

periferias: episode 1

Laura: [00:00:00] Welcome to periferias, a podcast highlighting the diverse and interdisciplinary voices that make up the King Juan Carlos I of Spain center here at New York University. I'm your host, Laura Keyt. On today's episode, a conversation with Luis Francia, poet, playwright, teacher, and co-chair of SULO: The Philippines' Studies Initiative.

Francia: Yeah, okay. Well, maybe the best way to begin is how did I wind up at NYU? Because I certainly didn't intend to be a teacher at the time when I first started teaching here, this was, I think in 2000, um, I was working as an associate or assistant editor at the *Village Voice* part-time. And so I did have time and the head of the Asian Pacific American Institute at the time, Jack Tchen, whom I knew, asked me if I wanted to teach a language course.

I said, sure. It seemed easy enough since I'm fluent in both languages. And so I accepted the gig. So anyway, I've been teaching here intermediate Filipino one and two since, I guess it's two decades now. Um, but in the meantime, of course I have my own work separate from academe. I mean, I don't consider myself an academic.

I mean, my approach to language has been mainly as a writer. So I use that when I teach the language to the students, who are mostly Filipino American, some of them were born in the Philippines, but came here when they were [00:02:00] really young. Some of them came over having finished high school. So they're actually pretty good in spoken, in speaking, but not necessarily in knowing the formal structures.

So at any rate in the course, um, I give them quite a bit of translation. It forces them to think bilingually, we read short, I guess you'd call it flash fiction, but in Filipino. And then of course we have grammar. I've been using my skills as a writer in the way that I teach the language, you know, so.

It's also a way of reintroducing those who came over at a really young age to the culture that their parents grew up with. And I think you have to understand that since we were a colony, a lot of the parents who migrate here don't necessarily want their children to speak the language of the, of their, of their home, because they say you're here.

You need to assimilate. So there's the burden of history that many of my students, um, consciously or not want to eject. And, and so it's a way of exploring their parents' background as well as reconnecting to maybe an imagined community as Benedict Anderson would put it. so anyway...

Laura: What do you --- feel about the concept of, or the utilization of heritage speaker as a category?

We use that in Spanish language pedagogy. Do you feel that that actually expresses who these students are and their experience with learning?

Francia: Mm, yes and no. I mean, [00:04:00] because heritage is kind of a fancy word, you know? I mean, it's not, because when I think of heritage, I think of this grandiloquent structure like a mansion you move in to.

And so I find it problematic, I just treat it as a language that they may have spoken when they were kids, or maybe not, because you have to understand the Philippines is an archipelago and Filipino, which is really the Tagalog, which is the main language because the capital is in Manila and the language in that region is Tagalog and that's become identical or the other way around Filipino has become like that.

Because with Tagalog, It's kind of like Spain, you have Castilian and you have the Basque region, you know, and I'm sure there are other languages. So, um, some of the students, their parents come from different regions in The Philippines. So you might technically consider them heritage speakers because officially their parents were supposed to learn what they would have considered the dominant language, you know, because certain areas of the Philippines view Manila as the Imperial capital, you know, it's kind of a replication of power structures that we were...

So yeah, I mean, I don't really use that term.

Laura: I think that it's beautiful, that you've referred to language as a mansion that you move into language is a, is a place like a house. And maybe we can talk a little bit now about the, your islands, um, Manila, Manhattan. You've lived here now for a very long time.

What do these places mean to you?

Francia: I have my scars...

Laura: Are you a New Yorker now?

Francia: Absolutely. You know, there's a classic essay, but I think Edmund Wilson, he writes [00:06:00] about the three types of New Yorker: those who were born here and they don't really, from his point of view, appreciate it because they're used to it. Right? And there's the, uh, transplant from within the States who come to New York because they've heard about it's alluring. And then there's the immigrant, you know, the one who was born overseas. And he says that uh, the second and the third are the ones who make New York because they can see what the native New Yorker may not see, and they come with a pain in their heart and a longing.

I read that essay when I first arrived and I said, this is ...describes accurately my feeling, I am a New Yorker in that sense of one who claims it, who may not have been born here, but who can navigate, you know, the different waterways and pathways, metaphorically, and literally that constitute this metropolis.

