

*Gazing at the Pinoy Pride's
Body: Manny Pacquiao's
Athletic Body as Meta-
phor-Product of the Na-
tional/Colonial Imaginary*

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**Body as Nation: Pacquiao as Product of
the National/Colonial Imagination**

Subsisting as a contestable yet distinct agency for discourses on national identification, the body and its continued use as a vehicle for discussing the nation and its consciousness – the individual's relationship/s to the nation, the nation's greater politics in this era of globalization – have brought forward new perspectives and strategies that enhance our ways of examination. The body as operation allows for an examination of the na-

tional identity on a physical and symbolic platform, not only providing a tiered lens for analysis but also ensuring an obvious link between the nation's outside and inside dynamics. However, the body can also be an easy vehicle for exploitation and commodification and overlapping this reality with the discourse on the body as national identity, it paves for new ways of receiving, imagining, and extending the 'nation.' This problematic on national identification is no stranger to the tropes and discourse of postcolonial studies; in fact, its constant questioning is perhaps the very fuel that sustains its production of scholars, hence paving for new or silenced postcolonial issues to emerge. This seeming 'fetishization' on national identity has eventually operated as a lens not only for the individual members of the nation, but even for those outside of it (perhaps in attempts to make sense of this postcolonial nation to their own); although this fixation has overtly produced two gazes, the outside and the inside gazes, the agenda of identifying the nation is shared by both.

Premising on this question of national identity in postcolonial studies, it is likely that critical discussions on the Filipino identity remains (and perhaps will always be) problematic. Among Filipino scholars, what posits as an obvious problematic in this identification is the 'fictive' association to national consciousness, rooted mostly on the illusory agendas of media and capitalism. In their respective critical works, Tolentino, Cañete and

Tadiar have utilized the body as agency for Filipino national identity, and these critics conclude that the ensuing national consciousness produced by the local media (Tolentino 2014, 157 - 186), the male-g geared capitalist industry (Cañete 2014, n.p.), and the Free World fantasy (as coined by Tadiar, pertaining to the false lack of national order in globalization) is an obvious imagination of a Philippine national identity (Tadiar 2004, 25 – 113). The fictive quality in this identification of the Philippine nation echoes Anderson's *imagined communities*, a proposition in which the nation is imagined as finite of its boundaries, sovereign in its articulation, and horizontal in its comradeship (Anderson 2006, 7); however, it is important to note that in this era of Free World fantasy, in which pathways for globalization and transnational cultures must be continuously opened, this national imagination of the Philippines no longer operates on an internal gaze as Anderson's critical work implies. This is largely due to the understanding that the Philippine media and capitalist industries, the local enterprises that posit the nation in this global market, make this participation possible through exportation; to be specific, the exportation of the body. Hence, this gaze on the national body, that is to say the body/ies that imagine/s the Philippine national identity, diverges into an outside and inside gaze; together, they put forward a national imagination that verifies the Philippines as a country liable to participate in the global market, all the while serving the individual interests of the inside and outside gazes.

The popularity and influence of Filipino boxing champion Emmanuel “Manny” Pacquiao posit as a fitting critical model in this argument of body-as-nation, with his athletic build being the most gazed at Filipino body by the local and international public. Throughout his boxing career, Pacquiao’s team was headed by American Coach Frederick “Freddie” Roach and comprised of mostly American and Filipino trainers and advisers (“Team Pacquiao Members” 2010, n.p.) setting the grounds of his fitness routine and boxing techniques as a seeming co-monopolization between the United States and the Philippines. This then locates the proprietors of the inside and outside gazes, and though both gazes identify the boxer Pacquiao as a national symbol, it is important to understand that these two gazes operate on different agendas in the intervention and interpretation of Manny Pacquiao’s body. For the United States, the valor of his body is hinged on its exoticness, for the mysticism of his small yet herculean physique has been of a definite wonder. This mystical element of his built becomes the key marketability of his professional boxer status, drawing in fans and athletic companies to invest in his training and fights in the United States and the Philippines. On the other hand, for the Filipinos, the valor in Pacquiao’s body is hinged on the poetic caliber of his own life story; the hardships and suffering he endured to attain his “Pinoy success story” is personified by his toned built. His strong brown body symbolizes the success of the patronized Filipino aspiration to “make it big” on a

global scale, a discernibly manufactured aspiration that is heavily cultivated in various Philippine institutions such as education, labor, media, etc.; Pacquiao's locally-rooted but internationally-recognized athleticism and athletic build serves as an obvious product of the Philippines' fantasy-production of the national imaginary, a mechanism that illusions his body as a metaphor for national identification. Hence, Pacquiao's body operates as a *product* in this body-as-nation discourse, and this commodifiable assemblage of Pacquiao's physique grounds the construction of the national imagination of the Filipino and Western gazes.

