The Celine Archive: Decolonial and Feminist Approaches to Filipina Lives

Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Rick Baldoz, José B. Capino, Denise Cruz, and Rachael Joo

Transcribed and edited by Rachael Joo.

The following are edited transcript excerpts from a conference panel titled, "The Celine Archive: Decolonial and Feminist Approaches to Filipina Lives" that took place on Zoom during the annual Association for Asian American Studies Conference on April 12, 2022, in Denver, Colorado, and was recorded with permission by all the presenters.

The Celine Archive (Women Make Movies, 2020) is a documentary film directed by Celine Parreñas Shimizu that covers the life and times of Celine Navarro, a Filipina woman who was killed in 1932 by her own community in California. As Shimizu grieves the loss of her son, Lakas, she tells a multidimensional story that worlds the legacy of Celine Navarro. The film explores themes of gendered violence, inter-generational trauma, and healing from devastating loss.

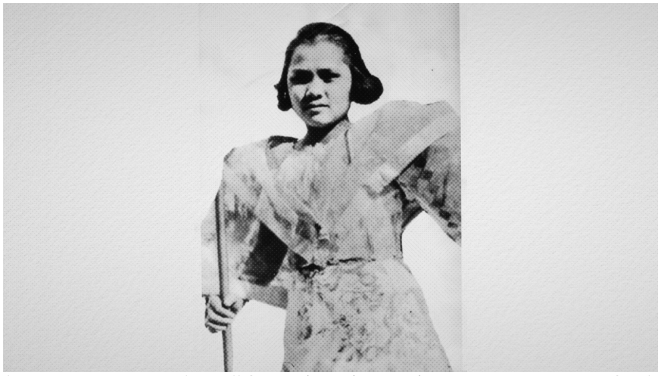
Chaired by Rachael Joo (Middlebury College), the remotely-convened panel on the film gathered luminaries in Filipinx American Studies including Celine Parreñas Shimizu (Dean of the Arts at UCSC), Rick Baldoz (Brown University, then Oberlin College), J.B. Capino (University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign), and Denise Cruz (Columbia University). The Zoom conversation was lively and engaging, covering critical theory, feminist methodology, and historiography. The following transcription highlights the productive intellectual conversations that we had about and around the film. This transcription acts as a critical companion piece to the film for scholars of feminist film and Asian American Studies.

Rick Baldoz:

I wanted to start off [with] the film's powerful mediation on grief and loss, and how we address those things in our lives. I just wanted to briefly acknowledge two beautiful souls who we see in the film, Lakas Parreñas Shimizu[1] and Dawn Mabalon,[2] whose imprint and legacy in our worlds remain deeply felt and I miss them both. This film was a nice way to kind of reconnect with the importance of those two people in our lives.

Where are the Stories of Women in Filipinx American History?

Let me talk about my response to the film and why I think it's an important contribution to Asian American Studies. One of the things that I find remarkable about the film is the amazing amount of detective work that went into piecing together the life, death, and legacy of Celine Navarro's story, who is a relatively obscure historical figure, who nonetheless offers important insights into the complexity of early Filipino American community and culture. I know in the film we learn that the story itself got a lot of media traction, but I think in some ways [in] those media depictions from the 1930s, Celine Navarro was in the background of the story. She was just the victim. I think this film does a good job of drawing out the importance of her life and what it can tell us about telling stories about Asian America.



Celine Navarro, 1932. Film still from *The Celine Archives*. A grainy image of Celine Navarro taken in 1932. The image is a black and white image of a young Filipinx woman in a dress holding a cane (http://celinearchive.wordpress.com/images). Used with permission.

[1] Lakas Shimizu is the son of Celine Parreñas Shimizu who died suddenly due to a virus that attacked his heart on December 25, 2013. He was eight years old.

[2] Dawn Mabalon, a professor of Asian American history at San Francisco State University, centered her work on the history of Filipinx communities in Stockton, California. Her work, *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) is a critically important work of social history that maps the contours of Filipinx American life throughout the twentieth century. Dawn Mabalon was an important figure in the film who died suddenly on a family vacation in 2018 prior to the completion of the film.

One of the most common critiques of my book, *The Third Asiatic Invasion*, was that it was a very male-centered project, and that the role of Filipino American women was muted.[3] One way I responded to that critique was to note that the Filipino population in the US during the time period I study was overwhelmingly male. Most estimates say around 96 percent men, so the majority of archival material and public records were about men. That's one way I've tried to explain that blind spot or shortcoming. At the same time, I've tried to acknowledge the blind spots in my work and admit that just because I didn't find a lot of material about Filipino American women doesn't mean that it's not out there waiting to be discovered. I think *The Celine Archive* is a wonderful example of someone who committed themselves to centering the stories of Filipino American women.

The film amasses what I consider an impressive treasure trove of ephemera about the gender politics surrounding the Maria Clara Lodge as well as the CDA (Caballeros de Dimas-Alang). Just the amount of photos that she was able to uncover offers a fascinating window into the world of Filipino America. People just doing everyday activities: hamming it up for the camera, wearing swimsuits, going out on the town. This film is a great catalyst for other scholars to follow Celine's lead and uncover more Filipino or Filipina American stories.[4] Hopefully, ones that are a little less violent than this one, but I do think there's a new generation of young Fil-Am scholars who are doing the work, and we'll see a lot more great, important work about Filipina America in the coming years.

Community as Bulwark

One thread from the film that I wanted to comment on was how do we make sense of the fact that Filipina women played such a central role in meting out violence and retribution against Celine Navarro? Why would women turn on another woman in their community? I think the CDA (and obviously the Maria

[3] Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2011).

