

Climate, Creativity, and Calamity

A Postcolonial Ecocritical Approach to Joanna Vasquez Arong's *To Calm The Pig Inside*

JOURNAL DOI <https://doi.org/10.31944>

Mylene C. Milan

Ateneo de Manila University

Abstract

On November 8, 2023, the Philippines commemorated ten years of recovery since typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) struck the Visayan region and brought about immense destruction. Considering the range of creative works produced in the storm's aftermath, this article is anchored on the primary definition—and problematization—of the documentary film as a “creative treatment of actuality.” It examines how the documentary representation of typhoon Yolanda in Joanna Vasquez Arong's film, *To Calm the Pig Inside* (2020), exhibits factual accuracy and historical “presence” despite the employment of fictional elements. The examination is framed by Bill Nichols' fundamental concept of “documentary representation” and Jaimie Baron's notion of “foundness” of archival documents, with Jeffrey Santa Ana's postcolonial conception of the “Filipino ecological imagination” as an overarching critical theory. This study asserts that the film illustrates how the Philippines' violent colonial history diminished the Filipinos' knowledge of weather disturbances and proposes the recourse to local popular consciousness for sustainable climate mitigation strategies which could be more compatible to the Philippine pacific and sociopolitical reality.

Keywords

Philippine climate disaster, Typhoon Yolanda, documentary representation, postcolonial ecocriticism, Filipino ecological imagination and social responsibility

Introduction

It has become a tradition for the people: streets were lit across downtown Tacloban, flickering at the doorsteps, along the pavements of a monolith of a chapel, around the traffic junction, beneath the remains of an iconic cargo vessel. Earlier, the priest blessed rows of pristine white crosses which bear a manifold of names but a singular date. On November 8, 2023, the Philippines marked ten years since the calamitous landfall of one of the deadliest storms in modern meteorological history, when super typhoon Yolanda lashed across Visayan provinces and left an approximated 6,300 deaths, 28,688 injured, 1,062 missing, 4.1 million displaced families, and 93 billion Peso-worth of damaged properties (Blanco 743; NDRRMC 2). The Philippines ranked fourth among ten countries most affected by weather-related losses from 2000-2019 in the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index (Eckstein et al. 4). Within the decade, Yolanda has been *the* storm that weather forecasts recall comparing the intensity of every other storm that entered the country—Lando in 2015, Ulysses and Rolly in 2020, Odette in 2021, and two within the previous year, Betty and Egay. This study is an attempt to impart a deeper comprehension of Philippine climate disasters from the creative treatment of typhoon Yolanda in Joanna Vasquez Arong’s documentary film, *To Calm the Pig Inside* (2020), in relation to Jeffrey Santa Ana’s postcolonial ecocritical framework, the “Filipino ecological imagination,” and Jaimie Baron’s “foundness” in documentary films. While recognizing how the country’s history of colonial violence aggravated the effects of climate change at present, it also offers glimpses of the recently concluded city-wide commemoration of the 10th year Yolanda anniversary in Tacloban City on November 7-11, 2023.

Documentary representation: Sustaining stories in “*the world*” than “*a world imagined*”

Nimbus clouds, murky outdoors, the probability of a flood - it is not difficult to conceive the image of a storm in the tropics. While the perfected cinematics of a Hollywood film could weaken one’s interest in the documentary genre with its incomprehensible interviews, monotonous narra-

tions, and recolored images, many are drawn to nonfictional entertainment produced through documentary techniques. Say, the noontime reality shows that add flavor to lunchbreaks and reenactments of compelling true-to-life stories that grace the dinner, together giving cultural identity to the colorful Pinoy household. How could such productions be engaging, addictive, and sometimes therapeutic? According to the filmmaker Sheila Curran Bernard, it is in the *stories*, complete with a beginning, middle, and end; we are easily moved by good stories, swayed by heroic pursuits, and awed by a satisfying battle of wits (Bernard 12).

In his book, *Introduction to Documentary*, the contemporary film critic and theoretician Bill Nichols offers an underlying definition of the documentary film as a compartment of stories “in *the* world in which we live rather than *a* world imagined” (Nichols xi). Similarly, Bernard describes it as that which “present factual information about real people, places, and events portrayed through authentic artifacts” (12). There are three suggested ways the documentary represents the world. First, it must provide a truthful depiction of people, places, events, and others to which the viewer can relate; second, it must stand for the interests of the people they represent and the agency behind their filmmaking; and third, it must offer an interpretation of this stand, to “convey impressions, make proposals, tell stories, mount arguments, or offer perspectives of their own” in an attempt to influence the viewer’s opinion (Bernard 29-31). Hence, the documentarian is a “chronicler” through whose presence, “we are taken to the scene and experience how it is to inhabit that particular place and moment” (Maranan 7). To paraphrase, the essence of documentary is in the world it represents - historical, rather than imaginary - a live capturing of the scene as opposed to computer-generated imagery and an engagement with the owner of the narrative instead of paying for the services of a trained actor. Furthermore, the notions of fact, reality, authenticity, artifact, *the* world, and the moment are considered pivotal to verifiable truth(s), hence the term, real-life stories.

