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## Coastal Bodies and Childhood Memories: Exploring Baby Boomers' Gendered Memories of the Waterfront in Virac, Catanduanes

Aireen Grace T. Andal

Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

### ABSTRACT

This work examines childhood memories of baby boomers in the municipality of Virac, Catanduanes Island (Philippines) to examine gender dynamics in Virac's seascapes. Through drawing together Donna Haraway's (1988) notion of partial perspectives and Frigga Haug's (1987) memory-work, this article shows the entanglement between the fragmented memories of boomers and the gendered waterfront of Virac. Employing unstructured interviews, this work presents the meanings and imaginations of the waterfront beyond being economic and industrial spaces. Three relevant discussions emerged from this interest: *first*, the boomers' narratives demonstrate how coastal femininities and masculinities are constructed in relation to bodies; *second*, in contrast to the masculine dismissal of emotions and desires, women's emotion-bound memories show potentials in navigating the symbolic meanings of bodies in relation to Virac's waterfront spaces; and *third*, memories recognise the past as a plurality of subjective meanings, with the waterfront as a relational space. These observations suggest that the waterfront and its contours work together to create remembered narratives that animate and shape Virac's waterscapes. This work is an invitation to provoke further thoughts and engage in alternative methods in making visible hidden gendered processes in hidden spaces.

### KEYWORDS

waterfront, memory-work, feminist geography, gender

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## Introduction

The Bicol region of the Philippines is surrounded by waterscapes—the Lamon Bay in the north, Visayan Sea in the south, the Pacific Ocean in the east, and Sibuyan Sea in the west. Bicol's history is saturated by century-long maritime disputes and boat wars since the eighteenth century due to Malay maritime raiding and piracy in Southeast Asia (Mallari, 1986; Warren, 2007). These events have been understood through masculine discourses down to the contemporary maritime industry and port traffic flows (see Blair & Robertson, 1906/1973; Mallari, 1989; Non, 1993). Commerce has flourished through trade interaction *via* waters, whether it is along riversides and the near-by coasts in pre-colonial Philippines or further across the seas and oceans as the route of galleon ships during Spanish colonisation (Gumba, 2015). Of particular interest is Virac, a municipality in the island-province of Catanduanes in Bicol, because of its maritime history. For a long time, Virac had the only port in the island of Catanduanes, making it the centre of trade and travel point in the island. During World War II, the waterfront in Virac was filled by passenger-cargo ships. Right after World War II, the former ships of the US military dominated the Philippine shipping industry (Baños, 2021), followed by the emergence of newly constructed railways and roads for trains and buses, respectively (The Trucks, 2016).

The narratives that couch Virac and its region suggest a distinct privileging of masculine constructs of strength and rationalism to represent waterfronts, in which the ideas of global market capitalism “are a masculine fiction that presumes that all individuals are self-reliant, thereby disregarding the critical importance of care” (Kumagai, 2020, p. 57). To this end, this work interrogates whether the masculine constructs of Virac's waterfront history resonate with lived realities. It shifts the focus from seeing the waterfront of Virac as a mere economic site to spaces invested with meaning to different people. Focusing on the childhood memories of Viracnon<sup>1</sup> women who spent their childhood along bodies of water, this work asks: How are waterfronts remembered and (re)constructed as gendered spaces? The aim is to have a retrospective visit on how Viracnons make sense of the waterfront areas in Catanduanes as a way to have an alternative understanding of Virac's historical transformation beyond an economic lens (Nora, 1989). Waterfront, in this paper, particularly refers to the coast of Virac, Catanduanes Island, Philippines.

## Geographies of Memory

This article uses memory as an important tool to engage with the spatial sketches of Virac's waterfront history (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004; Nora, 1989). As Shotter (1984) argues, the capacity to remember enables human agency to reinterpret because memory is where “past specificatory activities are linked to current specifiability—which makes for intentionality, and gives a ‘directionality’ to mental activities” (p. 208). Personal experiences generate narratives that are products of both memory and

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<sup>1</sup> People of Virac call themselves Viracnons.

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imagination as they are entangled with each other in telling personal stories. Randall (2013) refers to this as a process of “narrative reflection” (p. 9) or looking back as a way to imagine the future, embracing perpetual change, and thinking that the ending of our narratives remains open. In view of memory as a reconstructive process (Legg, 2007), the past is inevitably reinvented and reimagined, thereby not the exact replica of what happened (Schacter, 1996). Autobiographical recollections bring about recreated past events which “enable us to bring to the present that which is past (memoria), but never the thing itself, only its reconstructed image in personal terms (fantasia), and always in the context of our continuously evolving systems of self-constructions” (Neimeyer & Metzler, 1994, p. 130).

