

"Becoming" through Artistic Immersion

The *Bayanihan* in Helsinki

JAY MAR ALBAOS



Photo: Jay Mar Albaos

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THESIS

*“Becoming” through
Artistic Immersion*

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JAY MAR ALBAOS

ABSTRACT

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<p>Migrant Filipinos are neither here nor there. It is from this blurry position where I drew inspiration for my research. Migration is more than just a physical movement; it also involves the creation and recreation of spaces and destinations. The state of precarity that migrants belong to makes them an interesting group of people to study with.</p> <p>Departing from the nuanced collaborative piece of <i>Bayanihan</i>, my research focuses on the question: How did the Filipino labor migrants perform 'becoming' during the <i>Bayanihan</i> 2017 in Helsinki?</p> <p>This research aims to contribute, if not to widen, the discourse on migration not only as political and/or economic occurrence but also as a performative phenomenon. The research introduced artistic immersion as a method of doing community work. Ethnography was the initial methodological foundation of my research, but its tenets were limiting the depth of that which I wanted to capture. Hence, I introduced the notion of artistic immersion, which is based on recognition, inclusivity, and participation. Artistic immersion challenges the notion of 'interpretation' and stresses the importance of recognition. By doing so, we not only arrive merely at an understanding, but a recognition of those who are in the peripheries and, hopefully, eventually nurture inclusive coexistence.</p> <p>The thesis surveyed how 'becoming' happened in different, yet almost simultaneous, nuanced vectors. The process of 'becoming' became reliant to the human, ecological, political, and geographical environments it was into. It also touched many layers of theoretical concepts like performativity, place and site, reconstituting, to mention a few. Through <i>Bayanihan</i>, I realized that 'becoming' was momentary. Materially, it was constructed and eventually got destroyed in a span of time or days. Such momentariness of existence strongly relates to that of labor migrants. The precariousness of their situation suggests that one day they might lose their grant to stay and work in a foreign land.</p> <p>The thesis also included feedback from the participants of the artistic immersion and <i>Bayanihan</i>. This showed how the project treaded along the hazy act of collaboration by deploying recognition. In many ways, the work should not be solely credited to the author alone but also to the body-minds who made the process and project possible.</p> <p>Finally, it is proper to state that as much as problems arise in community work, so was in artistic immersion and <i>Bayanihan</i>. Communities and/or groups constantly change and adapt to dynamic environments. Artistic immersion itself is not finite and is subject to changes. Further assessments on its ideological implications, especially in different contexts, is encouraged. <i>Bayanihan</i> and artistic immersion, reveal so much how humans perform complex relationships (towards each other, institutions, identities, and so on).</p>			
KEYWORDS: Becoming, community work, artistic immersion, recognition, migration, labor migrant, Filipino labor migrant, performance,			

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	12
<i>Filipino Labor Migration</i>	14
<i>Scope of the Research</i>	14
<i>Previous Art Projects</i>	15
ARTISTIC IMMERSION	18
<i>Ethnography and Recognition</i>	18
<i>Furthering Immersion</i>	19
<i>Doing Artistic Immersion</i>	22
<i>Working in Finland</i>	24
MIGRATION	26
<i>Contextualizing Migration in my Research</i>	26
<i>The foreign and the local</i>	27
<i>Migration as a movement</i>	28
<i>Migration as a Human Yearning</i>	30
BAYANIHAN	33
<i>The Bayanihan of the Filipinos in Helsinki</i>	33
<i>Why Bayanihan?</i>	34
<i>Labor Migrants as Precarious Entities</i>	35
<i>Existing as Precarious Entities</i>	36
<i>Bayanihan: A Mass Demonstration?</i>	37
<i>Moving Around “Community”</i>	38
<i>Bayanihan as an Example of the ‘Performative’</i>	39
‘BECOMING’	42
<i>Reconstituting Material Existence</i>	42
<i>Reconstituting through a Pool of Others</i>	42
a. <i>The Core Group</i>	42
b. <i>Opening the Call to the Community and to the Public</i>	44
c. <i>The Children Wandered Free</i>	46
d. <i>Reconstituting in Relation</i>	46
<i>Becoming through the Kubo</i>	47
<i>Becoming through the Institution</i>	51
<i>Reconstituting through Negotiation</i>	51

<i>Negotiating Among Ourselves</i>	53
<i>Becoming through Food</i>	53
<i>Becoming through Place-Making</i>	57
<i>Becoming through Carrying the Kubo</i>	59
<i>The Kubo Left Without Goodbye</i>	61
<i>The Bayanihan was Momentary</i>	63
THERE SHOULD BE PIECES SOMEWHERE HERE	66
<i>The 'I' and the 'We'</i>	66
<i>Othering my Own</i>	69
<i>On Being Good</i>	70
<i>Exoticizing the community?</i>	71
OUR AFTER-THOUGHTS	74
<i>On Community and Unity</i>	77
<i>On Personal Reference to the Kubo</i>	79
<i>On Happiness</i>	80
<i>On Bayanihan as a Performance</i>	80
<i>On Encountering Fellow Foreigners</i>	81
<i>On Essence</i>	82
<i>More Feedback</i>	83
HONESTLY,	86
NO, IT DOESN'T END	88
MOVING FORWARD	92
BIBLIOGRAPHY	93
<i>BOOKS</i>	93
<i>ONLINE</i>	94

The thesis is a collaborative work by Jay Mar Albaos and all the border intellectuals who generously got themselves involved during the *Bayanihan* 2017. The *Bayanihan* project was part of the author's artistic immersion process with the Filipinos in Finland. This thesis is for the MA degree program in Live Art and Performance Studies of the Theatre Academy Helsinki.

Though concepts and theories came from the author, these academic claims are null without the practical and collaborative efforts especially from the Filipino community in Finland. The artist does not solely claim over-all originality. He acknowledges all those who've lent hands, shared their body-minds, and opened up personal spaces both for the research and the researcher in the whole process.

I am not alone. I am a multitude of selves. I am the many faces of my ancestors. I am the wishes of the elements who keep me breathing. I am the laughter of my friends, the tears of my parents. I am the

sweat of the farmers who feed me. I am the hugs of the people I work with. I am the kisses of the people
 dear to my heart.
 I am following meteors: some fell, some are still crossing skies. Still they taught me well. I am a flicker of
 light. And I see the same from all the people I met so far. I vow not to lose hope because my flicker
 might be a comet to someone else.
 I am not afraid because I have multitudes, I have abundance. I will walk this earth because I see
 footsteps - I know I am not alone.
 (Albaos 2017)

Let me begin with the people closest to my proximity as of writing this thesis: the Filipino community in Finland. Their resilience and dedication towards their families in the Philippines fuelled my desire to pursue my MA Degree in Arts and my artistic research. There was not a day that I was not inspired by their strength and struggle to 'become' amidst being in a foreign land. Most importantly, I want to thank the CFC-FFL community with Florencio and Nora Fajardo as current Country Servants. This written appreciation is not enough for everything the community personally and academically provided me.

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INTRODUCTION

To say Filipinos are everywhere is an understatement. In my travels in different parts of Europe and Asia, I have always met a fellow Filipino. Some of whom were tourists, but many were Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). In these encounters, I was invited to their respective houses. They shared their stories and experiences living and working in a foreign country; the struggles they encountered being away from their families.

Filipino workers successfully integrated into the foreign labor market and established a good reputation in terms of quality labor. OFWs are often featured in documentaries and advertisements as the "modern day heroes". In fact, "in 1988, President Corazon Aquino declared December as the month of Overseas Filipinos by virtue of Proclamation No. 276, honoring them as modern-day heroes" (Abacan 2015). In the eyes of the international community and their families back home, they are appraised as the people who made sacrifices for their families; to make their children's lives better.

"An average of 2,500 Filipinos leave the country every day to work abroad, and the Philippines is only second to Mexico as an exporter of labor" (Collymore 2003). This is reflected in the amount of remittances sent. In the first eight months of 2017 "personal remittance of Filipino workers abroad amounted to USD 20.7 billion" (Lucas 2017). This continues to be a crucial asset to the robust Philippine economy today, which World Bank predicted to grow to 6.7 percent in 2017. (de Vera 2018)

However, the normative notion of the "labor migrant" clouds the theoretical potentiality of their bodies as border crossers. The narrow perception that they left for others – their families, their country – hinders and closes the possibility of looking at their position past the ideal 'sacrificial' labor migrant.

This research will explore 'becoming' of the labor migrants as border crossers using the lens of performance. As a researcher, I was inspired by their process of leaving home particularly the notion of 'adapting'. Why was it easy for them to leave and arrive despite the cultural and language barriers? What were the risks they faced? Did they adapt, or did they go through a complex process of redefining themselves as "broken" individuals? How was this performative?

Specifically, I will respond to this question:

How did the Filipino labor migrants perform 'becoming' during the *Bayanihan* 2017 in Helsinki?

For this research, I have decided to focus on the Filipino labor migrants living in Helsinki. As a Filipino master's student, I got the opportunity to be part of a

Catholic Community – the Couples for Christ Foundation for Family and Life¹ – which has around 100 active members today. I met other Filipinos in my part-time jobs while the rest I met through shared networks.

My encounters with them inspired me to do performances and write poems, which I will share in my succeeding chapters. These poetries are metaphorical negotiations between me and the community. They also reflect the constant conversations I had with myself regarding the insights I gained from these encounters. I chose to scatter the poems and images in the thesis to reflect how spontaneous these thoughts were.

This research hopes to contribute, if not to widen, the discourse on migration as a political/economic occurrence and as a performative phenomenon. The research question would help us delve into the nuances of labor migrants. In addition, the research would introduce artistic immersion as a way of doing community work and see how effective it is in challenging the already existent conceptual capacities of precarious communities. Through this, we would arrive at an understanding of their precariousness and a recognition of those who are in the peripheries. Hopefully, this could nurture inclusive coexistence.

This research would shift from academic writing to poetry to autobiographical accounts, illustrating how my methods were reconstructed depending on the circumstances within the community. Working with a community confronts the worker with nuances. Departing from this nuanced experience and the collaborative project, this thesis follows the same format. It reflects the complex and simultaneous events while working with the community towards the *Bayanihan* project. Thus, as one progresses into the written text, one may feel that events were happening simultaneously, as well as thought processes with bits of theorization.

The constant shift within the project's multi-layered narratives – my experiences, commentaries from the people who got involved, and theories from scholars from various disciplines, demonstrates the process of reconstituting that the project brought along with it. My choice of having a narrative-theory-quotidian language is a representation of the organization of my thoughts and observations. At the same time, my writing method is a reflection of my work with bodies and thought systems which are unlikely academic but are still vital contributors to knowledge production.

The thesis will start with an introduction to the Filipino labour migration in Finland. I will include a discussion on my previous art projects which were the starting point of my explorations on 'becoming' as a concept and collaborations with the labour migrants. After that, I will introduce Artistic Immersion as a

¹ Couples for Christ Foundation for Family and Life is an international private association of the lay faithful whose main mission is to evangelize through family renewal. <http://www.cfcffl.org>

method which I used to work with the Filipino labour migrant community. In the discussion, I will re-establish recognition in the strongly interpretive research methods of present day. The next discussion will be on migration and the notion of labor migrants as precarious entities, a concept introduced by Judith Butler (2015). It will then move on to the MA collaborative artistic work, *Bayanihan*. The collection of subparts in this section will talk about the project's practical details alongside theoretical musings. Then, I will proceed with a discussion on how the labour migrants performed 'becoming' during the project. After that, I will go back to the complex nuances of the *Bayanihan* to further my personal deliberations. With the project's collaborative and participatory nature, the next section brings in the ideas and reflections of selected volunteers. Finally, I will bind my thoughts and realizations in an attempt to close the page (but not the possibilities) of this artistic research.

Filipino Labor Migration

According to an infographic report published by ABS-CBN, "the Philippines is the fourth largest labor exporter worldwide" (Abacan 2015). This is evident in the ten million Filipinos – which is about ten percent of the country's population – working and/or living abroad. In her online article "The Philippines: Beyond Labor Migration, Toward Development and (Possibly) Return", researcher Maruja M.B. Asis (2017) wrote that in the 1970s, the Philippines launched an overseas employment program which sought/aimed to find new labor markets. The program promoted Filipino workers to the oil-rich but labor short Gulf Cooperation Countries. However, even before this program, Filipinos have been migrating to the United States to work in sugarcane and pineapple plantations. At present, Filipinos are scattered around the world– either intermarried with other nationalities or as labor migrants.

In Finland, there are 3,568 Filipinos (born in the Philippines) who are living in Finland at the beginning of 2017, according to the data published by Filippiinit Seura Ry in their website². In my interviews with the so-called 'veterans' or those who have been in Finland for thirty years or more, I learned that the first wave of Filipinos (mostly Filipino women) arrived through intermarriage reasons. Later on, economically-driven Filipinos arrived to do domestic work.

Scope of the Research

This research will focus on the Filipino labor migrants in Finland as the study works its way into recognizing their processes of becoming. The research will

² Filippiinit Seura Ry is a "politically independent solidarity organization" founded in 1988 to "promote friendship and solidarity" between the Finnish and Philippine people. The organization operates on a voluntary basis.
<http://www.filippiinit-seura.fi>

depart from the MA artistic collaborative piece, *Bayanihan 2017*, as the performance work.

Previous Art Projects

Before arriving at my research question, I got involved in several experiments and collaborations. The insights from these undertakings became the foundations of my research.

The Tuminongnong

This was a project where I embodied a nature spirit from Philippine lore, the *Engkanto*. Since the Philippines is linguistically diverse, from the region where I come from, *engkanto* is referred to as *Tuminongnong*³ – which means first-dwellers.

I experimented with the project. There were times when I did solo performances, image loops for GIFs, and actions for video. It was also during this phase when I realized that I wanted to research the migration of Filipino laborers in Finland, though at that time I had yet to decide what approach to use. It was, however, a strong motivation that influenced my further undertakings.



Image. The *Tuminongnong* lives in a tree.
Photo: Jay Mar Albaos

The Mythological Institute

Jolijn de Wolf (my colleague in the MA Live Art and Performance Studies program who eventually became an art project collaborator) and I originally

³ *Engkanto* is usually a Tagalog word used to call the nature spirit. *Tuminongnong*, on the other hand, is from the Cebuano dialect. Cebuano is widely spoken in the Visayan region and even in considerable parts of Mindanao.

conceptualized the Mythological Institute for the New Performance Turku Festival 2016. The idea was to bring together our different ways of working toward the notion of myths. During that time, Jolijn was working with the classic Greek mythical creature Minotaur and I with the *Tuminongnong*. We realized that even though we both work with myths, we still had differing approaches toward it. Thus, we decided to create fictitious and experimental departments under the Mythological Institute. Working with the Minotaur and thought blueprints, Jolijn became the representative of SEWA (Self Exploration and World Arrangement). I, on the other hand, dealt with the concepts of place and migration which made me the representative of PaM (Place and Migration).

The performance in Turku turned out quite surprising, with positive feedback on our collaboration. But when the opportunity came to explore my artistic research into the Mythological Institute, I started to have inhibitions. At that point, I was already working with the Filipino community in Finland, specifically focusing on border crossing and place-making. I realized I had to go on my own way and leave the Mythological Institute.

Below are the reasons why I left:

1. I did not find the notion of 'institute' effective in approaching the specific population I was working with. I understand that Filipinos have had quite a hard time dealing with institutions or governments. The Philippines' political system has been tainted with corruption, injustice, instability, and distrust – ranging from a puppet president under the Japanese occupation during World War II down to the current Duterte administration. Such painful colonial history and unstable governance accumulated the doubt and distrust towards the term 'institution'. Such doubt could be attributed to the huge shifts in the institutional perceptions in the Philippine landscape - from the pre-colonial *barangay* political system to the colonial settlements (Spain, USA, and Japan) which led to the establishment of foreign political, social, academic, religious, and ideological institutions in the country. In my experience working in the government under a state office back in the Philippines, people responded to me accordingly whenever they figure out that I was a government employee. I would usually get the information I need, forms that should be filled out, et cetera. People saw me as a representative of authority and power. They complied with my requests on the premise of my position.

The term "institution" limited me and my ways of doing. In the course of my personal artistic research, I have developed a certain method I called Artistic Immersion which heavily relies on trust-earning and relationship-building with certain communities. I realized that if I labeled myself under an institution, I could never peel off that label in my processes. I would never achieve a level of trust of a "Jay who is a fellow Filipino who came to Finland to study his MA" versus a "Jay who is a representative of the Mythological Institute under the Department of Place and Migration".



Image. The Minotaur and the *Tuminongnong* appeared at Hakaniemi Bridge.
Photo: Jolijn de Wolf

2. On a personal note, I got lost under the Mythological Institute. It felt like I had to frame all that I was doing to fit into something vague like an 'institute' or a 'department'. The main reason why I left my organizations in the Philippines was because I got stuck with their "terms of references" and "ways of doing". Being with them made me grow, for sure. But it also meant that I sacrificed my possibilities as a doer and thinker. I got scared with the idea that I will get stuck with another institution – it became counterproductive rather than advantageous. I already lost myself, I don't want to lose it again this time.