Somebody who comes here, who is a person of color, but also a former colonial subject,. Not formally because I was born when we were already independent, but the burden, and in some ways the benediction of having been a colonized subject, but it forces one to explore, uh, different infrastructures, metaphorical, spiritual, political, social.

That make up say my context, and the context of values people and students, you know, I guess this is a about way, but [00:08:00] yeah, I'm a New Yorker, very much so, you know...

Laura: Did you want to speak a little bit about mestizaje and the figure of the Mestizo, thinking about the global Pacific. And I'd like to hear you also speak a little bit about how you feel about language geographies also potentially connected to that question of the Mestizo and the mestizaje.

Francia: Yeah, that's a really interesting question.

And last Friday, we were talking about this with Vince Dias the guest speaker from Minnesota. One of the faculty co-teachers for this course is Puerto Rican. So she has a very different idea of mestizaje from what in the Philippines we

would consider mestizaje, and Vince originally from Guam, uh, what his views were and in the Philippines being mestizo.

Ordinarily, if you tell somebody from the Philippines that somebody is mestizo, they will immediately link it to Spain, you know, because it's a Spanish word and mestizos in the hierarchy in the Philippines occupy a higher spot. As I think you'll find in Latin America, the closer you are to the looks of the former colonizer, meaning white. Um, the better your chances are in terms of mobility, but they're also different types of mestizo. There's the Chinesemestizo and there's the Afro Filipino. Those two kinds of mestizo-ness are not necessarily socially desirable. So there's a spectrum of mestizaje in the Philippines that may be absent in Puerto Rico [00:10:00] or Latin America.

Although Lauer did say in Mexico, they also kind of exclude the Chinese mestizos. Um, if I'm, if I was hearing her right. When you qualify and say so, and so is a Chinese mestizo it kind of devalues. Their status as Ms. Thesis. But if you were just to say, Luis is mestizo, which I am, then people assume immediately certain things about me that I'm privileged that, you know, I have certain education and educational pedigree that, you know, I would have it easier.

It's kind of the equivalent of white privilege here, but... the Chinese Mestizos in fact are now in positions of social and political prominence in the Philippines. So there's a kind of overturning so that in the world of business in the Philippines, the Chinese and the Spanish mestizos basically compete and they don't like one another.

And so that to me is interesting, you know, because they kind of positions themselves as both within, you know, the Proto-Malay main racial framework and without, you know, for them is the Chinese connection. And for the, we have families descended from the Spanish colonizers who are still... many of them still have dual Spanish citizenship.

And so, and then you have the tribes who are also seen as Filipino, but kind of beneath. So it's a [00:12:00] very complex portrait. When you talk of mestizaje in the Philippines. Um...

Laura: Yes. The other factor that I am really interested in is Catholicism, because not to jump ahead, but in *Black Henry*, I was so intrigued by the way that you're able to bring in these ideas about ritual and conversion, the

Eucharist, you know, this is of particular interest to me as an Early Modernist, but---

Francia: Were you raised as a Catholic?

Laura: --- No, but, um, since I study Catholic Iberia, Counter-Reformation, it's, Catholicism's deep. And from what I understand, or the popular conception is that the Philippines are one of the most prominently Catholic nations in the modern world. So what role does that also have in the construction of, of the Mestizo figure and mestizaje, or in your own personal feelings about identity?

Francia: Um, very good question. Um, you know, I always say, uh, there are three marks of Spanish---Hispanization: the Fiesta, the siesta and la iglesia. And I always say the last is my least favorite. The church, because the church has always been, maybe it's changed, um, but basically identified with the colonial state during the Spanish colonial era, which lasted for 333 years.

There was no distinction between church and state. In fact, you could say that the friarocracy. I'm not sure if I got that word correct---

Laura: I love it though!

Francia: They were the dominant power, why?

Because when they were assigned to the Philippines, I think this was the Franciscans, the Augustinians, the Benedictans, the Jesuits are a separate story because they were never Friars.

The Jesuits are always a separate story!

