

## INTRODUCTION

Tradition in publishing is set aside with this issue: What should have seen print later sees print earlier. There is a simple reason for this breach. An issue meant to commemorate a special event does not have time on its side. It cannot wait. It must come out during, not long after, the event.

1998 marks the celebration of the Centennial of the Declaration of Philippine Independence from Spain. This issue commemorates this event by bringing into its pages accounts of women who had proven themselves equal to the challenges posed by the historical forces at work during their respective times and climes.

Even the publication of this issue has been delayed. The reason for this was intimated in the last *RWS* issue: Very few write about women's history. It is a task beset with problems. First, there is the problem of a theoretical framework: What is considered "historical" and "heroic" have been defined by men, hence the difficulty of finding women who will fit the definition, considering that women are culturally defined differently from men. Secondly, there is the scarcity of data about women. Since it is men, not women, who are expected to be history makers, a conscious documentation of women's experiences through written records has been neglected. It is against this backdrop that the articles in this issue were selected. Not only the selection of the subjects, but also the mode of writing was given prime consideration.

Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo (1663-1748) has been beatified by the Holy Roman Catholic Church and may yet be the first Filipina to be proclaimed a saint. Her story is a good starting point for presenting the feminist issue of

women's invisibility in history. Very little can be known about her pre-*beatero* days for, as her most dedicated biographer, Sr. Maria Rita C. Ferraris, RVM, says in her *Tribute to Mother Ignacia del Espiritu*, the "social conditions of the colonial society and the historical experience of the Philippines seem to conspire in shrouding the earlier years of the servant of God under the veil of silence and anonymity. She belonged to the colonized race who hardly merited the concern of record keepers of the times, or if there had been the minimum of records, these did not survive the ravages of time" (p. 268). Fortunately, because she was found to be of service to the Church which was the dominant colonizing institution of the Spanish conquest, the Jesuit historian, Pedro Murillo Velarde (1696-1753), who Ferraris wrote "had the privilege of observing Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo at close range for a period of twenty five years," wrote about her thus:

Mother Ignacia. . . was truly a "valiant woman" who not only overcame the great difficulties encountered in her foundation from its initial stages up to its completion, but also conquered as well with singular constancy three of the more fundamental sloths. . . that which is inborn in her sex and that which is congenital to the nation and its inmost being. . . She was mortified, patient, devout, spiritual, zealous for the good of souls. (*Ibid.*: 276).

One gets to appreciate the priest's accolade when we come face to face with his "Questions" about the natives of the Philippines. One of these runs thus: "Question—What is an Indian? Reply — The lowest degree of rational animal." (Blair and Robertson, Vol. 40, p. 280).

Here quoted in full is a resume of P. Murillo Velarde's letter regarding the Indian:

The Filipino Indian is the embryo of nature and the offspring of grossness. He does not feel an insult or show grati-

rude or kindness. His continual habitation is the kitchen; and the smoke that harms all of us serves him the most refreshing breeze. If the Indian has morisqueta and salt, he gives himself no concern, though it rain thunder and lightning, and the sky fall. He is much given to lying, theft, and laziness. In the confessional he is a maze of contradictions, now denying proofs and now affirming impossible things. Now he plays the part of devout pilgrim over rough roads and through the deepest rivers, in order to hear mass on a workday at a shrine ten or twelve leagues away; while it is necessary to use violence to get him to hear mass on Sunday in his parish church. They are impious in their necessities with the Father, but liberal and charitable to their guests, even when they do not know them; and through that they are greatly disappointed. At the same time they are humble and proud; bold and atrocious, but cowardly and pusillanimous; compassionate and cruel; slothful and lazy, and diligent; careful and negligent in their own affairs; very dull and very foolish for good things, but very clever and intelligent in their rogueries. He who has most to do with them knows them least. Their greatest diversion is cockfighting, and they love their cocks more than their wives and children. They are more ready to believe any of their old people than even the apostolic preacher. They resemble *mellizas* in their vices and opposite virtues. In lying alone, is no contradiction found in them; for one does not know when they are not, whether they are telling the truth by mistake. One Indian does not resemble another Indian, or even himself. If they are given one thing, they immediately ask for another. They never fail to deceive, unless it crosses their own interest. In their suits, they are like flies on food, who never quit it, however much they are brushed away. Finally, here is no fixed rule by which to construe them; a new syntax is necessary for each one; and as they are all anomalous, the most intelligent man would be distracted if he tried to define them. Farewell. (*Ibid.*, pp. 282-283).

How P. Murillo Velarde tells the story of Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo shows a tone of voice so different from the tone of the account we have included in this issue. There

is a shift from the voice of a man/white/Spanish/colonizer to a woman/non-white/Filipino/decolonizer.

