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# MASAGANA 99: BEYOND SEEDS, GRAINS, AND STALKS

Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns

**ABSTRACT.** Alongside official policies and speeches declaring and steering official national identity, I turn to songs and dances as affective and performance archives that strategically rouse and structure our feelings of belonging to a cohesive and stable national culture. More broadly, I track the crafting of a Filipino/a national subject through state reliance on sedimented (and thus value-laden) forms such as ‘national traditions’ and ‘folk cultures’ to make possible the idea of a laboring and productive citizenry. I ask: How do traditional dances and songs sustain and indeed supplement the ambitions of government initiatives implemented during Ferdinand Marcos’s martial law, such as the rice production program Masagana 99? How do the timeless assemblages of performance shore up the edifice of an embattled and yet resilient nation-state? As we commemorate the afterlives of Martial Law, I return to such fragments of embodied memory with adjacent governmental policies of the time to underscore the complex scope and the scale of Marcos’s dictatorship, as well as relay these scenes as seeds of struggle, labor, and resistance.

*Magtanim ay di biro,  
Buong araw nakayuko.  
Di man lang makatayo,  
Di man lang makaupo.*

—Lyrics from the folk song “Planting Rice is Never Fun”

*Paunlarin natin ang palayan  
sa mga bagong paraan.  
Makisapi sa kilusan!  
Masagana 99!*

—Lyrics from Masagana 99 jingle<sup>1</sup>

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1. Translation: “Let rice farming thrive through new methods. Join the Masagana 99 movement.” Source: accessed September 1, 2015, [http://www.yourepeat.com/watch/?v=EPTMGi\\_48Bs](http://www.yourepeat.com/watch/?v=EPTMGi_48Bs). Posted by the Entrolezos. Performed by the Entrolezos: Dick, Chito, Nato, Precy, Chas, and Ningning.

“Seeding in these ways speaks to several things—the kind of circuit of farming that one could call ‘seed baiting’ (allied to credit-baiting); particular registers of futurity invested with hope; alchemical transformations that lie at the heart of agro-economies; vital environments slaughtered to spawn produce” [emphasis mine]

—Geeta Patel, “Seeding Debt: Alchemy, Death, and the Precarious Farming of Life-Finance in the Global South.”<sup>2</sup>

**F**olk songs enliven. I learned of these two songs at the same time, growing up in the late 1970s in Olongapo City. Though one is a folk song—“*Magtanim ay di Biro*”—and the other is a campaign jingle—“*Masagana 99*”—for a government policy, I heard these two songs together and made sense of them through each other. Both tunes are concerned with farming, agriculture, and in my mind had something to do with Filipino identity. These songs with accompanying dance movements were part of the Filipino folk curriculum taught to students and performed at school festivals. Here, I return to the plangent echoes of these tunes and the memory of dances learned and performed in school in the late 1970s as origin stories for the reproduction and consolidation of a singular Filipino national identity. Cultural practices and agricultural policies emerge as co-constitutive historical projects, forging what Geeta Patel calls “registers of futurity,” across heightened moments of political and social turmoil and unrest. Alongside official policies and speeches declaring and steering official national identity, I turn to these songs and dances as affective and performance archives that strategically rouse and structure our feelings of belonging to a cohesive and stable national culture. More broadly, I track the crafting of a Filipino/a national subject through state reliance on sedimented (and thus value-laden) forms such as “national traditions” and “folk cultures” to make possible the idea of a laboring and productive citizenry. I ask: How do traditional dances and songs sustain and indeed supplement the ambitions of a rice production program such as *Masagana 99*? How is the vitality of culture, movement and memory summoned to service the rapacity of postcolonial agro-reform? How do the timeless assemblages of performance recollect the edifice of an embattled and yet resilient nation-state? As we commemorate the afterlives of Martial Law, we return to such fragments of embodied memory as scenes, indeed, seeds, of struggle, labor, and resistance.

Let us begin. “*Magtanim ay di biro*” is a folk song translated into various Filipino languages. I cite the Filipino lyrics in the epigraph of this essay. The English language version reads: “Planting rice is never

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2. Geeta Patel. “Seeding Debt: Alchemy, Death, and the Precarious Farming of Life-Finance in the Global South.” *Cultural Critique* 89, 1-37.

fun/Bending over 'til the set of sun./Cannot sit, cannot stand/[Plant the seedlings all by hand.] I learned this song, in the mid-1970s, with accompanying choreography taught in grade school, performed in costumes—*baro't saya* for the girls and *camisa de chino* and relaxed rolled-up chino pants for the boys. Accoutrements including a *salakot* (conical hat), neckerchief for the boys, and a bandana headscarf for the girls. As students in an urban setting, far removed from the realities of agricultural life, we had a basic understanding of the practical purposes of the costumes we were wearing—the *salakot* as a shield from the sun; the neckerchief to cover the back of the neck but also to use to wipe the sweat; the head bandana to keep in place one's hair. Pants are rolled up high to keep them from getting muddied while plowing the fields. Some of us can reference our relatives who work in the rice farming industry of Central Luzon, where we visited them in their *palayan* (rice field) villages during school breaks and holidays. I made sense of all this then as I was told—these are cultural performances, referencing community celebrations, that express Filipino national values. Memorization of words, gestures, and sounds was my service to the burgeoning nation.

