filipinxs are caught up in a white settler colonial geography that offers varying forms of racialization including conditional (multicultural) belonging, racial violence, exploitation, and forever “foreign” status (McElhinny et al. 2012). These racializations manifest in multiple ways. They include, but are not limited to the well-documented channelling of Filipinxs into feminized, underpaid, and often exploitative labour, especially in care, service, and food sectors (Tungohan 2023); the high rates of educational incompleteness among Filipinx youth, shaped by unsupportive racist and classist public education systems (Farralles 2017b); and the stereotyping of Filipinxs as nannies, nurses, and gangsters (Coloma et al. 2012). Alignment with the goals of the settler state – through compliance and contribution as manageable workers, for example – enables Filipinxs in Canada to acquire economic opportunities and/or citizenship; in other words, semblances of conditional belonging through participation in the racialized capitalist systems of the settler state.

We understand the race to Indigeneity as a *specific* iteration of a diasporic desire for home. Its specificity is geographically transnational in form: it is a diasporic politics whose decolonial spirit requires the calibration of one’s place “here” (in the diaspora) against the “there” of the Philippines. In other words, the race to Indigeneity specifies a way of thinking about ethno-racial identity that firmly locates Filipinx-ness across multiple geographies but which identifies the Philippines as the originary space. In this practice, indigenization functions as the *ultimate* return to home, which we note below is premised on a romanticized imagination of a return to a primordial and untouched Indigeneity, often framed as superior to the “here” of diaspora (Paredes 2022).

Scholars of the Philippine diaspora in particular, and of diasporic politics in general, have long been concerned with how “home” is put to use in diasporic contexts in order to condition diasporic subjects’ understandings of themselves and their place in local, national, and transnational communities. Taking seriously the idea that diasporic subjects are caught up in transnational migration and multiple dislocations, such scholarship has theorized the home as a gathering place for material and affective attachments for bodies in diaspora. Nevertheless, scholars trouble the simplistic geography of “origin” and “destination” that sometimes accompanies discussions of migrant communities and their relationships to home and homeland. Martin Manalansan (2003), for example, cautions against the common treatment of “home” as a stagnant place from which one simply emigrates. Instead, in his ethnographic

work with Filipino gay men in New York, Manalansan demonstrates how migrant lives are lived along a continuum of spaces, where a return to originary space (like the Philippines) is accompanied by complex and ambivalent feelings conditioned by migrant gay men's class and sexual locations as diasporic subjects. For Manalansan's research subjects, home isn't simply a warm and fuzzy place to which one returns; it is a space conditioned by lived experiences negotiating transnational geographies of homophobia, socioeconomic im/mobility, and racialization. Similarly, Gayatri Gopinath's (2005) work on South Asian diasporas negotiating queer racializations points to how romanticized ideas of home as origin are often accompanied by conservative cisheteropatriarchal equations of "home" with family and nation. What this literature shows us is that home and the diasporic subject's orientation towards home are multiple and contingent and, importantly, shaped by the intersectional transnational geographies of race, gender, sexuality, and nation.

Returning to the T-shirt, and the larger politics of diasporic indigenization that it indexes, we argue that one way to think about the call to decolonize-indigenize is to consider it in relation to the diasporic politics of "home" and "home land," in particular the geographical movement from the "here" of migrant destination and the "there" of place of origin; that is, the diasporic search for and return to home. In such an exhortation, Indigeneity functions as a homing device, a way to connect to what is an idealized culture or cultures "back home," especially for second and subsequent generations of Filipinx. We specify "idealized" because we argue that it is necessary to recognize the often-oversimplified ways that ideas of Philippine indigeneities get mobilized by diasporic Filipinx trying to make sense of their place in transnational worlds. The simplification, we argue, arises from their unmooring from their geographical and historical contexts.

