

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Editor's Introduction

Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr.

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints
vol. 68 no. 1 (2020): 1–2

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Editor's Introduction

In response to the crisis of area studies, transregional studies emphasize the inherent transregionality of regions, with connections within, between, and beyond any region. In her professorial address, Caroline S. Hau explores the implications of transregional studies for Southeast Asian studies and Philippine studies, arguing that transregionality goes beyond an intellectual issue because it affects organizational changes in academic institutions. In pondering Southeast Asian studies, Hau argues that it is important to consider the identity of scholars who work on the region, their institutional affiliations, the audiences they address, and the interests they serve. From the outset, the field of Southeast Asian studies was transregional, but “it was region that needed to be fleshed out” (7).

When the idea of Southeast Asia began to emerge, the Philippines was excluded for being supposedly atypical, abetted by the leading scholars' ignorance about the Philippines. In the late twentieth century, when the country was already well within the regional definition, the Philippines again seemed odd because of its laggard economy. Hau contends, however, that in fact the Philippines exemplifies transregionality, a test case that illumines the transregional connections of Southeast Asia's peoples and places and, therefore, the concept of region. Its prehistory as well as recorded histories since the sixteenth century manifest dynamic links, especially to the Malay world to its south and west, to the Spanish world to the east across the Pacific, to Spain in Europe, to the US empire headquartered in North America, and now to the entire globe given the relentless mobilities of overseas Filipinos. Hau's point is that “scholars studying the Philippines and other countries have always had to grapple with both the possibilities and limits of adopting transregional perspectives”; as such, “Area studies need not be hobbled by intellectual parochialism that seeks to privilege . . . analysis at a given local, national, regional, or global scale” (19).

The three articles in this issue demonstrate the transregionality of the Philippines as well as authorial decisions on the extent to which a topic is framed in transregional terms. Abisai Pérez, a Mexican graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, revisits the 1812 Cádiz Constitution, which transformed the colonies in Asia and the Americas into provinces of Spain

and granted citizenship to colonial subjects. The extant legal regime in the Philippines had entitled natives to form corporate bodies in which local elites held positions as *cabezas de barangay* (barangay chiefs) and *gobernadorcillos* (town magistrates). For this modicum of self-governance, local elites were to serve as implementers of the tribute system. But the Cádiz Constitution meant the disbandment of the barangay system and the end of tribute collection, undermining the edifice of colonial governance. It also threatened the interests of creoles. As a result, a modified constitution was custom-made for the Philippines, which maintained the tribute and native elite privileges. Still, the festive ritual oath-taking to the new charter, which was read aloud in native languages across the countryside, imparted liberal ideas to natives, who claimed what they believed to be their rights, to the chagrin of the authorities.

In Gideon Lasco's history of height, the evidence indicates that in the encounters between natives and Europeans prior to the nineteenth century the height of natives was not cast in a negative light and native Filipinos were not typologized as short. However, the rise of scientific racism resulted, especially in the late nineteenth century, in the Europeans' marked tendency to problematize the natives' height and use it as a key marker of racial difference. Educated native elites (*ilustrados*) imbibed the tenets of scientific racism; they accepted tallness as a desirable attribute and began to depict the natives' stature as short. But the Spaniards who looked down on the natives' height also had to contend with their own sense of inferiority vis-à-vis northern Europeans. The racial hierarchy marched southward through Europe until it trampled upon the peoples of the Philippines.

Jonathan Victor Baldoza explores the formation of a Filipino scientific community during the first half of the twentieth century, when US colonial rulers imposed a scientific order upon the Philippines as part of its imperial project. The US-educated, English-speaking Filipino scientists recognized the progressive and modernizing possibilities that science could bring to the fledgling nation; men and women scientists thus avowedly utilized their expertise to prepare the country for an independent future. This scientific community was institutionalized through the creation of the National Research Council of the Philippines, which partnered with state and private entities. Evincing transregionality, Filipino scientists intentionally connected themselves to global circuits of scientific knowledge production and exchange.

Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr.
Ateneo de Manila University