This critical paper discusses how the body of champion boxer Manny Pacquiao serves as a product of the Filipino community's national imagination - a communal imaginary that undergoes habitual conditioning/s in preparation for that moment of absolute alliance, but has recently emerged with injuries and/or alterations that have ruptured this cycle of the nation's imaginary. The three phases in which the boxer's body is situated - training, fighting, and injury - will be the key contextual spaces in the analysis of Pacquiao's body as a mythical product for the West and as a fantasy product of the national imagination for the Filipinos. Furthermore, the critical paper will examine the consequential nature on how this national/colonial imaginary is constructed - how Pacquiao's masculine body as metaphor for the formation of national imagination is a consequence of

(1) his success as a product of the “make it big” agenda of the Philippine economy and (2) the Western gaze’s perpetuation of Pacquiao as a mythical product. This formation and patronage of Pacquiao’s boxing career throughout the years is received and substantiated by two gazes: one by the Filipinos who perceive his muscular body and athletic prowess as an outstanding product of the “Pinoy success story” economic agenda, and the other by the Western fans and athletic companies who inadvertently produce a colonial imagination of the Philippines, thus consequently producing a modern-day exoticization of Southeast Asian knowledge by funding and placing this Filipino-herculean body in an arena to contest with other subaltern bodies.

Professional boxing as grounds to maintain the alliance between colonial United States and former colony Philippines is not incidental in its roots, for it carries with it the historically-seated agenda of indoctrinating Filipinos into the civilized people as imagined by the Americans; being of an American inheritance, the sport symbolized a way to better a Filipino’s life. Hence, one cannot merely claim that Pacquiao’s inclination to the sport was due to its “monopoly of violence” (Cañete 2014, 119) because his undertaking of the sport was driven by the need for income by his family’s lowerclass status, and not purely by sheer interest. In her critical essay “Prizefighting, Masculinity, and the Sporting Life,” Filipino American critic Linda España-Maram examines the boxing cul-

ture among the First Wave of Filipino migrants in Los Angeles, discussing how the masculine spaces cultivated in these makeshift boxing arenas provided solidarity for the migrant workers and allowed them to celebrate male youth culture (which was otherwise suppressed by their mundane day-to-day jobs). As thoroughly discussed in the historical essay, the United States introduced American sports to the Filipinos, which included boxing, as a means to carry out the benevolent assimilation policy (España-Maram 2006, 84), and when the Filipinos “demonstrated exceptional abilities in sports, especially boxing, American trainers and managers went to the islands, taking the most promising athletes to the United States,” thus bridging Filipino and Filipino American experiences (España-Maram 2006, 75). She further discusses how being a Filipino boxer in the United States during this First Wave migration became a status symbol, signifying that they have achieved socioeconomic mobility in the U.S.

Despite the corrupt practices associated with prize-fighting, poor and working-class youths, frequently from ethnic communities, saw boxing as a viable ticket for socioeconomic mobility and celebrity status... For many marginalized, working-class, and poor youths, sports served as a vehicle for advancement. Since its introduction in the United States, boxing aroused working-class passions and remained principally an ethnic enterprise, attracting athletes and patrons largely from marginalized groups and the laboring classes. (España-Maram 2006, 91-92)

Hence, this era of boxing patronage in U.S.-Philippine history enriches the underlying agenda of benevolent assimilation and paves for a more profound alliance of the Philippines with the American sport; the Filipinos continued passion for boxing today (as a professional sport, as a work out method, etc.) reverberates the neo-colonial power of the United States.

With his back story as a provincial poor boy who eventually gained international prominence as a professional boxer, it is no wonder why many Filipinos perceive Pacquiao's athletic fame as one of the most striking Pinoy success story, and this melodramatic narratology in his boxing career further amplifies Pacquiao's influence and demand on the local and global platforms. Filipino sports journalist Recah Trinidad recounts the magnanimity of a Pacquiao homecoming, which has seemingly surpassed the frenzy of other notable Filipino influencers.