[4] The Maria Clara Lodge was the women's auxiliary of the Caballeros Dimas Alang. The name of the organization was inspired by a character in Jose Rizal's historical novel Noli Me Tangere. The CDA is the acronym for the Caballeros de Dimas-Alang, a Filipino American fraternal organization founded in California in the early 1920s. "Dimas Alang" was one of Jose Rizal's pseudonyms for his political writings. The CDA was an early mutual aid organization for Filipinos living in the United States and advocated for Philippine independence during the US colonial period.

Clara is an auxiliary of the CDA) can be understood as a quasi-messianic fraternal organization. The cloistered nature of these organizations gave rise to certain cult-like features that close ranks in response to perceived threats to their community standing. Consequently, because of the way they closed ranks and had these very maximalist attitudes about ingroup/outgroup behavior, loyalty was paramount. For the women of Maria Clara, the issue of loyalty was particularly intense, because the penalty for disloyalty was severe. Let's remember that these are people living in a deeply racist society that despises Filipinos, so the idea of betraying the community, going against the leaders of the community, would have invited a type of exile that must have been very terrifying. I think the most compelling explanation to me about why members of Maria Clara participated in the murder [of Celine Navarro] is because of the fear that they themselves would be exiled or punished if they didn't comply with the edicts of the leadership. We have to remember here that it wasn't like you could just say, "You know I'm through with this community. I'm going to go start over somewhere." To be a Filipino in the United States in the 1930s, there was no place to go. You couldn't just disappear and reinvent yourself as a flapper girl. The racial and class stigma associated with being Filipino meant that you were relegated to the margins of US society that faced the constant threat of nativist violence and surveillance. To be a Filipino woman was even more dangerous. In trying to make sense of why the members of the Maria Clara lodge were willing participants can be understood through the context of the clannish loyalty demanded in cult-like organizations.

Celine Parreñas Shimizu:

Centering the Family of Celine Navarro

Thank you so much, Rick. I really appreciate your trust in me in including you in the film and putting you in debate with Dawn Mabalon and Dorothy Cordova[5]. It is precisely what you said. They couldn't just leave, and there was definitely fear around where you couldn't go. They really did not have the ability to leave. I also appreciate your discussing the multiple kinds of archival materials that were there.

[5] Dorothy Cordova, along with her partner Fred Cordova, was the founder and long-time director of Filipino American National Historical Society.

The family was very cooperative, and it was almost like they were waiting for somebody to come around. Mike Dagampat, who is the grandson of Asun, Celine's sister, has organized the Juana Montayre Facebook page, where they gather all their family photos, perhaps knowing that somebody at some point was going to come around and talk to them about it. They were ready for this to be discussed, to be engaged, to be dissected, to be uncovered, to be wrestled with. They wanted to hand everything over. So, to answer your second question first, I think they really appreciated that. There were about ninety people invited for a family screening of the film before I even submitted to film festivals. I wanted to make sure they were okay with [it], letting them know that if they didn't like it, I wasn't going to go forward. For me, it's always that way as a filmmaker. If they don't like it, I'm not going to be able to move forward because I don't want film to harm them further, to harm anyone, but to harm them, in particular, further.

It's one of the greatest honors, as Rachael Joo and I talk about, for anthropologists to be adopted into the communities that they study, and this is definitely something that happened between me and the Navarro family. There was something that we detected in each other, a need for each other. We recognize in each other what it means to lose someone. This man, who is my age exactly, sat behind me during this private family screening at the Yerba Buena Center. He said to me that he has been living with the weight of his grandmother's death his whole life, and only on that day did it come off. It was the same watching it with Mama Lucia who was bawling the whole time the movie was going—not just like regular crying, but bawling. It was almost hard to watch the film because she was just… that choked up, crying, like the kind that feels sharp. You know what I mean? Not just beautiful tears, but just coughing, harsh, crying. Just this primal kind of cry. So that was hard. But the family was very happy. They continue to text me today, like in the middle of anywhere, just to say, "Thank you so much for making this film happen." I think because we went through it together. I think part of my work as a director is going there with them, going to the kernel of the emotion. When we were at the gravesite, I talked about what it meant to find their families that [didn't] even know they existed. I think we just all escalated emotionally. I think that's why the funeral in the film feels that way.

Descendants of Celine Navarro. Film still from *The Celine Archive*. The photo features a multi-generational group of thirty-eight people gathered for the funeral of Celine Navarro (http://celinearchive.wordpress.com/images). Used with permission.

Archives as a Community Project

In terms of your first question, is there anything that I wish I found? I did not expect to be given the chance to go to the storage materials in Filipino American National Historical Society—Stockton. When I first went to FAHNS Stockton[6] to access their archives, I opened the door, and they happened to have a board meeting, and they said, "Oh here's that lady [who] is making that movie about the woman that we killed." Maybe our inquiries over the years led to that open acknowledgment of the story [that] wasn't there when Dawn was writing about it, when Alex Fabros[7] was writing about it, when Jean Vengua[8] was writing about it. I think this story was almost out for a long time. There was that openness, and they opened the archive completely. This is another testimony to how amazing Dawn Mabalon is as a scholar. She said people used to go to FAHNS and just get stuff, but now, "We have a form. For every photo you want to use. You have to pay us fifty dollars." That was Dawn Mabalon teaching them how to do that. I was happy to fork that over because that's what it

[6] Filipino American National Historical Society in Stockton, California.
[7] Alex Fabros, Jr., is a retired professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University.
[8] Jean Vengua is a Filipina American novelist and a poet who wrote the poem "Marcelina," recently re-released by Paloma Press in 2021.

costs to do this kind of work and to say this material is valuable.