The seascapes of Virac make a vibrant case for examining memories of places because of their liminal character within the human-nature interface (Preston-Whyte, 2004). Being an “anomalous category”, the sea is an open slate that is “overloaded with potential meanings” (Fiske et al., 1987, as cited in Azaryahu, 2005, p. 120). The non-fixity of seascapes challenges the notion of stability and permanence not only in terms of human’s relations to places but also in memory, alluding to the question on what kinds of memories are created in such “fluid” environments. Such liminal qualities of the sea are even evident in the uncertainties found in applying legal measures in international waters and property issues in maritime territories (Mallari, 1986; Warren, 2007). This paper regards waterfront areas as “primal landscapes”<sup>2</sup> or “meaning-laden places where we explored, played, and tried to make sense of the world around us-form a primal landscape from which we compare and interpret future landscapes” (Measham, 2006, p. 433). Instead of landscapes, however, the waterfront becomes the centre of analysis as a memory-laden place where individuals create experiences and meanings to eventually remember, recreate, and reinvent. Moreover, the focus on seascape memories contributes to the uneven literature that mostly discusses narratives related to landscapes and specific inland geographical sites such as monuments, buildings, cultural landscapes, and historical figures (see Alderman, 2010; Hayden, 1995; Hoskins, 2007; Johnson, 2012). Studies on memories and waterscapes usually hinge on the discourse of temporariness related to tourists’ site visits and beach vacations (see Baerenholdt et al., 2004; Finlay et al., 2015; Hein, 2016). This escapist lens frames the seaside as “a departure from normality” (Elborough, 2010, p. 227), in which visitors experience the seaside only as a temporary place where “the stress of normal working lives is temporarily suspended, cultures merge, egalitarianism flourishes, and bonds of friendship are forged” (Preston-Whyte, 2004, p. 349). This work diverges from such memory-work of the seaside by shifting away from tourist experience and capturing the meaning-making and memories of those whose lives are daily intertwined with the sea. The memories of seascapes can be instructive in understanding how the sea is beyond a mere body of water and instead comprises waterbound spaces linked to life, history, and memory.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “primal landscape” was first coined by D. Gayton (1996) in *Landscapes of the Interior: Re-Explorations of Nature and Human Spirit*.

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### **Gender and Memory Work**

An important focus of this work is the memories of women who grew up in Virac. Guided by *feminist geographies*, this work builds on placing emphasis on the “voices and perspectives of women so that we might begin to hear the unheard and unimagined” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19). Specifically, this work echoes feminist geographers who use emotion and affect as orientations to destabilise the gendered assumptions in knowledge production—masculine as rational and scientific and feminine as “biased, subjective or, worse, political” (McDowell, 1992, p. 404; see also Davidson et al., 2005; Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Longhurst, 2001; McDowell, 1999; Smith et al., 2009). As Deborah Thien (2005) argues, emotions and affect have been devalued in favour of “reasonable scholarship” (p. 450). Deviating from masculine rhetorics of logic and structure in Virac, this work “document[s] transgressions” (Boyer, 2004, p. 170) that open up a space for the discontinuity of the institutionalised historicisation of Virac through letting women to “speak-for-themselves” (Bornat & Diamond, 2007, p. 21). This approach also resonates with the feminist criticism against positivism in the 1980s and the recognition of subjectivity as an analytical approach to advance research (Stanley & Wise, 1983; Stephens, 2010). The memories of women thus serve as a way to provide “critiques and methods for examining the functions and effects of any structure or grid of regularity that we put into place” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 6).

