

On Filipino Philosophy and Culture

Assumptions Related to the Literary Persona in Demetillo's *Barter in Panay: An Epic*

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Abstract: Literature is the bearer of all the treasures in the world—that includes the Filipino's ideology and philosophy, which are reflected in their own literatures. This literary analysis is a descriptive-qualitative research, employing the Marxist criticism in the assumptions related to the literary persona in Ricaredo Demetillo's *Barter in Panay*. Specifically, the literary analysis unveils the relationship between the poet's milieu and his literary persona, the socio-political phenomena revealed by the literary persona, and the critical views on race and power relations based on the construction of the poet's literary persona. The findings reveal that Demetillo, by projecting himself in his literary persona, Datu Sumakwel as a capitalist, favors today's capitalism and displays him to be a bourgeois proletarian. Through the assumptions regarding the literary persona in Demetillo's literary epic, we can hear the voices of the folks in the past who were the ruling class, and the voices of the modern folks—both the ruling and the ruled in today's world. The persona's poetic voice comes from the memory of every Filipino who lives in the here and the now, who passes the folkloric and historical records of ideologies to the younger generations.

Keywords: *Barter in Panay*, literary criticism, literary persona, Marxist philosophy

Introduction

The Philippines is segmented socially, economically, culturally, and ideologically, with geography not even a functional common denominator. The archipelagic makeup of the country has brought about the heterogeneity of the people with the constituent individuals hardly representing anything like a majority, because every aspect and every part of

it claims to be members of majority, and not one claims to be part of the minority.

Persona as the core element in understanding Philippine literature may be regarded as the medium through which the perception, sensibility, and attitude toward the topics of the language arts, especially the longest and deepest roots of Philippine cultural history—the folk tradition.¹

In literary criticism, a *persona* refers to a person figuring in, for example, in a poem. It could be someone who may or may not represent the author himself. The persona is assumed to be the intellectual or emotional center who speaks, as it were, to the reader or an audience. It is the mirroring device, which the author used to speak in his own name, whose words and ideas may also be fictive so as to produce a consistency between a fictional character and the ideas that he expresses.²

The subject of this literary criticism is Ricaredo Demetillo's *Barter in Panay* (1959), which he claims as the first true literary epic of the Philippines. *Barter in Panay* is a narrative material having been gathered "from the checkered history of the Filipinos themselves." Ricaredo states in his foreword to its published version (1961) that his literary epic aims to "project racial urges and desires for freedom, righteousness, and justice for our people." To fulfill this, he uses principally the myth of "Bornean settlement in Panay under the leadership of Datu Puti and Datu Sumakwel found in *Maragtas*" which contains, by his own description, "the semi-historical, semi-legendary accounts."

One of the important literary devices employed by Demetillo in his literary epic *Barter in Panay* is the *persona*. In folk literature of known authorship like Demetillo's, whose poetics are identifiable, the literary persona is not anonymous. The reader can identify the persona in the character of Datu Sumakwel, but his historical origin is difficult to determine for the author constructs him to sense the aspects of the world not only in the past and during the creation of his work, but also in the contemporary period. The author uses him to elucidate the less known to be known, and to discuss tangibly the less intangible in relation not only to his own perception, but to the reader's as well. It is difficult to determine what kind of people he was addressing at the time he composed his work, and what cultural conditions he merely presupposed. Thus, it is the readers/audience who would assume the matters depending on their perception and reception of the author's work. In effect, Demetillo's literary epic leaves a lot unsaid yet expects his readers to know what he does not say. In this regard, Hornedo affirms that the identification of the speaker or persona in folklore and perhaps in a

¹ See Florentino H. Hornedo, *Culture and Community in the Philippine Fiesta and Other Celebrations*. (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2000).

² *Ibid.*

literary epic helps in the reconstruction of the social milieu which produced the material, and hopefully broadens the reader's understanding of the attitudes and social contexts of the literary constructs.³ Thus, an attempt to identify the persona in the literary epic or any form of literature is *empirical*, a *critical need*, and a *pedagogical prerequisite* to fully appreciate what the work of art is saying.