With a diversified means by which stories can nowadays be gathered, it is understandable for Bernard to remark that these are exciting times not only for documentary films and filmmakers, but also for documentary

stories; these narratives grapple with real-life issues, inspire action and activism, and exemplify “strong characters, compelling tension, a credible resolution” (29) maneuvered by a range of creative choices about structure, perspective, and style. Indeed, modernity eased in sophisticated equipment and webbed platforms for broadened viewership. Hence, documentarians venture new filmmaking conventions which steadily demonstrate “the creative treatment of actuality,” to borrow the very first definition of the genre by John Grierson, the pioneer of documentary filmmaking (Nichols 5).

To an extent, one can easily discern between fiction and documentary through their traditional features, but Nichols places both genres on equal footing through “documentary representation,” which illustrates that documentaries can be filmed in the conventions of fiction, and vice versa (*Representing* 111). There is versatility in filmmaking with the progress of time. Film enthusiasts are often fascinated by reimaginations, if not original twists of a main narrative, which filmmakers strive to achieve, and sometimes succeed, by experimenting on novel or alternative techniques. Patrick Campos states that the documentary’s purpose for self-reflection alongside fidelity to truth necessitates “aesthetic risk and innovative experimentation that can counterbalance the monoform of the authoritative Documentary narrated by the voice of God” (Campos 123). Strictly speaking, Campos insists that documentarians begin deviating from the accustomed format of the genre, which employs the imposing form of commentary in demanding the audience’s trust and exacting *the* truth. Following the suggested deviation, Campos is rather resolute in providing for the audience a space for multiple interpretations. The concept of documentary representation eventually renders the documentary “a fiction (un)like any other,” given the premise that makers of fiction have long adopted documentary techniques in their creative films (Nichols, *Representing* 111).

There is, indeed, excitement in the renewed resources in today’s documentary filmmaking, but there is also a sense of urgency, a grave struggle against systematic networks of disinformation and political co-opting, circumstances which moved Campos to declare: “...it is the worst time to make documentaries, and it is the best time to make them”

(120). Urgent, grave, and paradoxical, Campos's sentiment comes from the problematic limitations on the "creative treatment of actuality" within certain contemporary realist films, which "parade as reflections of reality but are incapable of critiquing the conditions of such a reality" (120). Looking closer, it is the documentary's capacity for wonder and self-reflection, for propaganda and social movements, which makes it most appropriate for stories of survival from one of the most prevalent worldwide threats - climate disasters.

Typhoon Yolanda and the Filipino ecological imagination

A brief walk along the narrow aisles of crosses at barangay Basper, the scents of matchsticks and candlewax and of the wreathed daisies and freshly cut grass all mixing at dusk could easily remind one what a climate disaster is capable of. The poet and literary critic Rina Garcia Chua affirms that the impetus of including even such miniscule details comes from our perception of natural disasters which are likely anchored on death and survival: negative experiences which often compel us to share narratives of our grief (31). It is not an overstatement that writing about disasters is "a moral act ... an ethical event" as the current millennium seems to witness more human tragedies from which they relay expressions of hope and mechanisms for coping (Wang 116). As a result, Haiyan-inspired fiction flourished the way Jocelyn Martin puts it, to "either come to terms with the catastrophe and/or to pay tribute to the ones who passed away" (403), with some intended as fundraising channels to help provide for survivors. While the storm has eventually become 'uncanny' to some, such description does very little in the discourse of trauma in comparison to survivors' disclosing of dreary accounts to secondhand witnesses, social media, blog sites, or self-published prints (e.g., *Typhoon Haiyan the Untold Story: A Story of Hope and Survival* by Albert Mulles [2015]). Memorializing survivors' experiences enable them to reconstruct a consciousness of time by "establish[ing] a certain chronology to discern past and present" (Martin 407), which is vital in the process of recovery and post-traumatic growth. A few examples are noteworthy. *The Tempest Reimagined* is an adaptation by the Philippine Educational Theater

Organization (PETA) of William Shakespeare’s play, which incorporated survivors’ narratives. Likewise, three characters in separate story arcs share similar degrees of anguish during the storm’s aftermath in the local film *Taklub* (2015) by Brillante Mendoza. On the other hand, Filipino literati from the local and diaspora have collated poetry, short stories, and essays in poignant anthologies such as *Verses Typhoon Yolanda: A Storm of Filipino Poets* (2014), *Agam: Filipino Narratives on Uncertainty and Climate Change* (2014), and *Our Memory of Water: Words after Haiyan* (2016) edited by Eileen R. Tabios, Regina Abuyuan, and Merlie M. Alunan, respectively. Finally, the novel, *Remains* (2019), by Daryll Delgado, narrates the protagonist’s struggles in negotiating her childhood with the ruins that is her hometown, Tacloban.

