MONSTER-PRODUCING ISLANDS

Prospects for island detourning in contemporary times

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ABSTRACT: Colonialism produces monsters thriving in island ecologies, but without a structural/historical treatment of how island monsters are created, how the agential relation between colonisers and natives accentuates the dynamics of interpellation, the island would reveal nothing of its past, the reusable trace that can be interpellated in the present. In the modern-day Philippines, a former colonial object to three foreign aggressions (Spanish, American and Japanese) that spanned almost half a millennium, such reusable trace has recently entered the international streaming platform Netflix. *Trese* (2021), a Philippine-made anime, navigates the myth of *aswang*, one of the dominant features of Filipino folklore, which centres on the image of a female, vampire-like monster. This image traces its iterative root in the lost history of the *babaylans* (female shamans) amid the creation of folk Christianity and diffracted engagements with the Christian indoctrination of the islands. This article navigates this subject and how *Trese*, among other actants in this play of figuration, is itself interpellated by traces of historical, geographical, and non-human ecologies that, in turn, reflect the fundamental role of liquidity in monster-creation as a material-semiotic intervention. As the discussions expand on the two most essential concepts in Island Studies today, the archipelagic and the aquapelagic, the article deploys the concept of *detourning*, a critical rhetorical arc that binds the article's multi-faceted discussions, connections, and combinations, from human to the non-human, thus completing its assessment of the dynamics of islands being interpellated by traces.

KEYWORDS: aquapelago, archipelagic, *babaylans*, *détournement*, detourning, reflexive monsters, *Trese*, Philippines

Introduction

On June 11, 2021, Netflix released the Philippine-made anime *Trese* to an international audience.[1] Based on the eponymous three-volume comics series (De Vera, 2018), *Trese* draws on Filipino folklore including the myth of *aswang*, originally associated with the feminine character of a vampire-like monster (Nadeau, 2011; Menez, 1996; Ramos, 1969). As a dark mythical imaginary, the *aswang* became popular during Spain's colonisation of the islands. The Netflix release of *Trese* with a female lead who played the role of a detective warrior-shaman solving and fighting supernatural crimes (Figure 1) was a day shy of the commemoration of Philippine independence on June 12.

[1] https://www.netflix.com/ph/title/81012541

Figure 1 - Netflix promotional image of *Trese*, the warrior shaman. (Source: https://observer.com/2021/06/trese-netflix-filipino-folklore)

The choice of a female for the lead role of *Trese* is historically resonant. Under the Spanish Governor-General Miguel Lopez de Legazpi's command, the full-blown colonisation of the islands in the 16th century was met with intermittent resistance led by female shamans known as *babaylans* (Geremia-Lachica, 1996). This clandestine group, assisted by cross-dressing men (*asogs*) attacked Spanish garrisons during the night, resorting to trickery, deception, and tactical manoeuvres using their knowledge of the terrain and outwitting Spain's military strategists. Spanish friars retaliated by outlawing shamanism, forcefully removing *babaylans* from communities and demonising their adherents and followers through association with sorcery and witchcraft, alongside the systematic Christianisation of the natives. The latter only resulted in ambiguous *syncrasy* – the difficult harmonising of disparate biblical and folkloric elements centred on the feminine (Ramos, 1969). It is safe to say that some *babaylan* groups took advantage of these amorphous and mixed layers of characterisation while operating underground to escape persecution, remaining outside of the ambit of colonial violence and oppressive patriarchal culture. Female or male/effeminate male members of the *babaylans* became associated with the popular part-human vampire image of the *aswang* (Nadeau, 2011). The negative association was an integral component of child-rearing practice and the education of the young sanctioned by the colonial state. In heavily Christianised communities, young boys were indoctrinated by the clergy to take control of women (Hega et al., 2017).

This gender associative approach may be considered an extended model of the European witch-hunt at the height of the Inquisition. But the truth is that before Spain came to colonise the archipelago, horror tales, including *aswang* creatures, were part of the community rearing practice of the natives and the psychosocial dynamics of ritual enforcement of social ethos through ethical and moral role-playing games.

Figure 2 - Artistic representation of a *babaylan* priestess by Renz Y. Botero, Natu Xantino and Ram Botero. (Source: Diwata: Southeast Asian Queer Cultural Festival)

As observed by historians and anthropologists studying the region, these tales were characterised by "the use of metaphors as a way of teaching children how to resist this-worldly vices such as selfishness, greed, jealousy, and lust for power" (Hega et al., 2017, p. 259). Their pedagogic nature, for instance, echoes in *Trese*'s struggle with supernatural monsters that rally around the opposite demonic complement of kindness, charity, cooperation, and indifference to power (once cherished values of the pre-modern community). The community allowed these matters to play out, reflecting the psychosocial model of ritualising the contest of virtues, personality traits, etc., in community and household storytelling (Brams, 2011), cognisant of the moral compass it serves. But what this social necessity tells us is that the *aswang* myth was already in circulation in pre-colonial times, with varying degrees of interpretive metastability, as one scholar notes, owing to "the wider context of the maritime world of Southeast Asia in which it earlier surfaced" (Nadeau, 2011, p. 259).