Hornedo showed a historical evidence of Philippine society's stratification along lines of power and wealth that created a plurality of social interests and, therefore, of social perspective.⁴ With this declaration, it can be assumed that Demetillo as the poet and creative artist of folk literature is addressing his work to a particular society. He uses his characters to suit his purpose of presenting life around him as he sees it. In the process, he sees his contemporary world, and from that vantage point, he speaks through his key characters or creates characters who speak for themselves. In this way, Datu Sumakwel as Demetillo's persona is born to bring his audience to the different lenses and scenic angles and social stratification of his world and the Filipinos represented in *Barter in Panay*.

Though a lot can be said about the identification of literary persona, this researcher shall limit its identity as *class persona* for the present purpose of the study.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to draw assumptions on the characteristics of a literary persona in Ricaredo Demetillo's literary epic *Barter in Panay*. Specifically, this literary analysis sought to unveil: (1) the relationship between the poet's milieu and his literary persona in the text; (2) the socio-political phenomena reveals by the literary persona; and (3) the critical views on race and power relations based on the construction of the poet's literary persona.

Theoretical Framework

This literary analysis is anchored mainly on Marxist criticism and literary theory, grounded on the economic and cultural theory of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels, which are summarized by Abrams in the following contexts:

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

- (1) the evolving history of humanity, of its social relations, of its institutions, and of its ways of thinking are largely determined by the changing mode of its “material production”—that is, of its overall economic organization;
- (2) historical changes in the fundamental mode of production effect changes in social class structure, establishing in each era dominant and subordinate classes that engage in a struggle for economic, political, and social advantage; and
- (3) human consciousness is constituted by an *ideology*—that is, the beliefs, values, and ways of thinking and feeling through which human beings perceive, and recourse to which they explain, what they take to be reality. An ideology is, in complex ways, the product of the position and interests of a particular class. In any historical era, the dominant ideology embodies, and serves to legitimize and perpetuate, the interests of the dominant economic and social class.⁵

Marxism as a radical materialist philosophy claims that everything in the world that is not material is a consequence or product of some mode of material reality. In the world of humans, what is fundamental is the production and distribution of goods. The production, the social relations, and the institutions which arise because of economic forces structure society into a dominant exploitative class called *capitalists*, who own the material means of production and distribution, and the *proletarian* or wage-earning class. This social structure is not a permanent condition but a result of the present era of capitalist economic organization. If the present economic organization is changed, a new social order will emerge. It is with the conviction that the present capitalist era is susceptible to change that revolutionary Marxist ideas and praxis have been actively and aggressively promoted. In the context of promoting that change, Marxist criticism finds its role, for it has an explicit political agenda.⁶ It is on this philosophy that the assumptions of the literary persona in Demetillo’s *Barter in Panay* was conceptualized.

⁵ M.H. Abrams, “Marxist Criticism,” in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (USA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1988), 218-222.

⁶ Florentino H. Hornedo, *Pagpapakatao and Other Essays in Contemporary Philosophy and Literature of Ideas* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2002), 141-142.

Research Methodology

The study uses mainly the descriptive-qualitative type of research, employing Marxist criticism focusing on the literary persona used by Demetillo in his *Barter in Panay*. Likewise, the critical analysis is made by employing the close reading approach, wherein the text speaks itself to the reader, and the latter understands its contexts based on the significations of his/her experiences.

Results and Discussion

The Plot of *Barter in Panay*

Barter in Panay constitutes Book I of an epic trilogy centered on Datu Sumakwel. Book II is entitled “The Heart of the Emptiness is Black,” which covers the tragic relationship between Kapinangan, wife of Datu Sumakwel, and Gurong-gurong, leading to the killing of the latter by the chief. Book III, Demetillo said, would deal with Datu Sumakwel’s romance with Alayon, a chastened Kapinangan. But it was never written. In this context, *Barter in Panay* presents only a part of the entire epic text that articulates Demetillo’s construct of Bornean, as well as of Aeta identity.

