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GUMIL Hawaii Vision & Writing:
(Association of Ilokano Writers in Hawaii)
Potentially Disenfranchising?

By

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Abstract: John Berger posits that “every migrant knows in his heart of hearts that it is impossible to return. Even if he is physically able to return, he does not truly return, because he himself has been so deeply changed by his emigration” (San Juan 98). Thus, a great anxiety that Ilokano immigrants are gripped with is the impossibility of return, cutting all ties with ancestral roots, and the forgetting of one’s Ilokano native tongue. The possible disappearance of an entire culture is constant in the imaginary of the Ilokano exile.

Gunglo Dagiti Mammurat iti Ilokano ti Hawaii or its acronym GUMIL Hawaii, an association of Ilokano writers based in Hawaii has been established in the early 70’s as an attempt to defer memory loss of homeland. While the vision of GUMIL Hawaii of preserving Ilokano language, culture, and ethnic identity through the writings, is indeed, exemplary, lending solidarity and coherence to the otherwise dislocatory self of the immigrant personae, this valorization in the stories with reclaiming or retrieval of an originary Ilokandia culture and practices to assert an Ilokano distinctiveness could be depoliticizing, as it runs the risk of turning away from a critical understanding of the subtle contours of Filipino exploitation and US racializing systems.

The study analyzes award-winning short fiction circa 90s to mid 2000, published in different GUMIL Hawaii anthologies. Corollary to the study is problematizing the social formation of Ilokano immigrant community in Hawaii, their constitution and their response to such constructs, and the ensuing consequences of identity politics which GUMIL Hawaii writing is predisposed to take.

About the Speaker: Ma. Socorro Q. Perez is a Faculty member of the English Department of Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines. She is currently pursuing Ph.D in Comparative Literature at the University of the Philippines. She has been awarded a Fulbright research grant, her affiliation of which is at University of Hawaii at Manoa. Her essay, “Ilokano Immigrants’ Renegotiation of Space in GUMIL Hawaii Fiction (circa 80s)” has been published by Kritika Kultura, an internationally-refereed online journal of English Dept of the Ateneo de Manila. Her essay, “Ilokano Writers of Hawaii: Invisible Stragglers” is forthcoming. In the book, Philippine Studies: Have We Gone Beyond St. Louis? It is a collection of essays on Philippine literature and culture, edited by Priscelina Patajo-Legasto, and published by UP Press.

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