Filipino Martial Arts
And the Construction of Filipino National Identity

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Table of Contents

Plates.................................................................................................................4
Abstract.............................................................................................................5
Declaration.......................................................................................................6
Copyright Statement..........................................................................................7
Acknowledgements and Dedication.................................................................8

Introduction........................................................................................................9
  Historical Framework.......................................................................................11
  Method and Sources.........................................................................................27
  Scope, Structure and Contents........................................................................32

Chapter I - Old School: Homogeneity, Diversity, and the Early Practice of FMA
  Sixteenth Century Warfare in Visayan Barangays..........................................39
  Arnis, Kali, Eskrima and the Historical Narrative of FMA...............................45
  FMA Old School.............................................................................................54
  Conclusion......................................................................................................69

Chapter II - New School: The emergence of FMA Clubs and the Construction of National Identity from FMA
  Emergence of the New School.........................................................................74
  *Juego Todo* and Martial Prowess as Prestige...............................................79
  Conflicts between and within FMA Clubs, and the strengthening of local FMA identities..............................................................87
  Creation of ‘Filipino’ in FMA from abroad.......................................................94
  NARAPHIL and ARPI: State Appropriation of FMA
  and FMA’s Appropriation of Nationalism.......................................................98
  Conclusion....................................................................................................105

Chapter III - Lapulapu as a symbol of Filipino Identity....................................108
  Lapulapu as a link to Philippine pre-colonial National Identity......................112
  Negotiating Lapulapu as National Symbol....................................................115
Reconstructions of Lapulapu before 1946, and in two national monuments........................................122
Lapulapu in ‘Que Dios le Perdone’ (1614)
and the Declaration of Philippine Independence (1898)..............123
I. Physical Representation of Lapulapu in Monuments.................128
FMA-based reconstructions of Lapulapu (1953-2012).....................134
I. 1953 Lapu-Lapu comics and 1955 film.................................134
II. 2002 Lapu-Lapu film.....................................................139
III. FMA’s Appropriation of Lapulapu as National Symbol.........144
Conclusion...........................................................................156

Chapter IV - Negotiating National Identity in FMA films...............158
The Historical Context of the Emergence of FMA Films............163
Filmic Constructions of the Arnisador
Archetype as Representative of National Identity......................166
I. Engaging the Filipino with the Foreign Other.......................167
II. Filmic Representations of Continuing Tradition and Rural Identity as authentications of Filipino Identity........176
III. Masculinizing the Filipino, Feminizing the Nation..............188
FMA Films in the Negotiation over National Identity...............192
I. FMA Films as manuals for understanding the composition of FMA.................................................................194
II. FMA Films as Instructions for Nationalism........................195
III. Changing Contours of FMA and Filipino National Identity in FMA Films..............................................................197
How FMA films mediated negotiations on National Identity among FMA Clubs..................................................201
Conclusion...........................................................................205

Conclusion...........................................................................206
Bibliography........................................................................212

Word Count: 79,900
List of Plates

Plate No. 1: Book cover of *Filipino Martial Arts as Taught by Dan Inosanto*……54
Plate No. 2: Antonio Luna’s School of Fencing, circa 1894……………………………………74
Plate No. 3: The National Self-Defense Association, 1927………………………………………74
Plate No. 4: Bruce Lee wielding sticks in *Enter the Dragon*……………………………………97
Plate No. 5: Lapulapu Shrine........................................................................................……130
Plate No. 6: Sentinel of Freedom................................................................................……131
Plate No. 7: Mario Montenegro as Lapulapu..................................................................138
Plate No. 8: Roland Dantes as Lapulapu.................................................................140
Plate No. 9: Lito Lapid as Lapulapu...........................................................................140
Plate No. 10: Doce Pares Banner................................................................................148
Plate No. 11: Two Hall of Fame trophies of Roland Dantes.................................151
Plate No. 12: Two *sayaw* contestants both dressed as Lapulapu........................152
Plate No. 13: Filipino Martial Arts Logo.................................................................155
Plate No. 14: Disarmed, Mori calmly appeals to Ben to end his life...................171
Plate No. 15: Scenes from *The Pacific Connection*.............................................180
Plate No. 16: Scenes from *Arnis: The Sticks of Death*.........................................181
Plate No. 17: Johnny fights a poacher using Arnis..................................................181
Plate No. 18: Fighters training in *Kamagong*........................................................182
Plate No. 19: Costumes from *The Pacific Connection*............................................183
Plate No. 20: Costumes from *Arnis: The Sticks of Death* and *Kamagong*........184
Plate No. 21: Manuel endures hardening training with Maestro Sutero..............187
Abstract

This dissertation explores the construction of Filipino national identity by examining the Philippine national government’s appropriation of Filipino Martial Arts (FMA) between 1975 and 2010. FMA’s nationalization offers a window into the larger dynamics of nation-building in the Philippines. Having been colonized for nearly four centuries (1565-1946), the Philippine national government reified the Filipino nation by appropriating older symbols as national ones, and with the purpose of articulating a unique Filipino national identity. The nationalization of FMA is analyzed using Benedict Anderson’s constructivist interpretation of nations as ‘imagined communities’. The dissertation argues that in order to understand the logic behind the national government’s nation-building project using FMA, Filipino postcolonial anxieties over national identity (or their perceived lack of) must be taken into consideration. In this regard, FMA’s nationalization is engaged with Anthony Smith’s concept of the ethnie (ethnic community). Studying the history of how decentralized indigenous martial arts practice became institutionalized in FMA clubs, the dissertation finds that FMA as an ethnographic concept was formulated mainly since the 1970s in consonance with its commercialization, increasing popularity and nationalization. By looking at how national identity is represented in FMA films and in reconstructions of the national hero Lapulapu, the dissertation argues that FMA practitioners seek to highlight their localized identities by inserting their own symbols and interpretations into the national identity being articulated. This process, termed the ‘reverse appropriation’ of nationalism, was a way for FMA clubs to preserve their local institutions and identities from being totally consumed by the nationalization and nation-building project.

Keywords: nation, national identity, nationalism, ‘imagined communities’, ethnie
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Introduction

In the latest documentary on Filipino Martial Arts (FMA), The Bladed Hand: Global Impact of the Filipino Martial Arts (2012), filmmaker Jay Ignacio begins by asking random people at a town fiesta in the Philippines if they know anything about Kali, Eskrima, and Arnis—all of which are categorized as FMA. Nearly all who were asked had not the faintest idea what they were. This is intriguing considering that since the 1970s, FMA has been featured in many Hollywood films and has hundreds of practitioners around the world such that Ignacio called it ‘our country’s greatest cultural export’. Furthermore, since the 1970s, FMA was being mobilized by the national government for nation-building.

In December 2009, around the same period Ignacio began working on his documentary, the Philippine Republic Act (RA) 9850, entitled ‘An Act declaring Arnis as the National Martial Art and Sport of the Philippines’ was signed into law. It came to be informally called the ‘Arnis Law’. Among other things, the Arnis Law officialized Arnis as the national martial art and sport of the Philippines: it empowered government agencies—the Department of Education, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and the Philippine Sports Commission—with the task of promulgating the necessary rules and regulations to carry out the provisions of the Act; the symbol of Arnis was inscribed into the official seal of the Philippine Sports Commission; and Arnis was given the honour of being the first sporting event to be played in the annual national Olympics known as the Palarong Pambansa.

Significantly, it argued a definition of Arnis which made it coterminous with, if not a collective label for various forms of indigenous martial arts in the Philippines which more or less shared similar features. Section 2 of RA 9850 reads:

‘Section 2. Definition of Arnis. - Arnis, also known as Eskrima, Kali, Garrote and other names in various regional languages, such as Pananandata in Tagalog; Pagkalikali,
Ibanag; Kabaroan and Kalirongan, Pangasinan; Kaliradman, Bisaya; and Didja, Ilokano, is an indigenous Filipino martial art and sport characterized by the use of swinging and twirling movements, accompanied by striking, thrusting and parrying techniques for defense and offense. This is usually done with the use of one (1) or two (2) sticks or any similar implements or with bare hands and feet also used for striking, blocking, locking and grappling, with the use of the same principle as that with the canes.⁴

The individual differences of the arts in terms of style, origin, and other unique characteristics, were downplayed in the Arnis Law to build an image of a homogenous form of Filipino culture. Blurring out the differences between these arts reflects the state’s strategy of nation building by consolidating the different cultural and ethnic groups in the Philippines into a single national identity symbolized by Arnis.

If, as what Ignacio showed, the average Filipino has never heard of the various disciplines in FMA, what then is the underlying logic behind the government’s elevation of Arnis into the status of a national symbol? How was it historically understood in relation to the concept of nation and the formation of national identity? What processes and which groups were involved in the formulation and maintenance of this national identity using FMA?

The relationship between FMA and the national government is both intimate and historical. The Arnis Law is the latest of a series of state-sponsored programs first initiated in the 1970s under the direction of then-president Ferdinand Marcos—himself a one-time Arnis student—aimed at nationalizing FMA. The appropriation of FMA is, in turn, part of a longstanding anti-colonial, nationalist tradition in the Philippines which mobilizes national symbols in order to assert a unique Filipino national identity divorced from colonial history and its influences. This dissertation is principally concerned with the history of the formulation and appropriation of FMA, by FMA clubs and the national government, in order to articulate and reify Filipino national identity. The consolidation of FMA from fragmented indigenous

⁴ ‘Philippine Republic Act 9850...’
practices mirrors the construction of Filipino national identity from the diverse ethno-linguistic populations in the Philippines. Hence, through the prism of FMA—how it was constructed, legitimized, and mobilized as a national symbol—we can explore how a Filipino nation is understood and realized. A central argument made in the dissertation introduces the concept of the ‘reverse appropriation’ of nationalism—that is to say, when the government appropriates FMA for national identity construction, FMA clubs appropriate nationalism to underline their own significance in the nation. When FMA practitioners make their own representations of national identity in subscription to the state-led aspirations, they subtly insert representations of themselves in order to understand their role and symbolically elevate themselves in the nation. Since there is a lack of historical information regarding the historical past of FMA, the differences in representation are not actively challenged by other groups which also have their own representations, as long as the representations subscribe to a standard stencil generated by the government’s nationalistic agenda.

**Historical Framework**

While indigenous forms of martial arts have long been in existence across the Philippine archipelago, there has been no historical evidence to indicate that they were understood as a homogenous cultural entity prior to the twentieth century as argued by Celestino Macachor and Ned Nepangue.\(^5\) While they shared some common features, they existed separately and were generally distinct from each other especially in terms of their technical details.\(^6\) The number of terminologies introduced in Section 2 of the Arnis Law indicates the diversity of these martial arts. Since the twentieth century, these arts were gradually introduced outside the Philippines—as its ‘greatest cultural export’—and became identified as a collective set of martial arts from the Philippines labelled as ‘FMA’ by Dan Inosanto.\(^7\) This outflow of FMA prompted the national government in the Philippines to claim

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\(^6\) This is visible in the way an average FMA club’s book pedantically distinguishes itself from other FMA clubs.

ownership over it in the 1970s. An examination of the Arnis Law shows the
government-designed assertion that these martial arts, which it termed ‘Arnis’, were
practically the same thing albeit had different names. This homogenizing,
nationalistic usage of Arnis departs from Inosanto’s use of ‘FMA’ which
acknowledges the plurality of the different martial arts, and reveals the
conceptualization of FMA as problematic.

Caught in the midst of FMA’s nationalization are the FMA practitioners—
especially those belonging to the institution of FMA clubs—who, long before the
government’s appropriation of FMA, preserved and transmitted FMA knowledge.
Because the very nature of martial arts fosters a culture of supremacy, FMA
practitioners have historically asserted their individual uniqueness and superiority
among other practitioners. FMA’s nationalization confronted them with the dilemma
of manoeuvring between highlighting their localized culture and identity, and being
homogenized under the nation. What FMA clubs developed was a strategy of
reverse-appropriating nationalism in which they subscribed to government programs
on FMA in order to—characteristically—elevate themselves above other clubs. This
concept of reverse appropriation is similar to Vicente Rafael’s use of ‘translation’ as
a way of reading Spanish colonization of the Philippines.8 Rafael argued that the
relationship between Spanish missionaries and Tagalogs, mediated by the translation
of religious text which was the interpretive medium for colonization, became
ambiguous because of different practices in translation. Used in the same way,
nationalization became the ideological language which ‘colonized’ the individual
identities of FMA clubs. However, beyond just ‘translating’ what the national
government’s aims were, FMA clubs used the language of nationalism to elevate
themselves above each other. Government-sponsored nationalism enfranchised FMA
clubs and gave them agency in the nation. Hence, whichever clubs cooperated with
the government gained access to national funds and acquired social status. This
strategy was expressed multifariously including subtly inserting their own identities
in reconstructions of idealized FMA fighters. It enabled them to achieve elevation
over other clubs and also express their understanding of their place in the nation.

8 Vicente L. Rafael, Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog
Reverse appropriation characterized the participation of FMA clubs as key actors in the construction of a Filipino national identity based on FMA.

The evolution of FMA as a concept shows its transformation across Philippine history and how it becomes something realized, formulated and later appropriated to express forms of nationalism engineered by the state. The intersection of FMA and nationalism beginning in the 1970s exhibits a process that mirrors the larger construction of identity and nationhood at the national level. The relationship between FMA and nationalism offers a microcosm into examining how Filipino identity was formulated.

In order to understand where FMA clubs are coming from in their nationalism, two points need to be raised: The first is that the Philippines follows a longstanding tradition of nation-building, primarily by asserting a unique Filipino national identity by mobilizing national symbols. Second, the reason why Filipinos are so adamant about this is caused by a desire to distance the nation from its colonial experience and influences.

Various scholars have sought to define nations. However, to use John Hutchinson’s term, nations exhibit ‘protean’ characteristics and as such there is really no normative definition for nations, even more their composition and formation.\(^9\) The dominant perspective on the study of nations, which this dissertation adopts, regards it as predominantly a cultural entity. Several influential authors on nations defined them along cultural lines. Ernest Gellner argued that ‘two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture’, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating’.\(^10\) Anthony D. Smith has also defined the nation along cultural lines as ‘a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members’.\(^11\) Distinguishing nations from states using a cultural-political dichotomy, Montserrat Guibernau defined the nation as ‘a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the

future, and claiming the right to rule itself.\textsuperscript{12} What is perhaps the most widely-known definition of the nation—Benedict Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined community’—also attributes people’s perceived communion along cultural similarity.\textsuperscript{13} These definitions suggest that culture constitutes the cement which binds people together in the nation. That the cultural practice of FMA was selected for mobilization by the national government in order to reify the nation illustrates exactly how shared culture is a primary basis for arguing the existence of the nation. A close examination of Guibernau’s definition shows how she highlighted the conscious formation of a nation’s members. Likewise, Gellner further argued that ‘two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this kind which turns them into a nation, and not the other shared attributes, whatever they might be, which separate that category from non-members.'\textsuperscript{14} While the cultural glue is a key basis for the formation of nations, it is the consolidation of individuals who acknowledge their cultural similarities that is the actual process of national formation and which deserves more attention. Rogers Brubaker argued that scholars should be less preoccupied with the question ‘what is a nation?’ and more with ‘How is nationhood as a political and cultural form institutionalized within and among states?’\textsuperscript{15} In other words, to understand how nations come to be, it is important to look at how people become aware, acknowledge, construct and reify their national communion. Following Brubaker’s proposition, the examination of the dynamics of nation-building between FMA practitioners and the national government is the main preoccupation of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{12} Montserrat Guibernau, Nationalisms: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century. Cambridge: Polity, 1996, 47; emphasis mine
\textsuperscript{14} Nations and Nationalism, 7; emphasis mine
\textsuperscript{15} Rogers Brubaker, ‘Rethinking Nationhood: Nation as an Institutionalized Form, Practical Category, Contingent Event’ in Contention, 4(1) Fall 1994, 6
The dividing line in the study of nations lies between those who hold nations as the natural and default organization of human society (primordialists) and those who hold them as contingent constructions of modern societies intended to address specific historic needs (constructivists). Two notable primordialists, Clifford Geertz and Edward Shills, have analyzed the ways human societies place value upon and interpret themselves as being held together across time by their history and traditions. Smith contends that both authors are often misread as believing in the reality of a nation’s primordial ties—rather, it is that they believe that people perceive primordial ties as being real. Brubaker adds, ‘…it is participants, not the analysts, who are the real ‘primordialists’, treating ethnicity as naturally given and immutable.’ On the other hand, constructivists assume an instrumentalist approach and argue that nations are formed out of the requirements or consequences of modernity. As such, constructivists predominantly also hold the nation to be a novel phenomenon rather than something which was carried over from antiquity. The most notable scholars of this approach are Gellner, Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm.

In his seminal work on nationalism, Thought and Change, Gellner argued that nationalism ‘is not the awakening of nations but the invention of nations where they do not exist.’ That is to say that they were not constants of human existence that had just lain dormant but were fabrications tailored to suit specific needs. He argued that nationalism was ‘the necessary consequence or correlate of certain social conditions’ and attributed its emergence to the demands of an industrialized society as it shifted from an agrarian society. Unlike agrarian societies, industrial societies had different characteristics which agrarian institutions did not really address—for example, industrial societies tended to be mobile, anonymous, and the workforce adaptive and manoeuvrable. As such, nations and nationalism were born out of industrialization and the conditions of society imposed by industrialization (meritocracy, excess surplus, egalitarian societies, high social mobility, etc.) or

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demanded by it—due to its incapacity to subsist, an industrialized society relied on national institutions established by the state to keep itself operational.\textsuperscript{21} Gellner’s analysis on how these challenges were addressed by industrialized societies exhibits a top-down perspective such that it has been criticized by Hobsbawm as not being able to fully explain nationalism.\textsuperscript{22} Moreover, its overly functionalistic view removes agency from the nation’s members who believe in the reality of the nation. In its analysis of the FMA clubs’ reverse appropriation of nationalism, this dissertation offers one perspective that meets Hobsbawm’s invitation to examine the nation from the bottom-up. The dissertation illustrates how FMA clubs are equally significant players in the homogenization of culture which Gellner has mainly attributed to national elites.

Hobsbawm can be regarded as the most ardent critic of the proposition that nations are antique and essential. In one of his most iconic works, \textit{Nations and Nationalism since 1780}, he analyzed the historical chronology of nationalism since the late 18th century—which is also the period he sets for the first emergence of nations—and taking from Gellner, argued that nations emerge during a specific and novel moment in history. He writes, ‘Like most serious students, I do not regard the “nation” as an unchanging social entity. It belongs exclusively to a particular, and historically recent, period. It is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state, the "nation-state" and it is pointless to discuss nation and nationality except in so far as both relate to it… the basic characteristic of the modern nation and everything connected with it is its modernity.’\textsuperscript{23} Based on a Eurocentric model, he argued that nations only emerged after the political developments at the end of French Revolution—especially the rise of the bourgeois in Europe—and devotes an entire chapter to showing their novelty—the disconnection between concepts of nationhood in antiquity and the more modern era, as well as its changing meanings.\textsuperscript{24}

Possibly the most widely-read scholar on nations and nationalism is Benedict Anderson who famously described nations as ‘imagined communities’—a

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Nationalism}, 25-29
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Nations and Nationalism since 1780}, 9-10, 14
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Nations and Nationalism since 1780}, 14-45
\end{flushleft}
community of people who may never meet yet are aware of their communion. Anderson agrees with Gellner and Hobsbawm that nations are modern constructs which emerged out of the social conditions and needs of a modern society. But unlike Gellner, Anderson argued that the developmental transition is not agrarian-industrial, rather, it is the fall of religious and dynastic societies towards the end of the 18th century. Religious conversion entailed a concept of membership that was largely foreign to the idea of nationalism. Hence, its decline stimulated other senses of commonness—mainly, Anderson explains, in terms of language—that supplanted the religious community. This development intersected with the widespread innovations in print technology and the economic drive of capitalism to such a degree that it set up the social conditions that gave rise to nationalism. Most notable is Anderson’s analysis that the widespread reach of printed material—especially the novel and the newspaper—enabled people to be aware of their connection with each other. This awareness comes despite the fact that they have never really seen each other and are nevertheless conscious of each other’s existence. In this sense, their connection is perceived, or ‘imagined’. Anderson’s use of the term ‘imagined’ sets him apart from Gellner who presented nations along the lines of invention, falsity and fabrication. By doing so, Anderson legitimates the way people perceive their communion. His contention that ‘communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined’ overlaps with the views of Geertz and Shills in that the ways in which people perceive of their nation are never categorically ‘wrong’. Following Anderson, this dissertation reads FMA’s reconstructions of national identity as the subjective understanding of practitioners’ communion with each other, but adds that ‘imagining’ also reflects the subjective understanding of their uniqueness from others.

Taking all three perspectives from Gellner, Hobsbawm and Anderson, we can see that although they do not exactly agree on the catalyzing agent for and the chronological placement of nations, the central concepts of their theories rest on

25 Imagined Communities…, 12-22
26 Imagined Communities…, 12-18
27 Printing technology made written text readily available, and the demands of capitalism circulated these texts as well as influenced its vernacularization; Imagined Communities…, 37-46
28 Imagined Communities…, 15
29 Imagined Communities…, 6
ideas of construction and modernity. In many ways, this helps in understanding the construction of the Filipino nation. It is also in this regard that the dissertation holds the Filipino nation to be. Admittedly, however, the models are predominantly Eurocentric. When considering these perspectives as models for an analysis of the emergence of Filipino nationhood, one cannot help realize that they are not entirely applicable for two reasons: One, modernity cannot be objectively categorized. It is uneven and indefinite—the concept of modernity in Western Europe is not the same as that of the Philippines. As Neil Lazarus argued, the regional origin and chronological situation of the ‘modern’ period are the topics of academic debate.

Two, the Philippines emerged from colonization—setting the physical territory aside, what is today recognized as ‘the Philippine Islands’ was derived from the demarcations established by Spanish colonial ventures over a period of over three hundred years. In short, ideas of nationhood and nationalism are practically Western imports. To illustrate, let us consider the contributions of Filipino national hero Jose P. Rizal (1861-1896)—whose novels were used in Anderson’s argument about how the novel contributed to imagined communities—and how it is derived from European models of nationalism. To begin with, print technology and print-capitalism during the entire span of the Spanish era was dominated and controlled by the Spaniards, particularly by religious orders. Rizal’s novels were themselves published abroad rather than in the Philippines. His ideas were also formulated during his studies in Europe. After its publication, his novels were heavily criticized by the Spanish clergy in the Philippines who viewed them as heretical and subversive, and were thus banned from circulation in the Philippines. Furthermore, Rizal used Spanish as a medium which was mainly understood only by the elite and

30 Nations and Nationalism, xix; Anthony D. Smith, ‘Nations and History’ in Understanding Nationalism, 15
32 Using Rizal’s novel Noli Me Tangere (1887) as one example, Anderson illustrated how the reader can omnisciently observe how different characters are connected though they never meet, and how the reader becomes aware of a sense of time shared with the characters of the novel; Imagined Communities..., 25-31
34 Noli Me Tangere was published in Berlin in 1887, and El Filibusterismo was published in Ghent in 1891
35 Teodoro Agoncillo, History of the Filipino People. Quezon City: Garotech, 1990, 140
educated classes. This significantly restricted the reach of Rizal’s novels as a platform for nationhood in the colonial Philippines. Finally, the superimposition of Western traditions of nationalism on the Philippine colonial setting was arguably so alien that, as Reynaldo Ileto eloquently illustrated, by the time the nationalist ideologies of Rizal and his contemporaries trickled down to the masses, they were interpreted and expressed along the lines of Folk Christianity rather than say, French liberal nationalism.  

In order to analyze Filipino (or more particularly FMA) expressions of nationalism, constructivist understandings of nationhood must be engaged with the Philippine colonial experience. In this regard, Partha Chatterjee’s position on nationalism as a ‘derivative discourse’ among former colonies (like India or the Philippines) provides the dissertation’s examination of FMA clubs with an analytical tool. In his analysis of Indian nationalist thought, Partha Chatterjee showed how Marx—and subsequently Marxist historians—labelled Great Britain as the ‘unconscious’ tool for bringing about a modern, Indian nation. It is along the same logic that in a 1937 speech, Filipino president Manuel Quezon proposed to ‘forgive’ the Spaniards because they provided the homogenizing foundations of Filipino culture: ‘Above all, we owe to Spain the foundations of our national unity…’ (and because of this, Filipinos should) ‘raise in every heart… a monument of undying gratitude to the memory of Spain side by side with that which we should erect in honour of the American people.’ Like the Philippines, India’s colonial experience under the British was its introduction to national consciousness, as well as notions of backwardness and modernity—which were weighed against concepts of westernization. The tendency of former colonies to weigh themselves against their former masters is evident in John Plamenatz’ analysis of the uneven distribution of nationhood and modernity in Europe. Plamenatz argued that non-Western European countries—namely Slavic, African, Asian, and Latin American—have measured

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38 Karl Marx, quoted in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World…*, 22
their backwardness in terms of the global standards set by Western Europe. These countries adopted an Eastern model of nationalism evolved as a result of Western European penetration to these regions especially in the form of colonization. During their period of subjugation under Western dominance, ‘Eastern’ countries were exposed to Western models of civilization. This often proved to be a dilemma for nationalists in former colonies. For example, Plamenatz argued that the Chinese despised these Western models because they were associated with colonial experience. At the same time, they perceived these models as ideal standards of civilization and thus sought to emulate them. ‘Eastern’ countries acknowledged their own ‘backwardness’ and a need to transform themselves to overcome this backwardness and ‘catch up’ with the West. This resulted in an ambivalent type of nationalism that was both imitative and competitive to Western civilization.

Postcolonial thinker Frantz Fanon has commented on how ‘White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro’—causing him to assume two contradicting identities. Chatterjee further argued, the Eastern world sought to ‘re-equip’ the nation culturally to transform it by measuring their backwardness in terms of the standards set by their colonizers while being fully aware of how alien this standard was to them. Postcolonial nations adopted an approach to progress that subscribes to Western European models of nationhood without compromising their own cultural distinctiveness. Especially among countries with a colonial past like the Philippines which inherited an assortment of cultural groups from their colonizers, it became imperative to establish this distinctiveness as a unitary or homogenous entity if they desired to continue existing as nations—homogenous, as Gellner would have it, because it needed to hold its diverse populations together. Moreover, it was also necessary for national identity to be simultaneously inclusive and exclusive—to highlight similarities between local cultures within the nation while setting them apart from what was perceived as

41 This was notably the sentiments of many former colonies in Africa and Asia—which gained independence only after World War II—when they participated in the Bandung Conference in 1955; ‘Two Types of Nationalism’, 32
42 ‘Two Types of Nationalism’, 33
43 Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks (trans. Charles Lam Markmann) London: Pluto Press, 2008 [1952], 7
44 Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, 2
45 Nationalism, 29
foreign. Former colonies were faced with this postcolonial anxiety of having to use Western examples of nationhood and modernity while distinguishing themselves from Western culture, and having to absorb the diverse ethnic communities which the colonizer left behind. It is precisely from this background that the national government’s appropriation of FMA for nation building surfaces. This framework of insecurity and ambivalence is something that Philippine historiography has not widely used in analyzing the history of Filipino nationhood and nationalism. Like the constructivist theories discussed above, this dissertation holds the Philippines to be a modern construct. That is to say, it did not exist in antiquity in the same manner it does today. Rather, it is a product of specific historical circumstances (colonization and decolonization) which occurred in more recent times. At the same time, as with Anderson, Geertz and Shills, it does not wish to delegitimize the way in which nations are imagined regardless of historical accuracy or veracity.

Thus far, the section has laid out the theoretical logic for analyzing national identity construction in FMA. It is next important to look at the patterns of Filipino nationalism using specific examples which the Philippines historically employed to address its postcolonial anxieties since these tactics reflect the same way FMA was mobilized for nation-building. The national government has traditionally expressed its concept of a unique Filipino identity in two ways:

The first is to identify and draw a line between what is uniquely Filipino and what is foreign. It has been a common strategy among nations—not just postcolonial ones which tend to suffer from identity crisis—to identify themselves by distinguishing their difference with other nations. In *Being and Nothingness*, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre argued that the existence of the ‘other’ causes an individual to reorient his own position based on the mere presence of this other individual.46 Linda Colley’s seminal work on British identity argued that the underlying factor for the emergence of a British national identity was the threat posed by a French Catholic ‘other’.47 Colley referred to how the English, the Scottish, and the Welsh identified themselves against the Catholic French. The decline of this threat and the change in the perception of the French as ‘others’, have consequently led to a diminished sense of Britishness. As Tim Edensor put it,

juxtaposing and contrasting the national self from the foreign other is a way for nations to ‘draw boundaries’ around themselves. Following the same argument but taking into consideration what was discussed as postcolonial anxieties involving Western culture, Naoki Sakai argued how peoples in the ‘non-West’ have constructed their own historical and cultural identities against the hegemonic West.

The second tendency of expressing national identity in the Philippines, which is the condition that the first expression really seeks to satisfy, is to establish the antiquity of the Philippines as a nation—that is, that the Filipino nation was only interrupted by colonization rather than formed as a consequence of it. These expressions became avenues for Filipinos to emancipate themselves from their colonial heritage and experience. They reflect the observations made by cultural primordialists like Geertz and Shills regarding how members of a nation are passionate about and defensive of their historical continuity from the past—being the real primordialists as Smith earlier argued—regardless of whether the nation is acknowledged as a modern construct or not.

One of the main critiques to the modernist approach to nations and nationalism is the ethnosymbolic approach which argues that the emergence of nations can be traced to the pre-modern era. This particular branch of nationhood studies is championed by scholars like John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, the leading proponent of ethnosymbolism. Smith proposed that nations should be studied over la longue durée—long periods of time—rather than pinning their formation to specific periods in history or to the process of modernization. To use Umut Ozkirimli’s phrase, ‘the modern era is no tabula rasa’. Instead, they emerge from conditions and sentiments set by the pre-modern. While the nation’s territorial consolidation is recent, Hutchinson argued, their primary concern is not with modernity but with identity and history. Smith believes that nations are constituted by ethno-symbolic elements—ethnic myths, memories, symbols and culture. These elements act as some kind of cultural glue which draw people together and hold them

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50 Anthony D. Smith, Myths and Memories of the Nation. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 10
52 John Hutchinson, ‘Nations and Cultures’ in Understanding Nationalism, 76
53 ‘Nations and History’, 23
in place across time. In his seminal work, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Smith introduced his concept of *ethnie*—from the French term for ethnic group—as the pre-modern roots of the nation. It is based upon *ethnies* that modern nations are formulated. Hutchinson also argued that whenever populations need to be mobilized into action, ethnosymbols are appropriated by nations regardless of how ‘modern’ these nations are. In many cases, where they do not exist, the connection with the past is—Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm argue—‘invented’ using novel traditions. That is to say, symbols and meanings from the past are appropriated and reconfigured into something new that could serve to idealize national identity and mobilize a population into action.

Both forms of expressions of unique national identity served to address Philippine postcolonial insecurities over national identity. Borrowing Andris Zimelis’ interpretation, ‘nationalism’ can be understood as the process of ‘imagining nation’. It has been through the construction of Filipino national identity that Philippine nationalism was historically formulated. The articulation of national identity, as a form of nationalism, has been in place since the 1800s in the Philippines, shortly after what Hobsbawm regarded as the ‘modern’ era in nationalism studies. Filipino intellectual and economic elite in the latter half of the 1800s, known as *ilustrados* (enlightened)—one of whom was Jose Rizal—made the initial arguments on the continuity of the Filipino nation by claiming that Philippine culture was part of a Malay civilization particularly to distinguish the ‘Filipino’ from the ‘Spaniard’. Later nationalist ideology was patterned after the decolonizing aspirations of the *ilustrados*. National symbols provided the ammunition for this

55 ‘Nations and Cultures’, 77
57 Andris Zimelis, ‘Imagining Nations: Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities and Jorg Haider’s “Austrian” Nationalism’ in *Crossroads* 9(2), December 2010, 12
58 Renato Constantino has argued that Filipinos’ sense of nationalism has been too much preoccupied with the concept of identity but not of ‘a consciousness of common aspirations and goals’ which is far less rudimentary than the former; Renato Constantino, *Identity and Consciousness: The Philippine Experience*. Malaya, 1974
59 Anderson argues that the Philippines actually pioneered nationalist movements in the whole of Asia; *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism*, 23
60 Resil B. Mojares, ‘Claiming “Malayness”: Civilizational Discourse in Colonial Philippines’ in *More Hispanic Than We Admit: Insights Into Philippine Cultural History*. Isaac Donoso (ed.) Quezon City: Vibal, 303-326; Mojares contends that the argument on Malay Civilization was mostly theoretical.
argument, and have been used by the state to an almost overwhelming degree across several episodes in Philippine History. During the Commonwealth Government of the Philippines in 1935, national symbols were mobilized to argue for Filipino national identity in preparation for independence. A host of national symbols were associated, though unofficially, with the Philippines—these symbols have since been taught to elementary students in the country. Some examples of these include the Carabao (Water Buffalo) as the national animal, the Philippine mango as the national fruit, the Sampaguita as the national flower, the Narra tree as the national tree, and numerous more. Although seemingly excessive, it revealed the underlying agenda of distinguishing the Philippines from other nations. The obsessive mobilization of national symbols can be read as the pursuit of the Filipino ethnie in order to allay postcolonial anxieties over national identity. In 1956, the inclusion of the life and works of Rizal in school curricula was required by legislation for all academic institutions in all levels. In 1962, then-president Diosdado Macapagal—father of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo who signed the Arnis Law—moved Philippine Independence Day from July 4, 1946 to June 12, 1898. In 1998 a law was passed which detailed the handling of and proper conduct to the flag, coat of arms and other heraldic items. In 2011, the National Script Act officialized baybayin (Tagalog pre-Hispanic script) as the national Filipino script. Really then, the appropriation of FMA which began during the time of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s is thus just part of this age-old tradition of nationalism which is understood as the construction and assertion of a Filipino national identity.

Postcolonial anxiety over national identity was not just a matter for the national government. It was also a topic for discussion among academic circles, especially among historians, in the 1970s. The perception that the country lacked a cohesive expression of Filipino ‘identity’ was the subject of much consternation,

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61 The Commonwealth was intended to be a ten-year transitional period for eventual Philippine Independence from the United States. It was cut short by the Second World War.

62 July 4, 1946 is associated with American Independence. Moving Independence Day to June 12, 1898, the day when Filipino revolutionaries declared independence from Spain removes this association with American Independence Day. Moreover, symbolically, it showed that Philippine Independence was not just ‘granted’ by a colonizer but something fought for and won. Historian Usha Mahajani has made a similar argument—on the whole, Philippine Independence in 1946 was not so much the result of Filipinos winning or gaining it, but simply that the United States decided to withdraw its sovereignty from the country. Historically, the Philippine Republic that was formed in 1898 was quashed by American colonization the next year; Usha Mahajani, *Philippine Nationalism: External Challenge and Filipino Responses 1565-1946*. Queensland: University of Queensland Press 1971, 481
spawning a growth in a nationalist approach to the discipline of history. Nationalist historian Renato Constantino went to the extent of referring to the Filipinos as a ‘confused people’ in a ‘pathetic search for identity’. Constantino argued that even before independence in 1946, Filipinos had an affinity for things Western (Spanish and American) and acquired ‘a distorted picture of their own reality, a warped sense of values and a way of life not consistent with their economic status’. Instead of asserting their own identity, he argued, the Filipinos appropriated the colonial master’s identity. By shedding colonial influences, only then would the Filipinos recognize their own identity. As an approach to addressing this concern, Constantino’s historiography of Philippine history was laid out in the manner of Smith’s *la longue durée*. Two of Constantino’s most prominent books, which are today used as standard textbooks of Philippine history, revealed his view of continuity in Philippine History. In the field of archaeology, Felipe Landa Jocano’s 1975 work *Filipino Prehistory* reinforced the nationalist argument on the antiquity of the nation by showing fossil evidence that all Southeast Asians came from one ‘core population’. During this same period, literary circles in the Philippines were also preoccupied with the subject of the crisis in national identity. At least four national writers of fiction have tried to confront the issue by making it a main theme in their works: Francisco Sionil Jose, Nick Joaquin, Nestor Vicente Madali Gonzalez, and Amado Hernandez. All of them agreed that the Filipinos were a ‘lost soul’ owing to their colonial history. Based on the given examples of how the Philippines problematized and sought to address their postcolonial anxiety over national identity, it is easy to see why an ethnosymbolic analysis of FMA nationalism is useful. The Philippines has been shaped by historically modern forces of colonization, but it fervently clings to its imagined pre-colonial roots so as not to lose its sense of identity to the overwhelming forces of modernization, Western cultural hegemony and globalization.

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63 *Identity and Consciousness…*, 1
64 *Identity and Consciousness…*, 11
The problem with the Philippine nationalist rhetoric is that it ignores any sense of historical context in the nation’s linear history. If the imagined community is, as modernists argue, formulated to meet historic demands, it should be said that these demands—and the arguments put forth to meet them—change over the course of a nation’s history.\textsuperscript{68} The dissertation suggests that the appropriation of FMA must not be seen as a consistent and flawless process designed from the top by the national government as per Gellner’s design. An ongoing process, the construction of FMA is also being adjusted to conform to dominant or altering perceptions of Filipino national identity. Its features change over time to accommodate new ideas and historical developments. Moreover, the expressions of national identity at the level of the FMA clubs—or the reverse appropriation of nationalism—show the cohesion and fracture of localized identities under the national one being introduced. John Hutchinson has expressed how people who have overlapping claims to national identity battle over ownership of symbols in order to legitimize their claims.\textsuperscript{69} James Frusetta called this a ‘zero-sum game’ where only one identity is held as absolute.\textsuperscript{70} The clubs’ appropriation of nationalism shows a different kind of competition: it acknowledges communion, and it does not seek to actively counter the claims of other clubs, only to strengthen its own. The legitimacy of other FMA clubs’ identities is not actively disregarded, and their imagined communion is preserved.

\textsuperscript{68} For example, between the 1560s and the 1860s, the term ‘Filipino’ was specifically used to refer to only the creoles (Spaniards born in the archipelago). Shortly before the outbreak of the Philippine Revolution against Spain, this term was reformulated by ilustrados to include the rest of those who lived under Spanish rule. Among the ilustrados, there were also multiple imaginings of Filipino national identity that were tailored to their individual ideological concepts: Isabelo de los Reyes defined ‘Filipino’ along a scope that subverted the hierarchies of urban and rural, elite and popular, even Catholic and animist; When Macario Sakay established the Tagalog Republic during the struggle against the United States, his definition of Tagalog was very much akin to de los Reyes’ definition of ‘Filipino’ even though strictly speaking the Tagalogs are only one of the ethno-cultures in the archipelago. Another example is the three stars in the Philippine flag which were originally meant to refer to the three islands where the Revolution first erupted—Luzon, Panay, and Mindanao. After the initial stages of the revolution, the reference to Panay was altered to accommodate its neighbouring Visayan islands. As what historian Resil Mojares also argued, the initial nationalist discourse which was used to argue for independence was a question of a Malay race rather than a question of Filipino nationhood; Paul A. Kramer, The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & The Philippines. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 35-87, 68; ‘Claiming “Malayness”’, 319-321
\textsuperscript{69} ‘Nations and Cultures’ in Understanding Nationalism, 87
Method and Sources

This dissertation was done in three stages. The first stage involved preliminary research, establishing the research question, formulating the historical framework, building a list of relevant literature for both FMA and nationalism studies, and identifying historical sources. The second stage, lasting eight months, was spent doing fieldwork in the Philippines collecting data on FMA. Most of the work during this time involved interviewing FMA practitioners. The third stage was concerned with consolidating the findings and writing the analysis as the dissertation. During this time, the researcher maintained correspondence with some informants.

Admittedly, sources on the history of FMA are scant. In general, Philippine history beyond the last one hundred fifty to two hundred years ago is virtually unexplored because of the scarcity of historical records. Prior to Philippine independence in 1946, Philippine history was also written through a colonial filter by colonial scholars. Moreover, records from the Spanish colonial period tend to be in Spanish and thus prove difficult for historians not specialized in the language. In FMA, this is compounded by the fact that the majority of the founders of the clubs—and even many FMA teachers in the Philippines today—come from the lower classes of society and do not tend to keep written records of their own history, much less the history of FMA. This prompted the researcher to explore the oral history among practitioners, and use other historical sources such as martial arts films and journals to reconstruct FMA nationalism.

The earliest book on FMA was a training manual for Arnis written in 1957 by Placido Yambao. This is relatively recent considering that FMA claims antique origins. The introduction to the book provides a historical background to Arnis which follows the linear history that is commonly told among practitioners. The main concern of scholars with Yamboa’s history is that it does not provide sources that could be further examined—Yamboa was himself not a trained historian, and his book was essentially concerned with providing instructions for the practice of Arnis.

71 For example Antonio de Morga, who served as a Spanish colonial official in the Philippines, published Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas (Events in the Philippine Islands) in 1609. This was later annotated by Jose Rizal in 1890 with a lot of nationalist charged comments; for an online copy, see Antonio de Morga, Sucesos de Las Islas Filipinas. (1609) [web] http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/8phip10.txt (November 29, 2014)
72 Placido Yambao, Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis. University of the Philippines Press 1957
Nonetheless, Yambao’s pioneering work set the template for later books on FMA. This template basically consists of a potted history of FMA, a history of specific clubs, and instruction manuals for training in FMA usually in the form of illustrations or photographs.

Since Yambao, several FMA enthusiasts have followed his initiative to write a history of FMA. Most influential is Dan Inosanto’s *Filipino Martial Arts as taught by Dan Inosanto*, which also follows Yambao’s format. The majority of these authors, however, have not been trained as historians. The linear history of FMA reiterated in such books borders on myth and is often taken as truth. FMA scholar Mark Wiley—one of the early FMA scholars with a formal background in anthropology and sociology—stated that since the printing of Inosanto’s book, ‘…no one has conducted a study of the Filipino martial arts from a scholarly perspective nor has anyone attempted to validate many of the book’s claims.’ Nonetheless, such works are invaluable in that they offer what little history we have of FMA and how it is understood. Moreover, considering that FMA groups tend to be reclusive and standoffish to each other, these works provide a window into how an FMA community is imagined.

One of the best examples for this type of written material is Edgar Sulite’s *Masters of Arnis, Kalis & Escrima*. Sulite’s work is generally a transcript of his interviews with a number of FMA teachers around the country. His interrogation drew out information such as the teachers’ stylistic lineages, their personal views on martial arts, and personal experiences involving martial arts. More than anything, this line of questioning (and its replies) reveals what issues FMA practitioners are concerned with the most. Like many books which provide potted histories of FMA, one shortcoming of Sulite’s work as a research on history also gives its credence as a primary source because of its raw content. Caught in the politics within FMA, Sulite does not (or cannot) challenge or critically interpret his informants’ statements.

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Coming from a more academic background, Wiley endeavoured to validate them. However, Wiley’s historical analysis becomes mainly confined to just this. The preoccupation with the validation of FMA history is shared in later works by Felipe Jocano Jr., and Macachor and Nepangue which provide critiques of FMA history.

Aiming to go beyond this, the dissertation adopts the methodological approach towards oral history as proposed by Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson which seeks to look past the reality content of accounts and into ‘symbolic categories through which reality is perceived.’ Luise White has adopted a similar approach towards African oral history regarding Vampires. White illustrated how myths and rumours became ways in which Africans understood and interpreted their colonial experience, and how this was useful for writing colonial history. In the same way, this dissertation reads reconstructions of FMA history and national identity as revelations of people’s desires for nationhood and what national qualities they value.

FMA magazines and electronic journals on FMA have also been useful sources of information as they act as platforms for FMA enthusiasts to write down their interests and concerns. Although the vast majority of contributions are non-academic articles, they provide a repository for FMA-related knowledge. These media also provide the opportunity for like-minded readers to congregate, communicate, and network.

Films are another source for analyzing FMA and national identity, and are primary sources for the dissertation’s Chapter Four on FMA films. On one hand, FMA films—whose productions are mainly done by FMA enthusiasts—reveal certain understandings about how FMA relates to and expresses national identity and nationalism. On the other hand, the films—which were made over a period of four decades—reveal changing concepts of national identity and nationalism through the prism of FMA. Documentary type films, such as Jay Igncacio’s 2012 The Bladed 76

76 For instance, Wiley investigated the veracity of a fantastic account made by FMA teacher Angel Cabales regarding his own teacher by travelling to a remote mountain in the Philippines; Mark V. Wiley, The Secrets of Cabales Serrada Escrima. Tuttle Publishing 1999, 7-12
78 Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds.) The Myths We Live By. London: Routledge, 1990, 1
Hand and Kerwin Go’s *Eskrimadors* (2010) augment FMA books as sources of information on FMA history.¹ Like FMA books, both documentaries followed the same format in that they feature a history of FMA, a commentary on the present state of FMA, and interviews of various teachers and practitioners. Following the methodological approaches taken by Siu Leung Li, Vijay Prashad, and M.T. Kato in analyzing martial arts films, this dissertation examines the symbolic representations of films by contextualizing them along the ideological doctrines which prevailed over FMA.²

A close examination of the Sulite and Wiley’s methodology, also applied by Ignacio and Go, reveals that data gathering on FMA is predominantly accomplished through interviews and participant-observation, as pioneered by Bronislaw Malinowski.³ There are several reasons for this. As earlier mentioned, one is that there is generally a dearth in written sources in Philippine history. Another is that the older generation of FMA practitioners come from the lower classes of Philippine society. As such, they tend to be more inclined to keeping and transmitting their history by word of mouth rather than written form. Another reason, elaborated in the first chapter, has to do with the very personal manner in which knowledge in FMA is transmitted. Taking from the argument of Thomas Csordas on embodiment, D.S. Farrer and John Whalen-Bridge have argued that martial arts knowledge is a form of embodied knowledge: ‘Considering knowledge as “embodied,” where “embodiment is an existential condition in which the body is the subjective source or intersubjective ground of experience,” means understanding martial arts through cultural and historical experience; these are forms of knowledge characterized as “being-in-the-world” as opposed to abstract conceptions that are somehow supposedly transcendental.’⁴ Farrer approached his academic research in Kung Fu through what he called ‘martial arts performance ethnography’ which necessitated

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¹ *Eskrimadors*, dir. Kerwin Go, 2010
active participation to absorb embodied knowledge.\textsuperscript{85} To learn FMA is to develop some form of personal contact with the teacher and fellow students. This, along with the fact that—as the dissertation later argues—communities in the Philippines are drawn along lines of filiation, makes it relatively difficult to access information from practitioners. It is a problem that Wiley and Ignacio shared when they did their researches for their book and documentary, respectively.\textsuperscript{86} Admittedly, it has also proven to be an impediment to data gathering for this research. Wiley stated, ‘To say the least, this work has been an exercise in perseverance. For example, on several occasions an interviewed master would suddenly withdraw his support because he had learned that some other master was also due to be included in the book.’\textsuperscript{87} Additionally, it is very likely that in the course of data gathering or interview, the teacher will use the researcher as a training dummy or will ask the researcher to show his own martial skills. As can be seen in the works of Wiley, Sulite and Ignacio, the author or filmmaker ends up on the receiving end of the FMA teacher’s display of skills. Here, physical interaction via martial arts, mediated by oral conversation, becomes a form of communication and knowledge transmission. This type of embodied knowledge and relationship-dependent transmission is simply something that cannot be fully expressed by the teacher in written format and thus requires a degree of participant-observation. Because of the nature of these interactions, the interviews have to be flexible—as semi-structured interviews—in order to adapt to what informants desire to do or talk about. A total of thirty-eight informants were interviewed.

Considering that there are hundreds of commercial and non-commercial FMA groups spread around the Philippines, it was logistically impossible to cover all of them in the period of less than a year.\textsuperscript{88} Instead, data gathering was focused in areas with high concentrations of FMA clubs—Metro Manila and the islands of Panay, Negros, and Cebu. Of these, members and teachers of Modern Arnis and Doce Pares Eskrima (possibly the two clubs with largest number of followers in the Philippines) provided the most data for the research.

\textsuperscript{86} Interview with Jay Ignacio, April 25, 2012, Quezon City
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Filipino Martial Culture}, 14
\textsuperscript{88} For a list of known systems in FMA, see \textit{Filipino Martial Culture}. Tuttle Publishing 1998, 348
It is probably important to mention that the researcher has been a practitioner of FMA since 2005. This provided an easier integration into the FMA community during research as a participant-observer. This background allowed for the establishment of a wider network of informants for the research. The kinds of observing involved were concerned with actual training in FMA, attending FMA conferences, or gaining access to FMA teachers who tend to be quite reclusive in sharing their personal experiences in FMA or their relationships with other FMA teachers. Some of the information presented in the dissertation, like the ones in Chapter Three which discuss FMA tournaments, were drawn from actual experience or participation in these events.

By nature, groups of FMA practitioners (whether they are members of clubs or not)—henceforth called FMA circles—tend to be distant from each other. Some relationships between FMA teachers or practitioners are delicate. Historic rivalries often exist between clubs whose members may have at one point even come to blows with each other. Certain views or comments by some informants are potentially unfavourable to particular individuals. Exposing the identity of these informants may result in conflict. For these reasons, several informants have been anonymized.