One example of such use of Indigeneity "back home" for self-making in the diaspora can be found in the popularity of the figure of the babaylan in diasporic Filipinx gender and sexual politics. According to Melisa S.L. Casumbal-Salazar (2015, 80) a babaylan is "an animist Visayan spiritual leader, often a woman, who was targeted for elimination by Spanish Catholic Orders as a precondition for successful evangelization." Babaylans are usually understood as disruptors of Euro-Christian gender and sexual norms reserving priesthood and key religious leadership for men, and are, as a result, often elevated as "proto-feminist icon[s] of anti-colonial resistance" (Paredes 2023, 513). On Turtle Island, the US-based Center for Babaylan Studies and the scholar-activists Leny Strobel and

Lily Mendoza have been key to popularizing the turn to the babaylan. For them, the babaylan as a figure is important because the babaylan enables diasporic Filipinxs “to constitute a sense of identity” despite “lack[ing] access to Filipino language, culture and history” (quoted in Catungal 2017a, 33). Their turn to the babaylan as a figure exemplifies their approach to decolonization via indigenization and illustrates the messy conceptual and political maneuvers that enable a desire to “return.” Casumbal-Salazar (2015, 80) argues that Strobel’s mobilization of babaylan “as an indigenous, feminine, decolonial political subjectivity for contemporary Filipinas and Filipinos” in the diaspora relies on the conceptual and political subsumption of Indigeneity within Filipino-ness. This is evidenced by the way that babaylan is “territorialized nationally as ‘Filipino’” (81) and made available to those who attach themselves to “Filipino,” including in the diaspora. Indeed, even while “babaylan” is framed as a possibly decolonial subjectivity for diasporic Filipinxs to take up, its national scaling as “Filipino” reproduces the colonization of Indigeneity by the nation-state. Casumbal-Salazar notes that this scalar move has the effect of ignoring “the complex, ambivalent historic relationship many Philippine indigenous peoples have had with ... the nation itself” (82). It is the decontextualization of “babaylan” from its historical, geographical, and political specificity that enables it to become a figure on offer by Strobel and other “babaylan-inspired” people to those who are seeking a stronger sense of place, identity, and home in the diaspora.

The exhortation to indigenize can thus be understood as an invitation to take, as one’s own, ways of understanding Filipinx-ness through the unmooring, appropriation, and use of otherwise culturally and regionally situated Indigenous practices and ways of knowing. We caution against decontextualized uptakes of Indigeneity through an uncritical embrace and display of signs, symbols, and cultural practices that are legible as Indigenous. Indeed, along with the popularization of “babaylan” as an uncritical diasporic mode of supposed decolonial migrant subjectivity, the popularization of Kalinga tattoos and fabrics and the kulintang instrument of the Maguindanao, Maranao, and Lumad Peoples constitute examples of culturally specific practices that have come to be popularly used as public markers of Filipinx-ness in the diaspora, especially in celebratory performance settings such as ethnic and multicultural festivals. In other words, diasporic Filipinxs publicly communicate transnational ties to a homeland – the Philippines – through the public displays of Indigeneity on and through their bodies, not only to fellow diasporic Filipinxs but also to others.

We also see this turn to Indigeneity “back home” in our own personal family and kinship networks, as non-Indigenous Filipinxs, in so-called Vancouver. In winter 2020, May Farrales’s adult son, Sol, penned a poem that he recited in a short film about Filipino seafarers and their labour and place in the global shipping industry (Cabalu 2021). Writing from the unceded territories and waterways of the x^wməθk^wəyəm, Skw^xwú7mesh, and səlilwətaʔ, he opens the poem with an Igorot creation story, which narrates how the first human, crafted out of reeds by a spirit who descended to Earth, took immediately to the sea in search of a home. Illustrating intimate connections between land and sea and the islands’ relationship to water, this creation story, while originating from the mountains of the Cordilleras, came to be rhetorically dislocated from its cultural specificity and rescaled into a national and global claim, anchored particularly in the refrain “We were always seafaring people.” This poem asks the audience to consider how the peoples of the archipelago and our relationships to water have been captured and commodified by global capitalism, but it does so by constituting a “we” and a “people” through a turn to the “always” of an ahistorical Indigeneity. Since the film’s launch, the question of how the Igorot creation story anchored the poem has become a point for further conversation and reflection on non-Indigenous Filipinx’s relationship to Indigenous knowledge systems in the Philippines.