In Balinese horror tales, for example, expressed in the form of dance exorcism, which is part of the community's psychosocial rituals, women who practised sorcery acknowledged

that their "vulnerability to bewitchment" and enticement to "wield ambiguous power" (Parker, 2002, p. 90) disrupts the social balance. The dance exorcism played out these conflicts through a ritualistic process of self-recognition of guilt (potential or active) especially in relation to their critical roles in community child-reading practices. This explains their enduring hold among children whose impressionable nature is prone to external influence (beyond family relations) that may encourage vices threatening social cohesion. In these communities, shamans were believed to draw their healing and supernatural powers from liquidity or water. As midwives, their "access to the placenta" (Parker, 2002; Geertz, 1994) became suspect (painting shamans as evil characters) even as their social role in securing posterity granted them a quasi-privileged status. Eventually, men replaced female shamans and midwives. This is an example of psychosocial game dynamics that fostered social balance with ritual exorcism in place to play out tensions of psychological and social nature and resolve them in the long run by gradual reform of institutions.

In several places in Islamic Africa, similar game dynamics were allowed to play out the tensions between smiths/artisans and the community overseen by nobles. The smiths, with their healing and magical powers, utilising tricks and artifices common to their craft, would eventually come into conflict with the nobility. Their influence threatened a potential inversion of local control and authority, hence threatening the social order. The smiths were "ritual specialists, musicians, oral historians and confidantes to nobles" (Rasmussen, 1998, p. 459) – but they also became the object of social scapegoating, mainly for accusations of 'wife stealing' and receiving gratuitous favours that enriched them. In general, their undue influence grew out of the client-patron relationship sustained by the nobles, taking advantage of their powers and skills for personal gain. But in this case, traditional institutions permitted social scapegoating to run its course – "scapegoating as a tangible attempt to produce a particular kind of moral discourse," whereby social roles "were being transposed, contested and reformulated" (Rasmussen, 1998, p. 465). As a game theory, scapegoating is an attempt to sustain an ambiguous or abstract process with "one intended purpose: allowing players to make interesting decisions" (Burgun, 2013, p. 63). But these abstract processes were already nested in social practices, so-called "primitive utilities [that] provide a means for validly making interpersonal utility comparisons" (Heckathorn, 1992, p. 134).

These "primitive utilities" may also be considered, in a more formal description of game theory, as "common subroutines across strategies for different games [leading] to the emergence of intra- and inter-agent behavioural consistency" (Bednar & Page, 2007, p. 66). In the examples of Tuareg smiths and Balinese shamans, the game-theoretic model applies to how agents deal with social allegiances that have become "uncertain and unpredictable" (Rasmussen, 1998, p. 466). The latter was mainly brought about by a host of external, historical and environmental pressures, leading to a series of Tuareg rebellions against outsiders, and the French empire in general, that disrupted the old game-theory model crucial to their social cohesion as pastoral and semi-nomadic societies despite its imperfections.

In the Philippines, European colonialism drastically changed indigenous people's spiritual, cultural, and ecological landscapes to serve the interests of the colonists who ushered in, as the experience of the Tuareg, a different game model of negotiating psychosocial tensions. The practice of shamanism was a case in point. The colonial clergy simply reduced shamanism to evil practices via the popularisation of a one-sided, negative image of the *aswang* outside of its original pedagogic intent: the exercise of paradoxes for ethical

nurturance and moral education. Still, the tradition and legacy of the *babaylans* continue to this day. Their cultural image as healers, sages, and warriors has undoubtedly shaped the contemporary reception of the *aswang* myth.

Detourning the image

Here, as we shift to a contemporary focus, the image of the *aswang*, as it is now being socially interpellated, may be understood from the perspective of *détournement*, a French term popularised by the Situationist International. Broadly construed, *détournement* is a radical creative detour from established social reality that emerged out of the postcolonial life of former colonies, challenging the moral complacency of the status quo for the battle of minds, perceptions, and affects – i.e., the backbones of community ethos.

Détournement means "deflection [signalling] detours," and, in light of its resonance with the local guerrilla manoeuvres against colonial powers, the recourse to creative forms of "embezzlement, swindle, abduction, and hijacking" (Tier, 2014, p. 16). But the term *détournement* is also broadly utilised in promoting the play of images for anti-hegemonic practices and semiotic intervention in culture. Guy Debord (1959/2006, p. 67), one of the founders of the Situationist International, defined *détournement* as a method of "reuse of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble." With Gil Wolman, co-founder of the Situationist International, Debord expanded the method of *détournement* to mean the "mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions [that] supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organisation of greater efficacy" (Debord & Wolman, 1956/2006, p. 15). This presents *détournement* as a functional strategic approach and as a tactical tool of political activism in the face of the ever-increasing influence of images in commanding social consent.