**Scope, Structure and Contents**

Because of certain constraints in time and funding, this research has certain limitations which paint only a partial, but nonetheless significant picture of FMA. As such, the dissertation has chosen to focus on specific features necessary for exploring the project of nation-building between the state and FMA practitioners. Firstly, although the dissertation covers different historical periods, its primary historical focus lies between the 1970s—when FMA became prominent in popular culture and when the state began to nationalize it—and the present. This is the period of intersection between state-sponsored nationalism and FMA. It is the point of origin of many present-day concepts in FMA regarding nationalism and national identity. While it is true that there have been early articulations and proposals for the integration of FMA in Filipino national identity (such as with Yambao), the 1970s saw an unprecedented awareness and expression of these earlier understandings of FMA. Secondly, research fieldwork was limited to the islands of Panay, Negros, Cebu, and Metro Manila. Although FMA is practiced throughout the Philippines, it
is in these islands where FMA clubs proliferate the most and where FMA is most marketed. Thirdly, there are certain topics and features of FMA which have not been discussed in this work but need to be stressed as integral parts of its practice. For example, while FMA teachers are predominantly male, the practice of FMA today is not confined to, or even dominated by, men. Another subject which needs exploration is how FMA was predominantly practiced by the lower classes before its nationalization and it loses this stigma after the state stamps its national logo on FMA. Finally, there are esoteric traditions characteristic of FMA which this dissertation did not cover. The present systematization of FMA gives off an appearance of its being scientific, yet it is deeply rooted upon religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. These subjects of gender, class, and esoteric tradition have not been pursued deeply, and are recommended for future researches on FMA which could offer a more comprehensive picture of FMA.

The dissertation is divided into two parts, with each part consisting of two chapters. There are four chapters in total. Chapter One entitled ‘Old School: Homogeneity, Diversity, and the Early Practice of FMA’ provides a historical background to the dissertation’s principal subject—FMA practitioners. Using William Henry Scott’s iconic work on sixteenth century Visayan barangays, the chapter explores the pre-colonial, military past which FMA celebrates and seeks to establish a connection with. The Visayan region was the first area in the Philippines to be documented by European observers who provided historians with a description of the political-military situation of the place. Historically, the Visayan region was decentralized, politically volatile, and rocked by intermittent warfare. Despite this aura of fragmentation, FMA practitioners project a sense of cultural unity from this past even before they were mobilized by the national government. Using the historiography of Placido Yamboa and Dan Inosanto, Chapter One discusses how this past was reconstructed to paint a homogenous image of Filipino national identity as a way of imagining practitioners’ communion with each other, as well as to address anxieties over national identity. Using an article written for the FMA Digest relating a pre-World War II oral history from a remote town in Luzon,

89 Originating from before the arrival of Westerners and still in existence today, the barangay is historically the smallest political organization, mainly based on family-oriented communities that live together; William Henry Scott, Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society. Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2004
and engaging this with data collected from interviews, the last section of this chapter analyzes the characteristics of FMA practice before they were commercialized in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{90} By looking at the social politics in the practice of FMA prior to the commercialized clubs, the chapter explains that the learning and transmission of FMA is predominantly exclusive. It is this exclusivity in particular which resists the homogenizing effect of nationalizing FMA.

Chapter Two entitled ‘New School: The emergence of FMA Clubs and the Construction of National Identity from FMA’ discusses the rise of FMA clubs in the 1920s, paying close attention to the relationships and conflicts between clubs as precursory to their eventual nationalization in the 1970s. The chapter covers the period when FMA intersected with broader developments in government-sponsored, anti-colonial nationalism under Marcos’ ‘New Society’ program. It argues that the construction of FMA as an artefact of a Philippine ethnie was generally motivated by ‘New Society’ politics and catalyzed by FMA’s growing popularity abroad which triggered postcolonial concerns that foreigners might ‘lay claim’ to FMA. It examines the stimulus for the nationalization of FMA, as well as the politics involved in its construction. By establishing the nature of relationships between members of FMA clubs based on Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, the chapter illustrates the shifts of the dynamics in teaching, learning, and competition between FMA practitioners when FMA became commercialized in the twentieth century. This accumulation of cultural capital has certain implications on clubs’ reputations and reinforces the ways they are able to draw students in, participate in government-sponsored programs (like being able to teach in public schools), and even represent FMA-styled national identity. On one hand, FMA practitioners were inherently geared towards outdoing or outperforming each other. On the other hand, the nationalization of FMA pressured them to fall under the homogenizing forces in the nation. The result was that FMA clubs reverse-appropriated nationalism as a tool for their age-old pursuit for status over other FMA practitioners.

The second part of the dissertation adopts a more thematic approach and examines specific ways in which Filipino national identity was imagined as a result of the intersection of FMA and nationalism. Chapter Three, ‘Lapulapu as a Symbol of Filipino Identity’, explores how the national hero Lapulapu was appropriated by

\textsuperscript{90} Donald Muñiz, ‘The Silent Art of Luisianan, Laguna Eskrima’, in \textit{FMA Digest} 2(4), 2005
FMA practitioners to articulate their idealization of Filipino nationalism and national identity. The chapter discusses the historical development of Lapulapu as a national figure, and leads into the discussion of the ways in which FMA clubs used him for their own ends. By showing the strategies of FMA clubs for reconstructing Lapulapu, this chapter argues that clubs patterned idealizations of Lapulapu after themselves. Using the term ‘malleability’, the chapter argues that Lapulapu was open to various reconstructions because of the lack of historical data on him. Because they were also doing the same thing, FMA clubs did not actively challenge the legitimacy of other reconstructions of Lapulapu in FMA. As such, Lapulapu became a unifying figure with whom various FMA clubs could associate with. On one hand, the way FMA clubs reconstructed Lapulapu revealed how they understood and expressed their role in the nation. On the other hand, they exhibited how, by inserting characteristics of their clubs into reconstructions of Lapulapu, they sought to elevate themselves above other FMA clubs without compromising their ‘nationalism’. While using Lapulapu as a figure to set themselves apart from non-Filipino identity, FMA clubs were effectively also using Lapulapu to set themselves apart from other FMA clubs.

The last chapter entitled ‘Negotiating National Identity in FMA Films’ brings together characteristic elements of FMA from previous chapters as they appear in FMA films. As instruments for mass consumption, FMA films allowed for the wide circulation and standardization of idealized versions of national identity and nationalism based on FMA. The chapter presents three strategies used in the films for articulating idealized versions of Filipino national identity and nationalism. Mainly produced by people who were also involved in FMA practice, the films revealed mainstream understandings of nationalism and identity, and acted as platforms for officialising these understandings. The latter point is reflected in how FMA film star Roland Dantes is transformed into an iconic political figure in FMA who was able to draw FMA clubs into cooperation. Looking at the things FMA practitioners pay attention to in the FMA films reveals that their main preoccupation is not with historical accuracy or on elements pertaining to nationalism or national identity, but with the martial arts aspects of the films. This lack of critical tone implied that clubs are inclined to be part of a nation endowed with its own characteristics, and that they subscribe wholesale to the sense of national identity.
that was being forwarded by the films. Simultaneously, it exhibits how they applied the same strategies of social positioning discussed in Chapter Two.
Chapter I

Old School: Homogeneity, Diversity, and the Early Practice of FMA

On December 22, 2009, in a hotel in Manila, a small crowd mainly composed of prominent Filipino Martial Arts (FMA) teachers, practitioners, and enthusiasts, gathered together for a conference organized by the Philippine Sports Commission and the office of Philippine Senator Juan Miguel Zubiri. The purpose of the gathering was to formally announce the passing of Republic Act No. 9850—a law which declared Arnis as the national sport of the country. The drive to nationalize FMA had been already in motion even during the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s and was, for the last thirty-five years the subject of tense cultural and historical debate. This drive was part of a larger, national movement that sought to define and reinforce Filipino identity starting from 1946 after the country gained its formal independence.

‘We are entering new frontiers. I’m very excited,’ the senator exclaimed in the forum, ‘if this happens, it will be the first time in Philippine Arnis, Kali and Escrima that we will have an alliance.’ Zubiri went on, ‘I shall humble myself. I shall go to all of them—if I have to go to the four corners of the Philippines—to beg and appeal to our grandmasters to join in. That, I shall do.’

The anticipation and willingness of Zubiri—one of the most politically influential individuals in the country—to beg and plead raises interesting questions as to the politics at play in the cultural-political intercourse between the national government and FMA practitioners regarding the nationalization of FMA. What was the significance of an ‘alliance’? Why was the establishment of an ‘alliance’ through RA 9850 such a marvellous accomplishment? Furthermore, why was Zubiri specifically running after the ‘grandmasters’ of FMA?

This chapter examines the historical background of FMA and its early practice among fragmented groups based on kinship. It also explores the history practitioners tell about FMA as a way of imagining their origins and communion. Both the exclusive nature of FMA practice and the sense of common origins later explain the positions that FMA clubs assume when FMA is nationalized.

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1 Video footage of conference from the personal collection of Samuel Dulay; note that Zubiri used the word ‘we’ as he is also a practitioner of FMA
This chapter has three sections. The first part focuses on a description of warfare in the country before the arrival of the Spanish in 1521. Oral tradition in FMA traces FMA’s origins to the pre-colonial era. The same history is being forwarded in FMA books, like in the works of Placido Yambao and Dan Inosanto. By examining martial practices and warfare in the sixteenth century barangay—a pre-colonial political organization based on communities with filial ties which has endured into the present—and following Anthony Smith’s argument on ethnic myths, the chapter explores the past that contemporary FMA clubs pattern themselves after and use to inform their present relationships. It argues that martial practices during that period did not exist in the same form they do today and participants did not share a sense of commonality they do today. Yet, they are celebrated by FMA practitioners as the cultural origins of FMA because they enable clubs to make sense of their present.

Using literature on the history of FMA written by and told among FMA teachers and practitioners, the second section examines how the past that FMA practitioners reconstruct reflects the way they imagine their connection to each other. Particularly, it looks at similarities and differences between the three most popular disciplines in FMA—Arnis, Kali, and Eskrima—which are understood to be one and the same in RA 9850. It engages these observations with the claims made in Placido Yambao and Buenaventura Mirafuente’s *Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis* (1957) and Dan Inosanto’s *Filipino Martial Arts as Taught by Dan Inosanto* (1980) from which RA 9850 takes its definition of Arnis from. The section argues that practitioners project themselves to a mythical past beyond the reach of Spanish historiography in order to claim ownership over FMA. Because practitioners use Spanish history to locate FMA, they are brought to the point of first contact between natives and Europeans in the sixteenth century. Consequently, it becomes the historical basis for myths of ancestry.

The third and final section of this chapter examines the characteristics of FMA circles prior to their institutionalization in the FMA club—henceforth called

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4 *Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis; Filipino Martial Arts as taught by Dan Inosanto*
the ‘Old School’—by analyzing an oral history about FMA practice in a remote village in Laguna (central Luzon) before the commercialization of FMA and engaging this with data from fieldwork. Viewed from Marcel Mauss’ concept of the ‘gift’, the story reveals the nature of interaction between practitioners, and how FMA knowledge is preserved and transmitted exclusively. These characteristics explain the way FMA clubs relate with each other.

Sixteenth Century Warfare in Visayan Barangays

The Philippine archipelago is divided into three main regions—Luzon in the north, the Visayan group of islands in the centre, and Mindanao in the south. The Visayan group of islands, or Visayas, lies in the middle of the archipelago. It was the first region in the archipelago to have been Hispanized, and also the last bastion of Spain during the Hispano-American war in 1898.

Presently, there is a veritable dominance of Visayan teachers in FMA such that one can be easily led to believe that FMA is Visayan in origin, if not a Visayan art. Some FMA researchers have tried to examine this from a cultural and historical perspective. Pedro Reyes—a native of Luzon—has argued that the reason for this is because FMA teachers in the north are more modest in comparison to teachers in the south who are more prone to boast. Reyes’ comment has received a strong reply from fellow researcher Celestino Macachor—a Visayan—who critiqued Reyes’ argument as an attempt of ‘northerners’ to understate the connection between FMA and the Visayas. Valid or otherwise, the comments of Reyes and Macachor regarding the origins of FMA underscore the contest for ownership of FMA among Filipino practitioners today. Macachor argued that the origins of FMA cannot be attributed to a single ethnic group in the Philippines. However, in Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth, Celestino Macachor and Ned Nepangue made a compelling argument that showed why FMA flourished in the Visayas more than anywhere else in the country. They argued that the security conditions in the Visayas

6 Magellan first landed in Cebu, and Legazpi subsequently colonized the surrounding islands; Iloilo was the last seat of power of Spain in 1898, earning it the title of ‘The Most Noble and Loyal City’.
9 ‘New Theories on the Origins of Eskrima’
during the Spanish period—raids coming from Dutch, Chinese, and Muslim pirates—prompted its inhabitants to learn weapons-based martial arts which are the precursors of today’s FMA.\(^\text{10}\)

Admittedly, the Visayans are not the only ethnic groups in the Philippines to have experienced prolonged periods of warfare or threats to their security. José Eugenio Borao Mateo’s examination of the role of Pampangos and Cagayanes—from central and northern Luzon—in the Spanish colonial forces shows that the Spaniards made praises to the ‘martial spirit’ of most of the ethnic groups they conscripted into the military.\(^\text{11}\) Thus, the Visayans are not the only ones who could be categorized into something like a ‘martial race’ such as what the British did in India.\(^\text{12}\) They are certainly not the only practitioners of FMA today. What is certain is, as the next chapter shows, Visayan islands (especially Panay, Negros, and Cebu) are the bedrock of FMA clubs and the commercialization of FMA being the earliest to commercialize FMA in the twentieth century.

Macachor and Nepangue’s work, endeavours to explore the historical roots of FMA. The authors have admitted to have arrived only at educated hypotheses which are inconclusive. In general, the main obstacle in the study of Philippine history is the lack and inaccessibility of historical sources. Hence, it is impossible to accurately pinpoint the roots of FMA, especially before the coming of the Spaniards. Yet, there is a common history among FMA practitioners that begins in the Visayas, and an interpretation of FMA ascribed with Visayan socio-cultural features. This common history can be analyzed to understand the past that FMA practitioners trace their roots to.

The Visayas is the earliest region to be colonized and documented by the Spaniards. When Spanish conquistador Legazpi arrived in the Philippines in the 1560s to colonize the islands, he observed different levels of civilization among the inhabitants.\(^\text{13}\) The Visayas stood out because of its strong culture of warfare. In his

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\(^{10}\) Celestino Macachor and Ned Nepangue, *Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth*. Xlibris Corporation, 2007, 63-80


book *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society*, the American historian William Henry Scott dedicated an entire chapter on weaponry and warfare where he discussed in detail the material culture related to warfare in the Visayas—swords and daggers, spears, missiles, and defensive arms.\(^{14}\) This chapter, ‘Weapons and War’, is for the most part about the rich Visayan martial culture. Although Scott acknowledges the technological superiority of blacksmithing in the Muslim tribes in the far south, he makes little mention of Luzon and Mindanao in terms of weaponry and warfare.\(^{15}\)

Although it may not be entirely correct to say that the Visayan societies were more bellicose or militarily superior to the rest of the archipelago, they were nonetheless immersed in intermittent warfare over long periods of time with their neighbours. When Spanish conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legazpi arrived in the Philippines in 1565, he wrote of the warlike inhabitants in Cebu:

‘These people declare war among themselves at the slightest provocation, or with none whatever. All those who have not made a treaty of peace with them, or *drawn blood with them*, are considered enemies. Privateering and robbery have a natural attraction for them. Whenever the occasion presents itself, they rob one another, even if they be neighbours or relatives; and when they see and meet one another in the open fields at nightfall, they rob and seize one another. Many times it happens that half of a community is at peace with half of a neighbouring community and the other halves are at war, and they assault and seize one another; nor do they have any order or arrangement in anything. All their skill is employed in setting ambushes and laying snares to seize and capture one another, and they always try to attack with safety and advantage to themselves.’\(^{16}\)

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\(^{15}\) Scott admits that during this time the best Visayan blades were still inferior to their Mindanao and Sulu counterparts which in turn ‘were less esteemed than imports from Makassar and Borneo’. The southern, Islamized region of the archipelago had trading contact with the Moluccas. *Barangay*, 148

\(^{16}\) The act of ’drawing blood’ here is a ritual called a blood compact done to seal peace agreements; *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 3, 55; emphasis mine
The geography of the Visayas may play a role in shaping the political relationships of ethnic groups in the region. Compared to Mindanao and Luzon, which were larger land masses, the Visayas is comprised of several islands with decentralized communities. Furthermore, the flow of the currents in the Visayas area, and the shelter the islands offered seafaring vessels, turned the waters around the islands into nautical highways between Luzon and Mindanao for both traders and raiders alike.

Scott explains how wars ‘...were waged by raids intended to seize slaves outright, to initiate or enforce alliances for trading networks, and to take booty to cover costs in any case.’ On one hand, what was fought over in these wars was manpower rather than territory. On the other hand, wars were also fought to establish political and economic relationships between communities. Pre-colonial communities were organized into barangays, consisting of somewhere between thirty to a hundred families. Each barangay was independent and ruled by a datu or chieftain. We see this in Legazpi’s observation of the decentralization of communities:

‘The inhabitants of these islands are not subject to any law, king, or lord. Although there are large towns in some regions, the people do not act in concert or obey any ruling body; but each man does whatever he pleases, and takes care only of himself and of his slaves… They recognize neither lord nor rule; and even their slaves are not under great subjection to their masters and lords, serving them only under certain conditions, and when and how they please.’

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17 Barangay, 153
18 Barangay, 4-6; Teodoro Agoncillo defines the pre-colonial barangay as: ‘the unit of government and consisted of 30 to 100 families. The Tagalog word barangay was derived from the Malay balangay, a boat which transported them to these (Philippine) shores. Each barangay was independent and ruled by a chieftain: History of the Filipino People, 40; When the Spaniards colonized the Philippines, they retained the structure of the barangay and appointed a cabeza de barangay or literally, ‘head of barangay’. Although the word barrio was more widely used during the American period, the term resurfaced during the time of Ferdinand Marcos when he was pursuing nationalistic programs. It is currently the smallest political unit in the Philippines.
19 The Philippine Islands, Vol. 3, 54
Barangays had small populations and low levels of production but their environs had abundant natural resources. To ensure the survival of the community, it was thus necessary to bolster the scarce manpower, or ensure a steady flow of goods through trade relations even if militarily. The main tactic employed in warfare was catching target communities off guard with blitz raids or ambushes mostly by, but not limited to, attacking from the sea. Such raids were normally performed on other islands since it would hardly make sense to raid captives from the same island as the raiders. Partly, this point explains why the limited sense of community—or regionalism as Agoncillo classified it—usually encompasses islands. Scott calls sea raiding the ‘most celebrated form of Visayan warfare.’ Similarly, the best defence against a possible raid was to intercept the enemy at sea. The Ancient Visayans were celebrated by FMA practitioners as experts in these raids, called pangayaw in the native language.

There are other reasons for conflict between pre-Hispanic barangays such as retaliation against enemy raids or other forms of injury, betrayal of pacts or alliances, murder or theft by an outsider, and the need for a sacrificial victim in some cases like when the chieftain died. The most common reason was ‘to avenge the honour or name of a kinsman who was killed or harmed by another man coming from a different barangay.’ Still others involved territorial trespass, transgression of religious practices and taboos, and also the stealing of women. Scott argued that women (especially daughters of powerful men) were prized for their being able to carry bloodlines and were thus abducted during raids if not as booty, as an assurance of establishing what he calls ‘collateral ties’ with their fathers. Each barangay was

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20 Legazpi disparagingly comments how the ‘Indians’ (natives) were too lazy to work even their own mines and would rather have foreign traders (like the Chinese) mine them for a fee; The Philippine Islands, Vol. 3, 57
21 History of the Filipino People, 13
22 Barangay, 154-155
23 Barangay, 153; these reasons are generally common among other parts of the Philippines prior to European contact. For more examples, see Laura Lee Junker, Raiding, Trading, and Feasting: The Political Economy of Philippine Chiefdoms. University of Hawaii, 1999, 337-349
25 Barangay, 154-155; Filipino Prehistory, 200; the word bagani is a Visayan terminology, particularly Panayanon; Scott does not define what he means by ‘collateral ties’. My interpretation is that the captives were used as hostages to pressure their communities into an alliance.
defended by its own set of trained warriors called bagani and were led to combat by the datu. If warfare revealed the boundaries of baranganic communities, so too did the peace treaties between them. In fact, peace treaties revealed the boundaries of communities more than warfare because they laid down who was covered by these agreements. Scott stressed how the arrangements made were between two datus or chieftains only, and ‘not between two nations or tribes, and so were binding on other members of the community only to the extent of the pact holder’s effective authority and in no case other datus.’ When the Spaniards thus arrived and established peace pacts with the different native leaders, they had to do so with individual datu leaders usually by a blood compact or sandugo where blood was drawn between parties, mixed into wine, and drank. To seal a peace agreement in Cebu for example, Magellan had to draw blood with several chieftains in one sandugo. Despite the mass ceremony, the agreements remained binding to individual chieftains. The necessity to have to deal with more than one ruler again establishes just how decentralized Visayan communities were at the onset of Spanish colonization.

There are several observations we can draw from this section in relation to FMA. Firstly, ancient Visayans followed a systematized model of warfare. The complexity of the customs that governed war, the social and political practices that came with war, the methods and strategies of combat employed, and the proficiency of the warriors, were shared common features among ancient Visayan communities. However, as Macachor and Nepangue contend, it does not necessarily imply the presence of an institutionalized form of martial arts which carried on to become FMA as is widely held by today’s FMA practitioners. Secondly, for lack of sources on the rest of the Philippines in the sixteenth century, we cannot really claim some kind of martial exceptionalism on the part of the

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26 Filipino Prehistory, 200
27 Barangay, 156
29 Scott critiqued Filipino national hero Juan Luna’s painting El Pacto de Sangre (1883) that immortalized the sandugo because it depicted only one conquistador (Legazpi) and one datu (Sikatuna) sharing the drink; Barangay, 156
30 Felipe Landa Jocano makes the same observation; Filipino Prehistory, 200
31 Being adamant critics of FMA’s linear narrative, the noticeable tone of frustration in Cebuano Eskrima and Macachor’s subsequent internet blogs shows that majority of FMA practitioners ignore or are unable to respond to the historical questions posed to today’s FMA community by authors such as Macachor and Nepangue; Cebuano Eskrima, 45
Visayans. Popular stereotypes today brand Visayans in the same light as their ancestors—fierce, and lawless. Admittedly, these cannot be quantified. But these stereotypes, and the sizeable number of Visayan FMA teachers, reinforce the belief in the Visayas as the cultural nest of FMA. Regardless of whether or not FMA practitioners are aware of the details of Visayan warfare in the sixteenth century, or of whether there was an institutionalized martial art, it is this past that they celebrate and identify with. It is a past characterized by a politically volatile environment which forged today’s FMA from centuries of warfare. Thirdly, the politics governing these conflicts reveal the fragmented nature of baranganic societies. If the political structure in baranganic martial practice was the precursor of contemporary FMA clubs—since the barangay has endured to the present—this sheds light as to why, as the introduction to the chapter showed, Senator Miguel Zubiri had to pursue the FMA grandmasters in all the ‘four corners of the Philippines’ to get them on board the Arnis Law. Leadership was decentralized and scattered across the multitude of barangays in the islands. The task is akin to a European conquistador’s pursuit of native chieftains to sign a peace treaty in their own fashion.

**Arnis, Kali, Eskrima and the Historical Narrative of FMA**

The conflation of FMA with ancient Visayans reveals practitioners’ sense of historical connection with ancient practices of fighting. The majority of today’s individual club histories are anchored to this area and period. Smith has argued that societies often construct or reconstruct a historical ‘Golden Age’ which provides an idealized model for social behaviour and order: ‘By placing the present in the context of the past and of the community, the myth of descent interprets present social changes and collective endeavours in a manner that satisfies the drive for meaning by providing new identities that seem to be also very old, and restoring locations, social and territorial, that allegedly were the crucibles of those

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32 The Visayans have been, since the Spanish Period and even today, thrust into the conflict in the southern Philippines—Mindanao is predominantly inhabited by Visayans. Visayans are also stigmatized as bad elements responsible for crime in Metro Manila. After the Second World War, when the US Navy brought Filipinos—a majority of whom were Visayans from Cebu and Panay—with them to Palau as workers, the Filipinos quickly gained a reputation for carrying knives and using them during altercations. The Palauans called them ‘chad ra oles’ or ‘the knife people’; See Francesca K. Remengesau and Dirk Anthony Ballendorf, ‘From Soul to Somnolence: The Palau Community Association of Guam, 1948 to 1997’, in *Micronesian Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5 (1), November 2006, 633
identities…” As this section shows, FMA practitioners’ reconstruction of the past equipped them with idealized military qualities which they could emulate in the present. Furthermore, by articulating a sense of communion or common origin, FMA practitioners could make sense of their diversity as well as locate themselves in it.

In his December 2009 speech to a crowd of practitioners regarding the Arnis Law, Zubiri declared that it was going to be the first time that Arnis, Kali, and Eskrima—FMA disciplines with a host of clubs that adopt these styles—were going to have an alliance. Zubiri’s use of the term ‘alliance’ reveals how he treats the three as separate and unrelated entities. In contrast, the second section of the Arnis Law uses it differently since it regards them as the same thing. Zubiri may not have been well aware of the shift in his conceptualization of FMA. It is a common contradiction which FMA practitioners have not extensively discussed—their stance towards FMA identity falls between preserving a local one and being consumed by a national one.

In order to analyze the state’s logic behind, and the FMA clubs’ response to the nationalization of FMA, it is necessary to examine the composition and features of various FMA styles using the three dominant schools of FMA with the largest number of followers—Arnis, Kali and Eskrima. A critical examination of the similarities and differences between them—as a microcosm for all forms of FMA—and their engagement with nationalization would help us understand the forces of cohesion and fracture at play in the nationalization of FMA.

Buenaventura Mirafuente and Placido Yambao’s Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis was published in 1957 two decades before the state-sponsored nationalization of FMA. As previously discussed, it laid down the foundations for subsequent books on FMA in terms of the history it presented and of the structure of the book. Most importantly, it was the first book to introduce the idea that all types of FMA originated from—to borrow Mark Wiley’s phrase—‘a common root art’ that was present even before the arrival of the Spaniards. As such, it has become a cornerstone for nationalism among FMA practitioners. In fact, the Arnis Law takes its concept and definition of Philippine weapons-based martial arts, almost verbatim,

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33 Myths and Memories of the Nation, 62
34 See previous chapter for Section 2 of the Arnis Law.
35 Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis, 9-14
36 Mark V. Wiley, Filipino Martial Culture. Tuttle Publishing 1998, 16
from Yambao and Mirafuente.\textsuperscript{37} The short version of Arnis history in this book is as follows: the martial arts that constitute what we know today as FMA came from an original art called Kali. It was the martial art that was used by the native Lapulapu to fend off the soldiers of Spanish conquistador Ferdinand Magellan. When Magellan’s successor, conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, came to the Philippine islands, he and his crew were entertained by their native hosts with performances in the form of a display of martial arts skills. The display so worried the Spaniards that they outlawed the study of Kali since. The natives continued to practice it in secret. Kali went on to become known by other names, including Arnis and Eskrima. It continued to exist as a subaltern martial art and at the same time a form of resistance to the Spaniards who had outlawed it. The Philippine founding fathers were reputed to be skilled in Arnis and used it in their struggle for independence during the revolution against Spain (1896-1898).\textsuperscript{38}

It is easy to look at this narrative and understand how it can serve the nationalist agenda—it equips Filipinos with a cultural artefact of anti-colonial resistance that is still in practice today, and it traces the lineage of the presently diverse styles of FMA to a mother art. In effect, the antiquity and homogeneity of FMA also proves that Filipinos come from the same ethnic stock. What is interesting to note is that when Yambao and Mirafuente wrote their book, it was mainly intended to propose the teaching of Arnis in academic institutions, and its declaration as a national sport. Written a decade after formal independence, this book predates any of the later state-designed plans for FMA. Mirafuente’s written history evades historical corroboration for its lack of proper referencing. But what it does reveal is an oral history on the origins of FMA that has been transmitted among the different practitioners across generations. For instance, an Eskrima teacher from Cebu who was one of the first members of the earliest weapons-based martial arts club—called a ‘fencing’ club back then—in the 1920s, related how their system of fighting was traceable to historical figures such as Lapulapu and Humabon who were both chieftains in Cebu when Magellan arrived in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{39} There must have thus been a narrative of common origin in FMA that circulated among various

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis}, 10\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis}, 9-14\textsuperscript{39} Edgar Sulite, \textit{Masters of Arnis, Kalis & Escrima}. Socorro Publications 1994, 86
practitioners even before the writing of Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis and before any state-sponsored programs which sought to nationalize FMA.

Following Karunungan sa Larong Arnis in 1957, Filipino-American Dan Inosanto—the eminent contemporary of Bruce Lee—wrote Filipino Martial Arts as Taught by Dan Inosanto in 1980. Because of his status as an international martial arts celebrity, Inosanto’s book was arguably more popular than Yambao and Mirafuente’s and was circulated much more widely than its predecessor. Inosanto had studied under different Filipino teachers and compiled their versions of their martial arts’ history. Inosanto included a discussion on the migration of FMA to the US and its role during the Second World War. Apart from that section, Inosanto’s history and definitions of weapons-based martial arts in the Philippines paralleled the Yambao-Mirafuente narrative: Filipinos had a core-culture from which their martial arts came from, they kept it from the Spaniards, and it went on to be used in the Philippine Revolution and the Second World War. It is not clear whether Inosanto copied information from Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis. Like Yambao and Mirafuente, he did not cite his sources either. However, he did manage to gather oral testimonies and photographs from the different teachers he trained with and interviewed, which pointed to a narrative of origin that circulated among FMA practitioners. Yambao and Mirafuente, Inosanto, and later works that featured FMA history—such as books by Remy Presas, Romeo Mascado, and Jose Paman; and films by Kerwin Go and Jay Ignacio—all adhered to the same narrative of FMA history. This shared view of FMA history tell us is that FMA practitioners perceive of themselves as followers of an age-old, pre-Hispanic culture that is charged with a sense of national pride and sharpened by hundreds of years of conflict.

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41 Filipino Martial Arts as Taught by Dan Inosanto, 10-14
The FMA narrative holds that Kali was handed down to the inhabitants of the Philippines by the Srivijayans long before the Spaniards arrived in 1521. The Srivijayan Empire existed between the seventh and thirteenth centuries AD and covered what are today parts of Indonesia and Malaysia. There has been little inquiry and debate into the origin of the terminology when it was first introduced. In the documentary film *The Bladed Hand* (2012), Inosanto explains that the term Kali was derived from two Cebuano words *kamot* (hand) and *lihok* (movement). Yambao and Mirafuente argued that the term ‘Arnis’ first appeared in Francisco Baltazar’s epic poem *Florante at Laura* (1838) where it was referred to as a *laro*—literally play, but used in the context of sport. They argued that Arnis, short for Arnis de Mano, is a Tagalog corruption of the Spanish word *armes*—meaning harness—and pertained to either the colourful decorations worn by the early Filipinos, or the chain mail of medieval knights which were popularized in the Philippines by the Moro-Moro, a theatrical re-enactment of the Reconquista of Spain from the hands of the Moors. In English, Arnis de Mano translates to ‘Harness of the Hand’ or, ‘Armour of the Hand’. The idea is that one’s hands can be trained to act like armour for the rest of the body to deflect any attack that might cause injury. Eskrima, sometimes spelled as Escrima, is another corruption of a Spanish word *esgrima* meaning fencing, but could also mean a skirmish. A clash of armed individuals is called a skirmish. Yambao and Mirafuente argued that due to ‘unavoidable changes in time and events’, the early weapons-based martial art (Kali) came to be known by a host of other names—such as Pananandata, Pagkalikali, Kalirongan, Kaliradman, Pagaradman, Didya, and Kabaroan—as it spread across the Philippine. Of these, the most widely used were Arnis and Eskrima. Regardless of where or when the terms were coined, FMA authors seem to agree that they emerged from a ‘common root art’. Many practitioners also use the terms interchangeably. For example, Remy Presas who founded Modern Arnis had no qualms incorporating the word Eskrima in

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45 Dan Inosanto testimony, *The Bladed Hand*; FMA Grandmaster Ben Largusa also made the same claim. *Filipino Martial Culture*, 310
46 *Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis*, 11
48 ‘Filipino Martial Tradition’, 18-21
49 *Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis*, 10; notice the similarity between Section 2 of the Arnis Law and this definition in the book.
the title of his book on Arnis—*The Practical Art of Eskrima*. Also, one of the earliest students of the iconic Antonio Ilustrisimo related that Ilustrisimo had initially called his system Eskrima. A last example is that the World Eskrima Kali Arnis Federation (WEKAF), one of the largest and most influential international federations of FMA clubs, also incorporates all three FMA terms. Ned Nepangue related in an interview that there are three fundamental classifications among FMA styles—they are either blade-oriented, stick-oriented, or empty-handed fighting styles. In most FMA teaching, all three classifications are part of the curriculum even if their teachers have never met. FMA teacher and anthropologist Felipe Jocano Jr. posited the question, ‘What do you find in one (club) that you don’t find in another? Absolutely none’. The differences, he said, were all a matter of ‘cultural labels’ and ‘technical biases’. FMA has as of today adopted homogenized features that could classify it as a set of ‘Filipino’ arts. Jocano earlier pointed out that tracing the origins of FMA is virtually impossible. Yet the history that FMA practitioners collectively weave tells us something—it was a way for them to claim ownership over FMA and to position themselves in the present and make sense of it. Yambao, for example, understood Kali as an authentication of Filipino national identity free from Spanish influence and used it to argue for the establishment of a national sport and martial art. Because historical records on FMA are scant, practitioners have to rely on Spanish era records. But, like what Macachor and Nepangue propose, this makes FMA a colonial product—a prisoner of Spanish historiography. In order to ‘liberate’ FMA, practitioners project it to the ‘Golden Age’ at the dawn of Spanish colonization in the sixteenth century as evidence for its antiquity. Without Spanish historical records beyond the sixteenth century, FMA can be claimed as Filipino, homogenized, and freed of its colonial burden. In recent years, this narrative was challenged by a number of FMA practitioners themselves. Among FMA practitioners, Wiley was the first to comment on the lack of any scholarly work that

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51 Antonio Ilustrisimo’s relative, Regino, migrated to the US and was an informant for Dan Inosanto’s book. He was introduced as a master in Eskrima; Celestino Macachor, ‘Interview with Master Epifanio “Yuli” Romo Jr. of Kalis Ilustrisimo’ in *Filipino Martial Arts Digest* 2(4), 2005; *Filipino Martial Arts as Taught by Dan Inosanto*, 23
52 Interview with Felipe T. Jocano Jr., April 25, 2012, Quezon City
53 ‘A Question of Origins’
might support or dispute the claim that Kali is the mother art of FMA. In a fierce debate in an internet forum on the origins of FMA, FMA researcher and teacher James Sy Jr. presented forty arguments as to why Kali’s origins could not be traced to pre-Hispanic roots and is highly unlikely of Sri-Vijayan origin or related to neighbouring martial arts in Southeast Asia. The most influential work which challenges the FMA narrative is Macachor and Nepangue’s *Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth* which vehemently rejects the claim that Kali was of pre-Hispanic origin and instead proposes that FMA is primarily derived from Spanish late medieval fencing. The defining argument in *Cebuano Eskrima* is that FMA was taught to the natives by Spanish friars as a way to defend themselves against marauding pirates. This hit a nerve among many staunch advocates of the FMA narrative especially because it attributes the development of FMA to the Spaniards rather than to ancient Filipinos, weakening the potency of FMA in the nationalist rhetoric. Despite the convincing arguments laid out in *Cebuano Eskrima*, the authors admitted that these were critiques of an existing myth and were not conclusive. At first glance, it would seem to advocates of the FMA narrative that the book *Cebuano Eskrima* de-Filipinizes FMA by attributing its formation to the Spaniards. On the contrary, the authors argued that even if FMA was derived from Spanish fighting arts, it does not make it any less Filipino just as the Japanese influence in Brazilian Jiu-jitsu does not make it any less Brazilian. One significant observation that can be drawn from Macachor and Nepangue’s work is that while they question the periodization of FMA’s origins, they subscribe to the idea of a common root art—only that it was influenced by Spain and at a much later period that what the FMA narrative suggests. Regardless of the details, both versions are interpretably nationalistic.

Interestingly, while FMA practitioners subscribe to the idea of a homogenous origin, they also tend to highlight their present differences and treat each other as separate entities with distinct identities. This particular sense of individuality

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54 *Filipino Martial Culture*, 13, 309-311
56 *Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth*, 63-80
57 *Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth*, 80
58 This point is further discussed in Chapter Two.
among FMA clubs and circles is an inseparable feature from their sense of nationalism. In 1957, Yambao and Mirafuente argued that Kali came to be known by other names and adopted various features when they were adopted by different groups of people. Fundamentally however, according to Yambao and Mirafuente, they were the same thing. Inosanto, who experienced learning various styles under different Filipino teachers in the US, assumed a different outlook when he coined ‘Filipino Martial Arts’ (FMA) as the collective term for the various weapons-based martial arts that he learned.\(^{59}\) While Inosanto subscribed to the idea of Kali as the origin of FMA—he makes this clear in his historical background—using the term ‘FMA’ acknowledges the distinctions between various forms of FMA like Arnis, Kali and Eskrima. In other words, Inosanto’s terminology reveals the lines of division among various FMA clubs and circles. Having trained under many teachers, he knew all too well their sense of uniqueness and exclusivity. If in 2009 Zubiri was excited over the fact that an ‘alliance’ in Arnis, Kali and Eskrima was a first in FMA history, it shows how clubs had always treated themselves separately.

To understand this, we must look at how FMA styles differ from each other. Arguably, Arnis, Kali and Eskrima have differences both subtle and obvious in terms of technique and approach to situations which interdisciplinary FMA practitioners could easily notice.\(^{60}\) Arnis strikes are hard and solid, mostly delivered from a longer range and designed to knock an opponent out in the shortest amount of time possible. Eskrima strikes are short, abrupt flurries delivered up close and designed to wear out an opponent who is also, theoretically, delivering his own strikes on the defender. Kali is mainly blade oriented and designed for slashing, not bludgeon like Arnis or Eskrima. In terms of sporting events today, the three also use different gear, rules and ways of scoring. The names and terms used vary from place to place. Generally speaking (although not exclusively) Arnis is predominantly used as a term in Panay and Negros, Eskrima in Cebu, and Kali in Manila and in the US because of Inosanto.

These differences are just from the major schools of Arnis, Kali and Eskrima alone. They do not cover the differences between the individual systems under each

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59 Inosanto was actually the first person to use the term ‘Filipino Martial Arts’ as a collective term for the various weapons-based martial arts in the Philippines. This is further discussed in Chapter Two.
60 For the purpose of comparison, I am using the observations I have made from three of the FMA clubs I am most familiar with—Modern Arnis, Doce Pares Eskrima, and Kalis Ilustrisimo. I have personally trained in both Modern Arnis and Kalis Ilustrisimo enough to know the difference in their basic principles.
Moreover, there are also non-commercialized groups that practice their own brand of weapons-based martial arts in the remote areas of the Philippines—that may be categorized as FMA—but might have never even heard of FMA. One theory attributes this diversity to Philippine geography. Wiley has argued that because populations in the Philippines—especially outside urban centres—tend to be isolated from each other, variations in the martial arts are so extreme that ‘even with a given region, there is variation in martial practices’. Using the topography of the island of Negros as an example, FMA teacher Maxwell Maun argued that while Arnis is practiced throughout the island, the topography of one’s environment affects the preferred range of fighting, thus also affecting the way strikes are delivered. People in the mountainous north of Negros prefer to get up close (corto) and personal so as not to jeopardize their balance in an engagement. In the farmlands down south, fighters preferred a longer fighting range (largo) because the environment allowed them to be able to hit and evade. In the midlands of Negros where the land is both mountainous and flat, arnisadores there used a medium range of fighting (media) to be able to adapt to the changing terrain. In terms of their technical diversity, it thus becomes understandable why FMA clubs and circles are typically two-sided about the sense of identity—they cannot claim to have ‘the same’ martial arts as their neighbours’ whom they have so meticulously studied to best. The succeeding chapter goes on to discuss how political differences between FMA clubs tends to compound this ambivalence and drags the nationalization programs to a standstill.

The national identity shaped in FMA serves two masters—it is defensive of its homogenizing past and also of its diverse present. Because of this, the national identity that gets formulated in FMA is not fixed, and constantly manoeuvres between the local and the national. Sometimes, it is a combination of various versions. It is analogous to the ‘Filipino’ that Inosanto conceptualized from his interactions with multiple FMA teachers. His concept of the ‘Filipino’, drawn from the FMA narrative, can be seen in the way his book’s cover is designed.

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61 For example, during fieldwork in 2012, I was introduced to six individual systems—each with their own unique approaches to blade or cane fighting. The teachers would meticulously distinguish themselves from other forms of FMA. That was just a week in metro Cebu alone.

62 *Filipino Martial Culture*, 16

63 Interview with Max Maun, July 6, 2012 Bacolod City
In the foreground is Dan Inosanto, whose ancestral roots are Visayan and who received training in the US from various Filipino teachers. Inosanto wields two *kris* swords which are predominantly used among Muslim tribes in the south, and is poised in a *double sinawali* position. The *sinawali* position is shared by Arnis, Kali and Eskrima practitioners alike. In the background is an image of the Cebuano national hero, Lapu-Lapu who is an iconic figure shared among almost all FMA clubs. At the top part, in broad captioned letters, are the words ‘The Filipino Martial Arts’. The very baroque way in which FMA identity is embodied shows that multiple cultural elements have been borrowed to articulate what Inosanto understood to be ‘Filipino’. This reflects the same way that Filipino identity is being framed under the nationalization of FMA.

**FMA Old School**

Little research has been done regarding the history of weapons-based martial arts in the Philippines prior to their institutionalization and commercialization through the FMA clubs in the 1920s. Understandably, its history is very elusive, and what little is known about it can be traced by analyzing oral history among FMA practitioners which offers an insight into the collective memory of the practice of the arts. The origins of contemporary FMA practice are important for two reasons: Firstly, they reveal the politics involved in the transmission of martial knowledge.

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64 Cover of *Filipino Martial Arts as Taught by Dan Inosanto*
among *baranganic* communities; Secondly, relationships within and among clubs and circles are a microcosm for relationships between and among *barangays*—hence, any attempt to understand the way FMA clubs behave under the state’s nationalization program is inseparable from understanding the dynamics involved in intra and inter-club relations.

Strictly speaking, there is no precise period in Philippine history which could be the reference point for the metamorphosis of FMA from Old to New School. Instead, it was a gradual process spread over decades that is ongoing even to this day. Although the first FMA clubs were formed as early as 1920, the period between the start of World War II and the eventual independence of the Philippines (1941-1946) is generally accepted, by both practitioners and teachers alike, as the dividing line between an old and new form of FMA culture.\(^{65}\)

Quite recently, in a social media group for FMA teachers, enthusiasts, and practitioners, a young FMA teacher critiqued what he called the unprofessionalism of many teachers in FMA.\(^{66}\) He pointed out their lack of curriculum, absence of standardized implements and uniforms for their schools, and the absence of a fixed rate of payment. All of which, he said were necessary to ‘sell’ the art professionally and make sure it does not die out or lose to other martial arts. Here, the teaching of FMA was being weighed against the standards set by East Asian martial arts clubs which have culturally ‘colonized’ the Philippines in the 1960s and 1970s. Regardless, his observations of FMA teachers are characteristically true. For instance, when many of the FMA clubs first opened, they were poorly organized. In the 1970s, students came to class in varying attire—some wore Japanese kimonos while others wore shorts or pants, the length and kind of sticks they used varied, and in most cases the students paid what they could and when they could.\(^{67}\) Even today, some clubs do not have a standard set of uniform, equipment, or fixed tuition prices.

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\(^{66}\) The Filipino Warrior Arts Research Society (FWARS) ‘group’ on Facebook, is an exclusive social media group composed of FMA researchers, enthusiasts and practitioners who discuss any subject relating to martial arts, particularly FMA.

\(^{67}\) This observation was also corroborated by some of my informants; Celestino Macachor, ‘Interview with Master Epifanio “Yuly” Romo Jr. of Kalis Ilustrisimo’, in *Filipino Martial Arts Digest* 2 (4) 2005; ‘World Nickelstick Escrima Club Balintawak Style’; interview with Cristino Vasquez, March 10, 2012, Iloilo City; interview with Nicomedes Elizar, May 23, 2012, Cebu City.
What the comment reveals is a dilemma that present FMA teachers face between choosing to preserve traditional methods of teaching, or adapting to the commercial and streamlined mode. The fact that Old School practices persist today despite being counterproductive to commercialization shows that there is some resistance to attempts to change the way it has been taught. As Parthe Chatterjee argued, this dilemma is common in the nation when an assertion of tradition is inconsistent with historical progress. People have to choose between efficiency and the preservation of their traditions. Old school FMA is described by some contemporary FMA teachers and practitioners in two contrasting ways: on one hand, it is backward and learned painfully; on the other, it is pure and non-materialistic. The first observation is mostly attributed to FMA’s lack of formal curriculum, standardization, and the teacher’s deliberate intent to execute techniques as he would in real combat, often resulting in injuring the student in the process. The second is a nostalgic reverence for unadulterated, non-commercialized FMA that was free from the influences of institutionalized East Asian martial arts and useful in real combat.

For example, FMA teacher Cristino Vasquez related how he could only learn one technique per lesson from his own teacher because the latter would really hit his hand to show him how to disarm an opponent. The lesson would only resume when the pain or swelling has subsided. Moreover, whenever he made a mistake, his teacher would chastise him by flicking the stick on his shins. Vasquez’ former classmate, now FMA teacher Rodel Dagooc, related how there was no system for teaching when he was learning—the lesson depended on the mood of the teacher. Both these teachers have expressed how their Old School experiences would not be applicable to the present clubs they teach in—if you hurt students, they will not return; and if your lessons lack structure, your students will think you are just winging it and you will lose credibility. Dionisio Cañete, an FMA teacher from Cebu, expressed that it was necessary to preserve the values of the Old School because otherwise, FMA clubs would simply turn into ‘diploma mills’ where students pay to get titles but lack skills.

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69 Interview with Cristino Vasquez December 5, 2011, telephone conversation.
70 Interview with Rodel Dagooc, April 22, 2012, Manila
At the same time however, the way these teachers reminisced about their experiences in the Old School was with a deep sense of fulfilment—almost like their Old School lessons are what make them better at FMA than their present counterparts who have not undergone similar training. An oral history from a town in Luzon, written for the Filipino Martial Arts Digest by Donald Muñiz, describes what training was like in the Old School. Muñiz’ article primarily aimed to highlight the positive values of learning FMA in the Old School. This is also indicated by the apparent muting of the violence that is supposed to occur at the beginning and the end of the story. Like Vasquez, Dagooc, and Cañete, Muñiz writes about the Old School with a degree of reverence and nostalgia. Set during a time before FMA was commercialized, Muñiz wrote how ‘it was better back then’:\footnote{Muñiz related that the teachers who told him the account did not specify what time period it was set it. He himself is unsure. The story is applicable to the pre-World War II era, but also to the pre-colonial times. Regardless, what he aimed to emphasize are the values of the Old School that have been lost to commercialization; Interview with Donald Muñiz, June 29, 2013, online correspondence.}

‘the art of fighting was learned from people who would not teach you for money...there were no belts, no trophies, no uniforms, or “contracts”, nor would there be a special bow. There were no “Certificates of Recognition” except for the Certificate written in your Heart from the blood, sweat and tears shed in training...’\footnote{Donald Muñiz, ‘The Silent Art of Luisianan, Laguna Eskrima’ in Filipino Martial Arts Digest 2(4), 2005}

At present, belts and uniforms are necessities that have to be bought, and tournaments are tests of prowess that require entrance fees. Learning martial arts from the old school did not necessarily involve money as forms of payments. As well, proving your mettle in combat did not earn you a trophy that could be displayed—the experience of winning or losing was already well worth it. In that sense, the old method of learning FMA was seen as nobler and purer because it was earned in ‘blood, sweat and tears’ rather than paid for.

The characteristics of the Old School are revealed in Muñiz’ account about how a local village in Laguna—a town south of Manila—was raided by bandits. The village countered by learning self-defence from an Eskrima master in a neighbouring town.
village. The account offers an insight into how knowledge in FMA was transferred prior to the emergence of FMA clubs in the twentieth century. There are essentially three observable steps taken by an individual who desired to learn martial arts, all of which are illustrated in Muñiz article: Approaching a teacher, proving one’s worthiness to learn, and paying back for the knowledge.

In Muñiz’ account, a small village is devastated by a bandit raid—people are killed and their crops are taken. Soon after the attack, a young man from the raided village visits his uncle in a neighbouring village and learns that an Eskrima master lives there. This master taught the men from his village Eskrima and deterred the bandits from raiding their crops. Upon returning home, the young man informs his fellow villagers and they decide to seek out the Eskrima master to learn self-defence from him.