ARTISTIC IMMERSION

Ethnography and Recognition

“Qualitative research projects with an intent to provide detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice” has come to be equated with ethnography (Hoey n.d.). “This is sometimes referred to as thick description – a term attributed to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz writing on the idea of an interpretative theory of culture in the early 1970s” (ibid). In this sense, fieldwork becomes a vital process for any ethnographic work to achieve thickness or depth in its descriptions. Ethnography has anthropology as its disciplinary home. It is both “a qualitative research process (method) and product (the outcome of the process is an ethnography)” (ibid).

The main objective of ethnography is interpretation. In a short introduction on art theory, Cynthia Freeland (2001) describes interpretation “as explanations of how a work functions to communicate thoughts, emotions, and ideas. (It should be) grounded in reasons and evidence, and should provide a rich, complex, and illuminating way to comprehend a work of art” (ibid., 101). But Freeland (2001) admits that there is no absolute “true” interpretation. It is a mere expression of a conscious, thinking body. “Interpretations are always in relation to the researcher's perception of the nature of this knowledge and the subject's world views” (Hämeenaho and Koskinen-Koivisto according to Kantonen 2017, 413). This makes an ethnographic work a rich space of interpretations from both the researcher and the subject. In most cases, however, only the voice of the researcher is present.

Interpretation then, in the case of community work, becomes problematic: it can be counterproductive. It eliminates many voices in the process, considering that the work is communal. This goes against the notion of community work as inclusive and participatory. Working in the field is different from working in the academy where the views of the researcher dominates over what/who they are researching.

In order to make the observation reciprocal, incorporating the voices of both the researcher and the subject is vital. I then suggest using the term ‘recognition’ instead of interpretation. By definition, recognition is the “acknowledgement of the existence, validity, or legality of something”. Recognition here, seems passive – one that stands on the corner and looks at a subject with acknowledgement. This research will further the concept of recognition to activate this sense of acknowledgement by turning it into something. Recognition, in the process of artistic immersion, can be seen as an active vessel to navigate inside the complexity of the community. It doesn’t insist, nor is it submissive. Recognition becomes a manner of moving – thinking. For example, after meeting many Filipinos in Helsinki or having been in contact with them through social media platforms, I noticed that not everyone shares the

same view on current Philippine politics. Recognizing such, I became very cautious about saying anything about this topic. I avoided starting an argument – I let them open on their own. Recognition then, becomes an embodiment, a way of moving and doing to and from conceptual and practical spaces in the process of artistic immersion.

In the process of artistic immersion, I would like to challenge the position of interpretation in knowledge production by using recognition. Peshkin (2005) argues that in interpretation, the “researcher’s orientation and the definition of the situation cannot help but have ramifications for the way people are treated or thought of” (Peshkin 2005, 5). This makes the conventions produced through interpretation imbalanced. In interpretation, there is a tendency to distance one’s self from the ‘subject’ in order to achieve “objective reading”. This creates a centralized and impersonal output; further restricts the relationship of the ‘subject’ and the ‘researcher’. It also puts the control of knowledge and understanding solely to that of the ‘researcher’ and devalues any possible output and ideas coming from the community that could have possibly thickened or deepened the understanding of the phenomenon.

Recognition, unlike interpretation, widens the space for understanding and the analysis of behaviors and nuances of a community. It goes beyond merely observing and taking notes but acknowledging that there are differences or similarities in behavior and perception.

Furthering Immersion

Aside from recognition, another important process in this kind of inquiry is immersion. As a method, immersion is associated with qualitative research. “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln according to Creswell 2007, 36). In this type of research, the researcher becomes a central figure – an actualizing agent for the group in study.

In applied social sciences, especially in the field of social work, the researcher immerses into the setting. In her article on immersion, Ashley Crossman (2017) states that in the process the researcher “goes native”. They live among the participants for months or years. However, this perspective tends to exoticize the population, a proof of the classical academic notion of the elitist researcher and the odd other.

From this, I want to further immersion’s methodological function by bringing it from social sciences to arts. Hence, I conceptualized a process called Artistic Immersion. Artistic immersion is a way of doing fieldwork wherein the artistic researcher is actively involved with a specific population and records everything

that catches attention along the course of time. Just like in immersion, the researcher stays with the community for a significant amount of time to gather in-depth understanding. In that way, the researcher earns the trust not only of the individuals but also of the community.

In artistic immersion, the researcher does not only immerse with the group to be a distant observer or interpreter. It is a collaborative process where both the researcher and the community actively contribute to the process. Collectively, they strive to create a conducive environment for collaborating and sharing as comfortably as possible.

Artistic Immersion is artistic because inclusiveness and collectiveness inspires the creativity of not just the group but of the individuals that make up the community. Once the members feel that they are respected and recognized, they do not only provide data but express and/or perform naturally as well. They are what E. Patrick Johnson (2014) calls border intellectuals – people who are “neither or outside or one who never stops walking on the edges, incurring instantly the risk of falling off one side or the other side of the limit while undoing, redoing, and modifying” (Trinh according to Johnson 2014, 147). They are a group conscious of their capacities to do and to become. There might be contentions that border intellectuals should stay on the border. This conceptual perception, however, does not apply in the practical realm. The border intellectuals are actually the ones who have a grasp of “the real” world since they experience treading first-hand on precarity and the daily lived experience. I would also stress that being a border intellectual is not limited to the conscious and/or theoretical ‘intellectuals’. The border intellectual, in the case of my research, challenges the very notion of the ‘intellectual’ in the course of knowledge production. Being an intellectual is not only limited to the educated few – those who are privileged to sit in rooms with access to literatures and journals. Labor migrants, are intellectuals too; they have their own embodied ways and knowledges in confronting their respective situations as border crossers.

*To all the places
And spaces I let
A tear fall,
Know that I left you
A part of my being
That accidentally
I gave you the
Burden of keeping
A piece of me.
May you not tire
Of holding on to
My memory*

Please confide not

*My story.*⁴

Artistic immersion involves sensitivity. Reflecting on the above poetry piece from my *Thoughts on Existing* project, disclosing someone else's story requires a special kind of trust. Trust can be established when the party involved is assured that they have the final say – the privilege to say 'yes' or 'no'. Seeking consent or asking permission within the group should be practiced consistently.

In terms of my research, I do not see myself as "central" in my practice but rather as part of the whole web of expressions. While I acknowledge that the role of the observer is important in the research, the relationship between the subject and the researcher should be symbiotic. For example, anyone can become a facilitator. Any idea from a member can become the beginning of a thread of discussions. Anyone can ask for space from the group when the situation becomes tense. 'Center' becomes a momentary, passing concept. It shifts or jumps and takes different forms (i.e. physical, or conceptual). We can look past the spatial reference of center into an episodic perspective.

Negotiation and compromise are also crucial elements that allow flexibility within the group. In this case, the researcher should be flexible enough to let go of certain plans to accommodate the suggestions of the group. From what I learned from my previous experience in the field with indigenous communities, immersion cannot work without negotiation. The community, though they accepted the sincerity of the immersion, will always recognize the worker's position as an outsider. Immersion is a conscious position to be in, not only from the perspective of the researcher but from the community they are working with.

The same applies to the group being immersed with – they should be willing to go out of their comfort zones to contribute to the research. By considering and responding to the demands of the research, the group's 'normal' is altered. They undergo a process of negotiation within themselves if they want to get involved with the topic and/or activity or not. Thus, to get involved in the immersion process is voluntary. There is no assurance what one can get out of the experience other than the fact that there might be personal and communal realizations at the end of the encounter.

*It's funny how
We fill suitcases
As if we can bring
Everything.*

*This time I
Brought the*

⁴ Jay Mar Albaos. *Thoughts on Existing*, 17.2.2017

*Paste for my teeth
But not the
Brush.*⁵

In the poem, I was reflecting on the psyche of leaving home. It talks about the urge to bring everything (or bring as much as our luggage allowance can accommodate). But in reality, it is impossible – there will always be something that will be left behind. While doing artistic immersion, I recognized that I was dealing with a group of people, including myself, who hoped they were able to bring everything they need. Sad truth was, nobody was able to.

Doing Artistic Immersion

My engagement with Filipinos in Finland started two years ago, after I got acquainted and became part of the CFC-FFL community in Helsinki. I became a member of the church choir during the Tagalog-officiated Masses. I've served certain tasks in church celebrations like reading the gospels and singing psalms. The church was the initial place where I met most of the Filipinos I know today.

The connection with the CFC and the Catholic church paved way for me to be part of different Filipino events in the metropolitan area. Because many Filipinos go to Mass, I became a familiar face. I was invited to different gatherings - birthday parties, anniversaries, weddings, and baptisms. I was also invited to host commercial events such as concerts of Filipino entertainment artists. One event led to another. One of the important occasions I was invited to was the Philippine Independence Day celebration in Lahti last June 2017. It was attended by the Consul General of the Philippine Embassy from Oslo, the local Consul of the Philippine Consulate Office in Finland, and hundreds of Filipinos across the country.

Being acquainted to such events became beneficial to the research - I realized that Filipinos in Finland created different groups among themselves – groups where each felt comfortable to be with. There are religion-based groups (Mormon, Born Again, Roman Catholic, Adventist, et cetera.), ethnolinguistic groups or those who speak the same dialect, hobby-based groups (basketball enthusiasts), socio-civic groups, groups of Filipinas who intermarried with Finnish men, work/company-related groups, and so on.

⁵ Jay Mar Albaos. *Thoughts on Existing*, 5.5.2017



Image⁶. Honored to serve as emcees during the Philippine Independence Day 2017 celebration of the Filipino community in Finland. The event was held June 10, 2017 at Lahti, Finland. Photo: Maricel Billones

It was only later when I realized that I was already doing artistic immersion. In the beginning, the work I have been doing with the Filipino community was a method of coping with the new environment. As a border crosser myself, I had the strong urge to find a piece of me in the foreignness I was in: being in Helsinki, away from home for the first time in my life.

Before Christy and I⁷ left the Philippines in 2015, our relatives and friends already connected us with Filipinos who were in the Nordic and neighboring countries. We also found online groups of Filipino migrants, particularly in Facebook, and got connected with them right away. This was the start of our 'networking' with Filipino communities.

In relation to my research, constantly being with the Filipino community allowed me to show them that I was present – that I was with them and was able to relate to their struggles and homesickness. It was easier for me to understand them and for them to welcome me since I share some of their experiences, being a student and part-time worker at the same time. In return, they welcomed me with all honesty. They started opening up their spaces (social and personal) for me – I got invited during family dinners and gatherings. In the span of two years, I talked with them, listened to their stories, joined them for meals, and slept on their couches. I shared some of these encounters in certain art pieces and performances.

⁶ In photo (from left to right): Jay Mar Albaos, Christy Ann Balita

⁷ My girlfriend and I left the Philippines in 2015 at the same time to start our MA programs. Christy got accepted in an Erasmus Mundus program at Aarhus University. She started her first year in Denmark. I, on the other hand, got admitted to the Theatre Academy Helsinki.

Through my experience of working with them, I noticed that successful immersion involves being consistently present in the group. One has to make sure that one's presence is felt by others by being proactive. This includes getting involved in gatherings, volunteering for tasks, speaking up when asked or when needed, asking questions, clarifying concepts and tasks, lending a hand, and so on. Being actively present gives the community enough time to assess the sincerity of the individual who would like to earn their trust. Once trust is earned, the creation of a valuable and shared process-output follows. The term process-output denotes not a product but rather a point in the process where everyone involved works with what is at hand. The process continues even after the group arrived at a concept or material output.

Since I have been talking about my artistic immersion experiences with the Filipino labor migrants, one might assume that the method is limited to a certain nationality or group. Artistic immersion as a method of fieldwork can be done with any collective of any interests or affiliations. The method can be also done by a worker or researcher regardless of their race and complex self-identifications. To put it simply, artistic immersion is open and flexible. The worker can create ways of approaching and/or working with the community depending on the capacities, diversity, and decisions made with the group. All of these, of course, depends on the community and whether they would accept the immersion or not.



Image⁸. Celebrating birthday at a fast food chain.
Photo: Maricel Billones

Working in Finland

⁸ In photo (from left to right): Jay Mar Albaos, Sarah Jimenez, Liezel Supresencia, Florean Mae Reston, Jean Supresencia, Maricel Billones

One reason which made it easier for me to be accepted into the community was the fact that aside from being a fellow Filipino, I was also living almost the same kind of life they have. When I arrived in Helsinki from the Philippines, I had to work to support myself while studying. This led me to the cleaning industry – a common profession among the Filipino migrants. This also allowed me to gather information about the kind of life most labor migrants experience when they leave their home country to work abroad. Outside religion, hobbies, or other interests shared within groups, what really ties us was the fact that we are all working for survival and to support our families back home. Despite being a student, my status as a part-time worker at a cleaning company made it easier for the community to open up and share their ideas and frustrations with me. Because of our shared experience, it became easy for me to make friends and for them to become an extension of my family.



Image Set. Life as a cleaner.
Photo: Jay Mar Albaos

In all honesty, thinking of cleaning as a profession as difficult is a different story from actually doing it. It was profoundly shattering. The thought of wiping other people's fecal matter as I held a toilet brush for the first time made me weep. Degradation swept in my head. But then the thought of my fellow Filipinos who left their professional lives in the Philippines to become domestic or company-based workers or cleaner brought me back to the context of my research. For one, I was cleaning to survive. On the other hand, I've put myself in a situation where I could recognize their status, even on a psychological level.

MIGRATION

The International Organization for Migration (2018) defines migration as:

“the movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification.”

Though it comprehensively listed down different types of migration, the above definition conceals the complex nature of moving. Migration involves geography and landscapes (borders), movement (the initial performative action), and fragilities (bodies, children, language, memory, and so on). This complexity is reflected in this written thesis and I will elaborate on this in the next paragraphs.

In the context of my research, I focused on labor migrants – “casual and unskilled workers who move about systematically from one region to another offering their services on a temporary, usually seasonal, basis” (IOM 2018).

Contextualizing Migration in my Research

During LAPSody 2017: The Bubble⁹, we invited guests to explore the multifaceted potential of the bubble as a discursive and physical phenomenon. One of the artists, choreographer and activist Riikka Theresa Innanen, shared about the refugee situation in Finland. Innanen is visible in the demonstrations and movements against deportations by the Finnish government against war refugees. The deportations took place after the Finnish government announced that the refugees’ home countries are ‘safe’ to return to. Her dialogue piece was emotional – it asked the audience why festivals like LAPSody bring activism into the four corners of an institutional studio instead of going to the streets, joining the demonstrations. She furthered the discussion by asking (non-verbatim): “Why would there be a discussion when the urgency to act is screaming right outside the Theatre Academy building?” Sitting there, as both organizer and audience of LAPSody, I was saddened of the current refugee status in Finland. My heart bled for the situation of the asylum-seekers.

Her talk brought me back to my previous experience as regional focal person for Indigenous People under the Department of Social Welfare and

⁹ LAPSody 2017 - The Bubble: 6th International Festival and Conference ran from May 24-27, 2017. I was one of the organizer/curator for the event along with Antonin Brinda, Jolijn de Wolf, Harriet von Foreich, and Petros Konnaris. LAPSody took place inside Theatre Academy and site-specific venues around Helsinki. <http://lapsody2017.com/>. Accessed January 29, 2018. 14.22.

Development. Doing my terms-of-reference-oriented job, I got frustrated with the fact that I cannot do more than what my contract with the agency hired me for. Any attempt to do more for the indigenous communities required complex bureaucratic negotiations between agencies and stakeholders. In doing fieldwork, the clients are always tendered as important. However, as a fellow community worker like Innanen, I saw a selective outlook on who is 'important' in the current discourse on society and migration during her talk. As per observation on the refugee crisis (at least in Finland), the current and pressing call for activism only focuses on the refugees. As she started to become emotional towards what she was doing on the grass roots level, she seemed to polarize the two parties: the refugees and the Finns. At the same time, she overlooked the presence of other sectors who equally needs attention and activism, like the labor migrants who silently tread the streets of Finland.

Activism brings the plight of those in the margins to the figures of power – institutions. While it is understandable that urgency is the key word in such discussions, it should also be noted that urgency blinds us from the rest of the vulnerable sectors that are supposed to be seen as well. My varying view on standing up for people who have crossed borders buds from the erratic concept of migration.

The foreign and the local

Even when we exclude its non-human forms, “‘migration’ is a word that encompasses a lot. Whether it is thought of in terms of individuals (immigrant, expatriate, temporary worker, exile, refugee, itinerant, cosmopolitan nomad, et cetera) or collectives (colonial settlement, diaspora, slave or convict transportation, trafficking, displacement), migration is, at its heart, about encounters with foreignness – with foreign people, and with foreign places” (Cox 2014, 3). This definition, however, looks at ‘foreign’ from an internal perspective of a local – from somebody who sees the bodies outside their peripheries. We should look past the divisive binary between ‘foreign’ and ‘local’. For ‘foreign’ to exist, the relational subsistence with the local should be explored.