For Jeffrey Santa Ana, a literary framework to account for the colonial history of the Philippines may help us grasp how “Western imperialist plunder, conquest, and war” (Santa Ana 63) aggravated the effects of climate change in the country. The emphasis on war and imperialist militarism in the Philippines and Asia within Gina Apostol’s “Survival, Surrender, Oblivion” moved Santa Ana to remark that the immense devastation and loss of life from typhoon Yolanda and other extreme weather events are consequences of historical violence. Arguing that Philippine literature incited by typhoon Yolanda is a testimony of altered weather patterns brought about by our history of colonization, Santa Ana posits the “Filipino ecological imagination”:

a social remembering that both imagines and modifies a postcolonial ecocriticism to mediate environmental destruction within the history of imperialism in the Philippines. Through an ecological imagination, Philippine poetry and prose about Typhoon Yolanda articulate a postcolonial ecocritical perspective that discloses, through memory of how imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism have precipitated our planetary ecological crisis in the epoch of the Anthropocene. (62)

Here, Santa Ana stipulates how warfare drained colonies of their natural fossil fuel resources, and how the Yolanda disaster opened chances for rich, opportunistic nations to practice neocolonialism in the guise of humanitarian efforts. Santa Ana’s focus on the Yolanda disaster, then, widens a ground for

further critique on neocolonialism in the context of climate disasters in the country and across the Global South. At this point, however sublime the cinematics of a fictional blockbuster film that features an apocalypse are, they may not contain jarring realities of survival from a super typhoon as seen through the lens of the documentary by Joanna Vasquez Arong, *To Calm the Pig Inside (Ang Pagpapakalma sa Unos)*.

Facts from foundness: Postcolonial ecocriticism and *To Calm the Pig Inside* as “a fiction (un)like any other”

Released in 2019, *To Calm the Pig Inside* is an 18-minute documentary which conveys Arong’s contemplations on the aftermath of typhoon Yolanda on the port city of Tacloban. Pondering over myths that survivors fabricated to make sense of the disaster, she weaves in them fractions of her childhood memories to contrive her own understanding of the calamity. Arong herself identified it as an “essay film,” for the film exemplifies the creative nonfiction model of a first-person essay. She further describes it as “an essay, a very personal story to weave [...] different stories” (Arong, Personal Interview 09:32-09:37). The first-person essay model is a “personal account of some aspect of the author/filmmaker’s experience of point of view” (Nichols 106). Unique to the journalistic convention of the documentary, the creative non-fictional condition of *To Calm the Pig Inside* proposes a critical look into ways the actuality of Yolanda was creatively treated. This article explored how the documentary filmmaking technique of repurposing found visual documents (footage and image), the cinematic devices of black-and-white coloring and shot adjustments, and the incorporation of mythology and folklore as literary devices, altogether constituted the film’s aesthetic value and served as the ultimate means for realizing the “creative treatment of actuality [of Yolanda].” The technique centered around “foundness” as a theoretically intrinsic aspect in both found and archival material in any documentary, enhancing its factuality to produce historical presence. Film studies professor Jaimie Baron asserts that it is the “foundness” in these materials that warrants the film its “historical authority” (Baron 6), stating that:

Although filmmakers and theorists have frequently used the term “found footage” to refer to reels of film found on the street, in the trash, or at a flea market and reserved the term “archival footage” for films found inside a bona fide archive, this dichotomy is becoming increasingly difficult to justify ... Thus, rather than opposing the terms “found” and “archival,” I suggest we regard “foundness” as a constituent element of all archival documents, whether they were “found” in an archive or “found” on the street ... Indeed, this sense of “foundness” is integral to the experience of the archival document. It is part of what lends the archival document its aura of “authenticity” and enhances its seeming evidentiary value. (103)

The textual analysis of *To Calm the Pig Inside* included an identification of cinematic elements and how they worked together to communicate its message. As an interdisciplinary work it necessitated a juxtaposition of insights from relative literary studies and sociopolitical knowledge from Philippine writings. Fiction and documentary films primarily differ on “how the filmmaker engages with the historical world *in the course of making a film* and how he or she conveys that engagement to us” (Nichols 50, emphasis added). Nichols suggests the necessity of transparency in a documentary’s filmmaking process, which refers to extended features such as behind-the-scenes footage, promotional clips, or engagements with important personalities in the filmmaking crew. In the “Winners Speak” series of the World Press Photo Foundation on *YouTube* (henceforth “Winners Speak feature”) where short feature film awardees of the 2021 World Press Photo Digital Storytelling Contest narrate how their entries were filmed, Arong relates that she accomplished the documentary representation of *To Calm the Pig Inside* by repurposing found footage and images in harmony with her narrative. Found visual documents are spontaneously captured regardless of who did the recording, its location, or its subject, or plainly speaking, “footage not shot by the filmmaker” (Nichols xi).

As texts are better understood when “perceived as parts of actual social relations” (Bazerman 77), this study employed textual analysis in the style of Catherine Belsey, whose methodology on a painting claimed the feasibility of textual analysis on creative works other than the written form. Belsey (164) reiterates that textual analysis is illuminated by other methodologies

and/or perspectives (in this case, postcolonial ecocriticism), and background research on the context of the data source under scrutiny such as its production, content, and circulation, is vital to the method. Alongside scientific and quantitative sources, works produced through documentary representation can be a powerful tool to educate people about such disasters (Chua 41). Truths can be probed from narratives which were drawn from creative inquiry, granting us “the ability to see possibilities beyond personal, societal, and ecological turmoil,” (Pobre) and can further substantiate technical solutions documented in experiences which suggest or caution ways of surviving a natural calamity.