The manner in which they approached the Eskrimador exhibits a Filipino practice of asking favours from strangers perceived to be of higher social status.73 The young man in the story asked his uncle to intercede for him and his fellow villagers; to act as a padrino (literally meaning godfather, but in this context, sponsor or go-between).74 For his part, the uncle approached the Eskrima teacher named Amama (a fellow villager of his) and made the request on behalf of his nephew and his nephew’s fellow villagers. In approaching Amama, the uncle was doing two things that are characteristic of the gesture: first, he established the ties that linked Amama to the nephew; and second, he staked his own reputation by vouching for the worth of his nephew.

Muñiz’ description of his own learning at the beginning of the article gives an idea on why approaching a teacher was a complex issue:

‘When I first began my studies in the Warrior Arts of the Philippines, I was given a gift. The gift wasn’t one you could wear, or hang on the wall, or place on the mantel piece. The gift is the art itself.’75

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73 This is still common practice in contemporary Philippine society, observable in examples like courtship or when raising concerns to village captains.
74 The Filipino word for godfather, ninong (male) or ninang (female) is more formally used to refer to godparents during life events—baptism, weddings, confirmations, etc. but has also come to mean someone (who has the capacity to throw his weight around) who intercedes on your behalf.
75 ‘The Silent Art of Luisianan, Laguna Eskrima’
Eskrima was a gift that Amama did not share with just anybody. Metaphorically, it was a weapon that could not be handed to anyone who would ask for it, especially strangers. Amama had already taught Eskrima to the men from his own village because they too were threatened by the bandits. Muñiz writes of when the victims of the raid walked into Amama’s village:

‘They came into the village and observed men no different from themselves. No supermen, just regular farmers. Although to the naked eye, these farmers held their bodies slightly more erect. Slightly more watchful, slightly more observant of those coming into their village. Some had their hands on their hips; other pretended to not see anything at all.’

Earlier in the chapter, we established how pre-colonial communities were organized into barangays whose members normally had familial ties. The defence of the barangay fell on the shoulders of warriors who were also trained in the barangay, often by the datu who also led them into battle. The barangay, as a political unit, persisted into the Spanish Period and well into the present. The teaching of martial arts at the turn of the twentieth century mostly remained confined within the barangay, if not the family. The men from Amama’s village reacted with alert suspicion towards the victims of the raid because they were from another village. Amama’s village was the territory of people who lived there. Hence those not from that community were deemed as outsiders who needed to be carefully observed. As a community, Amama’s village was closed off to those who did not belong to it. The nephew knew that he had to ask his uncle to intercede on his behalf because he already understood the politics at work—there was a need for someone to establish a link between the two communities because it would authorize their entry

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56 ‘The Silent Art of Luisianan, Laguna Eskrima’
into Amama’s community, and especially because they wanted access to something found only in Amama’s community.\footnote{Muñiz does not write of how the uncle approached Amama, but it is implied in the story that by the time the nephew and his kin meet Amama, the Eskrimador has already agreed to meet them and in fact has food prepared for them. This would also imply that no meeting between the nephew and Amama had and must take place unless the uncle had performed his role in the interaction.}

Benedict Anderson has noted how Javanese villagers understood their connection to those outside their villages as ‘indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship’.\footnote{Benedict Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism}. London: Verso 1991, 15-16} The same logic operates in Muniz’ story—because Eskrima was something shared only with members of a person’s ‘inner circle’ or immediate community, the uncle thus had to remind Amama that they belonged to the same community. The uncle then extended that community to encompass the village of his nephew, making the nephew and his kin eligible to partake of that gift.

Using this example, the role of the \textit{padrino} as a bridge between two communities (made possible because he is a member of both) cancels out the need for an outsider to use different strategies of penetrating an inner circle, or in the following case, the giving of gifts. Taking a step back and viewing this model reveals that society was imagined as separate circles of filiation, linked together by \textit{padrinos} who had common ground with different circles and who had the power to enlarge or merge communities together.\footnote{I use ‘filiation’ here instead of ‘affiliation’ to mean the establishment of a connection by descent or blood relations.} If \textit{baranganic} communities were imagined along filial lines, padrinos were able to make these imaginations meet.

Edgar Sulite, an Eskrima master and FMA author, related how he approached his mentor, Jose Caballero, without the aid of a \textit{padrino}:\footnote{For Sulite’s book, see Edgar Sulite, \textit{Masters of Arnis, Kalis & Escrima}. Socorro Publications 1994}

‘It took me more than one year to court him, bringing him food each day on every visit as a means of a gift, just for him to accept me as a student. It was primarily because I was an outsider, one who didn’t belong to their family, that I was not accepted right away.’\footnote{Edgar Sulite, ‘Giving the Right Credits’, in \textit{Filipino Martial Arts Digest}, 3(4), 2006}
Sulite, like the victims of the bandit raid, was looking to partake of the ‘gift’ of knowledge in Eskrima. Because he did not have a *padrino* like the uncle in the story, Sulite had to ‘court’ his would-be teacher for over a year with gifts of his own in the form of meals. Gift exchange, in this sense, was a way by which an outsider sought entry into the community of the teacher. In the classic work *The Gift* (1967), which dwells on the subject of human relations and gift-giving, Marcel Mauss argued that a gift offered to an individual compelled that individual to make a return. By receiving the gift, a bond is created between the giver and the receiver who is now obligated to repay the gift. In Sulite’s case, Caballero is eventually compelled to take Sulite in for learning Eskrima.

The consequence of approaching a teacher without the help of a *padrino* or without gifts can be seen in the experience of Richard Bustillo and Dan Inosanto when they sought for an Eskrima teacher. Bustillo and Inosanto grew up in the United States and were close friends of the iconic Bruce Lee. They have been largely responsible for popularizing and propagating FMA in the United States in the 1970s to the present, especially its use in films. At one point in time, they searched for FMA teachers in the United States to request for instruction. One of the teachers they approached was an old Filipino migrant worker named Feliciano Maxicinete who thought that the two men had come to challenge him when they inquired if he knew any Eskrima. Inosanto, who could understand Tagalog, realized the misunderstanding when he overheard some of the bystanders taking bets as to whether Bustillo or the old Maxicinete would win.

Bustillo and Inosanto had approached Maxicinete with neither gifts nor the help of an intermediary. Maxicinete thus felt that the two men’s interest in Eskrima was invasive rather than out of a sincere desire to learn. From FMA’s example, the sense of community is initially limited (but not permanently closed) to the immediate kin or neighbour. If strangers approach it without bearing gifts, or establishing kinship ties, the community resists the strangers as could be seen in how the men from Amama’s village watched the newcomers with suspicious alertness or how Maxicinete misinterpreted the intentions of the Inosanto and Bustillo. It is important to bear in mind that originally, the defence of the *barangay* fell upon the

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82 *The Gift*, 13, 39-42.
shoulders of the datu and the bagani defenders. By the time the Spaniards colonized the Philippines and had a more organized military system, the datu and the bagani ceased to actively function in its pre-colonial form. However, martial knowledge continued to be preserved in the old way, as did the culture of vigilance towards outsiders. What Inosanto and Bustillo did then was similar to approaching a datu without bearing gifts.

Sulite’s account reveals the family as the immediate basis of relation and also the smallest unit of community. This was, as argued, characteristic of the barangay and now observably true in FMA as well. This explains why the community and the gifts it holds are not immediately open to outsiders especially if it were metaphorically a weapon—if the family was the most basic unit where the gift of Eskrima was kept, membership was exclusive to blood relations. A quick look at biographies of club founders or current senior teachers in clubs, especially those born before the Second World War, will show that their initial instructions were received from immediate male relatives—fathers, uncles, and grandfathers. A grandfather might teach his grandson how to fight, but he would be less open to teaching the grandson of a distant neighbour unless maybe a padrino would intercede for the neighbour. In this sense, the knowledge of FMA was treated as an heirloom—a traditional form of knowledge regarded as a gift and transmitted within the family.

The gifts a student presented, or a padrino’s effort at establishing a basis of affiliation between the student and the teacher does not necessarily guarantee that the teacher would accept the student into his fold. Even if a connection has been made through the efforts of a padrino, or if the teacher received the gift from the student, the student still needed to prove himself to the teacher. The padrino could only establish the connection between the student and teacher, he could not influence the decision of the teacher whether to share the heirloom or not, so too with gifts.

84 For examples, see Masters of Arnis, Kalis & Escrima; Filipino Martial Culture; Antonio Diego and Christopher Ricketts, The Secrets of Kalis Ilustrisimo: The Filipino Fighting Art Explained. Tuttle Publishing 1999, 3. These sources provide biographic information on FMA teachers. They show that majority of FMA teachers generally received their first instructions from male relatives; Dionisio Cañete, an icon of Eskrima in Cebu, exclaimed during my interview with him that he did not have to seek out Eskrima. It was already in his blood. The Cañete family run the longest-running FMA club in the Philippines—Doce Pares (1920). Interview with Dionisio Cañete, August 28, 2012, Cebu City.
The padrino may or may not sway the teacher’s decision, much less through the giving of a single gift. But constant gift-giving elevates the receiver to a position of prestige and eventually pressures him to repay the gift. Mauss argued how among northwest American tribes, the failure to repay the gifts meant losing honour. Sulite admitted that his gifts did not guarantee his acceptance by Jose Caballero, nor did he expect the old man to accept him through them alone. Rather, he claimed it was through his perseverance and gift-giving—which lasted for a year—that Jose Caballero finally agreed to teach him. Having been around for a year and having offered so many gifts to Caballero, Sulite had by then established a relationship with Caballero who had now opened up to Sulite.

Antonio Diego, who eventually inherited Kalis Ilustrisimo from Antonio ‘Tatang’ Ilustrisimo also had to incessantly plead for instruction. Initially, Ilustrisimo refused saying, ‘Young man, I learned Arnis to save my life. Why should I proclaim it to the rest of the world?’ Ilustrisimo refused to share his ‘weapon’ with others, the secrets with which he preserved himself in dangerous situations. Diego later kept coming back, despite having to go through the rough neighbourhood where Ilustrisimo resided, trying different schemes to coax the old man into teaching him: He brought with him pulutan (finger foods eaten during drinking) and drinks; he tried to subtly critique the old man’s style to which the old man responded with minor demonstrations; and at one point, Diego brought a fighting cock with him as a present. Like Sulite, Diego was only accepted after a long period of persistent pleading (and gift-giving), when Ilustrisimo eventually (as Diego relates) ‘took pity’ on him. The pity that the teacher felt for the student implies that Ilustrisimo understood that it was necessary for Diego to persistently perform these efforts at bridging trust and relation between them because it was the way by which Diego was screened for possible studentship.

In Muñiz article, Amama screens his would-be students in two ways: He first asks them questions about their lifestyle, occupation, and about their families. He gauges them based on their responses. Then for reasons Muñiz does not mention, he sends three of them home but not after offering them hospitality for the night. Before

85 The Gift, 35-37
86 Again, note that Ilustrisimo uses the term Arnis instead of Kali which he later adopts into his club’s name: The Secrets of Kalis Ilustrisimo…, 15-16, 18-20
87 The Secrets of Kalis Ilustrisimo…, 19-20
they begin their lessons the next day, Amama inquires if the men really needed to learn the art and explains the value of the lessons he was about to share with them:

‘My Father was a great Eskrimador and his love for the land and farmer’s life brought us to this village. He trained me as a child how to control the strike of a stick, then a bolo (short sword). I trained with him until the day he died. He explained that Eskrima is for me to keep and made me promise that if it is to be taught, teach only men of good moral character, men who may need it. Do you men have a need to use Eskrima?’

Eskrima was thus also an heirloom that was passed to Amama by his own father. And if it were to be shared to others, there were conditions that had to be met. The villagers, for their part, understood what they were receiving and affirmed their characters deserving of the art. One of them who had lost the most crops and lost a son to the bandits, assured Amama:

‘I know that I speak for all of us in saying that we have a need to know how to defend ourselves to preserve our lives and our families and our land. We will be greatly indebted to you for your teaching, Amama. And we will not disappoint you or your father.’

If the knowledge of FMA was treated as an heirloom, and membership to the immediate community of the teacher is centred on the family, once the student (the outsider) was admitted by the teacher, he becomes part of that community. The role the student performs becomes the role of a junior member of the family—a son or grandson of the teacher. Thus, if students like Sulite or Diego were to be regarded as son, nephew, or grandson by Caballero and Ilustrisimo, it explains why they had to go through a screening process of pleading, gift-giving, and relationship-building.

88 ‘The Silent Art of Luisianan...’
89 ‘The Silent Art of Luisianan...’
Muñiz writes of how, after several weeks of training, Amama finally dismissed the men:

“This is enough for now for the second harvest is coming up soon. It’s time for you all to go tend to your fields and some of you I know miss your wives and children. You came here as scared farmers and you leave here as eskrimadors. You go with my blessing to take care of your responsibilities and wherever you go, there will always be a little bit of me and my father in you!”

Furthermore, long after the villagers had left Amama:

“They would get together at night away from the view of others in their village and play and practice and talk about their teacher and without shame talk about their love for him and the gift they were given.”

Clearly the relationship between the villagers and Amama had become very personal during the training, akin to the relationship among family members. Amama sent the men off with a blessing, and also reminded the villagers that they carried with them his name and his father’s name, signifying that they had inherited the heirloom that once belonged to Amama’s inner circle.

These kinship-patterned relationships that are established during training in FMA can be observed among FMA clubs and circles today. Peter Norman Tamisin featured a US-based FMA group called Neo Tribe Kali for the FMA Digest. Tamisin interviewed its founder, Jeff Chung, as to how he conceptualized the name of their club. Chung explained that he chose to incorporate ‘tribe’ because he

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90 ‘The Silent Art of Luisianan...’
91 ‘The Silent Art of Luisianan...’; An interesting recreational activity of males in Panay island during family gatherings was to isolate themselves from the women and children and do problem-solving typed forums on how to defend themselves against different attacks. A circle would often be formed and a weapon passed from one person to another to display how they would solve ‘this attack’ or ‘that attack’. Sometimes, food and drinks would be passed around, and the whole endeavour would be accompanied with a guitar; Interview with Alfredo Nietes, September 17, 2012, Oton, Iloilo; Interview with Reynaldo Gonzales, September 17, 2012, Iloilo City.
92 Peter Norman Tamisin, ‘Neo Tribe Kali and Guro Jeff Chung’, in Filipino Martial Arts Digest, 2(3), 2005
equated the club to a tribe. Having been exposed to other Asian martial arts, Chung said that it was only in studying Kali in the Philippines where he noticed the teachers behaved more like fathers teaching their sons rather than teachers teaching students.  

Partly, this kind of relationship between teachers and students is owed to the way FMA is best taught—up close and personal. Unlike something that could be learned by mimicking a teacher’s movements from afar as in Kung Fu or Karate which could be taught to large crowds, FMA is more one-on-one, learned from close quarters, and involves a lot of physical contact. Felipe Jocano Jr. argued that more than just an FMA trait, the desire to be up close and personal with others (as in martial arts training) reflects how Filipinos seek to build and value harmonious relationship with other people.  

There are a lot of examples for the way relationships from FMA training became very personal and intimate. The students of Antonio Ilustrisimo, founder of Kalis Ilustrisimo, and Angel Cabales, founder of Cabales Serrada Eskrima affectionately called them Manoy, Tata or Tatang—terms which are used for fathers and grandfathers. Often, the relationship between teacher and student extends long after the student has finished learning. Rodel Dagooc of Modern Arnis for example, requested Remy Presas, to become a godfather during his wedding.  

The relationship is also fostered outside of training. Cristino Vasquez related that when he was accepted into the household of his teacher Remy Presas—who was also his cousin—he performed certain duties for the Presas family such as helping in the kitchen or fetching water. Vasquez understood his role as a student and knew what tasks were expected of him. The fact that Presas expected him to perform these tasks is a signal that Vasquez is now considered a member of the household. Moreover, during training, being chastised by being hit on the shin told him that he was accepted into the family because this was a liberty an impatient grandfather or uncle might take towards a slow-learning grandson or nephew, but certainly not a commercial club teacher to a paying customer. The infliction of pain and the

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93 ‘Neo Tribe Kali...’  
94 ‘A Question of Origins’, 15-17  
96 Interview with Rodel Dagooc, April 22, 2012, Manila
imposition of chores is something that only happens to a willing student—by taking the pain and doing the duties, the student begins to behave like a son or grandson.

As with Vasquez and Presas, the arrangement between teacher and student in Muñiz’ story was never perceived from a consumerist standpoint. Amama even acted as a host—housing and feeding the students—rather than an individual who charged money for teaching and lodging students. Likewise, the villagers who sought for his help had not brought any money with them when they came to see Amama. This shows that both parties did not expect an exchange of money for goods. Muñiz writes that as the villagers were going back to their village, they contemplated on how to repay their beloved teacher:

‘The farmers talked softly among themselves. “How could we thank him?” said one of the younger farmers? “Only by being the kind of man that Amama is and wants us to be.” said the Farmer that lost the most.’

If Eskrima was given as a gift, then as gifts are received, it did not require monetary form of payment. Rather, there was a responsibility that was required of the recipients as could be seen in the comment of one of the villagers—to be the kind of men that Amama was and wanted them to be.

Based on the story, Amama was portrayed as a kind and hospitable man who preserved the knowledge of Eskrima handed to him by his father. Once the uncle (padrino) established the link between Amama and the victims of the bandit raid, and once he had ensured their worth and sincere need for Eskrima, Amama became willing to share his well-guarded knowledge in Eskrima. Amama agreed to teach the villagers Eskrima because they declared it was for self-preservation. If the bandits had approached Amama, the Eskrimador would have most likely refused them on the grounds of their ‘ill moral character’.

The heirloom that Amama possessed was also something that could be shared to outsiders who have been accepted into his circle. And just as an heirloom is passed from one generation to the next, the new students too had the moral responsibility to pass this gift to others who could be judged as deserving. Following

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97 ‘The Silent Art of Luisianan...’
Mauss’ model of reciprocity, the initial giver (the student) is now obligated to repay the receiver after the lessons.

There are numerous examples in FMA of how teachers pass the torch onto their students the same way Amama did to the villagers. Like Muñiz’ article, these examples show the delicate politics and moral judgement involved. When his son was disabled by a car accident, Teofilo Velez, founder of the Teovel Balintawak Self-Defense Club, trained his student and namesake, Teofilo Roma so someone could carry the school on. 98 Roma understood that he received what was intended for Velez’ son, and carried on the school as a son would. Domingo Sinana, founder of the Sikaran school of fighting, requested one of his students, Vicente Ferrer, to carry on the legacy of Sikaran as he lay terminally ill. 99 Remy Presas, founder of the Modern Arnis School, found out he had brain cancer while in Europe. One of the first things he did was to gather his students and tell them to keep teaching Modern Arnis. 100 Finally, Angel Cabales, who taught Serrada Eskrima in the United States, urged his students to develop the art and pass it on when he said, ‘you have your wings, it is now your turn to fly.’ 101 With his health fast deteriorating, Cabales asked two of his top students, to take over his academy. The two refused, instead suggesting that Cabales’ son, Vincent (who had been inactive for years), take over. 102 Both students understood the politics at work and thus had to insist that Cabales’ son be proclaimed as the heir of the art.

The Old School exhibits the traditional ways in which FMA knowledge is transmitted and preserved. The examples in this section have illustrated the intricacies of social interaction involved in the preservation and transmission of FMA knowledge among FMA circles. Martial arts knowledge necessitates a process of integration into a filial-based community. The learning process develops a deep, filial relationship between the student and teacher. There are also certain expectations from the student once he completes his lessons—he is bound to this filial community and is expected to conduct himself like a family member. The

100 Interview with Cristino Vasquez and Samuel Dulay, November 2, 2011, online correspondence
101 Michael Schwarz, ‘Cabales Serrada Escrima’ in Filipino Martial Arts Digest, 2(4), 2005
nature of this relationship gets carried over into the New School and thus causes repercussions when FMA clubs are mobilized into a homogenous body for the sake of nation-building. Going back to the start of this section regarding the young teacher’s comments on social media, it becomes understandable why many FMA teachers do not follow the streamlining of martial arts like their East Asian counterparts. Tuition fees and uniforms saturate the personal relationships that are fostered. Curriculums also suggest standardization of lessons—something that cannot be pressed upon isolated FMA circles who are defensive of their uniqueness.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that FMA emerges from the martial arts practices of fragmented communities that practiced various weapons-based martial arts. By imagining a linear history to the sixteenth century, these groups tried to articulate the culture which they shared and make sense of their own location in the present. The politics involved in the learning and transmission of FMA, and the ways FMA practitioners reconstruct their past both reveal strategies for imagining communion. On its own, the tumultuous sixteenth century says little about FMA. Yet, by projecting FMA onto the socio-political milieu of that period and celebrating the ancient Visayans as the creators of today’s FMA—like what Yambao and Inosanto did—practitioners crafted a shared common ancestry and configured FMA as a Filipino tradition. Because historically tracing FMA eventually leads to the Spanish colonial era—as shown by Macachor and Nepangue—the antiquation of FMA as Kali allowed practitioners to prevent it from being identified as Spanish. Reconstructing the past towards what Smith termed a mythic ‘Golden Age’ provided practitioners with a narrative that informed them of their being ‘Filipino’.

Simultaneously, the communion articulated by FMA history is contradicted by the dynamics involved in learning FMA. Fostered by the intimacy of relationships within the group, FMA circles are characteristically exclusive and isolated. They are defensive of this isolation and do not easily open up to others. Yet, as Muñiz account showed, this isolation was located within an imagined network of communities that could be linked together either by certain practices like gift exchange or through individuals like padrinos.
Both examples—one inclusive, the other exclusive—show how FMA is able to express its understanding of relationships between practitioners, and their membership to the nation.
Johnny Chiuten was an icon in martial arts in the Philippines. Edgar Sulite interviewed him for the book *The Masters of Arnis, Kalis, & Eskrima* (1994). Here, Chiuten revealed that he returned to his hometown of Cebu after graduating from college in 1969. He was a student of Kung Fu, but sought out an Eskrima teacher after a young man named Remy Presas challenged him to a friendly match. Chiuten tried to enrol in the most famous Eskrima school in Cebu, the Doce Pares Club, which was at that time run by the Cañete brothers. According to Chiuten, one of the most senior members, Filemon ‘Momoy’ Cañete, ‘blackballed’ his entry and he was thus refused membership to the club. He instead found welcome in another Cebuano club that taught Eskrima, the Balintawak Club, which was also the bitter rival of Doce Pares.

Chiuten’s experience with finding membership in an Eskrima club illustrates the conflict between older traditions in FMA teaching, as discussed in the previous chapter, and an emerging practice of its commodification. Sulite’s interviews with Eulogio ‘Yoling’ Cañete (Momoy’s brother) and Johnny Chiuten some two decades after the incident revealed two contrasting anxieties. Chiuten expressed that Momoy was dubious of his intentions to enrol especially since he had an extensive background in other martial arts which the Cañete brothers did not have. He believed Momoy suspected he would adopt and propagate Doce Pares Eskrima as his own art. For his part, Yoling Cañete dismissed Chiuten as one of the potential ‘rebels’ and ‘rabble rousers’ and stated that the club had every right to refuse membership. Momoy’s anxiety could be construed as emerging from the Old School fears—as understood in the previous chapter—over someone undeserving receiving the ‘heirloom’. In the case of a commercial club, Chiuten’s agendas—such as whether or

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2 Presas is the founder of Modern Arnis
3 By the time of Sulite’s interview, Chiuten was a renowned Balintawak practitioner, and had been long exposed (and possibly even subscribed) to the animosity felt by Balintawak towards Doce Pares.
4 *The Masters of Arnis, Kalis & Eskrima*, 86, 100; Cañete does not go on to explain what he means by ‘rebels’ and Sulite does not offer any suggestion. I interpret it means those who join the group only to leave later and use Eskrima for their own ends.
not he would open his own club later on—should have been irrelevant. On the other hand, Chiuten could not understand why a commercial club turned him away, and he began to formulate possible reasons—based on Old School logic—why it happened.

Taking from the previous chapter’s discussion of the nature of social relationship and cultural memories that governed FMA circles, this chapter explores the way FMA practice became infused with nationalism through its commercialization, expansion abroad, and eventual nationalization by the government. The coalescent formation of FMA from diverse weapons-based martial arts, especially because of its intersection with nationalism, parallels similar patterns of nation-building in the Philippines.\(^5\) Equally, it reflects the tensions from the symbiotic relationship in nationhood between the local and the national. Discussed in five sections, the chapter argues that the transition of FMA from private to commercial practice facilitated its categorization as a national symbol and its later nationalization. This is set against the backdrop of earlier arguments made on Philippine postcolonial anxieties over national identity, and the previous chapter’s discussion of the close-knit relationships forged during the learning of FMA which in turn makes an impression on an FMA circle’s exclusivity.

The first section introduces the history of the earliest weapons-based martial arts group in the Philippines—the Labangon Fencing Club from Cebu—and its seminal commercialization of weapons-based martial arts. The formation and dissolution of the Labangon Fencing Club previews how commercialization intersects with the age-old exclusivity among FMA circles. Commercialization and exclusivity become the opposing forces that prevail among FMA circles and pressure them to choose between preserving their traditions and individualism, and foregoing these in order to sell FMA better. Clubs encounter the same dilemma when the national government later appropriates FMA.

Using Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of ‘cultural capital’, the second section examines accounts of martial prowess, particularly in juego todo (literally ‘play hard’) duels, as a form of social currency for elevating club or individual prestige.\(^6\)

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\(^5\) I use ‘weapons-based martial arts’ as the collective term for FMA, prior to Dan Inosanto’s introduction of ‘FMA’ in his 1980 work, to give credit to the distinctiveness of various arts in FMA; Dan Inosanto, *Filipino Martial Arts as Taught by Dan Inosanto*. Los Angeles: Know How Publishing Company 1980.

The establishment of prestige or reputation is critical for a club’s credibility and existence since it affected their capacity to draw in students, become popular in the wider society, and gain access to national programs involving FMA. Following similar analysis on storytelling—rumours, gossip, or myth-narratives—made by D.S. Farrer on Singaporean Kung Fu practitioners and James C. Scott on Malaysian peasant farmers, this section argues that tales of martial prowess are instruments for accumulating cultural capital, social positioning, and articulating an idealized social order which preserves practitioner’s traditions and place in the world.

When FMA clubs later reverse-appropriate nationalism, it is framed along the dynamics of prestige and status building.

Focusing on how FMA clubs were formed or dissolved, the third section argues that FMA clubs solidified their localized identities, fuelled by status building and capitalism. Drawing from oral testimonies, film documentaries, and written histories on FMA, the chapter looks at two types of conflicts among FMA clubs: between its own members, and with other practitioners outside their immediate group. The delicate politics that form between FMA clubs affect the nature of their cooperation in the nationalization project.

The fourth section examines the expansion of FMA clubs abroad—particularly in the United States—when Filipino immigrants such as Angel Cabales and Leo Giron taught FMA to non-Filipinos. It highlights the key role of Filipino-American martial artist and actor Dan Inosanto in conceptualizing FMA as a collective term for the multitude of weapons-based martial arts in the Philippines. The section argues that the concept of ‘Filipino’ in FMA was formulated abroad—because the weapons-based martial arts from the Philippines were being engaged with other national cultures, it became identified as ‘Filipino’, consequently blurring out the individual identities of each martial art.

The last section of this chapter discusses the establishment of the National Arnis Association of the Philippines (NARAPHIL) and Arnis Philippines Incorporated (ARPI) as state-sponsored organizations which administered the nationalization of FMA. On one level, FMA’s mobilization for nation-building

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paralleled similar state-led approaches in Indonesia and Japan—as shown by John Pemberton and Marilyn Ivy—and was meant to address postcolonial anxieties over national identity. On another level, these organizations were also actively steered from below by the FMA clubs whose cooperation was integral to the nationalization of FMA. In subscribing to the nationalization project however, FMA clubs did not want to compromise their individual groups and identities. To manage this dilemma, they resorted to reverse-appropriating nationalist rhetoric as an adaptive strategy for maintaining prestige and status.

**Emergence of the New School**

In 1920, Lorenzo ‘Ensong’ Saavedra and his brothers opened the first commercial weapons-based martial arts club in the Philippines—the Labangon Fencing Club of Cebu. It was composed of practitioners of six different styles of Eskrima who wanted to share skills with each other, and teach students for a fee. Fencing clubs in the Philippines were not unknown in the Philippines prior to the Labangon group. National heroes like Jose Rizal and Antonio Luna (among others) practiced and formally taught European fencing during the late nineteenth century.

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9 The use of the word ‘fencing’ here reflects the term used by the Americans when referring to Arnis/Eskrima.


12 Antonio Luna’s School of Fencing circa 1894, courtesy of the Corregidor Island Museum.
It is arguable that the Labangon Fencing Club followed a similar principle and set-up with earlier fencing schools. The uncanny resemblance between Spanish fencing and the weapons-based martial arts in terms of techniques and terminology have been pointed out by Celestino Macachor and Ned Nepangue.\textsuperscript{14} There were also some differences. For one, a comparison of the above photographs shows that the equipment used were different—the students on the right used wooden sticks instead of foil and armour. Another, more arguable difference is that unlike most students who practiced Spanish fencing, practitioners of FMA generally belong to the lower rungs of society.\textsuperscript{15} What made the Labangon Fencing Club special was that, as far as historical records show, it was the first club in the Philippines to market weapons-based martial arts which would eventually be classified as FMA, and represented a merger of the informal Old School and an emerging New School. The Saavedra brothers, themselves products of the Old School, introduced a system by which the patronage and clientship that governed Old School knowledge transmission could be circumvented. Enthusiasts did not have to seek out teachers and perform the meticulous social manoeuvring discussed in the previous chapter such as finding padrino assistance or gift-giving—these were now replaces by tuition and membership fees. The Labangon Fencing Club converted FMA from exclusive heirloom to purchasable commodity, opening the doors of FMA to a wider market.

Despite the change of approach to the teaching of weapons-based martial arts, the New School retained much of the Old School habits. Unsurprisingly, this was owed to the fact that its initial members were all products of the old school who envisioned the institutionalization of Eskrima.\textsuperscript{16} Of these habits, the filial connections and filial nature of relationships within the clubs persisted. One of the first students of the Labangon Fencing Club were the Saavedras’ own relatives by marriage—the Cañete brothers, who would play a significant role in shaping FMA

\textsuperscript{13} The National Self-Defense Association 1927, courtesy of Celestino Macachor; note the difference between their implements and that of Luna’s school. I had to use a different club to illustrate this point since the Labangon group photograph did not exhibit the weapons they used.
\textsuperscript{14} Celestino Macachor and Ned Nepangue, \textit{Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth}. Xlibris Corporation 2007
\textsuperscript{15} Many FMA teachers today lament that Filipinos who could afford to pay for lessons opt to study East Asian martial arts more ‘than their very own’; Interview with Rodel Dagooc, April 22, 2012, Manila; Interview with Manuel Monsour del Rosario III, April 26, 2012, Makati City
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Masters of Arnis, Kalis & Eskrima}, 86
history later. Like in the Old School, the Cañetes were instructed by their own relatives—Ensong Saavedra and his nephew Teodoro ‘Doring’ Saavedra.

The Labangon club was successful in drawing together different, formerly reclusive practitioners, under one group. The downside was that these groups soon found themselves bickering with each other for different reasons. To begin with, the very nature of martial arts styles aims to best other styles. The fact that the styles were associated with family-oriented groups complicated the tensions between the members. One of the Cañete brothers, Eulogio, recounted to Sulite in an interview, how students of one style would criticize the movements of students of another style. This led to heckling and insulting between members which became cause for concern such that the different styles were assigned different days of training so as to avoid any further trouble.\textsuperscript{17} Eventually, the conflicts became unmanageable and the club was dissolved eleven years after it was created.

Understanding the delicate politics at work, but acknowledging that the organization of a club was indeed more far-reaching than private practice, the Cañetes convinced the Saavedras and former members of Labangon to form another group in January 1932 which would eventually become the longest running (and possibly the most successful) FMA club—the Doce Pares.\textsuperscript{18} To avoid the same interpersonal issues that plagued the Labangon group faced, the Doce Pares resorted to the old school safeguards of screening would-be members. As evident in the beginning of this chapter, this was the system of screening which turned Chiuten away.

During the Second World War, Labangon members actively participated in the resistance against the Japanese. Ciriaco ‘Cacoy’ Cañete, at present the oldest and most senior member of Doce Pares, became a guerrilla. Many Saavedras unfortunately died out—Doring was captured, tortured and executed by Japanese.\textsuperscript{19}

After the war, Ensong (whom Labangon members had always looked up to) refused

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The Masters of Arnis, Kalis \& Eskrima}, 86
\item\textsuperscript{18} The name Doce Pares was chosen because there were twenty-four original founding members—twelve pairs (in Spanish, doce pares). Additionally, its members drew from the time’s regal, masculine symbolism that was featured in a metrical romance of the day about the twelve bodyguards of Charlemagne; \textit{Filipino Martial Culture}, 58; ‘Doce Pares’ http://www.visayanmartialarts.com/docepares.htm, [web] accessed on December 6, 2011; Paolo David, ‘Attillo Balintawak History’. http://atillobalintawak.com/history/atillo-balintawak_history.html [web] accessed April 25, 2013; David’s work is a transcript of his interview with Crispullo ‘Ising’ Atillo of Balintawak Arnis.
\item\textsuperscript{19} ‘Attillo Balintawak History
\end{footnotes}
to participate in Doce Pares for personal reasons. This created a power vacuum in Doce Pares which was filled by the Cañetes. However, not everyone was agreeable to the change in leadership. Venancio ‘Anciong’ Bacon was originally Ensong’s student and a close family friend of the Saavedras. After the war, he was the most senior among the Saavedras’ original students. Without their paternal figures (Ensong and Doring), the ‘blood tie’ that bound the Saavedra students with Doce Pares was severed. Moreover, Bacon himself had a disagreement with one of the Cañete brothers. With twenty-five followers, Bacon left Doce Pares. In 1952, Bacon set up his own school in a run-down gym beside a pig pen, in a Cebu city street called Balintawak. Balintawak was eventually adopted as the club’s name. It was as a teacher in Balintawak that Anciong Bacon earned himself the nickname ‘Mozart of Arnis’. Balintawak soon grew to become Doce Pares’ most bitter rival in terms of prestige and business.

Bacon never officially stated the reasons for his departure. Writing for the *Filipino Martial Arts Digest* on the history of Doce Pares, Cacoy Cañete related that Bacon’s grievance was really about the club’s election results in 1951. Whatever the cause may have been, the split showed the old school value both men placed on the leadership (or mentorship) though they had different perspectives on the matter. Like with Chiuten earlier, Cacoy perceived Bacon’s grievance from a new school perspective—owing it to Bacon’s dissatisfaction with election results. Club elections after all did not really exist in the old school. On the other hand, Bacon explained the reason for his departure in filial terms—having a disagreement with one of the Cañetes—rather than a case of ‘failed election’. Whatever the result of the election turned out, Bacon and his circle could not maintain good relations with the Cañetes anymore because of this disagreement. Either way, both perspectives stemmed from concern over the political vacuum left by the Saavedras.

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20 There are conflicting versions as to who he disagreed with exactly; *Filipino Martial Culture*, 267-268; ‘Attilo Balintawak History’
22 The club named itself after the street, which was in turn named after a historic location in modern day Quezon City. The name was appealing because of the reference it made to the Revolutionary Period’s ‘Cry of Balintawak’ where Philippine national hero Andres Bonifacio formally commenced the Philippine Revolution against Spain.
23 *Filipino Martial Culture*, 269
At first glance, the two clubs seem to be on opposite poles. In technical terms, Doce Pares drew its name from foreign, European origins while Balintawak drew its name from a local, historical, and more nationalistic reference. The pedagogy of Doce Pares, at that time, remained conventional—meaning without a formal curriculum or method—while Balintawak prided itself in a scientific approach to teaching introduced by two of its senior students. As Chiuten’s example showed at the beginning of this chapter, Doce Pares membership was very strict and rigid like in the Old School. In comparison, entry into Balintawak was more lax. The rigidity of membership in Doce Pares was owed to a longstanding characteristic of the club—it was controlled by the Cañete family. Lastly, the deterioration of the political relationship between their circles made reconciliation unlikely. It was no secret that the two clubs disliked each other—the conflicts of their seniors trickled down to the younger students on either side. However, both clubs had actually more in common than they cared to admit: the senior members of both clubs were former students of the Saavedras, their preferred fighting range was similar, both screened would-be members as the old school practice dictated (although Doce Pares was by far stricter), majority of the members in both clubs came from lower classes, and most important was the fact that all if not most of the members were Cebuanos.

The previous chapter argued how Old School communities organized into circles of filiation. The Labangon Fencing Club was the first attempt to consolidate various FMA circles into a single, commercial school. Its dissolution, the emergence of Doce Pares, and the breakaway of Balintawak illustrate how FMA clubs generally maintained their Old School practices. The structure of the clubs remained patterned after the filial FMA circles, membership was controlled to ensure its exclusivity, and an authority or ‘father’ figure was still needed to hold the group together. Although these clubs opened Eskrima to the public for consumption, these early examples showed how FMA circles continued to be defensive of their exclusivity and their individualisms, and how their sense of community remained limited in scope and filial in nature.

25 Jose Villasin and Teofilo Velez who would later form their own Balintawak-styled clubs.
26 Although Doce Pares has today split into two groups, both are still being managed and instructed by Cañetes.
27 Filiation here pertains to family-ties.
Juego Todo and Martial Prowess as Prestige

Bernd Wegener’s analysis of theories on prestige argued that prestige is commonly defined as ‘a variable representing a hierarchy of individual social positions’. Archaeologist Laura Lee Junker’s examination of the flow of ‘prestige goods’ in Philippine chiefdoms before the era of colonization also defines prestige along similar lines as ‘social rank and political authority in the context of status rivalry’. Junker’s research showed that the exchange of luxury items was used by Philippine chiefdoms to elevate their prestige in the eyes of their neighbours. Consequently, possession of these ‘prestige goods’ had an impact on their political standing in the region.

By its very nature, any martial art is designed to outdo or outperform others. FMA practitioners have historically been engaged in this constant struggle for prestige and status even before FMA clubs emerged. Whereas the accumulation of luxury items was the measure of prestige in Philippine chiefdoms, among FMA clubs, it was a matter of martial skill and prowess. Understandably, this cannot be quantified in the same way as archaeological evidence. Especially before regulated competitions were introduced in the 1970s, there was no way of quantitatively measuring victories. Instead they can be analyzed through the telling of accounts, testimonies, or rumours of martial prowess in actual combat. The value of one’s martial art is determined by how that individual fares in combat. Pierre Bourdieu has argued that cultural knowledge can be mobilized as a non-economic form of capital—cultural capital—to confer power and status in the social hierarchy. In this regard, knowledge in martial arts becomes a form of cultural capital and has a direct effect on the projection of one’s martial skill and prowess. FMA abounds with accounts of teachers or practitioners being involved in duelling or finding themselves caught in life and death situations. Their celebration could be understood as a way by which cultural capital is circulated in FMA. This section endeavours to analyze and

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30 See ‘The Forms of Capital’
to understand how these instances and accounts affect the relationships among FMA practitioners and their sense of identity and community.

Martial contests are a longstanding practice in the Philippines. The historical background in Placido Yambao and Buenaventura Mirafuente’s 1957 book on Arnis presents the earliest account of a martial performance in the Philippines. The authors claim that in February of 1564, Spanish conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legazpi was entertained in Leyte with martial dancing and martial arts sparring by the local chieftain, Malitik, and his warriors.\(^{31}\) Some three hundred years later, during the late Spanish period in the Philippines, it was not uncommon for Filipino elites to demand satisfaction from injury by formally challenging offenders to a duel. For instance, the Philippine national hero Jose Rizal issued three challenges, but all of which were aborted—two of these were issued to fellow national heroes Marcelo del Pilar and Antonio Luna who were both experienced fencers.

Both examples above show that martial contests can happen either as a form of pastime—such as martial play or martial performance—or as a medium for resolving grievances in the form of ritualized duelling. Such traditions were common practices in the Old School and were transmitted to the New School. In either case, there was a desire by fighters to outmatch the adversary regardless of whether the contest was just for display or a serious duel. Because fighting, or the display of superior martial skills, was a language—consisting of kinetic expressions of martial techniques—understood by all FMA practitioners, martial contests became venues for the accumulation of cultural capital in FMA. Fighting also drew the lines of the FMA circle and became a way of identifying the self and the other—who was part of the community, who was friend and who was foe.

Chief Malitik’s display of martial skills as a form of entertainment or performance shows the first type of martial contest. This type is used to pass time, as a form of entertainment, and also to accumulate martial knowledge. As such, it is thus an activity that is participated in by members of the same circle in FMA. These playful matches were un-choreographed and the participants controlled their strikes. It became a mode of ‘practice’—as in rehearsal or exercise—in preparation for

\(^{31}\) Placido Yambao and Buenaventura Mirafuente, Mga Karunungan sa Larong Arnis. University of the Philippines 1957, 9; The book’s lack of proper referencing has led historians to challenge the accuracy of the historical background the book offers. Nepangue and Macachor, for instance, argue that Legazpi was only leaving Mexico in November 1564; Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth, 93-94
actual combat. Although there are no written records on how Filipinos traditionally prepared for war or at which point in history they start doing this, Donald Muñiz’ article from the previous chapter offers some idea. Martial contest as a form of ‘practice’ was a regular activity in rural Visayas and was predominantly engaged in by men. One example from Antique, Iloilo was that in village gatherings, the men would huddle to one area and form a circle. A guitar may be played and drinks are often served. A bolo (long knife used as farm implement) is passed around as each man would display how he would defend against suggested attacks. The scenarios put forward often reflected real life situations that people find themselves in. The solutions varied from person to person and often, the men would boast, argue, and decide who had the best solution.

The second type of martial contest is in the form of formal duels. While duels in FMA can be similar to European modes of duelling which are often venues for settling grievances, they are not necessarily fights to the death and have often been organized only to see who the better fighter is. While duelling to settle grievances has been outlawed for centuries, martial contests designed to see who the better fighter is have not been formally illegalized. That is not to say of course that there have been no accounts of injury or death from duelling in FMA. Among Cebuano practitioners, the popular form of duelling is no-holds-barred matches famously known as juego todo (roughly meaning ‘hard play’ or ‘hard game’). Because of the injuries often sustained from such matches, juego todo duels have also been called ‘death matches’. It is both play (as in game or sport) and duel intended to gauge one’s martial abilities. It is similar to the earlier example of martial contest as a friendly display of skills except that here they do not pull their punches. Ideally, both parties agree to meet at a certain location. The FMA documentary film Eskrimadors (2010) re-enacted a classic description of a juego todo match where both fighters

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32 In Western Visayas, the word ‘practice’ is slang for rigorous physical training as in training in the gym or training in sports. Between FMA practitioners, to invite someone to ‘practice’ is another way of inviting someone to train in FMA.

33 Donald Muñiz, ‘The Silent Art of Luisianan, Laguna Eskrima’, in Filipino Martial Arts Digest 2(4), 2005; Muñiz writes an oral account on how villagers sought after an Eskrima teacher so they could defend themselves against marauding bandits.

34 Interview with Alfredo Nietes, September 17, 2012, Oton, Iloilo City; Interview with Frank Sobrino, August 6, 2012, Iloilo City


36 This explains why, for example, many FMA teachers claim to have participated in ‘over a hundred’ death matches.
first sign waivers in front of a lawyer before proceeding to fight resulting in the death of one participant.  

Juego todo matches typically end either in surrender, injury resulting to one participant being unable to continue, or rarely, even death. These types of matches are opportunities for participants to accumulate cultural capital. Because the credibility of FMA clubs relies on the martial skill of its teachers or members, participants of juego todo matches are naturally defensive and sensitive about their reputations. More often than not, there are no clear winners and both sides either claim victory or accuse each other of cheating.

There have been little or no records available regarding deaths from juego todo matches. However, oral accounts commonly speak of deaths resulting from these matches. Many accounts of juego todo matches which have resulted in injury or death are of instances of armed assault in which the defender was not given much option but to flee, disable or kill his attacker(s). In his article on juego todo, Celestino Macachor also used the term ‘juego todo’ to refer to violent altercations and fracases regardless of whether they were premeditated or not, or whether they were arranged or not. Although these instances do not resemble the Western notion of a duel, they are nonetheless viewed in FMA practice as times when the skill of the

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37 Eskrimadors, dir. Kerwin Go, 2010
38 Lorenzo Saavedra, one of the founders of Labangon, served time in prison supposedly for killing a Cebuano opponent in a stick fighting duel. Another account by the founder of Lapu-Lapu Viñas group in Bacolod, Jose ‘Joe’ Viñas (1906-1991), tells of his grandfather’s prowess. Andres Javellana, a native of Iloilo, was said to have killed several Spaniards in manly combat. His exploits irked the Spaniards who ordered his arrest. Javellana fled to the next island, Negros, where he changed his surname to Viñas to avoid being tracked. Yet another account speaks of how a Filipino migrant to the United States, Felix Goc-ong, got into hot water after he killed an African-American in a fair duel in Hawaii; Rene Capangpangan and Ned R. Nepangue, ‘History of Arnes Diablo: Ancient Filipino Knife Fighting’ in RAPID Journal 3(3) 1998; James U. Sy Jr., ‘LapuLapu Viñas Arnis’ in Filipino Martial Arts Digest, 3(4) 2006; Celestino Macachor, ‘Juego Todo’ http://decampo123.s5.com/custom2.html [web] May 4, 2013
39 FMA history is simply rife with accounts of teachers being waylaid or assaulted and the attacker killed when the teacher defended himself. These instances do not fall into the Western definition of a duel but are identified among FMA practitioners as incidents of juego todo: Anciong Bacon served time in prison for killing someone due to excessive force. Bacon justified his actions as self-defence but lost his appeal and was put in prison; A young Antonio Ilustrisimo killed a Muslim man who berated, and then assaulted him for buying alcohol at a store; A bully goaded Protacio Mutas to fight during a town ball. Seeing he could not pacify the situation, Mutas fought the man but killed him. The man’s family acknowledged this to be an act of self-defense and did not report it to authorities; An account of a juego todo was featured in Kerwin Go’s documentary Eskrimadors. It related the experience of Vicente ‘Inting’ Carin of Doce Pares who, during a town fiesta, fended off seven armed assailants, killing three of them. He passed out from wounds sustained but was later revived; see Ramil Gulle and Jovel Lorenzo, ‘The Bad-Ass Blows of Balintawak’ in Filipino Martial Arts Digest, 3(4) 2007; Antonio Diego and Christopher Ricketts, The Secrets of Kali’s Ilustrisimo. Tuttle Martial Arts 2002, 7-8; Eskrimadors; and ‘Juego Todo’ 40 ‘Juego Todo’
practitioner is measured. The likelihood is that these instances were really criminal acts perpetrated by one party (whether the practitioner or not)—such as manslaughter or murder—which have resulted in death, and have been retold as instances of juego todo to build up one’s martial reputation. By telling the account according to the common patterns of storytelling—focusing on themes of honour, fairness, skill, bravery, and temperance—the FMA practitioner’s cultural capital increases, and his reputation builds up.

The underlying logic behind participating in a juego todo is that defeating a famed Eskrimador (or Arnisador) elevated one’s martial reputation. In many cases, the famed Eskrimador is pressured to fight in order to keep his reputation.41 One of the most classic accounts of this in FMA is that of Anciong Bacon whose reputation invited him one trouble after another.42 Accounts state he once fought three consecutive matches. The first one—a proper duel—earned him a reputation because he was handicapped in that match—his opponent brought two long staves and he was armed with only a single short stick. In his second match, someone tried to stab him in the back to ‘test’ his skills and reflexes. Bacon defended himself but killed his attacker, landing him in prison. While in prison, he had to defend himself again from an inmate who also wanted to ‘test’ his fighting calibre.43 Reputation became the measure of a fighter’s prowess yet it invited people who wanted to challenge this prowess formally or otherwise. For this reason, skill or reputation was perceived as a burden. One FMA teacher, Protacio Mutas, even considered it a curse and refused to teach his sons Eskrima fearing they too might be challenged, tested, or possibly killed.44 What the tradition of duelling did was to create a vicious cycle in which the reputation of the teacher, or his students, needed to be defended and preserved. If an individual managed to defeat someone more skilled, he acquires cultural capital but

41 In Eskrimadors, the different teachers further explain the politics and norms behind the juego todo—one’s reputation invited challengers, a waiver could be signed denying either party any responsibility with the injuries sustained during the match, one could surrender if he had had enough, the only reward was an increased reputation as a fighter, and that one could not be considered an Eskrimador if one were not willing to fight.
42 Bacon was also reputed to have fought over a hundred death matches. Only one of these matches have been documented as having resulted in the death of an opponent; ‘A Brief History of Martial Arts, Eskrima and Balintawak System’, http://apobalintawak.wordpress.com/history/the-development-of-balintawak-and-eskrima/ [web] May 4, 2013
43 See Pacito ‘Chito’ Velez account, Eskrimadors; and ‘A Brief History of Martial Arts, Eskrima and Balintawak System’
44 ‘The Bad-Ass Blows of Balintawak’; ‘Juego Todo’; ‘A Brief History of Martial Arts, Eskrima and Balintawak System’
would eventually have to defend himself against the next fortune-seeking fighter who comes along. Additionally, by portraying his FMA teacher in this manner, the student basks in the reflection of the teacher’s cultural capital.

