A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Media and Ethnicity

Media are a major factor in the dissemination of the popular imaginary of the ethnic figure. In popular culture, the ethnic is *negra* (dark-skinned), *probinsyana* (provincial), *manang* (conservative), *tanga* (fool), *magaspang* (crass) at *kaiba* (different). In the movies, she is natively dressed, fresh out of the boat or bus, carrying a *tampipi* (local luggage) and animal stock. Just as she steps out of her transit vehicle in Manila — the city, site of urban cosmopolitanism and also, the site of the national movie industry — she is tricked out of her material wealth. For a time, the figure of Manilyn Reynes represented this figure of the ethnic — first, when at the height of her fame, she was named "Star of the 90s," her ethnic figure proliferated on the screen as the heroine in horror flicks; and later on, when her career was dwindling, as the *katulong* (helper) with a thick Cebuana accent. Her ethnicity would become one of the reasons for her being the abject figure in horror films. Terrorized out of her wits, her identity created the collective fantasy for treating the provincial. Later on, she would become the source of lampoon humor — that which could be no better than a domestic servant, that whose accent cannot be loosened (*matigas ang dila*), therefore, also an abject figure.

The ethnic is either this figure made abject or the epitome of the triumph of the will. Nora Aunor's lingering prominence rests on her rags-to-riches story. The brown Cinderella who made it blindingly big at a time when the norm for stardom was the *mestiza* (white mix) breed had to anchor her originary narrative as a seller of water at the Iriga train station in the Bikol region. Her rise to fame is doubly etched in both her class and ethnic backgrounds, making the achievement of fame doubly worthy. The University of the Philippines' various ethnic student organizations provide not only a venue for the preservation of cultural diversity but, against the epistemic and literal violence based on one's ethnicity, a support community. Popular media have produced the image of the Moro as *juramentado* (mad), the

Macabebe as traitor, the Ilokano as *kuripot* (spend-thrift), the Bikolana as *katulong* (household helper) or sex worker, the Ilonggo as overly sweet, and so on.

In the Philippines, the ethnic structure was utilized by the colonizers to create a caste system that inevitably privileged the colonial position. In the period of neocolonial capitalism, the ethnic structure would remain intact. At the top-most position, the figure of the *mestizaje*, the mixing of a purportedly national (the idea of the "Filipino") and privileged race — Spanish, American and Chinese — whose elite comprador capitalism would ensure the allegiance of their economic power with the prevailing political power structure vested in local landed elites whose history dates back to the colonizer's cooptation of the local ruling class. The distinct characteristic of the linguistic affinity of the group is its lack of a literal historico-spatial affinity. Its location is plush subdivision or ethnic enclaves (Chinatown, Greenhills, restaurant shops on Banaue and Wilson Streets), so unlike the Panggalatok speakers of Pangasinan, Waray speakers of Samar, and so on. The absence of an ethnic originary place — although not if one counts Intramuros for the Spanish and the peripheral Parian for the Chinese or the mansions of Vito Cruz for the Americans — further marks the prominence of the elite grouping. Although theories of ethnic cultures would caution against homogenized conclusions — not all Chinese form part of the elite group, for example — what becomes identifiable is that a substantial part of the Philippine elite is comprised of Chinese *taipans* and *ilustrados*. This, in turn, puts the non-elite majority of Chinese ethnics in the Philippines in limbo, obscuring its place in the ethnic structure — where does one place them when they do not have both economic and political power, and their linguistic presence is based on local ethnic groupings?

The next tier of the structure is the Tagalogs, and close to them, the Cebuanos — of authentic Cebu origin mainly. These are purer local elites or a locally purer mix in the mestizaje blend. Economically, they benefited from being in the center of power,

especially the Tagalogs. Culturally, the Tagalog language, by its proximity to the national center, becomes the national language.

The national center is also the locus of the media and cultural industries, as only a Tagalog-based Filipino can penetrate the dominantly English linguistic world of media. For a time, the Cebuano language equaled the prominence of the Tagalog as the elite users of the language also had national political and cultural prominence. But with the consolidation of the national center in Manila — the EDSA uprisings, for example, staged in the center, and national television, including cable, all operate with its headquarters in the capital — Cebuano's spread remained in the southern part of the country.

Other linguistic groups are compelled to adopt to the Tagalog Filipino or Cebuano inflected English pronunciation. Thus on the bottom third tier are the other ethnic groups, with sizeable population and a geopolitical terrain. These are the groups who have to adapt the ideals of citizenry of the national capital — bilingual education, national anthem and pledge of allegiance in Filipino, entry to national discussion of debates in civil society, and so on. These are also the groupings that could still be redeemed out of their local and into the umbrella of the national experience. The unilateral flow into the national involves a continuous political dynamics — depending on which party holds the presidency — and a cultural make-over: loosening of accent, conforming to the pop culture sense — fashion, food, media — of the center, subscribing to the decorum, of the premier urban center. The alternative is political or cultural suicide.