There had been record turnouts for luminaries like world flyweight boxing champion Pancho Villa (Francisco Guilledo in real life) in 1925, martyred former senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino in 1983, and movie king Fernando Poe Jr. in 2004. But admirers showed up in full force only during the respective funerals of these folk heroes. In Pacquiao's case, chroniclers could no longer measure the crowds during his homecoming. It did rain sporadically in the motorcade prepared by the city government of Manila, but countless fanatics pushed and shoved – old women in tears waited and waited on the side

street way past sunset – for a glimpse of the hero, now a glowing deity on a float... It was not what the economic doctors had prescribed for the impoverished nation. But the expected happened. Pacquiao's victory sent his poor nation tilting in ecstasy. (Recah 2006, 2)

In his critical essay “Man[n]ly Spectacles,” Reuben Ramas Cañete discusses how Pacquiao's status as a father of four, his athletic vigor, and his political and media personas have put forward “a specific representation of Filipino masculinity rooted within a discursive realm of liberal capitalism” (Cañete 2014, 120) that wholly posits Pacquiao as the ‘quintessential’ Filipino man of the Postmodern age. As a former member of the marginalized masses, Pacquiao has fought his way from poverty and flourished in his career as a boxer, businessman, and politician, securing his occupancy on the stage of power in this economy of desire (Cañete 2014, 119). However, Cañete argues of the transnational capitalist undertones of Pacquiao's influence and fame, which posits a problematization of his seat of power in this economy of desire: is he truly the one in charge, or was made to assume he is in charge?

With a suitably aggressive, masculine, but obedient status as a “by-the-rules professional” boxer, Pacquiao's “backstory” and humble but determined attitude functions as an agentic needle in this narrative, one that sews up and seals the complications

of transnational capital, imperial global finance, and neo-colonialism, transforming the “barbaric fighter” into a “civilised” gentleman, commodity fetish, and product endorser. (Cañete 2014, 128)

Perhaps to clarify Cañete’s problematization of the genuinity of Pacquiao’s fame and influence in the economy of desire, Neferti Tadiar’s framework of fantasy-production could serve as substantial reasoning to the true reception of Pacquiao’s success among the Filipinos. One of the highlights of Tadiar’s fantasy-production is on the premise of Philippine economic practices that are essentially deemed as fantasies - “abstract forms into which this work becomes subsumed within the world-system of production” (Tadiar 2004, 6) – that create a common imaginary that the nation hinges on and operates upon in order to participate in the transnational era of globalization. The identification of Pacquiao’s rags to riches story as the premier evidence of this Philippine manufactured aspiration is an obvious practice of the country’s fantasy-production, for a national alliance and imaginary was brought forth. Hence, Tadiar’s framework paves for the understanding that this economy of desire that is weaved from Pacquiao’s national and international influence and fame ultimately posits the athlete as the fantasy product of this capital flow.

Bringing together España-Maram’s historical account on the U.S.-Philippines boxing patronage, Cañete’s identifi-

cation of Pacquiao as a “commodity fetish,” and Tadiar’s framework as grounding for Pacquiao as fantasy product of the national imaginary, their critical insights buffer this study’s premise on Pacquiao as a product for the perpetuation of America’s colonial imagination of the Philippines, which consequently serves as an underlying fuel in the Filipinos interpretation of Pacquiao’s fame and influence as proof of a strong national camaraderie.

Pre-fight Training and Conditioning: Profiling Pacquiao’s Body and Alliance with Freddie Roach

Since his knockout win against Mexican boxer Antonio Barrera for the featherweight title back in 2003 (*The Telegraph*, 21 August 2018, n.p.) in which he gained international fame as the first Filipino and Asian to have had three simultaneous boxing titles (Collins 2018, n.p.) and became the only Filipino athlete to be conferred the Congressional Medal of Achievement (Navarro 2003, n.p.). Pacquiao’s body profile and athletic training has been tracked and studied by a myriad of professional (sports scientists and coaches) and amateur (sports enthusiasts and Pacquiao’s fans) boxing analysts, trying their best to decipher the marvel in Pacquiao’s physique that has allowed him to execute such remarkable boxing style. Prior to every fight, anticipation is built through the release of numerous footages of his trainings and various

