

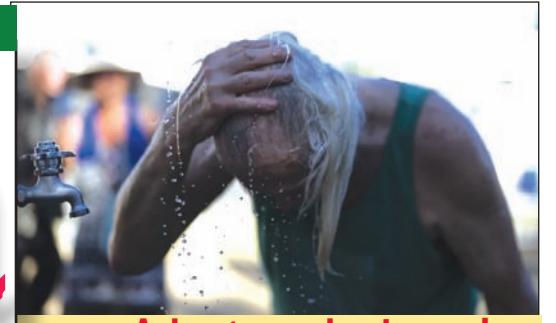


P2 The Power of Mimicry

PHILIPPINE Fiesta

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Volume 22 No. 2 July 2024



P14 A dangerous heat wave is scorching much of the US

Philippine military chief warns his forces will fight back if assaulted again in disputed sea



Philippine military chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr.

BY JIM GOMEZ

Manila, Philippines (AP) — Philippine forces will defend themselves with “the same level of force” if they come under assault again from China’s coast guard in the disputed South China Sea, where Chinese personnel armed with machetes and spears injured Filipino navy personnel and damaged two of their boats in a chaotic faceoff last month, the Philippine military chief said Thursday.

in case they are involved in another confrontation with Chinese forces at the shoal. “If a knife is used, for example, our personnel will also use a knife, nothing more, under the concept of proportionality.” “When I said that we’ll fight back, I meant we won’t allow ourselves to be bullied just like that, just like what happened the last time because, of course, our adversaries had weapons,” Brawner said, without elaborating.

Armed Forces of the Philippines chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. asked China to pay 60 million pesos (\$1 million) in damages for the two navy boats and return seven rifles which he said were seized by Chinese coast guard personnel during the June 17 confrontation at Second Thomas Shoal.

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea, which involve China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan, have long been seen as a flash point that could pit the U.S. against China if the confrontations escalate into an armed conflict. Washington has repeatedly warned that it is obligated to defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack, including in the disputed waters.

Philippine officials relayed the demands, along with a strong protest, during talks with a Chinese government delegation in Manila. The Chinese delegation did not immediately respond to the demands, a Philippine official told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because of not being authorized to discuss the sensitive issue publicly.

Second Thomas Shoal off the northwestern Philippines has emerged as a particularly dangerous area in the disputed South China Sea, which China claims virtually in its entirety. Chinese coast guard, navy and suspected militia ships have surrounded Philippine marines aboard a grounded ship to prevent the delivery of food and other supplies to Manila’s territorial outpost.

The Philippine military may also ask China to pay for planned surgery on the hand of a navy officer who lost his right thumb during the clash in the shoal when it was hit by a Chinese navy vessel that rammed his boat, Brawner said.

China and the Philippines accuse each other of instigating the confrontation at the shoal last month.

Continued on page 3

Consular Outreach Program



On June 29, 2024, the Knights of Rizal Sacramento Landmark Chapter and other community volunteers hosted the San Francisco Consulate Consular Outreach Program at the St. Joseph Parish Hall, Elk Grove CA.

BY IRVIN ISRAEL I. NOVAL



The Knights of Rizal Sacramento Chapter

The Philippine Consulate of San Francisco conducted an Outreach Program last June 29, from 8-5pm at the St. Joseph Parish, Msgr. O’Connor Social Hall, Elk Grove Ca. It was one of the most successful Outreach Program since post pandemic and served around almost 400 pinoy from passport services to dual citizenship. Overseas voter’s registration was also available, and a lawyer from the IBP and the US Department of Labor was present for immigration and labor law questions. Consul General Niel Frank R. Ferrer and the Outreach team headed by Consul Jed Llona and Vanessa Bago-Llona, were very thankful to the Knights of Rizal Sacramento Landmark Chapter headed by their Chapter Commander Sir Cesar Sotto, to KOR Sir Irvin Noval who served as the coordinator, the Pray & Play group headed by Edgar Flores and to all the volunteers who made the event possible.

Continued on page 6

FCSV SAMA SAMA FASHION SHOW 2024 Participants and Sponsors Appreciation Night



BY DALE ESPERANTE

The Sama Sama dinner party held at the Magellan Hall on July 5, 2024 truly embodied the spirit of unity. The goal of this unity is to establish a new Filipino Community Center in Sacramento and the movement is gaining ground based on recent reports by the Filipino Community of Sacramento and Vicinity organization.

The power of mimicry:

How human rights are covertly undermined in the Philippines

BY SYME DE LEON

Following the overthrow of the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. in the 1980s, it became commonplace for political leaders in the Philippines to claim to stand for democracy and human rights. Yet the recent global trend of democratic erosion has shifted this pattern, as exemplified by the presidencies of Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022) and President Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Marcos Jr., son of Marcos Sr.

In the Philippines, as in many parts of the world, there appears to be a resurgence in leaders’ use of discourses that seek to undermine the value of human rights, as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These discourses work overtly, through brazen attacks against human rights systems, principles, and actors, and covertly, through attempts to mimic and distort the meaning of human rights.

Many of former President Duterte’s speeches (my research has so far been on the period from 2016 to 2022 and is ongoing) exemplify overt tactics to undermine human rights. Although Duterte said throughout his presidency that he did not care about human rights, the term featured in many of his speeches. In my research analysing Duterte’s official



While Marcos has not disparaged human rights, he has evaded mechanisms of accountability that can bring justice to victims.

speeches, I have found at least 300 in his six-year term where he mentioned the word ‘human rights’ at least once. In some, he mentioned the term human rights as much as 15 times. In most instances when these words were used, it was in defence of the “war on drugs” that he championed, and to disparage human rights advocates, who saw this “war” as enabling severe human rights violations, such as the widespread killing of civilians. In his speeches, Duterte characterised human rights as a tool of Western imperialism, accused human rights advocates of conspiring with criminals and terrorists, and justified the killing of criminals as a necessity that he would be glad to do. In a move unprecedented in past presidencies, Duterte through these discourses removed all pretence of respecting human rights standards and instead actively worked to justify their violation.

Paradoxically, despite such brazen rhetoric, Duterte in

some instances also feigned to embrace human rights. After all, it is not easy to sustain an outright rejection of human rights, which still carry normative power. When Duterte did so, however, he would often interpret rights in exclusionary terms, by claiming to solely protect the rights of “innocent” people against the threat of “criminals”. We see this interpretation in his speech during the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, where he said, “The Philippines will continue to protect the human rights of its people, especially from the scourge of illegal drugs, criminality, and terrorism.” (Emphasis added.)

This tactic embraces human rights only to justify their violation, aligning well with what scholars have called the “(mis) appropriation of human rights”. This describes the use of human rights language “in the service of ends which are exclusionary, repressive, or anti-pluralist in character”, as well as in ways that are “highly retrogressive...

