

FROM THE EDITOR

Over the past twenty years, hybridity has become a crucible in problematizing issues of identity, culture, and personhood within the locus of the “postcolonial.” Developed by theorists like Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and from insights of the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, hybridity in this sense involves the critical reification of pluralities resulting from the intermingling of peoples, texts, and cultures often as a result of imperialism and coloniality. Premised upon the existence of an “liminal space” that opens up between dominant and resistant narratives that define relations of knowledge-power between the metropole and the colonized, hybridity has also become a useful term in revisiting static models of representations within dominant structures and spaces—especially those within former colonies, unveiling unexpected differences and permutations that enrich our notions of humanity, beingness, and the complexity of life in an interconnected planet.

In this issue of *Humanities Diliman*, Volume 13 Number 2, we revisit six sites of hybridity that underlie the links and nodes that defined empire and colony, nation and migration, domination and resistance, homogeneity and difference, and ritualized carnivals as spaces of critical reflection and imagination, in order to recuperate suppressed definitions of gendered performativity, diasporic affiliation, Third World urbanity, and simulated spectacles of nationality that continue to surface the complex task of scholarship in the Philippine postcolonial context. The first is Pauline Mari Hernado’s study of colonial domination over the Filipina body and her performativity as docile, Catholic subject. Detailing late-nineteenth century Spanish etiquette books translated into Tagalog, particularly *Mga tagobilin sa manga dalaga* by the Augustinian friar Antonio Maria Claret y Clara, Hernado unveils the panoptic program of the etiquette book as a subscribing device that reiterates the moral virtue of obedience to the Church’s strictures on the behavior of colonized femininity, not only as prayerful and charitable, but also resistant to secular vices, while striving to inculcate an ethos of feminine virtue of modesty and selflessness. Its voluminous spread and conversion into the various vernaculars were complicit to the colonial state’s own project of reinforcing surveillance and obedience to Spanish authority by redistributing the epistemology of “disciplining and punishing” the colonized mind/body into the woman’s spaces of home, church, and social world. Such surveillance extends into the woman’s mental sphere of contemplation (to read “good and sacred books” instead of doing nothing, that may lead to flirtatious or sinful thoughts), as well as the public presentation of modest dress to church, and not dressed ostentatiously as if one is going to the ball.

These strictures not only prove an attempt at “seeing the body” from the clerico-military state viewpoint; it also unveils a Hispanic paranoia over the unsupervised (thus potentially heretical) minds and enriched bodies of the colonized who are supposed to “stay within their station” in the imperial/colonial hierarchy. Occurring in the last decades of increasingly reactionary Spanish rule in the Philippines, this act of surveillance and domination over women’s minds and bodies shows the potency of texts that are read viscerally within the affective limits of one’s vernacular upbringing. At the same time, its imposition implies the state of native resistance by situating these proscriptions within the context of rapidly developing social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of colonial Philippines, an incipient secular modernity instigated by the very imperial power that contradicts itself by insisting upon a monastic/medieval model of womanhood, sealing the now dangerously articulate native to the amber of an idealized Siglo de Oro stasis.

The ability of the native mind/body to be transformed as an act of questioning static representations of, say gender, becomes the nexus upon which a critique of colonial subjugation of women can occur. This epistemic turn can equally be applied to the contemporary issues of queer life in the Philippines, where state sanctioned conservatism continues to deny the *bakla* the same social and legal status of equality enjoyed by heterosexuals. This, allied with the rendering of the life of armed revolutionaries within the communist New People’s Army (NPA), is the terrain explored by Rowell D. Madula in his investigation of the life of a gay national democratic revolutionary from southern Mindanao. Highlighting this revolutionary army’s sexual liberalism as an extension of its struggle against imperialism, bureaucrat-capitalism, and feudalism in the cultural sphere, Madula situates the *bakla* both as distinct voices that articulate their own life experiences and self-realization, as well as participants of a larger social struggle against oppression and indiscriminate violence, whose victimhood inscribed their own membership into the movement. Waging a “people’s war” through the persona of beauticians and wedding dressmakers who smuggle supplies through military checkpoints is part and parcel of a *bakla* revolutionary’s life, as told through the lens of Madula’s key field informant, Ka KC. A veteran of gay beauty pageants, Ka KC also personifies the hybrid conditions of *bakla* life, from experiencing sexual awakening in a peaceful community; to becoming a victim of paramilitary abuse through the extrajudicial killing of his father, as well as sexual harrassment; to becoming a revolutionary convert through the gay militant organization Mariah, and part of underground organizations like Katarungan. Sharing his life experiences as *bakla* revolutionary, Ka KC exemplifies for Madula the complexities of gender identity operating within the possibility space of revolutionary narrative, in which *bakla* lives are given the

liberated space of lived wholeness denied to them by the state. It also reaffirms the indeterminacy of sex/gender identity, where effeminacy and the pleasures of performing the body beautiful go hand in hand with militancy, courage, and radical commitment.