Although not necessarily aware of its operational technique as an artistic device, *Trese*, a modern-day detective story of a female warrior-shaman, exhibits a tendential spontaneous philosophy of detourning as it weaves together subaltern histories. It is another matter whether *Trese* complements *détournement* with an anti-capitalist message to counter the much powerful force of *recuperation*, the opposite of *détournement* in terms of state power, economy, and dominant culture. Recuperation is the force of the Spectacle (Debord, 1967) that depoliticises "anything subversive of its authority and control" by commodifying, for instance, "works of radical art and political criticism" (Mendez, 2014, p. 18).

Trese is now part of the Philippine horror film tradition that began with the release of the film *Manananggal* (Jose Nepomuceno, 1927). A sub-species of *aswang*, *Manananggal* refers to an older beautiful woman with a severed upper torso who flies with bat wings to prey on pregnant women. A decade before *Manananggal*'s release, medical bulletins showed that the lingering effects of Spanish influenza on survivors and their children were attributed to i*n utero* origins (Beach et al., 2020).[2] While this medical situation could be detourned, with regard to the *Manananggal* phenomenon, to represent unborn babies consumed by the vampire, the amorphous character of the *aswang* still refuses the clarity demanded by the spectacle.

[2] Curiously, unconfirmed reports about COVID-19 trace the zoonotic origin of the virus to the fruit bat (Woolston, 2020).

Figure 3 - Artistic representation of the *Manananggal* - an *aswang* variant - by Anthony Francisco. (Source: https://www.scarystudies.com/aswang-grimm)

This refusal manifests in how the image's detourning is consumed in today's popular culture. Through centuries of colonialism and post-colonialism, this appropriation has centred around the idea of culture to distinguish it from the lingering shadows of premodern values, the indigent, the marginalised, the subaltern, deemed susceptible to regressive social behaviour, to bewitchment and exotic monsters.

The spectacle of modernity: An assault on gender-based indigeneity

If Spain's colonial administration stifled the native belief in shamanism/animism by imposing Christianity, the American occupation that replaced Spain's more than 300-year rule followed the utilitarian interest of science translated into racial 'civilisation' and 'progress'. Exceeding what Spain achieved in her long history as a coloniser, the Americans destroyed the overarching ethos, cosmology, and spirituality that once inspired the local resistance against Spain through the strong spiritual leadership of the *babaylans*. The *babaylans* were undeniably influential across ethnolinguistic groups. In peacetime, they formed a quasi-independent priestly class but shared power with the male village chief (*datu*), as one study claimed (Zalazar, 2010). In wartime they formed ranks with other social classes, the nobles, the freemen, and dependents (or debt peons).[3] Given the limitations of their military capability to engage a colonial war machine (first Spain, then the United States), the natives relied on the superior knowledge of the *babaylans* on how to face

[3] In the early 16th century, Philippine revolts against Spain were led mainly by female shamans (*babaylans*). From the 17th to the 19th centuries, *babaylans*' resistance against Spain was characterised by the dominance of male shamans. In the post-colonial era, starting in the early 1980s, most *babaylans* were males (Geremia-Lachina, 1996). Looking at the increasing asymmetrical gender ratio in favour of males, it pays to note that colonialism enabled a structural bias for the masculine. Even in an indigenous setting, it shaped intersectional biases favouring the male ascendancy.

external physical threats using their profound understanding of nature, its elements, landscapes, and multispecies environs in defence strategies and in manufacturing natural weapons.

With the end of Spanish rule, the American government took up the colonial mantle to transform the archipelago into a global colonial brand. This colonial branding involved what Warwick Anderson (2006, p. 3) described as the first United States' model for its own internal "urban public health" system, which it experimented on the archipelago in terms of the production of germ-free bodies essential to the transformation of the "native to [citizenship]." The Philippine archipelago became a "laboratory of hygienic modernity" (Anderson, 2006, p. 3) anchored on the US vaunted promise of science and progress for the 'unwashed' peoples/subjects of this former Spanish colony. Unsurprisingly, this promise was mired by what US colonial authorities acknowledged as a moral and medical crisis, right after bombarding Intramuros (the historic walled area of Manila) in what is commonly characterised as a 'mock battle' with Spain. The battle's outcome was proof of how the islands' long history of colonial subjugation, which would be perfected by the Americans, systematically targeted gender and indigeneity (a social nexus relatively secured in pre-colonial times). With the US occupation of Manila, as Paul Kramer (2011, p. 5) writes, the dismal condition of gender surfaced in a staggering spectacle (which also mirrored the displacement of women in other parts of the world wrought by colonial and imperial wars):

> *The US occupation of Manila in August 1898, which blocked the entry of Philippine Revolutionary forces, did permit another, secondary occupation: that of hundreds of prostitutes who entered the city from innumerable ports of call. Imperial war had brought together the sex workers of the world in one dense capital city… Rural families in the Philippines in the late 19th century, displaced by rising rents, export agriculture or Spanish repression, had sent daughters to Manila to work; many were coerced and trapped in prostitution. The U.S. occupation of Manila, then, not only ushered the United States into the ranks of military powers in Asia, it assembled a genuinely international, imperial working class of sexual laborers.*

Then came the spectacle of the St. Louis World's Fair.