The various diasporic performances of Philippine-based indigeneities among non-Indigenous Filipinos in the diaspora, while wrought with a deep sense of dislocation and search for “home,” flattens the diverse cultural and historical geographies of the Philippines. Such turns to Indigeneity as a homing device also fail to fully capture how the Philippines – as “home” – is shaped by histories of colonialism that affected and continue to affect Indigenous people in the Philippines. Kankana-ey Igorot activist and theorist Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (Mander and Tauli-Corpuz 2006) demonstrates, for example, that differentiation among Indigenous communities in the Philippines came to be part of the colonization of the Philippines by the Spanish. She notes how Indigenous Peoples of the Luzon highlands of the archipelago came to be cast as different and placed outside of Spanish colonialism’s efforts to bring lowland peoples into the fold of its feudal designs. The displacement of Indigenous Peoples and their relegation to the mountains continued during US colonial occupation and into the nation-building project of the postcolonial era. Of the latter, Yén Lê Espiritu and Ruanto-Ramirez (2020) detail how the continued displacement of Indigenous Peoples in

the Philippines is intimately tied to the postcolonial nation-building efforts of landowning and Manila-centric elites. In their work on Vietnamese peoples, whose refuge in the Philippines was orchestrated by the US, Espiritu and Ruanto-Ramirez show how the Marcos dictatorship embarked on an intense campaign that removed and displaced the Magbukun Aytas of Bataan in Luzon to make way for Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s. They document how the Marcos regime further displaced and contained the Magbukun Ayta tribe from Sitio Lemon to clear land for the refugee processing centre and for the influx of Filipinos from different parts of the archipelago. In doing so, Espiritu and Ruanto-Ramirez capture the different ways that colonialism and nation-building projects come to be enacted spatially in the removals, movement, and containment of different peoples in different geographies (i.e., the mountains, the refugee processing centre, and the confinements). These geographical moves, they argue, “make visible both the geopolitical violence that accompanies refugee aid and the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous land and peoples in postcolonial nations” (119).

Taken together, what Tauli-Corpuz, Espiritu, and Ruanto-Ramirez theorize are the multiple, varied, visceral, and textured ways that Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines were subjected to the violence in colonial and postcolonial nation-building efforts and cast out of proper Philippine citizenship and nation. Such a nuanced appreciation of Indigenous Peoples’ experiences with colonialism in the Philippines pushes against the Philippine diaspora’s tendency to flatten the work of colonialism into narrow nationalist narratives; a tendency that allows those of us abroad to conflate notions of “home” with notions of Indigeneity divorced from the particularities of place. This conflation of “home” with Philippine-based Indigeneity also problematically invites consumption rather than careful consideration of our different relationships to Spanish, American, and postcolonial forms of displacement.

INDIGENEITY AS AN IDEOLOGICAL TECHNOLOGY

Along with enabling a sense of reconnection to a romanticized “home” in the context of migration and transnationalism, the race to Indigeneity among diasporic Filipinxs serves a second function: to enable diasporic Filipinxs to understand themselves and their place in the racialized context of the diaspora. That is, along with functioning as a homing device that enables Filipinxs to orient themselves to the “there” of the Philippines, Indigeneity also works as an ideological technology for

Filipinxs to make sense of themselves in the “here” of their diasporic locations. As racialized subjects in white settler societies, Filipinxs mobilize Indigeneity as a resource for making political claims to being and belonging in diasporic contexts, particularly in relation to race, gender, and sexuality.

In the course of our research and participation in local Filipinx communities in Coast Salish territories, we have noticed a tendency, for some in the diaspora, to claim and perform Indigeneity as a practice of disidentification from Western liberal categories and political recognition. It is this function that gives the race to Indigeneity a seemingly well-meaning anticolonial gloss and a politics that, at least on the surface, enables diasporic Filipinxs to think about our relationships and responsibilities to Indigenous people “here” beyond well-circulated rubrics of multicultural recognition and North American benevolence. More to the point, our argument in this section is that Filipinxs in the diaspora turn to forms of Philippine-based Indigeneity to come to terms with the white settler logics that racialize (im)migrants of colour as perpetual outsiders to the settler nation. We show, however, that this turn to Indigeneity as ideological and political technology unwittingly reproduces colonial discourses that contain Indigeneity and Indigenous people in the Philippines to the distant past, refusing their liveliness in the present.

One key arena in which the race to Indigeneity takes form is in diasporic Filipinxs’ gender and sexual politics. To a degree, our discussion above of the diasporic uses of *babaylan* anticipates our point that it is over anxieties about the limitations of Western gender and sexuality categories that diasporic Filipinxs wield Indigeneity as an alternate mode of doing gender and sexuality. In Farrales’s research on how Filipinxs articulate our sexualities in relation to the colonial projects of the Philippines and Canada, she notices a refusal of mainstream Western gender and sexual paradigms and politics, which her participants understand as failing to capture the particularities of racialized sexualities. One of the interviewees from her dissertation research, Mel, has this to say: “I feel like queerness is super-white . . . I always have to kind of check myself on what are the ways I understand queerness. How does it actually perpetuate a very white western way of sexuality?” (quoted in Farrales 2017c: 135). To disidentify from white queerness, Filipinx queer activists are looking to find a language *of their own* that might capture alternative ways of apprehending our racialized genders and sexualities in the diaspora.