A martial contest can also occur as a friendly match between teachers and students, friends, colleagues, or those who belong to the same FMA circle. Unlike the formal duel, friendly matches are for the most part non-violent. Because they act as a form of ‘practice’ between friends, they are not venues for accumulating cultural capital. People involved in friendly matches are more relaxed with their guard and pull their punches so as not to inflict injury upon one’s partner. In this respect, friendly matches also reveal the inclusionary and exclusionary limits of an FMA circle or network of circles. One taboo in friendly matches is to try and catch your partner off guard—especially one’s teacher—so as to humiliate or injure him. FMA teacher Cristino Vasquez related an oral history from a town in Victorias, Negros Occidental, about a student who tried to increase his reputation by beating his teacher. Vasquez related that one evening the student was drinking with his friends and was talked into waylaying his old Arnis teacher to earn the reputation of being the best Arnisador in the village. He ambushed the unarmed old man but was tricked into chipping off the tip of a sugar cane stalk which the old man used to stab him in the heart with. Regardless of whether it really happened or not, the account reveals an oral history passed through generations that drums in values of respect, seniority, honour, and the justification of killing only as self-defence. The account hence becomes a story with a moral lesson that can be passed down across generations—by ambushing his old teacher, the student violated these ideals and paid for it with his life. Taking from the previous chapter’s analogy of FMA knowledge as an heirloom, the student attacked someone who took him in as family and passed an heirloom to him, using the very heirloom that was given. Again, in the manner of Vasquez’s telling, the death of the student here appears to be acceptable. When asked to expound on his opinion of the student’s death, Vasquez remarked, ‘…he got what was coming to him. Who does something like that?’ signalling how it was taboo among practitioners to attack your own teacher to gain prestige. In fact, it was scorned.

45 Interview with Cristino Vasquez, March 10, 2012, Leganes, Iloilo
46 Interview with Cristino Vasquez, March 10, 2012, Leganes, Iloilo
What is most interesting from these accounts is that they reveal patterns of storytelling and idealized values held in esteem among FMA practitioners such as honour, discipline, and bravery. Consequently, these shared values also reveal a shared sense of communion among practitioners. As Farrer noted regarding Singaporean Kung Fu practitioners who socialized in coffee shops after martial arts training, ‘…the simple activities of sitting, eating, drinking, and storytelling would reveal the social bonds, group practices, inherited stories, and the social, political and religious beliefs of participants who are joined together as fictive kin.’ Prowess—victory in juego todo—can only earn someone cultural capital if these values are satisfied. It had to be done honourably, in defence, and always as a last resort. The accounts themselves therefore established the proper conditions for earning cultural capital. Each of Sulite’s informants did not hold back from relating their own experiences in terms of surviving a duel or a surprise attack. All of their accounts have made them out to be on the defensive. Of all the informants for the dissertation, only one of them admitted to having hit someone in anger, and stated that losing control was looked down upon by other FMA practitioners. There was an unwritten set of rules that governed how to fight and who to fight. The common pattern of juego todo accounts consist of the FMA practitioner getting caught in a situation where all measures for diplomacy have been taken and fighting is unavoidable or necessary for survival. Alternatively, it may also be that two fighters have agreed to engage in honourable combat—that is they have agreed when and where to meet, and what weapons to bring. The typical antagonists in these accounts are either a boastful bully who agitates the FMA practitioner, an undefeatable opponent armed with talismans, or a cowardly backstabber who attacks unexpectedly. Instances when FMA practitioners end up killing their opponents in juego todo (whether in self-defence or formal duel) are often presented in ways that seem to justify the deaths resulting from them. In a way therefore, the FMA practitioner is presented as someone who comes a moral high ground—murder was unacceptable but killing for a legitimate reason could be justified. The way these accounts are told—like when informants begin to get animated when discussing about someone’s martial prowess, especially their own—show a deep-seated respect for being able to overcome danger.

47 ‘Coffee-Shop Gods…’, 204
fight with a handicap, and exercise emotional restraint. Patricia Sexton has categorized similar values—‘courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure, and a considerable amount of toughness in mind and body’—as masculine values. The previous chapter has described the chaotic socio-political conditions of the Visayas in the sixteenth century. It is along this logic of admiration for what are perceived as masculine values attributed to martial prowess that FMA practitioners regard the pre-colonial past as an age of heroism and try to establish connections between themselves and that past.

At the same time, and on the opposite end of the spectrum, accounts of martial prowess are also windows into the social positioning going on among practitioners. Studying patterns of resistance among poor peasant farmers in a Malaysian village, Scott has argued that malicious gossip—that is, talking bad about a rich neighbour—was a way for them to protect their own interests without actually confronting the more economically superior neighbours who were disenfranchising them by investing in agricultural technology. Vasquez’ account of the student ambushing his old teacher and getting killed for doing so can be read as a way for him to dissuade his own students from bullying him in order to acquire cultural capital. Similarly, the reason why there are sometimes no clear winners in accounts of juego todo is because no one can afford to admit losing—it would deprive them of the credibility they needed to rake in students. FMA’s commercialization equated a club’s martial prowess with its marketability. Furthermore, the size and popularity of particular clubs later affected the level of influence they commanded over the

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48 Angel Cabales opined that the ultimate test of one’s skill were real life incidents where a practitioner had to rely on his martial arts skills. Ciriaco Cañete also valued any opportunity to test one’s skill. In a 1983 interview for a BBC documentary, he expressed how accepting challenges was the only way to prove that one’s style was the best. He then stated that he advises his students to retire if they ever refuse any challenge. Subsequent new school teachers, such as Christopher Ricketts of the Bakhakan International Club, even tested or initiated their students by tagging them along to night clubs or beer houses where fights were always around; Mila B. Davis, ‘The Endless Journey’ in Filipino Martial Arts Digest 3(3), 2006; The Way of the Warrior: Eskrima, the Philippino (sic) Way, dir. Michael Croucher and Dr. Howard Reid, prod. BBC, 1983; Interview with Manuel Monsour del Rosario III, April 26, 2012, Makati City; and Peachie Baron Saguin, September 20, 2012, Quezon City


50 Weapons of the Weak…, 304
government’s nationalization project as well as their participation in the making of FMA films which popularized constructions of national identity.\footnote{These points are elaborated in a later section in this chapter on NARAPHIL and ARPI, and Chapter IV of the dissertation.}

Martial contests involve a delicate politics of building up prestige and accumulating cultural capital. If we consider that each FMA club or circle had acquired its own set of cultural capital throughout the history of its existence, we can understand how belonging to a national organization deprives them of this.

**Conflicts between and within FMA Clubs, and the strengthening of local FMA identities**

Based on the previous section, a practitioner with a good reputation for having defeated his enemies in duels or having survived life and death situations amounted to his marketability. Combat—for example in the form of the *juego todo*—was a common language between the multitude of FMA clubs and circles, and centred on the idea of earning cultural capital which elevated its participants among other FMA practitioners. It acted as a platform for the convergence of various FMA practitioners. The very nature of a contest, however, meant that one party earned cultural capital while the other lost it. Because cultural capital was imperative to a club’s existence, martial contest became a process in which lines of Othering between FMA practitioners were created. As this section shows, this is true for members of different or similar clubs.

The reputation of the club amounted to its integrity and that of its members. The teacher’s character and martial abilities had a direct impact on the students. If the teacher’s abilities or lessons were questionable, it reflected on the students’ own abilities. To question the abilities of a club’s teacher, or to question the art he was teaching meant challenging the martial competence of every single individual who studied under that teacher. This explains why the results of a *juego todo* can be a very sensitive or obscure topic among FMA clubs whose teachers were involved—if the losing party could not corroborate the claims of victory, the teacher is depicted as having clearly and gallantly won; if both parties are able to tell the story, there is always no clear winner or loser, and if there was a winner, there would be
accusations of cheating. Questioning or challenging the credibility of a teacher or fighting system compels members of that particular club to redeem their reputation by proving it through the language of combat. After the clear break between Doce Pares and Balintawak, the clubs once more began to critique each other’s methods. Both sides were eager to ‘test’ each other’s skills. Between the 1950s and the early 1970s, FMA teachers and senior members from both Doce Pares and Balintawak issued challenges to each other with barely any of these coming to fruition. The Club histories of FMA teachers such as Anciong Bacon, Cacoy Cañete and Crispullo Attilo claim that these men have fought in over a hundred juego todo matches. Yet, many of them have never actually fought with each other apart from issuing challenges that are never followed through. For example, a teacher from Doce Pares would claim that the teacher from Balintawak never showed up at the agreed time and place. Likewise, the teacher from Balintawak would say the exact same thing. Dionisio Cañete, one of the principal teachers in Doce Pares, explained that there was a ‘balance of power’ between prominent FMA teachers. While it is possible that they have indeed fought in over a hundred matches, these were most likely with individuals who were virtually unknown in the world of Eskrima. These teachers have become so distinguished in their respective circles that they could not afford to lose the cultural capital they have accumulated to their rivals. More often than not, they were contented to make affirmations of prowess—and not having to fight at all—because these were enough to increase their reputation and grant them students.

The conflicts between the teachers trickled down to the younger students. Criticisms were not treated lightly. FMA teacher Chito Velez related his experience as a young man in Balintawak in the late sixties and early seventies:

52 ‘A Brief History of Martial Arts, Eskrima and Balintawak System’; ‘Attilo Balintawak History’; and ‘Beginning and Origins of Doce Pares’
53 Interview with Rodrigo Maranga and Rico Maranga, May 27, 2012, Cebu City
54 Interview with Dionisio Cañete, August 28, 2012, Cebu City
55 Interview with Dionisio Cañete, August 29, 2012; Interview with Celestino Macachor, May 25, 2012, Cebu City; both informants agree that prominent FMA teachers generally avoid confrontations but profess to never back down from one.
‘Whenever any of us from Balintawak would hear of anyone insulting our style, we’d go and find them. Our blood was boiling since we were young… it was a real fight.’

What is most interesting about these conflicts that arise from perceived insults to an FMA club’s integrity is that it opens a window into how FMA practitioners identified themselves along the same filial lines that could be found in the Old School discussed in the previous chapter, and how they positioned themselves against other FMA clubs. The club’s filial structure—the teacher as father, the FMA system as heirloom, and fellow club members as siblings—became antecedents of a practitioner’s identity. The teacher becomes inseparable from the FMA system he teaches. The student, having adopted the system, becomes identified with that specific club or system. Consequently, the student becomes protective of the teacher, the system, and his fellow students. Because one FMA club always engaged with another, the sense of the club as a group became limited to the individuals who ‘capitalized’ on the club’s reputation and contributed to increasing it. Those who sought to draw cultural capital away from one’s club were not considered part of the group. It is in conflict and contest where the lines of identity are solidified. As FMA clubs have shown, their groups are shaped by outlines of filial connection and techniques used. When the filial connections that hold the club together are erased, clubs tend to fracture. One observable trend is that when fellow club members begin to try and draw cultural capital from each other, it’s a sign they will eventually break off from the club—this happened in both Labangon and Doce Pares. The teacher is the key figure in holding members together and keeping the cultural capital in one place accessible to all. He fills the role of padrino (go-between) for the various members of the club. Once he is no longer there, or is politically incapacitated, some members either take charge as the new father figure or they try to fill in the shoes of the teacher as the renowned expert in FMA. In either case, it creates some tension within the group. One example previously discussed is how the surviving senior member of the Labangon Fencing Club, Lorenzo Saavedra, chose not to join Doce Pares after World War II. Leadership was assumed by the

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56 See Pacito ‘Chito’ Velez account, *Eskrimadors*

57 See Chapter I for a discussion on the role of the padrino.
Cañete brothers but this offset Bacon’s influence in the group since he was one of Saavedra’s most senior students and really had nothing to do with the Cañetes. The transfer of leadership, and thus of the club’s cultural capital, is a critical element in understanding how FMA clubs operate because they construct, demolish, and reconstruct the lines of filiation between FMA clubs.  

FMA clubs have adopted several strategies to assert their uniqueness along these lines. The first of these is to package the teacher (and later, his protégés) as a credible, one-of-a-kind FMA expert. Usually, this is visible in the affirmation of accounts about the martial prowess of that teacher. This can also be further supplemented by the teacher’s participation in martial contests. As mentioned earlier, the results of these contests are hazy, and participants fight over how the contest is narrated in order to build up their reputation. As one teacher from Cebu lamented about how his grandfather’s opponent boasted of victory in a match that ‘never happened’:

‘You know the sad part for us is that foreigners who come to study our system have usually also studied with them (the other club). And what they are told there is that their teacher beat my grandfather. How is that even possible when the two never faced in the (tournament) finals? How is that even possible when he (the other teacher) runs from the mere sight of my grandfather’s shadow?’

This example reveals that the way a martial contest is told can act as a sales pitch for FMA clubs. How ‘foreigners’ was used to refer to the audience of the accounts also reveals them as influential participants in reputation-building. Among FMA clubs, foreigners are perceived as good sources of income as well as prestige because they pay bigger and offer the club international repute. Control over accounts of prowess thus equates to control of cultural capital.

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58 FMA practitioner and Taekwondo national athlete Monsour del Rosario, commented that the reason why other national martial arts organizations are able to standardize and homogenize their martial arts because of a clear lineage and hierarchy in their arts and none in FMA. There are far too many masters and experts, and many of them claim to practice the ‘genuine’ version of FMA. As such, they do not easily cooperate with each other in state-sponsored programs; Interview with Manuel Monsour del Rosario III, April 26, 2012, Makati City
The teacher’s reputation and credibility are also ‘officialized’ through the use of titles such as ‘master’ and ‘grandmaster’—often granted by his students, or occasionally, himself. Needless to say, most of these individuals really believe themselves to be or are really considered by their following as exceptional FMA experts. FMA historian James Sy related that before martial arts became highly commercialised in the seventies, there were few ‘masters’ (black belts) around. In fact, if we consider how—as previously discussed—Dan Inosanto and Richard Bustillo had difficulty in running after various FMA teachers in the US in the 1960s and 1970s, it shows how FMA experts were secretive about their abilities. This was of course contrary to the requirements of capitalism where a teacher needed to advertise himself in order to keep the club running. The rise in popularity of martial arts meant an inflation of ‘masters’ such that the original teachers had to elevate (or be elevated) to higher ranks such as ‘senior master’, or ‘grandmaster’ which are today commonly used titles for the most senior teachers in a club. In order to assert superiority even farther, superfluous adjectives were added to titles such as ‘supreme’ grandmaster or even ‘eternal’ grandmaster. In the absence of a standard way of awarding titles, the term grandmaster later also became inflated. When teachers faced each other during gatherings such as when the Arnis Law (RA 9850) was announced to the FMA community in 2010, it was not uncommon for them to scoff at each others’ titles.

Following arguments made in Chapter One, a second strategy is to package the FMA system as derived from an antique, battle-tested martial art from time immemorial. An underlying logic for this is that FMA clubs have to be in keeping with the generic and widely circulated FMA narrative because it was the identified logo—this is the initial knowledge of potential customers and any divergence from it might only lead students away. Similar to how accounts of martial prowess increase a teacher’s reputation, by ascribing a sense of history and tradition to an FMA system, its cultural capital is increased. Additionally, antiquating FMA suggested its effectiveness across centuries of combat and explains why FMA clubs project their

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59 FMA teachers originally did not have belts similar to other East Asian martial arts. They later adopted belts—copying from East Asian martial arts—as FMA became more commercialised.

60 Interview with James U. Sy, May 17, 2013, electronic correspondence.

61 For a description of the Arnis Law, see the Introduction Chapter.
past to the volatile military situation in the pre-colonial Philippines. It is used both as a marketing tactic and a way to legitimize a club’s authenticity over another.

A third strategy for making an FMA club distinct from other clubs is to highlight a club’s technical biases and specialities. This can either be very specific or very comprehensive. For instance, one teacher would describe his art as specializing in the use of knives only while another would state that the skills he offers are transferable to all sorts of weaponry and even empty hands. In the transcript of his interviews of FMA teachers, Sulite almost always starts by asking what sets the informant’s FMA system apart from everyone else’s. Similarly, the majority of the informants for this dissertation offer this information outright even before the formal interview commenced. The proliferation of FMA clubs, especially after the Second World War, prompted FMA teachers to position themselves in a way that easily distinguished them from other clubs of various sizes and reputations. The club’s uniqueness is often reflected in the names that clubs adopt. In 1920, the first club used the name Labangon Fencing Club. Here, the club is identified as a ‘fencing club’—fencing being the generic term for weapons-based martial arts before the term FMA was popularized—based in a place called Labangon. Likewise, in the 1950s, Balintawak Eskrima adopted its name from a street. By the time Mark Wiley wrote *Filipino Martial Culture* in 1998, he identified nine ways by which FMA clubs named themselves—these were patterned after, for example, the founder’s name, technique used, preferred fighting range, place of origin and so on. The names themselves reveal the history and lineage of the clubs. Two good examples are ‘FILMOCAN San Miguel Eskrima Club’ and ‘Nickelstick Balintawak’. When dissected, they show that these are clubs which branched out from an original one—FILMOCAN San Miguel Eskrima was named after Filemon Momoy Cañete (hence the FIL-MO-CAN) who taught San Miguel style Eskrima in Doce Pares; likewise, Nickelstick Balintawak refers to the version of Balintawak taught by one of Balintawak’s first students, Nick Elizar (hence the Nick-el-stick). That they adopted these colourful labels shows their desire to assert their own uniqueness from the multitude of other FMA clubs.

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62 See Chapter One
63 Such, for example, is the difference between Baraw Sugbo and Doce Pares.
64 *Filipino Martial Culture*, 311 and 347
This third strategy is possibly the most significant factor in a club’s assertion of its unique composition and identity because it emphasized which things are offered by one club that are not available in others. As earlier discussed, there was an absence of curriculum, system or teaching method in the Old School. After the commercialization of FMA in the twentieth century, teachers were compelled to organize and institutionalize their teaching of FMA in order to make it more marketable. Macachor and Nepangue have noted how the vast majority of FMA clubs have adopted a ‘foreign mould’—seen in their following the Chinese and Japanese use of belts, ranks and honorific titles. This adoption shows the early attempts of the New School to systematize and organize the teaching of FMA. Much later, FMA teachers and practitioners broke down the movements into digestible lessons which were eventually incorporated into each club’s respective curriculum. The systematization of FMA knowledge is interpreted in FMA as a ‘modernizing’ process. A classic example is how the brothers Remy and Ernesto Presas ‘modernized’ Arnis teaching by watering down the painful methods of the Old School. In Balintawak Eskrima, a similar approach was initiated by students Jose Villasin and Teofilo Velez. Both clubs are today among the most prominent FMA clubs with members from around the world. The dilution of traditional FMA learning is both a strength and weakness—it becomes accessible to more people, but is also critiqued among traditionalist FMA practitioners for the softening of its techniques. This reflects the ambivalent stance, discussed in the introductory chapter, which nations adopt towards tradition and modernity. FMA is understood to be culturally valuable, but its crude and painful methods are distasteful to the ‘modern’ world. Furthermore, modernity in FMA pedagogy was patterned after the ‘foreign mould’ in the same way that postcolonial nations weigh the ir modernity against their former colonizers. Thus, the FMA teacher who manages to devise a ‘modernized’ system—by giving the Old School a place in contemporary society—acquires cultural capital. The public appeal of systematizing the learning of FMA is in itself a source of cultural capital such that students or teachers who participated in formulating the

65 Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth, 37-39
66 Interview with Cristino Vasquez, March 10, 2012, Iloilo City; Interview with Rodel Dagooc, April 22, 2012, Manila
system often vie for its authorship. This was indeed the case in both examples—the Presas brothers, Villasin and Velez subsequently drifted apart.68

Since the early twentieth century, FMA circles have transitioned into the New School where FMA was now being marketed for public consumption. As such, the dynamics of the transfer and preservation of FMA knowledge changed. It was now outward-looking and in competition with other FMA clubs. FMA clubs have thus adopted particular strategies which enabled them to stress their unique features—what sets them apart from other clubs—but in doing so, they have effectively demarcated their individual identities. The struggle for recognition and enrolment, and the strategies employed to attain them, served to establish individual identities between the independent FMA clubs that proliferated through time. Each club had its own name, revered its own grandmaster, wrote its own version of the history of FMA, and sought to outdo other clubs in martial arts tournaments. Hence, this makes it difficult for the state to nationalize Arnis because FMA practitioners have long manoeuvred to assert their own identities in the throng of FMA clubs, not to mention having historic grievances with each other.

**Creation of ‘Filipino’ in FMA from abroad**

The American colonization of the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century eventually led to Filipino migration to the US. Many migrants were knowledgeable in Philippine weapons-based martial arts. The previous chapter’s discussion on Filipino-Americans Dan Inosanto and Richard Bustillo’s quest to find instruction from these individuals illustrates how plentiful, albeit reclusive these practitioners were. Obviously, many of them practiced in private like in the Old School and as yet, did not teach in public. Characteristically, these practitioners were also fragmented and defensive about their skills. Using the history of Filipino migrants—particularly that of Leo Giron and Angel Cabales—who were among the first to open clubs in the US in the 1960s, this section argues that a similar transformation from Old School to New School FMA also happened outside the Philippines. More importantly, it argues that the weapons-based martial arts from the Philippines emerged, was ascribed, and identified as a ‘Filipino’ art outside the

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Philippines because it was being engaged with foreign cultures. Its popularization outside the Philippines ultimately became a significant factor for the Philippine national government’s appropriation of FMA in the 1970s.

Many of the migrants who sought for a better life in the US came from working class backgrounds. Cabales was a native of Antique, Iloilo and was originally a dock worker in Tondo, Manila which was infamous as a rough neighbourhood. In 1939, he decided to work on an international ship. While on board, he participated in a juego todo match which incapacitated another man, prompting him to jump ship in San Francisco. In 1945, he left to work at a cannery in Alaska but again got into an altercation where he severely injured three men. He went back to Stockton where he worked in an asparagus field until his death in 1991. Giron, a native of Pangasinan in Luzon, arrived in the US in the late 1920s and worked in agriculture in California. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Giron signed up for a volunteer Filipino battalion that was being mobilized for deployment in the Philippines. After the war, he returned to the US where he stayed until his death in 2002.

Although both men had prior knowledge in Philippine weapons-based martial arts, they initially refused to publicly teach FMA in the US. They did however train privately with other Filipinos upon their arrival. In 1966, following the general trend of the commercialization of martial arts in the US, businessman and fellow practitioner Max Sarmiento proposed to Cabales and Giron to collectively open an Eskrima Academy for the general public. They turned down Sarmiento’s offer, citing classic old school reasons—the skills should be kept secret. Sarmiento later managed to convince Cabales. Leo Giron adamantly refused Sarmiento’s offer, but changed his mind when news of the Richard Speck murders of student nurses (some of whom were Filipinas) in Chicago shocked the US. Giron realized a moral obligation to teach FMA, if only to prevent similar crimes from happening. On one hand, Giron’s frustration reveals his sense of helplessness towards the crime. He expressed his frustration at the fact that the assailant could have easily been

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70 *Filipino Martial Culture*, 152; *The Secrets of Cabales*..., 12-18
71 *Filipino Martial Culture*, 193-198
72 *Filipino Martial Culture*, 198; *The Secrets of Cabales*..., 14-15
73 *Filipino Martial Culture*, 198
overpowered if the nurses had the skill and confidence to do so. On the other hand, he revealed how his own imagined community as a Filipino in the US was laid out—Giron emphasized the fact that some of the nurses were Filipinas, and this added to his frustration. More than a crime against women, Giron felt that Speck committed a crime against the Filipina female—a figure the Filipino male felt obligated to defend in a foreign country. Defending his countrymen, and introducing a Filipino art was Giron’s own expression of nationalism. Shortly after their academy was established, Giron and Cabales fell out with each other over a disagreement on curriculum—both men wanted to prioritize their own styles, and ended up opening their own clubs separately. Although the initial plan for a centralised, commercial FMA club went awry, its foundations were laid down. The US continues to be the biggest market for FMA outside the Philippines to this day.

Several observations can be drawn from the history of Giron and Cabales. It reflects the same characteristics of the Old School—such as exclusivity, fragmentation, placing value on prowess, competing for prestige—and how these are incorporated into the increasing commercialization of FMA. Cabales’ involvement in several altercations equipped him with the cultural capital needed to establish himself as a legitimate Eskrima teacher. Similarly, Giron’s moral agenda to teach his own fighting methods credited him with another form of cultural capital. The falling out of the two teachers because of an argument over curriculum—and how they eventually opened their own exclusive clubs where they were free to teach their own systems—exhibits the very same inclinations of FMA clubs in the Philippines to assert their uniqueness and superiority. The ways they named their systems also mirror the examples in the previous section—Cabales called his brand Cabales Serrada Eskrima, and Giron called his system the ‘Bahala Na’ Multi-System.

Above all, the example of Giron and Cabales reflects how the Filipino migrants who were knowledgeable in weapons-based martial arts were ultimately as fragmented as their Philippine counterparts.

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74 Filipino Martial Culture, 199

75 Bahala na is a Filipino phrase which roughly translates to the Spanish phrase ‘que serra serra’—the surrender of the outcome to fate. Giron was also a member of the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion composed of Filipino volunteers which was dubbed the ‘Bahala Na’ Battalion; David T. Vivit, ‘The 1st and 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiments’ in Filipino Martial Arts Digest, Special Issue 2009
To New School students however, these lines of division were blurred out. These students were not aware of the intricacies of identity politics between teachers and collectively identified them as a set of Filipino weapons-based martial arts. The best example of a new school student who collapsed individual arts as ‘Filipino’ is the famous Daniel ‘Dan’ Arca Inosanto. Dan Inosanto is a Filipino-American who grew up in California. He is most famously associated with Bruce Lee who was his colleague in the film industry, and his martial arts teacher in Jeet Kune Do. In 1972, he starred in *The Game of Death* next to Bruce Lee.\(^{76}\) Inosanto’s role as a stick-wielding pagoda guardian immensely increased the popularity of Filipino weapons-based martial arts around the world. Lee’s other film *Enter the Dragon* (1973) also featured Filipino fighting arts when he incorporated the use of sticks in a memorable action sequence.\(^{77}\)

As discussed in Chapter One, Inosanto and his friend and colleague Richard Bustillo pursued various Filipino teachers—including Cabales and Giron—for instruction in weapons-based martial arts in the 1960s and 1970s. Their search for Filipino teachers in the US reveals their own search for cultural identity. Whereas Filipino old school teachers were more attentive to their differences with other teachers, Inosanto—distanced from this fragmentation by virtue of his having grown

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\(^{76}\) *The Game of Death*, dir. Bruce Lee, Columbia Pictures, 1973; the film was only partially completed due to Lee’s death, but was released five years later after additional scenes were shot.

\(^{77}\) *Enter the Dragon*, dir. Robert Clouse, Concord Productions, 1973

\(^{78}\) Bruce Lee wielding sticks in *Enter the Dragon*; Screengrab from *Enter the Dragon*
up in the US—paid more attention to the collective ‘Filipino-ness’ of FMA. In 1980, a product of his own research in the US, Inosanto published *Filipino Martial Arts*, and became the first person to introduce the term in a book.\(^7\) Subsequent books on FMA published in the Philippines and abroad drew from Inosanto, and utilized his term to collectively refer to weapons-based fighting arts in the Philippines. Inosanto’s own role in the construction of Filipino identity through FMA was arguably vital. Inosanto becomes a key figure in ascribing the ‘Filipino’ identity in the otherwise fragmented and bellicose weapons-based martial arts circles both in the US and the Philippines. Although the first proposal to make Arnis a national sport appeared in Yambao’s book in 1957, it was not until 1975 (a few years after *Enter the Dragon* and *The Game of Death*, and some ten years after Cabales, Giron, et. al. commercialised Filipino weapons-based martial arts in the US) that the Philippine government, took measures to appropriate Arnis—which the state interpreted as coterminous with other arts such as Kali or Eskrima—as a national symbol and sport. By then, FMA became more and more identifiable with the Philippines due to its popularity abroad, more than at home. More than just the invention of the term FMA as a collective noun, Inosanto became one of the first and probably most influential individuals to homogenize Filipino weapons-based fighting arts into FMA.

**NARAPHIL and ARPI: State Appropriation of FMA and FMA’s Appropriation of Nationalism**

To contextualize the national government’s appropriation of FMA, we must recapitulate previously made arguments. Firstly, although there is a sense of communion between them as evidenced by a common myth of origin, FMA circles behave as individual communities with its own set of hierarchies and traditions. The final section of Chapter One and earlier sections from this chapter described the intricate filial relationships developed through learning FMA, and the set of loyalties and hierarchies formed from such relationships which endured even as FMA became commercialized. The second section of this chapter showed that FMA circles were constantly competing for prestige and status. This caused clubs to be more assertive of their individual groups. Secondly, FMA as an ethnographic concept is something

\(^7\) *Filipino Martial Arts as Taught by Dan Inosanto*
that gradually gets realized and articulated only in more recent times mainly due to its increasing popularity especially in the US. Section four pointed out that Philippine weapons-based martial arts in the US gets ascribed with being ‘Filipino’ mainly because it was being engaged with other national cultures. As this section discusses, the foreign ascription is the main catalyst for the national government’s appropriation of FMA for nation-building. The exclusivity of FMA clubs and FMA’s articulation as a national symbol are opposing forces that tug at FMA clubs and confront them with a dilemma where they must manoeuvre between local and national identities.

As the introductory chapter discussed, the nationalization of FMA was intended to address postcolonial anxieties over national identity. Pemberton’s work on Indonesia and Ivy’s on Japan, parallel the Philippines’ rationale for nationalizing FMA. Pemberton’s work on Java examined how the ‘New Order’ regime under Suharto appropriated existing elements of Javanese culture and tradition in order to reify an idealised Indonesian identity patterned after the state’s cultural blueprints.80 What the New Order thus repressively imposed as ‘Indonesian identity’ was really the regime’s own understanding of Javanese cultural traditions. Likewise, Marilyn Ivy examined the cultural anxieties of modern Japanese society over their ‘vanishing’ national identity.81 Ivy’s research exhibited how modern Japanese society confronted the danger of loss of identity by memorialising and revitalising culture and tradition—even if through ‘invention’. Faced with similar concerns, the Philippine national government used what it understood as FMA to express what it imagined as Filipino national identity.

The nature of martial arts is identified with the idea of contest or resistance—martial combat involves a physical struggle for dominance or control. As such, it can be symbolically mobilized in nationalist anti-colonial rhetoric. Several academic works have discussed its instrumentalist function for states. Recent works which examined patterns of storytelling in martial arts film and literature characterized martial arts as being deeply embedded with anti-colonialism or nationalism and

80 On the Subject of ‘Java’: in the mid 1960s, Suharto sought to distinguish Indonesia from its former Dutch colonial masters by conceptualising a ‘New Order’.
81 Discourses of the Vanishing...
having emancipatory inclinations.\textsuperscript{82} In the field of sports—especially in the Olympics—martial arts can act as the proverbial flag to be waved, especially by countries which claim ownership over them—Judo and Karate for Japan, Wushu for China, and Taekwondo for Korea, to name a few.\textsuperscript{83} Other works have illustrated how states appropriate aspects of martial arts—for example health, recreation and philosophy—to serve political agenda. Denis Gainty showed how Japanese martial arts were used to shape a Japanese ‘national body’ during the Meiji period (1868-1912) by encouraging citizens to exercise and train in Jujutsu.\textsuperscript{84} Joseph S. Alter showed how the Hindu nationalist Keshnav Baliram Hedgewar (founder of the RSS—Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a right-wing Hindu militant group) appropriated the martial philosophy of Indian wrestling (pahalwani) as a religio-political ideology where by adapting pahalwani for its own use, the RSS created a somatic nationalism which differed from original pahalwani ideology.\textsuperscript{85} These examples show how states can mobilize martial arts to serve nationalist agenda, and it is in the same manner that the Philippine government used FMA.

The National Arnis Association of the Philippines (NARAPHIL) was a by-product of the Bagong Lipunan (‘New Society’) nationalist movement drawn by then-president Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s. The New Society uncannily resembled Suharto’s New Order program as a post-colonial effort at asserting identity. Their first ladies—Mrs. Suharto and Mrs. Marcos—also contributed similar supplementary projects to their husband’s cultural platforms by sponsoring


\textsuperscript{83} Renato Constantino argued that the rudimentary identity of nationhood becomes activated in international sporting events; Renato Constantino, \textit{Identity and Consciousness: The Philippine Experience}. Malaya, 1974, 52


infrastructures designed to promote national identity.\textsuperscript{86} Ideologically framed in ways similar to the New Order, one objective of the New Society brand of nationalism aimed to culturally ‘re-equip’—as Partha Chatterjee termed it—the Philippines with its own national identity.\textsuperscript{87} It is here where FMA becomes inserted. NARAPHIL was formed as a non-profit organization of FMA enthusiasts invested in the nationalistic agenda, and was supported by the national government. Its first president was Major General Fabian Ver who had a deep personal relationship with Marcos. Ver was the head of the Presidential Security Command and the stoutest defender of the Marcos regime in the Armed Forces of the Philippines.\textsuperscript{88} Ver’s presence was the strongest signal that Marcos was sincere about his support for the organization and its role.

The crucial role of Marcos in the nationalization of FMA deserves to be highlighted. Although previous administrations beginning from Manuel Quezon appropriated and mobilized various national symbols to reify the Philippine ethnie, Marcos had a personal fascination for the Philippine pre-Hispanic past which he asserted using his authoritarian regime. At one point he suggested renaming the Philippines to \textit{Maharlika}, the term for the feudal warrior class in pre-Hispanic Tagalog society, in order to remove the affiliation with King Philip II of Spain from whom the Philippines is named after.\textsuperscript{89}

The celebrated guerrilla leader Marcos ‘Marking’ Agustin claimed to have introduced the idea of nationalizing Arnis to Ferdinand Marcos during the Second World War when Agustin was both Marcos’ commanding officer and teacher in Arnis.\textsuperscript{90} Marcos later capitalized on his authority as president to put Agustin’s idea into action, though he never really acknowledged Agustin as the source. Agustin’s testimony implied that Marcos had a personal connection with Arnis which may

\textsuperscript{86} Imelda Marcos even attended the inauguration of Mrs. Suharto’s ‘Beautiful Indonesia’ park. See chapter ‘Origins Revisited’ in \textit{On the Subject of ‘Java’}, 148-196
\textsuperscript{87} Partha Chatterjee, \textit{Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse.} Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 2; The New Society’s ‘return to tradition’ also shares similar aspirations with the second of Sun Yat Sen’s three people’s principles which called for the revival of Chinese culture to help build the nationalism which could save China. See Marie-Claire Bergère, \textit{Sun Yat-sen.} Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1944, 365-370
\textsuperscript{90} Interview with Lodivico Losanes, March 9, 2015, telephone conversation
explain his enthusiasm in nationalizing FMA. Regardless of whether Agustin was trying to promote himself, or whether Marcos really trained in FMA, Marcos’ contribution to the construction and institutionalization of FMA is undeniable. Certainly, he was the first Philippine president to mobilize FMA on a national level and support it using national funds. Subsequent presidents who supported FMA were arguably following through what Marcos initiated.

NARAPHIL was established in 1975 roughly a decade after Giron and Cabales opened their short-lived martial arts academy in the United States. The early 1970s saw the immense global popularity of Hong Kong based martial arts films starring Bruce Lee. Moreover, since the end of World War II, Japan was producing samurai-themed action films. In other words, foreign martial arts flooded Philippine popular culture for around three decades, and counteracting this seepage of foreign martial arts cultures became one of the justifications for the establishment of NARAPHIL. If Filipinos needed to learn self-defense, they might as well train in a martial art that was ‘genuinely’ their own. They could then be in keeping with the nationalistic inclinations of the ‘New Society’.

Initially, four of the most prominent weapons-based clubs banded together under the umbrella of NARAPHIL. Its first project, ‘The Festival of Asian Martial Arts’ staged at the Folk Arts Theatre, was a spectacle intended to debut and promote Arnis in the Philippines’ martial arts community.91 This national debut of Arnis exhibited the strong support of the Marcos administration—the umbrella organization was formed by Marcos-styled nationalism, it was presided over by a Marcos strongman, and its debut was staged in a venue built by the first lady.

Between 1975 and 1977, NARAPHIL focused its effort on using Arnis as a state instrument. Among other activities: Arnis was introduced in schools and universities. Police and military personnel were trained in Arnis, and the Philippine police and military academies adopted Arnis training courses in their curriculum. The Kabataang Barangay (KB), a community-based youth organization founded by the presidential daughter Imee Marcos, adopted Arnis for their physical conditioning activities. Following the success of the KB adoption, Training programs for the community police, who are known as barangay tanods, were organized on a regular

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91 ‘About NARAPHIL’
basis. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, working with NARAPHIL, organized summer courses for physical education teachers in the country. And also, NARAPHIL began training NARAPHIL Arnis instructors in order to supplement the organization.

In February 1986, Marcos was ousted by the peaceful ‘People Power Revolution’ and replaced by Corazon Aquino. The Marcoses, along with Ver, escaped to the US. NARAPHIL thus lost its two strongest supporters. Because it was non-profit, it could not move without financial support from the government. Moreover, the change in government cast NARAPHIL in a bad light since it was a Marcos regime brainchild. Five months after the revolution, several NARAPHIL members splintered from the group and formed the Philippine Arnis Federation—later renamed the Arnis Philippines Incorporated (ARPI)—which shared very similar blueprints with NARAPHIL. By 1987, the Philippine Olympic Committee—the state-sponsored umbrella group of all National Sports Associations—sanctioned ARPI as its Arnis arm. By absorbing the ARPI, the Philippine Olympic Committee deprived NARAPHIL of its role and influence. NARAPHIL’s membership and activity rapidly diminished soon after. The decline of NARAPHIL was not entirely caused by the political changes in national administration. Friction between various club members that composed NARAPHIL—such as those previously mentioned in the last two chapters—had long caused tension. The official website of ARPI, which details the history of its formation, writes that ARPI was formed by ‘a group of men truly devoted to the art’. This particular phrasing stands out as a revelation of the animosity between the members of NARAPHIL. The formation and officialising of ARPI as a state-sponsored organization under Aquino allowed clubs to break off from NARAPHIL without compromising their nationalistic advocacies.

Although ARPI was able to maintain its role for the state since 1987 until now, it too has seen its share of fracture. Initially when it was established, some senior members of the Modern Arnis club affiliated with NARAPHIL decided to cast

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93 ‘About NARAPHIL’; ‘Chronicle of Arnis Events from the diary of Manong’


95 ‘Arnis History’
their lot with ARPI but left within a few months. The standards followed in NARAPHIL and ARPI simply did not conform with all clubs, including Modern Arnis. When NARAPHIL or ARPI imposed scoring systems to tournaments upon the clubs, some of them did not agree because the systems tended to be advantageous to specific styles of fighting. This disagreement is aside from the regular personal issues FMA teachers have between each other. One research informant accused the ARPI president (who still presides over ARPI today) of greedily holding on to his position in order to access the ‘perks’ provided by the national government—for example, funding and marketing. The contradicting preferences for style and leadership among FMA clubs exhibited their distaste for NARAPHIL or ARPI’s impositions and shows they were not completely willing to compromise their identities for a national identity.

Today, ARPI and Modern Arnis contend over the standardization of sporting regulations and other technicalities (more so since the Arnis Law was passed), and avoid having to deal with each other. Having been absorbed by the Philippine Olympic Committee, and being an umbrella organization of the Committee for Arnis, it is ARPI’s standards that have been adopted in national sporting events. But the Modern Arnis club, which practices a different set of standards, pushes for the acceptance of its own methods through lobbying and hosting its own Arnis tournaments. The Doce Pares led organization, World Eskrima Kali Arnis Federation (WEKAF), also pushes to achieve the same.

The convergence and divergence of state-sponsored organizations like NARAPHIL and ARPI reveals some interesting points about the discourse of nationalism between the state and the FMA clubs. Firstly, the rubric of nationalism and national identity in FMA was a program mainly initiated from the top by the state and followed through by FMA clubs. The existence of organizations such as NARAPHIL and ARPI were highly dependent upon the incumbent national leadership—like the breakup of Doce Pares in the 1950s, the change of padrino affected the order and hierarchy of the group. This implies that national organizations composed of the characteristically fragmented FMA clubs cannot hold themselves together on their own, unless a padrino figure—like Marcos or Aquino—supports and sanctions them to do so.

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96 Interview with Cristiano Vasquez and Samuel Dulay, November 2, 2011, online correspondence
Secondly, as earlier discussed, FMA clubs are generally fragmented, defensive of their exclusivity, and constantly seeking to accumulate cultural capital which would elevate them in the FMA community. The breakup of FMA clubs reveals their conflict between preserving localized identities—which FMA clubs have historically preserved and asserted—and assuming a national identity under a homogenizing national FMA organization.

Thirdly, and perhaps most interesting, when clubs broke off and formed another national FMA organization, they retained the original nationalist blueprint. This was true for NARAPHIL, ARPI, Modern Arnis, WEKAF and other large-scale FMA organizations. On the whole, FMA clubs subscribe to the national identity being pushed forward by the state. On one hand, this can be interpreted as FMA clubs holding fast to the longstanding FMA narrative of national cultural origin. On the other hand, what this also shows is how the state’s nationalist mobilization of culture became inserted in the social and political intercourse between FMA clubs in some form of mutual appropriation. If FMA served an instrumental function for nationalism, FMA clubs appropriated the state’s nationalist agenda to acquire cultural capital and assert themselves in the FMA community. Adopting the state’s homogenization of FMA would depict FMA clubs as nationalists, give them access to state support and funding, and increase their cultural capital in FMA. For disenfranchised clubs, the nationalization of FMA levelled the playing field. Consequently however, this also meant that clubs had to give up their localized identity and authority in favour of a national umbrella organization of FMA clubs. The fact that historically, every single state-initiated program since the 1970s geared towards homogenizing FMA have not been fully realized—including the very recent Arnis Law which, as of today, is still in its initial stages of planning despite having been enacted into law in 2010—shows the resilience of FMA clubs to homogenization.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the history of the emergence of FMA clubs and how FMA became appropriated as a national symbol. Tracing this development reveals how FMA—as a body of knowledge and as an ethnographic concept—was something gradually formulated over time in response to its spread and increasing
popularity. The sections of this chapter exhibited FMA’s transformation from informal weapons-based fighting practices among a multitude of exclusive groups in the Philippines, to a sophisticated set of martial arts collectively identified as Filipino. This chapter argued that ultimately, it was FMA’s proliferation abroad and the national government’s postcolonial anxieties over this expansion that subsequently led to its nationalization.

There are two forces discussed here that have consistently influenced this transformation since the clubs’ emergence in the 1920s. On one hand, similar to how Anderson attributed capitalism with expanding the reach of imagined communities, the commercialization of FMA expanded its membership—even abroad. More people became aware of the existing set of weapons-based martial arts from the Philippines and gained access to it where, as discussed in Chapter One, it was previously difficult to penetrate FMA circles. On the other hand, commercializing FMA decentralized the sense of identity among clubs. Marketing FMA meant that practitioners needed to brand their particular FMA systems as a sales pitch. Asserting uniqueness (and superiority) in order to sell it consequently highlighted differences. On top of this, as argued in the second section, FMA clubs were regularly competing for prestige and status.

In contrast to Anderson’s observation, the ‘imagined community’ born from commercializing FMA was reactive, mainly to postcolonial anxieties over national identity. The opening of clubs abroad made FMA popular among non-Filipinos and consequently pressured Filipinos—led by the national government—to lay claim to it. This, of course, necessitated the packaging of FMA as a homogenous ‘Filipino’ martial art. Noticeably, this is different from Inosanto’s more plural conceptualization of FMA which fits in more with how clubs can be seen to behave. The national government’s establishment of state-sponsored organizations like NARAPHIL and ARPI compelled FMA clubs to re-examine how they articulate their local identities against the homogenizing tide of these organizations. The observable approach they took was reverse-appropriating nationalism as a new platform for elevating themselves above other clubs. This is supported by the fact that subsequent organizations were formed and dissolved, yet the nationalist blueprint laid out by NARAPHIL remained consistent to this day. FMA’s nationalization was met with a subtle form of resistance—similar to what Scott
showed among Malaysian villagers—where instead of meeting the threat of being consumed by the nation head on, they subscribed to it and used its faculties to continue accumulating cultural capital. The succeeding chapters in this dissertation provide more specific cases for analyzing this reverse appropriation.
Chapter III  
Lapulapu as a symbol of Filipino Identity

In 1521, the Portuguese conquistador Ferdinand Magellan, on an expedition for the Spanish crown, met his death in an armed engagement on Mactan Island (off the coast of Cebu) with a local tribe under their chieftain Lapulapu. The defeat of the Spaniards in what came to be dubbed as the ‘Battle of Mactan’ earned for Lapulapu a place among the Philippine pantheon of national heroes. Presently and most especially among FMA practitioners, Lapulapu is honoured and sacralised as the earliest Filipino national hero despite predating any conceptualization of ‘Filipino’, and especially despite being historically elusive. Having very little historical information on Lapulapu, how was he constructed as a Philippine national hero, and what contributions did FMA offer to this process? Following the dissertation’s overarching argument on FMA’s reverse-appropriation of nationalism, how did FMA clubs insert themselves into reconstructions of Lapulapu?

The central theme discussed in this chapter is how FMA clubs transformed Lapulapu into an FMA fighter and claimed ownership over him by building on top of earlier historic appropriations. By tracing how Lapulapu was appropriated and reconstructed in FMA, this chapter explores how FMA clubs made sense of, and resisted their absorption into the nation by subtly asserting their localized identities in their representations of Lapulapu. It argues that FMA’s reconstruction of Lapulapu reveals two things: how clubs understood and idealized national identity; and how clubs reflected themselves into their various representations of Lapulapu in order to increase their prestige and legitimize the role assigned to them by the national government as beacons of national identity.

The introductory chapter extensively discussed that former colonies like the Philippines were anxious about their national identity (or lack of) and were resolved to assert this culturally and politically. The dominant approach, which reflects how Lapulapu was being used, was to antiquate the nation and mobilize symbols to reinforce a sense of national uniqueness. Filipino historian Renato Constantino argued how the Philippines’ lack of a complex pre-colonial civilization, and the overwhelming nature of its colonization by the Spaniards and Americans have made it imperative for the Philippines to assert their unique identity after formal
independence.\textsuperscript{1} It is this gap—formed by the lack of Filipino historiography of its pre-Hispanic roots—that Lapulapu was designated to fill as a national symbol.

The works of John Pemberton and Marilyn Ivy—also discussed in the previous chapter—exhibit similar approaches taken by state authority in mobilizing not ‘the past’, but ‘a past’ that could be configured (or reconfigured) to serve nationalist agenda or postcolonial anxieties.\textsuperscript{2} In *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Anthony Smith analyzed the significance of symbols from the past to societies in the present.\textsuperscript{3} A significant idea he raises is how in their search for national identity, societies conceptualize an idealized ‘Golden Age’ – a mythical past which embodies the best qualities such societies sought to emulate.\textsuperscript{4} As Fanon eloquently stated, the postcolonial individual ‘renounces the present and the future in the name of a mystical past’.\textsuperscript{5} Chapter One presented how the pre-colonial Philippines acts as the ‘Golden Age’ from which Lapulapu is drawn from and legitimized as a symbol of national identity.

Two works which examined mythmaking, have analyzed the instrumental use of myths and symbols. Like Smith, Yael Zerubavel argued that history and legend are culturally constructed entities that are mobilized for specific purposes.\textsuperscript{6} Analysing the 1920 clash at Tel Hai, Zerubavel argued how early Zionists in the 1920s who wanted Jewish immigrants to have stronger ties to the land turned the historical figure of Joseph Trumpledor into a heroic, larger-than-life figure.\textsuperscript{7} Trumpledor’s status and necessity as a heroic symbol declined after the State of Israel was established in 1948. Like Zerubavel’s analysis of Tel Hai as the focal point of Trumpledor’s mythic construction, the Battle of Mactan is analyzed as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Renato Constantino, *Identity and Consciousness: The Philippine Experience*. Malaya Books INC, 1974, 1-3
\item \textsuperscript{2} See chapter 4 of John Pemberton, *On the Subject of ‘Java’*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994; Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995; both Indonesia and Japan have been subjected to colonial or foreign dominance—Indonesia by the Dutch, and Japan by Americans after World War II.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999
\item \textsuperscript{4} *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 62-70
\item \textsuperscript{5} Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (trans. Charles Lam Markmann) London: Pluto Press, 2008 [1952].
\item \textsuperscript{7} The clash at Tel Hai was fought between Arabs and Jewish settlers. Trumpledor, a veteran of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 and World War I, died in the firefight that ensued and became glorified as a hero of the nation.
\end{itemize}
watershed of FMA myth-narratives. With Trumpledor being a documented historical figure in the early twentieth century, Zerubavel mainly pays attention to the interplay of history and legend, truth and fiction, and how Trumpledor is socially constructed into legend and commemorated in Israel. Like Trumpledor, Lapulapu is socially constructed, in order to inform the present about its national past. Unlike Trumpledor however, Lapulapu’s existence is barely documented. As a result, representations of him are imaginative and as such, qualities ascribed to him reveal what qualities people valued. The chapter introduces what this dissertation calls Lapulapu’s ‘malleability’ as a national symbol—that is, the ease with which he can be represented in a variety of ways because of the absence of more precise details. A similar research written regarding the mobilization of a historical figure to fulfil particular historic needs is James Mayer’s work on the ‘many faces’ of Alexander the Great. Like Zerubavel’s approach to Trumpledor, Mayer explored how myths surrounding Alexander’s conquest were later appropriated and reinterpreted by the civilizations he conquered (Jews, Persians, and Byzantines) in order to define themselves during critical moments in their history such as when under threat of invasion or radical changes to their ways of life.