The dances we learned and performed expressing *buhay sa bukid* at our school festivals are “occupational dances,” part of the Filipino folk curriculum taught to students and performed at school festivals. Writing for the National Commission for the Arts, Larry Gabao explains that “occupational dances depict the lifestyle and daily work of the people living in various topographies.”<sup>3</sup> Gabao writes that “Characteristically a hardworking group of people, the Filipinos exhibit work and occupation even in their dances,” and concludes that “The Filipinos by nature love to dance and work at the same time, and these are truly reflected in their occupational dances.” This ethnotypographic description and characterization is a pattern of identification based on the essence (“characteristically,” “by nature”), aimed to celebrate Filipino national cultural traits.

In the mid-to-late seventies when I was instructed to learn these songs and dances, the Marcos administration launched *Masagana 99*, a robust campaign to “increase rice production among Filipino farmers.” The anthem *Masagana 99* describes and valorizes agricultural life, cultivating hope through the celebration of virtues of cooperation and shared investment in uplifting and fostering rice farming: “*Paunlarin natin ang palayan, sa mga bagong paraan. Makisapi sa kilusan—Masagana 99.*” Of note here is the centrality of specific songs, dances, and other cultural media projects to brand and vitalize the

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3. Larry Gabao. “Philippine Occupational Dance.” GOV.PH. Government of the Philippines. <https://ncca.gov.ph/about-ncca-3/subcommissions/subcommission-on-the-arts-sca/dance/philippine-occupational-dance/>. June 19, 2021 NCAA was an initiative by President Corazon Aquino established in 1992 under the Republic Act 7356. NCAA is “the prime government agency that safeguards, develops, and promotes Filipino culture through the formulation and implementation of enabling policies and programs as well as the administration of endowment funds for culture and arts.” GOV. PH. Government of the Philippines. <https://ncca.gov.ph/>

*Masagana 99* program. The ideological deployment of culture in the *Masagana 99* campaign specifically embeds the *magsasaka* as a folk Filipino identity and way of life, a profoundly naturalized emplacement of rice farming and the rice farmer as a cornerstone of national identity. Furthermore, through the introduction of modern techniques in farming and seed experimentation, agriculture and farming are thus imagined as possibilities for living a modern life. That folk culture played a central role in the production of Ferdinand Marcos's postcolonial modernity, his ambitious vision of "New Society," has been made clear in the work of many scholars of Marcos' martial law, including Alice Guillermo, Doreen Fernandez, Bien Lumbera, Maria Josephine Barrios, and Roland Tolentino.<sup>4</sup> The development of agriculture, as Akhil Gupta notes in the Indian context, provides the critical link to the forging of the modern nation, alongside the overthrow of colonial regimes and bureaucracies.<sup>5</sup> The Marcos administration developed a broad agrarian policy that extended its reach to non-agrarian parts of the Philippines. Using new media (then, which were television and radio), culture, and education, the Marcos administration sought to enlist the citizenry and gain what scholar and anti-GMO activist Vandana Shiva calls "incipient revolutionaries."<sup>6</sup> In making culture constitutive of *Masagana 99*, the program arguably accomplished much more than what the program's seeds and new farming methods did.

These cultural components with adjacent governmental policies of the time underscore the complex scope and scale of Marcos's dictatorship. As I have argued elsewhere, the Marcoses profoundly understood and embraced culture as a place of both peril and possibility. Capitalizing on a period of transition for the nation, the Marcoses produced and employed folk culture for multiple purposes. The spectacularization of folk culture naturalized and popularized the new comprehensive agricultural policy. It also eased the introduction of a new technology of rice farming and rice seed itself because the new breed of rice seed meant learning new farming methods including the use of new chemicals as pesticides, new equipment, new watering systems, and a new production cycle. These folk songs and dances, aired on television and radio and performed at national and local gatherings, not only promoted the idea of a timeless collectivity and orality, around which a national self could cohere and stabilize; they also portrayed the image of planting rice as not simply a task, a form of

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4. Doreen Fernandez, *Palabas: Essays in Philippine History*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1996); Bienvenido Lumbera. *Writing the Nation/Pag-akda ng Bansa*. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2000); Alice G. Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines, 1970-1990*. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001); Rolando Tolentino and Frank Climatu, *Mondo Marcos: Writings on Martial Law and the Marcos Babies*. (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 2010).

5. Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

6. Vandana Shiva. *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics*, (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1993).

mere labor, but rather as a patriotic act intrinsic to the building of a modern Philippines. As Neferti Tadiar astutely notes: “the emergent culture of struggle of the colonized would consist of this process of freeing into expressivity the whole range of social life that colonialism impeded, if not obliterated. Culture was this very process of creative restitution and expressive action that Franz Fanon argued was commensurate with the concrete, practical struggle ‘to bring into existence this history of the nation—the history of decolonization’”(51).<sup>7</sup> The Marcoses cannily monetized these precise moments of decolonization, these freedom dreams, to refurbish a nation through cultural projects linked directly to government policy. These projects are an example of “how the state strives to draw its subjects into its own way of seeing, and thus to conform to *technicity of the state*” (230).<sup>8</sup> All the while, in the process, the state crafts an official national cultural identity.