Demetillo’s *Barter in Panay* is a literary epic composed of eleven cantos.

Canto I. The opening lines in Canto I establish the position of the persona of the epic, a Bornean “we” (the nearly consistent point of view shifts notably in Canto VIII and X, which take the perspective of the Aetas). Chronologically, the persona is positioned “full ten years from now... / Since at the Siruagan Creek we anchored,” recalling their flight “From far Brunei, where Makatunaw grasped / A despot’s sceptre and a murderer’s sword.” The use of “we” suggests a communal telling of the story, but the line “We struck the rabid billows with our oars,” suggests a male speaker, possibly a maharlika brave (“Ten datus sailed together with their wives; / And with them kindred maharlika braves... / And many slaves...”). As early as Canto I, Datu Puti speaks of the Bornean offer to the Aetas to barter the Panay land for gold:

Chief Marikudo, lay aside your bow ...
Grant to us strangers hospitality:
Water and food for bodies cramped with toil
And, most of all, barter us land for gold ...

Canto I also presents the readers with the first descriptions of the Aetas, as well as of pirates. Chief Marikudo demands a hostage as a guarantee of the Borneans' good conduct while he is away consulting with his elders about the proffered barter. Paibare, a young Bornean boy, offers to go with Chief Marikudo as his hostage.

Canto II. Canto II describes the Bornean community in a new territory, with their social structure intact. It devotes many stanzas to Datu Sumakwel's wife, Kapinangan, who is twenty years younger than the chief, and is "unfulfilled with child."

Canto III. Canto III features and names all ten datu who "sat in the council and debate / Presided by great Datu Puti." Maliksi, their interpreter and guide, relates to the council the result of his surveillance work on Chief Marikudo and his tribe in Sinugbahan, the Aeta settlement: "I saw nearly a thousand warriors there, / Twice that our number ... all armed / With spears and arrows tipped with poisoned darts." Further, Maliksi reports that he sees the amazement of the Aetas at the glitter of Paibare's clothing and ornaments. Maliksi assures the datu that Paibare is treated well by the Aetas. Paibare endears them with his natural kindness. Paibare's condition in the hands of the Aetas figures importantly in the decision the datu would make on how they would negotiate the barter.

Canto IV. Canto IV is a continuation of the preceding canto with focus on the discussion among the datu, Datu Sumakwel (who declares Panay "the land our gods have promised"), Paiburong (who reminds the other datu that "The black tribe holds the true deed to this land"), and Bangkaya (who cautions them against Datu Sumakwel's aide, Gurong-Gurong's suggestion that "we can seize, with boldness, all this land").

Canto V. In Canto V, Datu Puti and Datu Sumakwel stay after the dispersal of the others from the council meeting. Datu Puti tells Datu Sumakwel that he feels the strain of being a leader because of his old age. Thus, he wishes Datu Sumakwel to relieve him of the leadership of the group for he would go back to where he buried his first wife in Brunei. Datu Puti and Datu Sumakwel make up their minds "About the terms that we shall ask the blacks / And what to barter in return for land." Here, Datu Puti reminisces the "situation of Brunei," particularly the tyrant Makatunaw's ruthlessness which resulted in the murder of Datu Puti's first wife.

Canto VI. Canto VI relates Datu Sumakwel's musings about Rishi Lakhsman's prophecy "That on this island I shall leave a name." Rishi's vision includes allusions to subsequent Filipino heroes like Lapu-Lapu, Rizal, and Mabini. Rishi's prophecy is a revelation of the Filipinos' future under Datu Sumakwel's leadership. The canto then digresses to Datu Sumakwel's thoughts on Kapinangan.

Canto VII. In Canto VII, Gurong-Gurong is “the butt of jests,” despite the fact that “many younger braves approved his plan,” because “they all agreed Sumakwel different / ... marveled at his gift / To sway the datus with his arguments.” Envious, Gurong-Gurong entertains the thoughts of being “in Sumakwel’s place” and decides to seduce Datu Sumakwel’s wife in his ruse to usurp leadership “not on the throne but in his wife’s embrace.”