Interiorising the dilemma of modernity: On monsters as colonial trophies

The St. Louis World's Fair is a classic example of an imposed historical dramaturgy based on the idea of racial civilisation, which, as Fredric Jameson (1997, p 381) describes, involves "the feeling of radical difference… contemporaneous with modernism (and imperialism)." If modernism started with Kant's rallying cry for the Enlightenment, its colonial and imperialistic undertones reflect the desire of colonial empires to neutralise that "monstrous thing [that the West] cannot imagine seeing from the outside – that nameless alien being"(Jameson, 1997, p. 249) *qua* the thing-in-itself. This concerns what Jameson also calls a *decadent* impulse (within the West's hegemonic discourse) encouraging the colonial and modernist fantasy of "the return of all the weirdest… after the triumph of the secular, of homo economicus and of utilitarianism" (Jameson, 1997, p. 382). Yet this imaginary, which, Jameson (1997, p. 411) adds, involves the play of absence and presence, "haunted by the exotic," is precisely designed to downplay the global colonial system within which the dramaturgy, or the acting out of the dilemma of difference, is situated, and which

undergirds its "play of figuration" (Jameson, 1997, p. 382). This play mobilises "new languages and forms" (Jameson, 1997, p. 382) such as the iteration of the image of the subaltern, derived from the monstrosity of the alien other, etc., mainly organised around the assault on gender-based indigeneity (to sum up the virulent core of colonialism and imperialism vis-a-vis the vestiges of the premodern period).

Figure 4 - Igorots, an ethic group from the Northern Philippines, on display at the St. Louis World Fair. (Source: https://mohistory.org/collections/item/797-A)

The 1904 St. Louis World's Fair – officially known as the Louisiana Purchase Exposition – was America's attempt to show the world it had become a legitimate imperial power. A huge spectacle attended by 20 million visitors from across the globe, it allowed the US to display its colonial trophies (including prisoners of war and confiscated enemy weapons from its new colonies, including Hawai'i, Guam, American Samoa, and several Pacific Islands) and prized human possessions (native Indians and indigenous peoples of the Philippine islands) acquired through atrocious racist acts. Dubbed as the 'largest human zoo', encouraged by its early imperial successes the spectacle underwrote the American historical fantasy of erasing the traces of the so-called uncivilised world, if not to effectuate their gradual transition to modernity. More than 1,000 indigenous people from various ethnolinguistic communities in the Philippines were handpicked and forced to travel thousands of kilometres away from home (with some of them dying on the journey). This colonial intervention uprooted them from their ancestral lands (twice colonised by foreign powers) and forced them to perform daily ceremonies, dancing and hunting rituals (away from the natural ecological context for doing so, their irreversible entanglement with ancestral places replaced by a makeshift reservation ecology) for the delight of predominantly white fairgoers. According to journalistic reports, the primary attraction of the Philippine colonial contingent was the Igorots who were forced to perform dog-eating activities every day (Pilapil, 1992). Inside the Philippine Reservation, a 47-acre area (the largest for the 20 countries represented), different ethnic groups – Igorots, Negritos, Visayans, and Moros – were displayed as anthropological exhibits of how tribal

backwardness and sectarian antagonisms, partly blamed on their Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic religious backgrounds, prevented them from uniting into a nation. Advertised as the moral obligation of the American pacification campaign over the Philippines, it was implicit that placing these people under US care would enable them to transition to civility, their manifest destiny to enter the world of free nations (Parezo & Fowler, 2007, p. 165). It is worth noting that this dramaturgy was performed as a spectacle, as propaganda for the early years of American occupation. Nonetheless, this imposed historical dramaturgy was not new. It was riding on the colonial legacy of Spain to produce a kind of *reflexive monstrosity* that preoccupied later historiography.

Revisiting reflexive monsters

'Folk Christianity' is one example of this reflexive monster, a product of (what I prefer to call) the structural and historical game-theoretic perforation of the *babaylans*' long struggle with the racial atrocities of Christianising the islands and the natives' forced absorption of colonial sanctioned religion. Here, I am borrowing from feminist thinker Donna Haraway's post-cyborg manifesto's approach of "staying with the trouble" (2016) and Bruno Latour's concept of hybridity (Zammito, 2004). To remain afloat (to "stay with the trouble," in Haraway's lingo) amid the persecution of indigenous beliefs, reflected the modular dramatisation of the dilemma of Western hegemony on the part of the conquered and oppressed peoples. In this context, folk Christianity is a reflexive attempt to absorb the monster in their midst. But as this happened, indigeneity served a new purpose – hybridity. This concept of hybridity lines up with Jameson's (1997, p. 382) analysis of the capability of the empire to engender "new language and forms" via the "play of figuration."