At the bottom of the ethnic structure are the indigenous peoples, often referred to as "cultural minorities." The biggest groups here are the Igorots and the Bangsa Moro while the others, fewer in size but equally diverse, are numerous. Not only are they doubly abjected in popular culture — dancing with the ganza for money, photo-op fees for Igorots in g-strings and *amerikana* (suit), dog-eaters and other fares suitable only for segments of the challenge shows ***Fear Factor*** and ***Extra-Challenge***, and so on

— but, their economic and political rights are also disenfranchised. On the one hand, they are eroticized, constructed as a unique thread in the national fabric (the periodic adoption of presidents by tribes), or they self-eroticize their own identities (the flower festival *Panagbengan*); on the other hand, they remain in the margins of national power as both a manifestation of their historical unreliability to be colonized, or their historical anti-colonial footing. What becomes of indigenous, when there is a political and economic value, is construed as a piece in the national mosaic, or when the indigene gets politicized, an entity to be abjected in the national system — from *taga-labas* (outsider), *taga-bundok* (from the mountains), *nakayapak* (bare-footed) to insurgents, revolutionary and communist.

The term "ethnic" after all comes from "ethnicus" and "ethnikas," Latin and Greek, meaning "for nation." Ethnic becomes a distinguishing marker of the identity formation of a group, to mark both inclusion (belonging-ness) and exclusion. Thus the term "ethnic origin" refers not to the present affinity but the primordial origin of the ancestors, family surname or community — the Cojuangcos of Tarlac, the Jalandonis of Ilokos and Negros, Marcos of Ilokos, Romualdez of Leyte, and so on. Ethnicity is differentiated from race, which is a biological classification: skin color and tone, height, weight and build, facial features, and so on. A minority, rightfully, marks a subgroup, usually a disenfranchised subgrouping.

Although the Philippines is a multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual nation, it has however failed to realized this diversity. In contrast to Singapore and Malaysia, where ethnic harmony is enforced by law, the Philippines has yet to mobilize the state to effect ethnic bliss. What it has done is to be a governing agent for the continued stratification of ethnic categories, and at present, enforcing neoliberal policies as the equalizing factor in ethnic harmony. Igorots plant Malaysian mums instead of flowers, Batangas coffee trees are revived and its beans exported, Batanes vies for a World Heritage Site award, ethnic groups become the bulk of eight million Filipinos working overseas. Capital then

levels the playing field, giving access to familial economic (remittances) and political opportunities (overseas voting, for example) — in turn paving the way for generating ethnicity as a marker of cultural capital (Japanese *bandurya* players in the Osaka area, a Muslim nurse with her *gamelan* performing group in New York, a Malaysian doctoral student in Singapore doing a study on the politics in Tanauan, Batangas, and so on). The ethnic becomes a localized expression of the global desire for culture, at a time when culture itself has become a global commodity.

This is the direction the essays in this special issue are taking. The essays of Jema M. Pamintuan on the cultural landscaping and ghettoization of Quiapo; Jimmy B. Fong on pop music adaptation and innovation in the Cordillera; Alvin B. Yapan on the "tourist eye" in Philippine cinema; Ma. Rina G. Locsin on the shifting discourse of tradition and urbanization through the *pinikpikan* dish in Baguio; Jose Duke S. Bagulaya on the ideology of the Waray poetic and media form radio *siday*; and Anna Christie V. Torres on the politics of representation in the Cordillera postcards all recast the idiom of the native into a kind of cultural vernacular — not just to fine-tune the national but more so to interrogate the national's conceptualization of the ethnic, providing disjunctural and dialogical points of referencing, ways to critique and find relational issues between ethnicity and national identity formation.

This volume also has the Plaridel Lecture of Vilma Santos, the 2005 UP Gawad Plaridel awardee. In her lecture, Ms. Santos articulates the present and future directions of the Filipino film industry.

This issue also contains film reviews of Sine Patriatiko's ***UP Not for Sale, Mula 3rd Ave. Hanggang sa Dulo, Sila'y Anak N'yo Rin at Kasama,*** at ***Aklasan: Welga at Masaker sa Hacienda Luisita*** (Michael Francis C. Andrada) and the television reviews of three ***I-Witness*** documentaries: ***Dekada '70, From Iraq With Love***, and ***Mandirigma*** (Jane O. Vinculado). Lastly, this issue has the condensed abstracts of selected theses and dissertations produced in 2002 by undergraduate and graduate

students of the U.P. College of Mass Communication (UP CMC), prepared by Violeda A. Umali.

As issue editor, I thank all the contributors for their essays, reviews, and documents published in this volume; all the referees for painstakingly analyzing the contents of the articles and providing their most valued comments that helped improve the essays; GMA 7 Senior Vice President for News and Public Affairs Ms. Marissa Flores, for allowing our staff access to the ***I-Witness*** documentaries featured here; UP CMC Department of Journalism Chair Prof. Danilo A. Arao, for editing the Plaridel Lecture, UP CMC Office of Research and Publication Director Prof. Luis V. Teodoro and his staff Ms. Berinice I. Zamora; and CMC Dean Nicanor G. Tiongson for his continuing support of the scholarly pursuits of the College.

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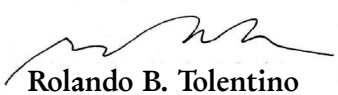

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