There were actually more things that I wish I put in. It was really amazing to see the name Celine Navarro with the names of the people who were indicted for killing her in the roster of attendance at the Maria Clara Lodge and the CDA. It was messy. It was within different pages of this book, and I just couldn't figure out how to do it. To honor Dawn, the crew and I who were supposed to travel with her were all rushing to eat at the Bruce Lee restaurant, because Dawn said, "When we go to Seattle, I'm gonna take you to Bruce Lee's restaurant! We're going to order this. We're gonna order that." Our whole crew went because we all were recently with Dawn at the previous shoot just two weeks before, and we ate all the dishes that she asked us to eat. That was a priority for our grief as a crew which meant that we couldn't get the shooting right. Our mourning Dawn was a priority. Thank you so much, Rick.

J.B. Capino:

The Celine Archive: Remaking the Decolonial Feminist Documentary

In *The Celine Archive*, Celine Parreñas Shimizu charts a new path for decolonial feminist documentary filmmaking. For Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, decoloniality entails not only a vigorous critique of Western modernity and both historical and ongoing forms of imperialism but also a complementary praxis that seeks to "confront, transgress, and undo" them.[9] *The Celine Archive* works constantly on both elements, developing rigorous critiques of the woman's plight under empire while also reconfiguring documentary filmmaking practice in the service of progressive ends.

The critique that the film advances is multi-pronged. The first two prongs are comprised of self-reflexive analyses of contemporary ways of recuperating and representing marginalized figures who have been virtually erased from history. The third prong is an excoriation of the ideologies and practices that led to the oppression of women like Cecilia Montaire Navarro—the documentary's subject—during their time. The cinematic vehicle for this three-pronged critique is similarly intricate. First, the filmmaker draws on the resources of feminist

[9] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 18.

documentary filmmaking, a stream of documentary practice which Julia Lesage defines in mainly political terms as "a cinematic genre congruent with...the [then] contemporary women's movement."[10] Though varying in "cinematic sophistication" and "quality of political analysis," feminist documentaries tend to share certain aspects, such as the spartan visual style of cinema verité and a soundtrack "usually told in the subjects' own words" and filled with "women's self-conscious, heightened, intellectual discussion of role and sexual politics."[11] Second, in reconstructing the gap-riddled story of Cecilia's tragedy and gathering multiple perspectives about it, *The Celine Archive* utilizes a rich assemblage of audio-visual techniques associated with what Linda Williams and other scholars have been calling the "new documentary."[12] Williams attaches the term to the audio-visually dense and syncretic form of documentary that often incorporates a self-conscious[13] postmodern questioning of truth claims.[14] Through the stylistic features of the new documentary, *The Celine Archive* creates dynamic interchanges involving competing perspectives, alternations between evidence and speculation, and shifts between heightened emotions and professorial discourse. Departing from the stylistic conservativeness of many historical documentaries, Parreñas Shimizu's film makes ample use of the lush audio-visual style, creative mise-en-scène, computer graphics, episodic structure, multiple narrators, and the use of B-roll footage associated with new documentaries such as Errol Morris's The Thin Blue Line.

Apart from the impetus of retelling Cecilia's story from a decolonial feminist perspective, the film's search for its elusive subject seems to draw some inspiration from a key essay from an earlier era of postcolonial feminist thought, namely Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"[15] Spivak articulates the challenge of speaking about a historical subject who was so extremely marginalized in their time that her existence was rendered practically invisible to history by their class po-

[10] Julia Lesage, "The Political Aesthetics of the Feminist Documentary Film," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (September 1978): 507.
[11] Lesage, "The Political Aesthetics," 519.
[12] Linda Williams, "Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 3 (April 1, 1993): 9–21; Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2011).
[13] Ibid., 11.
[14] Ibid., 17.
[15] Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (London: Macmillan, 1988), 66–111.

sition, gender, place within the colonial regime, and the biases of historical scholarship. Spivak describes the scholar's dilemma as "the problem of the muted subject of the subaltern woman."[16] The essay has figured previously in Parreñas Shimizu's scholarship.[17] In the remainder of this piece, I will read the film as an informal dialogue between the filmmaker and the essay, with the latter representing both Spivak's work and the still-vital influence that postcolonial critique can play in the advancement of the decolonial feminist documentary.

Spivak's essay and *The Celine Archive* both offer extended reflections on the outsize role that archives play in any effort to recuperate the history of the subaltern woman. The film's title—lest one forget—foregrounds the central significance not only of Cecilia but the archive as well. Near the start of the documentary, the filmmaker is shown rummaging through files at the Filipino American National Historical Society's (FAHNS) branch in Stockton, California, an area once settled by many Filipinos and the location of Historic Manilatown in the northern part of the Golden State. As it turns out, even an archive dedicated to Filipinx American history located close to where Cecilia died comes up short. It holds pictures and newspaper articles about the Filipinx community but apparently nothing revelatory about Cecilia.