--- Yeah, for good and bad! Um, they were there for the long haul, whereas the colonial officials, the [00:14:00] Governor General and the administrative bureaucrats, they were there for maybe five years. So the friars knew they were in power. They were, they could ignore the degrees-- the decrees from the Royal Court. To give you an example in, I think, 1861 Madrid, decreed that the schools in the--- las Islas Filipinas, should teach Spanish.

To the *indios*, you know, the derogatory term for the Filipinos and the friars ignored it, you know, they said well, you know, why would they need to learn Spanish if they might think they are equal. So there was this racial bias against the Indios learning the mother, what the Spanish considered, a superior tongue.

Um, and they could do that because Spain and the King were far away and God was even further away.

And the civil administration officials couldn't do anything because, um, they would be the friars. Bright the king or peacan so that over. So the colleges say, listen, this governor general is a real pain. He doesn't know what he's doing. Please recall them. And very often, uh, they would, you know, get their wish.

So the friars were a dominant power. And so you have this situation where at the end of 333 years, I think only 5 to 7% of the population could speak and write Spanish. So whenever I meet people say from Latin America, they say, Hey, Luis, qué pasa, porque no hablas español? And I say, yeah, I speak enough. [00:16:00] And then they say, but so many Filipinos don't, then I'll have to explain it's because of the friars.

They didn't want us to learn Spanish. So when the US enters the Colo--, The Great Game as it was then known, they were smart enough to say, okay, we will teach you our tongue, English. We will open up the flood gates so that modernity will enhance your lives. And I guess they knew that part of the resentment of the Filipinas, you know, part of the reason for the revolution in 1896 was this standoff, this racial prejudice against the indios

and so the US formally said, we're all brothers and of course we know that it was just a ploy to win over the revolutionaries, as an ally and get them as allies against Spain, the Spanish American war, which then becomes the Philippine American War, which I hope you're aware of.

Laura: Yes, layered fictions...yeah, of course. Yeah.

Francia: But you know, a lot of Americans don't know that the Philippines became a colony, not so much because of the Spanish American war, but because of the Philippine American war, which lasted for, until 1913, it was more brutal and savage in the Philippines, than the Spanish American war.

So that's why Spanish lingers on in Filipino. We have so many words in Filipino that are really, um, what we would say loan words, but they're part and parcel of Filipino. Now, like we would say pantalón, zapatos, medias, you know, and it didn't [00:18:00] mean we didn't have pants or shoes, but the weight of Spanish, um, linguistic dominance meant that the native word for pants, which is Salawal, is basically excluded from the dictionaries and pantalón... so many items that kind of identify the Filipino as being modern, reflect the Spanish

occupation. So just looking at the language, you can see the different pathways from different languages. And so Spanish lives on in Filipino, but very few Filipinos can speak Spanish as Spanish, but the Spanish descended family still speak. They pride themselves and speaking Spanish, which is great. For many of them, it's a way of kind of distancing themselves from the masses or what we call the Masa.

Laura: There's a question there also that you have a Spanish derived last name, just like many Filipino people do, choosing whether you want to do, how do you, I'm not actually sure how to say it in English like *voz inglesa* or *voz española*. Like if you pronounce it a Spanish way or the English way.

Francia: You know, I've thought of that and we pronounce it well, we, you know, my family pronounces it the Spanish way, Francia. Yeah. You know, like for inst-- and for a lot of Filipinos, they have to forego their pre Hispanic surnames because when you underwent conversion to Catholicism and you were baptized, you had to choose from a register, your Catholic name, which invariably was Spanish.

And [00:20:00] so the native name was consigned to the dustbin of history. However, in our case, we did have, I think my great great-grandfather on my father's side did come from Spain, and I imagine he was a poor, you know, rural man thinking I can make myself rich in the colonies the same way that many went to Latin America.

So he came and being Spanish, he acquired a lot of land from what my father was telling me and became fabulously rich, but which my grandfather lost. Unfortunately, he, my grandfather was, you know, Mestizo and a land owner, but he was a gambler, and he was very generous with his friends. If his friends borrowed money, he said, okay.