Canto VIII. Canto VIII shifts the focus to Chief Marikudo and the Aeta settlement where the council deliberates “On what the people from the seas desire / That we sell land to them along the coast.” The Aetas assess the might of the Borneans and argue about the wisdom of driving away “These men, intruders on these coasts of ours,” as Girum has suggested. Chief Marikudo warns them of the possibility that the Borneans might “... burn our settlement / And massacre our tribe.” Upon hearing this, Uran suggests “we should barter land. / This island is quite large and we can live / As much up in the highlands as on the coasts.” Polpulan, Chief Marikudo’s father, recounts a fortuneteller’s horoscope: “You will not die until brown strangers come / To barter gold for your patrimony.” He advises them to “Take gold and let the will of gods be done.” Girum is later killed for insulting Chief Marikudo’s father for his alleged cowardice and senility. Heeding the warning of the *babaylan* (“Blood defiles this place. / Two ghosts flit over us and, unappeased, / They will cast their evil spells”). Chief Marikudo seeks the other chiefs’ advice. He proclaims: “... Let us all find / A new home in the hills ...”

Canto IX. In Canto IX, with the literary epic focused back on the Borneans, Gurong-Gurong subtly flirts with Kapinangan. Paibare, the hostage, returns with the news that “Chief Marikudo promises to grant / Us all the coastal plains in exchange for gold!” Soon the Bornean and the Aeta elders meet to confirm the terms of the pact: a salakot and one large batya, both of solid gold, in exchange for the coastal plains. The Aetas retain the hills, including “an outlet to the sea,” for which they will relinquish their right to their houses in their settlement.

Canto X. Canto X contains two extended monologues by Chief Marikudo and his wife about their life stories, upon the urging of Datu Puti in the opening scene of the canto.

Canto XI. In Canto XI, Chief Marikudo begs Datu Puti to relate his own life story. Datu Puti’s narrative recalls the Borneans’ first home, Brunei, and again, the ruthless reign of King Makatunaw that led the ten datus and their families to flee to Panay. Datu Puti states his reflections on their new land where, “we’ll carve destiny / Commensurate with our hope of righteousness” and invites “Chief Marikudo [to] drink with me a pledge.” The literary epic ends with Datu Sumakwel and Kapinangan in an intimate embrace; however, Kapinangan’s thoughts are of young Gurong-Gurong.

Demetillo employed some structural features learned from Western literatures in writing *Barter in Panay*.

The opening canto starts with the landing at Siruagan River and the encounter with Chief Marikudo. Actually, the whole action starts with the tyranny and pillage of King Makatunaw as told by Datu Puti in Canto XI, of which tyranny, all the datus, especially Datu Puti, were the victims. Such technique by the author is a device called *in media res*, where the narration of the story starts from the midpoint rather than the beginning. This creates a nostalgic effect on the narrativity of Datu Sumakwel as the persona of the literary epic. In Canto X, Marikudo narrates his youthful exploits, ending with his marriage to Maniwantiwan. Both episodes in Canto X and Canto XI are told at the banquet in the same manner as the adventures of Ulysses are told by the hero himself to his audience of nobles at the palace of King Alcinous, father of Nausicaa. The episodes are included to complete the panoramic action of the literary epic to signify that a whole people, not just a handful of datus, are involved. By these means, Demetillo lets his contemporary audience take in the action as it were by making them feel involved in it, which, while having taken place in the past, still had strong ethical and social implications in Demetillo's milieu. The author tries to achieve the same purpose especially in Canto VI where Datu Sumakwel tells of his consultation with Rishi Lakshman, as in Virgil's epic where Aeneas, in conversation with his father Anchises in the underworld, sees the glorious deeds of his descendants, culminating in the achievement of Augustus Caesar himself. In this canto, the future of the Filipino people would be revealed to Datu Sumakwel in dramatic prophecies regarding the Filipino struggles for liberty and the rise of leaders, both political and artistic, to give luster to the national destiny. Highly entertaining narratives, the modifications add body to the whole epic structure and increase dimensions to the heroic characters of Datu Puti and Datu Sumakwel, as well as their lesser companions, sharers of a magnificent destiny. Thus, all movement of a large migration is given form and evoked by concrete details of which the barter is only the culminating point.