Elsewhere in the documentary, the filmmaker uses computer graphics to reproduce headlines from newspaper clippings about Cecilia's death, along with the name of the publications and the dates they appeared. Most of this reportage turns out to be comprised of dubious and sensationalistic reportage. The stories are replete with racist portrayals of Filipino Americans, playing on colonialist tropes of native savagery and memorably describing Cecilia's extrajudicial killing as an act of "jungle justice." The filmmaker juxtaposes the images with interviews that use critical race theory, postcolonial critique, and feminist thought to illuminate the roles that chauvinism, yellow journalism, and "yellow peril" (anti-Asian) discourse played in Cecilia's ordeal. The documentary trains the viewer to read these words against the grain, cueing spectators to apply the same critical procedure for every subsequent instance in which the film cuts between newspaper headlines and the all-Filipinx cast

[16] Ibid., 91.
[17] Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 188.

of commentators. Here, the decolonial feminist documentary implants what might be described as an anti-colonial hermeneutics of suspicion within the mise-en-scène and editing.

Dr. Dorothy Cordova and Lucia Navarro. Still from *The Celine Archive* (http://celinearchive.wordpress.com/images). Used with permission.

The documentary also shows the few traces of Cecilia's story that she had some hand in authoring. At the Seattle area branch of FAHNS, Dorothy Cordova, who with her late husband Fred were the pioneering archivists of the Filipino American experience, keeps duplicates of Cecilia's government records along with a handful of old photographs showing Cecilia, some of her family members, and what appears to be the ramshackle dwelling made of scrap wood and metal where she lived at some point. Though she did not take most of those photos, the fact that she posed for them means that she played some role in shaping their content. Instead of lingering on, reusing, and fetishizing photographs as Ken Burns often does in his historical documentaries, *The Celine Archive* presents them as fragments in a very incomplete assemblage, no different from the shards comprising the fractured narrative of Cecilia's life. To use a different metaphor, one might say that in relation to the totality of the documentary material within the film, the photographs appear as tiny islands surrounded by far larger bodies of content produced by others, separated by time and space from the elusive historical subject.

The film is brought to a close with a final instantiation of an archive, the pauper's grave that Cecilia's sister believed to

be her final resting place. The film pivots at this point from a reckoning with the aporia of historical insignificance to a collective yearning for what Mignolo and Walsh call "resurgence" and "re-existence." The film captures a belated funeral that the filmmakers have organized for Cecilia, with plenty of descendants and their friends in attendance. The attendees grieve for her and, in doing so, bemoan their own marginalization in US society as well. But the ending also picks up on the thread of endurance and resurgence already present at the beginning of the documentary in images of the filmmaker practicing yoga, rebuilding her family life after the demise of her son Lakas, making food for her family, visiting a memorial plaque for him at a park. The film returns to footage of Celine doing yoga and then, in a post-title sequence, draws a parallel by showing the funeral attendees doing push-ups and dancing for Cecilia. For Mignolo and Walsh, "resurgence" is a "renewal, restoration, revival or a continuing after interruption"[18] and "re-existence" is "the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity."[19] They are fitting responses to the "naturalization of death" that coloniality engenders[20]. In the film, the breath of life in yoga, dancing, and everyday existence functions as a simple but powerful metonym for the modes of thriving associated with resurgence and re-existence. Apart from anchoring life, the mindful breathing, aerobic exercise, and silliness also engender a transgenerational solidarity that counters the still-proximate forces of necropolitics and social death facing communities of color in the US, including—as seen in recent new stories of violent attacks in New York City—Filipina Americans.

[18] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 17.
[19] Ibid., 13.
[20] Ibid., 127.

The filmmaker practicing yoga in grief. Still from *The Celine Archive* (http://celinearchive.wordpress.com/images). Used with permission.

JB: My two questions for Celine: Was there ever any discussion of using DNA and forensic anthropology to look at those pauper's graves and see if perhaps those are her remains?

CPS: Thank you so much J.B. It's so amazing to hear an essay read out loud and mobilizing these giants in film theory and film documentary practice in relation to the film. These texts inform me, for sure, almost like an unconscious process. I appreciate the engagement with the body and the body remembering the trauma that somehow appears in this way. That's definitely in the family. They are a very fit family. I never saw them sing, but I definitely saw them default to working out a lot on set.

Feeling the Truth

In terms of the question of the DNA, it never really occurred to me because, in some ways, I don't want to know. And I don't think they want to know either. There's such an investment in a kind of knowing that they did not want dispelled, because it would question the authority of their Aunt Asun who said, "This is where Celine was buried." It would question the authority of their own sensibilities, like the dream. Henny dreams that his grandmother Celine talked to him. I'm not sure they're even tempted to test it. It didn't occur to me at all. So, make what you want out of it, but I think you probably recognize that choice.

JB: Oh yeah.

CPS: Filipino superstition and the connection to the dead they claim is real, because they feel it.

Legacy of Research

Then the second question is why does Alex Fabros disappear early? It's so interesting because Alex Fabros, when he wrote in 1997 in Filipinas Magazine, that was the very first lifeline for the family. It was the very first thing that they saw that confirmed what they were passing down orally as their history we know within the family, so they really hung on to that. They photocopied it endlessly. If you ran into them, they would probably be like, "Oh here it is." It's so important to them and they actually did not know about Dawn's book. So, I ended up telling them about that. And of course, Jean Vengua wanted to meet them and wanted to share the epic poem, Marcelina. I'm also interested in your choosing to call her Cecilia because that is her name. Cecilia Villiano Montyre Navarro is her name. I can't remember, but I think most of the family called her Celing. No one ever called her Celine. It's Celing. Everybody. Not one person called her anything but. I think Heny is the only one who called her Cecilia, too, so that's interesting. But it was Celing.

Thank you so much J.B.