For those of us removed from *buhay sa bukid* (life in the fields), *Masagana 99*'s comprehensive program that included the distribution of other seeds and plants—avocado, *malunggay* (moringa), and guava trees, root vegetables such as cassava, and tubers such as sweet potatoes and yams—provided crucial ways of participating in the “movement.” As we were told, these vegetables can be grown in our backyards or even from an empty *de lata* (tin can). Other initiatives such as worm farms for alternative proteins were offered up as possible lucrative businesses that were easily manageable and did not require extensive upkeep labor. Agricultural work—specifically with new and innovative techniques of mechanization, seed experimentation, and increased production—was thus retrofitted in the collective imaginary as a plausible option for the present and the future. To sing our folk songs of labor and fields was then to participate in the very material contexts of agro-modernities.

## I. Green Revolution and *Masagana 99*: The Revolution Will Be Technologized

*Thousands of students dress in magsasaka (farmer's) gender-conforming garbs. The boys were in a white camisa de chino, loose-fitting pants, a handkerchief tied around the neck, and a wide brim straw hat. The girls, standing next to them, wear mid-calf-length skirts, a blouse, and a bandana*

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7. Neferti Tadiar, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington. (New York: Grove Press, 1966).

8. “Technicity,” as Nick Cullather invokes in their article “Miracles of Modernization,” builds from Martin Heidegger and Michel Foucault’s use of this term in discussing “the way artifact is used to reveal and circumscribe the universe of priorities and possibilities.” Cullather’s article discusses the “miracle rice,” the new breed of rice variety upon which the Green Revolution was introduced and implemented in Asia. Nick Cullather, “Miracles of Modernization: The Green Revolution and the Apotheosis of Technology,” *Diplomatic History* 28.2 (April 2004): 227-252.

around to cover their hair. Once the music begins, in full orchestral opulence, dominated by plectrum instruments, the boy-girl pairs begin by stepping forward while in line.

*Magtanim ay di biro* is among the folk anthems of Filipino nationalism. In the decade of the 1970s, this song was recirculated and invoked to introduce *Bagong Lipunan*, Marcos's New Society campaign. The *Masagana 99* jingle uses revolutionary language in its call to action to join the program. Within this context, various folk songs celebrating agricultural life, coupling it with jingles promoting agricultural technologies, were introduced to a new generation of people and marked a new national era.<sup>9</sup> Marcos deployed various populist acts to gain the consent of the Filipino people as co-revolutionaries to his so-called Revolution from the Center. Populism as a political strategy transcends opposing political stances and differing class status; its effectivity is a political ideology and practice that transcends oppositions (conservatism or progressivism, rich or poor)—to appeal to a broad political and economic spectrum. Ernesto Laclau writes that “populism means putting into question the institutional order by constructing an underdog as a historical agent—i.e. an agent which is another in relation to the way things stand. But this is the same as politics. We only have politics through the gesture which embraces the existing state of affairs as a system and presents an alternative to it” (163).<sup>10</sup> The *Masagana 99* program's populist design brought together farmers, landowners, bankers, scientists, educators, nutritionists, local municipalities, as well as corporations under the common goal of making the Philippines self-sufficient in food production. Throughout there was a careful emphasis on how this new rice variety and modern technologies of rice farming would increase agricultural output and therefore bring prosperity to a needy nation. What remained unscathed was the system of land ownership that cultivated servitude, keeping intact an uneven and exploitative system at its very constitution. The campaign's platform of rousing agro-reform did not level the playing field, as it were; instead, the affective politics of cultural forms made possible a future absent of hunger and disenfranchisement.

*Masagana 99*'s goal was to produce 99 sacks or 4.4 tons of unmilled rice (palay) per hectare. By 1975, 500 farmers were partici-

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9. In a publication titled “Rice and the Filipino Diet and Culture,” Filomeno V. Aguilar, prolific scholar who has written about sugar cane, rice, landlessness and labor, social forestry, and upland development in the Philippines as well as Filipino migration in the globalized age, also mentions this song, noting that he “has not been able to ascertain the origins of the song commonly taught to schoolchildren until perhaps the 1970s (the generation in their 20s today [2004] do not seem to be familiar with it).” This article was written for the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice) and the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) joint publication initiative in celebration of the International Year of Rice in 2004. *Research paper series* No. 2008-03. Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2008.