In analysing memories, this work adopts two different yet mutually reinforcing approaches: Donna Haraway’s (1988) notions of partial perspectives and Frigga Haug’s (1987) concept of memory-work. Drawing from the experiences of women’s situated memories, this paper shows the link between the embodied self and Virac’s waterfront, thus presenting the complicated entanglement of gendered bodies and seas. Partial perspectives through memories are celebrated as a “privilege” rather than a “deficit” (Haraway, 1988), which opens an opportunity to reveal silences and tensions that universal knowledge glosses over (Haug, 1992). Applying the wisdom of partial perspectives to a memory-work approach, this paper highlights the active processes through which women’s memories are informed by their past lived experiences in Virac’s waterfront. Aside from mere collection of personal and cultural meanings from women’s recollections, such an approach also “enables the connecting of personal narratives and experiences with social structures bringing to the fore relations of power and how they impact on body and place” (Bryant & Livholts, 2015, p. 193). Although memory-work has been criticised for being “coloured by subjectivity” (Reinharz, 1992), it is precisely the aim of memory-work to take into account subjectivities and sensitivities of individuals and their sense of being-in-the-world (Farrar, 2001). As Crawford et al. (1992) puts it, “the underlying theory is that subjectively significant events, events which are remembered, and the way they are subsequently constructed, play an important part in the construction of self” (p. 37). Such an approach bolsters a meaningful access to the past of Virac’s women. To be clear, this paper takes memory-work in its broadest sense, which is analysing memories as a way to reimagine events of the past. This paper does not engage in a collaborative reworking of personal

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memories of both the participants and researcher (see Crawford et al., 1992). Finally, late childhood recollections are at the centre of discussion in examining waterfront memories since the exploration of past childhoods from auto-ethnographic and oral history approaches offers resources for reimagining how history can be differently conceived, how relationships between the sea and Virac's people can be understood in more complex terms, and how childhood memories can interact with waterfront spaces.

***Participants: Women Baby Boomers***

Baby boomers represent the generation born after World War II (1946–1964). Public discourse about baby boomers often describes them to have benefited “from educational and welfare systems which they now seem intent to deny future generations” (Phillipson et al., 2008, para. 4.9). However, such characterisations of baby boomers overlook their intra-generational heterogeneity. For instance, while baby boomers from middle class households had been well-served by a flourishing economy and education, others grew up facing struggles of poverty and low levels of education, ending up in casualised jobs and precarious work that resembles what is now considered a “gig economy” (France et al., 2018; Morgan & Nelligan, 2018). The case of boomers in Virac provides an interesting case as they had spent their childhoods in a context far from the mainstream childhoods of boomers, that is, in a postwar transition of an island. Today, this generation is entering their older years, carrying memories of their childhood in Virac. This raises the importance of accounting for boomers' memories as they carry unique substance, which are not to be reduced in a homogenised generational narrative. In this regard, the childhood memories of women from Virac challenge the veracity of claims made around the legacies of the baby boomer generation.

Through semi-structured interviews with 12 women baby boomers who grew up in Virac, Catanduanes, this work presents an oral history of the attributes of childhood meanings of waterfronts in a context of changing island spaces after WWII. All participants identify as a woman, former girl (younger self at 8–12 years old) and female, and such terms are used throughout the article. The statements originally expressed in the participant's local language were translated by the author. Childhood memories serve as points of analysis to articulate unheard narratives and alternative histories (Neimeyer & Metzler, 1994) of Virac's postwar waterfront, to find paths toward understanding the present differently and to map out possible future imaginations of the Virac waterfront. Since memory is a reconstructive process (Schacter, 1996), baby boomers' recollections of Virac waterfront areas render reinterpretations and recreations of prose narratives that reflect truthful accounts of what they held important in their remote past of the waterfront. The interviews not only provide retrospective narratives of the waterfront but also share a specific generational perspective. Such an approach offers a way for reimagining how waterfront experiences during the postwar era can be differently conceived, how relationships between participants in the island can be understood in more complex terms, or how childhood memories can interact with blue spaces.

## Memories of the Waterfront: Coastal Femininities and Masculinities

### *Feminine Gaze and the Macho Port*

In the participants' memories, the body serves as a relevant aspect of gendered inclusions and exclusions in seaports. The gendered space of the maritime industry has always been visible to the boomers growing up. According to the participants, the port community—port labourers, retailers, ship crew—embraced the narrative of the port as a “masculine” space due to the physically demanding nature of port activities. For example, big bodies are associated with power because of their ability to carry huge and heavy shipping equipment. Based on the bodily structures and voice presence of muscled men in the port, the boomers as girls were able to construct their version of what they call “macho men”. The dominance of muscular male bodies saturated the sights of the port, playing the central roles in the port's imagery. These men were either ship manual workers or *kargador*, referring to those whose primary role was to carry ship items. Men in uniform, however, receive a different attention. The ship captain and his uniformed crew received more reverence and respect from the women islanders as their constant subjects of admiration. As one boomer says, “Boys would love to be captains and girls would like to marry captains” (66 years old). Young boys would dream about being a ship captain and girls would fantasise getting married to a captain. Some participants remember their “puberty crush” being a ship crew. As young girls, the boomers also looked up to their teenage sisters, who have influenced how the participants look at men's bodies. Since masculine bodies in the port were a regular visuality going to school, their older sisters developed attraction to these frequently idealised bodies, thereby also shaping the participants' views of men's bodies as subjects of desire. At the same time, however, the boomers remember mocking some men without a “macho” body. One participant even admitted:

*I fantasised about muscular bodies in my early puberty, especially when I see sea crews. I compared them to “skeleton” [very thin] boys in school. I have to admit, I judged them [skeleton boys] and thought they rose from the dead. I was drawn to older men because of my sea crew crushes (63 years old).*

Not only did the girls witness teen girls' desires unfold before their eyes, these “role model” teens have also shaped their standards of women's femininity and beauty. For instance, the way they place gravity to the term “responsible” meant balancing between independence and maintaining the demeanour of a fragile body since physically strong women are viewed as “un-feminine”.

*If you're hopelessly in love with a man, you should not grow your armpit hair or present traditionally masculine activities but you should not be a damsel in distress and carry your own weight too (64 years old).*

The teenage girls whom boomers look up to enjoyed being fashionable, which reinforced the idea that being a woman has strict standards to follow whilst also being

intelligent, curious, and strong. As such, they kept on the beauty ideals of fair skin and straight hair. The boomers had the idea of spatialising hair and skin colour.

*When I see a woman in a darker shade of skin, I can tell from her background that she's poor, probably works in a farm, street vendor, or just exposed to the heat of the sun every single day. I did not want to have darker skin because I did not want to look poor (61 years old).*

Feminine performance also required that men's bodies be gazed at in public space but adored privately. The boomers had to shape their views of men's bodies secretly, alone or with a small group of friends. Girls were not expected to objectify, even compliment, men or boys as this would appear off-putting as they were only allowed certain forms of public display of attraction.

*Girls and women were to suppress anger and frustration, and just smile and take it when men disrespect them to down to the core of their souls (68 years old).*

*I wanted to be safely perceived as not "wild" but I understand the feeling of having to keep my thoughts and emotions hidden. I felt overlooked, and I indeed was. Still am, I guess. I sometimes feel like I should warn others [women] (66 years old).*

### ***Macho Women in the Seaside Market***

The femininity assumed in female bodies might seem imperceptible to the glamorised hugeness of the ocean and ships in ports. However, while the female body can be a subject of weakness, it can also be a position of power. The participants themselves recognise the roles of women in the seaside markets, which are integral parts of the everyday transactions and survival of the market. Specifically, women were the leaders in market informalities in the seaside, which is a terrain of intellectual sources. Six participants have mothers who work in the port, including food retail, micro-credit, and marine-based craftworks. As one participant mentioned:

*Men have macho bodies but my mother has a "macho brain" in seafood retail. I guess, many people did not realise that being in the seaside market requires not only physical strength but also intelligence and strategy development, and at times compassion (68 years old).*

The participants remember the seaside markets as a territory of women's intellect. Whereas the coastal market's narrative operates in logic of business deals and transactions, the feminine informal economy in Virac were sources of emotional support, knowledge, and sound advice in the market. For example, one big role women played in the seaside market was having informal micro-credit businesses. Instead of turning to big loan sharks for borrowing money, local people in Virac preferred informal credit businesses run by women not only for lower interest rates but also for financial literacy. Big credit businesses had been predatory, exploitative, and never lenient in

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deadlines for borrowers. In contrast, women micro-creditors provided an opportunity for people to access small loans with reasonable interests.

*As a loaner, my mother never profited from others' hardships and miseries. As a loaning woman, she could have easily milked out cash from them but she chose not to (63 years old).*

Not only did local people benefit from access to alternative loaning schemes, but they also accessed financial knowledge, albeit informal, through women loan providers. Although small-scale, women in informal microcredit businesses gave free financial advice and information to local people in Virac. Women loaners shared necessary tips to save money, prepare for children's education, and be financially stable in old age. Moreover, women in the seaside market were skilled bargainers and negotiators—skills that overshadow physical abilities. The participants recall that as young girls, they have seen and felt how trusted women were by fishermen in terms of monetary dialogues in seafood retail. Women seafood retailers were dependable in having fair pricing as they did not haggle for lower prices compared to bigger businesses that push local fishermen to sell their catches for cheaper amounts.