As previously discussed, Nichols proposed the following criteria for a film to pass as a documentary: it should reference a historical event; the characters are social actors; and the plot is maneuvered by narration or expository storytelling. In application, *To Calm the Pig Inside* was borne from the remains of typhoon Yolanda, which Arong described, has “wreaked havoc in the Philippines, causing thousands of deaths and leaving over four million homeless” (World Press, 2021, 00:05-00:17). The film maker becomes the social actor in her own film, and her ruminations over the calamity motions the plot through her own voice-over narrative.

In her *Winners Speak* feature, Arong shares having witnessed the extent of typhoon Yolanda’s severe aftereffect barely a day after she left for France. She narrated volunteering in the relief operations upon landing home, being overwhelmed by calamitous sights and stories, and later joining a French filmmaking team to survey tempests that followed around the country. She decided to make her own film soon after launching *Eskwela Haiyan*, a long-term scholarship program she initiated with several non-government organizations which would later help sustain the basic education of around 40 children orphaned by the storm. Consequently, Arong would produce *To Calm the Pig Inside* by resorting to found visual documents from freelance photographers and citizen journalists she collaborated with during her volunteer work.

According to Nichols, documentary filmmakers are welcome to utilize archival and found footage for auxiliary evidence of the truths they are

attempting to uncover, which Arong maximized in the process of her filmmaking. She listed the sources of visual documents at the end credits of *To Calm the Pig Inside*: archival materials from *The Philippine Star*, *Pilipino Star Ngayon*, *The Freeman*, *jeanapoles-blog* at Tumblr.com, and CNN; found materials from Earth Uncut TV directed by James Reynolds; and still images Mark Thomas, Christopher Linaban, Anna Rong, Veejay Villafranca, and Piyavit Thongsa-Ard.

With Nichols broadly stating that found materials are those “not shot by the filmmaker” (xi), it would be reasonable that if this paper intended to share truths on Philippine climate disasters, then a documentary founded on archival evidence would have been the more proper text to examine. Moreover, archival evidence is a major selling point for documentaries, being demonstrative of “both meticulous and tedious historical research as well as historical ‘truths’” (Baron 16). However, she also problematizes the archives, drawing upon Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida who construed that repositories of historical evidence have been infiltrated by the state, endowed with absolute power to delimit or commodify history, and thereby possibly circumventing truths within. This is not to say that found documents are shielded from manipulations that lead to a questioning of their epistemological value. On the contrary, found documents are as vulnerable to simulations and misuse as the archived for they “can be faked or manipulated” (88) given the rapid developments of various digital editing software which can force visual materials into a distinct narrative. At risk, too, is the surfacing of conspiracy theories aimed at discrediting even the “foundness” of the visual evidence by pursuing the agenda of “finding out” the document’s predetermined fictiveness.

This examination of the found visual materials in *To Calm the Pig Inside* is hence guided by Baron’s advice to position these documents as always open to interrogation and their arguments never treated as changeless nor irrefutable. Furthermore, “no pre-existing judgment is guaranteed to last forever” (David 25), therefore calling to mind Derrida’s argument on the infiniteness of truth. This study’s categorization as a reader-witness follows a duty not only to listen but also to “validate the survivor’s story” (Martin 414).

With Baron's insistence on a balanced assessment of all available resources, it begins with validating the "foundness" of several visual documents which, in turn, may enhance the film's factuality and legitimacy for truth-telling.

For instance, the still photograph of a man nearly concealed by haze in 07:49 finds its origin from Villafranca's first published book, *Signos*, an album of the survivors' black-and-white portraits and their living conditions after having been displaced by the storm. Other photographs Arong lifted from Villafranca can be viewed at 14:59, 15:03, 15:56, 16:50, and 17:13. On the other hand, Thongsa-Ard maintained the colors of his rendition, which became cover images of several digital publications such as *The Diplomat*. In the film, the still image of a man comfortably sitting on a couch salvaged from the background of rubble in 15:33 is among Thongsa-Ard's Facebook cover images in original colors. More of his photographs which were treated in black and white in the film can be viewed at 15:38 and 16:32. Additionally, Thongsa-Ard posted in his Instagram account the surreal portrait of a fisherman and his family which can be seen in *To Calm the Pig Inside* at 13:22; it is a glimpse of how survivors endured the absence of electricity, most considered lucky enough to have possessed a lamp and the comfort of even the dimmest light when the risk of theft and human trafficking became dangerously high. According to Arong, the only colored segment in her film is the slideshow of children's illustrations from 8:07 to 9:43, representing the vividness of their traumatic experiences of the storm.