The split between the local and the foreign creates an antagonism between the ‘divided’ parties. To some extent, such divisive point of view criminalizes the very existence of the yearning to become. As an effect, the regard towards the humane aspect of desiring is unconsciously omitted. To view yearning as criminal prevents us to become courageous and wilts our “native generosity into a sad space of selfishness, fear, and mistrust” (Sellars 2014, ix-x).

The local is perceived as the native of a place, one who comes from within the neighborhood. But should this binary be always the case – that the foreign “simply refer to the geographical fact of coming from elsewhere?” (Cox 2014,

3). To relate to someone through geographical distance creates estrangement, even fear, to some extent.



Image¹⁰. What could be the thoughts of labor migrants?
Photo: Jay Mar Albaos

Migration as a movement

To get a hold of how Filipino labor migrants in Finland think about the topic, I have conducted non-formal interviews through Facebook. I set up a private group and invited Filipinos living in Finland to join. In this group, I started asking random questions which tackle notions of migration, migrant bodies, and home. Non-formal interview is one of the miniscule steps I took during my method of artistic immersion.

¹⁰ In photo (from left to right): Yza Monterozo, Christy Ann Balita, Nora Fajardo, Herbert Billones, Maricel Billones, Jing Supresencia, Marissa Agillon, Ritchel Delfin, Livine Cajoles, Gwindolyn Dagondon, and Nimfa Lazaro

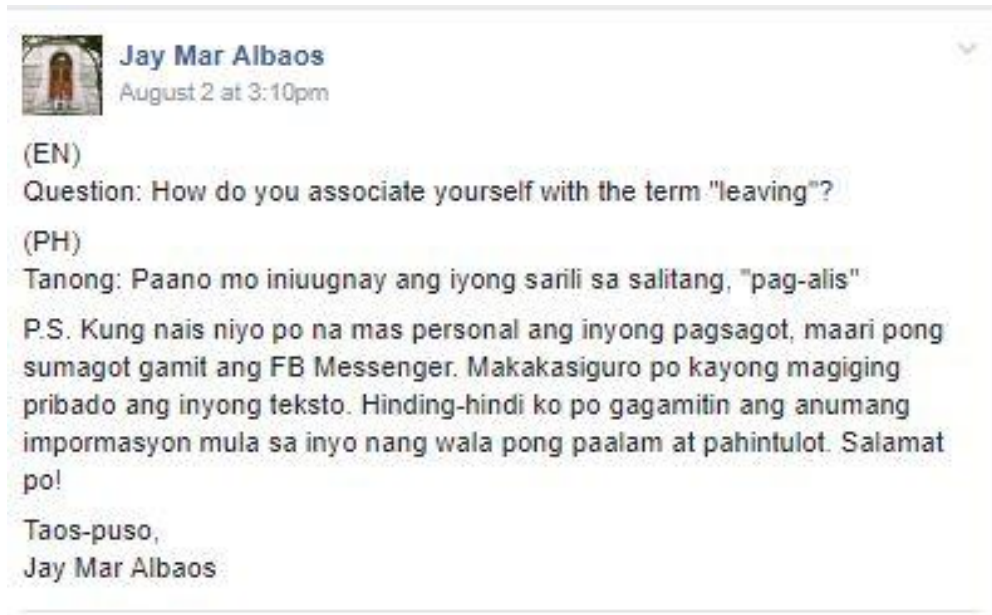


Image. Screenshot of a question posted at the Facebook group.



Photo 2. Screenshot of one of the respondents, Mira Sofia¹¹

In this post, I asked, "How would you associate yourself with the term 'leaving'?". Mira, one of the most active respondents, wrote in Tagalog:

"Yung ang tao ay parang isang migratory bird... luh di ko na ma expound pa hehehe.."

English translation¹²:

"When a person becomes like a migratory bird... I cannot expound anymore hehehe.."

Recognizing that she jokingly responded to the question, it could be furthered that in one way or another, labor migrants tend to overlook their situation. This might be because they have secured their stay in a foreign land (which they acquired through legal documents and official permit to work). On the other hand, how she related migration to birds was interesting. "Avian migration is a process in which different birds fly over distances of hundreds and thousands

¹¹ I asked Ms. Mira if I can use her response in the Facebook Forum for this paper and she agreed. She even added more explanation to her post, which she herself admitted was rather short

¹² Translation from Tagalog to English by Jay Mar Albaos

of kilometers to find the best ecological conditions and habitats for feeding, breeding, and raising their young” (World Migratory Bird Day 2010). In the human sense, we can see migration as a medium to feed and raise the young that are left behind. Since humans invented borders in order to control migration, it is not possible for humans to leave and arrive in flocks. The difference with avian from human labor migration, for one, is the fact that humans leave their homes not because of changes in the season but out of need and the demand for work. Also, most humans do not experience the whole process of leaving and arriving together with their flock or their young. Most migrant humans fly alone.

Migration as a Human Yearning

Sellars (2014) referred to migration as a “human yearning – to complete themselves, to open eyes, and open hearts” (Sellars, foreword to *Theatre & Migration*, ix). But with the era of borders and hyper-legal immigration superstructures, this yearning fell to the category of crime. Sellars (2014) adds, “we are living in a period of shame in which human beings are referred to as “aliens” and deportations are discussed as “removals”, as if a person is a piece of furniture or a can of garbage” (ibid).

Looking into the refugee crisis today, this makes sense. It is rather a sad reality, particularly in relation to the plight of the perceived ‘immediate’ migrants like the refugees and asylum seekers. The labor migrants, on the other hand, experience a different treatment. Since the former is experiencing immediate violence, refugee activists insist on “doing something now!”. The working migrant sector, on the other hand, are taken for granted. This sector tends to be forgotten in crucial discussions. Because of this, they also forgot that they have voices to put forward and be heard. They temporarily hide behind the documents that give them ‘legal’ status. Regardless of being a refugee or a labor migrant, all are politically referred to as *alien* – foreign, non-native, external.

But to refer to labor migrants as aliens, Sellars (2014) continued, is a “dehumanization of nomads, travelers, searchers who are equipped with the courage and tenacity to leave everything that is comfortable behind to venture against all odds into the unknown looking for change and willing to sacrifice everything for it – the dehumanization of the very flower of humanity demeans the species” (ibid). Many migrants trade their profession to gamble somewhere where the compensation humanizes the work that they do. A teacher in the Philippines would be willing to give up their career for a cleaning job in another country. Professionally speaking, this career change is odd – dehumanizing, to put it simply. They were doctors, nurses, certified public accountants, university lecturers, regularized government employees. But since pay is higher overseas, Filipino professionals close their eyes and strip everything they

equipped themselves with to become labor migrants. Though we should not discredit those who were able to practice their profession abroad, despite how small their numbers are.

Easily, leaving one's country can be associated with escapism. But it could also be seen as a redeeming quality, a strand to put hope to. When 'home' fails to give nutrition, there are always places where there is abundance. This abundance comes in the form of opportunities to become better and to provide for their families back home, even if it means doing menial jobs which is nowhere close to their profession.

Thus, to look at migrants as *aliens* is demeaning. Aliens are people, too. However, this view is not surprising. Institutions use the word 'alien' deliberately to put clear demarcations. "Because border control is at the core of notions of sovereignty, policymakers have often seen migration as something that could be turned on and off like a tap in response to assumed national interests" (Arango according to Castles 2002, 1145). While it is practical for sovereigns to protect what is theirs, it is also undeniable that turning people into aliens is a double-edged sword – we become estranged from our own beings. The *Aliens Act* of the Ministry of the Interior in Finland, for example, bluntly defines alien as "any person who is not a citizen of Finland" (Ministry of the Interior n.d.). This definition, among any others, violently separates who *is* from who is *not*.

Migrants, especially the working ones, contribute to the active transformation of social space. They are not merely 'acceptable' members of the host society but are crucial in the activation of the untouched dimensions of a room. They may become mum after their papers to stay are approved, but they undeniably exist. In a way, my study demands acknowledgement and inclusion for them. Going back to Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2008), "migration should not be seen only as the evacuation of a place and the occupation of a different one. It is the remaking of one's own life on the scenery of the world" (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2008), 225).

To put one's self in a precarious situation by leaving home, one may not help but ask: why leave in the first place? Immediately, the issue of poverty surfaces. Poverty, if viewed as an economic status, justifies the act of moving. On the other hand, poverty as a political concept becomes problematic. Who tags somebody as poor? Using what variables? This is an important point to consider because not all who chose to leave are economically destitute. The destitution is only amplified when the reason of leaving extends not only from the individual but to the whole network of family, even clan. Filipino labor migrants leave not only for themselves but for their children, nephews, cousins, grandparents – the extended family.

As a social effect, those who migrate earn a special place in their home countries. In a way, the migrant's capacity to provide for their family is sensationalized – a dehumanizing effect where labor migrants are perceived

as opportunities rather than sacrificing bodies. This is reflected in my poem below.

*How precious
A flesh becomes
After hovering
Over seas
And paving waves.*

*I wonder if those
Embraces would be as
Tight to a body
Who grew inside a
Bud, up on the
Mountains whose crickets only understand.¹³*

¹³ Jay Mar Albaos. *Thoughts on Existing*. 14.5.2017

BAYANIHAN

Philippine social work theorist Yolanda Ealdama (2012) writes that “(b)*ayanihan* is a Filipino tradition where people just went out of their way to help those in need. It’s root word is “bayan” which means nation. It [...] evokes a sense of solidarity and service. *Bayanihan* is related to “damayan” or the capacity to be compassionate to another. *Bayanihan* is done without expecting reward though generally people who have been helped feel obliged to return the favor some other time [...] The favor does not have to be returned directly to the person who gave the favor; one can give it back to other people in need.”

This way of thought could be attributed to the disaster-prone geography of the Philippines. With an average of twenty typhoons a year (Asian Disaster Reduction Center n.d.), locals are used to look out for each other when natural calamities constantly pose risks to communities.

Bayanihan, as a concept, encompasses specific forms. It does not limit itself only on helping during risky situations but on any occasion, which require additional hands. One of the most iconic image of *Bayanihan* is “house carrying”.

Aster Aquino, one of the Filipino volunteers for the project, narrated to me a story his grandfather told him. According to the story, moving houses in the older Philippine times happened when an offspring from a family got married. Parents usually give portions of their farm lands to the newly-weds. The house of the newly-weds would be built before the wedding day; it is usually constructed near the house of either the bride’s or groom’s parents. Neighbors would lend hands during the building. After the wedding, the couple, together with their new house, will be moved to their farm land. Same as during the building, neighbors would lend help with the moving – by carrying the house on their shoulders.

The Bayanihan of the Filipinos in Helsinki

The planning of the *Bayanihan* project at the Theatre Academy was finalized during a meeting with the Core Group. The Core Group comprised of members from the CFC-FFL who heeded my request to be part of the project. ‘Sharing’ and ‘building’ became the starting notions for the Core Group. We then decided that for the *Bayanihan* project, we would build a *kubo* (a traditional Filipino house) inside the Theatre Academy for five days. Food would be prepared inside the academy all throughout the evenings, mainly for the volunteers. On the final evening, the hut would be carried outside of the Theatre Academy to the highway aisle in front of the university. There would also be a shared banquet for all the guests and volunteers present. Everyone would be

requested to use bare hands while eating, which in the Philippines, eating using bare hands is called *kamayan* or *kinamot*¹⁴.

In our marketing campaigns we wrote:

The performance is a collective piece that explores what is lost and what is retained during border crossing. In the duration of five days, Filipino volunteers will build a *kubo*, a traditional Filipino hut, inside the Theatre Academy. The working group imagines the possibility where the term '*bayanihan*' can also be derived from the word '*bayani*' (hero), an allegory for millions of overseas Filipino workers scattered around the world. At the end of the five days of work, a '*kinamot*' (banquet) will be served.

Why Bayanihan?

My advocacy was to make the Filipino community visible by bringing them inside the Theatre Academy¹⁵. As an observation gained from living in Finland after earning a student slot at the Theatre Academy, there is a certain blindness towards the 'migrant'. The Finnish society claims to be accepting and accommodating but there has been an observed shortage in implementation of laws that actually favor them.

On the other hand, when you look at service industries, such as in the cleaning and food sectors, the population becomes heterogeneous. While these two spaces are not easily comparable (there are different requirements for these two fields), the possibility for an immigrant to find his place other than in the service sector is limited.

In the case of the Filipino labor migrants in Finland, working as au pairs, nannies, and cleaners were the opportunities they easily found. Most of Filipinos I knew consider learning Finnish as a crucial factor to help them qualify

¹⁴ Eating using hands has many names in the Philippines, depending on which region you refer. In the examples, *kamayan* is a Tagalog word usually used in the metro and north Philippines while *kinamot* is Cebuano, a dialect spoken in the large parts of Visayas and Mindanao.

¹⁵ At the Theatre Academy, the majority of the students and faculty are white and mostly Finnish; there are only seven out of the 13 master's programs taught in English (UniArts website n.d.). Though there are attempts of the institution to become international and there were or there are currently Finnish-speaking non-white students at the University, the number of students who are either Finnish or European are still prevalent. In the six MA Live Art and Performance Studies 2015 fellows, I am the only one who came from the "far east". This also applies to the other programs: one or two out of the whole class comes from outside Europe. While there is a development in the cultural diversity of the student body, the faculty is a different case. As per observation, the administrative and teaching body is limited to Finnish and American educators. I would recollect how odd I felt during the Global Performance – Asian Perspective Course that was taught by Anna Thuring and Ray Langenbach. I am not discrediting them as pedagogues, in fact I learned a lot from their lenses as artists/academicians who have worked in Asia. However, during the class, I felt that home was far away – that even the attempt to theorize my 'Asianness' cannot come from my fellow race but from others.

for better opportunities. Eventually, they hope that knowing basic Finnish, or hopefully being fluent, can grant them a chance to stay permanently.

Unfortunately for migrants, “acceptance” in a foreign land is ephemeral. Only for as long as they continue to show documents that they have valid reasons to stay, can they enjoy the privilege of being accepted to stay and live with the locals. Once their status changes, how they are seen by authorities also changes. Thus, learning the language doesn’t assure anything.

Bayanihan as a project was an avenue to open up outside of the normal crowd – outside work and informal gatherings with friends. *Bayanihan* was meant to open up the academic space (in this case, the Theatre Academy) for them and to give them a chance to create something they can own and take credit for. It “formed a bridge between these groups with one foot in academia and the other in another form of migrant labour” (Ray Langenbach, email feedback to author, March 3, 2018). The project addressed “these disparities between Filipino migrant culture and university culture” (ibid).

Labor Migrants as Precarious Entities

The *Bayanihan* was a performance for precarious entities – bodies whose existence were merely recognizable, almost insignificant. Philosopher and performance theorist Judith Butler (2015) calls them ‘disposables’ (Butler 2015, 25). They are members of the society who are easily eradicated at any time and in any situation. The position of labor migrants implies “negative connotations referring to the loss of the security” which Casas-Cortés (2016) refers to as “precarious labor” (ibid., 206). However, for most of the Filipino labor migrants, security is not fully absent – it only fluctuates. For example, a labor migrant can get a one-year renewable visa in Finland. When they renew the next year, they might be approved with a four-year visa. This decision depends on many reasons, one of which is for the migrant laborer to have a “salary high enough to support [...] the entire time” (Finnish Immigration Service 2018) of the resident permit’s validity. One can legally stay and work in a country but there is no assurance that the approval will be renewed afterwards.

“Precarity” comes from the “Latin word *prex* or *precis*, meaning ‘to pray, to plead’” (Casas-Cortés 2014, 207). Precarity suggests a phenomenological status – one that implies peril and uncertainty. Butler (2015) notes that “[...] precarity is not simply an existential truth – each of us could find ourselves subject to deprivation, injury, illness, debilitation, or death by virtue of events or processes outside of our control” (ibid., 20-21).

To describe the lives of the labor migrants as precarious is fitting, for theirs is a life of temporary acceptance and constant struggle for approval. In particular, I am referring to the “legal migrants”, those who have proper working papers to

stay in a foreign country. This approval from the Finnish government comes in the form of residence permits. Even so, they still have to renew their visas after a certain number of years. This means another hustle for them: setting appointments, gathering documents, proving their identity in person, waiting for decisions, et cetera. They are constantly in peril because their “legal existence” is limited and is dependent to the policies of the country they are living in.

For example, visa processing in Finland has been recently tightened. Reynolds (2017) wrote that in recent years, the number of people “seeking asylum in the European Union has skyrocketed to around 1.3 million in both 2015 and 2016 according to Eurostat figures”. Though the intention to tighten was projected towards refugees and asylum seekers, the technicality of the word ‘migrant’ affected other groups like the Filipinos. During the course of my artistic immersion, I conversed with some Filipinos who were alarmed at the changes in visa applications and applying for family reunification. According to Finland’s national public-broadcasting company, Yle, around a third of family reunification applications were rejected (Yle News 2017). In addition, an income of 2,600 euros per month should be earned for reunification applications with children. In my experience working part-time as a cleaner, earning over a thousand a month is difficult with the high taxation system. Pekka Myrskylä, Statistics Finland researcher, said that only twenty percent of Finns make that amount of money. (Migrant Tales 2016)

There is no denying that Butler’s (2015) views about precarious bodies’ assembly in public spaces are political. In relation to public spaces, she constantly and specifically used the term street – as in the typical venue of mass demonstrations and rallies. In such public demonstrations of bodies, the statement implies that “[...] they are still here and still there; they persist” (Butler 2015, 25). Going back to the concept of precarious entities, the *Bayanihan* in Helsinki was an avenue of expressing the Filipino labor migrant’s precarity. To bring it on a bigger scale, it was a representation of how precarious non-European/American labor migrants’ lives are. At the same time, it was a statement of claiming space, of marking one’s place with their bodily presence. I will demonstrate how *Bayanihan* attained these expansions in the next parts of this thesis.

