

Mapping From the Ground Up

Anti-authoritarianism in the context of the Philippines encompasses anti-fascist, anti-imperialist, and anti-feudal positions. We recognize that authoritarian rule enforces and perpetuates the semi-colonial and semi-feudal conditions in our socio-spatial realities.

What do we count as being authoritarian? First of all, the state, which historically has been a puppet of imperialist nations such as the USA; multi-national corporations and the landed bureaucratic capitalists, who divide and control large swaths of land through neoliberal policies; and state security forces, who maintain the state's fascist grip as it serves corporate agendas. Beyond individual names and faces, what is important is the systems of power which allow them to dominate the majority. Through authoritarian rule, the Philippines has been systematically over-exploited. Its resources have been plundered and its people are subject to the hegemony of neoliberal systems. In one way or another, authoritarian rule has shaped our pasts, our presents, and our possible futures. Likewise, these systems dominate the spaces we inhabit as well as the constitutional democratic rights we are all entitled to.

Attempts at insurgence

I am a visual artist based in the Philippines. My practice deals with notions of power and ways in which these are reproduced through objects and institutions. As maps have been used to exercise power and produce spaces of domination, I have turned to counter-mapping as a gesture of resistance. As Edward Said reminds us: "in the history of colonial invasion, maps are always first drawn by the victors, since maps are instruments of conquest. Geography is therefore the art of war but can also be the art of resistance if there is a counter-map and a counter-strategy."¹

The process of counter-mapping is transformative, as it urges the author(s) to reconfigure their positionalities in relation to oppressive power structures. Taking reference from medieval tapestries that depict feudal territories, my practice prompts an attempt at insurgence by producing "anti-feudal" textile maps. The works confront the material cultures of authoritarian rule that both enables and justifies land grabbing and forced displacement of landworking and indigenous communities. The production of these artworks is grounded in collaboration, as I work with embroiderer Henry Caceres as well as other activist-researchers.² Our work is informed by community narratives and peoples' organizations. Connecting the

Anti-Authoritarian Cartography in the Semi-Colony

spatial realities and lived experiences to the dominant systems of neoliberal globalization, we seek to formulate new visualizations that are based on anti-authoritarian movements advocating for social justice and liberation.

This text outlines the framework of my practice in mapping out the conditions and spaces of inequality and struggle while building solidarities with marginalized populations. Although much of my work circulates within networks of contemporary art and academic discourse, I continue to ground my methods on “militant research” and solidarity work. Manoeuvring within the contradictions of these distinct worlds becomes a perpetual struggle. Artistic platforms are dominated by the ruling elite who are either unsympathetic or, in one way or another, linked to oppressive power networks (land-grabbing families, union-busting clans, dictator’s cronies, and the like). Thus, public discourse on progressive cultural work is marginalized, giving way to market-oriented art practices

based on speculative trends. Lest we forget, artists, just like landless farmers and contractual workers, are trapped in a cycle of precarious working conditions. Although our main clientele comes from the upper classes of society, we are nowhere near as comfortable or safe as those who can afford our work. Art is not – and should not – be isolated from the rest of society. For as long as the common idea of art is encapsulated in the confines of galleries and institutions,

inaccessible and alienated from the masses and unresponsive to the conditions of society, it is doomed to remain a futile hobby for the rich, a false absolution against unrelenting accumulation by dispossession. I recognize that the objects I produce are, in a way, by-products to my militant position and the liberatory natures of anti-authoritarian action.

Steps for making a counter-map

Orient. Define the political line. Constantly reassess your positionalities and recognize that your job is to recentre your perspective from an individual to a member of a society. Understand the systematic and structural frameworks of peoples’ struggle. Whose perspectives need to be heard? How are our experiences tied to dominant geopolitical conditions and policies? In the case of the Philippines, we place our solidarities with farmers, indigenous minorities, workers, and the urban poor.

Locate. What do we need to talk about and visualize? What do we need to (counter)map? Identify socio-spatial issues which alienate the masses. Where are farmers landless? Where are indigenous minorities displaced? Where is there no access to resources? Where are workers exploited? Beyond these questions, we turn to groups that work toward shared goals of social justice. We turn to critical sources that present objective truths and relate them to systemic problems. We echo the calls and campaigns of people fighting for land, life, and justice.