What Mel gestures to in the above quote are diasporic Filipinxs' practices of "disidentification," the term queer Latinx scholar José Esteban Muñoz (1999) uses to name the ways that minority subjects survive and resist dominant ideologies and to produce space for their ways of being beyond dominant normative rubrics of subjectivity. Muñoz writes, "Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications" (3). As we've written elsewhere, Filipinxs in Canada and other racialized and migrant subjects must contend with the dominant racial, gender, and sexual logics that give structure and meaning to historical and ongoing settler colonialism (Farralles 2017a, 2019; Kojima et al. 2017; Catungal 2017a, 2017b). For some, the process of disidentifying from the normativities of white gendered and sexual categories involves laying claim to Philippine Indigenous gender and sexual formations as alternatives to categories like gay, lesbian, and trans. As we noted above, the babaylan is increasingly useful as one such possible alternative. Indeed, one participant in Farralles's dissertation research is fascinated by the figure of the babaylan, particularly as a means towards undoing what the participant describes, in an unpublished interview, as the "colonized psyche of the Filipino that has followed us to these lands and permeates the present." The interviewee explains further: "[The babaylan] is a sacred individual, right, and you are appointed to become a [babaylan]. Because you have such power. ... A babaylan can be a man or a woman. You know, that's the beauty of it." In this example, the turn to "babaylan" enables both a critique of the normativity of Western white categories of gender and sexuality and the articulation of racially inflected modes of gender and sexual subjectivities. Nevertheless, while such efforts to claim Indigenous social forms like babaylan work to disidentify the Filipinx queer subject from Western white normative codes, they also bring to the surface some important ethical and political questions around the basis of one's capacity to claim affinity with certain modes of Indigeneity. For example, if (as we note above citing Casumbal-Salazar) the babaylan must be understood as situated in Visayan cultural milieus, on what basis can a queer, diasporic person of Pangasinense ancestry from the Northern Philippines (as JP Catungal is) lay claim to babaylan-ness to disidentify from the racial limits of white queerness? We argue that a colonial nationalist move that collapses Visayan and Pangasinense under

the umbrella category “Filipinx” is foundational to the possibility of such a claim.

Hence, while such a disidentificatory move might enable an anti-racist turn away from white queerness, it does so via the extraction and unmooring of babaylan from its context. The point we want to extend here is that the disidentificatory possibilities enabled by the race to Indigeneity, as an ideological tool for political positioning in Western racial contexts, rely on and unwittingly restage colonial forms of displacement and appropriation that can replicate nationalist and nation-building agendas. We are especially cautious about how the mantle of a singularized “Filipinx-ness,” when mobilized for the purposes of decolonizing Western sexual and gender politics, paradoxically solidifies a colonial geography of the imagined national community in the name of diasporic, even antiracist, queer politics.

Moreover, we believe that it is particularly important to ask how such turns to Philippine forms of Indigeneity as a resource for constituting critical diasporic politics is being mobilized in efforts to be in relationship with Indigenous Peoples of so-called North America and their struggles, particularly in Canada. In one news article about Filipinx Canadians and Indigenous people in Coast Salish territories, the notion of “shared colonial history” is identified in the title and in the piece as a glue that binds these groups together (Eliot 2021). Interviewed as part of this article, a Filipino community organizer in Vancouver likewise mobilizes the rubric of similarity (between Filipinxs and Indigenous Peoples in Canada) as motivation for solidarity. The organizer argues, “Like Canada, the Philippines is also a colonized nation – by Spain and the U.S. – so we felt a *natural* direction was to go towards First Nations in solidarity more intentionally in the last year or so. Indigenous peoples of the world are very similar in their challenges to reclaim ancestral territory, and discrimination they face” (emphasis added). While the organizer makes a salient point that Indigenous Peoples of the world face similar challenges because of colonialism, the statement rests on two assumptions that serve to flatten the relationship between diasporic Filipinxs and Indigenous people in so-called Canada. First, it assumes that because the Philippines is colonized like Canada, the forms of colonialisms are the same and impact colonized peoples equally despite different contexts, positions, and logics. Second, it assumes that claiming Indigeneity as a subject position “naturally” aligns the Filipino diasporic subject with Indigenous peoples of Canada.

