

The Baul Archive

[Compiled Recordings](#)

Entry 595, November 30, 2150, by Yugto dela Cruz

YUGTO DELA CRUZ

Is this working? *click*

So I'm trying out this thing I found in my basement. Let's see if this works.

This is an old timey audio recording contraption, attached to what I think was called a laptop... maybe, over a hundred years old? I can't be sure, but I think I've seen something like it in a museum or a documentary.

I'm in Pampanga, the province my grandparents are from. They have this ancient house here—some 2 or 3 century old thing—mostly renovated, except for parts of the basement. Yeah, they actually have a basement, which is amazing considering how much it floods here. I found this *baul*—parts were a bit rotten, but a lot of the wood was pretty solid, and inside was all this old tech.

I've made a bit of a project of it to see if I could make some of it work. It took some research and I had to print a few of the parts since they don't make most of them anymore. So far, successful, I guess? It seems to be running.

Another incredible thing here are the files! Old audio files, can you imagine that! Since we're all the way out here in the province, I'm guessing these have been untouched for a hundred years... what secrets could be here? Let's see.

Entry 1, January 1, 2030, by Silakbo dela Cruz

SILAKBO DELA CRUZ

Hello, hello. Mic test. *Teka lang...*

Okay. This is Silakbo dela Cruz. I guess I should say happy new year, but I'm not sure how happy we should be. I'm recording this, secretly- or at least I hope so. It's hard to tell if anything is really secret anymore.

Why am I doing this? I'm a teacher, and a father. And I'm afraid. I'm afraid for the future. I'm afraid for Gunita, my daughter.

Everything started slowly, and we couldn't have suspected it. It started with the floods 5 years ago, do you remember that? Disaster after disaster. The government claimed they couldn't handle it. That the coffers were emptied—but we all know that's never true. So, they began to sell us. It started with loans from our big neighbor. And then it became businesses, and now whole provinces. No one suspected that the governors were being bought. It all happened behind closed doors among the powerful elites.

Did they think they would get away with this? That no one would put up a fight? We'll show them.

Entry 596, December 1, 2150, by Yugto dela Cruz

YUGTO DELA CRUZ

What was that? I'm very confused, and I'm not sure this was made as a joke. I suppose that's possible. I know I had ancestors named Gunita and Silakbo, but that was so long ago that I don't have any information about them. Can this really be Silakbo? If that's him, that's amazing. But I also don't know what on earth he's talking about.

Being bought? I assume he was talking about the old country, in what we call the "dark days." But that doesn't make sense. There was a referendum, and the only ones who fought it were the ignorant terrorist rebels.

Was Silakbo part of the *kilusan*? That can't be. Impossible. If that were true, that would be so embarrassing that I had an ancestor that backward.

I don't know if I should listen to any of this. It feels dangerous. But I'm also really curious. No one has to know.

Entry 10, June 12, 2030 by Silakbo dela Cruz

SILAKBO DELA CRUZ

Happy Independence Day. That was a joke.

Activism is a dirty word in this country. But there have always been activists. I wasn't always one either—that came later in life, but it became necessary and part of who I am.

I am a teacher from Pampanga. I studied in Manila, with the support of my hardworking parents. It was in Manila that I met Malaya, the leader of the League of Filipino Students in my university. I generally kept away from the activist crowd—they were a bit much. But Malaya was different. She was curious and open, and she took me in, a lost boy from the province. She would ask me questions and make me question things. She took me to the *lo-oban* in squatter areas—the inner streets of the slums, and she taught me about the world. But she was never bitter. Angry at injustice, but never bitter. I really looked up to her.

After university, I went back to Pampanga to teach, and Malaya went on to be a hot-shot journalist. We kept in touch through Telegram and the occasional Zoom call. But I worried about her a lot. Sometimes she would take her journalism too far.

Journalist—that's another dirty word in this country. Malaya asked too many questions. She began asking questions about the loans from the other country. She began asking who was buying boatloads of sand from our beaches, who was building mines in our mountains. Dangerous enough. Then she started asking about who was selling our data. She wrote the story, but it was silenced... it disappeared under an avalanche of useless information, internet videos, and memes. The greater powers hid it underneath algorithms. And then they hid Malaya.