Rachel Hutchin’s work on the appropriation of US national symbols in education looks more into the process of how societies construct symbols through negotiation by highlighting what is suitable or useful about such symbols, and downplaying what is not. Hutchins compared how Abraham Lincoln and George Washington were represented in American history textbooks over a period of two decades. Changing social pressures and conditions in America caused publishers to gradually highlight Washington and move Lincoln to the background. Washington’s involvement in the American Revolution—the establishment of the nation—meant that Americans from various backgrounds could identify with him more than they could with Lincoln who could be perceived as a figure alienating the south. Washington was also associated with national triumph whereas Lincoln stands as a


10 ‘Heroes and the renegotiation of national identity…’, 653
reminder of national failings.\textsuperscript{11} An interesting point Hutchins raised is that historical information on Lincoln is more detailed and explicit, revealing more about Lincoln’s own political agendas than historical information on Washington. As such, Washington has an almost mythical element to him, especially when he is portrayed in the textbooks. It is this myth of Washington—what he represents and stands for, the larger than life figure rather than the actual man—which makes him a favourable symbol over a more historically documented Lincoln.\textsuperscript{12} In much the same way as Washington, the historical obscurity of Lapulapu empowered him with enough useful information about his symbol without being compromised by more specific historical details about his life which may have otherwise made his image less appealing like Lincoln’s.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Following Smith’s ethnosymbolic analysis of nationhood, the first section discusses how Lapulapu is a significant figure in Philippine history for buttressing the antiquation of the nation to establish a Philippine version of Smith’s \textit{ethnie} (ethnic community) upon which Filipino national identity could be articulated.\textsuperscript{13} Using sixteenth century sources from Magellan’s contact with Visayans, the second section examines available information on Lapulapu, and analyzes how Filipinos negotiated with each other using this information to construct a national symbol. The dissertation’s concept of a national symbol’s ‘malleability’ is introduced here and argues that because little information on Lapulapu exists, he can be moulded in different ways to suit the needs of people. The third and fourth sections of this chapter develop the history of FMA’s reconstruction and appropriation of Lapulapu in the latter half of the twentieth century, with reference to his earlier reconstructions from which FMA reconstructions were based. The third section examines four reconstructions of Lapulapu made outside of FMA namely, in a poem about Magellan written in 1614, in the Philippine Declaration of Independence in 1898, and in two national monuments dedicated to Lapulapu built in 1991 and 2004 respectively. These shed light on the nature of Lapulapu’s portrayal in FMA. The fourth section is the centrepiece of the chapter and looks at the ways in which Lapulapu is reconstructed

\textsuperscript{11} ‘Heroes and the renegotiation of national identity…’, 665
\textsuperscript{12} ‘Heroes and the renegotiation of national identity…’, 665
\textsuperscript{13} For his seminal work on \textit{ethnies}, see Anthony D. Smith, \textit{The Ethnic Origins of Nations}. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986
in FMA. It explores Lapulapu’s representation in popular culture as seen in a 1950s graphic novel and its film version, a 2002 film on Lapulapu, and more recent reconstructions of Lapulapu by FMA clubs between 2000 and 2012, namely: an FMA club banner, two achievement trophies awarded to a distinguished practitioner, representations of Lapulapu in the dance category of FMA tournaments, and the current official logo of FMA. The dissertation argues its concept of reverse-appropriation by looking at how Lapulapu is constructed in these examples and how he transforms across time,

Historical references to Lapulapu are generally scant. As such, it should be worth noting that the chapter is organized based on these existing records, and tends to jump across distant chronological periods. For example, section three starts with a discussion of early recorded reconstructions of Lapulapu (1614 and 1898), but then jumps to the late twentieth century with the analysis of the two statues. The succeeding fourth section moves back to the 1950s again but afterwards progresses forward chronologically.

Lapulapu as a link to Philippine pre-colonial National Identity

The core concept of any national identity lies in how its uniqueness from other national identities is formulated. Guibernau elaborated on uniqueness by defining national identity as being ‘based upon the sentiment of belonging to a specific nation, endowed with its own symbols, traditions, sacred places, ceremonies, heroes, history, culture and territory.’\(^{14}\) One key strategy to meet this goal is to trace the origins of national identity in a nation’s past.

The past is a repository of memories, myths, symbols and meanings that can be mobilized in the present in order to satisfy national needs. Identification with these symbols creates a platform from which members of a nation conceptualise their membership to one particular nation and not another. It is from this that a concept of national identity surfaces. The abovementioned examples (Java, Japan, Tel Hai, and Alexander) illustrate how nations generally build up their national identities by drawing cultural material from the past. Renan’s famous essay ‘What is a Nation?’ argues that the past (as he specifies, a rich legacy of memories) is essential to the

present because it becomes a social capital upon which national ideas of the present are based.\textsuperscript{15} Likewise, Ozkirimli describes nationalism as being Janus-faced in that as an ideology, it simultaneously looks back at the past, at the present and towards the future.\textsuperscript{16} Understandably, the concept of historical continuity cannot divorce past and present (or future).

Smith argues that historical continuity allows social groups to make sense of their community in the present.\textsuperscript{17} A historical continuity with the past is essential for nations that their members even ‘invent’ traditions to reify this continuity.\textsuperscript{18} By establishing that the present national community is a historic extension of an earlier one, the extent of membership to the nation and the roles of its members are better defined.

In addition, Chatterjee argues that among former colonies, an assertion of national identity has a secondary objective: apart from seeking to strengthen the present national community by establishing its historic roots, outlining a national identity becomes a form of struggle against colonial exploitation.\textsuperscript{19} In earlier chapters, the dissertation discussed similar pursuits in the Philippines since the end of The Second World War. Like the Philippines, Ivy’s and Pemberton’s example on Japan’s nostalgia and Indonesia’s New Order were also born by a need to distance the nation from western or colonial influences. Among former colonies like the Philippines, it is particularly the pre-colonial past that becomes the cultural repository for elements of national identity.

A critical component of this pre-colonial past is the perceived unique ethnic make-up of national identity. Smith conceptualized this perceived uniqueness as the \textit{ethnie} which he defined in cultural terms as ‘named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with specified a territory and a sense of solidarity’.\textsuperscript{20} The dissertation introduction offers a lengthy

\textsuperscript{15} Ernest Renan, ‘What is a Nation?’ (1882) reproduced in \textit{Nation and Narration}, Homi Bhabha (ed.). London: Routledge, 1990, 19
\textsuperscript{17} In this particular argument, Smith refers to myths of ethnic descent. Such myths are often re-forged or event invented; \textit{Myths and Memories of the Nation}, 62
\textsuperscript{18} See \textit{The Invention of Tradition}, Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{The Ethnic Origins of Nations}, 32
discussion on the history of how Filipino nationalists have conceptualized a national identity with its own unique ethnic composition first as an argument for nationhood (Revolutionary Period) and later as an anti-Western rhetoric (Post-independence). Empirical evidence, such as those forwarded by archaeologist Felipe Landa Jocano in his ‘Core Population’ theory, further supported the idea of a Philippine *ethnie* by proposing a unique biological composition. Rejecting the metaphoric ‘contamination’ of pre-colonial ethnicity during the periods of colonization thus becomes a form of resistance for nations with a history of colonization. It is from this tradition of Philippine nationalism that Lapulapu emerges.

In his analysis of the cultural origins of nations, Smith argues that different nations often have ‘Golden Ages’—romanticized episodes in a nation’s history that serve as an ideal guide on how people should behave. Smith gives as an example how early Greek nationalists in their War of Independence (1821-1832) were likened to Achilles from Homer’s Iliad. That Achilles is fictional was of little concern to those who appropriated him. Rather, it was the qualities attributed to him that the Greek nationalists valued and sought to emulate. As later sections of this chapter will reveal, the figure of Lapulapu is also used in much the same way as Achilles, as was the general indifference of FMA practitioners to Lapulapu’s historicity. For Smith, the ‘Golden Age’ served a utilitarian function as vehicles of ‘historical or archaeological reconstructions’ that could ‘…dramatize the “atmosphere” and picturesque uniqueness of the people’s past, and of the events and personages which composed it’. As dramatic reconstructions, the ‘Golden Age’ is thus an artificial construct designed to radiate what is best in a nation’s culture and character. In effect, what ‘Golden Ages’ reveal are the ideals, principles, and qualities that nations value. Being the perceived link to the ‘Golden Age’, it thus becomes imperative for FMA clubs to build up Lapulapu’s image on their terms because how Lapulapu is reconstructed is in fact a reflection of FMA itself.

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21 See dissertation Introduction’s introduction o the Ilustrados, Manuel Quezon, etc.
23 *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 62-70
24 *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 66
25 *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 66; emphases mine.
It is in both ethnic and cultural purity that Lapulapu’s significance as a link to pre-colonial identity lies. Lapulapu becomes the embodiment of an unadulterated ethnicity and culture—one defined against the colonial experience of the Philippines. To assert his existence would therefore imply a return to the Philippine ‘Golden Age’, much more prove that it is real. This becomes a valuable strategy for nation-building. In the FMA narrative discussed in Chapter One, Lapulapu’s life and times are considered as the watershed of FMA history and myth. The following section discusses how Lapulapu as a national symbol is drawn from this watershed through ‘negotiation’.

**Negotiating Lapulapu as National Symbol**

To understand Lapulapu’s construction as a national symbol, it is important to first lay down historical information about him which act as pillars around which social groups manoeuvre in their representations of Lapulapu. The section argues how the general absence of information on Lapulapu transformed him into a semi-mythical, semi-historical figure which was easier to appropriate in different ways because groups (like FMA clubs today) could easily construct their own versions of Lapulapu since they did not have to subscribe to specific historical details about him. This concept of how easy it was to reconstruct and appropriate Lapulapu is what this section means by his ‘malleability’. This section explores how Lapulapu is imagined as an anti-colonial national symbol, and how Lapulapu’s malleability as a symbol largely hinges on the lack of definite historical information about him which may otherwise make it more difficult for groups to reconstruct and lay claim to him.

Historical data on Lapulapu is scant. Even in Pigafetta’s chronicle of Magellan’s voyage, which many consider as the most credible source on Lapulapu, Lapulapu is mentioned only a few times in passing.\(^\text{26}\) Even with Pigafetta’s detailed documentation of Magellan’s journey and death in the Philippines, Lapulapu remains a distant figure in history. This is particularly because Magellan and his men did not

\(^{26}\) Antonio Pigafetta, an Italian, was Magellan’s official chronicler. Although it is not the only surviving account of Magellan’s voyage, Maximilianus Transylvanus having interviewed survivors of the trip and publishing *De Moluccis* in 1523 (two years earlier than Pigafetta’s own publication of his work on Magellan’s voyage), Pigafetta’s work is generally accepted as the primary source and official report of the Magellan expedition. His work was originally written in Italian, translated to French, and later to English. Pigafetta’s text remains the most widely accepted source on Lapulapu; *Magellan’s Voyage: A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation*. New York: Dover, 1969 [1525]
have a prolonged period of interaction with Lapulapu unlike for example with Humabon, chief of Cebu. Pigafetta, or any of the Spaniards for that matter, may have never even seen what Lapulapu looked like considering Pigafetta does not have an entry describing the man as meticulously as he did the other chiefs he encountered. The closest that resembles interaction between Magellan and Lapulapu was on the day of the battle of Mactan in 1521 where the former lost his life. Even then, there is no evidence that Lapulapu was himself present in the engagement, much less dealt the killing blow to Magellan as contemporary re-enactments would have people believe.

Some information at least, is explicit. Pigafetta’s chronicle reveals that Lapulapu was the lord of Mactan. He had a subject named Zula, a lesser lord who ruled part of the island. In April of 1521, Magellan was docked at Cebu where he established relations with the local ruler, Humabon. Magellan secured Humabon’s allegiance and managed to baptize Humabon’s family and immediate subjects. When Magellan called on Humabon to order the neighbouring lords (and their subjects) to be baptized and offer tribute to the King of Spain, most of them complied. In late April, Zula approached Magellan saying that he had wished to pay tribute but that Lapulapu forbade him. Pigafetta writes that it was in fact Zula who implored Magellan to send a boatload of his men the following day to fight Lapulapu.

It is unclear what the hierarchy of power was between Zula, Humabon, and Lapulapu. Based on Pigafetta’s account of Zula’s dilemma, it is likely that Zula was the subject of Lapulapu, but Lapulapu was in turn the subject of Humabon, explaining why Zula had to give reason for his failure to comply with Humabon’s order. Scott contends that the opposite may in fact be the case—that Lapulapu was actually the lord of Humabon, or at least someone Humabon did not wish to cross.

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27 In the chronicle, Pigafetta’s use of the name ‘Mattan’ is a source of confusion for historians who posit that Lapulapu may have been from Mactang in Poro Island rather than Mactan Island near Cebu. I will use the name Mactan since it is more conventionally accepted.

28 Zzula in Pigafetta, Magellan’s Voyage..., 84

29 Pigafetta says they did so voluntarily; Magellan’s Voyage..., 82

30 Scott argues that Lapulapu’s position in Mactan gave him an economic advantage in the region—he had more access to the naval trade lanes than Humabon and could check incoming vessels at will. This raises the possibility that he may even be engaged in what could be categorized as acts of piracy. Transylvanus also writes that Lapulapu was militarily superior to any of his neighbours. Moreover, when Magellan tried to make Lapulapu acknowledge Humabon’s lordship, Lapulapu replied that ‘he was unwilling to come and do reverence to one whom he had been commanding for so long a time.’
Transylvanus writes that after Humabon’s conversion, Magellan urged him to subjugate his heathen neighbours since he was now a follower of the ‘true religion’. Being militarily (or politically) superior to Humabon, Lapulapu refused to pay homage to Humabon or Magellan.  

Regardless of whatever position Lapulapu may have held in relation to Humabon, what is clear is that Lapulapu refused to be baptized and pay tribute to the king of Spain, prompting Magellan to take military action against Lapulapu. The last entry about Lapulapu in Pigafetta’s chronicle is of how he refused the request to return Magellan’s body to the Spaniards, claiming it as a trophy instead. It is from that point on, that Lapulapu drifts from history and into myth.  

On the whole, Lapulapu’s picture in history is an almost blank canvass for several reasons: Firstly, due to the lack of description from Pigafetta or Transylvanus, contemporary historians could only make conjectures of Lapulapu’s age, physical appearance, religion, or even sex. At no point in the chronicle of Pigafetta or the interviews of Transylvanus was Lapulapu’s physical appearance ever described. Secondly, Lapulapu’s name has (or has had) several variations—Pulapula, Cilapulapu and Calipulako to name a few. Such confusion over his name suggests there may be several versions of Lapulapu’s narrative, or possibly at worst, these names may altogether refer to different individuals. Thirdly, Pigafetta’s use of the name ‘Mattan’ to refer to Lapulapu’s chiefdom raises questions about the actual domain of Lapulapu—he may have been from another island whose name resembles Pigafetta’s Mattan. That Mactan is widely held as the battle site is a result of a
general, though not uncontested, consensus among Cebuanos and not solid evidence. Finally, in both records of the Battle of Mactan (considered as the most significant and defining moment of Lapulapu), he is not even once mentioned. Considering all these points, it is thus difficult for historians to accurately reconstruct Lapulapu based on historical evidence. Yet as the succeeding sections illustrate, Lapulapu becomes a recurring symbol of Filipino resistance to colonization despite the extremely limited historical information available about his life. Moreover, present representations of Lapulapu (especially those in FMA) have relatively similar stencils, although they differ in the smaller details. In the absence of exact historical descriptions, the way Lapulapu is represented must be based more upon how he is imagined rather than how he actually was, and his potency as a national symbol is dependent on how acceptable those imaginings are to the community.

Mayer’s paper on Alexander the Great shows that the historicity of the myth-narratives on Alexander was not as important to those who were telling the stories as the act of establishing a historic link to Alexander and reinterpreting it to serve their needs of establishing national identities. The people who used Alexander may have even fabricated versions of him. 35 People make use of figures and symbols like Alexander whether the stories they tell are factual and accurate or not. Yet it should be said that the historical element (which could be considered an essential ingredient) has to be there even if limited. Alexander, Trumpledor, and Lapulapu could not have reinforced a linear connection with the past if they were completely fictitious because their actual existence was needed to establish the present’s historical continuity from the past.

Zerubavel, basing his argument on the legendization of Trumpledor after the Battle at Tel Hai, argues that the making of a modern historical legend is based upon ‘appropriate ingredients’. Using Trumpledor as a model, Zerubavel argues that modern historical legends need a hero, a conflict, a dramatic ending, and a moral

35 Mayer explains that it would be difficult to trace the truthfulness of ancient myth-narratives of Alexander, and he instead focuses on a close reading of stories about Alexander regardless of their historicity; Mayer’s paper shows how the Jews proved themselves to be ‘God’s chosen people’ such that Alexander spared them during his conquest, how Byzantine Christians claimed decent from Alexander in the face of political collapse, and how Persian Muslims elevated their own national identity by claiming that Alexander was a devout Muslim and was Darius III’s half-brother; ‘Mythological History…’, 3
lesson. Trumpledor’s life and character—a migrant to Palestine and veteran of two wars—ideally fit the demands of early Zionists for an iconic figure that could serve as a beacon for the growing Zionist movement. That he lost an arm as a soldier and died in combat at Tel Hai made for a romantic climax to his legend. In the same way, Lapulapu’s story has its own dramatic elements which make for a good modern historical legend—he was technically the first inhabitant of the archipelago to openly resist Spanish conquest, he embodied Smith’s romanticised pre-colonial ‘Golden Age’, and most importantly, he won against the Spaniards at Mactan. This one victory, despite technological inferiority, was something Filipinos could be proud of in an otherwise embarrassing history of military defeats at the hands of their colonizers.

The ‘appropriate ingredients’ for making a legendary national icon are only part of the equation though. The effectiveness of these ingredients still relied on how much people were willing to use them and negotiate with certain facts about these symbols that may otherwise be counterproductive to national identity. For instance, Trumpledor’s character hardly resembled a traditional exilic Jew—he grew up outside the Jewish community to assimilated parents, he did not go through Jewish schools, he did not know Yiddish, and he was loyal to the Russian tsar (losing an arm for Russia in the Russo-Japanese War). Yet it was his being non-Jewish that Zionists capitalized on when crafting him as a national symbol—by highlighting his being non-Jewish, Zionists could sell Zion to a wider market which encompassed non-traditional Jews. Despite not representing a large margin of the international Jewish community, Zionists negotiated with Trumpledor’s character in order to mould him into a figure they deemed useful.

Similarly, for the last century, those who sought to appropriate Lapulapu as a national symbol had to manoeuvre around certain traits that were either unnecessary or contradictory to his usefulness as a national symbol. A critical examination of Lapulapu raises certain points that could contradict him as a representative of

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36 ‘The Historic, the Legendary, and the Incredible…’, 108; this is on top of what I argue is a necessary element of truth.
37 The number of military defeats against the Spaniards and Americans during the Revolutionary era (1896-1902) and the Japanese in World War II far outweighed military victories against them.
38 For a reading on the process of constructing myths of the nation and national identities based on myths, see Duncan S. A. Bell, ‘Mythscapes: memory, mythology, and national identity’ in The British Journal of Sociology 54(1), 2003
39 ‘The Historic, the Legendary, and the Incredible…’, 108
Filipino national identity. For instance, in terms of who could best represent pre-colonial culture, there were clearly other chieftains whose communities were recorded in more detail by Pigafetta—there is absolutely no description of the culture of Lapulapu’s people by an observer from inside their community like Pigafetta’s records of Humabon’s chiefdom. If it was a question of resistance to the machinations of the foreigners, Humabon (although his approach may seem less glorious than Lapulapu’s) actually killed more foreigners than Lapulapu by poisoning them at a banquet he organized shortly after the Battle of Mactan. Also, following Scott’s proposition, it can be argued that Lapulapu’s resistance to Magellan was brought about more by a desire to keep his dominant position in regional politics (over Humabon) rather than a ‘nationalistic’ effort of protecting pre-colonial sovereignty. Yet it is Lapulapu and not Humabon who was for the last century or so, consistently mobilized as a national symbol. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Filipino nationalists who were looking for a symbolic figure from the ‘Golden Age’ of the Philippines deliberately chose to prioritize Lapulapu over Humabon because as an ingredient for nationalism, Lapulapu’s vehement resistance to the Spaniards was more appealing and useful to Filipino nationalists than Humabon who was remembered more for his cooperation with the Spaniards.

Hutchins’ work on the playing up and playing down of the historical figures of Washington and Lincoln in US history textbooks mirrors how Filipinos negotiated with the figures of Lapulapu and Humabon. On one hand, Hutchins’ work reflects how national symbols are consciously designed by society to meet specific, historical needs, and as such they change over time—for example how Lincoln’s presence is gradually minimized in textbooks across three decades, or how Trumpledor loses his significance after the state of Israel is established. On the other hand, Hutchins’ argument on how the mythical element of Washington is chosen over the historically detailed and politically specific life of Lincoln in American

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40 Pigafetta explains that Magellan’s brother-in-law and next in command, Durate Barbosa, had threatened their native interpreter, forcing the latter to conspire with Humabon to poison the Spaniards. Twenty four men died including Duarte Barbosa, and captain of the Santiago, Juan Serrano. *Magellan’s Voyage*..., 89-90; Admittedly, the circumstances surrounding Humabon poisoning his guests are not definite. Where Pigafetta blames Barbosa for the incident, Transylvanus blames Juan Serrano for threatening the native interpreter. *De Moluccis*, n.p. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13255/13255.txt (September 20, 2013)

41 Today, a statue of Humabon also stands in a less conspicuous location in Cebu City. That he has a monument to him means that he is, although to a lesser degree than Lapulapu, honoured in Cebu.

42 ‘Heroes and the renegotiation of national identity in American history textbooks...’
history textbooks exhibits what this chapter means by the malleability of particular national symbols. If more historical information on Washington were available, this might make him a less open-ended figure and hence his appeal might become more limited to more specific sectors of American society. Because less is known about him, he becomes associated more with his role as leader of the American Revolution rather than, say, the politics he was involved in before and after the revolution. In much the same way, Humabon can be likened to Lincoln—because Pigafetta chronicled that Humabon was friendly towards the Spaniards, it makes Humabon a less appealing candidate for the symbolic figure that Filipino nationalists were looking for and Lapulapu was attributed with. That he eventually poisoned the Spaniards only makes Humabon’s image less masculine, less honourable, and less romantic. In comparison, there is enough historical data known about Lapulapu to establish that he opposed the Spaniards, but not enough to specify certain details which may otherwise tarnish his pristine image. His victory at the clash at Mactan makes for a dramatic climax to a modern national legend. Lapulapu thus becomes a larger than life figure precisely because of his historical obscurity. Had it been historically established that he was say, a pirate raider like what Scott insinuated, his appeal to the anti-colonial sentiments of Filipinos would lose its potency because now he becomes a criminal, an aggressor, rather than a victim of colonization who merely taking defensive action. Moreover, as what shall be presented in the later sections, it is because of Lapulapu’s historical obscurity that FMA clubs re-tell his story in their own ways that they may understand their own roles in the nation. By taking the basic information (Zerubavel’s ‘appropriate ingredients’) about Lapulapu, and filling in the unknown facts about him with their own reconstructions and understanding, FMA clubs that appropriate him are able to do so with much ease. This is similar to how the history of Alexander the Great becomes appropriated and transformed into myth-narratives that explain different peoples’ national identities.

One of the most interesting points about Lapulapu as a national symbol is that while there are about a dozen monuments dedicated to him, and while his image appears in coins and stamps, he has never been officially declared as a national hero. While there are Philippine laws that honour national heroes in the country either by celebrating their birth or death anniversaries as holidays, erecting memorials, or naming institutions or places after them, there have been no laws prior to 1995 that
explicitly stipulated that such individuals are national heroes. In 1993, then-president Fidel Ramos, formed a ‘National Heroes Committee’ for the purpose of identifying and officialising Philippine national heroes. The committee, composed of prominent historians, did not include Lapulapu in their list.\textsuperscript{43} Majority of the heroes on the list were those who, in one way or another, pushed for independence from Spain or the United States. The committee’s criteria for inclusion into the list, argued that heroes were those who sacrificed for or contributed to the nation.\textsuperscript{44} That Lapulapu was not included implied that the committee did not perceive his actions in 1521 to be for the benefit of nation, and that he was more of a mythical figure than a historical individual.

Despite this, Lapulapu has endured for over a century in the popular consciousness, as a symbol of national identity, freedom, and resistance to colonization. As the succeeding sections show, his existence as a national symbol is (like FMA itself) something that underwent constant negotiation and renegotiation—shaped by historical events and the changing political outlooks that come with it. If Lapulapu’s history is virtually a blank canvass, the myths people tell about him and the way he is represented reveal how people (with the possible exception of intellectuals who are not as invested in him) understand and idealize national identity. Mythical elements are appealing and malleable, and people will seek to use myths for their own purposes whether they are historically accurate or not. Lapulapu’s potency as a national symbol is largely attributed to how he is imagined and romanticized, rather than what he actually is or what he did. The real value lies in the attributes that the nation imagines Lapulapu, its symbol of national identity, to posses. By constructing and romanticising Lapulapu in a certain way, the nation establishes a set of ideal qualities for its members to emulate.

**Reconstructions of Lapulapu before 1946, and in two national monuments**

In order to understand how why and FMA clubs have their own reconstructions of Lapulapu, and how they perceive this to be significant to their


\textsuperscript{44} See ‘Selection and Proclamation of National Heroes and Laws Honouring Filipino Historical Figures’
understanding of Filipino nationalism, it is necessary to examine the general way in which Lapulapu was represented and mobilized in the Philippines since the Spanish colonial period. When and how Lapulapu is mobilized and represented in these moments reveals much about the Filipinos’ understanding of nationhood and nationalism during that period.

There are four reconstructions of Lapulapu examined here, namely: A poem about Magellan in 1614, Lapulapu’s mention in the Philippine declaration of Independence in 1898, and representations of Lapulapu in two public monuments built in 1991 and 2004. These examples are elite-based reconstructions of Lapulapu and offer a top-down perspective of reconstructing and mobilising Lapulapu. These reconstructions are significant to understanding FMA reconstructions and appropriations of Lapulapu for two reasons: Firstly, because FMA reconstructions of Lapulapu emerged from and were influenced by how Lapulapu was historically reconstructed in these examples; and secondly, because these examples were themselves appropriations of Lapulapu to meet political ends, and which parallel FMA’s own appropriation of Lapulapu. The nationalist reconstruction of Lapulapu during the revolution served as the basis and foundation for subsequent reconstructions of him, especially in FMA.

I. Lapulapu in ‘Que Dios le Perdone’ (1614) and the Declaration of Philippine Independence (1898)

The endurance of Lapulapu as a national figure reveals a key feature of Filipino nationalism today that is reflective of Chatterjee’s argument on postcolonial national identity—it seeks to define what is ‘Filipino’ and reject what is not as a form of resistance to the foreign oppressor. It is Lapulapu’s acts of defiance against the militarily superior foreigners—the armed confrontation with Magellan; his vehement refusal to be converted, to pay tribute, and to return the body of his slain enemy—that have made him most appealing as a beacon of Filipino nationalism. The fact that Humabon’s ‘poisonous’ ploy at the banquet is barely even remembered shows that Humabon is remembered more for his initial complicity towards the foreigners.

Lapulapu did not originally enjoy the same status of hero as he does at present. Today’s adulation for Lapulapu emerges only from the ideological tradition
of anti-colonial Filipino nationalism that began in the Philippine Revolution. Earlier, during the first century of Spanish colonization, Lapulapu is condemned because of the very same actions he was lauded for in 1898. In 1614, nearly a century after the Battle of Mactan, a native poet named Carlos Calao wrote the poem ‘Que Dios le Perdone’ (May God forgive [Lapulapu]) where his depiction of Lapulapu deeply contrasts that of the revolutionaries’ two hundred eighty-four years later.45 That Calao was of mixed Chinese and Spanish ancestry meant that he was slightly more privileged in society in comparison to the indio (native).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Que Dios le perdone al salvaje,</td>
<td>May God forgive the savage,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al pagano de Mactán</td>
<td>Pagan of Mactan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que no entendió la palabra</td>
<td>He did not understand the word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Dios en el Capitán</td>
<td>Of God in the Captain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magallanes, a quién muerte</td>
<td>Magellan, to whom he gave death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dió por orden de Satán,</td>
<td>As ordered by Satan,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El enemigo de Cristo,</td>
<td>The enemy of Christ,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El ponsoñoso alacrán.</td>
<td>The poisonous scorpion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dos cientos cobardes</td>
<td>Two hundred cowards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cali Pulaco mandó</td>
<td>Cali Pulaco (Lapulapu) ordered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que se le tire arena</td>
<td>To throw sand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En los ojos a traición</td>
<td>So treacherously into his (Magellan’s) eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y que con pedradas y palos</td>
<td>And to, with stones and sticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se le cayera el toisón;</td>
<td>Take him down:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Un hombre contra dos cientos</td>
<td>One man against two hundred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvajes sin corazón!</td>
<td>Heartless savages!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Capitán Magallanes</td>
<td>The Captain Magellan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los invitó a servir</td>
<td>Invited them to serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al verdadero Dios servir nuestro;</td>
<td>Our one true God;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mas, aquel régulo vil</td>
<td>But that vile kinglet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Llamado Cali Pulaco</td>
<td>Called Cali Pulaco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No quiso ver ni sentir</td>
<td>Did not desire to see or feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La dádiva de la Fe</td>
<td>The gift of faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y nos lo hizo morir.</td>
<td>And so took him (Magellan) from us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mas, no fue en vano la muerte</td>
<td>But not in vain was his death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Del noble Conquistador.</td>
<td>The noble Conqueror.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Niño Jesús que se entrona</td>
<td>The child Jesus now enthroned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En Cebú es hoy la flor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, Lapulapu is depicted as a villain while Magellan is portrayed as the fallen hero and bringer of light. In the first stanza, Calao pleads that God may forgive Lapulapu for killing Magellan who sought to bring the word of God to the natives. Almost in the same manner as one of the seven last words of Christ, ‘forgive them for they know not what they do’, Calao pleads for forgiveness since the ‘savage pagans’ of Mactan did not understand the word of God in Magellan. Magellan here is portrayed as an agent of God while Lapulapu consequently carries out the will of Satan, the ‘poisonous scorpion’. The third stanza returns to the subject of the first—Magellan had only come to invite the natives to serve the one true God. Lapulapu, the ‘vile king of Mactan’, refuses this gift of faith and kills Magellan. Although the poem does not explicitly state that Lapulapu delivered the killing blow, it illustrates how Lapulapu is credited with slaying Magellan—a romanticism that will persist in future imaginings of Lapulapu.

In the second stanza, Calao writes how in a traitorous act, Lapulapu deploys two hundred ‘cowards’ and ‘heartless savages’ against a lone Magellan—Magellan’s men are not even once mentioned. In Pigafetta’s account of the battle, Magellan’s troops are active participants (Pigafetta among them)—Pigafetta uses terms like ‘we’, ‘us’, or ‘our’. In Calao’s poem, Magellan’s companions are absent, leaving the glory of an honourable defeat to Magellan alone. The number of Lapulapu’s forces differs from the ‘more than one thousand and fifty’ that Pigafetta claims to have amassed against Magellan’s.\(^{46}\) Needless to say, in both versions, the odds that Magellan and his men faced are both staggering, giving a sense of endurance in the face of hopelessness. Magellan’s death is made to dramatically appear almost humiliating since the natives were armed with ‘stones and sticks’. In this stanza, Calao also writes Lapulapu’s name as Cali Pulaco which is again different from Pigafetta’s Cilapulapu.\(^{47}\) These two points that differ from Pigafetta’s records of the

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\(^{46}\) *Magellan’s Voyage…*, 87

\(^{47}\) Cali Pulaco is also the name used by the signees of the Declaration of Independence.
events may suggest that a separate narrative of the battle may have been transmitted among the natives after the Battle of Mactan. Moreover, Pigafetta does not mention anything about the natives throwing sand into Magellan’s eyes. However which way the narrative may have been presented in the poem, what is clear is that in 1614, it is Magellan who is hailed as a hero and not Lapulapu.\textsuperscript{48} For his part, Lapulapu is treated in the narrative like a rebel or bandit.

The third stanza reveals that, apart from merely hailing Magellan as a hero, Calao actually claims ownership of Magellan by using ‘us’ (Magellan was taken from ‘us’). Exactly which group Calao was referring to is not entirely clear. The complexity of colonial society’s hierarchy makes a hasty supposition careless.\textsuperscript{49} Calao was of mixed Chinese and Spanish ancestry, and as such also belonged to a marginalized group in colonial society.\textsuperscript{50} Speaking from the social periphery, Calao’s use of ‘us’ suggests that Magellan is not just a Spanish hero, but every Filipino’s hero. Moreover, in painting a negative image of Lapulapu, Calao also makes out that Lapulapu is every Filipino’s villain as well.

The last stanza emphasizes the general perspective of the whole poem. It justifies colonization for the sake of conversion. Here, Magellan’s conquest is interpreted as a Catholic mission—there is practically no mention of it being an imperial venture. Having died for this cause, Magellan becomes a Christian martyr. His defeat is transformed into a victory for Christ since Calao points out that it is now the child Jesus (Santo Niño) who is enthroned in Cebu, and not Lapulapu. For Lapulapu’s part, the author declares him lost to memory, remembered only ‘perhaps by another vile traitor’. Ironically, it is in Calao’s poem that Lapulapu resurfaces in written work since Pigafetta’s account nearly a century earlier.

By depicting Magellan as a saviour, Calao’s poem displays how in the seventeenth century, the pre-colonial culture is generally perceived as something negative and backward from which the Philippines needed saving from. Words like ‘traitor’, ‘coward’, ‘venomous’, and ‘Satan’ were used to stress this negativity. In

\textsuperscript{48} As late as 1866 (thirty years before the revolution), during the reign of Queen Isabella II of Spain, Magellan may have still been widely perceived as a hero. It was in this year that the colonial administration under Miguel Creus erected a shrine dedicated ‘A Hernando de Magallanes’ (to Ferdinand Magellan) and ‘Glorias Españolas’ (Spanish Glory).

\textsuperscript{49} For a discussion on social classes in the Spanish colonial era in the Philippines, see Teodoro A. Agoncillo, \textit{History of the Filipino People}. Quezon City: Garotech, 1990 (1960), 129-148.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Philippine History}, 74.
contrast, ‘gift’, ‘noble’, ‘perfume’, and ‘martyr’ were used to glorify Magellan and Christianity. During this period when Spain exercised political authority over the Philippines, Lapulapu assumes a subaltern overtone—he is symbolically cast out of colonial society by a member of that society. The way Calao depicts Lapulapu reveals his subscription to prevailing concepts of his day with regards to the role and identity of natives in colonial society. The poem shows the ruling religious-political ideology of the day with which ‘Filipino-ness’ was defined—Christianity was a primary requirement for being part of the Spanish-imposed Filipino community. Part of Lapulapu’s villainy then was his rejection of Catholicism. At the time of the poem’s writing, those who chose to preserve their religion and culture, refusing to be Hispanized and subjected to colonial economic institutions, went to remote areas like the mountains. They became known among the Hispanized lowlanders as *taga-labas*, literally ‘from outside’ (outsiders). Under this categorization, Calao represented Lapulapu as an outsider whom ‘Filipinos’ could not and should not identify with. Calao’s demonizing of Lapulapu and adulation for Magellan in order to conform to Spanish cultural-political ideologies mirrors the present way FMA appropriates Lapulapu to conform to state designs for national identity. This is discussed further in a subsequent section.

In 1896, the Philippine Revolution against Spain began. Two years later, when the Filipino founding fathers signed the Philippine Declaration of Independence, Lapulapu was mobilized as evidence of pre-colonial sovereignty. The document states that the main aim of the revolution was to regain the sovereignty and independence lost to conquistador Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, who accomplished what Magellan started but failed to complete. Additionally, the declaration states that the chief Kalipulako had previously suspected the evil designs of Magellan and provoked him to a military confrontation at Mactan, effectively stunting Spanish colonial ambitions in the Philippines for several decades. On one hand, Lapulapu remains a representative of the pre-colonial culture in the Philippines. But whereas in Calao’s time, this pre-colonial culture was perceived as backward and negative, in

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1898 it was positively interpreted as the proof of a freedom lost to Spanish colonization. On the other hand, the roles of hero and villain are now reversed—Magellan is the evil schemer who forces the hand of Lapulapu who was only defending his sovereignty. In comparison, in 1614, Magellan was depicted as the noble martyr and Lapulapu was the treacherous villain. This reversal of Lapulapu and Magellan’s portrayal is visible here and overlies the cultural and political changes of the closing years of Spanish dominance in the Philippines.

The revolutionaries used Lapulapu both as a justification for their struggles and as a model for the Filipino stance on the revolution. Related to the earlier section discussion in the ‘Golden Age’, Smith argues that ‘every nationalism requires a touchstone of virtue and heroism, to guide and give meaning to the tasks of regeneration.’

Lapulapu’s defiance of Magellan sought to rouse similar sentiments in the developing revolution against Spain. In defeating Magellan, Lapulapu succeeded in defending the very thing that the revolutionaries were fighting for in 1896. By expelling the Spaniards, the revolutionaries also in effect sought to return to an imagined Golden Age—a time of freedom, a time without Spaniards. This reveals the ethnic conceptualization of nationhood discussed in the early section of the chapter. The Spaniards were eventually expelled from the country, not by the revolutionaries but by the Americans who started a new period of colonization. The significant impact of the revolution to Lapulapu is that it de-marginalized him from his 1614 representation and cemented him as an anti-colonial figure which essentially remained unchanged up to the present. FMA’s contemporary inscription of nationalism to Lapulapu’s image is derived from how the revolutionaries appropriated Lapulapu during the Philippine Revolution.

II. Physical Representation of Lapulapu in Monuments

One of the most notable absences in the 1614 and 1898 reconstructions of Lapulapu is the lack of any physical description of him. Considering there are no historical bases for reconstructing Lapulapu physically, visual representations of him are interesting in that they exhibit how his image is conceptualized in conjunction with the idealized traits attributed to him. More importantly, it solicits a query into

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53 Myths and Memories of the Nation, 65-67
the motives behind these conceptualizations. It is the relationship between how the
to the relationship between how the
statue is reconstructed and how it is mobilized that is analysed here.

This section examines two of what it considers are the two most iconic and
recognizable Lapulapu statues in the Philippines—the Lapulapu Shrine on Mactan
Island next to Cebu, and the Sentinel of Freedom at Rizal Park in Manila. Perhaps as
a testament to their distinction as the most prominent representations of Lapulapu, it
is also these two statues that FMA practitioners hold meaning to, identify with, and
appropriate the most. In later sections, we shall see that these statues are
incorporated into FMA club logos and certificates.

Presently, there are numerous statues of Lapulapu scattered across the
country. Some of them are official monuments of the state such as the two examined
here. Others are privately used for decoration. The Lapulapu Shrine was erected at
Punta Engaño, Mactan in 1991, on what was widely believed to be the site of the
battle. A shrine for Magellan had earlier been built on the same site in 1866. That
these two stood beside each other demonstrates the transformation of the roles
between Magellan and Lapulapu as heroes and villains over time, and the change of
state authority from Spanish to Filipino. At twenty feet, the statue of Lapulapu is an
imposing figure. He stands upright, his muscles ripped, and his hair is made to seem
as if blowing in the wind. He brandishes a *kampilan* (Philippine broadsword) in his
right hand, and a shield in his left, slightly raised as if anticipating a blow. He wears
only a loincloth, apart from a necklace and a cloth wrapped on his head. Lapulapu
has a vigilant, stern look, and stares out to the sea as if anticipating Magellan. Behind
his statue, the Philippine flag waves upon a high pole. He is armed with a more
glorious weapon than a stick, which ironically is what FMA practitioners train with.
It is Lapulapu’s vigilance, resistance, and courage that are celebrated here. The
layout of the shrine and the posture of the statue evoke a nationalistic sentiment.

Lapulapu’s statue appears to overshadow Magellan’s own monument. The
former was built closer to the shore, as if to block Magellan’s access to it. It is also
much better maintained as opposed to the mossy structure that is Magellan’s Shrine.
The builders of the Lapulapu Shrine in effect appropriated the site of the battle for
Lapulapu, and their religious maintenance of the shrine (as opposed to Magellan’s)
shows the value they place upon keeping it looking in a desired way. The local
tourism department have made strong efforts to highlight the statue to public
attention. Today, the Lapulapu Shrine is frequented by local and foreign tourists alike. It is featured in postcards and is marketed by the Department of Tourism as a tourist site. For several years now, an annual re-enactment of the Battle of Mactan, held at this location and participated in by celebrities from Manila, draws in a sizeable audience.

In 2004, the Korean Freedom League, comprised of veterans of the Korean War (1950-1953), financed the construction of another Lapulapu monument as a sign of gratitude to Filipino soldiers who served in the Korean War. Dubbed the ‘Statue of the Sentinel of Freedom’, it was intended to personify Filipinos who defended Korean freedom or freedom in general. Being the first native who resisted colonisation in the Philippines, Lapulapu became the ideal model. Then tourism secretary Richard Gordon, who was gunning for a senatorial seat in the 2004 election, facilitated the construction of a Lapulapu statue and gave the task to artist Juan Sajid Imao (son of national artist Abdulmari Asia Imao, renowned for featuring Muslim-Filipino culture in his work).

Like the one in Mactan, the Sentinel was also made of bronze, but stood taller at forty feet. It depicted a Lapulapu dressed in almost the same way as the statue in Mactan, but without the necklace and the shield. Unlike the statue in Mactan, the Sentinel has a calmer posture—no wind blowing in his hair, his muscles relaxed, and

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54 Lapulapu Shrine, personal copy, 2012
his arms folded over a sheathed *kampilan* which he appears to lean onto for support. He also stares out towards the sea but appears more peaceful rather than anxious. In 2013, a small-scale replica of this statue was erected in Ekaterinburg City, Russia by Russian and Filipino FMA practitioners to celebrate FMA, using Lapulapu as the model for FMA.\textsuperscript{55}

![Plate No. 6\textsuperscript{56}](image)

The construction of the statue was controversial on two grounds—first, Gordon chose to erect the statue at Rizal Park (also called Luneta) some four hundred meters away from Philippine National hero Jose Rizal’s own monument; second, Gordon made out Lapulapu to be a Muslim chieftain—a statement which touched a nerve among many Filipinos. His choice of Imao as an artist only fuelled the uneasiness felt by many towards his designs.\textsuperscript{57} Interestingly though, apart from an inscription at the base of the statue about Lapulapu’s being Muslim, his overall appearance (including his *kampilan*) is in keeping with general representations of him.

Some of Gordon’s staunchest critics were the officials of the National Historical Institute of the Philippines who argued that Luneta, being a place of execution during the Spanish era, should be reserved for the martyrs who died there.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{55} Interview with Rene Tongson, online correspondence, October 19, 2013
\item \textsuperscript{56} Sentinel of Freedom, courtesy of Samuel Dulay
\item \textsuperscript{57}N.a., ‘Lapu-Lapu stirs row at Luneta’, February 8, 2004. [web]
\end{itemize}
(Rizal most of all). Moreover, that a massive statue that rivalled the size of the Luneta Shrine (dedicated to Rizal) gave the impression that Lapulapu equalled Rizal in status. Gordon argued by highlighting Lapulapu as the first national hero and stating that Luneta was intended for all heroes whether they died there or not. Cebuanos, who historically claimed ownership over Lapulapu, vehemently questioned Gordon regarding his claims about Lapulapu’s being a Muslim, but Gordon failed to provide any significant historical evidence. Ultimately, Gordon followed through with the project and was able to erect the statue despite the protestations against it.58

For decades, before the statue was erected, various martial arts enthusiasts trained at Luneta Park on a regular Sunday. Among them are FMA practitioners from different clubs. When the statue was eventually raised, the area in front of it became a zone where different FMA practitioners congregated for training or special occasions. The way the statue drew in the FMA clubs which used to be spread out over Luneta Park was analogous to the power of Lapulapu’s symbol to bring together FMA practitioners. That FMA practitioners voluntarily congregated in front of the statue shows either their reverence for (and subscription to) the meaning that Lapulapu held for FMA, or an anxiety over being perceived as an un-nationalistic or inauthentic FMA club by their peers.

On one hand, the two statues were different. The ways in which both statues were depicted revealed the message they were conveying. The Lapulapu Shrine in Mactan celebrated Lapulapu’s defiance and victory against Spain. In comparison, the Sentinel—acting as a token of Korean gratitude—embodied Filipino character during the Korean War rather than the atmosphere of revolution. The artist, Imao, may have also been subtly depicting his own cultural minority background as a Filipino-Muslim in the Sentinel. Moreover, Gordon may have intended the Sentinel to bridge the cultural and political gap between Christian Filipinos and their Muslim countrymen by reconfiguring, if not establishing, a well-loved historical figure as

58 Gordon would later attempt to create a national holiday in honour of Lapulapu. Again, he asserts Lapulapu’s being a Muslim. The bill was not passed; Richard J. Gordon, ‘Philippine House Bill No. 2126 “An Act to declare April 27 of every year as a special non-working holiday throughout the country to commemorate the victory of Lapu-Lapu and his men over the Spaniards led by Fernando Magallanes in the historic Battle of Mactan on April 27, 1521, to be known as Lapu-Lapu Day or Adlaw ni Lapu-Lapu.”’ [web] http://www.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/70996341!.pdf (September 15, 2013)
Muslim.\textsuperscript{59} Almost like the supportive role the Filipinos played in Korea, the Sentinel displays its calm, defensive readiness to protect freedom. In contrast, the Lapulapu Shrine statue appeared ready to pounce upon a clear and present danger.

On the other hand, juxtaposing the images of the two Lapulapu statues shows the striking resemblance of their physical appearances—Lapulapu is represented as a middle-aged man, muscular, with long hair, and positioned in an upright and imposing stance. They are also depicted in a defensive stance, although at varying levels of aggression, and their weapons are highlighted. Apart from this, they are dressed and equipped similarly. The next section shows how this modular form that Lapulapu representations adopt is in keeping with the longer tradition of his reconstruction.

This section’s analysis of the 1614 poem, the appearance of Lapulapu in the 1898 declaration, and the two monuments, mainly exhibits how these reconstructions put forward an image of Lapulapu that was used for specific needs. Coming from a Hispanized author, the 1614 poem cast Lapulapu (the rebel) out from ‘Philippine society’. The 1898 declaration drew him back in and argued that his resistance to the Spaniards was the true measure of being a Filipino—consequently, it questioned the very essence of Filipino identity in the seventeenth century when the poem was written. Using Lapulapu as a platform, the founding fathers were able to articulate their arguments about national identity and nationalism. It is the revolutionary representation of Lapulapu that has resonated to the present the idea of nationalism that both the nation and FMA seek to emulate.

Both statues in the section were politically motivated reconstructions. Since the Sentinel was physically similar to the Lapulapu Shrine statue, what was more controversial was Gordon’s assertion that Lapulapu was a Muslim—a retelling of his myth in which other Filipinos have become familiar with and attached their own meanings to it. By changing this myth, Gordon was compromising these meanings which, as shown in the case of FMA practitioners below, were really reflections of themselves which they projected on Lapulapu. Lapulapu thus becomes a tool for Gordon to strategically position in the nation either himself or Filipino-Muslims by speaking for them.

\textsuperscript{59} Gordon later authored Senate Bill 2590 in 2009 which proposed making changes to the Philippine flag that would acknowledge Muslim contributions to Philippine history.
FMA-based reconstructions of Lapulapu (1953-2012)

Thus far, the chapter has argued the underlying logic behind the reconstruction and mobilization of Lapulapu in the long-standing discourse of nationalism and national identity in the Philippines, and argued that the historically obscurity behind Lapulapu enabled him to be easily reconstructed in different ways by different people with different agenda and interpretations. The previous section examined historical reconstructions and appropriations of Lapulapu outside of FMA-related themes and established how his figure had been mobilized during historical episodes in the Philippines—first as a villain in 1614 during the rise of Spanish colonization, then as a hero in 1898 during the Philippine Revolution. These representations revealed shifts in the manner in which he was represented and reflected significant or subtle changes in Philippine society—for instance, when Lapulapu transforms into a hero instead of a villain in 1898, or when he became associated with the Muslim minority group in 2004. In particular, it is the 1898 revolutionary reconstruction of Lapulapu as a hero of the nation that became a critical component for subsequent understandings of nationalism in the Philippines and the archetype for imagining Philippine national identity.

As discussed in the second chapter, the national government appropriated FMA for nation-building. Acting as beacons of Filipino identity, this effectively applies some pressure upon FMA practitioners to have to articulate their own understandings of nationalism and national identity using the ideological framework of the state. This section illustrates the ways in which a concept of Filipino martial identity and nationalism takes shape from multiple imaginations and understandings of Lapulapu. Moreover, it shows how different FMA clubs subtly apply a layer of their own interpretations of Lapulapu upon an existing modular form which is more recognizable to the nation. This becomes a strategy for FMA clubs to affirm their membership into the nation while at the same time asserting and elevating their more localised identities.