10. Ernesto Laclau, *Ernesto Laclau: Post-Marxism, Populism and Critique*, ed. David Howarth. (New York: Routledge, 2015).



pating in Kilusang *Masagana 99*, which meant increased numbers of people in debt.<sup>11</sup> And by 1977, the Marcos administration's campaign promise to make the Philippines rice self-sufficient for the first time in the nation's history had been achieved. Francisco S. Tatad, the editor of selected speeches of Ferdinand Marcos, writes the following in his brief introductory note to President Marcos's speech to launch *Masagana 99*: "No issue perhaps has obsessed the administration of President Marcos more than the challenge of *rice sufficiency*" (169).<sup>12</sup> The program was recognized for its focus on increasing the Philippines' rice production, enabling self-sufficiency for the first time in the nation's short history. It was a comprehensive agricultural reform program that introduced new agricultural techniques relying on machines, fertilizers, and pesticides, with no collateral loans for farmers.

*Masagana 99* was the policy through which the Marcos administration continued the project of the Green Revolution in the Philippines. The architects of *Masagana 99* were Peter Smith of Shell Company, Inocencio Bolo of the UP College of Agriculture, and Vernon Eugene Ross of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). Among the numerous proposals to the National Food and Agriculture Commission following the series of disasters that would put the country's rice shortage into "critical proportions" in 1973, it was Smith, Bolo, and Ross's idea of a comprehensive program that would yield "99 cavans of *palay* (i.e. unhusked rice) per hectare," which would be the formula needed, not only to get out of an impending disastrous famine, but ultimately to reach the self-sufficiency that then-Secretary of Agriculture Arturo Tanco Jr. approved. With some skepticism, Tanco advanced Smith, Bolo, and Ross's proposal to Marcos, who then gave the final green light. Tanco, Jr would lead the personnel who would compose the implementation team of *Masagana 99*, including Deputy Implementer Edgardo Quisumbing, Field Level Implementer Domingo Panganiban, IRRI founding director Santiago Obien, and Assistant to Tanco, Jr. Pilica Cortez. Those who worked on this new program (such as Domingo and Obien) were trained under the philosophy and methods of the Green Revolution.<sup>13</sup>

*Once the singing begins, "Magtanim ay di biro, maghapon nakayuko," the boys bend as if planting a seedling. They squat down, miming the gesture of placing seeds in the dirt. They*

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11. This estimated number of participants may or may not include those who were not necessarily farmers but wanted to take advantage of the loan system. "In 1973-74, the government set up an expanded and revolutionary credit system involving 420 rural banks, 102 branches of the Philippine National Bank, and 25 offices of the Agricultural Credit Administration." See Robert Chandler, *Rice in the Tropics: A Guide to the Development of National Programs*, 125.

12. Francisco S. Tatad, ed. "A Program of Survival" in *A Dialogue with My People: Selected Speeches of Ferdinand E. Marcos September 1972-September 1973* (Manila: The Department of Public Information Republic of the Philippines, (1973), 169.

13. Kenneth P. Smith. "Palay, Policy, and Public Administration: The 'Masagana 99' Program Revisited," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration* 33, 1 (January 1989): 69-93.



go in a circle around their dancing partners performing this action, as the partner stands holding a straw rice sifter shifting from one side of her waist to the other mimicking the act of cleaning out non-rice grains using their bilao (circular basket).

The Green Revolution was a diverse program developed to address the threat of global famine and food scarcity. In the mid-1940s, American agricultural scientist Norman Borlaug, in collaboration with scientists in Mexico, discovered a high-yielding short-strawed, disease-resistant wheat in his plant genetic experimentation. With this accomplishment, he became a much sought-after consultant. For this work, he would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970.<sup>14</sup> In 1959, the creation of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) based in Los Baños, Philippines introduced the Green Revolution to the Philippines under the leadership of Carlos P. Garcia, the eighth president of the country. The IRRI was continued under the administration of President Diosdado Macapagal. The IRRI was jointly funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation, which donated \$7.15 million to establish the IRRI and contributed an additional \$750,000 for research and training during the Institute's first three years of operation. The Filipino government and the Rockefeller Foundation assumed primary responsibility for staffing and operating the IRRI.[11] These foundations, along with USAID and World Bank financing, would continue to provide funding for research and implementation of the *Masagana 99* program. The range of technology to tackle food shortage was broad, from encouraging individual households to plant food to the creation of the IRRI, described by Borlaug in his Nobel Lecture as "the first truly international research and training institute, ... to work exclusively on the regionally all-important but too-long neglected rice crop." [4]

The Green Revolution's goal of increased food production would take root in different forms in other parts of Asia. Whereas in the Philippines, the Green Revolution asserted production for "self-sufficiency" in its implementation, in India, the program emphasized "material abundance to combat scarcity." Vandana Shiva, in her much-lauded book *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, describes the Green Revolution in India as a project of aggressive development:

[It] then becomes a strategy to 'combat scarcity and dominate nature' to generate material abundance. The view of scarcity and of violence is shared by both the left and the right. Capital accumulation through appropriation of nature is seen by both ends of traditional political spectrum as a source of generating material abundance, and through it conditions of peace. This orthodox view holds that 'the unprecedented control of the environment facilitated by a high-level technology thus the possibility of

