

Counter-Cartography of Resistance



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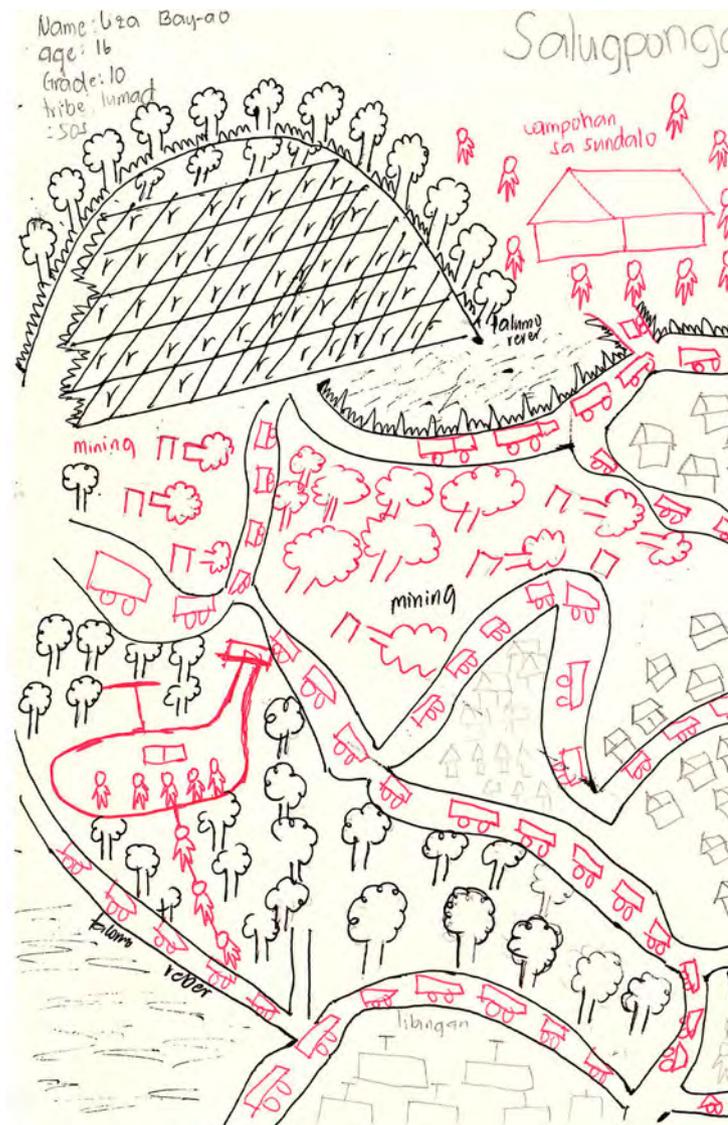
Exposing Everyday Authoritarianism in the Philippines

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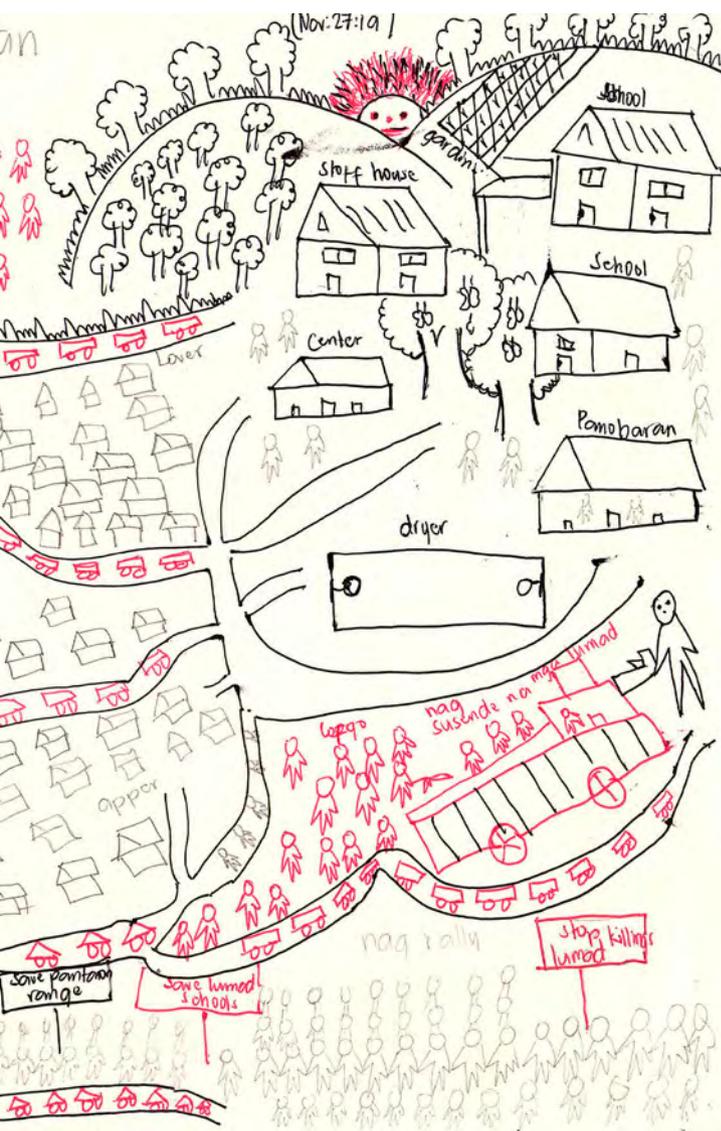
We, the Counter-Mapping PH Collective, are a collective of Filipino scholars, artists, and activists who foreground the visual politics of mapmaking as a means of contesting everyday expressions of authoritarianism in the Philippines.