Literature and Its Society

Literature is not simply a mimetic discourse *of or about* nature; rather, nature and society imitate literature. Hence, literature is both mimetic and pragmatic. In a sense, literature does not only connect with the society by being its product, mirror, and source of moral end, but literature also registers the details of society's internal conflicts especially when the society like ours—the Filipino society—is stratified by economic inequality and/or segmented by cultural differences. Looking at the period to which a literature

was produced, the tone and texture of the text significantly identifies the interests of a class or group *for whom, about whom, and/or against whom* the literature was created. Authors like Demetillo identify in their works the interests they write for, as well as the point of view from which they look at the world they write about.

It is known historically that at least the larger parts of the Philippines in the Tagalog and Visayan regions were socially stratified before the arrival of the Spaniards.⁷ A similar stratification has also been noted among the unhispanized Filipinos who, one may imagine, have carried into the 20th century some reflection of what they were before and during the colonization of much of our country by Spain and later by the United States of America. Instead of losing their stratification and becoming a homogeneous society, and despite the concerted effort to create a homogeneously Christian society, the colonized parts of the country have become more clearly stratified, both economically and politically. The Americans came after the Spaniards with the promise of egalitarian democracy. But while Spain culturally segmented the Filipinos by religion, the Americans resegmented the Filipinos by education. If at the inception of Hispanization, the conversion to Christianity paved the way to certain political and social privileges, during the American period, the fast absorption of American cultural ideals became the key to political and social positions. It is clear that Filipinos have always been, in general, socially and culturally stratified and consequently have been more or less plagued over time by the consequences of class disparities and conflicts of interests.⁸

Demetillo and His Society

Hornedo declares that a piece of literature documents the world and the worldview of its author—and in the case of folk literature, the world and the worldviews of the society that created it or carried it on by tradition.⁹ The assumption is meaningfully true in Demetillo's literary epic. As a document of the world of the author (author-society), Demetillo's *Barter in Panay* records the interests existing in and experienced by him, particularly by the people in the real world of its origin. In other words, the assumption construed is that Demetillo and the people in his society share their common experiences and interests expressed and recorded through a form of literature.

As a record of the worldviews of the author or as a social segmental author as Demetillo projects through his persona, *Barter in Panay* indicates the

⁷ William Henry Scott, "Prehispanic Source Materials for the Study of Philippine History," in *UNITAS*, 41:3 (1968), 371-387.

⁸ See Hornedo, *Culture and Community in the Philippine Fiesta and Other Celebrations*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

attitudes and values assumed to be favorable to him and unfavorable to the people or class (particularly King Makatunaw, and either Datu Sumakwel or Chief Marikudo and the class they represent) detrimental, or at least inimical, to his interests. However, Datu Sumakwel, as Demetillo's literary persona, belongs to both classes—the ruling and the ruled. Assuming that Datu Sumakwel is a member of the ruling class, he represents the Filipino in general and this allegorically legitimizes his aspirations of a just, equal and a liberal society, and disdains whatever puts him in an unfavorable light that may hinder the attainment of his aspirations for his society. To this, he projected the Aeta as the “othered” by describing their skin color—black. Datu Sumakwel, as a persona of the ruling class is solemn, almost humorless and is concerned with legitimizing his assertions for the good of his people. He legitimizes his own interests and that of the Borneans in general by bartering the land with the Aetas for gold.