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14. Scott Kohler, "The Green Revolution: Rockefeller Foundation, 1943," [https://cspcs.sanford.duke.edu/sites/default/files/descriptive/green\\_revolution.pdf](https://cspcs.sanford.duke.edu/sites/default/files/descriptive/green_revolution.pdf)

eliminating toil and poverty is the necessary pre-requisite for overcoming the struggle between men themselves.' ... the Green Revolution was prescribed as a techno-political strategy that would create abundance in agricultural societies and reduce the threat of communist insurgency and agrarian conflict. (14)

Shiva adds the following:

The British-American-sponsored Colombo Plan of 1952 was the explicit articulation of the development philosophy which saw the peasantry in Asia as incipient revolutionaries, who, if squeezed too hard, could be rallied against the politically and economically powerful groups. Rural development in general, and the Green Revolution in particular, assisted by foreign capital and planned by foreign experts were prescribed as a means of stabilizing the rural areas politically 'which would include defusing the most explosive grievances of the more important elements in the countryside.' (14)

In these passages, Shiva links development in the Third World during the 1970s to Western colonialism and points out that the production of the peasantry is always regarded as an impending oppositional force, always already a threat to the status quo. Critics of the Green Revolution situate it as a first world's effort to combat communist influence among developing countries who have yet to fall prey to it. The U.S., and global institutions that worked collaboratively with the U.S., offered development and aid to poor countries they believed were vulnerable to communism because they are destitute, and always at the brink of famine and starvation. Through new technology and programs designed to increase material production, these poor countries can be saved from the influence of communism.

Peasant unrests, or their possibilities, have both inspired and have always been perceived as a threat to the nation as "incipient revolutionaries." Historian of modern Philippines Reynaldo Ileto's groundbreaking book *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910* links peasant imaginaries and peasant uprisings to "Little Traditions," distinct from the elite-led movements for independence belonging to the "Great Traditions."<sup>15</sup> These "Little Traditions" of peasant unrest were muffled or ignored by the Filipino elite to preserve the image of national unity against colonial rule (6-7). But unlike the elite of the 19th-century revolution against colonial rule, Marcos directly enlisted peasants in his multiple revolutions—the Revolution from the Center, *Bagong Lipunan*/New Society, and the *Kilusang Masagana* 99. This time, however, the unity would not be marshaled against an occupying foreign force. Marcos gave peasants

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15. *Pasyon and Revolution*. (Manila, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979), 6-7, 16.

a part of his revolution from the center, a role in his vision of a new modern nation to appease them and to avoid a real peasant uprising.

In particular, *Masagana 99* was a campaign that envisioned the involvement of scientists, farmers, consumers, buyers, bankers, policymakers, and cultural producers. A major feature of this program was its focus on increasing rice and corn production through food science experimentation and innovation.<sup>16</sup> Vincent Boudreau writes “Though methods introduced through the Green Revolution, such as mechanization, have been in place since the 1950s, it was not accelerated until the 1970s through the high-yielding rice and corn varieties” (50).<sup>17</sup> *Masagana 99* promised not only rice harvest for consumption by the Filipino people but was touted as the strategy that would increase rice production for the Philippines to be the number one rice-producing country in Southeast Asia, effectively cornering the rice market. Other product-producing programs, such as the Blue Revolution (*Biyayang Dagat '79*), focused on increasing seafood harvesting industries and establishing a credit program aimed at smaller scale fisheries, were similarly structured, involving civic participation in Marcos’s *Bagong Lipunan*.<sup>18</sup> Marcos approached these structural policies as a total campaign wherein citizens were enlisted to carry on the “Revolution from the Center.”

Before, during, and following the years of World War II, visual artist Fernando Amorsolo made iconic the Philippine folk with images of the countryside and village life with paintings such as *Dalaga sa Bukid* and *Planting Rice with Mayon Volcano*. These paintings made rice fields synonymous with the Philippine nation. Philippine Studies scholar Alice Guillermo writes of Amorsolo’s rural panoramas: “Perpetuating the myth of the ‘beautiful land,’ Amorsolo was best known for his rice-planting scenes in which the arduous occupation of peasants working in the green paddies seemed to be gracefully choreographed against a backdrop of huge mango trees, mountains, and a nipa hut or two. ...Then, too, there were the cornucopia paintings of rosy young women and men carrying baskets of fruit from the harvest.”<sup>19</sup> Guillermo argues that Amorsolo contributes to “orientalist myth-making,” with romanticized depictions of the Philippine countryside life, rendering “a bright tone to the colo-

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16. Nick Cullather writes, “The extensive literature on the Green Revolution acknowledges its geopolitical agenda and describes the varied professional, commercial, and strategic interests behind scientific agriculture. Foundations and scientists fulfilled institutional and professional ambitions by supplanting local knowledge and praxis with international (Western) expertise.” (228). See “Miracles of Modernization: The Green Revolution and the Apotheosis of Technology,” *Diplomatic History* 28.2 (2004): 227-254.

17. Vincent Boudreau, *Grassroots and Cadre in the Protest Movement*. (Manila, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2001).