The Philippines is no stranger to authoritarianism. The country was previously under the dictatorial rule of Ferdinand Marcos, a regime known worldwide for its corruption, human rights violations, and profligacy. The – at the time of writing – current Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is considered to be one of the world's most controversial authoritarian figures. Since 2016, Duterte's administration has initiated contentious programmes leading to killings and human rights abuses, which includes the brutal war on drugs resulting in an estimated 20,000 deaths. The regime has simultaneously embarked on massive infrastructure programmes that are expected to displace millions of informal settlers. These modes of accumulation, which consolidate the political and economic power of Duterte and his allies, are facilitated by silencing dissent, particularly that of activists.

We resist by engaging in counter-mapping practices that not only expose the regime's violent operations, but also stand in solidarity with efforts to organize together with marginalized communities. Acknowledging the power of maps, we turn to counter-mapping, understanding it as a diverse set of mapping practices that enables marginalized groups to confront power while using multiple modalities to express their experiences. Our projects demonstrate the collaborative orientation of mapping and the power of visibility through community maps and protest arts, as tools for exposing violence and consolidating resistance. We feature three projects that support various campaigns against dispossession and human rights violations. These projects were the result of our recent engagements with communities, aiming to heed their calls and make their plights known through various creative and innovative means and platforms. Our collaborative mapping activities strengthened community resistance and yielded multiple



mapping outputs that were used for – among others – online campaigns, distribution of information to residents, and publication of reports for pertinent agencies. Beyond these mapping projects, our collective continues to collaborate with our community partners and readily engages with new community-based organizations, as more issues across the Philippines emerge.



Community-based mental mapping workshops

Our first project involved mental mapping workshops organized by artist Cian Dayrit.¹ Using mental mapping as a means of foregrounding stories of struggle and survival, these workshops were conducted with marginalized communities who have experienced rights violations,

land grabbing, and harassment. In the mental mapping activities, the main objective was to highlight the personal subjective accounts of lived experiences in relation to shared material conditions shaped by social inequities and lack of access to resources.

The workshops consisted of focus group discussions and drawing sessions. A point person was tasked with facilitating the discussions, reviewing the questions asked of participants, and providing necessary guidance in drawing various parts of the map. The sketching was done individually or in pairs using blank paper and basic drawing materials such as pencils and pens. The objective was to express and visualize the lived experiences of residents by tracing the everyday route of accessing resources, sketching spaces of fear and trauma, and articulating collective aspirations and calls.

Although mental mapping was done individually, the method prompts the participants to visualize their experiences within the context of their broader communities, as they were asked to articulate shared conditions and collective struggles from their individual viewpoints. The workshops yielded raw and intimate mental maps, serving as artefacts of personal narratives which provided a situated understanding of critical events that took place in their communities. For example, displaced lumads (Indigenous people of Mindanao island), who sought refuge in selected university spaces in Metro Manila, created mental maps that documented the militarization of their communities, resulting in violence and dispossession. Through mental mapping, the lumads were empowered to articulate their experiences and express them visually. For university students and the general public who joined the lumads in their gathering spaces, the maps unpacked and clarified the complicated narratives that emerge from the lumads' socio-spatial conditions. These workshops contributed to the ongoing social justice campaigns and in the organization of wider networks of allies and national minority advocates (see the sample mental map on this page).