feature articles that analyze how his training camps are tailored to ensure the signature ‘Pacman’ physique, all the while enhancing his existing fight techniques to secure his opponent’s knock out. While the journey of his athletic build may seem like the conventional story of any athlete who trains (ample strength and conditioning exercises, proper diet, etc.), much of his good built as a boxer is inherently organic; that is, his endowed body composition already makes him a natural athlete. In a published article in the boxing news and commentary website *Bad Left Hook*, an article was released that explained the science behind Manny Pacquiao’s body; originally written as a commentary article by Leandro Solis (who was casually referred to as a ‘scientist,’ given the informal orientation of the website) but was rewritten in the format of a sports article by Scott Christ, it discusses how the mysticism in Pacquiao’s body was rooted in the fact that his bone density is meant for a seven foot man, when Pacquiao is only five foot and five inches tall. Solis grounds his analysis with the fact that in human physiology, “wrist size is positively correlated to skeletal frame, as well as bone density and mineral content, which in short means, bigger wrist equals bigger bones” (Christ 2011, n.p.). After positing the claim, the discussion moves on to the explanation of what it means to have bigger bones, which prove to be revelatory; having bigger bones entails that one’s body structure is heavier and more stable, and is thus less prone to knockouts. Bigger bones also indicate a larger bone marrow that can

produce more red blood cells, and more red blood cells mean more stamina and endurance (Rock 2016, n.pg). Furthermore, he notes that “the bigger the skeleton, the more weight a fighter can put on such skeleton” (Christ 2011, n.p.), which greatly explains Pacquiao’s fluidity to move up weight divisions, allowing him to hold different weight division titles (“World Boxing Organization” 2011, n.p.). Manny Pacquiao’s wrists are eight inches, which are bigger than an average heavyweight boxer’s wrists, and he is only five foot five inches tall; an eight inch wrist usually belongs to a seven foot man, while a man of five foot five inches usually has a six inch wrist (Sparks 2011, n.p.). Hence, Pacquiao is a seven foot, heavyweight boxer trapped in a featherweight boxer’s body.

The remarkably surreal element in Pacquiao’s physique is what precisely posits him as a wonder for the Western audience, and this scientific examination of his body by an American analyst echoes much of how Western scholars and cultural analysts have archived and mythologized the body of martial artist Bruce Lee. In the essay “Brushes with Bruce Lee as Body,” from the collection *Theorizing Bruce Lee*, Paul Bowman discusses the mythical quality attached to Bruce Lee’s career and personal life, emphasizing that his film roles have illusioned him as transcendental and Lee’s mysterious death only heightened his god-like stance (Bowman 2010, 12). Similar to the phantasmic composition of Pacquiao’s body, Bow-

man quotes the wonder of American author David Miller during his first encounter with Lee, in which Miller states that Lee “served to foreshadow, and be a forebear of, the hyper-fitness body culture of the latter portion of our century. Before Lee, none of us had seen anyone with his streamlined, functional, no scrap masculinity. How can anyone look like that?” (Bowman 2010, 14). Bowman later on discusses the “asiaphiliac drive” that is very much evident in Lee’s cultural influence, in which the fetishization of anything Asian in popular culture is justified of its appropriation (Bowman 2010, 18). Interestingly, Pacquiao has overtly announced that he is a big fan of Bruce Lee and that his fighting style was greatly inspired by Lee (often watching his collector’s set of the artist’s films) (Bishop 2011, D1) and this overt connection that the boxer has made with the commodified martial artist has resumed and perpetuated this asiaphilic drive in the 21st century; only this time, it is directed at a Southeast Asian boxer. This is precisely the agenda in the study of Southeast Asian masculinity that Kam Louie points out in his critical essay on Asian Masculinity studies in the West, in which he states,

Thus the paucity of material on masculinities is not just found in South Asia, but also evident in Southeast Asia. It seems researchers tended not to look at the common man, but extraordinary figures, such as idealized classical spiritual man or the violent wrongdoer (particularly those of sexual nature). Up until the 21st century, little was written about ordi-

nary men performing mundane everyday masculinity
(Louie 2017, 7).

In essence, Louie explains that for the West, what is considered as a ‘valid’ form of Southeast Asian masculinity is that of a folkloric or mythical figure; hence, the mystical element in Pacquiao’s physique fits the exact profile of the West’s understanding on what Southeast Asian masculinity must be, and sheds light on the seeming fixation that the West has on the surreal composition of Pacquiao’s body.