In some local hermeneutical treatments of the plight of the *babaylans* (see Rodriguez, 2021), this "play of figuration" unwittingly serves this monster in a game theory dynamics, such as around the Christ-image as the liberator of the oppressed (the centrepiece of folk Christianity in millenarian appropriations of the Passion of Christ) (see Figure 5). This represents the Jamesonian charge of buying into the political unconscious of the oppressor from whose point of view the idea of radical difference (between modern and premodern, civilised and indigeneity) is acted out in a gain–loss calculus. This kind of figural play refracts a deeper analysis of the global colonial context within which the *babaylans*' appropriation of Western rationality (as 'staying afloat' and sustaining hybridity), which destroyed the cosmo-rational space of indigenous culture, is primarily situated. Firstly, the mere ascription of rationality to indigenous knowledge is misleading. In Jamesonian terms, this ascription reflects the Western approach toward domesticating the other "by means of the more banal anthropomorphic concepts of reasons, choices, motives, leaps of faith, irresistible compulsions, and the like" (Jameson, 1997, p. 249). Second, this figural play of Christ's image is done without interrogating how the indigenous appropriation of this rationality played out a historical dramaturgy that forced the natives to act out the dilemma of racial civilisation based on the idea of radical difference in the event of which indigeneity stands to serve a lost cause.

Figure 5 - A man nailed at the cross during Good Friday reenactment of the Passion of Christ in the Philippine archipelago. (Source: https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna42721319)

Concurrent with this approach is the relative ignorance of structural game theory analysis in favour of the linear necessity of the *reflexive monster* of folk Christianity. This means situating indigenous knowledge in a resilient modular absorption of colonial values (that the natives could exploit to their advantage), reflecting a game theory or agonistic model of absorbing the 'outside' but not because they were 'marginalised'. The truth is this absorption is mainly due to the threat of persecution. To understand this concept of reflexive monsters, I draw from Haraway's (1992, p. 333) description concerning the idea of the cyborg subject, expanding the Althusserian term, *interpellate*, as a "subject in ideology," which can turn out to be a neutral term for political and moral appropriation:

> *Interpellation is a special kind of interruption, to say the least. Its key meaning concerns a procedure in a parliament for asking a speaker who is a member of the government to provide an explanation of an act or policy, usually leading to a vote of confidence. [I]n a confidence game…* [the parliament forces] *recognition of how transfers of competences are made. A cyborg subject position results from and leads to interruption, diffraction, reinvention. It is dangerous and replete with the promises of monsters.*

From the Jamesonian perspective, the ideological interpretation of folk Christianity as a "democratic vision of the good society" (Rodriguez, 2021, p. 18) underscores the necessity on the part of the natives to surrender to the historical wave of interiorisation, which generates unforeseen "interruption, diffraction, reinvention" that could bear "monsters." These monsters, however, are parasitic to the contradiction of the colonial fantasy of the West in a "play of figuration" such as the Christ-image. The manner in which indigeneity is forced to stay with the trouble to sustain hybridity – which is not independent of the elite game of conniving with the colonisers – reflects a game-theoretic model within the larger

structural and historical context (of colonialism). Part of this rationalisation game is the entanglement of the native with the alien outside, the foreign aggressor, who, as it were, is supposed to give the native the integrity of rationality and their history.[4] Foreign aggression gave the natives a history they lacked. But this is game theory uncoupled from the structural and historical context of the dramaturgical scene, or the creation of reflexive monsters unmindful of the overarching game without a rule (the "political unconscious" named by Jameson) other than pure arbitrariness – i.e., the global colonial system that feeds on the ignorance of this larger power dynamic.

An example of a pure arbitrariness that defeats even the utilitarian aspect of maintaining a colony is the decision of Philip II to keep the islands under Spain's jurisdiction in the late 1500s. The Philippines were almost dropped from Spain's imperial concerns due to the poor economic prospects of sustaining it. The colony was not only in "direct competition with Islam," but was "clasped in monsoonal wind system" (Fernandez-Armesto, 1996, p. 661) that made for a treacherous journey from Europe (not to mention the oppressive heat and excessive rainfall that took a toll on the colony's overhead cost). Spain, in the end, could not abandon its will to spread Christianity:

> *When it was suggested to Philip II of Spain that the islands were not worth the effort and that the Philippines should be abandoned on economic grounds, he replied that he would rather spend all the gold in his treasury than sacrifice one oratory where the name of Christ was praised.* (Fernandez-Armesto, 1996, p. 306)