In the same manner, it can also be assumed that Datu Sumakwel represents the *ethos*, the voice of the Filipino people, particularly the ruled class. He upholds the dignity or praises the abilities of his own kind, like what he did in the characters of Datu Puti and Chief Marikudo as individuals who are ruling in their tribe. He let the two heroes narrate their own tales (Canto X and XI). Consciously, the persona showed a high reverence to the royalty and nobility of his own class as well as the values of morality they upheld. In doing so, he did it at the expense of those who are outside of his class and/or a member of his own class, that is by dishonoring King Makatunaw as a ruler who caused their subjugation, forcing them to flee and to seek freedom and justice elsewhere. Likewise, he stratified their rule and power in Panay by buying the land from its rightful owners, the Aetas and driving them away to the uplands.

It is also assumed that it is possible for Demetillo, who may represent a member of another class, to write in favor of another class either because he is caused to do so or because, by cultural subjugation, he has come to identify his own interests as a social critic with what he particularly sees as the malpractices and/or immoralities of his society. In this case, it is clear from a moral perspective that the ultimate class origin of the literature is one in whose interest is slanted.

It is also worthy to note that the composition of *folk* in Philippine history has changed. In precolonial times, *folk* excluded the *datu* and *sultan*, even the *maginoo* classes, for they were the ruling class in old Philippine society. However, during the colonial era, many of the *datu*s and *maginoo* fell from power and became reduced to the status of the common people or folk—the classless individuals. In effect, Datu Sumakwel as Demetillo's literary persona becomes one of the forebearers of these downgraded classes. Thus, *Barter in Panay* can be classified as folk literature, a literature of the ruling

class in a form of literary epic, eulogizing the virtues of the *once* ruling class of our society. We thus see literature as the voice of power—seeking to legitimize the ideals, virtues, and philosophical views regardless of whose voice articulates it—and in this instance, it is Demetillo, an educated folk.

The Socio-Political Phenomena Revealed by the Poet's Persona

What we have to learn from Demetillo as a nationalist-socialist critic in our time is that the poet and/or the critic, with his intellectual knowledge, can operate with ease and freedom what he could use as materials for his possession as a poet. Demetillo writes with the primary purpose of giving pleasure, of sharing memorable experience communicated through a medium of language. He has the gift or talent to identify and isolate what is memorable in his own experience or in the experience of others, which he imaginatively made his own. Demetillo turns these memorable experiences from abstract into concrete, so when we hear or read them, we find them suitably expressing our own pleasurable experiences. Here, our pleasure is not of recognition but of discovery. In any case, to use T.S. Eliot's words, there is in the literary production of Demetillo "the communication of some new experience, or fresh understanding of the familiar, or the expression of something we have experienced but have no words for, which enlarges our consciousness and refines our sensibilities."¹⁰ Thus, the twin pleasures of recognition and of discovery which literature offers lead inevitably to something of even greater value—an enlargement of consciousness, a refinement of sensibility, or to put it in another way, a better and deeper understanding of ourselves.

We are living in the most terrifyingly chaotic epoch of human history. Daily events shatter our ease and complacency; often, after continuous tremors, our responses are deadened into indifference. The events in our midst accent our feelings of uncertainty and our alienation from the people around us whose values are often totally different from ours. Newspapers, the radio, television, and movies around the world force us on surface values that immobilize or coarsen our sensibility as human persons. And these become the concern of the artist of every age. Mass media affect man with a culture that is beneath the level of human intellect and morality, degrade man to a mere organ motivated by sex, a mere semi-mechanical, semi-physiological organism devoid of any divine spark, of any absolute value, of

¹⁰ T.S. Eliot, 1957: 18. Eliot, T.S., *The social function of poetry in On poetry and poets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957). T.S. Eliot, "The Social Function of Poetry," in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 18.

anything noble and sacred. All these debasements of morality make man their end victims. In the urban societies of the contemporary world, thousands lead lives of waste and quiet despair. We feel the bluffs leading into the endless abysses of the spirit, stutteringly instructed by frenzied years and decades of violence, horror, and death. All these terrorize us almost daily and deaden our individual sensibility to the point where evil no longer arouses our indignation and good, no longer arouses us to commitment, because many of us feel that it is futile to do so. This picture of Philippine society today is the same picture that provoked Demetillo in the creation of his work.