On another gendered field, Maria Christine Muyco's study of the *binukot/nabukot* women of the Panay Bukidnon in western Visayas shows the continuities of the precolonial preciousness that privileged daughters of highland communities once enjoyed, not only as heirlooms to be protected (thus their status as *binukot*, meaning "to be secluded" indoors); but also as inheritors and sources of communal cultural knowledge through their imbibing and mastery of epic chants (*sugidanon*), women's dance (*tigbabayi*), and embroidery (*panubok*). This preciousness is preserved even after they are married, in which their status changes into *nabukot* (meaning a former *binukot*). As *nabukot*, she continues the tradition of passing down knowledge to mentees like younger *binukot*; as well as a continued reverence of her status by her family and community. Focusing on "indigenous feminism" as her guiding ethnographic principle, Muyco interdicts the Western theoretical constructs of, and contentions about, femininity by situating them in the *binukot/nabukot*'s changeability and adaptability to peculiar circumstances of community, environment, and the actual roles that women play in traditional societies. As exclusive keepers of local knowledge, the *nabukot* hold the actual reins of epistemic power within their society, and yet they willingly subsume their potential domination to be willing nurturers of husbands and children, or even become "lowly" farm workers themselves. This transformation from "privileged princess" to "community culture bearer" and "wife/mother/laborer" coexists within an exchange system that Muyco teases from the economist Titus Levi, who maps the *binukot/nabukot* transformation through the concept of "stocks and flows." Symbolic and exchange value are thus pivotal to the understanding of these constituent formations, and how the transformation works out to the women's advantage, not only in avoiding oppressive strictures that predetermine their life choices, but also in engaging in various kinds of capital exchange, in which her ability to activate her own agency is also central to her desirability as a "wise and strong woman." Although the *binukot* practice itself has died out, leaving only a few aged women as *nabukot*, Muyco continues to monitor the ideological effects of this formation and exchange system as it is embodied in practices and beliefs among contemporary Filipinos, especially in the privileging of indigenous cultural production by present-day Panay Bukidnon among themselves, as well as in "stock and flow" exchanges with the state cultural apparatus and the mass media.

This hybridized notion of identity, formed between the feminist modality of agency as well as the traditional female roles of knowledge-bearer, nurturer, and family member alerts us to the indeterminacy of a representation of gender, in the same way that a similar imagery of migration to a better land would cue us to factors beyond economic gain and cultural “assimilation” (in order to be more acceptable to their new country’s dominant culture) in determining identities of diasporic generations. Tabitha Espina-Velasco’s study of her Guamanian-Filipino heritage is phrased in this rubric. Laying down successive migrant generations keyed in native Filipino culinary tags (*ube* for the first generation; *sapin-sapin* for the second; and *halo-halo* for the third), Espina-Velasco focuses her narrative on the formative (or “roots”) generation, the *ube*, who migrated to this American Pacific possession 2,492 kilometers east of Manila after World War II. Using unpublished narratives—such as letters, diary entries, and storytelling—Espina-Velasco attempts to recapitulate the thoughts and realities of first-generation migrants as they transplant themselves to a new country, and meet the challenges of “integrating” into the larger—and equally diverse—Guamanian-American community. Supporting narrative theorist David Herman’s notion of personal narratives as documents to the reality of life’s experiences that help them make sense of themselves and the world around them, Espina-Velasco mines these unpublished narratives for insights into the minds primarily of migrant women who often carry the biggest burdens in moving and transplanting themselves and their families to an unfamiliar land. This process of unearthing narratives of her grandmother’s generation is thus akin to “digging at one’s roots,” revealing interconnections and similar challenges that continue to affect the Guamanian-Filipinos of Espina-Velasco’s own generation. This act of “personal archeology” and retelling allows Espina-Velasco to revisit the immigrant’s experience through her grandmother’s own perspective; this also allows her to analyze and understand that generation’s thoughts, emotions, and motivations for migrating.