Fig. 1. A child's illustration of Typhoon Yolanda, shown in the film in its original colors; from *To Calm the Pig Inside*, Joanna Vasquez Arong, 2020.¹

As for footage, clippings were found from the storm chasers managing Earth Uncut TV in their *YouTube* video, “Chasing the World’s Strongest Storm – Haiyan from Ground Zero.” For example, rain-battered trees and rooftops are hardly recognized in the wide angled footage of downtown Tacloban from 9:49 to 9:55 in the storm chasers’ documentation, which was zoomed closer in Arong’s film from 1:27 to 1:34, giving more attention to the tower of the historical Santo Niño Parish withstanding the storm. Furthermore, footage of wind and rain whipping torn shelters in 1:40 to 1:45, vehicles and houses submerged in the deluge in 1:54–2:06, and three men huddling beneath what remained of a looted pharmacy in 04:45–05:20 were lifted from the same source. Darza’s aerial footage captured while piloting an aircraft was committed to *The Wall Street Journal*; however, it remains exclusive only for paying subscribers.

It is interesting how, even with the extent of found visual materials Arong montaged in her film, there was no superimposition of citation on the images and footage - a procedure generally observed by filmmakers to disclaim rights and for the audience to recognize sources. While *To Calm the Pig Inside* may be called out for the lack of specification on sources not duly matched with each document, it is not necessarily unethical. Arong thoroughly acknowledged the names of people, organizations, and the editing and production agency whom she worked with on the film at the rolling end credits.

Arong employed three cinematic devices to repurpose the “foundness” in these visual documents and give a “creative treatment of [the] actuality” of Yolanda: monochrome imaging, shot adjustments, and mythological narrative, altogether serving the film its aesthetic quality. Beginning with the coloring, Villafranca’s influence over Arong to deliver the film in black and white serves aesthetic virtues which befit its motifs. Critics locate Villafranca’s photos between the traditional and modern: traditional in evoking the colorless trait of the earliest pictures, and modern in the alterations of texture through photo editing software which resulted in a sharp, high-contrast quality instead of inheriting the bleary and grayish characteristics peculiar to the antique (Alternative par. 4).

Interestingly, even the breakthrough of technicolor in the early 1900s did not hinder makers of serious dramas and horror to leave their films in black and white as the vigor of colors can curb the intended mood. Similarly, today’s filmmakers often revert to black and white as a tribute to history, a political stand, or a biographical flashback (Winokur and Holsinger 279-280), resonant, for instance, of the atrocities of the Holocaust in Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993). Hence, one can perceive Arong’s appropriation of black and white into the rest of her film as an allusion to the gothic, to death, devastation, and trauma, while filling in its intervals shades of administrative corruption at a time of desperate need. Arong’s childhood reminiscence goes well with the monochrome, considering black and white as an identifying mark of the earliest films and likewise a return to the past. We are given a few flashes of her childhood - running through the monsoon

with her cousins, telling relentless ghost stories, and being sentimental over her grandmother's singing of an old Visayan song - which can invite the viewer to relive similar memories of their own.

Filmmakers render similar importance to shots, as this element significantly communicates contexts, framing, and emotional connection between the subjects (i.e., characters) and the viewer. Cinematographer Timothy Heidrich enumerates a variety of framing which positions the viewer's distance and intimacy with the subject against its background scale. In *To Calm the Pig Inside*, Arong's selection of found visual documents plays between four types of shots: aerial shot, which is taken from an elevated platform; extreme long shot, which positions the character in the background; long shot, which turns the audience into a casual bystander and enables a surveying of the subject's full form; and medium long shot, which centers on the subject's facial expression and body language (Heidrich 7-8).

Arong's choices of visual documents are significant to the aesthetics of the film through their ability to stir a range of emotions. The aerial footage from 11:40 to 12:57 were taken from aircrafts to give a bird's eye view of the sweeping ruins, scattered crowds, and fishing boats stranded in neighborhoods after scraping houses off their foundations. An even more surreal sight, the sea is again bound by the shoreline, idle and placid, without a trace of its having funneled across towns and taking thousands of lives. An extreme long shot of children frolicking before a wreckage from 00:26 to 00:44 appeals to positive feelings, being what Arong described as "one of the few scenes of joy [throughout the film]" (World Press 4:45-5:00). On the other hand, dolls squeezed between the crisscross of a wire fence outside a maternity home become the subject of a long shot in 07:17. However uncanny, the shot assumes a memorializing of the infants swept by the storm, slowly altering the initial ambience of eeriness to grief. In 15:29, the film projects a medium shot of a man who seemed intent to be photographed. Shirtless and grimy, he holds out an identification card of a woman who might have been concluded missing at the time. The type of shot allows the viewer a clearer picture of what appears to be hope in his expression, perhaps counting on fellow survivors, even the photographer, to help him with the search.



Fig. 2. Screenshot from an aerial footage of the disaster (above), and a sample medium shot of dolls hung on the wired fence outside a maternity home (below), as how they both appear in the film; from *To Calm the Pig Inside*, Joanna Vasquez Arong, 2020.²

A unique feature in Arong's treatment of the "foundness" in a few visual documents is her adjusting the frame of a single image or footage and sequencing them in at least two types of shots. In the *YouTube* film by Earth Uncut TV, the footage of three men pressed together outside an abandoned pharmacy ran for only five seconds from 22:00. Arong repurposed the scene by extending the duration of the clip for as long as 35 seconds from

