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Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints

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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

Bodies of knowledge are neither monolithic nor unchanging. Some theories and frameworks may achieve dominance in a field of study, but paradigms shift sooner or later. In history, certain depictions of the past may attain rock-solid eminence but could still show cracks if put under scrutiny, as the first two articles of this issue demonstrate.

In “What Made the Masses Revolutionary? Ignorance, Character, and Class in Teodoro Agoncillo’s *The Revolt of the Masses*,” Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. revisits the classic book and challenges its author’s portrayal of the Philippine Revolution’s purported main agents. First published in 1956, *The Revolt of the Masses* has been influential in propagating the notion that the Filipino masses, led by the proletarian Andrés Bonifacio, embodied radicalism. And yet, at the same time, the book views them condescendingly. In fact, in Aguilar’s tally of the instances that the text mentions the masses, in a total of fifty-two cases Agoncillo uses negative terms to depict them, compared with just eighteen positive ones. The book highlights their “ignorance, gullibility, impulsiveness, irrationality, and treachery” (137), a mind-boggling imagery in a supposedly Marxist interpretation of the revolution. Aguilar posits that this incongruence, which is also symptomatic of how Agoncillo suffered from the “hubris of the educated” (162), stems from the overlapping of history and literature in this landmark work.

While Aguilar questions a classic text on the history of an anticolonial revolution, Patricia Irene Dacudao interrogates a long-held perception of anthropology as an American imperial appendage in the early twentieth-century Philippines. Her essay “Empire’s Informal Ties: Pioneer Anthropologists in Davao, 1904–1916” focuses on five American anthropologists who studied the indigenous Bagobo in Mindanao and worked for privately funded projects, including an expedition in 1910 supported by Chicago’s Field Museum of Natural History. Because they

worked independently of the colonial state, these scholars could engage with epistemes devoid of imperial designs. In particular, Dacudao argues that the five veered away from evolutionary anthropology, which was then championed by Dean Worcester, perhaps the most infamous personification of American imperial scholarship this side of the Pacific. Her conclusion that “not all anthropological projects stemmed from imperial fiat” (180) is based on her assessment that imperial motivations were in flux then, as the US was turning its gaze toward Europe at the outbreak of the First World War, and that scholarly interest in the Philippines was declining due to the Filipinization of the colonial bureaucracy under Democratic rule.

From bodies of knowledge, this journal issue turns its attention to bodily knowledge in the last two articles. Stephanie Coe treats physical appearance, including how dress enhances a person’s bodily attributes, not as a skin-deep signifier but as a terrain of historical meaning. In “Undressing Rizal’s Message: Clothing and Gender in *Noli me tângere*,” Coe explores how reality and fiction overlap to highlight an underappreciated aspect of the novel: its extensive use of sartorial details. Her article unpacks the layers of significance in José Rizal’s seemingly mundane descriptions of attire and accessories, which evoke not just power disparities but also “intimations of dissent” (232). Maria Clara’s dress and Doña Victorina’s silk gowns thus contribute to the scholarly discourse on the sexualization of female bodies before the male gaze, providing another lens with which to view gender relations during the “period of ferment” (234) that is the late nineteenth century.

Gendered bodies in the late nineteenth century are also the focus of Micah Jeiel R. Perez’s “Play and Propaganda: The Sports of the *Ilustrados* in Nineteenth-Century Europe.” Perez focuses on how the *ilustrados*, an all-male group of youthful and affluent Filipino propagandists in Europe, deemed sports and other forms of physical activities as arenas where they could conduct another mode of propaganda. *Ilustrados* like Rizal believed that displays of athleticism could convince Europeans that the Filipino body was characterized not by indolence but by honor, not vice but virtue. Moreover, excelling in European sports was the Propagandists’ way of showing that they were the Westerners’ coequals in terms of modernity and masculinity and therefore deserved equal treatment politically.

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