I. 1953 Lapu-Lapu comics and 1955 film60

In 1946 shortly after the Second World War, the Philippines was granted its formal independence by the United States. It emerged from the war in a state of

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economic collapse and political instability. Political leaders since the establishment of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935 had already been engaged in a drive to build national identity. However, the need for a strong statement of national identity became much more necessary upon formal independence. The drive for strengthening national identity is something that has persisted even to the present, with the Arnis Law of 2010 as one of the many consequences.

Alongside the initiative of political leaders, popular culture also became a venue for the building of Filipino national identity. Between November 1953 and April 1954, renowned Filipino graphic artist Francisco Coching created ‘Lapu-Lapu’, a twenty-five issue historical fiction, graphic novel printed by Pilipino Komiks.\(^61\) In 1955, Coching worked with director Lamberto V. Avellana for the release of the film version of ‘Lapu-Lapu’.\(^62\) Coching’s work reflects the metamorphosis of Lapulapu’s narrative and representation in the last half century or so since the revolution. Moreover, its popularity coincided with the commercialization of FMA after the war.\(^63\) Coching’s Lapulapu reveals how Lapulapu was popularly imagined immediately after Philippine independence. It also crafted a stencil of reconstructing Lapulapu for its audiences, among whom included FMA practitioners.

The most notable quality of Coching’s 1950s version is that Lapulapu is now personified and given an intricate background story—he is given characteristics and other details which were absent in Pigafetta’s chronicle and earlier reconstructions of Lapulapu. Here, he is depicted to be somewhere in his twenties or thirties, handsome, intelligent, unrivalled in his bravery, and of regal bearing. He is also given a sister and a betrothed, both of whom are absent in Pigafetta’s chronicle. Coching offers that Lapulapu’s name is drawn from his ability to dive and catch


\(^{62}\) For the purpose of analysis, I shall be moving back and forth between the film version and the comics.

\(^{63}\) See chapters one and two of this dissertation on the rise of FMA clubs.
Lapulapu fish. He is thrust into leadership following the sudden death of his father who was chief of their kaharian (kingdom).

Lapulapu is portrayed as a devoted ruler. He is overly protective of his sister, Yumina, most of all, and of his people. Lapulapu’s immediate rival is Sula and Sula’s two sons who rule their kingdom across the river that divides Mactan. Lapulapu is extremely xenophobic and suspicious of foreigners. On a hunting trip to an island near Mactan, Lapulapu meets Miraha, the daughter of the island’s king. He falls in love with Miraha but learns that she is to be given away that same day to the victor of a duel for her hand in marriage. Lapulapu decides to enter the fight and discovers his opponents were one of Sula’s sons, Rahab, and a rich Chinese merchant called Kim Long. Lapulapu defeats Rahab by severing his sword arm but refuses to kill him because he is ‘of the same race’. Lapulapu later declares that he has no second thoughts about killing Kim Long however, because he is a foreigner. The act of sparing the defeated Rahab shows how Lapulapu is portrayed as having a certain consciousness of his race. Although historically, the inhabitants of the Philippine islands killed and raided each other in the sixteenth century, Coching depicts a Lapulapu reluctant to kill someone of his own race. The way the Chinese merchants are portrayed as villains only reinforces Lapulapu’s own xenophobia.

When Magellan arrives in Cebu, he establishes good relations with Humabon. When Lapulapu learns of this, he is furious. When asked why he reacts that way, he explains, ‘Because they are sheer conquerors and I am their enemy! …and whichever foreigner steps on Mactan soil, their lives I shall end.’ Lapulapu’s disdain for foreigners shows how he defines ‘us’ and ‘them’ in ethnic terms.

In the final scene which depicts the Battle of Mactan, and as with Calao’s poem, it is Lapulapu who delivers the killing blow to Magellan. As the Spaniards retreat in defeat, Lapulapu rushes to the shoreline and starts yelling out a patriotic speech about how no foreigner shall ever come to invade ‘our’ land without threat of

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64 Lapulapu is also the name of a type of red grouper fish; Coching does not credit any source for his description of the origin of Lapulapu’s name. This too may have been derived from a narrative about Lapulapu separate from Pigafetta’s account.
65 This is perhaps in reference to Pigafetta’s own usage of the terms king and kingdom for the islands’ chiefs and their barangays.
66 Sula is Zula in Pigafetta.
67 Lapu-Lapu, No. 4-7
68 See Chapter One on 16th century Visayas.
69 Lapu-Lapu, No. 9, p.5
having their blood spilled where they stand. He adds that while a single ‘brown’ man yet lives, foreign invaders will always have an enemy. While Lapulapu dramatically recites this, the Philippine national anthem plays in the background. Pigafetta’s record of the battle was ambiguous about Lapulapu’s involvement. In fact, he is not mentioned to have participated in the engagement at all. Yet, Coching credit Lapulapu with having delivered or at least facilitated the killing blow so as to glorify him as a national hero. Furthermore, that the national anthem played in the background during Lapulapu’s speech in the film makes it obvious that this scene was trying to raise patriotic sentiments from the audience.

A twist occurs when Lapulapu’s sister Yumina falls in love with Arturo, a Spaniard. When Arturo learns of Magellan’s impending attack on Mactan, he goes to warn Lapulapu. Lapulapu arrests Arturo, refusing to believe that Arturo would betray his ‘kind’. Arturo explains that he needed to do so in order that he may not betray righteousness. Lapulapu imprisons Arturo and threatens to have him executed if Magellan does not attack as Arturo had warned. Arturo earns Lapulapu’s trust when Magellan attacks, and eventually even saves Lapulapu from being slain in battle.

Coching’s introduction of a number of characters diverges from the black-and-white manner in which Lapulapu, Magellan, and their troops were portrayed in 1614 and 1898. Magellan himself is depicted neither as a scheming conqueror nor a noble martyr, but as a clueless captain caught in the machinations of others. Sent to secure Lapulapu’s loyalty and friendship, Magellan’s pompous officer, Duarte Barbosa is undiplomatic and arrogant towards Lapulapu despite advice from Arturo to behave otherwise. Lapulapu punishes him by shaving half of his moustache and Barbosa furiously returns to Magellan with wild stories of Lapulapu’s aggression. This is fuelled by Sula, his sons, and Humabon. Forced to defend Spanish and Christian honour, Magellan finds no other way but to make preparations for an assault against Lapulapu. Sula, his sons, and Humabon promptly applaud each other for successfully orchestrating Lapulapu’s impending demise. Coching’s manner of

70 In the comics, Arturo has learned how to speak the local language while in the movie, he needs an interpreter.
71 Lapu-Lapu, No. 24, p. 5
72 As discussed earlier, Duarte Barbosa is historically Magellan’s brother-in-law and second-in-command.
73 Lapu-Lapu, No. 17-25
portraying Arturo and Magellan on one hand, and Barbosa and the native chiefs on the other, opens up a grey area which did not exist in earlier representations of Lapulapu and Magellan. Magellan attacks only because he has to, and Arturo is depicted in the comics as sympathetic to the local kingdoms and knowledgeable in their ways and language.\textsuperscript{74} This painted him as a ‘good’ Spaniard, making him acceptable among Filipino readers as Yumina’s love interest.

Interestingly, Coching’s work introduces a strong female presence to Lapulapu’s story. There are of course no traces of this in Pigafetta’s chronicle. Miraha’s representation as a fighter and hunter, and Lapulapu’s romance with her was intended to appeal to audiences exposed to Hollywood romance and adventure.

While the historical fiction in Coching’s work is obvious when compared to Pigafetta’s chronicle, it is in keeping with the general events in the Lapulapu narrative. The main actors are still present – Lapulapu, Magellan, Humabon and Sula. The most interesting additions, however, are the characteristics attributed to Lapulapu. When Coching creates Lapu-Lapu in 1953, he builds upon already existing representations. For instance, the oldest statue of Lapulapu constructed for the municipal hall of Opon (later renamed Lapu-Lapu City) in 1933 reflects the same physical representation of Lapulapu found in Coching’s artwork—masculine figure of regal bearing, shoulder-length hair, dressed in fine pre-colonial garments and

\textsuperscript{74} In the film version, he is abandoned in Mactan after the Spanish defeat. He can be seen standing alongside the natives while the Spaniards retreat.

\textsuperscript{75} Mario Montenegro as Lapulapu; Lapu-Lapu (1955) screengrab; pay attention to how this representation of Lapulapu becomes a stencil for future representations of him.
armed with a *kampilan*. But Coching’s physical representation of Lapulapu has some minor differences with the 1933 statue which suggests he may have slightly diverged from more traditional representations of Lapulapu—the 1933 statue is not bare-chested, and it originally depicted a Lapulapu armed with a bow and arrow. In the 1955 film, Lapulapu is shirtless half the time. He is also armed with a *kampilan* in battle rather than a bow and arrow which he only uses once for hunting. Regardless, both the 1933 and 1953 representations of Lapulapu evoke the non-physical traits Coching attributes Lapulapu with in his narrative such as bravery, defiance and vigilance.

More than any other physical representation of Lapulapu, it is Coching’s version—the one popularized for mass consumption—whose form has endured to the present and consequently influenced later reconstructions of Lapulapu. For example, Coching’s interpretation of Lapulapu’s physical form is reflected in both statues discussed in the previous section. In terms of the non-physical aspects of Lapulapu, Coching’s myth-making became an additional layer to existing representations of Lapulapu and have trickled down to the present. It is even held by some FMA practitioners as historical fact. This process of creating layers of meaning and representations can be seen in the next reconstruction examined.

II. 2002 *Lapu-Lapu* film

For a half century, there were no major film remakes of Coching’s *Lapu-Lapu*. The lead role for a next possible remake had since been highly coveted by

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76 I have not been able to trace the inspiration and basis of the 1933 statue with regard to how Lapulapu was physically represented. What is observable is how Coching adopted elements from this statue in his own reconstruction of Lapulapu—the muscular form, the length of the hair, the brandishing of weapons.

77 According to urban legend, the statue was remodelled following the deaths of three consecutive municipal mayors. It was believed that the deaths were because Lapulapu was pointing his weapon towards the municipal hall. The new statue showed Lapulapu with a massive pestle, and a slightly lowered *kampilan*. Emelio Pascual testimony, *I-Witness: Lapu Lapu*

78 Note that in Calao’s version, the natives were armed with stones and sticks.

79 For example, when I attended an Arnis class in 2007, the teacher began by discussing the Lapulapu narrative, calling Lapulapu a ‘brilliant strategist’. This piqued my curiosity and I asked him in what way he thought Lapulapu was a brilliant strategist. One reason he gave was that Lapulapu had stolen some of the Spaniards’ armour, and that he purposely forged his steel so that it could penetrate this armour. I discovered much later that this does not appear in either Pigafetta or Transylvanus’ works, but in Coching’s. To a large extent, Coching’s story telling and representations of Lapulapu (physical and non-physical) have been instrumental in shaping contemporary imaginings of Lapulapu, especially in FMA.

actors, especially those who were active in FMA. Roland Dantes, a bodybuilder-turned-actor and student of Modern Arnis, was renowned for his FMA themed films and sought to produce and star in a Lapulapu remake in the seventies. Pre-production was planned, but budget constraints ultimately prevented the film from materializing. In 2002, William Mayo directed *Lapu-Lapu* with actor-turned-politician Manuel Mercado ‘Lito’ Lapid starring the lead role. Like Dantes, Lapid was an FMA practitioner and had starred in an FMA-themed action film.

Like Coching, Mayo stayed true to the general events of the Lapulapu narrative. However, the 2002 version introduced a few changes which reflected more contemporary issues. Like the Coching-Avellana version, Mayo’s Lapulapu is brave, defiant, and xenophobic. The physical features are also strikingly similar—Lapulapu is masculine, his hair falls to his shoulder, and he also brandishes a *kampilan*. Similarly, Lapulapu here is also bare-chested, save for a type of waistcoat which was open in the middle.

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81 Interview with Chris Dantes, Quezon City, September 19, 2012
82 Lapid became a senator of the Philippines two years after the film. Dantes and Lapid’s other FMA-related films are discussed in chapter 4.
83 Films from both of these actors are analysed in the fourth chapter.
84 Roland Dantes as Lapulapu: pre-production still courtesy of Chris Dantes
86 In 2002, the forty-something Lito Lapid was significantly older than his 1955 counterpart, Mario Montenegro who was in his twenties when he played Lapulapu.
Like the 1955 version, Mayo also attempts to recreate cultural elements during Lapulapu’s time—both films for instance, feature a lavish feast whose main attraction was an indigenous dance.\(^{87}\) Mayo is more meticulous and pays more attention to cultural detail, clearly trying to assert a uniqueness of Filipino culture, and surpasses the 1955 film in terms of this.

Lapulapu is depicted as lord of seven barangays in Mactan and is frequently harassed by coordinated raids from Humabon and Zula.\(^{88}\) Such depiction agrees with Scott’s argument on the delicate, often bellicose relationship between barangays.\(^{89}\) Lapulapu’s vigilance is complemented by a system of meting out justice among his subjects, thus maintaining order. When a young woman is raped by one of the villagers, she commits suicide by drowning herself. A witness identifies the culprit and the man is arrested. The man pleads his innocence and (surprisingly without any cross-examination) Lapulapu refuses to believe the criminal. Lapulapu hands his own kampilan to the victim’s father who promptly cuts the criminal down. While Lapulapu’s sense of justice can be questioned by the fact that he automatically takes the word of the witness, what is interesting is how the scene depicts pre-colonial Filipinos with a system of law, and a sense of righteousness and justice.

Although not maintained throughout the film, the women appear bare-breasted in the 2002 version. In comparison, the women in the 1955 film are fully covered. Understandably, audiences in 1955 were more conservative about breast exposure than in 2002. This however, illustrates Mayo’s attempt to be consistent with Pigafetta’s description of women in the Visayan Islands, thereby recreating an authentic pre-Hispanic past.

The film is also given a strong female presence like Coching’s characters Yumina and Miraha. In Mayo’s version, Lapulapu has a mother, a sister, and he is married.\(^{90}\) The women in Mayo’s Lapulapu may not have actively participated in the Battle of Mactan as Miraha did in Coching’s version, but they are no less defensive.

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\(^{87}\) Perhaps anachronistically, the 1955 dance resembles an Indian traditional dance, and the 2002 version appears more similar to Islamic dances in the south of the Philippines rather than Visayan. Regardless, they were attempts at establishing the existence of pre-Hispanic styles of music and dance.

\(^{88}\) Unlike Coching’s version, Lapulapu here has no qualms about killing his enemies in battle even if they were of the same race.

\(^{89}\) For more on inter-baranganic warfare, see chapter 1.

\(^{90}\) Mayo’s introduction of Lapulapu’s mother, Bauga, is in keeping with a local narrative on Mactan Island where an oral account of Lapulapu’s family tree is kept. *I-Witness: Lapu Lapu*
about their sovereignty. It is in fact them who advise Lapulapu never to concede to the demands of the foreigners. Similarly, Humabon’s wife is the one who urges him to ally with Magellan if only to check the military supremacy of Lapulapu.

Lapulapu’s mother, Bauga, declares to Lapulapu’s council, ‘we should not worship them (the Spaniards) just because of the colour of their skin, their language, their ways, and the god they praise…’

Neither Pigafetta’s nor Transylvanus’ work bring up the subject of European skin colour as a factor in subjugating the natives. Rather, the subject of social status based on skin colour is a product of colonial history, and Bauga’s statements echo the nature of nationalism during the Philippine Revolution which endured to the present. The influential role of women in the film reflects more contemporary representations of women—women are given a significant role in the decisions of the male historical figures, thereby attributing them with shaping the course of Philippine history.

The role of Humabon also takes a different shape in the 2002 film. Where Magellan was ‘villain by circumstance’ in Coching’s version, here, it is Humabon. He initially refuses to bow to Magellan’s conditions and in fact demands tribute from Magellan. His wife, and one of his subjects dissuade him to upset the Spaniards because of their military might, and he is forced to capitulate and convert. Halfway through the Battle of Mactan scene, Humabon stands beside a worried Zula who exclaims that Magellan was losing and needed reinforcement. Humabon shakes his head and affirms Lapulapu’s superiority and rightful place as lord of Mactan, just as Lapulapu lands the killing blow on Magellan. In the film’s ending, Lapulapu is ambushed by Zula while on a hunting trip. Humabon tries to mount a rescue but falls to his knees in tears when he realizes that Lapulapu has been slain. What is interesting about this shift in Humabon’s character from the 1955 version is that by 2002, being the first converts of the island, Humabon and his wife have become important symbols of Christianity in Cebu. A statue presently stands in his honour in Cebu City. Mayo’s depiction of Humabon may have thus been influenced by the change in people’s perception of him.

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91 Translation mine.
92 Humabon demanding tribute from Magellan is in keeping with Pigafetta’s account.
Finally, as mentioned, Mayo’s film portrays the death of Lapulapu. Although Lapulapu’s death appears in myth, it is generally absent in written text. Mayo may have been seeking to replicate the same martyrdom that Calao wrote about Magellan, giving Lapulapu a more dramatic ending as opposed to a boring, peaceful death. It is also possible that Mayo was mimicking scenes from the film *Braveheart* (1995) especially since there were clear similarities between the two films. For example, when Lapulapu gives a speech to his men before clashing with Humabon and Zula, he says, ‘Warriors of Mactan, in the past, you’ve been wounded with my father, Datu Mangal. I ask that you now be wounded with me.’ In the closing scene of ‘Braveheart’, Robert the Bruce (played by Angus Macfayden) says, ‘You have bled with Wallace, now bleed with me.’ Also in this opening scene, notice how as plate number 9 shows, Lapulapu puts on war paint in a similar fashion as William Wallace (played by Mel Gibson) paints his face in the film’s scene of the Battle of Stirling. Lapulapu’s death (being pulled apart by water buffaloes) is almost similar to how William Wallace in Braveheart is tied to a rack and stretched. Regardless of whether Mayo ripped these scenes off from *Braveheart* or not, among Filipino audiences, the parallelism goes further—Lapu-Lapu elevated a sense of Filipino-ness just as *Braveheart* did with Scottishness as shown in Tim Edensor’s work.

The comics, the 1955 film, and the 2002 film on Lapulapu all built up pre-Hispanic national identity, but were doing so as a response to more recent, postcolonial necessities. The way Lapulapu was depicted in these three versions was that of a defender of the ‘Filipino’ in the post 1898 context even when theoretically speaking, there was no ‘Filipino’ yet in 1521. Lapulapu was mobilised in popular culture mainly in coordination with how the state was also building up national identity since the turn of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the ways Lapulapu was depicted in these different versions were done so on top of earlier representations of Lapulapu. The most striking feature in the comics and the two films is that Lapulapu is colourfully brought to life and further mythologized to the viewing or reading.

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93 Among villagers in Mactan, Lapulapu’s death has become a myth—locals believe that upon his death, he walked to the shore and transformed into a rock. Fishermen today toss coins at the rock they believe to be Lapulapu, to ask for permission to fish in his waters; *I-Witness: Lapu Lapu*

94 *Braveheart*, dir. Mel Gibson, Icon Productions, 1995

95 Translation mine; As with Bauga, Mangal also appears in local oral tradition in Mactan as Bauga’s husband. *I-Witness: Lapu Lapu*

public—details about his life which were generally absent based on historical information were ‘imagined’ to create an idealised figure that the readers and viewers could emulate. Unlike sculptures which are more static, these three reconstructions are able to create a more complex image of Filipino national identity on the basis of Lapulapu’s story.

In their effort to highlight the concept of national identity, both the Coching and Mayo versions of the Lapulapu narrative sought to recreate the sixteenth century cultural milieu whose description was absent from either the 1521 historical records or the 1614 and 1898 reconstructions. In doing so, the reconstruction of Lapulapu was informed by the realities of the 1950s and the early 2000s. An interesting connection can also be made between the two films and earlier reconstructions of Lapulapu: on one hand, the two films solidified a Lapulapu archetype that originated from before the 1950s and persisted to the present; on the other hand, the attitude, characteristics, and socio-political outlook of Lapulapu reflected the tradition of nationalism that emerged from the anti-colonial sentiments of the Philippine Revolution. It is this physical and ideological tradition that is carried over to FMA practitioners, and can be seen in how they appropriate and mobilize Lapulapu.

III. FMA’s Appropriation of Lapulapu as National Symbol

Thus far, the chapter has presented how Lapulapu’s meaning in Philippine society has changed over time, as well as accumulated layers of meaning. It is from this tradition of reconstruction and mobilisation of Lapulapu that FMA appropriates him in its role as a beacon of national identity. This section examines how Lapulapu is reconstructed and appropriated by FMA clubs. Drawing from the dissertation’s concept of reverse appropriation, this section argues that by appropriating Lapulapu for FMA, practitioners highlight and make sense of their own localized identities underneath a national identity that the state is attempting to construct. Because FMA clubs and practitioners seek to pattern Lapulapu after their own understandings for their own purposes, the differences in reconstructions of Lapulapu also reveals the identity tensions between FMA clubs.

Earlier, the chapter discussed the historical elusiveness of Lapulapu and how, to give life to an otherwise blank historical figure, these historical gaps were filled
with myths about his existence. Because FMA is given a role in nation building, FMA teachers and practitioners understand the task of retelling Lapulapu’s narrative to be their own. Because of Lapulapu’s malleability, localized interpretations about him get superimposed onto existing myths and fuel the mythmaking process. Interviewing FMA teachers from different clubs proves to be both interesting and arduous because they are as pedantic about details on Lapulapu as they are about the uniqueness of their martial styles. As with Mayer’s research on Alexander and about how myth-narratives on Alexander proliferated among subjugated populations who sought to appropriate him, FMA clubs and practitioners who appropriate Lapulapu subscribe to various myths about him which are historically difficult to prove if not fictitious. During fieldwork in 2012 for instance, one interviewed teacher—following the FMA narrative—asserted that all FMA styles come from an original source (Lapulapu) and should thus stop fighting with each other. When asked about how he knew that Lapulapu was the origin, he leaned forward and replied, ‘It is written.’ When further pressed about what written sources he was referring to, he answered, ‘The writings.’ Another teacher, when asked if he agreed with the myth-narratives on Lapulapu (for example, that he is the founder of Arnis or that he killed Magellan) outright replied ‘no’, then he added, ‘but I have to sell the idea. Do you understand the politics involved now?’

Both teachers have a large following in their respective clubs, and both actively engage with lawmakers involved with the Arnis Law. The second teacher’s statement about the ‘politics involved’ implied his clear position on Lapulapu being a myth. Yet, he had to sell the myth-narratives not for its truthfulness but for its capacity to highlight Filipino identity both locally and abroad. This is similar to how Chapter Two analyzed the FMA narrative as a recognizable ‘brand name’ that attracted would-be students. That the first teacher’s historical information on Lapulapu comes from vague, possibly non-existing sources is beside the point. What is most interesting in his testimony was how he used Lapulapu as a unifying figure that had a seemingly religio-political capacity to terminate nearly century-old squabbles between FMA clubs. Akin to what Mayer has stressed about myth-narratives on Alexander, it is not their historicity, rather how they were used that becomes useful to historians studying evasive historical figures like Lapulapu.
Considering that Lapulapu narratives could be traced as early as 1614, FMA’s appropriation of Lapulapu is relatively recent. Arguably, it is only as old as when FMA was mobilized for the nation in the seventies under Marcos. Sulite’s interview of Eskrima teacher Eulogio Cañete reveals that references to Lapulapu were around as early as the 1930s in Cebu. However, this was not as widespread compared to how he was popularized in FMA after the 1970s. Like the nature of the emergence of Lapulapu in popular culture and monuments, FMA references to Lapulapu were generally twentieth century phenomena that were gradually formulated and increased over time especially after the establishment of the state-sponsored National Arnis Association of the Philippines (NARAPHIL) which actively promoted Arnis in the Philippines.

A comparison of the 1930s and 1970s appropriation of Lapulapu in FMA also reveals a difference in the ways he was appropriated. The 1930s appropriation functioned as categorization and the latter as an instrument in identity politics. Understandably, the Philippines was still an American colony in the 1930s and did not or could not make use of Lapulapu in the same fashion that he was used in the 1970s. The way Lapulapu exists and is used in FMA in the present is actually influenced more by the nationalist programs in the 1970s rather than an age-old tradition that goes back to the Spanish period. In general, it was a response to the state’s own mobilization of FMA for nation and national identity building. By appropriating Lapulapu, FMA clubs were in fact fulfilling the role that the state had given them. Lapulapu effectively becomes a platform for FMA clubs to engage with the state. More importantly, how Lapulapu is reconstructed in FMA reflects how

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97 See Chapter Two.
98 This is by far the oldest documented reference to Lapulapu I have come across in my research. Cañete related that FMA practitioners followed two predominant styles of fighting dubbed Rajah Humabon style, and Lapulapu style which Cañete’s group adopted and developed; Edgar Sulite, The Masters of Arnis, Kali & Eskrima. Socorro Publications, 1993, 86-90
99 The NARAPHIL is an offshoot of then-president Ferdinand Marcos’ nationalist initiatives. A photograph of the cultural performing arm of NARAPHIL in 1975 shows the performers wearing Lapulapu-styled costumes. For a discussion of NARAPHIL, see chapter 2; also see Romeo C. Mascardo, ‘About NARAPHIL’ in Filipino Martial Arts Digest, Special Edition 2007
100 There were existing American Laws in the Philippines that illegalized the use of nationalistic symbols especially in the beginning of their colonial venture in 1898. For more on the American colonization of the Philippines, see History of the Filipino People and The Philippines: A Past Revisited
101 For a discussion of the nationalist programs (from which FMA was also appropriated by the state), see chapter 2.
FMA wanted to portray itself to its national and international following, and it had to do it along the state’s own designs.

Writing on how the Malaysian government configured Batik and Pewter to be national symbols as part of a marketing strategy, Barbara Leigh argued that national symbols are ‘an indication of how those in power within the country wish the nation to be represented on the global stage.’\(^{102}\) In the same way, the state, under the leadership of the successive governments since Marcos, appropriated FMA (and Lapulapu) to paint an image of an idealised Filipino identity. Leigh adds that national symbols are often institutionally promoted from the top and psychologically consumed domestically to ‘represent or encapsulate aspects of national identity.’\(^{103}\) This approach, however, stops short of examining what happens to these symbols and identities when they get ‘down’. FMA’s supportive role in the state’s nation building illustrates how the ‘bottom’ subscribes to, claims ownership of, reinforces and propagates the national symbols in order to justify its own role in nation building.

One example which reveals how FMA clubs understand their role in the nation can be seen in club advertisements or logos. As a marketing strategy, FMA clubs appropriate Lapulapu to sell themselves. Like in the statues of Lapulapu, images from club advertisements or logos often portray him in a masculine pose, clad only in loincloth, but armed with a set of weapons that particular clubs specialize in. Whereas in national monuments like the Lapulapu shrine the viewer is drawn to emulate the nationalistic qualities of Lapulapu, in advertisements and logos the viewer is drawn to learn and acquire the same level of Lapulapu’s martial prowess. In the former, Lapulapu is consumed psychologically as an idea. In the latter, he acquires a more economic value which can be purchased.

For example, at the Doce Pares headquarters in Cebu, one of the school’s banners that hung from the ceiling showed Lapulapu and Magellan locked in mortal combat.

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\(^{103}\) Leigh’s use of consumed here relates to her perception of identity as something that is psychologically marketed from above. ‘Batik and Pewter’, 95
The weapon Lapulapu wields here is a kris instead of the conventional kampilan he is usually depicted with.\textsuperscript{105} Magellan is armed with a sword and dagger which is actually one of the fighting styles taught in Doce Pares as a Filipino technique (espada y daga).\textsuperscript{106} Having no historical evidence that Magellan and Lapulapu actually faced off using whatever types of weapons, the image can be construed as a way of imagining national identity and nationalism. Regardless of any anachronism or misrepresentation, the chief teacher of the club explained that it was really intended to impress upon viewers the brave defiance of Lapulapu and his ability to stand toe to toe with an armoured conquistador despite technological handicap.\textsuperscript{107} Most of all, the image gave would-be students the impression that the art they were going to study was part of an age-old and anti-colonial tradition.\textsuperscript{108} By placing Magellan in opposition to Lapulapu in the banner, it is not just Lapulapu’s skill in FMA that is being sold but also his defeat of a technologically superior, Western colonizer. Portrayals such as this effectively resonate the idea that Lapulapu was an FMA fighter, and that in effect, FMA had defended Filipino freedom and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{104} Doce Pares banner, personal copy, 2012
  \item \textsuperscript{105} The kris is a wavy sword that is distinctively from Islamic tribes in the southern part of the Philippines.
  \item \textsuperscript{106} Derived from European renaissance fencing.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} Interview with Dionisio Cañete, August 28, 2012, Cebu City.
  \item \textsuperscript{108} That Lapulapu is the symbol of native victory over the white man might seem ironic considering nearly half of Doce Pares students in Cebu are foreigners.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
deserves a revered position in the nation. This gives an idea as to why FMA clubs vie for ownership of Lapulapu’s symbol.

Chapter Two discussed how practitioners of FMA come from various ethnic and regional backgrounds. Being so, multiple FMA clubs from multiple ethnic and regional backgrounds thus lay claim to Lapulapu. Discussing his concept of boundaries among ethnic groups, Frederik Barth argued that symbols are used functionally by ethnic groups to either emphasize or undervalue certain aspects of their own identities.\(^{109}\) Drawing from Barth, John Armstrong further argued that groups tend to do this to define themselves against other groups.\(^{110}\) Hence, Hutchinson adds, when more than one group lays claim to a certain symbol, people battle over ownership of these symbols to legitimize their claims.\(^{111}\) The criticism against Richard Gordon’s insistence on the location of the Sentinel statue, and against his claim that Lapulapu was Muslim is a clear example of this. On one hand, some did not want to displace Jose Rizal (another national symbol) by erecting a massive monument which would contest Rizal’s symbolic monopoly in a park named after him. On the other hand, others (especially Christianized Visayans) found it hard to accept Gordon’s alteration of a symbolic figure on which they had for so long laid claim to.\(^{112}\)

Again, discounting the idea of Lapulapu’s religion in both the Sentinel and the Lapulapu shrine, a close examination of the physical appearance of both statues shows that there is a similarity in the way Lapulapu is made to appear—his muscular form, long hair, weapons, and his nakedness are consistent in both statues, as well as other statues of Lapulapu throughout the country. In reconstructions of Lapulapu among FMA clubs, the general physical appearance of Lapulapu also remains consistent with earlier representations of him. However, it is in what type of weapons he is depicted with that have many variations, usually depending on the martial styles of these clubs. Being the greatest consumers of the symbol of


\(^{111}\) John Hutchinson, ‘Nations and Cultures’ in *Understanding Nationalism*, 87

\(^{112}\) There is still some animosity between Visayans and Muslims considering that the two have a long history of conflict. For an argument on Lapulapu being Muslim, and a history of the Muslim raids, see Celestino Macachor & Ned Nepangue, *Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth*. Xlibris Corporation 2007, 43-49 and 65-78
Lapulapu, it comes as no surprise that battles over claims to him are waged in FMA more than anywhere else in the nation. The second chapter discussed how FMA clubs pedantically identified themselves in opposition to other clubs. This was also done using Lapulapu’s representation as the proverbial battleground. By filling in the gaps in Lapulapu’s history and his character with their own myths and reconstructions, clubs remade Lapulapu to suit their own needs of identity definition. Again, this is possible because of how ‘malleable’ Lapulapu can be—because little historical data is known about him, FMA clubs can flexibly equip him with any weapon or clothing that suits them, or they could make him a Muslim warrior and still call him Lapulapu. Thus, FMA depictions of Lapulapu become re-imaginations of an already imagined symbol.

FMA clubs meticulously depicted Lapulapu with specific weapons that their respective clubs use in their training. Being a stick and blade-fighting art, FMA always depicts Lapulapu armed with a blade or stick rather than a bow and arrow or a spear (the latter two more accurately coincide with Pigafetta’s account of the battle). The blade-stick dichotomy reveals interesting debates among FMA clubs. For example, Visayan FMA teachers would often insist that Lapulapu’s weapon was a *kampilan* and not a *kris*. 113 Doing this suggests that Lapulapu was not, as Gordon would have it, a Muslim hero since *krises* are commonly from the Muslim tribes in the south. By designing its logo with a *kampilan*-wielding Lapulapu, a club can argue that the martial art it practices is Christian-Visayan. It would incomprehensible for, say, Cebuanos who have had a long history of conflict with the Muslim tribes in the south, to acknowledge that the ancestor of the martial art they claimed as theirs turned out to be a Muslim chieftain.

Two FMA Hall of Fame trophies awarded to the late Roland Dantes by two different FMA organizations illustrates how Lapulapu’s reconstruction is contested over in FMA:

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113 While the *kampilan* is used throughout the archipelago, the *kris* is culturally endemic to Muslim tribes. Hence, to depict Lapulapu with a *kris* is to suggest that he is an Islamic tribesman.
Both trophies were awarded by two different organizations to Roland Dantes as a lifetime achievement award. The trophy on the left is from Doce Pares’ Hall of Fame awards in 2008. The one on the right is from the national Philippine Martial Arts Hall of Fame awards in 2012. The Doce Pares trophy on the left depicts Lapulapu wielding *doble baston* (two sticks). The trophy on the right, on the other hand, portrays Lapulapu wielding a *baston* and a knife. While the general physical appearance of Lapulapu remains true to earlier depictions of him, the items which associate Lapulapu with the martial arts organizations that awarded the trophies are different. The masculine, partially naked figure of Lapulapu mirrors generic imaginings of Lapulapu in both trophies, but he is given particular sets of weapons which makes relation to the trophy slightly more exclusive. Both organizations do not deviate from general representations of Lapulapu. However, by competing over which weapons he should brandish, both representations attempt to associate particular clubs and their fighting styles with Lapulapu’s historic victory over Magellan. It thus becomes significant for FMA clubs to underpin their reconstructions since in doing so, they consequently reinforce their own sense of nationalism and their role in the nationalist programs of the state.

Provided that Lapulapu follow the generic, albeit informal stencil that took form over the long period of his mythmaking and reconstruction, the diversity of

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114 Two Hall of Fame trophies of Roland Dantes, courtesy of Chris Dantes, 2012
115 The main reason why Lapulapu is depicted as having specific weapons in the trophies (rather than the famous *kampilan* like in the two films discussed in this chapter) is because fewer people train with *kampilans* in FMA clubs.
weapons or even costumes he is depicted with becomes only secondary to the consensus of FMA practitioners on what Lapulapu’s image stands for—a rediscovery and assertion of Philippine identity grounded on pre-colonial culture. So long as he is portrayed as masculine, slightly nude, and wielding any form of traditional weapon, any FMA reconstruction of Lapulapu is easily consumable among FMA practitioners.

The variety of reconstructions of Lapulapu is best witnessed during FMA tournaments which usually include cultural presentations. One good example can be seen in tournaments organised by the International Modern Arnis Federation (IMAFP) since the early 2000s. One category in IMAFP tournaments is the *sayaw* (dance) contest wherein FMA practitioners wear costumes and display their martial skills in the form of a dance. The most common theme that contestants employ is to dress up as Lapulapu, and use weapons they are skilled at regardless of whether they believe Lapulapu to have used them or not.\(^{116}\)

The reconstruction of Lapulapu in both FMA tournaments and FMA trophies is twofold: on one level it is the perceived Filipino identity, expressed through Lapulapu, that is being reconstructed; on another level, the paraphernalia and the movements employed are an assertion of the more localised identity of the FMA club. In the first, Lapulapu is a fixed and uniform symbol—one collectively accepted

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\(^{116}\) Interestingly, women also participate in these contests and use the Lapulapu theme as well.

\(^{117}\) Two *sayaw* contestants both dressed as Lapulapu, courtesy of Ethel Mae Reyes
and familiar. In the second, Lapulapu is malleable—the ‘blank canvass’ filled in and appropriated by numerous FMA clubs to highlight their own proximity to the perceived Filipino identity. While FMA clubs have the freedom to portray Lapulapu in different ways because of his ‘malleability’, this must still be framed within the context of his modular form. In this way, the reconstruction of Lapulapu in FMA becomes a microcosm for the nation’s reconstruction of Filipino identity using FMA clubs. The nation collapses the plural identity of FMA clubs into one Filipino martial identity. The clubs, desiring to be a part of the national community, participates in the endeavour but finds ways of holding on to their localised identities by positioning themselves in the nation without compromising their own exclusivities.

Smith has argued that competing myths reveal social cleavages, but in the long term these merge into a universally accepted form thereby coalescing these cleavages. Building upon Armstrong’s analysis of how groups use symbols to identify themselves against others, Smith argued that symbols also offer cohesion to fragmented groups. For instance, the banner at the Doce Pares club, with its competing representations, illustrate how the variety of myths about Lapulapu converges into a unitary form that accommodates various reconstructions of Lapulapu in the name of national unity—much in the same way that Dan Inosanto designed the cover of his book. At some point, having subscribed to the designs of the state for national identity, these re-imaginations of Lapulapu begin to follow a generic imprint which results from an unofficial consensus among FMA clubs. This is visible in the apparent uniformity of Lapulapu’s physical appearance.

By 2010, when the Arnis Law came into being, Lapulapu’s image was already ubiquitous and largely generic in the FMA community. Foreigners who study FMA are usually given a brief history lesson by their instructors on Lapulapu based on existing myth-narratives about him. It was, by then, highly unlikely that an FMA practitioner did not and could not recognize an image of Lapulapu even in its manifold representations.

The years shortly before the promulgation of the Arnis Law saw renewed mobilization of FMA, largely spurred by the same people that manoeuvred to pass the Arnis Bill into Law. Consequently, Lapulapu became an ideal figure for the

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118 Myths and Memories of the Nation, 86-88
119 Myths and Memories of the Nation, 14-15
120 See Chapter One
proponents of the Arnis Law to get the fragmented FMA community to latch onto the project. Since the 1930s, FMA clubs found it nearly impossible to unify under a single organization with a uniform set of rules and regulations, and a single body of officers. In the years leading to the legislation of the Arnis Law, the consensus of the proponents of the Arnis Law was that it was better to keep the diversity of FMA clubs but to do so under the leadership of a government-sponsored organization—not to force them to conform to uniform standards of teaching, uniforms or tournament rules, but to keep them apart yet within reach of the national government.121

In line with the new concept of organization, FMA practitioners organized the first Filipino Martial Arts festival in 2006 in cooperation with the national government. The organizers crafted a logo for the event which eventually became the generic logo for FMA. As the most convenient beacon that different FMA clubs could identify with, Lapulapu became the central figure of the logo. Rather than creating a new image of Lapulapu, the logo designers replicated the statue of the Lapulapu shrine. Incorporating this official public monument meant that it was easy for different FMA clubs to identify with it as opposed to creating a new image no one was familiar with. The ease with which other FMA clubs were able to accept the logo showed how effectively the monument had penetrated the boundaries of these clubs’ imaginings of Lapulapu. To a certain extent, it could be said that it was easier for clubs to adopt a Lapulapu image endorsed by the government, just as much as they would be willing to join organizations sponsored by the government.

The FMA logo is a symbol comprised of three other symbols. The centre-piece is an image of Lapulapu patterned after the Lapulapu shrine in Mactan. It stands next to, almost foregrounding, a second symbol—an artistic impression of the Philippine flag. The third symbol is a bold font of ‘FMA’ with a subtext ‘Filipino Martial Arts’. The font is designed to look like rattan sticks—rattan sticks being the basic implement for studying FMA.

121 For more on this, see chapter 1.
The three symbols almost seem like they are overlapping according to significance, but they are really three symbols made to look like one. As one of the artists explains, the wave of Lapulapu’s hair connects with the wave of the Philippine flag, suggesting a connection between Lapulapu and the nation. The idea of Lapulapu’s hair and the flag waving in the air is also intended to suggest a continuity of FMA as a national legacy from the past. In its entirety, the logo connects the practice of FMA to the Philippine flag, and the Philippine pre-Hispanic past. The practitioner is thus reminded that he or she is an active participant of an age-old, nationalist tradition and should emulate Lapulapu’s qualities and actions—even if this itself is a mythical component.

The FMA logo reveals the manner in which Lapulapu’s symbol is inserted in the politics of national identity building between the national government and the FMA clubs. On one hand, the national government had to figure a strategy to get the diverse FMA community to amalgamate if it wanted the Arnis Law to succeed. On the other, while the FMA clubs were eager to display their sense of nation by committing to the Arnis Law, they inevitably sought to preserve their individual identities. To fulfil both aspirations the FMA logo assumed a rather baroque array of symbols that were easily recognizable to all FMA clubs. Because Lapulapu was ostensibly a protean icon among FMA clubs, using the Lapulapu shrine’s reconstruction of Lapulapu for the logo placated FMA clubs which would have otherwise found it uncomfortable to subscribe to another visual representation of

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122 Filipino Martial Arts Logo; Abner Anievas, ‘The Creation of Filipino Martial Art Logo’ in FMA Digest, 4(3), 2007
123 ‘The Creation of Filipino Martial Art Logo’
Lapulapu. Today, the FMA logo is recognized and used (though unofficially) by majority, if not all FMA clubs around the country. For instance, the International Federation of Modern Arnis, which is one of the largest FMA organizations in the world, uses both its own logo and the FMA logo as uniform patches. The FMA logo also appears in streamers when FMA clubs advertise seminars or tournaments, and are embossed in tournament trophies.

Conclusion

Arguably more than any other group in the Philippines, FMA practitioners passionately claim ownership over Lapulapu as a group symbol. At the same time he is a symbol for FMA, Lapulapu has become inextricably linked to broader concepts of Filipino nationalism and national identity. As this chapter has argued, Lapulapu’s victory over Magellan is one of the earliest documented native resistances against Spanish colonization. Both Lapulapu’s antiquity and victory over Magellan are historically symbolic testaments to a glorified Filipino ‘Golden Age’ and ethnie. As the wellspring of common myths of origin, Lapulapu underpins articulations of unique national identity not just from FMA but from Filipinos in general.

Like the dissertation’s argument regarding the formulation of FMA, the powerful connection with the image of Lapulapu in the Philippines is something that develops over time alongside changing concepts of nationalism and national identity. The meanings and symbols associated with Lapulapu are not fixed but are, to borrow Hutchins’ term, ‘negotiated’ over time. Since the Battle of Mactan, Lapulapu was depicted as a villain, a national hero, and today in FMA as a martial arts expert. The chapter made an argument regarding the malleability of Lapulapu’s symbol as something that could be owed to the absence of historical data on him.

Though the number of myths about Lapulapu cannot be entirely accounted for, they can be analyzed as shifting towards homogeneity. The narrative and representations of Lapulapu have gradually leant towards a more modular form best typified by how his story is told and how he appears in the statues and films discussed in the chapter. The same can be observed among FMA clubs—which they usually depict Lapulapu in ways that reflect themselves, they have always subscribed to a standardized representation which evolved from longstanding appropriations of Lapulapu. On one hand, this can be read as going along with the state-led,
consuming wave of nationhood and nationalization. On the other hand, this can also be read as an acknowledgement of other clubs’ connection with Lapulapu, and the sense of communion among FMA clubs.

Following the dissertation’s argument on reverse appropriation, FMA’s transformation of Lapulapu into an FMA fighter is meant to justify FMA clubs’ own participation in nation-building, as well their use of him as a platform for highlighting themselves above other FMA clubs. The alterable ways in which Lapulapu is portrayed in FMA—how he changes weapons, clothes, or ornaments—also shows that FMA itself is not a fixed but evolving concept.
Chapter IV
Negotiating National Identity in FMA films

In November 2007, during the gala night of a Filipino Martial Arts (FMA) memorial cup dedicated to Remy Presas, the founder of Modern Arnis, FMA teachers from various styles were engaged in conversation with each other over dinner. One of the teachers related to his colleagues how the aged FMA film star Roland Dantes had been moved to tears after witnessing the patriotic sayaw performance the teacher conceptualized and choreographed. Another teacher was fervently discussing with his juniors the feasibility of certain stunts and feats depicted in another FMA film starring Lito Lapid. The teacher was pointing out some elements in the film as authentically FMA and critiqued others as only there for show.

Rolando Pintoy and Manuel Lapid, more famously known by their screen names Roland Dantes and Lito Lapid, were prominent action film celebrities in the 1970s and 1980s who starred in films that featured FMA. Both men had trained with prominent FMA teachers, and later on in their lives became FMA icons, actively promoted FMA in the Philippines and abroad. Lapid ran for public office and eventually gained a seat in the Senate where he became a proponent of the Arnis Law of 2009 that nationalized Arnis in the Philippines. Dantes was later renowned as the unofficial international FMA emissary. The impact of both men upon the FMA community was substantial. During gatherings like FMA festivals where they were often guests of honour, their films became regular topics of conversation. Moreover, representations of FMA and Filipino identity in their films were so highly regarded by FMA practitioners that they became informally institutionalized as legitimate agents of FMA’s expression of Filipino national identity since the 1970s. Thus, the young teacher’s satisfaction over Dantes’ emotional response to his sayaw technique illustrates a widely-held perception that Dantes, as a padrino (godfather) of FMA, could legitimize his own personal understanding of Filipino national

1 I refer to fictional works (or historical fictions) and not documentaries or investigative films.
2 The sayaw category in Modern Arnis tournaments features Filipino identity through martial dancing.
3 Dantes was particularly remembered for his FMA-themed films. Lito Lapid’s films had various themes, though he was also interested in FMA—he starred in the 2002 film Lapu-Lapu, discussed in the previous chapter.
4 For a discussion of the Arnis Law (RA 9850) see chapter one.
identity.\(^5\) At the time, many practitioners similarly yearned for Roland Dantes’ approval, albeit indirectly. Dantes, the FMA film star was effectively an agent of national identity in FMA.

The previous chapter explored how FMA practitioners reconstructed and appropriated the historical figure of Lapulapu in order to draft idealized versions of national identity, and locate FMA in the politics of nation-building. Examining four FMA action films—*The Pacific Connection* (1974), *Arnis: The Sticks of Death* (1986), *Kamagong* (1986), and the more recent American-made *One Percent Full* (2007)—this chapter demonstrates that the same strategy of constructing national identity is utilized in FMA films.\(^6\) Although FMA is occasionally featured in action sequences on film and television, few films have been devoted solely to highlighting and promoting FMA. It is with this consideration that the four films were selected.

This chapter sets out to examine two things: First, by analyzing particular details in the films such as the narrative, setting, costumes, and periodization, it examines the general contours FMA’s idealizations of national identity and strategies for articulating these in film. Related to this is examining how these details shift over time and what these shifts reveal about FMA’s sense of national identity. Such examination reveals the changing concepts of national identity in FMA. Second, the chapter looks at how the films were used or influenced the way FMA practitioners negotiated on the subject of national identity among themselves. Related to this is examining the role of the film actor (particularly Roland Dantes) as a neutral party—hence an effective *padrino*—in these negotiations.

National identity and nationalism are commonly situated in martial arts narrative. Siu Leung Li’s analysis of Hong Kong martial arts film genre which pervaded global cinemas in the 1970s showed that martial arts films follow common patterns of storytelling which is steeped in nationalism.\(^7\) Likewise, D.S. Farrer and John Whalen-Bridge have argued that the martial arts fantasy follows common metanarratives of ‘self-regeneration’—a hero’s initial defeat and eventual triumph—

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\(^5\) For a discussion of the *padrino* in Philippine social intercourse, see chapter one.

\(^6\) The films were made during a period spanning four decades, from when the Marcos administration in the Philippines first appropriated FMA in nation-building (1970s) until more recently (2007) shortly before Arnis became the Philippine national martial art and sport; *The Pacific Connection*, dir. Luis Nepomuceno, Luis Nepomuceno Productions, 1974; *Arnis: The Sticks of Death*, dir. Ave C. Caparas, M-Kor Productions, 1986; *Kamagong*, dir. Carlo J. Caparas, Viva Films, 1986; *One Percent Full*, dir. Burton Richardson, Fat Free Entertainment, 2007

\(^7\) Siu Leung Li, ‘Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity’ in *Cultural Studies*, 15(3-4), 2001, 516
which are allegorical of national anxieties. To understand the appeal and endurance of nationalist narratives in martial arts films, it is necessary to historically situate the films and contextualize them in the larger social circumstance—a process Rey Chow terms ‘cultural translation’. 

Li argued that Hong Kong martial arts films existed as a cultural intervention for problematizing modernity and national identity—both of which were predominant anxieties in the social consciousness of Hong Kong as a postcolonial territory that was being integrated into nationalist China. Because Hong Kong’s coming to terms with modernity and Chinese nationalism were being articulated in the imaginary of Kung Fu films, the themes and narratives of such films became sources for reading how Hong Kong negotiated nationalism and modernity.

Similar approaches were adopted by Paul Bowman, M.T. Kato, and Vijay Prashad in their analyses of Bruce Lee’s films. By contextualizing Bruce Lee’s films within prevailing neo-colonial conditions in Asia, the subjugation of non-white culture in the US, and Bruce Lee’s penetration into the Hollywood-dominated film industry, the symbolic narratives in his films (for example introduced through martial arts choreography) were read as going beyond ‘aestheticized masculine violence’ because ‘they worked to produce politicized identifications and modes of subjectivation that supplemented many popular-cultural-political movements…’. As Bowman explains, ‘Bruce Lee’s films appealed into ongoing struggles in ways that appealed to certain constituencies at a particular historical political moment…’.