04:45, which is a sufficient time to frame the scene in two different shots corresponding to two different purposes. The first was in medium long, narrowing at each of the subject's appearances, perhaps their lack of clothing and footwear beneath the drizzle, their vulnerability to illness in such feeble age, or the familiarity to each other based on body language. The scene continues in long shot, which is not included in the found footage, where the men crouch over debris to get across the clearing and often pick beneath the dirt for anything useful. With a wider frame, the audience can see a better view of the environment the subject is moving about - outside a shut pharmacy, its roll-up doors punched with a gaping hole, hinting at its already pillaged condition and the men having nothing to loot for themselves. Arong repeats this transition of shots in one of the children's illustrations. In 08:08, the narrative introduces the tragic story of a boy who admitted having let his little brother go after being worn out swimming against the surge. He is presumed to own the drawing as shown with the narration - a sad-faced stick figure scratched over in black and blue. The story resumes with the boy reaching toward the surface and finding corpses everywhere. With this, the drawing pans out, and the said figure can be seen surrounded by what is interpreted as dead bodies and felled trees, and the black and blue scratches are, in fact, a watery grave, as shown in Figure 1.

The "foundness" from a film's visual aspect can be extended to a spectrum of fact and fiction, which would first relate to the factual sociopolitical turmoil behind the disaster, followed by the fictive essence of mythology. In 00:53 - 01:26, Arong divulges Napoles's masterminding the 2013 pork barrel scam as "one of the biggest corruption scandals" which "implicated congressmen and senators," playing over the names and pictures of Senator Defensor-Santiago and Napoles scanned from the front pages of archived newspapers. Later she discloses how, even after a year since the calamity, residents accuse the then-incumbent President, whom Arong characterized as "the leader of [their] country" of not paying immediate firsthand inspection on the damages. Arong shaded her narration reflecting the conflict between the city mayor and then incumbent Department of Interior and Local Government secretary captured on a leaked video, in which the mayor could be heard arguing in a

senate meeting: “The President is the President of the Philippines and he’s also the President of Tacloban City” (GMA Integrated News 02:24 - 02:30). In the documentary, Arong echoed the question with a creative deviation from the actual scene, which she repurposed to appear as if coming from the survivors: “they [townspeople] asked, ‘isn’t our town part of the country’” and “Isn’t he the President of our town as well?” Through the documentary voice, Arong laid open the lack of attention authorities and media paid to the Yolanda disaster, drawing arguments from the alleged inadequacy of media coverage, information dissemination, and the then President’s concern for the aftermath.

A recollection of the above is but one of the many cases the Yolanda disaster was exploited for political manipulation. In argument, Santa Ana describes how neoliberal economic policies and reforms strategize emergencies to maintain the Global South’s dependence on international humanitarian aid and supplies. Furthermore, these reforms have become “mechanisms of neocolonial influence and control: geopolitical practices of using economic globalization and cultural imperialism to extract the Philippines’ natural resources, degrade its environment, and worsen problems of unemployment, malnutrition, and disease” (75). In return, these policies and reforms would be unchallenged - “off limits to criticism” (75) - for the country to continue receiving donations, while risking the proliferation of US military bases, continuous harnessing of fossil fuel, and establishment of capital businesses within the country and the entire Global South. Never mind the history of imprisonment and torture against Filipino communities which harbored guerilla troops in the post Spanish-American War, the massacre and the scorched earth tactics which turned Samar into a “howling wilderness” (Santa Ana 63, or the isolated cases of rape and homicide against Filipinas by American soldiers protected by the Visiting Forces Agreement (Pagaduan). It is no wonder how easily the Yolanda disaster became a platform for political showdown among candidates vying for the most powerful positions in the country.

What could have further caused an exacerbation of the disaster? Arong identified in her film the lack of layman titles and translations of scientific

lexicon as Western terminology is employed in public warnings, instead of the vernacular of the communities entrenched in their local languages. The film, thus, confronts our preference for English, a language infused in our history through US imperialism which we claim to have appropriated insofar as installing it with an official status alongside Filipino. Like Arong, this author also wonders if some teachers “did not know what a storm surge was, how about those who didn’t speak English?” (02:30 – 02:40). This brings to mind what Santa Ana posits as a feature reinforcing the postcolonial ecological imagination - an artistic expression of overwhelming loss which may be viewed, other than “dispossessions, displacements, forced migrations, and deprived livelihoods” (76), as the Filipino’s detachment from the vernacular in favor of English used in public announcements. Santa Ana stresses that displacements take either a physical form, such as the forced migration of the Filipino, or temporal, “the present inability to recall and recognize colonialism’s destructive impact on the Philippines’ physical environment” (78). This is a neocolonial strategy within which our vernacular detachment is located. We render deep regard towards English for the many conveniences it can offer. Children are taught the language at an early age; others invest in language learning programs with high hopes of finding the better life promised in the West. English proficiency has given the Philippines a prestige distinct from its Asian neighbors, thus, baffling many to know that it had become a deterrent to comprehending the threat of a “storm surge.”

