

# Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints

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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 publication in 1979 of Reynaldo Ileto's *Pasyon and Revolution* (*PR*) transformed Philippine historiography. Popular literary forms, such as the Tagalog *pasyon* in the late nineteenth century, gained wide acceptance as sources for probing the meanings of events as ordinary people perceived them. Ileto sought to uncover the layers of meanings of words found in literary texts to illumine the perspectives of the masses, which contrasted with the views held by the *ilustrados*, the wealthy, educated, Europeanized, and politicized elites. Ileto's seminal work deservedly led to widespread acclaim.

Over three decades later digital technology has opened a novel approach to literary interpretation. Ramon Guillermo employs the techniques of corpus linguistics to examine the occurrences of the word *loob* in the *pasyon* and other texts of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century with available digitized versions. His findings indicate that the idiom of *loob* is often not used in a religious or mystical sense, as suggested in *PR*. Moreover, the connection between the *pasyon* and Bonifacio's texts posited in *PR* is challenged by a technique that measures "textual proximity." Guillermo argues that, by not translating *loob* and other Tagalog terms that form *PR*'s theoretical scaffolding, Ileto has not so much peeled off layers of meaning as impose a specific one supportive of his thesis. Guillermo encourages us to look at Ileto's fascinating work with fresh, critical eyes to expand the world of discourse that it opened up.

Twenty years after *PR* came Ileto's much-debated essay titled "Orientalism in the Study of Philippine Politics" (1999). It made a strident critique of well-cited studies on the Philippines by political scientists, most but not all US-based Americans. Ileto argued that their writings replicated colonial discourse marked by racial difference and Western superiority, and reduced Philippine politics to patron–client ties, factional loyalty and rivalry, and a "personalistic" culture.

Caroline Sy Hau revisits the debate that Ileto's Orientalism essay generated; she observes that both sides brandished the binaries of foreign/native and outsider/

insider, suggesting a “politics of location.” Hau discerns analogous, but broader, issues in a new dynamic involving Filipino-American and overseas Filipino intellectuals, on the one hand, and Philippine-based Filipino intellectuals, on the other hand. Who is the “real” native and insider in relation to a Philippines that has become a globalized nation? Who has authority to speak of and for a Filipino nation that thrives transnationally? How are we to account for the heterogeneity and the power and social class differentials among intellectuals both inside and outside the Philippines? Hau contends that the question of intellectual authority is not neutral because inequalities in location, race, language, and institutional settings affect the production and reception of ideas. Amid the dominance of metropolitan centers, Hau sees the way forward in regional dialogue, collaboration, and the creation of emancipatory knowledge.

The personal that some observers have decried in Philippine culture is thus necessarily implicated in one’s scholarship, regardless of ethnicity and location. Iletto historicizes the personal in his account of how he came to differ ideologically from his father. Retracing his and his father’s separate sojourns to the United States in a photo essay, Iletto explains the contrasting historical and institutional contexts of their journeys that led his father to embrace the US empire while he, while similarly “entangled in the empire’s web,” was not “entrapped” (107).

Vicente Rafael reads Iletto’s autobiographical essay as simultaneously anti-imperialist critique and nationalist affirmation. Rafael frames Iletto’s scholarship as a series of struggles against authority figures, and his sojourn to the US as turning him not just against the empire but also toward the Philippines and Tagalog. Iletto’s invocation of his mother as the “absent presence” in his narrative of father and son, Rafael notes, is akin to his authorial act of speaking of and for the “inarticulate masses.” Rafael relishes the “experience of being detained and stranded between languages” (130) made possible by the untranslated Tagalog terms in *PR*, which he celebrates as resisting reduction into English and appropriation into elite categories, a position that differs from Guillermo’s.

In a professorial address, Aileen S. P. Baviera juxtaposes the perspectives of China and the Philippines on the territorial and maritime resource disputes in the South China Sea, which the Philippines calls West Philippine Sea. Presenting the two views side by side in a sort of political dictionary, Baviera posits commensurability and engages in an act of translation that may help bridge the chasm between the two states.

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