The activation of multiple levels of meaning as a result of this “digging up at the roots” can be argued as a form of adaptation of contemporary Western theoretical models of ethnography to suit a more postcolonial site, in which the postcolonials themselves are being assessed, as well as the ones doing the digging. An auto-referential methodology in this case serves as a means of recuperating a sense of self that may be lost when insights derived from contemporary theory, like postmodernism’s insistence on a “universal decentering,” are indiscriminately applied. How can the native self, already burdened by a history of colonization, continue to renew their sense of being and space when the Other insists that everything has already been questioned and deconstructed? In a sense, this attempt at native

recuperation, emanating from the level of urban epistemology, is what Ana Micaela Chua investigates when she reads the narratives of Budjette Tan and Kajo Baldesimo's *Trese* comic book series. Invoking the postcolonial critique of postmodernism by Kumkum Sangari, in which various forms of Third World literary "realisms" are posited as political projects that actively differentiates themselves from the Euro-American skepticism of the centrality of meaning through its imposition of sociohistorical contexts, Chua inveighs against the insistence of postmodernism's pessimism of grand narratives by invoking an imaginative unity between reality and fantasy that is found in the *Trese* series, in which the main protagonist is a "spiritual detective" whose task is to "scientifically decode" clues of crimes committed by the otherworld within the urban (and thus "real") space of Manila. The recourse into the grand unity of plot, and the "total knowledge system" contained by Alexandra Trese—as revealed to us by her exploits in solving key crime cases—are reified by Chua as a hybrid means of recuperating a sense of lost knowledge on native mythology (the *bangungot*, the *batibat*, the *pagtatawas* ritual, etc.). This is then systemically reintegrated to the modern scientific world of forensics and criminal investigation, resulting in a textual wholeness of native experiences—replete with its suggestions of postcolonial urban pain and historical injustices as "backstories"—that Chua now posits as a central condition of contemporary fantasy graphic literature.

The recourse into a conflation of fantasy and reality, science and superstition, and premodern and modern knowledge is clearly an argument for hybridity's potential to, in the words of Joel Kourtti and Jopi Nyman, "increased cultural contact and mixing, and to the intermingling of the local and global...without losing sight of the psychological pains that diaspora, enforced migration, and exile generate, and of the historical and cultural contexts in which such narratives of the intercultural emerge" (Kourtti and Nyman 3). Such possibilities of contact and mixing are especially poignant when viewing narratives of nationhood and identity through the lens of a martyred hero's life. Sir Anril P. Tiatco's study of the play *Rizal X*, undertaken during Jose Rizal's sesquicentennial anniversary in 2011, utilizes the postmodern theory of entanglement in arriving at a conceptual idiom for the understanding of contemporary theater in Manila. Defining entanglement as "a condition of overlaps and a condition of blending or mixing together," Tiatco deploys this concept as a rubric that conflates other key concepts that "include associations, linkages, relations, proximity, affinity, amalgam, collation, syncretism, hybridity, and assemblage." These are then used as "common concepts... in discussing the aestheticized effects of intermingling elements in an entangled phenomenon." These entanglements are specified within the cultural and practisantal environment of

theater performance in Manila, where the convolutions of colonial history, modernity, and postcolonial reckonings of theater practice all contribute elements that “entangle” the textuality of *Rizal X* within the praxis of the *pista* mindset that typifies historical celebrations of heroism in the Philippines. The excessive nature of this *pista* condition is driven by Tiatco as a critical hermeneutic that potentially deconstructs *Rizal X* as pastiche and spectacle. Nonetheless, Tiatco cautions us that a simplistic utility of entanglement as theater criticism merely emphasizes the negative connotations of cultural bricolage, without reifying the aesthetics that theater practitioners adapt to survive and thrive in the challenging environment of staging live theater in this age of globalized mediascapes. What is thus needed is an “epistemology of the postcolonial hybrid” that will allow alternate avenues of critical insight to be fleshed out, rather than falling into a diachronic connoisseurship between “good” and “bad” art that potentially reproduces metropolitan elite discourses of cultural production, which in turn unveil hidden patterns of class patronage, neocolonialism, globalization’s “flattening of culture,” and native resistance to dominating metropolitan cultural power that enlivens and enriches critical discourse in the arts of a postcolonial nation like the Philippines.

All in all, the six articles of *Humanities Diliman*, Volume 13, Number 2 collectively drive the issue of hybrid identities of peoples, genders, diasporas, urbanities, and performativities that should continue to explore both the alternate and multiple possibilities of the humanities in this complicit age of metropolitan globalization. This drive to be different should in no way be interpreted as a collapse into a modern (hence authoritarian) native valorization, but rather as a means of transforming the postcolonial “native” beyond the rigidities of fixed narratives and into a dynamic and transformational engagement with the “textualities of the real.”



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Work Cited

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