And he never collected. So to cover his own debts, he borrowed money from this family known for money lending. They were usurers and he couldn't pay it back, so they would get a piece of land until eventually most of the land that he had inherited was gone. And so my father, when he was growing up for a while was really rich, was his father started losing the lands because of gambling and being generous.

He wound up, you know, ordinary middle-class. Um, and there's an interesting story when I was in university. I dated a young woman whose family was that

loan sharking family. And when my aunt found out just [00:22:00] said, don't you dare date that girl! I said, why? Her family took our lands.

Laura: So this was happening, like in the, in the interwar period?

Um, yes.

Francia: Well, when I started dating of course, this was in the sixties, but yeah, my grandfather kind of started to lose the lands, yes. So I could have been rich and probably an asshole, you know, a warlord!

Laura: We may take a turn toward talking a little bit more specifically about your work. Maybe we can begin talking about *Tattered Boat*?

Francia: One of the difficult things about, um, naming a volume of poems is, you know, because poetry is say different, say from a novel, the novel with a unifying theme and narrative.

Whereas poetry, at least the way I approach is very different in multiple works that may reflect different perspectives. Um, and so I said, well, what kind of, what should I call the book? And there's a poem in here where the line, one of the lines includes tattered boat. Ah well, book of poetry is a kind of boat, you know, tattered means, uh, frayed, used, not in good shape, and that could reflect my life and my navigation through the rights and tribulations, the trials and tribulations of living.

People always ask me, Hey, Luis, you know why *Tattered Boat*? I said, well, read the book.

Laura: Well, I had wondered, I haven't read the entire collection, um, but I had wondered because for me, the adjective 'tattered', really invokes fabrics and clothing. And then [00:24:00] I think that's just a really beautiful juxtaposition thinking about a structure that is solid and that's meant to hold a being in water, right? That's meant to float the tattered-ness combining with that--- the invocation of fabric, I thought was---

Francia: that's so lovely because---

Laura: I'm not sure if that's what you meant but---

---you know, like for instance, this sweater I've had for like 20 years, it's an Irish fisherman's sweater. Friend gave it and it tells, you know, it's kind of holes that you don't necessarily see, so it's tattered, but I love it, you know, because it's been with me, um, since 2000, I believe so.

Francia: Yeah. So I'm glad you brought that up. So, anyway, this is the poem, "Tattered Boat"

Bird sang. I tried singing back, / Took the littlest part.

Bird sang sharper and I turned way.

Is my dementia in overdrive or / Do I simply take to heart the / Bleak notes of a song?

I can lie about having known / Better things and now know / Only disappointment.

I sit with my coffee and wish / The bird would fly away, for its / Music is odd, though I am / Older now and odder still, an

Other bent inside himself, the past / In ribbons, morning and myself a

Tattered boat adrift on a / Nonexistent river.

That's "Tattered Boat".

There's another poem, if we're going with the aquatic imagery, uh, this one, actually I wrote because of the, this horrific storm we had, that was the strongest storm so far in the 21st century. Yolanda. It was like 200 miles per hour winds. And as you, as you may know, the [00:26:00] Philippines holds the dubious world records for the number of tycoons every year, 20 or 21 on the average spring from this part of the Pacific.

In the, uh, central part and always it will be horrific, but this particular storm was beyond the pale and okay, it's called "Gathering Storm"

Winds of sound will blow down your walls/ to render your rooms as desolate as the moors. / Who can contain the storm that gathers each / day from the multitudes of mouths, the mouths / of those who have loved and bled and wept? / Each name rides the hurricane, each name / brings an echo, a wound that /

mothers a republic of nothingness. / I would wish to cut my body into
multitudes and to / every part add a tongue to utter all their names / I would
wish my body into innumerable cathedrals, / every strand of hair a shrine for all
who have fallen.

I would wish my body to arise each / time, hosts of them, manifold and / myriad
in their colors, god beautiful--- / blood red in the firewinds, emerald green in /
the stirring breeze, indigo under a blossoming / sky, in a communion which
beckons growth. / The sounds that blow down your / swells will be the murmurs
of gardens digging / deep to embrace the dead with their roots, / to erect cities
of bone and memory, to / send out the tendrils of an epistemology, the
epistemology of refusal, / a refusal to die even when we are dead.