[and/or] evasive of “external monitoring or accountability”. It commonly manifests in “human rights mimicry” in which the language of human rights and its commitments is co-opted, precisely to undermine it. Mimicry functions in a more sophisticated way than overt attacks against rights, as it presents a facade that makes attacks harder to identify and combat. This highlights the importance of constantly remaining vigilant about political discourses on human rights.

In the Philippines, we can see such strategies of (mis) appropriation at play under Bongbong Marcos’ leadership. Since assuming presidency, Bongbong has sought to brand himself as a “human rights supporter”. Differing from Duterte, he has not brazenly disparaged rights, sworn at human rights institutions or threatened human rights activists. On the contrary, Bongbong has vowed to protect human rights in the Philippines and has even recently formed a

“super body” on human rights aimed at strengthening efforts to protect and promote human rights in the country.

At the same time, however, Bongbong has engaged in the distortion of human rights history and evaded mechanisms of accountability that can bring justice to victims of violations. For example, he has not taken steps to redress the human rights violations committed during his father’s term, often evading discussions about these atrocities. Moreover, the Marcos family has distorted this history by re-narrating Marcos Sr.’s presidency as a period of “economic prosperity and political order” while erasing the realities of “corruption and human rights violations”.

Bongbong has also eschewed mechanisms of accountability for addressing the “human rights crisis” that has occurred more recently. In particular, he has refused to cooperate with the International Criminal Court’s investigation into the alleged crimes against humanity that had been committed during Duterte’s “war on drugs”. Moreover, drug-related killings persist under Bongbong’s leadership. Documentation shows that between the start of Bongbong’s presidency on 30 June 2022 and 7 June this year, there were 679 drug-related killings reported. Such contradictory actions signal that Bongbong’s alleged endorsement of human rights, indicate not so much a commitment to these ideals, but to justifying his family’s hold on power, while evading accountability for human rights violations, both past and present. *MelbourneAsiaReview*

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Editor’s Note

So much has happened in the last month for us and our Filipino community and around. The scorching heat has not stopped us in the celebration of many events.

One for the record is the Sama-Sama Fashion Show 2024’s Appreciation Night for its Participants and Sponsors. It’s goes a long way to hold this kind of event, as a token of appreciation to their contributions in the success of FCSV’s fundraising event.

Congratulations to General Trias Family Association of NorCal for the successful celebration of its 50th Anniversary of Family Fiestas. Having lived the first 18 years of my life in General Trias, Cavite, I still treasure fond memories with my neighbor, friends, and schoolmates. And seeing some of them one more time at this last fiesta held in Fremont, in honor of our patron saint- St. Francis de Assisi, adds to more wonderful memories celebrating with them in my book. We will cover this event in our August issue of Philippine Fiesta News.

This is also to announce that next month in August will be our last issue of a newspaper format of this online publication. We will use other platforms to cover our Filipino-American community news in Sacramento. As always, we will continue to welcome anyone who wants to contribute to this family project for our community.

Please stay hydrated and be safe always!

With love,
Dinnah San Pedro

Philippines' oldest political prisoner walks free at 85

BY JAIRO BOLLEDO

Gerardo “Gerry” dela Peña jumped from one religion to another. He has worshipped the same God, but in different churches. But he only had one prayer: to be a free man.

On Sunday, June 30, Gerry got his prayer heard and he walked out of the New Bilibid Prison as a free man at 85 years old. He was the country’s oldest political prisoner, detained for almost 12 years.

A combination of campaign efforts plus benefits from much-needed prison reforms in a country plagued by severe overcrowding of jails are what got him out.

Gerry was a land tiller like his parents and was a long-time community organizer in Bicol. In 1982, he was arrested, detained, and tortured by state agents during the dictatorship of Ferdinand E. Marcos. A revision of parole and clemency guidelines under the dictator’s son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., freed him from detention.

Gerry was a known activist, and was once Camarines Norte chairperson of the rights group Samahan ng Ex-Detainees Laban sa Detensyon at Aresto or SELDA. He was arrested and later convicted of murder in 2013 for incidents that happened in 2009. Gerry said to this day he does not understand his case.

He was 74 when he was arrested in Vinzons, Camarines Norte.

“Nagdusa ako nang halos umabot ng 12 taon na hindi ko alam kung ano’ng kasalanan ko. Ginawaan lang ako ng kaso. Kaya ang kaso ko, hindi murder kundi planting rice, kung naintindihan nila. Ginawaan nila ako ng hindi ko ginagawang kaso... Lumuha man ako, wala akong magagawa,” Gerry told Rappler in a phone interview.

(I suffered for nearly 12 years without knowing what sin I had allegedly committed. They just filed a trumped-up case against me. That’s why my case is not murder, but rather planting

rice, if they understand what that means. They filed a case for a crime I did not commit. Even if I cry, I cannot do anything.)

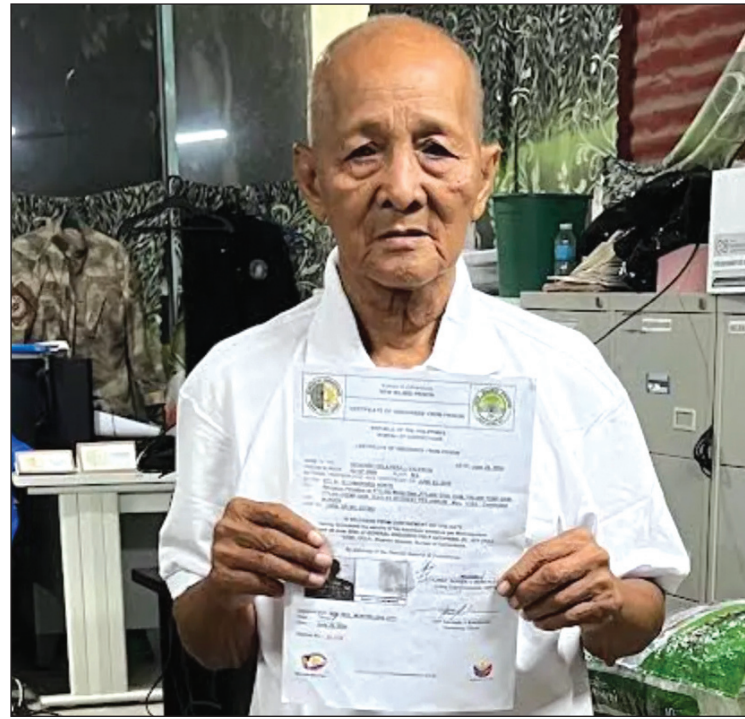
Activists have long complained that the government across presidencies have re-strategized to crack down on them using common crimes like murder, or more often illegal possession of firearms and explosives, instead of political crimes like rebellion. This way, the line that distinguishes between a political prisoner and an ordinary criminal blurs. This is important because those who are recognized as political prisoners can benefit from amnesties that result from peace talks. Those charged with common crimes may be left out.

When Gerry was released on Sunday, the National Security Council was quick to say he was not a political prisoner.

In a phone interview with Rappler, Gerry said he went straight home to Camarines Norte and that he would spend his remaining years making up for lost time with his 81-year-old wife Pilar, their children, and grandchildren.