In the same way, the emergence of FMA films was fixed within specific historical and ideological contexts. On one hand, they reflected and informed viewers of broader nationalist doctrines in the Philippines. On the other hand, they belonged to a resurging Philippine cinema which leaned towards addressing subjects of nationalism and national identity. Revealing traces of postcolonial anxieties, FMA

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11 ‘The Fantasy Corpus of Martial Arts…’, 64
12 ‘The Fantasy Corpus of Martial Arts…’, 67
films were themselves Philippine responses to the popularity of Bruce Lee films. By contextualizing FMA films along the ideological contours of nationalism, they become legible for examination as cultural imaginaries.

Andrew Higson argued that national cinema can be identified and analyzed in terms of its patterns of storytelling—a coherent proclamation of ‘a unique and a stable set of meanings’—and its mobilization as a form of ‘cultural (and economic) resistance’ against the dominance of Western cinema (particularly Hollywood). National cinemas adopt certain features which distinguish it from other national cinemas. Analyzing ‘Chineseness’ in the fields of literature and cultural studies, Rey Chow argued that the non-Western world has adopted a strategy of ‘self-orientalizing’—borrowing Edward Said’s term—or ‘self-othering’ where identification of national identity is reactive rather than active. It is in this regard that the chapter examines strategies of articulating national identity in FMA films where national identity and nationalism are defined by engagement with a postcolonial other using symbols and narratives. Such strategies of juxtaposition have effectively shaped an understanding of national identity and nationalism in FMA. FMA films, like the figure of Lapu-Lapu, became platforms for the articulation of FMA-based national identity. These films express a particular vision of the Filipino nation through the development of their main characters. The male protagonists were constructed as archetypal FMA fighters which possessed idealized characteristics of national identity and perceived nationalistic attitudes. In the process, the nation is also reified. The real-life actors who embodied these idealizations became tools for the negotiation of FMA-based national identity among FMA practitioners.

In their study of Indian cinema, Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel presented how changing details—for example the story’s setting or the costumes—in Bollywood films across time reveal shifts in people’s outlooks towards society like standards of beauty or perceptions of the countryside. Similar observations can be made from FMA films, particularly about changing concepts of FMA’s origin, location, stylistic

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composition, and sense of identity. Taking from this, the chapter argues that the films also reveal how homogenized definitions change over time. The subtle changes in how this identity is depicted in the four films—through narrative, setting, or portrayal—reveals changes in concepts on FMA techniques and cultural aspects across four decades. As with the argument made in the previous chapter about the plurality of Lapulapu representations, this construction of national identity using FMA is stimulated by a desire of FMA practitioners to reflect and elevate themselves in the nation. By ascribing the films’ male protagonists with knowledge in FMA, filmmakers and FMA practitioners were really building up an image of themselves as ideal Filipinos.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section of the chapter offers a historical context to the films (especially with regard to the first three) in Philippine cinema and society and sets the backdrop upon which FMA films emerge.

The second section examines the contours of Filipino national identity and nationalism, as depicted in the films. Under three subsections, it argues three strategies employed in formulating these contours. Subsection one examines how the Filipino is portrayed next to the foreigner, and how this engagement allows for the definition of Filipino national identity. Subsection two examines representations of the traditional rural dweller and his modernized urban counterpart. Through the rural dweller, FMA films attempted to construct a more authentic image of Filipino national identity. Subsection three examines how FMA films idealized Filipino masculinity as a metaphor for nationalism by engaging it with the ‘helpless female’.

The third section of the chapter analyzes the articulations of national identity made in the second section, and what they tell us about how FMA films engage the subject of nation and national identity. It makes three arguments: First, that FMA expressed how FMA practitioners understood themselves; second, that FMA films informed FMA practitioners of idealizations of nationalism; lastly, that changes within FMA—for example how it is taught or how it has gone global—are reflected in changes in the films’ themes, representations and narratives. As such, the sense of identity also goes under a transformation.

The chapter’s last section argues that FMA films played a role in the negotiations between clubs over national identity, mediated by the film actor. The actor assumes a neutral position in relation to the clubs, and is thus able to get them to discuss and formulate a homogenous FMA-based national identity. FMA films
also provided clubs with cultural material they could use in constructing national identity.

The Historical Context of the Emergence of FMA Films

There are four key points to consider when contextualizing FMA films in the Philippines. These act as the backdrop for FMA films, and shaped the conditions from which FMA films emerged. The first is the prolificacy and reach of consumption of Philippine productions in the 1970s. Secondly, three of the four films were made during the politically turbulent martial law era under Ferdinand Marcos. Third, the emergence of FMA films was mainly a reactive Filipino response to the popularity of Japanese and Chinese martial arts films in the Philippines, especially of Bruce Lee Kung Fu films in the early 1970s. Lastly, the emergence of FMA films came at a time when FMA was being nationalized by the government.

Philippine film scholars have dubbed the 1950s and 1970s as the first and second golden ages of Philippine cinema, respectively.\(^\text{16}\) Success in the 1950s was mostly associated with technological achievements in filming and an unprecedented increase in production since the start of the century. There was a rise in the number of film companies in the Philippines, and several films produced during the decade received international awards.\(^\text{17}\) Competition with the influx of Hollywood films in the 1960s gradually caused the decline of the movie industry in the Philippines. Particularly throughout this decade, locally made soft pornographic films flooded the industry as these seemed to be the only ones that could sell. Despite this decline, the momentum of the film industry in the 1950s endured into the 1970s such that the Philippines was still capable of marketing Filipino films to international audiences. A testament to this is that both of Dantes’ films *Pacific Connection* and *The Sticks of Death* was done in English.\(^\text{18}\) Because Philippine films in the 1970s were marketed


\(^{18}\) The films were intended for release in the United States.
abroad, it allowed FMA films to directly address its international viewers. The thematic approach of these films (articulation of Filipino national identity) thus becomes analytically important considering that they aimed to represent Filipino culture and identity to non-Filipino audiences.

After its slide in the 1960s, the film industry was revived in the 1970s—the second golden age of Philippine cinema. In contrast to the fifties, the seventies is recognized as a period of the resurgence of the Filipino film industry and is mostly associated with social criticism in film and the articulation of national identity through social criticism. In 1972, then-president Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law to counteract a supposed communist threat in the country. This instigated widespread uneasiness and disapproval among the populace—a sentiment also expressed in film.\(^\text{19}\) A number of films made in the 1970s (and even in the early part of the 1980s before Marcos was ousted in 1986), were predominantly allegorical critiques of Philippine society under the Marcos regime.\(^\text{20}\) As Patrick Campos argued, such films reflected the traditional nationalist doctrine in the Philippines which was ‘anti-imperial, anti-fascist, anti-commercial, and pro-Filipino.’\(^\text{21}\) Campos argues this era of cinematic nationalism was a mythic golden age in the sense that films during this period were able to acquire a mythic function which could ‘articulate national identity, maintain national pride and unity, and mobilize producers and consumers of serious films around a common history and hope. The canonical films of the Golden Age are regarded not as products generated by an economic sector but as cultural imaginaries of the nation.’\(^\text{22}\) These cultural imaginings of the nation are clearly visible in all four of the films examined in the chapter.

The plots of the FMA films made during the martial law era offered an alternative version of articulating national identity that was different from their contemporaries’, which were mainly critical of Philippine society and the ruling government. As the second chapter argued, since the Marcos administration (and subsequent administrations) financed and supported FMA activities, FMA’s relationship with state authority has always been cooperative—this can be seen in how the FMA films analyzed in this chapter are detached from the social critiquing

\(^{19}\) ‘Looming Over the Nation, Uneasy with the Folks…’, 37
\(^{20}\) They had to be subtly done since the films had to pass through a board of censors.
\(^{21}\) ‘Looming Over the Nation, Uneasy with the Folks…’, 38
\(^{22}\) ‘Looming Over the Nation, Uneasy with the Folks…’, 45
of its contemporaries. Moreover, the themes of Marcos era films like *Pacific Connection* and *The Sticks of Death* fell in line with the nationalist ideology of Marcos’ New Society program.\textsuperscript{23} As Chapter Two argued, FMA is regarded by its practitioners as a medium for challenging oppression (particularly colonial). Most famously this is represented in Lapulapu’s battle with Magellan or in depictions of *bolo*-wielding revolutionaries charging rifle-armed Spanish conscripts during the Philippine Revolution against Spain.\textsuperscript{24} It is thus interesting to note that FMA films lacked the same critical and oppositional undertone towards the dictatorial government that other films of its day possessed. Neither did they place the regime on a pedestal. Instead, as the chapter later shows, FMA films assumed a more neutral stance of glorifying the nation where by doing so, they appeal to both the incumbent administration and the critical voices in the country.

The third point of consideration is that FMA films were a reaction to the influx and popularity of other martial arts in Philippine popular culture. Martial arts-themed action films were already popular since the 1960s. Japanese martial arts-themed films, like samurai films, emerged vibrantly in global cinema after the Second World War. Philippine film companies capitalized on this popularity and produced local action films which also featured Japanese martial arts (particularly judo, jiujitsu, and karate). Actor Roberto Gonzalez was a practitioner of karate who performed in a number of karate-themed action films in the 1960s and 1970s. For this, he was dubbed the ‘Karate King’ of Philippine films. Another actor, Ramon Zamora, became recognized as the Philippine version of Bruce Lee in the early 1970s. By far, the greatest catalyst for the emergence of FMA films was the popularity of Bruce Lee’s Kung Fu films made between 1971 and 1973. For instance, it was a year after his death that *Pacific Connection* was released internationally, and *Enter Garote* was released in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{25} That *Enter Garote* phonetically mimics Bruce Lee’s *Enter the Dragon* indicates an attempt to

\textsuperscript{23} See Chapter Two on ‘New Society’.
\textsuperscript{24} The *bolo* is a farming implement akin to a machete.
\textsuperscript{25} Garote (or Garotte) is an alternative term for the training stick in some areas in the Visayas; The film features at least three minutes and forty seconds of cameo appearances from famous FMA clubs in the Philippines during the time of its filming. They are shown training, and doing martial arts choreography. I was not able to secure a copy of *Enter Garote*, and have decided not to include it in my analysis of FMA films; *Enter Garote* dirs. Florentino Garcia and Solano Gaudite, 1974; For a copy of this clip, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-fvUH9jt4&mode=related&search= (May 2, 2014)
provide a local counterpart to the Bruce Lee film. As a method of showing the superiority of FMA over other martial arts, the narratives of the films (especially the ones starring Roland Dantes) were often intended to highlight and favourably depict FMA in opposition to other martial arts. This narrative strategy follows the nationalistic, anti-colonial narratives commonly found in Bruce Lee films. Hence, as the subsequent section shows, the Filipino martial artist was often depicted to be at odds with a foreign martial artist much like in Bruce Lee films.

The final, and arguably most significant point to consider about FMA films, is that they surfaced during the time when FMA was gaining popularity both locally and abroad, especially in the United States. Chapter Two discussed how FMA became articulated as representative of Filipino national identity both in the Philippines and abroad between the sixties and eighties, but especially in the seventies. This can be seen in how popular culture and government initiatives intersect during this period—for instance, in 1975, a year after the release of Pacific Connection, the Marcos administration established the National Arnis Association of the Philippines (NARAPHIL). Hence, the films were located at a period in Philippine history when FMA was being appropriated by the national government in building national identity, and when FMA clubs and practitioners were negotiating between and among themselves the definitions of national identity and their own legitimation as beacons of national identity. Because of this, and similar to what the previous chapter argued, FMA films were effectively products of and contributors to an ongoing process of national identity construction. This ongoing discourse can be seen in the subtle changes to the narratives, themes, plots and other representations of national identity and nationalism in FMA films.

**Filmic Constructions of the Arnisador Archetype as Representative of National Identity**

Strategies of juxtaposition in FMA films appear in three ways: defining the national self against the foreign other; defining the rural Filipino against the urban

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26 *Enter the Dragon*, dir. Robert Clouse, Concord Productions, 1973  
27 For a more detailed discussion on the history behind this, please see chapter two.  
28 For a detailed discussion on NARAPHIL, see Chapter Two.  
29 The term Arnisador means someone who practices Arnis. I purposely use the term because the four films examined here use Arnis as a general term for FMA.
Filipino; and defining the masculine self with feminine symbols of the nation. Through them, FMA-based idealizations of Filipino national identity are expressed.

To begin, it is worth briefly discussing the themes of the four films. *Pacific Connection* is a story of revenge set against the backdrop of the Spanish colonial era. Here, the protagonist employs his knowledge of Arnis to defeat the Spaniards responsible for the death of his parents. *The Sticks of Death*, is once more a story of revenge. Here, the protagonist is a Philippine Constabulary officer who follows a trail of crime and violence which eventually leads him to an international crime syndicate and eventually his father’s murderer. *Kamagong* tells the story of two Arnis fighters who take different paths in life—one choosing to go to the city and the other choosing to remain in the countryside. Their paths eventually intersect in the hallowed Arnis duel. Finally, *One Percent Full* tells the story of an American whose decadent lifestyle is turned around when he is forced to live in the slums of Manila.

I. **Engaging the Filipino with the Foreign Other**

Chow has argued that Western culture has become so dominant in today’s world that non-Western societies tend to define themselves not in terms of what they are, but what they are not (how they are different from the West). This reactive self-definition can be seen in FMA films, and lies on top of the ambivalent perceptions Filipinos have towards the foreign as discussed in the introductory chapter. In all four films, the foreign becomes something both cherished and detested. The Filipino is strategically positioned in relation to this ambivalence. Through this, the Filipino self is identified against the foreign other and is subconsciously given a definition, role and place among other national identities.

The depiction of the foreign protagonists and antagonists have been designed to situate the Filipino in their midst. In *Pacific Connection*, the main character, Ben, is the sole dominant Filipino character. His being *mestizo* (mixed ancestry), his subservience to the tax collectors, and studentship under a Caucasian hermit are symbolic of the social dynamics during Spanish rule. His experience becomes the prism upon which the Filipino engages with the foreign.

The first way the foreign is depicted is contemptibly—a force desiring the downfall of the nation, and an individual that should not be emulated. For instance,

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30 Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies..., 2-7
there are the film’s villains: the local Spanish governor, his two sons Miguel and Antonio, and the Japanese samurai in the employ of the governor named Mori. The Spanish governor and his sons are depicted as oppressive in black-and-white fashion, seemingly devoid of any humanity or morality. The governor and his sons are symbolic of Spanish colonial authority—they dictate, coerce, and resemble Filipino fears of Spanish authority during the colonial period.

At the outset of the film, Miguel and Antonio are shown on horseback, leading a contingent of guardia civil on a raid of a town.\(^{31}\) This opening scene serves as a powerful metaphor of violence for the colonial experience of the Philippines under Spain. The acts are perpetrated by the embodiment of colonial authority and their native cohorts. The guardia civil rape, loot and pillage the town while Miguel and Antonio urge them on. The participation of the guardia civil also suggests that the atrocities were only possible because of Filipino complicity in these acts.

The protagonist, Ben, lives outside of the town with his parents Allan (a Spaniard) and Maria (a Filipina). Their lives are overturned when Miguel and Antonio come to collect taxes from them. The brothers harass the family for the money. As the money is handed to them, Antonio makes an attempt to fondle Maria’s breasts, for which he is slapped by Maria. Enraged, Antonio tears Maria’s clothes. When Ben and Allan see this, they lash out and fight off the brothers and their guards using Arnis sticks. The brothers return to the family’s house in the evening with their father, the governor, and a large retinue of guardia civil. Ben is subdued and restrained, while the governor enters to chastise the family. Already wounded from the earlier engagement and unable to use his trusty Arnis sticks, Allan is easily defeated and killed. The governor proceeds to rape Maria while Ben is helplessly made to watch. Ben is then sent off to forced labour aboard a ship.

In contrast to the governor and his sons, the second way the foreign is depicted is in a positive, endearing light. Ben’s father, Allan, is very mild mannered and charming, but fierce at Arnis of which he is an adept. Allan teaches Ben Arnis, and it is shown at the start of the film that Ben is quickly becoming more skilled than Allan. One of the film’s first scenes is that of Allan giving Ben one half of a medallion, telling him to seek out an old man who possessed the other half. This old man, Allan explained, is an Arnis master who could further teach Ben the mysteries

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\(^{31}\) The guardia civil (civil guards) were local conscripts who served both police and military functions in colonial society.
of Arnis. As the loving father who graciously imparts knowledge, Allan becomes representative of all that was good about the colonial experience. Through Allan, the Spaniard is depicted as a guiding figure for Ben, who symbolizes the Filipino.

A second figure depicted in a similar light is the old man, whom Ben eventually meets later in the film. The old man turns out to be a blind Caucasian hermit. Throughout the film, he is not given a name, and is simply referred to as ‘the old man’. He is also made out to be some sort of magical individual who could only die if he has found a rightful heir to his knowledge in Arnis. It is not made clear, but the garb that he wears suggests that he is some kind of priest or monk. On two separate occasions, the old man saves Ben’s life—first when he nurses Ben back to health after surviving a shipwreck, and second when he fools Ben’s enemies into thinking that Ben was already dead. When the old man discovers the medallion in Ben’s possession, he produces the second half of it and agrees to teach Ben his knowledge in Arnis. As mentor and saviour, he becomes the new father figure to Ben.

Like Allan, what is most striking about the old man is his role as guardian of Arnis secrets. Although it is unclear where Allan and the old man acquire their own knowledge in Arnis from, the film presents them as the direct sources of Ben’s knowledge in Arnis. As such, the film hints that Filipinos learned Arnis from Spaniards. Regardless of the origins of his knowledge, Ben and his journey of overcoming challenges using Arnis are the highlights of the film. The Filipino, embodied by Ben, is depicted as both a son and a disciple—disciplined, respectful, subservient and willing. On the other hand, the foreign becomes the loving father and skilled teacher who guides Ben to mastery, letting go only when the pupil is worthy and ready. This is represented in how the old man, fulfilling the legend

32 Although not definitely established, the image of the old man on screen easily resembles that of a Spanish friar. Historically, Spanish friars were popularly painted as villains. For instance, the novels of Philippine national hero Jose Rizal, Noli Me Tangere (1886) and El Filibusterismo (1891), credited with setting off the Philippine Revolution against Spain (1896-1898), both portray the Spanish clergy as all that is to be blamed about the ills of Philippine society. In any case, it is possible that the old man was meant to be some kind of religious clergy since the story later follows a twist similar to Alexandre Dumas’ The Count of Monte Cristo (1844). As such, the old man may have been intended to resemble the character of the mad priest who aids Edmond Dantes in his path of vengeance, much like Ben’s revenge in The Pacific Connection; the parallelism between Ben and Edmond Dantes was pointed out in a movie review of The Pacific Connection. See http://www.horrorview.com/hall-of-shame/stickfighter-aka-the-pacific-connection [web] (May 14, 2014)

33 A similar theory is forwarded by FMA authors Celestino Macachor and Ned Napangue, and is a touchy subject for FMA practitioners who cling to nationalist linear history; See chapter one for a discussion on this, also see Celestino Macachor & Ned Nepangue, Cebuano Eskrima: Beyond the Myth. Xlibris Corporation 2007
surrounding his existence, dies only when Ben completes his training. Moreover, before Ben is ready to face his own challenges, it is the foreign—embodied by Allan and the old man—that protects Ben from harm. The scene where the old man pieces together his half of the medallion with Ben’s other half is metaphoric of how the Filipino is only made whole if he receives instruction from the foreign. The two Spaniards’ treatment of Ben as both charge and pupil is also reminiscent of the romantically idealized Spanish colonial rule—acknowledging a duty to guide and protect, and eventually surrendering control to the competent Filipino.

Mori, the Japanese samurai in the service of the governor, lies between the two depictions of the foreign. Because he is bound to serve the governor, he is more of a ‘villain by circumstance’. Subscribing to popular idealizations of the Japanese samurai, Mori is unquestioningly obedient and has an unshakeable sense of honour. When he first arrives at the governor’s house, Mori presents the governor with gifts including a katana. Antonio, self-assertively questions whether the katana is faster than a European sword. Mori obliges him with sparring. Mori effortlessly dodges Antonio, who keeps stumbling about whenever he tries to attack. When it is evident that he has lost, Antonio feigns a congratulatory handshake. As Mori’s turns around, Antonio attempts to attack Mori from behind but is thrown back with an Aikido move. Antonio yields but declares that Mori has failed to scratch him even once. Mori then removes some thread in Antonio’s shirt and reveals several precise cuts which Mori made during their match. Antonio’s shirt falls off, and his pride is injured.

While Antonio and Mori are foreign in relation to the Filipino, they are also foreign in relation to each other. This can be seen in the striking difference in the way they are portrayed. Antonio is ill-disciplined, arrogant, and unskilled whereas Mori is calm, composed, and sure-footed. Though he characteristically remains a villain in the film, Mori’s personality is developed away from the governor and his sons. Mori faces off with Ben twice. In the first instance, he beats Ben. A woman who had fallen in love with Ben on the island throws herself over him before Mori can deliver the killing blow. Refusing to strike down the woman, Mori sheathes his sword. The film’s climax sees a second time Mori and Ben face off. With the aid of a fabled Arnis weapon, Ben breaks Mori’s samurai sword. Mori capitulates, and urges

34 Samurai and Japanese martial art films commonly depict the martial artist as disciplined and honourable, and in keeping with bushido tradition.
Ben to kill him for the shame of his broken sword. Ben refuses. When the governor makes an attempt to attack Ben from behind, Ben throws another sword at him. Mori, still bound by his duty to protect the governor, shields the governor with his body and is skewered. In the process, Mori fulfils his duty to the governor and keep his honour intact in the face of defeat.

Plate No. 14

Despite being a villain in the story, Mori’s character has more in common with Ben’s than with the governor and his sons. In this way, Mori is not depicted as being categorically foreign (or evil). Both fighters’ comprehension of the language of martial arts becomes a metaphor for the cultural platform they share as Asians. The fact that Ben and Mori are both subjects of the governor parallels the way the West has economically taken advantage of Filipinos and Japanese alike. This connection is exclusive to Ben and Mori alone. As the almost comical encounter between Mori and Antonio showed, the language of martial arts—the culture and meanings behind its use—was something the governor and his sons could never understand. Here, the film’s juxtaposition of the Filipino and the foreign reveals the process of negotiating lines of identification as an acknowledgement not just of difference but also of similarity with the foreign. Through martial arts, Ben is able to make sense of Mori’s being foreign in relation to himself and to the Spaniards. The foreign too, gauges the Filipino in the same manner. As a samurai, Mori understands the language of martial arts. It is the same language that Ben uses to express his vengeance over the death of his parents. Hence, when the two men duel, there is an

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35 Disarmed, Mori calmly appeals to Ben to end his life; Screengrab, *The Pacific Connection*
air of harmony between them as their weapons clash. In the two occasions Mori and Ben duel, they bow to each other, and there are subtle moments when they hold each other’s fierce gaze as if to indicate that they understand one another through the language of honourable combat. In contrast, the governor and his sons are depicted as being oblivious to this. For example, during their first clash, Ben and Mori cautiously nitpick at each other. Both fighters respectfully acknowledge the other’s capacity and refuse to rush in. This is deeply in contrast with how Antonio cockily engaged Mori and was humiliated because of it. During the first encounter of Mori and Ben, the governor assumes that Mori is merely toying with Ben and scolds him. The governor sees an execution in what is, for Ben and Mori, an honourable exchange of blows. In this respect, martial arts becomes a platform for Ben and Mori to understand themselves in relation to each other and to the Spaniards. On this platform, both men understand each other and how things operate—how it is wrong to strike down a woman, and how one’s life is forfeit when his weapon is broken. Most importantly, through the language of martial arts, they understand how alien the Europeans are to them.

Historically, there have been no records of any Japanese samurai serving a Spanish governor. However, inserting Mori in the storyline allowed filmmakers to engage the Filipino martial artist with the foreign martial artist on two levels: First, on racial and colonial terms; and second, in cultural terms—showing the superiority of the Arnisador over the Japanese samurai who personifies what is idealized as the most flawless martial artist. Moreover, the insertion of Mori allowed FMA to challenge the dominance of Japanese martial arts in both film and popular practice since the sixties. The clash between Ben and Mori is not an isolated instance of cultural juxtaposition. It followed similar trends in martial arts films of that era which have also tried to challenge the dominance of Japanese martial arts.

Liu and Kato have respectively shown how the Japanese are regarded as the ‘eastern-foreign other’ in Chinese martial arts films mainly due to Japan’s colonial (and neo-colonial) history in Asia—as such, the Japanese martial artist becomes a

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36 Such trends, most common in martial arts films made in the 1960s and 1970s, continued to be used in later years. For instance, Ronny Yu’s 2006 film Fearless starring Jet Li also engage Chinese Wushu with foreign martial arts from around the world. Fearless, dir. Ronny Yu, Beijing Film Studio, 2006
Kato and Prashad likewise argued that Bruce Lee’s films were expressions of Chinese anti-colonial, anti-imperial sentiments towards the political-economic and cultural dominance of America and Japan in the 1970s. Analyzing the fight choreography of *Way of the Dragon* (1972), Kato argues how the clash between a Chinese martial artist (Bruce Lee) and an American Karate champion (Chuck Norris) tells a ‘Kinetic Narrative of Decolonization’. Released two years after *Way of the Dragon*, *Pacific Connection* followed a similar style of narrating anti-colonialism. The fictitious portrayal of a clash between Arnis and Kenjutsu can be read as a cultural imagining of triumph over a superior, historical colonial other.

In Ben’s initial, disastrous encounter with Mori, we can find Chatterjee’s concept of backwardness as discussed in the introductory chapter. Ben, who is armed with wooden weapons, is easily beaten by Mori and his Japanese katana. Because it uses wooden sticks, Arnis is handicapped next to the katana. This way, Arnis is represented as a form of backwardness in comparison to Kenjutsu. Ben engages Mori using the only martial language known to him, and is defeated primarily due to a technological handicap. After his defeat, Ben undergoes rigorous training under the guidance of the old man. He is also sent to look for a mythical ‘iron reed’—a type of wood which could withstand steel. With this new weapon and better training, he is able to overcome Mori later on. The new weapon and the rigorous training resemble postcolonial desires for the cultural re-equipment of the nation in order to ‘catch up’ with the colonizer. Arnis becomes a symbol for postcolonial self-regeneration.

The ambivalence towards the foreign is also manifested in the other FMA films although from a slightly different perspective compared to the more forthright engagement between Filipino and foreigner like in *Pacific Connection*. In *One Percent Full* the detestable foreigner, embodied by an arrogant and self-indulgent American playboy, becomes the epitome of ‘everything that Filipinos are not or

37 ‘Burning Asia: Bruce Lee’s Kinetic Narrative of Decolonization’, 68; ‘Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity’, 517
38 ‘Bruce Lee and the Anti-imperialism of Kung Fu…’; ‘Bruce Lee’s Kinetic Narrative of Decolonization’, 62-99
40 Partha Chatterjee *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 (1986), 2
should not strive to be’. Here, the pervasive theme is the contrasting and comparing of two representations of national identities (American and Filipino), and how one rubs off into another. Filipino identity is filtered through the eyes of Frank and its articulation is designed to act as a moral lesson for Frank as well as the viewers. Frank’s initial lifestyle is representative of the stereotype of American decadence. He has a massive house, drives a fast car, profligately spends his money, has romantic liaisons with several women, and is utterly disrespectful of others. In complete contrast to Frank’s portrait is Boy, who might be taken as the idealized Filipino. Boy is hardworking, respectful, loyal and reserved. Above all, Boy is highlighted as someone who patiently endures his financial situation, and strives to take care of people around him especially his sister Girly who symbolizes the Filipina.

When a business trip to Manila goes awry, Frank is forced to find refuge with Boy—a hotel taxi driver—who lives in the slums of Manila. Frank gradually assumes the Filipino mindset and consequently becomes ‘Filipino’ himself. In becoming Filipino, the foreign turns into someone admirable. By the end of the film, Frank is shown wearing a barong Tagalog, completing his assimilation into the Philippines. This transformation is built upon the backdrop of poverty in the Philippines, and appreciating how (as the most poignant scene of the film shows) a glass is ‘one percent full’ rather than ‘ninety-nine percent empty’. Using a representation of American identity, One Percent Full articulates an idealized form of Filipino national identity in order to inform and reconfigure that American identity into something admirable.

The theme of backwardness again surfaces in the film. To borrow Laura Mulvey’s concept, One Percent Full is told from an American’s gaze. The film makes no attempt to sugar-coat the harsh realities of life in the Philippines. The condition of Manila becomes a metaphor for the Philippines itself. Frank’s side comments about Manila present to audiences what is wrong with Filipino society—traffic congestion, the absence of order, the unappealing look of the Philippine capital. In one scene, after Frank deliberately humiliates a Filipino fighter, the man

41 The Barong Tagalog is a suit for men, woven from pineapple fibre. It is regarded as the national costume of the Philippines.
42 Mulvey’s argues that women were objectified on film because the camera is shot from the perspective of heterosexual men. This implies that the narrative is biased towards the cameraholder—in this case, the foreigner; Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ in Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings (eds.) Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 833-844
tries to knife him. Boy disarms the man and warns Frank that ‘things are different here in the Philippines’—referring to the way people hold grudges and the dirty fighting. Being completely alien to Philippine social norms, Frank altogether dismisses Boy’s statement. While Frank is unable to implant himself in this backwardness, he remains a foreign other. Ultimately, it is only when the lines that divided the foreign from the Filipino are erased, that Frank begins resolving his predicaments in the story—it is when he becomes more like Mori (and less like the Spanish governor) that he understands how to cope with the chaos and danger in Manila. Filipino identity—akin to the manner in which Arnis is represented as being handicapped in comparison to other martial arts—is painted as disadvantaged and disorganized. The film portrays that to be Filipino is to find happiness and order amidst this poverty and chaos—to acknowledge the state of being backward, yet being able to turn this into an advantage by capitalizing on the ‘one percent full’ glass.

Arnis becomes a crucial element in helping Frank understand Filipino identity. Early on, Frank is introduced as a skilled martial artist. But his style and approach to combat are different from that of Boy’s. Shortly before he is almost stabbed, Frank behaves similar to the cocky Antonio who engages Mori without any consideration for the samurai’s own skills. Frank’s martial skills become useless in the Philippines where attackers come at you from behind with knives. His failure to understand martial arts from the perspective of Arnis symbolizes his failure to understand Filipino identity. The film subtly hints how Arnis represents Filipino identity by making Frank’s ability to adjust to life in the slums simultaneous with his increasing competence in Arnis. When a group of goons (in the employ of the film’s villain) assault Frank and Boy with melee weapons, the two use Arnis to defend themselves. How Arnis is used to offset the violence in the Manila slum, becomes a metaphor for coping with the stresses of living in the Philippines. Filipino identity is portrayed as the ability to cope with these stresses. As such, Arnis becomes a tool for resilience. Moreover, Boy’s instruction of Arnis to empower Frank (already a skilled martial artist), and the fact that the goons were respective experts in other martial arts, again exhibits the strategy in FMA films to demonstrate FMA’s superiority over other martial art forms. Consequently, this also exhibits Filipino superiority over the foreign. Like Ben overcoming Mori with Arnis, Frank and Boy use Arnis to defeat a collection of non-Arnis practitioners who are by no coincidence non-Filipinos.
The ways in which the foreign is represented and how the Filipino is positioned in relation to the foreign have become one strategy in FMA films to articulate what they understand as Filipino identity. In all four films, the foreign is never absent from the narrative. In the two films of Roland Dantes (Pacific Connection and The Sticks of Death), the foreigner is both protagonist and antagonist. In One Percent Full, the foreign becomes a figurative sculpture that is moulded into the Filipino form. The capacity of the foreign to be able to either fortify or weaken the Filipino, as the protagonists and villains in FMA films did, compels the Filipino to assume an ambivalent stance towards the foreign. The foreign is the source of both salvation and suffering, of guidance and strife. What remains constant in FMA films is that the Filipino always emerges triumphant. Using Arnis, the Filipino prevails in the martial struggle which foregrounds a larger struggle symbolic of national ones.

II. Filmic Representations of Continuing Tradition and Rural Identity as authentications of Filipino Identity

An assertion of authenticity is crucial to validating the existence of a nation as unique from other nations and endowed with characteristics of its own. Anthony Smith attributed authenticity with being the key concept in national identity. Taking cue from Smith, Eric Kaufmann and Oliver Zimmer have argued that an assertion of the nation’s authenticity ‘lends meaning and legitimation to the political order that is commonly referred to as the “state”’. This offers an explanation as to why, especially among postcolonial nations, it is important to create an aura of a genuine national uniqueness which could justify the existence of the nation, and of the political authority which manages its cohesion.

Two related strategies for authenticating representations of national identity which surface as recurring themes in FMA films are: making references to traditions which are often invented but passed off as long-established; and the portrayal of the countryside as the genuine and original source of FMA identity. This lies in contrast to the strategy of engaging the Filipino with the foreign in that it engages the Filipino

44 It is by no means to say that the state is solely responsible for the assertion of an authentic national identity. Nations, they argue, rest upon a synthesis of cultural and political—of nation and state. Eric Kaufmann and Oliver Zimmer, ‘In Search of the Authentic Nation: Landscape and National Identity in Canada and Switzerland’ in Nations and Nationalism, 4(4), 1998, 485
with himself—if it is well-established that the Filipino’s identity is separate from the foreigner, who among Filipinos are more Filipino than others? By highlighting a sense of continuity and origin in their narratives, FMA films ascribe a concept of time and space to the articulation of national identity which seeks to inform what and where Filipino identity is within the Philippines. Through these strategies of authentication, FMA films contributed to the discourse of FMA and national identity which is as yet ongoing.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have argued that traditions are commonly borrowed (or forged from earlier practices) in response to more novel necessities such as nationalism. These traditions, however, are commonly not acknowledged as borrowed or recent inventions but rather as enduring cultural practices. Using their concept of ‘sedimentation and tradition’, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann argued ‘why humans invent traditions and yet seriously hold that they stem from time immemorial.’ The sedimentation theory holds that only small pieces of human experiences are retained in consciousness. These build on top of each other as sediments which later congeal in memory, and are recollected as recognizable and memorable entities. The sediments are eventually incorporated into a larger body of tradition and eventually lose their meaning across time. Whenever they are needed, these traditions are mobilized and their origins made to appear as stretching far back into antiquity. In FMA films, these traditions are mostly represented in the form of onerous training methods and antiquated, honourable rules in combat.

Apart from representations of and references to tradition, national space has also been appropriated in the films to authenticate constructions of national identity. A number of scholars have argued how the national landscape can function as the representation of the nation and as the repository for cultural elements that could constitute a national identity. Kaufmann and Zimmer have pointed to the physical environment as a significant apparatus for validating the nation. This validation is

47 ‘Constructing Identity with Dreamstones…’ 34; The Social Construction of Reality..., 85–87
48 See ‘In Search of the Authentic Nation…’
done either by projecting the nation onto nature, or the other way around.\textsuperscript{49} Examining British rural studies, Julian Mischi argued that the nation’s romanticized rural areas are cultural constructs, points of contention, and sources of power.\textsuperscript{50} This definition implies some degree of impermanence, if not constant alteration. As a construct intended for particular historic needs, the countryside is constantly being remade and renegotiated over time. It is in the same manner that symbols, such as was shown of Lapulapu in the previous chapter, are constantly reconfigured to serve changing national demands. Yet as Lia Kinane argues, despite the countryside’s being a ‘dynamic and changing place’, it is also continuously represented and reinforced as something permanent and almost unalterable in order to reinforce an idea of authentic national identity.\textsuperscript{51} Hence, the repetitive reconstruction of the national landscape is built upon the view that it is the same nation though it has been renovated time and again. Like Berger and Luckmann’s sedimentation theory, the earlier idealizations of the countryside seep into later representations such that it is held to be the same thing, but has actually transformed from its original state.

References to FMA tradition and depictions of the rural as representations of idealized versions of Filipino national identity are found in all four of the FMA films. Often, these depictions are engaged with themes of foreignness and modernity—for instance, in scenes where a character from the city encounters another from the countryside. A main character in the film may also go into a meditative, self-regenerating, seclusion in the rural areas and undergo traditional forms of training in FMA which aids him in resolving his tribulations. The modern city-dweller assumes the same role as the foreigner—a character ascribed with traits or attributes that set him apart from another character designed to embody idealized representations of a more authentic Filipino national identity.

\textsuperscript{49} Kaufmann and Zimmer argue that the dialectic of landscape and nation has two scenarios: the ‘nationalisation of nature’ and the ‘naturalisation of the nation’. In the former, a nation’s myths, memories, and supposed national virtues are projected into the landscape to indicate a nation’s distinctiveness as reflected in the physical environment; in the latter, nature is depicted as a force that could shape the nation and its members. ‘In Search of the Authentic Nation…’, 486-487

178
To stress this contrast, the protagonist in FMA films is usually located away from the centres. In *Pacific Connection*, Ben is constantly shoved to peripheral locations by a series of circumstances that unfold. Yet, with each instance of his progression away from the central, he becomes a better FMA fighter. The opening scenes of the film show Ben and his parents living in a farm outside the town where the governor and his sons reside. After the death of his parents, Ben is arrested and sent to work on a galleon but is later shipwrecked on a remote island, far from the clutches of the governor. Later, after Ben’s disastrous first encounter with Mori, the old man nurses him to health and promises to teach him Arnis when he is healed. Ben is taken to a remote part of the island where he lives in isolation for two years. During this time, he is taught to develop physically by performing exercises, and mentally by meditating to detach his mind from the world. For a long period, he is forced to wear a blindfold made of goatskin until he is able to ‘see without seeing’. The old man later tells Ben of a magical weapon called the ‘iron reed’—a wood that could withstand the strongest blades—which lies somewhere in the vicinity of the island’s volcano. To get this weapon, Ben goes even deeper inland where no one has yet been. This is later the weapon he uses to break Mori’s sword. It becomes fairly noticeable that each time Ben progresses further away from the centre—the domain of the foreign—he becomes stronger and gets better at Arnis. The main character’s metaphoric distancing from the foreign and modernity actuates a process of self-identification. The rural is represented as the authentic national space in which the authentic national self is realized and cultivated.

The contrast of imagery in the cinematographic representation between the central and the peripheral is also a common strategy. In *Pacific Connection*, a shot of a sparring session between Ben and his father, Allan, is set in a quiet wooded area. This scene is immediately followed by an image of the governor’s sons, Antonio and Miguel, ransacking the town with their *guardia civil*. The serenity of the green flora and blue skies in Ben’s residence is shattered by the dullness of the grey stone houses in the town, the swirling clouds of dust, and the commotion of men and horses. The depiction of the town—the domain of the foreign—contrasts the way the domain of the native is depicted. The relaxed, open space in the rural area is completely opposite from the disorder and commotion in the central. The spaces unspoiled by the foreign—Ben’s farm, the island, and the place where he trained in Arnis for two years—are tranquil and capacious. In comparison, the space within the
reach of the governor’s authority—the town’s streets and the Spanish galleon Ben was forced to work in—are cramped and stressful.

Plate No. 15

The same contrast is also highlighted in *The Sticks of Death*. The first part of the film starts in the slums of Manila where the protagonist, Johnny Guerrero lives. When Ricky, a local drug lord, tries to persuade Johnny to sell drugs in the neighbourhood, Johnny angrily refuses. Ricky then sends men to kill Johnny, but they only manage in wounding him. Johnny ends up in grandfather’s farm in the countryside where he is nursed back to health. His grandfather, who used to train him in Arnis as a boy, pleads with him to develop his skills further before he returns to the city to exact his revenge. Johnny agrees and begins his training in the countryside. As with *Pacific Connection*, the rural area in *The Sticks of Death* becomes a place for self-improvement and self-discovery. A juxtaposition of the wide shots of the city and the countryside in *The Sticks of Death* also parallel that of *Pacific Connection*. Here, the city is depicted as a place bustling with life, vice and wealth, but is crowded, dirty and dangerous. On the other hand, the countryside is depicted as clean, comforting and serene. The mass of bodies in discordant motion in the city mirrors the town and galleon from *Pacific Connection*. Like Ben’s isolation on the island when he was being trained by the old man in *Pacific Connection*, the farm is also Johnny’s escape from the urban centre in *The Sticks of Death*.

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32 (Left) Ben and Allan prepare to spar in their farm outside the town; (Centre) Antonio and Miguel ransacking the town; (Right) The interior of the galleon where Ben was forced to do labour; Screengrab, *The Pacific Connection*
A striking clue to the use of the rural as a metonym for the nation can be seen in the scene that immediately follows the training near the river from the above plate. In order to stop illegal loggers from destroying the forest, Johnny and his grandfather fence off the loggers’ access. An altercation ensues where Johnny and his grandfather, armed only with sticks, subdue the poachers who are armed with machetes, axes, a chainsaw, and a gun. Again, Arnis is depicted as being technologically inferior to the weapons of the poachers but nevertheless overcomes this handicap. The emphasis on the use of Arnis sticks against the poachers’ more lethal weapons, and the act of beating them into submission, becomes a clear metaphor for the defence of the nation. Similar to the triumph of Ben’s ‘iron reed’ against Mori’s katana, Johnny’s triumph highlights the superiority of Arnis over those who threaten the national landscape, if not the nation itself.
The film *Kamagong* is another particularly good example of how FMA films engage the modern urban centre with the traditional countryside. Here, the characters are contrasted from each other much more clearly than in any of the other films. Whereas the protagonists of *Pacific Connection* and *Sticks of Death* merely transition from the urban to the rural, *Kamagong* pits two characters—one from the countryside and one from the city—against each other in a traditional Arnis duel. The juxtaposition of dramatic shots of Ariel (one of the protagonists) performing exercises on the hillside or at the beach during sunset, and shots of Lorenzo (the villain) lifting weights or brutally beating up sparring partners underscores the engagement of urban and rural identities within the context of FMA. Whereas Ariel uses the environment for his training, Lorenzo uses more modern equipment like weights or punching bags. The countryside as a training ground is again presented as being technologically inferior (or backward) compared to the city’s gym with all its modern equipment. Like the urban space, the gym is a symbol for modernity and Westernization. Both the city and the rural area produce formidable Arnis fighters, but only the one who trained in the countryside is perceived as the more authentic of the two.

Plate No. 18

Worth noting too, is how the wardrobe in the films parallels the ways in which the rural and urban identities are represented. Like the way Arnis is

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55 This particular scene brings to mind a similar juxtaposition of the modern and the traditional in the film *Rocky IV*, which was released a year before *Kamagong*, and may have inspired the similar representation; *Rocky IV*, dir. Sylvester Stallone, United Artists, 1985

56 (Left) Ariel trains on a beach at sunset; (Right) Lorenzo lifts weights during training; Screengrab, *Kamagong*
represented as being more ‘backward’ compared to a firearm, or how the rural landscape is represented as being humbler compared to the bright lights or stone houses of the urban area, the protagonists’ clothing are also depicted as being much simpler (or even bare) compared to the foreign or urban.\textsuperscript{57} In \textit{Pacific Connection}, the foreigners are dressed in long and flamboyant clothing, often showing very little bare skin. In contrast, the islanders are clothed in what appear to be swimwear.\textsuperscript{58} Moreover, when Ben fights Mori in the climactic scene, he is bare-breasted. Similarly, Johnny in \textit{The Sticks of Death} undergoes training in the farm bare-breasted. When a friend comes to visit him, they stand beside each other as the camera carefully highlights the contrast between how simply Johnny is dressed compared to his friend. A similar contrast is portrayed in \textit{Kamagong}.\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{plate19.png}
\caption{Plate No. 19\textsuperscript{60}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{57} In the previous chapter, I made an argument about how the nakedness of Lapulapu made him easier to idealize as a pre-colonial icon, thus validating him as a national symbol in the national imaginary. The way the Filipinos, especially the rural ones, are clothed in FMA films parallels the way Lapulapu’s costume is imagined.

\textsuperscript{58} I believe that the islanders’ clothing—which look more like what one might find in a beach in Hawaii—are rather anachronistic for a film set in the 1800s Philippines. Regardless, the effect of illustrating the ‘nakedness’ of the native inhabitants is clear.

\textsuperscript{59} The hanging of a towel around one’s neck is associated with blue-collar workers in the Philippines who use the towel to frequently wipe their perspiration.

\textsuperscript{60} (Left to Right) Mori, the Samurai; The governor (seated) flanked by his two sons Antonio (left) and Miguel (right); A Chinese merchant who trades on the island; Some women from the island find Ben washed ashore; Screengrab, \textit{The Pacific Connection}.\textsuperscript{183}
In the films, the central concept of rurality is its backwardness and disadvantage against modernity. Again, this brings to mind how postcolonial societies acknowledge their own backwardness compared to the Western models of civilization they seek to emulate. In FMA films, this is manifested in the way Arnis, rural landscape, rural culture, and even the rural clothing are engaged with modernity, the urban, and other martial arts, and how the things associated with the rural are portrayed as disadvantaged compared to the urban. The selling point of national identity in FMA films is that Arnis demonstrates how traditional culture overcomes the onslaught of modernity.

Another key concept in the dichotomous representation of the rural Filipino and the foreigner or urban Filipino is the protagonist’s immersion in FMA tradition, and the city-dweller’s rejection of or incompetence in tradition. Traditions relate to the rural space in that they are portrayed as located in or originating from the countryside. As such, the exercise of these traditions validates the martial artist as an authentic FMA fighter. FMA tradition has been consistently featured in all four films, especially in scenes that depict training in Arnis. The exercise of these traditions serves to legitimize the FMA fighter as Filipino, especially if he is from the city. Characteristics of FMA which have been elaborated in Chapter One and Two (such as belief in esoteric practices, the high exclusivity among and competition between FMA circles, FMA as heirloom, and so on), and traditions both invented

61 (Left) Johnny meets his friend, Pete, after a long period of training in the farm; Screengrab, Arnis: The Sticks of Death; (Center) Lorenzo returns to Mabolo as a champion fighter in the city; Screengrab, Kamagong; (Right) Manuel, the main protagonist, working in the fields; Screengrab, Kamagong.
and established make their appearance in FMA films and empower the protagonist for his upcoming struggles. In Pacific Connection, Ben is blindfolded for a year in order to awaken his ‘sixth sense’. In The Sticks of Death, Johnny’s grandfather builds him contraptions to aid him in his training. He also is taught how to drive a nail into wood with an Arnis stick just by flicking his wrist. Kamagong is replete with examples of near-superhuman feats which include being able to ‘fly like a bird and fall to the earth like a dry leaf’ and being able to parry a handful of corn grains thrown in the air with one flick of the wrist. These feats are only made possible through the performance of ritualistic, age-old methods of training in FMA. In the films, such trainings are shown to be drawn out over long periods of time, and are extremely exigent.

Two instances in Kamagong show what happens when this tradition is broken or hastened. A conversation between the main protagonist, Manuel, and the old Arnis teacher, Maestro Sutero, involves a history lesson on the prized Arnis sticks made of Kamagong wood and explains why the Arnis weapons need to be handed down to those only deemed worthy of it. These Kamagong sticks were shown to have been used during several historic episodes of the town’s anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles. Short retrospective scenes of former champions, one of whom was Manuel’s grandfather, flash on screen as the history of Arnis in the town is told. Here, the essence of the Kamagong sticks’ role as the symbol for anti-colonial struggle is stressed to Manuel. The Arnis champion carries with him a responsibility that, as the elders of the town agree, both Lorenzo and Ariel could not fulfil—Lorenzo for his aggressive attitude, and Ariel for his inexperience. At this point in the film, the Kamagong sticks have yet to be turned over to a successor. Lorenzo, who has become an Arnis champion in the city, comes to Maestro Sutero (who is also his uncle) demanding for the prized Arnis weapons. Maestro Sutero refuses, criticizing Lorenzo for turning Arnis into gambling and for always unnecessarily injuring his opponents. Desperate, Lorenzo tries to bribe Maestro Sutero with ten thousand pesos. Disgusted, Maestro Sutero sends Lorenzo away and disowns him as a nephew. Essentially, Lorenzo’s departure for the city life is symbolic of his disdain for the simplicity of the countryside and its traditions. More than anything else, it is his attempt to circumvent the tradition of earning the Arnis

62 This becomes useful in the climactic fight scene of the film where he has to fight his opponents in darkness.
sticks through bribery that he is forever disqualified from owning it. The same case happens to the young Ariel. When Ariel expresses his interest to train in Arnis, Manuel and Maestro Sutero explain to him the responsibilities and requirements that are involved. Most significant of these requirements is that Ariel must continue training for ten full moons. When Ariel is presented with an opportunity to face Lorenzo in the city, he stops training before the ten full moons are over. Furthermore, he attempts to steal the Kamagong sticks but is caught and disarmed by Manuel who ‘flies in the air like a bird and lands like a leaf’ behind Ariel. When he eventually faces Lorenzo, Ariel botches ‘flying like a bird’ and gets severely mauled.

In contrast to both Lorenzo and Ariel, Manuel strictly follows tradition and exhibits no desire to own the Kamagong sticks. Manuel has gone through the complete cycle of training for ten full moons, and he is subservient to the will of the elders. It is because of this unwavering faithfulness to the sense of tradition and honour that Manuel is eventually chosen to be the new caretaker of the Kamagong Arnis sticks.