Counter-mapping New Clark City

Another project was the counter-mapping of New Clark City (NCC), organized by a team of geographers, students, volunteers, residents, and community organizers. The mapping project contested the planned construction of the NCC, posed to displace thousands of farmers and Indigenous peoples of the area. Considered to be the Duterte administration's flagship infrastructural development, its land area is measured at 9,450 hectares, categorized by the government as "idle". NCC has been promoted as a smart city that is inclusive, sustainable, and disaster-resilient.

However, the rise of NCC threatens the conversion of vast lands and the dispossession of existing communities. Counter-mapping NCC contests the city's neoliberal narrative and foregrounds the communities' violent experiences through various mapping activities, such as mental and collective mapping, walking interviews, photo-elicitation, and auto-photography. We also conducted drone mapping (the lead image was taken during one of these drone flights) to document the area's rapid land conversion.

The mapping documented NCC's negative impact on the residents as well as the environment: from harassing farmers to the levelling of sacred ancestral mountains. The outcomes of the counter-mapping workshops were used for various community campaigns. The maps were disseminated across social media and some were printed and distributed in the communities as posters and flyers. The maps were also used in a background report about the NCC that was distributed to government agencies, international organizations, and other institutions.

For residents, these maps have been helpful in articulating the various ways they are being affected by the development of NCC through, for example, settlement and farmland displacement, or mountain and hillside destruction. The generated maps were utilized to consolidate support from affected communities and were used to challenge and resist the well-circulated commercial maps of NCC developers.

Geo-narratives of Human Rights Defenders in Negros Island

This project highlighted the geo-narratives of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in Negros Island, exposing the quotidian authoritarianism which HRDs confront. Negros Island has become the hotbed of impunity towards HRDs in the Philippines. This rise in human rights violations can be attributed to the implementation of counter-insurgency programmes and massive deployment of state troops in the island since the beginning of Duterte's presidency. In response, this third project counter-mapped the highly contested and largely unseen spaces of HRDs, examined their ideas of risk and security, and shed light on how to better protect and fight for their human rights. As this was conducted during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, this project employed a spatially-oriented qualitative method which combined mental mapping, online interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Utilizing an online meeting platform, human rights de-



fenders generated mental maps, and identified safe and precarious spaces through online interviews and FGDs. Spatial narratives detailing intense emotional journeys of HRDs who face violence and harassment were shown on the mental maps. HRDs experience psychological warfare in the form of deliberate and indirect intimidation, constant surveillance, death threats, and “red-tagging” – or accusation of being members of the New People’s Army (NPA). Furthermore, HRDs are faced with physical harassment such as assault and arbitrary arrests. These forms of violence occur in urban and rural settings in both private and public spaces, such as homes, workplaces, streets, and even on social media. The most notable form of violence experienced by HRDs are the killings that have taken the lives of more than 60 people since 2016. Such conditions have constrained their everyday geographies, making virtually all their spaces unsafe and potentially dangerous. From these spatial narratives, the project produced several maps that were used by HRDs in various campaigns.



Conclusion

As a collective, we are united in a common stand against authoritarianism in the Philippines. We turn to counter-mapping to expose the Duterte regime and its negative impacts on the lives of marginalized Filipinos. By using diverse forms of counter-mapping as a means of working with communities, we engage in creative projects that foreground experiences and concerns of the marginalized and forge ties of solidarity in the struggle against authoritarianism and imperialism. The multiple outcomes of the three projects that we featured have been utilized by our partner communities, grassroots organizations, and in academia. The maps took multiple forms and were deployed on various platforms, from poster maps prominently hung in community spaces, to infographics that show sites of violence. It is our hope that our participatory mapping projects will sustain and expand ongoing solidarity work among academics, organizations, and communities in confronting the operations of the authoritarian regime and in advocating for social justice.

Illustrations

- p. 80: Drone mapping in Tarlac, Counter-mapping PH Network-NCC Research Team, 2019.
- p. 82/83: Lumad mental maps, Cian Dayrit, 2019.
- p. 84: Mental Mapping workshop, Cian Dayrit, 2019.
- p. 85: Walking Interview in Tarlac, Counter-mapping PH Network-NCC Research Team, 2019.

Endnotes

- 1 See: Mapping From the Ground Up, p. 228.