“Siguro ang pamilya ko na lang [ang aking] paglilingkuran... hanggang sa ako ay magpantay ang paa. Nagpapasalamat ako at sa ilang panahon ng natitirang buhay ko ay nagkasama-sama pa kami ng pamilya ko. (I think I will just serve my family until the day I die. I am really thankful that in my twilight years, I was still reunited with my family).”

He will also try, he said, to help the family’s livelihood by tending to their fishpond and



‘I think I will just serve my family until the day I die. I am really thankful that in my twilight years, I was still reunited with my family,’ says Gerry, who got out after a combination of campaign efforts and some prison reforms.

coconut trees.

“Hanggang kakayanin ng lakas ko, magpapaunlad ako (Until my strength allows, I will help in growing our livelihood),” Gerry said.

When Gerry was arrested in 2013, his brother Armenio was also arrested over the same offenses. Armenio did not survive prison life and died in detention after suffering from a heart attack. Gerry, on the other hand, was sentenced to reclusion perpetua for the murder charge, or up to 40 years in prison.

Presidents of the Philippines have the power to grant executive clemency, and they always do in batches for elderly prisoners – usually an open-for-media event meant to send a feel-good message of rehabilitative justice. Clemency comes in different forms like pardon, or totally erasing a criminal record like plunder convict former president Joseph Estrada, who was pardoned by his successor former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo; or commutation of sentence for those who have already served time.

Elderly prisoners are usually given clemency by commutation of sentence. This was not an easy procedure for Gerry. In September 2023, Gerry’s application for clemency was denied, according to Fides Lim, spokesperson of the prisoners’ rights group Kapatid.

“In reaction to our persistent lobbying, the BPP [Board of Pardons and Parole] wrote us that on March 8, 2024 they recommended the commutation of Tatay Gerry’s sentence to 12 years, pursuant to that same BPP resolution amending the rules on parole and executive clemency,” said Lim.

She was referring to Resolution No. OT-08-02-2023 of the BPP issued December 2023 by the Department of Justice (DOJ). The old DOJ rules on clemency and parole cover sickly prisoners aged 65 years and above, but exclude heinous crime convicts. Under the law, heinous crimes, include among others, certain cases of rape,

murder, robbery, bribery, and plunder.

Under the December 2023 resolution, sickly PDLs (Persons Deprived of Liberty) who are 70 years old and above, even those convicted of heinous crimes, can avail of clemency if they have served at least 10 years of their prison term. That covered Gerry’s case.

For his family, it was the end of years-long depression and anxiety.

acidity, and arthritis. On top of that were his poor eyesight and hearing due to old age.

As of June 2024, there are still 755 political prisoners in the country, even if the government does not recognize this number. Of them, 91 are suffering from illnesses, while 102 are elderly. At least 103 of these PDLs were arrested under Marcos Jr.

Gerry can finally return home to his family and reunite with his wife Pilar in their twilight years. His release is a milestone for human rights campaigns, but also serves as a stark reminder of the obstacles that impede the release of political prisoners,” Lim said.

Prison reform

The Marcos Jr. administration has showed some attention to prison decongestion. The President’s cousin, House Speaker Martin Romualdez, said during the national decongestion summit that it is a “human rights issue.”

It provides an opening for advocates to push for more prison reforms. For example, it’s high time to have a mechanism to assess which types of offenders should be detained, and which types – especially those who are old and at low risk of committing the same crime – can just be penalized with community service, according to prison reform expert Raymund Narag, who teaches criminology at the Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Narag, a former PDL himself, said the likes of Gerry could have been punished with community service and put under supervised release. He said these are the best practices in other parts of the world in terms of handling prisoners

“Puwede silang mag-report lang sa barangay. Puwede silang, alam mo ‘yon, i-monitor ng respected member of the community (They can be released and be monitored by reporting in the barangay. They can also be monitored by respected members of the community),” Narag told Rappler.

But these are wishful options for now. – Rappler.com

Philippine military chief warns his forces will fight back if assaulted again in disputed sea

From page 1

Beijing accused the Filipinos of entering what it called Chinese territorial waters despite repeated warnings, prompting its coast guard to take action. The Philippines said its navy personnel were delivering food and other supplies to the Filipino forces stationed at the territorial outpost when Chinese coast guard personnel onboard at least eight boats assaulted them. Brawner spoke after he and other top military commanders met President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in a closed-

door conference where they explained progress in counter-insurgency efforts and updated plans to defend Philippine territorial interests in the South China Sea. Marcos renewed an order to Filipino forces to take steps to de-escalate tensions in the disputed waters, Brawner said, adding that the military would continue to comply.

“We want to avoid war,” Brawner said, but added that the military would never allow any foreign country to trample on the Philippines’ territorial rights.

Philippine Fiesta

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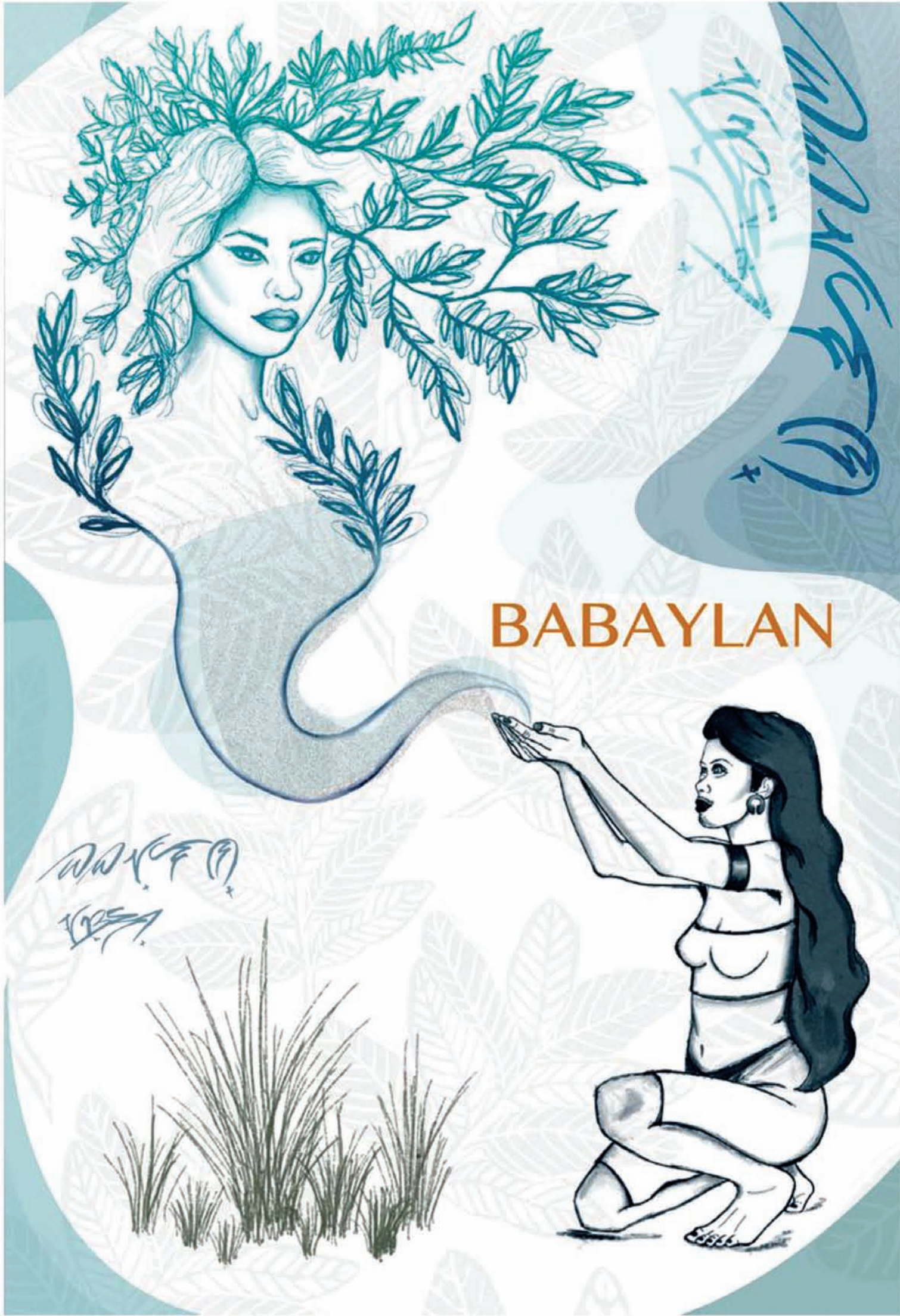
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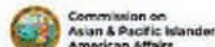
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**Babaylan (2024)
By Caralie Wegeng**