Existing as Precarious Entities

This research incorporates the concept of persistence in our existence. To exist is to live, to be recognized as a potent being regardless of the stereotypes the society appropriates them. Persistence reeks struggle while existing implies the habitual sense to be. Persistence, then, is a manner of existing; a way of making the world know that one is here. In order to be, one has to persist. Existing “amidst indeterminacy, precarity [...] involves hardship

and pain. But it also calls upon and calls forth deep resourcefulness and imagination” (Allison 2016). As the *Bayanihan* materialized inside the Theatre Academy, undertones of the plight of the labor migrants emerged along with the project.

For five days and nights, volunteers built the *kubo* and shared meals inside the institution. On the final evening, we carried the *kubo* from the Theatre Academy to a small park in Merihaka. The inside-outside set-up of the project enhanced Butler’s “justice [...] being enacted”. The ‘enactment’ occurs when bodies claim that “we are not disposable [...] we are still here, persisting, demanding greater justice, a release from precarity, a possibility of a livable life” (Butler 2015, 25). When one becomes tagged as the ‘other’ or ‘marginalized’, they immediately fall into the classification of disposables, as if they can be sacrificed. Labor migrants, because of their insecure status, become tagged as disposables. They can be sent back home any time – their visa could be refuted, denied, not renewed or extended. Their capacity to stay in a foreign country to work does not necessarily rely on their skills or their humanity as a whole, it’s the migration papers decided upon by institutions (school, work, et cetera.).

With the event happening inside the fortifications of the university, it did not mean that it was less of a statement in relation to Butler’s notion of persistence. Rather, *Bayanihan* was a proof that struggles for recognition should not only happen in public spaces. Precarious entities can and should bring the advocacy inside the very walls of institutions. Doing so, the distance between the privileged (institution) and the marginalized (migrants) diminishes. It brings the rather polarized ends to closer proximity.

The final evening, when we carried the *kubo* outside, marked the point where the structure became public. As volunteers tried to fit the structure through the doors of the school out to the streets, passersby and motorists became intrigued with what was happening. I saw the outsiders’ curious glances and pauses as my eyes panned from one side to another – before we lifted the hut on our shoulders for another set of carrying. Alongside moving the structure were volunteers who were carrying lamps – guiding the structure as we paved roads and crossed pedestrians to reach Merihaka. In the process, bodies congregated. We moved and spoke together, as we laid claim to “certain spaces as public space” (Butler 2015, 71). We reconstituted the very idea of public space and added layers to its already heavily-disputed meaning.

Bayanihan: A Mass Demonstration?

The *Bayanihan* became a chance for the Filipino labor migrants to exercise their “plural and performative right to appear” – an act and declaration of their complex citizenships. Even precarious bodies have the right to show up and express publicly. Acknowledging the right to claim for a “more liveable set of

economic, social and political conditions” (Butler 2015, 11) is vital to the process of becoming. This right proves itself as an agency, an empowerment for a group of bodies that are in a precarious situation.

Butler’s (2015) strong political assertions about appearing is present in *Bayanihan*. I saw the project in a non-violent light – a project that did not destructively demand attention and recognition but one that had sought to earn the right it was fighting for. As the organizer and fellow worker for the project, I made it clear at the very beginning that the aspiration and intention was to bring the Filipinos inside the institution without the intention of protesting. Though it was clear that they were in a perilous situation, vehemently demanding something from an already oppressive source could create another form of violence. One cannot demand respect; it has to be earned. In the end, we made the audience and the institution realize though our presence that we can and have been existing all this time.

It was a “mimetic claim to citizenship” (ibid). *Bayanihan* was an expression of the precarious situations of the bodies involved, especially those of the labor migrants’. Their citizenship is torn between where they came from and where they are at the moment. The only move their migrant bodies can do is to claim a piece of that foreign citizenship and blend it with the nationality they already carry. In the eyes of the volunteers, gathering and working together for five nights at the Theatre Academy indicated unity. In the lens of performance, it was a gathering to say (or even claim) something.

Moving Around “Community”

In my humanistic point of view, a community is a collective of people who find certain interests (political, cultural, religious, and so on) similar among each other. A community can also be tied to a language or dialect spoken. Kwon (2002) concisely defines community as “specific and self-determined” (Kwon 2002, 109). This means that communities, as a group of bodies, are aware of their reasons for participating. Most importantly, a community takes place when members agree to come together – they, as one consenting body, have determined that they will become a collective.

In doing my artistic immersion with the Filipinos in Helsinki, the main goal of gathering together became obvious – to find a sense of belonging from fellow Filipino migrants in the foreign host country. However, I observed that there is no single and unifying community established – subgroups among the migrants existed instead.

Kwon (2002) also introduced categories of groups “based on the kind of interactions between the artist(s) and the respective community partner(s)” (ibid., 117). The first category is *community of mythic unity*. Concisely, this kind of community has an “overgeneralized and abstract projection of commonality,

a *mythic* unity that gathers into its folds a range of particular persons and their experiences” (ibid., 120). “*Sited*” communities are the second category – a group which clearly have “defined identities in the sense of having locational bases, modes of operation, or a shared sense of purpose” (ibid). The third category is *invented communities (temporary)*. It is a “community group or organizations [which] is newly constituted and rendered operational through the coordination of the art work itself” (ibid., 126). The fourth category, *invented communities (ongoing)*, “is an offshoot of the third, the difference being in the community’s sustainability beyond the exhibition context and its institutional support” (ibid., 130). These categories, however, do not stand on their own. They could be a combination of categories. It could also be a progression from one category to another.

As a collaborator with the Filipino community, I can relate with Kwon’s (2002) categories in two levels: first with artistic immersion and the other with the *Bayanihan* 2017 project. In both cases, I was an insider and an outsider – a fellow Filipino but not an intentional labor migrant like most of them are.

In terms of artistic immersion, I found that the Filipino labor migrants in Finland is a community of *mythic* unity. They have gathered and created subgroups based on commonalities such as dialect, profession, and interests in the hopes of finding and creating a sense of belongingness in a foreign country. I also realized that the labor migrants were already ‘sited’ even before I came. They (in subgroups) already had their patterns and daily lived experiences. At the same time, they were already temporary invented communities. The fact that the individual existence is insecure (any time they can be sent back home) speaks much about their status as groups.

In terms of the *Bayanihan* project, it was a mythic unity of an already “sited” pockets of communities which was focused on a goal or aspiration. Through the project, we re-invented ourselves into another form of community, one that was supposed to exist in five nights. But what I realized was that the subgroups already created a system among themselves so that each of them can thrive. They can sustain themselves with or without any project – they have systemic gatherings among subgroups and as Filipinos (yearly events i.e. Philippine Independence Day celebrations, to name one).

Though Kwon (2002) made an extensive effort to arrive at the categories, she claimed that the concept of community still “remains a highly ambiguous and problematic concept in public art today” (Kwon 2002, 117). Community fluctuates not only inside itself but in relation to the environment that it thrives. Its behavior in relation to a project also rely on the conceptual framework and who the community is doing the project with.

Bayanihan as an Example of the ‘Performative’

In his essay, *Performative Utterances*, J.L. Austin (1979) introduced the notion of “*performative utterances*” (Austin and others, 1979, 235). It states that, “if a person makes an utterance of this sort we should say that he is *doing* something rather than merely *saying* something” (ibid).

To demonstrate how performative utterance works, let’s go back to the *Bayanihan* project. When I officially introduced the project to the community in a gathering and asked for help for a project, the response was: “Don’t worry, we will help you.” The statement was a confirmation made in public. By uttering “we will help you”, part of the action was made – a pact to proceed was confirmed. The “[...] performance of the action (was) undoubtedly done” (ibid).

This is what an utterance does – it alters perspectives and spaces. It puts new possibilities for future reference. Take another classic example. During a wedding, when the priest says the words: “I now pronounce you husband and wife”, the social status of two separate individuals shift in the eyes of the witnesses that day. Two individuals, arrive at a union.

Such conceptual union, bond, coming together – with just an utterance – showed that even words perform. But looking closely at how an utterance performs, there are prerequisites. One, there was an ‘authority’ present. In the case of *Bayanihan*, the elders and the household leaders embody authoritative stature. When the elders and leaders also spoke the words “We will help you”, it became a statement for a future task. Second, there should be witnesses. Since utterances are made out of words, there is a need for other bodies to hear the utterance so that it takes effect. Also, in a way, the person uttering the word becomes responsible towards their words when other bodies witnessed or heard the utterance. Additionally, for the utterance to perform/take effect, a convention is necessary – a space or opportunity for bodies to convene. Typically, ceremonial rites (like baptism or wedding) is ideal, but a performative utterance can happen over the dining table, inside the bus, or in the market. It is vital to also recognize that not all performative utterances result to positive or progressive effects. It can also halt possibilities by refusing – saying “no”.

Looking closer to ‘performative’, I start to wonder, does it only happen through utterances? Could it also happen through physical responses to situations like gestures, et cetera? The utterance, then, just becomes a catalytic moment which precipitates a succession of effects. In the *Bayanihan*, when the ‘yes’ was given, bodies reacted as the concept seeped into every consciousness. Eventually, when we posted the information in the internet we wrote: “We are going to build a hut and share food for five nights at the Theatre Academy”. This textual proclamation generated by a Core Group invaded the virtual public and the physical public (through posters). The proclamation ignited discussion, generated willing volunteers, and altered the fluid concept of tomorrow’s possibility.

Performance and Cultural Studies academician Della Pollock (2008) wrote that “performance is a promissory act. Not because it can only promise possible change but because it catches its participants – often by surprise – in a contract with possibility: with imagining what might be, could be, should be” (Pollock according to Heddon 2008, 5). Here, it is clear that the performative’s and performance’s main contribution is their offering of a possibility – a way to deal with the unknown. The assurance that even if the world is full of mights, coulds, and shoulds, it will keep the world moving through the promised action of the performative.

‘BECOMING’

Reconstituting Material Existence

In the case of Filipino labor migrants, migration is an act of seeking "to become". Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2008) stated that the concept of becoming "[...] seeks to articulate a political practice in which social actors escape their normalized representations and reconstitute themselves in the course of participating in, and changing, the conditions of their material existence." (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2008, 223). Because home did not satisfy the right environment to become, they took the risks abroad to search for opportunities that will alter their current "material existence". For most of them, economic factors are the principal reasons for leaving. In this formulation, the general understanding of migration is reaffirmed: it is an "undirectional, purposeful, and intentional process" (ibid).

Migration is intentional in order to realize an unspoken purpose to become. The notion of 'abroad' becomes fantasized as the "green pasture", a perfect place for the unsatisfied body to reconstitute itself. However, the vectors – the space where this purpose can happen, are not defined. In other words, the migrant does not necessarily consider the geographical destination important. While familiarity and proximity could affect their choices, I imagine the process as reactive – only realizing the weight of the act until the body settled and tried to adapt in the new environment.

In the *Bayanihan* project, the Filipino participants and volunteers displayed complex self-reconstituting. I will break down segments of the project in the following discussions, to show how the "material existence" (ibid) of the labor migrants were constantly changing. This is an attempt to respond to my research question: "How did the Filipino labor migrants perform "becoming" during the *Bayanihan* in Helsinki?"

Reconstituting through a Pool of Others

a. The Core Group

Through artistic immersion, backed with my fieldwork experiences in the Philippines, I realized that one cannot suggest a conventional community structure (a linear hierarchy with a leader and members) without first earning the trust of the leaders and elders. In the case of the Filipinos in Finland, especially with the CFC-FFL, the leaders and elders are important and decisive figures. In my project, I made sure that above anyone else, the leaders and

elders have the assurance that my intentions in conducting research would not be disruptive. I assured them that on the contrary, my approach intends to recognize and listen before offering anything on the table.

To make this happen, I approached Florencio Fajardo (fondly called *Tito*¹⁶ Ting) and his wife, Nora Fajardo (*Tita* Nora), who are the country heads of the CFC-FFL in Finland, about my research work. When I told them about the opportunity of doing a project at the Theatre Academy with fellow Filipinos, they were thrilled. Without hesitation, they told me that they are willing to help.



Image: Core Group Meeting¹⁷. August 16, 2017. Fajardo's residence.
Video and Screenshot: Jay Mar Albaos

Aside from them, I also approached several others who would be willing to take on leadership roles for the project. For this, I coordinated with Esteban Aquino, Christy Ann Balita, Gwindolyn Dagondon, Florean Mae Reston, Maricel Billones, Herbet Billones, and Annamay Dormis, and Philip Mauricio. Eventually, they became part of the project's Core Group. Again, without any hesitation and with all excitement, they agreed. As soon as we were able to agree on our schedules, we scheduled our first meeting where we brainstormed and decided crucial aspects of the project. Together, we came up with the *Bayanihan* concept/title. We also decided to delegate tasks within the group. Committees were formed: Design of the *Kubo*, Building, Food, Volunteers, Documentation, Public Relations, Treasury, et cetera.

¹⁶ *Tito* and *Tita* are Filipino endearments for older persons outside the immediate family. The words are translated in English to Uncle and Aunt, respectively.

¹⁷ In photo (from right to left): Florencio Fajardo, Jay Mar Albaos, Esteban Aquino, Christy Ann Balita, Gwindolyn Dagondon, Florean Reston, Maricel Billones, Annamay Dormis

Interestingly, all of us who were in the meeting started to associate our strengths and skillsets with the tasking. Before we met, we were the stereotype “labor migrant”. But when the opportunity opened up to ‘become’, everyone grabbed it. Professional architects, chefs, organizers, nurses, came out. While we were discussing this, I realized that the bodies I was occupying the room with had ‘other’ lives before they left the country. They were experts in their respective fields but due to economic reasons, they had to leave for abroad to become ‘another’.

b. Opening the Call to the Community and to the Public

After the meeting with the Core Group, *Tito Ting* and *Tita Nora* gave me the opportunity to discuss my project with the community in one of our monthly assemblies. I made sure that financial aspects of the project were transparent: they knew that the project had a limited budget (1500,00 euros to be exact). The positive response the project received was overwhelming. Everyone was excited to be part of it and to have the chance to share their skills and ideas.



Image¹⁸. Screenshot of video recording during the formal request for collaboration with the Filipino community for MA Thesis Work. Video was taken at St. Mary's Church with fellows of CFC-FFL.
Video: Christy Ann Balita
Screenshot: Jay Mar Albaos

Aside from the CFC-FFL community, I also created an open call on Facebook to reach out to the bigger Filipinos communities in Helsinki for volunteer roles. In the formulation of the call, I consulted with the Core Group and we made sure that the call was welcoming to everyone who would be willing to lend hands.

¹⁸ In photo (from right to left): Nora Fajardo, Angela Cortez, Shayne Mandap, Edita Santos, Rosa Calixto, Jessica Macatiag, Florean reston, Lilibeth Jubay, Otto Holm, Niely Cortez, Gwindolyn Dagondon

One of the techniques we devised to gauge our target volunteers was to set up a *Bayanihan* public event through Facebook. In the social media platform, updates of the project were posted regularly. Initially, there were concerns about the schedule since most of the Filipinos work during the day in the weekdays (*Bayanihan* was set to be done from Monday to Friday). But despite this, the number of volunteers who showed up during the five nights was surprising.



Image Set¹⁹: *Bayanihan* volunteers in action.
Photos: Christy Ann Balita

Since the event was intended to attract Filipino volunteers, we were thrilled to have not just Finnish volunteers but also people from Iraq, the US, Canada, Taiwan, Cyprus, among others. Colleagues studying at the Theatre Academy also stopped by to help. Eventually, the event was attended not just by Filipinos but by internationals as well. It became a melting pot of identities – those local to Finland and those who were temporarily accepted by the state through temporary residence permit statuses. This line of thought brings us back to the issue of who is actually in the peripheries in the discourse of *others*. The notion of “becoming” again goes back to relationality of one towards other existing

¹⁹ In photos (top left to right): Petros Konnaris, Shiella Santilles, Amanda Santilles, Angela Cortez, Ray Langenbach, (bottom photo, left to right): unknown volunteer, Mosaa Sabawe

bodies and how one's self-reconstituting is contingent to somebody else's process of becoming.

c. The Children Wandered Free

The project encouraged parents to bring their children to the project spaces. We made the work space as children-friendly as possible. During the Core Group meetings, there were specific persons who had the task of looking after the small ones so that their parents can participate.