*My father was a fisherman and Manay [general term for an older woman] has always helped him in finding other buyers. She has never taken advantage of my father, especially when his catches were not the best (65 years old).*

Most women in fish retail also prioritised small fishermen as suppliers over big companies. They even helped fishermen to contact local diners/eateries so that they can compete against big fishing companies in supplying catches to diners. Through “word of mouth”, women retailers gave positive testimonies to hook up local fishermen with diners and even restaurants as suppliers of fish. However, some women were sometimes impolite negotiators, especially when they thought that the situation was unfair. One boomer recalls:

*But they do explode too! I remember a woman in the market who expressed her resistance to give some drunk men who want to get inihaw na isda [grilled fish] from her street food stall in the market (63 years old).*

### **A “Soft” Port?**

On the flip side of seeing subversions of masculine powers, the boomers remember their interest in men who show transgressions against gendered expectations, which they described as “macho men with soft spots”. For the boomers, “soft spots” mean showing vulnerability and fragility, departing from the narrative of strength and control, and instead shapes a space for compassion and emotions. This takes place in two specific scenarios—leaving and arriving at the port. The waterfront and ships became symbols of both connection and obstacles that unify and break families apart. When overseas male workers such as seafarers or soldiers arrive, the port becomes a space

of happiness as families rejoice and celebrate for the momentary reunion. Yet, when the seafarers need to leave, the port transforms into a space of loss, fear, sadness, and insecurity. In both situations, men show emotions—bittersweet smiles, fear of uncertainty, parting tears—demonstrating “caring masculinities” (Tarrant, 2020, p. 347). This veers away from the hegemonic masculinities of domination and emotional suppression (hooks, 2004<sup>3</sup>).

*My father was a seaman and we just see him twice a year. When I look at the port, I remember my mother crying. It was sad. Until now, the port reminds me of fearing that my father won't be back (63 years old).*

Men showing vulnerability also manifested among those whose families were separated by labour migration. A small number of men and children were left by women in the household to work in the city as domestic helpers. Overseas employment for women has changed the meaning of motherhood among families. Women's physical bodies and strength have been relegated to bodies-that-provide while men's bodies became bodies-that-care. And while hegemonic masculinities entail the image of men surrounded by women at their disposal, there are men abandoned by their female partners. In being separated by the sea, the bodies of men and women acquired new meanings—bravery, sacrifice, and sometimes, betrayal. The waterfront has served as a dividing line between family members, which eventually shifted the dynamics within families' roles.

*When my mother left us to work, my father actually encouraged me to be as equal as him, even to take responsibility in the family. He took my opinions very seriously. He told me that when we get money or tasty food, it's through my mother's earnings (62 years old).*

### **Confusion on the Forbidden Coastlines**

In their childhood, the participants remember the port as a place for adults. Some waterfront spaces were off-limits to children such as the so-called *inuman* [drinking pubs] and pimp spaces. Alcohol houses are places where men go to have an alcoholic drink called “tuba” or fermented coconut sap. *Inuman* in Virac located near the ports, open at night and can accommodate up to 15 people. As the participants remember:

*My father and his friends usually go to inuman [drinking pubs] to relax before going home. However, sometimes, they could not get in because it is full (65 years old).*

*One time, my mother went to the inuman angrily because my father spent his money on drinks while we did not have enough for food (62 years old).*

<sup>3</sup> Feminist, political activist bell hooks refusing to capitalise the letters of her name to subvert grammar prescriptivism.

The pimp spaces are informal areas near the bay where pimps wait to match male clients with female sex workers. As brokers for sex work services offered by female sex workers, pimps usually talk to men tourists or shipping crew arriving from ports. While there are also local clients in Virac, they pay less and sex workers get into more trouble if they entertain local men. As many of the participants recall, pimp spaces are considered sinful but practical. None of the participants have directly met a pimp but one of them was friends with a sex worker's sister, and she recalls:

*My friend's sister got into trouble for hanging out with a man whose wife was a war-freak. At that time, she was not very skilled in dealing with people. She was, maybe, 18 and she could have got skilled in sensing which clients are worth going for but she had no idea. They didn't pay her enough, but she needed money. It's not easy being poor (65 years old).*