Cisgender, transgender, and genderfluid Babaylans were revered as healers and guides in pre-colonial Philippines. Despite enduring brutalization during Spanish colonial rule, Babaylans are now increasingly embraced in modern times, celebrated not only for their shamanic practices but also as icons in the Filipinx LGBTQIA+ Community. For us, safety means being proud of and normalizing our long-standing existence.”

The Filipino-American community is the largest Asian population in the Sacramento region and the second largest in California. While the impacts of anti-Asian hate are under-discussed in the Filipino community, **our presence is clear and our voice is strong.** The Laban Group’s Filipino artist campaign aims to uplift our experiences, tell our stories, and amplify our power. If you have experienced or witnessed an incident of anti-Asian hate, bigotry, bias, or discrimination, **report it at [CAVSHATE.ORG](https://www.cavshate.org)** or call **833-8-NO-HATE (833-866-4283)**. **YOU ARE NOT ALONE.**



This ad campaign is brought to you by the Laban Group: Filipino Ethnic Media Collaborative. This group aims to promote awareness in our beloved Filipino American community and the broader public about anti-Asian hate incidents and crimes; reduce stigma surrounding the reporting of hate incidents and hate crimes; enhance understanding of resources for victims and survivors; and, to promote community healing and cross-racial collaboration. This resource is supported in whole or in part by funding provided by the State of California, administered by the California State Library in partnership with the California Department of Social Services and the California Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander American Affairs as part of the Stop the Hate program. To report a hate incident or hate crime and get support, go to <https://www.cavshate.org/>.



Southeast Asian Americans face the brunt of racist attacks among Asians in U.S., new study finds

BY SAKSHI VENKATRAMAN

While many Americans believe anti-Asian hate has passed, experts say many communities are still living in fear.

Southeast Asian Americans face assault, verbal abuse and threats more than any other Asian American group, a new report by advocacy group The Asian American Foundation revealed.

The report, which surveyed 6,200 people across ethnicities, said 32% of Asian Americans nationwide were called a slur over the past 12 months, and 29% were verbally harassed or abused. Those numbers were markedly higher for Southeast Asian Americans, of whom 40% were called a slur and 38% faced verbal abuse.

While many Americans believe the Covid-fueled wave of anti-Asian hate has passed, TAAF Chief Executive Norman Chen said that's very much not the case.

Anti-Asian hate crimes dropped from 2021 to 2022, but Asian Americans surveyed say their daily realities are not free from its effects. In fact, 61% said hate continued to increase over the last year.

More than a quarter of Asian Americans say they feel unsafe on public transportation, and 41% think they will be the victim of a physical attack in the next five years.

“Our community continues to be very fearful, concerned and on guard,” Chen said. “People are still very concerned about going out on the streets and doing their daily activities; going to the store, going to school, going to work.”

He said it's hard to give one reason why Southeast Asians are feeling the brunt of this hate, but he thinks financial status might play a role. A 2020 report by the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center said that all Southeast Asian ethnic groups have a lower per capita income than the average in the U.S.

“It depends on socioeconomics,” Chen said. “Where these people are living, where they're commuting, where they're working. That may be a factor as well.”

Community members are still changing their behavior to prevent violence, he said, includ-



A protest to demand an end to anti-Asian violence in New York City. Spencer Platt / Getty Images file

ing refraining from speaking their mother tongues outside their homes and avoiding public transit.

The TAAF report found that just 38% of Asian Americans feel they belong in the U.S., compared to 70% of white Americans. Even less feel like their racial identities are accepted in the U.S., at 18%. When asked why, respondents said anti-Asian hate is the top reason. But the lack of representation

at high levels across industries was another top factor.

“People don't see Asian Americans in leadership positions in America enough,” Chen said. “The lack of senior representation in government, in the Supreme Court, in TV and movies, in culture and sports. That also creates this lack of belonging because you feel like, ‘Hey, my opportunities are limited.’”

The fact that the American

public seems to be forgetting about anti-Asian hate and racism is concerning, he said, and community members are facing their anxiety in silence. He hopes people will start paying attention.

“There's a lack of awareness of what the Asian American community continues to go through, literally on a daily basis,” he said. NBC News



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Photo by Dave San Pedro



KNIGHTS of RIZAL SACRAMENTO LANDMARK CHAPTER



Consular Outreach Program

From page 1

BY IRVIN ISRAEL I. NOVAL

The Philippine Consulate of San Francisco conducted an Outreach Program last June 29, from 8-5pm at the St. Joseph Parish, Msgr. O'Connor Social Hall, Elk Grove Ca. It was one of the most successful Outreach Program since post pandemic and served around almost 400 pinoys from passport services to dual citizenship.

Overseas voter's registration was also available, and a lawyer from the IBP and the US Department of Labor was present for immigration and labor law questions. Consul General Niel Frank R. Ferrer and the Outreach team headed by Consul Jed Llona and Vanessa Bago-Llona, were very thankful to the Knights of Rizal Sacramento Landmark Chapter headed by their Chapter Commander Sir Cesar Sotto, to KOR Sir Irvin Noval who served as the coordinator, the Pray & Play group headed by Edgar Flores and to all the volunteers who made the event possible.