18. “Letter of Instruction to the Minister of Natural Resources to operationalize the Blue Revolution Program of the Ministry of Natural Resources.” LETTER OF INSTRUCTION NO. 868. by Ferdinand Marcos. 1979. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1979/05/25/letter-of-instruction-no-868-s-1979/>

19. Alice Guillermo. “The History and Current Situation of Modern Art in the Philippines.”

nial endeavor.” Over the years, since their creation, these images were reproduced in calendars, cards, popular publications such as magazines, even placemats, thereby reaching a broad mass. Renewed circulation of iconic rice fields and planting rice during the *Masagana 99* period resig-nified these familiar images as stable and timeless depictions that plant the rice field as part of the modern destiny of the Philippine nation.

## II. Culture Baiting: Propagating and Programming

*Through the music and the dance, we were instructed on how to be part of Kilusang Masagana 99. We each knew our design-ated gendered part, carefully choreographed. Students in the Philippines and in different parts of the world where people of the Philippines have built their lives are taught this song and dance as representative of their national cultural identity.*

*Masagana 99* was a comprehensive program that was primarily agriculturally focused, but Marcos’s administration deployed a multi-sited approach that included arts and cultural development, extolling the promise of *Kilusang Masagana 99*. The campaign included seed experiments, the modernization of agricultural methods, capital-in-tensive farming methods, and health and nutrition programs designed to transform Filipino eating practices/habits to prevent specific food product shortages (particularly rice). Through *Masagana 99*, modern agricultural methods were introduced, including increased irrigation, herbicides, pesticides, and increased reliance on petroleum products. Furthermore, new foods were introduced, such as the ready-to-eat blend of whole wheat flour, non-fat dried milk powder, soy flour, iodized salt, and Nutribun (supplied by the US Agency for International Development). Alternative protein sources included soybean products and earthworms (for animal feed, but also proposed as human food).<sup>20</sup> Imelda Marcos spearheaded “Share for Progress,” seed distribution programs that encouraged the populace to grow their food. However, specific food items were pushed forth including the bitter green leafy vegetable *malunggay*, papaya, guava, banana, avocado, and potato and yam varieties.<sup>21</sup> Other techniques of local food production encouraged by the administration targeted individual households (repurposing used tin cans as planters for small plants) and encouraged the construction of *barangay* (neighborhood) and school collective gardens (3). The Phil-ippines was a site of food science research; thus, all the world awaited

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20. “RR8150B Philippines earthworms a new source of protein.” December 10, 1981. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7TDPAjFjz0>

21. I recall proudly growing cassava and varieties of sweet potatoes and yams. Once I was able to harvest them, I went on a consistent diet of root and tubers for weeks. It was the only food I would consume.

the promise of this seed explored through various experiments including genetic manipulation to increase production and nutritional value.

Seeding, in the terminology of chemistry, produces a reaction, an alchemical possibility. On the topic of seeds and debt in the Indian cotton context, Patel writes (as I noted in my epigraph) that “Seeding in these ways speaks to several things—the kind of circuit of farming that one could call ‘seed baiting’ (allied to credit-baiting); particular registers of futurity invested with hope; alchemical transformations that lie at the heart of agro-economies; *vital environments slaughtered to spawn produce*” (emphasis mine).<sup>22</sup> Scenes and sounds of folk, of promising farming life in the epic national story of the Philippines, were necessary to divert attention from the “slaughtering of vital environments.” The farmer and farm life, the scenes of folk I invoke in this essay are culture baits, in Patel’s sense of baiting, that were necessary to get the citizenry to believe and buy into the *Masagana 99* program. These occupational songs and dances depict farm life as innocuous and timeless, always already running through the course of the nation’s DNA. The details of the new methods, the new techniques, the new ways of working required by the new seed variety are genetically determined, so to speak. These details are blended in the rousing and robust orchestral sound, mixed in the catchy tune of and brevity of the campaign jingle which includes a spirited affirmation to be part of a larger cause, and embodied in a choreography of repetitive and even rhythmic movements, harmonious with the music, designed to depict collective satisfaction in hard work.

Dance and theater studies scholar Anthea Kraut writes about the constitutive function of folk in the modern imaginary through folk choreography, in her work on African American folk. I would add here that folk song and music share the same function. These choreographies, song lyrics, rhythm, and sounds express collectivity and gesture to a previous time, depicted as blissful and untouched by the struggles of modernity. And yet the folk form is a necessary invention for the modern nation—a grounding cultural force. To quote Kraut further:

the folk are imagined to be a homogeneous group who speak in a unified voice—a contract to the hybridity, complexity, and cacophony that characterize ‘modern culture.’ Again, this vision of an undifferentiated, harmonized collective contributes to the perceived simplicity and authenticity of the folk, and not coincidentally, makes their expressive forms appear so accessible to the nonfolk. ... constructions of the folk are almost invariably premised on a rather consistent set of stereotypes. ... This particular aspect of the folk exposes the constructedness of the entire category, for it inevitably emerges out of and in response to modernizing forces and broader historical changes (21).<sup>23</sup>

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22. Geeta Patel. “Seeding Debt: Alchemy, Death, and the Precarious Farming of Life-Finance in the Global South.” *Cultural Critique* 89, 1-37.