Denise Cruz:

I'm going to turn to the topic of motherhood and loss, one that's so personal and intimate for her and for me, because of what this film has really taught me about models of ethics and trust and care. I want to talk today about viewing this film in a time of grief and mourning and living, a time when I am deeply cognizant of the fact that I can't be, as we like to say "in community" with you and with each other in the way that we would like to be.

Grief and Care as Method

To begin my remarks, I'd like to turn to one of the opening shots of the film. It's a still shot of Celine and her dog amid trees and yellowing leaves. We can't tell immediately what they're looking

at, and in perhaps a second the shot transitions to one of Celine walking into the house. The opening question, "Where are the women in Filipino American history?," spoken by Celine in voiceover, is juxtaposed with this frame. We next see Shimizu on the couch. The light falls on her hair, her face, her concentrated gaze. The rest is what we assume to be her home. It's in relative darkness. The frame, this shot, takes up maybe two or three seconds, but I'm returning to it at length because it so importantly highlights the film's formal and feminist techniques, some of which J.B. has already talked about. The visual composition of the shot is carefully layered. As your eyes visually adjust to the image on your screen, you'll undoubtedly see that she sits here with her son, Lakas. There is his portrait on the right of the frame, on her left. There's his photo on her laptop. It's Christmas time. The tree behind her is decorated with ornaments. These images will return later. Alongside hands decorating the trees, Shimizu moves into soft focus and the background image of Lakas becomes sharper, his image soon in full color and light.

Screenshot of panel from Association for Asian American Studies Annual Conference in Denver, Colorado, April 12, 2022. Clockwise from top left corner: Denise Cruz, Rachael Joo, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Rick Baldoz, José B. Capino

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In its opening and throughout its progression, the film uses a method of juxtaposition of references to archival discovery, feminist scholarship, Filipina and Filipina American history. These recurring layers and assemblages drive the film, as J.B. pointed out, as we zoom in and out of collective and personal archive and memory. Shimizu's mode of documentary is deeply intentional, for her visual and narrative techniques disrupt cycles that repeatedly cast Filipinx and Asian American women as

exotic hypersexualized objects or nurturing caregivers. Instead, *The Celine Archive* imagines what she will later call a practice of encountering lives "in all of its dimensionality," an alternative ethical archive and documentary practice centered on modes of grief and care.

To clarify what I mean, though, about ethical archival practice, I want to turn to Shimizu's own theorization of cinematic work in her recent book-length study of intimacies in transnational film, *The Proximity of Other Skins*.[21] In the introduction to the book, she outlines which she calls ethical intimacy which she calls the "refusal of transcendence on the behalf of filmmakers who resist an audience's desires for resolution especially in cinematic portrayals of global difference." We cannot, she reminds us, create relationality that resolves radical differences in ways of life between the global north and the global south. She's talking here about narrative cinema and work that's different from her own, but I think the method of ethical intimacy is useful for us to consider: "Ethical intimacy describes the moments in films, the building blocks filmmakers create wherein characters face a choice that builds their character and shapes their surroundings and their futures. The factors involved in making these choices are their past, their backgrounds, and their present relations as well as the structures that limit and enable their mobility and movement. This interrogation when performed by the spectator on their viewing experience can also be transformative."[22]

The method of ethical intimacy is one that centers here and elsewhere on the model of accretion and accumulation. See, for example, the language of plurality, of moments, of blocks, shapes, structures, relations, parts that are assembled out of holes in a way that resists models of bildung or narrative or easy forms of empathy or relatability. Transformation is achieved not through models of linearity and unity, but rather through a viewer's interrogation of themselves, their reaction to the films. Similarly, I am reminded of the composite layered modes presented in the film in which Shimizu assembles modes of grief that are fragmented rather than whole in ways that, as J.B. noted, craft relations with a number of feminist scholars of

[21] Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Proximity of Other Skins: Ethical Intimacy in Global Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).
[22] Ibid., 24.

archives, Gayatri Spivak, of course, but also Diana Taylor, Ann Laura Stoler, and Saidiya Hartman. Here, for example is Hartman: "The loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them. So it's tempting to fill in the gaps and to provide closure where there is none. To create a space for mourning where it is prohibited. To fabricate a witness to a death not much noticed."[23]

Celine's talents and skill as a filmmaker, an historian, a scholar, a filmmaker, a feminist, [are] able to create a space of mourning and center one family's grief with her own [through] their encounter with documents from their mother or grandmother's death. She does so in ways that layer along the way another set of relations by foregrounding the work of other Filipina, Filipino, and Filipinx caretakers and archivists, a community of scholars that includes her sister Rhacel Parreñas, who appears throughout the film, the music composed by our colleague Theo Gonzalves, interviews with Alex [Fabros], Jr., Jean Vengua, Rick Baldoz, and the late Dawn Mabalon, the archives at FAHNS lovingly curated and sheltered by Dorothy and Fred Cordova, and of course, Celine Navarro's family.[24]

Roughly an hour into the film, we return to its opening with new information. Photos and images we saw from far away or at a distance are now in close and careful attention. We hear Celine's narration full of grief, her voice catching spoken layered over the sound of a beating heart. As she recalls what she calls Lakas's quote "Dimensionality." What he would say. How he would move. She wants to tell us, quote, "to give Celine's family her facets. The thick dimensionality of her story."