Such forbidden coastlines were where the participants came to understand female bodies as sexualised. The process of remembering about the waterfront usually leads to a condemnation of threats to safety. As some boomers explained, they were surprised at the number of times they recalled about their fear of sexual harassment. The participants felt conflicted over the feeling of disapproving the choice to be a sex worker on the one hand, and frustration that women on their island are being exploited due to their economically difficult situation, on the other. Such situations influenced their identity and therefore their actions and strategies to be protective of themselves and their younger female siblings. Interestingly, some participants initially hesitated to retell the stories of forbidden coastal spaces because they do not want to portray themselves, and generally girls in Virac, as transgressors of restricted spaces. However, they said that there is no point in hiding such memories because it is worth remembering every part of Virac—the beautiful, the ugly, and the in-betweens. The participants' memories of the unfamiliar spaces of alcohol houses and pimp spaces provide an interesting retrospective account to the times they did not know about these places. But at the same time the participants appreciate the eye-opening realities of their seascapes as they associate forbidden spaces with growing up, “real world”, and even as a necessity. The participants mostly remembered gradually learning why some spaces were forbidden. This gives glimpses of changes in their constructs of the waterfront, from the mystery of “adult only” spaces transitioning to these spaces as unfortunate and sinful.

### ***Faith, Fantasies, and Fears at the Beach***

The water serves as an important part of religious celebrations and *fiestas* in Virac. For instance, the fluvial procession of the Penafrañcia feast to celebrate the life of Virgin Mary is a shared memory among the boomers. This ritual involves making boats and placing Virgin Mary's icon for a floating procession. This kind of feminine celebration is not uncommon in the history of pre-colonial Bicol, in which femininity has played a big role in ancient practices. Spiritual rituals involved feminine roles in worshipping a god called *Gugurang* who lived in *Kamurawayan* [heaven] is worshipped (Roces, 1980).

To worship *Gugurang*, an effeminate priestess, *asog*, together with a female assistant, *baliana*, leads a ritual called *atang*, in which people offer best harvests from the land and sea to *Gugurang* in order to have their petitions granted or to demonstrate gratitude for answered prayers (San Antonio, 1977; as cited in Mintz, 1971/2019).

Another important dimension of the boomers' childhood in Virac's waterfront is linked to how strongly they integrate their lived and fantasised childhoods with water. The participants expressed their desire to relive the interruption of reality through water-related myths like local sea mermaids and other sea monsters. While they did not have actual sensory experiences with such mythical creatures, these fantasies are real in their memories. Since the water was part of their everyday sight, it is not surprising to expect the loss of mystery surrounding the sea. However, the water has remained partly bewildering because of the myths about it. For instance, the boomers remember believing that sea fairies attempt to reclaim the sacred parts of the waters against trespassing humans. While these fantasies were privately imagined in their minds, the boomers have experienced understanding and appreciating their culture's folklore, bringing back the mystery of water. Meanwhile, the participants also remember the feeling of fear of mythological creatures. For instance, in Virac, the *Aswang* is usually described as a shape-shifting creature who eats human flesh and has the power to change itself into animals or other forms. This mythical creature is a common object of fear in Philippine folklore. Another example is the notion of *Engkanto*, which refers to any mythical creature with supernatural powers such as fairies or elves. However, the participants also expressed their frustrations over their fear of "evil" mythical creatures tagged as females such as the *Aswang*. This image contradicts the charm they have seen growing up in the port, seaside market, or along the shores. This created a tension between the myths and realities for the boomers, underpinning the clashes in beliefs and expectations about women's roles in society. Finally, the participants also expressed their concern that such myths are not only part of their childhood but also of Virac's history and heritage. However, they are concerned that such existing myths and folktales are not officially recorded and will finally fade in time.

### **Discussion: Bodies, Subjectivities, and Messy Memories**

This section articulates the situatedness of the waterfront as necessarily gendered. The memories of women baby boomers presented hitherto are departures from the conventional approaches in understanding the waterfront as mere shipping route and economic zone. The location of the waterfront and its contours—built environments, moving bodies, and all cultural exigencies and conditions—work together to create remembered narratives that animate and shape Virac's waterscapes.