Additionally, from the perspective of pure arbitrariness, the threat of the oceanic lies at the heart of the liquidity of space that colonialism pretended to comprehend, occupy and use for gainful purposes. Imperial power depends on the global liquidity of the oceanic, which inspired its vision of venturing into the sea for newfound lands. This dependence, however, inevitably generates fluid movements that challenge its claim to mastery involving "separation, isolation, and differentiation, but also race mixture, assimilation, and hybridism" (Okihiro, 2010, p. 752). This necessitated a spatial logic of modernism designed to counter these threats, which at the outset has been organised around the gendered treatment of alien (indigenous) space – the island:

> *Widely held to be 'tiny spaces' absent significance or moment, islands are commonly represented as feminine – vacant, passive, acted upon, stirred only by outside manly manipulations. That gendered definition of self or continents as large, unbroken landmasses has its other, islands, as distant, small bodies of land surrounded by water.* (Okihiro, 2010, p. 746)

Unsurprisingly, empires found themselves confronting a network of onto-material entanglements of which liquid materialities are the most radical example in terms of the water element that disrupts the spatiality of colonisation weighed down by the fantasy of conquering the earth. Asia is a particular object of the geopolitics of imperial power and its spatial modernism, given that Asia's civilizations "are grouped around waterways, from the China Sea to the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic and Pacific" (Okihiro,

[4] As Hau'ofa (2008, p. 64) laments in *We Are the Ocean*: "Our histories did not begin with the coming of Europeans. If we continue to rely mainly on the works of archaeologists, linguists, botanists, zoologists, and the like for the reconstruction of our remote pasts, we will still be trapped with our pasts as prehistory. We must resort very seriously to our ecologically based oral narratives."

2010, p. 749). In the Philippines, the American occupation was shaped by the US experience of frontier expansionism translated into genocide (Charbonneau, 2016, p. 14). With the conquest of the native Americans, this brutal desire for land annexation met its early challenge in traversing the archipelago, riddled with internal waterways and aquapelagic boundaries (Hayward, 2012).

Figure 6 – An artistic rendition of a *babaylan* in Carlos 'Botong' Francisco's 'History of Philippine Medicine', a mural depicting the power of women in pre-colonial times. (Source: https://xiaochua.net/2013/03/08)

Detourning liquidity: Hydrotropic counter-spectacle and detective work

The game-theoretic approach discussed in the previous sections as a strategy of diffracting power from the peripheries and margins of social order is not independent of the overarching system that conditions its practice within a conquered space. In game theory, however, the system that makes these determinations possible, such as a colonial network that expands over the globe, is also indiscernible without accounting for multiple perspectives. These involve not only the central positions of power, including "counterfactual imaginations" (Apperley, 2018, p. 13), a *paratext* that contrasts to the official

position of colonial authority.[5] This power is without official origin and is only a negative plasticity (a history or genealogy) borne of the pure will as world-making (Kant, 1993, p. 240) without external reference to anything other than itself. But willing-a-world, in this sense, produces its monsters. As Haraway (1992, p. 300) would put it, these monsters are reflexive to the extent that they are created out of the willing subject's "illusion of essential, fixed position," such as the putative sovereign power of occupation.

This explains the existence of a colony like an island viewed as a monster-producing ecological landscape. An island becomes an engine that re-enforces the colonial authority by producing monsters on behalf of the power serialisation of the pure will of the West and later the American empire. Recall Jameson's view that a hegemonic power necessitates a *decadent* impulse, justifying the creation of horror, the othering of its unsettled identity by establishing binary opposites, such as the island-mainland divide reproducing the colonial imaginary.

Two leading concepts in Island Studies today, the archipelagic and the aquapelagic (Baldacchino, 2012; Hayward, 2012), have shattered this binarism modelled on the Western paradigm of dividing geographical spaces into agonistic pairs. These modern approaches emphasise: 1) the island as a vibrant space perceived through counter-mapping, borrowing the semantic practice of *archipelagraphy* (DeLoughrey, 2007), in contrast to *historiography* (that cements the island–mainland binarism from an external, so-called objective standpoint of historical science); and 2) the relationality interface between land and water, the archipelago and aquatic ecologies. These concepts define the relationality of islands (Pugh, 2018) mediated by the spatial fluidity of the ocean surrounding them. In this sense of fluidity, islands are generically symbiotic, preventing binarism from naturalising onto-epistemic divisions. In his rejoinder to Hayward's aquapelagic concept (which I will elaborate on shortly), Baldacchino (2012, p. 25) writes that, in this context, the ocean replaces the Earth as a place of habitation in terms of the "liquid consummation" of hegemonies as they operate inside land topographies, transforming them into hydrotropic paratexts without a sovereign foundation (thereby disabling their fixed spatial rationality). This is the vitalism of liquid geology at work inside the archipelagic territory. As Baldacchino (2012, p. 25) sums up, "the sea… gives life, takes it away, and connects us all. Creation is an archipelago."