The Consular Outreach Program in Elk Grove was an initiative that started during the Knights of Rizal Sacramento Landmark Chapter Courtesy call at the Philippine Consulate in SFO last year with Consul General Neil R. Ferrer who is a Knight himself. During that meeting, KOR Loreto Paragas proposed this event to be held in Sacramento, which after that became a history then. The KOR-SLC in collaboration with the local organizations will again coordinate with the SFO Philippine Consulate to provide consular services next year 2025.



The paperwork to be processed were Filipino Passport applications and renewals, Dual Citizenships and Legal Documents (Special Powers of Attorneys, Affidavits, Civil Registry and Reports of Births and Marriages.)



Photos by Irvin Noval

The Philippine Deputy Consul General Neil Frank R. Ferrer and Outreach team Consul Jed Llona and Vanessa Bago-Llona and the Consulate Staff with The Knights of Rizal Sacramento Landmark Chapter, the Pray and Play Group and other volunteers.

KEEP OUR COMMUNITIES SAFE.

Photograph by Andri Tambunan



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*Data pulled from the Bulosan Center's report on California Filipinos which gathered data from Stop AAPI Hate

If you have experienced or witnessed an incident of anti-Asian hate, bigotry, bias, or discrimination, report at **STOPHATE.CALCIVILRIGHTS.CA.GOV** or call **833-8-NO-HATE (833-866-4283)**.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE.



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Compiled BY **JOE NUEGA**
By Jonathan Finer
Washington Post Staff Writer

Doing Double DUTY

LIVING SUPPORT AREA 7
Kuwait, March 17

Allan Espiritu spends about half of his time training to save lives, and the other half preparing to take them.

As a Navy corpsman, he carries 40 pounds of medical gear to provide first aid to wounded Marines. But as a graduate of Marine Corps sniper school, he is also handy with an M40A1 rifle that could take out an Iraqi general from 1,000 yards.

The Hippocratic oath to “do no harm” might seem hard to reconcile with the sniper’s creed to “kill one, terrorize a thousand” but Espiritu seems comfortable in both roles.

“It’s an unusual combination,” said the congenial 25 year old Californian who will accompany a platoon of Marine snipers across the border if U.S. forces invade Iraq. “But being a sniper is about more than just killing. And one of the first rules of medicine I learned is that sometimes the best thing you can do for your patients is suppress fire. It’ll depend on the circumstances what exactly my role will be.”

Espiritu estimates he is one of only five Navy corpsmen among 250 active Marine Corps snipers. Corpsmen or “doc” as the Marines call

them, are non-combatants on the battlefield, prohibited from offensive fighting.

They are accorded certain protections by the Geneva Convention of 1949 that ordinary ground troops are not, such as the right to treat their patients if they are taken prisoner.

In conflicts such as WWII and the Vietnam War, medical personnel, some of whom wore red crosses on their uniforms, were often among the U.S. troops targeted by enemy forces because of their value to their units. To defend their patients or themselves, corpsmen are allowed to shoot back, though if they use weapons in an offensive fashion they forfeit their protected status.

Espiritu says he knows his primary mission is to see to the medical needs of his platoon. The Geneva Convention is printed in black ink on the back of his military identification card and can recite its dictates from memory. But should a fellow sniper fall, he said, he is prepared to step into a two-man sniper team to help the platoon complete its objective.

“Doc is one of the best shooters we have,” said Lt. Kendrick

Neal, 26, commander of the sniper platoon for the 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, to which Espiritu is assigned. “But shooting is only about 10 percent of the job and the rest is recon-naissance. We are the eyes and ears of the battalion. We go behind the lines to find the enemy and call in air support if we need it. We are also experts in cover and concealment. He gives us an extra degree of flexibility because we could use his two-man team if we needed to.”

To prepare for both situations, Espiritu trained with both group this week. He attended lectures by his battalion surgeon Hank Liang, a 29 year old Navy Lieu-tenant, on field medicine and dealing with chemical attacks.



He also joins the snipers on the range as they test-fired a newly adjusted SASR .50 caliber rifle, which fires an armor piercing round. He served as an observer for a platoon sergeant helping to direct the weapon’s fire.

Espiritu, who was born in the Philippines, said his father, is an accountant, his mother, a hotel manager, don’t fully understand his two jobs. They wanted him to finish college,

but he enlisted in the Navy after a semester at a school in his home town of Oxnard, California.

He had thought of becoming a doctor or a physician’s assistant, so he enrolled in the 14 week Navy Corpsmen’s emergency medical technician. Physically fit with sturdy build, he was assigned with Marine Snipers.

Four years ago, a slot at the sniper school at Camp Lejeune, N.C., opened up at the last minute and Espiritu’s platoon asked him if he wanted to train alongside Marines British special forces and Navy SEALs. He jumped at the chance.

At the completion of the rigorous three-month course, the trainees were required to hit a three-inch diameter target with

85 percent of their shots from 1,000 yards. In addition to a series of strenuous physical fitness test, they were given a memory exam.

Twelve items were placed on a blanket for about 30 seconds and the trainees were told to focus on them while Instructors shouted in their faces and poured sand over their heads to distract them. Then after few hours of physical activities, they were asked to recall what they had seen.

Out of 32 in the class, the young corpsman was one of the 12 who passed the course. Now, he said, it will be difficult to resist the urge to fight back if his platoon comes under fire. He doubts the Iraqi Army would honor his noncombatant status if he were taken a captive.

“From what I know about that government, it seems like they probably wouldn’t care if I am a corpsman or not,” he said.

Medical Officer, Liang, said his corpsman’s sniper training will “give him a better understanding of his patients and allow him to do better job of keeping himself and his platoon safe out there.”

Like most corpsmen, Espiritu does not wear a telltale red cross on his uniform because in the past wars it became something of a bull’s eye. But unlike most sniper, he doesn’t wear the trademark bullet around his neck he was awarded after sniper school—the one that is said to have meant for him.”

“I left mine at home in a drawer,” Espiritu said. “Out here, is sometimes safer if people don’t know.” *Reprint from Philfiesta.net 2003*

Navigating Pension Renewal: A Veteran’s Journey and a Touch of Kindness

BY **GABRIEL ORTIGOZA**

Ensuring that elderly veterans receive their rightful pensions can be a challenging task, often fraught with bureaucratic hurdles. For elderly pensioners of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), renewing their life status every six months is mandatory to continue receiving their monthly pension. Unfortunately, my father, a Korean War veteran, has encountered significant difficulties in this process.

Despite the provision to renew life status via phone call or video call, the provided phone numbers from the Pension and Gratuity Management Center (PGMC) often go unanswered or are unreachable. This inefficiency places unnecessary stress on veterans and their families, who must navigate these obstacles to secure their deserved benefits.