Having the children run freely inside the Studio and outside Tori provided another layer of involvement for the project. As second and third generation migrants, they embody another complexity of 'becoming', since they will later face the reality that they are considered an 'other' even if they have better opportunities to integrate with the foreign host country.

As pool of mature foreign bodies walked to and from the work spaces, these little bodies claimed spaces and dimensions grow-ups can't. This research wants to make an emphasis of the presence of not just Filipino/international mature bodies but also the subtle conceptual contribution of the children to project. They expanded the meaning of *Bayanihan* which another specific study can cater.



Image: Filipino children, parents, and babysitters.
Photo: Christy Ann Balita

d. Reconstituting in Relation

It was undeniable that a community of bodies completed the project. These are bodies who voluntarily signed up for a project they thought were familiar to

them. In the course of the preparations and the five days of *Bayanihan*, self-reconstituting happened conjointly with “building” and “sharing”.

To exist requires the presence of other bodies to communicate with and to exchange ideas, purpose, and reasons with; to give and to take. “As individuals, we exist in *relation* – we are neither fully separate, nor fully embraced within a group” (Kuppers & Robertson 2007, 35). We continue to engage in performative conversations with others to realize our existence.

Going back to *Bayanihan*, different layers of body and social facets were tapped first before the event was able to take place. I want to emphasize that the community is already an opulent resource. Even before a researcher arrives, they have already organized themselves in a way that one knows the other body’s capacities and limitations. They have created a routine that empowers each other. In the very beginning, they do not need any outside force for them to arrive at ‘becomings’. They know among themselves how to realize their beings, may that be as a group or individually. One just needs to tap that existing resource to generate flows and hopefully actions and or projects.

“*EVERYONE IS AN ARTIST*” (Beuys according to Petra Kuppers 2007, 29) is a constant concept in community work. As much as there’s certainty in this claim, we should also keep in mind that the mere fact of having bodies with varying sense of self-reconstituting doesn’t necessarily require labels (like “artist”) to function. Sometimes, all we need is a body we can relate to and from that conceptual departure, we can do more and become more.

Becoming through the Kubo

What is the matter of performance?²⁰ What does the matter of performance contribute to the materiality of Filipino labor migrants?

In the context of the Research Days II at the Theatre Academy Helsinki, I presented the *kubo* as one of the material outputs of the *Bayanihan* project.

²⁰ The same question was posed during the Research Days II 2018 at the Theatre Academy Helsinki. Research Days are part of the project How to do things with performance? and was organized by Annette Arlander, Tero Nauha, Hanna Järvinen, and Pilvi Porkola

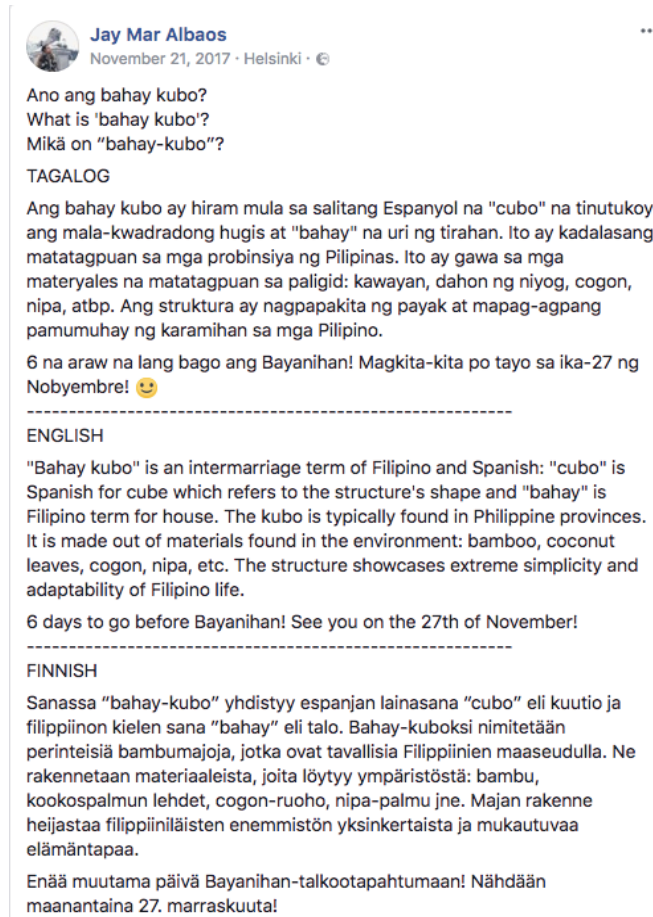


Image: Screenshot of the information we posted on Facebook few days before the *Bayanihan*
Screenshot: Jay Mar Albaos
Text: (Tagalog and English) Christy Ann Balita, (Finnish) Riitta Vartti

Undeniably, the *kubo* is a material – although it should be noted that even at the onset of the project and the immersion process there was lesser emphasis on any material output of the project. As I have mentioned in the previous chapters, artistic immersion does not have “end results”. Rather, it has focal points: the group creates something, discusses and gets over it, moves on with their lives, decides to create something again, and so on.

The *kubo* was a material from a focal event, *Bayanihan*. One could call it a residue, a proof that a group was in a cycle of doing. We can look at it as matter – in physical form. It was made out of solid materials found in the local environment. Originally, the structure would be made out of bamboos – especially the walls, floors, and ceiling. The roof, on the other hand, is made out of *cogon* or *nipa* leaves.



Image. Traditional Bahay-Kubo.
Design by Rhea Cenizal²¹

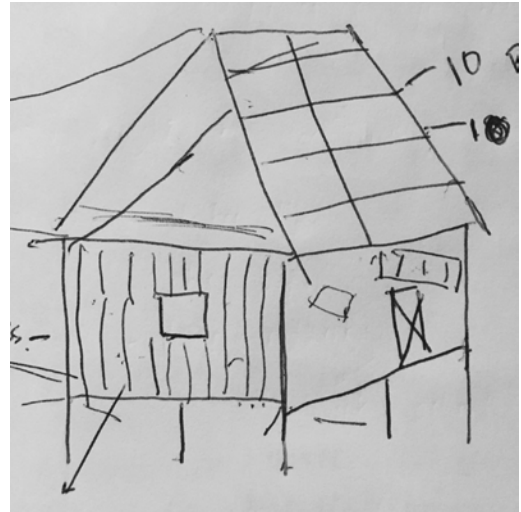


Image. *Kubo* draft design for *Bayanihan*
Photo: Jay Mar Albaos
Drawing/Design: Florencio Fajardo

Unfortunately, it was difficult for us to find the exact materials for the *kubo*. Construction-viable bamboo was not available in Finland, only shortly-cut and thin ones (for gardening) can be easily found. Buying the bamboos on Amazon was not possible; it was costly, considering that they also charge the shipping of the item.

For a compromise, there had been an exchange between the 'local' Helsinki with another foreign 'local', the Filipinos. Since there was no available 'original' materials, we reconstituted the structure with materials available in the Finnish environment. Heli Litmanen from Theatre Academy's Stage Department, suggested that we use cardboard pipes to replace the bamboos. For the *nipa* leaves (the materials for the roof), the Core Group decided to use hay or the grass which grows on the seaside.

²¹ Deviant Art. <https://rheasan.deviantart.com/art/bahay-kubo-377445146>. Accessed on February 22, 2018



Image. Harvesting from Finnish soil²². Screenshot from video material
Video and screenshot: Jay Mar Albaos

The creation of the *kubo* generated layers of room for analysis. The photo above shows one of our harvesting grass sessions – this time we were at a bay area in Tapiola. As we braced the frozen morning with our winter jackets and water boots (which failed to protect us from the cold waters), the image of us – foreigners, harvesting in Finnish land became obvious. The act of harvesting resonates with the fact that labor migrants live off the wealth of a host country. Particularly in Finland, where there is a concept of “everyman’s land”, there were no oppositions nor restrictions.

The reconstituting of the *kubo*’s materiality was an admittance that we were outside home. Our brokenness found healing in the foreign land, which offered its local materials in lieu of ‘homely’ provisions. At some point, the ideology of home falls short. I saw this as a breaking point, when a body realized that ‘home’ cannot deliver it’s expected nurturance. The body then adjusts – reconstitutes – to survive.

This is an interesting aspect of fixing or reconstituting: one has to adapt. As foreigners/immigrants, we are always affected by the external environment surrounding us. Because we cannot find the local materials we needed, we, foreign locals, had no choice but to reassess our standards and look inside, in our present environment. The moment that the Core Group gave up on the idea of ‘original’ Filipino hut, was liberating for our beings – a realization that not having material supplies from home cannot hinder us from building a *kubo* in Helsinki. As a researcher, I looked forward to these instances because going through such hurdles together count as significant moments of self-reconstituting.

²² In photo: Florean Reston

Becoming through the Institution

Institution, in the context of my research, is the Theatre Academy Helsinki. After communally arriving at ideas for *Bayanihan*, the next phase was to bring the concepts to the institution. Negotiating with the institution was vital to the whole process of the project. It was a push and pull of interests, at some point of power. “Is this okay?”, “Will this work?” were some of the questions we had to confront. The negotiation expanded the capacity of the project to realize itself in favourable terms to both the Core Group and the institution.

The *Bayanihan* project was positively received by the Theatre Academy’s production team – they got excited, to say the least. But, as expected, they had inhibitions and concerns. Despite this, their recommendations were encouraging – we realized that we were not alone in achieving our goal. Heli Litmanen, for example, told me that gathering bamboos would be an exciting challenge.

Reconstituting through Negotiation



Image²³. Meeting with Core Group and Aapo Juusti, our producer for the project
Photo: Christy Ann Balita

²³ In photo (from left to right): Florencio Fajardo, Herbert Billones, Esteban Aquino, Annamay Dormis, Philip Mauricio

During the Core Group meeting, we decided on a goal – to make the *kubo* as organic as possible. By organic, we meant as “real life” as possible. The group wanted to make an accurate replica of the structure. We asked Heli Litmanen to help us find bamboos as much as possible. She looked up in stores, but they were not suitable for construction; the ones sold in Amazon were too short and very expensive. Left with no option, the Core Group eventually agreed to use the cardboard pipes²⁴, which she suggested, as we realized that authentic materials were impossible to achieve.

There was, however, one striking incident I encountered while working with the physical representations of the institution. While laying out the plan of the group to the Production Team, some personnel told me that Theatre Academy produces props, not “real-life” projects. I was taken aback as soon as I heard this comment. I didn’t realize before that the institution does not have previous experience working with structures that can possibly be used outside the notion of a theatrical spectacle. This was, however, not reasonable enough to discourage our project, considering that we were flexible with the materials to be used. We did not want to push for what we know will create inconveniences to others.

This made me realize that as the institution relies on its machineries, it tries to ward off any attempts to change the organizational screws – how things usually work. By doing so, it negates the very idea of change, the possibility of its system to reconstitute alongside constantly reconstituting bodies.

Such rigorous effort to maintain status quo and keeping the system static resounds with French author George Perec’s (1997) notion of infra-ordinary. It is the “part of our lives that is so familiar that it has become almost invisible to us” (Perec according to Ehn and Löfgren 2010, 4). When a system is set to follow the same ways again and again, familiarity can turn negatively. It can result to disregard for details and refusal of innovation.

Our presence as Filipinos, especially the economic migrants, could be perceived as a challenge to the institution. Unconsciously and accidentally, this opened up a space for them to reconsider the status quo and learn to converse with the pools of the *other*. By doing so, both parties avoid overlooking each other’s plight and positively arrive at sensitive decisions.

However, it was not my intention to antagonize the notion of institution. I acknowledge that naturally, these systems may lose track of its environment as it continues to work as it does. In the end, the institution - Theatre Academy, became fluid to accommodate our conditions for production for the *Bayanihan* project in spite the comment that I received.

²⁴ The pipes were donated by a cores and boards factory in Loviisa, Corenso Oy

Negotiating Among Ourselves

Arriving at a consensus among ourselves was crucial to the whole process. Our first meeting as Core Group became one of the decisive points of the project. During the meeting, ‘building’ and ‘sharing’ were the initial concepts we had. For ‘building’, everyone immediately arrived at a consensus of building a *kubo* – including the transferring of the finished structure to another site. ‘Sharing’, on the other hand, was decided to come through food. Since the construction was going to happen for five days, preparing meals for the volunteers and visitors were considered.

For the title of the project, I suggested the Tagalog term *paglipat* (moving or to move²⁵). The group was hesitant towards the term and suggested *Bayanihan*. According to them, *Bayanihan* wraps the concepts of building and sharing together, though the term may sound cliché to fellow Filipinos.

The excitement the group members had for the project was contagious. It generated various ideas, and everyone freely expressed that energy during the meeting. Somehow, by giving them the power and space to speak up, it was affirmed that the peripheral sectors only need encouragement to reconstitute their beings. The chance to bare their ideas and negotiate allowed them to activate the skills and knowledge which they already possess.

Becoming through Food

As mentioned in the previous section, food became the medium where the notion of ‘sharing’ was brought up during the Core Group Meeting. Plans about what should be included in the daily menu were prepared. Headed by *Tita Nora*, the task group oversaw five days’ worth of dinner. It included identifying what ingredients are needed for every dish, who will be in charge of grocery shopping, and who will take charge of cooking. Concerns about budgeting the money and resources were also raised. In the end, the group decided to budget the food to a maximum of thirty heads per night and one hundred persons for the final evening.

²⁵ Translation from Tagalog to English by Jay Mar Albaos



Image Set²⁶. Food volunteers in action.
Photos: Christy Ann Balita

For the food presentations, we set up a kitchen in a corner inside the Studio 1. The Props Department provided us with electric stoves, cooking and dining utensils, and cleaning materials. As other volunteers made bundles of hays on one side of the room and others cutting wood in another part, food volunteers were busy preparing dinner on one part of the room.

²⁶ In photo set (from left to right): Shayne Mandap, Belle Corpuz, Elena Corsiga, Nora Fajardo, Eleda Aquino, Maricel Billones

We usually had our dinners at 9:30 in the evening – waiting mostly for the workers to finish the chunk of night's work. Everybody would then gather inside Studio 1, usually in the middle where tables and chairs were set up.



Image Set²⁷: Enjoying dinner after a night's work
Photos: Jay Mar Albaos

²⁷ In photo set (top photo, from left to right): Edita Santos, Ernesto Santos, Fr. Jigger Ganados, Esteban Aquino, Christy Ann Balita, Nora Fajardo, Maricel Billones, (bottom photo, addition: Florean Reston and Herbert Billones)

Kamayan

For *Bayanihan's* final evening, we set up a feast for the volunteers and visitors present. We called the shared dinner, *kamayan*. It a way of preparing and eating food where everything is laid on a long table covered with banana leaves. Everyone was then encouraged to eat using bare hands. *Kamayan* or using hands “evokes bond, neighbourhood, equality, and acceptance among the people sharing the meal²⁸”.

Filipino volunteers also showcased some dance and song numbers (including myself), as the Food Committee prepared the table. When the food was ready, Fr. Jigger Ganados led a prayer to bless the food before saying, “Attack!”.



Image. Preparing the long table with food for *Kamayan*
Photo: Michelle Pagala/Shayne Mandap



Image: Sumptuous *Kamayan* banquet
Photo: Michelle Pagala/Shayne Mandap

²⁸ The text was also what we wrote on our Facebook page as part of our public relations strategy. Text by Christy Ann Balita

The banquet and the food were a remarkable sight. Everyone, both foreign and local, lost themselves as soon as they approached the table. This is attributed not only to the fact that we were hungry; it was also because we abided by the invitation to be with each other. The Filipino volunteers and participants happily guided the foreign guests on how to approach the table, what kind of food was served, and how to eat with their hands. It was an overwhelming display – a meeting point of need and sustenance. We became vulnerable beings – bare, facing each other while eating the food on the table.

The environment provided an opportunity for the Filipino labor migrants to showcase themselves and our culture – hospitable and accommodating, in a crowd that expected nothing of them other than the labor that they were expected to provide. The dining table was a way for them to interact with the locals in their comfort zone – which the latter accepted and acknowledged warmly.



Image. We ate together. Screenshot from a video of the *kamayan*.

Video: Christy Ann Balita

Screenshot: Jay Mar Albaos

Going back to Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2008), the performative moment of becoming through shared food and *kamayan* showed how social actors escape normalized representations. There were no foreign or local at that moment. All of us were into a state of fulfilling our physical need – to fill our hunger.

Becoming through Place-Making

Leslie Hill (2006) writes that we are living in a “century of placelessness. This is an era when we lose our sense of place altogether – or transcend it” (Hill 2006, 13). With the internet and the continuous movement of people from one border to another, the idea of place as a geographical belonging doesn’t make sense anymore. Everyone can already communicate to anyone with their

devices wherever they may be. Anyone can go places if they financially can. This blurs the notion of place. However, I would argue that not only in this century did we lose sense of what is place. Rather, we never had a clear definition of what a place or site – the terms are somehow used interchangeably. Though there are efforts to describe what a site is, it was occasionally confused with place.