We argue that the invocation of similarity as a rhetorical device to call for solidarity is built upon effacements of the spatial and temporal particularities of colonialisms. We caution against rhetorical moves to similarity, not least because we hold that the naming of difference and inequality is a more responsible approach to solidarity. We develop this point in the section below.

INDIGENEITY AS A MEANS TOWARDS ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE DIASPORA

To put it simply, the “here” of settler colonialism in the diaspora is not similar to the colonialism in the Philippines, precisely because, as diasporic Filipinx, we are hailed in relation to these multiple colonialisms differently “here” than “there.” Recognizing our complex place in the “here” of settler colonial Canada and reorienting ourselves not to the Canadian nation-state but to Indigenous sovereignties are two key ways that we might turn to Indigeneity as an ethical practice. Our point in this section is that when we think about place, identity, and the diaspora in places like Canada, the US, Australia, and New Zealand, we need to account for the influence of both ongoing settler colonial geographies and the liveliness of Indigenous sovereignty on our everyday life-worlds. We argue that turning to Indigeneity (and Indigenous sovereignty) as an ethical orientation in the “here” of diaspora does not necessarily require claiming Indigeneity for ourselves if such claims are unwarranted.

We are exploring these questions and concerns in unceded Coast Salish territories. Even amidst ongoing attempts by the settler nation-state to erase and replace Indigenous legal orders, Coast Salish Nations insist on their continuing relationships to and jurisdictions on their lands and waterways. For example, a page titled “Musqueam’s Story” on the website of Musqueam Indian Band (2025) explains, “To this day, we continue to practice our traditions and culture on a daily basis. We do this in a number of ways such as practicing sacred ceremonies and more informally, through sharing meals and our *sx̣wəy̓əm* amongst our own community and with other First Nations communities who practice the same traditions. *x̣wəθḳwəy̓əm* people continue to honour our collective responsibilities to keep our culture vital and strong, share our teachings and laws, and work collaboratively to protect our environment while building a vibrant community for all.” This jurisdictional relationship and responsibility to territory, premised as it is on ongoing Indigenous sovereignty, exists in a geographical context of significant nonwhite

immigrant settler presence. x^wməθk^wəyəm councillor Morgan Guerin forcefully argues that this places Indigenous people in a position of host and nonwhite immigrants as guests on these lands. Guerin notes, “I embrace the idea of multiculturalism ... but many times as a First Nation person, you feel like you’re thrown into a pot. And I’ve said before how we’re connected to the land underneath us. We are not someone at the table – or just someone at the table – but rather a host to our guests. It’s a position of respect and honour in our own way and also a position of responsibility as well” (quoted in “2: Identities and Beliefs” 2017). In this quote, Guerin refuses the subsumption of Indigeneity into the project of Canadian multiculturalism. At the same time, in naming Indigenous people as hosts, he tacitly calls on those of us who are not Indigenous to these lands into an ethical relationship as guests. Indeed, in community events that we have been a part of, it is common for Indigenous leaders offering welcome to reiterate this ethical hailing, reminding audiences, including and especially racialized, migrant, and settler audiences, of their responsibilities to the Indigenous communities and lands on which they live, work, and organize. For community leader and activist Harsha Walia, an anticolonial recognition of Indigenous sovereignty should be the starting point for immigrant and racialized people’s organizing and activism. She argues:

That anti-racist fight cannot erase settler colonialism, It cannot erase the realities of genocide against Indigenous Peoples. The home that I am building is built on top of the home of other peoples. It is built on the dispossession of other peoples. The safety and the life that I am seeking for myself and for my family cannot be built on the ruins of other people.

That is part of the ethical orientation that compels me to be in relationship to Indigenous Peoples fighting for their homes, fighting for their homelands, fighting for clean water and the right not to be dispossessed. (quoted in Keung 2022)

Hence, Indigeneity – and Indigenous people – in this place orients us as much, if not more so, “here” as migrants, visitors, citizens, or arrivants as it can orient us, in complex ways, “back home.” We recognize that Filipinx people in Canada have another vexed relationship to Indigeneity in that we in the diaspora are wrapped up in more than one nation-making project. In Canada, that nation-building project is one founded on settler colonial logics, which are characterized by the state-led project

of eliminating Indigenous people, at the same time as it depends on Indigenous presence, through the force of law, representation, and bodily violence (Hunt/Tłaliłila'ogwa 2021; Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2013). How then do Filipinxs in Canada relate to Indigeneity while outside the Philippines and on lands stolen from Indigenous Peoples?