One particular scene in the film shows Manuel preparing for his match with Lorenzo. His head and feet are propped up while the rest of his body remain suspended in the air. Maestro Sutero delivers blows with the Kamagong sticks to harden Manuel’s flesh and make him resilient to pain. Manuel grunts from the blows, but remains motionless, surrendering himself to the pain. Like the ordeals that Ben and Johnny undergo in training in the other films, this ritualistic punishment of the Arnisador’s body is symbolic of the transfer of knowledge in Arnis. Lorenzo and Ariel were both impatient enough to try and elude this painful ritual and were thus rejected by Maestro Sutero when they claimed ownership of the Kamagong sticks. Manuel, on the other hand, remains disciplined and submissive much like Ben and Johnny from the other films. For this painful endurance and submission, Manuel is favoured by Maestro Sutero to carry the Kamagong sticks.
Some of the traditions, practices, and feats mentioned in the films are based on existing oral myths in FMA: For instance, Ben’s journey to meet the blind old man parallel myths about Floro Villabrille who claimed to have trained with a ‘blind princess’; Ben’s arduous journey to secure the ‘iron reed’ also parallel myths about FMA teacher Angel Cabales who claimed his own teacher learned from a hermit who lived in a cave—the journey to the hermit involved climbing a steep mountain and jumping into a shark infested lagoon; Manuel’s ability to ‘fly like a bird’ also parallels myths about another FMA teacher, Angel Blancia, who could supposedly levitate for several seconds. Regardless of the veracity of these myths in FMA, tradition, authenticity, and myth are predominant concerns among FMA practitioners, and as the chapter introduction mentioned, are frequent topics of conversation during FMA gatherings. At the core of this attention to minor technical details is the desire to preserve and continue tradition. The idealized Filipino in FMA films is thus one who, like Manuel, accepts the Arnis sticks handed down from the elders. The presence of male elders—literally handing Arnis sticks down—signifies the old tradition that waits to be handed down to the younger protagonists of the films. That the ‘elders’ in Pacific Connection and The Sticks of Death are

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63 Manuel endures hardening training with Maestro Sutero; Screengrab, Kamagong
nameless—the hermit is only known as ‘the old man’, and Johnny’s grandfather is only called ‘grandfather’—shows that the films are more concerned with the transmission of FMA tradition and less with establishing the origins of those traditions. Filmic portrayals of victory despite handicap, and ritualistic ‘passing down’ of Arnis sticks enables FMA to be culturally imagined as enduring the onslaught of modernity and loss of traditions.

In FMA films, FMA is portrayed as an age-old martial art that emerges, if not originates, from the countryside. Unlike the urban centres, the rural area is portrayed to have been something that managed to elude the advance of modernity and Westernization. The fighter who follows the hallowed traditions of Arnis, regardless of whether it is invented or not, is understood to be closer to a form of culture that is un tarnished by modernity and Westernization. Even in One Percent Full, which is set in a modern-day urban slum, the disdain for the modern, the modern way of life, the Westernized, and the foreign can still be felt—Manila is portrayed as peripheral compared to Hawaii, Boy is portrayed as having better character than Frank despite living in squalor, and Frank’s decadent way of life is portrayed contemptibly. By engaging Arnis with superior technology, and by engaging the country simpleton with the Westernized or urbanized, FMA films are able to highlight what they perceive to be authentic versions of Filipino fighters.

III. Masculinizing the Filipino, Feminizing the Nation

A third way FMA films articulate Filipino national identity is to engage the masculine Filipino, embodied by the protagonist, with a female character who is representative of the colonized nation. Here, the female character operates as a symbol in the same way as rural landscape was explained earlier—as a quintessential figure of the nation, exposed to exploitation and in need of defending. By depicting the female character as helpless, FMA films effectively subjugate the feminine—a process R.W. Connell termed ‘hegemonic masculinity’. However, like Chow’s argument on reactive self-definition, the subjugation of women are also reactive—it is only a consequence (rather than the intended end result) of a process of defeminising and justifying the Filipino male role as the saviour of the nation. In doing so, idealizations of Filipino nationalism are ascribed to filmic constructions of

national identity. Several authors have argued on the gendering of symbols in colonial and anti-colonial discourse, all of whom have attributed the nation or colony as a feminine entity. Thomas R. Metcalf devoted a chapter on arguing how the British Raj perceived and consciously effeminized its Indian colony as well as its Indian subjects in order to sustain and justify its overlordship. Sarah Mills, Shannon Lee Dawdy, and Uilleam Blacker, arguing from the perspective of the colony and the colonized, illustrate how the nation and its landscape are ascribed with femininity. There are two points with regards to gender and nationalist or anti-colonial struggle that are relevant to this chapter: Firstly, in most cases, the nation is sexualized as feminine—terms such as ‘motherland’, ‘lady liberty’, or the Filipino *Inang Bayan* (Mother Country) are some examples of feminizing the nation. The sexual domination or violation of native women by colonizers and the rescue of native women by the masculine colonizer are common tropes in both colonial and anti-colonial ideologies. Secondly, the colonized males are generally attributed with femininity by the colonizers who perceived themselves as more masculine. Ashis Nandy argued how the dominance of the masculine over the feminine was a metaphor for the political and economic subjugation by the colonizer. As such, the masculinity of the colonized male comes into question. Drawing from Edward Said, D.S. Farrer and John Whalen-Bridge have argued that martial arts, categorized as ‘Eastern’, offer a ‘counterdiscourse to effeminizing Orientalist clichés.’

By acting as protector or defender of the virtues of a female character, the male protagonist conveys the idealization, expression, and redemption of Filipino colonial and postcolonial masculinity. To be masculine is to stand up for the nation. Indirectly, masculinity is suggested as a form of nationalism. Like the image of the foreign and the city-dweller upon which the authentic Filipino is identified against,

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68 Metcalf particularly notes how British men perceived themselves as the saviours of Indian women from Indian men. See *Ideologies of the Raj*, 92-112; Blacker also noted how the colonized female body is ‘turned into a physical surface or space for the inscription of the discourses of power and resistance’. See ‘Nation, Body, Home…’, 488
70 *Martial Arts as Embodied Knowledge…*, 2-3
the women in FMA films also act as a platform for ascribing national identity with masculinity. The crises in the narratives which involve the female characters are subtly interwoven with the larger struggles of the protagonist. How these crises were resolved reveal the idealizations of how Filipino men should protect Filipina women. Moreover, the filmic representation of the protagonists’ struggles to defend the female characters also become sexualized metaphors for nationalism and anti-colonialism. All of the four films examined in the chapter had strong female presence, but is particularly more pronounced in *Pacific Connection* and *Kamagong*.

As discussed, one of the early scenes in *Pacific Connection* involve the brothers Miguel and Antonio collecting tax from Ben and his parents. At one point during the exchange of words, Antonio slaps Ben so hard the latter falls to the ground, wincing in pain. Filipino historian Teodoro Agoncillo has argued that slapping is culturally considered by Filipinos as ‘a sign of condescension’ and adds that Filipino men prefer instead to be boxed since slapping is only related to women.\(^71\) In the Philippine context, to be slapped is thus tantamount to be feminized. Despite this, Ben and his father Allan do not respond violently. However, it is when Ben’s mother, Maria, is sexually harassed by Antonio that Ben and Allan leap into action. What is striking about this response is that it illustrates how the feminization of Ben does not become the pretext for his use of Arnis against the governor’s sons. The use of violence against the Spaniards is not justified by Ben’s insecurity over his masculinity. Rather, it is the violation of the Filipina that prompts Ben and Allan to use Arnis.

A similar observation can be made about *Kamagong* where the initial conflict is triggered by Lorenzo molesting the fiancée of Ariel’s brother, Emilio. Emilio sees this and flies into a rage, nearly killing Lorenzo with a rock. Manuel throws himself between the two men and suggests that they finish their fight on top of the hill where they could duel in ‘gentlemanly combat’. This implies that the killing of the unarmed Lorenzo is deemed unmanly. A short scene prior to Emilio and Lorenzo’s duel shows a conversation between Emilio and his fiancée. When his fiancée discourages him from facing Lorenzo, a known cheater at Arnis, Emilio replies that he has to do it otherwise people will look down on her for having married a coward. This goes to suggest that Emilio is less concerned with being thought of as a coward himself, and

\(^{71}\) Teodoro Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People*. Quezon City: Garotech, 1990, 405
more with the likelihood that his would-be wife is shamed for being married to a coward. Once more too, the need for having to prove one’s masculinity is brought about by a desire to protect the integrity and purity of the Filipina rather than the masculine self. Proving masculinity is exercised through ‘gentlemanly combat’ where both men are equally armed and prepared.

The violation itself is symbolized as being sexual. The foreigner or the city-dweller is portrayed as sexually coveting the nation, in the form of the female character. This desire is one they can only express through the exertion of sexual violence as the ‘nation’ always rejects their sexual advances. It thus falls to the idealized Filipino man, appearing either as son or fiancé, to rescue the ‘nation’. The chastisement is also depicted in the form of sexual violence. In *Pacific Connection*, the punishment for the sexual advances of the foreign is represented by physically violent acts of emasculation. In one scene, Ben’s mother, Maria castrates the governor when he rapes her. In a later scene, a male islander is able to rescue a female islander from being raped by a *guardia civil*. The camera then emphasizes the male islander striking the *guardia civil* in the groin with Arnis sticks. In both instances, the sexual advances of the foreigner or city-dweller are chastised using sexual violence.

When the protagonist comes to the rescue of the female, he is also bound by an unofficial code of conduct with regard to how he approaches the tension. In *Pacific Connection*, this can be seen during the two clashes between Ben and Mori in the way they seem to communicate nonverbally using martial arts—especially in how Mori expected Ben to end his life when Ben broke his sword in two. During the duel between Emilio and Lorenzo in *Kamagong*, Manuel is seen contemplating on whether he should have intervened or not. This is signalled by the camera emphasizing his slightly confused look and a flashback from the time he stepped between Emilio and Lorenzo when they were fighting. During the duel, Lorenzo deviously knees Emilio in the groin—an illegal blow—but the referee, Maestro Sutero, does not see this. Manuel and Emilio’s younger brother, Ariel, both see this. Ariel beckons Manuel to stop the fight since Lorenzo is cheating to win. Manuel however, chooses to respect Maestro Sutero as referee and makes no attempt to stop the fight, which eventually leads to Emilio’s death. At a later time, Ariel accosts Manuel for not trying to avenge Emilio. Ariel questions Manuel’s masculinity and berates him, ‘...I’m not a coward. I’m a man, unlike you.’ Manuel is infuriated and
punches Ariel on the stomach punitively. Here, Manuel is quick to correct Ariel for doubting his masculinity—it is not that Manuel is afraid of facing Lorenzo, but that there are traditions in place that bind him to honour Lorenzo’s victory over Emilio.

Filipino masculinity is depicted as disciplined and passive—one that is held back until its protective instincts are triggered and justified by dangers posed to the female character. Relied upon as the protector of the nation against the advances of the colonial other, masculinity in FMA films is also ambivalent—it desires to resist, but is bound by ‘gentlemanly’ conduct. It is an honourable kind of masculinity that holds back Emilio from killing Lorenzo in an altercation, that justifies Emilio’s defeat and death at the hands of Lorenzo, that forces Ben to duel a better-equipped Mori, and that consigns Mori to death after Ben breaks his sword. The masculine Filipino is depicted as unquestionably capable and deadly. However, the inner conflict is when to unleash his potential for violence, or when is it justifiable. Similar characteristics can be seen in real-world exercise of restraint among FMA practitioners. Chapter Two illustrates for example how conflicts or altercations involving FMA practitioners are always reconstructed in oral tradition as being purely defensive.\textsuperscript{72} These same prevailing beliefs on the use of violence are reflected in the FMA films.

**FMA Films in the Negotiation over National Identity**

The previous section discussed three reactive strategies that FMA films commonly employ when constructing the FMA fighter as the archetype of the idealized Filipino. By engaging the FMA protagonist with the foreign, the modern, and the feminine, FMA films were able to represent their idealizations of Filipino national identity. This section mainly discusses how the FMA-based articulations of Filipino national identity in FMA films are utilized and appropriated in the ongoing discourse on nation-building between fragmented FMA clubs and the nation.

Chapter One and Two argued that one of the main challenges of nationalizing FMA for nation-building is the fragmented nature of FMA clubs. The rise in popularity of FMA films coincided with the nationalization of Arnis in the 1970s and potentially became a tool for drawing disparate FMA clubs together.

\textsuperscript{72} For a series of examples, see Edgar Sulite, *The Masters of Arnis, Kali & Eskrima*. Socorro Publications, 1993
Taking from Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’, Arjun Appadurai argued how electronic media can act as a platform for communion in the same way as print material.\footnote{See Appadurai’s concept of mediascapes. Arjun Appadurai, ‘Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy’ in \textit{Theory Culture Society} 7, 1990, 296, 298-299} FMA films offered a venue for those involved in the nationalization of Arnis to congregate and negotiate their communion under the subsuming structure of the nation. Perhaps, because of its extensive reach as a form of mass media, FMA films had the capacity to draw together FMA clubs which are characteristically in competition with each other. If the state was to appropriate FMA as a tool for nation-building, then FMA practitioners needed to participate. Yet, as was exhibited in Chapter Two, majority of them could not properly articulate (politically or academically) their ideas on the nationalization of FMA. Because of their format as pop culture, films spoke in a language that was familiar and comprehensible to the layman unlike the more specialized language of legislation. Most especially, FMA films provided FMA groups with narratives, details, and themes to discuss as they negotiate with each other over FMA-based Filipino national identity. FMA films laid out the blueprints for the archetypal nationalistic martial artist.

The previous chapter discussed patterns of storytelling and representation that could be found in the films examined here. These similarities exhibit how the themes of FMA films are built around the sense of nation, community, and identity. As Marc Ferro argued, these patterns of storytelling—along with trends in how films are produced and consumed—reveal much about the desires and aspirations of a given society.\footnote{Marc Ferro, ‘Film as an Agent, Product, and Source of History’ in \textit{Journal of Contemporary History}, Vol. 18 No. 3, Historians and Movies: The State of the Art: Part 1 (Jul., 1983), 357-364} When FMA films portray the story’s protagonist in a particular way, they are really revealing idealizations of how a Filipino practitioner of FMA should be or should behave.\footnote{In chapter three, I made an argument about how when FMA clubs were forwarding their depictions about Lapulapu, they were in fact negotiating over representations of themselves.} The same can be said about how films portray foreigners, city-dwellers, or even colonial subjugation.

Taking into account the characteristics and subject matter of films that national audiences consume and patronize, Carlo Celli argued that these characteristics and subject matters reveal the homogenous cultural traits that constitute what he regards as ‘national cinema’.\footnote{Carlo Celli, \textit{National Identity in Global Cinema: How Movies Explain the World}. Palgrave MacMillan 2011, 8} Although FMA films were not
directly financed or facilitated by the national government, they reflected the larger state-sponsored ideological projects which permeated in the nation.\textsuperscript{77} Beyond the administrative facilitation of the national government, the cultural imaginary forwarded by FMA films shapes and is shaped by identity construction going on at the level of FMA practitioners. While, for example, the Arnis Law officialises Arnis as a national symbol, it does not express the myths and traditions followed by FMA practitioners the same way films could. In this regard, Chris Berry argues that rather than thinking of nations as the ones that make national cinema, we should consider that national cinemas are in fact the ones that help make nations.\textsuperscript{78} To add to Berry, we can say that national cinema makes national identities as well.

Taking from the previous section, the themes and narratives in FMA films reveal three things about the discourse on national identity in FMA: First, they reveal how FMA practitioners understand (or have a lack of understanding of) themselves—their composition, their origins, and what constitutes as FMA; second, they reveal how FMA practitioners understand their roles and obligations towards the nation; and lastly, the subtle changes in the themes and narratives reveal the development of the debates on nation and national identity among FMA practitioners over time.

I. FMA Films as manuals for understanding the composition of FMA

FMA films paint a homogenous image of FMA. Consistently, all four films feature the trademark weapon of FMA—the wooden sticks. In doing so, the films make FMA techniques inseparable with the sticks. To an extent, this is accurate. There is a strong connection between FMA and the wooden sticks—in fact stick fighting is the first lesson taught to students. Yet all of the teachers who served as informants for this research argue that the sticks are substitutes for live blades, and that the fighting system derived from stick or blade is really just part of a larger whole in FMA.\textsuperscript{79} What is significant with this filmic portrayal is that, as Chapter One has shown, the wooden sticks are the common denominator among the

\textsuperscript{77} This is what Patrick Campos argued about ‘cultural imaginaries’ of the nation, as discussed in the first section; ‘Looming Over the Nation, Uneasy with the Folks…’, 45
\textsuperscript{78} Chris Berry, ‘If China can say No, Can China Make Movies? Or, Do Movies Make China? Rethinking National Cinema and National Agency’ in \textit{Boundary 2}, 25(3), \textit{Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field} (Autumn, 1998), 131
\textsuperscript{79} For instance, you are also trained in empty hand techniques or knife fighting in FMA.
multitude of FMA clubs. To feature style-specific weapons would glorify particular schools of FMA and antagonize the rest. By making stick fighting the centrepiece of martial arts choreography, FMA films solidified FMA around the wooden sticks.\textsuperscript{80} Moreover, as Ben’s duel with Mori illustrates, the humble wooden sticks operate as a handicapped instrument for counteracting modernity’s debilitation of tradition and identity. In this respect, the Arnisador archetype is portrayed as someone who is technologically inferior but superior in terms of skill and courage—making use of the ‘one percent full’ glass at his disposal.

Another noticeable characteristic of the films with regards to how they understand their communion is how one form of Arnis was never pitted against another style. In Pacific Connection, Arnis was used to fight European fencing and Japanese kenjutsu, but never against another kind of Arnis. In Kamagong, while it featured Arnisadores fighting for supremacy in the hallowed duel, the Arnis they used came from the same teacher and not another variation of Arnis. In fact, the protagonist Manuel regretfully expressed how he had to use his skills against a fellow Filipino. This absence of inter-FMA style conflict downplays (even completely ignores) the historic disagreements and actual fights between FMA teachers and clubs that were discussed in Chapter Two. The careful avoidance of showcasing such conflicts—which are understandably counterproductive to creating the image of a strong, homogenous Filipino martial art—reveals the nationalizing agenda of FMA films in their representation of FMA. This de-emphasis on inter-club conflict can be found in the four films which were made across four decades.

II. FMA Films as Instructions for Nationalism

FMA films also reveal how FMA practitioners understand the role of FMA—and therefore their own roles—in the nation. In all four films, the community (acting as a metonym for the nation) plays a discreet but significant role as the site of conflict and resolution. The resolution of these conflicts also effectively removes the tensions from the nation. Martin Jackson argued how films can act as a reflection of

\textsuperscript{80} We cannot trace exactly where or when FMA became primarily associated with the wooden sticks. By highlighting them in films, the association between FMA and the sticks was popularized; as per experience, if you ask Arnisadores to strike an action pose for the camera, they will normally grab the closest stick they can find and do a martial arts stance.
society’s opinion(s) about the past at a given moment. In the same light, Robert Rosenstone argued how the films that reconstruct the past condense the ‘past’ that filmmakers wish to highlight. The use of historical references to foreign dominance and the application of Arnis to counter it shows the ascription of anti-colonial meanings to FMA. *Pacific Connection* sets the canvass upon which the role of Arnis in anti-colonial struggle can be defined. On the surface, the struggle between the hero and the villains of the film are due to personal reasons. But this superstructure is underpinned by a deeper subject on Spanish colonial oppression. What sparks the conflict in the film is when the Spaniards collect taxes from Ben and his family. The defeat of the villains of *Pacific Connection*, who embodied Spanish colonial oppression, represented the emancipation of the nation. The deaths of the only figures of Spanish authority in the story also remove colonization in the film’s imaginary location. In *Pacific Connection*, Arnis is more than just a tool for Ben’s personal retribution—it is the tool which ends colonial oppression.

A similar function is ascribed to Arnis in *Kamagong*, best illustrated by the scene when Manuel learns of the history of the Kamagong sticks. Set in the 1980s, there were no more figures of colonial oppression like in *Pacific Connection*, though as argued earlier the figure of the colonizer is replaced with the city-dweller. The tradition surrounding the handing down of the Kamagong sticks was emphasized to stretch back to the period of the Philippines’ historical struggle against Spanish colonization and Japanese Imperialism. By stressing this key point, the film emphasized that Manuel’s practice of Arnis in the present is still deeply ascribed with nationalistic obligations—to protect the innocent, defend the town of Mabolo, and to uphold the hallowed traditions of Arnis in the face of modernization. Hence, the film edifies FMA practitioners that their practice of martial arts is steeped with obligations to the nation. In *The Sticks of Death*, this is highlighted when Johnny Guererro decides to join the Philippine Constabulary force when he emerges from the countryside as a skilled Arnisador.

Incidentally, the fact that both *Pacific Connection* and *The Sticks of Death* were dubbed in English for marketing in Hollywood can also be seen as a form of nationalism to challenge the imperialism of Hollywood in cinema.

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81 Martin A. Jackson, ‘Film as a Source Material: Some Preliminary Notes toward a Methodology’ in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 4(1), The Historian and the Arts, (Summer, 1973), 73-80

82 Robert Rosenstone, ‘The Historical Film as Reality’ in *Film Historia*, V(1), (1995), 5-23
In their attempt to construct the image of a strong national identity using FMA, the films also represented FMA as being in harmony with the nation. It is possibly for this reason that FMA films stand out from their contemporaries during the politically turbulent martial law years (1965-1986). Patrick Campos, discussing the history of Philippine cinema during the martial law period, argues how the film industry became one of the venues for voicing out opposition to the Marcos regime. He lists down several critically acclaimed films during this period whose common theme was their critical tone towards the Marcos administration and the way it shaped Philippine society. In comparison to these films, FMA films either adopted a constructive tone regarding society or altogether avoided raising political topics flagged up in other films. For example, *Pacific Connection* was chronologically detached from the present and *Kamagong* was distanced by its rural setting. *The Sticks of Death* did feature Philippine society during the martial law years, but is mum about dictatorship, and presents judicial authority positively by depicting Johnny Guerrero and the Philippine Constabulary as proverbial ‘good guys’. While militancy generally characterized nationalism in the martial law years (whether on film or on the streets in protest), FMA films had a different kind of nationalism—one which intended to present a homogenous Filipino nation and Filipino national identity. On one hand, this can be read as a case of clubs avoiding biting the hand that feeds them. Beyond that, however, FMA films did not adopt the same critical, state-dismantling tone of its contemporaries because its nationalism was framed according to a specific anti-colonial, anti-Western rhetoric such that any deviation from it becomes uninterpretable using the language familiar to FMA practitioners.

### III. Changing Contours of FMA and Filipino National Identity in FMA Films

The subtle thematic and narrative shifts in FMA films revealed how the articulation of national identity among practitioners changed over time. In both *Pacific Connection* and *The Sticks of Death*, the origins of Arnis are left vague. The obscure identity of the old man in *Pacific Connection* further adds to the mystery of the origin of Arnis. These two earlier films left out explaining where Arnis came from.

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83 Patrick F. Campos, ‘Looming Over the Nation, Uneasy with the Folks…’, 37
from or offer some historical context. The 1986 film *Kamagong* on the other hand offered some historical contextualization. Although it did not explicitly trace Arnis origins, it offered an explanation on what role Arnis played in Philippine history for the last hundred years. If this development is juxtaposed with the history of the nationalization of Arnis in the Philippines, one could see how the film is made roughly a decade since *Pacific Connection* was released in 1974, and the National Arnis Association of the Philippines (NARAPHIL) was established in 1975 to facilitate the nationalization of Arnis. By that time, as Chapter Two discussed, the FMA narrative of Yambao and Mirafuente was popularized in Dan Inosanto’s book *The Filipino Martial Arts as Taught by Dan Inosanto* (1980). We can see that *Kamagong*, made a few years after Inosanto’s book was released, subscribes to the historical narrative that Inosanto followed—one which romanticizes FMA as a pre-colonial martial art that endured through Philippine colonial history and continued to the present.

Perceptions on the legitimate site of FMA practice changed along with the locations in the films. Comparing the two of Dantes’ films with each other shows while that the setting of the earlier film *Pacific Connection* almost keeps escaping to remote places, *The Sticks of Death* is about returning to the city. *Kamagong*, in comparison to *One Percent Full* also shows this transition from the rural to the urban. Basically, the trend is that the earlier films about Arnis are located in the countryside, while later films move to the urban setting. This parallels the flow of FMA itself, as the second chapter has argued, from the family-based FMA circles which were typical in the rural areas to the money-making FMA clubs in the urban areas which were open to paying customers. By shifting the location of FMA stories from the countryside to the city, the urban area now becomes empowered as a legitimate source of FMA. Recall that the previous section argued how the urban area becomes something that is defined against the countryside in order to romanticize and authenticate the latter as genuinely Filipino. The fact is that the driving force behind the nationalization of FMA in the Philippines is centred on the country’s metropoles rather than its peripheries. Thus, as the number of city-based FMA practitioners grew over the years, they gradually became legitimated in FMA.

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films as authentic FMA fighters too. This is best represented in *One Percent Full* where Boy, a very skilled FMA fighter, resides in the slums of Manila rather than in the countryside like Manuel in *Kamagong*.

This relocation of the FMA fighter to the city also ties in with another shift in FMA films concerned with the changing association of FMA with national identity. Again, *One Percent Full* best illustrates this point. Whereas the three earlier films primarily used FMA to combat the idealized colonial other, in *One Percent Full*, the colonial other now adopts FMA for his own ends. Although *One Percent Full* is not the first film made by foreigners that featured FMA—there is a plethora of these in Hollywood—it was the first FMA-themed film to insert the Filipino in the narrative, and engage him with the foreigner.\(^{85}\) Allowing the foreigner to be adept at FMA in the Philippines—even more adept than other Filipino characters in the story—alters his status as the colonial other. Furthermore, FMA is now not exclusively Filipino—no longer something used only by Filipinos against only the colonial other. Instead, the foreigner can now be associated with something Filipino and be the protagonist in a film about FMA. Admittedly, *One Percent Full* is primarily an American film about an American in the Philippines. Its Anglo-centric perspective however, is already easily acceptable since by then FMA is already a global phenomenon with practitioners from different countries.\(^{86}\) Like the growing population of FMA practitioners in the urban areas, foreign students in FMA have been increasing in number since the 1970s. Like the change in the past representation of the city-dweller as an inauthentic FMA fighter, the foreigner was also now legitimated in FMA films as an authentic FMA fighter, provided that he receive guidance from an authentic Filipino FMA expert like the figure of Boy. Although the condition attached to his being accepted as Filipino still makes him a foreigner, he is nevertheless able to learn FMA in the same way a Filipino student would. In an interview for this research, FMA teacher Samuel Dulay expressed how he found that foreigners take FMA more seriously than their Filipino counterparts.\(^{87}\) His perception of foreigners illustrates the general sentiment of FMA teachers towards foreign students in FMA since the 1970s: as students who are fast becoming more

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\(^{85}\) Hollywood films that featured FMA utilized FMA only in the fight choreography. Hence, they do not really highlight the ‘Filipino’ character in the FMA choreography. Nevertheless, these films are sources of national pride among Filipinos.

\(^{86}\) For more on the historical background of this, see Chapter Two.

\(^{87}\) Interview with Samuel Dulay, July 28, 2012, Talisay City
legitimate FMA fighters than Filipinos themselves because they train harder and are more passionate about FMA than Filipinos. Presently then, it makes little sense to antagonize foreigners by portraying them as villains in FMA films in the same way that *Pacific Connection* did because they are potential students. However, Frank’s transformation in *One Percent Full* is careful to stress that his legitimacy as an FMA practitioner goes beyond just his physical skills. Instead, his personality changes and takes on a more Filipino character in all its idealized goodness. Just as much as Lorenzo in *Kamagong* could not inherit the Kamagong sticks by virtue of his fighting prowess alone, it is this change in personality—the adoption of Filipino resilience, gratitude, and goodness—that authenticates the foreign student as an FMA fighter.

Finally, *One Percent Full* reveals a long-standing observation about FMA that was not emphasized in the three earlier films—the fact that FMA is comprised of more than just skills with the wooden sticks. In *One Percent Full* Frank and Boy are shown to use any and all weapons they can get their hands on—their bare hands, wooden sticks, and other materials found in the immediate environment like doors, walls or chairs. The two men also perform tackles, locks, takedowns, and groundwork that were not really emphasized in any of the earlier films. This particular feature of FMA in *One Percent Full* reveals the development and sophistication of combat techniques in FMA over the last four decades since when FMA started to be institutionalized on a national level in the 1970s. Since then, FMA itself had been exposed to and adopted other martial arts and incorporated these into its curriculums. The difference between the fight sequences of *One Percent Full* and an earlier film like *Pacific Connection* reveals how fighting techniques in FMA changed over time. Although the lineage of a club can be traced back several generations, the styles of fighting passed through several generations too and have changed according to the preferences of its practitioners such that forty years later, FMA is more complex than its earlier form, or has incorporated other martial arts in its own techniques. This transformation in FMA techniques parallels changing articulations of FMA as representative of national identity—like the adoption of other fighting styles, FMA also accumulates various layers of meaning not introduced in earlier understandings of FMA.
How FMA films mediated negotiations on National Identity among FMA Clubs

Thus far, this chapter has argued how the themes of FMA films are deeply connected with articulations of the nation and Filipino national identity. This developed in consonance with the longer national project on FMA, and the influx of foreign martial arts films. An analysis of these themes reveals that FMA films have a way of understanding FMA’s location in the nation. However, they also show the transience of these understandings as they respond to developments in FMA and history. The next task is to explore how FMA practitioners take these constructions and understandings from FMA films and appropriate them in their negotiations over the construction of Filipino national identity. Earlier chapters have argued that FMA clubs had difficulty cooperating with each other, and they appropriated the state’s program of nationalization in order to elevate themselves above other clubs and in the nation.

FMA films contributed to the whole project of nation-building in two ways: First is that the actors served as brokering agents between FMA clubs; second is that films provided clubs with cultural material for imagining nationhood and national identity.

While films offered FMA practitioners a platform for realizing their communion, it did not translate to their cooperation in programs initiated by organizations like NARAPHIL. As previously discussed, while FMA clubs were willing to work with the national government, they were apprehensive about working with other FMA clubs whom they viewed as competitors in business and prestige. It is this predicament that is resolved by the actors who played the lead roles in FMA films. Being icons that FMA practitioners shared, the celebrities effectively became middle men between practitioners and the national government, and between practitioners themselves.

As the introduction of this chapter showed, FMA action stars actively participated in the discourse between the nation and FMA groups later on in their lives: Roland Dantes went around the world promoting FMA; Lito Lapid supported the Arnis Law in the Senate; Burton Richardson currently teaches FMA in the US, and was even an informant for the documentary *The Bladed Hand* (2012).88 Going back to the term *padrino* (go-between) discussed in Chapter One, the film actor

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assumed the role of *padrino* to the fragmented FMA community. In the first chapter, FMA circles were argued to be filial in orientation. The *padrino* was the individual who acted as mediator between these circles and bridged them together. The *padrino* becomes the basis of connection between two otherwise separate FMA groups. Similarly, the celebrity is able to fuse together these separate circles. It is moreover important to understand that the actors who participated in FMA films were themselves practitioners—Roland Dantes was a student of Modern Arnis, and Burton Richardson studied Kali Ilustrisimo in Manila.\(^{89}\) Rather than just being passive actors who merely performed the roles on film, the promotion of FMA was also a passion and an advocacy for them. The best example to consider is Roland Dantes. Dantes was a bodybuilder who at one time represented the Philippines in the international Mr. Universe competition for bodybuilders.\(^{90}\) He had pursued an interest in Arnis and developed a friendship with the founder of Modern Arnis, Remy Presas. He later worked with Presas when he transferred his own passion for Arnis onto film.\(^{91}\) Long after his films were made, Dantes continued to be actively involved with FMA groups, urging different teachers to work together and promoting FMA both locally and abroad. During the organization of FMA events, Dantes’ approval was held in high esteem, and he would often be asked to address the crowd. Because of this, he was considered by many FMA teachers as the international ‘emissary of FMA’.\(^{92}\) Since the 1970s until his death in 2009, Dantes worked closely with politicians and FMA practitioners, and actively promoted the Arnis Law among practitioners from its conception until it was signed into Law.\(^{93}\) On the evening of his death from heart failure, he had just returned from a gathering of FMA teachers from various disciplines where he played his usual role of intermediating and forging good relations between the different practitioners.\(^{94}\)

\(^{89}\) The same thing can be observed with Chinese martial arts action stars like Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, or Jet Li.\(^{90}\) As a Mr. Universe contestant, Dantes became a physical representation of the Philippines. It is perhaps because of this association with the nation that the FMA characters Dantes plays become easily digestible for national audiences.\(^{91}\) In some long shots in *The Pacific Connection*, Remy Presas was even a stunt double for Guy Madison who played the old man. Interview with Chris Dantes, September 19, 2012, Quezon City.\(^{92}\) Interviews with: Chris Dantes, September 19, 2012, Quezon City; Peachie Baron-Saguin September 20, 2012, Quezon City; and Rene Tongson, August 28, 2012, Bacolod City.\(^{93}\) The two trophies featured in Chapter Three belong to him. Both were lifetime achievement awards in two separate FMA organizations.\(^{94}\) Interview with Peachie Baron-Saguin September 20, 2012, Quezon City
How effectively he was able to perform his unofficial role as *padrino* to the multitude of clubs is explained by Dieter Knüttel, a friend and colleague of Dantes in Modern Arnis:

‘…through his film and acting career, he made friends with many people… he told me stories like when he played a master or grandmaster in a movie—that was screened in the provinces, and he was there—that after the film, you know, the real grandmasters were in front of the cinema… and sort of… “so you want to be a grandmaster?” and he (Dantes) told them “I’m just a *medium* to make you known, to put you in the right position where you belong.” So he (Dantes) had the ability to be friends with everybody and not offend anybody else. So, he was sort of a mediator between different styles because he was friendly and had good contacts to all styles—even to styles that were not friendly with each other—through him, there was some kind of (pause)… all the other masters and grandmasters come out of a certain style and of course, they are for their styles. That’s very normal. And he (Dantes) was above styles… He came up in Modern Arnis but his political position within Arnis in the Philippines—he was not representing a style but he was representing the Filipino Martial Arts. And he sort of brought people together through Arnis Philippines (a national Arnis organization) and also through the camps (FMA camps) and through the teaching he did, and also through the movies of course. He made it popular and made people aware of the Filipino art of stick fighting…’

As a ‘medium’, Dantes put himself forward as a form of canvass upon which FMA practitioners could negotiate national identity and FMA. Technically, the characters and narratives that were shown in Dantes’ films were themselves already

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95 Dieter Knüttel testimony in *The Bladed Hand*... emphasis mine.
constructions—mostly drawn from cultural traditions in Modern Arnis since Dantes was a practitioner of that discipline. Still, Dantes is able to present this to FMA circles as an ongoing process and entice them to partake in the construction of Filipino identity through FMA. Knüttel further stresses that the most striking character of Dantes is his humble comportment when dealing with various FMA teachers.\textsuperscript{96} Being such, Dantes is able to penetrate the otherwise exclusive FMA circles—he is able to let them articulate their own reconstructions without mandating what is right or not.\textsuperscript{97} This ties in with the previous chapter’s discussion on the malleability of a historically obscure symbol such as Lapulapu—because the figure of the Filipino archetype in FMA films is open-ended, FMA teachers can add their own layers or versions to the main characters in FMA films.\textsuperscript{98}

A second way in which FMA films contributed to ongoing processes of national identity construction is that they created a venue for FMA clubs to negotiate national identity using cultural materials provided by the films. From these negotiations, FMA films standardized and reinforced state-sponsored ideology in the same way that Dantes became an agent for legitimizing other people’s representations of national identity. At the same time, the films became inserted in the politics that was going on between FMA clubs. What is most interesting about these negotiations is the nature of the discussions that take place. FMA practitioners were more preoccupied with discussing film details that involved technical rather than theoretical or ideological aspects in FMA. Going back to the chapter introduction, when FMA teachers talked about the films, they critiqued footwork, choreography, and the myths rather than for example the fact that the protagonist was not a pure-blooded native or that the film’s Arnis expert was an old Caucasian. Similarly, when Dantes was confronted by FMA grandmasters after seeing his film, they did not discuss themes of nationalism or identity. Instead, they questioned his martial skills.

On one hand, practitioners negotiate national identity in terms of these details because it is the language that is available to them and because, as Chapter One argued, they already presuppose their communion. On the other hand, this can be read as another way of social positioning similar to what was discussed in Chapter

\textsuperscript{96} Dieter Knüttel testimony in *The Bladed Hand*...
\textsuperscript{97} For a discussion on the exclusivity and fragmented nature of FMA clubs, see chapter one.
\textsuperscript{98} For more on the dissertation’s discussion on the malleability of symbols, see chapter two.
Two. By critiquing film representations of national identity the way they do, they are really shaping these representations after themselves.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that FMA films contributed to imagining the nation by reflecting reconstructions of national identity and nationalism on film. This was achieved using three strategies of juxtaposition embedded in the film narratives which normally engaged the FMA protagonist with a foreign other, forces of modernity, and the helpless feminine. By defining the Filipino self against these, FMA films articulated and standardized an FMA-styled national identity and nationalism.

The films’ articulations are constructs which emerged from a specific historical period in which FMA was being appropriated by the national government for its longstanding project of nation-building. Furthermore, they surfaced during the time when foreign martial arts films, especially those by Bruce Lee, flooded Philippine popular culture and compelled a response from local filmmakers. As such, the contours of national identity that were being defined by the films were shaped by these historical circumstances. For example, there was a conscious effort to illustrate the superiority of FMA against foreign martial arts.

Based on an analysis of shifts in narrative themes and filmic representations, the chapter argued that the films reflected how FMA was itself undergoing construction and redefinition—seen for instance in changes to the setting in the various films. Following arguments made in Chapter Two regarding the social positioning of clubs through a pedantic assertion of technical superiority, the chapter argued that FMA practitioners processed FMA films according to these terms in order to characteristically elevate themselves above other clubs. That they don’t critique the films’ representations of national identity and nationalism shows their subscription to the film’s ideological constructions.
Conclusion

This dissertation examined the contributions of Filipino Martial Arts (FMA) to the discourse of nationalism and the construction of national identity particularly since the 1970s when the state appropriated it for its own agenda of nation-building. Drawing from Benedict Anderson’s concept of the ‘imagined community’, the dissertation argued that the Filipino nation is a novel construct—shaped by its colonial history—which imagined its communion as stretching to pre-colonial times in order to allay postcolonial anxieties over national identity.1 Following formal independence in 1946 after three hundred and eighty-one years of colonization, the Philippine national government pursued a longstanding national project of articulating a national identity that was distinct from its colonial legacy in order to naturalize what Anthony Smith conceptualized as the ethnie (ethnic community).2 Taking from Ernest Gellner’s logic that cultural homogeneity was a necessary requirement for nationalism and nationhood, the dissertation showed how the country’s leaders have long attempted to reify the Philippine ethnie in order to draw together the diverse cultural-ethnic communities in the Philippines into a national community—a process Partha Chatterjee called ‘culturally re-equipping the nation’.3 It is from this endeavour that the national government’s appropriation of FMA emerges. As part of this longstanding national project, FMA’s nationalization also paralleled the larger dynamics of the Philippines’ own consolidation of its imagined community which, in order to address postcolonial anxieties, was being designed along the framework of the ethnie.

Similar projects were undertaken in other postcolonial countries like Indonesia and Japan. Marilyn Ivy argued how Japanese nostalgia about their ‘vanishing’ past became a motivation for Japan to undertake nation-building projects to confront Japan’s rapid Westernization.4 Likewise, Pemberton showed how the Suharto regime in Indonesia appropriated Javanese culture for a nationalist theme.

park in order to showcase New Order ideology. In the same way, as the dissertation’s chapters on film and Lapulapu showed, FMA was formulated and showcased under the nationalization program as an evidence of the Filipino ethnie which would justify a Filipino nation and also legitimize the existing national government.

What such works have not examined, however, is how sub-national entities—specifically the FMA clubs—which claim ownership of particular cultures being appropriated by the state assume agency in nation-building by appropriating the very rhetoric of nationalism the state used to mobilize them—a process this dissertation has termed ‘reverse appropriation’ (of nationalism). Taking from Vicente Rafael’s use of ‘translation’ as a form of communication between Spanish missionaries and Tagalog natives under the rubric of conversion and colonization, this dissertation argued that FMA clubs ‘translated’ the nationalism being framed by the national government in their own terms as a way for them to subtly resist being consumed by the homogenizing forces of the nation and highlight themselves among the multitude of other FMA clubs. By analyzing the dynamics involved in the national government’s appropriation of FMA, the dissertation argued that FMA as an ethnographic concept, as well as the Filipino national identity that was being defined from it, were not fixed, uncontested, and monolithic constructs.

Chapters One and Two traced the emergence of FMA clubs in the 1920s and argued that the weapons-based martial arts that constituted FMA was brought about when they became commercialized and popularized. Chapter One argued that the groups (termed FMA circles) that practiced these martial arts were fragmented, exclusive, organized based on their kinship, practiced their own traditions, and had their own set of hierarchies. Chapter Two further argued that because of the nature of martial arts, FMA circles were always trying to outperform each other either by participating in duels, or telling stories about their martial prowess. Their fragmented nature and assertions of superiority became compounded when commercial FMA clubs opened in the 1920s because it forced them to package

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themselves better to potential students. However, while it distanced clubs from each other, commercialization simultaneously also allowed clubs to begin conceptualizing the kind of martial arts they taught, and systematize their pedagogy for it. These became the roots of what is today regarded as FMA. The dissertation thus argued that FMA was formulated mainly after 1946 and was heavily influenced both by the national government’s nationalization of weapons-based martial arts, and the international commercialization of these martial arts. As Chapter One argued, FMA practitioners began to imagine a common mythic past that was just beyond the reach of sixteenth century European historiography so as to lay claim to FMA, legitimate it as a time-tested fighting tradition, and allow it to fit the framework of nationalist ideology. Chapter Two argued that when the martial arts were exported abroad to places like the United States, they became collectively identified as Filipino martial arts because they were being engaged with other national cultures.\(^8\) Just as Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ was systematically diffused by capitalism, FMA as an ‘imagined identity’ was being articulated as it became more commercialized and popular. These articulations mainly originated from FMA clubs because they were the ones who needed to lay claim to it the most.

At the level of the national government, stimulated by the growing popularity of FMA and the influx of foreign martial arts in popular culture, measures were undertaken to appropriate FMA in the Philippines’ longstanding national programs aimed to address postcolonial anxieties over national identity. The establishment of institutions such as the National Arnis Association of the Philippines (NARAPHIL) compelled FMA clubs to participate in the nationalization of FMA. On one hand, clubs were defensive about being consumed by the homogenizing forces of the nation. At the same time, cooperation did not seem feasible since the nationalist project was fraught with the fragmented characteristics of FMA clubs. On the other hand, subscribing to the state’s nationalist designs on FMA—what the dissertation termed ‘reverse appropriation’ of nationalism—would allow the clubs to continue existing in the now commercialized and internationalized FMA environment. Set against the backdrop of their struggles for recognition and prestige at the sub-

\(^8\) The term FMA was first introduced by Filipino-American Dan Inosanto; Dan Inosanto, *Filipino Martial Arts as Taught by Dan Inosanto*. Los Angeles: Know How Publishing Company 1980
national level, adherence to the nationalist agenda became a way for clubs to highlight themselves in the nation. When the state appropriated FMA clubs for nation-building, the clubs saw this as an opportunity to elevate themselves within the national hierarchy and in FMA by subscribing to the state’s designs. This positioning led FMA clubs to assume two different sets of identities—they had to constantly manoeuvre between the national identity that was being promoted by the state, and their more localized identities which they have historically identified with, were defensive of, and used to engage with other clubs.

The dissertation presented the nature of this manoeuvring between the local and the national in Chapter Three using the historical-mythical figure of the Cebuano chieftain Lapulapu. Chapter Three argued how Lapulapu became incorporated in the articulation of an idealized FMA-based national identity. FMA’s own appropriation of him comes from a longstanding tradition. Historically, Lapulapu has been configured and reconfigured as a villain and hero to serve specific political ends. Mainly, Lapulapu’s myth and history have been used in Philippine nationalist tradition as evidence for a Philippine ethnie—a unique national identity derived from a complex pre-Hispanic civilization. By asserting that Lapulapu was a practitioner of FMA, FMA clubs validated the role ascribed to them by the state as beacons of Filipino national identity. How FMA practitioners reconstructed him as an FMA fighter in tournaments and cultural displays was a statement of their claim to ownership of him. On top of this, however, FMA clubs reconfigured Lapulapu’s image to resemble themselves. As the examples shown by the two trophies awarded to Roland Dantes, Lapulapu was depicted brandishing weapons that particular clubs favoured. Projecting their own images on Lapulapu lent FMA clubs the same importance and meaning that the national government historically ascribed to him. These reconfigurations were attempts to authenticate their own local identities so as to elevate themselves above other FMA clubs without compromising their subscription to the state’s national designs. The main reason why FMA clubs are able to come up with a variety of representations without being challenged is explained in Chapter Three as Lapulapu’s symbolic ‘malleability’—that is, the lack of historical information about him allowed those who represented him to ‘fill in the gaps’ with their own interpretations. As the case of Lapulapu showed, national symbols are not always monolithic constructs. The multitude of representations of
Lapulapu during FMA tournaments and the controversy over the statue of The Sentinel of Freedom reveals that various social and political groups are invested in him and contour him in ways that would address their personal interests, and highlight them above the rest.

Like the figure of Lapulapu, Chapter Four argued that FMA films are products of ongoing negotiations in FMA regarding what FMA is and how it understands nationalism. The emergence of the films and the themes and narratives they followed, were set against the backdrop of broader historical circumstances—for example, martial law under Ferdinand Marcos and the proliferation of foreign martial arts films in Philippine cinema. For these reasons, the films should be read as momentary snapshots of FMA representations and understandings of nationalism and national identity that have been influenced by specific historical and ideological conditions.

Chapter four also argued that FMA films became platforms for expressing and officializing FMA’s interpretations of nationalism and national identity which tied in with the national government’s designs. As a cultural imaginary, they provided practitioners with the cultural material that could be used for negotiating national identity. This was attested by the way actor Roland Dantes became an iconic figure and influential personage in FMA. Dantes’ background in Modern Arnis provided him with the representations he could use to depict Filipino identity on film. For instance, he used techniques in Modern Arnis to physically express the idealized Filipino fighter in the films’ martial arts choreography. He also incorporated the myths and legends told in Modern Arnis in the narratives of his films. In this regard, Dantes’ films contributed to standardizing a representation of FMA on film which was predominantly based on Modern Arnis. To some extent, Dantes was also responsible for popularizing Modern Arnis in the FMA community. Based on the testimonies of other FMA practitioners, Dantes’ goal was mainly to draw FMA practitioners together and make them cooperate with each other under the state’s program. His filmic reconstructions of FMA nonetheless elevated him into a

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9 Some examples are: the old hermit who would only die when a proper disciple is found; being forced to wear a blindfold for a year; and going on a quest to find Arnis sticks that could break steel. See Chapter Three’s discussion on the film *The Pacific Connection* (1974) and how similar narratives can be found among myths in FMA.

10 Modern Arnis was also used in *Kamagong; Kamagong*, dir. Carlo J. Caparas, Viva Films, 1986
position wherein the clubs identified with his representations and enabled him to act as padrino between the clubs in real life. Through his status as celebrity, Dantes forged relationships between FMA practitioners both locally and abroad. At the time of his death in 2009, Dantes was engaged in discussions with the legislators of the Arnis Law. Being one of the earliest individuals to put FMA in Philippine movie theatres, Dantes was able to monopolize early filmic representations of FMA and hence acquired a status which empowered him to legitimize or authenticate the representations that other FMA practitioners came up with.

This dissertation has argued that the history of how FMA became a significant role-player in nation-building was a deliberate effort, though maybe not a conscious one. In fact, the dissertation argued how FMA itself was a novel construct that was formulated in response to the rapid commercialization and increasing popularity of existing weapons-based martial arts in the Philippines. FMA’s example ties in with similar constructivist theories of nationhood as forwarded by scholars such as Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson. However, because the Philippines emerged as a nation that was anxious about its national identity, the Filipino nation also needs to be analyzed in terms of the way it understands itself as a form of what Anthony Smith called an ethnie. Using FMA, the Philippines imagined its origins in ethnic terms and argued its imagined community along this framework of communion. On top of this state-sponsored project of building a homogenous Filipino nation using the ethnie, the members of the ‘imagined community’ exhibit their own desires to preserve their local identities. As this dissertation argued using the concept of ‘reverse appropriation’, nationhood is not a linear and uncontested concept. It involves forces of cohesion and fracture that tug at the national project in opposite directions.

Due to certain constraints on time and funding, other themes on FMA such as on gender or longer traditions of esoteric practices were not covered in this dissertation. Further research into these may provide a deeper understanding of the constructivist-ethnosymbolist dichotomy at play in the nationalization of FMA and the construction of Filipino national identity.

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