I remember the day I learned about Lakas Shimizu's death just after Christmas. I can't remember how I learned exactly, but I remember my own son was still a baby. I sat down on the floor with him and wept for my mentor, for my friend, my colleague, my ally in Filipina feminism and motherhood, and her family. I can tell her now that I still think of Celine and Lakas sometimes when I walk in the park and breeze catches the leaves, or every time my house fills with the scent of pine in December, or sometimes when my son's hair falls over his eyes just so. I can tell my mentor, my friend, my colleague, my ally, and my fellow mother today that, yes, I still think of her and Lakas all the time.

[23] Saidiya Hartmann, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26, vol. 12, no. 2 (2008): 1-14.
[24] Rhacel Salazar Parreñas is an eminent sociologist and Professor of Sociology at University of Southern California. Theo Gonzalves is a composer, scholar, and curator at the Smithsonian.

A name that, for those of you who aren't Tagalog speakers, itself has multiple thick dimensionality as force, strength, power, hardiness, spirit, vitality, energy, and resistance.

I want to close then with this memory, deeply personal for me, but also for this film in a way that I hope is ethical and intimate. This film is not about the denial of grief—processing it, or overcoming it, or transcending it, but rather, of living with it and in it as individuals and as a collective, as we together craft a multidimensional archive of those we've lost and as we remember them in our living.

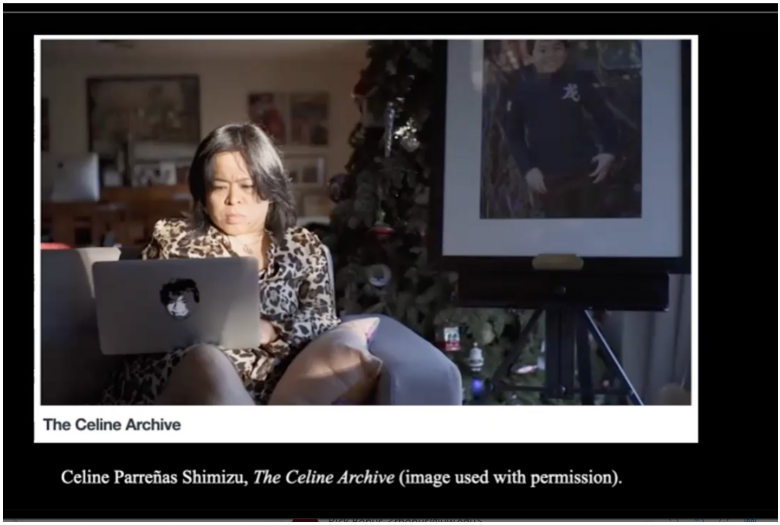
Thank you so much, Celine, for your work.

CPS

Living with Grief

Thank you so much for going there though, Denise. I think it makes me think about when you said today, "We don't know what she's doing when she's looking at the computer." I think we were just setting up the lights then. I think I was actually trying to sneak in some real work while directing this thing at the same time. In some ways, that was leaps and bounds away from when I first tried to start reading after he died. I remember it was maybe March or April 2014 when I first started trying to work again from the stupor and the shock of his death. I just couldn't read. Just looking at the computer, everything would just become blurry. I couldn't read words. I couldn't read books. I just really thought that I would totally fall apart, and just no longer live. I really thought that that's what would happen, like I would die because he died. So somehow I think it really was this film. Maybe because it was about going to the subject that was going to help people to figure out how to make sure Celine Navarro was given justice, was validated for her life. I was just curious about that. How would people recognize me that I was going to now be a dog walker. That's what I was going to do with my life. I was going to just walk dogs, because I no longer had mental capacity. Somehow, everything came back, like the reading and the writing, because of the movie. I quit my job, for example. So, thank you for going there because I think it just normalizes something that I want to be normalized which is the ability for

us to recognize how grief continues.



Screenshot from the presentation of panelist Denise Cruz featuring the director, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, and her tributes to Lakas, both as a portrait and on her computer.

Learning to Hear the Sounds of Life

There are certain sounds I don't want to be there that [are] confusing so I have to tell the sound designer, "We need to not do that. We need to figure out another sound." So it's interesting in terms of the heartbeat, the yoga, that both you and J.B. talked about. They recorded my own heartbeat as I was reading the text, so I think somehow that made it in there during the yoga part. I just really credit the sound designer, David Sandwisch.

Theo [Gonzalves] and I have been working together on music for over twenty-five years now, and I think for the first twenty years or so, we're just obsessed with one song which is Dahil Sa Iyo. I think for the first four films that we worked on, we just played with Dahil Sa Iyo, versions of it. You know, Dahil Sa Iyo means "because of you." We've given a theme song to everybody where it is different versions of that. Right now, I'm working with him on this new film 80 Years Later (2022) and he just understands what it means to be an Asian American, to be a Japanese American that we're not listening to Japanese flutes.[25] We're actually engaging a mixed kind of music. What do Japa-

[25] *80 Years Later*, directed by Celine Parreñas Shimizu (2022), 50 mins. https://www.80yearslater.film/

nese American people listen to that we're interviewing who are in their 80s, who are in their 60s, who are in their 40s and [in] their teens? So we talked about that without really even having to talk about it. We just completely understand each other because it comes from twenty-five years of research and collaboration.

Taming the Wildness of Life

One thing that Rhacel and I talked a lot about this film is why is she heroized? Is the hesitation around her being heroized because she was brutalized? Why would we heroize someone who was brutalized? This is where I appreciate the work that Rick Baldoz does about how the depth of the racism is something that can't be understated in the telling of the story.