We ask this question in part to make the point that the structural racism from which diasporic Filipinxs disidentify is part and parcel of a larger project of settler colonialism that conditionally invites people of colour into complicity through the possibility and promise of national multicultural belonging. In such a process, diasporic Filipinxs are invited into alignment with Canada the nation-state through promises of a future of national incorporation and socioeconomic betterment (Catungal 2017a). In appreciating our various complicities in settler colonialism, we join other Filipinx scholars in the diaspora (see Saranillio 2013; Compoc 2019) in calling critical attention to our attachment to (settler colonial) state promises of recognition and citizenship, which are reliant upon the dispossession of Indigenous sovereignty. In this sense, Indigeneity – when treated not as a primordial something “over there” to attach oneself to, but as vital and ongoing communities with active grounded legal and political orders – performs a third function for diasporic subjects, which is that it requires us to think carefully about our responsibility to those who are Indigenous to these lands and whose dispossession, disappearance, and dependence are foundational to countries like Canada and the US.

As Indigenous scholars, communities, and activists from what is colonially known as North America have long theorized, we need to be attentive to our different relationships to settler colonial attempts at dispossessing and disappearing Indigenous people from their lands, territories, waterways, relations, and legal orders (see Daigle 2018). This rootedness in place not only enables a clearer sense of the specifically located power formations and dynamics of settler colonialism that one is entangled in, but also allows one to centre the geographically situated Indigenous legal orders and world views that are tied to understanding the Indigenous places in which we, as diasporic Filipinxs, live (see Daigle 2019; Daigle and Ramírez 2019). Understanding the places in so-called North America we live in as Indigenous spaces opens up ways of orienting ourselves to the possibility of other-than-colonial and other-than-capitalist futurities, ones that exceed and refuse the settler colonial futurities being safeguarded by the nation-state.

The body of work that has emerged from the terrain of the US empire and Hawai'i on Asian settler colonialism offers those of us in the Filipinx

diaspora who are non-Indigenous one starting point for understanding our relationship to the Indigenous places in which we find ourselves in so-called North America. As Dean Itsuji Saranillio (2013) explains, the framework of Asian settler colonialism accounts for the various and varied ways that an immigrant of colour politics can become aligned with the liberal, multicultural, settler colonial nation-state. Extending the work of settler scholars like Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Okamura (2008) and Kanaka Maoli scholar Haunani-Kay Trask (2000), Saranillio argues that the settler state set up its management strategy along a series of multiple oppositional binaries, which has brought Asian immigrant interests and politics in line with its colonial desires and thus put Asians in direct conflict with Indigenous Peoples' desires for decolonization, self-determination, and the persistence of their legal and world orders. Through analyses such as Saranillio's, scholars of Asian settler colonialism invite those of us who are non-Indigenous in the Filipinx diaspora in North America to consider carefully how we are entangled in dynamics of power that prop up colonial agendas and settler interests. We glean from Saranillio's argument the trenchant point that diasporic Filipinxs need to recognize the specificity of our place and histories in the racial orderings that prop up settler colonialism. Doing so is one way to refuse similarity as the main rubrics for solidaristic and ethical relationality with Indigenous communities.

One example of such refusal can be found in different Filipinx communities' responses to the identification of unmarked graves of Indigenous children who attended Catholic-run residential schools organized by the Canadian state in an effort to assimilate and thus eliminate Indigenous people and communities. While the existence of such graves was widely known in Indigenous communities, between June and July 2021, three such sites had been identified at the St. Eugene's and Marieval Mission Schools and the Kamloops Indian Residential School. In a blog post circulated for Filipinxs in so-called Canada, Kaitlin Rizarri and Ashley Caranto Morford (2021) ask Filipinx peoples in Canada to reflect on how we, as immigrants granted citizenship or residency by the Canadian state, are implicated in the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples. In their post, they urge Filipinxs in Canada to support and amplify Indigenous sovereignty initiatives, such as the work of the Indian Residential School Survivors Society and the Orange Shirt Society. Another one of their demands is accountability from the Roman Catholic Church, a religious institution to which Filipinxs in Canada continue to have deep ties, and thus a space to which Filipinxs in Canada might address their solidarity