A Memorable Anniversary and an Unexpected Opportunity
On June 25th, my father at-

tended the 74th anniversary of the Korean War, commemorated at the Waterfront Insular Hotel in Davao City. This event was a significant milestone, bringing together veterans and their families to honor their shared history. My father, accompanied by my sister, her daughter and son and other relatives, Abigail and J-o, stayed at the hotel for two nights, enjoying the camaraderie and recognition of their service.

Seizing the opportunity presented by their presence in Davao City, I instructed our relatives escorting my father to renew his life status. This renewal was crucial for him to continue receiving his monthly pensions from both the AFP and the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO). I pro-



Korean War Veteran Marcelo Ortigoza with Major Gen. Rex Bergante

vided them with the addresses of PVAO and the Eastern Mindanao Command (EastMinCom) in Davao City.

A Remarkable Encounter at EastMinCom

While at EastMinCom, my niece Abigail informed me that Major General Rex Bergante, the Commander of Eastern Mindanao Command, was present. Recognizing a potential opportunity, I sent a message to Major General Bergante, informing him of



Abigail and J-o, Gen. Bergante and War Vet. Maecelo Ortigoza

my father’s presence at the command.

To my delight, the general responded affirmatively. Shortly thereafter, a soldier approached my father and invited him to meet with Major General Bergante. This unexpected gesture of kindness turned a routine task into a memorable experience.

Capturing the Moment

My niece, Abigail, was diligent in capturing this significant moment. She sent me nu-

merous photos of my father conversing with Major General Bergante, each image a testament to the respect and warmth extended by the general to my 96-year-old father. I am deeply grateful to Major General Bergante for taking the time to meet with my father and for the warm welcome he provided.

Gratitude and Blessings

This experience highlights the challenges faced by elderly veterans in securing their pensions, but it also showcases the profound impact of kindness and respect from those in positions of authority. Major General Bergante’s gesture was not only a solution to an administrative challenge but also a moment of honor and recognition for my father’s service.

Thank you, Major General Bergante, sir, for your time and your heartfelt welcome. Your actions have left a lasting impression on my family and me. God bless you.

FILIPINO MYTH

Compiled and illustrated
By Dave San Pedro

The Legend of Maria Makiling

Once upon a time, a diwata lived in a mountain of Laguna. She was called Maria Makiling. She has light olive skin, long shining black hair and twinkling eyes. She was breathtakingly beautiful. Maria was always about helping other people. One time, the children of a farmer got sick. When he went to Maria to seek help, he was given a bilao full of ginger. The farmer sadly went home carrying the bilao of ginger. When he reached his hut, he was greatly surprised: the ginger had turned to gold! Because of Maria's kindness, the townsfolk had grown to love her.

Maria was a great beauty. She was sought for and wooed by many suitors. Three of them were very much determined to have her. One is Captain Lara, a Spanish soldier who always brought her gifts from Europe. The other is Joselito, a Spanish mestizo who was studying in Manila. Every time Joselito visits Maria, he had many stories to tell her about foreign countries and the things that he had read in books. He dreamed of going to Spain. He didn't like to live in the Philippines.

Of the three, it was Juan who is the most industrious. He is a common farmer. But he is so hard working, and his fruits and vegetable grew fat and juicy. He also had many pet animals and birds. But if truth be told, it was Juan who Maria secretly admired.



As time passed, her suitors became more and more impatient and demanded that Maria tell them who she loves. So the diwata was forced to promise: "By the night of the full moon, I will tell you my answer." When the night of the full moon arrived, all of her suitors climbed up the mountain to know her decision. All was startled when Maria told them that it was Juan whom she loved. The

suitors went away feeling dejected. On the other hand, Joselito and Captain Lara were very much angry with Juan. They thought of a plan against him. One day, all was surprised when a huge fire devoured the cuartel of the Spaniards. Because of the fire, Captain Lara ordered many Filipinos to be captured.

Secretly, Joselito helped him. Juan was among those who they imprisoned and tortured. Many prisoners did not last long from the tortures the Spanish had inflicted upon them. One night, Captain Lara and Joselito secretly spoke with the prisoners. The next day, Juan was blamed for the burning of the Spanish cuartel.

"I did not do it!" cried Juan. But the prisoners pointed at him because Captain Lara and Joselito frightened them. The soldiers brought Juan to the plaza. In front of hundreds of people, Juan was shot as the enemy of the Spaniards. He was killed even though he didn't commit any wrongdoing. But before he died, he managed to shout out loud Maria's name. It was heard by the diwata so she quickly went down her mountain.

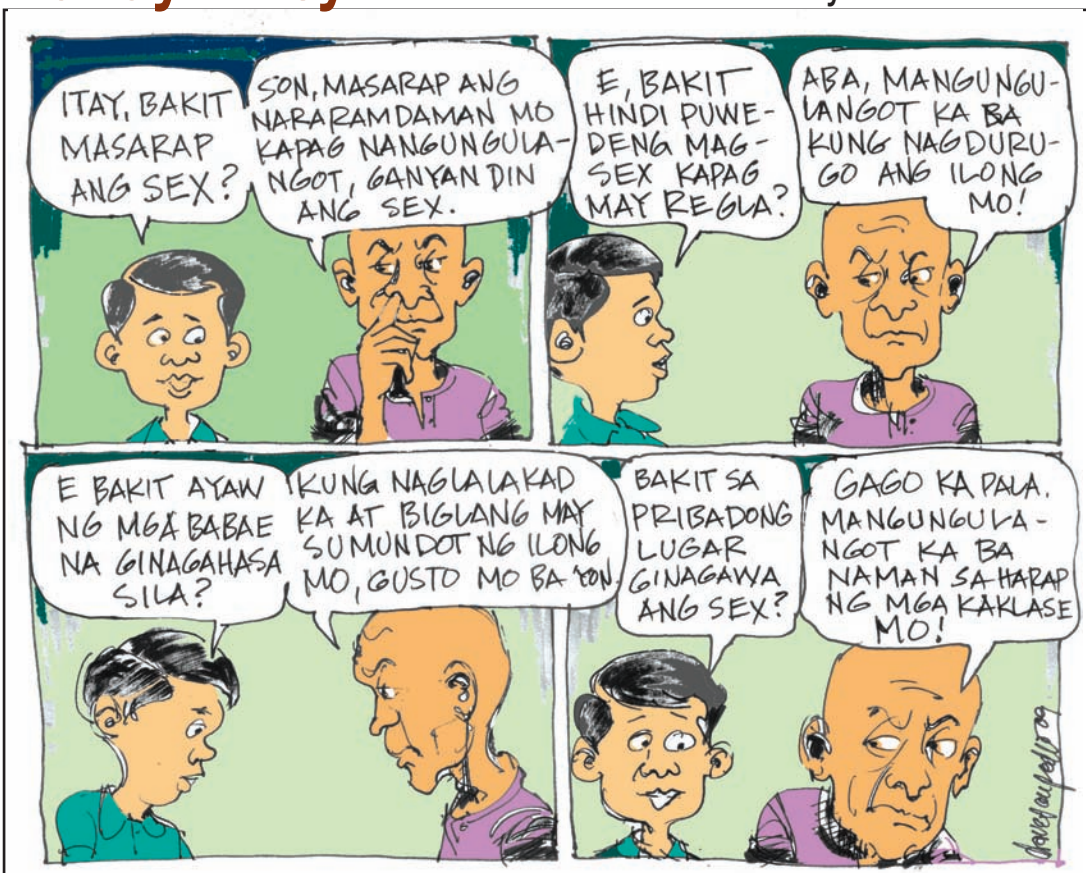
But Juan was already dead when Maria arrived. Tears falling down her face, she embraced tightly his lifeless body. Afterwards, she faced the crowd. "Why did you not take care of him?" she shouted. Meanwhile, Captain Lara and Joselito fled to Manila because they were afraid of Maria. When she learned of this, she cursed the two. She also cursed those men who cannot accept failure in love.