This phantasmic quality in Pacquiao’s athletic composition is what makes him alluring to the international public that such overwhelming speed and strength rests in this Southeast Asian body. It resonates a great symbolic ring because immense power, domination and athleticism are contained within a subalterned form. The specifics of the training and conditioning that Pacquiao subjects himself to prior to every fight amplifies the symbolic structure of his form, signifying how the subalterned community is exploited and contained within a neocolonial footing, all the while being lauded of its strong interiority. The website *Boxing Science* reports that Pacquiao’s training camp is not too long (spanning for only eight weeks as opposed to the usual ten weeks that other boxers undergo) but is very heavy and intensive; Freddie Roach prescribes longer, steady runs and more intense sets for strength and conditioning (Wilson n.d., n.p.). Based on the report, Pacquiao has good core

strength, signifying the athlete's strong interiority. Similarly, Filipino psychology places emphasis on the *loob/labas* dichotomy and Pacquiao's 'strong core' can be literally translated to *malakasngloob* or *lakasngloob*, a saying that has a metaphoric understanding in Filipino culture as guts, courage and/or willpower. Hence, as a professional athlete and a Filipino who carries with him the *lakasngloob* conviction, Pacquiao is sure to endure the physical and mental difficulties of his trainings. As a site intended for exercise enthusiasts and scientists, Boxing Science states that Pacquiao's training camp is not advisable for the non-athlete because his training inhibits proper recovery and does not give the body enough time to adapt to the training. Though this training obviously entails that Pacquiao's body is overworked within a short period of time, the extremity of this training technique apparently ensures his optimal endurance; coupling this high endurance exercise with his inherently strong bone density, Pacquiao is sure to last until the twelfth round of his fights, and perhaps even more. Furthermore, this training method sustains the momentum of his strength and speed just before the body picks up the monotony of the exercise, which is why the "Pacman speed" is very evident in his fights because his speed and strength are still at the peak of the training momentum (Wilson n.d., n.p.).

What this seemingly implies is that Roach does not mind placing Pacquiao's body under riskier and more stressful workouts, as long as it is sure to sustain the strength and

speed of his fighter. Mirroring the nature of Roach and Pacquiao's trainer-fighter relationship, which is greatly characterized as familial rather than legal, this circumstance reverberates the neocolonial alliance between the United States and the Philippines, which is heavily grounded on partiality towards the interests of the O/other. Pacquiao possesses the organic composition of a superb athlete, but it is Roach who has made it possible for Pacquiao to bring his athletic form to the global scene. Having been Pacquiao's head coach since 2001, Roach's directive of Pacquiao's training is laudable and is deemed indisputable of its efficiency; if not for Roach's access and position in the arena of American boxing, Pacquiao would not have been granted entry to the international stadium of boxing. Paralleling this reciprocated bond between coach and athlete to the Philippines – U.S. neocolonial alliance, it elevates the quality of this signifying structure, implying that the former colony's present-day global progress and transnational participation is perennial to the privileges of the former colonizer.

The Fighting Pacquiao: the Profitable Product of the National Imagination

The moment he steps into the ring, Manny Pacquiao is cheered on by two types of fans: the ones who patronize him for his dexterity and exceptional fighting skills, and the Filipinos who profess a blind devotion to their

kababayan (compatriot) who is now fighting on Western soil. In the early years of his fame, roughly around 2004-2009, it is a popular fact that Pacquiao's fights were days that subsided the riot and overturned the Sunday order in his homeland: fewer crimes were reported, the streets were nearly empty, Sunday masses in the morning had plenty of empty pews; Pacquiao's fights had the Filipinos glued to their television screens. The image of a fighting Pacquiao is a spectacle that operates on a double-tiered admiration, one that takes on a consumptive orientation and the other that takes on the lens of individual projection. His containment in the boxing ring, as spectacted by the Western gaze for their penchant amusement of exotic knowledge, serves to signify as a perimeter to condense, essentialize and unify the experience(s) of struggle that has become a key trope in the Filipino socio-cultural narrative. Made possible through the West's orchestration, Pacquiao is placed in a competitive arena to showcase his athletic valor for the West's consumption and to fight for his merited entry into international fame; as Pacquiao physically struggles to achieve both agendas, Filipinos from across the globe align their own ordeals of hardships with the Filipino boxer, collectively forming an abstract alliance with their other invisible *kababayans*.

