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## Guest Editors' Introduction

### **Rethinking Display of Filipinos at St. Louis: Embracing Heartbreak and Irony**

Cherubim A. Quizon and Patricia O. Afable

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#### **Colonialism and Heartbreak**

In 1904 more than a thousand Filipinos got on steamships and trains and were brought to St. Louis, Missouri, to be part of exhibitions at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. This event marked the centennial of Thomas Jefferson's massive expansion of American territory through the Louisiana Purchase. The St. Louis Fair was unique among world's fairs in many ways, especially in the unprecedented scale of the United States government's display of living peoples in the "Philippines Reservation." As such, the ethnology exhibition has been critically and productively approached as early American imperialism writ large (Rydell 1984; Vergara 1995; Kramer 1999).

The Filipinos who lived for half a year in "ethnological" mock-ups of their villages were indeed "objects" on display. The language used to frame their exhibition—part pop-science, part salacious humbug, and part political rhetoric—would outrage anyone reading it today. However, it has been a hundred years since Filipinos were classified into what we now know to be unscientific but persistent folk categories of "barbarism," "savagery" and semi-"civilized." It is now time to ask, What did the Igorot, Moro, Bagobo, Visayan and other Philippine "ethnicities" on display make of their placement in this sliding scale of civilization? How did they transform ideas and events intended to marginalize or exoticize them into something more resonant with their

own experiences and particular social objectives? In a similar vein, what did American fairgoers do with this carefully constructed political ideology masked as a “scientific” race hierarchy? How did they, as members of an ideologically divided public, respond to their own government’s claims about Filipinos?

Discussions of the iniquities of the Philippine ethnological exhibits have not always come to terms with the inherent irony of asking people to behave like moving mannequins, to demonstrate their culture daily by imitating an idealized version of themselves. The growing literature on living ethnological displays shows that all stories only initially seem the same (Lindfors 1999; Mathur 2000). When we learn of names, homelands, travels, and personal circumstances of displayed individuals, we gain insight into their humanity and only then can our discussions slip out of formulaic ideological bombast into the realm of history and heartbreak (Anonymous 2000; Green 1999; Ortiz 2005). Living exhibits, presumably rendered as silent scientific artifacts, do not really cease to have opinions and subjectivities.

However, in certain circles, it would seem like treason to suggest that some people on display at St. Louis did not feel completely humiliated, or to imagine their complicity, decision making, or desire for novel experiences. For one thing, the journeys abroad provided Bontoc, Suyoc, Bagobo, Ilocano, and others an analogous path to prestige based not so much on material wealth but also on knowledge and worldliness, something that continues to transform other young Southeast Asians who go on *merantau* (Ong and Peletz 1995). The impact of larger social forces on ostensibly marginalized individuals’ sense of self becomes clear when we consider the transformative role of travel and migration in the lives of Filipino economic migrants in more recent decades (Aguilar 1999; Constable 1999). These cultural shifts correspond to the transformation not only of individuals but also of the prestige structures in their communities of origin, changes that are not always welcomed, then and now, by elites and other stakeholders in existing configurations. Despite contrasting historical, political, and economic considerations, it is possible to argue that the plurality in contemporary narratives of travel and return extends as well to Filipino and American “others” at St. Louis (Clifford 1997).

In the particularly compelling case of the Igorot in 1904, there seems to be a longstanding postcolonial middle class conviction that showcasing Filipinos overseas wearing a *bahag* (loincloth) instead of an embroidered shirt of fine silky fiber or a three-piece suit could only hurt the nation, and that the perceived degradation, so total and absolute, is somehow self-reflexive. The cultural and political elite's discomfort with certain types of exoticism but not others has been shown to be a factor in many failed nationalist projects (Chatterjee 1998; Ramos 1998). Perhaps we need to untangle the potent and leveling discourse of *awa* (pity) from a diffuse and ultimately stratifying preoccupation with *hiya* (shame) (Ileto 1979; Aguilar 1996). Yet, in persisting with the premise that 1904 marked the end of Eden for displayed Filipinos, we mask our own interjection as their sole advocate and interlocutor. Let us now embrace the reality that the subaltern—culturally heterogeneous, politically astute, and socially segmented—already speaks (Spivak 1988).