Malaya left her house one morning and never returned. I tried calling her—nothing. We posted about it online, begged the police to do something. It never got out there. Nobody saw the posts, nobody listened. Some didn't believe anything was wrong and didn't care. Some believed that she was a liar, a rebel, and she deserved what she got. They believed whatever they were told on their screens.

Malaya was why I became an activist. I am not as brave as her, but I am learning. I'm reading, I'm talking to people, and I'm associating with groups that the government is painting as villains—the people against so-called progress. I'm also learning to control my emotions—but I am still so angry. I'm trying to redirect my focus to productive things, and to hoping that what I leave behind will be a better country for Gunita.

Entry 597, December 30, 2150, by Yugto dela Cruz

YUGTO DELA CRUZ

(Sighs)

I've listened to around fifty recordings from Silakbo, and... I don't know how much more I can take. These are things I never heard about. A lot of them are the opposite of what I believed to be true. Or still believe. I'm not sure.

It's hard to imagine what life was like over a hundred years ago with their simple technology and the changes they were going through. But conspiracy? Really?

In the last few recordings, he talked about what happened before the Referendum of 2046—I think that was the year? The referendum where Las Islas Filipinas joined the Fatherland. We celebrate our union with the Fatherland every year. We celebrate peace and prosperity—that's the slogan, that's the whole point. It was a peaceful transition—the Fatherland saved us after our country was pummeled by disaster after disaster. We had prosperity for a while! But it didn't last because the rebels destabilized things and broke the peace. But still—it was better than the dark days before the Referendum!

At least that's what I was taught. That's the information I can find, the information that's everywhere. I grew up with it, everyone thinks this way, how could it be a lie?

Entry 200, May 1, 2035 by Silakbo dela Cruz

SILAKBO DELA CRUZ

It's been a while since I've made a recording. I've lost my job. They removed me from the school. The principal warned me months ago that I've been saying dangerous things—things that children don't need to hear. I asked him if he thought I was telling them lies. He didn't answer that; he said it didn't matter. I am so frustrated—I thought we were supposed to be teaching the children critical thinking, how to sift through fiction and fake news for the truth. Apparently not—we're just supposed to make them graduate and become productive members of society. They listen to sound bites and read headlines, but they don't ask questions. They don't know what propaganda is! Will we ever learn to not be so easily manipulated? I guess not!

I feel the need to tell the truth because it might disappear forever. I find consolation in the fact that I'm not the only one who feels this way, that there are other people who are working to bring the truth to light, and to resist the sale of our land, our sovereignty, our people. The powerful have been talking about the Referendum for a few years now. They tested the waters for years. They peddled the same old story about the coffers being empty—the problems too great—the money they needed that only our neighboring country could give. And their efforts have been increasing, and I fear that they might actually succeed.

Entry 482, August 8, 2045 by Silakbo dela Cruz

SILAKBO DELA CRUZ

We've been on the run for a few months now. I'm with the *Kilusan*—there are around 25 of us here hiding in a safe house in a forest. None of us can use our phones or other devices. I'm doing this recording on a 40-year-old machine without connectivity. It amazes me to think that the only way to evade surveillance is to strip away our sophisticated devices. But we can't hide here for long—the special forces have ways of finding us—they'll get here eventually. But for now, we will rest.

They've branded us as rebels intent on keeping the country from progressing. They call us bandits, criminals. This is all because we spoke up. First, we tried fighting through legislative processes—no surprise that it failed. Then we tried circulating information—using all the communications tools at our disposal: the media, the internet, and everything in between. That led nowhere—the content just disappeared—the machines were too clever to cheat. So we went to the ground—the way people have organized for action for centuries. We spoke to people in communities, gathered *barangays* in assembly halls—at least the handfuls that would listen. And we spoke of the truth and made them ask questions. The *Kilusan* grew a little bit in number, but then the government began hunting us down. And like the past centuries, they tried to stamp out dissent with violence. What is the path forward? Will we run until we die? I don't know.

Entry 600, July 30, 2151 by Yugto dela Cruz

YUGTO DELA CRUZ

It's been around 7 months since I've begun this journey of listening to Silakbo's stories. I haven't told anyone about it, and I don't know if it would be safe to. But I feel connected to him somehow. This morning I took a walk outside, and I looked over at the mountain in the distance. I wondered: Did Silakbo and the *kilusan* hide there? The mountain was bare. Trees were sparse and it was mostly brown and gray. The mountain had been mined and quarried for over a century—is this what Silakbo spoke about? I've heard talk about the floods and the mudslides from the mountain. The surrounding area is uninhabitable. Was this always the case? Were there people who once lived there? I have so many questions. Maybe it's time to go on a hike.