The site resembles something that is labor-related. It is a space that one works at or for, hoping that one day an output will arise/emerge/happen. Performance theorist Miwon Kwon (2002) even proposes the “physical inseparability between a work and its site of installation” (Kwon 2002, 13). This suggests that an artwork defines a site as much as a site defines a work. There is a relational reconstitution between work and site. Both aspects affect the physical and conceptual materiality of each other.

However, if we bring back the notion of place, can we say that ‘site’ and ‘artwork’ contribute to the understanding of such an evasive conception? In my concept of artistic immersion, the notion of place started to become clearer. When one imbues a space not only with materiality (i.e. physical bodies and dense materials) but also with memories, emotions and other intangible attributes, it becomes a place.

I would consider the whole *Bayanihan* project an act of place-making – a complex happening where bodies do not just instill physical output (for example, the *kubo*) but also imbues memories. I am referring not only to physical spaces. This also includes every single body that became part of the project. As we made the hut and toiled inside Studio 1 and in Tori, we also filled these spaces (the whole academy, even), with our presence as non-white, migrant people. The crisp laughter and foreign dialects spoken while working reconstituted the whole institution’s being.

The *Bayanihan* contributed and at the same time claimed something from the Theatre Academy. Theatre Academy also did the same to the project. The process of “giving” and “taking” came from different trajectories which both parties reacted to, reciprocated, and replicated. To demonstrate: *Bayanihan* claimed a significant space from Theatre Academy’s main lobby so that the *kubo* can be built. We took materials from the institution’s workshops (i.e. saw, hammer, building paraphernalia, etc.) and from its other departments (i.e. stoves, kitchen utensils, etc.) which complemented to the other aspects of the project. Theatre Academy, on the other hand, held the truth that the project happened mainly inside its walls and that it supplied all of project’s needs (including the whole budget). As Filipinos and fellow internationals came to build a foreign structure, it was inevitable for the institution to inevitably etch *Bayanihan* in its conceptual history. For five nights, Theatre Academy proved again to itself that it can accommodate and converse with the foreign. As

Theatre Academy gave and took with the Filipino project, the institution went through its own process of becoming.

Becoming through Carrying the Kubo

On the fifth day of *Bayanihan*, we finished building the house and shared food through *kamayan*, plus some entertainment from the group. It did not end there, though. Part of the project was to carry the *kubo* outside to Merihaka.

There was one challenge: the hut did not fit the main door when we tried taking it out. Despite the calculations and measurements that our Project Engineer made, the *kubo* did not fit the main doors of the university. We had to plan how to get the structure through. After careful adjustments in terms of carrying the hut, particularly how high the volunteers had to lift it from the ground, eventually, we managed to find a way to make it fit. Everyone cheered as soon as the last part of the hut was finally fitted through the door. To guide those carrying the hut, there were people holding lamps on the way, while some wore reflector vests to warn the vehicles passing through.



Image. Moving the *kubo* outside the Theatre Academy to Merihaka. Screenshot from video material
Video: Christy Ann Balita
Screenshot: Jay Mar Albaos

As if on cue, snow started to fall on the final night. Imagine this scene: a tropical hut being carried and guided by people while snow was falling. Passersby and motorists stared as we crossed the pedestrian lanes. The lifters, on the other hand, had to signal each other to keep the hut tolerable while carrying. Since the lifters at the back practically cannot see where we were heading, lifters from

the front had to shout “left!”, “right!” “stop!” or “oops, oops!” to relay information. Being one of the lifters, I realized that it was necessary to be sensitive of my fellow lifters. The position of the hut revealed how the rest of the lifters were doing. If the hut was leaning too much on the left, it means that the people on the left were tired. Some even complained that their hands were starting to ache. There were several times when we had to put the hut to rest for a while. Meanwhile, the crowd cheered, recorded using their phones, gave directions, laughed, chatted.

After we passed the hallways of Theatre Academy outside, we unveiled the project, as if invisible cloaks were covering it at first. It finally became openly public – outside the walls of the institution. It became a sight to behold, like normal huts in the Philippines standing beside rice paddies and highways. But in Finnish context, it is still a display of difference, for the *kubo* will never resemble something that is Finnish. But still, it was constructed in a Finnish space, out of Finnish materials and a mixture of international hands.

The combination of the tropic and winter was also an interesting occurrence. The snow magnified the contextual difference of the structure. But then, the snow did not extinguish the context of the hut. Instead, the snow reconstituted the meaning of the structure. In a way, it depicted *possibility* – an opportunity to exist when the normative conventions thought it would not.



Image. Signals were important to navigate with the hut. Screenshot from a video material.
Video: Marlyn Raymundo Hiltunen

Screenshot: Jay Mar Albaos

The hut, on the other hand, reconstituted the snow in a way that cold is not just an adjective to gauge temperature, but a place for survival. The hut under the snow depicted *insistence* – a statement that it can survive the possibility of survival under circumstances which are deemed nonsensical.

The challenge of bringing the hut outside the building was an unforeseeable challenge. It can be likened to the psychological and emotional preparations that labor migrants may prepare for before they leave home. They may plan for culture shock, changes in the weather, difficulty in understanding and learning the language, as well as challenges that he/she may face in the work place. And by asking questions from fellow immigrants who left the country before them (particularly those who have experience working abroad), watching shows, or reading stories, they may be able to prepare for what kind of life awaits them. Despite all this, they will always face a fork in the road. But like the lifters who managed to find a way to fit the hut through the door, the labor migrant will learn to adapt and reconstitute to make their way through.

The Kubo Left Without Goodbye

After the phase of building something, the next process is to pause, appreciate the work, and hope to keep it as it is. But that was not the fate that the *kubo had*. Eventually, we had to take it down.

The personnel at the Theatre Academy gave us time to figure out what we would like to do with the structure after the project. There was a staff who became interested with the structure and wishes to use it as a prop for her wedding. Fr. Jigger Ganados, the Filipino parish priest from St. Mary's Church, offered the possibility of setting the *kubo* beside the church for Christmas *belen* (a tableau representing the Nativity scene). Another *Tita* offered her summer place outside Helsinki. However, because of the delivery costs and the weather, none of these were able to push through.



Image. Photo of the *kubo* in Merihaka. Taken the day after it was brought outside the Theatre Academy.
Photo: Heli Litmanen

In the end, the Core Group decided to acknowledge the last option: have the *kubo* dismantled and thrown to the huge garbage container. The permit we got from the City of Helsinki allowed us only two nights and three days for the hut to stay in Merihaka. Thankfully, due to changes in the availability of the university's staff and the celebration of Finland's Independence Day (December 6, 2017), it was postponed for a few more days. The hut had longer chance to be visited and looked at by the motorists driving through that area.

The day we were supposed to dismantle the hut, Heli Litmanen sent me a message that we didn't have to do it – the crane man did the job and the hut was immediately taken out from Merihaka.



Image. *Kubo's* remnants after the craning.
Photo: Jay Mar Albaos

When I arrived at the space where the structure stood for a couple of days, what was left were remnants: pieces of grass and the strings we used to tie them together. The *kubo* was long gone; no one from the university, not even Heli, saw the craning.

I was deeply saddened that I wasn't able to record the craning of the hut or say goodbye to it. The event led me to think of how momentary everything has been, from the planning to building the hut and eventually to the craning. Everything relied too much not only on the space(s) but also on the time allotted for things to happen. I want my sadness to resonate in this part of my thesis.

The Bayanihan was Momentary

Importantly, I want to open up the notion of the 'momentary' in relation to the *Bayanihan*. Momentariness easily relates to anything short-lived relative to time-boundedness: brief, quick, temporary, or as academicians call it, ephemeral. Momentary, as a concept, was encompassing to all the stages of *Bayanihan*: from planning, negotiating, preparing, making, transferring, discussing, and so on.

This means that the whole project was consciously built on the idea that everything will materialize and eventually will pass. We can go back to the notion of the performative. If we look at the performative as an utterance, once it is stated, it disappears. It cannot be recovered, even if the event was caught

on any recording device. The utterance will now heavily rely on the perception process – how the end-users will receive and proliferate the expression.

Bayanihan also resembles the momentary characteristic of the performative. Once the plans were laid, they disappeared as words and became written texts. Once the written plan was submitted to the institution, it became something else. Then the plans became solid materials – it became a hut, a dish; words became people. The project became a collection of “body-minds” – bodies working and minds thinking. Aside from helping in building the structure, the people who got their hands involved started to give their own versions of how to proceed with the project. Eventually, after *Bayanihan*, all of these plans transformed and became memories.

Ephemerality became the lifeline of becoming – brief but opulent. Becoming, in its momentariness, didn’t just follow a single line. It took place in different trajectories and in different places. Becoming then, can be seen as a multifaceted, almost simultaneous, manifold occurrence. Though the *Bayanihan* provided layers of spaces to reconstitute materiality, becoming as a process to ‘be’ is still a distant, hard-to-achieve concept. The labor migrants are still in the becoming phase, thus falling into what anthropologist Victor Turner (1977) calls the liminal personae. Threshold people “are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner 1977, 95). The core of their matter is to become; their very being is confined in the process of becoming.

One may look at the passing character of the project as a weakness because there was no residue. This is however not true in the case of *Bayanihan* – the momentariness actually enriched the project. The fact that the materiality of the project will eventually disappear made the volunteers and guests cling to the moment while the project was still going on. The *kubo*, for example, got craned in the end. The disposal of the hut speaks heavily about the very existence of the structure: it was meant to be destroyed eventually. The conception of the *kubo* was performative; passing, momentary. This is why we intentionally built using light materials (which normally *kubos* are because the Philippines is typhoon prone). The determination to make the hut again and again after every storm is note-worthy. Something passes, another will be made.

Though momentary, performativity has another interesting characteristic: it is repeated endlessly. This might appear ironic to my previous claim that the performative disappears after being stated. The utterance, once stated, immediately takes effect and conceptually loses its existence. On the other hand, it is repeated because the effect of the performative happens to specific people at a specific time i.e. weddings, agreements in meetings, and so on. Since humans have developed daily lived experience as ceremonial,

negotiated, and routinely, re-occurrence of performative is embedded in the daily lived experience as well. There might be alterations in the next event, utterance, structure, plan – but the concept is still there. If we connect the human aspect in this line of thinking, we can agree that “men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence” (Arendt 1958, 9). We humans are aware that we are momentary, passing. Thus, we embody the cores of performance: performativity and repetition. The labor migrants, in the context of this research, perform a becoming that is momentary and is adaptive to their local ecosystems.

The *Bayanihan* project is nuanced, broken. The project might be over, but the shards are still present. These reflections are only few of its broken parts. We captured the event on video and photo, even in texts – yet these wouldn't make the project whole again. I am not problematizing the project's brokenness and momentariness. As I wrote earlier, the Core Group and volunteers were aware and have already yielded to the fact that it was meant to end one day. But like the becoming of the labor migrants and the rest of the bodies present in the whole project, *Bayanihan* will only perish as a physical event but it will resonate as a memory – as long as the beings which were present will choose to forget.

THERE SHOULD BE PIECES SOMEWHERE HERE

I realized that the *Bayanihan* project carried within itself (and relatively outside of itself) complex nuances which reflected how complicated performance can be. There were notable moments, but it was never meant to be faultless. As the project expanded and compressed in its own way, it produced shards. The particles got dispersed in different vectors – some even got stuck in the corners. In this segment, I gather these shards and explore their traces, their cracks, their smell – the nuances that one fails to see when they were still one and whole.

The 'I' and the 'We'

To begin with, I avoid talking about myself, at least in relation to my work with the community. It is my belief that when I work with a group of people, I lose my sense of 'self'. As much as possible I let them speak as I sit there, listening. I only speak when somebody asks me a question or to share my thoughts, as well as when I feel uncomfortable in certain situations.

MANIFESTO

Jay Mar Albaos

*Listen. Listen.
You are in no position
To speak if you dont
Know how to listen.*

*Feel.
Acknowledge your senses.*

*Admit that you
Don't know –
It's better to be
Innocent like a
Child than be
Ignorant like a
Man.*

*For ignorance brings
Arrogance:
Nobody listens to arrogance.*

*It dies with the
Wind.*

*Hear.
Listen.
Feel.
Witness.
Be.
Then move,
Take action.
If you can,
Move mountains to
Be of help to
Those who are not privileged
Like you.*

*But never forget yourself.
Take care that
You don't shatter hard.
But learn how to break.
Break yourself.
Break with others.
Collect your pieces,
Don't be scared
You were never whole
Ever since.*

*You are a constellation of
Precious,
Broken pieces.²⁹*

In my artist's manifesto (2016), becoming a self-absorbed artist is the last thing I would like to become. In the first place, I don't even want to call myself an artist; I consider it pretentious. What is an artist, anyway? What is their difference with people who have dedicated their whole lives planting rice or cooking squash spring rolls?

Artist and critic John Howell (1979/80) commented that solo work, which is often importantly stressed of by most artists, "is as often an ego show [...] the virus of the 'I-Did-It-My-Way/I-Gotta-Be-Me' strain afflicts the larger number of such acts particularly in the performance art arena [...]" (Howell according to Heddon 2008, 4). The commentary to the artist attitude resounds so much with present artist circles. With these points, I prefer to call myself a worker – someone who toils. There is a universality with working – it is ingrained in the human, almost a reflex.

²⁹ May 23, 2016

My way of thinking roots back to my experience working with communities in the Philippines. I stayed and interacted with people who had an almost physical grasp of what the “daily lived experience” is. They are those who live far from the center and haven’t even heard ‘art’ or ‘theory’. They are the people who observe the movement of ants to predict an incoming earthquake. Immersing with communities through fieldwork, especially with indigenous communities, heightened my sensitivity towards others and myself.



Image. Taking a pose with Mamanwa³⁰ children and women after meeting with the Mamanwa Elders of Southern Leyte. Circa 2014.
Photo: Lando Calinawan

However, I am aware that this perspective also hinders me from moving outside my work. I have always been focused at going inwards - within communities. To understand performance and artistic research, I need distance to critically look at scopes with my own eyes. Is this my own version of escapism – of cowardice?

I am aware that someone may see my work with communities as a way to hide behind other bodies’ comfort and use them as shield. My initial response to such criticism leads me back to my ideology that it should be others first before

³⁰ “The Mamanwa form a distinct branch from the rest of the Philippine populations which include the various groups of the Negrito, and the Austronesian-speaking peoples which now comprise the modern populations.”
Source: National Commission on Culture and the Arts (2015)

myself. I see it as a manner of goodwill – the willingness to give up an opportunity so that others can ‘become’. I acknowledge that with such disposition, my confidence about my social status is illustrative. Undeniably, I am part of the privileged strata: educated, financially stable, young, marketable.

By this manner of goodwill, I consciously subjected myself to a form of power, which is the hegemony of ‘we’. The hegemony of a collective, of a ‘we’, controls societies and gives validity to culture. Culture, to put simply, is an agreed set of beliefs by a group (or groups) of people. One should be aware that “all culture serves someone’s interest” (Tax according to Kershaw 1992, 41). It is hard to tell if such interest will be beneficial or harmful to the hegemonic body but only until then, everybody can hope for the best.

“Cultural institutions and products are clearly central to the maintenance of dominant ideologies and are frequently the locus for ideological struggle in society. In particular, theatre and performance are major arenas for the reinforcement and/or the uncovering of hegemony” (Kershaw 1992, 21). There is a risk that oppression can creep in if the hegemony is given power over individuality.

The ‘I’ in a pool of ‘we’ then is an identity which is partly “a narrative, always in part a kind of representation. It is always within representation. Identity is not something which is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is that which is narrated in one’s own self” (Hall according to Deidre Heddon 2008, 27). The ‘I’ and the ‘We’ are pronouns only differentiated by the number of bodies included in them. “There is no ‘true’ self at the core that can be unmasked because the ‘self’ is a hypothetical place or space of storytelling” (Smith according to Heddon 2008, 27). At the end of the day, both can engage dialogues and arguments between each other – resulting in constant negotiation and shifts in ideological positions.

Othering my Own

While I was still at the stage of observing, taking down personal notes, and self-talking, there were countless moments when I felt that I was othering the same group of people whom I geographically and culturally belong to. As what I have mentioned in the previous paragraphs, I was aware of my position and my research intentions. I know that I was part of the group but in some layers, I know I was not. I was actively participating with them and at the same time, I was working on my research.

This position somehow reveals a rather utopian aspiration of working with communities. While I was contemplating on my guilt of othering my *kababayans* (fellow Filipinos), I realized that they were othering me too. Comments like, “[...] *Ay kasi nga estudyante ka*” (“[...] It’s because you’re a university student),

elevate the positional binary of othering. There is a tendency for both parties to differentiate one's position over the other.

On Being Good

"If given the choice between being right and being kind, choose kind." (Mr. Browne, 2015.)³¹

On a personal note, I believe that kindness is the best gift one can give to another. I have inculcated this thinking since I got raised by a grandmother who was doing community work. As early as I can remember, I got exposed to leaving my own comfort zones to be with others – especially those who are in the economic peripheries. I was raised in a low-middle class family, but I realized that in my country I was still privileged.