At the present, the country is passing through a crisis, which puts walls between the people and the government systems and officials, metaphorically and literally. The cases of then President Arroyo, the money laundering scam of Ex-Chief Justice Renato Corona, and the scam of Senators Enrile, Revilla, Estrada, and the like depict the segmental crises of the Filipino values system. As a nation, there are important human values that emanate even people from prison - vigilance against corruption and exploitation, human dignity that deserves better than scurvy treatment, righteous will to bring the goods of the world to everyone. It remains true that the 21st century man will still be subjected to the tensions and the meaninglessness of existence, which in the modern world, crowded and alienating city life, force many to live.

Demetillo, through his *Barter in Panay*, evokes the emotions and the attitudes that make up an intellectual and aesthetic milieu. His imagination as a modern man—a poet and a critic—tries to find the oblique images that enable Filipinos to confront the gorgons of life's reality. Time will come when Demetillo and other artists will tilt precariously in the night because of age; however, their works still keep their vigil through the readers/audience, who will defy the darkness of society while creating the proud emblems of human dignity.

At this time, the Filipino people appreciate the narratologies of their fictive and checkered history and continue to aspire for the ideals and cultural values of their ancestors. Though acculturation with the global through education, mass media, and travel have certainly drifted a lot of them into the mainstreams of the modern world, there are still in the Filipino masses a resilient and adaptive Datu Sumakwel, Datu Puti, and Chief Marikudo who always remind them of their true Filipino identity, values, morality, and aspirations, such as the desires for freedom, righteousness, and justice. And they should embrace these traditional values that treat all humanity equal regardless of their social stratification.

In totality, the tones and mood of the literary persona in Demetillo's literary epic are those of the ruling class. Datu Sumakwel is a distinguished member of the ruling class who projects their attitudes, worldviews, values,

and *mores*. Demetillo belongs to an elite and bourgeois proletariat, a class which is equal to his literary persona Datu Sumakwel. Through his literary persona, Demetillo moralizes or legitimizes his control over his society. He uses Datu Sumakwel as a didactical element to enshrine his class, entertain his readers, and criticize other characters, groups, or situations. As member of the ruling class himself, Demetillo is not capable of exposing himself and his literary persona to ridicule by telling nasty stories about him. Demetillo is incapable of speaking against the members of his own class who behave badly. Therefore, Demetillo's literary epic projects not only a tale of the Bornean settlement in Panay Island, but it is created to generally project the acts of the people—the act of the ruling class who possessed the idealistic and heroic characters. Thus, Demetillo's *Barter in Panay* is characterized as the *literature of the ruling class*.

The Critical Views on Race-Power Relations

In the analysis of Demetillo's representations of the Aeta and the Bornean identities, it is assumed that he was not able to establish himself as a true Filipino socialist of his time. He represented himself in the persona of Datu Sumakwel, a Bornean and a ruling class. This signifies that Demetillo was conscious of the social class of his literary persona who tries to speak on his behalf, because he himself belonged to the elite and was a bourgeois-proletarian. As a Bornean, the persona criticizes the Aeta when:

Chief Marikudo grabbed the salakot / And crowned his
head with it – the fit exact. / The gold was startling
contrast to his skin. / We dared not laugh, however, at
the sight. (Stanza 34, Canto 9).

Daring not to laugh signifies a mockery and discrimination between his race and the Aetas in terms of awareness of the self, skin color, and most importantly of the greediness projected on the “blacks.” In effect, Demetillo projects the ruling class by favoring the Bornean over the Aeta.

Just like Rizal of his time, an *ilustrado* who critically depicted the Spanish subjugation of the Filipinos in his novels, *El Filibusterismo* and *Noli Me Tangere*, Demetillo shows the Filipinos' weaknesses and ugliness of character through his description of the Aeta identity. Thus, he legitimizes the superiority of the Bornean both in color and values. In the same way, Demetillo is comparable to that group of Filipino ilustrados/elites who gathered together as a revolutionary group against the Spanish government when, in fact, they are not proletarians.