#### ***Bodies***

The boomers' narratives demonstrate how coastal women creatively imagine and re-imagine their coastal femininities and masculinities and understand their social space in relation to their bodies. Taking Haraway's critique of "disembodied scientific objectivity" (1988, p. 576), the memories of boomers are body-specific within a given

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site, engaging in the exploration of body, sexuality, and subjectivity. The boomers themselves were able to identify the importance of exploring gendered bodies in the everyday coastal spaces, and the ways in which they were involved in constructing their understanding of their own bodies and of others'. Such memories also illustrate transgressions of bodily binaries and meanings, revealing the complexity of bodies beyond feminine-masculine dichotomy. The participants were also able to witness different contexts of both reinforcing and challenging traditional gender roles through bodies. For instance, there was the presence of feminine bodies in ports but at the same time sex workers continued to be exploited in the same space. In folktales, women's bodies are sources of both fear (imaginaries of *Aswang*) and reverence (graven image of Virgin Mary). In addition, the boomers described how they used masculine bodies as objects of interest. All these point to an exploration of the irregularities in femininity-masculinity dynamics through bodies. Their memories, based on an influx of experiences, demonstrate that femininity and masculinity oscillate from one space to another. For instance, the boomers' narratives demonstrated resistance to the limited masculine constructions that foster domination and exclusions. Rather, their memories elucidate masculinities that form a space of "care". Also, the term "macho" has gained new meaning through women-led informalities in the seaside market.

Through their recollections of the waterfront, the boomers have made sense of the meanings given to gendered bodies. The female body's identity in the waterfront revealed the multiple and often conflicting gendered roles of women such as gazers of male bodies, sources of wisdom, sexualised beings, family providers among others. Such multiple roles show the ties between the waterfront and gender as fragments of broader contexts captured in moments of memories—the port, seaside market, and beach made them recall their gendered past. For instance, the narratives highlight the importance of overseas rural-urban migration for that shift coastal women's labour identities. As Haug (1987) puts it, "everything remembered constitutes a relevant trace—precisely because it is remembered for the formation of identity" (p. 50). The boomers, as embodied subjects, remember the integrated flow of gendered identities through their own bodies and bodies of others. Moreover, the waterfront offers an alternative space to articulate the link between bodies, spaces, and gender by challenging the literature in which gendered spaces are typically observed at home or workplace. These narratives in this work demonstrated homemaking in Virac as both feminine and masculine through the memories of leaving and arriving at the port; the waterfront has been shown to inflect home, identity, and belonging in Virac. This suggests a complicated dialogue between women's bodily mobility and immobility. Thus, the sea becomes the entrance to where bodies navigate different gender dynamics as demonstrated in the contrast between the sea and home, rendering a deeper understanding of domestic life in Virac.

### **Subjectivities**

The memories shared by participants have made salient the role of the subjectivities and emotions they attach to the waterfront in shaping their identities, thereby showing the affective dimensions of the waterfront in women's lives. This resonates with Haraway's (1988) critique of the scientific ideals in favour of partial perspectives not

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as a weakness to be overcome, but as an advantage to be celebrated. In contrast to the masculine dismissal of emotions and desires, women's emotion-bound memories have shown the potential of navigating the symbolic meanings of bodies moving through the Virac's waterfront spaces.

Emotion-oriented geographies of memory offer insights into the ways the boomers remember the waterfront as a matrix of interaction between the self and gendered spaces, instead of being mere transportation and trading routes. This approach counterpoises the neoliberal logics that normalise waterfronts as mainly economic zones. The boomers used their personal desire, pride, curiosity, confusion, faith, fear, and fantasies to access their memories of the waterfront. The most remembered memories are informed by a strong sense of joy, excitement, disgust, regret, surprise associated with the waterfront, enabling the participants to embark on a backward journey across the waterscapes that influenced their worldviews. The tensions and contradictions in the boomers' memories about gendered bodies in the waterfront are indicative of their personal relationships with multiple layers of the waterfront in the past. For example, through remembering emotions, the actions of going and returning to the port suggests more than tangible movements of people and ships. Rather, such actions underpin intimacy that goes out and returns when loved ones leave or go back to Virac. Likewise, the role of women micro-creditors as financial advisers goes beyond professional relationships. This is also instructive to understanding the notion of intimacy as having a plurality and varied meanings in their domestic relationships. As a participant stressed out:

*You may have read in history books about Virac, about our population, fishing economy, and all those typhoons. But the views of Viracnons' about their own place is an emotional experience you can't read in books or newspapers (68 years old).*