I appreciate all of you today because I think so much of this filmmaking process is so unconscious. Documentary is like trying to tame the wildness of life. We're not trying to make judgments, but we're just trying to be as open as possible to the complexity, the ambiguity of trauma and the not knowing what it really is. The thing that I most want to avoid as a filmmaker is when documentary subjects have the tendency to say, "But this is what it means." So we tend to take things out that discipline the truth, and prefer to stay in the space of bewilderment and grappling. I think that's probably what you're capturing here. We wanted to stay and honor the epic range of emotions that are on faces, that are in places.

When I interview Jean Vengua, that was actually the site where Celine Navarro's killers were let go. It's kind of amazing to have gone there, but we were not allowed to say that in the film. We were allowed to shoot there. There were police there. They didn't want us to step on the steps. They didn't want us to show the whole building. You can see we played around with kind of showing the corners of the buildings, because we couldn't show the whole thing. When we went there, Alex Fabros was telling us that, "Oh this is where this family stayed during the trial." It was a really long trial and a lot of Filipinos were going there. When Jean Vengua and I were standing on those steps [we were] being defended by the ten San Francisco State students around us who were cajoling the police. They were negotiating: "Can we touch the hand rails? Can we stand on the first step?" We were just moved by the locations that we went to. As J.B. was saying,

the unmarked grave. I think every single place that we went to, including their homes, was so amazing. When you make a film, you come into intimate engagement with people, and I really hope that film is a gift and not a vehicle of harm. Because I think that's too easily what can happen, especially when you're contending with families. Films can unearth and shed a light on the thing that we keep in the dark in order for us to survive. If films shed a light on that thing, will people be able to watch the film? Maybe it's okay if they don't watch it. Hopefully they participated in it, and in their vulnerability experienced a new plane of existence. That's the goal.

Q & A:

J.B. Capino: One of the wonderful things about the documentary is that idea of unknowing. There's just a limit to what we can know. There are many things we really just cannot understand. But the viciousness of the women who participated in this violence for some reason, that is not something that I felt to be elusive or difficult to understand. The religious fanaticism among some Filipinos, Filipinas. We see it throughout history and so that was one of the parts that to me wasn't that difficult to sort of understand and I'm wondering if that's a kind of difference in epistemology. Of course I can imagine them doing that, really descending on her and pouncing on her.

C. Parreñas Shimizu: And I'm sure they did it in a really ceremonial, ritualistic, costumed, regal way that they tortured her almost like in a mass-like situation. I think they made a ceremony out of it. I knew it from reading and studying Filipino American history, but I think I was so stunned by the formality of the Tagalog in those books and why they made books out of them. They were making church-like, Bible-like rituals; like "You are now unleashed. You are now forgiven. You can now enter the space." It's so dramatic. I mean, J.B., I wish I could remember. I wish I shot all those pages. But they made those books themselves to document their rituals and philosophies with the super-deep Tagalog words they used.

JBC: I was also wondering how much if it draws from the Propaganda Movement, [Marcelo H.] Del Pilar, their attachment to the Masons. How much of that literature is actually just, like, im-

ported piecemeal from some of the documents that they might have brought over from the Philippines?

CPS: I mean, I have no doubt. You know, it's important enough that they probably brought all that stuff over. One thing that Dawn Mabalon really reminds us is that most of these people were so young. There was nobody really over their 30s around, so if you can imagine like age fourteen to thirty-two, what they were doing. I think they were most lost, and they were trying to redeem themselves through the scaffolding of past rituals that they knew about and recreating them in their new context.

R. Baldoz: One of the things that I was thinking about when I was watching the film was that this particular thread of Filipino American history, these more conservative kinds of organizations and groups, because I think the general disposition of Ethnic Studies scholars, tend to be downplayed. One of the largest Fil-Am organizations during this was the Filipino Federation of America. They weren't quite as nutty as, you know, the CDA and Maria Clara but they were very conservative. I think they claimed they had six- or eight-thousand members in Southern California—viciously anti-union, super anti-communist in the sense that they sort of accepted this kind of popular notion that all Filipino American labor activists were communists, work closely with the police to crack down on the vice habits of Filipino immigrants, would denounce them for betraying or making Filipinos look bad by crossing the color line. In some ways, it's a kind of blind spot, but it's a choice that I made to not talk very much about those and to celebrate the more conventional—the Bulosans and the more progressive elements of the community. I think someone's going to write a book or many articles about these more conservative elements that refract both some of the Catholicism of the Philippines married to this fraternal secret societies in the US and all the strange… I mean it's sort of a challenge, right? The secret societies—they're secret, so it's sometimes hard to know exactly what they were doing and what they were up to, but we did get a sense of the ritualistic nature of this organization.

JBC: I do have a couple of questions. This could be attached to the movie as a sort of supplement. Was it really true, that whole

thing about her hands sticking out of the grave? Because it's mentioned several times in the film. The other thing is that picture of a woman outside this really ramshackle dwelling which I found profoundly moving. Was that her or was that a kind of representative of someone in that situation?

CPS: I don't know if that first assertion is true. The person who asserts that her hands were coming out from the ground is Alex Fabros. It's in his writing. It's in the Filipinas article. And it's also in the bigger unpublished manuscript of his that's so cinematic. I don't know if it's cinematic license that he's taking but it's not in the newspapers. What is in the newspapers is that she had a bunch of jewelry on and money. She had about $200 at the time which is a lot of money now. I looked it up and I think it's over $1000 now and nobody took it. So those are the kinds of details that were there, but nothing about a hand sticking out of the ground. But there were details about how she died through suffocation. So she died there in their burying her alive. She was not yet dead when they buried her.