Soon, the curse took effect. Joselito suddenly became ill. There was no cure for his illness. Captain Lara, on the other hand, was called back to Laguna when the Filipinos revolted against the abuse that the Spaniards had inflicted upon them. The revolution quickly spread to many parts of the Philippines. The revolutionary Filipinos killed Captain Lara.

From then on, Maria never let herself be seen by the people. Every time somebody got lost on the mountain, they remember the curse of the diwata. They remember the great love of Maria Makiling.

Buhay Pinoy

Komiks by Dave San Pedro



Lasang Pinoy

Kutsinta

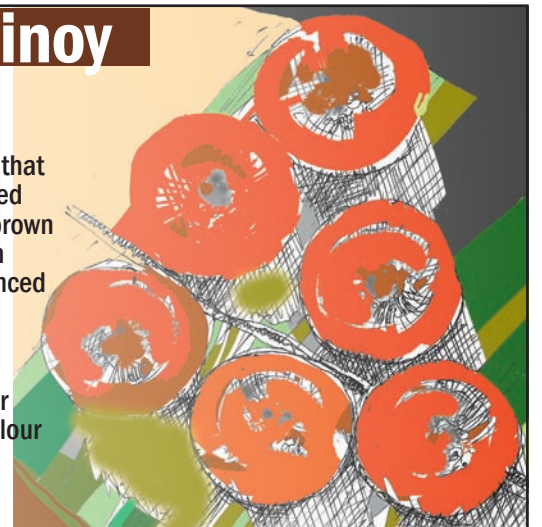
A native Filipino snack that are small sweet steamed sticky rice cakes. It is brown or reddish in color from brown sugar and enhanced with achuete.

Ingredients

½ cup all-purpose flour
3 tablespoon tapioca flour
½ cup brown sugar
1 cup water
1 teaspoon lye water -
1 teaspoon annatto/achuete powder - for coloring

Instructions

Slightly grease your kutsinta molds with oil and set aside. In a bowl, combine the all-purpose flour, tapioca flour and sugar. Add in the water and stir until sugar is dissolved and the mixture is smooth. Add the annatto/achuete powder and mix well. Then stir in the lye water. Fill the molds about three quarters (¾) full and steam for 30-40 minutes or until top is set when touched. Remove from heat and allow to cool before removing from molds. Serve with grated coconut.



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A dangerous heat wave is scorching much of the US. Weather experts predict record-setting temps

BY CLAIRE RUSH & REBECCA BOONE

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A slow-moving and potentially record-setting heat wave is spreading across the Western U.S., the National Weather Service said, sending many residents in search of a cool haven from the dangerously high temperatures. The Southeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the U.S. are also sweltering, with oppressive heat and humidity expected to last through Saturday.

Widespread temperature records are expected to be tied or even broken during the heat wave, with much of the West Coast likely to see triple-digit temperatures that are between 15 and 30 degrees Fahrenheit (8 and 16 degrees Celsius) higher than average, the National Weather Service said.

"The duration of this heat is also concerning as scorching above average temperatures are forecast to linger into next week," the weather service said.

In the Portland, Oregon, suburb of Gresham, Sherri Thompson, 52, was waiting in her car with her 14-year-old chihuahua Kiwani for a cooling center to open late Friday morning. Thompson has lived in her car for three years and can only run its air conditioning for about 20 minutes at a time as it causes the engine to overheat.

Thompson said the high temperatures prompted health concerns, as she had been hospitalized for a heat stroke in the past.

"I have anxiety and panic attacks and I get worried. I don't want to have another



A person cools off during the Waterfront Blues Festival on Friday, July 5, 2024 in Portland, Oregon. A slow moving and potentially record-setting heat wave is spreading across the Western U.S. Photo by Jenny Kane

heat stroke, and everything just triggers my anxiety a lot," she said.

Inside the air conditioned center, Multnomah County spokesperson Julia Comnes oversaw county staff and people working with a local homeless services provider as they lined up thin mattresses in rows on the floor and set up cots for people with disabilities. She said the space had capacity for up to 80 people.

"Some of the hazards associated with this weekend especially is that it's still pretty early in the season. We had a pretty cool June, so our bodies aren't totally acclimated yet to the heat," she said. "For people living outside or more vulnerable people, the cooling space like this is really important for them to just cool off for a few hours."

The blistering weather in the Portland region is expected to last at least through Monday, National Weather Service meteorologist Clinton Rockey said. If the triple-digit temperatures (well over 37 degrees

Celsius) stretch into Tuesday, then the region will match a record last seen in July 1941, with five consecutive days of more than 100-degree weather, Rockey said.

The duration is a problem: Many homes in the area lack air conditioning, and round-the-clock hot weather means people's bodies aren't able to sufficiently cool down at night. The issue is compounded in many city settings, where concrete and pavement can store the heat, essentially acting as an oven.

"That's what drives people batty," Rockey said. "It's going to be obnoxious. And unfortunately for some people, if you're not having good shelter, it could be a very challenging, life-threatening situation."

In Arizona's Maricopa County, which encompasses Phoenix, there have been at least 13 confirmed heat-related deaths this year, while the causes of more than 160 other suspected heat deaths were still under investigation, according to the county's most recent report on

such deaths through June 29. That doesn't include the death of a 10-year-old boy earlier this week in Phoenix, who suffered a "heat-related medical event" while hiking with his family at South Mountain Park and Preserve, according to the Phoenix Police Department.

Among extremes, the forecast for Furnace Creek in Death Valley National Park calls for daytime highs of 129 degrees (53.8 degrees Celsius) on Sunday, and then around 130 (54.44 C) through Wednesday. The official world record for hottest temperature recorded on Earth was 134 degrees (56.67 C) in Death Valley in July 1913, but some experts dispute that measurement and say the real record was 130 recorded there in July 2021.

At Bullhead City, Arizona, the temperature already had reached 111 degrees (44.4 C) by 11 a.m. Friday. The city opened a pair of cooling centers for seniors and others, but locals seemed to be taking it in stride.