On a fictive sense, one can readily observe that mythology is a conspicuous feature in the film. The title itself alludes to a particular myth which Arong gathered from local narratives during her volunteer work in Bohol which was struck by 7-magnitude earthquake three weeks preceding Yolanda. Apparently, the folks shared a story about a mythical pig living beneath the earth and causing earthquakes when agitated, at which they would shout “*Buwa! Buwa!*” to placate the creature (*To Calm* 03:22-3:55). Anthropologically speaking, ancient Visayas was as animistic as tribes in Luzon, who deeply venerated spirits they believed inhabited every organism in nature. Jean Karl Gaverza writes that ancestors of the Kankanaeys in

highland Benguet render a fairly identical version: a gigantic hog occupies the realm between the living and dead, and earthquakes happen when it scratches against the massive posts between the said worlds (Gaverza). Arong's deployment of myths, then, rather establishes the film's factuality. The existence of such myths proves that our ancestors likewise fabricated stories in the attempt to explain weather phenomena, which survivors of typhoon Yolanda apparently resonated with as a strategy to generate local knowledge about the storm. They reimagined Yolanda as "a girl left behind by her lover," was courted by Serge in Samar, and followed to Tacloban where they finally reconciled (*To Calm* 1:47-2:05).

True enough, the personification and romantic engagements behind storms have been a poetic literary trope in the Philippines since the age of epics. In *The Maiden of Buhong Sky* of the Manobo, for example, the hero Tuwa-ang subdues many supernatural enemies to wed the Lady of Buhong Sky. He ascends with her to heaven while thunder and lightning relentlessly flashed in celebration of the marriage, mythically suggesting how, like Yolanda and Serge, violent weather was once perceived as "visceral signs of the lovers' movements in heaven" (Lacuna 21). Though circulated in jest, survivors invented the myth of Yolanda to remember the storm *surge* by conceiving a fictional character homophonic to the flood - "Serge." This form of reimagination allowed a capturing of the deluge in a single image - grim cascading waters quickly rising - which translations, broadcasts, and public memos failed to inform and elaborate prior to the storm. Given such influence of mythology on the film, it can be surmised that *To Calm the Pig Inside* is a manifestation of the Filipino culture's entrenchment in traditions and folklore, however transfigured over the course of centuries. Mythmaking can be discerned as a means of generating knowledge on climate disasters, and in this case, "foundness" is constitutional in popular consciousness and may function as an index of the community.

Resistance and recourses: A conclusion

At the heart of documentary representations are stories from our real world. Today's progressive era allows for novel and alternative ways of narrating

real life stories other than through nonfictional means. This study is centered on the documentary representation of super typhoon Yolanda which devastated central Philippines in November 2013, moving Filipino and foreign artists to channel their grief and advocacy through creative works. *To Calm the Pig Inside* teaches us the advantage of “finding” already existing materials and repurposing them to relate the historical experience of Yolanda to succeeding weather disturbances. As our colonial experience has diminished our knowledge of the storms, the progressing Anthropocene draws us closer to a time when restorations of myths or wisdom from Filipino ecopoetry can only do so little, or nothing, to prevent imminent “natural” disasters. In a way, the preservation of certain mythical tropes can be seen as latent forms of resistance to neocolonial agents (e.g. Western interpretation, English language). Survivors now have a clear picture of the storm surge based on the trauma aggravated by the shortcomings of Western meteorological terms and the country’s post-disaster response.

In the end, it took a massive destruction for modifications to be enacted by the PAG-ASA: amendments of flood and storm surge maps, conduct of seminars for local government units, fortifications of evacuation areas, upgrades of equipment in weather stations, and translation of scientific jargon to the local language. Public signs cautioning storm surge areas in specific points around the city are testaments to these changes.

In the light of Lacuna’s concern that “the imaginative leap is what seems to be disappearing” in the discourses of storms (23), this paper calls for more forms of documentary storytelling - “creative treatments of actuality” on environmental concerns which remains under-scrutinized not only in terms of research but also in terms of execution. Resonating with Chua, this is an appeal to include creative works beside scientific literature as legitimate sources to inform the crafting of environmental preservation and disaster risk reduction policies. Ultimately, Arong demonstrates a return to what is found in the locality - footage of ruins, still images of survivors, and oral history such as narratives of coping and myths to claim the origins of a phenomena. This similarly reflects the Yolanda museum organized within UP - Tacloban which exhibits various memorabilia

of survival: overused thermoses, mud-crusted toys and makeshift tents, handmade flipbooks, and protest signboards from the 30-day climate solidarity walk, all serving as reminders to resist imperial forgetting, the “smaller scale” disasters we need to prevent first before the “bigger disasters ... to ensure that all species can anticipate and outlast the next Sendong, Ondoy, Maring, or Yolanda” (Chua 43).



Fig. 3. A few takes from the People's Museum of Climate Justice set up during the week-long 10th year commemoration of Yolanda, courtesy of the University of the Philippines – Tacloban in partnership with Green Peace – Philippines: a protest poster from the Climate Walk 2023 (left), inside a reconstructed makeshift tent (middle), lined with images from the actual post-disaster tents (right); from the author's collection.

Note

1. The stills published in this article were provided by dir. Joanna Vasquez Arong through an e-mail correspondence. The film can be viewed at the Argo application through subscription. This particular drawing was rendered by Jeremy Mercado from Tacloban City.
2. The above image is a screenshot from the footage by Chris Darza; below it is a still by Veejay Villafranca in its original monochrome.