And then the picture of the ramshackle dwelling. I can't quite recall, except I do have to tell you that the family was very strict, because I do think it is from the family, so whether it's her or another person from the family, that picture was from the family. It is not from the Filipino American archives or any of the other archives that we used. So if it's not Celine, it's someone else from her community, so yes. You know, it is ramshackle as you were describing earlier, J.B. It's like super pulubi, super abject and poor and just makeshift—metal scraps, cartons, newspapers—I mean that's what the houses look like. I actually did not know that until going through the archival materials.

Alex Fabros had 200 Filipino American students doing this research. I had ten San Francisco State cinema students who were working with me across the archives. Going to them physically and also just doing a lot of research finding the material.

D. Cruz: I love that detail about the students who worked with you, because one of the things I found so striking about the film was the decentering of your role, but of you as the primary person threading all of this together. I think that you so carefully underscore the value of the collective. I was really struck by

that scene where the family is encountering the death certificate, and they say, "This made it real for me." Where you capture those moments where the family is really having these emotional reactions to the archive. I would love to just hear a little bit more about what was happening before and after that scene.

CPS: I remember going to Chicago and finding their apartment. I was so excited to finally meet Celine Navarro's daughter. It's kind of unbelievable that we found her. She was willing to talk with us. It took a long time. It took weeks and weeks. I think we had a weekly phone call on Wednesday night where we would talk for a couple of hours, just talking about this until the son was finally like, "Who are you talking to on the phone? This could be like a swindler." Then I talked to the son for so long. He was asking me, "Who are you? Why are you doing this? What do you want from my mom?" When we finally got access, it felt like it was really hard-earned. To be able to walk into the door of the apartment building and walk into the hallway. I remember getting out of the elevator. We were so nervous. It was a small elevator and there were a ton of us in it. They were at the end of the hall, and Mama Lucia was at the end, like, jumping up and down. I thought, "This woman is 94 years old! How is she jumping up and down?" Then when we got inside. As a film crew, we cater everything, but we cater everything Filipino vegan wherever we went which is so hard to do, like, just get another circus thing we had to do to ensure comfort and sustenance of the crew. But Tootsie insisted on cooking for us. So when we got there, there was a massive spread, but of course we couldn't eat yet. They were like, "No, no eat." We were like "Oh my god, we have to shoot!" So it was welcoming, fun, and funny to be together, right before the spilling of tears from the truths they shared.

They had all the receipts, like the death certificate that they were ready to pull out for the film. When we went to Henny's house, he had the receipt for the headstone for his Grandma Celine's grave. When we went to Lucia's and Tootsie's house, I did not know that they had the death certificates. They were just ready to show it.

When we shot in Chicago, we really make use of the Asian American Documentary Network (A-Doc). It's a very powerful network, powerful in the sense of grassroots. That was Shuling Yong and she collaborates with everybody like Grace Lee and

being a filmmaker in her own right. I remember when we were shooting, Rhacel and I were in the back asking questions. I actually never like to interview myself. I always need to have an interviewer, because I have to deal with everything else. Rhacel and I are texting questions. When that death certificate came up, Shuling just punched in. Of course, it was so extraordinary to be able to see Rhacel in action because I think she's just one of the best ethnographers, interviewers, out there. She asked, "What did you have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner." And Lucia started crying when she was asked. I mean it just says a lot about the deprivation, and how she was really made an orphan when her mom died.

Linh Thuy Nguyen: One of my favorite quotes from your most recent book is that "The past is not the past. Not only is it not here but also is not a place of truth from whence to understand our present and our future. Our truth is more than the cold facts of where we come from. Representation is not just about authenticity and its achievement."

I think that your project really shows us an ethical mode of representation that speaks to the history. It walks us through a relationship with the history and really shows that much of what historical projects are—for folks in the diaspora or underrepresented folks—is not just this act of recovery. So the past has this possibility of finding your identity, is going to give you purpose in your life or finding out something about your parents' past is going to suddenly shift your understanding of who you are, because it was your missing puzzle-piece. It's a totally different kind of relationship and I just love it because it really challenges students' desire to... when we have students in the diaspora, they're like "I don't know such and such about my parents' experience and it's such this great pain for me." Is that thing the pain or is it this gap in your relationship because of [the] thing you perceive to be the cause of the pain?

I was just thinking through how that's such a beautiful mode of representation that's really forcing me to rethink my criticisms of historiography projects. You know, reading that and seeing the way that you do it, I'm like, "Okay, there is a way that we can do it." There's so much more intentionality and care that needs to be there and it really is about building this kind of relationship. So you successfully challenged me to not be

grumpy about this thing. I don't know if you can talk a little bit more about the relationality part of representational practices, because as a documentary filmmaker, I think that is a huge part of it for you. It's not just about owning a story or claiming a story but representation is doing something specific.

Along the way that there was so much lost. It is what you say, like my students just last week came up to me and said, "I really need to know my history and I don't know it. Because to know your history is to know yourself." I said, "Actually, maybe not. I mean, maybe the question is why do you have this problem about feeling like you've betrayed something? What is the loss? Maybe that's the question." I think I'm like you in that I share that that kind of irritation.

I think filmmaking is a confrontation with history, the self, and one's relations. Filmmaking is diving deep into a relationality that you hope is ethical and responsible to the person you're engaging. Right now, my family on my husband's side, whom we are making a film about, they may be afraid or wary maybe of what the film will be. I hope, like the Navarro family, that they end up considering it a gift as well.