### Fieldwork, Family Talk, and Irony

In 1997, on the Bontoc-Kalinga road, anthropologist and Ibaloy-speaker Patricia Afable had a discussion with fellow jeepney passengers about people who went to the St. Louis fair almost a century before. On that trip, the Bontoc expression *nikimaliká* was volunteered to describe those first ones “who went to America/Malika.” On a passenger's necklace two blue beads, called *minaliká* (“made the American way”), were said to have come from *Luwisyana* (the Louisiana Purchase Exposition). The word *maliká* conjured a faraway, almost mythical, time and place that only the oldest of the travelers knew about. “Now it is *Amélika* or *Amérika*,” a younger man interjected; “that is where *Igorot* people go to find work.”

Such evocative linguistic distinctions informed Afable's search for the St. Louis Fair's legacy in specific geographical and social particulars of its participants. Her article focuses on the role of the Bontoc garrison's multilingual young people in the early American colonial project. As mediators between Chico River communities and the first American anthropologists, missionaries, colonial officials, and exposition business-

men, this small cohort of interpreters had a substantial influence on the rise of a modern Igorot identity in the central Cordillera.

Around the time of Afable's conversations in Bontoc, Cherubim Quizon was completing her fieldwork in Davao. Responses from colleagues to her much earlier work, about the problems of representation in the display of Igorot, revealed shared intuitions about the troubling gaps in our knowledge of the displayed individuals at the Fairs that archival and museum research alone could not address (Afable 1998; Quizon 1991; Campomanes 1993). In Mindanao, while studying the current social context of Bagobo textile and dress, Quizon came upon local knowledge of individuals who went to St. Louis. The stories about Bagobo individuals who came back, however, were not marked by sadness nor displeasure but by admiration and irony, especially when recalling certain Bagobo men who embraced White man's glamour by wearing a suit (*amerikana*) everyday. She also knew of a number of independent-minded Americans (including Elizabeth and Sarah Metcalf of whom she writes in this issue) who went to the Bagobo homeland, but the St. Louis Fair's crucial role in these travels, especially the types of interaction between displayed people and fairgoers, was not initially clear.

Eventually, Afable was to learn of Antonio Buangan's personal quest to learn more about his wife's and his Suyoc ancestors who went to the 1904 Fair. His research, which is part family history and part journey of remembrance, brings together Kankanaey kinspeople's stories from family and "clan" reunions and kitchen table conversations in Baguio, California, and Benguet. In photo archives, he saw the same photographs that so disturbed others because of their ideological context as moments of connectedness with named people, long dead but not forgotten. In formal presentations of his research, Buangan's audiences have included other Suyoc descendants who have enthusiastically welcomed this repatriation of their ancestors' photographs. Furthermore, Buangan's use of photographs as primary sources, echoing Quizon's use of ethnological textiles, suggests that the agency of art opens up unique pathways for historically silenced voices (Gell 1998).

At the International Conference for Philippine Studies in Leiden in June 2004, Afable's, Quizon's, and Buangan's panel, entitled "Looking

Backwards, Talking Back," had Mary Talusan in the audience. She said that she, too, had a family member at the Fair: a maternal great-grandfather, Pedro V. Navarro, a piccolo player, had composed music and assisted the Philippine Constabulary Band's much-admired African-American conductor, William Loving. Her contribution here presents music and musicianship as a language that speaks to multivalent colonial experiences. It is a rare view from the vantage of a Black-American-led-Filipino-underdog-marching-band, ironically presented as the end-result of a civilized *pax Americana* in a complex arena of empire and twentieth-century reformulations of a race-based American social hierarchy.

This issue of *Philippine Studies* introduces the reader to alternate perspectives on the 1904 Fair: the views and experiences of Filipinos who traveled to be displayed there and of some Americans who became their associates before, during, and after the exposition. The accounts come from academics and non-specialists who are, in different ways, both insiders and outsiders to the communities at the ethnological exhibitions and are presented here in a broad attempt to include important voices in the telling of a century-old story.

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