"While this is a heat wave

and we urge everyone to be cautious, we typically don't see large attendance at our cooling centers unless there are power outages," Bullhead City spokesperson Mackenzie Covert said Friday. "Our community is hot every summer. Our residents are kind of aware of it. They all tend to have working air conditioners."

Figure skaters took to the ice at the Reno Ice Rink in Nevada starting at 6 a.m. Friday, general manager Kevin Sunde said. By the time the rink closes at 10:30 p.m. on Friday, Sunde expected nearly 300 people would have visited, with more parents hanging around to watch kids' hockey practice than usual.

"They may not be getting on the ice themselves, but enjoying the cool," Sunde said. "We're the only sheet of ice within about an hour's drive."

In Norfolk, Virginia, Kristin Weisenborn set up her table at an outdoor farmer's market to sell sourdough bread. The air was hovering just below the triple digits, but the 58% humidity in the air made it feel more like 114 degrees (46 C), according to the National Weather Service.

"It's so hot, I just hope there's a lot of people here that can buy my bread," said Weisenborn, 42, whose Krid's Crumbs bakery is based in Virginia Beach. "Otherwise we're just standing here sweating," she said, adding that unsold bread will be donated or frozen.

Despite the layer of unmoving humidity that hung between tables, people were already buying Weisenborn's loaves of bread as the market got underway.

"It's hot, but it's July," Weisenborn added. "Better than snow, I guess." The Washington Post

IPAGMAMALAKI AT IPAGLALABAN



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**Asian or Not (2024)
By Angelo Manzano**

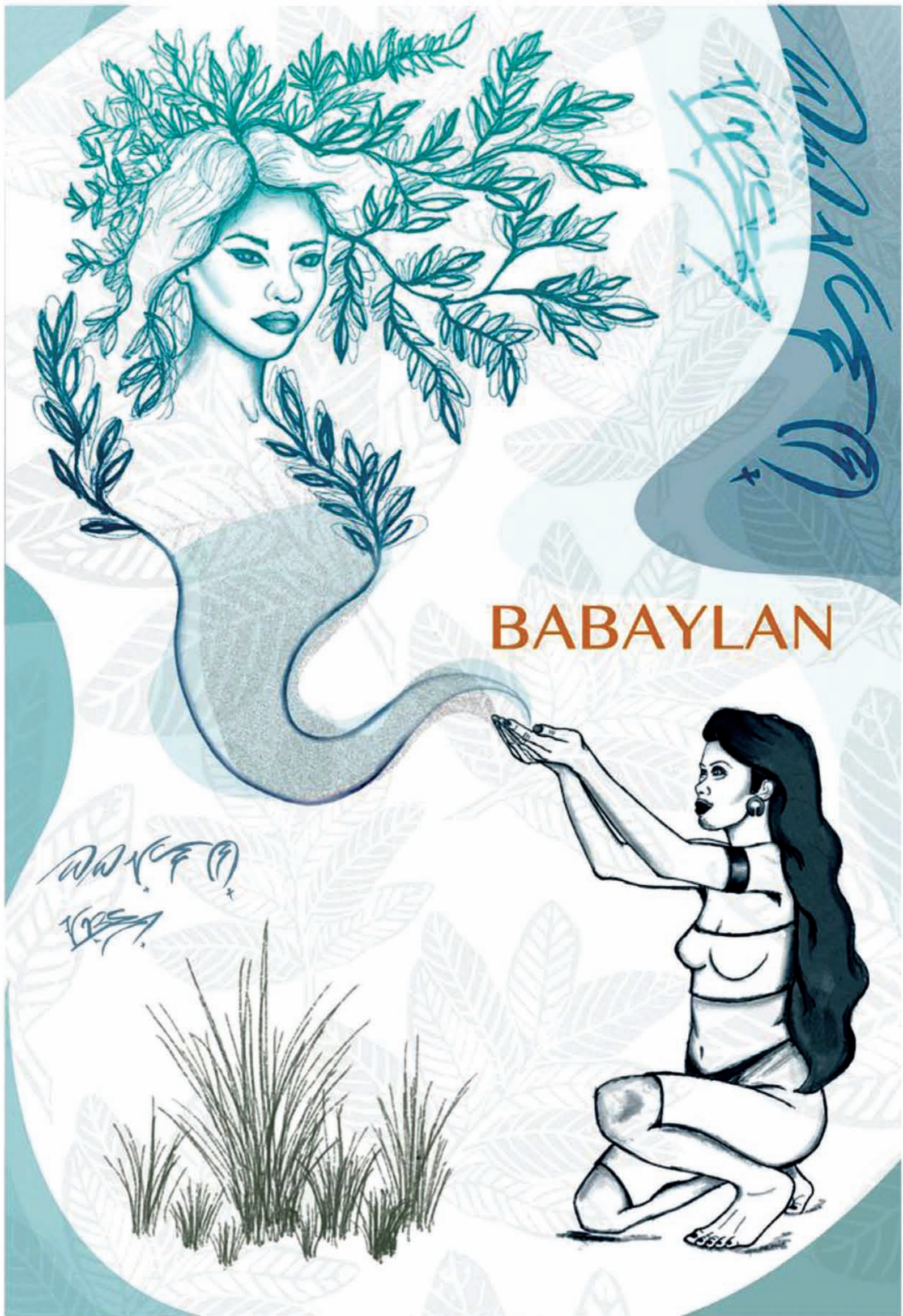
"Nakapikit man pdang kanilang mga mata at ang pag-asa ay unti-unting naglalaho sa kanilang mga mukha, kababayan natin sila at kaagapay na nangangailangan ng kalinga. Sino ba ang dapat magtanggol sa kanila? MASKI SINO!"

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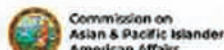


BABAYLAN

Babaylan (2024) By Caralie Wegeng

"Ang mga cisgender, bakla, at genderfluid na Babaylans ay ginagalang na nagpapagaling sa may mga may sakit at gabay noong sakop pa ng Espanya ang Pilipinas. Maski matagal silang nagtiis sa kalupitan ng mga kastilla, Babaylans ngayon ay dumadami ang mga tuma-tanggap sa bagong panahon na ito, ipinag-diriwang hindi lang dahil sa kanilang katalunan at gawi, dahil rin sila ay kilala na mga puno ng Filipinx LGBTQIA+ kumunidad. Para sa amin, ibig-sabihin ng kaligtasan kami ay may pagmamalaki sa normalizing ang matagal naming katauhan.

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Photograph by Andri Tambunan



AAPI HATE AND VIOLENCE DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTS FILIPINA WOMEN AS THEY ACCOUNT FOR 55% (247) OF THE REPORTS IN CALIFORNIA.* But that darkness cannot dim our light. Proudly burn bright to lead our community. If you have experienced or witnessed an incident of anti-Asian hate, bigotry, bias, or discrimination, report it at STOPHATE.CALCIVILRIGHTS.CA.GOV or **CALL 833-8-NO-HATE (833-866-4283).**

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**Data pulled from the Bulosan Center's report on California Filipinos which gathered data from Stop AAPI Hate*