I received this comment twice from my professor and supervisor, Ray Langenbach (non-verbatim): "You're trying to be good". Sometimes I took it as a compliment; most of the times I thought he was teasing me. But now, writing my thesis, I started to perceive the comment as a criticism. When I asked Ray about his comment, he furthered: "I was questioning the theatre of "goodness", because many performance artists try to make sure that we see them as "good people". Actors on stage act out a role often written by someone else, but for performance artists, they themselves tend to be seen as the role. At that point the performance devolves into narcissism camouflaged as "goodness". This can be particularly acute in participatory and socially engaged performance work." (Langenbach, email feedback to author, March 27, 2018)

Goodness is seen and utilized differently especially by performance artists. I met some who believed that their political pieces are their way of talking back to their government about "what is right and what is wrong". Some consider their rebellious and alarming pieces as a way of expressing their subjective take on something; such act could be their perception of what is 'good'. On my part, I chose goodness as a constant departure from whatever I do because in my lived experience, people reciprocate whatever you show them. Though not always the case, but many of my encounters with people and even strangers, were pleasant because I made sure that they saw my good intentions.

During the *Bayanihan*, after all the preparations made before the building days, I got immensely tense. I realized that everything will come down to the fact that the whole project heavily relied on the presence of the volunteers. The project didn't have official binding relationship with the people who said 'yes' – meaning, they can freely show up or not. I went on imagining about my 'goal' of making the project not mine but a project by the Filipino migrant community.

³¹ Mr. Browne is a fictional character from the movie *Wonder* which was co-produced by Lionsgate, Madeville Films, Participant Media, Walden Media and was released last December 1, 2017.

I went on reassessing the core of *Bayanihan* as a selfless act of helping. But if volunteers didn't show up, that would defeat the very idea of the project – it relied on goodwill. I then realized that goodness as a concept shifts and varies in intensity, given the social framework.

I noticed that I was continuously crossing boundaries: communities and institutions, myself and the community, groups within the community, departments inside the institution, the private and the public, open and closed spaces, foreign and local bodies, students and professionals, et cetera. Was my anxiety really because of the project or because of my personal 'goals'? Was it an act to bring together; to make amends? Was it an attempt for utopia? Was it an attempt to heal – or at least aid – each other's precarious situations? I would say that all these were not necessarily conscious choices but rather requisites to challenge my overarching notion on goodness.

"All artists are alike. They dream of doing something that's more social, more collaborative, and more real than art." (Graham according to Claire Bishop 2012, 1) Based on my experience, there are certain truths in this statement. Doing collaborative work is an attempt to elevate the notion of 'art' from an elitist perception to the real world – a level where individuals and communities can engage and relate to the work.

Exoticizing the community?

However, while doing collaborative work and bringing my fellow Filipino migrants to convene in a specific space, there was a risk that I would exhibit our 'exotic' during *Bayanihan*. If so, this defeats my notion on goodness – I actually dragged everybody to the pits of the unwanted truth about knowledge production: there should be an odd other. In this line of thought, the Filipinos, including myself, unconsciously submitted ourselves to become subjects.

The work of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña entitled "Two Undiscovered Amerindians" heavily talks about exoticizing the other. First performed in 1991 in London and Madrid, the original intention of the artists was to "create a satirical commentary on Western concepts of the exotic, primitive Other [...]" (Fusco 1994, 143). In her essay entitled *The Other History of Intercultural Performance*, Fusco (1994) described the performance vividly:

"Our plan was to live in a golden cage for three days, presenting ourselves as undiscovered Amerindians from an island in the Gulf of Mexico that had somehow been overlooked by Europeans for five centuries. We called our homeland Guatinau, and ourselves Guatinais. We performed our "traditional tasks", which ranged from sewing voodoo dolls and lifting weights to watching television and working on a laptop computer. A donation box in front of the cage indicated that for a small

fee, I would dance (to rap music), Guillermo would tell authentic Amerindian stories (in a nonsensical language) and we would pose for polaroids with visitors. Two “zoo guards” would be on hand to speak to visitors (since we could not understand them), take us to the bathroom on leashes, and feed us sandwiches and fruit.” (Fusco 1994, 145)

In Fusco's and Gómez-Peña's cage performance, the social disparity between them as “tribe people” and the audience amplified. They were watched, talked about, filmed, photographed from the outside. The piece intentionally created a line that conceptually shouldn't be crossed. They have portrayed themselves as active victims. They were aware and ready to be violently ‘othered’ by the public.

Fusco's and Gómez-Peña's cage performance can be related to the *Bayanihan* project. The material existence of non-European structure (the *kubo* for *Bayanihan* and the cage for the Two Undiscovered Amerindians), and the presence of non-European bodies (Filipinos for the *Bayanihan*; a Cuban and Mexican for the Two Undiscovered Amerindians) matches both performances as similar in displaying the exotic. The idea of the tropics through the hut and the food served during the *Bayanihan* was undeniably non-Finnish in context. But what separates the two works from each other was the intention the projects were built on. The *Bayanihan* was an attempt to present an identity that is relatively existent and a culture that is relatively practiced by a group of people. In the Two Undiscovered Amerindians, the intention was more conceptual – mythical to some extent. It was a make-believe identity and cultural performance which aimed to satirically talk about how the West generates the exotic. Fusco's and Gómez-Peña's performance were almost a ‘slap-you-in-the-face’, violent, and blame-tripping piece.

The *Bayanihan*, on the other hand, was welcoming, open, and ran through the ideological lines of kindness. It was as if the piece told the audience: “We are different, but we are not dangerous. We are here, and we are willing to share and coexist with you.” It was a hopeful piece of understanding and exchange. Inviting the community inside the Theatre Academy meant opening up the space where I work (aside from my part time cleaning job) and to the realm of the academia. They don't know the academic world that I am moving in. This is a continuation of the trust-earning process, where as “researcher” I'm not the only one watching them and entering their spaces but they also take up my space.

The “desire (was) to activate the audience in participatory art at the same time a drive to emancipate it from a state of alienation induced by the dominant ideological order – be this consumer capitalism, totalitarian socialism, or military dictatorship” (Groys according to Claire Bishop 2012, 275). In this research's case, it was directed towards the apparent blindness of the dominant social strata. This act, though relatively small, could be brought up to the bigger migration discourse that Finland, and other countries, are facing.

The emancipation doesn't necessarily have to happen through violence. One has to think that other bodies are in different political and social situations. When these bodies are confronted with violence, the initial response is rejection as a form of self-defense. On this note, I think of *Bayanihan* as a reimagined prayer-vigil, a non-violent hum for recognition.

Such thinking brings me back to the 1986 People Power Revolution in EDSA. The peaceful revolution "gathered millions of Filipinos from all walks of life to march along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), the main artery of Metro Manila, to end the dictatorship of President Ferdinand E. Marcos and begin a new era marked by true freedom and democracy" (Official Gazette n.d.). The revolution was an occupation by the masses who held prayer vigils, peaceful concerts, and public speeches. More than the fact that it was attended by millions (since the protests were simultaneously held in different parts of the country), the success of the demand for recognition can be traced to the goodness-oriented expression of institutional discontentment. Same with *Bayanihan*, there was no violent demand, just the opportunity to experience the other's plight. By doing so, the project hoped that it created bridges and ideally, change.

OUR AFTER-THOUGHTS

For the previous pages of this thesis, only one perspective was writing and talking: the author. In artistic immersion, I stressed the importance of conversation and hearing everybody's voices as much as possible. In the whole process, the voice of the community is essential because they are the foundation of the project's progress. I will bind their responses based on the common notions raised.

After a couple of months, I started asking the participants about their experience during the *Bayanihan*. The questions were both in Tagalog and English, and I stressed that the responses can be done in any language and dialect they are comfortable with. The questions were sent out through Facebook messenger, which went like this:

[...] *(S)alamat po for this opportunity to ask you questions about Bayanihan. Dalawa lang po ang aking mga katanungan. Maari pong sagutin sa Tagalog, Ingles, o kahit anong dayalektong Pilipino (Cebuano, Ilocano, atbp).*

(ENG) Thank you for this opportunity to ask you questions about *Bayanihan*. I only have two questions. You may answer this in *Tagalog*, English, or any other Filipino dialects (Cebuano, Ilocano, et cetera).

1. (ENG) What were your realizations about the 'Bayanihan' 2017 project?


(PHL) *Ano ang iyong mga napagtanto sa proyektong Bayanihan 2017?*


2. (ENG) How did Bayanihan 2017 make you feel as a Filipino (labor) migrant?

(PHL) *Paano mo iiugnay ang 'Bayanihan' 2017 sa iyong sarili bilang isang Pilipinong nangibang-bayan?*

(PHL) *Sana po ay maliwanag ang aking mga katanungan. Kung mayroon pong nais na linawin, huwag mag-atubiling ako ay tanungin.*

(ENG) I hope that the questions are clear. Should there be any clarifications, please feel free to ask me.

(PHL) *Maraming salamat po!* 

(ENG) Thank you very much!  ³²

The interviewees were selected based on their involvement in the project. At the same time, I aimed at having equal numbers for both male and female respondents. I interviewed (or sent the questions to) Elena Corsiga, Florean

³² Translation from Filipino to English by Jay Mar Albaos

Mae Reston, Cheryl Morit, Fr. Jigger Ganados, Herbert Billones, and Florencio Fajardo. Unfortunately, Fr. Jigger was unable to send his responses.

Below are the responses I received, which I categorized individually.

ELENA CORSIGA

1. My realization during the “Bayanihan” 2017 project, at first when it was announced you have that feeling of excitement of getting involve in this kind of activity because this is one way of introducing to other culture as one of the core essence of Filipino culture. Through Bayanihan 2017 project it unites our fellow Filipinos to show the spirit of community.
2. Bayanihan 2017 made me feel again a proud Filipino that it’s our nature to help our fellowmen voluntarily wherever we are.

HERBERT BILLONES

1. *Ang napagtanto ko sa proyektong "Bayaanihan 2017" ay ang sumusunod: una, pinagbuklod ng proyektong ito ang mga Pilipino. San man sila galing na lugar sa Pilipinas, ano man ang salitang kanilang ginagamit at relihiyong meron tayo, ay nagpapakita ng pagkakaisa. Dahil sa proyektong ito, meron din akong nakilalang ibang taong banyaga. Pangalawa, dahil sa proyektong ito, naipakita natin sa ibang lahi na ang Pilipino ay masasaya pagdating sa anumang pagsubok na dumating sa buhay. Naibahagi natin sa iba ang ating kulturang dala-dala na nagdadamayan at nagtutulungan lalo na sa panahon ng pangangailangan.*
2. *Bilang isang Pilipinong nangibang-bayan, maiuugnay ko sa aking sarili ang "Bayanihan 2017" na katulad ng isang bahay-kubong ililipat ng buo mula sa lumang luagr patungo sa bangong lugar tulad din sa sarili ko na aalis sa aking lugar na kinagisnan patungo sa bagong lugar na kung saan meron aabutang bagong karanasan sa buhay. Maihahambing ko din ang paglalakbay ng aking sarili saisang panibagong buhay sa ibang bansa kasama ng aking mga pangarap, kultura bilang isang Pilipino at iba pa na pwede kong maibahagi saibang lahi dito sa Finland.*

Translation:³³

1. Here are my realizations on the project *Bayanihan 2017*: first, the project united the Filipinos. Regardless of where they come from in the Philippines, the language they speak and their religious orientations, they have shown unity. This project also became an opportunity for me to meet foreign people. Second, through this project, we were able to show to other nationalities that Filipinos, as a culture, can remain positive despite the challenges that we may have to face and overcome.

³³ Translation from Filipino to English by Christy Ann Balita

We were able to share with them the spirit of camaraderie and willingness to help especially in times of need.

2. As a Filipino who left my country to go abroad, I can relate myself as the hut that was carried and transferred to a new place or country, in the same way that the hut was carried during the *Bayanihan 2017*. I left home for a new one that promises new opportunities and experiences. I can also compare this to my journey to a new life in a foreign country, carrying my dreams, my Filipino culture, and all the rest that I can offer to the Finnish people.

FLOREAN MAE RESTON

1. Through this project, I saw that the spirit of Filipino *Bayanihan* is still alive within the hearts of the Filipinos even though they have been living abroad. I realized that nothing is impossible if people work hand in hand to achieve a specific goal. In (the) *Bayanihan* project I saw how people put their dedication and effort, starting from planning, during the construction, and up to the very end. That even a small and simple help can contribute to the accomplishment of the project.
2. I can compare myself to the hut. I built and developed my foundations, characteristics, abilities and so on in my native land through the help of many people including my family, friends, schools and many others. The desire to give my family a better life is the force that carried me from my native land to this foreign land and keeps me going. Despite the distance, the connection will always be strong. I feel proud that I am able to showcase the Filipino traits in this country in my own little ways- in my workplace and I all the place I go to.

FLORENCIO FAJARDO

1. *Para sa akin I realized na buhay na buhay parin sa puso ng mga pilipino yung kaugalihan tungkol sa bayanihan .at kahit pa nasa ibang bansa at dramatize lng sya ay marami ang natuwa at nanabik sa bayanihan.*
2. *Para sa akin ay feeling proud na filipino na mayroon tayong ganyang tradisyon dahil isa ito dahilan bakit tayo hospitable at puwedeng gumawa ng libre. At yung nakausap kong foreigner doon sa event baka daw kung meron silang ganyang tradisyon na bayanihan sa kanilang bansa baka raw hindi ganun kagulo sa kanila sa ngayon .dahil sa nakiita niya ang maraming bagandang bagay sa kosepto ng bayanihan.. That's all I thank you.....!!*

TRANSLATION³⁴:

³⁴ Translation from Filipino to English by Christy Ann Balita

1. For me, I realized that the spirit of *Bayanihan* still lives in the hearts of the Filipinos. Despite it being held in a foreign country and the fact that it was a performance, many were thrilled and yearned for it.
2. I felt proud as a Filipino that we have a tradition such as this. It is the reason why we are hospitable and are willing to work for free. I spoke with a foreigner during the event and he said that if only they have the same tradition in their country, they could not be in turmoil right now. This is because he saw different positive aspects in the concept of *Bayanihan*. That's all. I thank you...!!

CHERYL MORIT

1. I have come to realize that our culture and heritage is very rich and strong. Now that I am in foreign land, I can still see that *Bayanihan* is still being practiced though not in its literal form but in its real essence. For example, when one is moving from the old to new apartment. I myself has moved four times and during those transfers, my Filipino friends were helping me with my stuff. They carried my things, so it is like "they were carrying and moving my home to the new place".
2. The *Bayanihan* 2017 project made me feel as a Filipino labor migrant in the sense that my small part of my salary that I send back to the Philippines enables me somehow to carry my home that is, my country & countrymen towards a better and new place that is a good future.

On Community and Unity

In her response, *Ate*³⁵ Elena³⁶ validated the notion of 'community' in the *Bayanihan* and how it was vital in the Filipino lived experience. For *Ate* Elena to claim that the project was a way to introduce the Filipino culture, or a pigment of the culture, is a feat for the project.

³⁵ *Ate* is a Tagalog word of endearment and respect for an elder woman, usually used for sisters. *Kuya* is the male counterpart.

³⁶ Elena (fondly called *Ate* Elena), was part of the volunteers who were tasked under the Food Committee. They were the ones responsible for the nightly menu and cooking. Aside from this, they also decide how much portions should be allotted per head. *Ate* Elena also did some of the market chores, at some point.



Image. Ate Elena preparing *tocino* for the *Kamayan*
 Photo: Christy Ann Balita

Unity was a concept mentioned by *Kuya Pol*³⁷ on his discussions. As a concept, unity is closely related to coming together but in a deeper sense, it is a gathering with intense sensitivity towards each other. The aspect of unity is challenging considering the geographically divided makeup of the Philippines. Each island/province/region has nuanced similarities and/or differences in beliefs, political perspectives, religions, and most importantly – dialects. The project can claim that it was able to gather the already scattered Filipinos in Helsinki.

Ate Daimae's³⁸ response reinforced *Kuya Pol*'s and *Ate Elena*'s notions of community and “working hand in hand to achieve specific goal” (Reston 2018). The physicality of help varied: some provided huge amount of help, others small. All these, when added up, constituted a reckoning force that was crucial in the completion of the project.

³⁷ Herbert (fondly called *Kuya Pol*), is one of the volunteers who were constantly present during the five evenings. Also, *Kuya Pol* is the musician and lead guitarist of one the Filipino choirs at St. Mary's Church. During the *Bayanihan*, *Kuya Pol* also helped arrange the program during the final evening. He also played accompaniment to the singers with a guitar.

³⁸ Florean (fondly called *Daimae*), was also one of the constants during the project. She was part of the Core Group, together with *Kuya Pol*. During *Bayanihan*, she was doing multiple tasks: tying grass to bundles, harvesting organic materials, carpentry, cooking, buying ingredients, and so on.



Image. Ate Daimae working on the grass we collected.
Photo: Christy Ann Balita

On Personal Reference to the Kubo

Kuya Pol interestingly related his status as a migrant to the moving of the *kubo*, a metaphorical representation of him leaving home to another place where he hoped to find new opportunities and experiences. However, he also stressed that he didn't leave empty-handed. He brought with him essentials to the foreign land – his being Filipino.