Laura: I'd like to talk about two things, I'd like you to, to expand for our
listeners, what you mean by epistemology and how you're utilizing this concept
inside the poem

Francia: Okay, my choice of words, [00:28:00] often rides on the sound, not
necessarily the spelling, I mean, not necessarily on the meanings. So I thought
epistemology sounded good.

And it's the way that I approach poetry as distinct from a prose mentality, a
prose, let's say a prose writer, um, will have a clearly defined map from A to C
going through B. As a poet, I have no idea where I'll wind up. I wish to start
from a word or a phrase. And in this case, remembering back, you know, I was
struck by the ferocity of the storm, but then you can also read the poem as a
political, um, recalling of the people who die in the Philippines because of
different kinds of storms, the storm of poverty, of political violence, as well as
physical storms, you know, so I thought epistemology sounds nice. and it also
kind of covers, hints at different layers of meaning, brings to mind what I think
at T.S. Eliot once said, You can appreciate the poem even before you understand
it. And you kind of reverse engineer that I will like something, even if I don't
know why, but I'll say I'll go with it.

I don't need to know the A's and the B's everything rational about the choice.
[00:30:00] If I feel good, I'll go with it then later on, I'll say, okay. I can look at
it and say, why did I choose that? And invariably, I'll say, oh, I liked it.

But yeah, in that word, I liked the sound.

Laura: I love that that's your answer because part of what I loved about the appearance of epistemology of refusal, it's sort of, we're going through the poem and I'm really in this bodily space with you with the repetition of, I would wish that my body, I would wish that my body and in no way as a listener, am I expecting to then hear 'epistemology of refusal'!

And it hits us! Both in terms of the sound and in terms of the conceptual weight at the end.

Francia: Do you ever write?

Laura: Um, well, I'm writing my dissertation... but I love poetry!

And that would be the next question too. If you want to talk a little bit, connecting back to the, um, "Tattered Boat", the titular poem that you read first, about the body and embodiment. I really caught on to the image of the bended over body. And then here you have all of these desires that you're locating in your own body.

Yeah, well, you know, in Tattered Boat, I referred to the inner body that may be very different from say the upright body. So in the case of Tattered Boat, it's kind of a body within me. That's kind of bent and unsure, maybe fetal. Um, and I leave it to the reader to imagine why the body has been... what causes that body within the poet or the speaker, because the speaker may not always be the poet himself, you know, there's a kind of distancing.

And so, yeah. I [00:32:00] like to leave space for the reader, to, for the reader's imagination to come in and to work, you know, and I don't want to lay everything out, you know, and for me, that's the beauty of poetry, it forces the reader to work, and if they're willing to work, then hopefully there'll be a reward.

Perhaps we can turn now to your recently debuted play, *Black Henry*. Our listeners are going to need some context, a little bit about the story. And I guess my opening question would be, why did you take on this huge canonical story for me, the *conquistas*, these epics. It's brave!. It's very daring.

What were your goals and why?

Francia: Yeah well, I have a Yahoo email account and the name I use for that is Lapu Lapu, who was the man who slew Magellan, or it was his army that's slew

Magellan, and a number of the conquistadors, I've always had that name. Before, I think 2000, I read the journals of Pigafetta, now Pigafetta accompanied Magellan on the historic, uh, circumnavigation.

And he survived. And it's through his journals that we learned most of what we know about that, uh, expedition and, when Magellan and the ships by then the five ships are down to three. They reached the Philippines in, of course it wasn't known as the Philippines, in 1521, 500 years ago in March of 1521, [00:34:00] Magellan had a slave, a Malay slave, whose Christian name was Enrique.

And suddenly he makes an appearance in Pigafetta's journals because it turns out he speaks the language of Cebu the island, where they dock for I think six weeks. And he looks like the islanders. You know, and in the play of course, Magellan tells Enrique, Enrique, this is wonderful! You look like them, you speak the language and he doesn't go to the logical conclusion, which is maybe you came from here and Enrique by 1521 had been Magellan's slave for 10 years.

He had been bought in Malacca, which is in Malaysia, which is west of the Philippines. Malacca had a famous slave market. So you have these raider ships that went through Southeast Asia and raided coastal towns and took their captives to Malacca the slave market. Yeah, they were commodities.