The aspect in Pacquiao's boxing artistry that has attracted much attention is the strength and speed of his left hand punch; often dubbed as the "Pacman punch" or

“Pacman speed,” his notorious left hand jab has developed into various offshoots that are now known as some of his signature moves (*Evolve Daily*, n.d., n.p.), and many sports analysts and boxing enthusiasts have developed an extensive literature about this signature punch-speed combination. With many analysts frequently characterizing his boxing technique as ‘unorthodox’ due to his heavy left hand preference and ‘deceptive’ because his unpredictable hand-step coordination confuses his opponents (i.e. a right step would usually mean an immediate right hand punch, but Pacquiao intentionally disrupts this sequence), it is amenable to claim that Pacquiao’s aptitude as a boxer does not only lie in his naturally strong physique, but also in his poised and clever movements. It has been noted by these analysts that his movements are devoid of sloppy motions and are expertly calculated to land the signature punch, and the penultimate way to witness this remarkable choreography is to set up an organized fight for Pacquiao in a boxing ring.

Pacquiao’s longtime boxing promoter, American Bob Arum, has obviously weighed in on the profitability of seeing the Pacman punch in action, and has made it possible for the Filipino boxer to regularly exhibit his athletic prowess in the gambling capital of the United States. Arum has been known for the “lose a great star, create another one” strategy in his promotion endeavors (Pugmire 2016, n.p.), revealing the veteran’s attitude of establishing partition with his goods. With boxers as the main

products, the profit lies on which players would narrate the best stories in the ring, and Arum's extensive history of promoting Pacquiao's fights despite his no-strings-attached strategy reveals his bias towards the Filipino boxer. Perhaps, Arum has recognized that regardless as to who Pacquiao fights, a fight with this Southeast Asian Filipino boxer always has a story tell because the boxer himself has a good back story; the pairing of his rags to riches life story with the peculiar style of his boxing choreography carries with it a high exotic value for audiences in the United States. Furthermore, a Pacquiao fight automatically entails a following from his *kababayans*, given that Filipinos operate on a "Pinoy Pride" patronage with any Filipino who is recognized outside of the country (Cañete 2014, 115). Hence, Arum is confident in promoting Pacquiao's fights mainly because profits are secured, making Pacquiao an enticing product of choice in this trading jungle of the boxing industry. Circling back to the profitability of witnessing the Pacman punch in action, this economy of desire that the live audiences of Pacquiao's fights have participated in is fuelled by the appetite to witness and be overwhelmed by the exotic: live audiences are willing to shell out money to watch the peculiar and unorthodox movements of this non-Western public figure. Strategized like a veteran businessman, Arum has promoted Pacquiao according to the extent of the boxer's terms and conditions, and has posited him in a leveled space of flashiness (United States – Las Vegas – boxing stadium) that sets the motion for the

asiaphilic drive. However, it is important to note that in this particular system of capitalized desire, the product functions on a personal agenda: that he is fighting because he aims to validate the merits of his international fame. In his official autobiography, Pacquiao reflects on the ironical influence of his profession as a boxer, as a man who engages in violence to instill hope.

There is an irony in the fact that I am able to instill hope in people through my profession of boxing, which some view as one of violence – a fighter willing to go to war with anyone at any time. It has been said by ring announcers that I like to see my own blood. I can't say that is really true, but I cannot say that it is false. I just know the harder the battle I am in, the more I am working to fulfill my purpose. (Pacquiao 2010, 147)

It is with this premise that Pacquiao enforces the Filipino socio-cultural trope of “making it big,” and bringing this ideology with him as he steps into the ring initiates the greater communal production of this national narrative.

In the Philippines, it has been of a popular translation that a Pacquiao fight is the Filipino people's fight; that is, his matches were often interpreted as a form of diplomatic event in which Pacquiao's exhibition on the boxing ring is simply a more performative and radical representation of the Philippines as a nation. However, what distinguishes Pacquiao from being a mere poster boy is the