Works Cited

- Alternative, The. "Signs of the Times." *The Alternative Online Magazine*, 6 July 2018, <https://www.thealternativeph.com/signos-veejay-villafranca/>.
- Arong, Joanna Vasquez. Personal Interview. 17 Dec. 2023.
- Baron, Jaimie. *The Archive Effect: Archival Footage as an Experience of Reception*. Routledge, 2014.
- Bazerman, Charles. "Analyzing the Multidimensionality of Texts in Education." *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research*, edited by Judith L. Green et al., Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2006, pp. 77-78.
- Belsey, Catherine. "Textual Analysis as a Research Method." *Research Methods for English Studies*, edited by Gabriele Griffin, 2nd ed., Edinburgh UP, 2013, pp. 160-178.
- Bernard, Sheila Curran. *Documentary Storytelling, Making Stronger and More Dramatic Nonfiction Films*. E-book ed., 2nd ed., Elsevier, 2007.
- Blanco, Dennis Vicencio. "Disaster Governance in the Philippines: Issues, Lessons Learned, and Future Directions in the Post-Yolanda Super Typhoon Aftermath." *International Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 38, June 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2014.979198>.
- Campos, Patrick F. "Thinking About Philippine Political Documentaries Today." *Daang Doky: A Festival of Philippine Documentaries, 2020*, FilDocs, Inc., pp. 113-124. <https://daangdoky.ph/book>.
- Chua, Rina Garcia. "Dismantling Disaster, Death, and Survival in Philippine Ecopoetry." *Kritika Kultura*, vol. 25, 2015, pp. 25-45. AJOL, <https://dx.doi.org/>. PDF download.
- David, J. (n.d). Auteurs & Amateurs: Toward an Ethics of Film Criticism. *Unitas*. <http://unitasust.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/UNITAS-93-1-Joel-David-Auteurs-Amateurs.pdf>
- Eckstein, David, et al. "Global Climate Risk Index 2021: Who Suffers Most From Extreme Weather Events? Weather-related Loss Events in 2019 and 2000 to 2019." *Germanwatch*, 2021, https://germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021_1.pdf. PDF download.
- Gaverza, Jean Karl. *The Myths of the Philippines*. 2014. U of the Philippines Diliman, Undergraduate thesis.
- GMA Integrated News (2013, December 9). *SONA: Tacloban City Mayor Alfred Romualdez, naglabas ng hinanakit kanina sa hearing sa Senado* [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryXnGhkKO18>
- Heidrich, Timothy. *Cinematography Techniques: The Different Types of Shots in Film*, <https://oma.on.ca/en/contestpages/resources/free-report-cinematography.pdf>. Accessed 29 Sept. 2022.

- Lacuna, Isabela. *Typhoon Tropology: The Storm in Tagalog Folk Literature*. 2017. Ateneo de Manila U, Master's Thesis.
- Maranan, Jewel. "Prompting the Imaginings of Futures: The Reason for Daang Dokyu." *Daang Dokyu: A Festival of Philippine Documentaries*, 2020, FilDocs, Inc., pp. 7-12. <https://daangdokyu.ph/book>.
- Martin, Jocelyn. "The Wave, the Wound, and the Witness: Climate Trauma, Ethics and Listening in *Les Mains Lâchées*." *Forum for World Literature Studies*, vol. 11, no. 30, Sept. 2019, pp. 402-417.
- NDRRMC. "Final Report re effects of Typhoon "Yolanda" (Haiyan)." *Relief Web*, Apr. 2014, <https://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/ndrrmc-update-sitrep-no-108-effects-typhoon-yolanda-haiyan>.
- Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. 3rd ed., Indiana UP, 2017.
- . *Representing Reality, Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Indiana UP, 1991.
- Pagaduan, Drew. "Neocolonialism in the Philippines." *SNOQAP*, 04 Nov. 2023, <https://www.snoqap.com/posts/2022/11/4/neocolonialism-in-the-philippines>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2023.
- Pobre, Carissa. "The Necessity of Creative Inquiry in Troubled Times." *Agam Agenda*, 05 Ap. 2023, <https://agamagenda.com/creativeinquiry/>. Accessed 02 Sep. 2023.
- Santa Ana, Jeffrey. "Filipino Ecological Imagination: Typhoon Yolanda, Climate Change, and Imperialism in Philippine Poetry and Prose." *Southeast Asian Ecocriticism: Theories, Practices, Prospects*, edited by John Charles Ryan, Lexington Books, 2018, pp. 61-86.
- To Calm the Pig Inside: Ang Pagpapakalma sa Unos*. Directed by Joanna Vasquez Arong, Old Fool Films, 2020.
- Wang, Zhuo. "Our Common Sufferings": Reflections on the Ethical Dimensions of Contemporary Disaster Poetry. *Journal of Cambridge Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4, December 2009, pp. 114-126.
- Winokur, Mark and Bruce Holsinger. *Movies, Flicks, and Film*, Alpha Books, 2001.
- "World Press Photo Festival 2021 | Winners Speak: Joanna Vasquez Arong." *Youtube*, uploaded by World Press Photo Foundation, 21 Apr. 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZpVUcEZGBA>.