Navigate. Expose and oppose policies that put profit over people. Identify the historical lines of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-authoritarian resistance. Align your work with movements based on social justice and human rights. By remembering the plights of the masses from centuries ago, we will better understand the struggles of the masses today. Revolutionary paths are carved from gestures of freedom and justice. Guided by these principles, we must aim to uncover what authoritative maps have historically hidden: the people and their/our struggle.

Synthesize. Centre all the stories, all the information, all the ideas into a coherent composition that will manifest into the materiality of your work. Ground multi-epistemic narratives in relation to the delineated borders drawn by oppressive centralized bodies. Expose inconsistencies of corporate and neo-colonial boundaries with collective aspirations based on equity and justice.

Validate. Subject your practice to deep scrutiny by asking how the people need and want to be represented – and how you can or cannot help. Address the contradictions of your practice and the platforms you take on. The only validation you need is the validation of the masses. In the Philippines there is a saying: “Mula sa masa tungo sa masa” – “Of the masses, for the masses”.

Activate. Counter-mapping as well as socially engaged artistic practices should sustain solidarities with marginalized populations. Solidarity is a state of being that is expressed through work and action. Our work does not end with formulating counter-narratives. As information is dynamic, our work can act as an extension of memory, repository of evidence, articulation of actions, or provocation to enlightenment.

Conclusion

This practice is an attempt at breaking the imperialist matrix of power and the legacies of colonialism. The map, a static image which serves as a historical account, represents dominant perceptions of space and time. As we question the authorship and agendas of maps imposed upon us, we internalize the systems of control that bind and alienate us. While we identify frameworks of power that authoritarian rule is built on, we manoeuvre through conditions that normalize oppression. Maps are themselves discursive instruments to exercise authority. When we make maps against oppressive systems, not only do we foreground collective resistance, we contribute to realizing just and equitable futures. Anti-authoritarian mapping guides us in finding ourselves within the struggles of the masses where we realize that the ground is, in fact, a place of authority. As we build solidarities with disenfranchised populations on the ground, we collectively map out the world based on social justice and human rights.

Illustrations

All embroidery work done in collaboration with Henry Caceres.

- p. 231: “Land Which Outlives”, 2021; A tapestry of Cordillera region. Web based links of a selection of related articles and other material are printed as QR codes and sewn into the composition.
- p. 232: “Valley of Dispossession”, 2021; Depicting Central Luzon region in the Philippines, plotting areas of development aggression, militarization and largest landholdings.
- p. 233: “Both Poles Serve You”, 2021; A google-translated “eat the rich” proclamation looms over an inverted world map littered with symbols of colonial violence and resource extraction.

Endnotes

- 1 Edward Said, “Facts, facts, and more facts”, *Peace and Its Discontents: Essays on Palestine in the Middle East Peace Process*, Vintage: New York, 1996.
- 2 The collective CountermappingPH was established in 2020 to consolidate various counter-mapping initiatives across the archipelago. See their contribution: Counter-Cartographies of Resistance, p.80.

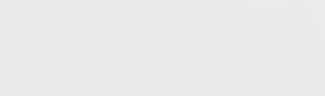
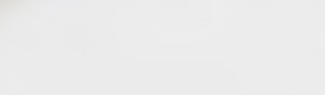
KABUNIAN LUMAUIG UMACAYONG MAH-NONGAN WIGAN

Indigenous Resistance to
Imperialist Plunder
in the
GRAN CORDILLERA

LIBERATION + SELF-DETERMINATION



LUPANG NINUNO

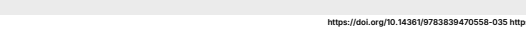
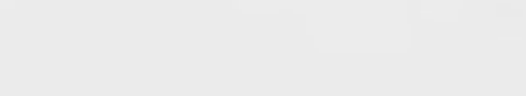


You ask if we own the land
and mock us saying 'Where
is your title?' We ask the
meaning of your words
you answer with taunting
arrogance, 'Where is the
document to prove that
you own the land?' Titles?
Documents? Proof of owner-
ship. Such arrogance
to speak of owning the
land when we instead
are owned by it.
How can you own
that which will
outlive you? Only
the race owns the
land because the
race lives on forever.
-Macli-ing Dulag

LEGEND

- Administrative region (est. 1998)
- Provincial boundaries
- River system
- Military presence
- Aggressive development projects (energy/infrastructure)
- Large scale mining tenements

Resist militarization, foreign mining and large dams!



INDIGENOUS CULTURE IS ROOTED IN THE STRUGGLE FOR LAND

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