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philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

The articles in this issue deal with the margins of historiography. Except for historical demographers, few historians, for instance, do quantitative analysis. Nicholas Sy adopts this approach to test the common assertion that colonial-era native elites married within their own social stratum. Despite limitations, Sy examines the marriages recorded in the parish register of San Pablo, Laguna, during a twelve-month period in 1853–1854. This exercise requires the precise definition of variables. Given that the only available information on elite status is the possession of the honorific title “Don,” to which local chiefs (*cabezas de barangay*) as well as municipal captains (*gobernadorcillos*) were entitled, Sy focuses on the political rather than the economic elite. His study finds that, except for 0.5 percent of brides and 3 percent of grooms, most of the children of San Pablo’s elites (and 96.5 percent of all marriage candidates), obtained marriage partners from within the municipality, suggesting its relative physical isolation. Given the geographically circumscribed pool of potential spouses and the fact that the elite constituted a numerical minority, Sy discovers that 83.1 percent of elite marriage candidates in San Pablo married nonelites, a finding that goes against the grain of common assumptions in Philippine history.

This study raises important issues about marriages in the nineteenth century across different social strata, such as the role of romantic love and the degree of individual freedom in the choice of marriage partner, the autonomy of women, the influence of parental consent, the incidence of arranged marriages, the impact of property transmission, the influence of geography and the spread of unions across municipal boundaries, the variations across ethnicities and time periods, and so on. Finding sources to construct the social histories of marital unions under Spanish colonial rule is a great challenge that we hope younger historians like Nicholas Sy will have the ingenuity and perseverance to uncover.

In literary history, literature from the geographic margins of the nation-state used to be deemed peripheral. But this thinking has changed, and regional literatures are now seen as constitutive of national literature, a source of strength and a contributor to identity in the multifaceted and variegated dimensions of nationness. In this light, Raniela E. Barbaza demonstrates that the short stories, novels, and essays of the Bikolano Patricio M. Janer (1882–1965) are concerned with the literary development of the Bikol language

and with the assertion of the regional self, but concomitantly they evoke the nation's collective self and the individual's participation in building the national state. As an exponent of the Bikol language, Janer experimented with nonhispanized Bikol words, word plays, and word formations, providing copious footnotes with word equivalents, resulting in a critic like Lilia Realubit dismissing him as possibly "a good lexicographer rather than a good fiction writer" (188). But Janer can be regarded as a type of pioneer of this literary strategy. His faithfulness to and affection for (*kadayuputan*) the "delectable language" (*managom na tataramon*) of his "own place" (*rugaring*) gives him prominence in the regional and, one would hope, the national canon.

As in Sy's case, Barbaza also faced the challenge of finding sources. Janer's works numbered over a hundred, but many of the original manuscripts as well as the magazines where they appeared have been lost. Of his sixty-two essays, for example, only eighteen are found in the Janer collection in the main library of the University of the Philippines Diliman. In the case of his 109 short stories, only in the case of ten titles are copies of both the manuscript and the magazines that published them available. The preservation of creative works such as Janer's is a patently urgent task.

In her analysis of Darna movies, Cherish Aileen A. Brillon also begins from a marginal position: superhero stories cannot shake off their reputation as "infantile subliterate," as nothing but profitable entertainment, yet fantastic tales such as those of Darna can be seen as articulating societal issues. And while some scholars have analyzed the comic book (*komiks*) versions of Darna, Brillon chooses to read two Darna movies that were produced and shown in the early period of martial law. Although sources on how viewers interpreted these films at that time seem unavailable, Brillon forwards the view that through its representations of violence these Darna movies expressed the country's trauma at the imposition of martial rule.

In a research note, Jethro Calacday questions the persistent efforts of historians to say that the seminary in Nueva Caceres was established in 1793 and yet also argue for an older inception by linking the seminary to the Casa de Clérigos, whose existence is not even ascertained. Calacday argues that the case for the Casa as an incipient seminary is weak and even fallacious. The reliable historical evidence, he contends, is a royal order issued in 1785 directing the creation of the seminary, which was physically inaugurated in 1797.

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