work in response to settler colonialism. Similarly, in “Open Letter to Filipinos in Canada to Support the Demands of Indian Residential School Survivors” (2021), re-published in this special issue as a *This Space Here* piece, members of the community are asked to reflect on the role of the Catholic Church in the colonization of both the Philippines and of Canada. The letter stresses that practising our responsibilities to the Indigenous Peoples and Nations on whose territories we live is an ongoing process, one that requires us to mobilize especially in spaces and institutions with which we are entangled. Both efforts steer away from claiming Indigeneity in ways that might slide into the vexed territories of appropriation, consumption, and liberal multicultural politics. Instead, they start conversations with the community from a place of understanding the different ways that the diaspora is enrolled in the settler colonial project of Canada.

Taken together, scholarly and political work emerging from Filipinx in Canada and our engagement with geographically and culturally situated Indigenous thought, legal orders, and calls to action offers another way of approaching questions of Indigeneity beyond a politics of similarity and the race to Indigeneity. Through a solidaristic approach grounded in a politics of difference and relationality, we see possibilities for Filipinx in the diaspora, especially in so-called North America, to engage Indigeneity as a means to be in allyship with Indigenous Peoples of these territories.

CONCLUSION

As scholars of Filipinx Canadian studies and active participants in Filipinx Canadian community formations in so-called Vancouver, we write this paper from a place of both discomfort and necessity. We are aware of how difficult it is to articulate visions of more socially just and more livable futures for our communities, especially as this task often requires us to address our grievances and wishes to the very Canadian structures and systems that fuel the racialized conditions of our diasporic existence. This task is also accompanied by the additional work of addressing colonialism, both as it has affected our communities directly and as it has conscripted us as people of colour in settler colonial contexts. Such ambivalent positioning, Sunera Thobani (2007) reminds us, is structurally embedded and enforced: nonwhite subjects are often required to understand ourselves as needing to vie for belonging within the terms of settler colonial nationalism and its racialized, gendered,

and sexual politics. In this paper, we consider how diasporic Filipinx calibrate their understandings of themselves and their place in settler colonial contexts through invocations of and relations to Indigeneity. We identify three particular vexations of Indigeneity that characterize complex conversations among those in the Filipinx diaspora about what it means for us to be transnational subjects caught up between colonial histories in the Philippines and racialization and settler colonialism in the diaspora. We point, particularly, to the violences enabled by appropriative and liberal uptakes of Indigeneity as part of Filipinx self-making in the diaspora, especially where becoming Indigenous or putting on Indigeneity is framed as a decolonial tactic. We argue that this race to Indigeneity unmoors Indigeneity from its place-based historical and cultural contexts and ongoing vitality. It also reinforces nationalist projects that subsume Indigeneity within the national frame of "Filipino." In Canada, such a race to Indigeneity works partly through a politics of recognition that treats Indigeneity as yet another form of multicultural difference. Instead of such a politics of sameness and the race to Indigeneity, we point to the ethical possibilities enabled by the foregrounding of difference and responsibility. We argue that orienting ourselves to Indigenous sovereignties in our diasporic locations requires Filipinx who are not Indigenous not to claim Indigeneity ourselves or position ourselves as supplicants to the settler colonial nation-state.

Conversations among Filipinx Canadian communities with regards to our relationship to settler colonialism and to Indigeneity, including in the Philippines, are ongoing. These conversations are at once difficult and absolutely necessary. We offer our reflections above as a contribution to these conversations, recognizing that what we have laid out challenges foundational and at times deeply held approaches for some in our communities who are seeking more responsible relationships to Indigeneity. We join other thinkers, including and especially from allied communities (e.g., Filipinx American communities), who offer lessons based on their locales on the politics of Indigeneity in relation to Filipinx-ness. We are especially indebted to Indigenous thinkers, including Ruanto-Ramirez and Tauli-Corpuz, who challenge the consolidation of the category "Filipinx," including in the diaspora, through the erasure of Indigeneity. In pointing to how the race to Indigeneity contributes to this erasure, we hope to encourage alternative approaches to our community's efforts to address issues of belonging and sense of place in our diasporic contexts.

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