Laura: This is important context because I don't think that many listeners are aware of a slave trade happening in the Indian Ocean in that area. Definitely not, uh, very well documented.

Francia: Absolutely. And the Portuguese were in Goa at the time and Magellan, uh, an expedition went to Malaka. I believe they attacked it and there was a slave market and he takes Enrique, you know, young man, teenager. He becomes his personal slave... body, man, I guess in today's terms because he has him baptized and then Enrique goes with [00:36:00] him to Europe, learn Spanish, probably spoke Portuguese and in a way becomes the modern Filipino.

If we assume, and we have quite a bit of basis for assuming, he originally came from Cebu, which is the central part of the Philippines. Ten years after, he arrives and says, Hey, these people, they look like me, I speak their language. It's bringing back memories of the years that when I was growing up. He becomes a kind of Malinche.

He becomes the bridge between the conquistadores and the native tribes in Cebu and without him, uh, it would have been probably a very different story. So in Pigafetta's journals, he becomes prominent, but once the, Magellan is slain. in that fateful encounter. And what happens is that Magellan is thinking I can take over, you know, uh, the Pope basically divided the globe into two. I believe the Western part was for Spain and the Eastern part for Portugal or vice versa.

Laura: Mhm, Tordesillas.

Francia: And basically disregarded any of the other nations. Right? So he said, yeah, you know, I have permission I'm taking over and he was an over-zealous Catholic. And he tells the chieftan of Cebu, if you ally with me, I can take care of your opponent, Lapu Lapu, my email name, because the two were at [00:38:00] odds. So Humabon, out of uh, strategic gain says, okay, let's ally, I'll convert. So he converts he and his queen and the court convert to Christianity for Humabon, it's purely utilitarian, but for the queen, she begins to really dig the religion. Because it's a very different approach.

Okay. But that's kind of in the background. So Magellan says, you know, I can take care of your foe Lapu Lapu, Humabon says, well, I can give you a thousand warriors. Magellan says, cool it, my men, each one of them is worth a hundred of yours. It's insulting---

Laura: This is about to go sideways for him!

Francia: Yeah. And Humabon is thinking okay, you asshole, go ahead! You know, my men, we'll just watch, you know, so they go and the captains of Magellan, you know, the three other captains say, oh yeah, this is not such a good idea. We're just coming here for trade, to get, to get spices. Why do we need to involve ourselves in this inter tribal warfare and Magellan says, Hey, listen, if we don't show them, who's boss they're not going to listen to us.

So he gets 60 volunteers because he said nobody has to come with me. I just want volunteers. And of course Enrique goes along. And of course, you know, is he a traitor? Is he working against his own people? By then he's formed this--- there's a trait with Filipinos, they become very loyal.

And Magellan, it's implied, treats him quite well, because in the will [00:40:00] of Magellan, he says on my death, you will be a free man. And you will be given 10,000 maravedís, which is a substantial sum of money.

Laura: Quite a sum of money!

Francia: Yeah. So he was loyal to Magellan because he was, you know, like maybe 15 and Magellan becomes this father figure. Right?

Laura: Sure. I think also, um, if I'm remembering the journey correctly, they had just forged themselves in the crucible of that journey across the Pacific, where they almost starved to death, nobody had any idea where they were, it was, it was almost a year, if I remember right?

Francia: Six months...

Laura: That would make you bond with anyone! Thinking about the pandemic...

Francia: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. You know, the, what we're undergoing is nothing. I mean, they have to eat rats, drink their urine, capture seagulls, you know, it was horrible. And they get to the Philippines and there's a tradition of hospitality in the islands for the first time. It's unlike, say, many places along the way. You know, they have to fight whoever the indigenous tribes were. The Filipinos said, Hey, we have a lot, you know, we can share it's great. And he takes advantage of-- Magellan takes advantage of that. So, Enrique is in the position of owing a lot to Magellan and he can see also this intra ethnic rivalry brewing.

