

Nation in Motion:

Changing Representations of Philippine Culture & Identities

2024 Symposium

ABSTRACTS

**Jessica Delphine Brändli, Jenny Furter & Lynn Amy Vellacott
(with studiyo filipino)**

(students of History & Social Anthropology, University of Zurich)

“How did that get here?”: The case study of three Filipino objects in the Völkerkundemuseum Zürich

In the early 20th century, there were hundreds of objects that traveled from the Philippines to Switzerland at the hands of the Swiss diplomat Emil Sprüngli. Today, these objects are kept in the archives of the Zurich Ethnographic Museum (Völkerkundemuseum Zürich / VMZ), hidden from the public eye. In 2022, studiyo filipino launched a common project with the VMZ and SOAS University of London to help make these objects accessible through the platform “Mapping Philippine Material Culture”, as presented by Dr. Cristina Juan at the previous symposium. In this part of the program, studiyo filipino will give a brief progress report, followed by the presentation of three students of University of Zurich. During a recent seminar, the students were tasked with investigating the objects’ provenance by applying ethnographic field methods. They previously presented their results to a broader audience at the museum; during the symposium, they will have a chance to share and discuss their findings with the Filipino Community living in Switzerland.

Dr. Stephanie Marie Coo

(Historian, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal, and
Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines)

Unraveling the Sensory Threads of Philippine Culture

Drawing from the abstracts of the distinguished speakers, performers, and designers who are gathered at this symposium, this presentation is a multi-dimensional exploration of Philippine sartorial, sensory, and colonial entanglements in specific contexts and combinations.

The first part which centers on the "possessions" of nineteenth-century lowland christianized "Filipinos" under Spanish colonial rule harmonizes with Tamara Tinner's presentation on how Philippine Muslim women's fashions were perceived, judged, and moulded during the American colonial period in the twentieth century. Our complementary concepts, which demonstrates how the human body can serve as a site and space for resistance, set the stage for Chris Müller's exploration of gender boundaries through his creative command over materials and fit and through his integration of both historical and contemporary forms.

The second part presents the various theoretical frameworks to navigate the vast array of textual (personal letters, shipping notices, and other documents relevant to provenance research), iconographic (tipós filipinos, costumbrismo), material (comb, amulet), auditory (songs, serenades), and olfactory (nutmeg) records from the late 19th to early 20th centuries. Although sense and its derivatives—sensual, sensibility, sensitivity, and sensationalism—have been extensively researched in many contexts, this presentation ties together the diverse themes (derived from Charisse Dumlao's piano performance and the case study by Jessica Delphine Brändli, Jenny Further and Lynn Amy Vellacoot's on three Filipino objects at Zurich's Ethnographic Museum) by demonstrating how the senses interact, define, or influence one another. The realms of producers, sellers, wearers, and spectators, as well as creators, collectors, and collecting institutions, are then structured within the spectrum of production, consumption, distribution, transmission, and accumulation of various aspects of Philippine sensory culture.

This sensory journey through the intersections of history, culture, and identity concludes with an invitation to exchange knowledge, stories, and anecdotes—both personal and historical—that can illuminate our nation’s complex and dynamic cultural tapestry while also highlighting the symphony of experiences we share with other nations.

Charisse Dumlao

(Pianist, University of Santo Tomas Manila, Philippines)

A Philippine musical tour across different time periods

The evolution of Filipino piano music mirrors the country’s rich cultural history, blending indigenous, Spanish, and American influences. In the 19th century, during the Spanish colonial period, Filipino composers began integrating traditional folk melodies with European classical forms, resulting in a unique fusion of styles. Filipino piano music continues to evolve, reflecting the dynamic cultural landscape of the Philippines. Composers draw inspiration from a wide range of sources, blending tradition with innovation to create music that is both uniquely Filipino and globally resonant. Filipino piano music remains a vibrant and integral part of the country’s musical heritage. 3-4 pieces of Filipino Piano Music from different periods will be performed, each offering a unique glimpse into the evolution of our rich musical tradition.

Chris Müller

(Fashion designer Our. Newnisex, Zurich University of the Arts)

Our. Newnisex: bringing human change and applauding gender neutrality through fashion and fit

Implementing current trends while combining them with classic cuts, Chris Müller creates unique and individual pieces that build the new Unisex. The philosophy of Our. Newnisex touches every aspect of their products, supporting everyday wear, independent of gender, age or background. In this brief presentation, the designer explains the concept behind the brand and their mission to provide wearers the freedom to bring their personality to the forefront. The pieces they create are manufactured in the Philippines but shaped from the designer’s unique vantage point and their individual experience.

Tamara Ann Tinner

(Historian, Linnaeus University, Sweden)

The Paradoxes of Fashion: Tailoring Philippine Muslim Women within Notions of Slavery and Polygamy

The representation of appearance – such as the way of clothing – is deeply connected with power. This talk unveils these power hierarchies by telling a Global Fashion History that starts in Sulu and Mindanao, the Islamized parts of the Philippine archipelago. The focus lies on how different U.S. actors “tailored” an image of Philippine Muslim women, especially in regard to their appearance and their way of dressing, in order to fit their own imperial agendas. The presentation looks at how Philippine Muslim women and a Sulu Princess were portrayed when they resisted and rebelled against U.S. colonial rule in the early twentieth century. At the heart of these colonial representations are notions of slavery, polygamy, and the harem. Philippine Muslim women were painted as victims of polygamist and misogynist indigenous men who were trapped in the harem of their oppressors. In the eyes of the U.S. population, Muslim women were commodities that could be sold or seized just like slaves. Polygamy and slavery became interchangeable terms when talking about the Islamic Philippines. The talk illustrates with historical source material the ambivalent tension between the condemnation of the harem as an enslaving practice and the exoticisation of the harem in fashion as a liberating tool. It shows how Muslim women in the Philippines were considered to either transgress gender or ascribed to savagery when wearing ‘Oriental’ clothing. Paradoxically, some white female rights advocates strategically had turned to the Islamic Orient for their own purposes. For these actors, the Orient – with its fantasies of the harem – embodied sensuality and femininity and they thereby hoped to avoid accusations of rebellion or masculinization. The talk argues that in fashion there is a “racial boundary” where the rules of fashion and aesthetics do not apply to everybody equally.