Similar to *Kuya Pol*, *Ate Daimae* also compared herself to the hut but her take on the comparison is interesting. She was already a whole, completed hut way back home; she attributed her 'completion' to the immediate people in her life. Thus, when she left to find better opportunities abroad, she was ready. She called this conceptual completion as a 'force'. In my process of doing artistic immersion, stories of their families and friends who they left behind became their motivation to continue living their lives in a foreign country.

Another noteworthy notion which *Ate Che* raised was that of money in relation to her being a labor migrant. Since *Bayanihan's* core discipline is to help, the act of sending money back to their families is their own way of showing another form of 'helping without expecting anything in return'. Not to mention the fact that the remittances sent helps the economy. Such social and national responsibilities become personal huts that each Filipino labor migrant carry on their shoulders.

On Happiness

I have mentioned the *kubo* in relation to momentariness from the previous part of this thesis. During destructive typhoons, it is not only houses and materials belongings that get damaged but also people's self-esteem. Getting used and being coexistent with the tropical weather somehow made Filipinos resilient. This positivism is transposed together with their physical bodies when they migrate.



Image. *Kuya* Pol taking a breather from working on the hut.
Photo: Christy Ann Balita

One staff from the university approached me during the third day of the project. The structure of the hut was already standing in Tori with a few grass bundles attached on the roof. Lights were directed to the structure, making it 'visible'. With a smile, the staff said (non-verbatim): "It feels sunny here!" It was the middle of autumn – darkness started to envelop Finland. I want to connect this encounter with another point *Kuya* Pol raised: happiness. He used the Tagalog word *masaya* (happiness in English), but it could be elevated to positivity.

On Bayanihan as a Performance

It was interesting that *Tito Ting*³⁹ clearly saw the *Bayanihan* as a performance, a representation of an intangible. It came clear to me why he really pushed into finishing the hut; I told *Tito Ting* on the third day of the project that there was a possibility of not finishing the *kubo*. His response was firm: we will do our best to finish.

His observation of the people (even fellow Filipinos) enjoying *Bayanihan* leads us back to the issue of the exotic. Who is exoticizing who? Who gets the most out of the exoticization? Observing *Tito Ting* during the *Bayanihan* was also endearing to me: how he claimed to know what he is doing but at the same time accepting other people's suggestions. It is good to note that many of the men who came to help were experienced carpenters as well. Because of this fact, interesting negotiations between the building volunteers took place – such as, was presentation necessary over the weight of the hut, and so on.

On Encountering Fellow Foreigners

Kuya Pol pointed out meeting other *banyaga* (foreigners) – an interesting relative experience coming from a foreigner himself. The event then did not only provide a space for 'becoming' for Filipino migrants but also for foreigners in general.

Tito Ting's encounter with a foreigner was interesting. Somehow, the foreigner's recognition of the *Bayanihan* culture allowed him to ponder on his own. This affirms the potentiality of recognition as an important aspect in working with communities.

³⁹ Florencio (fondly called *Tito Ting*), could be considered as one of the vital persons in the Core Group. As I mentioned in the earlier parts the thesis, *Tito Ting* is the Country Head of CFC-FFL. He is one of the most respected people I have met among the Filipino labor migrants circle. He could have earned this recognition from his length of stay in Finland; his whole family (including extended family, or clan, even) already moved to the Finnish lands. He was the authority for performative decisions. In the Core Group, he was our architect and designer; he was knowledgeable with professional carpentry and his familiarity with Filipino structures like the *kubo*. He became the main person we relied on structural/material needs.



Image. *Tito* Ting drilling like a pro.
Photo: Christy Ann Balita

On Essence

In Ate Cheryl's⁴⁰ response, she opened up the notion of essence. Essence relates to something authentic or unique. "The uniqueness of a work is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable" (Benjamin 1969, 6). *Bayanihan* was unique because it was culture not inherent to the space where it was happening – it was a tradition that was not local. Making something essential – particularly that which can be represented or reproduced – seems ironic. The *Bayanihan*, for example, was not authentic, rather, it was a commentary to authenticity, even tradition.

⁴⁰ Cheryl (fondly called *Ate* Che), already told me when she learned about the project that she will do her best to support *Bayanihan* but cannot do so in physical help because she had two energetic young boys to look after to. Her husband, *Kuya* William, also expressed his disappointment of not being able to come to the project. His job ends late in the evenings. Even so, *Ate* Che still made it (not nightly, though), with her two boys. She became one of the people who looked after the children.



Image. Ate Che with her energetic boys (from left to right) Hans and Noel
Photo: Annamay Dormis

More Feedback

“Participation thus forms part of a larger narrative that traverses modernity.” (Bishop 2012, 275)⁴¹. Participation, in the case of *Bayanihan*, was not just mere activation of the “passive sector”. To begin with, there was no passive sector – only an unrecognized, functioning ecosystem. When a work tries to expand its scope towards inclusivity, that catalyzes participation and eventually gains access to narratives that are richly nuanced yet detailed.

⁴¹ Bishop, Claire. 2012. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. Verso. New York.



Image. Screenshot of conversation with *Tita* Marlyn Hiltunen in Facebook.
Screenshot: Jay Mar Albaos

In the conversation above, I was asking for *Tita* Marlyn's permission if I can use her video material of the *kubo* carrying on Bayanihan's final evening. After giving her permission, she also expressed her appreciation on the *Bayanihan* experience.

TRANSLATION⁴²

Tita Marlyn (last comment): Thank you Jay Mar Albaos for the experience! Even though we are far from our land of birth we always carry our culture! Proud *Pinoy* and the foreigners enjoyed it more!

In this response, the sensitivity towards other foreign bodies is again apparent. Given the fact that even in family clans, there is always a member who went abroad to work. Thus, in one way or another, the notion of foreignness can be considered normative in the Philippine mindset.

To extend my goal of making everybody feel that the project was also theirs, there were interesting moments when foreigners shed parts of their minds to the project. All of the suggestions, however, were subject to the Core Group's and the volunteer's plans.

⁴² Translation from Tagalog-English to English

Ray Langenbach, for example, suggested other ways to bring the hut outside the Theatre Academy. He thought of having the *kubo* walls breakable so that only the structure goes directly to Merihaka. The rest of the body parts (roof, walls, et cetera.) will take a separate procession route around the city before finally heading to Merihaka.

Heli Litmanen also suggested that we could use wheels when moving the hut outside the school. She actually made one for us but during the moving, we were not able to use them. The moving worked well with just the volunteers carrying the hut.

Yuan Mor'o Ocampo, a fellow Filipino and MA LAPS student, suggested to add finishing details (i.e. lamp, et cetera.) when the *kubo* already sits in Merihaka. This didn't push through though, since there were high chances that anything left behind in the open hut will get stolen.

Tita Rosa Calixto, one of the Filipina volunteers, tirelessly spent her evenings at TeaK tying the grass into bundles. According to her, she liked the task very much and remembered her life in the farm and the projects they did in school. One night, she approached me and started a conversation. What she said never left my head (non-verbatim): "I grew old in the Philippines and even left home for Finland, but I never expected that I will witness *Bayanihan* with my own eyes here abroad. I never saw it in my own country." Hearing this, I realized that even I didn't witness the sight of people carrying house on their shoulders. I grew up with farming grandparents and *kubo* carrying was already rare by then. *Tita* Rosa is way older than me which makes this memory lane trip interesting.

The visual representation of *Bayanihan* is taught in schools and is illustrated in books, but there are rare chances of actually seeing one, especially in these times. Is *Bayanihan*, then, just a myth? Is it a yearning? Following the idea of myths, the making of the *kubo* at the Theatre Academy could be our unconscious attempt to realize it. The thought that such local myth and yearning will have to take place in a foreign land brings back my previous discussion on 'becoming'. When home fails to provide one's need to 'become', moving is inevitable. It could be that in the foreign land, when the desire to become progresses, myths can happen as well.

HONESTLY,

1. Though *Bayanihan* appears as a fruitful project, there were certain aspects in the piece which challenged me. For one, I never realized how risky it was to rely my trust on the complex human. People's 'yes' can be perceived as an affirmation but there will be times when they would break their promises. This uncertainty, especially with the volunteer-based nature of the project, posed concerns.

2. Aside from the risk that nobody will come, there was a possibility that those who appeared to be active during the planning process would not show up during the actual event. There was one case when the original architect (also a member of the Core Group) stopped responding to our messages. After drafting a rather ambitious design of the *kubo* and meeting the producer once, we never heard from the said volunteer again. The person started to ignore my calls and messages. It was crucial because the production team from the university relied on our plans. After considerable attempts of contacting the architect, I gave up and asked *Tito Ting* for advice. At the end of the day, *Tito Ting* and I decided to draw a rather amateurish design of the *kubo*.

3. The project confronted me of my incapacities: I don't know have any practical construction skills, much so building houses. It became a challenge talking to both parties about measurements, quantity, and the alternatives of the materials needed because in the first place I didn't wholly understood what they were about or what they were for. My incapacity, generated gaps when coordinating between the two groups.

4. There were times when I felt drowning as I dealt with the institution, the community, myself, my supervisors, and other circles about my thesis and *Bayanihan*. At some point, I felt overburdened with the complex organizing I was doing. There was so much responsibilities and accountabilities on my shoulder.

5. A certain sadness ensued while doing the work. At the height of everything, as an organizer, I seemed to become an invisible yet performing thread which ran to and from places to tie gaps.

6. Individuality apparently became invisible – any effort of one becomes an accomplishment of the many. Somehow, the collective became a black hole which sucked everything towards it. This hegemonic character of the collective was an asset but also created problematics. For example, not all volunteers shared the same amount of work (dedication, even) towards *Bayanihan* but their mere presence defined their 'participation' in the project. It was also hard to gauge who did what, but such accounting of tasks may lead to misunderstandings among the group.

7. I got petrified towards the thought of writing the thesis. I was not sure if the written thesis would give justice to the communal work, especially because I would be on my own in writing the whole theoretical aspect of the project. Compared to doing *Bayanihan*, writing ideally involved only one hand – the author's. This is problematic since I have issues claiming authorship.

8. Did my method, artistic immersion, achieve its goals? What were the ethical disputes towards it? After conceptualizing and deploying the method, I found it hard to look for holes and humps since eyes were already stained.

9. My position as a Filipino working with Filipino labor migrants posed issues on ethnographic and theoretical biases. My nationality, in relation to the group, and my familiarity to local Filipino concepts drastically narrowed the perspectives of this written thesis.

10. I am pretty sure I overlooked something in this huge work and wide range of theoretical discursive openings.

11. I am currently thinking: *After the project and this thesis, what then?*

NO, IT DOESN'T END

Migrant Filipinos are neither here nor there. It is from this blurry position where I drew inspiration for my research. Migration is more than just a physical movement; it also involves the creation and recreation of spaces and destinations. The state of precarity that they belong to makes migrants, in the case of my research the Filipino labor migrants, an interesting group of people to study with.

Ethnography was the initial methodological foundation of my research, but its tenets were limiting the depth of that which I wanted to capture. Hence, I introduced the notion of artistic immersion, which is based on recognition, inclusivity, and participation. One cannot expect to bring out the best of the community (including artistic tendencies) without first giving them the assurance that each of them is recognized.

Communities and/or groups constantly change and adapt to environments. To further understand this, and relate it to the community established during *Bayanihan*, I used Kwon's (2002) categories of groups. In the case of my process of artistic immersion and *Bayanihan*, I found that the Filipino labor migrants was a community of *mythic unity* – they created subgroups that closely relates to their interests, ethnolinguistic background, and profession. As a group of people, they are 'sited' – they already established patterns and daily lived experience even before I came. In the case of the community created during *Bayanihan*, it was a mythic unity of an already 'sited' pockets of communities which was focused on a goal or aspiration. During the project, another form of community was formed, one that was supposed to exist in five nights.

Artistic immersion itself, as a method, is not finite and is subject to changes depending on the context. Further assessments on its ideological implications is encouraged. The method, however, is fitting for this kind of exploration because it does not impose the baggage of a role on the researcher. As much as possible, I avoided being labeled as superior (i.e. researcher, ethnographer, etc.). I saw myself as a worker and participant. I tried not to intimidate the community with labels such as a 'researcher' but rather become another in a collection of others.

I want to emphasize that artistic immersion is reactive. It does not presuppose what will happen but instead reflects on the nuances experienced during the immersion. My personal goal is not to interrupt but to go with the routine and theorize that strand of obedience (and eventually disobedience). I consider it vital that the community does not feel violated with the conduct of study.

Though I endorsed artistic immersion as a method, I do not intend to say that it is the 'right' way of doing. There can never be exact methods of how to do; artistic immersion is not perfect. I must deal with the flaws of my method as my research advances. One thing is for sure though: artistic immersion is at the intersections. It leads one to different paths that are interconnected. It is also a durational process that might test the endurance of the researcher and the community. I hope that it expresses the best and the worst of the researcher to the group and vice versa.

For my research question, I asked: How did the Filipino labor migrants perform 'becoming' during the *Bayanihan* in Helsinki? What follows is a summary of my findings and realizations in this research.

First, I realized that the notion of 'becoming' happens through many vectors in complicated trajectories. It doesn't happen in a single line. The *Bayanihan* provided rich opportunities for 'becoming' in a complex manner. The complexity comes from the fact that *Bayanihan* became an overarching event composed of different, almost simultaneous occurrences such as building the hut, cooking food, binding grass, discussions, children playing, negotiating for materials, and more.

'Becoming' was performed simultaneously with other bodies and non-human materials. The process of 'becoming' became reliant to the human, ecological, and geographical environment it was into. It shifted into different forms in varying durations.

Going back to Butler's (2015) notion of precarious entities, I see that the labor migrants' counter-performance on precarity is through 'becoming'. In the case of labor migration, conceptually, precarity arises from the being dislocated and relocated in an environment where one's existence is measured by foreign institutional criteria. The insecurity of their status makes them susceptible to become disposable. Through 'becoming', they reconstitute to complex versions of themselves that are encompassing what is acceptable. Such complex reconstituting was reflected during *Bayanihan*.

Through *Bayanihan*, I realized that 'becoming' was momentary. It was constructed and was destroyed in a span of days or even milliseconds. To illustrate: the *kubo* which was built on five nights disappeared in a few minutes after it was craned; the food which was cooked for a couple of hours was wiped out after a few minutes; volunteers came and went; and so on. *Bayanihan* also reflected the momentariness of the existence of the labor migrants. The precariousness of their situation suggests that one day they might lose their grant to stay and work in a foreign land.

I want to emphasize that the *Bayanihan* project was not a final output. There is no such thing as 'final outputs'. The project was one of the many manifestations

in the web of expressions. Communities will plan, create, get things done, move on with life, and goes back to planning - all within a seemingly circular pattern.

Momentariness also reflected the conceptual frame of the project. After a few meetings, the Core Group came up with the idea and after the conceptual execution, life went back to normal – the *Bayanihan* was a mere memory. I have noticed that in the community, people come and go. Once they feel that they are not getting anything from the hegemonic body anymore, some members choose to go out and became individuals. I saw members make in and break out – mirroring the construction and reconstruction of the group. In each moment, the composition was different.

At the end of the day, the project became a collection of differently nuanced 'becomings'. What was faulty in my research question was that it assumed linearity of becoming as an event. Turns out that 'becoming' is complicated as much as migration is.

During my presentation at the Research Day II at the Theatre Academy last March 2, 2018, artist and professor Anette Arlander (who also happened to be my thesis examiner) asked me if I found any form of materiality with the Filipino labor migrants after the project. Reflecting on the question, I found hazy images of migration's and becoming's materiality. Nevertheless, I found out a texture – elasticity. 'Becoming' and migration (embodied by Filipino labor migrants in the context of this research) both possess elastic qualities which allow them to take different forms. With elasticity, the concepts can engulf their milieus and create molds out of it. Copying the environments, they can locate themselves and assume compatibility. 'Becoming' in migration then becomes a tactic for survival.

I strongly feel associated with the research because I wasn't only immersing with the Filipino labor migrants. I was also immersing with the environment that they are into: the foreignness of the new place – its people, its landscapes, its climate. This, in turn, helped me confront my status as an academic and/or economic migrant in Helsinki.

In my research question, I asked how the Filipino labor migrants perform 'becoming'. Reflecting on the two years of doing my artistic immersion with the community vis-a-vis the five nights on the *Bayanihan* project, I realized that the Filipino labor migrants in Finland endlessly performs their respective nuanced 'becomings' even as of the writing of this very sentence. I have to keep up; I still need to go and do further. The research doesn't end here.

Excuse me but,

*Where am I again?*⁴³

⁴³ Jay Mar Albaos. *Thoughts on Existing*, 18.7.2017

MOVING FORWARD

All these: the notions I raised, my commentaries on migration and the ripples it created, my artistic immersion as a method, my relationship with the community, the depth of the nuances I saw, the *Bayanihan* and its complexities, and more – are open to be furthered/challenged by future researchers in diverse fields. I am referring to researchers who are at the intersections; intellectuals who are working on making many ends meet.

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