Implicitly, Demetillo by projecting himself in Datu Sumakwel as a capitalist, favors today's capitalism in his own land. The foreigners serve as the capitalists who buy the prime resort and tourist land from the Aeta—the natives in Boracay and/or El Nido, Palawan. The capitalists transform the lands into resorts while the erstwhile owners are driven out to the margins of the society. In a sense, Demetillo is considered not a serious/true proletarian critic but, instead, a bourgeois proletarian because he favors the Bornean who represents the capitalists, who belong to the same social stratification as he.

Demetillo's view of the social stratification between the Aeta and the Bornean is a familiarization of the present situation not only in Panay, but in the country in general. In Panay, the capitalists buy the land at a lower/cheaper cost from the natives. In return, they build commercial establishments like hotels, subdivisions, and resorts. The growth of the Zobel-Ayala Land corporations and the sprouting of Henry Sy's SM Supermalls all over the Philippines are examples of capitalism spreading in the country. While they bring significant economic development to the land, they are either driving away people or hiring them as workers, thus, subjugating them in their own land or territory.

But what has happened to the natives? Since they sold their lands, they lost their patrimony. Obviously, the money did not last long in their hands and they become nomads. Truly, the natives have become victims of capitalists. In some establishments, the natives serve as the employees of the capitalists, yet they are projected as the slaves in their own land. In addition, the Aetas are hired as manufacturers, utilizing their own materials, but they are paid less by the capitalists. Relatively, Datu Sumakwel as the forefather of the Filipino nation, is a metaphoric figure of the Filipino today.

Conclusion

What Demetillo, as the author of a fictional work, or what Datu Sumakwel, as his persona, narrates is held to constitute "pretended" assertions of his ideologies, which are understood by his audience. In this view, it is Datu Sumakwel and not the author himself who is committed to the truth of ideologies that he asserts. It is assumed, moreover, that within the frame of a fictional world, literature through the *persona* created by the author imitates reality by representing in a verbal medium the setting, actions, utterances, and interactions of human beings. Thus, through the persona created by the author, we can respond emotively with our shared experiences and, perhaps, our own utterances.

Through the assumptions regarding the literary persona in Demetillo's literary epic, we can conclude that Datu Sumakwel carries the voices of the folks in the past who were the ruling class, and the voices of the

modern folks—both the ruling and the ruled in today’s world. Thus, we hear the voice of our ancestors—the past—and its relativity to the present, its timelessness. The persona’s poetic voice comes from the memory of Datu Sumakwel, and every Filipino who lives in the *here* and the *now* who passes on this account as a folkloric or historical record of ideologies to the younger generations. The voice in Demetillo’s literary creation depicts a Panay-anon himself and the Filipinos as a whole, and sketches the community beyond the spatial and projects itself into the future that will continue and preserve his legacy and his race. It yields insight into the literary epic’s own preservation and function. In this part, Demetillo’s role as a writer-critic of his time brings not only the historical aspects, but also the *class consciousness* of the Filipinos through his literary work. His motives as a social critic are constructed through the representations of his literary persona and his relation to it, his literary text, and his society.

The picture of the society today imitates literature through the character representations, situation or plot, and the literary persona of Demetillo’s *Barter in Panay*. Demetillo’s projection of Datu Sumakwel as an *aristocrat* and *capitalist* affirms the assumption that he legitimizes his own race as an elite and bourgeois proletarian whose ideologies and interests of power are further strengthened. Datu Sumakwel upholds the dignity and abilities of his own kind. Notably, Demetillo as the voice represented by Datu Sumakwel does these at the expense of those outside his class—the Aeta. Demetillo should have written his literary epic with the aim of projecting the race-power relationships of the Bornean and the Aeta, so that the later generations—today’s natives, the true-blooded Filipinos—would be illuminated and moved to seek freedom, righteousness, and social justice from those who marginalized them in Philippine society. Thus, the projected result would be: *today’s natives will no longer be yesterday’s visitors*.

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