23. Anthea Kraut, *Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neal Hurston*.

The emergence of the Philippines as an independent democratic nation following centuries of colonial rule and Marcos' specific approach to postcolonial nation building are among these "modernizing forces and broader historical changes."

Popularized versions of the folk songs I have named here were recorded by the Mabuhay Singers. The Mabuhay Singers became the sound of Filipiniana folk songs, recording over 100 albums with the Villar Recording Company, starting in 1958.<sup>24</sup> The signature sound of these folk recordings combines a folk message with the sound of rondalla instruments—string instruments played with a pick or plectrum.<sup>25</sup> The rondalla's big band, grand, and symphonic sound are compatible with the lyrics of these folk songs emphasizing togetherness and cooperation. The sounds are cheery, upbeat, infectious, and participatory (we all know when to start clapping to the beat). Music scholar Christi-Anne de Castro makes an important distinction between the development of folk music and folk dance in the Philippines: "folkloric dance in the Philippines references the populist, while the arranged folk song is much more overtly professionalized" (142).<sup>26</sup>

### III. Beyond Seeds, Grains, and Stalks

Our malunggay trees did not blossom. We could not live on what our papaya, guava, or banana trees produced. I could only sustain my cassava and kamote-centric diet for so long, realizing I had developed unhealthy, deficient, obsessive consumption habits. The worm farm my parents and godmother co-invested in did not prosper into a tasty and lucrative protein worm burger alternative to animal meat protein.

Marcos's anxiety about unity and collectivity was directly expressed in launching the Masagana 99 program in 1973: "We have taken it upon ourselves to eliminate the dividing line between these different sectors of our people. We have found common programs and activities that unite us rather than divide us. *Masagana 99* is such a program" (170).<sup>27</sup> Ten years later, at the dusk of his dictatorial regime, Marcos cites the *Masagana 99* initiative as one of the programs that makes up what he would call "Filipino ideology." His 1983 Executive Order 879 directed toward the dissemination of Filipino ideology enlisted the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports to administer

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(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

24. Mabuhay Singers. "Folksongs of the Philippines." Villar Records International. 1958.

25. Rondallas, brought by Spanish colonialism, vernacularized in the Philippines band music that creates musical sounds from instruments including the guitar, bandurria, ukulele, and banjo.

26. Christi-Anne Castro, *Musical Renderings of the Philippine Nation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

27. Ferdinand Marcos, "A Program of Survival. Launching of *Masagana 99* Program Malacañang 21 May 1973," Francisco S. Tatad, ed. *A Dialogue with My People: Selected Speeches of Ferdinand E. Marcos September 1972–September 1973* (Manila: The Department of Public Information Republic of the Philippines), 169–176.



“the study and understanding of the Filipino ideology in the curricula of all levels of education and training in all schools in the country” (Section 2).<sup>28</sup> By this time, however, a critical mass had been building, and eleven months later, Marcos, with his family and hundreds of his cronies would be driven out of power by the people’s revolution.

Rumblings of the return of *Masagana 99* and *Biyayang Dagat* under current Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte surfaced in 2016. In March 2020, speaking as the Chair of the Senate Committee on Economic Affairs, Imee Marcos invoked *Masagana 99* as a possible model for supporting farmers in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez III cut off the Senator, noting that he “was the Sec of Agriculture who cleaned up the M99 mess,” citing 800 rural banks that bankrupted due to unpaid loans/loan defaults. Imee Marcos attempted to redirect Dominguez’s comment as an insult to the Filipino farmers, issuing a press release that stated: “Shame on you, Secretary Dominguez, give the Filipino farmer some credit! When supported by sound government policy and defended against rampant importation, we can feed ourselves. Give the Filipino farmer a chance!”<sup>29</sup> Imee Marcos, the eldest daughter of Ferdinand Marcos, attempted to be the voice of rescue for the aggrieved Filipino farmers, dismissing Dominguez’s criticism of her father’s touted program.

The Marcos administration was working to avoid the spread of the Red Revolution. During this time, neighboring Southeast Asian countries were transforming through programs such as Year Zero in Cambodia—a reconstruction of the entire Cambodian society towards an extreme agrarian society, devoid of Western influence. Resetting the country to Year Zero involved the erasure of cultural practices (through the killing of artists, teachers, and other figures who may bear cultural memory) of Cambodia before Year Zero. In addition, in Indonesia, this was evinced by authoritarianism under the banner of the “New Order” under the leadership of Suharto. In each of these political and societal transitions, the governments struggled differently with economic instability, an increasing number of poor people, dissent, the ruling elite, population increase, the exponential growth of urban migration, foreign investments, histories of colonial occupation, ethnic minorities, and minority religions—all of which posed some form of threat to national security, vulnerable at the time of the nation’s nascent independence. Randolph Baker, Robert Herdt, and Beth Rose argue that “for the majority of Asian countries, the new technology provided an opportunity to reduce dependence

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28. See Executive Order No. 879, s. 1983, “Directing the propagation of the Filipino ideology and creating a committee to evolve, supervise and monitor the implementation of the program for its dissemination.” <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1983/03/01/executive-order-no-879-s-1983/>