### **Multiple, Messy Pasts**

Finally, the memories shared in this work challenge the often-dichotomised categories of gender practices as traditional or defiant. Rather, the memories shared in work recast gender and gendered spaces as fragmented lived experiences—both demonstrating disruptions of dominant gender narratives (e.g., vulnerable masculinities) to a continuity of traditional gendered practices (e.g., feminine beauty standards). On the one hand, the memories shared by boomers challenged the universalist and urban-centric constructions of feminism and homogenous representations of rural women (Pini et al., 2020). Whereas in Western feminist geography, home can be a vilified location that is associated with restrictions (Espino et al., 2012), the boomers' homes were spaces of desire as opposed to the sea as a space of separation. But on the other hand, it is important to understand the uni-dimensionality of the waterfront spaces as working concomitantly to locate male agency and privilege throughout the cultural waterscapes, simultaneously downplaying women's diverse experiences. Although the port, seaside market, and beach reveal layers of femininities and masculinities, these spaces also show the emphasis on men's visibility and women's hidden roles in these places. More

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than the materiality of the waterfront, it is the messy spatial tensions between the memory-holder and space that are remembered (see Hetherington, 1997). As such, in contrast to historicism's official recording of the past, memories' partial perspective lay bare "hidden dimensions" (Hughes & Lury, 2013, p. 797) that impart another perspective, one that lends an ear away from the intentions of linear history.

The patchworks of memories in this article recognise the past as a plurality of subjective meanings, treating memories of the waterfront as an interactive web of relations. Notably, this captures Haug's vision for memory work as "the process whereby individuals construct themselves into existing social relations" (1987, p. 33). The memories shared here are fluid, in which instability is ever present behind the narratives of the waterfront. The idea of moving through space with memories is one that engages more directly with questions of perpetual interpretations and reinterpretations. That relationality extends to inquiries about the past as much as it does to current social practices. Not only do the details in the boomers' memories change per individual, but so do the reasons why such memories are remembered. The boomers have conveyed their memories in a way that the past appeared in their trivial experiences, which shaped their relationship with the waterfront.

This calls for the willingness to be comfortable with ambivalence in retelling histories. There is no one coherent narrative that the boomers' memories follow in their stories. As a collection of fragmented memories with sediment patterns of practices embedded in the fabric of the waterfront, Virac lends itself to being seen as an "archive" of patchworks documented over time to be a collection of memories that remain fragmented but nonetheless resonate at present. Showing the traces of the Virac waterfront from a framework of partiality reveals that while memories are reinforced by historical processes such as economic development and urbanisation, these memories are nonetheless constructed through the constellations of partial memories. Not only did the port, the coast layout, and the seaside market become a part of the parietal perspectives in Virac, but so did the more hidden and restricted places. This allows for new perspectives on the waterfront to surface, which can challenge or disrupt conventional narratives and representations of Virac. A participant has even expressed the same sentiment in saying:

*Imagine telling these stories to researchers only to end up narrating my story bound to be "repackaged" or twisted to align in favour of what they have previously read or believed about Virac's history (65 years old).*

## Conclusion

The memories shared in this work are more than time capsules of the boomers' childhoods. Memories can unfold many ignored realities, some of which even challenge dominant public historicism. The boomers' memories of the waterfront remain relevant because they offer an alternative way of seeing Virac's history. The memories concerning the gendered spaces of Virac's waterfront show the potential of partial perspectives to guide historical knowledge. Memories shared in this work

are not only linked to specific geographic spaces along the waterfront but are rather extended to the tensions of feminine and masculine identities, reflecting the range of gendered practices for further exploration. The women boomers of Virac serve as enablers to turn our gaze to the waterfront's gendered spatiality. Dismissing the multiplicity of women's views runs the risk of flattening and oversimplifying a rather entangled waterscape. As Reinharz (1992) puts it, there are "women's ways [emphasis added] of knowing" (p. 4). Subjectivities and emotions are specifically relevant to how the boomers' memories cement in particular spaces, which extend through time. By ignoring gender dynamics, what remains is only a decontextualised understanding of the waterfront's reality in Virac. To this end, the potential of research on marginal areas, in particular islands will require acknowledgements of partial perspectives as legitimate epistemological stances. It seems daring to navigate knowledge generation from hidden voices, perhaps even rebellious. Such concerns generate messy and painful dialogues but are nonetheless necessary to understand deeper the intricate link between gendered spaces and memories. Such ideas have already been raised by the forerunners of feminist geographies. It is the task of contemporary scholars to engage with the previous works, be it in terms of continuing or challenging the legacy set forth to them. The findings of this paper only cover a space within an entire web of narratives about marginal islands. With these considerations, this work is an invitation to those who consider themselves scholars of spaces and gender to provoke further thoughts and engage in alternative methods in making visible hidden gendered processes in hidden spaces.

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