conscious rapport that the Filipino individual establishes with the boxer, an affinity that works on the more profound mechanism of shared suffering and perseverance. In the Philippines, Pacquiao's rags to riches narrative is one of the most iconic instances of this Filipino cultural aspiration to "make it big," and what distinguishes his story on a more admirable scale is that his elevation from rural marginalized poverty transcended the typical ascension to urban middle-class; hence, the impressive agency of Pacquiao's success story lies in the fact that his leveling up in the social ladder stretched from the extreme ends of the spectrum, from provincial poor to global billionaire. This is perhaps the basis of the willingness to establish an abstract rapport with Pacquiao, because by establishing this spiritual association with the boxer, the individual could attain the same magnanimity of success. This affiliation, which is grounded on transference, is what deepens the *kababayans* patronage to the Filipino boxer; the Filipino individual supports him because his pain and suffering as a marginalized member of the masses is a familiar status, his success story is something the individual would want to happen to oneself, and his glorified athleticism by the international audience always brings with it the Filipino identification. By positing Pacquiao within the parameters of the boxing ring, these individual causes of abstract affinity then become centralized and communal, marking an intensification of this spiritual association with the boxer; Pacquiao in the boxing ring prompts the shared patron-

age and alliance with him, and thus signifies the ultimate union of the Filipino consciousness. His agile body maneuvering across the boxing ring metaphors the robust breadth and expansion of this abstract Filipino identification, and the varying Pacman punch combinations he executes in the arena are dynamic symbols that signify the “fighting spirit” trope in the Philippine economy of aspiring to “make it big.” Furthermore, a Pacquiao fight transforms the boxing arena into a momentary physical manifestation of the imagined space, which the communal Filipino sensibility wanders; thus, the arena serves to temporarily herd these otherwise wandering modes of consciousness. Central to this temporary space of nationhood is Pacquiao’s moving body, which resonates as a strong metaphor for this imagined national alliance; a national imaginary that is robust, unpredictable and dynamic. Fleeting as it may be, a Pacquiao fight is a crucial element in the sustenance of this imagined nation because it brings to actuality a unified sense of Filipino identity.

The Flawed Product: The Injured Pacquiao and A Regression on Transnationalism and Globalization

A day after the Pacquiao-Mayweather fight back in 2015, news broke of the Pacquiao team’s revelation (Okamoto and the Associated Press 2015, n.p.) that the Filipino

boxer did not fight at his best due to him being denied of an anti-inflammatory shot hours before the match (Sandritter 2015, n.p). According to official reports from Pacquiao's team and the Nevada Athletic Commission, Pacquiao tore his right shoulder's rotator cuff, a collection of muscles that secures the placement of the upper arm bone on the shoulder, in March of that year and was given treatment; however, his training for the fight with Mayweather paved for the resurfacing of the injury days prior to the fight. Pacquiao's team requested for an anti-inflammatory shot hours before he stepped on the ring, but was denied of the shot because the filed paperwork to the Commission did not clarify the details of the shoulder injury. Hence, Pacquiao fought with an aching right shoulder. However, the eventual dismay of fans towards the match was perhaps not due to Pacquiao's substandard performance; dubbed as the "fight of the century," the resulting match left the audiences underwhelmed by the monotony of Pacquiao and Mayweather's movements and the absence of the hyped-up 'knockout' punch, and the next day's exposé of Pacquiao's shoulder injury seemed to be a strategy to appease underwhelmed fans and/or to initiate the talks of a potential rematch. Whichever the agenda might have been, the alarming state of Pacquiao's injury became of central concern, and the years following its surgery and therapy caused a spiraling of Pacquiao's relationship with both Arum and Roach.

Pacquiao's injury in 2015 proved to be a pivotal juncture in the continuity and quality of the signifying gazes directed at his physique, because his damage has shattered the mysticism of his body and has fractured the wholeness of a national trophy. A rotator cuff injury is, in fact, a commonplace injury that anyone can obtain if one strenuously does a familiar activity (such as lifting a heavy chair) and this type of injury is not usually brought by a single, high-impact occasion; rather, it is caused by a wear and tear of the tissue ("Rotator Cuff Injury" 2018, n.p.) . Thus, Pacquiao's injury could be attributed to his training and sparring throughout the years, and cannot be wholly perceived as a heroic badge from a monumental brawl. Given the triviality of this shoulder damage, the injury depreciates the value of Pacquiao from mythical to mortal. Furthermore, according to an interview with orthopedic surgeon Dr. Surena Namdari by *Sports Illustrated*, rotator cuff injuries are also rooted in age, which proves to be a significant factor in the cause and treatment of the injury, and in the case of Pacquiao, it was a combination of age and repetition.