Doña Consolacion is a character from Dr. Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, the novel which made history because with its publication, Philippine letters long fettered by a colonial tradition that prevented its effective functioning as mimesis and manipulation, was ushered into the Age of Realism. Generally read as a negative character, she is made to epitomize the colonial whose main mission in life is how to be like the colonizer. Albina Peczon Fernandez' "Reading Women and Art In and Out of Blank Space" liberates the doña from this kind of reading. Using symptomatic reading that is guided by the "third eye" of socialist feminism, Doña Consolacion becomes, in fact, a decolonizer: Her "language of gestures" can be read as a century early response to the 20th century feminist post-structuralist call to "take back the talk" by junking language where the master signifier is the phallus, what Jacques Lacan calls "The Law of the Father". On the other hand, Doña Consolacion's dance, which she choreographs for Sisa and herself, can be read as a text that proposes the liberation of Philippine arts and letters from the effects of colonial aesthetic ideology and its various colonial/colonizing practices.

Sra. Agueda Cahabagan led a contingent of armed soldiers during the Philippine Revolution. Not much is known about this woman because of the absence of written records about her. It is for this reason that space is given to the letter of General Pio del Pilar to the Secretary of War asking that she be granted the rank of "General" in the Revolutionary Army of the Philippine Republic. Dated April 6, 1899, the letter was written in Spanish. It is to the credit of Capt. R.M. Taylor that this letter was preserved and kept part of what

this American named “Philippine Insurgents' Records”. The letter which the American officer translated into English, has stories to tell: It tells us the story of why women are invisible in history. The “no written record, no history” principle of traditional historiography prevents the writing of women's history. There is simply a dearth of written records on women that could be the basis of accounts about their history making. Men, who culture has consistently constructed as the “authoritative” writers, mostly wrote/write about themselves. Women have always faced the problem of memorializing themselves in written texts because they did not receive the kind of education men got during the Spanish occupation or were too busy doing the proverbial “women's work” that never gets done to find the leisure and the pleasure for writing down their thoughts. Besides, having been progressively marginalized in colonial society, those who did manage to write, were not considered authoritative sources of historical records. Their writings were not collected for posterity and deposited in archives and libraries. The other story the letter tells pertains to the disempowering effects of the imposition of the colonizers' tongue as the official language. It becomes the “legitimate language” and the language of power. Women who have no access to the official language cannot be heard by official ears. It is in this context that the struggle of the twenty-one women of Malolos to have a night school of their own where they could learn the Castillian language assumes great historical importance. The other story is in the area of what-could-have-been. We ask: What could have happened if the status of women in 19th century colonial Philippines were high? If Sra. Agueda could write in the official language? If she did not have to do domestic work and thus enjoy the leisure so necessary for the recollection of thoughts and their memorialization through writing?

Indeed, the lack of documents on women poses a challenge even to academically trained historians like Atoy Navarro. Relying mostly on published secondary sources, he was nevertheless able to present women who participated in the struggle against colonial rule and the class struggle. Due to his imprisonment by traditional historiography, Navarro, however, could not tell the full story of his subjects as fighting women. His account, for example, is silent on how women who have been socially constructed to inhabit the private world/underworld of women coped with the demands of history making in the public world/upperworld of men.

The silence of Navarro's account on the private world/underworld of women is made to speak by the work of Daniel Talde. A UP-Tacloban political science academic, this man allowed himself to be educated by feminist historiography. He makes use of the techniques of writing women's history as suggested by UP history professor Digna Apilado in her account of women freedom fighters in the Ilocos region (See the last issue of *RWS*). His account of the women of a small town in Leyte during the Japanese occupation and the subsequent American liberation of the place is a pioneering work which hopefully will interest other men to help in the recovery of what women have lost—their own history.

The retrieval of women's past through woman-centered oral history has its limits. For example, how can this technique possibly retrieve from the silence of the past the history of women who lived centuries ago? Whom can the researcher interview? Alas, unknown and unmarked graves cannot be interviewed. It is this consciousness of the limitation of oral history which prodded us to provide a special place for first-person accounts of women. To preserve the authenticity of their respective voices, their respective accounts are printed as submitted.

The accounts of Felisa de los Reyes, the “comfort woman” who is fighting for compensation and an official apology from the Japanese government for the wrongs done her during World War II; of Peach Mondiguing, who was detained for being the wife of a high-ranking member of the Communist Party of the Philippines; and of Carolina Malay, who was a leftist activist during the martial law years of the Philippine Republic and for sometime a member of the peace negotiation between the government and leftist activist groups soon after the EDSA Revolution are welcome additions to printed materials on women's history.

Estefania Wangdali Kollin, in her paper “Heroines in Kalingas: The Chico River Dam” makes the women speak for themselves. This technique of writing should not fail to sensitize us to the fact that *there is power in speaking*. For far too long and far too well women have been spoken *for* by those who cannot really know for sure who the women they speak for *were/are*, or what these women would have wanted to be articulated in *their* name. It is high time that as we move towards the next millennium *women themselves must speak for themselves* if only to avoid untruths and half-truths about them. But this cannot be accomplished unless women will initiate, invigorate and continue with the struggle for a kind of culture that will enable them to construct themselves as speaking subjects. Then they will speak the truth, and the truth will set them free.

For our book review we have Dr. Thelma Kintanar's appreciation of *Women in the Philippine Revolution*.

Dear Readers, back issues are being readied for publication. By year's end all are expected to be off the press. Thank you for bearing with us.

Albina Peczon Fernandez