For his part, Hayward's (2012) aquapelagic concept ensures this vitalism does not lead into the unconscious archetype, a political unconscious to the extent that its fluidity is refractive to retracing genealogies, movements and tensions, even perspectival treatments of space (as counter-factual challenges to hegemonic narratives of spatiality). The aquapelagic ascertains the creation of the archipelago by inhabiting it, by actants "[pitching] their tents from island to island and over the sea" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 105). The aquapelagic gives us the unbounded, unfinished dramaturgy of the archipelago whereby the serialisations of movement are contested, reformulated and redrawn. In the Deleuzian sense, this means the kind of "legwork" as in itself "a literary practice that creates and re-creates a people's 'soul'" (Rivas, 2019, p. 110).

Here, as we return to the TV series *Trese*, this kind of "legwork" amounts to detective work. In *Trese*, the warrior shaman assumes the role of a historical detective from the post-

[5] In the gaming community, a *paratext* designates "secondary sources of information … which can include: internet sites, chat rooms, bulletin boards, conversations with other players and game magazines" (Apperley, 2018, p. 13).

colonial perspective of deterritorialising the enduring influence of two mutually conflicting reflexive monsters – folk Christianity (on the part of the natives) and colonialism and imperialism (on the part of geopolitical powers). This deterritorialisation involves re-enchanting indigeneity and gender as part of the dramaturgical entanglement of the present with an unsettled past. *Trese* is a counter-spectacle from the standpoint of culture that power (in the guise of the Spectacle) reterritorialises into the historiography of folk Christianity (back to the 'received knowledge' of historical science in the sense mentioned above). It goes without saying that folk Christianity is part of establishment Catholicism in the Philippines (recall the function of 'recuperation' in Debord's notion of the Society of the Spectacle) (Nelmida-Flores, 2021). But faced with the forces of recuperation that serve the Spectacle in Debord and Wolman's (1956/2006) examination of the power of images in contemporary times, *Trese* is a disputable counter-spectacle. As an alternative spectacle, arguably, it is not detourned enough to counter the Spectacle of neoliberal capital, similarly to all other recent counter-spectacles in the face of the increasing algorithmic governmentality of images (Rouvroy & Berns, 2013). But there is a much larger detourning force that exceeds the counter-spectacle of the image (such as *Trese*) or even the Spectacle itself. Here, as we proceed to the conclusion, I propose an arc of detourning from the geographical to the geopolitical and to island transversality. This completes the movement (so far) of the material entanglements of the island as a monster-producing ecology, then and now. From this perspective we can look at *Trese* as detourned by the almost-forgotten history of female shamans that a counter-spectacle attempts to revive (in terms of the dramaturgy of lost story arcs overwhelmed by the binarism of colonial past and the continuing post-colonial present). But a detourned image is also supposed to be a plagiarised image (Trier, 2014, p. 16), consistent with the definition of the Situationist International, indifferent to a copy's authenticity. But how is *Trese* detourned by the lost history of the *babaylans*? The *babaylans*' history is also detourned by the islands' return as a focus of transversality, especially in the age of climate change (Rivas, 2019). To the extent that a lost history detourns the present, the past can only be glimpsed through a reusable – and thus already detourned – trace.

Conclusion: The arc of detourning

The concept of liquidity is one approach to answering the question of detourning the past, which, for instance, surrounds the practice of shamanism, reflecting the aquatic arc of long-forgotten histories traversing multiple ecologies that stretch hundreds of nautical miles. They once formed a formidable nexus of gender and indigeneity mediated by fluid spaces traversed by rituals where things, perspectives, projections and memories "seeped in, and with social memory in their production and consumption" (Baldacchino, 2010, p. 764), generating the vibrant materiality of co-habitational existence in a multispecies world. In the advent of colonialism, this materiality was erased, sanctioning a kind of thinking that is bound to a place, the metaphysical opposite of the nomad, sedentary thinking, privileging the stationary over liquid mobility that encouraged creating new spaces out of place. Stationary thinking proved effective in controlling subjects to re-enforce the colonial imaginary, who responded *in situ* with the invention of folk Christianity. However, it is important to note that the pre-history of the Philippines and its Southeast Asian neighbours' geographical importance attests to the crucial aspect of liquid mobility in terms of culture and trade:

> *There are three main 'mega-archipelagos' in the world: the group bounded by Sumatra, Timor, the Solomons and Philippines; the archipelagos of northern*

> *Canada; and the Caribbean. Together, they contain more islands, and cover a larger area, than all other open ocean archipelagos put together, and include most of the world's largest islands.* (Depraetere & Dahl, 2018, p. 33)

Against the background of these liquid spaces, colonialism stifled people's movements (through culture and trade) alongside the systematic fabrication of the negative image of gender-based indigeneity that characterised native peoples and ecologies. As one feminist Island Studies scholar observes, the intersection of gender and indigenous epistemologies, culture and practices essentially "contour[s] the particular conditions of [indigenous] life – economic, geographical and ecological" (Karides, 2017, p. 32). Demonising the intersectional spirit of the islands (by suppressing gender and indigeneity) was part of the colonial mindset of mastering the liquidity of conquest, fearful of the intrinsic reality of power. This echoes two dire warnings (especially the second): 1) Marx's citable meme that "all that is solid melts into air"; and 2) in hydrofeminism, that all is "*becoming a body of water*—ebbing, fluvial, dripping, coursing, traversing time and space, pooling as both matter and meaning" (Neimanis, 2012, p. 85, emphasis in original).