There are two kinds of rotator cuff tears: The type that occurs over time, which is called degeneration, and is most commonly found in older patients and in younger patients, tears are typically acute traumatic injuries, caused by lifting something heavy or experiencing an abnormal torque. I would suspect Pacquiao's was some of a combination of both. For Manny Pacquiao, boxing for so many number of

years, over time, the tendon may have experienced a gradual wear and tear. A lot of times in athletes it's a combination of wear and tear and specific impact events (Fischer 2015, n.p.).

This fact amplifies this newfound perception of Pacquiao as a mere mortal because he is ageing; moreover, the very advent of the injury breaks the illusion of his supposed dynamism and unorthodoxness because he obtained the damage through repetitive and mechanical acts. Dr. Namdari further explains that the surgery would take only an hour to an hour and a half, with six months recovery period; however, given Pacquiao's age, it was advised that his recovery was of a full year (12 months). Hence, this undevoted spotlight on Pacquiao's injury has only called attention to the fact that this exotic product and national trophy is ageing, bringing forward unfavorable notions of decay and deterioration.

Positing this revelation on the signifying structure of his body as a product of the national imagination, his injury regresses the value of the mysteriously potent colony, paving for a weakening of the reciprocity in this neocolonial dynamic. This premise was eventually given much enlightenment, for in the succeeding years since his rotator cuff surgery, Pacquiao's relationships with Roach and Arum took on their gradual decline. In April of 2018, Pacquiao announced that Roach would no longer be in his team for his upcoming fight with

Lucas Matthyse, signaling the end of their longstanding alliance since 2011; reasons for the separation were not fully exposed, but it seemed that it was Pacquiao who had let go of his head coach (Dawson 2018, n.p.). Prior to this separation from Roach, it was also announced by Arum's agency that Pacquiao would not be in the line-up of fights for the following months, with alleged reports that the boxer was hurt for being set up for an undercard match (Rafael 2018, n.p.). Based on numerous reports, the separation Pacquiao had with these longtime alliances were cordial; what perhaps posed as a shock was that the ruptures were seemingly synched. This disbanding with his American benefactors has brought forward a more independent Pacquiao; however, this post-injury version of Pacquiao as a self-promoted boxer who relies on a more nativist coaching (his coach now is his longtime friend Buboy Fernandez) garners a mixed following from his usual pool of fans. Again, positing these turn of events on the signifying structure of the Filipino boxer as metaphor, this post-injured and independent Pacquiao symbolizes a regression from transnational modes of relation and a negative participation to this era of globalization.

The onset of this spiraling could be largely attributed to the spotlight on his injury, in which the formerly value-laden product, whose financial worth was based on its mythical and dynamic quality, was revealed of its true agency as mortal and mundane. When the prod-

uct was subtracted of its 'exotic' market value, it was consequently reduced of its patronage from the Western gaze; whether it was truly Pacquiao who had let go of both Roach and Arum, his separation from these Western allies was an eventuality that both parties knew would happen due to Pacquiao's maturity as a boxer. With no U.S. intervention and hence no viewership of an international magnitude, Pacquiao is unable to execute a placement of himself within a temporary space of nationhood, therefore failing to prompt an imagined national alliance. However, this failure to actualize a national imaginary is not to be solely blamed on this ill-executed system, because Pacquiao's injury had already fractured the national imagination. The damaged and decaying Pacquiao called attention to the very reality of the Filipino nation's identity: that it is not as robust and dynamic as the Filipinos had imagined it to be. Upon announcing his July 2018 fight with Matthisse in April of the same year, many of his Filipino boxing fans have expressed their apprehensions of his return, with a general consensus that he has aged and has already achieved high fame for a boxer of his time (Aziz 2018, n.p.). With the realization that the national trophy is flawed, the Filipinos have ceased to put effort on forging a national alliance, in which Pacquiao is the central figure in this abstract space, because it does not ensure continuity and potency. Thus, Pacquiao as metaphor-product for this national and colonial imagination perhaps needs to be incubated and realigned of its course; it cannot be de-

nied that Pacquiao's fame had at least placed the Philippines on the map of international knowledge, so to completely neglect him as a national trophy would be a disregard of his hard work and an unfair erasure of a monumental era in Philippine sports history. However, the possibility for a new national metaphor to emerge is plausible especially since Pacquiao had already paved an opening to the Filipino's potential. Perhaps with this new metaphor, access to construct an imagined alliance of the nation would no longer rely on the profitability of its exoticized body, but on the genuine recognition that this new national symbol speaks to the sensibility of every Filipino.

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