So he's not sure, you know, but when Magellan is killed, his successor refuses to let Enrique free. He refuses to follow the will because he says as long as I'm the captain and commander and we're on this boat, I am your master and you will still be a slave. So Enrique basically says, well, fuck you, you know, I don't owe you anything, [00:42:00] but he doesn't say that.

He says, okay, he plays along. But then, you know, in the play, he hatches this revenge with Humabon because by then Humabon realizes Magellan is ordinary. He's not some huge, not like the way that Moctezuma viewed Cortez as a kind of semi divine figure, right, on the white horse. Humabon is down there, and he says, okay, what do you plan?

And he says, we have a dinner, invite them to bid them farewell on their long voyage. And then we strike. And that's how the play culminates. And then at the end, of course, he's buried with Islamic prayers, but the queen in another scene that ends the play, she's seen with the priest who stayed behind and they're

saying the Lord's Prayer and she's properly, she's kneeling and really means what she's saying.

So there's that reference to the Christianization that's going to come.

So Enrique becomes not only the prototype of the modern Philippines because he learns several languages. He, because the prototype of the colonial subject and he becomes the first overseas Filipino worker and, you know, the Merchant Marine? 40 to 60% of the crew are made up of Filipinos on cruise ships, on commercial containers, they're Filipino. So there's a whole tradition of seafaring.

And, you know, I joke with my friends Enrique didn't know is coming back to the Philippines. So he didn't bring any home coming goods. [00:44:00] Filipinos, if you know any, when they go back home, they have these huge, what we call Balikbayan boxes, full of whatever goods: candy, the electronic apparatus as you know, as welcoming gifts. So, you know, he didn't know he was returning to where he most likely came from.

And I'm not the only one saying that, uh, I think a number of historians are saying he probably was the first to circumnavigate the world because Magellan is killed and 18 people make it back. But before then, and Enrique comes back to where he was raised because he speaks the language and he looks like that. Yeah.

Laura: So for you, this, taking on this grand narrative has to do with the connections that you feel resonate with the experience of Filipino diaspora today?

Francia: Yeah! Yeah, yeah. But of course, I didn't want to load it with, you know, you have to also stay away from making it propagandistic. I wanted the story to survive when he saw that, even if he didn't know, you know, just the weight of the narrative, this man, wanting to conquer this territory, the people he deals with were also using him and the man in between who is in Enrique and what happens to him when his master dies and the successor this--- you know, has no feelings for his humanity, you know, that's the story. And you can see certain resonances because of the history of colonialism and Christianity and the diaspora, yeah.

Laura: Are you familiar with the PBS show *Secrets of the Dead*? It's one of their big---

Francia: They had a Magellan---

Laura: Would you like to speak about this?

Francia: Yes, [00:46:00] I was so disappointed because---

Laura: They were doing a rewriting, but they rewrote the wrong story!

Francia: Absolutely! And then Enrique looks like a 60 year old man. He has grey hair and he was like maybe 25 or---

Laura: And the hero was Elcano in the end.

Francia: Of course, you know, and I was like, thinking, yeah, this is so conventional.

That story of Enrique was so much more interesting and the way they portrayed the warriors, um, they're relying, I think on Pigafetta saying there were a thousand men, but did he go and count them? You know, they were only 60 and certainly Lapu Lapu's men were more numerous, but they didn't have to be a thousand because these guys were warriors. They knew the martial arts.

Laura: They knew their own land.

Francia: Yeah, and what they did was they aim because, you know, Magellan's men wore breast mail, right, and helmet, so they aim for the legs and the neck and they were, Lapu Lapu's men were fleet, they were not burdened by armors that they could run and dodge.

So they went slashing. So they had to retreat, you know, so yeah, it was, too bad.

Laura: It was too bad because I just love that--- I mean, maybe historically we will never have the total evidence to say that Enrique was the first person to truly circumnavigate the globe. But I think we can say with certainty that the first person to circumnavigate the globe was definitely a person of color and that person was probably enslaved.

Francia: Yeah. And yeah. And you know, um, that's one reason I wanted to do the play.

Laura: For links, episode notes, transcripts and more visit our website at kjcc.org/initiatives/periferias-the-podcast. That's PER-FER-IAS. Thank you for listening.[00:48:00] .