As a vital element of vibrant materiality that islands demonstrate, liquidity is a non-human *détournement* whose force lies in the vitality of "matter and meaning" (meaning as a 'nonhuman' intervention, if we expand Neimanis' [2012, p. 85] thesis). As the site of evolution's natural experiments (spanning aeons) and human interventions as well, the island is nature's detourning fluvial trace, the aquatic movement through which monsters are created. The games these monsters enable and disseminate continually ascertain the creation and re-creation of the spirit of the archipelago.

From the perspective of contemporary game theory that intersects with postcolonial studies, these games can be expressed through negotiations "made tangible through the production and sharing of paratexts that remix the official history of the games to include other perspectives" (Apperley, 2018, p. 1). Games are types of negotiations that interpretive actants (individuals or groups) perform through which the "disjunction between official history and lived experience" (Apperley, 2018, p. 17) becomes transparent. The importance of game theory in postcolonial studies cannot be overestimated: games influence popular culture, while the latter serves as a historical filter where temporalities overlap. Nonetheless, games and popular culture shaped by the digital media have limited potential to disrupt dominant paradigms of historiography, insofar as they "are anchored in software" (Apperley, 2018, p. 17) that mirrors the white colonial perspective of the more technologically advanced West.

In this context, the detourning of *Trese* as a counter-spectacle does not have sufficient power to reuse the paratext of colonial disruptions with the degree of free and open interpretation necessary to re-imagine the past and bring it into tension with the present, which is already riddled with complicated forms of attention and expectation courtesy of the algorithmic governance of technological media. These cognitive conditions have defined the conflict between the retentive consciousness of the past and the protention (which involves the synthesis of retentive memory and creative imagination) of an open future. These are the same conditions that structure the truth landscape of today – the era of post-truth characterised by a fundamental lack of temporal reckoning in favour of refractive memory that privileges the point of view of the present, thus enabling the *recuperation* of the Society of the Spectacle. Recuperation commands the false idea of pure identity (as presence), a positive truth-claim, and sovereign power, forming an axis of

modernity's material-semiotic landscape – self, knowledge, and power that repel counter-hegemonic challenges of liquidity and fluid spaces.

But the arc of detourning I suggest is a potential force of decentering the anthropomorphism (*qua* land-based determinability) of monster creation from both perspectives, the centre and peripheries. This has never been more potent than in the age of climate change. From the geographical to the geopolitical to island transversality, detourning returns to the material genealogy of the fluid trace of vibrant assemblages – from the oceanic to the archipelago and the aquapelagic as "water-bound interfaces between animate and inanimate entities… [occurring] performatively at the threshold between social life and environmental landscapes" (Joseph & Varino, 2017, p. 151). Incidentally, *Trese*, the warrior-shaman, traverses these interfaces using the water medium to negotiate peace and forge wars with supernatural beings, demons, etc. But the use of the water medium in *Trese* has a specific goal – titular character Alexandra Trese dips her magical dagger's blade (*sinag*) into it to reveal the identity of the supernatural creature responsible for a crime or offence that disturbs the balance between the human and the supernatural. In this context, the water medium serves as a *testigo* (witness) to the crime or offense.

Still, *Trese*, as I have claimed, is not sufficiently detourned as a counter-image of the certainty of the self, in terms of its central protagonist's knowledge and appeal to the balance of power between the human and supernatural worlds. Her identity as a detective shaman, capable of traversing both worlds, still reflects the key features of a land-based anthropomorphic approach to monster-creation and *interpellation*. The latter is essential to locating the source of the emergence of cyborg subjects capable of "interrupting, diffracting, and reinventing" the terms of this balance – borrowing from Haraway (1992, p. 333), "replete with the promises of monsters." In the case of *Trese*, the dagger's blade interpellates the water medium that reveals the source of monsters. But *Trese* is not detourned enough, not sufficiently *plagiarised* to return the interfaces she sustains performatively to a real relationship with things. Instead, it is the limitation of detourning itself, being overtaken by the fluid genealogies of the island at the interface between matter and meaning or, echoing Neimanis, at the threshold of the collapse of meaning to matter. Runaway climate change is a looming eventuality that motions this collapse.

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