Entry 594, April 9, 2050 by Gunita dela Cruz

GUNITA DELA CRUZ

Hello. Um, I hope this works. This is Gunita dela Cruz, the daughter of Ka-Silakbo. My *tatay*, my father... is dead. Their unit of the *kilusan* was discovered and executed. Nobody knows about this. The truth was covered up. He is one of the *desaparecidos*—he disappeared. We don't know what really happened to him, but we heard that there was an encounter between the military and a group of bandits in the mountains. The military claimed that the bandits were the aggressors and that they had no choice but to fire upon them. How could this be true...? *Tatay* did not even have a gun.

It is not safe for me here anymore. I've been silent, but I know too much. I am going to travel overseas, and I don't know if and when I will return. But before I go, I need to do this... to hide this archive of my *tatay* and to protect it.

The Referendum passed around four years ago. The country is now part of the Fatherland. We are no longer a nation of our own. As far as most people can tell, this happened seamlessly with little to no significant resistance. This is the story that people believe and have accepted as truth. It's hard to remember a time when people asked questions and fought back. We were a nation of kind-hearted people... but also warriors. The memory of resistance is fading... as the old paper books decay and the machines erase the narratives of our forefathers. What does not change is the violence and oppression, hidden from the public eye, conducted in secret.

What is left after all the erasure? Perhaps just this... this record of my *tatay*, Silakbo. And the records of the others of the *kilusan*. They are out there, hidden in the fringes... other stories of people who spoke the truth, who fought to protect the soul of our nation, and who have paid for it with their lives. I know they will be forgotten, as most of our history has been. But I hope and pray that one day, this clunk of old hardware finds its way into good hands—the hands of a truth-seeker. If you find this, and found the truth, please... find the others. There is a much larger story to tell.

Entry 650, December 30, 2151 by Yugto dela Cruz

YUGTO DELA CRUZ

It's been over a year since I've begun this journey into the archives inside the *baul*. Every evening for a year, I have listened to Silakbo's voice and heard his stories. In these recordings, I've seen his transformation, and I felt as if I were changing alongside him. Is it possible to grieve someone you've never met? For someone a hundred years ago? I found myself grieving with Gunita, his daughter.

Silakbo's stories have rocked me to my core. They have turned my world upside down.

My world is so different from Silakbo's world—but some things stay the same. Many things he's spoken of are alien and unrecognizable... but I recognize the mountain, now barren. I recognize where the forests had once been. I recognize this house—miraculously still standing. These things tethered me to the earth when I thought I had gone mad—when all the information I know and all I could find would not match Silakbo's stories. How is it that I have an infinite number of tools at my fingertips, but still cannot find the truth?

Stories are powerful... and perhaps have always been powerful. I see that now. I am changed. Silakbo and Gunita have changed me in ways I have yet to realize and that I will continue to unpack. Yes, Gunita... I will find the others. Perhaps in basements. Perhaps people.

And... I think I'll also tell my story as I make sense of the world that I'm unlearning and relearning... as I make sense of who I am, and what I will do now and tomorrow. I don't know what this will bring. One thing is certain, I can't return to the darkness of ignorance and lies.

Ang namulat, di na muling pipikit. Eyes that have been opened, will never close again.

Glossary of Terms

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| <i>baul</i> | Tagalog (n.) clothes chest; locker; trunk |
| <i>barangay</i> | Tagalog (n.) the smallest unit of government; a neighborhood; barrio |
| <i>desaparecidos</i> | Spanish/ Tagalog (n.) a person who has disappeared, presumed killed |
| <i>gunita</i> | Tagalog (n.) memory; recollection; reminiscence; phantasm |
| <i>kilusan</i> | Tagalog (n.) campaign; movement; activity; crusade |
| <i>malaya</i> | Tagalog (adj.) free |
| <i>silakbo</i> | Tagalog (n.) outburst, eruption; spasm; surge |
| <i>tatay</i> | Tagalog (n.) father |
| <i>yugto</i> | Tagalog (n.) a fundamental transition or development of a story or phenomenon |