29. Miguel Paolo P. Reyes, Joel Ariate Jr, Larah Vinda Del Mundo. “‘Success’ of Masagana 99 All in Imee’s Head—UP Researchers.” *PhilStar Global*. May 24, 2020, accessed June 9, 2021, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/05/24/2016215/success-masagana-99-all-imees-head-researchers>.



on rice imports. ... Agrarian reform was attempted in some countries to provide greater security in tenure and property rights” (256).<sup>30</sup>

What grew during this period of martial law?<sup>31</sup> The number of people in debt certainly grew. The national debt for development, foreign borrowing, and poverty grew. The trade terms grew worse, and growth in the domestic product per capita lagged. Moreover, underemployment rose, as did income inequality. So, too, did the large landfill in Manila, Smokey Mountain. The failures of the new rice technology in the Philippines and other countries have been well-documented: high-yielding crops increased the use of chemicals that depleted land nutrients, while technology-heavy methods led to ecological exhaustion. Ultimately, estimates of higher numbers of harvest may not necessarily be attributed to the new technology and new methods of farming, and more from the expansion of hectares. Natural alternatives, such as the apple snail, turned into pests in rice fields. Small farmers lost their land while corporate landowners reaped profits. “Technological innovations and capital intensive cultivation methods enabled the expulsion of tenants in favor of agrarian wage-laborers” (Fegan 67).<sup>32</sup> The government credit system failed, leaving hundreds of small banks bankrupt.<sup>33</sup>

This essay has worked to make sense of “traditional national culture” produced within a set of political and social agendas in a specific historical moment. In our school festivals and other events, thousands of urban kids like myself, performed the stylized version of the farmer folk. “Non folks” like me were fed and became part of the “undifferentiated, harmonized collective,” performing what we perceived as the “simplicity and authenticity of the folk.”<sup>34</sup> To close, I share one memory of my encounter as a “non-folk” with those who I presumed were the “folk”:

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30. J. Lim, *Philippine Macroeconomic Developments 1970–1993* (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Policy Studies, 1996).

31. I acknowledge that I do not discuss here resistance movements that also grew during this period. In other writings, I have discussed the theaters of martial law. An insightful work on protest movement that includes historical information of grassroots organizing during this period is Vince Boudreau’s *Grass Roots and Cadre in the Protest Movement* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2001).

32. Brian Fegan. “Land Reform and Technical Change in Central Luzon: The Rice Industry under Martial Law.” *Philippine Sociological Review* 31, no. 1/2 (January-June 1983): 67–86.

33. The rampancy of corruption was well-known, with “fake farmers” and “ghost borrowers” taking advantage of the no-collateral, low-interest loan. “Biyayang Dagat was a complete failure that it was called ‘Buwayang Dagat’ as the money allegedly went to Marcos’s cronies and oligarchs in the far-flung provinces. See Virgilio Esguerra and Ephraim Romero, *Agrarian Reform, Taxation and Cooperatives*. Manila: National Book Store, 1991. 180.

34. Anthea Kraut. *Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neal Hurston*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Though not elaborated on, the line separating folk and non-folk is not clear or clean cut. Kraut’s book discusses the complex processes that make folk folk and when folk become non-folk. What I find usefully underscored in Kraut’s discussion is the reliance on a binary imaginary that produces a non-folk and also establishes a hierarchical difference between folk and non-folk.

My aunt chose me to accompany her to visit her family in Gapan, Nueva Ecija, in Central Luzon. I had known that she came from a family of rice growers who did not own the land on which they work. Though I had previously seen and been in rice farming villages, specifically Pulong Masle in Pampanga, I had never been intimately exposed to farm work itself. I was excited to be going on this trip for two reasons. First, I was the only one among my siblings and cousins who was chosen to go. Second, it was harvest season! Even before we left, I asked my aunt, incessantly, if I could help with the harvest. She laughed and told my uncle “Gusto daw niyang tumulong sa bukid, gustong mag-ani.” My uncle also laughed and added “Talaga? Sige. Hayaan natin.” Let her do it.

The morning after we arrived, my aunt’s sister approaches me. “Halika na. Sabi sa akin ni Susan (my aunt) na gusto mong sumama sa bukid.” She puts out her cigarette and motions me to follow her. She’s wearing chinos and they are already rolled up. Trailing behind her, I ask: “Kailangan ko pong magpalit? What should I wear?” She doesn’t reply.

When we arrive at the rice field, I follow her as she walks toward the threshing device. “Heto siya? Pamangkin na Boy at Susan. Galing sa Olongapo.” I hear her responding to questions from other workers about who I am. She adds “Gusto raw mag-ani.” Once we get to the device, she tells the worker there to give me a bundle of stalks and teach me to use the device separating the stalks and grain. He shows me what to do--slam the bundle onto the device--and I am ready to begin. He yells out to everyone “O ayan, siya na ang mag-i-ikik.” A few of the workers in the field form a crowd around to watch me. They laugh, giggle, seemingly amused to watch this non-folk make a spectacle of herself.

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